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Want Free Original Artworks? Gallery Owner Is Cruising Your Area to Spur Collecting

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About the Author: Victoria Clayton is Southern California-based freelance writer.

How much fun would it be to drive around the country in a 1977 VW bus and give away art? That's exactly what Atlanta gallery owner (and mom of three) Jennifer Schwartz is doing. Schwartz's Crusade for Collecting, a nonprofit project funded by the New York Foundation for the Arts, was born out of frustration with both trying to find collectors for nascent photographers, as well as wanting to ignite passion for original art.



Gallery owner Jennifer Schwartz is touring the country in a VW bus, giving away art to clear misconceptions about collecting original art.

"Many people right now are extremely engaged with many aspects of life — food, gardening, travel, different causes, you name it," Schwartz says. "They should be art collectors too, but they're too often not. My project is about bringing art to the people, starting a conversation and trying to break through some of the misperceptions about collecting original art."

One of the biggest myths concerns price. "Many people just assume original art is beyond their budget, when it's often not," Schwartz jokes that what she'd really like to do is stand at every IKEA checkout counter with a piece of original art and show people what they could get for the same price they're paying for mass-produced pieces.

Instead, she cooked up the 10-city tour. The idea is simple: Give away good art and make a bit of scene to bring attention to the cause. In each city, Schwartz parks her VW — purchased with money raised through the art-project site Kickstarter — and has five local photographers come out to help greet unsuspecting passersby. Each photographer donates 10 copies of one image. Then the fun begins. They engage with people and send many home with a free piece of original, unframed art. Out of this engagement, Schwartz hopes to simply bring awareness about the artists who live in each city and the fact that collecting is more accessible than many people believe.

Some of the tour has been a family event for Schwartz; she synced it with her children's school breaks. For other legs of her tour, Schwartz is on her own with the artists. The experience has been different in each city, she says.

"In Los Angeles they were saying, 'This is the coolest thing!'" Schwartz recalls. "They were practically doing cartwheels. In San Francisco people had their earbuds in and their heads down; it was hard to give away anything. Portland was hilarious. They were really shy and someone told us he was refusing to take the art as a way of protesting some type of taxes." But, overall, Schwartz says the reception has been positive in each city and the feeling of creating 50 new collectors every time has been exhilarating.

The tour kicked off in Atlanta and New Orleans and has already finished the West Coast. The bus is in Chicago today and will hit Cleveland (May 26), New York City (June 2) and Washington, DC (June 5), before the grand finale on June 9 in Richmond, VA. Follow the Crusade on Twitter @crusade4art.

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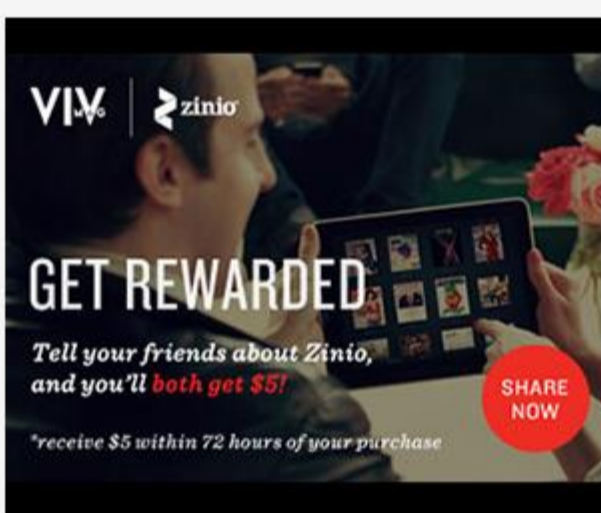


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