

Unlocking the gallery door: Insider Strategies for Artists

Ready to take your art career to the next level?

Join gallerist Christine O'Donnell and artist Sima Schloss for an essential guide to navigating the professional art world.

We'll demystify the submission process, covering exactly what galleries look for, how to build a winning professional toolkit (including your portfolio, and artist statement), and the best strategies for creating successful artist-gallery partnerships. Bring your questions, and learn to define your practice, make a powerful first approach, and work towards confidently secure exhibition opportunities.

photo credit: Alex Arlos



Agenda

Intro and then Questions First!

What do you want to learn/expectations?

Key I: Artist's Role

Know yourself, define your practice, and create a cohesive body of work that demonstrates vision.

Key II: Gallerist Perspective

Understanding what galleries look for in artists and building the right professional relationship.

Key III: The Toolkit

Essential materials every artist needs including portfolio, statement, bio, and digital presence.

Key IV: Making Your Approach

From research to submission and building meaningful professional connections.

Introduction & Today's Plan

Who We Are

Christine O'Donnell and Sima Schloss bring years of gallery experience to guide artists through the complex world of gallery representation.



Our Mission

To demystify the gallery world and provide artists with practical tools for successful partnerships.



Today's Goal

Equip you with knowledge, strategies, and confidence to approach galleries professionally and effectively.



photo credit: Sonya Tanae Fort

Introduction & Today's Plan

What are your questions?

We are switching things up! Rather than leaving your questions for the end, we want them first!



What are you wondering about?



What do you want to learn? What are your expectations?



photo credit: Sonya Tanae Fort

Raise your hand, or put your ideas in the chat!

Part I: The Artist's Role – Know Yourself

Define Your Practice & Goals

Understand your artistic vision – what do you want to say?

Define your career objectives – where do you want to see yourself in 2, 5, 10 years?

These two items forms the foundation of successful gallery relationships.

Identify your goals: Is it selling work, expressing yourself? building connection? building a community?

Define your practice: What is your work about?
What themes do you explore?

Find Your Unique Voice

Your distinctive style, message, and process are what distinguish you in the competitive art world.

Develop a personal style that reflects your artistic perspective and approach. Be inspired by others but avoid clear cliché or derivative

Craft a clear message that communicates concepts and themes (once you know your vision!)

Establish consistent processes that demonstrate dedication to your artistic practice and growth.
How often do you create? How often do you show?

Create a cohesive body of work that demonstrates clear artistic vision.

Part II: The Gallerist Perspective

Clear Cohesive Vision

Professional Standards

Good Fit / Gallery Alignment

Long Term Commitment

Vision & Consistency

We seek artists who are confident in their work with artistic direction/a message or theme

A vision they can articulate that demonstrates artistic skill, understanding of the field, and (if looking to be shown in museums) is a unique contribution

Consistency in practice (even if part time!), dedication to producing high-quality work regularly.

Direction that shows growth and development over time, or exploration of materials and concepts

Professional Standards

Professionalism encompasses organization, communication, and presentation excellence in all interactions.

Well-organized portfolio with clear, high-resolution images of your best work.

Respectful communication and professional conduct in all gallery interactions.

Willingness to negotiate, compromise, and consider alternative perspectives while also advocating for their artistic vision.

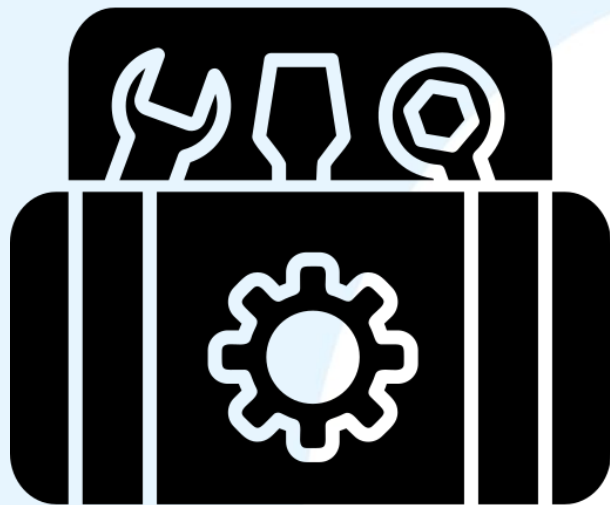
Gallery Alignment

Success requires understanding the gallery aesthetic, mission, and your contribution

Understanding gallery audience and surrounding community, and how your work will resonate.

Commitment to long-term relationship rather than one-time transactional approach.

Part III: The Professional Toolkit – Essential Materials



Essential Digital Materials

Portfolio: 10–15 high-resolution images of your best, most recent work as PDF or website page/pages

Professional Documentation

Artist Bio: Brief career narrative including education, exhibitions, and achievements.

Artist Statement: Short, compelling 1–4 paragraphs explaining your work’s ideas with minimal jargon.

