

Apogee Photo Magazine



## Art Shows: Selling Your Fine Art Photography

by Andy Long

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**Foxglove**

You've been doing photography for several years, so you have a nice selection of images that your friends say includes some really good work. You agree that your images are worthy of more than just being shown around at your local camera club or to your friends on the job. The next step is to try to sell your work, and one way you might try is to enter local art festivals. Art shows are a good venue for selling photography, but there's a lot more to entering than merely gathering a bunch of prints together and setting up shop. You'll face lots of competition, and competing successfully requires more effort than you think.

As with any business venture, the first step is to do market research. Go to a festival or two and look at what your local competition has and how they do business. While you could approach them and start asking questions, you may be better off merely observing them, as some

vendors aren't willing to divulge information. Visit each photography booth and pay attention to what's going on. Notice the types of images each one has, see what people are buying, determine what formats and image sizes are being offered, and pay attention to the pricing. Take a note pad, and when you leave a booth, write down what you saw.

Buyers like variety, both in print sizes and the number of different images available. See what the various photographers at the shows have to offer. Most have bins with lots of matted material in at least three different sizes to choose from. The most common mat sizes are 8" X 10", 11" X 14" and 16" by 20". (Some photographers offer larger mat sizes, but the aforementioned are the most common.)

Examine the prices listed for the matted images. At any given show, there will be

some images whose prices are on the very high end and some under-valued, but most are within a general range that can vary from state-to-state and show-to-show. High-end shows in exclusive areas can push their prices up, since the people there have more to spend, but these aren't the shows someone just breaking in will get into, because prestigious shows want established vendors who have been doing shows for several years.

Stay in the general vicinity of a booth to see what types of images people are buying. You might have to situate yourself for at least an hour at each booth, because there's not a continuous flow of sales for any one vendor. My goal at an art show is to achieve at least one sale per hour for a two-day show and two sales per hour for a one-day show. While you'd like to have more sales, these are reasonable goals.

After checking out a couple of shows and determining that your work is equal in quality to what's there, it's time to make some decisions. How many images do you want to include? What images do you start off with? What size matted prints should you include? Do you go with matted and framed or laminated board mounts (which have become popular the last few years)? Do you print them out on your inkjet printer or have a pro lab do them? Do you get the material and cut the mat boards yourself, or do you buy precut mats? Do you use metal grids for hanging material for display or mesh or hard walls?

Almost all of these questions can be answered easily based on how much money you want to spend up front. To get started doing art shows, you're going to have to invest a fair amount of money even before getting into a show. A tent is the first requirement, and these can cost anywhere from \$200 to \$500, depending on whether or not you choose to get a tent with sides. The sides protect against direct sunlight during hot days, inclement weather and can be closed up at night if you're doing 2-3 day shows. Grids are the least expensive way to go at \$25 each for displaying your work. You can make your own frames, or you can spend up to several thousand dollars for the better designed pro walls. You then need tables on which to place your bin material as well as the bins themselves displaying your work. And don't forget your sales materials: business cards and/or sales brochures or flyers (*be sure to include you web site and email address if you have one*). If you have a computer and a graphic software program, your can save a lot of expense by creating these yourself. You will have spent plenty before you even begin counting the cost of the pictures you're going to sell.



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### **Fall Reflections**

To start, don't have four or five of every print you plan to put out for sale so you have plenty of replacements when something sells. One copy each of some images

and two or three copies of images you know will sell will be sufficient. You don't want to be overloaded so that your would-be sellers end up collecting dust. Just because you really like a picture doesn't mean others want it hanging in their home or office. This is where your fieldwork checking out what kinds of images sell for other photographers will pay off. In addition, when you consider that a large show might house upwards of twenty photographers, you realize that you need to bring work that people will prefer over that of the competition. Even after careful market research, it will probably take you a year or two of hands-on learning to find out which images in your collection the buying public really likes.

You have all your display material and images ready; now what? Find some shows to enter. Don't try for the top shows in your area; stick to the smaller to mid-size shows. These cost less to enter--some as low as \$50 as opposed to high-end shows that can charge \$500 or more just for a booth space. Most major metropolitan areas have numerous shows from which to choose. If you're willing to travel several hours within your state, you'll find shows throughout the year. You can apply to several larger shows, because they are willing to accept new artists, but don't be upset when you receive a letter stating you haven't been accepted. Non-juried shows are easier to get into than juried shows, but the juried shows typically have a crowd that's more willing to buy artwork. While the crowds won't be as large in the smaller shows, you can get a feel for what people like in your work. Even without making a sale, you can tell what they think by the comments they make as they look through your material.

Another project to think about is getting set up to accept credit cards. There are lots of services online that can help you. While many people will have cash or checks to pay for a purchase, not having the capability to accept credit cards could cost you several sales, especially for higher priced items.

Be a salesperson. You have to be able to interact with customers. If you're not enthusiastic about your own work, how can customers feel good about buying it? While some photos sell themselves, you have to encourage people to want your photography over someone else's - but not at the expense of presenting the other photographer's images as being inferior in any way. Just promote your work and yourself. And along with your promotional materials, always keep in mind - just because you didn't sell them today, you still need to always be at your best as a salesperson - these are *potential customers* who may be calling or emailing you to purchase in the future. Most of all, don't let yourself become discouraged when you're starting out. Keep your goals reasonable, and keep your mind open as to what you can do to improve your sales with what you have to offer, the images you have available, and how you're interacting with your customers.

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