



HOW TO SELL ART QUILTS INDEPENDENTLY (WITHOUT USING THE ART ESTABLISHMENT) - AN INTERVIEW WITH CINDY GRISDELA

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Clara Nartey Interviews Cindy Grisdela

Cindy is an award-winning artist, an author, and a teacher. Her formal education includes a BA in Fine Arts and an MBA. She improvisationally designs colorful abstract art quilts without a preconceived pattern in mind. It's my pleasure to welcome Cindy Grisdela to the blog today.

CN: Hi Cindy, welcome to the Clara Nartey Blog for this episode of Textile Arts Business Interview

CG: Thank you Clara, it's a pleasure to be here.

CN: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came into textile art?

CG: I've been sewing since I was old enough to reach the pedals of my Mom's Singer, and I made most of my clothes as a teenager and young adult.

How Cindy Got Started with Art Quilts

I don't come from a quilting tradition since there weren't any quilters in my family, but I was always encouraged to be creative. In my early twenties, I fell in love with quilts after I saw an article in a magazine.

I assumed that since I knew how to sew already, making a quilt should be no big deal. My first quilt was a queen size Trip Around the World, and I realized I had a lot to learn! But I was hooked on quilting and never looked back.

CN: Cindy, give us some insight into your creative process and how you come about making your beautiful art quilts.

CG: I started out making quilts using traditional patterns, but somewhere along the way I got tired of using patterns and decided to see if I could come up with my own style. I love improvisational quilts because each design evolves organically as my choices of color and shape influence each other. It's sort of like putting together a jigsaw puzzle, but I get to decide what the picture on the box looks like.

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Typically I don't make preliminary sketches or drawings first; I just cut into the fabric to make shapes, put them up on my design wall, and play with them until I have a design that speaks to me.

Why Cindy Chooses to Work with Fabric and Not Another Medium



Cindy Grisdela in Her Studio

CN: I'm often intrigued to hear what made artists who've been exposed to different forms of art media chose textiles over the other media. What is it about fabrics that makes you like working with them?

CG: I've tried a lot of different media over the years--drawing, painting, sculpture, pottery--but what I enjoy most about working with fiber is the tactile nature of the medium.

I can create an interesting composition with color, line, and shape, and then I can add another layer or dimension with dense free motion quilting. My stitching is more than just a way to hold three layers together; it's an integral part of the design itself.

CN: That's exactly how I feel about my stitching too. One question I hear very often from art quilters is, "how do I sell my work"?



Two Paths to Selling Your Artwork



Cindy Grisdela Giving a Lecture

To my mind, there are two paths. The traditional path, which is the Art Establishment Path – through galleries, art consultants, art shows and more.

And the second path which is the Independent Artist Path, where an artist sells their work directly to collectors, through fine craft shows, open studios, personal online stores etc.

My question is two-fold. First, do you agree with my assessment of these two paths and second, which of the paths have you pursued in selling your art and why?

CG: Yes, I agree with you.

I've tried a number of different ways to sell my work--some from the first path and some from the second.

I found that I like selling my work directly to the customer through fine art and craft shows, open studios and through my website. The reason for this is that I believe that collectors buy the artist and his or her story as much as they buy the artwork itself. And no one can tell my story as successfully as I can.

The Number One Reason Artists Have Trouble Selling Their Work



Cindy Grisdela An Award Winner

You have to market yourself to be successful, but you can do it in a way that makes people happy to hear from you.

CN: A lot of people struggle to sell their work. In your opinion, what's the number one misconception quilt artists have about their ability to sell their work?

What is the mindset that holds people from being successful at selling their art-work?

CG: The number one reason artists of any medium have trouble selling their work is they don't want to market themselves--they don't want to seem "pushy."

You have to market yourself to be successful, but you can do it in a way that makes people happy to hear from you by being active on one or two social media sites and collecting email addresses at your events for a regular email newsletter.

CN: How do you balance producing your art and promoting it?

CG: That balancing act is really tough. I probably spend 50% of my time making art and 60% marketing it. Yes, I know that adds up to more than 100% and that's the problem. To be successful, you can't just say "I'd rather be in the studio" and not be willing to put in the time to have a blog, a robust social media presence, write a regular email newsletter, and get yourself and your work out in the world. Nobody is going to beat a path to your door, no matter how good your art is.

CN: Well said Cindy, well said. So, what's been your biggest challenge in selling your art and what have done or are you doing to overcome this?



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The Biggest Challenge of Selling Art Quilts

CG: The biggest challenge to selling my art has been educating customers about the idea of putting a quilt on the wall instead of on the bed.

