

My First Art Fair

A User Guide

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Hello,

I just recently completed my first art fair and would like to share my experiences and information for those that are planning to do the same. There is a lot more involved than one might think so I've documented everything that I can remember in order to help others.

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1. Applying for a fair:

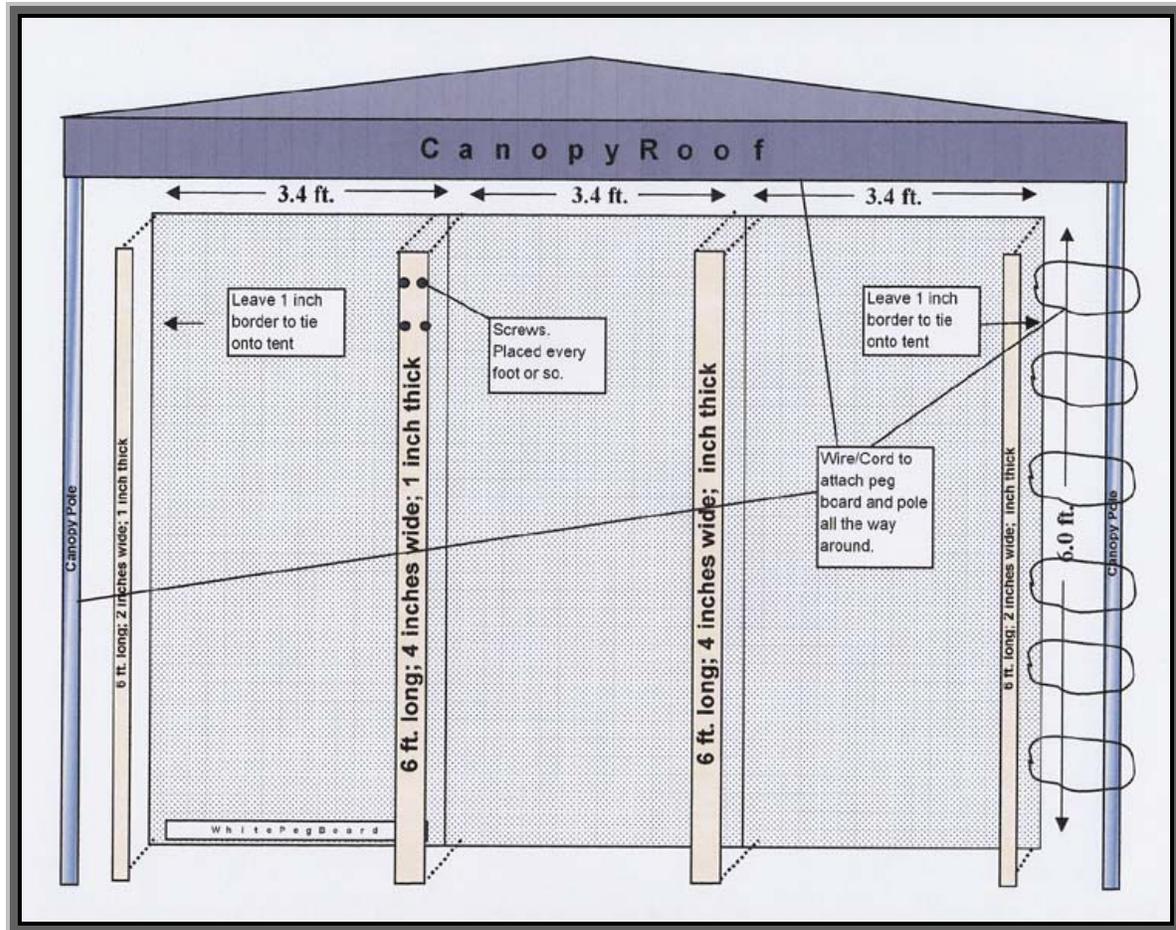
For my first fair, I chose a small local juried art fair (30 artists) so I could get a feel for it before I went 'worldwide'. I had to submit a CD that contained (5) 300dpi images of my work, the application, and a resume. I jazzed it up a bit by presenting the disc as a DVD (cover and insert) and included detailed descriptions of the artwork I submitted. I don't know if that helped but it was worth a try. There was an application fee of \$20.00 and a booth fee of \$175.00. I will keep 100% of all sales. About 2 months later I received a letter stating that I was accepted into the show, so great, now I need to get everything for it.

