

# Professional Guidelines

## **OPEN STUDIOS: Artist Checklist**

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### **I Introduction**

An Open Studio event brings the artist and the public together. It is an opportunity to expose a broad portion of the community to what it is we do and make. We can educate them on how and why we build what we do. We can answer technical questions and address issues of price and materials. We can even dispel a few myths and misconceptions. And, of course, we can open the door to new markets.

The Open studio is also an invaluable opportunity for us to see, first hand, how our work is received. In the case of wearable work we can observe how objects fit or hang or how clasps and closures function. We observe first hand who responds to a particular series and why. We can ask specific questions and gather immediate and, perhaps, honest information about our work that can be very difficult to glean without directly engaging the public.

Participating in an Open Studio event is not for everybody. While it can be beneficial in many ways and offer important insights into the conception, design, manufacturing and marketing of our work, there are many issues to be contemplated. If you have local, or even national, gallery representation there may be concerns regarding exclusivity and commissions. Allowing people to spend time in your workspace can be both an energizing and unnerving experience; simply dealing with the general public can be eye opening.

The following checklist will help you decide if taking part in such an event would be personally advantageous and then to help guide you through the process. These guidelines should be considered and tailored to the specific needs and situations of each individual artist or craftsman.

## II Some Reasons to Participate in an Open Studio Event

- A **Generation of revenue**
- B **Exposure to a new audience**
- C **Keep-established clients abreast of current work**
- D **Educate a broad audience about your media, showing techniques to interested people**
- E **Break down barriers by allowing the artist and the public direct and immediate interaction and communication**
- F **As an information gathering tool**
- G **Networking: Connecting with other artists and professionals, in and outside of your Medium**
- H **Introduce your work to possible collectors, galleries or curators**

## III Some Reasons that You May Not Want to Participate in Open Studios

- A **If you have local gallery representation that may see such participation as competition**
- B **Artists who are uncomfortable in public situations may find such an event unappealing.** Giving the public access to an artist's workspace can, for some, be an unsettling experience.
- C **Some studios may be dangerous or unhealthy places for the public.**
- D **Artist or maker has no need to expand clientele or investigate new demographics.**

## IV Concerns and Considerations

- A **The entities sponsoring an Open Studio event have an obligation to run a well-organized affair.** (This would include providing accurate information to the public regarding hours of operation, studio locations, etc.) Be sure that an Open Studio event sponsored by the community or an organization is on the level: established promoters have track records and new organizers should be able to answer basic questions regarding promotion, fees, responsibilities, etc.
- B **When deciding to participate in a non-community sponsored Open Studio event** such as one organized by colleagues or acquaintances, trust your instincts. Ask pertinent questions about individual expectations and Open Studio experiences. Clearly define responsibilities for each individual.
- C **If you do not wish to give the public access to your studio** consider hosting an Open Studio event in an alternate space such as a rented storefront.

**D It is wise for artists to weigh the relative merits of reaching their regional audiences** through the venue of a gallery, or direct marketing such as an Open Studio event, private sales, or craft/ arts fair or festival.

- 1 **Some artists find it more effective to participate in one major sales/marketing event a year** (such as an Open Studio event or its cousin the craft/ arts fair or festival). They feel that a wider demographic is reached by the Open Studio event including people who may consider the gallery to be a pretentious or uncomfortable venue. Additionally, some collectors do not wish to go through the “middle man” of the gallery to contact the artist. In the case of a retail event, the artist keeps the money, including the usual consignment markup, and most often pays a fee or percentage to the show’s organizer.
- 2 **Others see value in an ongoing (local) gallery relationship.** They may feel that the atmosphere of a gallery lends validity or value to their work. The work of other artists adds to this ambience. Problems with collectors, customers and clients are handled by the gallery staff; issues of display, advertising, and sales tax are no longer relevant, and the artist is free to focus on the work. Some collectors feel more comfortable dealing with a gallery: return policies are clear, hours consistent, and identities may remain confidential.

