Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 9.8
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Drawspace Curriculum 5.2.R9 - 18 Pages and 14 Illustrations

Working as a Visual Artist

Helpful insights into potential challenges encountered by artists who choose careers in the visual arts

This resource has eleven sections:

- Art, Death, and Taxes
- Earning a Living as an Artist
- The Art Market Crash
- The Barter Economy
- Virtual Galleries
- Legalese for Artists
- Juried Art Shows
- Geography and Success
- Boondocks Marketing
- Getting Discovered
- Quitting Your Day Job

In this resource, I talk about the good, bad, and ugly world of art.

As a working artist, you know there's a lot of road for the proverbial rubber to meet; and that road is chock-full of potholes – perhaps more potholes than road at times.

From death and taxes, to critics and connoisseurs, you are bound to encounter some incarnation of nearly every pothole talked about.

The goal here is not just to point out the potholes, but to toughen up the artists who encounter them.

Figure 1

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Ideally, the vigilant artist can steer around most of the potholes. If not, you must simply endure their bone-jarring intensity and motor on.

Art, Death, and Taxes

There is an old proverb that claims, “Nothing is inevitable but death and taxes.” My wife, the tax expert, insists that this also applies to artists. Inevitable or not, people spend thousands of dollars every year trying to avoid both, yet the best you can ever do is to reduce their impact somewhat.

With every receipt you save, every painting you donate to charity, every square foot of your home studio you write off as a business expense; you devote a considerable amount of time, effort, and money to avoiding taxes.

The same goes for the thousands of dollars you spend each year for health care and insurance in trying to avoid death. Of course, the two are interrelated. I’m not sure if avoiding taxes ever led to anyone’s death, but I do know that death in no way leads to avoiding taxes.

The strange thing is, as an artist, hardly a day goes by you don’t prepare for the taxes part. But when it comes to death, not only are artists usually unprepared, but they don’t even want to think about it. Most artists under thirty don’t even have a will. And lest those of you over fifty get smug about the fact that you *do* have one, it’s probably so outdated that at least one of the beneficiaries may no longer be among the living.

Unless you’re more anal-retentive than most, chances are you haven’t bequeathed any individual paintings in your will. Yet you probably have dozens, maybe hundreds of paintings lying around the studio (or in storage), which someone will have to dispose of in the event of your untimely demise.

At one time or another, you have probably harbored vainglorious thoughts of bequeathing all your unsold work to some museum for the future enlightenment of mankind. Or, if you’re particularly perverse, you may have pictured your heirs squabbling among themselves over your priceless masterpieces. Maybe you’ve envisioned Sotheby’s auctioning off the remnants of your estate for untold megabucks. Silly as all these scenarios may be, any of them are probably preferable to the situation in which you’ve done *nothing* to handle the disposition of your work after your death. So, in the interest of avoiding taxes – if not death itself – here are some suggestions:

First, don’t leave your artwork to any next of kin unless you’re positive they will treasure it on their walls for the rest of their lives. Otherwise, unless they are art marketing experts, they will overvalue your work in trying to sell it, confusing sentiment with value. To the other extreme, your heirs might also *under*value your leftover works and stow them away in attics for generations. They might also demand too high a percentage if sold by a dealer, or be swindled by an unscrupulous agent.

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A much better course would be to name in your will a trusted dealer, gallery, or museum to handle all your remaining work in the event of your death. If a museum has expressed interest in any of your pieces, there are certain tax advantages to bequeathing them one or more paintings as selected by the museum, either before or after your death. However, if no such interest exists, leaving the whole lot to such an institution will only guarantee more attic storage or a white-elephant sale of your work sometime in the future.

Second, in setting up an arrangement with a dealer, gallery, or museum, specify the numbers in advance. List wholesale prices, retail prices, percentages – whatever you like – but get it in writing. You know the market for your work. So does the museum or gallery. Your heirs probably won't.

Third, make sure you provide some type of documentation for each piece; something signed by you and attached to the work itself (as well as on file).

This could be a major undertaking for some people, which is a good reason to start now. In an envelope attached to the artwork, you should specify the painting's title, media used, date completed, and personal comments on the work. You should also include any appraisals, awards, copyright papers, archival information, and perhaps even preliminary photos or sketches used to create the work.

In addition to making life easier for your executor, preparations such as these will almost certainly result in greater financial gain for your heirs.

The professional handling of your artistic legacy will further enhance the value of your art to collectors, apart from the fact that you are also dead.

Figure 2

Earning a Living as an Artist

As a writer of ArtyFacts, I sometimes felt like a musician. People asked, "Do you take requests?" The short answer was, "Not usually". But that doesn't mean I never utilize suggestions from my readers in deciding what to write. However, they were mostly inadvertent suggestions about some topic that is important to artists in general. This was the case recently when someone asked, "How does one make a living as an artist?"

