

SVOS UNIVERSITY 2013

27TH ANNUAL

SILICON VALLEY OPEN STUDIOS



PART 2- PREPARING YOUR OPEN STUDIO



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Preparing Your

Open Studio

Do any of these statements apply to you?

*My studio is the **dining room table**...
I don't know what to do!*

*I work in my **garage**... how
do I light my pieces?"*

*This sounds crazy, but my
work is selling too well. I think I'm
underpricing it.*

*I want to get paid for my efforts but
I don't want to scare off potential buyers with
prices that are too high.*

If the answer is **"yes"** then you're in the right place.

Here are tips on how to prepare your open studio inside and outside for guests.

Preparing Your Studio:

Inside

▶ Give yourself plenty of time to prepare. **Clean and remove clutter.**

People need to be able to move freely to see your art.

▶ Change your thinking from creating art to **displaying art**. Get ideas from stores, booths at arts & crafts shows, galleries, and museums.

▶ What's the first thing visitors see when they enter your studio? Whether it's a dramatic piece or an interesting grouping, it should **make an impression**. Create an atmosphere that encourages people to linger and

hopefully, spend money on your art. Soft music is pleasing and fresh flowers are always nice.

▶ **Keep a small area in its "natural state"** as it is when you are working.

▶ Consider having **someone to help** when it's busy and talk to when it's slow. It's also a good security measure.

▶ **Do a demonstration** of your art while visitors are present. People are fascinated by watching an artist at work. Sharing your creative process and educating the public is a benefit that could result in increased sales.

▶ Pick up **artist directories** for your studio and deliver them along with any other **promotional materials** to other locations that have agreed to carry them for you.



It's not juried... No worries about getting accepted and what you can show. Exhibit all your pieces, show the breadth of your work.



Have a place for your **guest book**, artist directories and promotional materials you've collected from other artists and businesses. Keep a guide opened to the page for your area (use a highlighter to outline your map), and have a stack for visitors to take. As guests leave, give them one and suggest they visit nearby artists.

Prominently **display any books, magazines, or newspaper articles** where you or your work is profiled.

Each piece should have its price clearly marked, or post a title card nearby with a corresponding **master price list**. Have photocopies available for people to take while they look at your work.

For example:

Blue Flowers.....\$195
 Old Mission.....\$225
 Garden Path.....\$295

Or, use colored dots on each piece and post a master "key" list:

● blue dot.....\$225
 ● yellow dot.....\$350
 ● green dot.....\$475
 ● red dot.....sold



If your work is unframed, **consider framing a few pieces**. It helps people "see" the work. Offer the option of buying a framed piece. Clearly note your prices for framed and unframed work in different sizes.

Use walls, easels, pedestals, shelves, tables and bins. Find them at local art stores, catalogs, or online. Costco, Target, K-Mart, Wal-Mart, Ikea, OfficeMax, etc. all carry affordable display items, tables, and shelving.

Are you going to be doing other shows/venues? You may want to **invest in a canopy and display walls**. There are many different systems: Propanel, grids/peg board, Canopies include EZ Up and Caravan.

Ask other artists for **suggestions**.



Tables should be high enough for people to comfortably peruse your work. **Create multi-level displays on tables**. Drape cloth over a box to make a pedestal. Use table coverings that reach the floor to create storage space underneath.

To **hide unsightly areas** and/or cover tables: tablecloths, drapes, bedspreads in dark and/or neutral colors that flatter your work. Check out fabric stores, discount stores, home stores, garage sales for good deals.

Preparing Your Studio:

Outside

► Make the **entrance to your studio** clean and inviting. Flowers and plants and, of course, art that's safe outside.

► **Clear the clutter.** Bicycles, skateboards, toys, lawnmowers, and garbage cans etc. should all be picked up and put out of sight.

► **Garage Sales** are open before 11am. Bring fliers and ask if they'll hand them out for you in exchange for you mentioning their sale. Ask to post a directional sign too.

