

# EPISODE 31: HOW YOU CAN MAKE MONEY AS AN ARTIST NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE with Antrese Wood

Marketing for Creatives Show  
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**Announcer:**

Turn your hobby and freelance work into a profitable business! Make your marketing easier by applying the strategies of experienced entrepreneurs and have more time to do the work you love. You are listening to the Marketing for Creatives show with your host Marina Barayeva.

**Marina Barayeva:**

Hi everyone. This is Marina Barayeva. Welcome to another episode of Marketing for Creatives show. In this episode, we gonna talk about how you can make money as an artist.

We'll talk about transitioning from the regular job to the independent artist career, how to deal with the starving artist syndrome and the different ways to make money as an artist.

I'm very excited to be joined today by Antrese Wood.

Antrese is an artist and the host of the [Savvy Painter](#) Podcast. The Savvy Painter features interviews with top artists who talk about their mindset, process, and gives tips and techniques to aspiring painters.

Antrese paints and teaches online workshops from her home in Mammoth Lakes, California.

**Marina Barayeva:**

Okay, Antrese. Welcome to the show. How are you doing today?

**Antrese Wood:**

I'm doing great. Thank you so much for having me on, Marina.

**Marina Barayeva:**

It's a pleasure to have you on the show. Please tell us a little bit about yourself. How did you start your artistic journey and what do you do now?

### **Antrese Wood:**

I went to the ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena and I studied fine art and illustration there.

From there I had a lot of student loans when I left so I went to work at Disney in their video game department. They change their names a million times so if you hear me hesitate I was about to say, thinking of the five different names that they changed that department to, but the Disney video game department is where I worked for about 10 years. I was there for a long while, left and came back a couple of times.

Then I finally decided that I was going to bite the bullet and focus on my own painting because that's something that had always been nagging at me, that I wasn't doing what I wanted to do. Even though I loved my job and I loved the people that I worked with and I learned so much working at Disney but it was time to leave the nest and go out on my own.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

And for a lot of people it's the same thing. They do their job and they want to do some artistic things but they are afraid that maybe they will not make money out of this or maybe it just takes a lot of time. What made you, what motivated you to make this transition and how, in the end, did you start to grow as an artist and sell your art?

### **Antrese Wood:**

To actually make the transition took me a while because it is scary. It's terrifying to go from, especially that I was very lucky and had a very cushy job and I loved it. It wasn't like I was unhappy and there was something pushing me out. It was definitely like you're in this warm cozy bed and you have to get out and it's 15 below zero (laughter). The heat's not on and you're like, "Oh, no!"

It took me a long time from the time that I realized that not only did I want to do it but that I was going to do it. I saved up a little nest egg. I pushed my go in and tell my boss date probably five or six times before I actually did it.

It wasn't something that I took lightly and it was very scary, so I don't want to give the impression that, "Oh, yes. I just left my job and it was no big deal." It was kind of a big deal.

I prepared for it and I was ready, willing, and able for a big change because I knew that was coming.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

How did you transition it into a business? How did you start selling that?

### **Antrese Wood:**

There were a lot of fits and starts. There was a lot of getting to understand what this new creative life meant.

The thing that surprised me the most was how different it is to be painting when you have a full-time job and you know that all of your bills and everything is paid for, and then all of a sudden you are wondering, "Is this going to sell? What's going to happen?"

It's a lot of pressure that I didn't realize how difficult that would be to deal with. That's the part that I think surprised me the most. What I did was I just started painting my butt off. Because I did a lot of project management at Disney, I was the art director there for the video game department and I did a lot of project management there so I just thought it was a one-to-one ratio.

So I made this schedule, I'm going to paint for this long and this is how long it would take me to do a series of paintings. I had all of that mapped up. I just buckled down and got to work.

Then I started really slowly showing in local restaurants, and in a couple of art fairs, those aren't my favorite thing in the world, slowly but surely getting the work out and making an aim for myself.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

When you were doing this transition from the Disney job that you liked, as you said, and then going to your art, did you believe or did you have those thoughts that you are going to grow as a business or did you believe that you can sell them and completely forget about your Disney job, just focus on your art?

### **Antrese Wood:**

I wasn't expecting to leave my job and then have exactly the same benefits and perks and make exactly the same amount of money. I was fully prepared for a couple of years of struggling with it or being reliant on my savings.

Because I was prepared for that, I was fine with it. It didn't really bother me that much. I picked a really bad time to do this though. It was in early 2007 and things were going really well and I was selling a lot of paintings and I was doing great and really happy, thinking, "Wow, if I can do this, this is better than I thought I would do. So this is fantastic. I'm on my way."

