



Tips for Approaching a Gallery

There are two types of galleries: for-profit and not-for-profit. Artists can sell their work at not-for-profit galleries, but the primary for showing your work at these types of galleries is for the exposure it can provide rather than the sales that can be generated. Be sure that you know which type of gallery you are applying to before you submit your work. First, it might be wise to establish yourself in your home town/city before tackling New York.

1. Identify your target galleries by developing a set of criteria. The gallery:

- Should sell the media that you work in (photographers should not approach galleries that sell only paintings).
- Should represent artwork styles that will draw buyers who would also be interested in your style (abstract artists should not approach realism galleries).
- Must be reputable - you may have to ask artist friends and do some digging to determine this.
- Should promote themselves and have obvious strategies for generating leads. This may be magazine advertising but could also be having a high-traffic location, a targeted direct mail campaign, or even email campaigns. This may be difficult to determine in advance, but you will see advertisements and other artists may know how a given gallery generates leads.

2. Do a thorough job of researching galleries. Look at their web sites, read their literature and reviews.

- Most importantly, make sure that your work fits the style of the gallery.
- Do NOT just send your portfolio to every gallery you see advertised.

3. Visit as many galleries as possible. Keep a log of your impressions of each one.

- Get on the mailing list of the ones you like and attend their receptions often.
- Meet the people who run the galleries and who own them (they might be different people). When you attend receptions, don't drink the wine! You are there to network and to show your support for the gallery. It might not be a bad idea to purchase a small piece. That will definitely get their attention.

4. When you feel comfortable approaching the owner or director, ask if it would be possible to show your work to them.

- Offer any one or combination of these options: a studio visit, a portfolio review, or to bring a few pieces to the gallery.
- Ideally, you want the gallery owner/director to visit your studio. It does not have to be a studio setting, but it should be a private space where your work can be reviewed without distraction. The point is to display the work in the best way possible.
- If you want to present your portfolio, the best way to do so is on a laptop using a slide show format. Don't talk while the slide show is in progress but do offer to answer any questions the owner/director has.

- Another way to show work is with professional quality 8 1/2" x 11" photos that are labeled (not hand written, but typed labels). Do not shower the owner/director with images, a judgment will probably be quickly made after the first one or two images are seen. Present 12 images and have 12 or so more as a back up that can be shown if requested
- Show only the work you feel is the MOST SUCCESSFUL and you are most proud of.

5. Lastly, when approaching a gallery you are in effect, offering to be in a type of partnership with the gallery.

- It is a professional relationship. You must convince the gallery that you would like them to represent you. You must understand what that means. You will never, under any circumstances, sell your work on your own from your studio.
- Only the gallery will sell your work, even if it is to your friends and relatives. Many artists do fine selling from their studio, but if you want show at a gallery, you must be honest about this and trusted.

Frequently Asked Questions

Should you send photos to galleries with SASE envelopes?

Don't bother, they are overwhelmed by them.

Can you call and make an appointment?

Forget it. Although there are always exceptions, the best is the hands on approach and to present yourself in person either at an opening or upon visiting the gallery. Galleries are run on the basis of trust, so the first thing you need to do is establish a relationship with the people at the gallery.

When are you ready to approach galleries?

First, you have to be confident about the quality of your work. It might be wise to get the opinion of other working artists about the work you are planning to present to a gallery before you do so. Some artists bloom early while others take time. There is no set time-table, and you should not rush the process due to impatience.

Can you show more than one style of work, or work in more than one medium?

No. Galleries want you to be known for one recognizable style. There are exceptions, but that is the general rule.

How about CD's and websites?

The odds are low that an owner/director will take the time to look at them.