

## Responsibilities of the Ideal Gallery

Visual artists are constantly worrying about what the standard artist/gallery relationship should consist of. Feeling insecure about how to handle these negotiations are natural...artists are not business people and are often ill-equipped as well as inexperienced at handling their own business affairs. Following is a set of guidelines that I recommend artists use when considering establishing a relationship with a gallery. Remember, the ideal gallery does not exist. The best way to use this information is as a standard, by which you can grade the level of commitment of a particular gallery. In that way, you can go into the relationship with an educated and realistic set of expectations.

Most galleries are now taking percentages of 50% or more on the sale of artwork. The percentage that you pay a gallery should be considered a fee for the services rendered, not something you add to the existing sales price of a work. \*(More about this in an upcoming article "Pricing Your Work") In exchange for the percentage, you should expect the gallery to assume the costs of advertising, (ideally in at least one national magazine and all local sources) the cost of printing an announcement, postage for the gallery mailing list as well as your personal list, preparation and mailing of a press release, transportation of the artwork to and from the gallery, updated consignment receipts that document current inventory of your work, the services of a professional art installer, insurance against loss or damage and documentation in the form of 35mm slides. These terms are all negotiable, for example, a gallery may have only a set budget for printing the mailer. If you want a fancier mailer, you may have to pay the difference. Some galleries may expect you to share in the cost of advertising, pay for the shipping of your artwork or provide your own documentation. None of these expectations are unreasonable from the gallery point of view. Other galleries will assume all costs without question, even offering to pay for framing! Remember, these terms are all negotiable depending on how badly the gallery wants you vs. how badly you want the gallery.

When a gallery decides to represent you on an exclusive basis, you should expect at least one solo exhibition every two to three years, depending on your productivity. Also, the gallery should place your work in gallery group shows in the alternate years, and always have current work on hand in the back room to show prospective clients.

Every reputable gallery has the legal responsibility to provide you with the name and address of each collector that purchases your work. Naturally, a lot of galleries resist this, for fear the artist will then go directly to the collector for future sales. Your ideal gallery relationship must be based on mutual trust and the gallery understanding an artists need to know the whereabouts of the work in the event it may need to be borrowed for a future exhibition. One way to build this trust, is to refer all sales to the gallery, regardless of who initiated the sale, you or the gallery. A lot of artists resist the notion of paying a commission to the gallery for a sale they made through their studio that had nothing to do with the gallery. However, if you expect the gallery to invest in your career by offering you the perks of representation, they deserve to be compensated. You are also entitled to know the final sales price and any discounts given. Payment should be received within 30 days of the sale. Failure to do so is a violation of the California State Penal Code. Legislation is pending in other states. Your gallery should also endorse the California Resale Royalties Act. This entitles artists to 5% of the resale of any artwork over \$1000. It is the gallery's responsibility to notify you in the event of a resale and compensate you accordingly.

One of the most important things a gallery can do for you is to offer to sponsor a catalog or a print. A catalog is the single most impressive thing an artist can have as documentation of an exhibition. It is an impressive addition to grant applications, collectors and museums. It provides you with a marketing tool that instills immediate respect and credibility when published in conjunction with a show.

Prints make your work available to large numbers of people at affordable prices. If your gallery is willing to do either of these things, it indicates a willingness to contribute to your long range career development rather than focus solely on immediate sales.

The Ideal Gallery should be selective about the sales of your most important pieces. That may mean refusing the sale of a particular piece to a casual buyer. Your career development depends, in part, on being included in important collections, including museums. Cultivating relationships with other dealers, museum curators and critics is just as important as selling the art to collectors. It is the ultimate sign of support if your gallery is willing to embrace the responsibility of stimulating interest in your work outside of their area of exclusivity.

Your dealer should have all biographical information (resume, biography, reviews) easily accessible for interested collectors. A three ring binder containing a complete selection of available work (old and new) with an updated price list will help to educate potential collectors about the development of your work.

Finally, the ideal dealer will be a person whom you can fully trust, and feel free and comfortable to discuss any problems as they arise. There will be differences. The priorities of a gallery in business are very different from that of an artist preparing to reveal the intimacies of their soul. However, it is possible that with open communication and realistic expectations, mutual understanding and respect can flourish in this often complicated relationship.