► Lighting

► **Notice the light in your studio**, both natural and artificial, and use it to show off your work. In May it stays light later. If possible, show some work outdoors to take advantage of daylight.

► Ideally you want both **ambient and directional light**.

► **Invest in quality lighting.** Home Depot and stores like it offer many options – track lighting and clamp-on lamps provide flexibility. Halogen is excellent and can be used at any indoor venue.

► If you don't want to invest in lighting, simply bring in lamps from other rooms to **brighten your show space**.

► Keep **extra bulbs, extension cords, surge protectors**, duct tape, cable ties, bungee cords, etc. on hand.

► **Test your set-up in advance** to be sure everything works and to see if you need additional lighting, cords, etc.

► **Note: halogen lighting gets hot.** Turn it off and let it cool completely before dismantling your set-up.

► Refreshments

► **Refreshments add a nice touch** and encourage people to linger. They don't have to be expensive. Offer drinks and finger foods that aren't messy. Remember you'll be encouraging people to handle your artwork.

► Have **napkins, cups, small plates, and a trash** receptacle near the refreshments.

► If space allows, **place refreshments away from the entrance** so visitors will have to go through your studio to reach them.

► Consider having **your own reception** for a select group. "Reception: hors d'oeuvres 6-8 pm Sat May 1" If you decide to serve alcohol, look into liability issues. **Invite only people you know and trust.**



Preparing and Placing Signs

► **How many directional signs** will you need and where will you put them? Check local ordinances. Get permission from neighbors to use lawns, trees, etc.

► **Pick up signs every night and replace each day.** Remember to take signs down at the end of each weekend.

► SVOS has art work for lawn signs available on the website. They can be printed for \$15 or less at Vista-Print or other online vendors. These are like the political signs. You can ask permission to put on neighbors lawns and avoid city ordinance issues.

► Directional signs are critical to **help the public find you.** Don't be stingy, especially if you're in a hard-to-find location. Create a path to your door.

► Be sure that **signs can be read from driver's eye-level.** Bold directional arrows are very helpful. What you see when you're posting a sign is not necessarily what the driver sees. Drive your route to check that signs are properly placed.

► Many artists **laminates** their signs so they can be used from year to year.

Pricing Your Work

You can show with other artists. Group sites attract more visitors and let you show in a different place each weekend.



Notice how similar work is priced. Check out other events, galleries, arts & crafts fairs, boutiques, museums, websites, etc. Be aware that artists with established “names” can ask more for their work.

Establish your pricing strategy, then mark your pieces and/or write a price list.

Don't get emotional. Just because a particular piece is your favorite, or took longer to create, doesn't necessarily mean it is more valuable to buyers.

Consider labor, materials, and overhead when pricing your work. Determine how much labor on average goes into a typical piece. This information is useful for those pieces that for whatever reason took considerably more or less time to create, yet you want to keep their prices in line with your other work.

Prices should be logical. If a smaller piece costs more than a larger piece, be able to give an understandable and simple explanation of why.

If you sell through galleries, check to see if you can offer discounts on your direct sales to the public. Most galleries will allow a 10% or 15% discount off your gallery prices, but beware of discounting or selling without their knowledge.

The economy matters. Art is discretionary spending. People spend according to how they perceive their economic future.

Different price points. Someone may love your \$2,000 oil painting, but only have \$200 to spend. With a range of price points, you'll appeal to more buyers.

For example: \$100 - \$200, \$50 - \$100, \$25 - \$50, and \$25 and under.

It's not unheard of for someone to buy an inexpensive item one year and come back in the future to buy something much more expensive.

Items \$25 and under sell very well. People want something they love from the artist who created it. Many artists and photographers create blank note cards of their work and sell them individually or in packets. Whatever your medium, consider including inexpensive items. Serious buyers may buy a few cards or small pieces and later order a larger work.

