

## CHAPTER 8 | CREATE CRITICAL COLLATERAL

In 2005, the gallery had grown to a point where we were ready to take our marketing efforts up a notch. Up to this point, we had been creating most of our own advertising. We began interviewing marketing firms around Phoenix, looking for one that would understand our goals and help us increase both traffic to the gallery and sales for our artists.

Fairly quickly, we found an agency with whom we felt we could relate. They met with us in their beautiful office space, and scheduled several sessions for us to talk about who we were as a gallery, who our customers were, and where we wanted to go. They really seemed to capture our vision and our direction. We indicated we were ready to proceed with them, and were anxious to see what they would come up with for us.

The firm calendared a follow-up meeting the next week, when they planned to show us some initial concepts. They wanted to rebrand the business, and felt it was important to start with our stationery design. We agreed to return a week later to see what they had for us.

I am not exaggerating when I say we were blown away with the concept they envisioned. The new stationery was to be created on velum, with our four-color logo at the top. Running through the paper was a swirling, spinning line that matched the theme of the logo. The matching envelopes were also printed on velum. A customer who received a letter with images from us would be able to see the artwork before ever opening the envelope. We had never seen anything as beautiful, and knew we had found our marketing team!

Then they handed us the printing estimate . . .

Now let me tell you I am no stranger to printing costs. We had already run stationery when we opened the gallery, and had also run postcards and brochures. I understand that to make an impression one has to make an investment; but all we were doing here was creating one ream of letterhead and accompanying envelopes - \$800, \$1,200, \$2,000? How much was a new business image worth?

\$9,873.

At least that is what they tried to tell us. \$9,873 for 500 sheets of stationery and matching envelopes, and that didn't even include design fees.

After they picked me up off the floor, we had a long and deep discussion, and I realized perhaps this company

didn't understand us as well as we had hoped. If they thought our business could afford to spend nearly \$10,000 on paper – now keep in mind this wouldn't bring one additional customer in our door- they had another thought coming.

Very quickly, we realized the firm was accustomed to working with large corporations with mountainous advertising budgets. They may have had some tremendous ideas, but we would have been bankrupt before they ever could have been implemented.

I share this story with you because at some point you may face a similar temptation. You may think that in order to make it, you need to pour money into creating ad materials or into expensive advertisements. Resist the temptation.

Below you will find a list of collateral materials you might consider creating for your artwork, and the degree of importance these materials hold toward your success in approaching galleries. I am going to list the items I feel least necessary first, and explain why, and work my way up to the more critical. I have rated each with a five star rating system – one star means the item is optional and unimportant in approaching galleries, while five stars signal that the item is critical and warrants your dedication of time and resources to producing it.

**Business Cards ★★** are fun to have and make you feel professional; and let's face it, they're not awfully expensive. On the other hand, they are not going to be the deciding difference between getting into a gallery and not. The truth is, you hand me a business card, and it's going to float around on my desk for a few days before it disappears forever into a Bermuda triangle of flotsam that is my filing system. I don't have a rolodex for cards, so my policy when an artist hands me a card is to save myself some time, and throw it directly into the trash. If you want me to have your contact information, send me an e-mail.

**Brochures ★** are absolutely critical if you are doing art festivals or weekend shows. You want to have something you can hand to a collector so that he can walk away with images of your work, together with your contact information. When you approach a gallery, however, the brochure becomes next to worthless. A brochure is even worse than a business card, because it creates more mess for me. If I should choose to represent you, I can't use the brochure for my clients because: a.) it has your contact information, and b.) it won't match my branding.

I worked with an artist who produced an incredible brochure, and spent many thousands to do it. It was so nice, I even consented to hand some of them out to my collectors because he didn't put personal contact info on it. The problem, of course, was the brochure's inability to

keep up with new work. Within several months, the brochure was already feeling dated, and soon we weren't handing it out anymore. I was in the artist's studio in Utah a few weeks ago, and saw several boxes of the brochures sitting in the corner collecting dust.

You may have an opportunity to share costs on a brochure with your gallery. This route would make more sense both for you and the gallery.

**Postcards ★.** The same issues apply here as those listed for business cards and brochures. Again, if you are doing your own direct marketing, they make sense; but if your goal is getting galleries to do the marketing for you, there is no logical reason for you to spend a lot of time or money on postcards.

**Artist's Statement ★★★.** I have read a lot of terrible artist's statements over the years, and have almost stopped reading them altogether. I still recommend that my artists put the time and effort into creating the statement, so that I can share it with my collectors. The statement is a summary of what your approach to your art is, what your philosophy is . . . in essence, it's why you think you are wonderful. You can see where there could be some potential for going a bit over the top.

