

ARTS & culture

STATE OF THE ART

Firm consults on art acquisition for home, office

BY JOHN TOWNES

Along with a personal move to the Berkshires from Westchester County in New York, professional curator and artist Katharine Dufault has relocated her business, State Of The Art, here.

Dufault uses her expertise and knowledge of the contemporary art scene to help clients select and acquire paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures and other artwork for their homes or businesses.

"It's a small art consultancy," said Dufault, who is currently living in Great Barrington. "I also do some consulting on interior decor as needed."

Dufault said that she provides a combination of expertise and an eye for design, symmetry and the relationship of art to its surroundings, as well as the logistics of buying and installing art.

"The art world can be very intimidating and confusing for people," said Dufault, who is also a professional artist. "I've been involved in art all my life. I also have developed an extensive network of artists and galleries, and have a huge database of contacts."

She explained that State Of The Art's clients are diverse and retain her services for various reasons. She works with people who are completely unfamiliar with art, as well as experienced buyers and collectors.

"It's all very individual, and each situation is different," she said. "Some people are simply looking for a single artwork for a particular room. Others are doing a remodeling project or are moving into a new home and are looking for multiple works."

The motivations of clients for retaining a professional also vary.

"Some people are simply too busy to seek out and purchase art themselves, and they want someone to do it for them," she said. "I also advise people who are adding to their



Katharine Dufault admires custom-framed artwork by Tess Recordon that she installed in a patient waiting area at a medical center in New York's Westchester County. Dufault recently relocated her art consultancy, State Of The Art, from downstate New York to the Berkshires. (Photo courtesy of State Of The Art)

collection. And I work with people who have no experience in buying art and for whom this is a special purchase."

Dufault also works with corporate and organizational clients to provide art for offices and other spaces.

One of her largest ongoing clients is a hospital in Westchester County. "I provide art for their offices and waiting rooms and hallways," she said. "That's very satisfying because the art is enhancing an environment

where people are often going through very difficult experiences."

"Buy art you love"

While the needs and circumstances vary, Dufault said she bases her work on a strong underlying principle.

She noted that art is often seen as an investment, and she is knowledgeable in the dynamics of the marketplace. However, she emphasizes the personal and aesthetic aspects to her clients.

"The most important thing is that people buy work that's meaningful for them personally," she said. "The first suggestion I give to people is to buy something they love. Helping people to achieve that is what's fulfilling about what I do."

She handles the actual purchasing process, shipping and installation.

"I also have arrangements with framers to ensure that a work is framed in the best manner possible," she said.

Dufault is from Cambridge, England, and grew up visiting artists' studios, galleries and museum exhibitions. She also had an interest in interior design.

After studying visual arts, graphic design and photography at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, she moved to New York and graduated with honors in painting and literature from Columbia University.

As an artist (katharinedufault.com), Dufault has shown her work in galleries and other solo and group shows in New York City, upstate New York, the Berkshires, and other locations.

She has also curated over half a dozen exhibitions in New York City and other locations, two of which were reviewed in *The New York Times*. In this role, she selected the artists and artworks and was the liaison between the gallery and artists. She also chose the placement of the works within the gallery

space and performed the hands-on installation of the work. She also led presentations and tours about the shows and artists.

"Through this experience of using my creative skills, and contacts in a public sphere, I established the consulting and curating business," she said.

She started State Of The Art (914-484-0535 or www.stateofthearthome.com) in 2015, when she and her husband Scott were living in Westchester County.

They moved to Berkshire County last summer. While that coincided with an influx of urbanites moving to the Berkshires to escape the coronavirus pandemic, she said that was not their primary motivation.

"The timing was coincidental," she said. "My husband has a number of family members in the Berkshires, and we used to come here often for visits. When he retired last year, we decided to move here to be closer to them."

She noted that her business is regionally oriented. "When we lived in Westchester, most of my clients were from that area," she said. "I still work with clients I had there, but my primary focus is now on the Berkshires and nearby areas. So in a sense I'm rebuilding the business."

Dufault concentrates on contemporary art and artists. "That's what I'm personally interested in, and what I know the most about," she said. "However, contemporary art is very diverse and includes artists who work with traditional styles and subjects."

Detailed process

Dufault said she has a basic process when she is retained.

"I meet with the client for a consultation and we talk about why they are buying art, and what they like, and their budget," she said. "I go into detail. Do their tastes tend to the abstract, or do they prefer art that is more

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representational? Do they like landscapes or other subjects? Do they want something to calm them or inspire them? Are they looking for a brand name or are they open to work by new or unknown artists?"

She added that she aims to be as specific as possible.

"Abstract art is a broad term, for example," she said. "Abstract works can be very bright and joyful, or soothing or arouse other emotions. So a person can love some abstract work and strongly dislike others. So, in addition to learning what they want, it's also important to find out what they don't want."

In addition Dufault evaluates the room where the art will be placed.

"It will ultimately be a dialogue between the art and the space, and there should be a sense of harmony between them," she said.

She noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced her to handle those aspects of the business differently.

