

Best Practices Guide for Artists

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West Seattle Art Walk

About us

The West Seattle Art Walk is a monthly art event held on the second Thursday of each month (year-round) from 5pm to late. The Art Walk is hosted by local West Seattle merchants who feature a wide range of art and showcase our vibrant artist community.

Our goal is to support and connect artists and merchants in creating a memorable Art Walk experience. We aim to do this by providing a framework for best practices in working with each other to create a successful show, by promoting artists and businesses in our marketing efforts online and in print, and by offering educational workshops that allow all of us to take this community event to the next level.

The West Seattle Art Walk is proudly brought to you by the West Seattle Junction Association, a nonprofit 501(c)(3), and the West Seattle Arts Council.

Visit our website at www.wsartwalk.org. You can email us at wsartwalk@gmail.com.

About this guide

This guide is meant to walk you through the process of participating in the West Seattle Art Walk event so that you know what to expect from start to finish.

Joining the Art Walk

If you're interested in having a show at a participating venue, we recommend you connect to businesses directly. Our current participating merchants/venues are listed on our website. These merchants book their own artists.

If you are interested at showing at a business who is NOT listed on the Art Walk website, don't hesitate to reach out to them. You could create a partnership that is new to the program.

If you don't have a particular venue in mind and would like to be contacted as space becomes available, submit your samples to us and we'll add them to a portfolio that is shared with merchants. From there, they can reach out to you directly.

If you're a new artist, you may consider asking a fellow new artist to show in conjunction with your show. This should be addressed with the merchant prior to initial contact.

Additionally, each quarter, the Art Walk conducts a call to artists to submit artwork that sets the tone for the event. You can submit your work for inclusion on our digital and printed Art Walk promotional materials. This includes the printed walking map postcards and posters that will be displayed around West Seattle. This is a great opportunity to have your work prominently featured and promoted within the community!

Getting started

You want to produce an art show. First, we suggest you determine your goals and objectives. Do you want to gain exposure? Sell more art? Reach a new audience? Make new business connections?

Having clarity on your goals will help you stay on track. Stay focused on your goals and think about what you want to achieve; use those things to measure your success, whatever that may look like to you.

List your top three goals:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Remember, as an artist, you have two options for finding a venue to show your artwork.

1. Connect with individual venues that might be a good fit for you and your art.
2. Share your artwork with us so that we can distribute it to merchants for consideration. They can reach out to you directly.

Research and building relationships

Review the list of current participating Art Walk merchants and identify places that might be mutually beneficial. Before you reach out to them, do your research to ensure that you aren't wasting your time or theirs.

Here are some things to consider:

- Does this merchant or gallery show works or genres similar to your own?
- Who are the artists that have shown art at this location? Are they new artists or are they more established? Where do you stand?
- What is the general aesthetic of this gallery?
- Who are their clients, and do they match your buyers?
- Do you have any connections or know someone who would be open to introducing or recommending you?

Tip: You might think you've found a suitable match, but don't presume or suggest that you know what's best for a given gallery or merchant.

Once you have narrowed down potential venues, dig deeper and get to know them as a supporter. This is your opportunity to build relationships, which increases your chances of initiating the conversation about showing your art. Join their mailing list, attend other events that they host, follow their social media accounts. Think about the ways that you might be able to support their business. Build a connection and leave a positive impression so that, even if this particular place isn't the right fit, they'll want to help connect you with other people who may be able to help. Building good relationships takes time; exercise patience and don't rush this process.

Prepare your materials for submission

While you're researching potential venues, start gathering your materials so you have everything ready to submit once you identify a match for you and your artwork.

Some of the things you may be expected to send to a potential merchant:

- Images of your work
- Artist biography
- Artist statement
- C.V.

If the merchant you want to engage with is accepting new artwork submissions, they may have a particular process for how you need to send your information. Follow that process. If they say they are **not** accepting new submissions, don't send your information anyway. **DO** check in with the merchant at regular intervals; they may have a cancellation which opens up an opportunity to show.

If you send the inquiry online via email or web form, be sure to send images as .JPEG or .PNG file types as they are the most easily accessible to open and make sure the file size is not too large. Better yet, send a link to your online portfolio.

If you opt to create a physical package to drop off with the merchant, it could be as simple as an intro/cover letter, a sampling of your work, and a business card (or how they can contact you).