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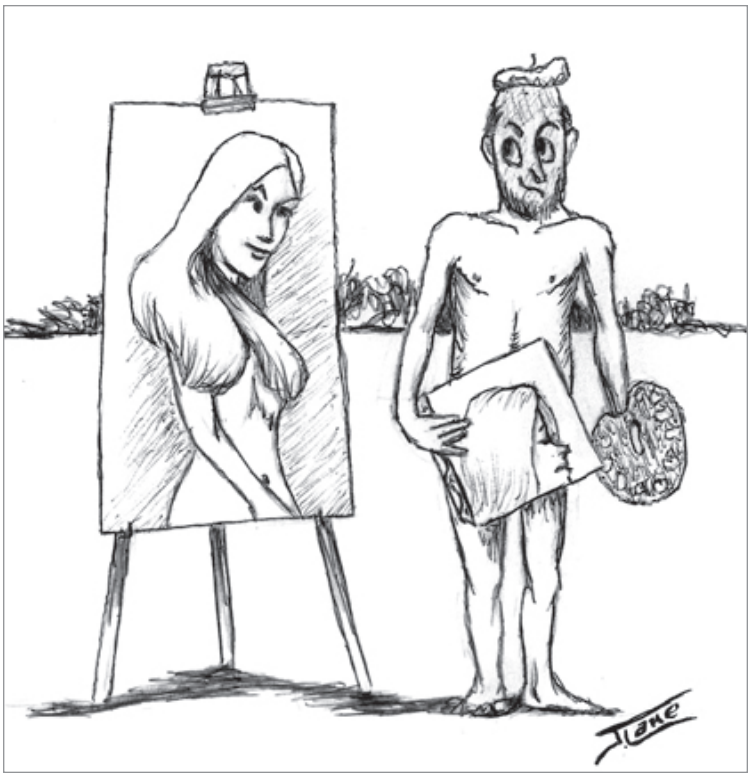
You can't get much more universal than that! I could be flip and answer with a tired old joke ending in, "...practice, practice."

Figure 3



Despite the cliché humor, there is a real grain of truth here. Ya gotta work at it.

A college professor I once knew insisted that to make a living as an artist you had to be an exhibitionist – in that you had to be willing to stand naked to the world every time you exhibited your art.

Of course, that brings up all manner of interesting mental images, but, like the Carnegie Hall joke, there is an element of truth. You need a healthy ego.

Seriously, regardless of the profession, you earn in direct relationship to four factors. Think of these factors as hierarchal levels in a pyramid.

The lowest level involves the physical effort applied. At the next level are the academic credentials you have earned, or experience gained, followed on the third level by the responsibility you are willing to assume. Topping them all is the rarity of your skills. For the artist, I should probably add a fifth level: the creativity in your thinking. So, the more you have going for you at the top of the pyramid, the less you have to depend on the broader factors toward the bottom.

In essence, there has to be a willingness to pop your head up above the crowd of thousands of other talented artists and do that which the others are either unable or unwilling to do. And to really excel, you need to do it better, and for less money, at least until you become famous. Add to that a healthy ego and creative thinking, and you have a recipe for success. These are the economic facts of life. If you were expecting a laundry list of ways artists can earn a buck, sorry; they don't make laundry lists that long.

The Art Market Crash

Even the most historically challenged are familiar with the significance of October, 1929; the date of the calamitous stock market collapse, which signaled the start of the Great Depression.

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Figure 4

However, few people are aware that some sixty years later, there was a similar collapse of the art market. Throughout the 1980s, the art world saw a speculative run-up of auction prices for various masterpieces, with particular emphasis on those of the impressionists.

Van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* (Figure 4) sold for a record $82 million, while Renoir's *A Dance at the Moulin de la Galette* (Figure 5) brought $78 million.

This was the high-water mark. Shortly thereafter came a downturn. While it might not have been as precipitous as that which led to the Great Depression, to certain high-rolling Japanese art speculators, it probably seemed that way.

Figure 5

With the stagnation of the Japanese economy during most of the 1990s, Ryoei Saito, who purchased both paintings, went bankrupt.

He even asked to be cremated with his Van Gogh.

Fortunately, he'd already "lost" his painting of Dr. Gachet before he died. Strangely enough, it still appears to be lost. (Or at least, no one is saying where it is.)

Today, there is over $200 million worth of other fine art, with signatures like Chagall, Picasso, and Braque, sitting in bank vaults in Japan, confiscated by creditors from spendthrift Japanese businessmen who found themselves in a similar position as Saito. The worst part is, these banks and trust cartels have no idea what to do with them.

The banks find themselves in something of a classic Catch-22 situation. On the one hand, as assets, the works of art earn no interest and, indeed, cost money to store and protect. Yet, dumping them on the art market would not only cause them to bring far less than their inflated 1980s prices, but would also serve to depress the entire marketplace for such top-drawer collectibles. Given this situation, there is every likelihood that these beautiful masterpieces will remain locked up for some time to come.

