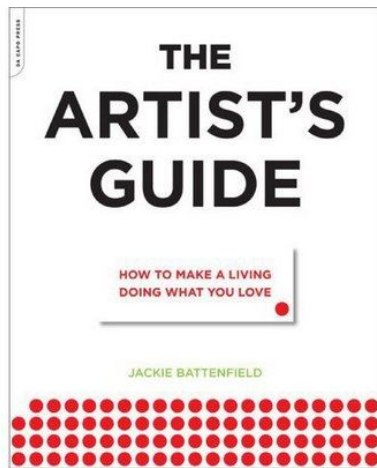


Guaranteed Biased, Myopic, Incomplete and Journalistically Suspect

Monday, June 15, 2009

Marketing Mondays: "The Artist's Guide" and Other Books

Talk about timely. Just as the art world is shaken to its foundations by the economic downturn, along comes [The Artist's Guide: How To Make A Living Doing What You Love](#) by [Jackie Battenfield](#). I'm not being flip. Even though galleries are downsizing or shutting their doors, artists are still making art and still need to find a place for themselves. This book explains the art world (to the extent that something as multifaceted, international, freeform and unencumbered by "rules" can be explained) and offers clear and useful steps to setting goals and achieving them--information that until recently most artists never learned in art school.



Let me say up front that Jackie and I have seen our professional paths cross and weave into a fabric of mutual respect and friendship. We have [taught together](#). We have shown together. She even [interviewed me](#) for this book. We both teach the business of art (she at Columbia University; I at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston.)

But I can be totally objective when I say that this is one well-timed and well-written book. For mid-career artists especially, it's important to know that things have changed from when you were in art school. If you're operating on the ideas and assumptions you formed 20 (or 30) years ago, you may be trying to navigate the contemporary art world in a Datsun—or an Edsel. Jackie gives you a capacious new Mercedes loaded with business information, marketing advice and encouragement for a 21st century approach to your career. If you're a recent graduate, she expands on the information you received—or should have received—in your last semester.

Jackie is writing from her experience as a successful exhibiting artist, lecturer and teacher, and gallery director (she founded the Rotunda Gallery, a non-profit Brooklyn institution). Her information is therefore not theoretical but steeped in firsthand knowledge. Sidebar quotes--she calls them "Reality Checks"-- from artists, dealers, critics and curators underscore the relevance of the material. One of my favorites comes from Camilo Alvarez, principal of Samson Projects in Boston, who makes an art world distinction: "A *gallerist* will send a collector the artist's bio, whereas a *dealer* sends them the invoice.")

There are exercises and lists to get you revved up, or to shift you into the next-higher gear, but I have to say that it's the guidance and observations I like best. "Much of my advice is not secret information," writes Jackie. But it's rare to find it compiled so well. Here's some of what I like:

. "What you reveal reflects a delicate balance between expressing your ideas and providing just enough information for viewers so they can start their own process of engagement. Your artist statement is specific and poetic at the same time. . . It takes a lot of messy writing . . . to get less than one page or even a paragraph of a finished statement." (pps. 49-50)

. "Promoting your work *requires* that you be assertive. It does not mean you are impolite, disrespectful or inappropriately aggressive. At an opening, it's the difference between saying a few words about the show to the curator and imploring them to visit your studio. . . You need to untangle promotion from your feelings of self worth and proceed as if it is another part of your artistic practice."(p. 99)

. "Money is the ten-ton elephant in the studio that most of us would like to ignore. . . While you're in school, the connection between art and money is suspended. . .Eventually reality intervenes. "(pps. 159-160)

. "Constantly asking for money is called 'begging"; purposefully asking for support is an 'empowered request.'" (p. 197).

While you're in this section, be sure to read artist Jody Lee 's story of how she funded her studio by lining up patrons to support her studio.

. "In every project you need to consider how to pay yourself. This is an artist's fee. . . . A funder expects to see this expense on your budget, so don't eliminate it thinking they will reward your selfless commitment. Instead, they will see it as a sign that you do not think of yourself as professional." (p. 227)

. "A cardinal rule to follow is that whenever a work of art leaves your hands, *it must have a paper trail.* (p. 262)

. "You may make the art by yourself, but you'll need a community for advice and support." (p. 311)

. "If I'm not being regularly rejected, it means I'm not pursuing opportunities." (p. 327)

. "Every day you have the opportunity to make the art world a more generous place." (p. 340)