



ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

'Marketing for Artists' - Chris Christoforou, 5th January 2019

Chris was born in London, raised in Cyprus and returned to UK to take a degree in Computer Science but soon decided that he did not want to stay in industry. Realising that there was too much competition trying to make a living from his first love, music, he liked the idea of living as an artist and so went to an Art School. He learnt a lot about different mediums and, most importantly he said, about materials but he did not finish the course because someone saw his work and offered him a job.

Now, although Chris has sold his paintings in all the best places, his main activity in the art world is in promoting shows, tours, talks and marketing generally, so he is very well qualified to lecture us on the subject of selling our artwork.

The OAG has some members who paint with the object of selling their work as a significant source of income, whilst others paint as a hobby and for their own satisfaction in developing a skill - though of course they are not averse to selling it if that happens. Chris's lecture was very much focused on the former group but the points he made should be of interest to every artist who has sold a piece of work.

He emphasised that it was important to think seriously about who you were selling to and to get to know your market. People do not need to buy paintings, they do so for three main reasons; as a reminder of places they knew, as a perceived investment or because they want something to match their curtains. One must devise a plan of action, be it online or off-line. He had been fortunate early in his career in that a painting he did of a hawk led him to become aware of a well-defined group of falconers, many of whom were extremely wealthy, to whom no-one was offering paintings of their birds. It is an example of 'niche marketing' that has served him very well.

If your genre is specific get involve with a relevant group of enthusiasts. However be selective in where you market your art. For example, if you are good at and enjoy painting dogs it is a waste of time exhibiting at Cruft's because the competition is all consuming, but smaller dog shows offer opportunities to engage with dog lovers who frequently want a painting of their pets.

Craft Fairs, Game Fairs, Town and Country Fairs could all be good venues. When setting up one's own stall at such events great attention to presentation is fundamental. Always be on your stand ready to greet potential customers and make them feel welcome. Do not have anything between you and them.

Chris was a great exponent of understanding and using correct body language. If you appear nervous and apprehensive it will affect your prospective customers. Always display the price, name and medium clearly at eye level. Have different sized work on offer along with greeting cards. Tell the artist's story. You will lose 30% of sales if you do not offer Credit Card facilities or the like, he said. Securing easels and panels can be problematical. He had been quoted prices to hire panels of from £250 to £400 each but he found he could have them made for £150. Think of the packaging material likely to be needed by your purchasers and ensure you have a plentiful supply – people paying three figures for a painting don't want to take it home in a Tesco's bag. Importantly do ensure that you make a note of the buyer's details and invite them to your future show. Even if they don't buy anything else they may well bring along friends who will. Building your own marketing database is key.

At an exhibition, 70% of business will be done at the Preview and sales during the rest of the event is usually just icing on the cake. Art Galleries and Art Agencies have their place but money spent on advertising was wasted in his opinion. The only thing that sold was what was on the wall; your audience either liked it or didn't. He has successfully sold on eBay and in on-line auctions. He cited etsy.com.uk, notonthehighstreet.com and artistsinfo.co.uk as useful websites.

Concerning price, he acknowledged that it is a most difficult subject but he did point out that in his opinion most artists undervalued their work. He advised that one should always ask for a bit more than one wanted and to keep pushing upwards. He recalled his joy at first getting £50 but, having got that, he aimed for £100, thence to £250, £500 and £1,000. He rejoiced that one of our members had sold for more than £2,000. He said that when an Arab Sheik had once asked him how much he would charge to paint one of his falcons he said, rather too quickly, £6,000 which was immediately accepted. Later he realized that the bird was worth perhaps twenty times that. However, all things are relative!

He said haggling was OK but quibbling was toxic. Having offered a discount - stick to it. When asked for advice about dealing with friends he suggested that if you really wanted £200, say "I would usually get £300 for this but you can have it for £200". That way everyone is happy!

Afterwards I asked what a minimum charge should be at the likes of our group's exhibition. He said that, for something about 12" square, not less than £125. This reflects a remark I heard at the exhibition "If she only thinks it's worth £70 then I don't want it". A painting only has a perceived value, not a "real" one, so one of the lessons we should learn from Chris is to be brave at our next exhibition!

John Kynoch.
8/1/2019