

FOR THIS ARTIST, SELLING ART ISN'T SELLING OUT

Painter, author, business coach Ann Rea '87 says every artist is an entrepreneur.

By Carolyn Jack

Art heals. Especially when you make it, sell it, and keep all the profits. Ann Rea '87 came to that conclusion after years of emotional turmoil and professional frustration had left her without creative outlet and at odds with America's fine art and design industries. Since rediscovering her love for visual self-expression and reinventing herself as a noted and collected painter of California landscapes, Rea has started building a system for helping other artists become successful at both the artistic and business sides of art-making.

Like Def Jam music-label founder and business mogul Russell Simmons' mentor Dr. E, Rea said, she believes that "every artist is an entrepreneur and every entrepreneur is an artist."

And she doesn't believe in sell-outs. She thinks artists can get both income and artistic satisfaction by making art that has value to others, as well as to themselves.

"It's much more inspiring to sell the work and see its effect on your clients," Rea explained by phone from her adopted home of San Francisco. "If I have a gallery represent me, I don't get that. And I don't get all the money or to explore all of the market."

Determined to help artists become independent financially and creatively, Rea set herself up as a business coach in 2011 with the launch of her site ArtistsWhoTHRIVE.com. She devised an online course, "MAKINGArtMakingMONEY.com" that offers a live, eight-week class in business basics. Then, earlier this year, she self-published her new book: A course-related primer titled *Selling Art without Selling Out: 101 Rules*, available at Amazon.com. It actually encourages artists to break rules by writing in the book and, using social media, contributing their own perspectives on selling art.

As of March, her course was the most popular business and money course on CreativeLive.com, according to its producer, Justin Barker, beating out several *New York Times* best-selling business authors.

Rea's goal is to free artists from the control of an art establishment that she believes turns art-makers into the passive, under-rewarded supplicants of industry gatekeepers. She'd like to turn the words "starving artist" into an oxymoron.

"The book is about the first hurdle that an artist has to overcome, to get over the notion of being a sell-out" if he or she wants to make a living out of art. That attitude is the first of many that Rea has challenged in her long struggle for personal wellbeing and equal professional opportunity. From her earliest years in the Cleveland suburb of Parma, art was her refuge, at home as well as at school.

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She won a scholarship to Cleveland Institute of Art. But even college presented difficulties: As an Industrial Design major—a field she chose for the job prospects although she loved painting—Rea faced a 1980s-era boys'-club atmosphere that threatened to derail her ambitions.

Instead of being crushed, she fought back. Encouraged by faculty members including Roger Coast and the legendary

Viktor Schreckengost '29, "I just refused to quit," she said. Years later, two male students who had given her a hard time apologized, telling her that her tenacity had inspired them.

But she had to confront that same kind of old-school sexism when she graduated and worked on a design account for the automotive-design industry of the 1980s. As she moved into one traditional business position after another, she found herself more and more unhappy.

It took a handful of enlightening experiences—including conversations with two co-workers who were cancer survivors—to convince Rea that she needed to give art-making another chance and fully commit herself to achieving success.

Beginning to think strategically about the kinds of people most likely to buy her landscape paintings, she wrote a business plan. In that first year, she targeted wineries as strategic partners, won her first clients, and earned over \$100,000 in art sales.

Rea wants artists to know that they don't have to be born salespeople to get others to buy their work. What they do have to be is willing to figure out how to create value above and beyond their art, and what target market they will serve.

"I don't sell art," Rea said. What she does instead is provide clients an experience of commissioning a piece of art that involves getting to know the artist and experiencing the creative process.

Rea aims to crush the "starving artist" mythology by helping artists secure their creative freedom through focused business savvy.

Rea counsils artists, "Selling art is a business. If you want to sell art then it's not about you and your creative process.



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It's about you defining a unique value proposition grounded in your personal mission and values so that you may be of service to a targeted market." She has no patience with artists who want to paint only what they want to paint.

"Good luck with that," she said drily. The truth is, "You get paid if you offer value to the world. Authors have figured this out. Musicians have figured this out. They leverage their online platforms where content is king." But that's not all: "You get so much creative freedom when you set your own rules."