

WHEN ART AND LIFE ALIGN

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Local art consultant Marlissa Gardner's appreciation for beauty spans the globe.

By Alyssa Morlacci

The first time Marlissa Gardner recalls feeling awe-struck by a piece of art was when her father bought a line drawing from a local artist to hang in their Fairview, Pennsylvania, home. It portrayed a woman with flowers and butterflies in her hair on a 2-by-2.5-foot woven archival paper. "She had the most beautiful eyes and lips, and I was thinking the whole time, 'My God, how much I want to be this woman,'" she says.

Now as the founder of Emillions Art on Fifth Avenue South in Naples, Gardner has graduated to working with contemporary creators from across the globe. She now facilitates the sales and acquisitions of collections by Banksy, Rubens, Picasso, Warhol and other renowned artists.

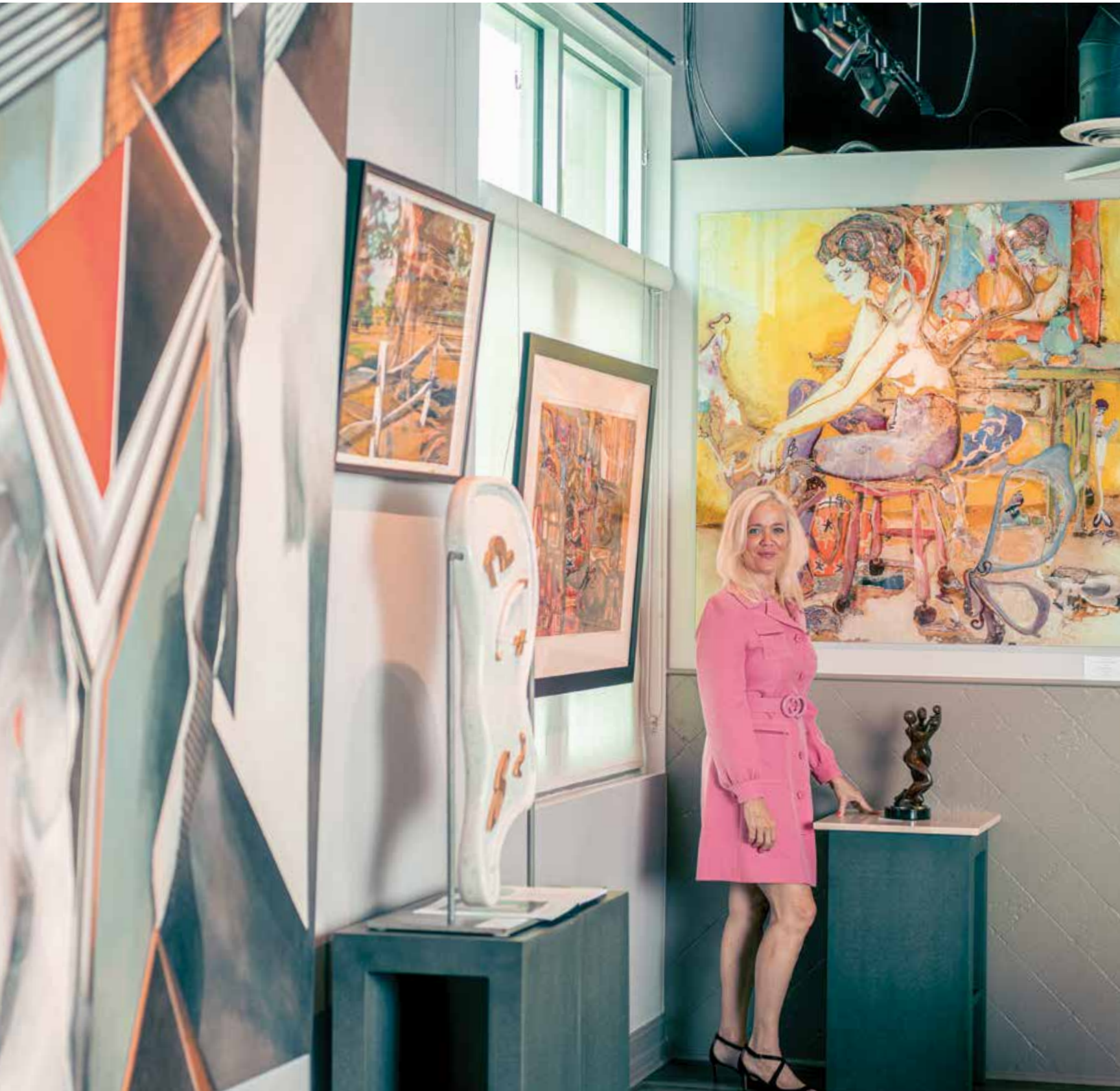
Early exposure played an essential role in Gardner's interest, and her appreciation grew synonymously with her travels. Her family would take frequent trips to museums all over the world. When she was 12 years old, she recalls visiting 30 countries throughout Europe for five weeks, making a stop at the Vatican to sit in the Sistine Chapel and look up at Michelangelo's painted ceiling.

