



THE ART NEWSPAPER

February 22, 2025
By Benjamin Sutton

'I'm still dreaming about a very large Tomo Campbell painting': the lighting executive Alexandra Mathews on brilliant abstraction

The collector tells us about her family firm's artist collaborations, and her first art purchase, furniture from a Paris flea market



Alexandra Mathews is a Los Angeles-based collector and an executive vice president at Lucifer Lighting, the high-end lighting company responsible for brightening iconic institutions like the Beverly Hills Hotel
Casey Kelbaugh

Alexandra Mathews grew up in a well-lit home, surrounded by art: her parents, the collectors Gilbert and Suzanne Mathews, are the founders of the San Antonio-based high-end lighting company Lucifer Lighting. The family's collection includes works by Mel Bochner, Sonia Delaunay, Alberto Giacometti, Alex Katz and Adolph Gottlieb. In addition to high-end retail and hospitality, the family business's clients include the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and it operates a showroom in Lower Manhattan that opened in 2023 with a selection of art curated by Lehmann Maupin. Alexandra, now an executive vice president at Lucifer Lighting, is based in Los Angeles and carving out her own identity as a collector.

The Art Newspaper: How were you affected by the wildfires?

Alexandra Mathews: We had friends who lost their homes or have been permanently displaced as a result of the Los Angeles wildfires, which has been heartbreaking. My family was not in the initial evacuation zone, but as the situation worsened, we evacuated for what ended up being two weeks after the Palisades fire started. The unknown of the situation is incredibly scary, something that no one can fully prepare for; however, it's a special thing to see the good in humanity come to life and rally behind one another to support those who lost everything and those on the front lines, who continue to risk their lives to save the people, animals and property in our communities.

What are you looking forward to during Frieze Los Angeles this year?

I prefer to keep my agenda flexible, allowing me to fully immerse myself in the vibrant Los Angeles art scene and its thriving community. I see fairs as incredible opportunities for discovery, where I can learn about both Los Angeles-based and visiting galleries.

I'll be sure to visit Lehmann Maupin's booth. Our company, Lucifer Lighting, recently collaborated with them for a presentation featuring works by David Salle and Catherine Opie at our Tribeca showroom. The collaboration is part of a rotating gallery series designed to showcase the dynamic relationship between contemporary art and design—something that aligns with our family's deep passion for the arts. I'm also especially excited to check out the new Post-Fair in Santa Monica [until 22 February], which promises to add another dimension to Los Angeles's ever-evolving art landscape.

Where do you like to eat and drink in or near Santa Monica?

My all-time favourite restaurant in Los Angeles is Capo—exceptional Italian (think homemade pasta, fresh seafood, meat, etc). Dinner at the bar is heaven. Another great spot is Le Great Outdoor Restaurant. The food is fantastic and the atmosphere embodies a summer meal in Europe. I also love grabbing a drink at the Beverly Hills Hotel—not just for its iconic interiors but also to check out our lighting installed throughout the property.

What was the first work you ever bought?

My first purchase was a pair of Francis Jourdain chairs from the 1920s (that I also bought in my 20s). I found them at the Marché aux Puces in Paris.

What was the most recent work you bought?

Our most recent gallery collaboration at our Tribeca showroom, in partnership with Marianne Boesky Gallery, featured works by the Dallas-based self-taught painter Jammie Holmes. We wanted to invite an artist with Texas roots to exhibit as an extension of our 45th anniversary celebrations last year. Our family was instantly captivated by Jammie's work and practice, and I have my eye on one of his paintings.

How quickly do you decide to buy a work of art?

Quickly! I know immediately when I love something—it's an instinctive reaction. Then, I take a moment to assess its value, ensuring it's a smart investment. If everything checks out, I shift to the next step: figuring out the perfect place for it.

What do you regret not buying when you had the chance?

I'm still dreaming about a very large Tomo Campbell painting—an Aubusson tapestry-meets-Fauve hunting scene. It perfectly captures the brilliance of Campbell's coloured grounds and his brilliant abstraction. The only problem was I didn't have room!



Henri Matisse's *Le Bonheur de vivre* (the joy of life, 1905-06), which was once owned by Gertrude Stein and her husband, and is now in the collection of the Barnes Foundation, is the work in a museum that Mathews would most like to own
Public domain, Courtesy of Barnes Foundation

If you could have any work from any museum in the world, what would it be?

Le Bonheur de vivre (the joy of life, 1905-06) by Henri Matisse at the Barnes Foundation.