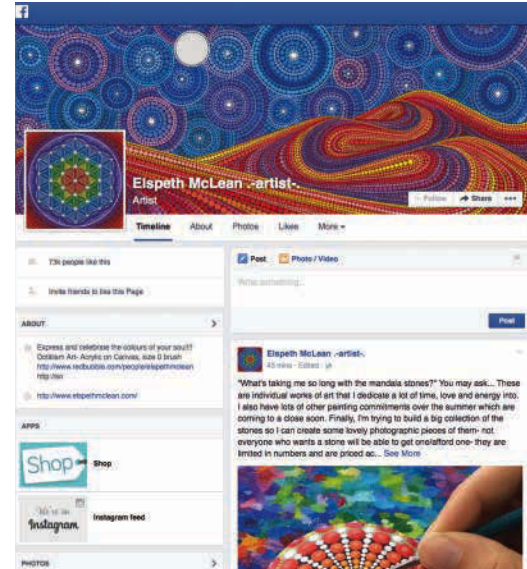




BUILD YOUR FOLLOWING on Facebook

In 2009, artist Elspeth McLean (elspethmclean.com) signed up for a personal Facebook page so that she could show her family and friends what she was working on while she was traveling. About a year and a half later, she launched the Facebook artist page “Elspeth McLean Artist” and, five years later, the page has more than 73,000 “likes.”

“ The purpose of my artist page on Facebook is to bring color and something uplifting into people’s lives. ... I want to bring positivity to Facebook. ~Elsbeth McLean



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“How did you do get so many ‘likes’?” is a question she hears often, especially now that she’s supporting herself as a full-time artist from sales of her original art, prints, painted rocks and items such as shirts, mugs and cushions printed with her art. It’s been four years since she quit the part-time job she had to pay the bills.

McLean, a resident of British Columbia, conducts most of her business via Etsy, RedBubble and Studio6. (See related article on Page 30 about alternatives to selling on Etsy.) Her Facebook page leads many of those customers to her online shops, as does her Pinterest page.

But she isn’t only on Facebook to find customers. Facebook is where she engages with her community. In fact, what she’s discovered using Facebook daily for more than five years is that the posts that are the most “salesy” receive the fewest “likes” and “shares.”

So, how has she built such a big following?

She knows her mission.

“The purpose of my artist page on Facebook is to bring color and something uplifting into people’s lives,” she said. “I want to bring positivity to Facebook. It’s my

mission to counteract the sometimes dark and unpleasant things you can find on Facebook.”

Without a mission, “it can get confused as to why you’re doing it,” she said.