In May people are shopping for unique gifts for Mother's Day, Father's Day, weddings, and graduations.

Selling Your Work

Sales Tips

Selling your work can be daunting. Most of us are uncomfortable with blatant self promotion. **Get over it!** You can do this without being pushy or obnoxious. **The following tips will give you the tools you need to sell with confidence:**



- Think about how you like to be approached. No one likes a salesperson who hovers or pressures us to buy. Conversely, it's frustrating to be ignored when it's clear you want help.

- Greet people when they come in. Introduce yourself. "Hi, I'm (give your own name). Welcome to my open studio. Feel free to look around and have something to eat." "Hi, come in. How did you discover my open studio?" "Hello. Glad you stopped in. We have three artists showing together this weekend. Mary does ceramics and Joe and I are glass artists."

Make people comfortable talking to you and looking at your work. Plan questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.

- Plan ahead. Think of how you describe your work/creative process to people you know. Come up with things you can say about yourself as an artist and your work in 30 seconds or less. "I started painting as a hobby after 25 years in the military", "All my pieces are pit-fired, are you familiar with the process?", "In addition to the work on display, I do commission pieces if there's something special you're looking for."

- Give people a price list or tell them where to find one if your pieces aren't individually marked.

- Encourage people to touch, hold, try on your work. People are much more likely to buy something they've touched. Use phrases that get people thinking about owning the work. "This painting would be the focal point in a large room." "These bowls are great centerpieces." If you sell wearables, be honest about fit, color, style, etc. "I love the blue on you, but the sleeves are a little short, they're easily altered."

- When people ask questions, consider it your invitation to sell to them. Answering is your opportunity to tell them why they should own your work.

- Ask people how they found you. If they saw your work in the artist directory or on the website, you know they've made a special trip just to see you.

- When people ask the price, use it as an opportunity to talk about the piece. Resist the urge to over-explain or to discount immediately. Customer: "How much is the photo of the oak tree?" Artist: "\$150. You know that tree is over 100 years old. I got up at sunrise to get that incredible light coming through the branches."

- Encourage visitors to sign your guest book. It's a great way to build a client list and let people know about upcoming shows. Snail mail is expensive. Many artists ask only for e-mail addresses and phone numbers.



Discounts

Decide in advance if you're willing to negotiate or offer discounts, and price accordingly.

Some suggestions:



- Offer a discount for volume purchases such as "10% off purchases of \$100 or more."

- Frequent buyer cards. This works well if you're doing lots of local shows and have lower priced items. Create a card that you can stamp or punch each time a customer makes a purchase. For example; after 10 purchases or a certain amount spent the customer gets a discount or a freebie.

- Make sure the marked price allows you "wiggle room." Don't negotiate in the presence of others. Take the client aside and speak quietly. Make your customer feel she is getting a special deal.

- When someone asks for a price reduction, one option is to ask "how many pieces were you planning to buy?" It lets them know they have to spend more for you to consider their request.



- Rather than lower your price, throw in a freebie. Offer a lower priced piece for free to those making a major purchase (but only if you feel it will close the sale).

- Offer a layaway plan instead of a discount. Get a deposit and arrange regular (monthly, weekly) payments of an agreed upon amount. Be sure to get it in writing.

- Just say "no." Be prepared to gently explain how much creative energy went into making the piece. If you use expensive materials, explain that too. For example "each of my pieces takes an average of 20 hours to create" or "I use handspun, hand-dyed fibers in my weaving." In other words, make it clear that your time, experience, creativity, and material are valuable and your prices reflect it.

Receipts

You've made a sale! You've made a sale! Now what? You must write a receipt. Besides recording the sale, a receipt establishes provenance which over time may become important to the buyer for insurance, resale, estate planning purposes, etc. And, you will need it for your own records.

The receipt should contain:



- Your name and contact info. Complete ahead of time if possible.