And then the economic crisis in the United States hit and everything went to hell in a hand basket. That was definitely a tough period, trying to figure out how to deal with that and how to keep going and what to do.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

That was quite a difficult time I guess. When you transitioned from your first job, you just started out and then after the crisis, that was another difficult period. A lot of creative entrepreneurs are struggling to make money with their art or to get better paid clients.

When you get to the point where you need to sell somehow because you don't have money, you need to make money somehow out of your art, and this is the starving artist syndrome. How do you get rid of this? Do you have any tips on that?

### **Antrese Wood:**

I do. I have a lot to say about that. There's a lot of truth to the idea that it is really hard to make it as an artist. But when it's labeled the starving artist and you internalize that and you completely believe it, you're sort of expecting it. Think about that, the starving artist. It might be difficult and you might be struggling and you might have a hard time at first paying your rent but that is very different from literally starving.

I take issue with that in the sense that it doesn't do artists any service to have this belief that being an artist is about starving and suffering. You put yourself in that mindset, then everything you see confirms that you miss a lot of opportunities when you see things that way. That's one thing I would say about it.

Think about ways to reframe that and look for the opportunities because I believe that right now we live in a time where there are more opportunities than there have ever been for artists.

We can sell directly to our collectors. We no longer have our hands tied by having to go through a middle-man, which would be the galleries or a dealer. That has never been possible before for artists to reach their own collectors and to develop relationships with them like there is now.

How to get rid of that is look at the opportunities and focus your energy on that instead of focusing on why everything is so hard and it sucks and it's awful (laughter).

Artists are pretty much the only arts, and in this statement, I'm going to include all of the arts, meaning visual arts, performing arts, writing, where you are constantly told that you should have a back-up plan and if you decide to go to college or university to study that, you're often told you should get a second degree. They don't tell anyone else that.

All of that sets artists up for this belief that they can't make it.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

When you were growing as an artist, when you were growing your art business, what helped you grow it as a business and make money as an artist?

### **Antrese Wood:**

This is a very simplistic answer. It's very simple but it's not easy. Looking at everything that works and doing more of that and looking at what's not working and stopping doing that (laughter).

I know that is such a simple statement that it might seem very superficial but when I'm standing in front of a canvas, I am present in that moment and I am thinking about the painting and I'm thinking about what I need to do to make that a beautiful painting or what I need to do to solve certain technical skills.

When I think that way, I'm seeing what's working, and if it's not working, then I can shift gears slightly. When I am thinking about sales and I'm looking at what are the things that I've tried to do to sell my art, and I mentioned earlier that for me, this isn't true for everybody, that's another thing. There are thousands of ways to do this. There's not one rule but for me

I really didn't like, conferences is going through my head and that's not what I'm thinking about right now. Setting up a tent in these little art fairs and---

**Marina Barayeva:**

Trade show?

**Antrese Wood:**

It's more of an art fair. A lot of communities have them around various holidays. It's an art fair for the public to come. You set up a tent, you put your work out and you sit there for three days and people come in and look at your art. You can sell your art that way.

I know a lot of artists have, they're art fairs obviously, that's why I couldn't think of the work, I was totally going the wrong way. The art fairs are really good for some people but for me, I just can't. I don't enjoy them. And if I don't enjoy them, I can't do a good job of it.

That's another thing that wasn't working for me so just admitting that and saying, "You know what? That's really not my thing. I'm not going to do that anymore, I'm not going to bother with it, and I'm not going to be chasing after all those opportunities and wondering if I'm missing something." It's that sort of decisiveness, of saying that's not working, I'm not doing it.

Again, back to that statement of do more of what works and do less of what doesn't, I know it sounds very simplistic in a very shifty answer but I take a really strong look in everything I'm doing and I analyze its effectiveness. And that's how I make my decisions.

**Marina Barayeva:**

As you say, there are a lot of opportunities for people and we live in an amazing time. There are different ways to make money as an artist. Can you give us ideas of what and how to sell, how you do this?

**Antrese Wood:**

How I do it. Most of my work I sell online and a lot of it is sold in person because I have direct contact with people, with my collectors.

**Marina Barayeva:**

How did you get all of these contacts?

**Antrese Wood:**

When somebody buys my work, I pay attention to them: they're now a customer (laughter).

That's one thing that I think a lot of artists don't do, keeping a list of your collectors, maintaining an email list, keeping contact information, asking them questions about why they buy your painting, what they like about it, and checking back in with them later.

That's developing a relationship as opposed to, "Thanks for the check, bye." That would be one way.

After the stock market crash, the economic crisis in the United States, I ended up meeting my future husband, meeting this guy and eventually moving to Argentina and eventually getting married.

For a second time, I found myself in a situation where, in this case, I didn't have any contacts. It was a completely different culture. Instead of being in Los Angeles where I was surrounded by lots of other artists, I was in a much much smaller town and for the first time ever in my life I felt really isolated from artists.

