



*Silk Road 115, 2009.*  
 Courtesy of the artist and  
 DM Contemporary,  
 Mill Neck, New York



*Silk Road, Studio view  
 with work in progress*



*Silk Road 107, 2008.*  
 Courtesy of the artist and  
 Adler & Co. Gallery, San Francisco

*Joanne Mattera is a painter, author of **The Art of Encaustic Painting**, and an enthusiastic blogger, where her Marketing Monday reports are drawing a huge fan base. She supports herself from a studio practice through representation by a network of galleries across the United States. Prior to making a living from her studio, Joanne worked in the publishing field. Our interview discusses her transition to a full-time practice, its daily management, and how her editorial skills are now applied to Joanne Mattera Art Blog, “guaranteed biased, myopic, incomplete and journalistically suspect.”*

JACKIE: Joanne, you are an artist who makes a living from your studio practice. I want to talk about all the practical nitty-gritty things that got you on the road here. I would like to start with how you schedule your life these days. You have a combination of teaching and galleries that represent you.

JOANNE: My schedule changes from day to day, but the overall picture is that the art business, which includes painting and the corollary administration, takes about 70% of my work life. The other 30% is involved with activities like teaching, maintaining my blog, occasionally writing an essay or curating a show. When the painting and administration start to be encroached by the other projects, I know I have to cut back on those projects. There are whole days, sometimes a week, when I don't paint because I'm doing other things. But when I'm getting ready for a show, or starting a new series, I'm totally focused on the artmaking and do very little else.

JACKIE: So, you've created kind of a flexible modular base schedule that allows you to give your artistic practice what it needs first and to fill in around it with those other activities that interest you and inform your work.

JOANNE: Yes. When I was working a 9-5 job, I was rigorous about my studio time. Now that this is my full-time job, I can be more flexible because I have the discipline to go into the studio when I need to—but because this is now my livelihood as well as my aesthetic expression, I have figured out how to parcel my time according to what needs to be done. If you're just starting out as an artist, though, you have to get into a routine. And if you have a

limited amount of time, you really need to make a schedule and stick to it. If you say, I'm going to take another yoga class, I'm going to go to the gym, or I'm going to go to the movies—if you don't schedule studio time and stick to the schedule— then you're sunk because you don't have all that much time to work with.

JACKIE: How did you make the transition? You were working as a full time editor.

JOANNE: I worked full time for a big publishing company in New York City for close to twenty years. That was the thing that allowed me to have my art life. It was great because it provided structure—my art life was everything outside the parameters of Monday-Friday, 9-5— and it provided a nice income along with vacation time (most of which I spent in the studio), and benefits. Then, ten years ago, a new editor in chief came in and fired the entire senior staff. After the initial panic and numbness, I thought, *This is a gift*. I had always wanted to be full time in the studio. I got a severance package and I then said, *Now is the time*.

JACKIE: It's almost as if Providence had handed it to you.

JOANNE: That's exactly right, but I don't want to minimize the panic you feel when your job ends—I mean, I was paying a mortgage and a maintenance on my co-op plus a studio rent—but I did know that this was the time to finally do what I'd been wanting to do. So I flipped the schedule: more time for art-making, with some hours each week for the freelance writing that supported me during the transition. I even made time to write a book, [The Art of Encaustic Painting](#), which I knew would help me practically and professionally. But I have to say that I was able to make the transition rather seamlessly because I already had a strong artmaking schedule in place. And it helped that my paintings were selling.

JACKIE: You are represented by a network of galleries around the United States. How is it that you found these opportunities?

JOANNE: Each one has a story and I won't go into all of them, but when you live and work in New York, the galleries are here. You have to make a point of going to them. My first major representation was with a New York City gallery. Once that happened, it was much easier to find other galleries. I made the initial contact through conversation—I was a regular visitor to the gallery—and eventually asked if I could show the dealer my slides, the way that you did ten or twenty years ago.

JACKIE: Yes, it was twenty years ago for me.

JOANNE: The specifics are different now, but the process is the same. Once I was represented, I explored possibilities in other cities with a small package of slides and a few announcements from current or recent shows. The material allowed a prospective dealer to see that I was actively pursuing my career. The synergy of current shows, especially, seemed to make a difference. It's like dating: When you're wanted, everyone wants you. I tried to maximize that interest.