2. Canopy/Tent

The first thing I bought was a 10x10 canopy (standard EZup). I wanted a four-wall canopy in case it rained but I have seen several canopies that do not have walls so don't feel like this is a requirement. I did some research and most EZup 4-walls (www.ezupdirect.com) were anywhere from \$250-400 dollars. This was not acceptable to me, so I looked up some canopies on Ebay and there they were. Brand new 4-wall's (off brand) selling for MUCH cheaper. So, I was able to purchase a 4-wall for about half the retail price...smooth.

3. Panels:

Next, I had to figure out how I was going to display my paintings...either using panels or easels. I have seen artists take off the canopy walls and just use cheap easels for display. This seems like a decent way to display art but not for me and what if it rains or it's windy? I wanted walls so I could protect what was inside so, I decided to go with panels. After doing some research it became very clear to me that ready made panels (www.propanels.com) were going to be super expensive. So, I decided to make some out of pegboard. The Lowe's here in town sells them already painted white so I had some sheets cut to certain specs (Lowe's will do this for you). Here is my 'design' for one a panel wall (total of three):



Leaving about 2 inches of pegboard extending past the support, I was able to tie the canopy pole onto the pegboard using thick wire. Once all three panel walls were erected and tied together it became a very solid structure that I was very pleased with. If you plan to go this route contact me via email because there is a lot more info you need to be aware of. Picture of the panels attached to the canopy:



4. Weights:

Although I didn't try very hard, I couldn't find any woven nylon bags or sand weight bags to tie down the tent. Menards and Lowe's didn't have them. PVC pipes were suggested by other artists but I didn't want to deal with making more stuff so I used the weight plates from my workout bench. I have (2) 44lb. weights, (2) 33's, (2) 22's, (2) 11's, and (4) 5.5's. That ought to do it.

5. Lights:

This particular show had a preview party at night so lighting was essential. I was able to find (2) clamp-on lights (at Menards, under \$10.00 each) that I could just clamp on the inside supports of the canopy. I also used one of those hanging lights in the center to help. I don't think lighting is required at all of the fairs but it's good to be aware of it and know where to get things.

6. Tables/Chairs:

Just about any card table or long table will do just make sure it's covered with white cloth or a cloth color that fits your panel scheme. I borrowed a long table for this show but plan to buy one in the future. I used a 'tailgating' chair which I may not use next time. It served its purpose, but it sits kind of low so maybe a lawn chair would work better...I guess it all depends on where you will be sitting.

7. Paintings/Frames/Framing:

This particular show required that (if paintings) 75% of all work had to be framed and ready to hang. This was by far and away my biggest obstacle for this show mainly because of my 3 large pieces (24x48, 36x48, and another 24x48) and my irregular sizes (24x30, 12x24, 24x30). Using a '50% off your entire framing order' coupon, I went to Michaels and got all three of the really large paintings framed for several hundred dollars. Sounds like a lot but I spent a lot of time on those paintings and they are certainly worth a custom frame regardless of an upcoming show. So there, I don't want to talk about it anymore.

For the irregular sizes, I bought sectional frames (4 separate pieces) and assembled them to form a decent frame. Also, Michael's framed four of my paintings for free because I bought the frames there. So, if you buy ready made open back frames at Michael's, they will frame them for you for free. If you have the time, I recommend doing that...they have good frames.

For the rest of the paintings, I simply bought open back frames using 50% off coupons here and there and framed them myself. To frame them all you need is (4) offset clips and screw them onto the frame (with the painting enclosed) and then screw on wire rings (or strap hangers or d-ring hangers) about 1/3 down the paintings. Then use the wire and wrap it on one side (on the clip) about 4-5 times and then stretch it across the painting (make sure there is a little slack) and do the same on the other clip. There you go, it's framed. You can choose to put paper on the paper like most commercial framers do but it's not necessary. You can find the wire and wire rings at Menards or Lowes but I couldn't find the offset clips there, but, you should be able to find all of these items at Michaels in the frame department. If not, you can find whatever you need on Ebay...usually cheaper and usually in bulk. Here is a picture of the back of a 'self framed' painting:



8. Framed painting descriptions:

Since I have detailed descriptions for most of my paintings I felt that I should include those somehow in the show. So, I bought several cheap 11x14 frames, printed out my descriptions on parchment paper, matted them, and framed them. They look pretty good but it's not required for your fair.