Again, looking for opportunities. What I did was I thought, "Okay, I'm living in a new country. I don't know very much about this country. I know a lot about the local area that I'm in but this is a huge country and this is a huge opportunity." Again, I could have looked at it like, "Oh, my gosh. What am I doing? I went from a city of 5 million people to a town of 5 thousand. What am I going to do now? I can't handle this. I'm going back home," or, "I can look for the opportunities."

And the opportunity that I saw was, "I can see this country through the eyes of a foreigner which means I will see things differently than the people who live there because they see it all the time, every day. I find that all the time when people come visit me, that they see things and I'm like, "Wow. I look at that every day and I didn't see it?"

I did a Kickstarter project. That was the idea that I came up with. I decided that I was going to travel around the country and paint all the different provinces. I realized, "Gosh, if I'm going to do that, I need some money." So Kickstarter seemed like a great idea.

I created this Kickstarter project and raised the money to do the project and for about two or three years it was the highest grossing Kickstarter project for painting and I held that record for I think about two years before someone knocked me off.

Those are specific ways. I start looking for where am, what's happening, and what are the resources that I can leverage to create a project and sell my art?

Always the first thing for me is the work has got to be good. I'm not ever willing to sacrifice the work just to pander to an audience. But assuming the work is really good, I think there are so many ways to sell your art.

If you want specifics, Kickstarter, I just gave you the example of that. You can sell your work online by either working with an online gallery or going off on your own.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

How do you reach online galleries so they will sell your art?

### **Antrese Wood:**

There are thousands of them. Google, (laughter) honestly.

As with anything there are lots of variations on it, meaning that there are some that you pay a monthly fee and you're in. There are some that are curated. Depending on what route you want to go, I would basically do a lot of research.

Find out everything you can about the gallery, talk to some of the artists that are in the gallery and find out what their experiences are because if you go the gallery route, whether it's online or an actual brick and mortar place, you're entering a relationship with somebody who presumably will be long term so you better like them and you better trust them.

In general, I guess my answer to all these questions is do some research, do your homework, find out what opportunities that fit with your personality, your lifestyle, and start talking to people. Actually pick up the phone and talk to people.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

What other ways to make money as an artist? Give us some more ideas. Google is a good thing but sometimes you don't know what to Google.

### **Antrese Wood:**

You asked specifically about online galleries so I'm saying I don't know the names of them all but you can really easily find that out by Googling online galleries and by talking to other artists and by doing a little legwork.

I think that one thing that can be really dangerous is that artists, I'm talking about painters, they tend to want to be in their studio painting. And I do too, more than anything. That's my love. That's my happy place. That's where I want to be all the time.

But if you're going to run it like a business, you have to treat it like a business, which means you have to show up and do the work on a regular and consistent basis. That means no sitting there hoping that somebody's going to magically discover you when you haven't even bothered to put up a website.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

We talked about Kickstarter project. We talked about online galleries. What else can we have? We can sell art to people personally. How else can we get creative? Where else can we get money?

### **Antrese Wood:**

Those are the ones that I have direct experience with, and brick and mortar galleries, so that's how I do it. You can sell prints. You can do those art fairs that I mentioned. You can have art parties.

Artists are pretty creative so the question is not how to make money like tell me every single way to make money making your spice with your art. I think a better question for the individual artist who is listening to this is to understand where their own priorities lie and what they actually like to do because if you hate doing something, you're never going to do it.

There are some artists who are perfectly comfortable almost standing on a corner and shouting and selling their art. You can go to, in Los Angeles, there's 3<sup>rd</sup> Street Promenade. There are lots of artists who sit there and paint live and in-person and sell their art that way.

That all depends on who you are. I think it's pretty easy to come up to Google a list of how to make money selling art and you'll probably come up with thousands of ways to do it but do you want to do that? That's the better question.

**Marina Barayeva:**

That's the key.

**Antrese Wood:**

Yes.

**Marina Barayeva:**

Okay. Let's say people want to create multiple income streams and we talked about several ways. Do you have any recommendations on how to grow it step by step?

Even you as an artist, you do a few things to sell your art and when you work on different projects it's easy to get disappointed and instead of getting income, you spread yourself all over and you lose money in the end.

**Antrese Wood:**

You're talking about artists in general doing that?

**Marina Barayeva:**

Mm-hmm (agreement).

**Antrese Wood:**

I think you have to make decisions and making decisions means saying no. I think saying No is much more important than saying Yes.

Artists in that situation that you're talking about, you're talking about somebody who has adopted this mentality that they're starving, which in turn means that they're desperate, which means that they're willing to do almost anything to sell their artwork. That is a terrible, horrible place to be.

First thing I would say is do not allow yourself to get there, to that state of mind that says I'm desperate and will do anything.