I considered including one example of a poorly written statement here illustrating the point, but I am afraid the internet would make it too easy to trace back to the art-

ist. My intent is not to make anyone feel bad, nor end up in a law suit, so I'm not going to do that. I am including (with the permission of the artist) a statement which I feel does a good job.

*Sample Artist's Statement - Silvana LaCreta Ravena*

Silvana LaCreta Ravena is a versatile painter who works in oils, acrylics, watercolors, and encaustic. (She also creates wearable art.) Her non-encaustic work is both abstract and figurative, while the encaustic work is completely abstract. The encaustics, meticulous in their use of color and line, seem at first glimpse to be heavily influenced by Kandinsky and abstract expressionism, especially color field painting. But further acquaintance with Silvana's unique biography and the sources/inspirations behind her oeuvre reveal an artist who has deftly marshaled passion, intellectual rigor, and solid technique to create a genuinely original body of work.

Silvana is originally from Sao Paulo, Brazil, and was educated as a psychologist. She also holds degrees in art therapy and art history. A practicing psychotherapist, her experience in the field led to the development of her signature artistic theme: memory. Further study and experimentation led Silvana to develop her own encaustic technique as a vehicle for exploring the subject.

As Silvana discovered, the hot wax used in encaustic painting, with its soft, pliable consistency is an ideal material for expressing the layered nature of memory. Before application, the heat binds the layers of wax to one another, creating a rich and complex surface. Then the wax, combined with pigment, can be liter-

ally sculpted upon the canvas, creating an infinite combination of textures.

Silvana's nontraditional technique brings further variety to her paintings through the use of custom made colors and additional manipulations of the material. With different wax mixtures, for example, she can give the raw material varying degrees of opacity and translucency.

"This whole art form is reminiscent of the process we use to store memories . . . It's an ancient idea—Socrates considered wax a metaphor for memory," says Silvana. The layers Silvana creates in her paintings are intended to bring the layers of memory to life; the paintings' textures are not merely symbolized, but are present on the canvass. The work is decidedly three-dimensional and demands a live experience—it is impossible to perceive the paintings' rich textures by seeing them online or in print.

Drawing upon her training as a psychologist and academic, she incorporates into her work a variety of theoretical ideas, thus infusing it with another range of textures, beyond the pictorial. Freudian concepts such as the unconscious, repression, and latent/manifest content are especially important to the encaustic paintings. Such a range of influences serves to broaden her work, giving it a more fluid, open-ended character that invites the viewer to appreciate it in his/her own unique way.

The unique combination of elements Silvana LaCreta Ravena brings to her work—artistic, personal, and professional—gives her the credibility of an original. While each individual piece of hers certainly "speaks for itself," when seen in the context of the artist's background, ideas, and singular technique, it clearly gains a degree of vitality and significance that indicates the true measure of the work.

Silvana's statement is perfect. It is concise, focused and to the point. From it the reader gains a sense of who she is, what her work signifies, and her methods and techniques for working. The statement refrains from using superlatives and art jargon.

Limit your statement to one page, and ideally it will be even less. Organize the statement so the most important information appears in the beginning, realizing you will lose readers with each succeeding paragraph.

Your statement may be written in either the first or third person, but should maintain an air of formality above that which you might take with your biography.

Also, you may need several different statements, one tailored to your galleries, another directed toward juries, and another to the press.

**Resume or Curriculum Vitae ★★★★★** The resume is one of the most important, yet least read documents you will ever produce. I mean, really, who is going to read the whole thing from start to finish? No one. The resume, or *curriculum vitae* if you drink your tea with your pinky sticking out, has one job: to sit securely in a gallery owner's or collector's hand, and prove you are serious about your career.

A couple of key points. If you have led a dual existence, pursuing a career to pay the bills and put the kids through college, you should think twice about including much about that part of your life in the resume. If you are trying to prove you are a professional artist, including your aeronautical engineering education and experience is not going to help to do this; in fact it may send exactly the opposite message. The only exception to this rule is when that other career was a part of your story as an artist (let's say you are a former aeronautical engineer who creates sculptures of rocketships, for example).

Include not only your education and your shows, awards and accolades, but also a list of collectors, and (eventually) a list of your galleries. You may have to stretch a bit on your collector list at first. For example:

Dr. & Mrs. Spencer Williams  
*Private Collectors, Idaho*

Looks pretty impressive, doesn't it? You don't have to tell me they are an uncle and aunt, and I'm not going to ask. This list of patrons is critical for letting your galleries and collectors know they are not making a mistake by buying your work because, look, other people have already purchased your art.\*

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\* This may be a good time to mention that your galleries are unlikely to share with you the contact information of your collectors who buy your work through the gallery. Remember, all I own as a

Your resume should be no longer than two pages, and I honestly prefer the one page resume. Keep it to the point.

