Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries

lensculture

Hello and welcome to our

Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries.

If you have downloaded this guide, it's likely you dream of having your work exhibited in a gallery and sharing it with an audience. You are not alone! Our wonderful community of photographers frequently tells us they want more opportunities for their work to be seen by gallery professionals, a deeper understanding about the gallery world, and tips for connecting with curators. This guide does just that, and more.

The goal of this guide is to level the playing field for photographers like you, and empower you to make considered and strategic decisions about the professional relationships you develop. In *Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries*, we help you understand the different types of galleries that exist, how they operate, and how they benefit the photographers they exhibit.

We guide you on how to prepare your portfolio, written materials, and online presence with professional rigor, so you're in the best possible shape for being seen by gallerists and curators. Finally, we outline some ideas for authentically connecting with different types of gallery professionals and building the foundations for a strong relationship—one of the most vital aspects of working with galleries no matter where you are in your journey.

Throughout this guide, you'll read advice and candid insight from a range of other professionals, including practicing artists, independent curators, commercial gallerists, non-traditional initiatives, and educators, all with diverse perspectives and experiences that speak to the multifaceted nature of the gallery world. There is no one single path to take—the most important thing to do is find a path that feels right for you and your work. *Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries* has been written to give you the confidence, mindset and knowledge to position yourself in the best possible light and for you to determine what opportunities are best suited for YOU.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide is built on strong foundations. The structure and content of *Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries* is a digital expansion of a weekend workshop regularly run by Debra Klomp Ching and Darren Ching, co-founders of Klompching Gallery in Brooklyn, New York. We'd like to thank them for their insight and collaboration on this project. Our appreciation and thanks must also go to Serge J-F. Levy, Natasha Caruana, Jennifer Yoffy and Janelle Lynch, who were each consulted during the writing of the chapters. All of our contributors are experts in their field and some offer private consultation. We encourage you to seek them out for additional support with your professional artistic practice.

Ready?
Let's begin.



How to use this guide

Find out more about

PROJECT REVIEWS

There are two ways to approach learning via *Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries:* 1. use this guide as a free and informative stand-alone resource, or 2. boost your learning experience by pairing the guide with *LensCulture's Fine Art Project Review*, our online review service that provides professional feedback on your project images and supporting written materials.

No matter which option you choose, *Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries* will walk you through a process that will leave you better informed, professionally prepared, and empowered to make good decisions for your career now and in the future.

GUIDE & PROJECT REVIEW — HOW IT WORKS:

1. Download the guide ✓
2. Use the information and tasks in Chapter 3 to draft or refresh your project statement, artist bio, and project images
3. Get professional feedback on your drafts via *LensCulture Fine Art Project Review* (fees apply)
4. Feel confident knowing you have given yourself the best chance of success
5. Get out there and make yourself known!

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“ The architect aspires to build in a city as the artist aspires to exhibit his works in a museum.”

— MARIO BOTTA





01. WHY EXHIBIT?

Image Left: © Viktoria Sorochinski. Image Right: © Snezhana Von Büdingen

EXPERT INSIGHT

The value of showing your work

"The exhibition of photographs is important because it showcases them as original artworks, as art objects. This is fundamentally different to and transformative from artworks being viewed digitally. The exhibition invites interaction from the viewing audience, and enables collectors to experience the art object that they're purchasing."

DEBRA KLOMP CHING
Klompching Gallery, New York

"Exhibiting is an important part of my practice because it is, in a sense, the last phase of completing a body of work. An exhibition is a space for dialogue, exchange of ideas, and critical feedback. It offers an opportunity for the work to be seen by current and new audiences, and to be celebrated. It makes the chance for impact possible."

JANELLE LYNCH
Artist, New York

EXPERT INSIGHT

The value of showing your work

"Exhibitions are capable of igniting a process of self-knowledge, by posing crucial questions about the purposefulness of the artwork, its materiality, and its ability to successfully communicate."

NATASHA CHRISTIA
Unaffiliated Curator, Writer and Educator, Barcelona

"I wouldn't necessarily say that exhibiting work is important; however, the steps leading to exhibiting work — including but not limited to editing, sizing, printing, editioning, pricing, transporting, framing, hanging — are all important for your professional practice."

MICHAEL DOONEY
Jarvis Dooney Galerie, Berlin



© George Marazakis

Is exhibiting right for you?



© Antigone Kourakou

Exhibiting at a gallery can have many benefits for your career as an artist, but it is important to keep things in perspective — galleries are not the only avenue for sharing your work and progressing your career. The idea of frequent artwork sales, solo shows, and international recognition have dazzling allure, but the large investment of time, money and energy required for these ventures is often underestimated. For example, a photographer on the roster of a small commercial gallery might produce an exhibition every two years, and spend around $10,000 on printing and framing the work. They might make $15,000 in sales, of which the gallery takes half to cover costs, such as marketing, staff resources, and other charges associated with the exhibition and selling the work.

Before we unpack how galleries work and how to prepare yourself and your work to be seen, we want to take a moment to make sure exhibiting in a gallery is the right direction for you and your work. Use the reflection task on the following page to get some clarity on your art practice and career goals. Being realistic about where you're at in your journey and what you want to achieve will set you up for a fulfilling career both personally and professionally, whether galleries are part of your future or not.

This section was written in consultation with Serge J-F. Levy, photographer, educator and consultant for photographers. www.sergelevy.com

TASK 01: REFLECTION

Use these questions to help you reflect on your work, the audience for your work, and the realities of exhibiting and selling work. There are no right or wrong answers, so dig deep, be honest with yourself, and get to the core of your practice. Find clarity on your goals and work towards personally and professionally satisfying ways of sharing your work that are realistic and achievable.

TASK 01: REFLECTION: IS EXHIBITING IN A GALLERY RIGHT FOR YOU?

Your work

What is the purpose of your work?

Being able to articulate the purpose of your work for you and/or your audience is important for finding a gallery that is the right match.

Do you have at least one mature body of work completed, or one that is formally resolved and conceptually coherent?

Is your work suited to prints on a wall? What other mediums might be suitable for your work, and are there galleries that support those mediums?

Do you produce new work regularly, and are you committed to doing so?

Would you feel comfortable producing new work on a gallery schedule?

TASK 01: REFLECTION: IS EXHIBITING IN A GALLERY RIGHT FOR YOU?

Your audience

Who is the primary audience for your work?

Is it for the art world? Is it for a specific community or niche audience interested in a particular topic?

What do you want the audience to do, think or feel after seeing your work?

Do you want them to take action about a cause, think differently about a topic, buy your work, or do something else?

With this in mind, what are the best ways to directly reach your audience?

Would a magazine, an outdoor exhibition, a dedicated website, photography festival, or community event be more suitable than a gallery?

TASK 01: REFLECTION: IS EXHIBITING IN A GALLERY RIGHT FOR YOU?

Selling and exhibiting your work

Can you pinpoint why you want to exhibit?

For some photographers, sharing their work in a gallery is a way to participate in a larger dialogue with other artists and the wider public. Other photographers feel like their work isn't complete until it is printed and framed. It's also fine to simply want the prestige that comes along with being a part of a reputable gallery's roster.

Is your work for sale?

Are you legally able to sell your work?

In some countries, images made of people in the public domain come with restrictions.

TASK 01: REFLECTION: IS EXHIBITING IN A GALLERY RIGHT FOR YOU?

Do you have a budget readily available for exhibiting your work?

It's difficult to provide ballpark figures on exhibition costs. The best thing you can DO is seek out estimates from printers and framers in your area, and perhaps ask your peers for advice. Always add 10% contingency on top of estimates for any unforeseeable expenses that inevitably arise.

Some galleries will expect you to cover 100% of the printing, mounting, and framing expenses. Others will cover a portion of production costs, or sometimes (very rarely) a gallery will cover all of the production costs, then deduct those costs from sales. Depending on the size of your exhibition and the scale of your works, the costs can add up quickly, to thousands of dollars. Be realistic about your budget and weigh the likelihood of making sales to recoup costs, or finding alternative sources of funding.

Are you comfortable editioning your work to a limited number?

The number of prints in a limited edition is directly related to the value of that work. The lower the number of prints in the edition, the more collectible the work is, making it higher in monetary value. Some photographers prefer not to edition their work because they believe that the negative or digital file is inherently meant to be reproduced in endless multiples. A decision not to edition can be political for some photographers: they are allowing their images to be reproduced en masse, therefore making it accessible to more people, potentially at a lower price. If you are comfortable and willing to edition your work, remember it is your legal and professional responsibility to keep good records of your artwork and editions sold.

TASK 01: REFLECTION: IS EXHIBITING IN A GALLERY RIGHT FOR YOU?

Time and relationship building

Do you have the time to engage with the process of exhibiting?

The process of selecting, printing, mounting, framing, and delivering your works can take considerable time, as can the promotion of the show.

Is now the right time in your creative and professional career to seek out a professional relationship with a gallery?

When you work with a gallery, there are production schedules, deadlines, and constant expectations of the artist that can often compete with one's creative aspirations.

EXPERT INSIGHT

What's the most important consideration for a photographer deciding if they want to approach a gallery?

"Readiness: you must be certain that the work is indeed ready and that you are ready to partner with a gallery socially, emotionally, logistically, practically, and professionally."