**E Exclusivity. This is a very important and often sensitive topic.** Issues over exclusivity most often arise when an artist has local or regional gallery representation. The term “exclusivity” is described in the Overview of the **Consignment Contract** in the **Professional Guidelines**. (also see section **XII. Sales** in this document)

- 1 **Communication is the key.**
  - a It is very important that the artist and the regional gallery define the parameters for exclusivity as regards the physically exclusive area (city or state boundaries) as well as what work (such as limited additions, series or specific bodies of work) may be considered exclusive to the gallery.
  - b Let the gallery know of your intention to participate in such an event. Even galleries outside of regional boundaries may see such participation as direct competition and in violation of a contract. Read your contract! Keep communications cordial and respectful.
  - c Reaffirm to the gallery that you consider your relationship with them important and that you view the Open Studio event as an opportunity to promote both yourself and the gallery. Ask for promotional material from the gallery that you could distribute at the Open Studio event. Assure them that clients will be sent to the gallery after the Open Studio event is over.

## **V Planning for an Open Studios Event**

**A Goals: Clearly define your goals and objectives in advance.** What do you want from an Open Studio Experience? Are you interested in:

- 1 **Sales**
- 2 **Exposure for your work**
- 3 **Meeting new people and gaining referrals**
- 4 **Networking: Connecting with other artists and professionals, in and outside of your medium**
- 5 **Introducing your work to possible collectors, galleries or curators**
- 6 **Keeping collectors abreast of recent work**

## 7 Feedback from the public such as:

- a Identifying fashion trends and public reaction
  - Types of jewelry or accessories such as pendants or scarves
  - Colors or finishes
  - Materials: precious, non-precious, “earthy”, or refined.
  - Purchases made as gifts themselves or “nesting” influence for the home
- b How do people react to elements such as design sensibility or thematic content?
  - Is certain subject matter offensive or taboo?
- c How do people interact with your work?
  - Are the clasps or closures easy to use?
  - How does your clothing or jewelry fit?
  - Does your work catch or snag in any way?
- d How is your presentation and display received?

## B Start by scheduling your preparations early - several months in advance at least.

- 1 If you plan to participate in a community-wide Open Studio event:
  - a Do the scheduled dates work for you?
  - b Be certain that you can operate within the timeline of the event.
  - c That is, produce enough work, assemble display and promotional materials, etc.
  - d Pick up an application early and file it on time
  - e Make any preparations that you can as early as possible. This may include securing help, or display materials.
- 2 If you host your own Open Studio (without connection to a community wide event):
  - a Pick a good date far in advance
    - Carefully consider the date of the event to avoid conflict with other events.
    - A weekday evening can also work out well for an Open Studio.
  - b Decide on the duration
    - Will the event be held on a single day, a single weekend, or over several weeks or weekends?
    - How many hours each day/evening?
  - c Consider combining your Open Studio with other artists to attract a larger audience. This could be in the same space or at separate studios nearby at the same time.
  - d Decide if there will be an “opening” event and what this will be.
    - If this includes the serving of liquor, be sure to check with local ordinances and obtain all necessary permits, etc.

## C Publicity

- 1 **Decide on a mailer/announcement.**
  - a If you are holding your own Open Studio, this may be a postcard.
  - b A larger, community sponsored Open Studio Event may have its own group flyer or postcard series. Check with the sponsors.
  - c The announcement should include:
    - A professional quality, **strong**, visual image
    - Date(s) of Open Studio (including the year)
    - Day of the week
    - Time
    - Location
    - A map (or directions, if necessary)
    - Information on whether your studio is handicapped accessible or not
  - d Additional information can be added to the postcard using your printer or use

large stick-on labels.

**2 Send out the announcements**

- a Write a short personal note on each announcement card.
- b Send announcements to local people on your mailing list.
  - Do this even if the community Open Studio does its own publicity.
  - Send announcements to people who have purchased your work, indicated a strong interest in your work or interest in coming to your Open Studio.
- c Announcements to out-of-town people should be sent 2 months in advance; in time for them to make travel plans.
  - Anyone within 100 miles should be considered within a reasonable distance.
- d Consider expanding your mailing list.
  - Share mailing lists with fellow artists whose works are of a similar nature and price range, in some way compliments your own or whose clientele might appreciate your work.
  - You may wish to ask friends or associates to send some invitations on your behalf with a personal note.

