

THE BUSINESS OF ART

FINDING MORE SAVVY WAYS TO SELL

By COELI CARR

>> "The 'starving artists' saying is not a myth," says Timothy Martin.

PEOPLE trying to earn their living as artists still recoil when they hear those heart-tugging stories about impoverished creative brethren from yesteryear.

Those romantic tales about giving away your work for a song, in order to keep body and soul together — often hit way too close to home.

"The starving artist is not a myth," said Timothy Martin, an oil painter living in Stockton, N.J., whose canvases depict furniture and musical instruments fashioned from nature — such as a chair made of flowers or a violin made of ferns.

He suggests that all artists need to and can dispel that myth for themselves by taking a more business-like approach.

Martin realized early in his career — he taught art in elementary school for several years before becoming a full-time painter — that the visual realm was his strong suit, not numbers.

He grew weary of having to keep the selling aspect as both "a separate job and mindset," and of having to scrutinize the artistic merits and value of each piece of work he produced before he put it on the market.

"Thank God for Jan," he

said. Jan is Janis Burenga, his wife and the president of Bailiwick Co., a PR and marketing company. She's also Martin's business representative.

Although her husband's canvases now sell for thousands of dollars, his big break came in 1993 when Burenga successfully queried Tiffany & Co. about using Martin's art in their display windows — as she knows how tough it is for artists trying to launch their careers.

"No matter how talented they are, artists are always going in as supplicants to galleries who have all the power," she said.

Which is why, she suggests, it's often so critical and beneficial for artists "who are too passionate about their work to conduct business with a level head" to remove themselves from the selling equation, just as Martin did.

Even though a fledgling artist may not be able to find a bona fide artist's representative, other avenues are possible. One of which is enlisting the services of a relative

or a best friend who believes in your work, she said, adding that the arrangement doesn't have to go according to a business model.

The go-between might be very happy to receive a small painting as payment, in lieu of a commission. Bu-



Felix Bryant (2)

renga also suggests that artists read books on negotiating, role-play and exchanging leads with oth-

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THE COUPLE CONNECTION: Janis Burenga while her husband, Timothy Martin, does

er artists to improve their chances.

Burenga wants believe that had she not represented her husband, he still would have gotten the de-served. But because an artist's talent is self-evident to buyers, it can

only help creatives to develop solid business acumen.

"It's both strategic and advantageous for art schools to promote business training," said Christopher Cyphers, provost at The School of Visual Arts in Manhattan, which provides instruction in painting, sculpture, photography, illustration, and more. Cyphers says the photography students take two different required courses on the business aspects of the



craft, adding that, even where there are no formal courses in other disciplines, "the issue of selling one's work is reinforced everywhere in the curriculum."

Martin and Burenga, however, feel that often the best solution is for artists to cede control of the selling of their work to another. "In realizing where my value lies as a painter it doesn't matter that I can't do those other things," Martin said.