Pre-print peel & stick labels on your computer. Or, keep business cards handy to staple to the receipt.

- Date of sale
- Price of the piece. Any discounts should be noted before calculating sales tax.
- A description of the work: title, size, medium, date created. E.g., "Sunrise in Manhattan", 18" x 24", oil, 2005.
- Remember to charge sales tax!

Receipt options include:

- **Two or three-part receipt books** available at office supply stores. Give the customer the original and keep a copy for your records. A three part receipt is useful for commissions, layaway, or any situation where the customer is not taking the piece with them at the point of sale. Give the customer the original – which should include info on any arrangements. Include the second copy when delivering the piece to the customer. The third copy stays with you for your records.
- **Create a template on your computer.** This works best if you have the ability to print out copies in your studio.
- **Custom printed multi-part receipts.** Probably the most expensive option. Get estimates from local printers.

LEGAL ISSUES

Sales Tax and Reseller Permits

If you sell merchandise, you are required to have a sellers permit and collect (and pay) sales tax. You can learn how to do this at State Board of Equalization, www.boe.ca.gov then click on "sales & use tax" or call 1 800 400-7115. You will also need a business license which is issued by the city, and many cities require a temporary sellers permit if you are selling in that city for a day.

If you are not doing business under your own name, then you will probably need to file a fictitious business name statement (dba) with the County Clerks Office.

Liability Insurance

You may have visitors who are not familiar with your home so make sure that the pathways, sidewalks, driveway and steps are in good condition and clear of clutter. Check your insurance policy, or speak with your insurance agent, to make sure you understand how your coverage applies to visitors and your obligations.

Checklist

Preparing Your Open Studio

- Multiple copy sales book or template on your computer with ability to print copies.
- Calculator (check the tax rate for your county & town). If you have lots of items for the same price, figure out what their price is after tax is added. Keep this information handy.
- Seller's Permit: go to www.boe.ca.gov, click on "sales & use tax" or call 1 (800) 400-7115
- Price list
- Credit card machine/slips (if you accept credit cards)
- Business cards
- Artist directories
- Schedule of any other shows you're doing and other promotional materials (yours and nearby artists')
- Guest book for visitors' email addresses/phone numbers (makes it easy to notify people about future shows)



- "Tools of your trade" in case you need to make small repairs, alterations, change a frame. It saves you needing to ship, deliver or arrange for the customer to pick up at a later date.
- Pens/pencils/markers
- Extra labels
- Glue sticks/tape
- Bags, tissue paper, packing materials
- Small notebook to record sales, orders, etc.
- Money to make change: coins, ones, fives, and tens. A fanny pack is a good way to hold money, checks, etc. Know where your money is at all times during the show.
- Extra bulbs, extension cords, surge protectors, duct tape, cable ties, bungee cords, etc.
- Extra stock for replenishing display or special orders

“Pricing Your Art” by Jeff Bramschreiber

(Originally written for AVARTFEST)

Now that you have been accepted into this wonderful show, you may be asking yourself, “Just how do I go about pricing my art?” You are not alone, even long established artists wrestle with this question from time to time. You want a fair price, but you do not want to price too high and shrink your market, but you also don’t want to price yourself too low because you may not be taken seriously. I must say this question has no single correct answer, there are many things to consider like the art itself, your material costs (including framing), your time, prices of comparable art in the show, show fees, your financial situation, and the type of show you are doing just to name a few. What I will be doing here is giving you a few suggestions, and hopefully some ideas to make the process less stressful for you. Again these are suggestions only; ultimately the pricing of art is the decision of the artist.

When I was in college a professor once gave me this advice; “Start with all of your material costs, I mean everything!” How much money did your piece of art actually cost you to produce? Think carefully, did you use pencils, pens, erasers, brushes, paint, paper, or canvas? How did you frame it? Was there matting, mounting and glass involved or just a frame and did you have it framed or did you frame it yourself? If you are not sure, look at your receipts, if you don’t have receipts go into the store and get prices (and then remember to start saving your receipts). Did you have to send away for something, and was there postage involved? How much driving around did you do to get the materials, and do the show? I am sure you can think of other costs too. The point is to start here and come up with a number, be honest & don’t exaggerate.

