

# STOP RIGHT

# THERE!



## 12 MISTAKES TO AVOID

BY GARY T. KERR

Every successful artist must be doing *something* right. But knowing where one has gone wrong is equally important. As you map out your own creative milestones, be conscious of the missteps that many artists make—and how to avoid them.

### 1. SIGNING YOUR ART WITH JUST YOUR INITIALS •

When you sign your art with just your initials, what you're saying is, "I'm not ready for the big time yet." It's okay to sign a variation of your name, i.e. John Joe Smith or J.J. Smith, but keep it consistent. And don't use a Sharpie to sign your art!

### 2. NOT FRAMING YOUR ART •

Representational art should always be displayed in a proper frame, even if it's a minimalist, floater-type affair. Framing your art adds value, and art that's framed well is less likely to have an interested buyer balk at the price.

### 3. MAKING ENDLESS TOUCH-UPS

• Once you've finished a piece, leave it alone. No piece of art is ever 100 percent finished. Tinkering is irresistible, and it takes discipline to walk away. But being able to do so is the mark of a great artist.

### 4. MISCOMMUNICATING DIMENSIONS •

Always communicate image dimensions accurately, with height stated first and width second. It's not interchangeable, so stick to this standard.

## 5. DISCOUNTING YOUR ART TO MAKE A SALE •

Lowering prices to make a sale may seem like a smart move, but discounting your art sets a precedent. Once you've established a price, stick with it. When buyers know you're not going to lower your prices as soon as they've walked out the door, they'll feel protected, which could turn them into loyal customers. If you run into price-sensitive buyers, offer them a fine art print instead. Reserve your originals for people who want—and are willing to pay for—original art.

## 6. USING CHEAP OR LOW-END MATERIALS •

Every artist has been tempted to save money by using cheap materials. But if you want to be taken seriously, skip the canvas-wrapped panels; those are for art students. Consider a quality stretched canvas or premium-brand watercolor paper, and avoid the cheap knockoff brands. Investing in good brushes is also essential, as they can make a huge difference if you take good care of them. High-end tools and supplies perform better, last longer and put your art more firmly in the “collectible” category. You *will* be judged by the quality of the materials you use.

## 7. NOT TITLING YOUR ART •

The art business is one of selling emotion, and a title emphasizes that emotion. A good title confirms to the buyer that this piece belongs in his or her home, so don't omit this critical step. Observe how art is titled in museums and galleries. Always keep accurate records of the title and date of each piece. Avoid tongue-in-cheek, kitsch or cliché titles, like naming a piece with a movie title.

**8. CREATING ONE-OFFS •** As an artist, you are on a journey, and it's not going to be a short one. Plan to create a collection of eight to 12 pieces, minimum, using a cohesive voice and style. Any artist can hit one or two home runs, but truly successful artists stick with a consistent voice and theme to build their portfolios and prove their staying power.

**9. USE MULTIPLE VOICES AND STYLES •** If 10 of your pieces of art are mixed in with 90 others made by

different artists, a prospective buyer should be able to pick out which pieces are yours. Without a distinct style, you will struggle to attract the attention of serious buyers. Your style should be unique, yet consistent. If your work is all over the map, no one is going to find you.

**10. MISHANDLING YOUR ART •** Treat everything you've created like it's precious, even if it's not your best work. Never transport your art in a trash bag; the message you're sending could be catastrophic. Professional portfolio cases and packaging are worth the cost to protect your work *and* your professional image.

## 11. IMPROPERLY DISPLAYING ART FOR SALE •

Where and how a piece of art is displayed has an impact on its perceived value. Always hang your art or place it on an easel or platform, and be sure it's properly lit. Relegate a piece to some poorly lit corner, and it probably won't sell. Take a hint from the care that galleries and museums put into hanging and lighting the art that hangs on their walls.

## 12. NOT GETTING AN ART CAPTURE •

Don't sell a single piece without first getting a preservation-grade art capture of it. As the son of an artist who painted hundreds of oil paintings in the 1970s and '80s—all of which sold, but none of which were captured on so much as a photo slide—I can assure you how much you'll regret not doing this. The image of your art may actually end up being worth more than the original piece. Without high-quality art captures, there will be no retrospective of your work in the future. Don't let that happen. It's not just preserving the past, it's a security issue, too. If there's ever a copyright dispute over one of your pieces, you could end up high and dry. **ABN**

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