**3 Consider how you can use your email list, online newsletter, blog and/or web site to expand the potential of your Open Studio.**

**4 Consider whether you want your address in the newspaper, on the Internet, or in other public advertisements.**

- a Remember that while an Open Studio is a public event, the public may be somewhat screened or selected through the filter of the sponsoring organization's mailing list.

**D Plan for parking.**

- 1 Be considerate of your neighbors.
  - a As a courtesy, it's a good idea to inform your neighbors in advance of the event. This will anticipate any problems that may arise due to parking issues or increased traffic.
  - b Arrange (if you can) for extra parking spaces.
  - c Mark alternate parking areas well.
  - d Invite your neighbors to your Open Studio. This may alleviate their anxiety about the extra traffic. Remember: They are potential customers too.

**E Directions to your studio - signage.**

- 1 If it is difficult to find your studio, put some "markers" or signs along the route.
  - a Consider balloons, logos, symbols or arrows.
  - b If you wish to place signs on private property, get permission.
  - c Do not attach signs to existing signs or signals.
  - d Check local ordinances about signs if there is any question.

## **VI Prepare Your Space for the Open Studio Event**

**A Arrange the studio/show space.**

- 1 **You may need to remove furniture from your living or work space** to make a more gallery-like setting for displaying finished work.
- 2 **You may need to add additional display areas, such as secure cases or pedestals.**

## **B Plan for safety and security.**

### **1 Your personal safety**

- a Always have at least one other person with you at all times.
    - Hire an assistant.
    - Ask a friend - consider offering them credit towards a piece or a percent of all sales.
  - b Clearly mark areas that are off limits to visitors with ropes or obvious signs.
  - c Clearly designate handicapped access.
  - d If your studio is in or near your home, make sure someone is in your house at all times for security reasons. One person should be responsible for money and checks.
    - Money and checks should be carried and kept with them at all times.
    - Do not put your money or checks down or keep it in a box that can be stolen.
- 2 Plan for contingencies if there are problems.
    - a Have a plan for medical emergency or security problems.
  - 3 Safeguard valuable materials, tools, and small artworks.
  - 4 If your studio will be open all day, schedule for meals and breaks.

## **C Safety of your guests.**

- 1 **Unplug power tools**
- 2 **Remove acids and dangerous chemicals**
- 3 **Put up signs or rope off unsafe areas**
- 4 **Mark steps or uneven pavement**

## **D Take photos of your set-up, display, and work area for future applications and publicity.**

- 1 **Take photos of your Return Policy sign** in case you need to prove that your sign was visible.

## **VII Music**

### **A While music is optional, the following should be considered.**

- 1 **Music may distract some people** who are already stimulated by the visual feast of your studio. At most, it should be used in the background to enhance the Open Studio experience, never to compete with it.
- 2 **Regardless of where an event is held (gallery, store, studio), if prerecorded music is played**, someone is responsible to pay performance license fees. This why is why the radio is often used instead: no fees are owed or required.

## **VIII Refreshments**

### **A While refreshments are optional and may add a nice touch to the event, keep in mind:**

- 1 **Be careful of the message that you send:** a party atmosphere may detract from your work and dilute the objective of the Open Studio.
  - a Sparkling water and a simple snack are often enough.
- 2 **Keep refreshments and unclean hands away from finished work and displays.**

## IX Insurance

- A Check with your homeowners or renters insurance company.**
- 1 Operating a business in your home may not be covered.**
  - 2 Most homeowners or renters policies will not cover loss or liability** resulting from a business.

