

# To Exhibit or not to Exhibit

## Outtakes from Lens Culture – Guide to Exhibiting

*The idea of frequent artwork sales, solo shows, and international recognition have dazzling allure, but the large investment of time, money and energy required for these ventures is often underestimated. For example, a photographer on the roster of a small commercial gallery might produce an exhibition every two years, and spend around \$10,000 on printing and framing the work. They might make \$15,000 in sales, of which the gallery takes half to cover costs, such as marketing, staff resources, and other charges associated with the exhibition and selling the work.*

***In other words, there's not a great financial incentive – in fact it is a financial risk***

## Reflection

### What is the purpose of my work?

Do I have at least one Body of Work completed - YES

Is my work suitable for prints on a wall – YES

Other mediums for work? – Books / Web Site

Are there galleries that specialise in documentary photography? I suspect they are small / private / regional

Can I commit to new work regularly? Yes

Can I commit to gallery schedules? Yes

### My audience

Is it art, community or niche? It's the latter two

What do I want the audience to do after seeing the work?

    Create a reaction / create an awareness of injustice

    Go to my web site

    Buy a catalogue

    Buy a book

How do I directly communicate with an audience?

    Social Media

    Exhibition

    Web

### Why exhibit?

Why not, it's a culmination of a Body of Work

It gets the work out to a wider audience

It creates dialogue

It is a badge on the cv

### Is a gallery the right medium for me?

**I know how to run and cost an exhibition -**

**I have run two successful and profitable photography exhibitions.**

**This covered**

- **Competition within a camera club (Bedford Camera Club 2013 & 2014)**
- **Rules for entry including sizes / mounts for prints and sizes for DPs**
- **Categories**

- Organising judging by a regional recognised and qualified judge
- Booking premises (The Bedford Corn Exchange)
- Organising display apparatus / refreshments / audio equipment
- Sharing cost by booking framers and photo renovator
- Managing the site preparation and deconstruction
- Advertising in local news
- Posters and banner
- Catalogue using local printer
- Opening evening with prize giving to group winners by the Mayor as guest of honour to ensure local press coverage
- Circa 400 visitors for both exhibitions

### **Framing and editioning**

I am aware of the cost of framing – as an example, this canvas of my work costs £55 for a 40X50 print.



A frame with non-reflective glass would be a similar price, meaning the outlay on images alone for (say) 25 images would be circa £1400.

Editioning is not something I have considered at the moment – it's to be considered and may be something that a gallery insists on.

### **Am I ready?**

*“Readiness: you must be certain that the work is indeed ready and that you are ready to partner with a gallery socially, emotionally, logistically, practically, and professionally.”*

*JANELLE LYNCH Artist, New York.*

I can do this

# Gallery Types

## Co-ops and Artists Run Initiatives (ARIs)

These galleries are organized and operated by a group of artists with the purpose of exhibiting and promoting the artworks or projects of the members. Members are often responsible for all the operational costs, including their own production and exhibition expenses. Commissions on sales are paid to the co-op, normally at a lower rate than other galleries.

### **Suitable for photographers who:**

- + want exposure and/or exhibiting experience
- + would like a high level of involvement in curation

## NON-PROFIT GALLERIES

These galleries work within the parameters of a mission statement, overseen by a board of directors. They have varying areas of interest and purpose that are not necessarily tied to art sales. For example, the gallery might be dedicated to education, audience development, innovation in the arts, diverse voices, or a particular type of photography. Non-profit galleries will normally receive funding from grants and donations. They will often have numerous exhibiting opportunities throughout the year, especially via open calls. Often, they charge lower commission fees than commercial galleries.

### **Suitable for photographers who:**

- + are making artwork that aligns with the gallery's mission
- + are open to having their work curated by the gallery
- + want to experiment with their artwork without the pressure of potential reviews or sales attached to the outcome

## INSTITUTIONAL GALLERIES

These galleries often reside within a university or college. The gallery program is normally curated and overseen by an exhibitions committee or board. The purpose of the gallery is defined and publicly available, and the cost of producing the exhibition is often covered.

### **Suitable for photographers who:**

- + work with strong academic concepts

## SMALL COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Mostly sell primary market artworks\* priced below USD\$25,000 on average. These galleries are normally owner-operated with few additional staff members, if any. The physical size of these galleries is small, often with a single exhibition space, and their exhibition schedules focus on a small roster. Occasionally, small commercial galleries will also work with invited artists. Photographers often work closely with the gallery owner.

## RENTAL GALLERY/VANITY GALLERY

These galleries generate an income by charging exhibiting artists a fee to show their work, rather than focusing on artwork sales. The charges usually come in the form of a flat exhibitor fee or a rental fee based on the

space being used and the time period of the exhibition. Vanity galleries are an avenue for new artists to get their name out into the world and gain exhibition experience, however there is little incentive for the gallery to sell work because the artist has paid them upfront.

**Suitable for photographers who:**

- + want to exhibit their work publicly when other options are not available
- + are willing and able to pay the fees
- + are less concerned with artwork sales
- + would like a high level of involvement in curation

**VIRTUAL GALLERY**

In more recent times, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, online exhibitions and virtual galleries have become more common in the gallery world. A virtual gallery is an interactive digital space that allows online visitors to explore, learn about and buy exhibited works online, some using advanced 3D technologies. Some virtual galleries are connected and closely represent physical galleries, offering a new avenue for galleries to reach buyers and audiences. Others are digital-only spaces, adding a new type of gallery for photographers to explore for presenting their work. Suitable for photographers interested in innovative ways to reach diverse audiences.

*Initially I see my outlet options as those highlighted in red*

*“ There are many misconceptions people have around galleries. One of the most difficult to contend with is the belief that galleries make a lot of money. Although it is true that some gallery owners are wealthy, it’s typically not a result of running that space.”*

**MICHAEL DOONEY**

Jarvis Dooney Galerie, Berlin

*In other words, it's not a guaranteed route to profit*

## **Identify Galleries**

There are many different ways to start building a list of galleries in your area or your interest area. It can be helpful to start looking locally first, as these galleries are the ones you will be able to visit in person and are likely to be the galleries that are interested in exhibiting local emerging artists without much exhibition history.