

Notes from Rise Parberry's Lecture on Entering Work in Exhibitions January 9th, 2008

Starting Out

- There are many great opportunities for entering your artwork – if you look you can find shows that cater to all levels, mediums, and themes
- It's best in the beginning to start locally, and start small
- One of the best things about entering shows, especially locally, is that you will see your work out of the studio, framed and on a wall, and it's a great place to meet other artists
- One of the best things you can do when you are starting out is work behind the scenes at a show – by being part of the process you'll learn how shows prefer work to be framed, what happens to submitted work, and how jurors work
- When choosing a show to enter – especially one where they require you to ship a piece – check the credentials and history of the show or organization if you're unfamiliar with it

Understanding the Show Prospectus

- It's important to understand your responsibilities as a participant – reading the prospectus carefully will help ensure that there will be no technical reason for your painting to be eliminated before it reaches the juror
- Should you be a member? Some associations give discounts for members or require membership to enter a show, so find out if it would be a benefit to you to become a member
- Read any special guidelines for the show – should you be a certain age or live in a certain region to enter?
- Be completely honest when filling in the form – if they only want a specific media or size, don't try to enter something different
- When you sign the entry form you're signing a legal document, so be sure all of your information is correct (you can't change it later!)
- If a piece is accepted into a show, don't sell it before you ship or deliver it! Remember, if you're accepted into a show that means that someone else got rejected, and if your piece sells before the show and can't hang, it's not fair to those who were rejected
- Many shows require a painting to be for sale, which means it must be for sale (no NFS, or they may not accept it) – galleries need to support themselves to stay open, and they do this by selling paintings

- You can't change the price (or title) of your work once it's accepted
- Some shows ask for permission to reproduce – this means that they might want to use your artwork in their promotional materials in the show
- Be sure to be professional when you're entering a show – you may not think so, but the people who run the show will remember you, and won't want to deal with an artist who's rude or ignores the rules (even if their work is excellent)
- What does being professional mean? It means pay attention to the entry date, know the size and medium requirements, and have your work properly framed

Framing

- Your frame should be clean and in good shape (don't use an obviously old frame)
- Most shows require wires and won't take your work otherwise – this means wires, not sawtooth hangers!
- Don't forget the back of the painting! You want the buyer to be impressed, so use a backing board and make sure the back is clean and neat
- Make sure your glass and plexiglass is clean and free of scratches – most larger shows will require plexiglass rather than glass (with pastels being the only exception)
- Use the simplest frame possible, especially for photos and watermedia
- Frames for oil paintings can be bolder, but stay away from heavily carved or ornate frames (many plein air exhibits will prefer or even require a gold frame)
- Some shows will actually specify the type of frame they want and will send you a packet after you've submitted a slide or photo of your work
- Be quiet and tasteful in your mat choices – a bright color might be good for a buyer, but it will make it hard to hang your painting in a show
- Off-white, light neutrals, or black (for photos) work best for mats – try not to have a mat lighter than the lightest part of your image or darker than the darkest part
- Give adequate mat space (usually 2 to 3 inches in width minimum) so that your painting is really set off – it will make it more visible and attractive to buyers!
- The size and width of the frame and mat relate to the painting – a more delicate painting can have a more delicate frame and smaller mat, but a bold painting needs a lot more mat space
- Whatever frame you choose, make sure it's not distracting – you want the viewer to see your artwork, not your framing job!

- Remember, even excellent work can be juried out because of a bad frame!

The Juror

- The name or names of the jurors will usually be listed on the show prospectus – sometimes there will be a juror for each media/category, but more often if there are multiple jurors they will view and vote on all the work together
- It's good to know who the juror is and what their credentials, media and subjects are – it's especially good to know if they have any quirks or preferences
- However, don't enter a painting for one juror! Many shows require all of the jurors to vote for a piece, not just one
- Most jurors are not purely interested in their own work – they know their media and subject and are likely to judge it harder than subjects which are very different
- In a show that requires you to send in slides before you are accepted, the juror(s) will sit in a room together and view all of the slides in very quick succession, voting on each one, so it's important to have a distinctive image to present to the jurors