In addition to preparing these assets, prepare some talking points for when conversations arise, and you will need to be able to talk about yourself and your art. It may be difficult if you're not practiced in this. Don't assume that your "work will speak for itself". Give it a narrative and be ready to tell your story. If this doesn't come naturally to you, enlist some family and friends that you can practice with.

Initiating conversation and booking your show

Assuming that you successfully sent your artwork for consideration and the merchant/gallery has contacted you to explore working together, the next step is to set up a meeting to discuss the details.

Here are some topics to cover:

Percentages, pricing, and handling sales – some merchants may operate on a consignment or commission structure. They may want you to pay for credit card transaction fees if they handle sales. There may be other fees associated with showing your work in their space. If they handle sales, how do you get paid and when? Be prepared to talk about pricing your work as well.

Marketing/promotional outreach – ask what marketing and promotion might look like for your show, especially if they are operating on commission. Know that this is not their sole responsibility and that you, as the artist, also carry the responsibility to market and sell your work.

This is a joint effort, but you need to be an active participant in this process.

Installation – what kind of space is available, how many pieces can you showcase, how is the lighting, are there hardware/hanging requirements, who is responsible for installing and taking down artwork, what is the duration that artwork is expected to be displayed?

Artist opening reception – is there a reception, what are your obligations or expectations to fulfill? How long are you expected to be there?

Reception food/beverage – ask the merchant how they would like to handle this. Who is responsible for providing these, if applicable? Research permits required to serve wine if you and your merchant decide to do this.

(Initiating conversation and booking your show con't)

Next steps – cover key deadlines and dates for when things need to happen, such as when artwork needs to be given to the merchant or installed by you; marketing information sent over such as your artist bio, artist statement, social media handles; when to arrive for the opening reception; and when to close the show.

Signed agreement – Your merchant will likely have a standard artist agreement outlining expectations for everyone involved. Review it and make sure you both agree to the terms. If they don't have an agreement, create your own document that covers all the details of who is responsible for a given action.

Promoting your event

The West Seattle Art Walk will be promoting this event throughout our social channels, our website, and event calendars across the city, including the West Seattle Blog. Your host will also reach out to their connections to promote your show.

It is **your** show and therefore your responsibility to promote your work and this event.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

In Person – Invite your friends and family. Let them know you're having a show. They will come support you, but you have to tell them about it.

Online – All of these options below are easily shareable and will help you get more people to your event.

- **Your website or blog** – Having a website shows that you are a professional. Keep this updated and include your upcoming show(s) so people know it's happening.
- **Your email newsletter** – If you're able to write content and share news about your art, upcoming shows, updates to your website, or anything going on with your art business, you should consider email marketing as another way to stay connected with people who have expressed an interest in your artwork. One way to build this list is to include an email sign-up on your website. Another way would be to set up a guest book at your events so that people who are interested in your work can stay informed. Check services such as Mailchimp and Constant Contact to get started.
- **Event sites** – You can create events on sites like Eventbrite.com to further market your show to a broader audience. Often times, people who are using Eventbrite to

search for events will stumble upon your listing and decide they want to attend.

- **Social media** – Facebook, Instagram, and to some extent, Twitter, are all good options to engage with a large audience. If you don't use social media very much, try to pick just one platform that you are comfortable with and stick to it. The goal is to create content that gets people interested in you and your show. In addition to your own social media accounts, be sure to post your show information on relevant groups. For example, there is a very active group called 'West Seattle Connection' and it's a great place to share your event with locals.

You will want to promote your show before it happens, the day of the event*, as well as the duration of your exhibition to continue driving people to your host's venue to see your work and hopefully convert to buyers.

**On the day of your event, it's likely that you will be too busy talking to potential buyers and other guests to be posting online about your show. Enlist some of your friends to come support you, take photos, and post on your behalf on Art Walk night.*

At-a-glance details

Keep the details of your opening reception and show handy in case you need to answer an inquiry or write a post to promote your show.

