

SALVAGE ROOM

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emerging UAE **51**

Edited by: kstrickland@afr.com.au

A Most Improved purchase

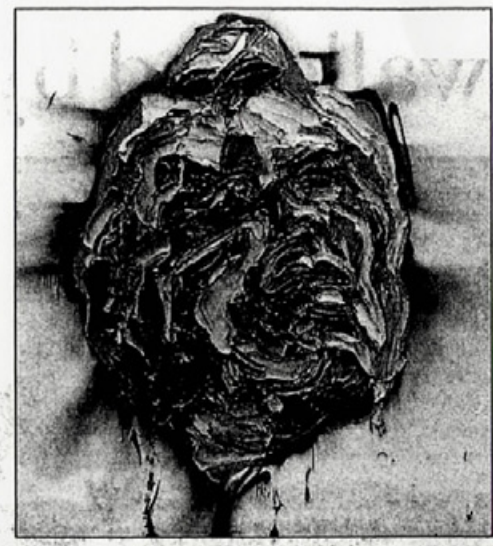
Katrina Strickland

Ben Quilty had vaguely heard of Jeffrey Archer before last week, but he thought he was a playwright.

The British author of 14 novels made the Sydney artist's day, however, when he walked into Grant Pirrie Gallery in Sydney's Redfern and bought one of Quilty's paintings, a 2007 self-portrait called *Most Improved*.

The \$24,000 purchase was part of a \$264,000 spending spree during which Archer bought a large 1970s Shoalhaven painting by Arthur Boyd, a giant pinky-purple Rosella Namok abstract, and an Edward Hopper-esque street scene by young Brisbane artist Robert Brownhall.

Archer bought the three latter pictures from Brisbane dealer Philip Bacon, with whom he has been dealing for more than two decades and who he now counts as a friend. (Bacon sees Archer whenever he goes to the UK, including visiting him during the high-profile author's two-year stint in jail for perjury).



According to Bacon, it is the first time Archer has ventured to buy art by young Australian artists; he's bought plenty of works from Australia during previous visits, but they have tended to be by artists such as Rupert Bunny, John Glover, Sidney Nolan and Boyd.

Brownhall has had a couple of shows at Rebecca Hossack Gallery in London, and his first solo show with Bacon last year

was a sell-out. Namok is the most celebrated of Cape York's young Lockhart River indigenous artists.

"I took [Archer] to the Warhol show [at the Queensland Art Gallery] and he loved that," says Bacon, adding that the author owns about a dozen Warhols.

Archer sought out the work of Quilty on the advice of Sydney art critic John

Underpriced . . . the 2007 Quilty work, part of Jeffrey Archer's \$264,000 spending spree.

McDonald. Having secured his Quilty, he went on to talk about how great — and cheap — Australian art is, spruiking it during a TV interview to promote his new book, *A Prisoner of Birth*. He reiterated the point to *The Australian Financial Review* on Tuesday, just before boarding a flight back to the United Kingdom after his two-week promotional tour. Of the 400-plus artworks in his collection he says about 20 are by Australian artists.

"Australian art is underpriced and undervalued," Archer says.

"If Arthur Boyd had been born in England his paintings would be selling for £1 million [\$2.1 million], and if he had been born in America they would be \$US5 million [\$5.3 million]."

Quilty says the work Archer bought is based on the head on a "most improved" trophy that he won for cricket at age 12.