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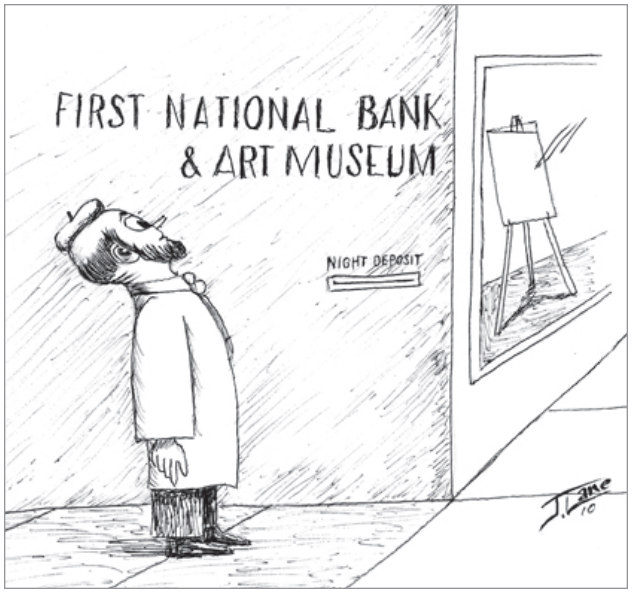
There is a second reason for hiding these painted assets. Doing so serves to enhance the aura of fine art in general, making it seem almost divine, untouchable, unattainable. Such works become objects of veneration on a par with the *Mona Lisa* or the Hope Diamond. The sad part is, these imprisoned paintings were meant to be seen, to bring joy, to expose us to expressive beauty as seen through the eyes of some of the greatest artists who ever lived. Stored away in bank vaults, they might as well be junk bonds.

Figure 6



The Barter Economy

One time I returned from an expensive art show with less cash in my pockets than when I'd left. Someone, in trying to make me feel better, reminded me that during his entire life, Vincent van Gogh sold only one painting. Did it help?

Not really. I've never been one to give much thought to flirting with madness or suicide at an early age in order to obtain even the astronomical prices Van Gogh's work now brings.

I've always felt that death was a highly overrated marketing ploy, never mind the fact I've already sold far more than Van Gogh ever did, and, I'm well past dying young. But, I have often wondered precisely which painting Van Gogh managed to sell, to whom, and for how much. So, I looked it up.

The painting was titled *The Red Vineyard*, a strikingly colored sunset showing peasants working in a vineyard next to a small stream. Van Gogh sold it in 1888, about a year and a half before his death, to the sister of his friend, Eugène Boch, a poet. The price was less than ten francs, less than $100 today.

Figure 7

In researching the Van Gogh painting, I found that quite a number of individuals ended up owning paintings by Van Gogh and other impecunious artists of that time largely by default.

In the 1880s, an average monthly wage for a Paris office worker was about 125 francs. A meal in a Montmartre tavern might cost less than one franc. It wasn't unusual for an artist to pay for that meal with a painting.

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Eugene Murer, a Paris pastry-shop owner, ended up with quite a valuable collection of modern art that way. So did Auguste Pellerin, who manufactured margarine, and Pere Soulier, who made mattresses.

The biggest winners in this barter economy were those supplying goods and services needed by the artists, individuals such as Pere Tanguy, who sold indispensable paint and canvases, or the owners of framing shops. Tanguy's collection eventually ended up in the Louvre.

Van Gogh's doctor, Paul Gachet, apparently took out his fees in paintings. Vincent did three portraits of him.

Figure 8

Two paintings and a drawing depict the sad, melancholy face of this kindly old physician. In 1990, one of these broke the record for the highest amount ever paid for a single work of art. Ironically, it was Dr. Gachet, an amateur artist himself, who did the final portrait of Van Gogh – a small pencil drawing – as his patient lay dying from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Virtual Galleries

Several years ago, in an Internet discussion group for painters, some friends and I were discussing e-commerce and the art world. Like me, one woman had her paintings online and was a keen observer of this manner of selling art. I've always been an optimist at heart. I reported encouraging, if not spectacular, sales over the Internet; not to mention the positive image and interest such exposure generates. My friend was not so upbeat. It occurred to me that perhaps I had been overly optimistic about the world of Internet art marketing.

For artists, the trends in e-commerce look favorable over the long run. The potential exposure is enormous. But likewise, the competition is enormous too; much keener than brick-and-mortar art markets. In the past, galleries have tended to insulate artists from the market forces at hand. Space was limited, so exclusivity was a must. And because of high overhead costs, prices were high. Those who won gallery representation (or obtained an agent) saw their work go for comforting prices.

However, online galleries seldom have a personal relationship with their artists because they can feature a virtually unlimited stable of extremely talented (and some not-so-talented) artists at very little expense. Any remnant of exclusivity is a paper-thin charade; as transparent to the buyer as their computer screen. Yet, for this, online galleries often demand a commission as high as the traditional 50 percent.

