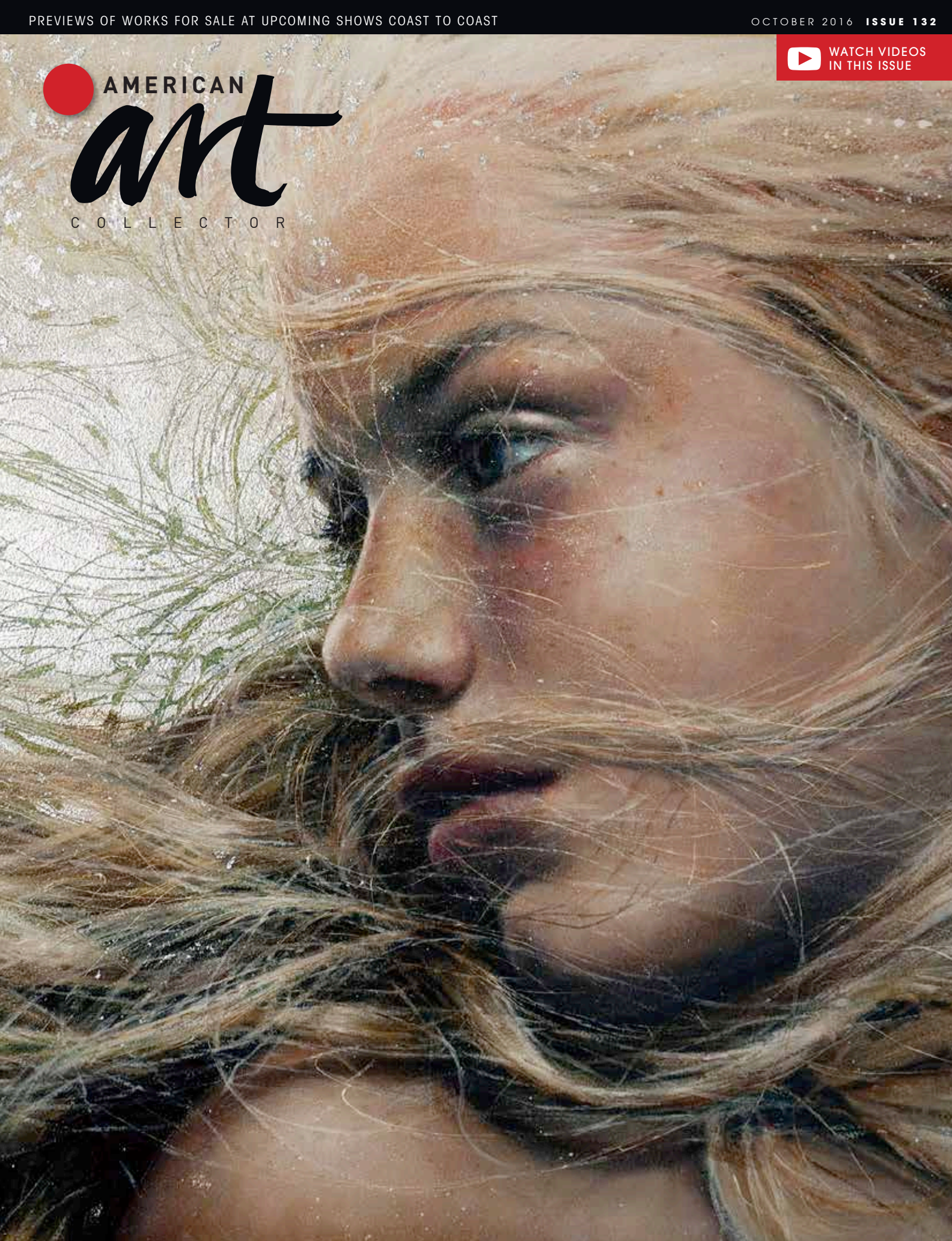


AMERICAN
art
COLLECTOR

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PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

THIS LONG ISLAND COLLECTION BOASTS PAINTINGS THE COLLECTORS BUY WITH THEIR HEARTS.

BY JOHN O'HERN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCIS SMITH

Our collectors first saw a work by the Chilean artist Claudio Bravo (1936-2011) about 10 years ago on a visit to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It was a large drawing of a package wrapped in white paper and tied with brown twine. “We both loved it,” the husband acknowledges.

