

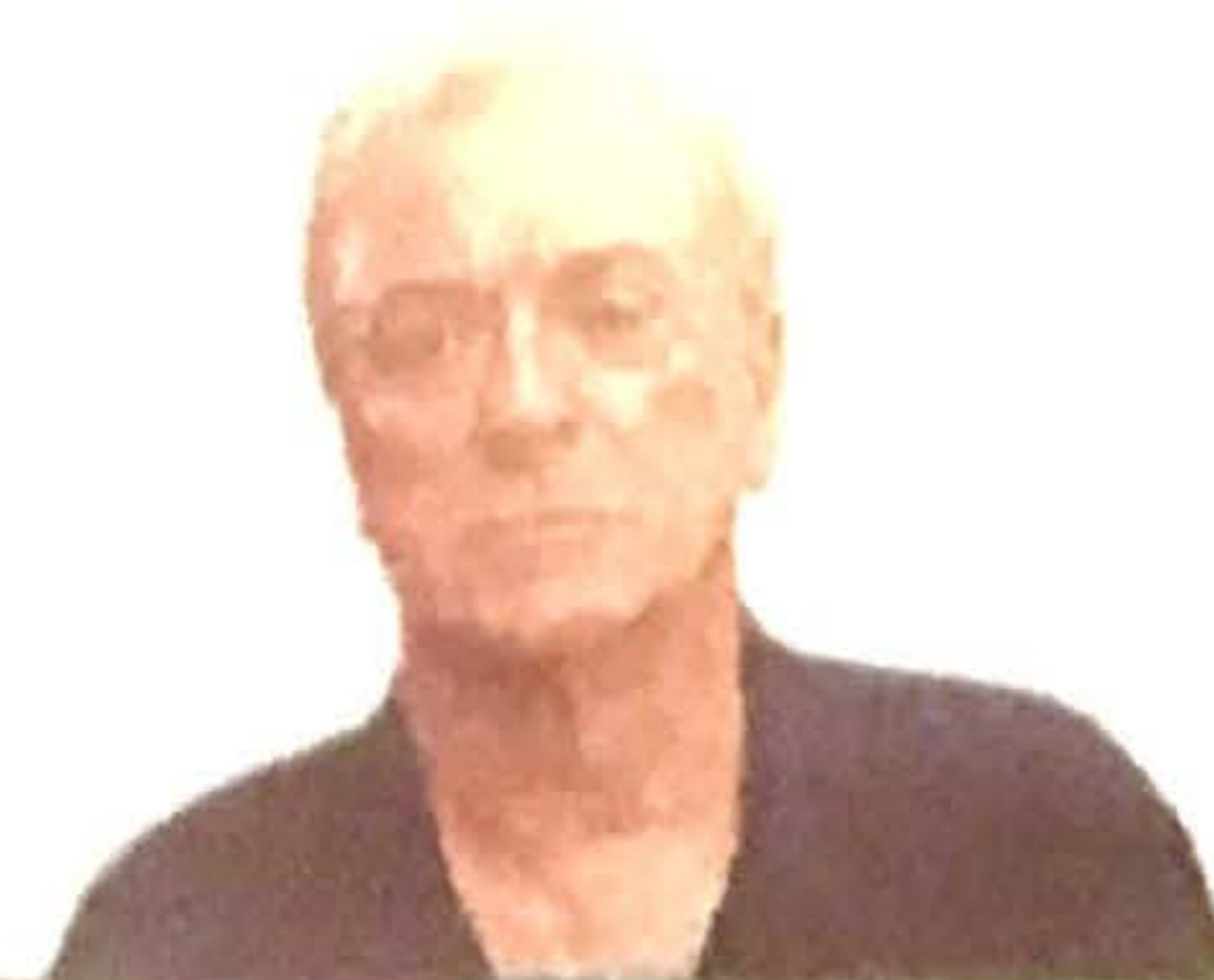
ARTS ENTERTAINMENT

Michael Caine fought for "The Quiet American," and the effort paid off. In *Variety FreeTime*

