

Luxembourg
Forbes

Sterenn Denys

“ART IS BOUGHT WITH THE EYES AND THE HEART”

Art **historian** and art **advisor**, **photographer** and creative **artist**, former **gallerist** and **dealer**, Brussels-born Sterenn Denys has explored every facet of the art world before forging her own original and innovative **path**. Today, she devotes her passion for **beauty** and her international **expertise** to advising **collectors**—both newcomers and seasoned connoisseurs—helping them build collections that are lasting, meaningful, impactful... and transferable.

Sterenn Denys grew up immersed in art. “I was raised to look at objects, to consider their context and historical importance. That was my upbringing.” A grandfather who was a cabinetmaker, a father who became an international expert and merchant in 20th-century design... At nine, she was given her first camera, learnt to develop film and to “observe the world and frame it to enhance its beauty.” By sixteen, she was accompanying her father to TEFAF Maastricht before moving on to Art Basel, the Biennale des Antiquaires and The Armory Show in New York. “From the very beginning I enjoyed engaging with museum directors, curators, collectors, artists. I sensed the richness of art as a testimony to human achievement. These encounters also allowed me to build a network and a body of field knowledge that are fairly rare.”

Still, she hesitated. Wanting distance, she studied both art history and sociology at Oxford. “I needed to be sure my passion for art wasn’t only the result of family influence. I soon realised it wasn’t—my sense of beauty, of historical

significance, and of the pleasure of engaging with remarkable personalities in the art world had become part of my DNA.” She went on to deepen her studies at Cambridge, adding photography, then completed a master’s in history of design at Sotheby’s Institute.

At the same time, she pursued her own artistic practice in photography (and more recently in painting), with works exhibited across Europe and the United States and part of permanent collections in several museums, from Brussels to Berlin, including London, Lausanne, Charleroi, and Cambridge. One skill was missing: structure. “I was given a rigorous education. Being disorganised or without strategy was not an option.” She refined that rigour with a Master of Business at Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management, giving her the multidimensional understanding of art, its context and its value that today defines her unique profession: art advisory. “I have built something that allows me to live both my values and my philosophy of life.”

Sterenn Denys, art historian, art advisor,
photographer and creative artist

BUILDING, MANAGING AND TRANSMITTING A COLLECTION

What Sterenn Denys offers is independent, bespoke support for collectors, families and institutions wishing to build, manage, preserve and transmit an art collection. She has transformed her eye for acquisition—together with her own artistic experience—into a structured and strategic practice, underpinned by almost 35 years of international expertise. At the head of Sterenn Denys Art Advisory, she has developed an approach founded on neutrality, rigour, discretion and long-term vision. Her services adapt to each client: whether creating a coherent collection, structuring a transmission plan, or aligning cultural assets with philanthropic intent.

Early in her career, she found herself stepping into the commercial side almost by accident. At 25, while living in Cambridge, she had to take over her father Philippe Denys's gallery in Sablon, Brussels, after a health issue. She also founded and headed the modern and contemporary photography department at Pierre Bergé & Associés in Brussels, Paris and Geneva. These experiences sharpened her knowledge of the art market, yet she chose to step away from commercial dealings altogether, ensuring the neutrality of her advisory practice and shielding it from speculative pressures. *"I carried out a deep introspection, listened to my longstanding clients and concluded that being a dealer no longer aligned with my values."*

TRANSPARENCY, TRACEABILITY, TRUST

The lack of transparency in the art world—often opaque, sometimes manipulated—was decisive. *"Studies show that most transactions fall through because of a lack of clarity over value or provenance. People hold back from buying or lending due to a lack of trust."* She therefore made trust the cornerstone of her practice, through five services that span the entire lifecycle of a collection—from creation to transmission, by way of its enrichment. *"Whether the works are worth €500 or €5 million, I guide the building of a collection with the same museum-grade standards, turning it into a legitimate, transmissible cultural legacy."*

Among her most innovative pillars: traceability. *"With strengthened European and American legislation, this is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Without traceability, an artwork cannot be sold, transmitted or legitimised, whatever its emotional, historical or financial worth, because it cannot circulate freely."* She assists clients in reconstructing

provenance, and documentation. *"Collectors feel reassured knowing there are concrete solutions to fill the gaps in their collections, document them, and secure their cultural assets. With the added satisfaction of reconstructing a solid, incontestable history—especially in view of transmission."*

Transmission itself is a key stage. *"My role is to ensure each collection retains its integrity and value, so that its transfer is as harmonious as possible between those giving and those receiving. Whether the choice is to preserve the collection, divide it equitably or sell it. Each work is documented, its meaning preserved, its transmission aligned with the collector's wishes, in close coordination with fiscal and legal advisers."*

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FROM PHILANTHROPY TO SCENOGRAPHY

Sterenn's conviction that art can transform lives was reinforced in 1999, when one of her photographs helped raise £300,000 for humanitarian work in Uganda, supporting more than 10,000 children. Since then, she has assisted clients in activating the philanthropic potential of their collections, creating bespoke projects with trusted cultural and institutional partners across Europe and the United States. *"Many people wonder what will become of their collection. It is touching—and fascinating—to transform cultural assets and financial gifts into lasting cultural and social influence, aligned with the collector's values."*

Her advisory would not be complete without scenography. From private homes to museum installations and even pre-auction exhibitions and art fairs, she seeks to stage works in a way that heightens their emotional and aesthetic presence. *"Passionate about the synergy between art, design and architecture, I design settings that embrace modern, contemporary and classical art, as well as photography and design. It takes deep listening to make eras, styles and media converse—while serving the unique narrative of the collection."* ■

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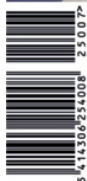
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