His wife explains that a friend bought a Bravo painting in 2008, a painting she admits to still coveting. In 2013 Marlborough Gallery had an exhibition of 40 of Bravo’s paintings painted during the years he was represented by the gallery.

The couple had met Laura Grenning, owner of

Grenning Gallery in Sag Harbor, New York, through a friend. She told them she was going to the Bravo show at Marlborough and asked if they wanted to go along. They did. “We bought quite a few,” the husband admits. “We had never been anywhere but Marlborough and were overwhelmed to see so many Bravos in one room.”

In 1993, I was visiting the late collectors Melvin Blake and Frank Purnell at their apartment in Manhattan. They asked if I wanted to see the apartment across the hall that they were looking after for...Claudio Bravo. It had been mind blowing to

1
Morteros / Mortars, 2001, oil on canvas, by Claudio Bravo (1936-2011), hangs in the dining room with Ben Fenske’s *Secret Beach*, 2011, oil on canvas.

2
Hanging above the family room fireplace is *Blue and Green Babouche*, 2004, oil on canvas, by Claudio Bravo (1936-2011).







3



4

see a famous Antonio López García, a great Magritte and Bravo's awesome drawing *Lying Christ* at Mel and Frank's, but stepping into Bravo's apartment left me breathless. When I left the apartment, I thought, "Well this will never happen again [seeing so many Bravos in one space]."

Our collectors have perhaps the largest private collections of Bravos in the country. Not only are his paintings displayed throughout their home but their apartment in North Carolina has two large paintings. The pièce de résistance of their Long Island collection is a triptych measuring 78¾ by 118 inches. It's the first thing they see when they step out of their bedroom.

"I wake up every morning and see the sun rise," he says. "And then I see the triptych. It makes me smile. It makes me feel better about people...that someone can accomplish that. His paintings aren't photographic—they have a certain warmth to them. Living with them we can look at them up close just as he did when he was painting them. They don't look hyperrealistic at that distance but they do from 10 feet away. I like that he can make that transition in his mind.

"Most people who visit our home have never seen a Bravo," he continues. "They're pretty surprised. They like that he makes paintings of things that are so mundane. Often their response is surprise at how pleased they are by a painting of just a wrapped package."

"We didn't really intend to collect art," she admits. "It just snowballed. We may have had two paintings between us when we got married. We had just built a new house and had empty walls everywhere. We knew we had to start collecting art but didn't know what. It was all extremely new to us. Laura has guided us all along. After we saw the Bravos at Marlborough she took us down to the New York Academy of Art where we met Kristy Gordon and bought several of her pieces. Laura invited us out to her gallery and has taken us around to each of the artists' studios before we purchased their art.

"Our house is on the water," she continues, "so most of the paintings, other than the Bravos, are coastal scenes. We like the warmth of the beach scenes, and that's the direction I thought I wanted to go before we purchased the Bravos. We have been to most of the major museums in the world. It's a different experience seeing art in a museum and having it hanging in your home, being able to walk by it every day. It's extremely exciting. Every time it takes your breath away."

They both remark on liking Bravo's drawings as well as his figure paintings although very few of the latter appear on the



5

3
Ben Fenske's *Moonrise July*, 2010, oil, hangs in a guest room.

4
Melissa Franklin Sanchez's *Poppy Fields*, 2011, oil, hangs in the kitchen.

5
Red and White Triptych, 2005, oil on three canvases, by Claudio Bravo (1936-2011), hangs in the stairwell.

6
Aluminio rojo / Red Aluminum, 2010, oil on canvas, by Claudio Bravo (1936-2011), hangs in the living room.
Hippo, 2009, bronze, edition 5 of 9, by Robert Hooke is on the coffee table.

7
In a guest room are, from top to bottom, Nelson White, *The Yellow Umbrella*, 2011 oil; *Beach Scene*, 2012, oil, by Ramiro; and White's *Long Beach Sag Harbor*, 2012, oil.