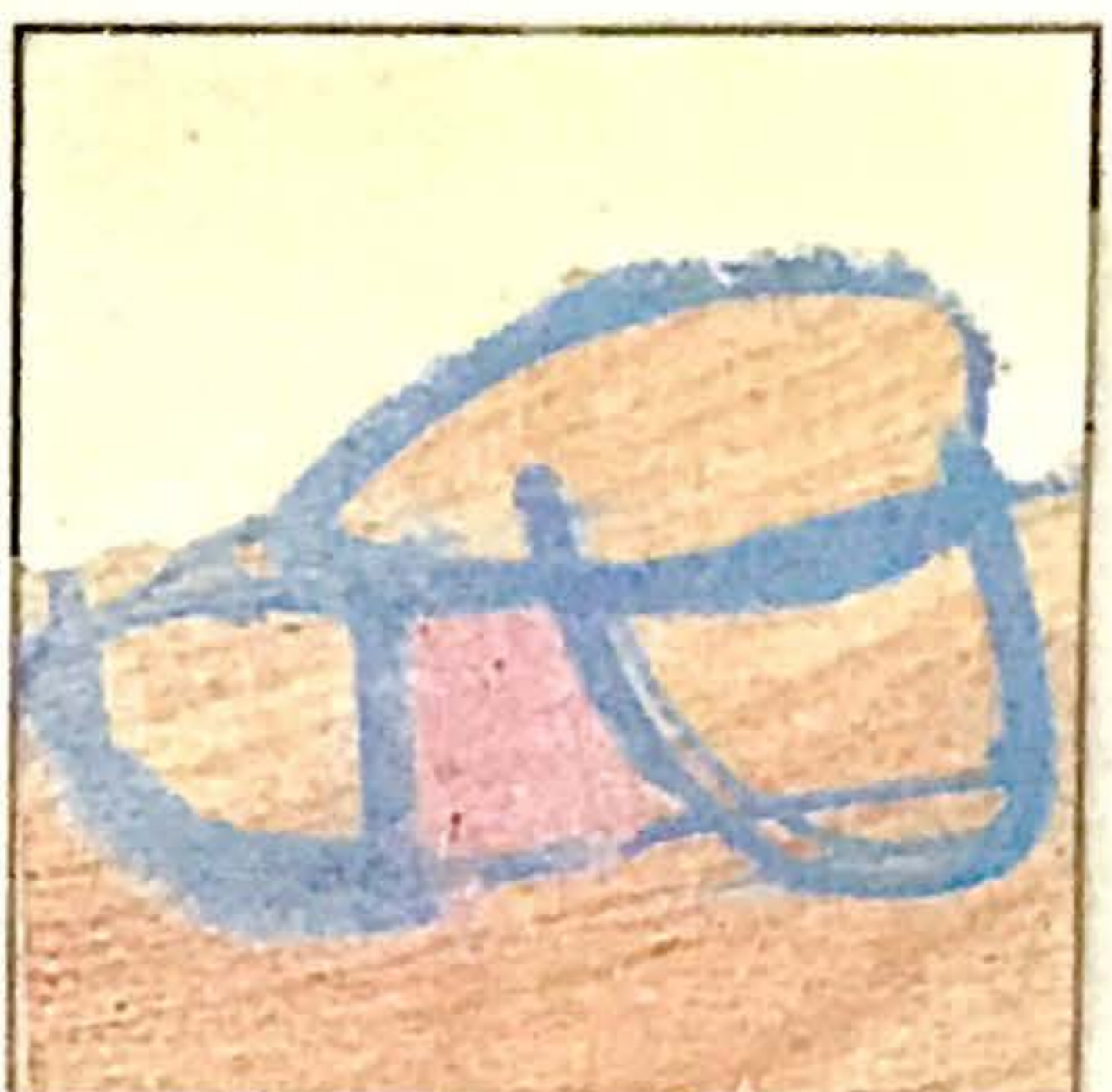
