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Art Market Revealed

Nicky Akehurst

"Imagery has become part of fashion and design."

The above statement is extremely important for all aspiring fine art photographers to understand. Detailed explanations will be revealed later in this article. Nicky was born and grew up in New Zealand. In 1978 she left Christchurch, which is situated in South Island, and headed for London; where she has lived ever since and now considers herself to be a Londoner. There she commenced her nursing training but fell ill from an infection caught on the hospital ward. She was so badly treated by hospital administrators during her illness that she decided working in the health service was not for her. She had been assisting part-time in a gallery in Camden and became acquainted with the photographer Charlie Rolf. During the mid-1980s Nicky marketed and managed his collection of black and white images for calendars and postcards. Since that date her expertise has grown considerably in promoting photographers, curating exhibitions, arranging sponsorships, installations, and managing photographic archives.

Contracts for photographers

Nicky wants to emphasise to all aspiring art photographers that they should not be impatient. Many younger photographers expect the world immediately and do not realise that it takes 10 to 15 years to develop their careers. Even if Nicky likes the work of a photographer she refuses to represent them if they are hungry for immediate acclaim. It is important to have an income from commercial photography or another career while building their reputation. If a photographer signs an exclusive contract then they must ensure that they stick to it. Many photographers become frustrated at the slow pace of progress and ignore their contracts by being greedy, because they want faster results that someone else may promise. Reneging on a contract can be fatal for a career. Once it becomes known that a contract has been broken, arranging contracts with other agents could become impossible.

Photographers tend to work in isolation. If they study at college they are provided with continual guidance and appraisal. When they leave, they start working in a vacuum. It is very important that a photographer seeks out a mentor who can offer a professional and unbiased critique of their work together with inspiration and help. Nicky provides this service to all the photographers she represents. She develops a strong working relationship (which can be very intense), listening to and dealing with professional and personal frustrations, then offering advice. She can be very forthright and has been known to tell photographers to grab their cameras - and take more images to add to their archives - instead of blocking her telephone line!

Successful selling images

The million dollar question is always, "what images are selling?" Images that sell vary considerably depending on the market, industry segment, and whether they are commercial stock images or gallery images. As a rule of thumb an image should be evocative, strong, graphic and timeless. Colour work is always a challenge but of course is the market preference for advertising, marketing, posters, calendars and book covers. Certain subject matter such as the Bruce Rae series of botanical studies is a genre that never goes out of style, and appeals to companies such as IKEA and ArtGroup for their wall décor market. Currently there is a revival of interest in powerful images which stand alone and communicate a mood, event, era, place or activity. The power of such an image, which does not require text or captions to be understood, is a valuable commodity. Commercial prices are falling and many smaller photo libraries are struggling. As retail prices fall so do prices paid for stock images which have to rely on royalty sales. Prices paid for images can vary from £500.00 (USD\$1,000) for a book cover, £4,000 (USD\$8,000) for a series of images used for a calendar and up to £20,000 (USD\$40,000) for an image mass printed for the poster market. These prices are only a rough guideline and can vary up or down depending on the image, market and whether the circulation is national or international.



Nautilus, Salt Print ©Bruce Rae



The Gallery Market

This market is very cyclical and varies greatly from country to country. The avid and serious collectors are predominately from the USA, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland. Great Britain has very different types of buyers who tend to be professionals between 30 and 45 years of age. This particular purchaser tends to buy what is fashionable and only wants a certain number of artworks to cover their walls rather than to build up a collection. Once they have reached this level they may never buy again and are more likely to sell an image when it drops out of fashion. The plus side is that they are prepared to spend a lot of money and there are lots of potential purchasers who fit this profile.

Galleries vary enormously on which photographers they exhibit: the portfolio of images, edition size, the printing process and whether the prints are

contemporary or vintage. Top galleries tend to feature only established artists with a minimum selling price of £1,000 plus , per print, because their 50% commission is barely enough to cover the costs of the gallery expenses. This makes it difficult for emerging artists to exhibit in major galleries.

Akehurst Creative Management

Nicky Akehurst specializes in the management of photographers and archives, monitoring image copyright, undertaking picture research for corporate clients and developing touring exhibitions. Currently, on a full time basis , she promotes about six photographers and accepts other photographers on single projects. To view more images, and to find out more about the services provided by her agency visit www.nickyakehurst.com

Notting Hill Couple 1967
©Charlie Phillips



Top: Abbeyfeale Cafe 1974 Somerville MA, ©Jerry Berndt

Right: Ella Fitzgerald in the Gaumont State Cinema, Kilburn. Jazz at the Philharmonic, London 1958 ©Jamie Hodgson estate.

This photo of Ella, who was in a very bad mood, was taken backstage before a Sunday night performance. According to Jamie: "She was complaining because they wouldn't allow Oscar Peterson onstage to accompany her, due to the unions' regulations."

