

Pricing Your Art

There are few things in the marketplace priced as irrationally as art. As in other areas of business, pricing is mostly determined by the law of supply and demand. Most artists typically have a big supply and little or no demand. Using this most basic principle, an increase in price is only justified when this balance shifts...either the demand increases, or the supply decreases. Although artists and galleries try to fix prices based on the law of supply and demand and what the market will bear, there are always extenuating circumstances that contribute to the final price...where the artist is, in his or her career range, is probably the most important and also the most difficult to quantify. Medium, size, complexity, cost of production and previous sales history, also play important roles in determining the final sales price. But the bottom line could just as easily be determined by how much an artist is attached to a particular piece. Although I never recommend artists pricing works of the same size, same medium and same series differently, based on their attachment to it, it sometimes does occur. Artists need to realize the unconscious message this gives to the collector..."I value that piece more than the others." As a professional artist, it is your responsibility to pre-screen all the work you create before it ever sees the light of day. Therefore, the work you present publicly should all be of the highest caliber and of equal value. If you are particularly attached to a particular piece and want to price it twice as much as the other work in the show, it is better to just mark the piece sold and keep it for yourself until your work increases in value to a point where the price you want is justified.

The first step in trying to price your work is discussed in detail in a previous ArtAdvice article called [How To Decide Which Galleries Are Right For You To Approach](#) . It involves visiting galleries on a regular basis to determine where your work fits in to the current art market. When going to galleries, study the price lists of artists whose work is similar to yours stylistically, as well as in size and medium. Ask to see the artists resume... how does the career level compare with yours? To begin, ask yourself some of these questions:

- What is the number and quality of the venue of group and solo exhibitions?
- Are the shows all local or spread out nationally or even internationally?
- Are there any museum shows?
- Does the artist have any critical published reviews?
- What kinds of publications and who are the writers?
- Have any catalogs been done in conjunction with any of the shows?
- What is the artists sales history?
- Is there a long list of collectors?
- Are the collectors mainly private collectors, or are there public institutions listed?
- Any permanent museum collections?

Depending on where you live, doing your homework for pricing can vary dramatically. For example, emerging artists can sell work for almost twice as much on the East Coast as on the West Coast...but, again, there is a good reason for that. Usually, by the time an emerging artist has acquired a New York gallery, they are already further along in their career development and consequently, the maturity of their work, to justify higher prices. One would think that because of the thousands of artists and hundreds of galleries in New York, the law of supply and demand would reduce prices. However, in this case, exactly the reverse is true. It is due to the intense competition in NYC and the great demand for excellence that New Yorkers and collectors from around the world expect from the New York art scene.

In general, I recommend artists price their work as low as they can possibly bear to start out. Remember, it is more important to cultivate on-going relationships with dealers and consultants than to sell one piece. Ignore artworld admonitions that you can never lower your prices. Art prices fluctuate just like real estate and the stock market. Low prices will attract their interest and encourage them to take a risk on you until they test their market. Ultimately, it is better for the work to be out there than sitting in your studio. I believe art is

a process, a verb, not a noun. And, part of the process necessitates that the work be exhibited, purchased and appreciated by others. By the same token, I don't want you to price the work so low that you will regret selling it and resent the process. For artists just starting out, try playing this game with yourself to help you determine what prices feel right to you.

Pretend a collector walks into your studio and sees a piece they like. They offer you \$5 for it. Would you be willing to let them take it home for that price? Probably not. What if they offered you \$5000 for it? Feeling pretty good about that? Okay, somewhere between \$5 and \$5000 there is going to be a price that makes you feel like you can let that piece go. You may not be totally happy about it, you may feel the piece is worth more, but it is the lowest possible price you can live with. Now, double it. Congratulations, you have just established the retail price of that piece. Assuming that any gallery or private art consultant will take 50% of the sales price when they sell it, you now have come up with your net price. This price should remain stabilized until you have one or more of the following: increased sales, increases in the number of exhibitions you participate in, increase in the number galleries that represent you, or inflation. To use this formula in pricing your other work, adjust the pricing by size. We simply figure the square inch/foot cost of what was established and apply it to all the work.

Remember, this is just a starting point. If you are fortunate enough to have a gallery representative, they should work with you in helping to determine a realistic price for you work. Ultimately, your prices will establish themselves as you start showing your work and getting a reaction. Selling a lot? Too low. Not selling at all? Too high.