9. Giclee Prints:

I have been scanning and printing my artwork for a couple of years so my up front cost for this show was minimal. However, if you are just starting this may be quite pricey so be warned. It is not recommended to use digital prints for numbered prints and please don't say they are giclee because they are not even close. Most art collectors will pick up on this right away. Doing a 300dpi scan on your home scanner is also completely different than having a professional do it...trust me, I've tried it and the quality is not the same. With that being said, I used Virtu Fine Art (317-822-1800; www.virtufinearts.com) mainly because of their top of line facilities and their familiarity with my work...and they are only 20 minutes away. They have 96 x 60 flatbed scanner and one scan is around \$200.00 (but you can fit 4 or so paintings on the scan) and 15 cents a square inch (paper and adjustments are already included in these prices) for printing. The giclees were printed on Museo Max archival by Crane. So, an 8x10 giclee would cost \$12.00 and a 16x20 would cost \$48.00 so price accordingly (accounting for the bag and mounts). I highly recommend giclees because they are top quality and you only have to order one at a time (vs. large editions for lithographs).

I think I had about 28 giclees for sale of various different paintings. I kept the sizes small this time around (8x10, 10x12, etc.) because the larger sizes would be more expensive and I wanted to see how well these did first. I offered prints of paintings that the original was also for sale at the fair...and some that were not. It seems that 2-3 prints of each

piece on hand should be enough for your first time, hopefully you will need to increase that number!

10. Notecards:

I never really gave this much thought but I have seen several other artists offer notecards at their shows so I decided to do the same. I used Avery notecards (standard matte finish) and printed them out on my own computer (using the giclee image files) and then created a template in Excel for my contact information on the back of the card. Email me if you want a copy. I sold quite a few of these things so I feel it is a must that you offer notecards.

11. Print Bags/Notecard bags:

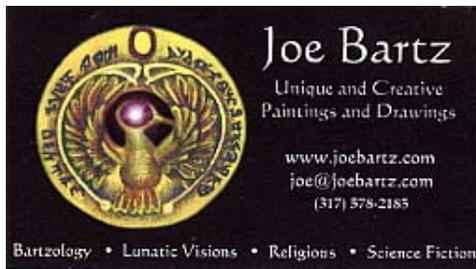
My contact at Virtu Fine Art recommended using Light Impressions Direct (www.lightimpressionsdirect.com) for the bags. So, I went to the web-site and ordered a catalog and got it about 2 weeks later. When I went to pick up my prints at Virtu, my contact sat down with me and recommended some bags and bag stiffers. So, I bought item #2690 (11 3/8 x 14 1/4 clear bags) and item #5246 (11 x 14 1/4 bag stiffers) for my giclee prints and item #20337 (4 1/2 x 6 1/4 clear bags) for my notecards. It took about 2 weeks to get here (they are in California) so allow time for delivery. All of my prints had a 1" border so I had to cut down the bag stiffers to fit properly and then I placed them in the bag, stretched it so it was taught and taped the excess 'baggage' in the back using standard scotch tape. I was able to sign, number, cut, bag, and tape all of the prints in one afternoon. I asked several people if these bagged prints looked good enough and everyone agreed that they looked good (not just good enough) so this seems to be a pretty decent process. Make sure you have an exacto knife or a mat board cutter and plenty of blades on hand for this.

12. Signs:

I've seen some pretty standard signs in other fairs so I decided to make something funky for mine (plus it was already made). I used the desktop wallpaper I created for joebartz.com and made some modifications. I blew it up a bit (it was 300dpi) and the design guy at my work printed it out (it was an irregular size), glued it on mat board, and then I glued hooks on the back. I think it turned out great and I also received several compliments at the show. For the signs above the paintings, I bought a foam board at Prizm Art Supply here in town (www.prizmart.com) and sliced that bad boy into sections. Using the 'Calligraph421 BT' font in Word, I printed the painting titles on regular paper, used carbon paper to transfer the exact font onto the foam board, and then colored in the letters with a white prismacolor pencil. Again, I think these worked out well.

13. Business Cards:

I used the Avery business cards (standard) and designed a card using the free Avery software that they recommended in the package. I gave these away for free at the fair but the coins were only given to the people that purchased something. Here is a picture of both:



14. Credit Cards:

I think it's imperative that you have a way of accepting credit cards (although most of my sales were cash this time around). Most of the artists use a 'knuckle buster' or something similar. I was able to purchase a 'credit card kit' on Ebay for under \$15.00 that included a brand new knuckle buster, a visa/mc sign, and 100 credit card sales slips. I have a website set up to accept credit cards via Paypal. So, after I got the credit card imprint, I went to my site and entered the information onto a 'buy now' button. For me, this was very easy but you may not have a website so you will need to get with a bank and figure out how to do this. Make sure you have a couple of ball point pens to write any additional information on the credit card slip. Make sure you practice a couple of swipes before the fair.

