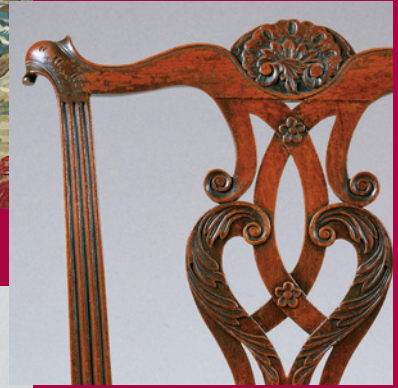
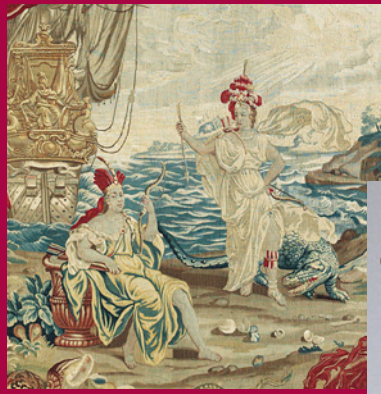


If I had \$1 Million



Our second annual “if I had \$1 million” spree took place again this year at the prestigious Winter Antiques Show held in mid-January at New York City’s Park

Avenue armory. Since initiating our fantasy spree, we’ve discovered that others enjoy playing the game too; in fact, we encountered several people with clipboards at the show compiling their own imaginary purchases.

This year we brought together a quintet of art and antiques lovers: a museum curator, dealer, decorator, collector, and myself, a writer and collector. Each of us had an imaginary budget of \$1 million to purchase four objects. The rules were: one object had to cost \$15,000 or less, and two of the four objects had to come from outside the participants’ areas of expertise.

collected by Mark Golodetz



A Winter
Antiques
Show
Buying
Spree



Johanna Metzgar Brown is the director of collections and the curator of Old Salem Museums and Gardens, including the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), since 1991.



Demilune Federal card table, circa 1800; priced at \$145,000. Courtesy of Sumpter Priddy, Inc., Alexandria, Va.



Desk, attributed to William Howard, circa 1870; priced at \$285,000. Courtesy of Leigh Keno American Antiques, New York, NY.



Furniture pulls and fashion engravings, 1785–1788; 1777–1799; priced at \$5,000. Courtesy of Cora Ginsburg, New York, NY.



James Earl, *Lady Mary Beauclerk*, circa 1790; priced at \$450,000. Courtesy of Alexander Galleries.

My husband will tell you that spending money has never been hard for me, so imagine my delight when presented with a million imaginary dollars to spend any way I chose on objects for the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts. Beginning in Sumpter Priddy's booth, my first "must have" object was the remarkable demilune card table by an unidentified but talented cabinetmaker working in Virginia or Maryland. The asking price: \$145,000. The inlay on the table relates to another less sophisticated example already in the MESDA collection, possibly from the same shop. Sumpter Priddy speculated that the table represents the work of this artisan shortly after his arrival in America, possibly from Scotland, while other related examples represent the work of his shop after he had more fully incorporated prevailing mid-Atlantic characteristics.

My second object was the antithesis to the high style card table and appealed to me for

just that reason. Offered by Leigh Keno, the desk was made circa 1870. It is attributed to William "Willie" Howard, a freed African-American slave working on the Mississippi plantation of Mississippi Governor William McWillie. It was adorned with relief carving of everything from tools to domestic cutlery—the materials of everyday life for its maker. Its rarity as a well-documented African-American-made decorative art object from just after the Civil War made it a bargain at \$285,000.

In an effort to venture away from furniture—but not too far—I couldn't pass up the enamel and stamped brass furniture pulls depicting a young lady wearing a stylish headdress, which I coupled with a pocket-book album of fashion engravings. This combination of objects was priced at \$5,000 at Cora Ginsberg's booth. Speaking to the impact of clothing fashions in the larger marketplace, both appealed to the social historian in me, as I imagined the delight of

the fashion-conscious woman who assembled the album, had she been able to install these pulls on her dressing table drawers.

My final, perhaps favorite, "purchase" was offered by Alexander Galleries: a portrait of Lady Mary Beauclerk, daughter of Lord Aubrey and Lady Jane Beauclerk, painted circa 1790 by James Earl, brother of the better known Ralph Earl. There's a universal appeal to the young Mary, dressed in a pristine white dress and holding a basket of nearly translucent cherries in a bucolic setting. Yet, what drew me to this portrait was how much she reminded me of my own daughter, Libby, when she was a baby. Although the price tag on the painting was \$450,000, the evocation of such memories is surely priceless.

In tallying up my expenses, I realized that I had spent only \$885,000. So many more things beckoned during my tour of the Winter Antiques Show, most notably a magnificent cast iron Newfoundland dog (not

pictured) offered by Barbara Israel Garden Antiques. My budget could have covered it, but alas, the game limits its players to four

objects, and I had fudged already in my grouping of the pulls and fashion album. My husband claims it's no surprise that I was able

to get so close to the limit on my imaginary expense account with only four objects, he's just amazed that I didn't go over.