When I'm out at a show, or anywhere else with my work, I think of myself as an ambassador for the art quilt. Because we're involved in the art quilt world, we tend to think that everyone knows about it, but they don't, and you have to be

willing to explain why anyone should be interested in quilts as art.

This is not something most painters have to deal with. To help overcome this problem, several years ago I started mounting my smaller quilts on painted black canvas. That gives the piece more of a presence for the wall and allows me to offer a variety of price points in my booth for people who enjoy my work.

We Can't Run Away From History

CN: You make a good point, Cindy. The concept of an art quilt as wall art is foreign to most people. However, that hasn't stopped you from selling a lot of art quilts. Do you think there'll ever come a time when art quilters will enjoy the acceptance painters have and they'll not have to explain why they or their art-work should be taken seriously?

CG: Unfortunately, I doubt it. Painting has such a long history that many people feel it's the only "real" art. That's hard to combat, but I'll keep trying!

CN: So, what exactly do you say to a buyer by way of an explaining why they should purchase an art quilt?

CG: I emphasize the warmth and texture hanging textiles on the walls gives to a room, as well as the more intimate feel a quilt has compared to other types of wall art. Sometimes people are concerned about how to clean an art quilt, and I reassure them that a lint roller will do the job just fine. Most of the time it's not a hard sell--if people aren't interested in textile art they don't stop in my booth, and if they have stopped and expressed interest in a piece, then they are already part way to taking it home.





Cindy Grisdela at the Ann Arbor Art Show

Making Time to Create

Making art is my passion and putting my work out there is my job....

CN: You're a pretty busy woman. You teach, you travel extensively, and you maintain consistent open studio hours. How do you make time for it all?

CG: I think of myself as a small business and every day I'm working at some aspect of my craft.

Making art quilts is my passion, and putting my work out there by teaching, lecturing, writing my book--Artful Improv, and traveling to shows is my job. I'm incredibly fortunate to be able to do what I love.

Each day I make a list of the things that have to get done that day and use that to organize my time. It helps that my boys are grown and out on their own now, and my husband is very supportive of what I do.



CN: You're exactly right. I used the same concept for the title of my [free ebook - "Win @ Work & Play"](#). Because I believe there are two parts to our creative lives. First of all, we have creating and following our passions, which falls under the play part. In addition, we've got promoting your creations so you get paid to play some more and follow your passion which falls under the work part of it.

Finally, Cindy before I let you go, there are two segments I include in every interview because readers really enjoy these segments.

(a) The first is this: "What are your five favorite tools, supplies and resources"?

(b) The second is, "What are 6 Tips you can give to someone who's struggling to independently sell their textile artwork".

Cindy's Five Favorites



Cindy Grisdela's Five Favorites

1. My Bernina Sewing Machine
2. [Instagram](#)--a great way to connect with people who like your work
3. Oversized [Olfa cutting mat](#) and [rotary cutter](#) for free-form cutting
4. Cherrywood hand-dyed solid fabrics - they have such strong saturated colors!
5. [King Tut variegated threads](#) - to add additional texture and dimension to my stitching.



Cindy's Tips for Independently Selling Your Artwork



1. Make the best art you can
2. Have a good looking website and keep it updated.
3. Choose one or two social media outlets and be actively involved in sharing your work and interacting with your followers.
4. Collect emails from people interested in your work and send out a regular email newsletter. These are people who WANT to hear from you.
5. Make work in a variety of sizes and price points.
6. Get yourself and your art out in the world as much as possible by doing things like these. Entering shows and hanging your work in the library. Furthermore, participate in an art group in your community--even if you're the only fiber artist. Moreover, submit proposals, and say yes to opportunities that come your way!



Thanks Cindy for coming on to share your business insights with us. To learn more about Cindy Grisdela's art quilts and her workshops, [visit her website](#).

Interview Quotes and Highlights

- △ I assumed that since I knew how to sew already, making a quilt should be no big deal
- △ I believe that collectors buy the artist and his or her story as much as they buy the artwork itself. And no one can tell my story as successfully as I can.
- △ You have to market yourself to be successful, but you can do it in a way that makes people happy to hear from you
- △ I probably spend 50% of my time making art and 60% marketing it.
- △ Making art is my passion and putting my work out there is my job...



Clara Nartey is an artist and a writer. She finds and interviews thriving entrepreneurs from all over the world about their mindsets and the systems they use to grow their businesses, in order to help artists learn how to start or grow their own creative businesses. To get more of her writings and access to her free resources for textile & quilt artists, makers, and creators, [sign up here](#).



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