

Jackie Battenfield -

# The Artist's Guide: How to make a living doing what you love.

**Mark Golden:** Jackie, this past June you published, *The Artist's Guide: How to Make a Living Doing What You Love*. What got you started on this journey?

**Jackie Battenfield:** In 1989, I took eight years of experience running the Rotunda Gallery, a non profit exhibition space in Brooklyn, and decided to use those skills on myself to make a living from my painting.

It was a similar time to now, the economy was in recession which had hit the New York art world pretty hard. I also didn't pin my hopes on one gallery, but decided to develop a broad base of support for my work with multiple art dealers throughout the USA. I did my research, interviewed friends, corresponded, received tons of rejection, but positive responses as well. Over the next few years I began relationships with art professionals who had an audience for my work.

In 1992, the Bronx Museum of the Arts asked me to take over the Artist in the Marketplace (AIM) seminars. This program was twelve evening sessions with a select group of emerging artists where they would meet with art professionals and discuss business issues.

It was a perfect fit for me, my night out, and helped relieve the isolation of my studio practice. I could take the lessons and challenges I was facing building my own career and share the information with a motivated group of emerging artists.

**Mark:** Did you set that curriculum up for the AIM program?

**Jackie:** Not entirely, the AIM program had been around for over a decade, but I made changes. I created more interaction between the artists, assigned homework, nurtured community, and shared my "from the trenches" experience.

I could speak frankly as one artist to another in a safe place where we could discuss issues and exchange information as colleagues.

**Mark:** I think that comes across really well in the new book too, the voice of someone who's been there.

**Jackie:** I encouraged the artists to bring in their experiences -- the good, bad and ugly. Often, an artist thinks they are the only one struggling with an issue that everyone else has figured out. Sharing helps you realize others grapple with it, too.

**Mark:** I've run across many AIM artists that went through the program with you and noticed how grateful they were for the program and their admiration of your skills.

**Jackie:** Thank you. As my AIM seminars became well-known, I was invited to do others. I helped design workshops for the Creative Capital Foundation, and I teach a professional development class in the MFA program at Columbia University. These experiences have allowed me to sharpen my skills teaching strategies of self-promotion, grant writing, financial management, and organization to artists at different stages of their career.

The weekend retreat developed at the Creative Capital Foundation has allowed me to work with wonderful artists around the USA. I have witnessed and addressed the challenges they face to maintain their practice in big and little cities, small towns, and small rural communities.

**Mark:** Jackie, can you talk a little bit about creating a college level curriculum, I assume it created some significant challenges and debate.

**Jackie:** The wonderful thing about a semester class is that I get to provide information systematically and assign homework. I concentrate on those skills artists need the first decade out of school. I have found some messages are hard for a student to comprehend, such as how isolating your studio practice can be and the self-discipline necessary to create art in the midst of juggling life and an outside job.

Working with students over fifteen weeks, I can address the organization, promotional, and financial challenges they will encounter and walk them through ways to manage them. These are the skills that are seldom addressed in a

structured fashion outside the occasional career workshop. There is a significant difference between the systematic approach of a semester-long curriculum and the hit or miss of workshops.

**Mark:** I'm sure there have been some incredibly inviting schools, but many say what you teach is careerism when speaking of educating the student to survive as an artist.

**Jackie:** That's unfortunate, as my classes are designed to help artists understand and apply skills and techniques that will allow them to make their best work over a lifetime.

**Mark:** Careerism. Well, the battle is not amongst the students who are so appreciative of the information, or certainly emerging artists who are now in the real world and hadn't got that education, but it's the educational institutions that seem to create the greatest obstacle to these classes.

**Jackie:** My book and classes are about teaching life skills: how to maintain a studio practice. They're not about how to get famous, but how to live a fulfilling life as an artist.

**Mark:** I saw that several times in the book you downplayed your incredible credentials for what you do, Jackie. I wonder, at some point when you'll be able to consider yourself more than 'working in the field'.

**Jackie:** [Laughter] I do have a lot of experience working with artists and am able to provide one example of a satisfying career. Our society does not offer up many models of success outside the art stars or skid row. So artists end up judging themselves by polar opposites. But if you ask most artists what success means - it is having the time, space, and money to make the art they envision, and sharing it with a receptive audience.

**Mark:** Well I know you're aware of all sorts of books, videos, and websites that are offering marketing how to's for artists. What makes *The Artist's Guide* different?

