

OPEN STUDIOS: A GUIDE FOR ORGANIZATIONS SPONSORING AN OPEN STUDIOS EVENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

An Open Studio event provides an opportunity for artists and craftspeople to reach a broad audience, to educate their community and ultimately to develop new markets. During these events, the general public is invited to view the artists' studios, to experience this creative environment and, hopefully, to make a purchase directly from the artist.

What distinguishes an Open Studio event from a Studio Visit or museum sponsored tour is the intended audience. Whether organized under the auspices of a community arts group or by independent artists, an Open Studio event welcomes the general public rather than a specific group. Some of those who attend an Open Studio Event may never venture into an art or craft gallery or attend a museum exhibition opening. It is this egalitarian distinction that makes an Open Studio event a vibrant addition to the community.

II. ECONOMIC IMPACT OF OPEN STUDIOS

- A. The economic benefits to the Artist:** Artists who do not have gallery representation in the area can benefit significantly. This type of event may be the most effective way for an artist to reach a local or regional audience. The artist can show their work to the public, sell it at retail prices and keep 100% of the revenue without giving a commission to galleries.

These events can also be instrumental in building professional relationships. Collectors or gallery owners may go to Open Studio events looking for new artists. Keeping this in mind, artists should sell their work at retail prices. Price parity allows all who view the work to understand its established market value. Artists should also read the Professional Guidelines document: **OPEN STUDIOS: Artist Checklist** to prepare their studio and themselves for this unique, entrepreneurial experience whether they are planning to participate in a community-wide Open Studios event or hosting an Open Studios event on their own.

- B. The economic benefits of Open Studio events to the community:** Open studio events may attract people from outside the community in addition to local residents. The event can generate income for artists and for local businesses, restaurants and hotels. Open Studios can generate revenue for the local art organization sponsoring the Open Studios or create visibility and focus for the local art organization, which may increase membership. Additionally, Open Studio events can attract the public to areas that are affordable to artists (often the less developed areas of the community). These events can serve as a recurring catalyst to boost the economic vitality of a previously “run down” or “undesirable” neighborhood.
- C. The economic impact on Galleries:** Open Studio events may be viewed as competing with local galleries and art marketing venues, especially if the gallery exhibits the work of the local artists participating in the Open Studio event. If this is the case, details of the event should be considered and discussed before the Open Studio event between the artist and the gallery (or store) that represents the artist to avoid any possible conflicts. These details may include whether or not an artist participates in the event, sales commissions, mailing/client lists and type of work exhibited.

III. CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS

There are many issues involved in deciding to participate in an Open Studio Event. Many of these concerns are addressed in the ***OPEN STUDIOS: Artist Checklist*** document in the Professional Guidelines. They range from the nuts and bolts worries of display to the ethical implications of discounts and exclusivity. It is important to consider:

- A. The entities sponsoring an Open Studio event** have an obligation to run a well-organized affair. (This would include providing accurate information to the public regarding hours of operation, studio locations, etc.) Be sure that an Open Studio event sponsored by the community or an organization is on the level: established promoters have track records and new organizers should be able to answer basic questions regarding promotion, fees, responsibilities, etc.
- B. Exclusivity. This is a very important and often sensitive topic.** Issues over exclusivity most often arise when an artist has local or regional gallery or retail representation. The term “exclusivity” is described in the ***Overview of the Model Consignment Contract*** in the Professional Guidelines.

IV. EXAMPLE OF A COMMUNITY WIDE OPEN STUDIO EVENT: Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County Open Studio Art Tour.

Below is a brief description of an Open Studios Event organized by the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County, California. This is an example of a superbly run and organized event and represents many years of accumulated knowledge and experience. Complete information is available on their web site at <http://www.ccsc.org>.

A. Background

The Open Studios Art Tour in Santa Cruz County has become a model for open studios events across the country. The Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County employs a professional Events Coordinator and a Development and Marketing Director who support a hard working, dedicated, all volunteer Open Studios Committee comprised of local artists from a wide range of disciplines. The Committee, with direction from the Council's Board of Directors and facilitation from the Events Coordinator, works all year long to put on a successful event during the first three weekends in October every year.

B. History

The Open Studios Art Tour was initiated in 1986 by the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County as a means of showcasing and marketing the work of artists countywide. (See the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County web site for Open Studios Art Tour application at <http://www.ccsc.org>). Only artists accepted through a screening process and agreeing to comply with the guidelines can participate in Open Studios. It is estimated that at least 2,000 visual artists live in Santa Cruz County. Of that number, a little over 400 apply and between 275 and 300 are accepted to participate in Open Studios each year.