At 16, Gardner lived as a high school foreign exchange student in Brazil, where paintings of landscapes, birds and flowers colored with bright reds, greens and yellows left her wondering what



Tina Sargeant

Marlissa Gardner, the founder of Emillions Art on Fifth Avenue South in Naples, started her art consulting firm and online gallery with a single client about seven years ago. Now, she deals in museum-worthy works from local and national artists. She recently aided a client in the world's first trade of an original Picasso using IDON tokens, a cryptocurrency.



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In addition to representing contemporary artists, such as Joan Sonnenberg of Naples (right), Gardner also facilitates the acquisitions of modern and old masters works by artists such as Banksy, Andy Warhol and Peter Paul Rubens.





Courtesy Louis Vienne

else was out there. Later, while attending Boston University to study broadcasting and film, she traveled to Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Singapore to explore everything from Asian pottery to Balinese teak furnishings.

A few years after graduating, she worked for an Indian film company in Mumbai (at the time Bombay) during the explosion of Bollywood. “It was fascinating,” she says. “People running around and learning and taking every job they could get and pumping out films as quickly as they could. India was hungry for entertainment.”

While working on a Hindi sitcom and game show, Gardner made her first art acquisitions with three large paintings. One was called *Emerging To Life*, which Gardner says depicts an “explosion of pain while evolving into adulthood.”

Soon after arriving back in Boston, she got an offer to return to India to work for a big-time director under a bridge contract for three years that would lead to a Los Angeles transfer. She had eight months to get out of her lease and find a new place to live in India when her boyfriend at the time, who lived in Boston, asked her to marry him. “I ended up giving up a job for a marriage, and ultimately a family,” she says, adding that she now has two beautiful kids.

Still, she was drawn back into the arts, taking up sports photography on the sidelines of



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her son's football games or her daughter's equestrian competitions.

Then about seven years ago, she found herself in the middle of a divorce and jumping out of airplanes on the east coast of Florida. "I was doing all kinds of crazy things, and I decided to get my skydiving license. The day I was doing my 15th jump, the clouds were hanging too low and they told me I could not jump." To fill the time instead, she grabbed her camera and sent herself on a photojournalistic jaunt.

She happened upon an antique shop and art gallery and began chatting with the owner who said something that really stuck with Gardner: "I get to do some of the things I love the most in life, which is travel, visit other countries, learn about their culture, buy what I like, bring it home and share it." She thought to herself, "He just summarized every little element of who I am in one sentence."

One week later, Gardner had an LLC for her own online global art consulting firm, named after her favorite wine region of Saint-Émilion outside of Bordeaux on the west coast of France. "The same people who are buying that wine are interested in art," she explains.

Six months into her new venture, she visited Art New York to search for artists to represent. A Mexican artist said yes; she and her husband were going to Art Monaco that summer, and they agreed to



Gardner moved her business from Boston to Southwest Florida four years ago. "The people here are very cultured," she says. "They understand art and the essentialness of art, how it affects every little element in our lives."

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pay for nearly all of Gardner's expenses while also giving her 50% of everything she sold. "It really launched my career," she says. "It took me to a point where I suddenly had a whole new element in my life—princes, and senators, and prime ministers, who came from all around the world, were now in my network."

Four years ago, Gardner brought her business from Boston to Florida's west

coast, a place where her family often vacationed while she was growing up in the Midwest. "The people here are very cultured. They understand art and the essentialness of art, how it affects every little element in our lives," she says.

Not only does she work with local talent, like Joan Sonnenberg, a 90-year-old artist of all forms based in Naples, but she also represents artists like Andreas

Nottebohm—a German artist based in Maui, Hawaii and known for his oil on aluminum works—and Dario Campanelli, an Italian-born painter, who created the mountainous 75th anniversary logo for Paramount Studios.

In addition to working with contemporary artists, Gardner also has a masters division through which she facilitates art acquisitions. Recently, she aided a client

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in the world's first trade of an original Picasso using IDON tokens, a cryptocurrency for luxury assets. The piece is one of 15 artist's proofs from the Marina Picasso Private Collection. "[Picasso] was still making changes to the looks of it, he was still going through a mental process, which makes these etchings and their prints so important," she says. "The artist's proof becomes a mental process that you get to see into the mind's eye of the artist himself—where was he going with this?"

Gardner was asking herself a similar question about the trajectory of her career a few years ago. Like an artist tweaks a piece before presenting a final proof, Gardner made adjustments throughout her life until reaching this moment of total alignment, able to immerse herself in other cultures and share the art she discovers with her community. 

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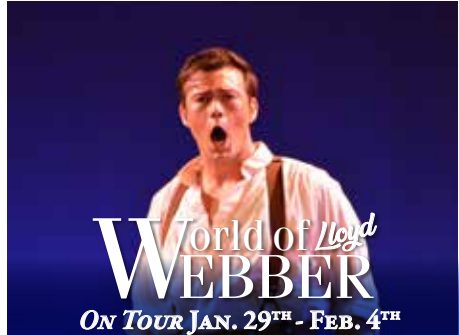
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