## X Presentation of Your Work

- A Preview exhibition:** If the Open Studio sponsor is hosting a preview exhibition, prepare for the show as follows:
- 1 Choose a strong piece that is representative of the work** that will be shown at your Open Studio.
  - 2 Provide an appropriate display or pedestal as needed.** Do not assume that the exhibition sponsor will have the appropriate pedestal, platform, etc. Ask or offer to help install your work.
  - 3 Be sure to send labeled digital images of the piece chosen for the preview exhibition** as soon as possible for advance publicity. Submit a complete description of the work chosen for the preview exhibition.
  - 4 See the event as a marketing opportunity.** Arrive early to the opening of the preview exhibition and stay until the end. Circulate, do not talk to just your friends.
  - 5 Stay within eyesight of your work in the exhibition.** Walk up and introduce yourself to people who are admiring your work.
  - 6 Wear one of your own pieces, if appropriate.** Have your friends wear some of your work, if appropriate.
- B Design your display for the Open Studio event itself:**
- 1 Carefully select what work to show.**
    - a** If you plan to display older work along with recent work, consider the following:
      - Older work should be selected to complement and enhance recent work, setting it in context and illustrating the evolution of a coherent style.
      - Strongly consider presenting older work on an equal footing with more recent work.
      - If work is too old to merit a quality effort for display, do not throw it on a heap in the back as work available for purchase.
    - b** Production lines and multiples:
      - It may be a business decision to sell older production items, series and styles at a discount. However, it is always a good idea to display these items respectfully.
  - 2 Present your work in the best manner possible.**
    - a** Display work thoughtfully and respectfully: Leave ample room between pieces so that a cluttered appearance is avoided.
    - b** Allow as much work to be seen as possible from various vantage points.
    - c** Prepare professional looking labels for the work on display (both recent and older). Label information may include:
      - title
      - date
      - materials
      - price

- d You may wish to include informational cards, such as a brief, well-written artist's statement or information specific to a particular piece.
- 3 **Do not make it easy for work to be picked up or removed without help from the artist or their agent/assistant.**
- 4 **Keep displays tidy and glass cases fingerprint free.**
- 5 **Display of work in progress**
  - a People usually like to see work in progress.
    - Consider laying out work neatly on your workbench.
    - You may wish to include written information cards describing the various stages in the creation of the piece.

**C Demonstration of technique, processes or materials.** This is meant to engage and educate the public about your work and what it is that you do. You want visitors to your Open Studio to gain an enhanced appreciation of your skill and the time you invest in your work.

**1 Options for demonstration.**

- a A "poster type" of demonstration.
  - Lay out a step-by-step example of your process or technique with written explanations if your process is slow or too tedious to demonstrate.
- b A "live" demonstration.
  - Arrange a brief, easily understandable demonstration of a technique or process such as soldering, forging or enameling.
  - Consider having your assistant demonstrate so you are free to interact with your guests.
  - Publish demonstration times in your announcement or on a sign at the studio.
  - Safety considerations are important. Choose a demonstration that is not hazardous to the health and safety of your guests.
- 2 **Run a digital projector, video or a computer/laptop PowerPoint show about your work.** This could be shown in a darker adjacent room.
  - a Organize your PowerPoint presentation by themes, for example, content issues, consecutive development or technique.
  - b Set up chairs for the comfort of your guests. Moving chairs from other rooms can free up space for a more gallery-like setting in other rooms.
  - c Make sure an attendant is responsible for monitoring the projector video, or computer/laptop. Turn off the sleep or screen saver mode on the computer/laptop so this will continue to run without constant supervision.

**D Establish your credibility and track record.**

- 1 **Display materials from previous exhibitions,** such as catalogues, show cards or posters
- 2 **Display magazine articles**
- 3 **Display books that include your work**
  - a Mark pertinent pages with "post it" tabs
- 4 **Set out a portfolio of your work.** This may include a complete C.V., color prints or articles about your work.
- 5 **Give away color postcards**
- 6 **Prepare a few resumes just in case someone asks.**
- 7 **Have a guest book ready for people to leave their names and addresses.** Leave this in an obvious location and encourage people to sign it!
- 8 **Put out announcements for up coming shows, workshops or lectures.**