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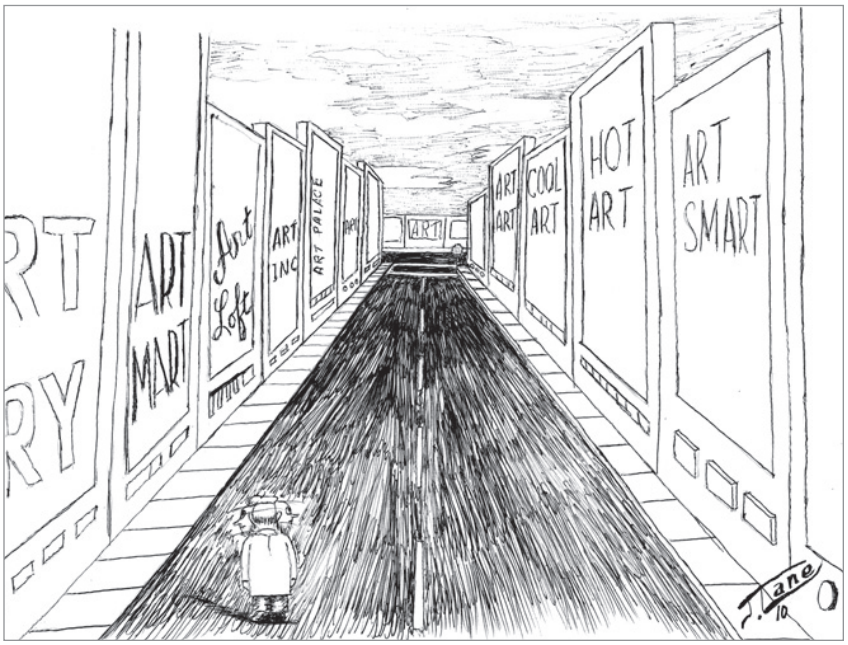
Without the protective shell of marketing savvy traditional galleries offer, artists today find themselves having to set up their own virtual galleries, either creating, and/or paying for, the HTML walls and storefront windows which showcase their work online. Even then they are not guaranteed typical drop-in (or rather “surf-in”) business because they find themselves situated on an endless virtual avenue of seemingly identical virtual galleries of every stripe that is miles long and several stories high.

With this kind of competition, art prices have fallen. On top of that, the clientele is different.

Traditional galleries cater to a very upscale, art-literate collector with fairly deep pockets. As the Internet becomes increasingly accessible, bargain hunters have begun to dominate the market. Even those who can afford to pay traditional gallery prices now expect to pay less when shopping online.

Figure 9



Thus comparison shopping for fine art – unheard of before virtual shopping – has become very much a reality.

Fifteen years ago, when I opened my first, crude website to the world, I was stunned to hear from my online artist friends that my prices were too low. Yet, my instincts told me they were about right. I made sales, and still do. Not only that, but other artists I knew were also selling their work online for fairly reasonable prices.

At the same time, my friends were right. My prices were low, but only insofar as traditional art markets, with their high overhead and heavy commissions, were concerned. With my own website, I didn’t have to contend with either of these factors.

However, I did invest a tremendous amount of time in setting up and promoting my web presence. Also, being a realist painter, my clients were not as upscale or art-literate as those of traditional galleries. At that time, many of my buyers were computer newbies.

So, what does this mean for the struggling online artist today?

First, make every effort to stand out from the pack. Make your virtual gallery not just good, but spectacular.

Second, the artwork has to be spectacular too.

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Third, with all this spectacularity booming around you, keep your ego under control, and with it, your prices. Remember, you are not yet famous, nor, realistically speaking, ever likely to become so (during your lifetime at least).

Fourth, don't think traditional art galleries are going to dry up and blow away. Look upon your virtual gallery as your key to the front-door markets. Just don't expect that key to be made of solid gold.

Legalese for Artists

I've never before done an art-book review for the simple, shameful reason that I don't read many books. Just as most artists would rather create art than merely look at it, I'd rather write words than read them. But there is one good book I recommend, and it's one that every artist and artisan, as craftspeople now like to be called, should either have access to, or own. Granted, this tome won't keep you awake at night wondering about the outcome. In fact, it would actually be a great bedtime read, especially if you're prone to insomnia.

The book is titled *Business and Legal Forms for Crafts*, written by Tad Crawford, an attorney and former general counsel for the Graphic Artists Guild. Though written with more than a little legalese, this is legalese that every professional artist needs to understand. And, as legalese goes, Crawford's brand is probably as painless as any. The book includes everything from how to create the simplest invoice, to a three-page contract covering the commissioning of a portrait. I've painted portraits in less time than it took me to digest this document.

Nonetheless, that portion of the book (to me at least) was almost interesting. Best of all, the contracts in the book are written with every possible legal right and advantage accruing to the artist. More than just a collection of blank forms, Crawford's book begins not with contracts and agreements, but with the negotiations between artists and buyers which lead to them.

The emphasis is on how to land the best possible deal. In this book you'll also find government forms for applying for American copyrights and trademarks.

The book also comes with a CD, allowing the reader to modify and print the forms as needed. Add to this agreements covering speaking engagements, the loaning of work, rentals, licensing, limited-edition prints, model releases, consignments, and independent contracts, to name but a few, and you have what is essentially a paperback lawyer who doesn't charge a hundred bucks an hour.

Figure 10

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Juried Art Shows

The life of an artist can be full of frustrations of various sizes and importance, from brushes that fall apart, to paintings that do likewise (figuratively speaking, of course). Perhaps one of the oldest artist frustrations is the venerable juried art show. I use the terms *oldest* and *venerable* somewhat lightly because the juried art show is neither old nor all that venerable. They were virtually unknown in England before the 1850s, while in France they date back to the early 1800s and the Paris salons of the infamous Académie des Beaux-Arts.

