

An Approachable Gallery

An Interview with
**Frederick S. Clark, Vice President and Director,
 Wally Findlay Galleries International, Inc.**



Frederick S. Clark (left) at Wally Findlay's New York Gallery



EDITORS' NOTE Prior to his current post, Frederick Clark was President and is Founder of MiMedia, Inc. From 2006 to 2009, he was Associate Publisher and is Founder of ForbesLife MountainTime magazine. He has also been Director at Digital Convergence Corporation, Vice President at W.P. Carey & Co, Inc., Equity Research Associate for ING Baring Furman Selz LLC, and an independent consultant. He received his M.B.A. from the Stern School of Business at New York University and his B.S. in Finance from University of Maryland College Park.

COMPANY BRIEF As art dealers serving individuals, institutions, and corporate collectors, Wally Findlay Galleries International, Inc. (wallyfindlay.com), was founded in 1870 in Kansas City, Missouri. With galleries in New York and Barcelona, and affiliates in London, Paris, and Monte Carlo, in addition to its flagship premises in Palm Beach, Florida, Wally Findlay Galleries specializes in Impressionist and Modern Masters, and is considered one of the leading authorities of paintings of the École de Rouen (France). The gallery currently represents more than 40 contemporary artists worldwide, creating more than 50 exhibitions annually within their gallery network.

How do you define the service component within Wally Findlay?

Service is paramount at Wally Findlay, and we encourage people to come by and experience it for themselves. I could share a lot of anecdotes about how we treat customers and the kinds of services we offer. However, the important thing is that all customers get treated with great care whether they spend \$5,000, \$5 million, or anywhere in between.

Art is one of the remaining purchases that ought to be seen personally before purchased. So we facilitate that whenever possible. It's part of our vision of service. If the client can't come to us, then we'll get the painting to them. We want them to see it on their wall to make an informed decision about whether or not they want to make the acquisition.

Buying art can be intimidating and the general rule is that the trendier the gallery, the more cold an environment it is. We want people who walk in our door to feel absolutely at home. We don't pressure sales. We try to have a conversation with someone before I ask if they're in the market for anything. Doing so also helps the client better articulate what it is they may be looking for.

We also believe that even the smartest consumers want to learn, and the learning process is now part of the consuming process. The customers want to be taught, not told.

In this type of business, is the website an informational tool only? Do customers really have to come in and see the art piece to get a feel for it before buying?

We're still trying to figure that out. I believe we need to get to the next generation in terms of digital marketing, and that art galleries are probably behind the times on this.

I don't think we will ever have a purchase funnel that we're optimizing to increase conversions like Netflix. However, the website can still be an integral part of the purchase by informing the customer about the work, the artist, the movement, and the market. In this sense, the site is another tool we use to engage and educate the consumer.

What is the thrust of your concierge marketing program?

Marketing to concierges is part of a larger effort to market to professionals who make recommendations and manage the affairs of others. We want to ensure people in that role understand Wally Findlay beyond

the contents of our collection. They need to understand how Wally Findlay treats our clients from beginning to end – and I say that without regard to how much they spend or if they spend at all.

The genesis behind this is that there is a growing population constricted by only one thing: time. This group has money, property, power – whatever they want – except time. They often wish to be guided, but not in a commercial way. Concierges are a trusted resource meeting this need.

For our part, we meet personally with concierges throughout the city, sharing with them the Wally Findlay story and explaining how we take care of our clients. Most importantly, we assure them we will treat their guests the way they would. We also invite them to visit the gallery to experience Wally Findlay for themselves. In addition to these personal meetings, we also reach out to the concierge professional organizations including Les Clefs d'Or USA and the New York City Association of Concierges.

As I indicated, concierges are one part of this marketing to advisors. We also work with family offices, business managers, art advisors, interior designers, and asset managers.

Do most people look at art as an investment or as something they can enjoy?

Sometimes it can be a great combination of both. Although we're not licensed investment advisors, some artists and particular works of art have made the leap to an investment class and we try to convey that information to the collector.

Are you still bringing new artists in? Are there certain traits you look for in a new artist?

All the time. We have been around for 144 years and exhibiting new artists is important to our future. The art business is a little different than a lot of businesses in that replacing sold inventory can be a challenge. After all, everything we sell is one of a kind.

New artists come to us often and getting to know them is part of what we do. They have to fit into Wally Findlay somehow. We have long been a gallery that specializes in representational art. Some things are more abstract than others, but everything has to fit with us and we have to be comfortable marketing new artists to our clients. ●