

Proposing your exhibition to museums & galleries– hints and tips

Here are some things to consider when contacting museums with a view to getting your work shown.

Questions to ask:

Before you send a proposal...

- Who is the best person to send information to?
- What format does the gallery need the information in? Digital? On paper?
- What is the programming process? Is there a committee/group? How often do they meet?
- How far ahead is the programme set? (for public museums/galleries this is usually 18 – 24 months)

If the discussion progresses...

- Does the organisation have funding for some or all of your project? (It is unlikely that a public gallery will be able to wholly fund the making of the work, but some organisations have money available which can be used as seed funding for grant applications).
- What other support would the museum/gallery be able to provide? Do they have a marketing team? Do they have active social media accounts? Can they help with the technical installation?
- Do they have the capacity to sell your work? If so, what commission do they take?

Exact information required will vary from organisation to organisation. But most galleries will need:

- An outline of the exhibition you are proposing
- Images. If the work has not been made yet, then photographs of previous work plus a written plan or sketches of new work
- Your CV

Questions the museum/gallery might ask:

- Do you envisage the work would be shown as a solo exhibition, or as part of a group show?
- How many pieces are you offering for the exhibition? What size are they? Are they already made or is it new work?
- When will the work be available?
- Do you have a plan for how the work might be installed? It's fine if you don't, but if your work must be shown in a specific way it's worth mentioning it at the start. For instance, Grade I listed buildings are not able to drill a hole in a wall/ceiling without speaking to a planning officer, so if your work needs suspending it's worth discussing this with the venue from the outset.
- What fee would you be charging? Is this an exhibition fee or is it a contribution towards the cost of producing the work?
- What is the retail price of your work?
- How will the work be transported? Will it fit in a car, or a van?
- Have you got 150-200 words which the gallery would use for text panels and press releases?
- Will your work be on display in any other galleries in the vicinity around the same time?

Also bear in mind...

- If you have a mailing list then get people from galleries on it. They may not make it to many of your previews but lots of curators keep an eye on people's work over a period of years. Also, they may not be able to offer you a show, but they may be potential customers in their private lives!
- Make sure you include details of the best place to contact you during working hours. Most public museums/galleries work business hours (although some may be only part-time) so make sure you give a contact number where you can be reached between 9am and 5pm.

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