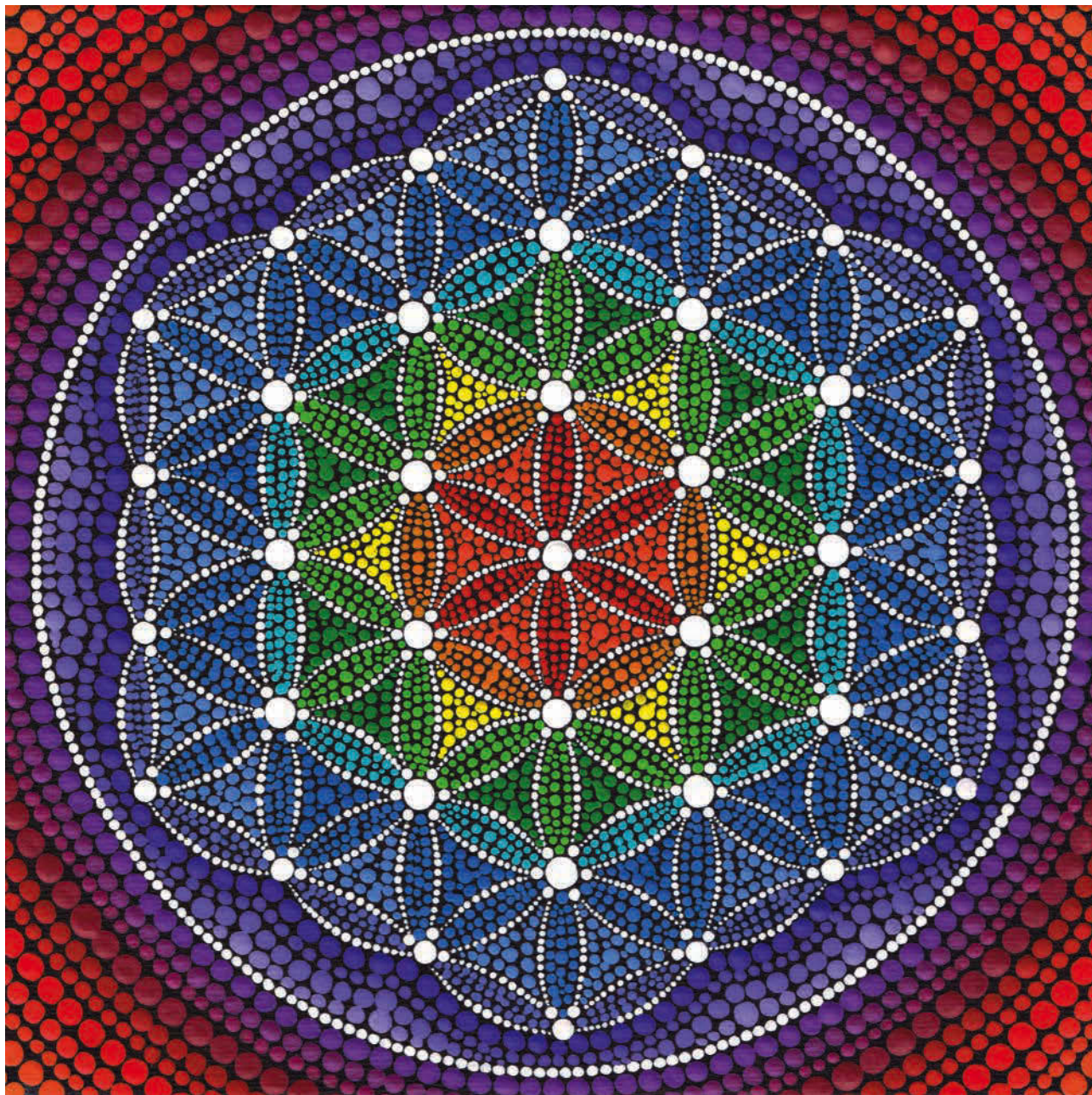
Her work, which she calls “dottilism” is composed of many vibrantly colored “dots” and perfectly aligns with her mission. You can’t help but smile when you see the rainbow-colored visuals created with colorful dots that she painstakingly paints.

With this clarity of mission, McLean posts daily, but it’s not just photographs of her artwork. She posts images of work in progress, including ones of her in the studio and close-ups of the process — all with a pithy message or story that’s less than a paragraph long.

Her followers tell her that they look forward to her daily posts so they can be uplifted by the beauty and color of her work.

Before she joined Facebook, McLean sold her art at craft market stalls, but as soon as Facebook took off, she realized “I didn’t have to sit out in the rain and I could do this from home.” She gave up her market stall and moved

1 In a recent post on her Facebook page, Elspeth McLean explains the time involved to create her mandala stones. 2 Elspeth McLean’s Facebook business page has more than 73,000 “likes”.



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her community to Facebook.

Now, the same pleasure she used to find interacting with customers in person she finds in her daily posting to Facebook, which has become part of her routine.

"You have to enjoy it," she said, of her Facebook involvement. "I love photography. I love people. Running a Facebook page is a pleasure; it's not a business chore and that comes across on my page."

How does she find ideas for what to post?

"People love seeing studio photos," she said.

"People go to Facebook to reach out and photos of the studio allow people to feel special and included, to feel part of something bigger." Even if being an artist is not their calling, she explained, they get to be part of your creative process. "You're allowing people to see what you do through your own eyes."

Her followers are "more interested in my process than the finished product," she said, which is why she receives less shares when she's advertising one of her products.

