

## TAA Podcast Season 3 Episode 1: John Kraft

Cory: Okay. Hey Crowdcast listeners and watchers. We're just about to go live, we're just setting up Facebook stuff. Hey Susan. So hang tight, I've got John right here and we'll go live in just a second.

I just have to make sure that I keep the Facebook broadcast going here so that I know that it's going and so I can see comments, and I have to make sure that the audio on that one is turned off. Perfect.

John: That's always- when you're doing these things and I know that we're in the lobby as it were, it's amazing when there's so many things and you have a ghost in the machine and you're trying to say okay, what thing is not quite working, or what is that extra voice coming from?

Cory: Yes, indeed. The internet is complicated.

John: Yes. While we are waiting I'm going to send out a thank-you to Gwenn, cause I see Gwenn's comment about the colors, which I think is about the splash image of one of my pieces, so thanks so much. And Dorothea as well, Laura, thank you. So yeah, love. We artists love that affirmation, don't we? Yes we do.

Cory: Cool. Alright. 35 seconds.

John: I always wanted to work for SpaceX and now I feel like I am, we're doing a countdown. Just, there's less at stake probably.

Cory: So all of you that are here early that are in the lobby with us, feel free if you want, to add some additional questions over in Crowdcast, you can click on the Ask a Question section and if we can get- we may get to everybody's question, we may not, but we should have a good conversation. Alright, excellent. Here we go.

Hello everybody, this is Cory with The Abundant Artist. I'm super excited that you're here, that you joined us. And over on Facebook, hello everybody. I'm excited to be reintroducing the new season of The Abundant Artist Podcast.

I'm very excited to welcome our guest John Kraft who we'll get to in just a second. I just want a little housekeeping thing- I want to say hi to everybody that's watching live, as well as hello to everybody who is listening to the recording afterward. This podcast has been going off and on for about three years. We interview artists from all over the world to talk to them about how they make a living from their work as well as what kind of life they make with their work. So I'm excited to welcome today's guest, John Kraft.

I'll share a little bit of John's bio from his website: John was born L.A. in 1967 and after graduating in 1989 with degrees in mechanical and marine engineering, John decided to pursue an artistic path. Throughout the 90s he developed a style and a visual vocabulary punctuated by bright colors and whimsical themes, which we'll get to in just a few minutes. He was selected as a featured artist by Apple in 2001 and his art has been included in Better Homes & Gardens, The

Artful Home and Modern Painters. He's received coverage by the San Francisco Chronicle, the Huffington Post, the LA times, and MacWorld UK. In 2010 John was selected to create a large heart for Heroes and Hearts which benefits the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation. John participated in the Amsterdam-based project eARTH...looks like earth, spelled out. And his work was featured in recent live auctions for the San Francisco Firefighter's Cancer... la la la, John is great. He's a member of the City Art Gallery, the Red Umbrella Fine Art Group, and the Marin Open Studio's board of directors. So John, thank you very much for being here. I'm excited to have you here today.

John: Thank you Cory, it was great to speak to you all those years back and it's nice to be here again. I must share with everybody who's watching, one of the things I mentioned to Cory is one of the probably many things he and I have in common- is we kind of picked what we loved to do and we stuck with it, and all these years later, look! We're still doing it. So I think that's probably a good setup for the whole conversation.

Cory: That is a good introduction to the conversation. And I didn't even mention in the introduction that back when I started The Abundant Artist, that was in 2009, and I started The Abundant Artist by interviewing artists that- any artist that I could get a hold of, I would try to interview, either try to do an audio recording or do a blog post about them and how they make a living from their work. And in 2010 John graciously gave a nobody blogger his time to talk about how he sells his work, and I'm super excited to have him back 7 years later as we're still going. So I'm excited to have this conversation today, John. So let's dive right in.

Your website, everybody who wants to see your work can see it at [JohnKraft.com](http://JohnKraft.com), that's Kraft with a K. And your website features your current work and calls it assemblage. I know you did the heart thing, and then you also have some flower-based pieces and the Sausalito festival, so how would you describe your art?

John: Very good, well there's two main bodies of work. You mentioned the digital assemblage and that's the work that I've been doing for 15, 20 years. And that's a composite of traditional techniques and digital techniques. The result is an additional series of work, so that's like the core work that I've done for years. It includes all sorts of illustrations. Some of those illustrations have included, many of them, I should say, have included flowers and floral patterns. So after years of doing digital, I almost kind of did it in reverse. Many people go from traditional into digital, I kind of made my circuitous path back to mixed-media and getting my hands dirty, and now my main focus is this mixed-media and resin work, and briefly what I'm doing is I'm taking these custom illustrations that I've created over the years, I'm printing them on archival sheets of paper, I'm hand-cutting those into the different patterns, and then I'm creating what amounts to floral patterns of those illustrations, and then finishing, I'm including acrylic paint and different things for color, and then I'm finishing with a two part epoxy resin.

