



# The First Piece

*Even the biggest art collections have to start somewhere. Elizabeth Winding asked five collectors what was the first work they bought*

## COLLECTOR: ROSE ISSA

First piece: *Nature et Reverie* by Manuel Duque, 1984

Rose Issa has been a champion of visual art and film from the Arab world and Iran for over three decades. Now the owner of a private project space in Kensington, London, she has helped introduce numerous artists to the West, including Monir Farmanfarmaian and Chant Avedissian. She has also acted as a guest curator at an international array of public institutions and museums, including the Barbican, Tate Britain, the Hermitage in St Petersburg, the House of World Cultures in Berlin and the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona. Her involvement in the arts began in 1982, when she launched the first Arab Film Festival in Paris.

I bought my first artwork in Paris. I'd been living there for a few years, planning to go back to Lebanon after the war. Instead the situation got worse. In 1983, my sister was killed in the bombing near the American Embassy. Before then I'd never felt settled and couldn't imagine even buying any furniture, but after that I decided to stay. To me, that meant having something of my own; a painting first, then a flat.

I'd become great friends with the artist Manuel Duque, who taught me everything about the arts scene. My background

was as a mathematician, journalist and historian, not in the arts, but every day we'd go and see exhibitions together. He taught me the difference between a painter and an artist; I still can't explain it, but now I know it intuitively. One day he showed me some works he was taking to a gallery, and I thought: 'No, I want that one!' and bought it.

It was a strange effect the painting had on me. I still can't see an acacia tree or the coming of spring without thinking of him: it's like when people discover Van Gogh, and from then on can never see a sunflower in the same way. For me, every acacia tree, every forest, every mass of greenery reminds me of Duque's work. He died in 1998 in Spain. At the start of his career his work was almost totally abstract, but towards the end it became almost figurative; the piece I bought was a transitional moment.

Works of art speak to you at certain times in your life, I think, and say something about your own life; looking at my own collection, I can trace the evolution of my ideas through the works that I acquired. I loved Duque as an artist, and have a fantastic respect for the decision he made to remain himself and not to sell himself. Even now, when I go to see an exhibition, I see it through his eyes: he's always there.



