

Polsky, Richard
I BOUGHT ANDY WARHOL
Abrams (256 pp.)
\$24.95
June 2003
ISBN 0-8109-4271-2

An often biting, but always amusing, behind-the-scenes glimpse of the heady world of fine art collecting and its ranks of participants.

The author knows well whereof he writes, having been at one time in his career an exhibiting artist, gallery director, gallery owner, and private art dealer. He has also written a series of financial guides on the art markets and is a frequent contributor to artnet.com. The present work concerns Polsky's twelve-year quest to acquire his own Warhol painting with \$100,000 he'd set aside for the purchase in 1987, a goal at times tantalizingly close and impossibly remote as the art market paralleled the fluctuations of the stock market whose excesses fueled and quenched its flames. In the author's words, it's a book about "doing business in the art world," a promise on which he delivers while sparing the reader the stupefying details of its more mundane aspects. He goes directly for the meat: the quirky characters and surreal situations, the high-figure deals and over-the-top greed, the outright snobbery and seemingly purposeful sexual ambiguity. Some particularly funny moments include Polsky's observations on a gallery receptionist's icy disdain, the humiliating finesse required merely to get a rival dealer's catalogue, and a Whitney show of Warhol portraits at which many of the portrait subjects were in attendance. At his weakest, Polsky, put in mind of a related incident, interrupts his narrative to score an additional point or drop another name. It helps, though, that he is a genuine fan of Warhol's work, making his account seem genuine, rather than carping. Ultimately, it's a juicy tale of money and manipulation that rivals anything Wall Street has been able to deliver recently. But the book is not merely for those with the bucks to purchase a work of well-known art, or for those who insist on paying "hyper-retail." It is also for those with an interest in contemporary art and its cult of celebrating those who have achieved their "fifteen minutes."

Polsky delivers both sound advice and a plethora of wry anecdotes on the subject of acquiring a work of contemporary art, bringing the ethereal down to earth without dragging it through the mud.