I joined galleries in Atlanta and Boston, and my network expanded from there. The Internet was developing at the same time my career was. Shortly after my website went up in 1998, I responded to a classified ad in the back of, probably *ARTnews*: "New contemporary art gallery in Southwest seeks mid-career artists for new gallery." Instead of the dreaded slides, I tried something different: I sent a postcard with an image of my work and my URL, which was and is joannemattera.com. On the back I wrote: "Please visit my website. If you like what you see, I'd be happy to send you a package." The dealer called to schedule a studio visit. I've been with that gallery now for ten years and have had three solo shows there. Since then I've learned that many dealers and curators use the Internet as a huge resource pool even when they may be cool toward submission packages. You may not know until they contact you, but dealers are also looking for artists. The other way I have found dealers, or they have found me, is through referrals from artists who are already with those galleries.

JACKIE: You maintain studio spaces in New York and up in Massachusetts. Is it harder to get a studio visit in Massachusetts?

JOANNE: Actually my studio is in Massachusetts, and I have an apartment in New York. My career is at the point where the dealers I work with in New York are familiar with my painting. If a new curator or dealer needs to see work, I drive it to my apartment and meet with them there. But I show a lot, in group and solo shows in New York, so my work is visible and I make a point of inviting them to see the work in those venues.

JACKIE: What piece of advice would you have for someone just starting out about launching their career?

JOANNE: One of the things I say to my students, and my students include mid-career adults who are learning this stuff for the first time—

JACKIE: —and who don't live in New York—

JOANNE: Right. What I say is show, show, show, show, show, show and then look for a gallery, which I am sure you tell your students as well. Being in a show gives an artist the opportunity to make a postcard with their best image on it, put their name on the front, make sure their website and email address are on the back, and send it around. Everybody looks at a postcard. We know that dealers look, and some may even follow up with a visit to the website. If a dealer says, "I'd like to see your work, send me a piece," Fed-Ex or the other carriers can deliver work overnight if necessary. If they like what they see, they can go to the next step to arrange a studio visit.

JACKIE: How do you use your website? Is it important for introducing you to people or for people finding you on their own?

JOANNE: The Internet offers ever greater opportunities, so I have been using it in different ways. I have a website, joannemattera.com, which I update occasionally. It shows a small

selection of my work and includes a statement. It used to be larger, but I redesigned it recently to show a smaller selection of work because I'm linking to other online tools: a resume and an exhibition schedule. And I have a blog, Joanne Mattera Art Blog at [joannemattera.blogspot.com](http://joannemattera.blogspot.com).

JACKIE: How did you get started blogging?

JOANNE: Having worked in publishing for so many years, writing is just part of what I do. But when I first started blogging in June 2006, I wasn't sure what I wanted to say. I started by writing about my own work and then about other blogs. That December I went to Miami for Art Basel Miami and the satellite fairs. My goal was to look at all of the fairs and provide a kind of you-are-there experience. I ended up reporting on what I saw: where the events took place, what the atmosphere was like, what the weather was like. And of course I commented on what I was seeing, what I liked and what trends I saw. Since then I've been posting two or three times a week. I think of myself not as a critic, because I'm not trained as a critic, but as a reporter with opinions.

JACKIE: I think of you as a commentator.

JOANNE: That's good. I like that better. So since then I've been commentating mostly on the shows I see in New York, but also on the art I see wherever I travel—sometimes even while I'm on the road: Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and the Miami fairs. I recently started a feature that's right up your alley, "Marketing Mondays," in which I address issues of interest to artists. Blogging is addictive, to tell you the truth

JACKIE: Do you have an idea of who your reader is for the blog?

JOANNE: Yes, I get comments on my posts, so I have a sense of who my readers are. Many blogs develop a following. I use [statcounter.com](http://statcounter.com) to learn where my readers are located and to track the number of hits I get each day. It's a free service.

JACKIE: You can get that for your website too.

