

Preparing For An Exhibition- How To Get The Most Out Of This Valued Experience

You've worked hard to develop a cohesive body of work. You've done your homework, worked diligently to do the research to find a place to exhibit your work. Perhaps you fell into a lucky situation and been offered an exhibition. How do you prepare for it to get the most out of this valuable experience? Well, the first thing is to realize that this is *not* a time to relax and enjoy the show...this is the opportunity to figure out a way to leverage this experience into something more productive and profitable. Following is a list of things to consider while preparing for an exhibition. Use this list and add to it as you learn more about your work and your audience.

Before the exhibition: Preparing for a show starts months before the dates for an exhibition are ever scheduled. In anticipation of a show, you should be gathering names and addresses (including email addresses) of everyone who has ever expressed an interest in your work, including current collectors and target galleries. (Read [How to Decide Which Galleries are Right for you to Approach](#)) You should also have acquired a list of art critics and/or writers and art magazines that you feel would be receptive to your work. Having an organized database will help you immensely not only for this exhibition, but for everything you do from this point forward. Decide on a budget and make preliminary arrangements for advertising, listings and invitations. Schedule pick up and delivery dates, framing deadlines, installation and de-installation dates and opening reception.

Selecting the exhibition: Most artists feel like they want to show every piece they have ever done. Fight your urge to crowd an exhibit. The goal is to give viewers a taste of what your work is like so they will want to see more, not to give them so much to choose from that they leave confused. Most people can only look at 8-10 pieces of art before becoming hydroscopic...like a sponge that just can not absorb any more water, after a certain point the brain just shuts off. Keep in mind that your eye is used to seeing your work in the close quarters of your studio. A casual observer needs the work to be isolated by at least 3-4' of white wall to experience a piece of art individually. Less is more; give each piece the space it needs to "breathe."

Selecting the announcement: The invitation is the single most important part of your exhibition. Blow the budget here, go for great color and quality card stock. A cheap announcement is a waste of money. The announcement will be seen by people who will never get to see the show, make it stand out. Your goal should be to pick the piece most representative of this body of work. Additionally, it must be the piece that will reproduce the best...this may or may not be your strongest work or your favorite piece. You need to select an image for the announcement objectively; keeping in mind your primary goal is to select a piece that photographs well, usually higher contrast images work best. Remember to put your name prominently on the front of the announcement. The brain sees your name and your art as one singular image...the seed you are trying to plant is the association of those two things. Print plenty of announcements, at least twice as many as you think you will need. You will use them for a long time. Your invitation should go in the mail at least two weeks

before the opening. A press release should be mailed 4-6 weeks before the opening. (Writing a press release is covered in more detail in a separate article.)

Hanging the show: Following the logic of planting the seed of your name with your imagery, I encourage artists to have their name and/or the title of the exhibition on the wall somewhere. Most sign shops will make custom vinyl letters that rub on a wall temporarily and can be easily removed without damaging paint or walls and the end of the show. Installing the work, you should keep in mind the general rule of thumb, the center of your painting should be at eye level of the average person's height...considering 5'6"-5'9" average, that would place the center of your piece at about a 62" centerline. You will need to adjust for unusual situations; this is just a very rough average. The art should be numbered, starting at the point of entrance going clockwise around the gallery. There should be an accompanying price list (in plastic sleeves) that lists the title, size, medium and price of each piece. (Read [Pricing Your Art](#)) If you have a press release, artist's statement or review, you can put it in the back of the sleeve. If you prefer, your resume with list of exhibitions and collectors can go in there. Don't forget to re-adjust lighting, clean the frames and/or glass and put a level on every piece.

The opening reception: This is your chance to talk about your work and relish in the glory and support of your friends and fans. Be prepared with a few concise statements that reflect your influences for this series of work. Have specific details from one or two pieces that will enable you to elaborate...people love to hear the artist talk about their work! (Read [Tips on How to Conduct Studio Visits and Gallery Interviews](#) and/or [The Dreaded Artists' Statement](#)) Make sure the gallery has made adequate arrangements for refreshments. People will tend to linger in this area. It is also advisable to put out a guest book to add new contacts to your mailing list and for comments (this is great reading when you are feeling down about your work).

During the exhibition: Your job for the duration of the exhibition can best be described as "schmoozing." Your goal is to get everyone you know into the gallery to see your show. This is where the database you started working on before the exhibition comes in handy. You may need to buy them lunch to get them there, you may need to get a key to the gallery so you can bring guests in after hours, you may need to organize an artists' talk and bring a van full of people...whatever works for you. The more people that see your show, the better it is for you and your work. Carry your announcements with you everywhere and hand them out every chance you get. Put a stack everywhere you go, restaurants, framers, neighboring businesses. Again, don't forget to ask people to sign the guestbook.

After the exhibition: Take the time to sit back and appreciate what you have accomplished. Read [Art is a Verb, not a Noun](#), to remind yourself how important it is for the work to be seen. You can then pack up your show knowing you've done exactly what needed to be done...given your work the opportunity to exist in the real world (albeit for a short period of time) so it can complete the cycle of "becomingness." Add all of your new contacts to your database and begin a strategy for contacting them on a regular basis...2-3 times per year should be sufficient. If you find yourself feeling down, read [Coping with the Post Exhibition Blues](#). It will assure you that what you are experiencing is the normal letdown that occurs after such an important experience. The best thing you can do now is get back to work. As soon as you have a new body of work, you can start the process all over again. Remember, *enjoy* the process, that's what making art is all about.