





# CURATIVE POWER

ONE WOMAN CREATES A GLOBAL GALLERY

WRITTEN BY DIANE VADINO PHOTOGRAPHY BY PABLO MASON

If the exquisitely adorned walls of the world's finest hotels increasingly resemble those of top-end art galleries, Joan Warren-Grady knows why. "Hotel developers are the new Medicis," declares the curator, who's put together collections at the Regent in Bal Harbour, Florida, the Beverly Hills Hotel, London's Berkeley and an assortment of Ritz-Carltons and Four Seasons, to name a few. The genesis of Joan Warren-Grady Art Advisory, her San Diego firm, can be traced back to the 1980s, when Warren-Grady was building corporate art collections. After some were purchased by Japanese buyers in the early '90s, she says, the emphasis shifted from simply decorating a space to creating a legitimate collection. "With these hotels, the developers don't want interior designers just putting up tapestries or botanical prints on the walls, which had been the norm," she says. "I love the scale I get to work on because of that, and the incredible amount of art that I'm able to buy."

The lucky recipients of those purchases run from emerging to established artists, at properties ranging from Aspen, Colorado's Little Nell to the recently opened Atlantis, the Palm, in Dubai. A common trait is her artists' regional credentials. "I'm always looking to integrate local talent, and some of the most amazing work I found was in the Bahamas, where there's a local art form derived from Junkanoo culture," says Warren-Grady, who developed collections at several hotels on the resort islands. "I hired a driver to take me to these little villages—we'd go into what were virtually huts, and the artists would be sitting on dirt floors, painting on cardboard, or whatever they could get their hands on. It was very exciting, and very beautiful."

The fairy-godmother aspect of Warren-Grady's work is just one; her diverse background—including a fine art major, math minor, and coursework in architectural drafting—has generated a skill set uniquely suited for communicating with both artists and economics-minded developers. "This is a lucrative, viable career, and it just happens that it's very difficult to get the proper background to do it," she says. "I just thank God my father lived to see the day that my art degree made some money." [jwgaa.com](http://jwgaa.com); 619.531.0888