

Art & Financial Forecasting

Artists and agents share their views on how the recession has affected trends and their artistic vision for 2011 with Regina Molaro Cooper.

Many artists and agents report that business has been experiencing an uptake—a small step for many rather than a leap—but still, a step in the right direction. According to J'net Smith, owner of All Art Licensing, the artists who are experiencing the most success in terms of licensing and revenue, have a unique style that truly makes a statement. “These success stories are often the artists who you can easily identify from others, as their style is totally unique,” says Smith. “They are approaching their art and the marketplace with passion and instinct, yet still creating artistic work that meets market criteria.” Those with a generic computer-graphic-type style are suffering, as the market is saturated with this style and companies can easily generate that type of work in-house without entering into a licensing revenue model. Categories that are affiliated with more inexpensive items, such as paper, seem to be gaining popularity as well, whereas the sales of higher priced items such as bedding, furniture, and tabletops seem to be in a downturn. According to Glenn Abrams, president of San Diego based Kids-Did-It! Properties, the print category leads the way with books, cards, posters, and calendars.

Profitability has been a top priority for struggling artists, agents, and retailers, and luckily, the market is seeing signs of growth. At fine art licensing, marketing, and consulting firm, TSB & Co., profitability has grown steadily in 2010 and the company expects that to continue. “We are busier than we’ve ever been with developing and showing new artwork and putting licensing deals together,” says Karen Hacker, vice president of sales and licensing.

For Kids-Did-It!, business has been quite mixed. “There’s been some reliable, repeat business—some with creative terms split between the licensor, manufacturer, and buyer, and an existing deal that is behind in payments,” says Abrams. “Overall, 2011 is still in a state of confusion due, in part, to the

unknown fiscal impact of tax policy and health care costs on the business, and the economy in general.”

For art licensing agency, D. Parks and Associates, business was certainly better in 2010 than it was in 2009. “Our outlook is one of expansion and optimistic prosperity. We represent well known artists, and in the current financial climate, consumers can’t afford to spend on original art,” says Ayako Parks, president of D. Parks and Associates, who believes that if a company produces affordable, quality licensed products, consumers will respond.

CopCorp Licensing experienced a down year for domestic royalties (US), but a growth year in terms of adding licensees and opening new markets, and not just for It’s Happy Bunny, but for several other properties overseas.

An optimistic viewpoint from many raises the question: what themes, colours, and categories will drive business forward in 2011? Kids-Did-It!’s Abrams says there’s a continued interest in the company’s timeless, inspirational collection of colourful artwork images created by children. Animal and floral themes are dominating, followed by still life works and landscapes. People and portraits, as well as transportation and holiday themes are also quite popular.

“We’re still seeing a focus on world travel, fashion, women and girlfriend humour, and inspirational themes,” says TSB & Co.’s Hacker.

In a July 2010 blog (www.allartlicensing.com/blog), All Art Licensing’s Smith pointed to a trend toward words playing a key graphic element in design. By December, Smith saw this concept start to generate significant interest. “I encourage artists to search for trends in all types of media and related industries for translation to their artwork. Even if it’s something that others have already identified as a trend, there’s often still time to present their own ‘version of the vision’ to manufacturers,” says Smith.

What else is trending? In terms of prints and patterns, ethnic and “worldly” designs are being influenced by exotic locations such as

India, Peru, Africa, and Turkey. Silhouette and patchwork artwork also continues to trend upward. A demand for owls has also emerged with continued interest in birds, particularly humming birds, chickadees, robins, and peacocks.

After experiencing a dismal economic outlook for some time now, we look to the colour category for inspiration and direction. Artist Jen Landis of Pincurl Girls, says the “saturated tertiary’s,” specifically magentas, teals, golden yellows, and yellow golds will cast a glow on 2011. For TSB & Co.’s Hacker, a gray and silver palette dominates. Far from dull, this palette is contrasted by splashes of vivid colour, such as reds, amber yellows, turquoises, purples, or oranges. A deeper, rich teal and marine blue hue is also being paired with rich chocolate browns or silver/grey tones. Hacker notes that this particular shade of blue is not the soft, aqua/turquoise that was trending this past year, but a fresh interpretation.

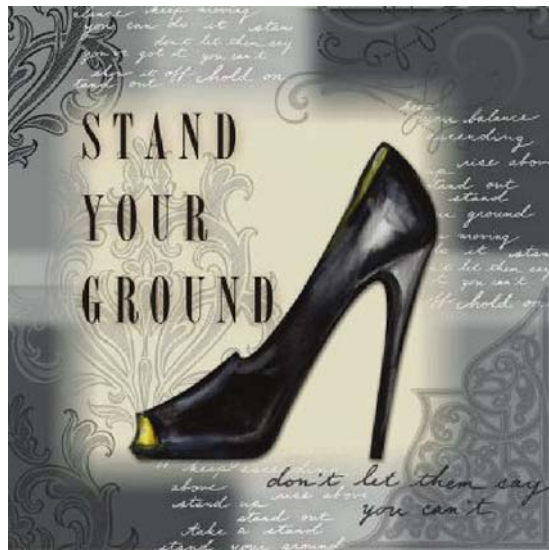
Will the “green” trend continue or will it begin to fade? Many predict that green products and services will remain a significant category, but since more manufacturers and service providers are finding ways to “go green,” it’s no longer the hot concept it once was. Others too, believe the green category has leveled off a bit, and isn’t trending as strong as it was earlier in 2010.

For D. Parks and Associates, conservation themes, which tie into the environment, still remain a focus. Since many animals are on the brink of extinction, wild animals and their habitats will dominate and artwork by Japanese artists Kentaro Nishino and Hiroo Isono highlight these animals and the environmental issues.

According to D. Parks and Associates, consumers continue to seek “art with a heart.” These “happy images” include themes that centre on flowers and children. After what we’ve experienced in the past few years, it’s easy to see why these trends and timeless humour continues to gain recognition and generate consumer interest.

Regina Cooper is a freelance writer based in New York City. Most recently she served as senior editor of License Global where she covered the art, fashion, home, and brand categories. Contact details are reginacooper30@yahoo.com





Clockwise from top left:

Laurie Wisbrun - Avian Therapy • Halloween Brains (CopCorp Licensing) • TSB & Co • Kentaro Nishino - Nestling Close • Kids did it!

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