

## **Preparing Your Portfolio and Artist Bios** [by Ashley McKenzie-Barnes](#)

### PREPARING YOUR PORTFOLIO

Once you have a few exhibition venues in mind, you'll have to focus on preparing your portfolio. This will often be the first exposure to your work, so you want to make the best possible impression.

Your portfolio potentially will be seen by many others – perhaps hundreds of others – especially if you are submitting to a general call for submissions or applying for a grant.

#### **Tips on developing a successful portfolio**

##### **Many times it's the simple things that make up the most powerful work**

- Portfolio should be cohesive
- Clearly organized
- Impactful on the front-page whether it's visually or with copy (don't start with a bio)
- Appropriate descriptions of works
- Listing or showcase of important clients
- High-quality (HD) documentation
- Properly labelled
- Tailored to a recipient's specification
- MUST be attractive, with creativity and visual appeal (You will not have a single portfolio when submitting digitally, you will have many).

#### **Examples of well-curated online portfolios:**

- <http://merijnhos.com>
- <http://velvetspectrum.com>
- <http://malikafavre.com>
- <http://www.leslie-david.com>

#### **Different recipients expect different things. Here's some things you should highlight:**

- In-depth look at your motivations and inspirations
- The range of your work
- Introduction to a single series or work

*Note:* You don't need to start over every time: the easiest way to prepare a portfolio is to begin with a master archive (discussed below).

#### **Submitting a portfolio for consideration.**

##### **Inquire about what kind of documentation the recipient wants:**

- Hard copy or digital?
- How many images? Or how many minutes of film or video?
- Most recipients will not want more than 15 – 25 images, and many will cap at ten or even three, depending on what you are submitting your portfolio for
- What kinds of supporting documentation are required? (see list below)
- Is there a need to see recent exhibitions and activities?
- Specific types of works? Mediums?

#### **General requirements of different types of recipients:**

##### **Commercial galleries, dealers, collectors**

- Establish a longer-term relationship
- More interested in seeing a portfolio that highlights consistency
- Thematic or stylistic connections between your works
- Large sense of progression– you do not want to appear stagnant
- BUT do not make sudden and radical changes in your style or techniques constantly
- Never send original works of art, irreplaceable slides or video masters. They may be lost and never returned

## **Artist-run centres, art fairs, residency programs**

- Short-term interests
- Prefer to see your most recent work
- Sense of what you are currently producing, and know what they can expect from you in the short

## **Art schools**

- Want to see a retrospective of your work
- Demonstration your adaptability and flexibility
- Range of themes and conceptual underpinnings
- The scope of your technical skills

## **After you send in your portfolio.**

### **Your follow up will depend on what you have submitted your portfolio for.**

- General call for submissions, you may have to wait up to six months to hear back
- You'll have to wait longer for the larger and more high-profile exhibition spaces, as they can organize shows as much as a year or two in advance
- ARCs (Artist Run Centres) usually make their decisions by jury or selection committee so the process can take time
- Be patient, and don't let it discourage or concern you
- Unsolicited submission, for example to a commercial gallery, follow up with a phone call about a week or two later
- If unsolicited, make sure they received the package
- Do not be offended if they have not had a chance to take a look at it yet. Ask to make an appointment to meet with them in person to discuss your portfolio
- Be prepared with something to say about your work, something one writer describes as "the 10-second pitch."
- Or ask when you can expect to hear back from them
- However, do not be too pushy. Remember they didn't ask to see your work

*Note:* Curators keep up with the developments in the visual arts community through reading published reviews and articles, and by visiting exhibitions in other galleries and institutions. They also serve on competition juries. This underlines the importance of keeping a public profile.

## WHEN YOUR WORK IS ACCEPTED

### **In general always find out all details such as:**

- Will you receive a CARFAC or artist fee fee?  
*Download the CARFAC-RAAV Minimum Copyright and Professional Fees Schedules here:*  
<https://0655288595.saas.quicksilk.com/en/Grilles-tarifaires>
- Dates for the show
- Deadlines by which they will need your work
- Appropriate pricing
- Commission structure (artist, gallery, curator, artist manager, etc.)
- How will you know when a work has been sold and to whom?
- Is insurance provided?
- Division of responsibilities, and anything else you will need to know. (Custom install, promotion, set-up of installation requirements, set-up of video, etc.)
- How will the show be advertised and/or promoted? Who will cover the costs of the marketing material?
- Who covers the cost of any catalogue or other printed materials produced in affiliation with an exhibition?
- Get an exhibition contract. Highly recommend getting a contract to protect yourself and your work, and to make sure all the above points on this list are negotiated and documented