JANELLE LYNCH
Artist, New York

"Understand and question the ethics that guide you into making a work. The gallery needs to be a space that can offer you growth and support you. What are the ethics and vision of the gallery you are aligning with and are there any contradictions in the work that you are doing? Spend time knowing the team better, have conversations with them and understand how your thoughts and theirs can come together. Speak to them about logistics such as commissions and their process, and make sure you are comfortable with their terms of contract."

ANSHIKA VARMA
Independent Curator and Founder of Offset Projects, New Delhi







02. ANATOMY OF THE ART GALLERY



So you've completed the reflection task in the previous chapter and you're confident that exhibiting should be part of your artistic journey.

Fantastic! Before approaching a gallery, it's important to understand what types of galleries exist, the different roles within them, and what gallery is right for your work, your goals, and level of experience.

The gallery ecosystem is reasonably structured, and most photographers, aside from the few who explode onto the scene, follow a predictable path over time as their career progresses. Once you understand how things work, you can navigate your way through with purpose and efficiency to get where you want to go. Not all galleries are created equal, so use this chapter to answer two key questions: what type of gallery is a really good fit for your work, and who specifically do you need to build a relationship with at the gallery?

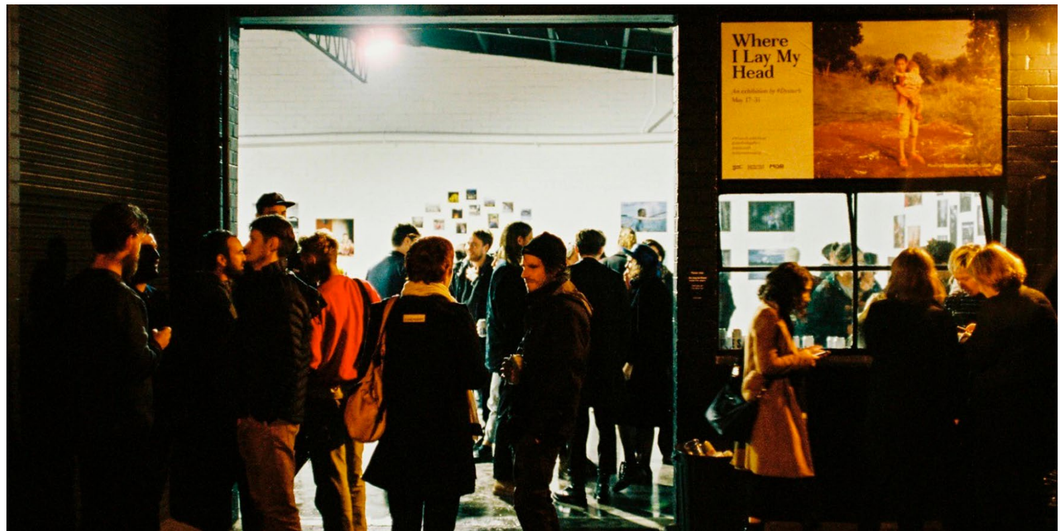
For this chapter, we consulted with Debra Klomp Ching and Darren Ching, Co-Founders and Directors of Klompching Gallery, a commercial gallery for contemporary photography in Brooklyn, New York. www.klompching.com

EXPLAINED

Gallery Types

Galleries are the vehicle through which many artists find their way to major institutions and collections, or in the homes of people who love their work. Galleries come in all shapes and sizes, each one with a different goal and function, suitable for specific types of artists and photographers:

Hillvale Gallery, Melbourne



CO-OPS & ARTIST-RUN INITIATIVES (ARIs)

These galleries are organized and operated by a group of artists with the purpose of exhibiting and promoting the artworks or projects of the members. Members are often responsible for all the operational costs, including their own production and exhibition expenses. Commissions on sales are paid to the co-op, normally at a lower rate than other galleries.

Suitable for photographers who:

+ want exposure and/or exhibiting experience
+ would like a high level of involvement in curation

Examples:

+ Zoetrope, Athens (see our interview on page 39)
+ Hillvale Gallery, Melbourne
+ Fishbar, London
+ ChaShaMa, New York

NON-PROFIT GALLERIES

These galleries work within the parameters of a mission statement, overseen by a board of directors. They have varying areas of interest and purpose that are not necessarily tied to art sales. For example, the gallery might be dedicated to education, audience development, innovation in the arts, diverse voices, or a particular type of photography. Non-profit galleries will normally receive funding from grants and donations. They will often have numerous exhibiting opportunities throughout the year, especially via open calls. Often, they charge lower commission fees than commercial galleries.

Suitable for photographers who:

+ are making artwork that aligns with the gallery's mission
+ are open to having their work curated by the gallery
+ want to experiment with their artwork without the pressure of potential reviews or sales attached to the outcome

Examples:

+ Autograph, London
+ Monash Gallery of Art, Melbourne
+ The Photographer's Gallery, London

INSTITUTIONAL GALLERIES

These galleries often reside within a university or college. The gallery program is normally curated and overseen by an exhibitions committee or board. The purpose of the gallery is defined and publicly available, and the cost of producing the exhibition is often covered.

Suitable for photographers who:

+ work with strong academic concepts

Examples:

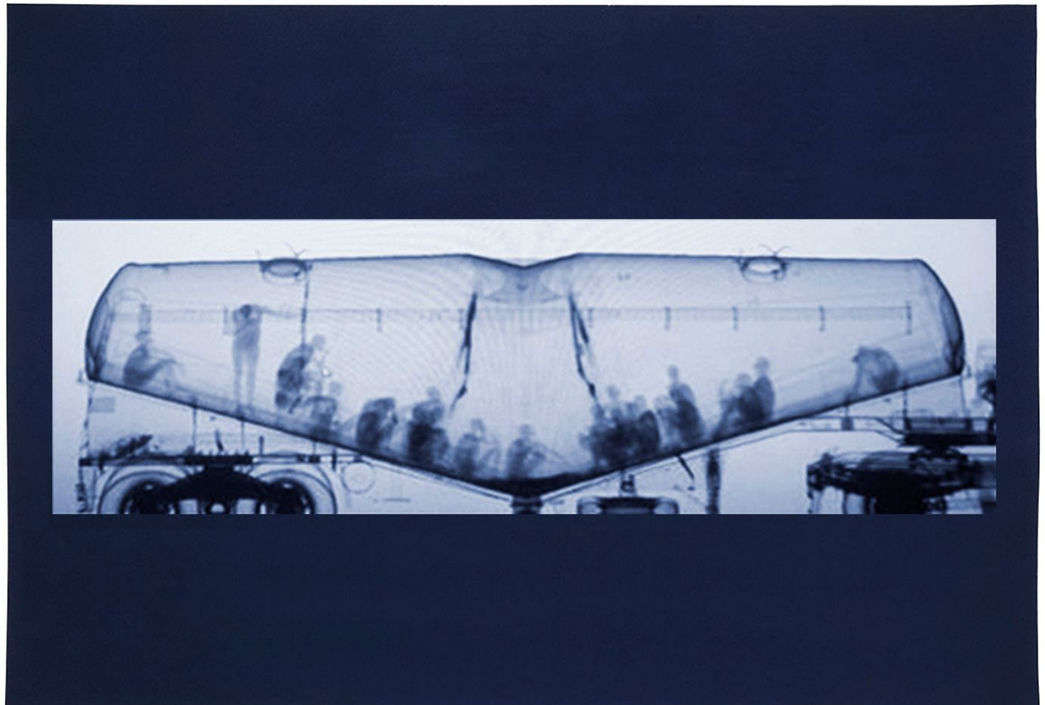
+ The University Museum and Art Gallery (UMAG) of The University of Hong Kong
+ KABK Gallery, connected to the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague

COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Commercial galleries exist to exhibit and sell artworks, to build artists' careers, and to develop a market for their artists' work. The galleries make money by taking a percentage of artwork sales, often as high as 50 percent. For the purpose of this guide, we discuss three sizes of commercial galleries: small, mid-size, and mega.

Suitable for photographers who:

+ are well established, with a proven market for their work
+ have nurtured strong relationships with gallerists



SMALL COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Mostly sell primary market artworks* priced below USD$25,000 on average. These galleries are normally owner-operated with few additional staff members, if any. The physical size of these galleries is small, often with a single exhibition space, and their exhibition schedules focus on a small roster. Occasionally, small commercial galleries will also work with invited artists. Photographers often work closely with the gallery owner.

Examples:

+ Elizabeth Houston Gallery, New York
+ Foley Gallery, New York
+ Robert Koch Gallery, San Francisco

* The **PRIMARY ART MARKET** refers to the first sale of an artwork, either through a gallery or directly out of the artist's studio. The price is based on the artist's exhibition history, sales history (if any), career level, and size of artwork.

© Noelle Mason

MID-SIZED COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Are owner-operated and are able to support some additional staffing. They have a large physical footprint, sometimes more than one gallery space, and have a larger roster of artists with which they work exclusively. That said, these galleries may occasionally invite other artists into group exhibitions. Mid-sized galleries are more likely to work with both primary and secondary market artworks* with prices on artworks up to USD$100,000 on average.

