

Right: We asked four art buyers to nominate a recent piece of work that they felt to be a notable example of what great art buying can contribute to a project. Daniel Moorey of DDB chose the agency's poster campaign for the FT. Creatives: Victor Monclus, Will Lowe (Sharks and Cityscape), Damien Bellon, Thierry Albert (Che); Illustrators: Denis Scott (Sharks), Mathieu Raynault (Cityscape), Steven Wilson (Che); Art buyers: Helen Parker (Sharks), Daniel Moorey (Cityscape), Sarah Thomson (Che)

The art buyer provides inspiration and talent to the creative department in ad agencies. With the rise of digital it is a role that is evolving, *writes Eliza Williams*

Making friends & influencing people

The art buyer in an agency has one of the most diverse roles in advertising, but it is a job that remains mysterious to many outside the industry. Straddling both the creative and the client side, the job has been described as that of project manager, creative matchmaker, or even nanny.

It certainly requires the ability to multi-task. “On a general level the art buyer provides inspiration to the creative department, and keeps them up-to-date with everything going on in the commercial creative and art worlds,” says Daniel Moorey, head of art buying at DDB London. “This could be a new exhibition, an illustrator that might be good for a particular client, an new visual technique or style. On a more specific level, an art buyer commissions external suppliers to represent the ideas of the creative department. This might be a photographer, set builder, designer, illustrator, CG artist, model-maker and so on. The art buyer makes sure any project comes in on time, on budget, and most importantly that the end result is the best possible expression of the idea.”

Passion for the visual arts

Moorey sees the essential skill of the role to have an “instinctive understanding” and appreciation of the visual arts, along with “being organised, compassionate when needed, tough when needed, street smart, enthusiastic, decent, good with people, a regular exhibition-goer, film-watcher, magazine reader etc, etc.” For Mary Martin, head of the art production department at AMV BBDO, the skills required can be summed up with one word: passion. “Passion to create ads, passion to be a good team player, passion for visual arts,” she says. “Procedures, systems etc can be taught, passion cannot.”

Art buyers are traditionally associated with print and poster advertising, and as such have specialist knowledge of the work of photographers and illustrators. As well as keeping abreast of the most talented creators around, and getting to know them and their work, they also consider how well they will work alongside the creatives at the agency. “I do make a point of seeing photographers as I like to hear from them personally what they’re most passionate about,” explains Choi Liu, art buyer at M&C Saatchi. “From the meeting I would get a sense of their personality and their likes and dislikes. Before calling in portfolios, I would think about the personality of the art director and the photographer, as when they are on a shoot they need to work closely, so they both need to be on the same wavelength.”

“It’s putting people together stylistically, but it’s also getting the right personalities together as well,” agrees Sarah Pascoe, head of print at BBH, “and understanding your client, your art director, all the agency needs. It’s matchmaking.”



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↳ The advertising industry has changed significantly in recent years, with the rise of digital technology deeply affecting both the work produced by agencies, and the production methods employed. The role of the art buyer has had to evolve with these changes, though in many respects the core qualities that the position requires, of constantly searching out the new and the exciting, and managing the relationship between the artists and photographers and the team at the agency, remains the same as ever.

The influence of the client

One of the most obvious changes, however, is the involvement of clients, which has increased across all aspects of advertising, and of course impacts on the job performed by art buyers. “Clients are now under a lot of pressure, and getting a lot of information from different places, such as research and data analysis,” says Pascoe. “It’s our job to use this info and push them, sometimes out of their comfort zone, and give them something unexpected, otherwise we may all lose out in creating something very special.”

“The production process is much more in-depth than say ten or 15 years ago,” agrees Moorey. “Email made a big difference to how much involvement clients have, for better and worse.” Moorey has also noticed that a certain degree of conservatism has crept into the industry too. “It’s maybe a little harder to take risks with photographers than it used to be,” he continues. “When I started there was a vogue for using unusual photographers to shoot cars – fashion photographers or table-top still lifers, for instance – this would be very hard now. First and foremost their work has to be good, and appropriate to the job ... that said, just working with photographers that have ↴

“It’s our job to give them something unexpected, otherwise we may all lose out in creating something very special”

Sarah Pascoe, BBH

Above: Sarah Pascoe from BBH picked DDB’s work for Harvey Nichols for its ongoing quality. Shown above is a recent sale poster for the store. Creatives: Victor Monclus, Will Lowe; Photographer: Frederike Helwig; Head of art: Grant Parker; Art buyer: Sarah Thomson

“done good advertising is overly restrictive, not always necessary, and boring.”

