The Art of the Bullseye: Balancing Creative Vision and the Reality of Commerce

Today's column is not about answers. It is about questions—very important questions that every artist needs to ask himself, EVERY single day.

Young artists often want to "re-invent the wheel". People wanting to set the world on fire (especially young people) want to "change the world" and "shake up the status quo". It's not for nothing that the pop group Fun had a world-wide, essential hit singing: *"Tonight, we are young. So, let's set the world on fire, we can burn brighter than the sun."* Wanting to set the world on fire is using the fire of change and of ambition that burns brightly in every artist's heart. These are not negative things. Factually, they are essential thought processes which further both the individual, the society, and the world of art.

Without the creation of a state of "continuous advancement," we, as a society, begin to retract. My father used to say "If you don't grow, you shrink." In the natural universe, there are no statics. Matter is in a constant state of movement and of change. We either expand or contract. Quite nothing ever stays the same—nor should it!

But the first question I would like to ask is: **"Does changing the status quo require obliterating EVERYTHING that has come before us?"** Is there an easier way?

WHO Are You Creating FOR?

We are all artists. Generally speaking, artists want to create, and don't really want to be bothered with "Business."

Good. Go! Create! But ask yourself this second question: **"WHO are you creating FOR?"** Artist: *"Say what??? I paint (draw, sculpt, sing, dance, act, WHATEVER—fill in the discipline yourself). What kind of stupid question is that????"*

I'll repeat the question: "Who is your audience? Do you create for yourself? Your Mother? Your Friends? Art Critics? Art Dealers? Media attention? None of the above? ALL of the above?"

Whether you are selling coffee, tampons, or a platinum skull encrusted with 8,601 flawless diamonds, EVERY product has a target audience. If you want to LIVE from your art, then you must find out WHO is your audience. Your work must reach its target audience.

Bending Infrastructure to Your Will

Walking the fine line between art and commerce has been the balancing act that every successful artist has had to learn. However, once you get it right, you hit a Bullseye!

Advancing art is easy—financing it is not.
A vision's just a vision if it's only in your head.
If no one gets to see it, it's as good as dead.
It has to come to light!

Georges Seurat's struggles with his revolutionary pointillistic style were immortalized in Stephen Sondheim's 1985 creative output, the musical *"Sunday in the Park with George."* In the second act, there is a very telling lyric from the song "Putting it Together" which I think makes this point brilliantly:

> *Dot by dot, building up the image.*
> *Shot by shot, keeping at a distance doesn't pay.*
> *Still, if you remember your objective, not give all your privacy away,*
> *a little bit of hype can be effective, long as you can keep it in perspective.*
> *After all, without some recognition no one's going to give you a commission.*
> *Art isn't easy.*

No, art isn't easy. But consider this: what if it were possible, without (greatly) compromising your own vision, to take the existing infrastructures and bend them to your own will? You may ask, "Which infrastructures?" How about the marketing, sales, and distribution infrastructures great businessmen and women have already created?

Masters of the Shock and Sell: Warhol, Hirst, and Banksy

Whatever one thinks of their creative output, there are very few people who would argue that an Andy Warhol, a Banksy, or a Damien Hirst did not "shake up the status quo."

If we look carefully, it becomes clear that in addition to their artworks, their marketing and sales strategies were also REVOLUTIONARY. These artists not only understood, but mastered the "art" of marketing, sales, and distribution as well.

Did these artists "compromise" their vision?? Putting a cow in formaldehyde (Hirst), pissing on your own paintings (Warhol), or working as a politically astute, stencilling graffiti artist (Banksy), are not the kind of artistic endeavors that have the word "COMPROMISE" tattooed all over them. However, these gentlemen have been spectacularly successful in their own lifetimes—Bullseye!

- **Damien Hirst's** diamond-encrusted skull gathered worldwide media attention and was "sold" for €58 million Euros.
- **Andy Warhol's** "Eight Elvises" sold for $100 million dollars. Did Warhol know that doing silk-screen paintings of the biggest movie stars of his time would get him media attention and raise both his profile and his asking prices? You're damn right, he did.
- **Banksy's** stencil "paintings" are selling for $40,000—and I don't want to know how much they paid him to create the opening sequence of a "Simpsons" episode.

Do Banksy and Hirst use "shock value" methods to catapult their artistic endeavors into public consciousness?? They sure do.

Hitting the Bullseye

Is that art? Is that marketing? Is it both? Does it matter?

At the end of the day, navigating the commercial world doesn't mean losing your soul. It means ensuring your voice is actually heard. When you finally learn to balance the fire of your creation with the reality of the market, you hit a perfect, undeniable bullseye.

For more thoughts on surviving and thriving in the entertainment industry, check out the ***Mark Janicello Blog****. If you are ready to take your own craft to the next level, explore my available* ***Masterclasses and Vocal Coaching*** *in London and worldwide.*