Notes from Artist Workshop: Selling at Art Events

Monday April 23, 2108 - UVA Headquarters, Brighton

Panel: Tsun Ming Chmielinski, Karen Smigliani and Christine Winship. Moderated by John Quatrale

Summary: the 3 presenters gave many suggestions and tips, including these common themes: Make a connection to the customer, be personable, have something to say about your art that will appeal to different customers, smile, don’t sit if possible, be ready at all times for a sale, and be yourself because only you can be truly enthusiastic about your own art.

Christine Winship

No yes or no questions

Has anyone here worked in a retail environment? Talk about 9West, greeting, how to never a potential customer. How “Can you hold this for me” never happens (unfortunately). If someone say “how much is this?” Tell them…..but follow up with what drew you to this piece? And start making a connection.

Find a connection with your audience

EoD once said their favorite time to play was at a festival because at an EoD show (or focused gallery show) they are coming to see you. At a festival (or an art show/fair) you have a chance to bring more people into your tribe of followers.

Because my work is focused on animals, people tend to talk about animals with me. My art work has moved toward making connections with animals and nature and the world around us. I tell them that I hope my makes them think about just looking at things around them a little bit closer.

Talk about your work

I must admit that I’m more of an How’d they make that junkie MORE than – what is that person trying to say to me. And I know I’m not the only one. Offer people a little insight on how this particular piece easy made AS WELL AS why you made it and you start making a connection that way. Also LISTEN to what their responses are…what’s the body language while you’re chatting…are they staring deeper into the work? Or have they moved on and are now looking at another piece. This sometimes can be tricky as no one likes to feel pressured into buying anything. Use your best judgement.
Have an artist statement

No one can really read your mind. It’s best to have an artist statement…even if not on paper but in your head. And it doesn’t have to be of how you started drawing at 3 years of age, or that you “LOVE COLOR!” because, c’mon who doesn’t love color? But be more like I started working like this, and then this happened in my life and I noticed my art turned “this way or whatever. Believe me, this is what people are interested in.

Remain professional (even if someone says they don’t like something about a particular piece.)

Once, a woman came in and started rubbing the dust off the prints. Another time a child decided to put her sticky fingers on my low hanging piece. And to try to remain professional throughout the experience. People take that home with them and you are also a reflection of the art show in particular. It can be hard, but it can be done. Some people buy just because it will match their sofa. It’s reality. Where you think you poured your heart and soul into something and their buying it simply because it’s yellow. I try to think that it’s not just because it’s yellow…there is a connection there. And maybe your viewer doesn’t even know it yet. But, maybe when it’s finally hanging in her home she’ll realize the connection there.

Karen Smigliani

Bring a variety of art and prices to attract everyone

Larger pieces are good to attract attention (1 or 2)

Smaller ones on the table

Prepare your work to be ready to hang. For stretched canvas, use eye hooks and wire, works on paper, a mat and simple frame is fine. Provide hanging hooks if possible.

Have a little story about each piece. Tell the buyer what inspired you. Emphasizes the uniqueness of the art, that it is one of a king. Not mass-produced as you would find at retail stores. (TJ Max)

Educate and entice a one of kind piece of art.

Matting in a sleeve is good for work on paper too.

Prices on the each piece help to allow customer to make decisions on purchases.

Decide beforehand if you want to negotiate on price and decide what you’ll accept

Discount on multiples? Decide beforehand.

Business cards with art image help to remind people of your art and style. Has contact info for the future.

Websites allow people to see more of your work to consider buying at a later time.

Business card can be used to label your artwork too.
Make eye contact with everyone. Smile!
Have a good time.
Standing is preferred.

**Tsun Ming Chmielinski**

Maybe your purpose is to make money, get rid of inventory but it is more important to build up your client/fan base.

Goal should be to build a fan base - Have some new work to help your collectors expand their collection of your work.

I don’t suggest that you cut prices of your works.

Do research beforehand - demography, who else is selling, know what to bring or not to bring. Don’t bring too many different styles. Be careful what you mix, depending on the event and the expected customers.

Display - leave a lot of space to allow everything to be appreciated. Allow them to breathe. A couple of signature pieces to attract traffic. Not too many price points. Might be confusing to some buyers.

Take notes during the event. What did this person buy? Have a guest book and make sure that people provide their names and email addresses. Use this information to invite them to future events. For any significant sales, send thank you notes the day after.

Talk about your piece, what inspired you to create it, and suggest additional purchases that complement and expand the collection for the buyer. Suggested questions: It looks like you have a question? Is that true? Are you interested in that piece? Where it will go in your home or office?

Spend time with your fan base - your customers. Family attendance is great, but focus on the fans and collectors.

Sales tax - collect it and make it easy for customers. Use Square, etc.

Recruit a friend to help at your event and handle the transactions. This frees you – the artist – to connect to customers.

You have direct access to buyers.

No one can promote your work better than yourself. Everyone is different in terms of connecting to people. Find your way to connect.

Be prepared. Be ready to promote. Be present. Be yourself and have fun!