

Talking to Artists

Every artist is different. This is meant to give a general idea of what life is like for the artist, and hopefully give a little knowledge and understanding to the patron.

Proceed with caution:

1. “Can I get a discount?” Or, “Will you take \$500 instead of \$1,000?” This is an insult to the work and the artist. Most artists price their work at very fair rates based on time, materials and overhead. Think of it like this: What would you say if you went into work on Monday and your boss asked you to work at half your usual salary for the week? You’d probably quit.
2. “Does this come in any other size/color?” Each piece of art is a unique creation by the artist, not a mass-produced item (refers strictly to original art, not prints and reproductions, which can come in several sizes). DO ask to look at the artist’s portfolio, there may be something there you like even better.
3. “How long did it take you to do that?” How long it takes to make has no bearing on the value. Here is a story to explain why: Pablo Picasso is having coffee when a fan asks, “Would you draw something on this napkin for me?” He does a drawing on the napkin, hands it to the fan and says, “That will be \$10,000.” The fan says, “It only took you a few minutes to draw it.” The reply is, “It took me a lifetime to learn to draw that way.”
4. “How did you make that?” There is a fine line with this one, as it’s all about the context. Often, this question is asked with the intention, “I’ll make one just like it.” Inquiring about the artist’s process (i.e. “Tell me about your process.”) is all right.
5. “Your work is just like so-and-so’s.” Artists would rather not be compared to other artists. It’s always all right to ask by whom the artist is influenced.
6. “I want to learn to do art when I retire/have free-time, etc.” This can be taken the wrong way. This question goes hand-in-hand with “How can I learn to do art like that?” Just don’t go there. “Do you teach?” Now that’s a good question.

Never insult the work. Even if you think it’s hideous, keep it to yourself. That’s a person’s heart and soul on display, even if you don’t like it. The person standing or sitting behind you may be the artist. If you want to discuss the work in a negative way, wait until you leave. Always.

Proceed with gusto:

1. “Tell me about your work.” It’s the perfect question.
2. “What/who influences you?” An excellent conversation starter, always welcome.
3. “What inspired you to create that?”

4. “What attracted you to working with pattern/the figure/still life/animals, etc?”
5. Sincere compliments are always welcome.
6. It’s all right to be silent. A person thoughtfully and quietly studying a piece is always welcome. Don’t feel you have to say something.

A few final notes:

Never take pictures of the art unless you ask the artist for permission first.

The artists are here to sell their work. Don’t be offended if they excuse themselves from your conversation to greet or speak with someone else who may be a potential customer.

Edited excerpts from July 5, 2013 vlasticstudio blog (<http://theyearoflivingfabulously.com/2013/07/05/how-to-talk-to-artists-at-art-festivals-the-dos-and-donts-warning-youve-probably-been-guilty-of-at-least-one-of-the-donts/>)