McLean's following was boosted by about 50,000 followers when the photographs of the stones she paints

“ Ask yourself: ‘What is it that I’m most excited about?’ and then share that. ~Elspeth McLean



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went viral. “It’s rather rare and lucky,” she said about having an image go viral. “But if I hadn’t put the images out there in the first place, they wouldn’t have been there to be found.”



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On a Facebook artist page, you can pay to “boost” a post and it will reach more people. McLean has tried that a few times but didn’t find that it helped with sales or gained her more followers so she doesn’t do it now.

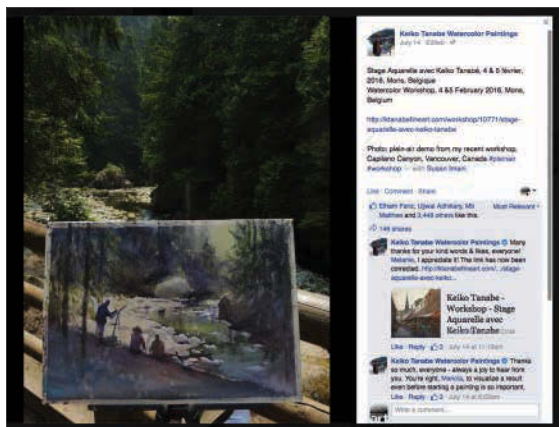
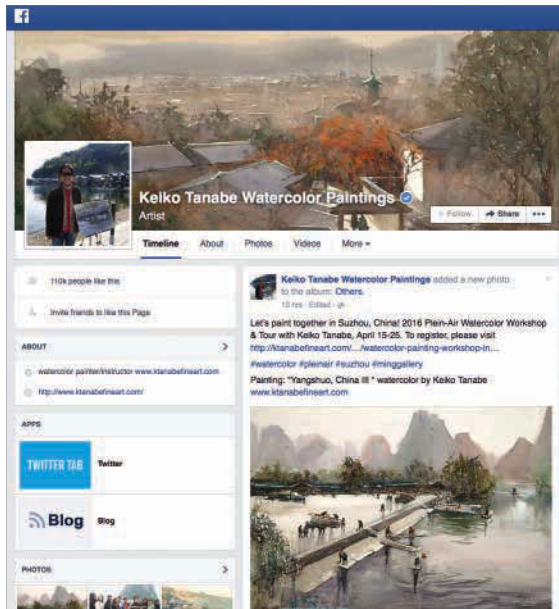
“It’s more important to regularly post and keep it interesting,” she said. She advises artists to make the image so captivating that a viewer can’t help but want to share it. When someone shares it, then you’re exposed to all of her friends too. Then, friends of followers can “like” your page. But this won’t happen if you don’t have something worth sharing.

“My fan base has been built with shares,” she said.

McLean is selective about what she posts. She doesn’t post much about her personal life, and she never shares something with her followers unless she’s passionate about it. For artists who want to gain more followers, McLean advises: “Ask yourself: ‘What is it that I’m most excited about?’ and then share that,” she said.

4 Morning Light, San Miguel de Allende, 2015, by Keiko Tanabe. Plein-air watercolor on paper, 14”x 20”.

5 Keiko Tanabe 6 Rainy Morning, Yangshuo, China, 2015, by Keiko Tanabe. Plein-air watercolor on paper, 14”x 20”. Copyright © 2015 Keiko Tanabe. Used by permission of the artist.



Now that she has such a big following, McLean doesn't have the time to respond to every comment. "If I answered every question and message, it would be a full-time job."

Landscape Painter Keiko Tanabe (ktanabefineart.com) was relatively late joining Facebook when she started her artist page in 2011. Four years later, she has 110,000 "likes" on her page "Keiko Tanabe Watercolor Paintings." She followed many of the same guidelines for building a fan base as McLean did.

Tanabe posts daily, which is easy for her to do because she's a "daily painter" and sometimes paints more than one painting a day. So, she always has a new piece of art to show and she posts one every morning.

Tanabe sells her original paintings from either one of her galleries or from her website, which she considers her hub. "Everything I do on the Internet is linked back to my website," she said.

On each painting she posts she includes a watermark with her website address, which she feels gives her some protection against having the images stolen and illegally copied.