Examples:

+ Flowers Gallery, London, New York, Hong Kong
+ Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco
+ Yossi Milo Gallery, New York

BLUE-CHIP OR MEGA COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Are large, fully staffed spaces with the owner being the figurehead. They will often have galleries in more than one country, each one with a large physical footprint. Mega commercial galleries operate within both the primary and secondary market, working with established and very experienced artists whose artworks are priced accordingly. Some works will sell for six-figures, usually to established collectors.

For the photographer, commercial galleries can be instrumental in building a career as an artist, placing work into important private and public collections, creating an income, as well as developing status and considerable exposure.

Examples:

+ David Zwirner Gallery, New York, Paris, Hong Kong
+ Gagosian Gallery, numerous locations worldwide

* The **SECONDARY MARKET** refers to art that has been sold at least once before, typically by artists who have a substantial reputation. Prices for artworks on the secondary market are determined by factors such as condition, provenance, and the significance of a work within the artist's career.

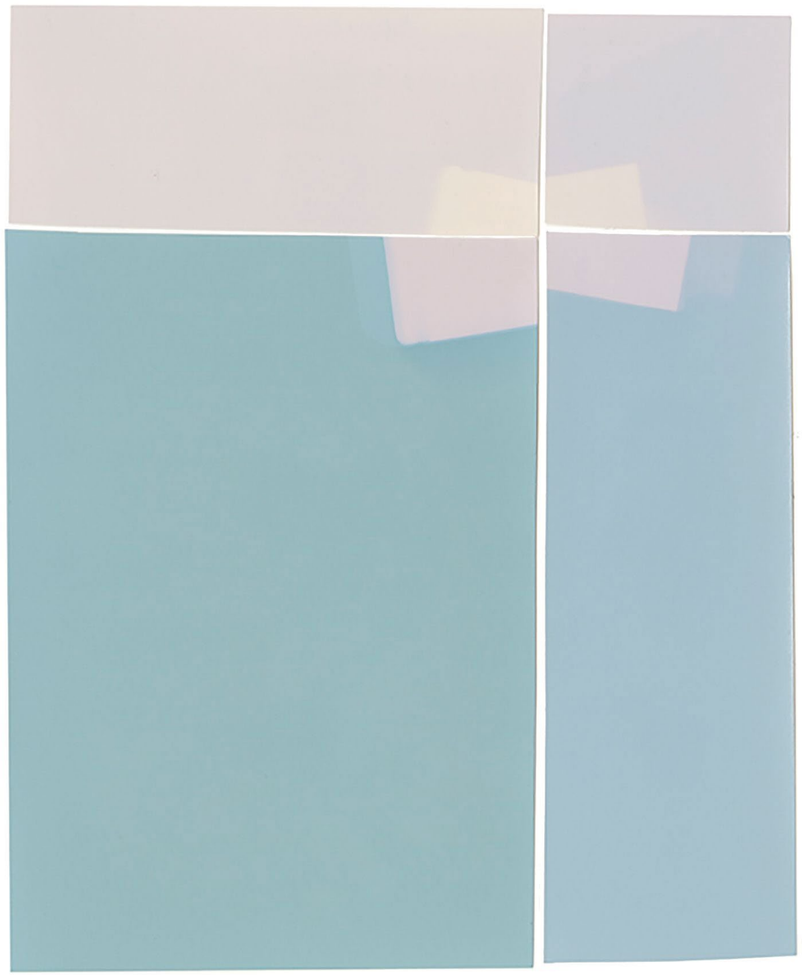
RENTAL GALLERY/VANITY GALLERY

These galleries generate an income by charging exhibiting artists a fee to show their work, rather than focusing on artwork sales. The charges usually come in the form of a flat exhibitor fee or a rental fee based on the space being used and the time period of the exhibition. Vanity galleries are an avenue for new artists to get their name out into the world and gain exhibition experience, however there is little incentive for the gallery to sell work because the artist has paid them upfront.

Suitable for photographers who:

+ want to exhibit their work publicly when other options are not available
+ are willing and able to pay the fees
+ are less concerned with artwork sales
+ would like a high level of involvement in curation

* A **POP-UP EXHIBITION** and/or gallery is when a curator, organization or art dealer rents a space for a short period of time for a one-off exhibition. A pop-up show can take place at a retail space, a rental gallery, or a venue not usually used for exhibitions. Pop-up shows are also a revenue stream for small galleries who decide to rent their space out to other exhibitors for a particular show.



© Amanda Marchand

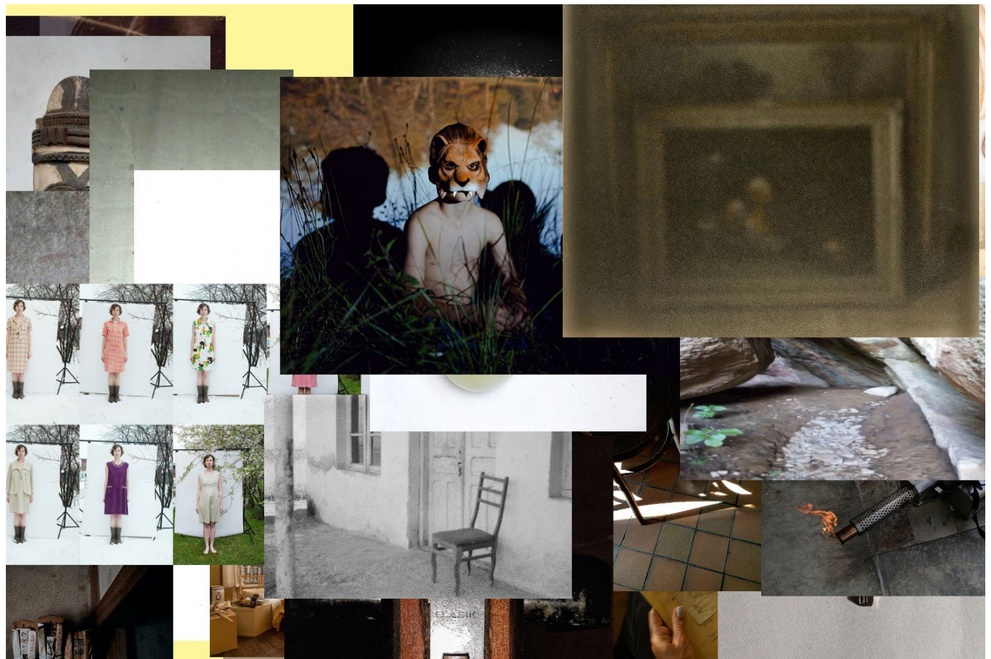
VIRTUAL GALLERY

In more recent times, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, online exhibitions and virtual galleries have become more common in the gallery world. A virtual gallery is an interactive digital space that allows online visitors to explore, learn about and buy exhibited works online, some using advanced 3D technologies. Some virtual galleries are connected and closely represent physical galleries, offering a new avenue for galleries to reach buyers and audiences. Others are digital-only spaces, adding a new type of gallery for photographers to explore for presenting their work. Suitable for photographers interested in innovative ways to reach diverse audiences.

Examples:

+ PH Museum Online Exhibitions
+ Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg
+ BlueThumb Gallery
+ MoMA Virtual Views
+ Galleries Now
+ Museum of Photography Art Online Exhibitions
+ Humble Arts Foundation

READ THE IN-DEPTH ARTICLE



EXPLAINED

Gallery Roles

GALLERY OWNER

The owner of the gallery works directly with clients, collectors and curators to place artworks into homes and collections. They determine who is on the roster based on their vision for the gallery, personal taste, and relationships with the artists, often built over several years.

GALLERY DIRECTOR

The director of the gallery reports to the owner and also interacts directly with clients, collectors, and curators. The gallery director is responsible for sales.

CURATOR

The word curator can be applied to several roles. In some cases, a curator is responsible for creating and executing the vision for an exhibition, including the mounting and installation of the work.

A curator can be an independent contractor, commissioned for a specific exhibition (see our interview with Natasha Christia on page 64), or a museum or non-profit gallery may have a permanent curator on staff. In a museum, a curator is usually responsible for overseeing and interpreting one or more collections for which they have specialized knowledge. Commercial galleries usually do not have a curator.

MARKETING, PRESS AND COMMUNICATIONS

The staff in these roles are responsible for writing and distributing media releases to press, organizing media opportunities for artists, keeping a record of reviews and media coverage, managing social media platforms for the gallery, and many other tasks related to the promotion of a gallery's exhibitions, program, and roster to their audiences.

REGISTRAR

A registrar usually works in a blue-chip gallery, tracking and recording all artworks that move into and out of a gallery.

ART HANDLER

An art handler organizes and handles the physical movement of artworks into and out of the gallery for exhibitions, loans and consignments, as well as movement between storage sites and shipment to clients.

EXPLAINED

Gallery representation



© Alexandra Lethbridge

In the commercial gallery world, exhibiting usually goes hand-in-hand with representation by that gallery, beyond a single exhibition. Gallery representation is a formal relationship between a gallery and an artist. While each partnership works differently, a gallery usually decides to represent an artist with the sole intention of selling their works to buyers, and placing them in museums and collections.

