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The Public Influence of the Private Collector: A Hand in History

Nicola Kritzinger

ABSTRACT

This report examines the collecting practices of the private collector of South African art, situated in South Africa, and considers the way in which the act of collecting influences both the contemporary market and the construction of the art historical canon. The report questions the contribution made to the South African art world by collecting practices and considers what is involved in the collecting of fine art. I discuss the collector in relation to Sylvester Ogbechie's (2010) notion of cultural brokerage; I examine notions of both public and private through the writings of Michael Warner (2002); and I consider what makes into one a collector, with reference to Thomas G. Tanselle's (1998) text *A Rationale of Collecting*, while engaging several other sources. The report continues with a comparison between international collectors, with a focus on the ways in which they contribute to what becomes and remains relevant, as well as discussing some local collectors. I conclude with an examination of the way in which auction houses have played a seminal role in the establishment of the canon in South Africa, and the role of the collector in relation to this system. In summary, this paper examines the ways in which the private collector of South African art has a great influence on what is perceived as relevant to the canon, to culture and to art history.

(Keywords: private collector; collecting; South African Art; Sylvester Ogbechie; culture broker; Michael Warner; South African Art canon; public; auction)