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How to make it as an artist in New York

To survive as an artist takes a lot but it's not impossible. Here's how some of t

By Noah Davis



Photo: Buck Ennis

Deshawn Dumas said when he took the desires of the market into account, his financial fortunes improved

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It took Deshawn Dumas a decade to make a single significant sale. In 2015, a gallery representing the now-32-year-old visual artist sold three of his bold, colorful abstract paintings that feature quotes from Enlightenment thinkers.

William Powhida estimates he lost close to \$12,000 on his art in 2015 when he compares his sales with the time and materials he invested. He holds a full-time job as artistic co-director of the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design in Dumbo, which provides him with a cluttered studio space for his text-based artwork.

Working weekends, he produces roughly 15 to 20 original pieces a year, which sell for an average of \$5,000. He says he generates \$60,000 to \$70,000 in annual revenue through sales, half of which goes to the galleries representing him: Postmasters Gallery in New York, Charlie James Gallery in Los Angeles and Gallery Poulsen in Copenhagen. Powhida sells prints of his original works, which cost \$1,000 or less. In 2014, he sold 27 prints in China after a show. Powhida's work, which satirizes the art market, was an inspiration for *9.5 Theses on Art and Class*, a book by critic Ben Davis.

"I never thought I would see my work reviewed in *Art in America*. I never thought I would be represented by one gallery, let alone four. I never thought I would create work that would be included in a larger dialogue," he said. "I need to make sure that I'm not trying to define my career based on a [Jeff] Koonsian figure or the superstars." It's an emotionally rewarding career, but sales are sporadic: "I wish I had a little more economic freedom."