

Submitting for juries – putting together your submission package

As ceramic artists, we are often faced with exciting opportunities for submitting our work into various potential venues or for exhibitions. These opportunities can help us to market ourselves, and gain valuable experience while increase our profiles. It is crucial to be able to present ourselves in the most professional manner possible. Of course it is equally important that the work we are proposing be suitable to the venue...not all work is appropriate in every gallery or retail space.

Once you deem that you are ready and you make the decision to go ahead and apply, do give it your all. It does take time and effort to put together a proposal, but it is a recurring part of being a professional potter. The good news is that the time it takes should be lessened with each additional proposal that you submit providing you stay on top of things such as regularly photographing your work and keeping your resume current.

Putting the submission package together boils down to using some common sense: Follow the instructions! I can't stress this enough. Provide everything that is asked for in your submission information and check the list twice to be sure. (Obvious? Perhaps, but its amazing to hear that this is a common error made by many applicants and so it does need to be stated.) Submit professional quality images with neutral backgrounds that are well focused and representative of the actual work. For some juries, actual samples of work are also required so realize that the pieces you choose for the jury set the bar for what is expected from you should you be accepted.

It is also beneficial to put together a unified submission package – Not everyone is equally comfortable on a computer but certain things are worth the effort to learn or worth asking a friend or even hiring someone to help with. I like to use the same fonts consistently and format all of my documents with the same presentation style as a way to “brand” myself. I use similar layouts on my website, my business cards and all my professional documents (artist statements, bio, resume, even inventory lists etc.). Once these are designed, the hard work is over and it really is simply a matter of making updates as required. The format doesn't have to be complicated, just clean, consistent and easy to read. The jury is faced with reviewing numerous proposals in a relatively quick time frame, so making it easier for them to get through all your material is imperative. The jury will also look at the package as a bit of an indication, (whether accurate or not) of what you, the artist, will be like to work with once accepted. The more professional, the better the potential outcome, as you will appear to be ‘ready’ to show. Once accepted, a commitment to being professional throughout the relationship with the gallery is expected. Although work is always judged and accepted based on merit and quality, an incomplete or scattered proposal can be means for rejection so don't give the jury that reason.

If you are applying for an exhibition, be creative and have fun – exhibitions provide wonderful opportunities for exploring outside of your ordinary scope of work. Be clear about your theme and express it as succinctly, yet thoroughly as possible. The idea needs to be described to the jury so that it is easy for them to visualize how the show will look. Going through this process actually also helps you be clearer when you are producing the work for the show.

Once you have gathered all the items on your checklist, place everything in some form of presentation folder available at office supply stores. I personally like the 10 or 20 page folders

with clear plastic sleeves that you simply drop each page into. This way your presentation stays in the correct order and is easy to flip through and nothing gets misplaced. Don't send loose, unlabeled snapshots in an envelope. Photo's can either be printed letter size (8 1/2 x 11 to match the folder or can be mounted on paper or card stock before being placed in a sleeve. Label everything: All actual works or photos should be labeled as well with whatever numbering system is requested by the gallery in the proposal information. The clearer you are with every aspect of the application (even if it seems redundant) will make it clear to the jury panel, who can then focus on judging the work itself rather than wasting valuable time figuring out what goes with what.

Apply often – don't get discouraged: it is always disappointing to be rejected for whatever the reason, even when we don't know the reason. It is important to realize that we each create unique work and our work simply won't be accepted by every jury we submit to. For each call for entry, rejections outnumber accepted applicants simply based on demand. Try not to take it personally. So many variables affect the outcome but with practice, at least the way in which we present ourselves can be controlled and can be improved. It is another learned skill not unlike learning to make pottery. It is a skill that as potters wishing to show work in gallery settings, is essential to grasp at least some basic comfort level with.

A few notes on photographing your work:

With digital images being widely accepted these days, gone are the days of having to shoot slides, and processing film. I personally feel that a photo booth in the studio is becoming a necessary piece of equipment. Cameras are getting better and less expensive all the time. Investing in a clean backdrop, a camera and tripod and proper lights in the studio is very useful to any potter. Once you swallow the costs of the initial setup, taking digital images really doesn't cost anything. (Printing them is another matter). Not only does a studio photo booth allow us to easily take regular "reference" images of our work, with some fine tuning it can also be used to take "professional" quality images, ultimately saving in costs associated with having to hire a photographer each time (and if I can, you can too). Sometimes it takes a little trial and error – I usually take a bunch of shots of some pots and then load them onto the computer to see how they look. The immediacy of the results allows me to make adjustments to the camera angle or perhaps tweak the lights a little and reshoot the pots to improve the images. I shoot everything in the camera RAW format so that the resulting photos are uncompressed (of the best quality) allowing them to be used for any future purpose. Having learned to do this myself allows me to put together packages very quickly and the ability to do this has provided more opportunities that I would otherwise have missed. It is a competitive market and I do think that we need to be professional in other aspects other than just the playing with the clay. Realistically, there is always ample warning for submission deadlines so it does allow all of us to seek help if needed in putting together our own professional portfolios. Good luck!