

ART

Ya gotta have art

Tips for enjoying and being enjoyed at Cascade AIDS Project fundraiser

BY FLOYD SKLAVER

Imagine 1,500 people milling in an atrium decorated to look like a French museum. Add outstanding food from Portland's finest restaurants, hundreds of works by both emerging and well-established artists and one really terrific cause and you have Cascade AIDS Project's annual Art for Life auction, April 10 at Montgomery Park.

Admittedly, rubbing shoulders with high society while trying to understand modern art can be nerve-wracking, so I've prepared this handy guide to navigating the shoals of the Saturday night scene.

First, and most importantly, the evening is about raising money (some \$350,000), and the way CAP does this is by selling art. Lots of it.

This year there are works by such luminaries as Portland painters Kim Osgood, Lucinda Miller and G. Lewis Clevenger as well as from people you probably haven't heard of yet (but certainly will), like Barbara Gilbert, a striking mixed-media artist, and Deborah Gillis, a Portland painter.

Still, art can be pretty intimidating. I mean, how can you really tell if that thing that looks like your nephew's finger painting is good or not?

First off, trust your instincts. Simply ask yourself how the piece makes you feel when you look at it. Don't be embarrassed. If "ick" is the first thing that comes to mind; that just means it's probably not the one for you.

Playwright Claudia Shearer once said: "Art should have a smell. That way, if it's bad you wouldn't have it in your house."

Veteran collectors recommend speed. Walk into a gallery and take a quick look around. If nothing captures your attention immediately, move on. And that's particularly good advice for this event, where more than 380 items will be vying for your attention and your purse.

Speaking of purse strings, be sure to ask yourself, "Would I like to look at this piece over and over again?" This is important because, let's face it, once you've splurged on the tickets

(\$100 for the auction and hors d'oeuvres or \$250 with patron dinner), the clothes (event co-chairman and Saks Fifth Avenue general manager Jeff Miller suggests his store has just the right outfit for you) and the art, you'll probably have no money left for anything else.

Here's a little secret you won't hear

from anyone but me: If you think a piece is ugly, chances are it is. But that doesn't mean someone won't find it appealing. (There's no accounting for taste.) Even so, it's best to whisper your snickering comments rather than offend others.

If you must speak them out loud (and if you're standing close to me, then you absolutely must), always use SAT-level words arranged in a pompous and pretentious fashion.

Of course, the same tone should be affected for critiquing all things that evening. For instance, when evaluating the artichoke heart pancakes from Imbibe, one of more than 35 eateries donating canapés and desserts, describe it as "an explosion of flavors that remind one of summer strolls on the Champs Elysee."

Now for tips on bidding: If there's a piece you fall in love with (and with so many, there's bound to be), stake out a close spot and, like a jealous lover, keep a watchful eye.

My first year, I bid on one I adored, but with so many pieces on display, I couldn't find it again later to monitor the bidding. Lesson learned, last year I made sure to jot down the location for a particular favorite, but every time I checked back, I was outbid.

Finally, I spied my friends Phyllis and Warren hiding behind a pillar. As soon as I increased my bid and walked away, Phyllis

raced over and raised me. I finally conceded the piece but then got back at them by putting their bidder number down for another painting. Hey, it was for a good cause!

The highlight of the evening is the live auction, where 23 of the best works are sold by auctioneer extraordinaire Steve Talbot. These pieces have been painstakingly selected by Art in America editor and critic Peter Selz.

The only advice I have for bidding at the live auction is not to sit near me, because I've been known to reach over and tickle my neighbor in the armpit so that his or her arm flies into the air just as the auctioneer announces, "Once...twice...."

Finally, plan to arrive early because that's when most of the socializing occurs. At that point, no one is paying much attention to the art. It's all about the dresses (from Saks, of course), the hair (Mr. Paul from Ziva Salon) and the shoes (Louis Vuitton in Pioneer Place). But don't be intimidated.

As Jeff Miller says, "It's going to be a great party." □

ART FOR LIFE is 5:30 to 11 p.m. April 10 at Montgomery Park, 2107 N.W. Vaughn St. Tickets are \$100 or \$250 for patrons, which includes dinner and an art preview, from 503-223-9255 or www.artforlifekintera.org.



Lucinda Miller's "Shipyard" is waiting for just the right bid at the April 10 Art for Life



Art for Life co-chairman Jeff Miller promises "a great party"

If there's a piece you fall in love with, stake out a close spot and, like a jealous lover, keep a watchful eye

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