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THREE THINGS TO DO TONIGHT

CANDY GIRL CATFIGHT | by Kate Marshall - one of the pieces on sale at DegreeArt.com



TURNING STUDENT ART INTO COLLECTORS' ITEMS

Graduate Gallery

Rose Rouse meets the pair who defied the odds to create a booming business

OF THE two least promising starts to a career, one has to be hearing the immortal words "You're fired" from Alan Sugar, and the other being laughed off set by one of the Dragons in BBC's *Dragon's Den*.

It was the latter that happened to art graduates Isobel Beauchamp and Elinor Olisa. Just 24 and 23 when they appeared on the show in 2005, with the idea of creating a website to sell their friends' end-of-degree artwork, they were met with mockery by then-Dragon Rachel Elnaugh, who told them they were a pair of silly schoolgirls

online contemporary art business and gallery, Empire, in Bethnal Green's Vyner St.

Their idea was simple. "I was at London College of Fashion and Elinor was at Goldsmiths. Our friends were graduating, they'd have amazing end-of-year shows but then have to get a job in a bar. They didn't have a clue how to sell their work," says Isobel, now 26. "We created Degree-Art.com to give a platform to artists like them and allow anyone with a computer to become an art investor."

She adds: "We're always looking for art students who are graduating but have a professional attitude

to make commercial decisions."

What was their first sale? "We sold four paintings for £400 each to a guy who worked in London but had a flat in New York," laughs Elinor, 27. "We nearly exploded with excitement. They're worth twice that now so it was an investment."

Their unique selling point is their lack of pretentiousness. "We pride ourselves on being approachable. Our openings are very friendly affairs," says Isobel.

In 2007, their 20 best-selling artists earned £100,000

sive contract. "We don't want to stifle their development," they explain.

Not a pair to sit back, they have just launched a new business, GlimpseOnline.com. "It's more design-orientated with jewellery, design and photos. But it's very quality-controlled," says Elinor.

www.degreeart.com,
www.glimpseonline.com

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