"Like all businesses, COVID has forced me to change how I work," she said. "Rather than meeting in person, I'll often consult with them over Zoom or FaceTime, and do a virtual tour of the space. Fortunately, with cell phones, it's fairly easy to do a walk through that way."

She added that she has done some in-person visits, with careful procedures for sanitation and safety.

Based on the information and her observations, she conducts research and contacts galleries and artists to identify specific works that meet the client's criteria and budget. She then presents her recommendations to them. If there is nothing they want, she will continue looking based on their feedback.

"The process depends on the client," she said. "Some people can make a selection based on a photograph of the work. Others need to see the work directly, in which case I might arrange a visit to a gallery or artist's studio."

She charges a base hourly fee, plus a commission on the work that is purchased.

"With my connections, I can often arrange for the work to be purchased at a discount, which can help to offset my fee," she said.

While Dufault's focus is on the art, she also will assist the client with interior design at times.

"Sometimes we get into a discussion about the decor of a space," she said. "I'm not an actual interior designer, but if asked I'll offer suggestions and assistance on that." ♦

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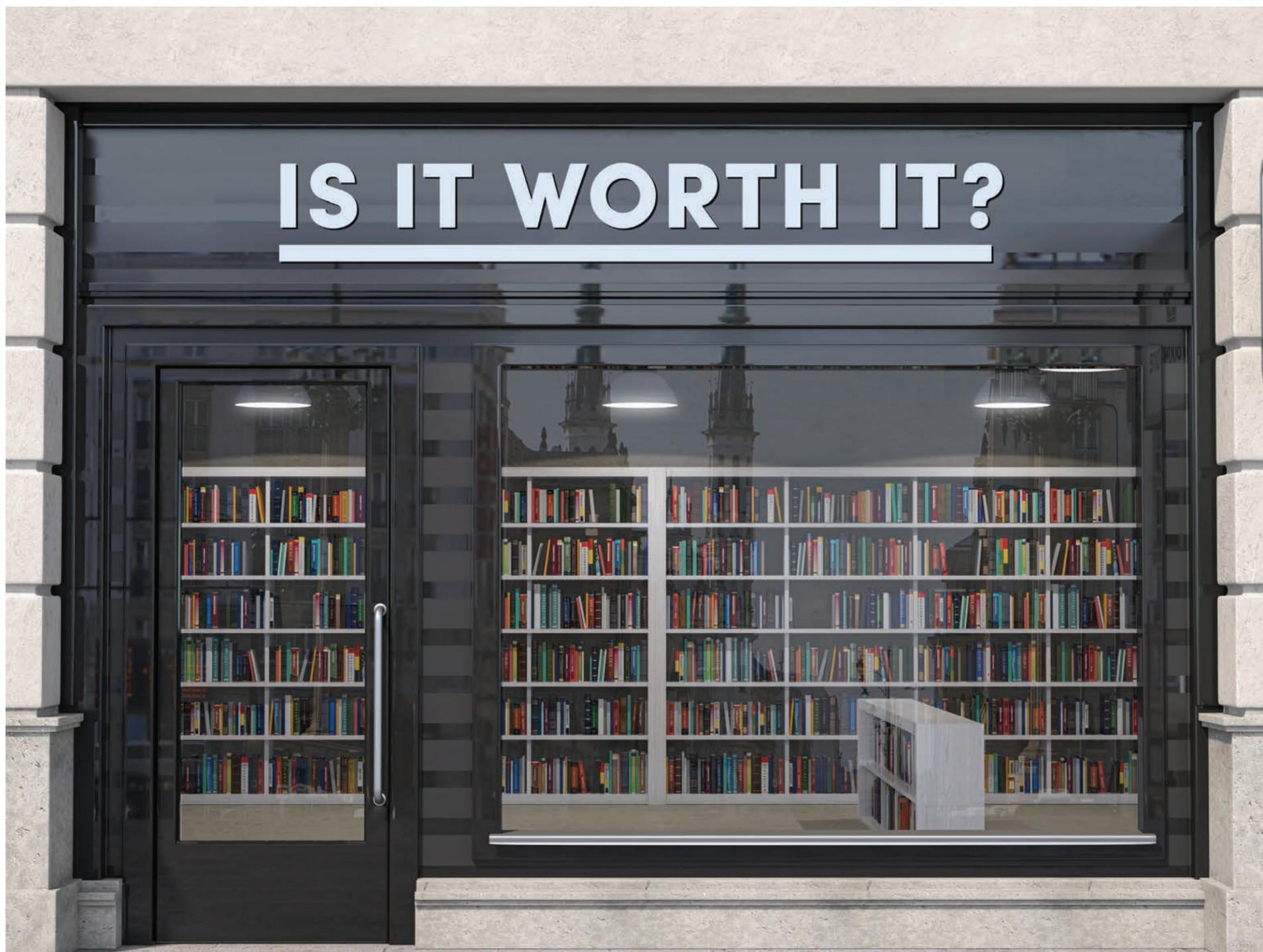
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