

Selling your artwork- a personal view

When I started painting, I didn't ever think that I would sell any of my work. As a result, when I did sell my first painting, I was taken aback!

That first sale started a long conversation within me about why I was painting and whether it was right to sell work when God had given me the picture in the first place. Each artist has to work their way through to the position they are comfortable with. My (current) conclusion is that God has given me a creative gift for a reason, and that the reason is not just to fill up my spare room with canvases! There is a place for private artwork, but creativity usually indicates that there will be an audience. I have compared creativity with the Dead Sea, in that, unless there is a natural flow out as well as in, creativity can become lifeless and sterile.

Having accepted that my artwork needs to "get out there", I am faced with the choice of selling it or giving it away. Like most artists, I do a bit of both, but I do try actively to sell my work.

How do you go about it?

Paying attention to the product

This is an overlooked part of selling your work. The best opportunity to find out what people really think about your work is to enter a group exhibition and then lurk amongst those attending, listening to what people say. If you want to sell your work, people need to want to buy it, so pay attention to all comments about your work and the work of others. You will learn a great deal about what people do and don't like about your work.

Don't try to cut corners with your work. Treat it with the respect it deserves. Use the best quality materials that you can afford and make sure you have the right tools. If using canvases, paint around the edge of the canvas too, so that it looks tidy if you have to hang it unframed. Always sign your work. Pay to have it framed professionally if you can.

Don't be lazy! I speak to myself here! I have painted flowers without looking at any source material or doing any preparatory drawings and, guess what, the flowers look wooden and artificial. If your painting is worth doing, it is worth spending the preparation time to get it right. Sadly this is especially true if you are painting people.

Subject matter matters! People buy paintings when they make some sort of emotional attachment with the picture. Abstract paintings do sell, but to a much smaller percentage of the buying population than work with some figurative content. Paintings with a positive feeling about them will sell better than negative ones. Colour can also attract people to the work. If you paint trains, historical portraits, Christian themed work and flowers, you need to be aware that your subject matter narrows the possible audience and customer base. You may be fine with that, but you do need to be aware of it and make efforts to ensure that the right customers are able to see your work.

Marketing and advertising

A personal website is a very good idea, or even a personal blog, that you can set up for free. Make sure that it is regularly updated and that you advertise it. Put the website address after your email signature. Add the website to your business card. Tell your friends- regularly not just once. Keep mentioning your website on Facebook and Twitter.

Keep email addresses or phone details of those who have shown an interest in your work and let them know when you add more work, or have an exhibition.

Actually selling

If you have work in an exhibition, make sure it is presented well and is not too crowded. Paintings need space around them in order to be appreciated. Label your work carefully. Make sure you have business cards available nearby.

DO NOT SELL YOUR WORK TOO CHEAPLY! Apologies for the capitals, but it is a common fault with artists. If you try to sell paintings for £20, the customers will think, "This person isn't really an artist," or "They're obviously not very good." This may deter them from buying your painting, even if they like the picture! I know this sounds crazy, but it is true!

I always put a decent price on my work when I sell it, because I want to indicate that I am serious about my work (which I am). I do not sell many paintings, but selling even one or two a year is enough to keep me in canvases and good quality paint for the whole year. It also allows me to get my work framed properly, which makes it look better, which means that it sells more readily. It is better to sell one painting for £500 than 5 paintings for £100, because 5 paintings take a lot more time and materials than one. The other reason for not selling too cheaply is that it raises your view of your work. If you barely cover the cost of materials, it makes you unwilling to spend a lot of time on a piece. Your time is actually the greatest cost of your artwork, and you need to factor it in when you sell something.

Be ready for the sale! Think in advance about things like how the customer will pay, how you will wrap and/or send their purchase and what you will include with the purchase so that they are able to contact you again. I always staple a business card to the back of any canvases I complete, so that I won't forget to do it later.

I am sure I have missed some snippets of advice, but will probably come back and add them as they occur to me.

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