JOANNE: Yes. And that tracking has other uses, too. I recently created a blog for a class I teach. It's a great way to go paperless—no more photocopying. With the counter I can track how many times my students are referring to the syllabus. I'm gratified; they're using it exactly as I'd hoped. New technology gives us new ways of approaching something as conventional as a syllabus.

JACKIE: Besides the fact that you get to be a commentator about the art world, what other benefits does blogging have for you?

JOANNE: I have found, throughout my career, whether it's blogging or networking in some other way, that I like sharing. Blogging allows me to do that. I am a firm believer that sharing information, credit, images and ideas is a good way for all of us who are working alone in

our studios to be out in the world and have a larger presence in the world. Sharing and referring make for good art karma.

JACKIE: Absolutely. So, what is the difference between the purpose of your website and the purpose of your blog?

JOANNE: The website is a static tool. Images of recent work are accessible with a click. Visitors can read the statement. But the site doesn't change very often, maybe once a year. I have someone do it for me.

The blog is a much more dynamic tool. I can make changes everyday if I choose, and I can go back and correct information if necessary. If I visit an exhibition, I can immediately post a report and installation shots. My blog is as much visual as it is textual. I want to show people what I am seeing. The other thing about the blog is that it allows for instantaneous cross-referencing. If I see an artist's work, I can insert a live link to their blog or gallery, or to a review. So you could read my blog and go off in ten different directions just from that post alone.

JACKIE: Do you read other people's blogs?

JOANNE: Yes, of course.

JACKIE: It's a huge world. I don't participate in it as much as you do and the idea of creating a blog is not attractive to me.

JOANNE: You wait.

JACKIE: Can artists use a blog instead of having a website?

JOANNE: Sure. Some artists prefer it because it's so user friendly.

JACKIE: What do you mean by that?

JOANNE: I use Blogger. There are other hosts such as WordPress and TypePad. But, I use Blogger because it's the simplest and it's free. Anyone can go onto blogger.com and in three steps have a blog. There are tons of blogs out there—some 186 million, according to a recent Google search of "number of blogs"—but only a small percentage are art blogs. My blog has a moderate readership, 500 or 600 on an average day, double that during the Miami reports. A blog like Edward Winkleman's ([edwardwinkleman.blogspot.com](http://edwardwinkleman.blogspot.com)) probably attracts more readers. Ed is a New York City gallerist who shares insights about the gallery business—often about the nuts-and-bolts things that artists need to know, such as how to write a perfect resume and how to get into a gallery—and his blog provides a lively forum for comment.

JACKIE: It's a great way of sharing information.



JOANNE: Oh, yes. I organized a little blog conference at the Red Dot Art fair in New York in March 2008 with another blogger, a painter named Sharon Butler. Ed was on the panel along with the painter and critic, Carol Diehl, who has a blog, [artvent.blogspot.com](http://artvent.blogspot.com); Paddy Johnson of [artfagcity.com](http://artfagcity.com); and Carolina Miranda, of [C-monster.net](http://C-monster.net). We had a panel discussion and about 60 bloggers came out in real time and space to interact. It was gratifying to connect names and faces. Everybody blogs for different reason and everybody does a different kind of blog. Sharon's for instance, [twocoatsofpaint.blogspot.com](http://twocoatsofpaint.blogspot.com), is a digest of current critical writing about painting. Carolina's is a cultural digest with links to various posts. Typically they're labors of love.

I have several blogs and I use them in several ways. Joanne Mattera Art Blog ([joannemattera.blogspot.com](http://joannemattera.blogspot.com)), is my art commentary. On that site, there are links to other blogs that I maintain. One is a schedule blog that lists my activities, with links to the various venues. I also have my resume online, [jmresume.blogspot.com](http://jmresume.blogspot.com). It's the most up-to-date resume I have—and it has images! I can post pictures of paintings from a recent show or installation shots. What I like about the online resume is that it's totally accessible if you choose to access it. The Internet has changed the way we can promote ourselves.

JACKIE: Absolutely. I generally believe that's why I think an artist doesn't have to be in New York. You can make the most esoteric work and there is really only a handful of dedicated individuals that would be interested in it and you can get to them through the internet.