So what's interesting about this new work is it truly is the culmination of all those years of creativity. There's a rather overstated, clichéd story of Picasso that did a quick sketch for a woman, and he handed it to her and he told her the price and she said "My God, how long did that take?" and his response was "72 years". So the point of that story or that anecdote is that what we all create respectively as artists is the culmination of our experience and what we've done. And what's kind of a neat little caveat of my work is there's both the esoteric kind of truth

of that, but then the substantive truth that if you buy a piece that I completed last night, it includes creative input going back well over a decade. And that's a lot of fun, and again the response to the new work has been fantastic. I know we're gonna talk about things like price points, things like that, but getting back into the original one-of-a-kind pieces and it's allowed me to provide or offer up a series at much higher price points. And yeah, so that's my somewhat brief response to your first question.

Cory: I love it! I love it. So basically this maybe gives you a little bit of an opportunity to reflect back on some of your early work because you're working off of that, right?

John: Absolutely. Absolutely. And it makes, I've already kind of alluded to the fact that it has this kind of built-in story to it, it also has both a general and a literal thread from the work because, and this is something that I think a lot of artists deal with, whether they're established or they're just starting out, it's- there is a lot of truth to the idea of picking a lane, picking a focus, and picking a look and a style. There's something very, for example- when I did that heart back in 2010, it was gratifying that I would hear from people that had seen it across this Union Square, cause it was in Union Square in San Francisco, and they would immediately know it's your work. It's a great feeling to get to that point. The downside, if there is one, is the associated reticence or fear in exploring and pushing and shifting. So a couple years ago when I decided to shift back or shift into this mixed media work, I have to confess there was a little trepidation, and you know, is this the right thing? I've built up a brand over many years with this San Francisco, iconic imagery and palette. Is this going to work? And it was very much a leap of faith, and if there's a thread, there's the thread that we've already discussed in terms of the creativity or the creative assets, the elements, but the other thread is just this love of color.

It was very nice to you know, just when we logged on this morning the very first set of comments from folks like Gwenn and Dorothea specifically, is the reference to color and it's been gratifying to see that thread allow me to kind of push and connect the different collections. So what could have been a challenge to my brand standpoint and a marketing standpoint, it's ended up being less of a challenge than I thought. And the upside has been fantastic.

So what's the summary of that? The summary is, it is smart to have focus in your work. It's smart to have cohesion and to allow people to get to know and appreciate what you're doing and feel that they identify the voice that you have. At the same time, don't be afraid to push and don't be afraid to grow as an artist, because once you lose that in many respects you kind of lose the love of why you're creating in the first place.

Cory: Yeah, the tension between wanting to explore and pushing new directions and having an identifiable brand that, where you have a large body of work that people can purchase, there is a lot of value in having that large body of easily-identifiable work so that people can go "Oh yeah, that's a John Kraft piece, I want to buy that because it's John Kraft," you know, a lot of artists that I work with will push back and say "I don't want to spend a lot of time exploring in one area, or making art in one area." How did you, was that a challenge for you early in your career? Or did you have the desire to go in lots of different directions? Because you've been pretty focused for a long time.

John: Right. Well, I've been focused for a long time, but then again I've been doing it for even longer. So there is a lot of work that you might find online or you might see in, go to [archive.org](https://archive.org) and look at my website from 1992 or something, you might see some stuff that I've tried to erase from the internet. Just kidding. But there was definitely that period of time where I was trying absolutely everything. And even within this last 2 years I've explored different things. There's some original abstract work on the site that's very simple, they're almost like color studies. So going back to your question, once I had settled on that- not settled, really it's the wrong word. Once I'd defined the style of putting together these digital elements and traditional elements and I was focused on these concepts of color, of repetition, of symmetry, and that kind of defined my aesthetic, I felt quite happy to explore subject matter within that. So if you look at the digital assemblage work, that's how I refer to it, there's a wide variety of subject matter. Certainly there's the San Francisco focus, but there's wine country, there's fantasy, there's different groupings that I've created. In addition to all that, there's a new collection that I released two years ago called Desk Art, of all things.

Cory: I just want to-

John: Yeah please, go ahead.

Cory: I want to, something you said stuck out to me. You differentiated between aesthetic and subject matter. And you basically said that you would, you define an aesthetic like being a technique and a way that you work and a color scheme and things like that. But then in that aesthetic you started exploring different subject matter. I think that's really interesting. You know, a lot of artists that are trying to be all over the place and going wherever their heart takes them, that's maybe that's an interesting way for those artists to create cohesion in their work.

John: Right. And it goes back to the top of the discussion, you read a bit from my bio and I have this phrase where, especially around the digital work, where I had developed a vocabulary. And once I had that vocabulary slash aesthetic, however you want to define it, it allowed me to tell different stories, but using basically a lot of the same words and the same concepts. And that created a thread of you know, consistency across the work. A lot of people that look at the digital work, they'll see that I have this little blue character in a lot of the pieces. It's kind of like, you know- that blue character can represent anything, it can represent anybody, it can be you, it could be me, it could be whatever. But it's, it was a lot of fun to kind of play in that space for a while.

And now, getting back to the most recent work, and I know we want to talk more than just about the work itself, but with the most recent work it is still this focus on color and joy and whimsy. There is certainly no heavy handed political commentary going on here, I am not exorcising any demons to speak of. It's just joyful work. So there are some people who respond really well to kind of you would almost call it lite or just pop-y bright work, and there are some folks who really demand more of what they engage with. They want it to have deeper themes. And I could certainly tease out those deeper themes. Because if there's a deeper theme than finding happiness and joy I'd love to hear what it is because I think that's pretty deep. But anyway.