Name of your show, if applicable	
Opening reception date and time	
Dates of exhibition	
Merchant name and location	
About the show	
Short artist bio	
Your website	
Your social media account	
Merchant's website	
Merchant's social media account	
Hashtags and Geolocation attributes *	

** "Tag" the geolocation of your host's venue/address in social media posts. That way, people can find you and your artwork by the location you specify.*

** Hashtags are used on many social platforms, particularly Instagram and Twitter, so that other people can share and view photos from an event with that hashtag. For example, we use ones like #westseattleartwalk and #westseattle on Instagram, so that anyone who clicks on that hashtag will see all photos with that tag. You can also '@' someone, which is when you tag someone's account and give them attribution.*

If you have questions on either of these, find a friend who is savvy with social media.

Installation

Some merchants will want to handle the installation for you. If that is the case, arrange a time to drop off your artwork so they can hang it in time for your show. You may want to include an inventory sheet so that all your work is accounted for.

You might have your own vision for how your work is displayed within a space, but your merchant may have other suggestions. Be open and work with them to determine the best placement for your work.

These are some tips for displaying your artwork if you are responsible for the installation.

- Ask what kind of hardware you are allowed to use for their space. Bring your own tools.
- Install your artwork on a date and time prior to Art Walk night that you and your host agreed on.
- Be respectful of the business and customers.
- Plan ahead to make the installation as quick and clean as possible.
- Work around customers and be kind and courteous.
- Smile and greet the customers.
- Keep your area clean and safe.
- Clean up after installation (vacuum if needed).

Art Walk Night

This is the main event! Be prepared to talk to customers about yourself, about your artwork, and to sell your art.

Confirm with your host what time you will arrive, set up food and drinks (if you are responsible for that), and wrap up your reception. If your host cannot attend, ask for the staff person who will be your day-of point of contact in case you need anything.

Food and beverage

It is typical to have light snacks and beverages during a reception. Some venues will host the food and beverages, others leave that to the artist. Be clear on who takes on this responsibility.

Practice safe food handling. Make sure there are food handling gloves when preparing food for the public.

The West Seattle Art Walk in no way endorses serving alcohol. If you or your host choose to serve alcohol for your Art Walk reception, we suggest you check with your insurance carrier about liability coverage and with the state liquor control board regarding permits. We suggest you have a designated person who is pouring wine, checking IDs, and making sure people don't leave your business with alcohol. **If you choose to serve alcohol, it's vital that you don't allow folks who are drinking wine/alcohol to leave the venue with their beverage.**

Selling art

Selling your art doesn't mean you have to be a salesperson. Answer any questions your guests have, be prepared to talk about your process. Let people get to know you. Make it easy for your guests to become buyers. Think of it as an opportunity to connect with people who support your work.

If your host is handling sales, you can relay that to your guests.

In the case that you are handling sales directly, consider setting up a payment account that is linked to your bank account, such as Venmo,

(Selling art, con't)

Paypal, or Cash.me. If you have a Square reader to connect to your phone, you can also take payments that way. You might consider having a friend help you with this as you may be busy talking to guests.

Guest book

Including a guest book at your reception allows you to capture emails and grow your list of contacts. Be sure to mention that it will be kept private and that this is just for the purpose of keeping them current on new pieces you're working on, future exhibit dates, and more. **Do not abuse the contact list and use it for anything else.** As mentioned in the section, 'Promoting your event', check out services like MailChimp or Constant Contact to increase your marketing reach.

Conversation tips

- You are the greeter - introduce yourself and engage!
- Prepare your elevator speech.
- Think of some conversation starters (e.g. your favorite piece and why).
- Anticipate questions you might be asked.
- Be aware of your body language. Be inviting and approachable.
- Practice eye contact and listening skills.
- Thank guests for coming to your show.

Tip: Mingle. Don't just chat with your friends. People are here to see you and your art. Be gracious and welcoming to all your guests. People are more likely to buy art if they feel a connection with the artist.

Wrapping up

Break down exhibition

If you did the install, likely you will also do the break down. Do this at the date and time you and your host agreed upon. Make sure to take everything down and clean up after yourself. Just as you did with the installation, be mindful of working around customers and work quickly to pack up your artwork.

Otherwise, if your host is handling this, be clear on when you are expected to pick up any unsold artwork.

Art sales and inventory

Work with your host to note of pieces that have been marked as 'sold' and set those aside to ship, drop off, or make available for pickup for your buyers. Do this promptly.

If there are original pieces, prints, or other artwork that buyers have requested during the month, either you or your host need to follow up on those requests, per your agreement on how to handle art sales.