JOANNE: I agree that artists don't have to be in New York to have a career. But they do have to be here to have a New York career. I do consultations with artists, and one of the things I ask them is where they would like to be in a year, in five years. Of course everybody would like to be in a New York City gallery. But when I ask them, "How often do you get to New York?" I often hear "Well, I haven't been there in five years," or "I've never been to New York." So, yes, I think blogs and websites are great for getting your work out into the world and having it be seen by people around the world, but if what you want is to have your work in New York, or in any large city for that matter, there is no substitute for physical presence. You need to see the galleries and they need to see you.

JACKIE: Let's go back to the business of art a bit. Do you think planning and setting goals is different for artists than it is for other professional people?

JOANNE: Planning and setting goals, achieving them, and then creating a new set of goals is the same whether you are an artist or a dentist or Revlon or the Ford Motor Company. It's a way to move your career along. The big difference is that we cannot plan on sales the way a corporation can.

JACKIE: What we are selling are not necessities.

JOANNE: Right. We can't plan on an income of X amount in this or any year. A gallery, perhaps, can do that because they have a number of artists, each with dedicated collector base. (Although right now, in this economy, even galleries are having a hard time with any kind of business plan.) But as artists we can certainly plan how to get from one point to the next point professionally. If you are showing locally, how do you step up to show regionally, then nationally, maybe internationally? That's certainly something that an artist can do with a well-thought-out promotional strategy.

JACKIE: Is that the kind of advice you give artists when you do your consultations?

JOANNE: Yes. Because the experience you gain at the local level and at the regional level—in terms of securing a venue and planning for the show, preparing a resume, writing a statement, talking with people about your work—are skills that will prepare you for the next level of your career. When you get an invitation to show in a larger gallery or a larger city and the dealer needs a certain number of paintings to be delivered at a certain time, and wants to see a bio and a resume and a statement, you are not caught unprepared.

JACKIE: Do you set goals? How do you do your planning?

JOANNE: I'll be honest: I don't set goals anymore. Mostly now it's just a to-do list.

JACKIE: But you did at the beginning?

JOANNE: I absolutely did at the beginning. I knew that there were certain things that I needed to do. I needed to build up my painting chops, get fluent with my medium, shoot my work regularly, refine my resume and my statement, have a website made, get out and meet other artists. Now, I have those things or do them as a matter of course, so it's just a matter of staying on top of them. So, for me it's not so much goals anymore. It's more about career management.

JACKIE: Isn't that a nice place to be?

JOANNE: Yes! Yes it is, especially to not have to send out images anymore.

JACKIE: People now find you.

JOANNE: The first time that happened. I thought, hmm this is nice. And now it happens more regularly.

Each achievement brings with it a whole new set of issues, though. For instance, I thought getting into a gallery in New York City was the goal. And I got into one. I spent five years with the Stephen Haller Gallery, a gallery whose aesthetic I adore, a dealer whom I adore and whom I consider a friend and a mentor. I thought that once I got into that gallery, life would be heaven, I would be able to pull out the lounge chair and sip lemonade and life would be groovy. Wow, was I in for a shock. Everything became ten times more demanding and went

ten times faster because then I needed to keep producing. You want to make the work that comes from your heart, but the work that comes from your heart has to be well received, your dealer has to like it, there has to be a market for it, ideally there's a positive critical and curatorial response. Suddenly, it's your art life to the tenth life power.

JACKIE: That's one of the sad facts of our system. Many artists think that their only goal is to get into a gallery and that somehow everything magically follows from that. I always tell my students that that's fine to have that as a goal, but just realize you are just exchanging one set of problems for another.

JOANNE: And demands. It's like the video games. You get through the first level with the dragons, and you think phew! Suddenly the road is steeper, the monsters are bigger, the fireballs are fiercer, and so on and so forth up through the subsequent levels. I have not reached a point in my career where I can pull out the lounge chair. I'm not sure that an artist ever gets to that point.

JACKIE: So, what would you say is your favorite part of the art business besides the studio work that you do?

JOANNE: Let me acknowledge that when I'm painting and things are going well, it's a transcendent experience. There's nowhere else I'd rather be. But it doesn't happen that often. Most of the time painting is just hard work. Outside the studio, my favorite part is looking at art, making studio visits, spending time with other artists, and then connecting the dots and blogging about it. I also like to curate occasionally. (In my next life, I hope to come back as a museum curator.)