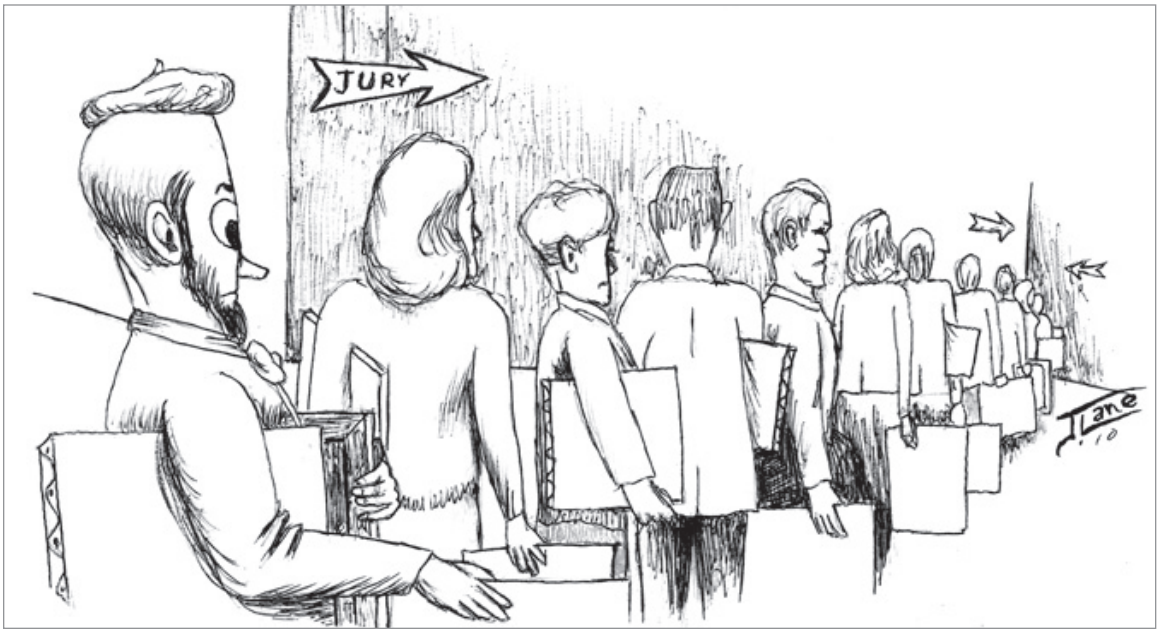
In both countries, juried shows were the result of a desire to exhibit the best work of living artists, thereby promoting their careers, selling their paintings, and simultaneously shaping the tastes of the buying public. Of course, the very fact that there *was* a buying public, in England at least, could be attributed to the sudden influx of spare change resulting from the first manifestations of the Industrial Revolution.

Wealth inevitably begets artists, who beget art. All too quickly, all this begetting begets too many artists begetting too much art. Hence, there developed the need to whittle down the number of newly begotten paintings to something approximating the wall space available in the cavernous London and Paris exhibition halls. Secondarily, this brutal, but supposedly healthy, competition was proclaimed as having the side effect of improving the quality of the national corps of artists and the subsequent art they produced.

Thus, in the land that first gave us the jury in the court of jurisprudence, there came the same process by Royal Academicians in selecting the art that would be elevated to public prominence.

In the early years, this was a rather modest and informal process in which all works were hung before the less noble ones were removed to allow for a pleasing exhibit.

Figure 11



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However, as years passed and the number of entries doubled, then quadrupled, this gentle, ego-salving process gradually became the heartless, brutal, and coldly efficient cattle-call we all know and love today.

By 1875, the jurying process in England had pretty much arrived at its modern incarnation. That year, 4,638 works were entered by professional, Royal Academy artists in the London Summer Exhibition. Of those, only 561 were accepted, and some 995 were marked doubtful, meaning if space were available after all the accepted works were hung, this group would be considered.

A dismal 3,082 were rejected outright. That year, Charles West Cope even painted a picture of the ruthless jurying process with portraits of those involved. Inasmuch as there's no record of Cope's painting having been accepted, it probably wasn't.

Fellow rejected artist John Soden was so disconsolate; he wrote a satiric poem about it:

> "The toil of months, experience of years
>
> Before the dreaded Council now appears –
>
> It's left their view almost as soon as in it –
>
> They damn them at the rate of three a minute,
>
> Scarce time for even faults to be detected,
>
> The cross is chalked: 'tis flung aside 'REJECTED'."

Given the jury's apparent fondness for children, as seen in those paintings that found acceptance, Soden took his criticisms further :

> "...scenes of babydom immortalized
>
> Dear Baby's bath. Dear Baby – well!' at meals.
>
> Baby's first lollipop – its little toes,
>
> First 'ittle toof' and 'Blowing Baby's nose'."

I know how he felt. I'll admit, at times art show juries have befuddled me in much the same way. I just never managed to rise to such eloquence.