**Biographical Sketch ★★★★★** People fall in love with artwork; they buy stories. The most common question I hear from visitors to the gallery, and I hear it dozens of times each day, is: “Where is the artist from?” Although the answer I give doesn’t seem to make any difference, when someone is looking at a piece of art, this seems to be the burning question.

Why the need to know from whence the artist hails? When a person sees a piece of art for the first time, he or she is challenged to understand it, to categorize it, to make a connection with it. Knowing where the artist is from is a jumping off point on that journey to understanding.

Having spoken with many collectors about the artwork they own, I know that geography plays a number of important rolls. First, I always hear where they found the work. “We were vacationing in Carmel,” or “We found it on a trip to Rome.” Then, invariably, geography has an impact in the story of the artist: “The artist is a color-blind painter from Texas,” or “she’s a twenty-year old

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gallery owner is my collector list. I protect the list very carefully, and you will find other gallery owners do the same.

sculptor from Montana.” The more the collector can wrap his mind around the artist’s story, the more likely he is to make an emotional connection and buy.

This is where a strong biographical sketch can help you increase your sales. I had a client from California visit the gallery in the spring of 2007. She was attracted to paintings by one of my artists, and we had a brief discussion about his work, before I handed her a copy of his biography. Normally a collector would have taken the bio home, read it, and if still interested in the work, called me back. This collector, however, sat down in a chair in the gallery, read the whole bio, and then bought three major pieces on the spot. I have no doubt the bio played a major role in reinforcing her love for the artwork and driving her to a buying decision.

Think of your bio as a brief magazine article about you and your history. I recommend the bio be written in third-person, and run anywhere from 3-10 pages (although if you have a lot of story to tell, I see no reason not to make it longer). If you want to have an idea of what it should contain, pick up a copy of Southwest Art magazine and model your bio after their articles.

You should answer the following questions in your bio:

1. Where are you from? The bio can retrace your geography from your birth to the present day.

2. How did you become interested in art?
3. What kind of formal (and/or informal) training do you have?
4. How has your career developed?
5. What is your primary subject matter? Why?
6. What techniques do you employ?
7. What is your style?
8. Are you involved with any arts or charitable organizations?
9. What notable awards have you won? (Don't list all of your awards here, that's what a resume is for.)
10. What has been your motivation or inspiration?
11. What have others (the more notable the source the better) said about your work?
12. What do your collectors feel about your work?

Of course, the more creative you are, the better. Look for a unique angle to drive the article.

If you are not an adept writer (and why would you be? You're a *visual* artist after all) find someone to write the article for you. A local free-lance writer might be inclined to trade writing service for artwork, for example. Or, you may have a friend or family member who has a flair for words. Put some real effort into this; your bio is an investment that will pay you dividends for years to come.

Here is an example of a bio I wrote several years ago for Robert Burt. At the risk of sounding a bit egotistical, I am fairly proud of the bio, and I enjoy reading it even now. Note how the narrative is built around the concept of trying to understand from where the artwork comes. Also note how I used quotes to give the reader a better sense of connection to the artist.

### *Sample Bio - Robert Burt, Artist*

How much can one learn about an artist by looking at his work? A review of painter Robert Burt's latest pieces reveals a great deal about the soft-spoken artist's life and passions.

Abandoned adobe churches - deserted city streets from small towns in Mexico and South America - long, rolling, country roads disappearing into the distance. Each scene conveys a sense of peace and solitude, while at the same time, Burt's bold use of color and strong compositional elements convey the intense beauty the artist sees in the world around him. His paintings invite the viewer on a journey to explore a world that lies far from the hustle of everyday life.

Robert Burt's personal journey as an artist began in his childhood. Born in the 1950's in the upstate New York hamlet of Kingston, Burt showed an aptitude for art from an early age.

"My uncle lived in Manhattan and was an artist working in the advertising field," Burt recalls. "When I was eight or nine, he started giving me lessons in chess and, more importantly, in painting." Burt's interest in art flourished under his uncle's tutelage and by the time he was in his teens, Burt was taking figure-drawing classes at a local art gallery.

In high school, Burt began taking summer classes sponsored by the Art Students' League of New York in Woodstock, the heart of a burgeoning artists' community. The young artist studied under Franklin Alexander and further developed his drawing, painting and composition skills.