Gary Sergeant is a dealer based in Woodbury, Connecticut, who specializes in eighteenth-century English & American furniture.



Chippendale side chair, circa 1765; priced at \$650,000. Courtesy of David Schorsch & Eileen M. Smiles Antiques, Woodbury, CT.



Louis XIII frame, priced at \$25,000. Courtesy of Julius Lowy Frame & Restoration, Inc., New York, NY.

At first I did not have a plan as how to approach my task, but it soon became apparent that all I had to do was to react "instinctively" and with passion. A very successful friend and colleague once told me that she bought items that made her smile, and over the years this approach has become my mantra. My first discovery was a painted George II rococo mirror, circa 1755, offered for \$160,000 by Kentshire Galleries. I was taken by the fine detail the artisan carved directly into the wood rather than into the gesso, the more usual method. The provenance was interesting too; the mirror was designed for an English Palladian villa completed in 1731 for Henry Combe, a prominent Bristol merchant.



George II rococo mirror, circa 1755; priced at \$160,000. Courtesy of Kentshire, New York, NY.

My next choice was also from the George II period; a rare burr walnut bookcase cabinet. The proportion, selection of woods, and magnificent carved elements immediately got my attention. I could imagine this piece in my library. It had personality and I started smiling. The carved hairy paw feet lifted this piece up, as if to define its individual space in a room. This piece was offered by Hyde Park Antiques and at the same price as my first object, \$160,000.

So far I had not chosen anything American, which surprised me, since American furniture was where I got my start in the business. And then I spotted it. Wow! On David Schorsch's stand was a magnificent Philadelphia side chair with cabriole legs, ball and claw feet, and provenance, but not just any provenance. This chair was owned by Benjamin Franklin. The opportunity to own a piece with such

history only occurs occasionally. It had all the proper elements: proportion, surface, quality of materials, and that very special provenance. This would definitely be on my shopping list at \$650,000.

Finally, I discovered at the Lowy booth a rectangular carved and gilded Louis XIII frame. The detail and execution was flawless and the frame appeared "untouched." I was happy to hear that at \$25,000 it would not put me over my limit. When I added up my purchases, my total was \$995,000. I think I'll save the \$5,000 balance for another day!



George II bookcase, circa 1750; priced at \$160,000. Courtesy of Hyde Park Antiques, New York, NY.



Queen Anne tea table, circa 1750; priced at \$405,000. Courtesy of Leigh Keno American Antiques, New York, NY.



Charles Rennie Mackintosh side chair, circa 1904; priced at \$370,000. Courtesy of Fine Arts Society, London and Edinburgh



Stone jaguar mortar, 3,200–2,800 B.C.; priced at \$25,000. Courtesy of Throckmorton Fine Art, New York, NY.

As an interior designer working simultaneously for many clients, I have often shopped beyond the means I could lavish upon myself. For this article, however, I had the opportunity to pretend I had a spare million to make myself even happier than usual.

As soon as I entered the Armory I spotted my first selection; Leigh Keno had a simple Queen Anne mahogany tea table at \$405,000. This Sully family tea table was made in Philadelphia circa 1750. Its extraordinary silhouette captured me immediately—the equivalent of Audrey Hepburn wearing Givenchy. The top edge flowed seamlessly into the bulged apron and down the attenuated cabriole leg to stop securely in prominent spurs. Although a diminutive twenty-eight by eighteen inches, it was nonetheless imposing with a wonderful, distinctive feeling of arrested movement.

Similar in essence to my first choice was a \$370,00 Charles Rennie Mackintosh side chair, circa 1904, at the Fine Arts Society booth. One of the most sophisticated of Macintosh designs, the subtle curves at the base of the back and the apron were a graceful counterpoint to the overall geometric design. I was particularly intrigued with the stretcher at ground level that gave the chair the same sense of arrested movement as the spurs on the tea table. I was also enchanted with the colored glass fitted between the vertical slats of the back.

A different kind of sophistication was apparent in the elegant George I English mirror in the French taste at Clinton Howell for \$125,000.00. The unusual cartouche shaped rectangular frame was both more restrained and gutsier than similar mirrors.

The subdued gilding added softness to the controlled design and the shell and leaf carvings add a gentle tension.

At Throckmorton I felt my pulse quicken.



George I mirror, circa 1715; priced at \$125,000. Courtesy of Clinton Howell, New York, NY.

Concealed behind a pedestal was a brown stone Chorrera jaguar mortar from Ecuador circa 3200–2800 B.C., priced at \$25,000. Primitive and throbbing with strength, the head appeared to be pulling the vessel forward as the tail anchored it to the spot. Its grinning face with larger exaggerated teeth reminded me of Keith Haring's work.

I spent almost my entire million. Now I have to decide, do I want the jaguar in the bedroom to greet me each morning, or in the living room for all to enjoy?

