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Art World Speculates About Trump's Artistic Tastes

President-elect Trump's 'brand' is synonymous with flashy buildings and luxurious flourishes—an aesthetic that seems unlikely to prevail in the White House

By **KELLY CROW**

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Donald Trump is known for speaking and tweeting what's on his mind but hasn't revealed much about his taste in art. That has museums, galleries and private collectors guessing what the president-elect will display in the White House.

Mr. Trump's relationship to the art world is complex. On the one hand, the billionaire businessman's brand is linked to luxurious flourishes and visual sumptuousness. Yet art dealers say Mr. Trump isn't a fixture at high-end auctions or art fairs, and he doesn't use the properties that bear his name to showcase contemporary artists such as Jeff Koons as some other developers do.

Magazine profiles of the Trumps' \$100 million New York penthouse indicate that the president-elect and his wife, Melania, favor 18th-century French style with gilded finishes and marble walls as well as painted ceilings and sculptures featuring mythological gods like Apollo, Eros and Psyche. Mrs. Trump's home office recently displayed a reproduction of "Theater Box," an 1874 portrait of a couple by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. The original hangs in London's Courtauld Gallery.

Mr. Trump's older daughter, Ivanka, has worked with New York art adviser Alex Marshall to collect rising stars like Nate Lowman, who paints oversize, comic-

book-style bullet holes, and Alex Israel, whose canvases resemble pastel skies.

Once Mr. Trump takes office, he and his Cabinet will be allowed to sift through the White House's permanent collection or seek art loans from museums on the National Mall and beyond. The first couple also could hang up pieces from one of their homes.

The Trumps could affect the market values of artists they display—and at the same time send political messages with their choices. Bill Clinton earned praise for picking Simmie Knox, who is African-American, to paint the White House portraits of the president and first lady. President George W. Bush's administration was hailed for acquiring "The Builders," by African-American artist Jacob Lawrence, though some criticized the move because the painting depicts black men doing menial labor.



Jacob Lawrence, "The Builders," 1947. PHOTO: WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

A spokeswoman for William Allman, the White House's longtime curator, said it is too soon to know whether Mr. Trump or members of his cabinet will seek to borrow or swap out art

for their offices. If so, Mr. Allman will help them draw up wish lists and send loan requests to museums, likely after the inauguration.

The White House declined to comment.

A spokeswoman for the White House Historical Association, the nonprofit that preserves and buys art for the White House, said new presidents usually redecorate their upstairs residences and the Oval Office within their first year of taking office. The spokeswoman, Lara Kline, added that Congress sets aside \$100,000 for the purpose.

Some works are likely keepers because past presidents have displayed them, regardless of their political leanings, Ms. Kline said. Paintings with bipartisan appeal include Gilbert Stuart's 1797 portrait of George Washington that hangs in



George P.A. Healy's official portrait of Abraham Lincoln. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

the East Room and George P.A. Healy's 1869 portrait of Abraham Lincoln above the mantel in the State Dining Room.

The current president and first lady brought in bold, abstract works—including Glenn Ligon's text piece about segregation, "Black Like Me #2," which departed sharply from the 19th-century still lifes and pastoral scenes in the White House's public rooms.

Two years ago, Alma Thomas became the first female African-American artist to enter the White House collection after

Michelle Obama asked the historical association to buy "Resurrection," Ms. Thomas's rainbow-hue painting that evokes a target. "The Obamas brought a modern aesthetic," Ms. Kline added.

Elizabeth Feld, whose Hirschl & Adler Galleries in New York sell high-end antiques and classical paintings, said Mr. Trump likely will try to set a presidential tone now by displaying works that "make him look regal and strong, something with eagles or worthy heroes like Benjamin Franklin or Thomas Jefferson."

Adam Williams, a New York-based seller of European Old Master paintings, said Mr. Trump tends to decorate with reproductions rather than antiques—but he hopes the new president will come to appreciate the originals on site. (Much of the French furniture in the White House was bought during James Monroe's



Alma Thomas's 'Resurrection,' 1966 PHOTO: WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

administration.)

“You don’t want a Koons on the wall of the Oval Office,” Mr. Williams said. “You want calm and soothing.”

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