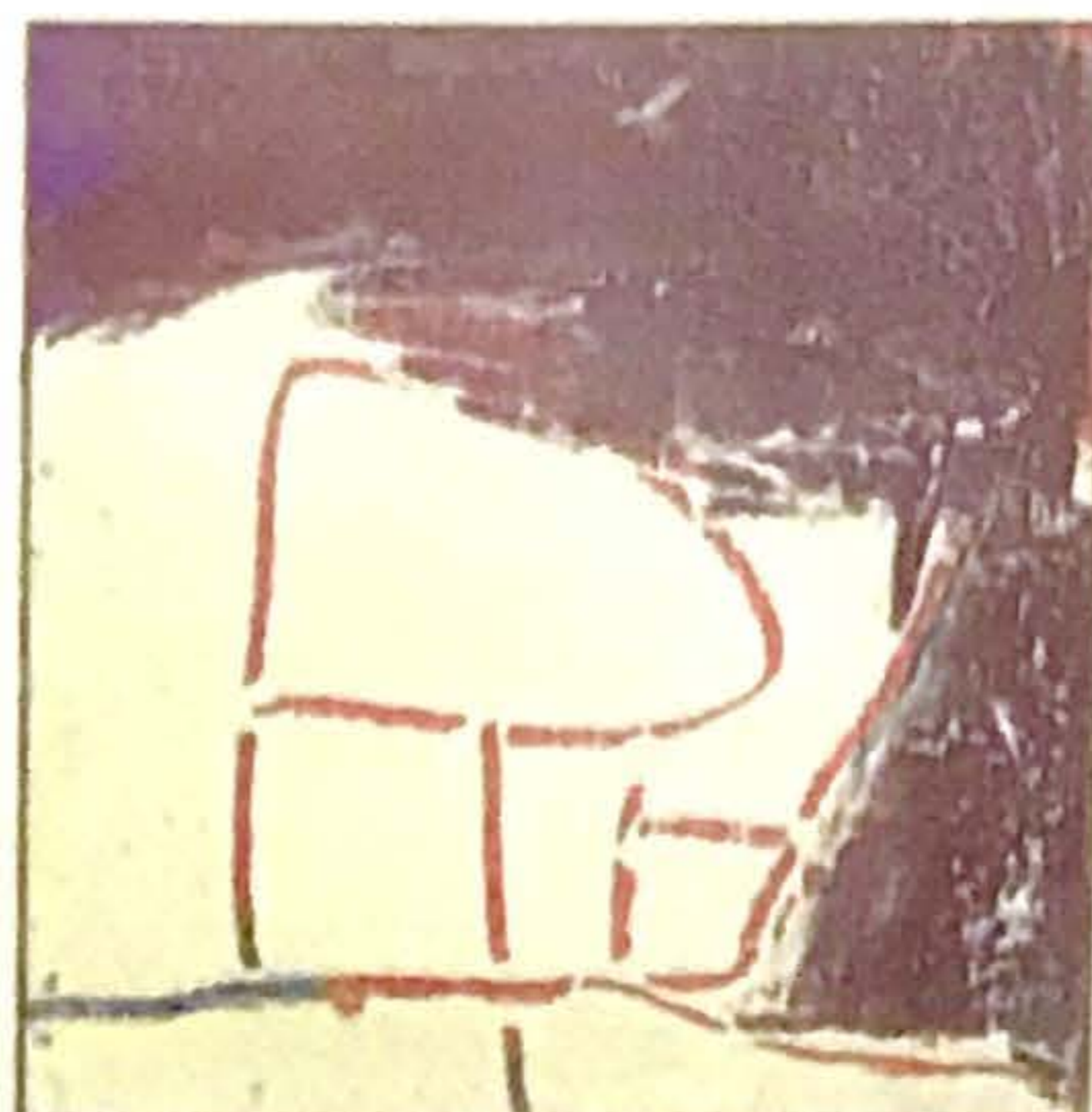
TODAY'S QUOTE

