Artist Workshop: Advice from a Creative Agent
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Profession: Artist

Bravo to you, brave soul! You have endeavored on one of the most difficult careers, yet one of the most important and oldest careers, known to mankind. You are an artist. You make the world a better place!

As an artist you are a cottage industry. Yes you are the idea person and the craftsperson, but you are also a business. You are a sole proprietorship. You are the R&D, the manufacturer, the accountant, the HR department, the PR & marketing department, the I.T. team, the problem solver and the CEO. You are your boss, you have yourself to answer to!

Artists often don't like to think of themselves as a business, but the work you make and what happens with it after it leaves your studio are two different things. If you make salable art, you are creating a commodity – your customers are the buyers, the more eyeballs on your work, the more sales. At the same time you still must entice gallerists, curators, jurors and other gatekeepers to the art world.

If you create conceptual art, your audience is the art world. They may "speak the same language" but their criticism is educated, and more insular.

Art is an inspiration commodity, based on relationships. The more true you are to you, your process, your intention, the more it will radiate out through you and to your admirers.

Thriving as a successful artist:

- Buy services that are not your forté. Hire web developers, graphic designers, bookkeepers/tax preparers, PR, grant writers, business and/or creative coach.
- Run your studio practice like an artists, but run your business as a business. Hiding from your financial reality, sheepish self-promotion, poor communication, disorganization is not going to HELP your career.
- Be selective, though. Saying "No!" is a good way to help you know what you really want to do, and allows you to have time for projects/opportunities that come along that truly inspire you.
- This is a job. Show up to work every day. Inspiration comes when you're already working, it is not what drives you to the workspace.
- Value yourself, and others will value you. Know what it costs you to create what you do: supplies, time, skill development, rent, insurance, promotion. All of these are inputs into what you are selling. And once you realize how much you've invested, you will stand firm on your price of your work.
- You have to believe in what you do, first and foremost. You need to have thick skin! Art is a personal, opinionated business. If you can't take criticism, rejection, inequality, unfairness, you are going to suffer greatly.
- Respect others' time! You may be the center of your universe, but all others in your world are in business for themselves as well. Respect your vendors, your buyers, your colleagues!

I don't have a lot of respect for talent. Talent is genetic. It's what you do with it that counts.
– Martin Ritt

Who is (insert your name here) / Identity / Talking Points / Descriptions:

- Make a list of words and ways that describe you / your process / your identity as an artist / why you create what you do / what it means to you / how you started

- You will ultimately use this type of information to inform how you talk about your work to others casually, when you speak in front of people. You'll use similar ideas for your artist statement, and these ideas will organically be incorporated into all your promotional materials

Contacts (this is your goldmine!):

Address book / data base of:
- Friends
- Fans
- Buyers (names, address, what bought and where)
- Galleries (choose based on type of work they support)
- Shops
- Juried Shows
- Fairs

Retain as much info as possible:
- Name
- Address
- Email
- What purchased
- Where met / source of contact / through whom
- Specifics about that person, interests, family, etc

Sales:

- Keep a detailed receipt of every work sold. You may never know when you'll need to borrow back a piece from a collector for a retrospective.
- Make sure the purchaser has a detailed receipt for their records. Shows provenance and original value.
- You own your copyright, always. Protect it, value it, guard it. The purchaser owns the object and has the legal responsibility to keep your work safe. They do not own the image, and may not – by law – do anything to reproduce that image without express written permission (and licensing fees and a contract!) from you.
- You set the price, you can adjust your price. Be very clear with galleries and shop owners what your allowed discounts are, if any.
- Art is sold by desire, not by price. Do not sell yourself short, don't give work for free or for "promotion/visibility" unless you support the endeavor with your heart.
- Professionals do not work for free, neither should you. Donating to something you believe in is something else entirely.

Business:

- Get your local business license.
- Get your resellers (CA state sales tax) certificate.
- Get Business Liability & Property insurance.

Promotional Material:

If possible, business cards, postcards, website – should all have same look & feel

- Think about idea of "branding" yourself as artist
- What colors/theme/styles resonate with you/your style/your work

Business Cards / Postcards

Important to have take-away/leave-behinds when you meet people:

- Name
- Contact (email at least, phone if you choose)
- Website
- Image
- Image info (medium, size, year)

Website

- Ability for viewers to see work – both archive and what's available for purchase
- Do you want to have a "store" on your site – or if people want to buy – how contact?
- "About" section = bio/philosophy/why
- What do you show/share for free?

C.V.

- Start now to create lists of shows / projects / awards / education

Upcoming Shows

- Make sure you have at least a month lead time to promote the event
- Include verbiage in your promotional materials that describes the show – always important to plant ideas of opportunities and reason to buy in people's minds
- People that know you WANT you to remind them about your shows and what you have going on. Believe me, people want to know people who are doing interesting things!

Financial Record keeping:

- Keep EVERY receipt (if no receipt, write down DATE/Amount/Reason on a piece of paper)
- Start NOW to make a filing system that contains ALL your records
- Every art supply (paper/paints/framing, etc etc)
- Transportation to/from art errands / meetings
- Meals/coffees/meetings where your art & career is discussed
- Mail / promotion (business/post cards)

- Telephone calls, cell service, utilities, in-home "office"/studio rental
- Professional services (management/graphic design/photography, etc.)

Longer term planning:

- Identify shops / galleries that your work would be appropriate and get to know them personally
- Grants for your genre/ethnicity/medium
- Public art calls for entry – would your work translate beautifully to tile mural? A glass sculpture?
- Art Exhibits and art fairs where your work will be well received
  - Budget / Logistics / Audience / Exposure / Contacts / Juried
- Publishing:
  - Self v small, local press v small publishing house v large publishing house

Archive:

- Document all your work:
- PHOTO (high-res image)
- Title (it's okay if your title is a basic description for you to identify which piece if you have trouble with titles for your work)
- Year
- Medium
- Size
- Notes about your process / location / inspiration / attribution to particular body of work

Promotion (in general):

- Go to art events and introduce yourself (make sure to have business/post cards on you)
- Invite everyone you know and meet to your events
- Facebook and/or Twitter – casually post info about what you're working on and about upcoming events
- Social media abounds: Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/Vine/Vimeo/You Tube/Tumblr/Pinterest/Google+/personal blogs/email newsletters
- Try to have regular correspondence with your audience, in your own voice. Be real.

Remember:

- ❤ You are the expert about your work
- ❤ You are the boss of your career and your work
- ❤ You are the best ambassador of your work
- ❤ Your work inspires people, or perhaps it challenges people. Use this opportunity to open dialog!
- ❤ The more eyes that see your work, the more people will buy your work, the more your vision of purpose and inspiration will spread
- ❤ Be authentic
- ❤ It is often audacity, not skill nor talent, that moves artists to the forefront
- ❤ Be BOLD on your own behalf