

# **12 steps for entry level artists to successfully enter juried shows**

## *by Joanne Shellan*

### **1. Join every local arts group, sign up for every email art site**

When you first start painting, finding a group like EAFA is a godsend. You're going to get the best information on how the local arts scene works from your local artists and you'll find your local artists in your local arts groups. Join all the groups you can find; Pastel Society, Co-Arts, Seattle Print Arts, EAFA, NWS, etc. Cities have arts organizations; Shoreline, Snohomish, Edmonds, Pt. Townsend, Edmonds Center for the Arts. There are national and local websites for the arts; Public Art Program [PublicArt@4culture.org], artsunlimitedofrenton@hotmail.com. Ask artists who are ahead of you if they're on any artist E-mail lists or to which art groups they belong. What you want is to start getting the monthly news bulletins and emails from these groups. Every newsletter has a section called ARTIST OPPORTUNITIES. Once you're established you can let some of these memberships go and be more selective but at the beginning, you want to be a joiner. Look for local shows, contests, events and places to hang. For example, you might see that Woodinville is looking for art to hang in their local library. For more information, call librarian Lil at XXX-XXXX. Circle those opportunities that look interesting and get on the horn and start making the contacts. If you spend a couple years doing this, you'll learn a huge amount. Every time you hang outside your home, you make a contact and learn something more about the business of art. Smaller, local shows are easier to get into. A strong ego suggests you enter these first!

### **2. When entering juried shows, follow prospectus directions very, very carefully. Be exact.**

It is VERY important to CAREFULLY read all the fine print on an entry prospectus and follow their rules to a T. You'll become more and more professional as you enter more and more shows.

### **3. Choose your best work. Lean away from the tried and true**

Ask for help choosing if you need it. At first you won't even know which of your paintings to enter. Ask a friends and teachers who are at least as good or better painters than you for help. But after you enter enough shows, you become savvier and you start to see what gets in, what's really good, and why others didn't get in. Enter your very best work and make sure it's unusual. Judges want something new and different. Work you enter in a gallery isn't the same you enter in a show. A very experienced artist or curator will be judging the works and they've seen everything at this point in their career. They want something different. Surprise them They've seen a 1000 close ups of flowers...even if your technique is perfect, yours had better have something different about it to get into the show. Don't make a decision based on what the judge's art looks like---just choose your own best work. And know that the piece of work you enter in a show will be out of circulation until you get a letter saying you're in or you're out.

Every juror has a different way of judging a show. These are some things they might consider; visible value changes from across the room, great composition, different point of view, something unusual- perhaps subject or emotional content, show unusual technique, or perfection of a technique. I've heard that you shouldn't paint in the juror's style- they're probably going to be better at it than you!

#### **4. Be Persistent**

If you don't enter the show, you've already lost. If you enter, you have a 50/50 chance- 50% yes, 50% no! Winnings stay with you forever, feelings of rejections pass. That rejection was just one person's opinion. Your resume shows your winnings, not a single rejection letter listed. No one knows what you didn't get into! Over time, you begin to know how to critique your own work and judge it like a judge. Keep entering shows, regardless if you get rejected. If you continue to work on your art every day, you will get better and eventually you'll get in. You are becoming a professional.

#### **5. When you get into a show, make sure your work is in perfect condition.**

Every piece of art you hang outside your home should be in primo condition with sparkling clean glass, no bugs on the mat, perfect framing, printed information on the back about you and the painting. Treat your work as if it were a Rembrandt. When you bring your painting to Lil the Librarian, imagine you are bringing her the most important diamond in the world and wrap and present it accordingly. If you treat your painting like a million dollars, people will see it as such and respect your work.

#### **6. Be extremely professional in all art business transactions.**

Act like you're applying for a job. The same principals apply to the business of art as they do to every other business. Treat every transaction with every individual like they were going to give you a million dollars. Employ your highest work ethics. If this is your profession and not a hobby, you must treat it like you're a working professional. Dress professionally, speak with confidence, always be on time, keep a record of every transaction, etc.

#### **7. Learn how to use a computer.**

If you're not using the computer as a tool for your art business, you're missing the boat. And if you need help learning about how to use your computer, don't despair. You can do it. There are classes out there for you or you can hire your own computer coach. One of my closest friends, Tania Scutt, is a computer coach. I have her brochures up here to pass out later. She'll come to your house and sit patiently with you while you learn the basics of the computer. She can also help you with the computers more technical side as well. If you run into computer problems, know where to turn for help. Find a geeky friend and barter art or homemade food in exchange for help or hire a tutor or take a class.

#### **8. Know that you need to spend money to make money and look professional.**

You cannot buy a frame from Value Village, poorly photograph your own work for competitions, never advertise and expect to do well in this business. If you are a professional artist, you must spend some money to get there.

#### **9. Take an experienced artist to lunch**

Find people who are ahead of where you're at and take them to lunch and LISTEN. Then go home and write down what they said because you're gonna forget it! The business of art is best learned as an apprentice.

**10. Sign up for a class about the business of art.**

This can be a turning point in the career of any artist starting out. Miriam Works teaches a class as does Arts Now in Edmonds. Absolutely essential for any artist.

**11. After you feel more experienced getting into local shows, apply to larger state and national shows.**

Artists who show at booths at local fairs like the Bellevue Arts Fair and the Edmonds Arts Festival have quite a bit of mileage under their belts already. These are highly competitive juried shows. The smaller, localized community fairs like Shoreline, Magnolia, Kirkland, and Bothell are ones to enter at first. Keep your eye on the local papers and again always watch the arts bulletins for announcements. These fairs often have several options. There might be a juried art show where you submit a piece to get into the show. Or there might be an option of putting up a tent to sell your art.

**12. Discipline yourself to work at your art every day**

Award winning author Michael Chabon believes that three things are required for success as a novelist: talent, luck, and discipline. As he says, “Discipline is the one element of those three things that you can control, and so that is the one that you have to focus on controlling, and you just have to hope and trust in the other two.”

*I'm a watercolor painter. I took my first WC class about nine years ago and got serious about painting about five or six years ago. It hit me like a bolt of lightning that if I painted every day, I would get better. That huge, enormous, important fact has kept me hammering away at it day after day. I'm a signature member of the NWWWS, I've won many awards in different shows and I'm currently in four galleries yet I see myself as having a long way to go. I feel so lucky to be able to go to my studio and play in my art all day!*

*Never hesitate to contact me with any questions or just to talk- 425.822.2144 or joanne.shellan@verizon.net. You can always reach me through my website as well-*

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*Good luck to you all!*