Cory: No, I love that. Like we, in the art world, there's a lot of focus on negativity. There's shock art and political art and the art that portrays the darker side of humanity tends to get a lot of attention. And especially in the art media, right, the New York Times and the Hyperallergic, things like that. But I think that finding happiness and meaning in life is just as important and meaningful as exploring all the dark stuff. So I love that.

John: I do.

Cory: So you mentioned briefly the heart thing, and you've been involved in a number of charitable projects.

John: Right.

Cory: So tell us a little bit about some of your favorite charitable projects, what the heart thing is, and then we'll talk a little bit about why you go there.

John: Sure, sure. I mean the heart is probably the most notable. Again that was back in 2010, it's a fundraiser that's held every year for the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation. And they select- artists apply, it's like an open call for artists, it's almost like an open call for a gallery show. It's pretty similar, it's run in a similar way. But they select a small group of artists each year. Sometimes 6, sometimes 8. And they're invited to not create the physical heart, the heart is created, it's an existing sculpture that's basically delivered to you, and then you apply your style, your vision, to that heart. And the event is called Heroes & Hearts because what San Francisco General does is it celebrates heroes within the community and then it also celebrates the arts through their creation of these hearts. The hearts are then auctioned off or sponsored by corporations and foundations. Usually to the- I mean, it varies, but to the tune of between twenty-five and fifty thousand dollars per heart, and that money goes to the foundation. That's one.

A more recent one has been Project Earth with an organization called Just Dig It out of Amsterdam, and they're building, creating new hydrological corridors in Sub-Saharan Africa, and one of the, not just a metaphor, but literally the tool that they use is a shovel because really, and just very briefly- if you dig a lot of trenches, it can retain the rainwater, you can then have growth, then that growth retains more water and it feeds upon itself. So I was fortunate enough to become involved with that organization, they invited me to create one of these shovels and it's not dissimilar from the heart project where you're provided with the piece and then you apply your artwork to it. So that's been really wonderful.

Beyond that I've been involved with organizations like ArtSpan, which is based in San Francisco and it's an artist organization that, it supports artists, but it also supports the collector community and kind of just provides that platform for education, for exhibition, for awareness. Wonderful group. And then most recently I joined the board of directors for Marin Open Studios which is a similar organization that works in Marin County.

So that's a brief description of some of the different groups. In terms of the why, the why is twofold: there is the inherent part which is just altruism, like you know, it feels good to give. And that's about as simple as you can put it. The other aspect of it is something where I'm actually going to allude to the Steve Jobs commencement speech at Stanford University. And my

favorite part of that commencement speech is where he says “You cannot connect the dots looking forward, you can only connect the dots looking backward.” And when I get involved with these organizations, when I deliver a heart that’s going to be sold for \$50,000 that I might not see a dime from, monetarily, I’m doing it, one, because it feels good, as I covered, but the other thing is I’m creating connections. I’m making people aware of what I’m doing. I’m creating a positive brand affinity, to use a fancy term. Like when people say “Oh John Kraft the artist, oh yes, I like his work. Oh, and he also does these other things.” And it’s not contrived. Your fundamental motivation should be to help and to create, but the benefit, the long-term benefit that can come back to you for years and years throughout your career is all the connections you make, all the positive impact that you’re making. And that kind of summarizes both the groups that I’ve been involved with. Oh, I left out an important one- Art for AIDS, which I’ve contributed to over the last 7 or 8 years. And I’ve had a piece accepted this year as well for the live auction. And again, you’re doing something to support a cause but at the same time you’re getting your work in front of thousands and thousands of people.

Cory: Yeah, there’s a few things to unpack there. I get, I know a lot of artists who come to me to say “XYZ charity has asked me to contribute a piece for this auction, should I do it?” And I always, it’s sometimes a struggle to answer that because there’s some information you need to know, right? Like these organizations that you have been involved with have a demonstrated ability to you know, sell a piece for a large amount of money. The heart pieces go for you said \$50,000. If it’s an organization that has an ability to sell something at that price point, that seems like from a marketing and branding perspective, something that’s worth your time, right?

John: Right.

Cory: But if it’s some tiny little charity that doesn’t have any reach and they’re hoping to sell your piece for \$100, that is a very different experience and very different thing that you’re going for.

John: It’s a different experience but I certainly wouldn’t shut them out. Again, so much of what we’re talking about today and you know, probably will get into even more detail about some of the tactics around marketing and presenting yourself as an artist, but so much is tied to where you are in your career. In other words, if you’re just starting out and you have perhaps a smaller nonprofit or an organization that’s looking for donations and they’re going to have a nice reception with 100 people and they’re going to sell your piece for \$100 or \$200 or that’s what ends up getting spent for the piece, maybe that’s perfect for you, in other words. But I agree with you that what you need to do when it comes to the invitations to donate is just to be judicious. So I have fairly specific organizations that I donate to each year. One is ArtSpan, Marin Open Studios, Art for AIDS, and they’re kind of just every year I donate not just because of the, you know, the brand connection or the brand benefit perhaps there. It’s because I’ve built relationships with the people within these organizations and I truly believe in supporting them. So I think it’s about being judicious. You know, If you connect with a cause you want to connect and support causes that you believe in. That’s a part of it too. I’ve heard some people, if I may say, in a fairly heavy-handed way say “Do not donate your work to auctions,” and I could not disagree more strongly. I think it is always unbalanced to you benefit to be altruistic and giving in that regard. It doesn’t mean give away all your work. It doesn’t mean give away your most

expensive piece. It doesn't mean say yes to everyone who asks. But I think the idea that you absolutely shut those folks out is frankly naïve.