**Marina Barayeva:**

How would you grow then, step by step? Let's say if now you need to start everything from zero, no money, no connections, just your talent, you're good at your art but you still want to make money as an artist. What would you do?

**Antrese Wood:**

Get really good at what you do. That's the first step. Don't pretend that you're better than you are. Understand where you are in the context of your peers.



In that case though, let's say that I lose everything but I still know how to paint. I have paintbrushes and paint and no past portfolio. The first thing I would do is I would focus very hard on making really good art. Making art that I am proud of, that's the best that I can do with my current capabilities.

Not the best you can do in the world, because that puts you in this weird position of comparing yourself to Picasso and he's 80 and you're not Picasso at 80. Having a realistic understanding of where you are.

Then the first thing I would do is start making an email list of people who like my work and then I would start getting it out in front of them, either using social media or if they're local, do it live, open studios are really good.

The relationship you have with your collectors is your most valuable asset. That is my universal answer for it. Step one, paint well. Step two create an actual real relationship with your customers, with your collectors and build it from there.

You build it from there by asking for referrals, by treating them really well, by treating them like human beings and not commodities, and by continuing to be the best you can be with your painting. Does that answer your question?

### **Marina Barayeva:**

Antrese, you are hitting a point because we have many artists among our listeners.

When you say that you would collect emails and get good relationships with your collectors, if you would just grow your business, or let's imagine there's going to be another crisis here, what would you pay attention to in order to build the relationship? How would you remind about yourself? They bought your stuff and that's it?

### **Antrese Wood:**

Building your list, you absolutely should have a method to collect email addresses on your website so people who are going to your website have a way to give you their email list and don't be afraid to ask for it. Don't be shy about asking for it. If you're showing your work in person anywhere you always have--

Again, anytime you interact with the public and are showing your artwork, whether it's virtual or in-person, you're collecting emails and talking to people, developing a way to talk about your work, which starts a conversation. That's step one of building the relationship.

It's like if you walk into a bar and somebody all of a sudden lays a kiss on you, it's not going to be received very well. Every interaction with your collector, and in this case, the kiss or however far you want to take that is selling them artwork.

You don't walk up to somebody and in the first sentence try to take it to third base or however you want to put that. Meet them where they're at and start a conversation and develop a friendship as opposed to going straight in to a sale.

That's a huge part of it, treating your collectors like human beings because they are. It's like if you walk into a store and you just want to look around and a sales person comes up and says, "Give me your credit card. Which one do you want?" It's a turn off.

**Marina Barayeva:**

If you would summarize all of this, what would one big piece of advice to artists who want to make money as an artist? What would be number one thing to remember during this business journey?

**Antrese Wood:**

The first thing is creating good art. You cannot skip that step.

**Marina Barayeva:**

So you should be great in your art.

**Antrese Wood:**

(Laughter) that's the first thing and the next thing is treat your collectors like human beings and have a relationship with them. They're people and they want to know you so let them know you.

**Marina Barayeva:**

Yes, every business has a foundation and probably for artists and other creative no matter what you do, you need to know your craft. You need to be a good artist. You need to be good at what you do.

**Antrese Wood:**

Yes. I know that's not the answer a lot of people want to hear but that is the step that a lot of people skip and they get really frustrated because they don't understand why all these marketing efforts aren't working. You have to start with the product.

**Marina Barayeva:**

Fantastic. Thank you, Antrese, for a lot of great tips and sharing your experience.

**Antrese Wood:**

Absolutely.

**Marina Barayeva:**

How can we know more about you? Where can we find you? And you have an awesome podcast for our guests. Tell us about that.

**Antrese Wood:**

My podcast is called **Savvy Painter**. It is specifically for painters. We talk a lot about the craft of painting and what different artists did to get where they are. I ask a lot of similar things that you do: what happened to you, how do you do that? A little bit more about that specific person than, give me all the answers now.

I'm just saying that because we go into that single artist, their career and what their painting practice is like inside their studio and what they use and how they interact with galleries if they're in them or how they sell their work if they're not. That is at [savvypainter.com](http://savvypainter.com).

My own work is at [antrese.com](http://antrese.com).

### **Marina Barayeva:**

Fantastic. We're looking forward to see more of your work. Thank you so much, it was great to have you here.

### **Antrese Wood:**

Thanks, Marina.

### **Marina Barayeva:**

Thank you for joining me for this episode today. You can find the show notes and the full transcript of the episode at [intnetworkplus.com](http://intnetworkplus.com).

And by the way, give me feedback. What other topics do you want to hear? Do you think this is good, do you think there is nothing for you here? I want to hear everything that you have. You can always email me at [marina@intnetworkplus.com](mailto:marina@intnetworkplus.com), and your email will get right to my inbox. That's all for today, and I'll see you next time.

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