



The New Emerging (or Re-emerging) Artist

by Joanne Mattera

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An artist emailed me privately last week to chastise me for Marketing Mondays: “You are promoting careerism over integrity. I have lived in poverty all my life and although it has not been easy, my art is better for it.”

Really? Poverty makes art better? How thoroughly have we been indoctrinated into the concept of angst and penury for artists that we cannot see that creativity and professionalism are partners? We don't expect gallerists or collectors to live in garrets and die of consumption; why should we expect that of artists? (Not to be ageist, but I'm guessing my writer is old school, like maybe art school from the Fifties.)

The new breed of artists—and many mid-career and even late-career artists, who are purging themselves of ingrained old-think—are not just working in their studios but presenting themselves to the world.

A favorite recent example: Two mid-career artists, attendees at a conference, opened their hotel suite for an exhibition of their work. New Yorkers, they understood well the concept of the hotel fair. After conference hours, their “311 Salon,” named for the hotel room number, became the place to be at. Work was seen. Sales were made. They raised the bar for what was possible entrepreneurially at a small conference.

And, of course, the Internet has changed things dramatically for artists. Where previous generations had the co-op gallery (a model that remains viable), we now also have websites, and—with some entrepreneurial motivation—online salons, exhibitions, businesses. Over the past couple of years we've seen Matthew Langley's 246 Editions offering high-quality but inexpensive digital prints of selected artists' work, a complement to such dealer-generated projects as Compound-Editions and Artist of the Month Club.

Businesses like this might not last longer than a year or two; sometimes that's all it takes to get things moving. Then again, they might thrive for a good long time. Witness Jen Bekman's 20x200 Project. My favorite here is David Schoener's Hassla Books, a project the artist, who is a photographer, began as an art student in Massachusetts and continues as an artist/publisher in New York.

Many art schools, mindful of the need for their students to understand how to make a career for him/herself after graduation, now offer courses in professional practices. (I teach one, but you know that.) Students are leaving school with an understanding of the artist-dealer relationship and realistic ideas about how the art world works; they're prepared with well-crafted, if sparse, resumes; statements; business basics; and career-enhancing instruments like business cards, websites and blogs. Compare that to the decade-of-reinventing-the-wheel that most of us underwent back in the day.

They also understand the value of having a goal and a plan to work toward it. I think about my own “plan” early on--a series of crummy part-time jobs that I maintained while in haphazard pursuit of a series of often crummy, dead-end exhibitions.

Not that we don't want to work in partnership with gallerists and curators; we do. But it's a big art world out there, and this new breed of emerging artist has learned there's no need for artists to sit around suffering.

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They're taking their careers into their own hands until a gallery relationship develops. Then they will be prepared to deliver in all the big and small ways that are necessary to work successfully with a gallery. And if that gallery relationship never develops, they still have a career to develop along the pathways already laid down.

And if you happen to be the old fart who wrote me that email? It's never too late to reemerge with a new attitude.

Joanne Mattera is a widely exhibited painter who works in a style that is chromatically resonant and compositionally reductive. "Diamond Life," her 26th career solo, took place at the Marcia Wood Gallery, Atlanta, earlier this year. In New York City she is represented by DM Contemporary. Mattera's work has been reviewed in *Art in America*, *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. She is the author of the *Joanne Mattera Art Blog*, which has developed a dedicated following for its coverage of art and artists in New York City, the Miami art fairs, and elsewhere; a weekly feature, *Marketing Mondays*, begins its fourth year in January. Recent curatorial projects include *Luxe, Calme et Volupté: A Meditation on Visual Pleasure* at the Marcia Wood Gallery, Atlanta, 2007; and *Textility*, a look at the textile sensibility in contemporary painting and sculpture, at the Visual Art Center of New Jersey, Summit, co-curated with Mary Birmingham, which opens in mid January. Mattera is the founder/director of the International Encaustic Conference, which takes place in Provincetown, Mass., each June.

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