Cory: Thank you.

John: How's that for an understatement?

Cory: I like that. I think that any charity or cause that you feel strongly connected to, I think you should support. And then when we get talking about limited time and limited resources, then you start having to make decisions about who you're willing to support and in some cases what you give back for that support. So I think these are, I like the way that you framed it.

John: And it's been a tremendous experience, I mean, with the heart, you know, it was in- I mentioned this, it was in Union Square. This was a- you know, for those who aren't familiar with San Francisco, it's one of the main shopping center points of San Francisco. Tourists, tourists, I mean thousands of people a day, so just that was just so hugely gratifying and helpful. And in terms of just building awareness, and you know, at some point we'll transition to some specific talk about marketing and things of that assort. But very briefly, when it comes to people eventually buying your art, the first thing they need to know is that you exist. So everything you can do, everything you can do to tip that first point or to tick that first box- they know you exist. Then the rest of it can start. Until that first thing happens, you're not going to sell any art. It's analogous to the person that complains about not winning the lottery, but never buys a ticket. You've got to get people aware of you at the front end. And doing things like this charitable work and giving and donations is not only artistically gratifying, but it does yield benefits in other ways.

Cory: Yeah. So this is a good segue to a conversation about the Red Umbrellas. So you, on their website, the Red Umbrellas website, it says "We believe that all artists should not be kept separate from the people who respond to their work. We want to know these people, meet with them, talk art with them, and keep them as friends and collectors." So why did you decide to join the organization? You know, what's your connection with that mission?

John: Sure. Absolutely. Great question. And yeah, I'm very fortunate to be a part of Red Umbrellas which is this artist's guild which is a fairly finite group of artists. It's under, certainly under 20, and they show different parts of San Francisco- it includes Union Square, Golden Gate Park, Washington Square, different parts of the city. And as you just mentioned, one of the missions, one of the reasons the group exists is a belief in the value of delivering fine art directly to the public and being able to engage with artists directly with the public. And of course very brief caveat, I'm fully aware that there are some artists where the last thing they want to do is actually stand in front of people and talk about their work. They want to create it, they want to hand it off to someone else to let them do it. And I have complete respect for those people. The reason I became involved and interested was because I'm definitely, if there's any doubt at this point, I doubt there is, but I'm one of those people that absolutely loves to be connecting with people directly, talking about the process, talking about my work, and meeting with them. It's been hugely gratifying.

I can also share, and this is not for a fact, I'm not inventing a news story because we're being interviewed. I literally sold another piece this morning to a couple from [unintelligible]

California, down south near L.A. that met me in Union Square through Red Umbrellas. And again, it was this ability to interact directly and have that conversation, explain the work. People that collect work often love to meet the artist. But I also wanted to share because this is also another big theme out there with artists developing their work, is these direct channels. I'll use the word channels, direct channels whether it be through your own website or Red Umbrellas in a more physical setting. And then there's the gallery system and the gallery world and I work with gallerists and art consultants. Well guess what- I love them too, because I think everyone has their place and everyone has their role. Certain collectors only want to access, certain collectors don't particularly want to engage directly with the artist, believe it or not. They want to look at some art, they want to talk to someone who's really informed and has a broad context of the art world, and make their selection from those people and get their work that way. So that's fine, you can work with galleries, you can work with art consultants, and again- I don't want to get far afield from your question which was about Red Umbrellas. But I think it's important that my approach to how I sell my work has always been a mix. A mix of activities, let's put it that way. And there are some ground rules to make that successful that we can get into. But it's a mix of being face to face with people, or going through galleries, art consultants. And it's understand that if you set all the right parameters and you have the right attitude and the right communication, frankly, that that can work for you.

Cory: Yeah. Okay, so let's get into it- you mentioned that you know, you have these ground rules. Like, how do you decide, somebody else asks, how do you find out about- Tracy asks, how do you find out about the types of organizations and opportunities that you've been able to take advantage of? So, what's your, you know, how did your radar work, or how do you find these opportunities for yourself?

John: It's a great question and there's a bit of a reference there also to that Steve Jobs quote that I threw out there about connecting dots. Some of it is very intentional, and I'm sure Cory has shared this over the years, there are sites that list all open calls for art, some of those open calls, the nonprofits will get involved and they'll throw their calls for art within there and they'll just state that it's a fundraiser. But I think probably the number one thing apart from the online resources is getting out there to gallery openings, getting involved with your local art organizations, just being out there. And that is perhaps a broader theme which is- I am the first to be a major advocate for online, I mean, I have- I spend most of my life online, many would say. But the success you'll find as an artist, particularly as you're building your career and creating these dots and becoming aware of things is by physically getting out there. By going to galleries. One of the first things a gallerist is probably going to ask you if you walk in there or contact them about showing your work is "Have you been to one of our openings?" The answer had better be yes. Because if you've not been to one of their openings, if you've not supported the gallery, and in a consistent way, not in a one off "Hey, I'm going to go to your one opening and then I'm going to call you." But if you provide that support you'll get a lot out of that. One, you become, you get yourself out there and you have the networking component. But you become aware of these opportunities.

