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*I am a contributing author for **Fine Art Views**, a blog hosted by **Bold Brush** on the **Fine Art Studio Online** platform. I highly recommend this blog, focused on providing quality art marketing and sales information for artists. For those of you who don't subscribe to FASO, monthly articles will be posted on WAOW's website.*

January Article: Move the Needle

Are you happy with the progress in your art business? I am right now, but there have been years when I REALLY wanted to move the needle forward. I felt like things were stagnating.

We all have good times. But some times are just a bear to navigate. For many of us, our reaction is to work harder. If I can just improve my skills, or if I can just get into a gallery, or if ... You fill in the blank.

What I found, is working harder on whatever I was doing - it was the least effective way to move the needle. In order to affect change, I had to completely alter my approach. I had to think outside the box.

When the needle began to move slowly, THAT was the time to work harder. In my experience, working harder can accelerate things already in motion. Working harder rarely gets me out of the ditch. Only a different strategy does that.

When nobody was inviting me to be in their gallery, I joined a local group that was founding a co-op gallery. That gallery is still going strong today. I learned a lot about being on the other side of the sales desk, and after just a year working that start up, two other galleries had offered me representation. I am convinced this is because the experience in the co-op changed my whole demeanor.

When I was a beginner, I wasn't winning awards in lots of shows. I threw myself into a smaller niche - the miniature fine art shows. There are many of them, all around the world. I entered them and learned so much. It was incredible learning to paint under lighted magnification, on panels that are less than 25 square inches. To this day, I love entering these shows. Contact me if you'd like information on some of them.

The process of working through how to create realistic art on such a small scale was priceless. It is what led me down the paths that got me to where I am today. Solving problems painting in little made me a better painter of full sized pieces. The experience changed my approach to painting profoundly, from the medium and substrate I use, to the most basic ways of creating the illusion of depth. I started winning awards and getting sales in national shows, frequently.

Sometimes one success can hamper another. When I first started my art business, I built up a robust commissioned painting sales history. Then, I got representation in galleries in 2010. By 2012, my commission sales had all but disappeared. My artwork was priced according to the gallery standards, and it was important to me to keep all my pricing consistent. I couldn't afford the gallery's 50% cut without raising my prices, so my existing commission clients dried up. They didn't want to pay more than they had been.

What to do? I sent a letter to each of my galleries. I made a pitch that whatever collectors might want, I could paint it. My tagline was "If you can photograph it, I can paint it." I wrote about how I can paint any subject, person, place or thing. I printed postcards with images of my past commissions. These were pets, people, favorite vacation spots, churches, groupings of favorite wines, houses, etc. I also created several paintings for the galleries to hang that were examples of the types of artworks patrons could commission. In the middle of the display, I put a framed sign that said "commissions welcome."

It worked. Soon, the gallery owners were getting requests from their clients. Just describing what I could do got the gallery owners and their collectors talking about what I could do for them.

In every gallery, there are times when sales are slow. I asked if I could come on a few weekends during those times, and do "interactive painting demonstrations." I painted small pieces to where they were almost finished. Then I put a layer of varnish on them. I invited patrons to come during my demo and paint on them from a reference photo. Then when they walked away, I removed their paint layer with solvent, so the painting in progress was ready for the next person to step up and give it a go.

By the second or third time I showed up in each venue, there were repeat visitors, and a few sales. I started the needle moving in the right direction, so the hard work could begin to accelerate it.

I'm not suggesting you add a bunch of lines to your already long to do list for the year. But I am strongly recommending that you stop working hard for a minute. Take a look at whether your needles are moving. If they are stuck, how convinced are you that hard work doing the same things you have been doing will get them moving?

Is it maybe time to think up a different way of working? We are creatives. It's what we do. Are there creative solutions that could make your hard work pay off bigger dividends?