

# TEN TIPS FOR HOLDING AN EXHIBITION

Linda Gilbert

## OVERVIEW

These are some of the things I do. I hope there might be something useful in here to help you on your artistic journey.

### TIP ONE: START MAKING

Have a strong idea that *really* excites you and won't bore you or your audience. Commit yourself to the concept, but be flexible enough to evolve with it. Start making.

### TIP TWO: BOOK A VENUE

Commit yourself to your idea and back yourself by booking a venue. It might not be a gallery, it could be a café, or other interesting spot like a private house. If you want to show in a gallery then put together your finest portfolio, research the galleries you think could be interested in your genre, then make bookings to meet the director in person if possible. Introduce yourself and your art to a range of galleries – get used to telling them who you are, show them what you are capable of producing and outline your idea. Breathe deeply, walk in the door and be proud that you're putting yourself out there. If they're not interested, they will politely let you down and sometimes provide really valuable feedback. Embrace failure, it's your friend and will toughen your diaphanous skin. If by chance they want to show your work, you've hit the jackpot in a peculiar lottery of chance. Whatever the outcome, keep making.

### TIP THREE: ONCE YOU HAVE A BOOKING, CREATE A TIMELINE

Once you have a booking, do a timeline and break down the fun making part from the organising part – start from the exhibition date and work backwards. Mindmap everything that needs to be done – talk to a friend or find yourself a mentor to keep you on track. Separate the time you need to make from the

time you need to get the admin side of things for the exhibition happening.  
Some things I do are:

### *Making*

- Research, research, research
- Draw, draw, draw (often I'll attend a drawing class to get back into the swing of looking/drawing if I haven't drawn and painted for a while)
- Decide on how many paintings to show
- Buy the materials (as finances allow)
- Commit to a regular studio schedule
- Reward yourself each time you walk into your studio even if you don't actually get as much done as you'd hoped. I usually get myself some new music to play on the day I start, and each time I finish a painting
- Start painting two works: one as a care-free rendition and the other the more careful, serious attempt – often the first one is looser and more painterly so the second becomes the first...?! (Strange how two white canvases can help me overcome the anxiety of facing a single white canvas!).
- When a painting is finished I usually turn it to the wall to dry. I'll try not to look at it for a few weeks and put it out of my mind while getting on with the next one. Then one day I'll come in, turn it around and voila! It works, or it doesn't and boy do I know!
- Decide how many of the paintings are good enough to show
- Decide how you will frame your paintings
- Decide who will frame your paintings

### *Admin*

- Work out a budget for costs
- Decide about financing it – sponsorship, grants etc.
- Begin writing up a guest list for opening night
- Put together your artist bio, press release and artist statement
- Think about a publicity and marketing plan: discuss this with your gallery – they will have their own channels, but you may want to include your

own networks and ways of advertising your show. Are you going to have flyers, posters, and invitations? Or will you choose to exploit cheaper e-channels including social media and viral marketing. Then there is radio, television and internet-based media to consider. Maybe you could upload a little video about your show. The main thing is to think about and target the audience you want to attract.

- Decide how much you'll sell each painting for (often the gallery dealer will be helpful at this point as they're less subjective, experienced in pricing and generally more aware of what your paintings might fetch)
- Book in a framer in plenty of time before the show – talk to them about getting the look you want and the costs etc.

#### TIP FOUR: TACKLE THE MOST DIFFICULT AND BORING PARTS FIRST

.....or at least early on in your schedule. For me that is the admin side of things. I feel a great sense of relief to get all of those irritating tasks out of the way (or at least underway) so I can concentrate on meeting the painting deadlines.

#### TIP FIVE: WHEN IT COMES TO THE MAKING – ALLOW YOURSELF PLENTY OF TIME

This is the part you should enjoy and look forward to. I always allow twice as much time as I think I'll need. That way I'm not under pressure if things go wrong, I get sick, the paint doesn't dry, etc. It also allows me time to do one or two extras if I've stuck to my schedule and that gives me more to choose from so I only put my best out there.

#### TIP SIX: LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Good wholesome food, regular exercise, being kind to yourself (and others) is, in my experience, a pre-requisite for sustaining the artistic life. Mental health in particular needs to be nurtured. I've never painted my best work when anxious, stressed, depressed, angry or in an altered state. These experiences contribute to my particular view of the world, but its only through a healthy rear-view mirror of experience can I delve safely into my psyche. You may be different.

## TIP SEVEN: TELL EVERYONE YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE HAVING AN EXHIBITION

Talk it up but don't show them any of the paintings until the big reveal on opening night. Anticipation is contagious and exciting.

## TIP EIGHT: DON'T WORRY IF YOUR IDEA MORPHS AS YOU GO ALONG

This is a good thing. Work with the dialogue you have going with your painting. This is another reason for doing two versions. It can help you to work through ideas without the fear of ruining your exhibition plan.

## TIP NINE: KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THE GALLERY

Give the curator progress reports so they know you're on track and will come up with the goods in time. Not only does this give them confidence but they can add a lot of value by providing feedback on early paintings and themes etc. Remember they really want you to succeed.

## TIP TEN: ATTEND TO THE DETAILS

Attend to all those professional and curatorial details. Make sure your titles, prices and any other paper work the gallery requires is finalised well

before opening night. Try and budget for excellent frames (or make them if you're handy). If you're not using frames, buy the best canvases that you can afford and make sure they are ready to hang when you deliver them to the gallery. Its often attention to these annoying details that establish you as a professional and make it more likely to be asked back again. Think of it like having good manners.

Good luck and go for it!!!

## ABOUT LINDA GILBERT

LINDA GILBERT is a contemporary multi-media artist. For Linda art is about ideas, and she enlists the most appropriate medium to express those ideas. Currently she is playing with printmaking and encaustics (using hot wax for painting and sculpture).

Linda's works are set within cultural narratives that often reference human

rights or conservation themes. She is interested in feelings and experiences rather than literal representations. This often results in abstract works or dreamscapes, leaving the viewer to interpret the image according to their own experience.

Linda has informal and formal art training. She has held several solo exhibitions and participated in many group shows in galleries all over New Zealand. She sometimes accepts commissions and these are held in private collections in New Zealand, Australia and the USA.

Linda is based on the Kapiti Coast in Aotearoa, New Zealand and you can contact her at:

[Linda.g@xtra.co.nz](mailto:Linda.g@xtra.co.nz)

You can check out some of her art at:

<http://www.lindagilbert.co.nz/>