I'm trying to think back, again, this was 2009 actually, when I created the heart because they release them the year after typically, just the way the schedule hits. And I'm trying to remember exactly how I heard about that. It was probably word of mouth, it might have been through



Facebook. But again, it's keeping your eyes and ears open for these opportunities. There's online resources and listings of open calls across the country, but really the most important thing at a grassroots level is become involved and known within your local community. To the degree you have time, there's a local arts organization and you can volunteer for that organization in some capacity, that's huge. If you can, yeah. So I'll just leave it there.

Cory: That's awesome. So, as you know, if you're not a full time artist yet and you're not making a living from your work, there are constraints. You talked about having time. You might have a day job, so is there a list or a way of thinking about, okay- these opportunities come up. Which one do I say yes to, which one do I say no to?

John: Yeah. Well, so, I'll confess one of my- I probably have a few, but one weakness is I'm not always so great at the saying no part. So I've had to become a lot better, and I'm still frankly working on it. As far as being a little bit more protective of my time and not overextending. In terms of, I am a full time artist now, but there was a time when I had you know, the day job, I was doing consulting and I have a family. And I'm very much still trying to find that balance. And I'm being really candid with everybody who's watching- I can't say that I've been super successful at that balance yet. I tend to focus you know, 300% on what's in front of me. I'm the guy that's up at 6:00 and goes to bed at 2:00 in the morning, I'm one of those, I like to say I'm one of those people that's annoying twice a day because I'm a morning person and a night person. So I'm perky and obnoxious twice a day. And it's not easy. There's the time management, which is always a challenge. And being judicious with the time that you have. I will say for those that have the full-time day job, you know, and the family, or some mix thereof, it's just about, it is about carving out that time. But again- I'm, you know, people can send me tips, frankly, when it comes to this question of work-life balance because I definitely do not have it licked, per se.

Cory: Fair enough. Yeah, I appreciate the honesty. We'll find somebody who is an expert on productivity and have them talk.

John: Yeah, and I'll be the first attendee for that one, for sure.

Cory: Cool. So, let's dive into some of the more marketing-y technical stuff, cause I know you've got a lot to say about this. One of the first things that I noticed when I went to your website was a blog post, you gave a shout out to Dana Davis, a photographer who was taking some pictures of your work. We get a lot of early-career artists coming to us and saying "Help! How do I get my work photographed if I want to do prints, or if I just want to have some good photographs for my website or even Instagram? How do I get my work professionally photographed for use?"

John: Great, I'll actually just share precisely the process I took to find Dana. Within the San Francisco Bay area ArtSpan powers a Facebook group- it's San Francisco Artist Resources, and it's a group where you can post anything- I think there's roughly 4,000 members or something, but I had posted and said "Hey, looking for recommendations for a photographer to shoot some work." In my instance it was my new resined work which brought with it very specific challenges because photographing nice shiny resin work is not the easiest thing in the world. And within 5 minutes I had like 3 or 4 different recommendations. I went to their site, I went to Dana's site, loved what he had done. He had worked with some artists that I was aware of, because again I had been

out there and you kinda get to know people, so that provides context. And he's absolutely a pleasure to work with.

In terms of why you want to do that- and you kind of referenced a lot of different use cases, the top of the list in terms of where you absolutely need the quality is to the degree you're going to be doing limited editions of your work. In other words if you're going to be doing prints of your work do not skimp on the photography of those works. If you've got a good image, good resolution, and you can output it at a range of sizes, it will pay for itself. If the image is not there, the quality is not there, even though you might feel that you've saved a little bit of money up front, it's going to cost you down the road. When it comes to populating Instagram and maintaining your feed with just general updates on the work you're doing, you know, take a photograph with your iPhone, it's totally fine. Try to take a good photograph, but don't worry much. So that's like, for me those are the two ends of the spectrum.

If I'm taking a quick shot at a gallery show or something like that, then I might use my phone. If I'm using something where I'm going to create additional work I will do that. And also there's a third use case, which is calls for art, for juried shows. So of course you want to have really good images for the shows that you apply to because- there's two reasons: one is the quality of the art and how it translates what you created, but it also translates, there's that underlying message of you get it, you care, you're professional. If you submit work to a show that's a national juried show that somebody's going to be looking at, they're looking at all this different art, and they come upon a piece of art that is shot with an iPhone with poor lighting up against a wall where the perspective's off, it's not that it rules you out, they might still kind of get what you're doing through all of that, but it sets up some hurdles. And really, across the realm of marketing or presenting yourself, it's- there's things you can control and there's things you cannot control. If you can improve on the things you can control, you're going to present yourself in a better, more professional way, and that's going to translate into more people becoming aware of your work, and more people deciding to purchase your work.