JACKIE: What's your least favorite thing to do?

JOANNE: Administration.

JACKIE: What part of it?

JOANNE: All of it. After making the art, I have to digitally photograph it and Photoshop it and archive it. I hate keeping track of inventory. But if you make art, then you have to keep track of it. And if you work with a gallery, you need to keep track of what they have and what they have sold. And if you work with more than one gallery, that's administrative work times two or three or six or ten. Some galleries do this really well, which makes my job easier, but I have found that with galleries that have limited administrative help, it's to my benefit to keep track of my work. Let's not forget accounts payable and receivable, and packing and shipping. And then there are unexpected requests from your dealers for images, information, a collector who's in town who'd like to make a studio visit, whatever. I try to be accommodating. Some artists have studio managers, but I like to work alone.

JACKIE: What software do you use for tracking your work and inventory?



JOANNE: I don't use software. I work on a PC and I create folders. I have a visual inventory. I maintain a folder for each gallery I work with, and within that folder there are sub folders to show me what they have now, what they have sold, what they have returned to me or I have retrieved from them. So I have a good visual record of my history with them.

JACKIE: That's an interesting way to do it, a visual inventory.

JOANNE: I'm a visual person. I like to write, but I can't follow directions. I have a really hard time with Excel spreadsheets and stuff like that. I want to see it. As soon as I see an image of the work, I remember everything about it: when I made it, what the day was like when I made it, when I showed it. Everything.

JACKIE: One of the things that I have been talking about in my book is readiness. How does an artist know they are ready to get their work out into the world? Do you have any thoughts about it?

JOANNE: That's a great issue, Jackie, because we know that galleries are full of packages from artists who have not done their homework and who aren't right for the gallery. Even if they are right conceptually, their work or their presentation of it may not be sufficiently developed. Not being ready—contacting a gallery too soon—could ruin your chances down the road when you really are ready.

So, how do you know you are ready? It's part of the reason I encourage artists to go from local to regional visibility and then work their way out. I use the analogy of tossing a pebble into a pool. Those ripples go out from the center, generated by the power of the pebble. The energy doesn't jump to the outer ring before it works its way out. In the process of rippling, we learn how to do all the things that we need to do: the packages, the statement, something as simple as learning how to take a good digital photograph and Photoshop it, learning how to talk about your work in an intelligent way, learning how to interact and network with people. In terms of rippling, you might enter a juried show in New York—maybe it's something like the NYU small works show, which I think is a fabulous show for people from out of town—or maybe it's one of the juried shows from one of the co-op galleries which typically have a summer show, which may yield pretty good results for people.

JACKIE: They do?

JOANNE: Yes. For co-op galleries, often the prize is participation in a group show—or a solo show. Is it going to get reviewed in the *New York Times*? No, but it's an opportunity to get your work in a New York City gallery. If you have been showing your work and talking with dealers in the meantime, it's a chance to say, "Come and see my work." Gallerists and curators understand that artists have to start somewhere, and a reasonable person is not going to ignore good work because it's not being shown in a commercial gallery.

JACKIE: So, let's go back to readiness.

JOANNE: So, you are working locally, regionally, rippling outward, and part of the process is entering a few juried shows. You meet the gallery director, maybe the juror. The other artists in the show may become part of your network.

JACKIE: You have a far more generous assessment of juried shows than I do.

JOANNE: I have to tell you, Jackie, and this is my personal experience, there are many dealers and gallery directors who started out as directors or assistants in nonprofits or in—

JACKIE: I have no problems with regular shows at the nonprofits. They do a fabulous job. I do have issues with juried shows. As a former arts administrator, I know it's a cheap way to finance a show and it isn't necessarily the best vehicle for an artist. I also see too many artists that get trapped into a juried show cycle and they don't seem to be able to move themselves out of it. So, I'm not stoking the fires of the juried show circuit much in my book. I'll leave that for somebody else to do.