The benefits of representation can be:

+ Increased artwork sales
+ Support for the business and marketing side of your artwork sales
+ Prestige and public endorsement of your work
+ Access to the gallery's clientele of loyal buyers and collectors
+ Introduction to influential people in the industry
+ Overall management/assistance with your art career

How representation works:

Often, but not always, when an artist is represented by a gallery, they are expected to exhibit new work at that gallery on an agreed schedule. The gallery takes a commission from sales generated from that exhibition, as well as sales generated through other gallery activities, such as participation at art fairs or negotiations with private buyers and collectors. Some galleries only offer services within a specific geographic area, which is why you see some artists represented by different galleries in different continents, countries or cities. Sometimes a gallery will only represent a specific project by an artist.

Things to consider:

If you are interested in being represented by a gallery or are already in contact with a gallery that has the potential for representation, gain as much knowledge as you can to make an assessment on whether it is a good fit for you and your work. Consider:

+ the reputation of the gallery
+ the personality and professionalism of the gallerist
+ the alignment of your work, ethics and personality with the gallery
+ the exhibition schedule for represented artists
+ the commission on artwork sales
+ if there is exclusivity for a particular region or country
+ who is responsible for the costs of making the work (printing, framing, mounting)
+ the marketing, promotion efforts, and contacts of the gallery
+ whether the gallery attends art fairs

Like any relationship, trust is vital. Many galleries need to know the artist professionally and personally for years before they are ready to formalize the relationship through representation. Photographers are equally encouraged to take the time to make sure the gallery is right for you. In *Chapter 4: Make Yourself Known*, we discuss some ideas for introducing yourself and your work to galleries, and to start a fruitful relationship with them.

This section was written in consultation with Janelle Lynch, an exhibiting photographic artist represented by Flowers Gallery in London, Robert Morat Galerie in Berlin, and 3 Punts Galería in Barcelona. www.janellelynch.net

EXPERT INSIGHT

On Representation

"First, I'm a cheerleader [for the artists I represent] — I promote and support their efforts. Beyond that, I think each gallerist is different, which is what gives each gallery its distinctive quality. We recently began working with a young artist who is really excited to collaborate with us. When he travels, he asks who we know in each city, and introduces himself. He shows up at fairs and tries to meet as many people as he can, promoting himself and his relationship with us. That's the sort of symbiosis that is helpful; dropping off a pile of work at the gallery, less so. The best scenario is a collaboration between the artist and the gallery, in which everyone benefits."

JANET BORDEN
Janet Borden, Inc, New York

"Photographers need to ask themselves, objectively, if their work has a strong concept and aesthetic, excellent execution of craft, and originality of vision. Are they committed to making new work? Are they ready and able to continue investing in themselves and their work? Is making photographs their primary passion? Do they understand that making the work is only about 50% of the equation? The remaining 50% is about the business of the image: marketing, public relations, record-keeping, fulfilling print orders, etc. One of the biggest misconceptions is that the gallerist will take care of everything. This is not the case; representation is a professional collaboration and should be viewed in that context."

DEBRA KLOMP CHING
Klompching Gallery, New York

EXPERT INSIGHT

On Representation

"A successful photographer/gallerist relationship is dependent upon mutual professional respect and getting along with each other. So, personal relationships are fundamentally crucial. I think the most important thing to consider is whether it's someone you want to be in a long-term (if not lifelong) relationship with. In general, it isn't a good idea to bounce around between dealers. You want someone that you trust and who can be honest with you — someone who will give you the time of day and help you get to the next step in your career."

KAYCEE OLSEN
Art Advisor, Los Angeles

"As far as 'living off the sales' of gallery representation goes, that is very rare. It generally takes a mix of activities for an artist to put together a life that can produce that kind of income. It's not always that the work is not worthy of being purchased and loved. The biggest impediment to the distribution of photography is the overwhelming amount of it that's available, as well as the current market, which lowers the value for a serious artist because of that proliferation."

SUSAN NALBAND
FP3 Gallery, Boston

EXPERT INSIGHT

What are gallerists and curators looking for?

"I look for artists who interest or surprise me, but I'm also drawn to pieces that I would like to have for myself. When you have that feeling, it's easier to convince others of their value too. Timeless subject matter plays a huge part in this. The group of photographers that we represent at the gallery are broad and diverse, and they explore the boundaries of what is considered photography, either digitally or manually. A signature style, authenticity, a good work mentality, and of course, having the eye."

ROY KAHMANN
Kahmann Gallery, Amsterdam

"I am most curious about the motivations of the photographer behind their work. Works that give me a glimpse into the concerns and identities that the photographers align themselves with are extremely important to me. It is difficult to place yourself and your politics within your work, and it takes time, but if a project can put forward that honesty, it brings forward larger questions to me as a curator, on the movements within photography, and what I can add to emphasize the life of the work that the photographer has envisioned."

ANSHIKA VARMA
Independent Curator and Founder, Offset Projects, New Delhi

EXPERT INSIGHT

What are gallerists and curators looking for?

"I like to see new work, and every once in a million times, I get a real jolt from discovering something new. But often, I will need to see it a few times to see how it grows. Besides the work, my relationship with artists is extremely personal. There has to be some chemistry — so that everyone is in it together. It seems that photographers think that looking at new work is a gallerist's job, but that isn't our job. Our job is selling the work we already represent."

JANET BORDEN
Janet Borden, Inc, New York

"First and foremost, their work has to speak to me. It has to be aligned with my research field. It has to provoke curiosity within me, make me feel that there is a lot to dig in and try out. Besides the specific project or work, I have to be intrigued by the intellectual and human exchange with the artist in question; there must be a field of shared values and questions about the world that will stimulate us both, and enough openness to be able to try out new things together."

NATASHA CHRISTIA
Unaffiliated Curator, Writer and Educator, Barcelona

EXPERT INSIGHT

Misconceptions about galleries

"One of the misconceptions photographers have about galleries is that if they don't get an exhibition immediately, we are not interested in the work. Sometimes we look at a photographer's work, fall in love with it, but there is no place on our curatorial calendar to give them an exhibition. In some cases, we contact an artist five years after we see them for representation and a show. Patience is really important in this field."

DEBRA KLOMP CHING
Klompching Gallery, New York

"With practitioners who are young to the medium, the gallery space can often seem very imposing. Do not be overwhelmed by its presence — embrace it but also be critical of it. Photographers often begin to alter their work or practice to suit a gallery or curatorial call, which can be very dangerous. Remember that you are the author of your work, and the way in which you put it forward is a reflection of who you are. Allow your work to be interpreted by different curatorial perspectives, but this should not change what your work is — question, speak and communicate if you have concerns."

ANSHIKA VARMA
Independent Curator and Founder, Offset Projects, New Delhi

EXPERT INSIGHT

Misconceptions about galleries

"There are many misconceptions people have around galleries. One of the most difficult to contend with is the belief that galleries make a lot of money. Although it is true that some gallery owners are wealthy, it's typically not a result of running that space."

MICHAEL DOONEY
Jarvis Dooney Galerie, Berlin

"I have observed a mistrust towards galleries, and some photographers question whether they should allow galleries to acquire a percentage of their work when there are opportunities to sell the work themselves. My answer to that is: this type of arrangement happens in every sector. Galleries and the people working within them are professionals in their field, and an essential part of the chain. They are not just commercial mediators — they can also be communicators and mentors."

NATASHA CHRISTIA
Unaffiliated Curator, Writer and Educator, Barcelona

TASK 02: GALLERY RESEARCH - PART I

Now that you know a little more about the anatomy of the art gallery world and the roles within it, it's time to do some desktop research and identify some spaces that are suitable for your work and reaching your audience. Use the prompts below to guide your research.
Your aim is to build a list of possible galleries that would be a good match.

TASK 02: GALLERY RESEARCH - PART I

01. Identify Galleries

Finding galleries can feel like a daunting task at first, but it can be helpful to think about it as detective work — one piece of information can lead to another, and so on. If you have professional photography friends and connections, have a chat with them to see if they can share any names of galleries with you. You could also start with a broad online search—for example, 'commercial photography gallery in Boston'—or speak to your local municipal council, who might have a list of galleries available in the arts and culture section of their website, or information available via their customer service team. In bigger cities, you might be able to find lists or databases online, or listings for weekly openings happening in your area, giving you a list of gallery names to explore. To research from a different angle, you could look at the websites of photographers in the area who have similar work to yours to see if they have any gallery exhibitions listed on their CV.

There are many different ways to start building a list of galleries in your area or your interest area. It can be helpful to start looking locally first, as these galleries are the ones you will be able to visit in person *(see Chapter 4: Make Yourself Known)* and are likely to be the galleries that are interested in exhibiting local emerging artists without much exhibition history.

02. Assess Galleries

When you find a gallery that you feel might be suitable for your work, your next job is to find out as much as you can about that gallery. Information-gathering and research, both desktop and in person, are key in determining if you've found a possible match for your work.

What type of work does the gallery show?

Is there a theme that defines the program? Do they only work with local artists? Do they only show a particular type of photography, or do they show a range of different types of art, including photography?

TASK 02: GALLERY RESEARCH - PART I

What can you find out about the artists who exhibit at the gallery?

What is their level of experience? What kind of work do they make? See what information you can find out through the details presented on their website, in addition to the information on the individual artists' website. Can you see yourself being a part of this group? Is your experience similar?

How does the gallery participate in the wider community?

Do they attend art fairs, or industry and community events?

What kind of reputation does the gallery have in the community?