Cory: Excellent. Excellent. So, ballpark, I know you live in San Francisco so everything's a little more expensive, but if you wanted to get your work high-quality photographed ready for printmaking, how much should you expect to pay a photographer?

John: Gosh, well, it's all over the map. I mean, for me, some do per-image and some do based on an amount of time. For me, I can get 9-10 images shot for around \$200. So it's not crazy. And for some who might say "Oh my god that's super expensive," but to have really good professional shots of that number of pieces for that price is pretty good. But you're going to find, again, depending on where you live in the country, you're going to find that price, the range is very broad. But here's the thing in terms of is it worth it- make sure you're looking at the work that they've shot, hopefully connect with a photographer that is used to shooting your kind of work, and what do I mean by that? If you do assemblage work, you're doing 3D sculpture, do they shoot sculpture or have they only done 2D? If it's in my case you do resined work, that brings with it a totally different level of challenges in terms of capturing the image appropriately. If you have the opportunity to look at photographs that a photographer has done and see the work, the original, in some other setting, and this is kind of a harder thing to pull off sometimes, but

that's also going to help you to have a sense as to whether or not the work is, they're really capturing both the color and the feel of the work and it's translating into the digital space.

Cory: I was actually thinking \$200 for 10 images sounds very reasonable, considering, if you're going to turn around and sell those prints for a couple hundred bucks each, you're going to make your money back very quickly. That seems like a pretty small upfront investment for making prints.

John: Yeah, and that goes for almost any marketing investment you might make, whether it be postcards or business cards, or printers, if like you're doing prints and you finally take the leap and buy your own archival printer. It's scary and it's hard to make those up front investments, but it really depends where you are in your life, and your risk-tolerance. The companies that, if you look at like large companies, like I keep referencing Steve Jobs, you look at Apple or you look at any, any company, those folks that made it from the garage to the penthouse or wherever they made it, the fourth floor infinite loop in Cupertino in Steve Job's case, but the people that make it that far, there's always that early stage where they kind of push beyond the comfort level. Biggest thing is to be open to iteration, to shifting course, to flexibility, test things, if they don't work then change. You kind of figure out what's working for you. Anyway, I'll leave it at that.

Cory: I was just thinking about, yeah- like, the whole marketing mindset of testing and trying and just pushing at the edges to see what you can do. So you, you are somebody who has been pushing at the edges for a long time, and you had a website before it was cool to have a website.

John: Yes.

Cory: Or maybe, maybe you had a website when it was still cool, or when it was edgy and cool to have a website, right. I don't know.

John: When it was painful to have a website.

Cory: Yes, when it was painful to have a website. Yeah, so you had a website back in the 90s, which is awesome and fun, and maybe we'll post some screenshots from archive.org of the old version of your website cause I think that would be awesome. But on your website, a lot of artists just have on their contact page or commissions page they'll just say "if you want a commission contact me here", but you go way beyond that. And you outline some steps for working with you and a commission, and you have some text there, and it says "here are all the steps for working with me on a commission" and those bullet point steps are the initial consultation proposal development, you do a digital preview of the art as it's going to appear in your space. Basically mocking up the art in their living space. You work their interior designers and architects, you offer framing and installation, and then site-specific commissions. So you'll do work that's specific to their space. So why do you outline all of that on your website? What does that help with?

John: Sure. There's two reasons. One is it's what I do. So in other words, I can provide all of those services. But equally as important, is it sends a pretty clear message that I know what I'm doing. So in other words it's not "Hey I accept commissions and here's my email, let me know." So if you're someone particularly at a company and you've been given a budget and a timeline to source art, you're going to look around for artists that maybe have done that and get some

sense of it. If you have someone that's going to deliver that degree of, I don't want to say hand-holding, but that level of service and engagement, you feel more confident about going down that path. So briefly stated, it's twofold. It's one, just accurately describing the services I can provide in addition to the art. But it sends a very very clear message, and that goes across your entire website. The way you present yourself either makes people more likely or less likely to engage with you and purchase your work.

So, and there's the more involved, say, like the corporate installation, but then there's the more personal one-on-one placement of art in someone's home. And if I can share just a brief anecdote- so there's this piece that I just sold this morning, was a 36x36 mixed media on wood panel piece. I had met the folks first through Red Umbrellas, so face-to-face conversation. That piece actually was not even on display. So then after the fact I followed up by email, I thanked them, they received one of my newsletters. I shouldn't call it a newsletter cause I send out an email every week. But they received one of my emails which reminded them that I existed, and they went and looked at my full collection, fell in love with the piece. And then they reached out and they expressed some interest. So the next step of that, and this isn't so much commission related, but it is related to the services side of it. I invited them to send me photographs of different paces in their home where they thought it might go.

Cory: Right.

John: I then provided them, and some people don't know Photoshop and I get that, but if you do know Photoshop, this is something you can provide to your collectors or prospective collectors. I superimposed this piece that they saw on the website in their home in these different settings. And it was all through my website. So they had to go to the website to see these previews. It made them comfortable enough that, you know, one, I was professional, I was engaging with them, I was trying to provide that certain level of service. Then after a period of time they reflected on what they liked, blah blah blah, and this morning I got a notification literally as I was making my morning coffee. So I wasn't sitting there waiting for the sale to come in, so to speak, but I was making my coffee, and I got a notification that they had purchased the piece. So the loose connection to your original question as far as letting people know what service you provide, is making people aware that they can have that level of engagement, of care, is important. Anything you can do to differentiate yourself from the thousands and thousands of artists that have kind of the generic website where there's an image and a link and that's it, you know, you've got to kind of build more of a rapport with the people who are considering your work.

