

INTRODUCTION:
Driver's Manual

For many artists, developing a workable plan and finding the resources and courage necessary to reach their destination as a “successful artist” is an almost insurmountable challenge. Some get detoured along the way, get stalled before they get there, or wind up at a dead end. They may be traveling on a side road when the superhighway is only a few miles away. What *Accelerating on the Curves* does is to provide “The Artist’s Roadmap to Success.”

In the 30 years that have passed since I founded Katharine T. Carter & Associates, I’ve worked with hundreds of artists, helping them to find their way to a professionally rewarding career. *Accelerating on the Curves* describes the journey, which is the culmination of what I’ve learned, along with the contributions of the Associates and other colleagues, all of whom are accomplished art world professionals.

Accelerating on the Curves is written for artists at varying levels of career development, which I’ve categorized as Stages One, Two, and Three. There are practical guides and concrete examples to help you navigate through each stage. Mindful attention and careful consideration of each facet and requirement expedites reaching your destination that much sooner.

For purposes of understanding the sequence as well as the integral relationship between each component of activity, you must be fully conscious of where you are in the three stages of career development and related areas of professional involvement. At Stage One, you focus on achieving success at the local – city, county, and state levels – moving on to regional in Stage Two, and finally arriving properly equipped to compete at the national level in Stage Three. At each stage, your success will be measured by the quality of the exhibitions in which you participate, the types of media coverage you generate, and your sales performance.

Several qualifying factors will also help you to identify a level for each of these institutions, nonprofits, and gallery venues nationally. Although each situation/entity must be qualified or assessed on an individual basis, for the purpose of our roadmap and the organization of information and research, we have developed a unique way to profile venues as Level I, Level II, Level III, and Elite. This is based on annual attendance or the estimated number of people that would view your work during the run of an exhibition. (Attendance levels can be found in *The Official Museum Directory* and the *American Art Directory*.) There are

All you need is a plan, a roadmap, and the courage to press on to your destination.

UNKNOWN

From small beginnings come great things.

UNKNOWN

many exceptions to this method of profiling, and some venues may have low attendance, but, by virtue of location and connections, exhibit major artists, thus raising their level. The stature of the curator or the quality of exhibition programming also affects the category of the venue.

At Stage One, you need to compete and gain recognition on the local and state level before you can garner regional or national acclaim. Success at Stage One prepares you to participate in progressively larger arenas, extending your professional activities to your region in Stage Two and beyond in Stage Three.

To determine where you are on this journey, as well as your current stage of activity, it is imperative for you to assess what you have already accomplished in terms of solid, professional value and what areas still need to be addressed.

Recognition and success at higher levels of professional involvement require an honest evaluation of your talent and level of commitment, as there are no guarantees of any kind in the art world. Objectivity – knowing what you can still realistically accomplish, and how effectively and efficiently the desired outcome can be achieved – is essential.

The Stage Three pinnacle of success for most artists would be gallery representation in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, or other metropolitan and cultural destinations; reviews in major art magazines; one-person exhibitions in mid-sized to larger museums; inclusion in exhibitions at the most prestigious museums nationally; and living solely from the sale of work.

This process ultimately has nothing to do with speed. For example, one artist's goal of affiliation with a gallery, especially in a major American city, may be achieved in less than a decade; for others, it may take two or three times longer. This is largely determined by the level at which he or she enters the process of career development and the quality of his or her accomplishments. An artist who has developed a strong history of sales and a solid base of collectors can reach this goal more quickly than someone with no proven track record.

Attention and thoroughness given to each strategic area of your career development is vital to quality results for your efforts. This includes being constantly vigilant and recognizing the delicate balance between exhibitions, sales, awards and honors, and reviews. (In many cases, cultivation of the press and media is largely overlooked, and it is a critical component to every artist's name recognition on the local, regional, and national levels.)

Waiting for others to discover you and to help make you successful, or to write about you and your work, is an absolute, sure-fire path to failure. Acting with dignity and integrity in the professional arena, having an overall sense of what you believe to be appropriate to achieving your professional goals, and the proper timing of your initiatives are crucial pieces to attaining the recognition you deserve and progressing to the next stage.

Doing your very best and never being ashamed of acting on what is in your own self-interest is clear, productive thinking, and a strategy to follow at all times – without apology.

As artists become educated about the value and importance of investing in themselves through promotion, advertising, marketing research, and public relations, many are questioning whether it is wise to wait for the “possible eventuality” of a dealer or exhibiting institution offering to invest in a catalogue and critic’s essay, advertising, and public relations.

Even if this should happen, it is not uncommon these days for artists to assume part or all of these promotional expenses, even advertising costs in some situations, a paradigm shift that has been occurring for the last decade or more.

In the past, self-initiated publishing projects were considered suspect by some, especially when the printed piece was a brochure or catalogue with an essay for which the artist has paid the writer or critic. Yet the identical practice has long been followed by exhibiting institutions and galleries. The essays in their publications (catalogues and books, not reviews) are also “bought.” So it certainly stands to reason that artists, who are also art professionals and who wish to act as their own representatives, would have the same and equal right to avail themselves of the writing services of a critic or writer.

Nonconstructive and judgmental notions about this or similar initiatives, which involve artists taking the wheel and having more control in the outcome of their careers, have too often been perpetuated in the academic environment, resulting in many talented and

*The rule is: if it really contributes to your best interest, it is right.
The other side of the same rule is: if it hinders your self-development, it is wrong.*

VERNON HOWARD

*You can't make someone else's choices.
You shouldn't let someone else make yours.*

COLIN POWELL

deserving artists being under-recognized or unknown – fearful that they will be judged harshly by their own colleagues.

This negative programming and helpless attitude, which translates into an ineptness in business, purity in poverty, along with loads of victimization – “poor, misunderstood me” – have not equipped artists with the survival tools or dose of reality necessary to succeed in today's art world.

There is no nobility in this limited kind of thinking. Common sense survival modes and the right to happiness and financial success dictate that artists move beyond a role that is professionally crippling and hampers their ability to take advantage of the untold possibilities available to any life.

When you decided to become an artist or just gave into that compulsion to make art, you did not take a vow of poverty. The idea that artists can create great art and have a mind for business, take well-planned initiatives, and consciously and aggressively pursue certain outcomes through judicious promotional ploys was, and still is, seen by many as selling out – or even worse, as selling your soul, when in fact, it is your salvation.

I spent ten years on the road educating artists, giving over 1,000 lectures and seminars at universities and colleges, museums, and art centers in an attempt to try to shift these attitudes and perceptions that limit and restrict artists. Katharine T. Carter & Associates has also hosted dozens of Professional Development Seminars during the last three decades: one- to three-day exhaustively informative workshops and lectures on all aspects of marketing and promotion. As a team, we are committed to the empowerment of artists, and our main thrust is to enable them to reach their full potential.

Accelerating on the Curves was written to help you reach the highest possible levels of professional achievement and recognition in the art world. I want you to become empowered, and to have a successful and meaningful career – this is the purpose and mission of Katharine T. Carter & Associates.

Your colleague and traveling companion,
Katharine T. Carter