

Approaching a Gallery

1. Identify your space/spaces – What do they do?

Exhibitions?

Retail?

Some do both?

I recommend that you visit the galleries before you approach them and consider questions such as;

Is the gallery appropriate for your work?

Do they have a history of showing your type of work?

Do they have an artistic policy?

Check their website for things like this and look at past shows on there

2. What are you looking for?

An opening to sell work on a retail basis?

An exhibition opportunity?

Is it for a solo exhibition?

Is it to be considered for a group show curated by the gallery?

Is it a group show application – of recent graduates including yourself?

A studio visit by the exhibitions officer/curator?

Or just to show your portfolio to get some advice?

Whichever of these you choose will dictate the best approach.

3. Identify your market

Virtually all gallery's aim these days is to address the question of making revenue/profit. It is often a requirement of funding/targets set by funders – to generate own income, become financially sustainable.

For artists, it should also matter of course. It will often be a process of experimentation; understanding your market and developing good relationships with galleries generally. Ideally you should have a recommended selling/artists price with which to approach galleries based on what you know it cost you to make it (materials, time etc). This is so it is consistent across other galleries you are selling/exhibiting in –

or if you have the work on your own website/online shop. You do not want to create unnecessary conflict.

If you sell somewhere else close by (within 50 miles) it is vital out of courtesy and professionalism to confirm with your first and existing gallery of this approach and check that if both are happy, you ensure the work is identically priced at each gallery. Be clear and honest with galleries – they want to sell your work as much as you do!

4. Sales Procedures

If the gallery is commercial/selling/retail and operates on a sale or return basis only, then you should include an indication of your prices.

If they are selling your work through an exhibition then find out what commission they take. In either case, check if they are Vat registered. If so, then they will then have to take more...

For example: Mission Gallery takes 40% commission plus VAT (20%), so if your print costs £400, this is the breakdown;

Selling Price: £400

Minus 40%: £160 (to gallery)

Sub total: £240

Minus 20%: £48 (to Vat Man)

Add gallery & vat commission (£208)

Minus from selling price (£400)

To Artist: £192

Other examples

£10 RRP

£4 commission to MG

80p to VAT man

Artist gets £5.20

£40 RRP

£16 commission to MG

£3.20 to VAT man

Artist gets £20.80

If the gallery is one which does both exhibitions and retail, ask if they ever buy work outright?

Sometimes Mission Gallery does, in which case we at least double the 'artists' or wholesale price. This is common – a 60% - 100% mark up.

5. Contacting Galleries

Telephone or check website to confirm name/email of person whom you should write to. Some clearly state that they do not accept exhibition applications.

If there are exhibition programming meetings enquire as to when the next one might be. Follow this up with a letter of introduction a short cv, bio, website links etc and some images (around 6-10 is fine).

All galleries are busy and notoriously understaffed – your package/email will be one of dozens received that week, so make it clear and complete, taking care to include your cv and statement with images/photographs. Make sure all images are titled, credited and all documents have your name and contact details. If sending any discs, memory sticks, via post that you want returned, then make this clear and enclosed a stamped addressed envelope so it can be returned. If you do not have a reply after 3 months, email or telephone to clarify developments.

It is rare to be offered an appointment if you do not know the gallery. Do not expect to see people without an appointment or turn up with your portfolio unannounced.

Most galleries now programme at least a year in advance – many a lot further ahead due to grants/funding criteria. Mission Gallery is programmed up to 2020 and we are also pencilling in dates for 2021 due to City of Culture bid. This is normal for most galleries of Missions size.

Mission Gallery's Exhibition Application Procedure

Link to website: <http://www.missiongallery.co.uk/faq/#q1>

To apply for an exhibition please send the following information to

The Programming Team

c/o Deirdre Finnerty, Exhibitions & Marketing Assistant

exhibitions@missiongallery.co.uk

Applications must contain:

An up-to-date CV

A set of 6-10 images

An exhibition proposal

The Programming Team meet every three months to look at submissions

6. Develop successful relationships with galleries

- Offer more adventurous work on SOR to build their confidence
- Offer to exchange work that sticks around a long time;
- Always let galleries know if an order will be delayed - or offer to send a part order
- Have details of one off pieces as well as more saleable 'production' range. If a gallery buys smaller works outright, offer larger more expensive ones on SOR.

7. Further Advice

- Get on gallery mailing list
- Go to private views and events
- Go and see as many exhibitions as you can – even ones you don't like. You may see a new way of displaying work; you may like a certain colour wall or hanging system.
- Look at all the art magazines available – libraries often order or look at them in galleries.
- Opportunities on websites such as Arts Council of Wales
- Join a group or workshops
- Enter open competitions/fill in application forms. Even those where you know you are not going to get very far with! It is useful to learn how to fill in these forms and be knowledgeable about criteria.

- Consider voluntary work at a gallery – you gain fantastic experience in setting up shows and gallery administration and it can lead to other opportunities.

8. Presentation

- It is absolutely vital to have a good set of images. This is usually your first contact with a gallery – make sure they do not let you down.
- Find someone who can photograph your work well
- A coloured postcard of your work is a good investment – you can enclose this in all correspondence and use it as a business card, sell it to galleries, give to customers etc
- Keep your cv up to date – put everything onto a long version and then you can edit it into a short version for specific applications
- Keep all press coverage, invitation cards, brochures and posters etc
- Keep adding names to your mailing list – curators, exhibition officers, arts council officers – buyers

9. Studio Space

Important to keep all this up after leaving college as you may start to feel isolated and lonely. Try and stay in a similar creative environment if possible – a studio space will help. Swansea has lots of affordable studio spaces through Elysium.

- Put your name on a waiting list
- Share one to keep costs down
- Start your own artist group
- Go to talks and conferences – meet people
- Go to private views, talk and network

10. Marketing

- Look at Mailchimp for quarterly newsletters;
- Square space and Shopify have been useful to focus on selling online, especially prints. See Mission's shop here: <https://www.missionshop.co.uk/collections/40-for-40>
- Wordpress – as a tool for writing about projects/keeping a journal. A curatorial blog: CIVIC <http://www.civicarchive.co.uk/>

- Hyde + Hyde

<https://www.hydearchitects.com/>

Excellent example of clean strong branding and philosophy. Knowing how much to communicate and when etc

- Aerende – a clear message, social responsibility
<https://www.aerende.co.uk/>

11. Having an exhibition.

Procedures and questions to ask

What is the budget?

Is there an exhibiting fee?

Confirm who pays for what - Invites, mailing, private view, marketing & advertising, insurance, transport etc.

Pricing of work/commission

Put everything in writing – confirmation/acceptance of exhibition offer and all terms

Will they document the exhibition and give you copies – make sure you get permission to do it yourself if not

On return of work, check all unsold work returned for damage asap.

All these details should be in a contract between the artist and the gallery.

If you start your own business or become a self employed artist/freelancer you are an artist, a designer a project manager.

Creative thinking, problem solving, practical solutions are what artists are good at – and often end up in other careers as well as the Arts because of these skills.

You must have marketing and financial skills. You are secretary, an administrator and your own boss. So are your clients/buyers/patrons.

Remember that galleries and buyers are desperate to find new artists and talent who are professional and produce good quality work!

Mission Gallery: www.missiongallery.co.uk