**Jackie:** Yes, there's a lot of advice out there. Over the years I consulted many career guides for artists. Most aren't written by practicing artists so they can't speak to an artist in the intimate way I can, as I face the same challenges they do.

So my book goes beyond telling an artist WHAT to do, it addresses WHY they should do it. How it will benefit

them. For example, given limited time and resources, artists need to understand the payoff of a well written artist statement, keeping records, networking, or a budget, otherwise they won't make the investment to do it.

**Mark:** What was also helpful are the quotes from a wide range of professionals peppered throughout the book, a network of the larger artist community to share, and stress the points you were making in their own words.

**Jackie:** Absolutely. When teaching my AIM and Columbia students I found that when another art professional validates the information I've given them, the point is driven home, so I included other voices in my book.

**Jackie:** I conducted 34 interviews with art professionals, many of them artists accomplished in several fields. For example, one of the arts lawyers I interviewed, Sergio Sarmiento, became a lawyer as part of his art practice. Jaq Chartier is a widely exhibited painter and co-founded a Miami Basel art fair.

**Mark:** You've also continued to use the website you started even before the book was published. What was its purpose and how do you see it evolving?

**Jackie:** There's probably no better marketing tool than a good website. I wanted to share the interviews I was conducting right away, so eighteen months before the book was released, I began posting them on the book's website. That information has been used by artists and teachers and their students long before the book came out.

**Mark:** It's a great contribution and offers opportunities beyond the book as well, Jackie.

**Jackie:** It took a lot of effort to edit the transcripts and slowed my writing but was well worth it.

**Mark:** What I found really profound was that the book speaks to any businessperson who's a sole proprietor. Why is it such an uncommon message to share with artists?

**Jackie:** 'Cause artists don't consider themselves a business. These days an artist's education is in an academic environment that values teaching technique and theory. The student has no opportunity to witness the day-to-day issues artists encounter. Most programs insist there is no room in their curriculum to address practical matters.

In the past an artist's education came through apprenticeship to a master. You started sweeping floors and moved up to painting the backgrounds. As you stepped up the ranks you watched the master artist run the studio and court patrons.

**Mark:** There's a real separation that seems so arbitrary.

**Jackie:** Yes. Art professors present one kind of model, teaching to support an art practice. Most of them can't address other ways to sustain a career outside the academy.

**Mark:** Jackie, when you were writing this book, it was smack in the middle of this severe economic crisis. Is there a message in *The Artist's Guide* that responds to what artists are facing now?

**Jackie:** What I address in the book are tools and techniques that serve artists during economic upturns and downturns. They are life skills that can maintain them in any economy. Even during the best of times an artist can have a show that doesn't sell.

**Mark:** Or even in the midst of good times artists are unlikely to be supported by the gallery.

**Jackie:** Right. My book discusses skills anyone can learn.

**Mark:** So our current circumstances don't really matter.

**Jackie:** I don't want to underestimate its challenges, but an artist could experience scarcity in the midst of plenty or have multiple opportunities in an economic recession.

**Mark:** Jackie, even before the book's release you've been one of the most sought out experts and lecturers on the development of artists' careers. Have you managed to insert art making back into your life?

**Jackie:** I'm in my studio allowing new work to slowly generate.

**Mark:** Thanks, Jackie. For most people, any one of the single career paths that you've taken would have been enough to pursue, but you've managed multiple paths and navigated them incredibly well. Thanks for sharing your story.

**Jackie:** I feel lucky to wake up every day and make art or work with my community. What better life could you ask for?



## About the Author

Twenty years ago Jackie Battenfield was faced with the frightening choice many artists confront: give up on her own dreams, or discover how to make a living from her art. Applying her experience as a gallery director, and after years of trial and error, she achieved her goals, and then some. Today in workshops and seminars in New York City and across America, Battenfield shares these skills with artists at all stages of their career. *The Artist's Guide* picks up where art school leaves off, and teaches artists how to successfully share their talent with the world.

With equal parts of practicality, warmth, good humor, and insight, Jackie Battenfield shares her years of experience as a self-supporting artist and makes the overwhelming task of growing and sustaining an art career clear and manageable. *The Artist's Guide* is a resource artists will return to at every stage of their career.

Jackie Battenfield is represented in galleries throughout the United States and in over a thousand collections worldwide. She teaches professional practices at Columbia University and for the Creative Capital Foundation.

Visit [www.artistcareerguide.com](http://www.artistcareerguide.com) today to order your copy of the book and access over 20 full-length interviews with gallerists, art lawyers, curators, and artists.