Can you ask the opinions of others in your community?

What staff roles exist at the gallery, and who is currently in those positions?

+ Check the gallery website, search online for media mentions, or explore LinkedIn.
+ Are there media interviews with those people?
+ What kind of work are they interested in?

Based on the information you have gathered, do you feel this gallery is a good match for your work?

Is it a good match for you right now, or something to work towards for the future? If so, great! You can add them to your list of potential galleries to approach. If not, your research with this particular gallery is done and you can move on to find other alternatives.



Revelation through Collaboration

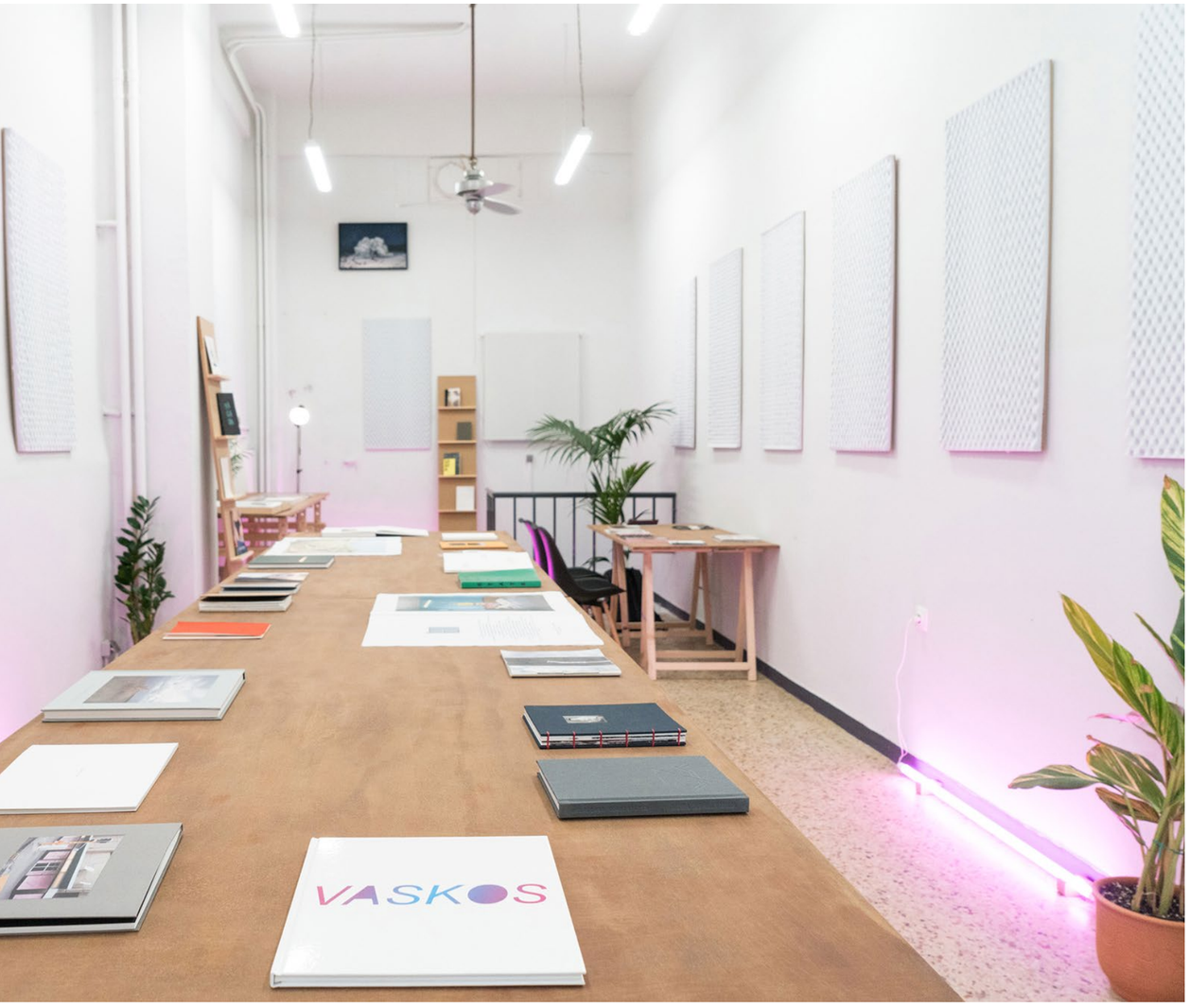
INTERVIEW WITH ZOETROPE

Zoetrope is an artist-run space in the Athens neighbourhood of Kypseli, founded by Alexandra Saliba and Yorgos Yatromanolakis. Rather than organizing classical exhibitions of artists' work, Zoetrope invites all kinds of creators to pitch novel projects, including workshops, demonstrations, reading groups and, most recently, a radio show. In this conversation, they speak about the necessity for artists to have an alternative outlet outside of traditional gallery settings.

LensCulture: I think of book-making and photobooks as the foundation of Zoetrope. How did each of you get into photography and book-making, and how did this shape your ideas behind Zoetrope?

Yorgos Yatromanolakis: Photography and photobooks are interrelated concepts in my artistic practice. We were always enthusiastic about book-making and we would devote our time looking at books, doing research and having never-ending conversations, so it was natural to start developing Zoetrope around photobooks and book-making while bringing together a dynamic community of emerging book-makers.

Alexandra Saliba: I am a documentary filmmaker with a background in cultural studies and visual arts, and I got into book-making because it felt like an expanded form of filmmaking. Two years ago, when Yorgos and I were both working on our books, we realized that self-publishing was a growing practice in Greece, and while many photobook makers were becoming increasingly engaged in exploring and discovering new tools and manifesting new methods of artistic expression, they remained invisible, or with limited exposure. We wanted to create a space that fostered opportunities for self-published photographers to show and share their work. When we opened Zoetrope, our first exhibition, titled *Plateau 034*, consisted of Greek self-published photobooks, and that's when we started mapping this network.



Yorgos: We didn't want to create a traditional exhibition event—we wanted to open up a dialogue between self-publishers and other people who work with books, like typographers, designers, and book-binders. We wanted to map out their needs while thinking of solutions for self-publishers. From the moment we started, we felt the need to run the exhibition collaboratively, so we brought together a number of photographers, researchers, and book-makers to open up a dialogue from different perspectives.

Alexandra: In general, we prefer to be as inclusive as possible. We didn't want it to just be Yorgos and myself selecting twenty books to be shown. It was very important for us to have a curatorial team made up of people from different backgrounds and disciplines. We wanted to create momentum, and we wanted to ignite a community of self-publishers, and this was part of it.

LensCulture: Your programming stands out in comparison to other galleries and spaces because its core is rooted in interaction and curiosity, rather than standing back and quietly observing prints on display. Why do you think this is an important approach?

Yorgos: This is Zoetrope's main priority; we always thought of it as an archival project in the sense that everything we do should somehow leave a minimal trace instead of popping up and disappearing. We wanted to make projects in our space, but we also wanted to exchange experience and knowledge within it. Most importantly, we wanted people to do all of those things together.

Alexandra: One of the things that we discussed when we were thinking about creating Zoetrope was how we could open up the photographic community of Athens, because we felt that photographers were quite isolated from other communities. As Yorgos mentioned, we wanted it to be an artist-run space in its essence, but we didn't want it to feel distinctly like its own solitary entity. To be honest, to this day we don't know what Zoetrope is, because it is constantly in a state of becoming and re-definition. People are invited to take part in and shape its identity, and that is why we encourage people to interact with the community, engaging in dialogues, topics and issues that are really critical—connecting with global issues, but also connecting with the realities of Kypseli, the neighbourhood where we are based.

Yorgos: We are far more interested in people showing their works-in-progress than a completed project, running workshops and dialogues so that different people can have conversations about projects from a bunch of different backgrounds and perspectives.

LensCulture: Can you tell me about the library you created in your space?