Then my professor advised me to take this number and double it. You want to get your costs back and you want to produce more and comparable work right? This puts you in the position to do another piece if you are fortunate enough to sell the first one. But this still does not take into account the artwork itself, your time or several of the other factors I mentioned above. My professor’s final bit of advice was to double the number one last time. This gives you a fair baseline from which to price you work. For example, if a piece costs you \$100.00 to produce, you should consider selling it for not less than \$400.00 ;(and of course you are free to sell it for more too).

This formula is not infallible but it is a start. You may think this method sets the bar too high but ask yourself, would you pay \$400.00 for the piece? Be honest with yourself but also trust in your abilities and don’t sell yourself short (if you don’t believe in you who will?). If the answer is yes, great you are home free. If the answer is no, ask yourself what price you would pay. The point is you must be comfortable with your decision not anxious about it. If you simply can’t decide, you may want to consider looking at comparable art in quality and size in other art shows, what is it selling for? You may want to seek the advice of an experienced art professional. You may also want to read resource books on art pricing standards. Once you determine a fair price, give the art a chance to sell before you even consider lowering your prices. There are many things contributing to unsuccessful sales, pricing is only one of those many things.

Another thing to consider is to have a variety of prices and sizes for sale. Again if you only display huge work in the \$3000.00 range you will probably sell fewer

“Pricing Your Art” by Jeff Bramschreiber

pieces (though this is not always the case) because your market is smaller; fewer people are walking around with three grand to drop! If however you have a range of work starting with smaller sizes in the \$100.00 to \$400.00 range, then some mid-priced ones from \$500.00 to \$800.00, a few higher priced ones at \$900.00- \$1500.00 and then a show stopper or two at above \$1500.00 you may get more traffic in your booth and subsequently more chances to sell your art.

You may want to try a size only method of pricing. Simply put, you have a range of sizes you like to paint in, and you average the costs for each size and determine a selling price based on that information; so an 8”x10” piece costs this much, an 11”x14” piece costs that much and so on. This allows you to make a price list you can stick to and adjust periodically as your pieces begin to sell. This method can actually simplify the pricing process for you and be helpful if you have a client base to work with.

Still other artists use an “I won’t sell for less than this” approach. That is to say an artist might not ever sell anything below a certain price as to do so is not worth their time or effort. This method says the pricing starts at \$350.00 for example and goes up from there. These artists have set the bottom line and will not deviate from the price structure that they have established for any reason, art is time and time is money. I even know some artists who will not paint at all unless they have a client in

mind or a predetermined buyer already for their art. Then they work diligently and methodically until the piece is completed and go on to the next one.

As I mentioned earlier, the type of show you are doing should also be considered when painting, presenting and pricing your art. If you are exhibiting in an Art and Wine Festival, most of the people attending are looking for something inexpensive, usually small that they can carry around, something special, affordable and maybe a little crafty; a memento or keepsake if you will. Thus, having only high priced watercolors on display is probably going to result in a very slow sales day for you in this type of an environment. So in this type of a show you might want to consider keeping your pieces smaller, lower priced and having more of them on display. The AVARTFEST on the other hand is not an Art and Wine Festival, collectors routinely shop this show, looking for work to add to their collections. We also have the folks looking for the keepsake art mentioned above. We also have people who are buying art for the first time, looking to start a collection for themselves or a loved one. We also have companies looking for art for their offices and galleries looking for new talent. This makes the AVARTFEST a wonderful place to have a good representation of your best work in a variety of price levels on display and shown to best effect. Whichever method you decide on, I hope this has helped and I wish you increased sales and a great show.