"If by day art is in the service of business, the evenings are devoted to the businessman's enjoyment of it."

— Karl Kraus, Austrian writer



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HOW MUCH IS THAT PAINTING IN THE WINDOW?



If you think art-buying is only for wealthy insiders, read on. Twin Cities gallery owners say the art trade here is mostly at a more affordable level.



Flatland Gallery owner Robyne Robinson worked with painter Greg Dickerson to keep the prices down for his colorful abstractions. "I'm never going to recoup what I put into it, but it's great that someone wants something you've created," Dickerson said.

Photographs by Tom Sweeney/Star Tribune

By Mary Abbe
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Original art is assumed to be a plaything of the rich, but it is available at Twin Cities art galleries at prices accessible to more than the trust-fund set. The range of art — and art prices — is as varied as houses on the Twin Cities real-estate market, but without the million-dollar mansions at the top end, art dealers say.

"No one here is dealing with \$1 million or \$2 million paintings on a daily basis. It's never happened here and most likely never will," said Minneapolis art dealer Martin Weinstein, who shows many nationally known artists, primarily photographers, at his namesake gallery in a former grocery store in south Minneapolis.

Twin Cities collectors are buying multi-million-dollar art, but Weinstein and others said that such sales generally take place in New York, London and other major art markets. The bread-and-butter art sales in the Twin Cities are much more modest.

"We don't have that much work to compare in the \$200,000 range, but if you're looking for art in the \$2,000 to \$10,000 range we have fabulous pieces flowing out of these galleries all the time," said veteran dealer Sally Johnson, who has been selling Midwestern landscapes, abstractions and figurative art for more than 25 years as director of Groveland Gallery in Minneapolis.

Those prices are for top-quality paintings, drawings or sculpture, generally by Midwestern artists, some of whom have work in museum collections here and

Greg Dickerson's paintings, above, exemplify the mission of Robyne Robinson's Flatland Gallery, which aims to showcase less expensive work by emerging artists. Robinson, a KMSB-TV news anchor, said she gets lots of first-time buyers at the Minneapolis shop.

These 7-by-7-inch paintings cost \$95 each; they have sold well during the current show, which continues through Thursday.

elsewhere. Limited-edition photos or prints might be priced substantially lower. (Or higher, depending on the artist's age, reputation, track record and other business factors.)

Minneapolis art dealer Robyne Robinson aims for even lower prices. At Flatland Gallery, her sunny little storefront on E. Hennepin Avenue, she tries to keep prices for one-of-a-kind paintings, drawings and sculpture well below \$1,000 — ideally in the \$100-to-\$500 range. The KMSB-TV Channel 9 anchor, who tends the gallery herself before and after her on-air stints, shows mostly young Twin Cities artists who are launching their careers.

"Lots of first-time buyers come here," Robinson said. "The great feeling for me is seeing the joy on people's faces when they realize they can not only appreciate the art but also buy it. Everybody wants to be welcome at the table, you know?"

Johnson tries to account for the big financial picture when she sets prices.

ART continues on F8:
— Artists typically split their proceeds 50-50 with galleries.

The right price for artist, buyer is a delicate balance

"If a person wants to buy art, they're going to be coming out all the other things they may want to acquire — a new washing machine, their kids' orthodontia," Johnson said. "So I want to make it as affordable as possible, and I am trying to push the price down as much as I can, because art is not a necessity."

Keeping prices low is a delicate balancing act because art dealing is first and foremost a business — albeit a small, intimate business with perhaps just a whiff of mystery and glamour.

Artists typically split their proceeds 50-50 with the gallery. Out of their 50 percent, the galleries pay salaries, rent, insurance, taxes, utilities and advertising and promotion costs. They maintain extensive slide files and documentation of the artists' careers; meet with potential buyers, stage opening receptions with food and wine, arrange shows at galleries elsewhere in the country; pay for return shipping and sometimes for installing the art.

Artists have to stretch their 50 percent to cover living and professional expenses, and must take many things into account when pricing their work.

"The artists may make 40 paintings a year, but they can't expect to sell all of them, so they have to build their costs into the equation," Johnson said. "So it's a partnership with the artist when we try to figure out what we each need in order to make a work."

Working with young artists poses special pricing challenges, all the dealers said.

"The philosophy I hold is that when an artist is just getting started, the last thing you want to do is price something too high, because it drives people away," said Thomas Barry, whose namesake gallery in the Minneapolis warehouse district is a showplace for quirky Midwestern surrealism, folk-



Architect Mark

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nered spots in private and museum collections from Walker Art Center to the Bibliothèque National in Paris. She exhibits regularly throughout the country, and a book of her black-and-white prints, "Poetics of Place," was published in 1998. A second book, featuring her color work, will appear next fall.

"When we introduced Lynn's art in 1981, the prints were \$200 each," Barry said. "A similar-sized piece now would be \$1,500 to \$1,800, which is still pretty reasonable considering what she has done with her career."

Greccaman credits Barry for much of her success.

"Tom is the only rep I've ever had," Greccaman said, describing him as "a buffer" between herself and buyers. "Everything goes through him. Without him it is not clear that I would ever have sold any-

thing on top dollar might be afforded. On the other hand, secondary careers reduce the time available for artmaking, affecting an artist's output.

"It's really a full-time job getting your slides out there and making sure you're maintaining those relationships" with galleries and potential buyers, said Michael Kareken, a Minneapolis painter who also chairs the fine-arts department at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. He moved to the Twin Cities a few years ago after working for a decade in New York City. His recent Twin Cities shows of surrealism-wracked landscapes and meditative figure drawings have sold well at Groveland, and he's now "gearing up to approach New York and Chicago" galleries, he said.