Make sure to do a financial reconciliation to make sure all pieces sold have been accounted for. If your merchant is handling your artwork sales, be clear on when you will be paid.

Thank you

Be sure to say thank you to everyone who helped you along the way. Write a quick thank you note to friends, family, and your connections online for supporting you.

Send a thank you card to your hosts and their team for promoting your artwork and your show, for staffing your artist reception, and for featuring your work for the month (or however long). You may wish to book a follow up show for a future date.

Being gracious goes a long way in building relationships and nurturing professional connections.

Self-reflection

Reflect on the event as a whole. From the initial conversations, to the planning, to the big night, and closing your show - how did it go? Did it meet the goals you originally set out in the beginning of this process? Did your goals change?

Capturing your thoughts and conducting a thorough evaluation soon after the reception and the close of your show will help you better prepare for your next art show.

Appendix

Art Walk checklist

Use and amend this checklist to suit you.

Basic details

Title of show

Time and date of
opening reception

Exhibition dates

Venue name, address,
phone, hours, website

Planning and pre-work

- Forms: sign contract
- Artwork: finalize artworks to be displayed
- Pricing: finalize pricing with your host
- Marketing: create and share artist statement, artist bio, and photo with your host
- Marketing/social media: brainstorm, prepare, and write content for marketing efforts; create a cadence for posting that you can stick to
- Social media: save the date announcements; create event on Facebook, Eventbrite, your website, or other relevant event calendars
- Email marketing: create and send newsletter to your mailing list (if you have one); put email addresses in BCC rather than TO so that emails remain private
- Meeting: meet with host to key dates/activities
- Install: schedule installation or have your works and inventory list ready to hand off to the merchant to install; remember to bring artwork labels
- Signage: print materials e.g. artwork labels, programs (if applicable), guest book or sign-in sheet to collect email addresses
- What to wear: select your outfit, if you have to dry-clean, allow for enough time (2 weeks out)

Art Walk reception

- Food and beverage: buy these if you are handling (day before/day of)
- Food and beverage: have someone pour drinks
- Social media: remind your audience of the show
- Handling sales: if you are handling your own sales, make sure to have systems set up to accept payment, otherwise direct customers to the merchant
- Be on time. Smile, be present, gracious, and welcoming to your guests!

Post Art Walk reception

- Social media: post photos and write a small note of thanks to your audience and host; remind people about the last chance to see show
- Thank you: send thank you note to your host for staffing the reception
- Recap: write up a post-mortem for your own reflection

Closing show

- De-install works: Remove your artwork or arrange a time to pick up unsold works with your host
 - Accounting: set up a time to review all sold works and confirm payment details
 - Social media: let people know your show has closed, say thanks, and mention any notable happenings
 - Thank you: send thank you card to your host for supporting your show
 - Recap: write up a post-mortem for your own reflection
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Artwork labels

While the elements may vary depending on the show, here are some basics for your artwork labels.

Your name*
Title of artwork, this should be italicized
Dimensions
Type of medium, e.g. acrylic on canvas
Price, if applicable, or "NFS" (not for sale)

**If you are doing a solo show, you may not need to include your name on every label if your name is prominently displayed nearby and it is clear that the works are yours. However, if you are sharing a show with other artists or your works are spread out within a space, it is better to include your name.*

Options for labeling

Cardstock. Print on cardstock, cut to size, and adhere with putty that doesn't damage walls.

Adhesive labels. These are very common and come in many sizes.

Foamcore board. Print your artwork label on regular paper, use spray adhesive on the foamcore, apply the label, and then cut to size using an exacto-knife or sharp blade.

Use a clear and legible font. They should be identical in size if possible and placed uniformly next to each piece.

Check with your host to see if they have any requirements on the aesthetic of your labels.

Additional resources

Here are some websites that cover topics on managing your art business, marketing, how-to tutorials, and more. There are countless sources of information on the internet; do your research.

- <https://www.agora-gallery.com/advice/>
- <https://theworkingartist.com/>
- <https://thepracticalartworld.com/>
- <http://www.artbusiness.com/artists.html>
- <https://www.artworkarchive.com/blog/artists>
- <https://www.gyst-ink.com/professional-practices-for-artists/>

- <https://lcb.wa.gov/licensing/online-banquet-permit> (banquet permit to serve alcohol)

