

# Art for art's sake

**Kate Sole** learns a few tricks of the trade about buying art

**A**S the black cloud of the financial crisis continues to cast its deathly shadow over the property market and retail sector, there is one area that can still offer a sound investment – art!

Even in this time of fiscal insecurity, the sector has continued to show that it can remain buoyant and one only needs to look at last September's auction of Damien Hirst works, which fetched a record-breaking £111 million, for proof.

Realistically, the vast majority of

us do not have the budget of high-end investors to blow on a £2 million Hirst. However, art can still be a wise and sensible addition to your portfolio, whatever your budget.

But what should you look for when buying art, and what are the pitfalls to avoid? With my art knowledge stretching to knowing a Jack Vettriano when I see one, I decided to speak to art consultant and exhibitions curator Micky Middleton, of the Red Gallery, to get some expert advice.

Stepping into Micky's cosy Buckinghamshire cottage in Loudwater Village is much like stepping into an art lover's dream. Kate Moss stares out from the sitting room wall – forever captured as a flawless 17-year-old by Tony Briggs – a screenprint courtesy of Banksy's

idol Blek le Rat adorns the adjacent wall, and glass cabinets display gorgeous sculptures created by one of Micky's own, and very collectable, artists, Stanley Dove.

There is, however, one artist prominently exhibited in the house who is perhaps less known to the art circuit and that is Micky's five-year-old son Jacob, who is already demonstrating a certain flair with a crayon. "He doesn't get it from me, I didn't even do art A-level," the Cotswolds-born dealer jokes.

In fact, 36-year-old Micky, who represents a select number of British and European artists through her online gallery, received no formal training. She just had a passion for art, which, she tells me, came from accompanying her antique dealer father to art fairs.

"I loved hearing my dad talk about 17th Century furniture. I loved looking at the furniture and seeing why it was original and not a fake and I loved talking to the clients and meeting some amazing people."

Now Micky, who has more than 15 years experience of gallery management, exhibition curating, publishing and sourcing of both contemporary and investment works of art for clients, is herself exhibiting at international and UK art fairs and passing on her passion to her clients.

"When I buy art for myself and when I am choosing artists for my gallery, it's exactly the same format. It's very much based on what I like and then that passion flows through to my clients.

"I can't imagine many people buying art just for investment value alone, it's a side factor, but it can work for clients and it has certainly



Art consultant and exhibitions curator, Micky Middleton beside her latest purchase, *Haute Coiffure*, by Tony Briggs