

## Options

**Putting the Art in Cart**  
**On Amazon.com, your**  
**own private masterpiece is**  
**just a mouse click away.**

By Anthony Effinger

> So, you're ready to replace that poster from the Montreal Jazz Fest but hate the idea of going into a gallery hawking "the next Andy Warhol"? Jeff Bezos has the answer: Amazon Art.

Last year, the e-tailer started selling fine art from galleries around the world—and in typical Bezos style, broke every rule in the book. Amazon's "gallery" sells \$25 photographs alongside \$525,000 oil paintings. You can search by artist, price, size, subject, style and even color. Click on the blue square in the search palette and you may get an arty image of New York's Rockefeller

Center by little-known photographer Dimitrios Manousakis for \$60 and, several screens later, *Monkey Train (Blue)*, a limited-edition mixed-media print by contemporary superstar Jeff Koons for \$40,000.

On just about every page, there's something to keep you looking, titillating your taste with Amazon's search tools until you land on a work that resonates. And then it's just a click to buy. No haggling, no pressure, no pretense. It's as easy as purchasing a pair of headphones. Or a humidifier. The gallery, not Amazon, ships to you directly—and often for free.

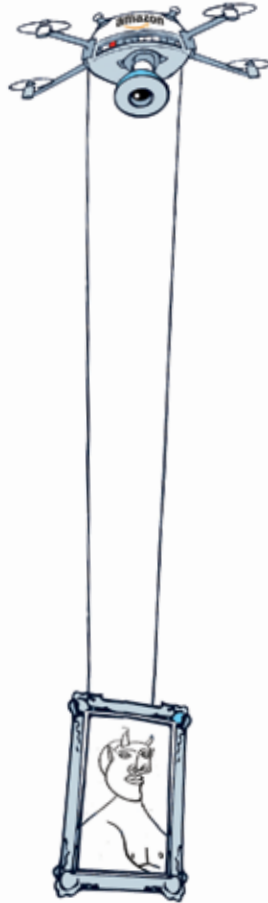
Charlotte Nichols, director of marketing at UGallery.com in San Francisco, says the future of art is online. UGallery has been on the Web since 2006. When Amazon called about a partnership, it was a no-brainer, she says. After all, a lot more people are trolling around Amazon.com than UGallery.com. She's happy to pay Amazon's fee, which neither she nor the online giant will disclose. "It's been a great relationship for us," Nichols says.

People have been selling fine art online for more than a decade on shopping sites such as EBay. As for dedicated venues, the oldest is probably Artnet.com, a German company founded in 1998 that runs auctions, hosts galleries and gathers data on a broad spectrum of sales worldwide (for which it remains the gold standard). There are also Paddle8.com and ArtSlant.com.

Artsy.net, backed by Twitter Inc. co-founder Jack Dorsey and Wendi Deng, ex-wife of Rupert Murdoch, has rounded up the hottest galleries: Acquavella, Gagosian, White Cube. About 1,500 galleries list on Artsy compared with 250 for Amazon. In terms of inventory, the two are about equal: 50,000 pieces on Artsy versus 55,000 on Amazon.

Curiator.com, a site that invited beta testers to join in September and that's expected to launch in earnest in April, allows users to gather images from around the Web and build a virtual collection in anticipation of an actual one. "We want to be there *before* people buy," says Moenen Erbauer, who started the site with former Google Inc. engineer Tobias Boonstoppel. The duo eventually plan to sell art directly and from galleries.

Among the strictly online art purveyors, Amazon is by far the easiest through which to make an impulse purchase, with the familiar yellow Add to Cart button beside each and every piece. On Artsy, you sometimes have to click on Contact Gallery, perhaps prompting second thoughts.



Both Amazon and Artsy say they're selective about their member galleries, and both have neat-o software that displays how a piece will look in a room. But the similarities end there. Artsy charges galleries to list work. Amazon charges nothing for listings and takes a percentage upon sale. It's easy to do an end run around the Seattle-based superstore and contact a gallery directly, although Amazon claims not to mind if you do. "We strive to offer everything that our customers want," spokesman Erik Fairleigh says.

The art establishment is by turns wary and dismissive. Peter Hort, a lawyer and collector, says he hasn't purchased anything on Amazon because most of its offerings are decorative, not investment grade. Hort, 42, lauds Amazon for getting more art into the hands of the people; he cringes, however, at the thought of buying art based solely on a JPEG. Nor would he sort offerings by size, subject or, heaven forbid, color. "Most of the artwork I own doesn't even have my favorite color—red—in it," he says.

Betsy Senior, owner of Senior & Shopmaker Gallery in New York's Chelsea neighborhood, sells work through Artsy but not Amazon. "The Amazon venture is never going to be serious about reaching the kind of collector I want to reach," Senior says. "It's too populist."

Indeed, the high-end gallery owners who have so far joined Amazon haven't moved much merchandise. Kenneth Friedman, for example, owns an eponymous gallery in Calabasas, California, dealing in work by Chuck Close, Jim Dine and Ed Ruscha. Friedman spent a week loading digital images into Amazon's system, including a self-portrait by Close for \$14,000, a Robert Rauschenberg screen print for \$15,000 and a Richard Serra etching for \$9,500. Then he waited. And waited. "We've sold one piece," Friedman says. "And that was an uphill battle."

It's not for lack of trying. Friedman shares Bezos's commitment to the lowest possible prices. "Nobody has priced material lower than us," Friedman says. "And I provide free shipping."

It's early days, though. Sometime soon, while sifting through Amazon.com for ceiling fans or sofas, you may decide to grab a Warhol screen print to take your living room up a notch. In January, there was just such a work—of Chairman Mao, his face a deep blue, his jacket a Kelly green—for \$200,000. Go ahead; add it to your cart.