

How to Forge a Relationship with a Gallery

> What to Do

- Get involved (go to gallery openings & exhibitions, join museum groups, read the local art papers, be active in the local community)
- Befriend other artists
- Pick galleries to target that best fit your work
- Talk to the people who run & work at these galleries
- Ask artists who show at these galleries what they think
- Ask if a gallery is accepting submissions BEFORE you email or mail a packet
- Ask how a gallery prefers to view portfolios - every gallery is different
- Take a look at an exhibition before asking about submission policies
- Respect the gallery's submission policies
- Be friendly - a little kindness goes a long way
- Be able to knowledgeably, concisely, and clearly discuss your own work
- Keep things simple (Keep the jargon to a minimum. No fancy rice paper for your resume, no fancy presentation boxes with bows, no fancy type-faces, no flowery prose: these things reek of desperation. Instead, be professional and straightforward.)
- Burn DVDs or CDs with your resume, images (10 is a safe number), & artist statement. Keep a supply on hand (they're cheap, easy to produce, and (unlike slides) don't have to be returned).
- Your website is good reference material ...but keep it simple (no flash, no crazy drivers to download, etc).
- Learn the basics of how galleries function as a business
- Wait for quality galleries & shows rather than quantity

> What NOT to Do (ever, ever, ever):

- Cold calling... never cold call (ever, ever, ever)
- Contacting 100 galleries at a time to see who bites (either by phone or snail mail)
- Email a bunch of galleries at once (even if you "blind CC" everyone) to see who bites first
- Email images to a gallery unless specifically invited to do so
- Send an artist package if gallery states they are not accepting submissions
- Walk into a gallery and ask for them to view your portfolio without an appointment
- Solicit your work at Art Fairs
- Show just for the sake of showing
- Be unnecessarily demanding or pushy

SO YOU'RE WORKING WITH A GALLERY...NOW WHAT?

Okay, you've found the gallery that works best for you, done the studio visit, arranged for work to start being in the "backroom" and/or in an exhibition. Maybe you're even being represented! For all these scenarios, here's what to keep in mind:

> What to EXPECT From Your Gallery

- *Constant promotion* (a gallery is constantly promoting itself and its artists)
- *Public Presence* (website, art fairs, and exhibitions)
- *A Healthy Relationship* (A gallery works both for you and with you. You are not a slave to the gallery, and they are not your servants, either.)
- *Payment* (generally within 30 days of sale. This goes for exhibitions, art fairs, backroom sales, studio sales. The gallery should provide you with client information for your records)
- *A Contract* (this allows for a transparent relationship: lay it all out on the table... no surprises)
- *Career Advice* (pricing, other galleries, collectors, etc.)
- *An Advocate* (the gallery must be knowledgeable about your work and articulate when discussing it)
- *A Manager* (you create work, the gallery handles sales, studio visits, contacts, shipping, record keeping, etc.)

> Good Communication = Good Relationship

- Communicate your needs to the gallery in a professional (and cordial) manner
- From the get-go: discuss your goals with your gallery and methods for achieving them
- Keep your gallery in the loop (direct inquiries for purchasing work or outside shows their way)
- Discuss pricing with your gallery (consistent pricing is a must in this business)
- Lay off the drama (the art world is small, word gets around real quick if you're a pain in the ass).
- Support everything your gallery does (go to ALL gallery events, not just your own)
- Be punctual, respect deadlines, and keep your word
- Be flexible (The art world is crazy: clients don't always pay on time, the press needs everything yesterday, etc.)
- Trust their advice (If you've picked the gallery based on your tastes, their program, etc., don't micromanage their decisions regarding pricing, commission, where to show, and targeting clients... that's their job.)
- Never speak ill of your gallery, or artists represented by your gallery... especially in public.

This is an edited version of lecture notes provided by sixspace gallery owner Caryn Coleman for her "What Do Curators Want?" presentation at Side Street Projects on Wednesday, April 18th 2007. Side Street Projects' "Meet the Experts" public lecture series is made possible by a generous grant from the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation's Marketplace Empowerment for Artists program.