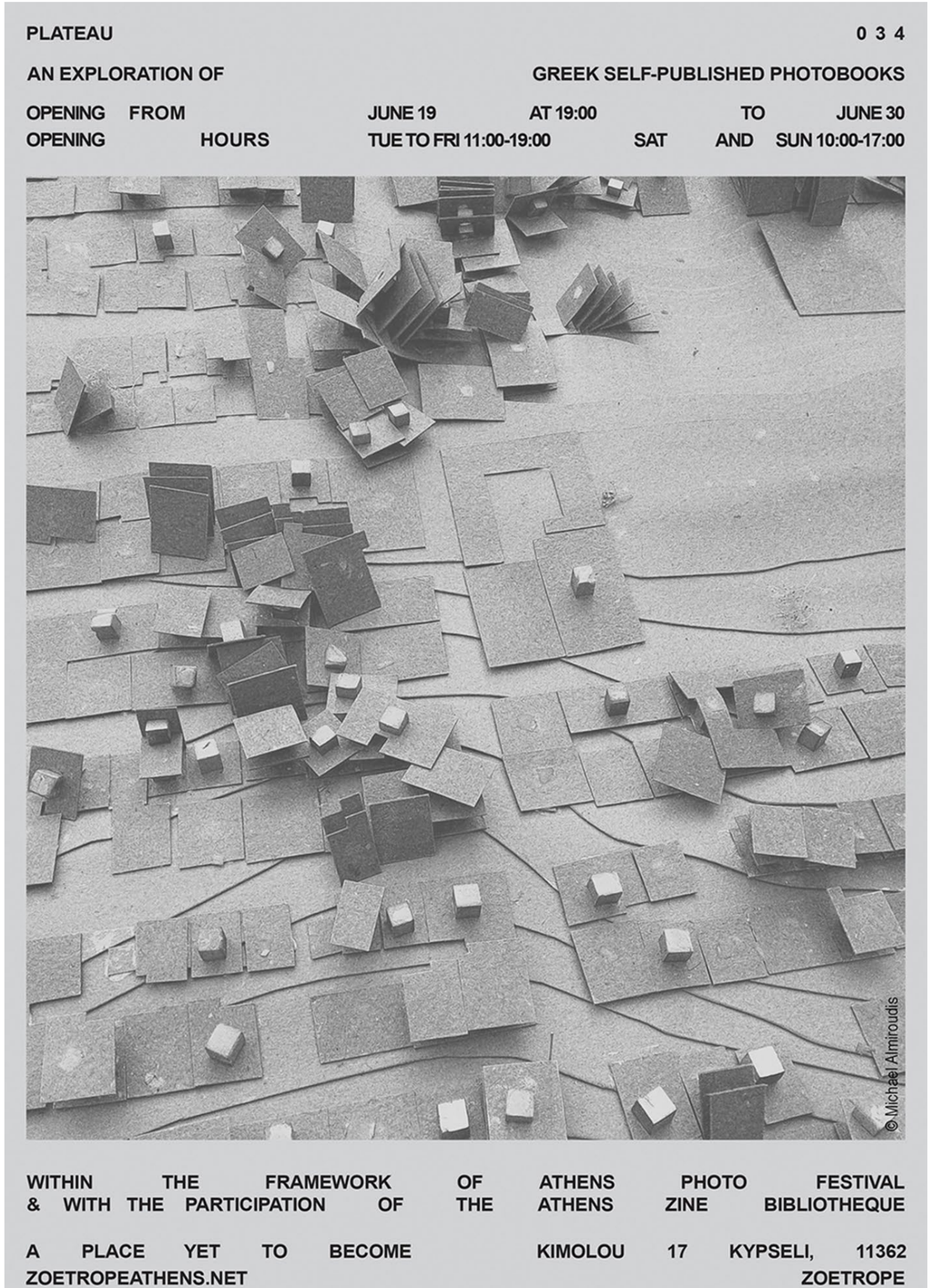
Alexandra: We quickly realized during our first exhibition that there aren't any open libraries where you can find Greek self-published photobooks, and we also realized that most small-run books are hidden away in drawers, in houses, or in private collections. We wanted to create an opportunity for self-publishers to share their work with the Greek audience, so we thought it would be nice to create a physical space of reference. We kicked things off with an exhibition, where at least 600 people showed up, which is not a small number for such a small space, and many people outside of the photographic community visited. They were so impressed by the selections in the curation, the materials, and the content, and we considered it our responsibility to go a step further by creating this space and making these books visible to a wider audience.

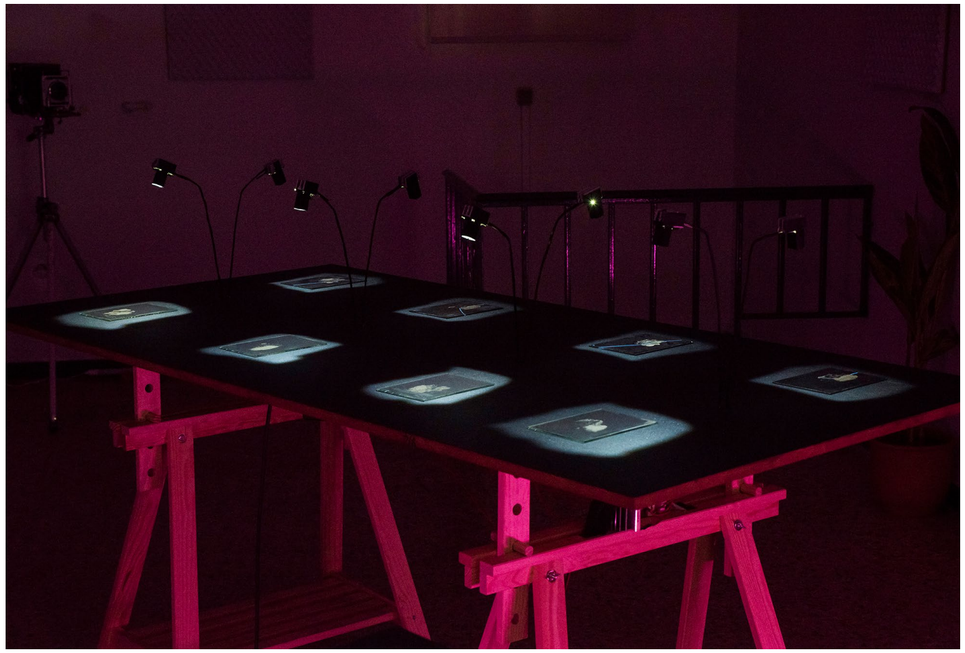
Yorgos: It is very difficult to find some of these books if you don't already know that they exist, or if you do not know the author personally, so they simply weren't accessible. Since the exhibition, curators and researchers from abroad ask to visit the space and look at the books, so it really has become a point of reference. For us, it isn't just a library—it's more like a project. We believe that the concept of the photobook in Greece is a relatively new phenomenon, and it will grow, so we will grow together, and we hope that we will make a bigger library in the coming years.

LensCulture: Aside from the library, what is your favourite type of programming that you put together?

Alexandra: We really enjoy working with communities. We are interested in how we can cultivate circumstances and opportunities for dialogue and social transformation through artistic practices and actions. For example, one of my favourite upcoming programs was submitted through our open call by German artist Karl Heinz Jeron, who works in media practices. He proposed the creation of a DIY pirate radio station, and will invite people from the diverse community of Kypseli to produce their own content. This will result in a location-based radio broadcast for a city walk so that people can tune in to the frequency of the station and listen to the content. To be honest, we feel awkward when we get proposals from artists who simply want to show their finished work. We are not a traditional gallery—we don't really understand how to put something like that together.

Yorgos: We have received a number of proposals that are typical in this way, where people want to make a solo exhibition with frames and flat prints—without encouraging any kind of interaction—and we wonder: why would they want to do that here? Most importantly, we can't support it, because if you are a traditional gallerist, you have direct access to collectors and buyers, which is a network that we don't really have and are not interested in developing. I love the programming we do where people work with alternative developing and printing processes, because all of these little things have a way of bringing people together. I have never worked at a collaborative studio before, and I like knowing that we have a space where we can bring artists together to share their knowledge with each other and work through things together.







Alexandra: I think an important dimension of making work is breaking down the established art practices to find new methods, and working with people who are eager to share and learn these practices. We don't want to be yet another artist-run space. We want to grow roots and we want to become part of our local network, and as a space we participate in many local initiatives. Kypseli contains an art scene full of people of colour from around the world; it's a community of people who see art in the same way as us, and they see how things can evolve, how we can be more inclusive, and how we can be more fair.

Yorgos: And it's not just artists. It's also about merging political views, organization, and community, so we don't feel like we are alone. We feel like we are part of something bigger.

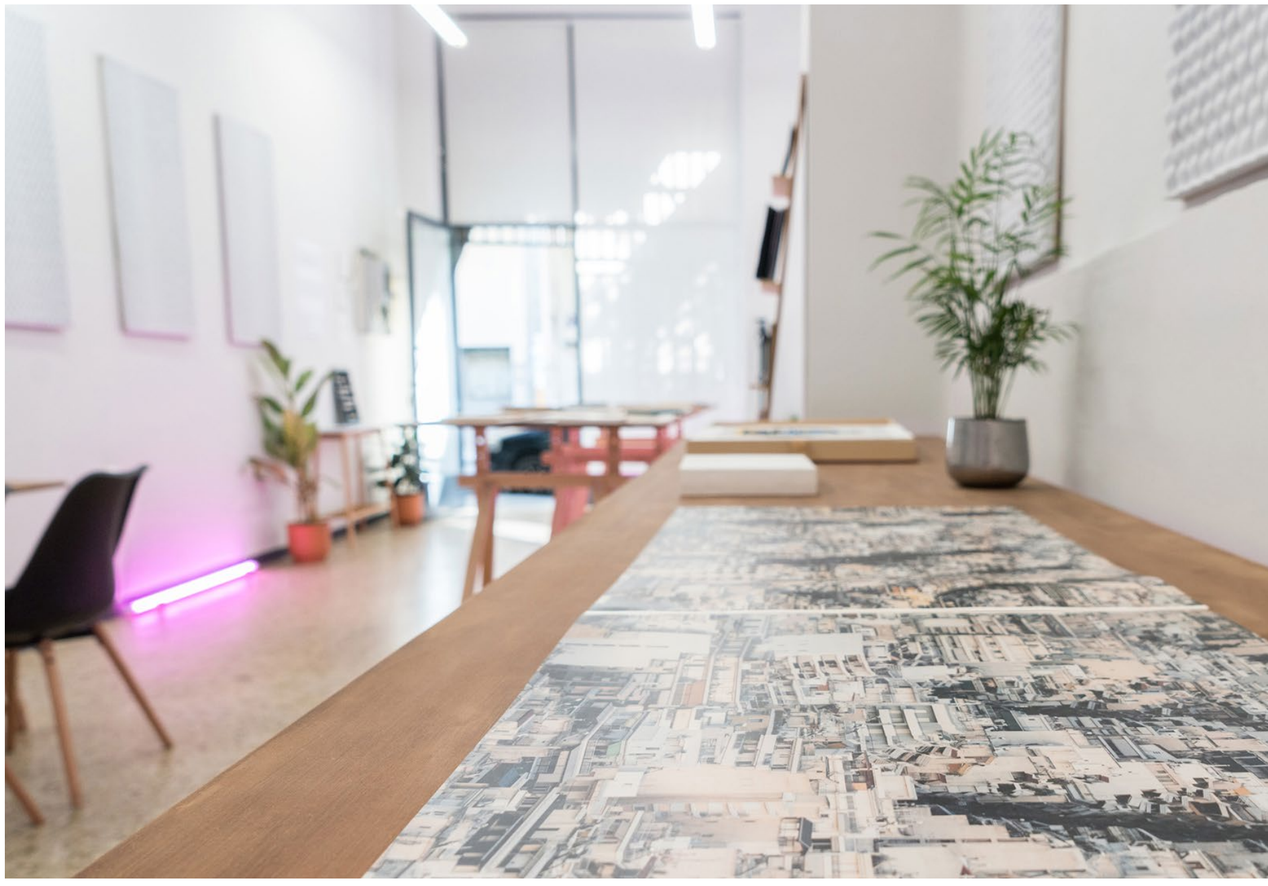
LensCulture: Moving forward, what are the ways you hope to use this space, and what are the biggest lessons you have learned through opening Zoetrope?