Cory: Yeah, I like that. So, speaking of building a rapport with the people on your website, I noticed that you have a live chat feature enabled on your website. Do you use that?

John: I do. And I use it- it's interesting. It's not always for its perhaps stated function. What I mean by that is, with this particular integration, not only can I engage people in live chat if I choose to do that or if they reach out to me, but I can also follow, track them through the website. I can actually see where they came in, where they came from, where they're located, what they're doing as they go through the website. And anyone who's had a website who's looked at any kind of analytics knows how valuable it is to know how people navigate through what you're offering. So what I'm trying to say is it's called live chat, and I should be very specific- I very very

rarely will initiate a chat. So I'm not, and it's not automated, and it's always, like I should also say it's always me, like I'm on the other side of the live chat. But it's more- I am there if someone has a question and they want to reach out. And the greatest thing about that particular feature on my site, is if I'm not online, it's a very prominent message that says hey- Send John a Message. And I've found that very useful because some people want to engage that way. Again, it goes back to what we've been talking about this whole, say, the last segment of time, which is perception. There's the substance of what you get out of that live chat functionality, and then there's the impression it gives to people visiting your site. This is an artist that knows how to do corporate art consulting and installations, commissions, and they have live chat!

Cory: You're literally the only artist I've seen that has that.

John: There you go. And that makes me kind of a geek as well, but I think it's great. I also, just to throw into the mix, I also have on many of the pages, particularly for the additions, I have collector reviews. And I should emphasize- these are not reviews of people that come to the website and say "Hey I really like this." Every review you see on the website is someone who's actually purchased that piece. And I actively invite them to review two things when they provide those reviews: they're reviewing the art, like, "Hey I'm really happy with the piece," of course, but I also invite them to comment on the experience of purchasing and receiving the art. So if someone goes and sees one of my pictures of sailboats and there's a review and let's just say for example they live in Europe. And they see on that page, oh there's a review from someone who ordered this piece who's in Sydney, Australia, and they say they like the work- oh, and it arrived in perfect condition. Those little kind of touch points, those little, it's providing credibility, it's a direct endorsement from someone that's purchased the work. And it's just all those little tiny things you can do to add to the credibility. And a very very big one before I kind of wrap this little bit up, is having photographs of your work in context. You need- it's fine to have the thumbnail image and that you click on the image and it gets bigger and you see it bigger- that's great. But you need photos of your work on a wall in a space. Or it's you holding the work. Or, ideally, it's a photograph from someone who has purchased similar work holding it up. Because the other thing you do to differentiate yourself through online sales is to communicate that you're a real person with real art that goes on a real wall. You're not just another web page with an image.

Cory: Yeah. Yeah. People don't know- like, they can literally read a description of a piece of art and it'll say it's 3 feet by 4 feet or whatever, but most people are not visually oriented enough to say okay, that's 3 feet I don't- this is what that would look like on this wall. They need to know "bigger than my couch".

John: Right.

Cory: They need to know "It'll fit above, it'll fit in this section of my wall." So having those context shots is really good. Michelle Bolari says- and Tracy Weiss had this same question, so- how you create these. It sounded like you do them in Photoshop?

John: I do. I do, so typically I'll have the person take a photograph and you know, hopefully a nice photograph of the space. It doesn't have to be perfect. But then I also ask them to give me a

reference and say you know, pick out, either put a piece of paper on the wall or you know, 8 1/2 x 11 piece of paper or tell me the dimension of something in that room. And that allows me to go into Photoshop and then I can create the composite, and the piece is not just "this is kind of what it would look like". I actually scale the art so that it's scaled to fit their space so they genuinely know. And I sold a piece to a couple in Calgary a couple of weeks ago, and it was a big piece. It was 48 inches by 36 inches, and I did this similar thing where I created this composite, and what was really gratifying was they sent me a photograph once it was installed on the wall, and I kid you not- you can almost not tell the difference between the composite that I had created and the piece on the wall. And that was really gratifying because it's not just "Hey, wouldn't this be a neat idea," it proved to me yet again, not only is it a good idea, it's something that can actually truly convey what you're going to provide. And to be very clear and candid, sometimes that exercise results in losing the sale. And, so that's not necessarily a bad thing. So what do I mean? If they think they want a 48 inch piece and they think they want it on a certain wall, and they order it and they get it, and it ends up being too big, too small, they don't like it in the space, who's the winner? You're not a winner because they're going to want their money back whether or not you decide to give it to them is up to you. So for me, I've had, it's not common, but I've had instances where folks say oh gee whiz, it doesn't quite fit there. I've had situations where people say "Oh, we need a larger piece!" Well isn't that a happy problem.

Cory: Okay, so you whip up the preview image and you just email it to them, right? You're not like putting it on your website next to the image or whatever?