⁷ Keiko Tanabe shares photos from recent plein-air workshops on her Facebook page, which has more than 110,000 "likes".

DOS AND DON'TS OF BUILDING A FOLLOWING ON FACEBOOK

Dos

- Define your mission. Why are you posting? To brighten people's lives? Make them think? Have a clear intention.
- Post daily or at least several times a week.
- Create an artist page separate from your personal profile, otherwise you will be limited to 5,000 friends.
- Always post a visual. This could be an artwork, a work in progress, a workshop in progress, a still life, anything art-related.
- "Like" artist and gallery pages you admire. Notice what inspires you to "like" and "share" a post.

Don'ts

- Don't post more than 2-3 times a day. You want people to look forward to your posts, not get tired of hearing from you.
- Don't use the same image again and again.
- Don't write posts that are more than a paragraph long.
- Don't make each post about selling. Your followers want to see the world where the art was created.
- Don't use Facebook as a way to avoid time in the studio. Post, close your computer and make art.



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But Tanabe doesn't spend too much time worrying about that. "If you're afraid of having your work copied, don't use the Internet," she said. She did discover that two of her paintings were copied and being sold as posters for a few dollars, but she said she doesn't have the time to track down all the thieves.

On her Facebook page you can also find photographs from her workshops, news on upcoming exhibitions and links to media coverage of her work. She teaches 20-30 workshops all over the world that give her an unending stream of photo opportunities.

Tanabe voiced one warning for artists using Facebook: "Some artists tend to stay there too long," she said. "You should always work on your craft first." She begins every day from her studio in San Diego, California, with a post to Facebook and then closes her computer and paints.



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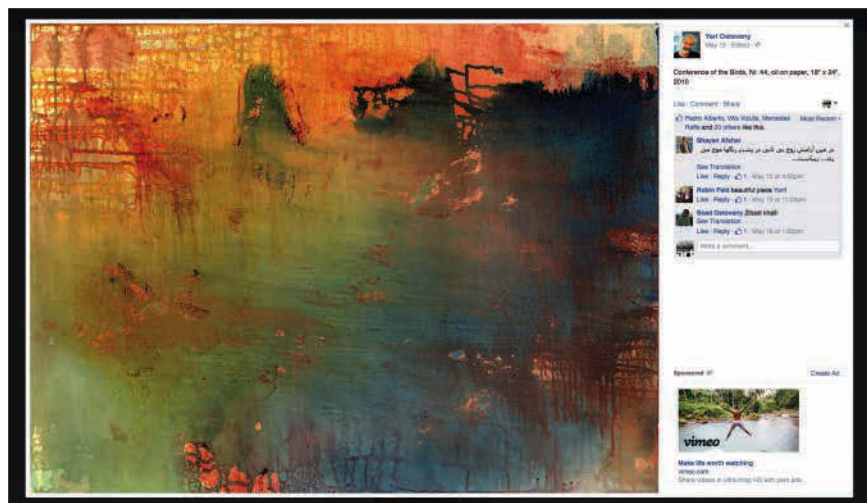
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Yari Ostovany, a painter rooted in abstract expressionism, uses Facebook in a slightly different way. He's not concerned as much with how many likes he receives but more with the quality of the connections he makes within the Facebook community. Right now, he has 5,000 friends on his personal Facebook profile, which is the maximum number of friends Facebook allows. He launched an artist page that now has about 900 "likes," and he's encouraging followers to migrate from his personal profile to his artist page.

During this transition, he posts to both pages.

Ostovany uses Facebook to network with artists, research galleries and keep his finger on the pulse of the art world.