Burt went on to study fine arts at Ulster College, while continuing with summer studies at the Art Students' League. After leaving school he began working in batik, an art form which originated in Southeast Asia. The batik artist creates designs on fabric by masking areas with hot wax and then dyeing the cloth. The coated area doesn't take the dye, and by coating different areas in wax and dyeing the cloth repeatedly, the artist can create complex, layered images.

Burt loved the technique for the bold compositions and strong colors he was able to achieve. He began selling his batik apparel in art shows and shops, eventually opening his own gallery in Lake Placid, New York, which he ran successfully through the early 1980's.

In the mid-eighties, on the recommendation of friends, Burt decided to move the business to Asheville, North Carolina. Within a few years, the shop had done so well he decided to open a second shop in Chapel Hill.

During this period, Burt had several important experiences that would move him toward a full-time career as a painter. In an effort to broaden his artistic work, Burt began painting on the silk, in addition to dyeing it. He also traveled for several months through Europe and Asia. Burt was deeply moved by the richness of the cultures and landscapes he encountered, and while in Amsterdam, having realized he needed a new medium to convey his experiences, he bought a set of pastels. Upon his return to the U.S., Burt began painting in earnest.

Through the late eighties and early nineties, though he still owned the galleries in North Carolina, Burt devoted more and more of his time to pastel work. He took six months to apprentice with Ben Konis, a well-respected pastelist living in Amarillo,

Texas, who showed Burt not only technique, but what it took to make it in the art world.

By the mid 1990's, Burt sold his businesses in North Carolina and moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

"I always loved the drama of the Southwest," Burt explains. "I chose Santa Fe because I wanted to be among the artists and galleries there, and because of the convergence of the Hispanic, Indian, and cowboy cultures. I love to paint the adobe architecture set along the small, winding roads around Santa Fe and throughout New Mexico." He spent a great deal of time on the road throughout the Southwest gathering subject matter.

In Santa Fe, Burt soon made another important change in his artwork, moving from pastels into acrylics, which allowed him to better capture the bold colors of the landscapes, the people and the architecture, and to work on a larger scale.

Burt spent several years developing his style, drawing upon techniques he used in batik, silk painting and pastel to create bold color fields and a depth of vision within his paintings, which he achieved by layering colors. His subjects were varied, but most came from his travels, which grew more and more extensive.

In 2003, he saw photographs taken by a friend who had visited Peru. "I knew right away I had to go," Burt says.

He ultimately spent a month traveling through Peru, led by a guide who was happy to show him a Peru not often glimpsed by foreigners. They visited small villages and traveled by back roads into the Andes.

The sketches and photos Burt compiled while in Peru kept him painting furiously for some time once he returned to Santa Fe. "In fact," Burt admits, "Peru still finds its way into my work."

A sculptor from the Mexican state of Sonora, whom Burt had befriended in Santa Fe, saw Burt's love for Latin culture and scenery and invited the artist to visit his home village in the mountains of Northern Mexico. Burt accepted the invitation, and in the fall of 2004 the two made the journey to Huachinara, which is about five hours south of the Mexican border.

Burt quickly fell in love with the town and its people. Before the end of his visit, he bought land to build an adobe home and studio, which are now nearly completed.

"I can't wait to start painting there," Burt says. "The light is excellent for a painter; the air is incredibly clean, and the studio will have great views of the mountains." He plans to divide his time amongst Huachinara, Santa Fe, and the open road.

Burt's visit happened to coincide with a visit by the governor of Sonora. Burt and his friend were invited to join the governor and a couple of thousand Sonoran ranchers and cowboys on a two-day trail ride from ranch to ranch in the surrounding countryside.

Burt's friend had been working for several years to create an art and cultural school in Huachinara, and during the ride the governor laid the cornerstone for the building of the school.

Burt was invited to join the school's board, an invitation he readily accepted.

"I had fallen in love with the people of the Santa Madre Mountains, and I want to help them improve their lives," Burt says of the endeavor. "We want to be able to provide work, to

teach art classes, to bring money and prosperity into the communities of the mountain region. It is a wonderful opportunity to give back, to help others."

Burt taught his first painting class in Huachinara in December 2004, and found that students of all ages were hungry to express themselves through art.

"I started the class at 9 a.m. each day, and they kept me there until 9 p.m." Burt says. "I was exhausted, but it was rewarding; I developed many new friendships."

Burt's travels have led him to a wide range of subject matter. One canvas may depict the softly curving lines of a New Mexican adobe schoolhouse, and the next might show the winding streets of a South American village; but all of Burt's work invites the viewer to join him in the adventure of life.