(Quotation from *Victorian Painting* by Lionel Lambourne)

Geography and Success

Beginning artists often labor under the mistaken belief that to be successful, they must live in or near a big city, and thus have access to large, upscale galleries and their big-money clients. In fact, for the beginning artist, geography is largely irrelevant. Having access to a large metropolitan area is important for novice artists only in that it allows them to visit museums, galleries, and traveling exhibitions.

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Insofar as selling is concerned, I dare say that no beginning artist is going to walk into a major gallery, portfolio in hand, and gain instant representation. That doesn't happen – even in the movies.

Regardless of place of domicile, *you* can succeed if you will simply *adapt*. The key is to be versatile. This means letting your environment shape your career, instead of trying to shoehorn someone else's model success story into your own situation. Though I'm by no means a model success story, here's some quick advice for artists living in a small town (population of five to ten thousand) which I've garnered over the years from experience, books, and other artists.

1. **Work from your home:** Storefronts are expensive ego trips, and 90 percent of them fold within ninety days. Otherwise, be prepared to live in the back room.

2. **Take classes, or else teach classes:** Either way, you're going to learn. Collect books on all types of art, including art history: You may learn far more *how-to* from them than from actual how-to books.

3. **Join a local arts group:** No man (or woman) is an island. United you expand, divided you withdraw.

4. **Do self-portraits:** You get to know yourself, and you always have the model handy when you show your work.

5. **Build a tear file:** Collect any pictures you think might even remotely be of use. Mine occupy the better part of a two-drawer file cabinet.

6. **Discipline yourself:** Take pride in the fact that you work when you don't feel like it.

7. **Do local color:** Hit the parks, monuments, bridges, schools, churches, stores, post offices, and factories first. Then do that which sells a second time, from a different angle, in a different size, medium, format, or time of the year. After that, start doing some of the more outstanding homes in the area. This really works!

8. **Don't miss simple beauty in search of the grand:** A row of flower boxes can be just as interesting as a row of mansions.

9. **Once you have a body of work, arrange an art show:** Consider any clean, attractive place open for several hours at a time over a period of days or weeks. In addition to the usual restaurants and cafés, consider libraries, vacant store windows, local gift shops, churches, or street-level offices.

10. **Learn to take good, utilitarian photos:** You're not going to be displaying them, so they need only be good enough for utilitarian purposes.

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11. **Do matting and framing:** It takes some space, some new skills, and some time, but it allows you to control a piece of artwork from conception to sale. In a low-volume situation, the savings add up quickly. It's also a welcomed service in a small community.

12. **Enter local juried shows:** Even if you don't win, and even if you don't even get accepted, they're fun, educational, and important to your career.

13. **Promote, but don't advertise:** Business cards, a brochure, a newspaper article; that's promotion. Print ads are a waste.

14. **Keep your own books and other records:** Know where the money comes from, and more importantly, where it goes.

15. **Price to sell:** If you get too busy; raise your prices. If the opposite is true, lower them.

16. **Learn to do it all:** I repeat the most important item of all: be versatile.

Boondocks Marketing

In the previous section, I outlined some ways which can help beginning artists succeed in a small-town environment. In this section, the emphasis is mostly on marketing artwork in a predominantly rural area (communities of less than five thousand), where the nearest city with an established art market is more than two hours away.

Some of this repeats ideas from the previous list. That's because, with some obvious adjustments, what works in a small town also tends to work in a *very* small town. As something of an expert on selling artwork in a rural area, let me also enumerate here a series of broader, more general ideas aimed at the more experienced artist.

1. **Expose your work:** Continually keep it before the public in any venue you can find. Restaurants, libraries, banks, gift shops, movie theaters, doctors' offices, and book stores are all good; essentially anywhere there is shelter, some security, and a decent amount of traffic. I hung and sold work in a local restaurant for over twenty-five years.

2. **Beware of local art galleries:** In a tiny art market, galleries come and go as fast as the weather. Most are opened by people with more dreams than business savvy, and quickly fold once the economic realities of the minuscule art market make themselves felt. Those that don't fail are usually owned by well-established artists who are more interested in selling their own work than yours. If you do display in a local gallery, especially a new one, watch them like a hawk! I've lost at a least half-dozen paintings over the years in dealing with art galleries.

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3. **Work and sell out of your own home:** The IRS is quite generous with tax allowances if you provide adequate documentation. It keeps the overhead down. Keep in mind, to sell from your home, it must be easily accessible to the public, and the space professionally organized. An unused upstairs bedroom does not meet this requirement.

4. **Advertise thoughtfully:** A business card is a must. A brochure is nice. An outdoor sign is a good investment if it's tastefully done, well-placed, and easily readable by passing motorists. Be sure to check local zoning ordinances before installing a sign. Study other signs as you pass them on the highway to decide how big yours should be and how it should look. Keep it simple and keep it near your place of business to direct visitors to your door.

5. **Know the art tastes of your community:** Abstracts seldom do well in a rural area. Such work requires an elite, art-educated clientele that small communities rarely have. Stick with landscapes, pets, cars, or portraits, better yet, all of the above and more.

6. **Distinguish yourself from the local amateurs:** Go to workshops, read books, take classes – anything to be the foremost artist in your community.

