

## **Notes from the DAC Workshop Survivor, an artist's opportunity workshop**

I attended the Survivor workshop this weekend (May 30-June 1 2008) offered through the Dumbo Arts Center. Below are my notes and brief summaries of what was discussed. I attended all of the workshops, except for the website workshop and the GYST workshop (I do have synopsis for those two presentations.)

### **SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE**

A panel discussion of 3 mid-career artists, talking about their experience in the art world. Artists: Kanishka Raja, Heide Fasnacht, Jane South.

The panel discussion started with Kanishka Raja stressing the importance of building connections within your art community and among your peers, and offering as an example his experience of going to Skowhegan and meeting fellow artists there who later recommended him to New York galleries.

The moderator pointed out how competitive Skowhegan is, to which Kanishka responded: "it took me 3 times to get accepted... and rejection is awful". I can't tell you how refreshing it was to hear established artists admitting that rejection is never easy, no matter where you are in your career. It seemed more honest than the usual advise I have gotten over the years which has basically boiled down to "Get over it!". The artists on the panel had different ways to deal with rejection: applying to as many opportunities as possible to dilute the pain of rejections; getting angry instead of depressed and using that energy in a positive way; allowing themselves to feel bad for a day, and moving on to the next application.

Rejection is an unfortunate part of an artist life, and I applaud the panel for being honest and human about the sting of having work rejected.

Moving on in the discussion, the general consensus among the 3 artists is that an art career is non-linear, meaning you can have great success one year, and sell nothing the next. In order to sustain those ups and downs, artists should concentrate on making art consistently, and making art that is honest: don't try and second-guess what the market wants because chances are that the market will change its mind! Be true to yourself and your art.

These artists also stressed the importance of networking: networking as creating friendship among your peers, helping your fellow artists, and creating a larger sense of an art community. So don't forget to venture out of the studio and meet other artists, and don't hesitate to help your colleagues who might one day help your career as well.

### **PERFECT PACKET**

Tips on putting together the perfect artist packet by Melissa Potter.

Artists should ideally have ready a basic information packet that can be used and built upon to apply to different types of opportunities: grants, gallery opportunities, residencies, etc. The packet should contain at minimum: an artist statement, a resume, a CV, and visual materials.

#### *Artist statement*

The art statement should illuminate elements of the work that may not be apparent. At its core, it should follow the "what/where/why/when/how" rule. For example, it should present the medium, scale and any references that will make the work more understandable.

### *Resume and CV*

An artist resume will typically exclude non art-related experience, and concentrate mainly of lists of shows, residencies, and an art bibliography. A CV will contain a wider scope of experience, and can include additional background and skills: you could include consulting work for example, or work you may have done as an artist assistant. Guidelines for building a resume and CV can be found at the College of Art Association's website:

[www.collegeart.org/guidelines/](http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/)

### *Visual materials*

Although slides are quickly going out of fashion, it can be helpful to have a portfolio ready with both digital images and slides. Smaller art associations have not moved to digital yet because of the costs associated with converting to digital. It is perfectly acceptable to shoot artwork with a digital camera and convert the file to a traditional slide. Some Internet services who offer such conversions are [gammatech.com](http://gammatech.com) and [iprintfromhome.com](http://iprintfromhome.com)

Be aware of the fact that different monitors display images differently and it is therefore very important for you to check your images on multiple computers. The speaker also pointed out that digital projectors which are used by nyfa for example, will not show the image the same way as your monitor. The projected images will tend to be more washed out: if you know of anyone who use such a projector, try and use it before you send your images to maximize quality.

Here, I want to dispel an urban legend that came up during the presentation. Some folks are under the impression that jpg images will lose quality as they are opened and closed. This is simply NOT the case. You can open and close a jpg a million times, and it will appear the same way. The confusion comes from the fact that SOME image editors will re-compress the jpg file after you edit the image AND either save it or "save it as" a different filename.

### *Additional materials*

When you send a slide list, consider having a mini-statement with each file, beyond medium and size.

Have all reviews of your work ready to be sent, either printed or in a digital format.

Consider having print-outs of your images on good quality paper.

When making a CD, consider making the jewel case sleeve a print-out of thumbnails of the images contained on the CD.

### *General advise*

Do your homework: don't apply to organizations or galleries that do not show the type of work you do. When applying for a grant, look through the previous winners to get a sense of the type of work that was accepted.

And one more time: network! Do go out and meet other artists, create or grow your art community and help your fellow artists.

Use good follow-up protocol: if you have been accepted or have been helped by someone in your community, be sure to thank them in writing: and not email! A thank you card says that you have spent the time and energy to show your appreciation.

### **NYFA SOURCE**

Presentation of the nyfa source website by Linda Park.

Nyfa source is a searchable database of grants, opportunities and services for individual artists. Though I have found their new login protocol to be quite annoying, NYFA is not only free but it is the best and most comprehensive websites for artists.

NYFA source lets you do basic searches (such as awards based on geographical location and types of awards) to more advanced searches such as searches by keyword, or types of discipline. NYFA source will launch its new site at the end of June with more filters and capabilities. I highly recommend you spend some time looking for opportunities there.

[www.nyfa.org](http://www.nyfa.org)

## **TOOLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

I did not attend this seminar but the synopsis seemed to follow design advise I have given in my article “20 tips for a good website design” and “Make your site work for you”.

### **GYST**

I did not attend this seminar because I use Indie Band Manager as a database tool. GYST is a software that was specifically designed for visual artists and is more complete than IBM (it's also more expensive). It is a database program to help artists keep track of their artwork, proposals, mailing list, etc. I have put their link online under Resources, and I highly recommend you check it out.

## **MAKING A STATEMENT**

Writing workshop to help artists write their art statement by Sarah Schmerler.

Sarah has different opinions on the role of an art statement than Melissa Potter, which made the presentation both interesting and confusing for me! For Sarah, the main goal of an art statement is to be a point of entry leading to the work. As such, it should be direct, honest, simple and clear, and mainly be descriptive as opposed to offering a critique of the work: let the viewer interpret the work themselves, don't necessarily do that for them before they see the art.

The speaker's advise was to establish a writing process similar to an art making process: generate ideas first, and let the writing flow completely uncensored, then go back and edit the statement, clarifying and organizing your ideas. Her suggestions were to keep the statement short (100 words to 300 words maximum) and to let your own voice come through. She felt there was no need to contextualize the work, but instead to aim at giving a mental picture of the work.

She suggested artists read art listing blurbs in the newspaper, looking for descriptive language as opposed to critical language or opinions. Use formal art elements to describe your work (color, composition, line, form, etc..), but do not use too many elements in the description: don't give the reader too many choices. The statement needs to be a narrative that grabs the reader's attention. As such, ask friends and colleagues to read your statement and give you feedback.