I realized, however, that many of the objects I coveted at the show were actually in the vicinity of \$25,000. I don't need a million to be happy.

Marc Ginzberg is a New York based collector of African art and has written about the subject extensively. His collection is featured as a Lifestyle in this issue of *Antiques and Fine Art*.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:

Wood scepter, Sierra Leone, early 20th century; priced at \$15,000. Courtesy of Kevin Conru, Brussels, Belgium.

Snow goggles, Punuk tribe, Alaska, 500–1,000 A.D.; priced at \$65,000. Courtesy of Donald Ellis Gallery, Ltd., Dundas, Ontario.

Southern Arabian stone figure; priced at \$150,000, circa 2,000–3,000 B.C. Courtesy of Safani Galleries, Inc., New York City.

Herter Brothers (1865–1905) Aesthetic oak sideboard, New York, 1875–1880; priced at \$75,000. Courtesy of Associated Artists', Southport, Ct.

Given a million dollars to spend, I'd prefer to hold some back for another day. On the other hand, as a friend recently told me, "A collector who buys only what he can afford is no collector at all."

At Kevin Conru, I found a little wood scepter from the Mende people of Sierra Leone. Some seek an aura of magic and ritual in African art, while others prefer refined formalism; this piece had a little of both. At \$15,000 it was well priced, considering that wealthy collectors from outside the field are nowadays looking to place African objects alongside their Western sculptures and paintings.

At Donald Ellis, I picked out some fine snow

goggles from the Bering Sea or Punuk tribe made out of marine ivory and with incised designs. Nothing primitive here: the goggles could have been French eighteenth century in concept and execution. I have always liked this form. This pair set me back \$65,000.

A neophyte when it comes to furniture, it was probably for all the wrong reasons that I fell in love at the Associated Artists' booth with an oak sideboard with gallery by the New York firm of Herter Brothers. Almost eight feet high and very practical, it has a glass door that pulls out and down to create a vitrine, and a solid base with four doors opening to useful storage space. I could throw out a couple of much less

attractive cabinets in my home and, for \$75,000, let this one do the work.

My last choice was less practical. At Safani Gallery, for \$150,000, I found a stone figure from Southern Arabia. It was not immediately accessible esthetically—in other words, it wasn't pretty—but as a collector, it appealed to me as a possible new area to collect and study. My attention was caught by the arms folded across the stomach in the fashion of Greek Cycladic statues that also date, like this figure, to 2000–3000 B.C. Could there have been a connection between these cultures? This could be a niche to get into—before anyone notices and it takes off.

Mark Golodetz has been around antiques since the age of six, when his father dragged him around the antique shops of London. He now writes about furniture as well as his first love, wine.



17th-century Antwerp tapestry; priced at \$700,000. Courtesy of Keshishian, New York and London.


Last year I struggled to spend the \$1 million, in fact, I had trouble spending even half that amount. This year I ended up juggling the budget just to be able to afford a single piece; the \$700,000 tapestry that dominated the booth of London dealer Keshishian. Although textiles are outside my field of expertise, this rare Antwerp tapestry drew me in immediately. Made in the late seventeenth century, this is one of the earliest woven depictions of the four continents. A similar tapestry is in the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; the few other examples known are either in royal or museum collections.

There was a folk art quality to the composition and a wonderful naïve quality to the personification of America surrounded by snakes, crocodiles, and turtles. And to cap it all, the condition was stunning; the colors bright and true, and there were no signs of repair. An incredible find.

My next choice was a piece of jewelry; a swaggering duck dressed as a cowboy at A La Vieille Russie's booth. This is no ordinary cowboy duck (if there is such a thing); its appeal comes from the strut the jeweler

managed to incorporate into the duck's body. This delightful brooch from the 1950s is unsigned but attributed to Cartier, and at \$7,500, was not expensive.

The circa 1715 George I bachelor's chest in Kentshire's stand was a true connoisseur's piece. The color grabbed my eye; a dark honey-colored burr yew veneer that has mellowed beautifully over the centuries; it had wonderful proportions and a definite if understated presence that enhanced the quality and color of the wood. It was priced at \$75,000.

My final choice was a painting by Samuel Peploe (1871–1935), one of the most prominent painters of the Scottish Colourist movement that flourished at the end of the nineteenth century. Offered by The Fine Arts Society, *The Bathers* is an early Peploe painting of a beach scene; a mere ten by nine inches, but a powerhouse of swirling colors and shapes anchored by a still, dark figure on the left. With Peploe's prices on the increase, at \$175,000, this decision was a snap. 

Bathers, Paris Plage, Samuel Peploe (1871–1935), circa 1910. Oil on board, 8-1/2 x 10-1/2 inches; priced at \$175,000. Courtesy of Fine Arts Society, London.



George I bachelor's chest, England, circa 1715; priced at \$75,000. Courtesy of Kentshire, New York City.



Gold and agate brooch, attributed to Cartier, circa 1950; priced at \$7,500. Courtesy of A La Vieille Russie, New York, NY.



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