



Images of Park West Gallery Courtesy of Park West Gallery®

The Art of Doing Business

By: Gina Samarotto, Samarotto Design Group

Before the birth of what we have come to know as the modern, commercial art gallery; the masters created ingenious ways to lucratively connect with their patrons.

Take Dali's brilliant, albeit quirky; penchant for adding hand drawn sketches to the faces of checks he wrote to cover his dinner bills. With a few strokes of the pen, he created a personal connection with the recipient - precluding most from actually cashing their cache.

In 1905 while still a darling, rising star of the art world; Picasso painted a canvas depicting a scene at Au Lapin Agile supper club in Paris. The painting was offered up to settle his tab. One has to wonder just how sublime the wine and dinners were, as the painting commanded over \$40M at auction some eighty-plus years later.

In a modern day interpretation of singing - or drawing, as the case may be - for one's supper; commercially successful, business savvy artists may not be bartering with canvases and embellished personal checks... but they are wisely accepting gallery invitations to meet collectors, both established and would-be, at carefully orchestrated VIP events.

From well-heeled cocktail parties to decadent weekends at five-star hotels to luxury ocean cruises, the art of wooing collectors has become big business. And in order to attract the 'whales' of the art world, galleries and artists are striving to make the offerings irresistible.

From the collectors' point of view, the lure is easy to understand. The exclusivity of these

events combined with enviable destinations and the promised proximity to an admired artist is a compelling draw. Even for collectors who aren't attracted to the plush perks the destinations offer, simply acquiring an original work and having it dedicated at a "by invitation only" event guarantees some pretty significant bragging rights - not to mention indisputable provenance.

The critically acclaimed Israeli artist, Yuval Wolfson, enjoys the accolades of a following that is as charmed by his engaging warmth as they are by his stunning, exciting use of color. At events in Tel Aviv, Wolfson's celebrity has guests vying for attention in the hopes of sharing a word or two with the artist. And while physical distance may limit the opportunity for Wolfson to extend himself the same way for his North American fans; the artist has become a master at using electronic social media to develop and maintain strong, ongoing relationships with those stateside collectors.

Pop art icon Peter Max - arguably the most famous living artist in the world today and certainly among the best traveled - has been quoted as saying he spends about 40 weekends a year appearing at events where he's kept busy meeting collectors, posing for photos and graciously answering questions about his work and life in his signature, soft spoken voice.

One has to wonder why the world famous septuagenarian would expend that kind of time and energy traveling the globe when he could simply be enjoying the fruits of

his many years of labor; reveling at home amongst family, friends and the spoils of his considerable success. Of course there's huge sales potential for the artist, but could it really be just the money? Or perhaps... just perhaps... is the lure of personal connection between artist and adoring collector somewhat seductive, even to a rock star like Max?

In the realm of attracting and retaining artists and collectors, few do it better than the colossal Park West Gallery headquartered in Detroit, Michigan. The gallery has mastered the craft of bringing artists and top tier collectors together in a way that leaves each feeling as if they've been singled out for privilege. When asked why the approach was so resoundingly successful, Park West Gallery Founder and CEO Albert Scaglione put it elegantly,

"Art speaks to people on many levels. It's personal. And we recognize that profoundly. Our ability to bring some of the world's finest art -- and artists -- directly to collectors is transformational in their personal relationship with the art they choose to bring home. For artists who enjoy exposure to collectors of their work, it's transformational for them as well. For example, I was recently in France, and Jean-Claude Picot told me how witnessing collectors respond to his work energizes him to work more. He's not alone in that sentiment. Passion begets passion."

It would seem that Mr. Scaglione has it right, at the core of the matter is one very human trait... passion begets passion and passion is, clearly, very good business.