New opportunities

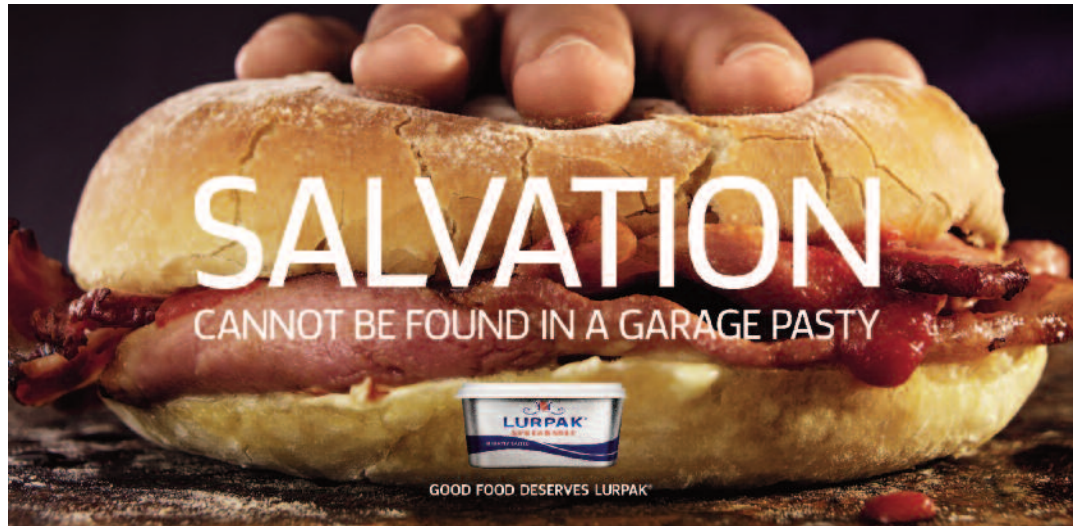
Despite these problems, the rise of digital is also opening up new creative possibilities for photographers and other artists too. Art buyers are increasingly working on moving image projects now, alongside their core work in print, and will often use photographers on these projects. While the major TV commercials are still directed by film directors, more experimental pieces, to be shown online for example, are regularly created by photographers. This year's CR Photography Annual reflects these changes, with the addition of a moving image category.

“At the moment there's lots of talk about being integrated and how efficient an agency can become by having a 'super producer', somebody that handles the whole production side of things,” says Pascoe. “But if you've got a TV commercial, that's a big number, and you need somebody that knows the ins and outs of that. But I think there are times when a person like me, the art buyer/art producer, can shoot something that's within their discipline. Creating photographic images and then alongside that shooting a mood film that's a few minutes long: it doesn't have to have the same production values, it's not a million pound commercial.”

“I'm doing some digital escalator panels at the moment,” she continues, “and I'm just quoting on doing a moving image extra to add to what essentially is a static idea, but we're trying to add a little bit of whiz-bang to it. And I want that to be by our photographers, rather than going to a film director because to me it doesn't need it. As long as you've got somebody that has the vision, that isn't scared of it.”

Pascoe has noticed how the changes are filtering through the system, and impacting on the way photographers present their work to art buyers now. “When they come in and show their work to us, they've all got their moving image sections, they are all going into that,” she says. “I think because of the iPad, and digital posters, it's just evolving. There are some photographers that will never do it, because that's just not where they want to be. But when you're going into the commercial world of photography and advertising, there's nothing wrong with it, as long as you treat it with the same regard. It's not an add-on, it needs to be treated with respect and be thought through.”

Above all else though, art buyers are always on the hunt for an original and fresh approach from photographers, something that stands out in a saturated market. “The internet is to blame for the lack of originality,” says Choi Liu. “It's so easy to look and be influenced by what you see. It's best to be yourself, be original and don't think too much about what other photographers are doing.”



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Choi Liu, M&C Saatchi

Above: Choi Liu from M&C Saatchi chose Wieden + Kennedy's recent campaign for Lurpak as a highlight. Creative directors: Ray Shaughnessy, Dan Norris. Photographer: Nadege Meriau. Art buyer: Anna Blom.



Below: Mary Martin from AMV BBDO chose the agency's recent work for Sainsbury's. Creatives: Simon Rice, Diane Leaver. Photographer: Venetia Dearden