

Art Fair Necessities: Learn from the Pros

by Georgia Lange

On October 18, 2009, I paid homage to the prestigious Beverly Hills art show known as the “[Affaire in the Gardens](#)”. This art show features over 200 nationwide artists and attracts up to 40,000 spectators every fall and spring since 1973. If you are a fan of outdoor group art shows and fairs, Affaire in the Gardens is top of the line. Even the Andy Gumps are swank at this renowned event.

The Affaire in the Gardens art show is almost too prestigious to be labeled an “art fair”; these individuals are not selling candles and clothing. In researching the exhibition guidelines, I learned that all wearable art and accessories (with the exception of jewelry) is strictly prohibited. Although this particular art show may be out of the traditional art fair league, no one can say that its magnificent display methods cannot be used as a model to other artists for other art shows.

How do these artists prepare for a show such as the Affaire in the Gardens art show; how were the booths set up? How was the necessary equipment acquired? What did each artist offer to promote his or her work? This article is specifically geared towards artists who may want to participate in the Affaire in the Gardens art shows in the future, and how one can prepare for application and participation. However, many of the principles discussed here could be applied to outdoor art shows other than the Beverly Hills art show. It is important to remember that every art show has different guidelines, and it is vital to do the research and examine the requirements before beginning the preparation process. Pay strict attention to deadlines and be at least partially prepared before applying, and remember that what applies to one show may not apply to another.

CATEGORIES OF WORK

The categories of work for the Affaire in the Gardens art show include ceramics, drawing and printmaking, glass, jewelry, mixed media (hard and soft), new media (such as digitally created art), painting, photography, sculpture, and watercolor. As it is with many outdoor art shows with an open application process (meaning that anyone can apply to participate), each category requires a separate application. This is important to remember for those artists who work in more than one medium. Choose wisely what you wish to exhibit, and decide if it is worth it to show your work in more than one category.

BOOTHS

One of the aspects of most outdoor art shows is that every artist has a booth. The setup of each booth varies in accordance with the type of work that is being displayed. One of the consistent elements of all the booths is the use of a canopy or sun shelter. Most outdoor art shows take place during daylight hours and rarely offer the use of generators. A canopy is necessary to avoid discomfort for the artist and the various spectators viewing the work.

Almost every artist whose work fell into two-dimensional categories had panel walls included in his or her booth. There were a select few in this category who used easels as a substitute, though this was mostly to accommodate larger pieces that would not fit on panel walls. Artists whose works were three-dimensional did not include panel walls for their booths and used a variety of other surfaces to display their works such as tables, shelves, and pedestals.

The biggest question that I had in regards to booths was how the artist acquires all of these elements to create a booth. I learned that the City of Beverly Hills rents these elements to the exhibitors on a first come first served basis for the Affair in the Gardens art show. There were some individuals who personally acquired some of the aspects of their booths. For example, there were many sculptors who frequently participated in art fairs and had, over time, acquired the shelves and pedestals that were needed to display their works. The renting of sun shelters and panel walls through the city for an art show is to my knowledge an unusual practice. Most art fairs that I know of do not offer such a valuable service to the participating artists. Investing in the necessary equipment for setting up a booth can prove to be more cost effective in the long term if you plan to participate in numerous art fairs over the years. However, offering a rental service for this equipment is considered a perk to most of the artists who participate in the Beverly Hills art show.

Another factor to take into consideration when it comes to booths is preparation for the application process. It is a common requirement among art fairs to include a photograph of what your display will look like. If you already have a history of being an art fair participant and you have documentation of your experiences, then this is less of an issue for you. If you lack this kind of experience however, this aspect of the application process can prove to be problematic. You will have to research where to rent the necessary equipment in your area and create a mock photo shoot for your application. If you are looking to purchase equipment for setting up your booth such as panel walls, there is a company in Texas, ProPanels, that is excellent. They also have some great visual examples of how to assemble your booth if you are looking for ideas to assist you in your setup. Check out their [website](#) for more information.

SELF PROMOTION & PACKAGING

I paid very close attention this year to what artists included in their exhibits to promote themselves and sell their work. This was of great interest to me on both a personal and a professional level. In examining the promotional efforts of the art show participants, I knew that we at Oak Creek Print Works provide almost all of these self promotion essentials and more. Every artist I saw had combinations of business cards, brochures, and postcards that were offered to spectators and buyers. At Oak Creek Print Works, we provide both design and printing services for these items.

I also witnessed that every participating artist whose work fell into a two dimensional category offered a variety of fine art prints in addition to the original art. The Affaire in

the Gardens art show allows ten percent of the work found in each exhibit to be reproductions or prints. Most of these artists had their originals hanging on display and had display racks filled with prints. Every print that I looked at (with the exception of those on stretched canvases) was matted and placed in a protective plastic sleeve. I also saw greeting card racks filled with cards sold individually in plastic sleeves. These items are more affordable for the average buyer and are a great way to make some money and promote your art. We offer all of these items; [prints](#), [plastic sleeves](#), [greeting card racks](#), and more.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LITTLE THINGS

As I walked around from booth to booth, I noticed a lot of little things that made artists stand out and look more professional. The first thing I noticed was that a lot of artists had banners with their names attached to their canopies. They were made in many different ways. My favorite was carved out of wood. I saw many that were simply stickers, but the effect was unanimous; these artists stood out and looked good doing it.

Another little thing I noticed that almost every artist had was a guest book alongside his or her business cards, postcards, and brochures. A guestbook is always a good thing for an artist to have. It allows the artist to collect contacts, buyers, comments and feedback from the people who view their work. It is a wonderful networking technique that I highly recommend. It has a friendly and welcoming effect on viewers; it makes the average person walking by feel that they can connect with the artist without the pressure of striking up a conversation.

Other things I noticed involved presentation. One of the classiest little presentations involved putting fresh flowers on the promotion tables and plants in the corners of the booths. This looked really good, and I noticed that it had a great effect on the many spectators. They flocked to the booths that had these classy little touches. It made the artwork look that much better.

The last thing I noticed was that many artists had artist statements, biographies, and descriptions of their individual pieces included in the presentations. These elements also seemed to draw people in. Striking up a conversation with an artist or a spectator can be awkward for many, and having elements that allow people to learn about the artist and his or her work included in the overall presentation is another way to connect with people who are perhaps a little shy. People tend to connect more with the art when they are able to read the story behind its creation.

If you wish to participate in the Affaire in the Gardens art shows in the future, I would recommend that you first attend the show to really see what its all about. You learn so much by just walking around and talking to people. If you are interested in seeing some of the work that was exhibited this past show, or if you are seeking more information, check out their [website](#).