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Buying Art with the Click of a Mouse

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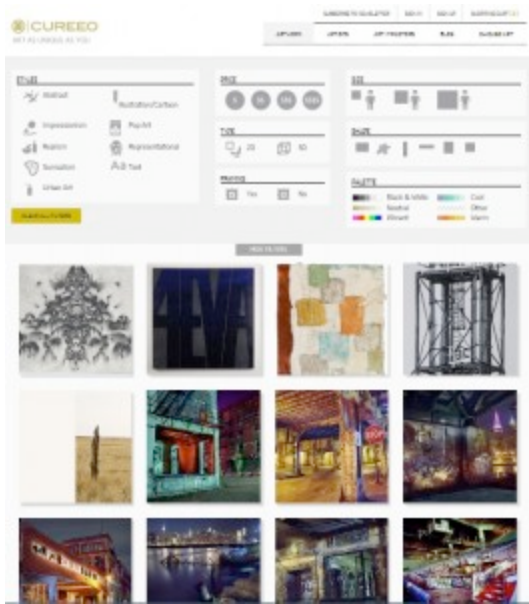
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[Nov 16, 2012](#) Posted by [Meredith Deliso](#)

Thanks to the bounty that is online shopping, you can buy anything from socks to diamond rings on the Internet, and usually for a bargain. Add to that long list: art.



Art has been readily available through galleries, art fairs, and even flea markets for the art savvy keen on hunting down investment pieces. But in the past few years, a number of websites have popped up that take a lot of the intimidation and confusion out of buying art by making it accessible – and affordable. This can be especially relevant to people, especially young adults, looking to start a collection but don’t know where to begin or don’t have a lot to spend. In fact, many of these sites exude an egalitarian ethos that everyone should be able to buy art. Think websites like [20X200](#), an online gallery launched in 2007 that sells art, prints, and photographs priced as low as \$24 and upwards of \$1,200, to more recent, similar upstarts like [Cureeo](#) and, to a lesser extent, the uber-fine art online market [Art.sy](#), where pieces start out at \$1,000 but can top \$1 million.

Even big-box retailers are getting in on the action. [Costco](#), which has sold fine art for several years, caused a media storm recently when it [quietly started selling prints](#) from big names like Andy Warhol and Matisse that are cheaper than most flat-screen TVs.

For what you may lose by seeing the art only in JPEGs versus in person, you can make up for in price. And from Costco to Cureeo, the mission is often the same: provide vouched-for pieces at an affordable price, minus the intimidation factor.

“People are very attracted to art. They see it as something that’s a nice thing to own, kind of comparable to the next luxury item, if you will, but they just don’t know how to go about getting it and how to value it,” said Maida Swenson-Fortune, the founder of Cureeo.

Swenson-Fortune launched Cureeo earlier this summer, saying that she liked sites like Etsy, which hundreds of artists use to sell their art, but saw the Internet lacking in a website that focuses on fine art (the difference between something that’s \$100, and \$1,000). To that end, Cureeo focuses on original pieces and prints from about 60 artists priced in the middle of the art market at anywhere from \$200 to \$10,000. The website’s search tools allow customers to find art by style (do you like abstract art, or are you more of a realist?), as well as by price, size, and palette. And Cureeo’s curators, called “art impactors,” vet the work so that customers can trust they’re getting a good piece that’s worth the price.

being asked.

“I think there’s a real opportunity to help people get great art and live with great art,” said Swenson-Fortune. “For the same price that you can buy a plane ticket, a handbag, or a pair of shoes, you can buy something that’s one of a kind.”

Cureeo joins a league of similar sites that curate emerging and established artists and create an online gallery, including pioneers like 20×200 and [Ugallery](#), a curated online gallery for mid-career and emerging artists that launched in 2006, as well as newer communities like [Unit](#), which focuses on limited edition prints, multiples, and publications; [The Working Proof](#), design-oriented website that sells prints that are paired with a charity of the artist’s choice; and Canvas Pop’s [LTD.](#), a flash sale for photography and prints that cost \$150 or less.

The other part of the equation are third-party sites that give customers direct contact with artists. A forum like [Etsy](#) is a virtual craft fair. Among categories like jewelry and home and living is one for [art](#), and features pieces in a variety of media, including collage, painting, photography, and prints. Without a gallery or curator to take a cut of the profits, customers can find art for a lower price than in a gallery.

“I love Etsy and think it is an amazing service that allows me to buy directly from the artist, which is always the best way to go,” said Natasha Geraghty-Medved, a marketing specialist in San Francisco. “The prices are better and you are not paying for the middle-man’s ‘eye.’”

[Society6](#) is another affordable art site that is open to any number of artists to feature their work, except here, the site produces all of the products and ships them on behalf of the artist. Thousands of artists are featured from around the world.

Artists themselves are drawn to the convenience and sense of control that sites like Etsy and Society6 provide while promoting and selling their work.

“I like that it is an extremely democratic process, that there is really not much of a barrier there for anyone that can at least access the Internet and set up some kind of online account, and that I can price my art at amounts that I am comfortable with and that will ensure that anyone has a chance to own something completely unique and original,” said artist [Matt Kish](#), who uses Etsy to sell his original drawings. “For someone like me, Etsy provides a really convenient, simple, nicely customizable and very fairly priced Internet storefront. They do most of the heavy-lifting, and I just sell and ship my work.”

If you’re thinking of dipping your toes into the online art market, there are some things to keep in mind. Andrew Schrage, founder of the finance blog [Money Crashers](#), recommends sticking with authentic work that’s been signed by the artist, verifying the seller’s return policy, and to find affordable pieces, going with prints instead of originals.

“You can also look for a piece that’s part of a limited series. That way, you’ll own a piece of art which has better resale value if that’s what you’re looking to do,” said Schrage.

And while the Internet does provide room for a lot of self-discovery, a gallerist or curator can still

serve a purpose for those who need a little more guidance (which is a service curated sites like Cureeo do provide through their art impactors).

“Locating affordable art for your home should be utilized through a gallery that will take the time to get to know you as a person and guide you through the many different art mediums and forms,” said [Ryan James](#), who is in the process of opening an art gallery in Seattle that features works priced between \$200 and \$2,000. “Having an understanding of what you are purchasing creates a greater connection to the work and through that, an appreciation will grow and a new generation of art lovers and collectors will emerge.”

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