Yorgos: First of all, I think that we make mistakes every day. But we always make something out of them. When we opened the space, we had no plans for how this would work. I think that we were very optimistic, and actually romanticized the idea—but we still try to keep that energy going. We didn't know how many hours a day we would have to be there, or how Zoetrope would become sustainable. It was an improvisation.

Alexandra: A traditional gallery has a really clear stature and purpose, but Zoetrope is constantly waiting to be discovered, resisting a fixed identity and remaining fluid. In terms of sustainability, it is very hard for us, because we have to organize things differently to create these spaces of opportunity and dialogue. It takes a lot of our energy. But there is this urgency to change things. Urgency is a key word. It's the urgency to create a library with Greek photobooks; the urgency to create an open photographic community; the urgency to experiment with other artists; the urgency to bridge artistic communities with social and political communities. What we earn from Zoetrope is this pleasure of meeting new people, and the joy of experimenting and discovering new possibilities and ways of making things happen with others.

Yorgos: And I think what keeps us going is the fact that we have a lot of love and support from and for the community. We can also act as a bridge between communities and institutions, including festivals and museums, finding ways to work with these classical spaces, but integrating our own methodology—and this is very important.

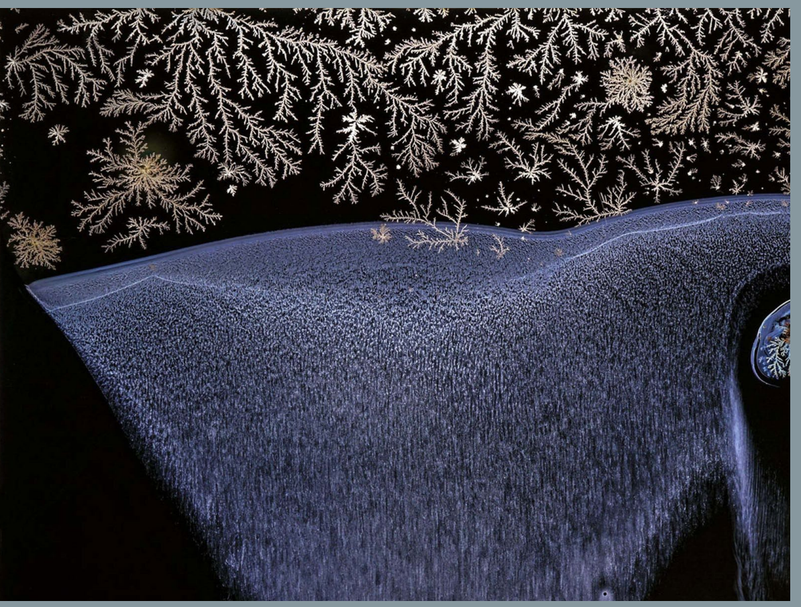
—Interview by Cat Lachowskyj







INTERVIEW WITH CATHERINE EDELMAN



What Is Art Photography?

Debuting with the *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* by Nan Goldin in 1987, Catherine Edelman Gallery has been a leader in the fine art world for more than thirty years. Gallery founder and owner Catherine Edelman is well-versed in the myriad forms that art photography can take, and in this conversation she offers advice to photographers on how to approach a gallery.

COVER IMAGES: LEFT: Waterfalls #6230, 2018. © Michael Koerner / Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago. MIDDLE: Emerge, 2017 © Clarissa Bonet / Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago. RIGHT: Harvest, 1984. © Joel-Peter Witkin / Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago

LensCulture: Your gallery has been open for 30 years, and I would imagine the way you source work has changed a lot. How do you find new work? How do you stay up to date?

Catherine Edelman: When I first started, the only option was to sit at bookstores and comb through all the books, which I used to do every Sunday and Monday. When the gallery opened, I didn't even have a computer. That's how much things have changed. Since then, Facebook and Instagram have been our go-to sources for finding new photographers. In some ways, I don't think many photographers are using Instagram properly. Some are, and they use it for PR. That's smart. But I don't want to see your morning coffee; I don't want to see your dog. Save that for your personal account. Show me what you're working on; show me your process. Show me what you're inspired by and excited about.

LensCulture: What kind of work are you interested in discovering now, and has that interest changed at all over 30 years of running a gallery?

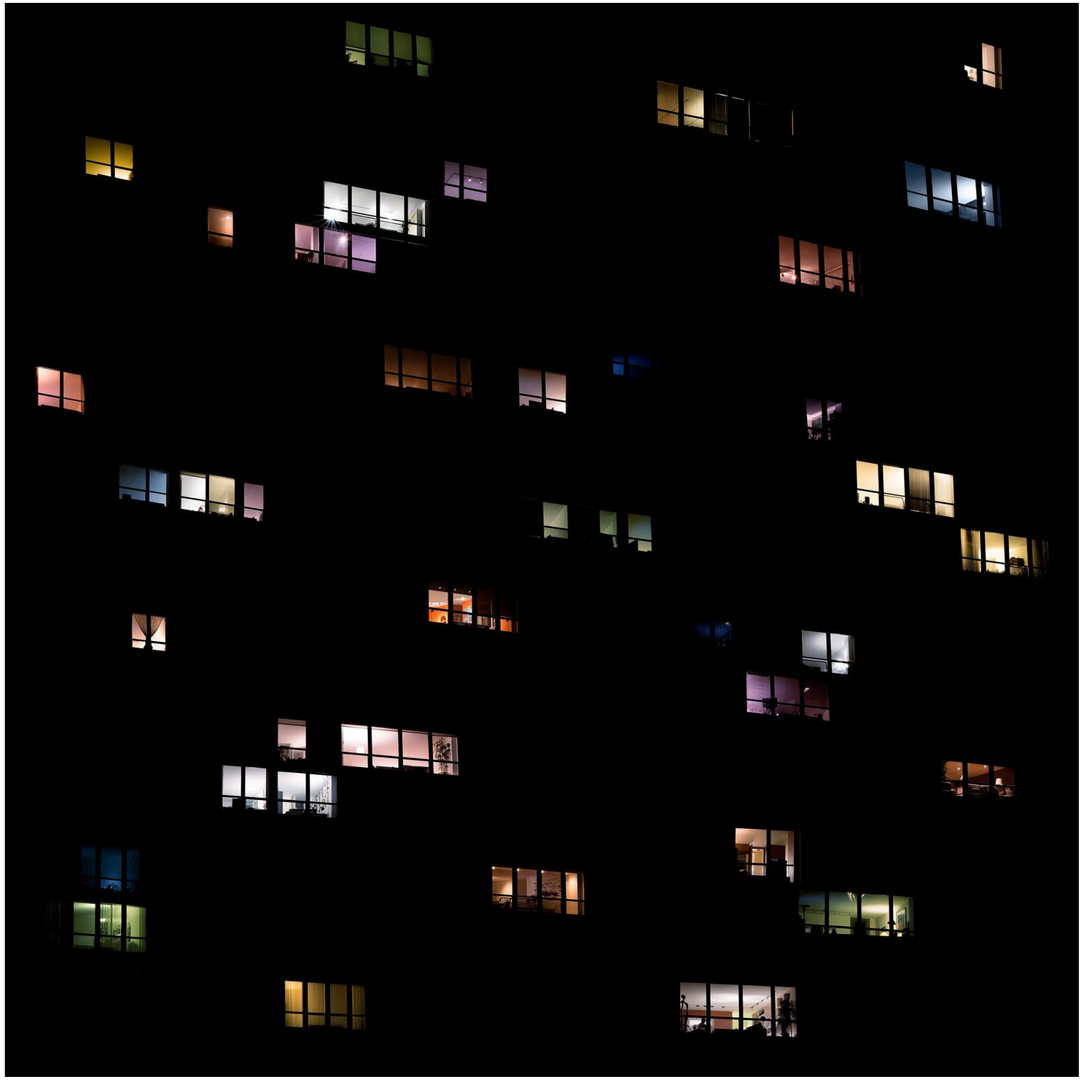
Catherine: Right now I'm very interested in political work that has meaning—work where people who are affected by a crisis are doing the talking, as opposed to photographers going in, making work, and then leaving. I was a very political youngster. Very political and a bit angry. And now, with age, I'm not angry, but I understand the power that photographs can have, and I don't see it being used properly. So I want to support photographers that are dedicated to their subject, whether that means a group of people or a topic.