- 9 **Consider displaying a list of galleries in which you are featured.** This will allow people to have access to your work after the Open Studio event.
- 10 **Wear a nametag and make name tags for your assistants as well.**

## **XI Artist Behavior**

### **A Stay focused**

- 1 **Keep track of who is where and whose hands are doing what.**

### **B As during the preview exhibition:**

- 1 **Remember to circulate and engage people.**
- 2 **Wear a carefully chosen piece of your work** (if appropriate.)
- 3 **Be prepared to talk about your work.**
- 4 **Be friendly to everyone.** Introduce yourself to strangers.
- 5 **Remember why you are there!**
  - a Do not spend your time talking with your friends.
  - b Having a fun conversation with your friends or assistant may be costing you money.

### **C You should be at your Open Studio the entire time. People are coming to meet the artist.**

### **D Consider listening to *Dynamic Sales and Customer Service Techniques* by Bruce Baker. (<http://www.bbakerinc.com>) This is listed in the Professional Guidelines under the *Resources for Legal and Professional Advice* and worth every penny of the price. Listen to the tape over and over.**

### **E Be prepared for difficult questions that make you feel uncomfortable.**

- 1 **Prepare answers in advance for questions about:**
  - a Studio discounts.
  - b "How long does it take you to make a piece?"
  - c Why does this work cost so much?
    - Be careful with these questions: if it only took an hour, people may ask why it costs so much. They may not understand the time and effort it took to develop a certain series initially.

## **XII Retail Sales**

### **A Advance considerations.**

- 1 **Post prices with each piece or prepare a price list that is easily referenced.**
- 2 **Decide on a return policy.**
  - a Prepare a sign with your Return Policy.
    - This sign must be prominently posted before the point of purchase to be legally enforceable. Prominent posting may be at the entrance, at the sales area, or attached to each item.
- 3 **Always sell work at retail prices This is very important.**
  - a Do not sell work at wholesale prices at Open Studios under any circumstances.
    - At an Open Studio, you do have 'retailing' expenses.
    - Galleries, who are seeking new artists, may see your work during an Open Studio and assume the work is priced at retail (thereby misjudging its suitability for their space).

- Selling work at wholesale prices at Open Studios is unprofessional and discredits the retail value of your work.
- 4 **Some artists prepare smaller or lower priced items for Open Studios.** This is a business decision dependent on your objectives for having an Open Studio.
  - 5 **Develop and include care and maintenance instructions, as appropriate.**
  - 6 **Discounts.**
    - a Read the **Professional Guidelines** document on *Discounts*.
    - b Decide your policy for discounts at an Open Studio -- and stick to it.
      - Decide whether you will offer discounts for cash. **You will be asked!**
    - c Again, older work, discontinued “limited editions” or older studies for one-of-a-kind pieces should not be sold as seconds.
      - Older pieces represent your body of work. Consider that you will one day become well known, and when you do these seminal pieces will have value to collectors and museums. They are not leftovers to be discounted and sold at lower prices.
    - d **Production lines and multiples:** While an Open Studio event may be seen as an opportunity to sell off excess or dated inventory, under-valuing of older work suggests that the same thing could happen to current work in the future. **This is not the message to send!** Be careful when discounting older work.
      - While pricing of older work may be lower than current pieces, it should not be drastically so. There should never be a “bargain basement” feel to any part of the display.
      - It may, never the less, be a business decision to sell discontinued lines. Do this only if the line of work is no longer sold at galleries or stores that carry your work.
      - “Seconds” should be clearly marked.
  - 7 **Prepare an Invoice form for Open Studios in advance.** Customer information filled out on an invoice can be used for future marketing.
    - a Invoice information:
      - Address of collector. For future mailing lists and to keep a record of your work. The Professional Guidelines recommends that you keep a record of the collectors of any work over \$500 for future exhibitions and to develop a provenance for the work.
      - Price
      - Tax
      - How did they find out about Open Studios?
      - Where have they seen your work? (If the collector was introduced to your work through a gallery or store that represents your work, you may owe them 50% of the retail price. This is why it is so important to discuss this with your gallery in advance).
      - Shipping charges, if appropriate. If the work is shipped out of state, you will not need to charge sales tax.
    - b The invoice should clearly state your Return Policy for your protection.
      - The Return Policy should be printed on all sales receipts, invoices and/or credit card receipts.
      - You can use a rubber stamp to add this information if you are using sales receipts that don’t include this information.
  - 8 **Make sure that you have change available—and secure—for cash sales.**
  - 9 **Exclusivity:**
    - a Communication is the key:

