

FROM THE JURY ROOM
The Inside Scoop

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Having been there – as a juror, an organizer of juries and a recipient of both “accepted” and “rejected” notices, I feel somewhat qualified to say a thing or two about the jurying process.

First and foremost, presentation of your images is paramount and cannot be stressed enough. The image projected onto the screen is the only way the jurors can judge your work. A poor reproduction of your artwork will inevitably lead to rejection of your entry and diminish you as a professional artist. Photos must only show the image – nothing else. It pays to take the time to crop and label them correctly. Follow the submission guidelines to the letter! Preview your images to get an idea of what the image(s) look like blown up on the screen. Make sure the image is as close to the original as possible but do not embellish it as exhibition coordinators or venues often reserve the right to reject work that does not look like the submitted image.

If you apply for membership in an art society, consistency is what jurors are looking for, don't show them everything you can do. Really concentrate on whatever you are best at and keep the images consistent in style and sometimes even in subject matter. You want to communicate to a juror what you are all about. People usually say that once you are accepted into a society and then start submitting to shows, you can mix up your images. However, I find that even then a juror can get confused as to when an artist submits a landscape along with an abstract, always wondering if one or the other is a “one off”?!

Juries are a minefield and submitting yourself to one is always a gamble. If you are happy to paint for your own enjoyment, then don't even venture into this arena. If you wish to see how your work stacks up against other artists out there on any level, then throw your hat into the ring and hold on! You may have to grow a thick skin but the rewards are great and potentially career-building if you are determined to learn along the way and not take it too personally.

First of all one needs to realize that only 50-100 paintings at the most may be picked for any given show because of the simple fact that exhibition venues only have so much wall space. For big national or international shows it may mean that only 10% of all submitted work can be accepted. When you consider it a numbers game, then the only chance you have to

stand out is to be “So Good They Can’t Ignore You” as Cal Newport says in his book by the same name, subtitled “Why Skills Trump Passion in the Quest for Work You Love”. I love this book and quote it a lot as I believe that ultimately cream will rise to the top as a result of hard work and sticking to your own unique vision.

When jurors select work for inclusion in an exhibition, they look for technical proficiency, strong values, good design, good composition and a message. They may also have to deal with a theme and may have the ominous task of selecting quality artwork that “hangs well together”. Choosing artwork worthy of an award is a much more difficult task. Jurors look for work that speaks to them and touches them on an emotional level. Award jurors will ultimately agree on a work deserving recognition when a painting demonstrates that magical combination of technique and emotional content, mood or unique perspective. If an artist manages to successfully share his vision and engage a juror, that’s a winner! Unfortunately jurors are people with their own bias and emotions and they don’t always get it right. It takes strong conviction in one’s work and belief in the validity of one’s artistic direction to enter the same rejected work in another exhibition, often to find out that another set of jurors will find the work exceptional and even deserving of an award. If you find that you are being rejected a lot, then maybe consult a trusted senior colleague to see if there are ways you can make your artwork more effective.

I personally do believe that evolution happens in a climate of nurture and criticism. If you have the determination to succeed, you will thrive on encouragement and learn from mistakes. Be persistent!

Best of luck!
