

Oxfordshire Artweeks advice on approaching a gallery

Know who you are and what you're doing

You need a well-developed identity and consistency to interest a good gallery. Your artist's statement should be honest, short, simple, and striking.

Being creative isn't enough. You need to be confident, professional, polish up your people skills and maintain a good level of organisation, stock lists etc.. You should also unleash the inner self-publicist as you'll need to market yourself to a gallery (and everywhere you go).

And develop a thick-skin: you'll be putting your work in front of the unbiased professional and might get a response you'd rather not hear. Remember that it isn't personal. Also, not all galleries will suit all artists and if one isn't a good match, try another. And on the flip side, don't allow yourself to be flattered or pushed: you can take a little time to decide whether a keen gallery offers the support you're looking for. Also, you can have several, as long as they don't overlap geographically (the rule is often ten miles).

Whom to approach

Think objectively about which gallery/ies to approach as you, and they, are looking for a fruitful long term relationship. Your work will need to match with their style/etc. and you will need to develop a relationship with the gallery.

If the gallery has instructions on their web site for how to apply then follow it to the letter – they'll be getting dozens of applications every week. If there are no instructions then call the gallery to ask how best to apply and what information they need – and send what they ask for in an email that's written specifically for that with just a careful and coherent selection of jpgs in low res format and a link to your website if you have one. Try to have professional photos taken for these. Don't chase them: you only want a gallery that like what you do and are proactive enough to get back to you.

Never cold call nor approach a gallery at an art fair, or approach a gallery with concepts or work in progress.

Know your figures

Think about your overheads, the costs of materials and how long it takes to make a piece. You can then decide on the price bracket within which you have to price your work to be commercial.

Plan to keep your pricing consistent, whatever channel it is sold through. For a gallery, this should include a commission of 40-50% and VAT, though this will vary from place to place and a gallery might like a little discretion to discount by a few percent for their best clients.