

"There's a reason they say 'starving artist' but they don't say 'starving musician.' It's not that it's easy to be a musician. It's that it's impossible to be a visual artist."

BEN GOLDMAN, ART GALLERY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Ben Goldman, executive director of the City Without Walls gallery in Newark, shows his new frame design, which allows art to be sold in the same way that music is.

# This could be music to an artist's ears

## Entrepreneur brings 'sound' marketing to visual field

BY JENNIFER WEISS  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Ben Goldman hopes one day you will walk into an Ikea store looking for something to hang in your living room. Instead of picking up the mass-produced Gustav Klimt, you'll leave with a framed, limited-edition print of a painting by Emanuele Cacciatore — a Weehawken artist you've never heard of.

You'll hang the art, with its jewel box-like frame Goldman designed, and enjoy it. When you want a change, you'll snap the frame open, slip out the print and slide in a new one, a limited-edition reproduction of a mixed-media, hand-signed work by, say, the Jersey City artist Hiroshi Kumagai. (Why not? It was easy to buy at Goldman's online catalog, available at the Web site of the gallery he directs, City Without Walls.)

Think of Goldman's business as something like a record label. Called defEYE Productions, his "label" brings a music-business approach to the visual art world.

"There's a reason they say 'starving artist' but they don't say 'starving musician,'" said Goldman, the executive director of Newark's established art gallery City Without Walls. "It's not that it's easy to be a musician. It's that it's impossible to be a visual artist."

Goldman chose two images by each of 11 artists to reproduce, digitally, 100 times. He had the artists sign each print, and then packaged many of the prints in a frame that he developed.

Coated with a protective glaze, Goldman's patent-pending 19-by-24-inch frame pops open, allowing prints to be easily

slipped in and out. The frame is made of UV-protected acrylic and polycarbonate and resembles a CD jewel box, offering liner notes in the form of a certificate of authenticity with a short bio and description of the piece. Besides a modest advance, artists will earn additional royalties as prints sell.

### COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL

Art photographer Emma Wilcox, 27, says that if Goldman's idea takes off, she would quit her day job.

"It's conceivable to me that this model could work because there could be some rebellion with the state of the art market," said Wilcox, who pays most of her bills as a nanny. She knows artists who work in such varied professions as strippers, accountants and house painters to make a living. "But of course I would quit my day job. If it was possible to live on the royalties from these things, of course people would do it."

The frames and select prints were sold for the first time on Thursday, when Goldman's exhibit "On Every Wall" opened. While the show ends Nov. 1, he plans to continue selling the frames and the prints, replenishing as they sell out. (Also available at the gallery's Web site, [www.cwow.org](http://www.cwow.org).) A print without frame costs \$211; framed, \$299 — far less than the \$500 to \$5,000 the artists charge for the originals.

David Ross, the co-founder of an investment program for artists called Artist Pension Trust and the former director of both the Whitney Museum of American Art and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, said the success of Goldman's project would depend on the quality of artists involved. He ques-

tioned whether there would be money enough to market the concept, since the costs of the prints are so low.

"There are many more than 100 people out there that are buying art, but the question is getting to them and getting them to sign onto works they might not have even seen yet," Ross said. (Goldman said he is funding defEYE with the help of private investors.)

### ARTISTIC TOUCH

Suzanne Anker, chair of the fine arts department at the School of Visual Arts in New York, applauded Goldman's idea but also stressed the need for participation from high-quality artists. "I think that affordable art is something that should be made possible," Anker said.

The generally accepted notion in the art world that making multiples of a work devalues the original is nonsense, Goldman said. Musicians record performances and studio takes to be sold and re-played. Authors write books that are sold in large quantities. Goldman doesn't believe serious fine artists should cringe at the thought of reproducing their art, especially if the reproductions are high-quality, limited in number and made more special with a signature. He hopes to start a subscription service soon, whereby members can choose a new digital print every month.

Married with two young daughters, Goldman, 46, knows how hard it is to make a living as an artist. He holds a doctorate in public administration from New York University. Before he switched gears to become a full-time artist a decade ago, he worked in public policy as an entrepreneur, teacher, consultant and activist. He is the author

### Gallery goes-on

The artists taking part on "On Every Wall" are Michael Amter, Emanuele J. Cacciatore, Elizabeth Cooper, Scherezade Garcia, E. Jan Kounitz, Hiroshi Kumagai, Greg Leshé, Manuela Paz, Alejandra Villasmil, Peter Walsh and Emma Wilcox. Open Sept. 20-Nov. 1 at City Without Walls Gallery, 6 Crawford St., Newark.

"On Every Wall" will have another reception Oct. 27 as part of the Newark Open Doors Studio Tour. The first numbered print of each edition will be auctioned off at City Without Walls' inaugural gala benefit, Nov. 14 at the Newark Club.

of a half-dozen books on environmental issues and served on President Clinton's Council on Sustainable Development.

"I realized that I was not the only struggling artist; in fact, I was more successful than many that I knew," Goldman said. "It enabled me to ask not only, 'What's wrong with this picture?' but, because I have fairly unique training, I was able to take those skills and answer the question."

The answer, he said, is for artists to stop seeing consumer-friendly reproductions as evil and start seeing them as a way to increase public appreciation for quality art. In 2005, he started a business to sell artists' work, United Visual Arts Inc. defEYE will be the company's first product line.

### OLD ROOTS

The concept of having artists produce multiples of a work isn't new — in the 1600s, Rembrandt made hundreds of etchings; in the 1800s, Currier & Ives made more than a million lithographs; in the same century, Jules Chéret, a French painter and lithographer, broadened the reach of posters.

Today, print centers such as Rutgers University's Brodsky Center for Print and Paper work with artists to create prints and bring them to the marketplace.

Judith Brodsky, the Brodsky Center's founding director, compared the prints produced there to a musical composition rather than a recorded performance. Artists are deeply involved in the process and are paid an honorarium and given half of what's produced; a print made by an emerging artist is typically priced at around \$1,000.

Goldman, by contrast, takes an artist's image and has it reproduced. While artists may give input at the beginning of this process, a printer makes the digital reproductions and each one is the same.

A reproduction that doesn't involve the artist the whole way through "does have this reputation of being suspect and not really being true art," Brodsky said. "That may be something that may be difficult for Ben to overcome with this project."

But if his record-label business model holds — that is if the market accepts it — this concern could become a thing of the past.

"It's a big risk margin that you need to live with if you're in art-making," said Wilcox, the daytime nanny, who is also co-owner of Newark's Gallery Aferra. "I don't think people in other professions understand that."

Jennifer Weiss may be reached at [jweiss@starledger.com](mailto:jweiss@starledger.com) or (973) 392-7896.