

Chapter 3

Finding and Choosing Shows

***"Give me six hours to chop down a tree
and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."
—Abraham Lincoln***

I live in Las Vegas, Nevada, which I characterize to my customers as the “cultural capital of the world”. They laugh, invariably. When I first started doing art shows I didn’t believe there would be any local art shows that were worth doing; later I found out even in Vegas money can be made and the art shows get better and better. It was here in the comfort of my own home that I learned that there are art shows and there are art shows.

I am not going to even attempt to classify or qualify the types of art shows, even though among fellow artists we often talk about “mall shows”, “dinky shows”, “parking lot shows”, “easy shows” and a myriad of other classes of shows. We know what we’re talking about, I think. And there is a wide variety of shows, which doesn’t mean one is better than the other or money is a sure thing in some and a rarity in others. The main goal to be achieved by attempting to qualify and classify shows is simply to find a match for your particular type of offering. Fine-art-only shows may be the place for many painters, but jewelers seem to thrive there as well and sometimes the attendance at these exclusive shows is so poor that nobody sells anything. Huge mixed shows would seem a mismatch to high-end 2-D (wall-art, as we like to call it), but there is plenty of money to be made for everyone when 100,000 people show up in a buying mood.

One of the most important things to remember about art festivals is that there is a huge quantity and variety of shows to choose from. As artists and business persons, we owe it to ourselves to, not only research shows, but be picky about which shows we continue to support. But first, you have to have a choice, so let’s take the first thing first

and chat about how to find shows. Then we can get into some tuning tips so that you find the best show suited to you.

Where are all these shows?

First year “in the circuit” I made the mistake of not seeking enough shows and not researching enough *about* shows. I guess that’s two mistakes. The predictable result was a disaster year in which my total gross income was around \$14,000. Well, I didn’t even know if I wanted to do shows and I was doing them very part-time and this tough year taught me that I needed to do some serious research and dedicate some time to the fine art of planning.

Let’s start with where to find shows. There are several publications around, some cover the entire US, Sunshine Artist, Craftmaster News and The Crafts Report to name just three. Out West we also have a regional guide or two and every region has its own websites and publications dedicated to festival listings. Obviously the country-wide publications will have a lot of extraneous information and listings if you are just looking to do shows in your state and surrounding areas. Another most important source is the web, but I have a whole chapter coming up about Loose Nuts and Bolts that covers the “nobody told meeee” stuff, with a section on the internet as a most valuable resource. Anyhow, just to whet your appetite, a search on the web for “art festivals” will yield several thousand results and if you are the surfing kind, you may not need a stinkin’ magazine at all. Other internet resources covering the rare gem festivals such as those offered by small museums or art organizations are the Art Calendar listings and the Art Deadline web site. All these resources are conveniently listed in the back of this handy book.

Time invested in researching all, not just some, of these sources will pay off tenfold, as there are shows that only list in some publications, shows that don’t have websites, shows that are only advertise regionally and so on. Every promoter of an art festival, after a few years, knows just where to advertise their particular shows to get enough (but not too many) artists to apply. It follows that artists must do a bit of sleuthing to figure out how to find the right show in the right place at the right time.

Last but not least, attend the local shows you see in the newspaper or television. Asking artists attending a local show will usually yield a filtered list of a few shows in the area and will certainly get you the name of the promoter of that particular show. In the beginning, the local shows are the easiest to taste anyway.

What do you look for in a show listing magazine or web site? The same thing you look at when shopping for anything else: large selection, wide variety and features! You want as many shows as possible, of course, organized in some sort of calendar, and hopefully by city and state.

First thing you notice when you look at the June issue of one of the publications is that most of the June shows had deadlines last November and it is now too late to apply.