

March 2009

John Pototschnik Fine Art Newsletter

That Painting is How Much?

[Many folks question the price of original fine art. Here's the inside scoop.](#)

Most people interested in art wonder how in the world an artist establishes his prices. What factors determine the worth of a painting? There are at least eight factors that can be easily identified: 1) Public demand for the artist's work. 2) Public identification with the artist's name. 3) Desirability of the subject matter. 4) Medium used (oil, watercolor, pencil, etc.). 5) Quality of the art. 6) Size of the work. 7) Cost of the frame. 8) Whether the work was commissioned or not.

The **public's demand for the artist's work** is far and away the biggest factor determining what an artist charges (the supply and demand idea). When I first entered the fine art field from commercial illustration in 1982, I stupidly thought I could charge the same amount for my fine art pieces as I was receiving for my commercial ones. I learned very quickly, that wasn't going to be the case. In fact, I soon came to realize, I was starting a totally new business from the ground up. Only the talent translated over, nothing else. I foolishly thought people would be falling over themselves wanting to purchase my paintings. I desperately wanted to make a living in fine art but was forced to face the hard reality that at least initially, that living wasn't going to be as good as I expected. So, I cut my prices by one-third...more shows...still nothing sold. Had I made the right decision? It was becoming a depressing situation. Was the quality too low for the price? I worked harder. Nothing. I took on some illustration jobs to pay the bills...still nothing. The public was just not willing to pay what I thought my paintings were worth even though I was beginning to win awards in various shows. What next? I again cut my prices by one-third. That did it!! The paintings began selling. By the middle of 1984, I had sold virtually everything I had painted to that point except for a handful, and a few throwaways. I had learned a good principle firsthand. The public determines what the fair market value of a product is.

Public identification with the artist's name also plays an important role. Some folks buy art strictly because of a name. A recognizable name, more often than not, increases the desirability of an artist's work – which increases demand – so the circle is complete.

Believe it or not, **desirability of a particular subject matter** by the public affects an artist's pricing about as much as anything. The latest rankings of preferable subject matter are: Landscapes, cityscapes, figurative, portraits, abstract, floral, gardens, and animals. And then there is western. That's in a league by itself because its collectors are so passionate about the subject. I'm categorized as a landscape painter, no doubt, and that seems to be what people expect from me because they express surprise when I paint something different. However, being an artist is not about the subject, it's about expressing to others those things that move us deeply, regardless of the subject.

The **medium used** also affects the price. Oil paintings have a long and fabulous tradition. When we speak of great painters of the past – Rembrandt, Monet, Rubens, David, etc., they were all oil painters. Generally, the public considers oil as the fine art medium. Take a look at the major art shows; it's always oil paintings that garner the highest prices.

Quality of the art is one of those subjective things. I don't think it should be. I'm asked to judge art shows quite frequently and I judge them on the quality of the art. In many cases, the average buyer purchases solely on emotion, subject matter, color, and price. Unless one has looked at a lot of art and become very knowledgeable about art, quality is not at the top of everyone's list. Regardless, it is the artist's job to make sure our paintings are of the highest quality possible. Realistically however, the more one has to pay for something, the more they expect fine quality.

Size of the work and **cost of the frame** certainly are huge considerations. Some artists arbitrarily determine their prices, oftentimes based on their emotional attachment to the piece they have just created. I sought consistency in my pricing. When the public determined for me what they were willing to pay for my paintings (for instance, let's say a specific size of 12"x16") – I just determined the cost per square inch. This gave me a very reasonable guide in establishing all of my prices. There are slight adjustments and refinements within this structure but it works very well. The final price of a painting is not always known until the frame is selected so quoting an absolute price before everything is in place is sometimes difficult.

Finally, is the work a **commissioned piece**? A specifically commissioned work often requires significantly more effort. There is research, preliminary studies submitted for the client's approval, possible travel to gather necessary material and maybe even shipping expenses. All these factors add to the final cost.

Art enthusiasts/collectors will ask the question we began with, "That painting is how much?" However when it comes time to sell, the question changes to, "That's all you're going to give me, you've got to be kidding?"

So there you have it. I welcome your comments.

Competition News

Oil Painters of America 2009 National Juried Exhibition of Traditional Oils will hold its 18th annual show during the month of May in Santa Fe, NM. The juried show has become one of the most competitive in the country. More than 2000 entries from all parts of the United States sought one of the 200 spots in this prestigious show. I am again honored to be a participant in 2009. Sage Creek Gallery will host the show and **Kevin Macpherson** <http://www.kevinmacpherson.com/>

will be the awarding juror.



My entry this year is a 12"x16" oil, titled: "You're My Star, Chief". As a small boy, I just loved cars. I still do. I built many plastic models, entered them in competitions, loved drawing cars; I even kept charts in an attempt to calculate which brand and models were the most popular. Every autumn was looked to with great anticipation as each manufacturer released their new models. Most appealing to me are the automobiles of the 30's, 40's and 50's. This painting is of a 1954 Pontiac Star Chief. Oh, what character! The cars then were distinctive, now it's all about aerodynamics.

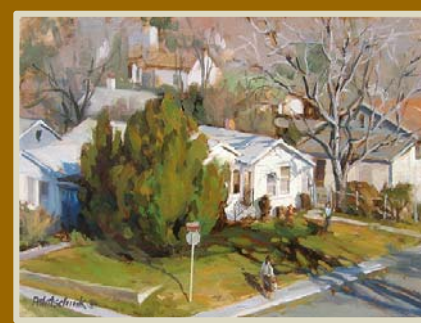
Click on the link in order to see a larger version:

<http://www.pototschnik.com/displaypainting.asp?pid=476>

Greenhouse Gallery of Fine Art in San Antonio hosts the **Salon International 2009 Juried Exhibition**. It will be a spectacular exhibit of 347 paintings selected from 1031 entries representing 43 states and 15 countries. In selecting paintings for the exhibit the jury was looking for over-all artistic excellence. The amazing **Daniel Greene** [Daniel E. Greene - Portrait Artist, Subway Paintings, Still Lifes, Workshops, Paint Sets & Painting Videos](#) has been selected as juror for the more than \$30,000 in awards to be presented. These painting will be included in the show. **Click on the link by each painting in order to see the larger version.**



<http://www.pototschnik.com/displaypainting.asp?pid=478>



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If you are interested in purchasing any of these paintings, please contact me: 972-442-5109.