What Jurors Look For

- Because jurors see so many pieces, enter a piece with stronger design and contrast – when they are scanning through hundreds of slides they might not see a more subtle image (these have more success in a local show where jurors are looking at your actual artwork)
- Do something no one else will do, rather than just copying a photo
- Paint a subject that deeply moves you – your passion will show in the painting!
- Play with colors, paint things unusual colors, be abstract, play with design
- Don't be stuck by themed shows – many times the juror won't really care what the theme is, and most of the time they won't even know what your title is (the only exception is when a prospectus requires a specific subject)
- A great advantage we have locally is access to the San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park, which means we can paint exotic animals (from life or photo) in a natural-looking setting – something hard to come by in other parts of the country
- If you are painting wildlife you can and should enter specific wildlife shows, but don't be afraid to enter other shows – your work might stand out more

- With paintings of animals, jurors are usually looking for unusual views, abstraction of the animal, unusual colors, odd poses, or something that will set your painting off from all other paintings of that animal
- Especially in non-wildlife themed shows, a juror is looking for unique imagery, shapes, colors, composition, cropping, or emotional impact, rather than an accurate representation of that animal

More about Your Image:

- You should try to enter your best possible work – talk to a trusted art teacher to see what they believe is your most mature work, and ask what level they think you might start in if you're unsure
- Entries must be your own personal, original work:
 - Work that a teacher has worked on or heavily guided you on is “student” work, not original work
 - If you painted something in a workshop, ask yourself if it looks strongly like what the teacher or other students did, rather than your own style – if your answer is yes, then it's student work and likely not your best work anyway
 - Don't use copyrighted source material! (National Geographic or Arizona Highways references, for example)
- Find out what materials are allowed: what surfaces (canvas, paper), what media, is sculpture or photography allowed?

About Slides, Digital Entries, & Photographing Your Work:

- Remember, judges have to scan through hundreds of slides or digital entries very, very quickly – make sure the image you send in is the closest representation of your work possible
- A good photo of your work will make a good slide or digital entry
- To take photos, use neutral mat and remove painting from frame and glass – the more filters between your lens and the image, the fuzzier it will be
- Cloudy but bright days are good for taking photos outside, or you can take them inside in a dark room with no ambient light
- When you use a photo for a slide or digital entry, make sure it shows only the image – no background, no fingers holding it up, not even a frame (unless specified)
- Use a manual setting on your camera, put your camera on a tripod, put the painting on an easel, and always double bracket your exposures
- When in doubt, save the headache and go to a pro photographer – if you don't know any, ask at the local camera store

- When making a slide, be sure to your entire image shows – don't crop it to a different ratio than your actual painting
- Once you've entered a slide, don't change your actual painting! Don't paint more on it, crop it, or anything else
- Don't "fiddle" with the image of your painting on a computer – it's one thing to make the photo look more like your painting, but it's another thing to completely change contrast, color, or cropping
- Most places that accept digital entries don't accept CD's (they break and are hard to handle) – it's usually preferable to email digital entries or upload them to the competition's website (they will instruct you on how to do this)
- Many of the biggest and oldest shows will not accept digital entries (and may never), so you still need slides
- A professional art photographer can usually turn photos or digital images into slides

Shipping and/or Delivery

- If you're accepted into a show, you're responsible for shipping or delivering it – there will be both shipping and handling fees because most places hire people to unpack
- If the show is within a few hours' drive, don't ship – take an afternoon or weekend vacation and save the headache and cost of shipping
- Understand right up front that no show insures your work for shipping
- Check carrier guidelines
- When shipping, make sure your frame is really sturdy – archival goes out the door, glue it in place if you have to! You can always fix it when it gets back to you
- Use plywood or reinforced cardboard for shipping boxes – the boxes may be stacked, walked on, taken apart the wrong way, etc, so be sure it's made of strong stuff

Resources:

- Magazine contests are good in that they don't require you to ever ship your work and there is a lower entry fee, but the image of your work that the public will see depends on their printing process and the quality of picture you send in
- A good place to start for local artists is San Diego Art Institute's Museum of the Living Artist (sandiego_art.org), which usually has slightly edgier work – by entering shows you can build up points to eventually have your own solo show

- San Diego Art and Sol (www.sandiegoartandsol.com) lists all local art organizations, clubs, galleries, and events
- More Resources:
 - Artshow.com
 - Art Calendar Magazine
 - The back of American Artist
 - Studio of Art and Design: www.rikki-studio.com (For Watercolor)
 - San Diego Watercolor Society, sdws.org
- Airfloat containers for shipping: www.airfloat.cm
- Gemmatec.com – great info about digital entries, great slides for a great price