7. **Keep your prices low:** Price your time at twice what you could make working anywhere else in your community. More importantly, keep the amount of time you have in any individual piece to a reasonable level. Learn to work quickly. Do it right the first time. Use any shortcut that saves time and doesn't sacrifice quality.

8. **Paint local color:** It is absolutely necessary that a buyer establish an emotional tie with any work that they propose to purchase. Local landmarks may seem boring, but if you search for unique and creative approaches to that schoolhouse you've painted ten times already, you can alleviate this boredom. The list of best sellers bears repeating: churches, bridges, schools, courthouses, old homes, historic landmarks, monuments, gazebos, parks, picturesque places of business, no-longer-standing structures, and even residential street scenes.

9. **Do art shows (indoor and outdoor):** If you can take the heat, mosquitoes, boredom, and hard work, art shows can pay well; but choose your shows carefully. The burnout rate for this sort of thing is very high, and given the high entry fees and travel expenses for some of the better shows, there is often some financial risk. Don't be discouraged if you don't break sales records at a show; it's the exposure that counts. I never knew for sure how good a show may have been until months later when the exposure began to pay off.

10. **Learn HTML:** Put up a web page. Consider HTML to be just another art skill to be mastered. Today's "What You See Is What You Get" (WYSIWYG) editors minimize the effort in setting up a website. If you so desire, your web presence may well be your ticket *out* of your small community.

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11. **Keep the size of your work reasonable for your subject matter:** Paint pets about life-size (except for a horse, of course). Landscapes can be the largest. But, even a couch painting should seldom be more than four feet in width. Vertical-format landscapes are easily hung in most homes, and are usually quite eye-catching because of their verticality. Regardless of the subject, I seldom paint larger than 3 by 3 feet.

12. **Do murals (either indoors or outdoors):** They are popular; even in small markets. Fund-raising for a mural project also carries with it valuable community exposure.

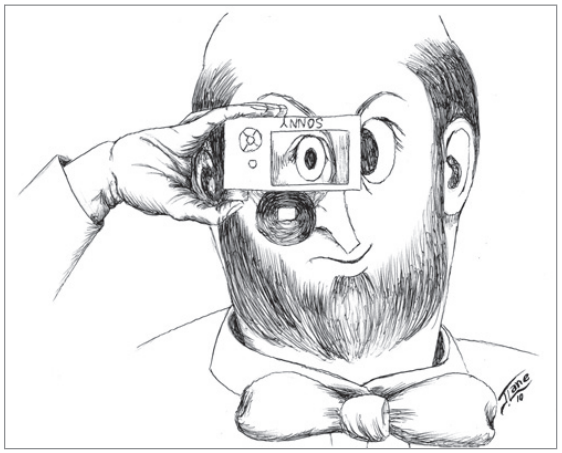
13. **Eat up free local publicity:** It's far better than any you can buy.

14. **Teach classes:** Children or adult, classes can be a nice little sideline. (One case where a newspaper ad may be valuable.)

15. **Guard your business, personal, and artistic integrity at all times:** It's your most valuable commodity. In small towns, people talk. Word of mouth is great; just make sure it's all positive.

16. **Learn photography:** Then learn to use photography correctly in your art. This can save a tremendous amount of time and prevent costly errors. Artists who refuse to use such a valuable tool before, during, and after their work is created, are struggling with one hand tied behind their backs.

Figure 12



17. **If your community has no art association; start one:** As a pro among amateurs, you'll be a big cheese. Make the most of it.

18. **Don't be afraid to venture out of your local community, but do so advisedly:** If you have very little experience marketing your art, be wary of potentially unscrupulous individuals (in a big-city art market especially) who may try to take advantage of you.

19. **Get involved in local community service:** You'll meet people with money. People with money buy artwork.

20. **Don't be a specialist:** In this, artists are much like doctors. The small-town artist should be a G.P. (general practitioner). Medical specialists have to congregate around large hospitals in big cities to succeed. Likewise, art specialists have to be near a large market to succeed in any specialty.

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21. **Learn to mat and frame:** This service can be a tremendous source of income, and one that is often independent of your art sales. I'm not talking about buying a chopper, stocking umpteen different moldings, or even mastering a miter saw. Instead, become a dealer for a nearby frame outlet or wholesaler. Or, buy from a wholesale mail-order firm. Invest in a mat cutter that is no more expensive or elaborate than you can manage. I've had a Dexter for over forty years. (I think they sell now for around $35.) From there you can go up to several hundred dollars for the more or less foolproof, "idiot" mat cutters (as in, any idiot can use them). Such contraptions are not ideal in cramped spaces.

22. **Avoid inventories:** Boondocks clients expect to have to wait for merchandise to arrive. But don't let a lack of basic art supplies rob you of your productivity. Buy wholesale and try to have only the supplies you'll reasonably need, and when you need them.

23. **If you have one, don't quit your day job:** The pressures may be rough at times, but relish those times when you're busy, because unfortunately, they often don't last. As in any other retail business, you're going to be busier the latter half of the year. Learn to enjoy your slack times to create your serious work while the rest of the year you're (hopefully) swamped with commissions.

