

Survival in a Slowing Economy

By now it's pretty obvious that the economy has changed the buying habits of potential customers. It has also changed how much of an investment artists are able to make to further their careers. What I was able and willing to invest in materials and self promotion is now very limited by my concerns over what the next year will bring and how much it will affect my income. Being self employed as a full time artist can be rewarding - you set your own goals and how to go about achieving them. But it can also be frustrating when you don't have the resources to implement your plans, and where to invest precious finances to their best effect becomes more confusing. Worst of all, the emotional strain of navigating the business side of an art career, can ruin your creative ability.

After some thought about my own strategies, here are some of the things you can do to take back emotional control over your career.

1. If the wolf is at the door, and you are incurring debt and no income, being able to create in that frame of mind may be impossible. So first things first, consider a full or part time job to get some income so that when you have time to create you can concentrate on it. Look for creative jobs that will enhance your career. Teaching can be very rewarding, the flow of information and creative ideas between teacher and student can bring on a whole new style. Work at something you love, being fulfilled goes a long way. Try something physical, it will pay dividends in your health and spirit.
2. Lose unrealistic mind sets. I have a very talented friend who was floundering under the idea she was betraying her artistic destiny by working outside her field. She was so upset she was unable to create or find paying work. When she allowed herself to get a paying job outside the creative field it freed her up to once again enjoy and loose herself in her creative time. In a short time she was able to move to part time work. Using connections she made on the job led to commissions and opportunities that enhanced her art career. Don't overlook the possibility of having all aspects of your life further your artistic career.
3. If you are still able to support yourself through your art career consider broadening your range of marketable products. Not to diminish your larger more expensive works, but to offer new and young collectors the opportunity to begin collecting original art they can afford. I decided to stop making giclees, the expense is too much for me right now, but I still needed \$100 - \$300 pieces at my shows. I made a series of watercolors based on my travels that I matted and sold alongside the larger more expensive oils. I found people were more likely to buy an original than a giclee. They could group two or three to fill a larger space, and I made a sale to a potential new collector. Most importantly I was able to fill my time with creative work that was exciting and new for me.
4. If you have time on your hands re-invest in your skills. Get back to basics. Set aside time to draw and sketch or learn a new medium. If necessary take some classes and meet new people. Everything you do will enhance your ability to take back control of your art career.
5. Try marketing your work in different ways. If you have been showing exclusively in galleries, try doing a studio show. Market your art to your neighbors, create an event that will excite people about you and your work.
6. Use this time to update your website, or create a web site. This is the best way to direct potential customers and galleries to your work.
7. Consider trading your work for goods and services.
8. Take the time to create new work and focus on why you are doing this in the first place. Build up a body of work to market when things turn around.
9. For now forget about sales and concentrate on creating exactly what you love, whether you think it will be marketable or not. There is a lot of truth to the adage, "do what you love and the money will follow". In the arts the most sincere and personal works are the ones that stand the tests of time.
10. You are not alone in this. Extend yourself to others who are worse off than you.

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