

Surviving on Art: Finding galleries



Using social media and Google to research galleries and reduce your rejection rate

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1. A brief introduction

Most of you reading this will in some way be a little familiar with my wife Magdalena's artwork but maybe I should outline a little about how her work fits into the context of our lives. We both love to travel and between us Magdalena and I have lived in England, Poland, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland and since 2015, Spain.

We used to have a fairly traditional family setup, with me providing the bulk of the income from my work as an IT consultant. Magdalena would paint whenever she could, however, the constant demands of two small children and the challenges of having to learn first English, then German and now Spanish made it nearly impossible for her to find the time necessary to devote to art as a career.

Early in 2016 Magdalena had been considering her options. She'd had a few exhibitions previously and has been represented by one gallery in particular since 2008 but with both kids now at school, she needed to do something with her newfound freedom. An opportune invitation to be represented by a start-up gallery in the south of France provided the impetus she needed. We ultimately decided not to continue with that particular gallery, but it gave her the nerve up to register as self-employed (no small task here in Spain and comes with a hefty fixed monthly fee) and she began to paint. And paint. And paint.

From that time onwards, I was spending my days working on IT contracts and my evenings figuring out how to build up her visibility online. By October 2016, when the contract I'd been working on came to an end, I was ready for a new challenge and decided to concentrate on supporting Magdalena's budding art career full time.

2017 was a phenomenal year for us, with Magdalena having a string of exhibitions all over Europe. I began to realise that all this information that I'd been absorbing and then applying may also be useful to other artists out there. Magdalena suggested that I try to condense it into guides, so that is what you are now reading. This particular guide on the way we've used social media and Google Maps to find and research suitable galleries to display and represent her work describes the approach we took whilst initially building Magdalena's online visibility.

2. Why do you need galleries?

You don't necessarily, but they really help!

The relationship between artist and a representative gallery can be a very stimulating and interesting thing. With some galleries it may be a very simple case of supply and demand, but with others it can become a long-burning working partnership where the gallery has a hand in guiding the artist's professional development.

With the arrival of the internet and the potential for online sales, many artists are currently wondering whether they still actually need galleries at all. Why should they give someone else a slice of the pie when they can do it themselves? There are two answers to that.

Time

The first is simple; there's only so many hours in the day to paint, photograph your work, crop it, resize it, get the detail shots, in-situ shots, write descriptions, upload it, shout about it on social media, write invoices, pack paintings, arrange shipping, order supplies, do market research, sort out tax returns, reply to emails, engage on social media, clean the house, do the shopping, make meals, feed the kids and cats, ... you get the idea. Some of these things will always be necessary, but if you can find a someone to shoulder even just a few of these tasks, it seems rather self-defeating not to take the opportunity! In general (and this is a generalisation, not a rule) artists tend to dislike market research, self promotion and sales, why not allow someone else that does enjoy it to do it for you?

Validation

The second answer is a little less obvious but possibly far more important. Galleries provide an independent means of verifying the validity of a work of art or an artist. If a collector happens to see your art online and instantly falls in love with it, great! But that doesn't happen all the time. Most art needs a little time to insinuate itself into the collector's consciousness, to intrigue the senses and to challenge the viewer. A gallery provides not only the opportunity to see a work of art "in the flesh", but also for a collector to discuss the work and the artist with the gallerist.

A genuine gallerist will represent the art that they themselves can talk passionately about. Having a respected and trusted third party validate the integrity and beauty of a work of art can often be enough to guide a collector towards an artwork or an artist that they previously may only have had a vague whiff of attraction towards.

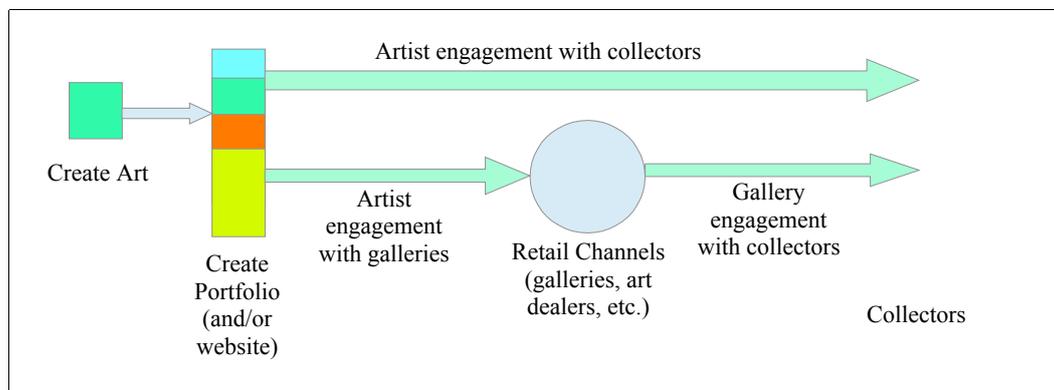


4. The process of selling your art

The following is a rather simplistic but also somewhat realistic model of the process involved in selling your art.

1. Create Art
2. Create a portfolio that you can send to art dealers, galleries and curators.
3. Define your collectors
4. Establish your distribution/retail channels
5. Engagement

Here's another way of visualising this:



Note that it's perfectly possible and acceptable to engage your collectors directly and this is an important potential consideration when planning your marketing strategy. This is part of the reason why I have also included the “Define you Collectors” part of the process at stage 3, instead of being at the end. The other reason for not trying to define your collectors at the end of the process is that if you know who your collectors are, you are more likely to be able to find galleries that will be on their radar.

All the rest

There are loads of other smaller social media platforms available and as time goes by and social trends rise and fall I'll investigate them with a view to the art market. It's well worth keeping an eye on the latest trends amongst teenagers regarding which platforms they're using as they'll become the next generation of art buyers and as they grow up they will tend to stick with certain platforms in much the same way that a whole generation continues to use Facebook regularly. For now though, if you only have time for one or two, Facebook and Instagram would be my personal suggestions.

14. Final words

Finding galleries to represent you can be a daunting task. Not all galleries are equal and you want to ensure that you are selecting galleries that are right for you and your artwork.

As time goes by and as your social media presence increases, there is a good chance that galleries will begin to get in touch with you. Again, do your research. There is a huge temptation to jump for joy and be so pleased that a gallery's actually contacted you that you forget that whilst there are many lovely galleries out there there are also many sharks waiting for a chance to take a bite out of you. They don't care whether you have rent to pay, babies to feed or a car that desperately needs fixing, they simply want your cash. Before you reply, do some digging around. If you find one or two mixed reviews, maybe it's possible to find an artist that's been displayed there before and ask them about the experience.

I hope this guide has been somewhat useful. Good luck with your hunt for galleries and please feel free to get in touch if you think I may be able to help with anything I've covered!