C. Purpose

The event is intended for artists who are currently producing and exhibiting their work and offers them an opportunity to show a body of work in their studio environment. Artists are required to demonstrate or otherwise show their process at their Open Studio. An important aspect of the event is to educate the public about the value and importance of original art work. Visitors see work in many disciplines across a diverse range of media and styles. If you are interested in reviewing some of the criteria established by the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County for their Open Studios Art Tour read the Frequently Asked Questions at <http://www.ccsc.org/openstudios.htm>.

D. Dates

The Open Studios Art Tour hosted by the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County is held each year on the first **three weekends in October**. The county is divided into two sections, north and south, and the artists from each area open their studios on different weekends. The first and second weekends focus on the north or south region, respectively. (This alternates each year.) The third weekend is open to any accepted artist who wishes to participate for a second weekend.

E. Revenue

Revenue to support the countywide open studios program is from three sources: the application fee, sales from the calendar/catalog for Open Studios, and private and corporate sponsors. About 10,000 visitors attend the event each year. Outreach and advertising bring people from adjacent counties and regions.

F. Artists' Revenue

Artists report collective income from, and related to, Open Studios in Santa Cruz County to be well over \$1,000,000 annually.

G. Community Impact

Visitors see a wide variety of work and become personally informed about art and craft processes, materials, and the creative spirit. The public is educated to become patrons of the arts in their own way.

H. Application and Guidelines

The success of the Open Studios Art Tour sponsored by the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz is in part due to the excellent Application and Guidelines that they have developed over the years. (Look at <http://www.ccsc.org> for more details.) Each year this is evaluated, updated and improved to keep careful control over the quality of this event. The Guidelines cover specific criteria for artists participating in the Open Studio event, which include: residency of the artist, definition for a body of work, and the screening criteria for participants.

Artists are required to submit slides of their artwork, photos of their studio, a description of the demonstration of process they plan to use and the location of their studio on a Santa Cruz County map. After acceptance, an image is submitted for the catalog (which is a 15-month calendar). Strict protocols are followed and are clearly outlined on the website. Guidelines clearly describe issues such as hosting two or more artists in one studio, definition of original artwork vs. reproductions, participation in the Preview Exhibition and a mentoring Program for artists participating in Open Studios.

I. Calendar and Events

The Open Studios weekends in Santa Cruz County are supported by three very important components: **a calendar/catalog, a Gala opening for the Preview Exhibition** of Open Studio artists, **and the Preview Exhibition**. Each component generates publicity, public interest, and funding for the year long planning of Santa Cruz Open Studios Art Tour events, publications, and Open Studios.

1. Catalog or Calendar: The 15-month Calendar/Catalog

- a.** The calendar serves as a guide to the Open Studios and it generates income for the organization. Publishing a catalog or calendar with the addresses of the artists participating in the Open Studios event is essential.
- b.** Newspaper or Internet listings of participants' addresses should be avoided to protect artist's privacy (and to protect the Open Studios sponsor from unnecessary liability.) The calendar includes a separate listing by media of the artists participating in the Open Studios and an alphabetical list of artists participating in Open Studios.
- c.** The purchase price of the calendar generates funds to cover the cost of printing the calendar and for organizing the event. [The Calendar/Open Studio Art Tour Guide is sold at numerous locations throughout the county.]
- d.** The calendar or catalog provides a more secure list of Open Studio participants. Only individuals interested in Open Studios who purchase the calendar will have the addresses of the artists in Open Studios. The map in the calendar or catalog is a guide to the Open Studio locations for anyone not familiar with the area, identifies the location of each Open Studio and the dates that the artist's studio will be open to the public.
- e.** The calendar or catalog contains a color photo and description of every artist's work officially participating in Open Studios. The color images of artwork make the calendar attractive and interesting month after month functioning as a reference for the entire year in case the viewer wants to buy from an artist at a later date. Kept for more than a year, the calendar reintroduces, month after month, a new selection of artists work featured on each page. Anyone who wants to make a purchase later in the year still has the information about the artists for easy reference.

2. A Gala Reception for the Preview Exhibition.

The Gala is a much-anticipated social event bringing together the arts community. The Gala generates publicity for the Open Studio weekends and allows the artists and the public to preview the work that will be seen. Donations from the sponsors are used for the reception.

3. A Preview Exhibition opens with the Gala one week before the first Open Studio weekend and continues for one month till all Open Studio weekends have been held. At one exhibition location, an example of each artist's work is on view for people to evaluate. Anyone viewing the Preview Exhibition can decide which artist's work peaks their interest the most, thus deciding the artist's Open Studio to visit. Calendar/catalogs are sold at this Preview Exhibition, which includes the map and other relevant information. The Preview Exhibition also offers exposure for new or emerging artists participating in Open Studios.

V. CONCLUSION: The participation of individual artists and the greater community in an Open Studio Event can be beneficial in many ways. Some of the tangible gains have already been addressed, but it is the intangible benefits such as strengthened community ties, expanded communication and a greater education in and appreciation for the arts that must not be undervalued.

SNAG Professional Guidelines Committee
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