- Check with local/regional galleries that represent your work.
- Read your contract.
- b Commission Structure
  - The gallery may be entitled to a commission for work sold at the Open studio event. This percentage should be negotiated in advance with the gallery on an individual basis.
  - Special circumstances that may arise include collectors of your work who have been cultivated by the gallery. This commission can be quite sticky.
- c A few suggestions for working out potential conflicts with venues that sell your work:
  - Consider not participating in Open Studio if your work is already represented in the area.
  - Consider selling only a body of work that is not available at your gallery.
  - Consider showing and demonstrating your work at your Open Studio but directing people to the gallery to make retail purchases.
  - Consider offering your local gallery 50% of all your sales from the event.
  - Consider approaching the gallery with the idea of sponsoring the Open Studio event. For this sponsorship, the gallery receives a percentage of sales, advertising, etc.
  - Consider showing your work only at galleries outside your area. Thus, Open Studios events will not be competing with your gallery.

## B Handling Sales

- 1 **Consider having another person responsible for sales transactions.**  
This keeps you, the artist, free to discuss your work.
- 2 **If your profits become substantial, reduce their visibility and increase your safety by periodically stashing your excess revenue in a safe place.**
- 3 **One person should be responsible for money and checks.**
  - a Cash and checks should be carried and kept with that person at all times. Keeping your money in a fanny pack or a zipper pocket inside your coat may prevent an unhappy separation from your funds.
- 4 **Method of payment:**
  - a Cash. Have plenty of small change.
  - b Check.
    - Make sure you get the complete address and telephone number on your invoice in case of a problem.
    - Inquire with your bank concerning what other check security options may be available.
    - Keep the addresses to develop a mailing list.
  - c Charge.
    - People may not expect you to have the ability to charge purchases. However, if you can make arrangements for charging purchases, it may help your sales. - See if you can arrange to charge credit cards through your gallery (if you are paying them a percent of your sales) or through a colleague/ family business, etc.
  - d Installment payments and layaways.
    - Artists should retain any work purchased “on time” or installment with a written **contract until the work is paid in full.**

## C Commissions and special orders.

- 1 **If you wish to accept commissions or special orders**, post this information somewhere in your display or on your cards and invoices.
- 2 **An Open Studio event may be too busy or distracting a venue to negotiate commissions or special orders.**
  - a Prepare a form with contact information so that a future meeting can be scheduled.

### **XIII Follow-Up After Open Studios is Over**

- A **Debriefing: Make notes to yourself about what was successful or unsuccessful** for your next Open Studio.
  - 1 **How was your work received?**
  - 2 **What was popular and, perhaps, why?**
  - 3 **How was your presentation received?**
    - a Were all pieces visible and accessible?
    - b Was your work secure?
    - c Was there a comfortable traffic flow?
- B **Save your 'studio signs', etc** (assuming they are reusable, neat and clean).
- C **Develop your mailing list for next time.**
  - 1 **Your mailing list** (and any sub-categories) should be organized by zip code.
  - 2 **Review all your invoices**; add names and addresses to your mailing list.
  - 3 **Review your guest book**; add names and addresses to your mailing list.
- D **Follow up commissions or special orders promptly.**
- E **Pay your gallery a percentage of sales, if this is your agreement.**
- F **Pay your assistant.**
- G **Write Thank you notes.**
  - 1 **To your assistants who helped you make your Open Studio event a success!**
  - 2 **To your collectors and clients for purchasing your work!**
  - 3 **To anyone who came to your Open Studio that made the day memorable!**

#### **© 2004, 2008, 2010 Harriete Estel Berman**

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