**Applying for Gallery Exhibitions**

**Starting Out**

What am I focusing on tonight? Applying to ARCs. There are many different ways that your work can and should be displayed and showing with an ARC is one option. However, applying to an ARC may not necessarily be the right option for you, and that’s OK.

Where are you at in your artistic career? Are you:

* Emerging, mid-career, or an established artist
* Once you have decided this, it can make your decision on where and when to apply for an exhibition easier
* It is important to be practical and honest when considering where you are at in your artistic career, however the lines between these three classifications can often be murky with no clear solution of distinction

What are some ways to find out about Calls for Submissions?

* Akimbo – great, free way of connecting with what is happening in the world of contemporary art. Have the ability to manage your own profile and preferences
* Mailing lists – free to sign up and a great way to keep in touch with individual galleries. Is totally dependant on how much an individual gallery chooses to use their mailing list
* Social Media – seemingly infinite possibilities to connect with various galleries and artist run spaces through Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Liking and following galleries is a great way to stay up to date with calls for submissions and exhibition opportunities
* And finally - **Face to Face Networking** – whether you like it or not, part of the responsibility of making connections in the art world falls on you, the artist. Getting out to galleries and familiarizing yourself with what options exist is an important element of your development as an artist. That means not only becoming familiar with what is available to you in your hometown, but in neighbouring communities as well

**Things to Consider**

What do you need to know before you apply? Probably more than you think. So…

**Do your homework!**

**1. Gallery Info**

* Find the gallery’s website and browse!
* Specifically, the GALLERY MISSION AND MANDATE – find it and know the details
* Review past exhibitions – who has shown at the gallery you are applying to. This will give you a sense of the gallery’s audience, who they serve, and they reach and reputation
* Have you shown at the gallery recently? If so, re-think your application
* Gallery floor plan – if it is not posted online get in contact with someone at the gallery and ask for one
* Do you get paid? Does the gallery adhere to CARFAC (Canadian Artists Representation/Front des artistes canadiens) fee schedule? If they don’t, is there some form of compensation? Beyond CARFAC, what else would the gallery cover?

Once you have done this, start to formulate a plan for your application…

**2. Personal Info**

* What are you applying for? Solo exhibition? Group exhibition? Curatorial project? Be specific and know what you want. If you are open to both solo and group exhibitions, state that.
* In that respect, what are you presenting? **IDENTIFY -** Do you have a specific body of work you would like to present? If not, what do you plan to submit in your application? Identify if it is:
  + New work that is either in the development stages or recently completed
  + Existing work that you have previously exhibited
  + If the gallery you are applying to has more than one exhibition space, which one are you applying for?
  + If you have a clear idea of the work you would like to exhibit, what are your technical requirements? Be as specific as possible, as this will help the curator/programming committee make an informed decision as to their ability to exhibit your work
  + Are there any special considerations you should identify in regards to your exhibition?
  + DO NOT underestimate the importance of your Artist Statement. It should reflect the body of work you have submitted for consideration. An Artist Statement and a Exhibition Proposal are two different documents. The former encapsulates your practice in it’s most current form, while the latter should be a direct, didactic explanation of the exhibition you propose.

Reach out to your peers – artists, curators, arts administrators – who have knowledge of the field and have had some connection/contact with the gallery you intend to apply to. It can be beneficial to have some understanding of the gallery beyond what you are able to find online or through a conversation with individuals employed at the gallery.

This will allow you to discover any “truths” about the gallery and what it is like to work with them, which can be very beneficial and may or may not influence your decision to apply or not apply.

**Preparing and Submitting Your Application**

Documentation and image formatting - ensure you have high quality images and follow individual submission guidelines. Professional documentation of your work can be expensive. However, there is no excuse for not having documentation that is of a reasonably good quality. This is imperative when it comes to apply for exhibitions.

Follow guidelines when it comes to formatting your written work – docx or pdf? A single or individual documents.

If you are applying through Submittable or a portal, be sure to do all your written work in a separate, saveable document. Then copy and paste when you are ready to submit.

**Examples of Calls for Submissions**

Artspace (Peterborough, ON)

Xpace Cultural Centre (Toronto, ON)

Forest City Gallery (London, ON)

A Space (Toronto, ON)

Hamilton Artists Inc. (Hamilton, ON)

**General Do’s and Don’ts**

**Do**

* Get in touch with the gallery you intend to apply to; Generally speaking, galleries appreciate engagement so long as it is relevant and well thought out. From my perspective, initial contact via email is good, but after that attempt to speak over the phone/skype if that is an option
* Follow all requirements of the application –no one is exempt from these requirements!
* Have someone proofread your application – the more eyes on your submission the better
* Be selective of the images you include; only the best and only what is relevant to your application
* In that vain, spend time editing your portfolio; make sure your have high quality digital images of your work on hand, as this is the standard for exhibition applications
* Provide your most up-to-date CV and be selective about what you include; your artistic CV is not the same as the CV you would use to apply for a job

**Don’t**

* Assume anything – if you have questions regarding any aspect of your application, get in touch with the gallery/centre
* Ignore word counts – they are in place for a reason. If you are applying via email (ie. Not through Dropbox or another online platform that will cut you off at the selected word count), strictly adhere to the outlined word counts
* Be casual in your approach to your application
* Use a “blanket application” approach; be specific with your application because curators, arts administrators, and programming committees can tell when they are reading a generalized application
* If you have been successful with an application to a gallery, don’t apply to the same gallery again the following year – it’s time to broaden your horizons!
* It is very, very important to diversify you history of exhibitions, so consider your options once you have shown at gallery X

**Differences Between a Grant Application and an Exhibition Application**

A significant amount of what we have just discussed is completely applicable to preparing a grant for either the Ontario Arts Council or the Canada Council for the Arts. However, there a few significant differences that you should take note of when preparing a grant application

**1. Online Registration and Submission Process**

* Both the OAC and CCA have launched their online grant application system – so you need to become familiar with these platforms as paper applications are no longer an option
* Both require you to register as a user and as these are new systems, can be glitch-y and there may be lag time between when you register and when you are approved as a user. Therefore, be sure to register well in advance of your grant deadline
* Much like applying online to an open Call for Submissions, there are strict word counts and formatting guidelines for online grant applications, so be sure to log in early and familiarize yourself with them

**2. Telling Your Story**

Another key difference in applying for a grant is that you are telling a story or constructing a narrative within your application. You are giving context to your larger practice, while also explaining how this funding could support future endeavours in your practice. Connecting these two threads is important, especially if you are looking to take your work in a new direction.

* It is important to make the distinction between project and research-driven grants, awards, and “exploratory” grants, as these require considerably different approaches in your writing and support material, and the story you are trying to tell

**3. Budget**

For most grants, you will be expected to complete a budget. This is often a major oversight for many artists, and not enough time is spent developing your budget. Take the time to think about how the money will be spent on your project. No matter how compelling the grant proposal may be, it is well thought out, financially viable projects stand the best chance of being awarded a grant.

* Balance your budget
* Consider other revenue streams for your project and reflect this in both your written application and budget
* If generating revenue is part of your project, be realistic about how this will be done, and how much revenue can be generated through bar and ticket sales etc.

**Closing Thoughts**

Remember, being turned down for an exhibition is not personal. Galleries receive hundreds of submissions and often only have between 5 and 7 slots per year to work with.

If your application is turned down, ask for feedback. It can be an excellent learning experience for you as an artist and could result in an exhibition somewhere down the road.

Your “success” as an artist is entirely dependant on your own ideas of success and what you hope to accomplish as an artist

**Questions**