**JURORS: PUTTING YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD. © andy cooperman 2006**

Rejection is always an unpleasant experience.  Unfortunately it is a fact of life, especially so for those artists and craftspeople who wish to sell their work or gain exposure and perhaps notoriety by showing their work in a competitive environment. Juried venues such as exhibitions, craft shows and publications attract fresh talent and can raise the competitive bar regarding quality and innovation.  And, because it is exclusionary by definition, adding the word “Juried” before any listing on your resume gives it professional weight. So there are many sound reasons that we take the emotional risk of submitting work to a jury.  But who gets in and who doesn’t in the end boils down to the opinion(s) of that jury.  And while nothing can or should change that, things can certainly be done to improve a person’s chances.

There is nothing that will block the path towards “acceptance” more quickly than a poor quality or unintelligible image, be it digital or slide.  The goal is to convey as much information about the piece pictured as possible WITHOUT AMBIGUITY OR CONFUSION.  Relying on the jurors’ having any time or desire to puzzle out what is going on in an image will result in an irritated jury indisposed to accepting the entry.  The odds are that they will simply move along.  It should be clear in the slide what the object is, and the character of the surfaces and materials.  (Some materials may be nontraditional, experimental or used in a new way.  This is, of course, fine but how the material appears to the eye—its character-- is crucial.)

If you don’t take your work seriously enough to document it well, then there’s a good chance that jurors will equate your lack of proper documentation with a lack of professionalism or commitment and in turn may not give it serious consideration.  But obtaining quality images of your work does not of necessity mean parting with large amounts of hard earned cash. It is certainly within the grasp of most of us to learn how to shoot images (film or digital) that, while perhaps not quite up to publishing standards, are suitable for jurying.

Lighting is perhaps the single most important thing to consider. If the piece is under lit or too heavily shadowed it will create confusion. Drama is fine and can actually help to create a powerful impression.  That being said, too much of a good thing can get in the way. Avoid slick, Madison Avenue types of composition.  Also, too much backlighting can create a silhouetted appearance in the slide that flattens the image and draws the eye towards the periphery.

Consider your background.  Is it:

•distracting?

•too busy or cluttered?

•too dark or light?

•does it bleach out the piece?

•does it isolate the piece?

•does the object need to be recorded in context—that is, does it need to be sited on the body, on a wall or somehow installed?

As stated above, be sure that the materials are clearly depicted.  Yellow gold should appear yellow. Sterling should be silvery white if not patinated but not the glaring white of an overly “hot” image. These hot spots draw the eye and create misleading or distracting focal points. Highly polished reflective surfaces are tough to record with accuracy and clarity.  They should never include a fun house mirror reflection of the camera, photographer, light stand or studio wall.

Label the slide clearly.  At the absolute minimum indicate the orientation of the slide with an arrow (or whatever is required in an exhibition prospectus) the artist’s name, title of the piece and the type of object. Ideally information detailing materials, techniques, dimensions and year of completion should appear on the slide mount. When the competition is tough and the jury needs to make a cut, this information can make a real difference.  If you are including a slide list to accompany the submission, then a clear number corresponding to that list should appear.

Even with the best possible images work submitted should be appropriate to the theme or character of the venue.  Production work conceived and designed to be worn at the office may not be the best choice to submit to an academic exhibition.  And edgy, one of a kind pieces featuring controversial subject matter may not be suitable for submission to a church based craft fair.  I am not assigning relative validity to any type of work but, if the goal is to be juried in, then doesn’t it make sense to focus your efforts towards appropriate scenarios?

Some work comes alive only when held in the hand.  It may have some tactile quality or a specific function that is interactive. Think hard about choosing these pieces for submission. Ask yourself whether any functionality will be apparent from within the static confines of a sealed display case, a slide (or digital image) or a 2 dimensional published image.  If you do choose to submit such a piece, be sure to illustrate anything that is special about its character in detail images.

Jurying anything is a difficult task and carries with it serious responsibility.  Anyone asked to provide their services as a juror or on a panel of jurors should well consider whether they are prepared to make difficult, objective and perhaps even harsh decisions before accepting.  That’s the juror’s side of the equation.  The artist or craftsperson must fulfill their side of the bargain by submitting the best possible visuals they can of their strongest work, thoroughly labeled and documented. Do your homework and select an exhibition that you feel suits your work.  Assemble a group of images that works well together compositionally and perhaps thematically. And understand that even though rejection is part of the game, you can maximize your chances of making the cut.  In a competitive world it’s always smart to put your best foot forward.