"Different galleries have different riches," Kareken said. "Groveland is a great regional gallery that has relationships elsewhere, but if I really want to show in New York, I have to find a gallery to rep me there."

Deciding on price isn't easy

Highly trained and often burdened with educational loans, young artists, especially, often feel economic and psychological pressure to boost prices. And virtually all of them want to quit their "day jobs" in favor of the studio.

Setting prices is "the most difficult thing I do here," said Wanda Flechsig, who shows a mix of young and seasoned artists at Circa, her 13-year-old gallery near Loring Park in Minneapolis. She specializes in sensitive, nature-inspired abstractions and contemporary designs that range from wall-sized paintings to table-top sculpture.

When traveling, Flechsig constantly compares the quality and price of Twin Cities art with what she encounters elsewhere. Some of her artists also show in Santa Fe, N.M., "where prices tend to be higher," she said, a fact that must be taken into consideration when setting local prices. Others may have informal or contractual ties to a "primary dealer" elsewhere in the country who recommends a price range and

track records also are considered, although those factors don't necessarily dictate who will get top dollar.

Flechsig, for example, sells the comparatively small — 24 by 24 inch — paintings of New York artist Joseph Janku, which are made of marble dust on paper, for between \$1,400 and \$2,200. She prices the "big, beautiful, lush" abstractions of Minnesota artist James Heinberg, which are up to 6 feet wide, at \$5,000 to \$5,800.

"James' paintings are much bigger, but Joseph Haskie is in his 60s and has been in the Whitney Biennial and in group shows at [late New York dealer] Leo Castelli's gallery, so he has a very intimidating résumé," Flechsig said. "He knows the value of his work at his age, and I'm lucky to have him."

Still, Heinberg's career is hot, too, Flechsig said. At 32, the artist has gotten several prestigious Minnesota grants, been shown at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and recently secured gallery representation in Chicago and Boston.

First solo show in Minneapolis

When Robinson and painter Greg Dickerson began planning for his current show at Flatland, which runs through Thursday, they had to do a little negotiating to pull his prices down into her under-\$1,000 ballpark. He'd had some success previously showing in Los Angeles, and for the past two years had sold his colorful abstractions out of his studio in St. Paul's Lowertown neighborhood during the area's semi-annual Art Crawl.

Dickerson, 28, filed the idea of having his first Minneapolis solo show at Robinson's gallery, but worried about the economic viability of splitting his sales 50-50 with her.

"In New York City a 20-inch-by-20-inch painting would be \$1,500 to \$2,200, and here they're going for \$425," Dickerson said. "But it's a lose-win scenario. I'm never going to recoup what I put into it, but it's great that someone wants something that you've created."

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When Barry began showing Geesaman's photos in 1981, she was a novice with no exhibition record. Geesaman's star has soared as her elegant images of formal European and American gardens have gar-

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Rules of the gallery game

For artists, a variety of expectations and needs come into play when setting prices. If they have income from other jobs — teaching and construction work are popular auxiliary careers — the pressure to de-

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"Some artists price by the inch or by the foot," Flechsig said. "If I have a 24-inch-by-36-inch piece as opposed to a 60-inch-by-72-inch painting, the smaller obviously costs less because there's less time and material in it."

Artists' ages, experience and

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In the end, Dickerson said he was pleased with his Flatland show because Robinson not only sold nine of his paintings, but brought a lot of new people in to see his work and arranged a show for him in Cleveland, his hometown.

Buyer Mark Westman was pleased, too. An architect whose office in the former Grain Belt Brewery is not far from Flatland, Westman considers himself an art collector "on a modest scale." He volunteers as a tour guide at Walker Art Center and, with his partner, has bought art at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design's annual faculty-student sales and other offbeat venues.

Spying some of Dickerson's work at Flatland, he bought it because "I really liked Greg's use of color" and because he could afford it.

"Robyne is making an effort to introduce younger artists and make them accessible to those of us who aren't affluent, but like the work and would like to have some of it," Westman said.

— Mary Abba is at mabba@startribune.com.



Sally Johnson, director the Groveland Gallery in Minneapolis, looks over a canvas by artist Michael Kareken. In the Twin Cities, Johnson says, "If you're looking for art in the \$2,000 to \$10,000 range, we have fabulous pieces flowing out of these galleries all the time."