24. **If possible, consider your art income as bonus money:** Save it. Spend it on vacations. Buy big-ticket items with cash that you'd otherwise have to buy on credit. Invest in your business only if you can expect increased income as a direct result. Try not to get in the habit of using your art income for daily household expenses unless you're a full-time professional with no other source of revenue.

25. **Get and use a credit card for the purchase of supplies and items for resale:** However, make sure you pay it off IN FULL on a monthly basis, thus avoiding interest charges. Plastic money is great for smoothing cash-flow problems and ordering items over the phone or Internet, but deadly if used indiscriminately.

26. **Enlist your spouse and/or children in your marketing efforts:** They can help with everything from building display racks to cleaning the cobwebs from around the lights. Also, they work cheap. Kids are great at art shows to help unload, load, and run errands while you do what you do best. Moreover, art shows are also a good educational experience for young people.

27. **Never turn down a speaking request:** You owe it to your community and yourself to be *the* art resource/expert to whom everyone turns when they need advice. If you're shy in front of groups, just remember; you know a hell of a lot more about art than they do, and that makes you superior to every last one of them. So, use the opportunity to show off a little. Be sure to bring slides.

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Getting Discovered

Figure 13

Everyone has probably heard the legendary story of how screen starlet Lana Turner was “discovered” by a film casting director as the actress sat at the soda fountain in a Hollywood drugstore during the late 1930s.

Artists also have such dreams of being discovered, although a bar stool in a drugstore is not the usual venue. They set up their wares on street corners near museums, or wear thin their shoe leather, pounding the pavement from gallery to gallery, portfolio in hand. They fill out volumes of paperwork to enter juried art shows with their hopes and dreams. Sometimes it works. Usually it doesn’t, and the artist goes on eking out a living, being known as – at best – a regional favorite.

In 1950, one such brash young artist hit the big time. His dream came true at the Betty Parson’s Gallery in Manhattan.

He was an instant success, though in fact, he’d been working hard at attaining such acclaim for almost twenty years. While plenty brash, he was actually not all that young. He was thirty-eight. He was an abstract expressionist, struggling, along with about a dozen similar New York-based artists, to break through the barriers of representational conformity with a style which even the critics were still debating. For the most part, the public neither understood nor liked his work. Although part of a group referred to as “action painters,” this man had a further peculiarity that set him apart: he didn’t use brushes. Instead, he *dripped* his paint on the canvas (Figure 14). His name was Jackson Pollock.

Pollock did more than make a name for himself at that show. He made a name for the whole New York school, and the entire artistic movement for that matter. His paintings sold more rapidly than even *he* could drip them, creating a shortage of works, which created rising prices. This, in turn, generated dozens of other abstract expressionists. They churned out work at an incredible rate, in a frenzy of paint slinging not seen before or since. Some of it was good. Some of it was great, in fact. But most was mediocre at best. Yet, it was all so new that few could tell the difference.

Pollock’s work sold for astronomical prices at the time, as did the work of Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and de Kooning, to mention a few.

Like the artists finally reaping the rewards for their persistence, abstract expressionism was no flash in the pan. With artists such as Pollock leading the way, this art totally dominated the art scene in the United States – and internationally – for the next fifteen years. This sudden success was as frightening as it was exhilarating for the artists concerned. Some handled it better than others. Pollock perhaps, handled it worst of all.

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Figure 14

Quitting Your Day Job

On October 30, 1998, I wrote as my daily ArtyFact: “There are certain milestones in every artist’s life that he or she will never forget: the first art class, the first “good” painting, the first “sold” painting, first blue ribbon, or the first TV interview.

All of these serve to move that artist from student to rank amateur, to talented practitioner, and eventually, if you don’t get lost along the way, to the lofty designation of ‘experienced professional.’ I try not to talk about myself when I write, but today marks one of those milestones for me. I did something today that everyone warns artists and entertainers not to do. Today, at 3:17 p.m., I quit my day job.”

Proudly boasting, I went on: “It’s official; I’ve got my gold watch from the local teachers association to prove it.” Actually, it was not quite that dramatic, though no less memorable personally. For me, quitting my day job entailed retiring after twenty-six years of teaching art in the public schools. I was not going to be desperately clawing to avoid starvation. Thanks to the state teachers’ retirement system, and the fact that my wife did not retire for two more years after that, we were not in the position of having to eke out a living exclusively from my artwork.

We did make some modest changes. We let go of our twice-a-week housekeeper. I took up doing the household chores in my spare moments. Severance pay and a generous retirement bonus permitted us to pay off a car, then reduce, combine, and refinance both of our mortgages at fortuitously low interest rates.

Also, I had managed to save a little money and had a greater than usual backlog of work. So, even though I was fairly young for retirement (fifty-three), I felt secure.

In my ArtyFact entry, I couldn’t help going on: “From now on, all I have to do is sit back, write my daily ArtyFacts, and paint whatever and whenever I feel the urge, until death forces me to slow down a little.”

I was looking forward to retirement with so many exciting options I got a little giddy just thinking about them.

On the downside, all those things I’d been putting off until I retired began coming down on me like the torrent from Fibber McGee’s overstuffed closet (an old-time radio reference my dad liked to use).

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