

# Artist Power

**Will the Web emancipate artists from their bondage to dealers? Probably not, but it will certainly broaden their markets.**

BY MISSY SULLIVAN

**P**HOTOGRAPHER FRANK JUMP documents vintage ads on the sides of old New York buildings. He knows that little-known artists like himself need somewhere public to display their wares. They need dealers. Lotsa luck. While there's no hard data, industry experts estimate that only about 5%–10% of artists nationally are represented by galleries. And those that are, regularly surrender 50%—or more—of the sales price.

Jump wasn't exactly chased by dealers. So he took his stuff to the Internet. Log on to Frankjump.com, and you can see his work, e-mail him questions about it and buy it if it interests you.

"The site has acted as my press agent," Jump says. It didn't hurt that it was chosen as a Yahoo site of the week in early 1999. He's now listed on nearly 80 search engines worldwide.

Goodbye dealers? Not yet. Jump admits he hasn't sold much on the Web. And he's kept his day job, managing a dental practice. Still, many art dealers are worried. The Internet is changing so many businesses; it's bound to have an impact on theirs. And it is. But rather than disintermediating dealers, it's moving them online.

There are more than 20,000 sites currently showcasing art online—established galleries, auction houses, Web-only retail sites, artist-run collectives. All, of course, levy a charge on the artist, but they do get the work exposed to a broader audience. With so much art on the Net, where should you go? Here-with, some advice for readers who want to go art hunting on the Web.

If you're looking for a name-brand artist like Andy Warhol or William Wegman, your best bet is at one of the gallery networks like Onview.com and Eartgroup.com, or the auction sites Artnet.com and Sothebys.com. These e-businesses cull inventory from blue-chip galleries, and operate on the traditional middleman model.

can easily consult online price guides.

Can you haggle over price? Sometimes. Onview.com names a price, but then encourages collectors to make a counter-offer. Don't be shy about naming a lower price: there's plenty of room to haggle in a business where you probably have a 50% dealer markup but also a site commission of 5%–10%.

If you're interested in discovering a new talent and your tastes don't necessarily run to the avant-garde, there are many sites—like Guild.com, NextMonet.com, PaintingsDirect.com and the recently launched ArtAdvocate.com—that have experts to do the sifting for you.

Unlike galleries, these sites don't hold inventory. Instead, they rely on



**Metalsmith Boris Bally and (inset) some of his wares.**

There's this difference: On the Web you don't get that in-your-face snootiness that turns off so many

would-be buyers at elite galleries. Web emporia provide information and hand-holding to buyers and browsers alike, plus helpful links to services like appraisal, framing and shipping.

The other big difference: a welcome transparency of pricing. Whereas old-line dealer prices can vary from client to client, online prices are posted right on the screen. And smart Web shoppers

artists to fulfill customer orders directly from their studios. Because they don't hold inventory, this kind of juried site doesn't hit the artist as hard. Guild.com, for example, charges the artist 25%–35% of the sales price.

For metalsmith Boris Bally, who has his own informational Web site and several dozen craft galleries across the country selling his work, juried is the way to go. "I would have been hesitant if Guild didn't jury. I've seen a lot of schlock out there and I want to make sure I'm associated with good stuff."

DANA SMITH