

ARTIST / COLLECTOR MODEL RELATIONSHIP

I recently exchanged a flurry of emails with Scottish wildlife painter, Derek Robertson (derekrobertson.com). In the course of our discussion about the possibility of including a few of his works for an exhibition I am organizing, he pointed out to me that the works I was considering, though previously purchased and now owned by collectors, were never-the-less, all available for exhibition. In Derek's words, "Those already sold have loan agreements with purchasers."

When I read Derek's email, I almost couldn't believe my eyes. Though I've worked with wildlife artists for 35 years, I've never before experienced something like this, particularly in the U.S. or Canada. So I replied, "Could you share with me the terms of your loan agreements with your purchasers. That is something I would like to recommend to other artists."

Derek's response: "The agreement I have is informal: An email exchange agreeing a loan period of up to a year should I need it and an offer to lend a painting or print of similar size to fill the space on their wall in return." To which he added, "Although I would have to credit my wife who is good at making me get organised....she now works for the Tate Galleries whose curatorial staff seem to strongly share your view."

A former museum man myself, I can understand the advice Derek's wife gave him, since collectors are sometimes unwilling to part with their purchases for museum exhibitions. In Derek's case, his collectors are to be complimented not only for their affability, but also for their wisdom and sophistication. By agreeing to lend works back for display, Derek's collectors are supporting Derek and his career. But they are also helping themselves by creating a history for the artwork they happen to own. This history, known as "provenance" among connoisseurs, imbues artworks with real added value. To appreciate this, just go to Christie's or Sotheby's or most any other reputable auction house, and you will see that they rely heavily on an artwork's individual history to establish and justify value.

Derek's savvy and the savvy of his collectors should be followed as a model by North American artists lucky enough to have their work requested for display in galleries and museums. Thank you, Derek, for sharing that with me.

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Curator/Tour Director