JOANNE: I'll say this; it is one of several options for artists. I totally agree that you don't want this to be your career path. But let me tell you my story because I don't think I am alone in this: In 1994, I entered the Small Works show at NYU. I love that annual show. I don't enter juried shows anymore, but this one has a long history, and it's got seven galleries full of small work. You get to see a lot of very interesting work by a lot of artists. Every year they get a really good juror, a critic, a curator, or a gallerist from New York. The year I entered, Jackie Littlejohn was the juror. She gave me a juror's award and accepted all three of my works.

Here's what I didn't know about the show: Marilyn Gelfman had for many years been the director of the gallery. She's married to Ivan Karp of OK Harris, and one of the things Marilyn and Ivan did every year was to go over for a preview of the show. So, after getting the news that I'd gotten a juror's award, I arrived at my studio after work and the little red light on my answering machine was blinking. "Hi, this is Ivan Karp from OK Harris. I saw your work in the Small Works show. I'd like to come for a studio visit." SoHo was the center of the art world then, and Ivan Karp called me! He subsequently came to my studio, saw my work, and offered me a small solo show. It was the most generous thing that a gallerist has ever done for me.

JACKIE: Why would you say that that's the most generous thing a gallerist has ever done?

JOANNE: He went to look at this show with the idea of tapping a few artists whose work he liked. I think that's an extraordinarily generous thing. He didn't have to do it. I mean people were beating a path to his door. As a result of that show, another dealer that I had been in discussion with invited me to join his gallery. But the cordial relationship with OK Harris has persisted to this day. I love the folks there. In 2007 I had my second solo show with the gallery, which got a good review and sold well, and in the summer of 2008 I was invited to participate in their big summer show, "No Chromophobia," which focused on

non-objective color. So you never know when you enter a show, in any large city, what the reverberation will be.

JACKIE: Well that's true. And that's why you have to be well prepared for everything.

JOANNE: We're in total agreement there.

JACKIE: Do you have any tips for artists considering the artist dealer relationship? Artists tend to have these sort of love hate relationship with their gallerists.

JOANNE: The dealer is your partner. That's a really big change from what mid-career artists are used to hearing. When I went to art school, what I heard was, "The dealer is your enemy." What kind of crap is that? Think about the way our system works. The artist makes the art, the dealer sells it, and the collector acquires it. So in terms of this continuum, the dealer is your partner in creating visibility and sales for you so that your work can be acquired by an individual collector, by a museum, by a corporate collection. Certainly some dealers are not good partners. But in general, the dealer is the person that you work with. You have to do your homework so that you find one whose program and personality resonate on your wavelength, and vice versa. Those are the most successful partnerships. A good working relationship could continue for a decade or two or three.

In terms of the work, I think an artist who is successful understands the two-pronged nature of the activity. It's the art-making but it's also getting that art into the world, and it's a mistake to be too focused on either prong. If you spend all your time in your studio, that's exactly where your work is going to stay. On the other hand, if you spend all your time going to openings, and networking, and schmoozing, you're not making any work. A successful artist understands the equation.

Finally, I would say that the art world is much smaller than you imagine. We are all in this business because we love it. Most dealers and critics are not wealthy, just like most artists. We're all connected. Artists have gone to art school with people who go on to become curators and critics and dealers and educators. Everyone has their respective professional organizations. And everyone comes together at openings and art fairs. It's maybe two or three degrees of separation. What was once a very large place filled with a lot of borders and hurdles is in fact much easier to navigate now. There are many more connections.

JACKIE: This has been fun. Thank you for allowing me to interview you, Joanne.

**Joanne Mattera** is an artist whose focus is lush color and reductive geometry, an esthetic she calls "lush minimalism." She has exhibited extensively in New York at the Stephen Haller Gallery; the Elizabeth Harris Gallery; Thatcher Projects; the Heidi Cho Gallery; and at OK Harris. She is the writer of *The Art of Encaustic Painting* and her reports on the annual Basel/Miami Art Fairs have attracted a following in the blogosphere. She is a visiting lecturer at Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, and Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, Mass. Her most recent curatorial effort was "Luxe, Calme et Volupte: A Meditation on Visual

Pleasure," for the Marcia Wood Gallery, Atlanta, where she is a represented artist.

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