15. Guest/Newsletter book:

I had a book set up for people to sign up for the monthly newsletter I write for www.joebartz.com. I have seen other artists that have guestbook's in their booth as well. It's a nice touch but not required.

16. Price Tags:

I re-created my business card in Excel so I could manipulate it better (plus I ran out of business card paper) and priced each painting accordingly. Email me if you want the template. For the prints, I used Avery stickers and wrote the price on the stickers. I was given these stickers so I imagine that these would be available at any Office Depot, Staples, or OfficeMax.

17. Radio/TV:

There may be times were nobody will be in your tent so you may want to keep yourself entertained. If you are a talkative person then you may be fine but if you are quiet like me then bring something. I had a little TV that was hidden right behind my 'Joe Bartz' sign. How many artists do you know watch a football game while displaying their art?

18. Misc:

- Bring a fan in case it's hot outside. If you have an enclosed tent it could get stuffy in there.
- Bring a Cashbox, lockbox and one of those waist bag things for your cash. You don't want to have that stuff lying around.
- Cash: Make sure you have plenty of singles, 5's, 10's and quarters for small purchases.
- If you are hanging paintings, make sure you have clips. I used pegboard clips.

- Have some kind of basket to put your prints and notecards in. I used metal baskets but you could use just about anything. People will be flinging that stuff around anyway so it's just a temporary home.
- Have a calculator for multiple purchases and sales tax.
- Take pictures of your setup and the actual show so you can present that in your application for your next show.

19. Preview Party:

This particular fair had an 'exclusive' preview party the night before during which the jurors announced the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners. I didn't win (bastards!) but I was right beside the 1st place person and he was worthy so I was okay with that. You were allowed to bring 1 free guest but for everyone else it was \$35.00 to enter. They served wine, beer and hor'deuvres. My guest went to check out the rest of the show and she came back with some hor'deuvres for me. I didn't know what any of that sheet was man. I could not clearly identify anything on my plate. Beef, snails, worms...hell, I had no clue what I was eating...I just made sure it wasn't moving. The evening was nice and I had a good time so if your fair offers a preview party, go ahead and plan on having a good time. This was my first experience with the 'yuppy artsy fartsy' crowd so it was very interesting...not bad...just interesting.

20. The Fair:

I live in central Indiana so that means that there is potential for a severe thunderstorm (or tornado) at any given time. On this particular Friday and Saturday the potential was really high and so were the winds. The committee decided to move the fair inside the Museum and Cultural Center and I think almost every single artist was happy with that decision. So my crew (my parents) and I had about 4 hours to come up with a display design, in a museum...on a wall. We just kind of started putting up the paintings and seeing what worked best until I was satisfied with it. Here is a picture of the final set up:



So, all that work and all that money for the canopy and display went to waste this time around but it's all paid for, built, and ready to go next time (which will be soon).

On with the show. To my pleasant surprise, there was a pretty constant flow of people throughout the day. Again, we were having spotty thunderstorms and rain but for most of the day there was someone checking out my work. I met people from all walks of life and received many compliments and interesting comments. Around 10-12 of my friends/coworkers filtered in throughout the day. It was nice to see a familiar face every now and then amongst the droves of strange ones. Lunch was catered for all the artists (again, not sure of the contents but I ate it anyway). I ended up selling 10 items, none of which I could retire on, but I was pleased with that amount for my first show. By far and away, 'Macaroni and Cheese' was the most popular painting, followed by 'The Last Supper (All Things Must Pass)', 'Pink Floyd', and 'The Legend of Camelot'...which confirmed my suspicion that those are my best pieces. 'Purgatory of the Fallen Angels' was compared to the Egyptian plagues. 'Pepperoni Pizza' and 'Helluva Ham Sandwich' were also commented on quite often. Maybe I should just paint each meal I eat from here on out...it seems to be popular.



21. Closing:

Well, that's about it. These fairs require a lot of upfront work and planning (more than I expected) but it's definitely worth it. I have gained valuable experience and felt comfortable out there...usually when I do something for the first time I am nervous but this time I wasn't. I pretty much have everything ready to go for the next one and now I am ready to take on the BIG BOYS here in Indianapolis (Talbot, Broad Ripple, Penrod, etc.). I'm looking forward to those. I hope this information helps someone out there that is planning to do their first fair. I appreciate all the comments I received from other artists...every little bit helps. Thanks!