

PUT THE BEST OF YOURSELF IN EVERYTHING YOU DO & NEVER LOOK BACK

A Candid Conversation with Daniele Proner

I teach my two sons, Frank and Paul, that it's important to practice what you preach, to know and trust that you're doing the best you can with what you have, and to make the best choices based on what you have and know at the time. I also remind them that the thoughts they have today are their reality tomorrow. I believe positive thoughts grow, that they have their own energy. This is how I try to live my life.

When I came back to the United States from Europe last year I was faced with having to make a living. After all, I have two kids to support. I thought I would look for a job and at the same time try to find somebody to market my work. I asked a lot of people for help. I just kept putting it out there again and again. I got a lot of advice and a lot of names of people who might possibly help me.

I called every single name I was given, but it became apparent to me after a while that I wasn't getting anywhere. I finally realized that the answer wasn't out there, it was inside me. There is no magic answer, no Prince Charming who is going to come and rescue me. I knew then that I would have to represent myself.

In the meantime I was offered a few jobs, but I turned them down because they weren't what I really wanted to do. I knew what I really wanted to do was be a full-time

artist. Making that decision was scary, but I also felt empowered. It was like declaring to the world "I am who I am".

I was terrified last December and January. I had no money, no job, and I wasn't sure where I was going. I felt like I had jumped off the cliff. I was in mid-air and I didn't know where I was going to land. But somehow the money came. I think when you make this kind of commitment to yourself, other people respond to it, too.

Friends asked me if I needed help and I said yes. I didn't say no. I didn't try to be tough and pretend everything was okay when it wasn't. One woman bought an extra gallon of milk every week and brought it to me. Another friend offered me \$300 which I accepted. They helped me to survive this hard time and I am very grateful. But, even though this period was very difficult for me and my family, I am so glad I trusted my gut and stuck with it. I realize now this was the time when the chrysalis was becoming a butterfly.

Watercolor on Silk

When I am asked about my work I say I do watercolor on silk. Some people have a tendency to want to downgrade what I do and say it isn't really fine art. I don't like being judged. I consider myself a fine artist. I see no difference between painting on silk and watercolor. Both techniques involve applying layer after layer of transparent color, moving from light to dark. And, like watercolor, I have to know where a painting is going before I start. The silk is unforgiving. I can't paint over my mistakes. If I make a mistake I have to discard the entire painting. I find I thrive on this lack of compromise.

Before I began painting on silk, I was trained in drawing and oil painting in France and I have an MFA (Diplome Supérieur d'Arts Plastiques) from Beaux Arts, Paris. In school I ran across a lot of people who were there simply because they had nowhere else to go. It was very sad. They were not really committed to what they were doing and it showed in their work. It takes a lot of dedication and commitment to make art.



I cannot stress enough the importance, I feel, of being trained in how to handle a brush or pencil properly. You can have a lot of energy, but you have to know how to apply it. I call that connection between the brain and the hand the "art muscle". It has to be worked constantly to keep it in good shape. It's wonderful knowing that the older I get and the more experience I have the less I have to concern myself with the technical aspects of what I do. It frees me. I know how the colors will react. I know how the brush responds. Nothing is holding me back.

Representing Myself

When I decided to represent myself, I had to start at step one. Do I really like what I do and am I confident I am doing the best work I can do? When I decided the answer to both those questions was yes, I was ready. I knew no amount of rejection would bother me because I believe in myself.

Presenting my work in a professional manner is very important. I have a nice looking portfolio, not too slick, with photographs and slides of my work, and my resume. I have also worked a lot on being very clear and concise about who I am, what I do

and what my inspiration is. I keep it to a minimum, using as few words as possible.

Follow-through is critical. I make a lot of phone calls. I follow up every possible lead. If someone expresses an interest in my work I make sure I stay in touch with that person. I do what I say I am going to do. I keep my promises.

Perhaps the most important thing I've learned is when to shut up. I've learned not to comment on my work when I'm showing it. What I put into a painting isn't necessarily what the viewer is getting from it, and it is the right of the viewer to see whatever she wants to see in it. A painting is like a child, once it's out of me it has a life of its own. Why should I tell people they are wrong about what they are seeing? It's none of my business. Also, I never point out my mistakes. Never. I have to believe I did the best I could and then let it go.

Have The Answers Ready

I make sure I am ready to answer any questions people have about my work. The question I get asked most often is how much time I spend on a painting. I took the time to figure it out and discovered I spend an average of two hours to paint a square foot of silk.

It's important to have a pricing structure for your work. People don't like hearing "Well, it depends...". They want directness. Some artists base their prices on what paintings they like best. You can't do that. I had some pieces I didn't like at all and they were the first things to be sold. You never know. You also can't base your pricing on how long a painting takes to complete. Is the painting that takes a month to finish necessarily better than one that takes three days? I don't think so.

In pricing my work, I decided I wanted to make \$60 an hour. When I averaged in the time I spend on a painting I decided to charge \$1 per square inch. People love the idea. It's



Reverie ©1990 Daniele Proser

Painted on silk using the French Serti technique.

more understandable, less threatening. It takes the mystery out of it. I have sold a lot of work using this system.

Donating can help you get your foot in the door. I believe in donating, but I am selective. Last Christmas, I opened my studio in Berkeley. I knew I wasn't going to sell any of the paintings, so I was content to just enjoy the feedback I got on them. Most of it was very positive and complimentary.

Then, one woman came in and really responded to my work. We started talking and I showed her a copy of a poster for a wildlife organization in eastern Europe for which I had donated the painting. She got very excited. Through her I am now doing a poster for the primate center at Duke University. Again, it is a donation, but I have since been commissioned to design their logo and I have several other strong leads for commis-

sions. It has been a wonderful experience.

It showed me that when you give and don't hold back sooner or later it comes back to you in ways you could never have imagined. I have faith. I trust that when I put my best into what I do that the world will respond to it. I've also learned that I don't deplete myself when I give it away. I am tapped into a limitless source.

Choosing to live as an artist is like navigating in strange waters. But now that I've chosen my direction I will never look back. I hope I will never say "what if I had..." I intend to always look forward, never backward. It's important to be open, willing and ready. When someone asks you if you can do something, say yes. And, even though you may not know where you are headed, trust that you are headed in the right direction. I believe anything is possible.