John: Well, I'm not publicly listing it, it's created on an unlisted page. If someone was really, you know, digging around, they could probably find it. I did have something again with this particular piece, and this is something also I've shared on some artists resource groups- I did a really quick simple iPhone shot video of me demonstrating or holding the piece up. So I- you know, between the iPhone and YouTube I created a unlisted video of me literally introducing the work to them, turning it around, showing the back. Showing where it was signed and dated. And ostensibly it was just for them. But it's a great tool. If you have someone across the U.S. that's interested in a piece, you can give them a very personal introduction to the piece and really give them a tactile sense of what it looks like. And that can really help close the sale as well. It looks like - I'm looking at some of these comments.

Cory: Yeah, Rochelle is having a great time and enjoying it. We are running short on time, so I wanted to see if we can fit in some of the audience questions that we haven't gotten to yet. And maybe sort of treat these as short answers to the questions.

John: Sure.

Cory: Fiona Berdue says "Your style is so uniquely your own, have you been asked to create something that doesn't quite fit with your style, and what was your response?"

John: Hm. Yes, certainly that comes up and typically I, well not typically, I decline those requests. But I will say whether it comes like digital work or some of the newer commissions within the flower series, people are reaching out because they want it in their style. I actually just finished a private commission for a couple that's getting married in Florida and the woman's from Boston, the gentleman's from north in Seattle and we had this wonderful conversation and I developed

this commission piece just for them that celebrates all the elements of their life, but it was- they approached me because they wanted it in the style, they wanted the two little blue people behind the wedding cake and all that cool stuff. So yeah, it doesn't happen much where people are like "Oh, can you do something different?" Because as the person stated, the style is pretty defined. You're not coming to me if you're looking for a photorealistic portrait of your kids. That's for sure.

Cory: Nice, cool.

John: Unless they happen to be blue.

Cory: So Linda Young says "What would you say to someone in their mid-60s who's just starting out to pursue art professionally and they don't have a list or clients or anything like that?" So how would you get started now if you were starting over?

John: It would be the same advice, ironically, as I would give to someone who is 20, which is go out, go to events, get involved with art organizations. If you have the time, become involved in volunteering, start applying to shows with the work that you have. Whether or not you get into the shows, it's still a great experience, you get to meet jurors and people become aware of your work. And really just, also, enjoy creating the work. Depending on how much work you've created to date, part of it is building up a body of work and having some inventory. So make sure that while you're doing all these other networking type things that you're creating the work. But just approach it- and find things, find settings that are consistent with your personality. If you're not really an extrovert, then maybe you're volunteering for an arts organization within their office. And you're helping support the arts in that way. You're getting your name out there but you're not like in a big room of 200 people you don't know feeling the pressure to network. But I know many artists here in San Francisco that are in that, you know, I turned 50 this year too so I have to be careful about segmenting people who are 60 as being something very remote from me because they aren't. But people at all ages that are starting their career, their art career or their art practice I should say. Have fun and don't think you can't do anything that the 20 year old starting artists can do. You can do all of it.

Cory: Cool. Linda, I'll also say, if you're looking for inspiration, we did a blog post on artists who are all, like late bloomers essentially. A bunch of artists who started after the age of 60. That includes Grandma Moses and Chagall and a couple others. So go check that out.

This is a good one- Tracy Weiss. "I should ask you this because I love asking every artist this. What percentage of time do you spend on making your art versus marketing, networking, other business stuff? What's that mix?"

John: Short answer, these are deposition version answers. 50/50. Next question.

Cory: Do you have a particular mantra or thought process when you're developing your style?

John: Well, you said mantra so I have to hold this up. So there you are, I don't know if you can see this. It says do you what you heart. Do what you love. This is from my DESKART collection, but no. It, truly, when it comes to either developing a style or working on a new piece, it's do what you're naturally drawn to do. And don't try to force it. It doesn't mean you shouldn't explore things,

but just do what you love to do. And this kind of again, this is very much tied to marketing, I will say this- do not try to chase trends or certain things that are super popular and all that. Because one of the great things about there being billions of people on the planet is that means that there are millions of people that are going to absolutely adore what you do. No matter what. No matter what that is. And I've seen a lot of pretty interesting art that, but- there is an audience for everything. And it's just, yeah. There you go.

Cory: Yeah. So John I want to thank you very much for taking the time to visit with us today. Before we sign off I want to give one plug to, if you're not familiar with The Abundant Artist, we have literally hundreds of articles, blog posts, podcasts just like this one, over at [theabundantartist.com](http://theabundantartist.com), where you can learn more about how to grow your art career, how to become a successful artist. We also have- it's called The Abundant Artist Association. It's a professional trade association for fine artists. And it's specifically designed to, we have a whole bunch of courses on learning how to sell art, so some of the stuff that we've talked about here with John, we get into the nitty gritty details of what to do and how to do it. And we also have an online community of artists who are in various stages of professional, being professional artists. So that community is an awesome community that helps each other out a lot. I would love to have you in there. You can check all that out at [theabundantartist.com](http://theabundantartist.com).

John, if somebody wanted to get in touch with you and follow up more about your stuff, where would they go?

John: Absolutely. My website is just [johnkraft.com](http://johnkraft.com). Also on Instagram at @johnkraft, and I'm on Facebook at artistjohnkraft.

Cory: John, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

John: Thank you, Cory.