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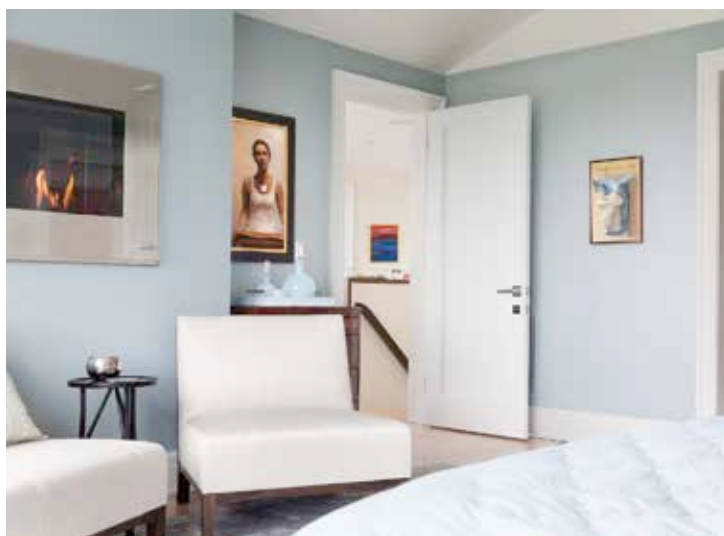
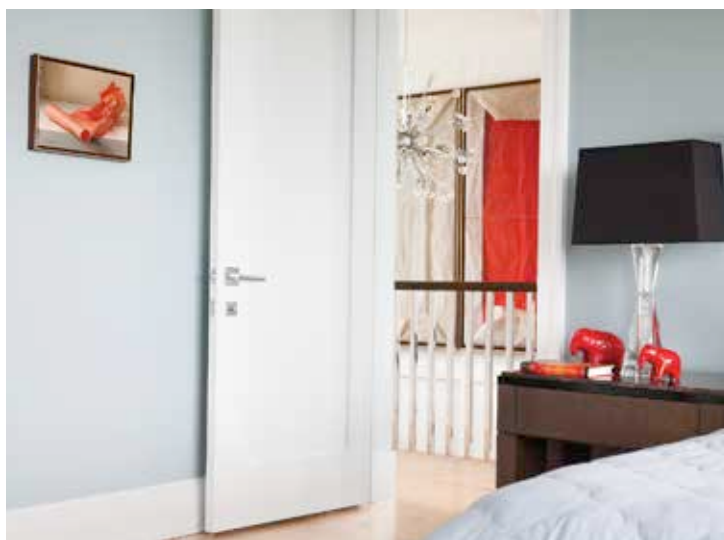


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In a guest room is *Castelmuzio*, 2016, oil on linen, by Marc Dalessio.

9
Small Copper Boulder and Large Copper Boulder, 2013, copper sheet patches and rivets, by Nathan Joseph, are on the lawn.

10
Salmon Paper, 2006, oil on canvas, by Claudio Bravo (1936-2011), is in the master bedroom and through the door is his *Red and White Triptych*, 2005, oil on three canvases.

11
Melissa Franklin Sanchez's *Self Portrait Always Dreaming*, 2012, oil, is beside the door in the master bedroom. *Blue and White Paper*, 2007, oil on canvas, by Claudio Bravo (1936-2011), is on the right.



market. It's likely that his drawings will begin to find their way into the collection.

Through Grenning they have met and come to know a number of artists working in the region. He remarks, "We have several pieces by Nathan Joseph. I like his stuff, but I really just like him. He's a bigger-than-life character. He makes me smile." She adds, "He's quite entertaining. His studio is such a mess; I don't know how he keeps it all straight in his head. He's extremely talented."

She continues, "We buy pieces that speak to us. I would advise people to buy what moves them. Some people look at purchasing art as a transaction, an investment." "We've bought what we like," he observes, "because we've wanted to live with it." She adds, "The art makes our house a home, something we love as part of our everyday life."

Their philosophy is to buy what they both agree on. "I feel strongest about people whose work we can reasonably afford and whom I respect," he explains. "The best thing is when you go out and meet the artists and talk to them. It brings a personal element to it. We buy a piece because we want to live with it."

"When the time comes that it will have served its purpose," he continues, "for us, we'd like to facilitate the paintings becoming part of a public museum where others can experience the Bravos, for instance, all in one space." ●