CV: Formal list of professional experience, education, exhibitions, publications, and awards received.

Online Presence

Professional website and at least one social media presence is essential for showcasing your work, your professionalism and ongoing relevance.

Highlight the portfolio and your professional documentation within.

Our Perspective: some best practices

Items to ensure you have:

A portfolio of images (in one PDF)

Up to date biography (approximately 2 paragraphs) – and if you have a longer one too, you can put it on your website. You can have more than one. Usually write in the 3rd person.

A headshot – recent. If you don't like your head, it can be artistic!

An artist statement – for your most recent series, and/or all your work. You will write many, many artist statements – keep them all on file.

Your CV or resume

Website + Social Media presence

An email list and regular correspondence

A checklist of all your work, with images (title, dimensions, price, etc.

Your website should include...

A Homepage/landing page (you choose look)

Your artwork

Organized by series, by year, by medium...

You choose what makes sense

Add artist statement(s) for series or years as appropriate

A page about you

Your CV / Resume

Artist statement

Your headshot and bio

Contact information

A contact page or field

Your social media handle(s)

Gallery/Galleries that represent you

Press/Media clippings

Our Perspective: some advice

Titles

Don't be lazy with titles.

Great titles add to a piece of artwork

Good titles allow for easy identification

"Untitled" leaves the viewer missing a dimension of your creation

Keep a running list of titles (e.g. in "notes" in your phone)

Sima's Favorite Title:

"Me and my own council"

Pricing

- Pricing work is hard! It's normal to struggle at the start.
- Galleries can offer advice - it's ok to ask if you need it. Better even is ask other artists or artist friends.
- Read your contract for the commission split before pricing, and consider framing and shipping costs
- Pricing works off of "comps" - from yourself and other similar artists, so it's important to keep a record of sales.
- Pricing works the same in-gallery and in-studio is good

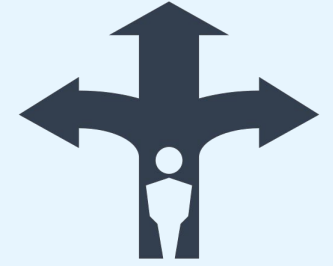
Listen to the voice of experience

Particularly during installations. If someone tells you it won't work or it's not a good idea - don't just push ahead.

Consider good advice you receive even if you want to be defensive or protective of your artwork. Try to listen.

It can lead to even better outcomes!

Part IV: Making the Approach



Research Thoroughly

Visit galleries, follow social media, read mission statements.

Research first.

Don't approach without knowing a gallery's focus

.It;s aslo useful to look up who is who for visual ID of director,

AD, etc.

Check online for opportunities (like ShowUp's Roll Call!)



Follow Submission Guidelines

Follow formal processes precisely.

Never drop in unannounced in person with your portfolio

under any circumstances

You can cold email, but don't expect a response

Don't expect or request feedback from a call, it's not

professional.

Attend Gallery Openings + Events

Best way to meet gallerists, artists, and connect (and don't just talk about yourself when there)

Be part of community! Find collaborators!

Don't pitch at openings, (*would you propose at someone's wedding?*)

wait for request/interest

Craft Brief, Personalized Emails

Keep initial contact concise and respectful.

Explain why you're good fit, include website link.

Get a warm intro from someone else if possible.

Networking remains important in this field

The Gallery Artist-Partnership

Building Successful Partnerships

The relationship between artist and gallerist extends far beyond individual sales, encompassing trust, communication, and a shared vision for long-term success. Think about whether your gallery is aligned with you.



Clear Contracts

Good relationships start with clear contracts outlining responsibilities, commission, and payment terms for all parties. Read all terms, ask Qs



Open Communication

Discuss expectations openly for exhibition scope and scale, marketing, and shared responsibilities. Ensure mutual understanding for success.



Measure Success

Success includes audience engagement, press coverage, connections made, and personal growth - not just sales!

Think about what you can do, not just what gallery is doing for you!

Examples – when things went well and didn't go well

Sima

Positive (working with Christine, of course!)

My group and solo shows with Christine :-)

Being invited to show at Scope Art Fair

My solo show this past fall in NYC

Press

Creating a wonderful support system of artists and art professionals

Negative Being too eager

Not researching certain shows, groups enough to determine if they fit what I want

Not reading the FINE PRINT

Christine

Rosa Leff – Paper Cutter who emailed me out of the blue

Rolling Submissions – ShowUp accepts exhibition proposals all the time.

We've had some amazing exhibitions come out of that program

Submit for Roll-Call – pop ups this summer!!

