

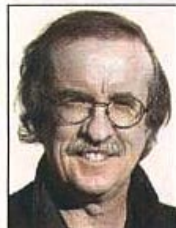
# Painter's a master in art of the deal

**C**ontrary to faded, romantic notions of roach-infested garrets and severed earlobes, plenty of artists uphold their integrity while they're enjoying commercial success.

Picasso hit primo pay dirt. Monet made money. But nobody accused them of selling out.

For an example in the here and now, consider Calgary painter Paul Van Ginkel. Van Ginkel bolted from his

## THE KEYSER REPORT



**TOM KEYSER**  
Business Edge

America's third-largest art market (trailing only New York and L.A.)

A starving artist he ain't. Yet Van Ginkel fiercely protects a set of high standards.

Yes, he occasionally issues limited-edition prints of his work, such as those he donated to the Chickwagon gang's charity auction this week (see image at right).

But Van Ginkel refuses to dabble in assembly-line poster production. Unlike, say, Thomas Kinkadee, current darling of the North American mass market, you won't find Van Ginkel images adorning placemats, teacups or T-shirts.

Not to say that he eschews the business of art. Au contraire.

Van Ginkel not only paints about 100 canvases annually, he has studied every nuance of the art of the deal. He serves as his own chief negotiator, marketing agent and pricing consultant.

And with a 30-inch x 40-inch Van Ginkel original fetching prices in the \$4,000 range, it's pointless to deny the obvious: stiletto-sharp business skills are among his most valuable assets.

salaried job as a Calgary Herald graphic artist about 12 years ago. He works out of a splendid studio/loft in the high-rent district.

His oils hang in the homes of discerning collectors. He has created long-term relationships with galleries in Palm Springs, Calif., and Santa Fe, N.M., which ranks as North



Shannon Oatway, Business Edge

Above, Paul Van Ginkel is surrounded by his art in his home. Below, the painting he donated to the Chickwagon team.



There's no time like the present to evaluate Van Ginkel's western-themed creations. A 22-piece Van Ginkel collection may be viewed during the annual Stampede art sale in the Roundup Centre's West Hall.

(For a thumbnail preview of his contribution, connect to Paul's website at: [www.paulvanginkel.com](http://www.paulvanginkel.com))

Van Ginkel reveres the Stampede show because it provided his first big break. And he considers his annual participation in the Western Showcase the most important exhibit of the year. Enormous crowds saunter past his booth and he expects to sell at least 20 paintings during the show.

He sometimes remarks that he pays the mortgage in front of his easel.

But the buyers don't bite until the product goes to market. And, here, too, the artist is a past master.

"I consider myself to be an artist . . . AND a businessman," Van Ginkel said.

As such, he pays attention to the most minute promotional details.

In advance of a show, he mails postcards to each of 2,500 names on his mailing list. If a prospective buyer expresses interest during an exhibit, chances are he'll receive a follow-up call from the artist, who has perfected a smooth sales style.

One of the most delicate tasks undertaken by the chief exec of Van Ginkel Visuals is the matter of pricing his own creations.

"If you want to do this as a career, you'd better develop a pricing strategy," he said. "It's acceptable to marginally increase your prices each year.

"But if you're just starting to sell paintings, don't start out with a price that's too high. Because if you're forced to roll back your price, you're shooting yourself in the foot."

A canvas is priced with the market in mind. And it's the artist's job to know the market. As Van Ginkel says, it's impressive to see an exhibited

painting with a sticker price of \$25,000. But till the money changes hands, a big-ticket price is nothing more than a number.

Meanwhile, a hard-headed attitude to negotiation remains a useful arrow in any artist's commercial quiver.

Frequently, a buyer will try to run a lowball price past the artist. It's the wealthiest art lovers who drive the shrewdest bargains. As Van Ginkel puts it, "they love the game of it."

But Van Ginkel rarely rolls over. He enjoys the game as much as they do and, besides, there's more on the table than merely the price of the picture in question.

"It's important not to sell yourself short," he advised. "Because word gets around. People talk."

In Western art circles, plenty of them are talking about Van Ginkel.

He's one of the hottest commodities around because his enigmatic, heavily shadowed images have struck responsive chords with art buyers across a continent.

Then, too, he's equally accomplished in the art of the deal.

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