

Three Constants of Juried Competitions

1. **Rejection is inevitable.** You cannot take it personally. The same work of art that wins an award in one show may be rejected from the next – it is the nature of the process. You must not allow rejection to become debilitating. Artists must learn to accept rejection without internalizing it.
2. **The law of averages.** The more shows you enter, the more chances you have of acceptance. Be consistent. Don't give up! If the show is worth entering to help you on your career path, then enter it. You can be sure that you will NOT get into a show if you DON'T enter it.
3. **Makes sure your visual documentation is first-rate** and accurately represents the work you are submitting. “... *I rejected works simply because the images were so poor that I could not be certain what I was seeing and was unwilling to take a chance.*”

We must buy proper digital equipment and learn how to use it or hire a professional to accurately document our work. Make sure your work shows well on a digital monitor. A 10” work will appear the same size on a monitor as a work that is 10’ across. Even when projected via a data projector, you cannot expect your work to look as it does in reality. A small delicate piece may lose all of its subtlety. A large piece may lose its impact of scale. **Be certain that what the juror see looks good.** Awards are normally judged from the accepted works after the show is hung, but your primary concern is to make it to the show in the first place.

Variables in the Process: The Jurors

1. **Find out as much about the juror as possible** before entering a show. Search the Web for the juror's work (if s/he is an artist). If the juror is a curator of a museum or society, look at the museum's or society's works. Don't assume that the juror might not be sympathetic to abstraction because their works are realistic. In fact, a juror could be harsher with works in his/her own genre or discipline. Simply learn what you can and select your work accordingly.
2. **Understand the juror's job.** Jurors are usually given guidelines – which may include a target number of works to include. This may mean eliminating pieces they really like, or including pieces that they are less pleased with.

Each juror has their own way of working. Mr. Daub scrolls through the pieces to get a feel for the works, without making any decisions. Then he goes through the works referring to the accompanying list (titles, media, sizes). Then he eliminates pieces that he believes are not at the level of the best work presented. Those that he has some doubts about will stay for another round – and he continues working this way: scrolling through the works and eliminating each round. “*The question I ask myself is: ‘Am I making the show better, or only bigger, by including this piece?’*”

- 3. The juror's "bias" – subjectivity.** Although the look of the show is determined by the art that has been submitted, it is on some level a reflection of its juror. Jurors inevitably bring their own particular points of view and priorities to the process. *"I rejected several exceptionally well-crafted watercolors ...and accepted others that were less technically competent.. because I get tired of seeing the same subjects and techniques repeated over and again... Although I admire good craftsmanship and mastery of materials, a fresh and personal point of view is much more interesting to me."*

Weigh the Pros and Cons for Each Show

- 1. Weigh the cost versus the benefit.** Is the show sufficiently prestigious to warrant shipping your work halfway across the country? Will there be a catalog printed? Are there generous cash awards? Will the line on your resume truly enhance your professional credentials?
- 2. Be wary of exhibitions hosted by vanity galleries.** They may charge excessive fees and are often come-ons for solicitation. Listing these shows can have a negative impact when your resume is reviewed by a knowledgeable professional.

Insights from Seasoned Jurors: Katherine Chang Liu and Harold Gregor

Harold: When multiple entries are allowed, artists should ensure that all of their entries are of equal quality. *"Some artists submit one high-level work backed by a second weaker one. The lesser work, in some cases, confirms the weakness in the stronger effort."*

Harold shies away from work that is obviously derivative of better-known artists, and views clichéd subjects with skepticism unless the artist *"has invested it with new life"*. Artistic individuality is an important factor in assessment.

Katherine: *"...it is good policy to show consistency in quality as well as approach. A juried show is not where one shows versatility; entries that are too different in approach imply the artist is still in the searching stage...leaving the impression of an artist who is not quite ready."*

"The 'reach' of an artwork is the combination of the artist's individuality, expressive ability, personal visual language and a hard-to-define depth of content."

Both Harold and Katherine feel that the quality of work in most national exhibitions is so high that technical proficiency is "a given." Artists who have had success in local and state level competitions should consider moving to larger regional and national competitions, but caution that competitions may not be the best way for artists to measure their artistic growth: *"The real measure is for the artist to compare his or her current work with that of previous years."*