Negative – when I don't follow my instincts. There have been times with people or exhibitions that I've known things were not going to go well. Usually it's because someone (artist or curator) seems unwilling to listen. I don't mean do what I say, but more so have a conversation, or respect process, or simply get down to business and do the work. Always trust your gut. And know that your reputation follows you

Bonus: Advice and tips

Resume

Name and contact details (address, email, website) at the top
Education (all college degrees, relevant art education)
Relevant work experience
Exhibitions (15 shows or less) or Solo – Group separated, or Selected exhibitions
Awards won
Grants won
Residencies attended
Commissions completed
Professional societies of which you are a member
Publications (articles you wrote, articles where you were featured)
Collections where your work can be found
– Use “Private Collection, City, State” for all private collectors or even people to whom you have gifted a piece

Photos

These days, photos on your phone are good enough for most art. You don't always need a professional photographer. Perhaps sometimes, but not always, and not right when you're starting out!

Consider editing features available right in the photo app if you need to crop or straighten out any paintings.

If you're taking HEICs and it's making you crazy, you can look up how to change it to JPGs as default for ease of use.

Networking

Collaborations seem to be the key to a lot of success these days. If you find yourself discouraged for any reason: out of ideas, tired of your medium, wishing you lived elsewhere, etc. consider finding a collaborator and starting a project together!

This can be music and visual arts, can be two different mediums, can be the same medium!

Networking in person is still important. Go out and see art and talk to people.

*Maintain a Curriculum Vitae (the full list of every single thing you have ever done as well. Be sure to review and add/delete items from your resume according to the opportunity at hand. You can have more than one bio, more than one statement, more than one resume

Where to start?

Build community and a network

Co-op galleries

Pay to be a member:

Bromfield
Boston Sculptors Gallery
Kingston
Galatea
The Art Gallery (not a co-op, but membership gallery)

Invite only:

Copley Society

Studio Buildings

The Gallery at 249 A Street:
Fort Point Artist Studios
450 Harrison (SoWA)
Atlantic Works Gallery
Brickbottom Gallery
Boston Center for the Arts (application, 3 year residency)
Humphreys Street Studios
(Dorchester/Uphams Corner)
Joy Street Studios (Somerville)
Western Avenue Studios (Lowell) - largest in New England

Nonprofits

Places where you can submit:

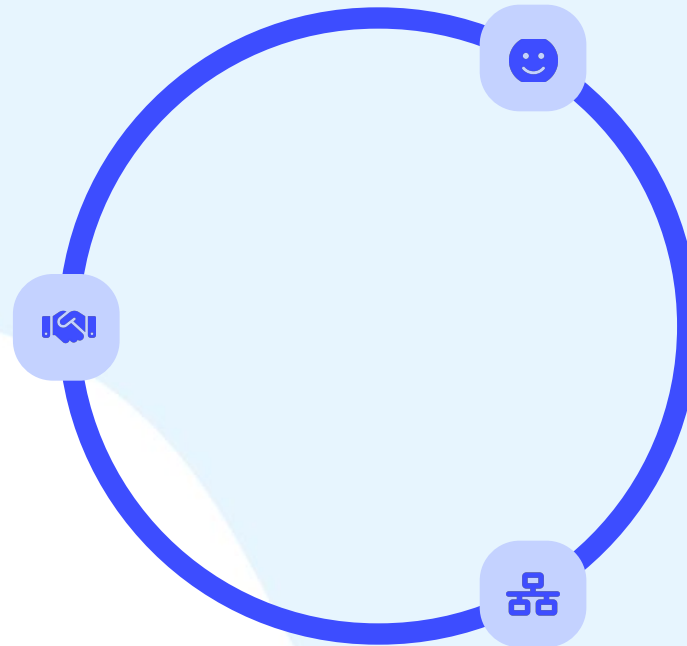
Gallery 263
Piano Craft Gallery
ShowUp
Mills Gallery (part of BCA)
University exhibition spaces (BU, etc.)

Sign up for **Boston Art Review** newsletter (and subscribe!) and receive the weekly email with calls!

Final Thoughts 1: Keys to Success

Partnership Mindset

The relationship between artist and gallerist is a partnership built on mutual respect, shared goals, and professional collaboration.



Stay Creative

Be professional, be persistent, and keep making work. Your artistic practice is the foundation.

Network & Advocate

Networking can pay dividends over time. Be your own best advocate while building authentic professional relationships in the art world.

Final Thoughts : Keys to Success

What is success?

Think about what you want and why

Why are you making art in the first place?

Is it so people will like you? Pay attention to you? Validate you?

There is no right or wrong reason, but don't lie to yourself about why.

There is something inherent about a desire for human connection with each other that we all seek.

Think about that.

Then, consider whether or not that desire for connection requires that you put a price tag and also try to commercialize and sell your work.

What is the most life-giving way you can create?

**talent - Organization - Grit - plus the "X" factor
(network or luck)**

what [Christine] thinks one needs to truly "make it" in the art world

Questions & Discussion

Feel free to email questions we didn't cover. Follow our work and connect with us professionally.