

What Are You Really Earning? By Anne Copeland

You have made a sale, and you feel rightfully good about it. You may have priced your work by the square foot and it seems to be a decent amount. In your own area, your work may not sell for much more. Although it is a consistent way you can create a value, it may be an inadequate method, for basically what you are looking at with that method is how much time it takes to create a square foot of work. But the work to create that square foot is not the total time involved in making the piece.

The following table gives you a clear idea of what you are actually making an hour for your work based on the number of hours you have put into it.

| Total Hrs | Total Days | \$1,200 | \$1,800 | \$2,500 | \$2,800 | \$3,200 | \$3,500 | \$3,800 | \$4,200 | \$4,500 |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 100 | 8 | \$12.00 | \$18.00 | \$25.00 | \$28.00 | \$32.00 | \$35.00 | \$38.00 | \$42.00 | \$45.00 |
| 200 | 17 | \$6.00 | \$9.00 | \$12.50 | \$14.00 | \$16.00 | \$17.50 | \$19.00 | \$21.00 | \$22.50 |
| 300 | 25 | \$4.00 | \$6.00 | \$8.33 | \$9.33 | \$10.67 | \$11.67 | \$12.67 | \$14.00 | \$15.00 |
| 400 | 33 | \$3.00 | \$4.50 | \$6.25 | \$7.00 | \$8.00 | \$8.75 | \$9.50 | \$10.50 | \$11.25 |
| 500 | 42 | \$2.40 | \$3.60 | \$5.00 | \$5.60 | \$6.40 | \$7.00 | \$7.60 | \$8.40 | \$9.00 |
| 600 | 50 | \$2.00 | \$3.00 | \$4.17 | \$4.67 | \$5.33 | \$5.83 | \$6.33 | \$7.00 | \$7.50 |

When you are looking at the time it takes to create your art, you need to consider the actual design work, the time spent selecting the fabric and other materials, as well as any time preparing the materials to work with them. You also need to be taking into account the dollar amount spent for equipment (even if you have used it for many fiberarts pieces), electricity, and all other expenses related to the creation of the piece. And there is time spent setting up your machine and other equipment before you even start sewing. If you keep accurate time of your actual work related to the piece, you may be surprised to learn how many hours you have actually spent. You may have taken classes or purchased special books to gain the skills to make your art. Those costs should be divided across the number of pieces you create and sell in a year. Other expenses such as professional services (quilting, binding, appraisals, etc.), slides, postage for mailing, insurance, taxes, and of course commissions, ultimately need to be included in the cost. In quality assurance, this is referred to as "the true cost of quality." This really is "the true cost of creating fiberarts."

Of course you can cut down on the amount of time that it takes you to make a piece of art, but it is possible that in doing so, you also may be jeopardizing your reputation for creating excellent works of art. The time it takes to make a work of art is the time it takes; that is a given.

Some artists claim that their fiberarts pieces would not sell if they were to raise their prices, and this may well be true if they continue to market in the same ways and in the same areas. Perhaps to really be able to raise the prices of your work, you need to create a new series, or larger pieces, or perhaps the raising of prices might be tied into a timeframe. For example, you could raise your prices every year.

Sometimes raising prices can have a very positive effect on how your work is valued by collectors, assuming excellent quality and overall expression of your medium. My former husband, Spencer MacCallum and I worked with a group of Mexican potters for a number of years in the mid 1970s through the early 1980s. When the pots were being sold for a nominal amount by the potters, there were very few collectors. Dealers would buy the pots, but sell them for much higher rates to tourists lacking in knowledge about collecting.

After several years of working with the potters, an opportunity presented itself in the form of a nonprofit

organization fundraising. We were asked to donate one of the pots for auction at the event. Spencer told the main potter to make the best pot he could, and to make a large pot that would show well. At the auction, the pot brought \$5,000. Now auctions are odd events, because it often isn't the object itself that is the reason for the huge amount of money from bidders. Rather they might really want to support the organization, and they might also be showing others that they have the money to outbid anyone else. Regardless of the reason for the pot going for such a high amount, it represented a turning point for collectors. Suddenly knowledgeable collectors were spending time convincing other collectors that these pots were an excellent "investment," and the prices of the pottery shot up almost overnight.

If you break out of the average square foot rates that most quilted art of similar complexity and size by artists with similar name and fame are using, you may find that your art doesn't sell as fast, but at the same time, collectors may take a second look at your work because they believe it might be a good investment. You need to be confident about your work, but with good reasoning backing you. One of the things we found with the potters was that the more confident Spencer was in discussing the work of the potters, and the more interesting stories he told about their latest experiences with their pottery, the more interest grew about the pottery, and the more collectors wanted it.

One solution is for quilt artists to continue to explore new quilt sales venues. Join your local non-art-quilt associations and when an opportunity to exhibit in a mixed media environment comes up, take it. Try some nontraditional venues as well; remember that collectors are just like other people in that they go to restaurants, book stores, specialty plant nurseries, live theatres, wineries, etc. In those environments, you might be able to have a one man or one woman show, and you can start charging higher prices for your work. Be consistent however; once you raise your rates, they must be consistent at every venue.

But first and foremost, you have to get it in your mind that your time and work are worth more.