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How to Plan and Stage a Successful Open Studio

SUMMARY

Open Studios are a popular way to show your latest work to collectors, arts professionals, and the public. They can also be a successful and consistent way to sell your work. Read on to find out how to stage one successfully.

Before The Event.....

Decide what a Successful Open Studio means to you

Understand what you want to achieve from your open studio and then plan accordingly. Success to one artist might mean the sale of works of art, whilst to another it could mean an expanded mailing list or a connection with a gallery or dealer.

Understand your existing Gallery/Dealer Relationships

This is very important. If you have an existing relationship with a gallery or dealer you need to check the fine print of your contract to understand if any commission payments are applicable to sales from your Studio. If so, have the gallery work with you to publicize the event. Make it a win-win as much as you can!

Choose a time that works for your visitors!

A good friend used to have a regular open studio in New York on Sunday afternoons with very few visitors. Then one day it dawned on her that most people in her area were in their Hamptons vacation homes on the weekends. She changed to weekday evenings and suddenly had lots more visitors. Find out what works in your area!

Promote your Open Studio Event

Start planning at least a month in advance and be creative! As a bare minimum you should use the following list:

- Press releases to local or arts related publications
- Announcements in local event listings
- Email announcements to your email list
- Postcard mailings to snail-mail list
- Postcard mailings to local galleries and museums
- Posters in cafes, health practitioners offices, clinics, libraries, etc
- Tell everyone you know

Curate and Hang the Artwork

Curating is an art in its own right! Don't leave the placement of the art until the last minute – start staging the work at least a week prior to the show.

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If you feel comfortable, invite trusted friends and arts professionals to look critically at the placement of the work. A well-curated show will have a sense of “flow” and will give visitors a sense of the whole of your work rather than just a collection of individual parts.

Think about payment Methods

Many people will be happy to write you a check in the event of a purchase while others may prefer to use a credit card. If you are planning to have regular Open Studio events you might want to think about setting up a merchant account so that you can accept credit card payments. There are some very simple and cost effective solutions available, so be sure to do your research before signing up.

On The Day.....

Dress For Success

That might mean a breezy floral outfit if you are showing in Jacksonville, or a pair of ripped diesel jeans and a too-small t-shirt if you are exhibiting in Williamsburg. Wear what feels appropriate to your market and your art.

Engage Your Friends

Enlist your friends to help with the running of the show. That includes greeting visitors, offering drinks and snacks, and taking care of sales transactions and packing. Good friends will have a blast helping you succeed. Buy them dinner or return the favor!

Cater

No need to go overboard, but a simple selection of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks will always smooth the conversation and open up new connections for you. A tasteful selection of snacks (that don't run out) also helps.

Be the artist

With your friends and family taking care of details, allow yourself to “be the artist”. Chat with visitors, talk about what motivates you, point out features of your work. You need to meet everyone at your open studio so enlist one of your friends to move you on to the next guest if your attention is being monopolized.

Guestbook

Everyone who walks through your door is a potential collector. So, be sure to invite all visitors to sign your guestbook. If possible, have them leave both an email and a regular mail address, and a phone number.

Taking Care of Sales

Have a friend take care of any sales paperwork and packing. Make sure that they have a current pricelist and understand how to calculate and add sales tax. You don't want to ruin a friendship over a miscalculated price! Be sure that you have plenty of bubble-wrap and packing tape on hand too.

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After The Event....

Relax and Have a Drink

You deserve it! Talk with your friends and find out what worked well and what could be improved. Take notes and make those changes to your next event.

Follow Up

You've just completed phase 1 of a multi-phase selling process. Make sure you follow-up:

Send Thank you cards to all your visitors

Follow-up by phone with potential buyers

Call and personally thank any arts professionals who visited your event

Update Your Mailing List

The new contacts who signed your guestbook might be the most valuable result of your open studio – treat them like gold! Add their names to your mailing list and be sure to invite them to future events.

Plan Your Next Event

No time to lose! Start planning your next event. You can use the same process we outlined here but updated based on your own experience.

Go Create

Marketing without great art behind it is just a big bag of wind. Go create masterpieces for a while so that you have something truly authentic to show next time!

About This Report

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