

TEN TIPS FOR PROVING THE EXCEPTION

Eric Maisel

OVERVIEW

Tens of millions of people produce visual art of one sort or another. It is a straightforward matter of supply and demand that not all of these people will be able to make money from their efforts. It is therefore the case that if you want to be one of the relatively few who do make sufficient money from your efforts, you must prove the exception. It follows that it will not make sense to do exactly what most artists do, as most artists aren't making sufficient money. You must do other things as well. Here are ten tips for doing just that: for proving the exception.

TEN TIPS: UNDERSTANDING WHY "PROVING THE EXCEPTION" IS VITAL

If you have it in your head that by doing what most artists do you can be successful, you will want to have a serious chat with yourself about that faulty thinking. Can it really be sufficient to paint a few paintings, build an average website, and open the doors to your studio one weekend a year during Open Studios? Why would you do so little, even if that is exactly as little as the typical artist does? Isn't it abundantly clear that such efforts can't amount to enough in an art environment with so many producers and so few buyers?

TIP TWO: UNDERSTANDING HOW "MOST ARTISTS" OPERATE

If you intend to prove the exception, you will need to learn what is average or typical. Use the evidence of your eyes to distinguish between what most artists are doing and what successful artists are doing. What concrete differences do you notice between the one group and the other? Are the successes of successful artists more about their subject matter choices, their technical merit,

their marketing efforts, the stunts they pull, or their sociability? What do you see?

TIP THREE: ARTICULATING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “THE NORMAL WAY” AND “THE EXCEPTIONAL WAY”

As you begin to understand what amounts to an average effort and what amounts to an exceptional effort, articulate what you are learning. Write out your own “ten tips” for proving the exception. Be able to say in a clear sentence or two how you mean to distinguish your efforts from customary efforts. Create your own plan for “proving the exception.” Clearly identify what you will need to do in order to make your plan work.

TIP FOUR: STEPPING INTO THE SHOES OF “SOMEONE EXCEPTIONAL”

Once you’ve articulated your understanding of the difference between an average effort and an exceptional effort, you will want to become the person capable of making such an effort. That may mean working on your shyness, your anxieties, your passivity, and your dislike of self-promotion. If proving the exception requires that you do x, y, and z, you must become the person capable of doing x, y, and z.

TIP FIVE: REACHING OUT

Learn how to send clear, concise, friendly, useful emails and other messages to those people who might be able to help you. Learn not to labor over such missives—they do not need to be elaborate works of art or skillful apologies for why you aren’t further along in your career or more important as an artist. Reach out to three people a day ... five people a day ... seven people a day. Reach out regularly and continually.

TIP SIX: FOLLOWING THROUGH

It is one thing to make a sensible plan and another thing to follow through on all the steps required to turn any plan into a successful experience. You will come up against innumerable obstacles as you endeavor to prove the exception, from unreturned emails and phone calls to technological glitches to rude, off-

handed criticism to deals falling through to contracts not being honored. Persevere; follow through; keep at it!

TIP SEVEN: BECOMING REALLY AVAILABLE

You could act as if relating in the marketplace is tremendously burdensome and make yourself only grudgingly available or you could invite such interactions, make dates for coffee, accept any and all invitations to speak or be interviewed, and otherwise become really and readily available. Become a recluse *after* you are famous, not before. Yes, you need studio time; yes, you need time for all of the rest of life, including time for your day job; and yet you must still find the time and the wherewithal to make yourself really available.

TIP EIGHT: CREATING THE OCCASIONAL STUNT

Occasional stunts may be necessary. A stunt is an event created to produce publicity. It might be you shredding your unwanted paintings in a public place with the press alerted, it might be you attending your opening nude rather than dressed, it might be you marrying and divorcing another artist in a ceremony the two of you design to advertise your “marriage doesn’t work” suite of paintings. Most artists hate stunts. It is nevertheless worth your while to calmly think through your relationships to stunts. Who knows?—you may actually have a stunt or two right up your sleeve without knowing it!

TIP NINE: ANGLING FOR BIG OUTCOMES

Convince a friendly gallery owner not to hang one or two of your paintings but to give you a whole show. Use your rhetorical skills and powers of persuasion to angle for this bigger outcome. Ask a friendly collector not only to take a look at your new body of work but to throw an event in support of it. Use your charm and smarts to angle for this bigger outcome. Each time you think about attempting something, ask yourself, “What bigger outcome could I angle for with exactly the same amount of effort?”

TIP TEN: THINKING GLOBALLY

It is wonderful to be represented by the gallery down the street but it is unlikely, verging on impossible, that you can prove the exception if your field of vision is limited to your immediate neighborhood. What if the galleries most

likely to be interested in you are scattered all over the world? Then you must search them out and reach out to them. It is excellent to fashion and maintain local relationships but to prove the exception you will need to make the world your oyster.

ABOUT ERIC MAISEL

Eric Maisel is the author of more than 30 books, including *The Art of the Book Proposal*. His recent books include *Brainstorm: Harnessing the Power of Productive Obsessions*, *Mastering Creative Anxiety*, and *The Depression Code: From Mental Disorder to Meaning Solution* (2012). Dr. Maisel writes for Art Bistro, Professional Artist Magazine, Wholeliving.com., and the Huffington Post, trains creativity coaches and meaning coaches, works with individual clients, and presents workshops worldwide in places like San Francisco, New York, London, Paris and Berlin. Visit Dr. Maisel at ericmaisel.com or contact him at ericmaisel@hotmail.com.