"I start a story with each of my paintings," Burt says, "but I allow the viewer to join me in finishing the story with his or her own experiences and emotions."

For his part of that story, Burt employs bold colors and reduces the scene to its most elemental and powerful components. Each painting vibrates with artistic energy and color, entertaining the eye and mind. "I want to create paintings that convey a bit of mystery and adventure," the artist says, "but also the feeling of joy."

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**The Portfolio ★★★★★** The portfolio is the artist's primary tool in getting his or her work in front of potential collectors and gallery owners. The portfolio is going to be the first impression you, the artist, leave, and you want to leave the right impression.

You now have a selection of different portfolio formats. Twenty-five years ago, an artist's portfolio was exactly that: a large portfolio with photos slipped into plastic sheets. Now you can choose between many different formats, including Image CDs, hard or soft-cover books printed online, purely digital .pdf portfolios, etc. Each of these formats has something to offer, and each comes with drawbacks.

*The CD* filled with digital images of your work is an inexpensive way to get a number of your portfolios out there. You can burn dozens of CDs for just a few dollars, and they are inexpensive to mail. The drawback to the CD is that it is easy for me to throw away, without ever having looked at the images; and the truth is, I do this all the time. Looking at a CD is simply too much work for me in my busy life. I have to get it into the computer, close whatever else I was working on,

only to discover that you created the images on a Mac, while I am on a PC, so my computer doesn't want to open them. It's honestly more effort than I care to expend.

That's not to say you shouldn't create CDs of your work; they truly can be great ways to multiply your efforts and get your work out to a larger audience. However, I recommend you use the CD as a supplement to your primary portfolio, and not as the primary portfolio itself.

*The Digital Photo Book*, which you can now print online inexpensively (visit sites like Blurb.com, or mypublisher.com to see examples) and professionally, is another option to consider. This book reproduces your work beautifully, and looks like it just came out of a bookstore. Nothing will stroke your vanity like seeing your work in print in one of these books.

The problem? Unless you are willing to republish and reformat your book every month or so, it is quickly going to be out of date. This would be another great supplementary item for you to sell at art festivals, but is not flexible enough to be your primary portfolio.

*The disposable presentation folder*, a simple report cover with 20-30 plastic sheet holders inside is my favorite portfolio. You will find them at your local office supply store, and can use them to create a half-dozen

identical portfolios. Print the images from your high-quality home ink-jet, and insert the pages into the folder. You now have an easy-to-maintain, professional portfolio that will enable you to get your most recent images in front of your target audience.

Each portfolio page should include 1-2 images. With each image, you should include all pertinent information: title, medium, size, and price. Make it easy for me to know exactly what I am looking at.

I recommend you format your portfolio to make the images what the viewer sees first. Include 20-25 images in the portfolio, including several sold pieces, clearly marked as sold (or even better, show them in the settings of the owners' homes or offices). Place your bio, resume and artist's statement at the back of the portfolio.

Sample Portfolio Page



Colors of October  
by John Horejs  
72" x 72"  
Oil

\$15000

Sample Portfolio Page – Sold Artwork



Sold to Private Collector ●  
Fountain Hills, AZ

**Artist's Website ★★★★★** This topic is so important that it gets its own chapter to follow.

**Digital Images ★★★★★★★★** I cannot over-emphasize how important it is that every piece of artwork coming out of your studio be captured digitally with a quality camera. The images are going to be critical to you and your galleries in marketing your work. These images will be used for websites, postcards and newsletters.

Devise a setup in your studio that will allow you to take the photos yourself. You may need a simple cloth backdrop, and some lighting, or you may find you can use natural light, or even shoot in direct sunlight. Experiment to find the simplest means possible to get your work to look good on disk. There will certainly be times when you need a professional photographer to do the shot for you, as when you print in a magazine, but otherwise, your photography will suffice.

Keep the photos organized (this will be simple to do if you have implemented the inventory numbering system recommended in chapter 7) on your computer, and for heaven's sake, **BACK UP YOUR IMAGES AND KEEP THE BACKUP IN A SAFE PLACE.** I was sick to learn a couple of years ago that thieves broke into one of my artist's van, and stole his laptop. The loss of a laptop is a tragedy, but

imagine the pain the artist felt when he realized the images of his past five year body of work were stored on the hard drive and nowhere else. True story. BACKUP!

Don't worry about standardizing your image resolution or sizes; simply store the raw file at its highest resolution, and resize images when they are requested by your gallery.