

# Collector Convos

Chicago Gallery News introduces a new series focusing on the Collector. For this first interview, art critic Alicia Eler spoke with Jefferson Goddard, video art collector and Chair of the MCA's VERGE, to talk moving images, and how collecting art can be like getting a tattoo.

You won't find the evening news blaring at 6 pm on a weeknight in Jefferson Godard's home. For the past five years, the Chicago-based collector has carefully grown his exclusively video art collection and, like any art aficionado, strives to have pieces in every room, hallway, corner and doorway of his home. The only twist here is that they're all on, competing for the viewers' attention at the same time—something one can't say about paintings.



Still from Marc Swanson's *Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime*

Now the Chair of VERGE, an emerging collectors group at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Godard is committed to cultivating both his own and the Chicago art scene's appreciation of new media works by up-and-coming artists.

We sat down in his living room where, on a particularly wintery day, candles flickered in Jay Hikes's two-channel video installation *The Sixth Re-Telling* (2006);

silver tinsel flashed between shots of a gay serial killer from the 1970s psychedelic porn flick, *Bijou*, in Marc Swanson's fast-paced, one-minute mish-mash *Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime* (2006); and a fireplace — a real one, not a prerecorded video — warmed the room.

## Tell me about how you became interested in video.

*For me it grew out of studying the city as an architecture graduate student. I lived in Berlin from 2001–2003 and, for me, understanding the city became more conceptual than historical or linguistic—I began to see Berlin through the means of film techniques, like pan, montage and still. Through that I fostered a growing love of film and video. When I got out of school and started working, I was naturally drawn to video and the multiplicity of images, which I know can be contradictory because someone who loves painting could say the same thing about that medium. But for me, this became part of my experience with video.*

## How do you live with the constant stimulation of video art?

*It helps to have works to choose from, and it helps to change it up. I get to experience a variety of pieces but, to be perfectly honest, they eventually become background noise—like a low-playing radio. I guess the constant noise of television is more disconcerting for me than video art because I'm not used to it, it changes in volume, and at least there's a steadiness to a video piece—it kind of becomes a timbre. I know what the Jay Hikes's piece sounds like, I know what the Marc Swanson piece sounds like, whereas commercials and television shows are in constant flux.*

## Did you set out to buy only video, or did it just happen?

*After I bought a Taryn Simon photograph from Gagosian Gallery in New York, art collecting became its own animal. Once you decide to invest that much of your own money into something you really love, it's going to be part of you and part of your aesthetic—it becomes an obsession, like anything else.*

## Did you start collecting with certain themes in mind?

*After you buy a certain number of works, you realize that you have a theme. For me, those themes are humor, sexuality, the sense of self—how the self relates to society, and the study of the self. The work isn't all narrative, either, and everything is cacophonous.*

*I also have a lot of "firsts"—a lot of my work is from emerging artists. I have the first video Kara Walker made, three of Guy Ben-Ner's first videos, one of Jay Hikes's first videos, Marc Swanson's first video, Robin Rhode's first studio work that he did inside, rather than on the street, Kate Gilmore's first video that she did with a sculpture installation that she showed alongside of it. I like that my collection has that emerging energy.*



Video still from Jeroen Nelemans's *Red Alert*

## Do you think collecting art is similar to the way people are with tattoos, like once you get one you have to get another?

*That's an interesting analogy. When you buy art, it's not like you're buying 100 shares of IBM that you can sell. You're buying work that you really have to love, that you have to experience, that you have to live with, and you're inking yourself—it's going to be permanently on your body. And of course you can get it removed, of course you can sell something, but who knows if the ink will all come out, or if you can actually sell a piece of art.*

## Do you foresee selling any of the videos?

*You can't think about it because it doesn't happen that much unless it's a Bill Viola. If I ever sell something it would be to buy something else. Because, like a tattoo, if you have free skin you're going to put another tattoo on it. You're not going to buy another person and tattoo them, right?*



Collector Jefferson Goddard

## Local Collector Resources & Groups

### ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

#### • Society for Contemporary Art (SCA)

Promotes better understanding and appreciation of contemporary art through a series of lectures and meetings. Offering insights into the production, collection, and display of the art of our own time, the SCA's programs offer access to a roster of leading national and international artists, dealers, critics, art historians, and curators, as well as visits to private Chicago collections. The SCA aims to enhance the Art Institute's collection. Every year members review a selected group of contemporary works, and, through a voting process, choose one or more objects to purchase on behalf of the museum. SCA membership is available in 6 categories, ranging from \$150 - \$2,500. Contact Jenny Gheith: [jgheith@artic.edu](mailto:jgheith@artic.edu) or (312) 443-3630

### MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

#### • Collectors Forum

Dedicated to encouraging collecting in Chicago and enhancing knowledge of contemporary art through exclusive opportunities to view private collections, connect with other like-minded art enthusiasts, and explore contemporary art around the world. Annual dues support the MCA's exhibition programs as well as the acquisition of new works for the collection. Contact Lisa Key at 312.397.3867 or [lkey@mcachicago.org](mailto:lkey@mcachicago.org).

#### • VERGE

The MCA's auxiliary group for young collectors helps the museum remain vital and relevant by creating dialogue among collectors of works by emerging international artists and providing fresh perspectives on Chicago's cultural community. Annual dues of \$1,000 directly support the acquisition of works for the museum's collection. Contact Dominic Molon, Curator: 312.397.3852 or [dmolon@mcachicago.org](mailto:dmolon@mcachicago.org).