"Facebook has allowed me to connect to artists around the world," Ostovany said. He's eventually met many of these



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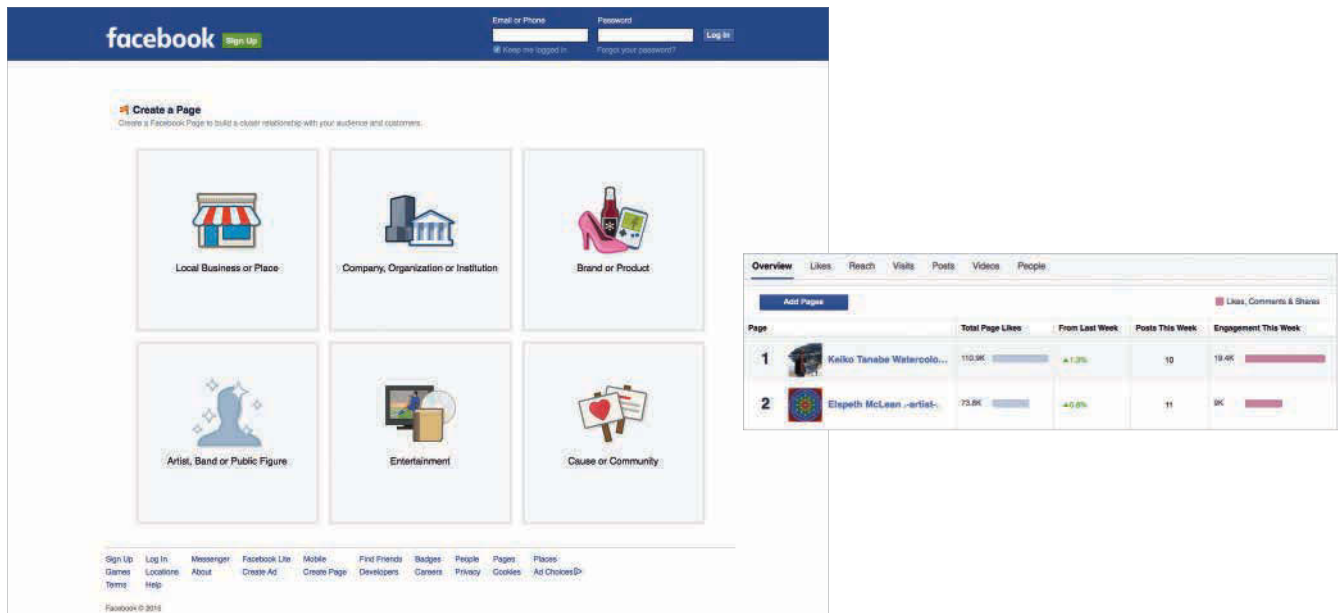
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“If you just put the link, people won’t click on it. ... You really have to **hold the image in front of people’s faces**. ~Yari Ostovany

artists in person and been introduced to galleries and other artists who share his sensibilities.

“I just started working with an art agent who I came across on Facebook two years ago,” Ostovany said. “Without Facebook, I wouldn’t have known of him.”

He’s used Facebook to find out about and research galleries that may be a good fit for his work.

Ostovany posts several times a week. “I keep it afloat not to let interest drop,” he said. If he doesn’t have anything new, he posts an older work or reposts an image from when he had fewer followers. Like McLean and Tanabe, he always posts an image, not just a link.

“If you just put the link, people won’t click on it,” he said. “You really have to hold the image in front of people’s faces. The response changes immediately.”

Ostovany, who is based in the San Francisco Bay Area, rarely shows work in progress. “I’m a private painter,” he said. Although he doesn’t invite the camera into his

studio, he does post behind-the-scenes images captured at exhibitions and other events. When he posts finished work, he includes its title, date and medium. His poetic and lyrical titles of his paintings are almost as captivating as his images.

Like McLean and Tanabe, his art is at the center of his life, and he uses Facebook to enhance his life as an artist and find and grow his community. Posting to Facebook has been folded into the routine of daily activities for these three artists. As McLean said, “Ten to 15 minutes every day can make all the difference.” **PA**

Gigi Rosenberg is the editor of Professional Artist. She’s also an artist coach and the author of The Artist’s Guide to Grant Writing (Watson-Guptill, 2010). She’s been a guest commentator on Oregon Public Broadcasting, performed at Seattle’s On The Boards, and been published by Seal Press, Poets & Writers, and Psychology Today. For the latest, visit gigirosenberg.com or reach her at grosenberg@professionalartistmag.com.

[12] Visit facebook.com/pages/create and click on the “Artist, Band or Public Figure” button to create your own business page.