LensCulture: Did you always intend to show such diverse work at your gallery? Nan Goldin, Susan Meiselas, Michael Kenna...

Catherine: Well, when I started the gallery, it was very important to me that I start with a stance. As I mentioned, I was very political back then, and I was very young. I was 25 when I opened the gallery, and it was important that I opened with a show that would set the course for what the gallery was going to look like. Nan Goldin was an obvious choice. We went through hell together to put on that show, but it really set the stage. After that, I did political show after political show, just to build up the gallery. I think it's important to stick to your guns. My name's on the door of the gallery. It's not "Chicago Photography Gallery"—it's Catherine Edelman Gallery. It's my name, and so I have to (for lack of a better term) live or die by the work I show. When I opened, maybe I was too young or naive to be aware of that.

LensCulture: When you're looking for artists to represent, what qualities are important to you?

Catherine: I look for people who are passionate, and who make work because they have to, not because they're thinking about sales. Sometimes, I think, the sales mentality gets in the way. If you're too focused on the money, it dilutes the core of what makes your art powerful.



SL.2018.0222 Chicago, 2018 © Clarissa Bonet / Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago



Untitled, 2015 from the series "Live, Love, Refugee" © Omar Imam / Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago

LensCulture: I think about the flood of images a lot—in particular how it affects work by emerging artists. Do you think young artists look at too much work these days? Is part of the problem that they get distracted and they aren't sure which direction or style to pursue?

Catherine: I think young artists are eager to make a name too fast. I call it the Yale Effect. They all want to be Katy Grannan instantly, and that's a rare thing. I would encourage younger artists to relax and make work and not worry about the fame and the fortune. A lot of artists are too aggressive; they don't understand how to interact with someone without it being about them. Some photographers need to learn that when I ask, "Hi, how are you?" I'm not interested in a sales pitch. I can look at your work and tell you almost immediately if I'm interested or not. Self promotion is tricky. When I walk around, I don't tell every person I meet, "I'm Catherine Edelman and I have a gallery in Chicago and I'd love to show you the work I represent." But that's what a lot of artists end up doing, and they don't understand how difficult that is for the people around them! You need to be respectful and follow up when you're offered an opportunity.



LensCulture: Finally, what advice would you offer to people who want to catch your eye?

Catherine: I would say, being personable is half the battle. When I meet someone and enjoy having a conversation with them, that's when I'll take a moment to look up their work. Because for me, it all has to be there: you have to have a vision, the work has to be powerful, it has to have deep meaning, and I have to enjoy working with you.

— Excerpt from an interview by Coralie Kraft

Above the Abreuvoir, France, 1996 © Michael Kenna / Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago







INTERVIEW KLOMPCHING GALLERY

Inside a New York City Gallery

Debra Klomp Ching is the co-founder and director of Klompching Gallery in New York. The gallery's exceptional exhibitions have earned reviews in prestigious publications including *The New Yorker, Art Review,* and the *Wall Street Journal*, to name a few. Debra has been an art dealer and gallery owner in New York for more than a decade, and she has more than twenty years of curatorial experience. She shares her advice for photographers in this generous interview.

COVER IMAGES: LEFT: Develop Before 03/1990 (Kodacolor Gold 200) (2014-2015) © Odette England/courtesy Klompching Gallery, New York. MIDDLE: Becoming Forest No. 1 (2017) © Helen Sear/courtesy Klompching Gallery, New York. RIGHT: Herero Woman in Patchwork Dress (2012) © Jim Naughten/courtesy Klompching Gallery, New York.

LensCulture: How did you become interested in starting a gallery? What do you like best about your role as a gallerist?

Debra Klomp Ching: I've been involved with photography since the late 1980s in various capacities—it was one of my ambitions for quite some time to own a gallery. I was particularly interested in exhibiting and selling photographs, specifically. When I relocated to New York from the UK in 2006, the circumstances and timing allowed me to fulfill that goal.

I really enjoy the curation process, which I undertake in collaboration with Darren Ching (co-owner of the gallery). It's a wonderful opportunity to employ our creativity, knowledge and expertise. A good deal of debate and discussion always ensues, resulting in exhibitions that present both the photographer's and our vision well! Selling the photographs and placing them into good homes and collections is always immensely rewarding—especially when you've worked with a client and introduced them to artists that are new to them. Additionally, something that provides enduring satisfaction is the legacy that's created through placing artworks into museum collections.

LensCulture:: If a gallery agrees to look at a photographer's work, how should they prepare for the meeting?

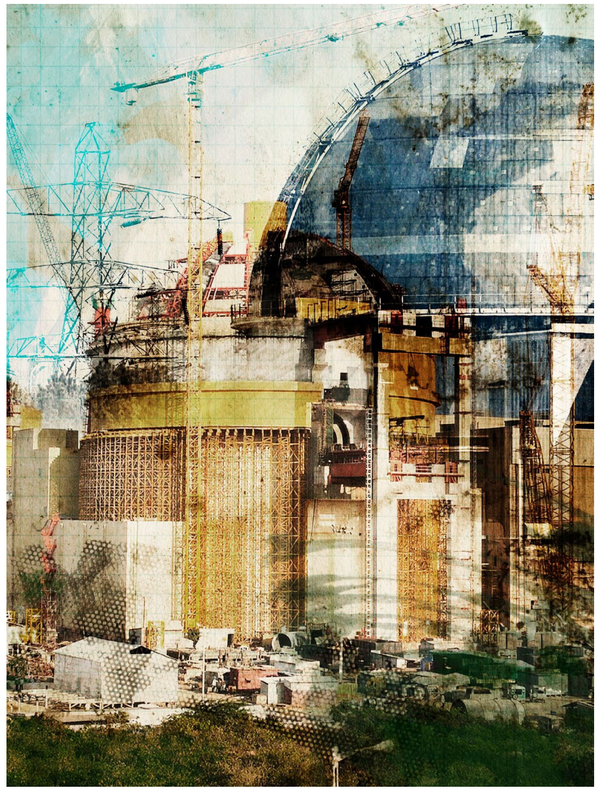
Debra: Treat the meeting like you would any other business meeting. Be professional and on time. Bring only the amount of photographs that you can reasonably show within the allotted time. Be flexible regarding the outcome of the meeting—the gallerist may not make any decisions on the spot. Transparency is important, meaning: if you're showing your work to multiple gallerists, be open about this, but be clear about your reasons for speaking with the particular gallerist you're meeting with.

Ensure you bring a quality portfolio of photographs to the meeting: well-edited and—this is important—printed to the standard you would if you were exhibiting or selling them. Gallerists don't just sell images—they sell physical objects and will evaluate you on this. Be prepared to leave the portfolio behind if the gallerist asks.



05.18.09 (2009) © Cornelia Hediger/courtesy Klompching Gallery, New York





LEFT: On Ripeness and Rot #14 (2013) © Kimberly Witham/courtesy Klompching Gallery, New York.
RIGHT: © Max de Esteban/courtesy Klompching Gallery, New York.

LensCulture: Is there anything photographers should steadfastly avoid when it comes to presentation or approaching you?

Debra: I remember this one time, when we were hosting an opening reception for one of our artists, I was approached by a photographer—whom I'd never met—who forcefully suggested that I look at their portfolio of work, which they had tucked under their arm. This was rude, presumptuous and a total misunderstanding of basic etiquette. Don't promote your own work at another photographer's opening reception.

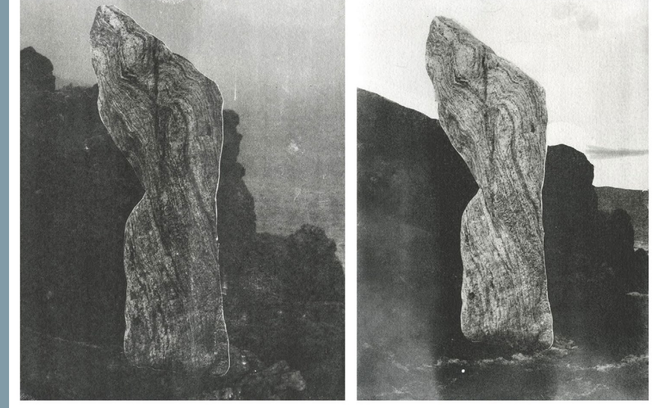
LensCulture: What do you wish more photographers understood about presenting their work to you?

Debra: A common error of judgement is not always understanding the importance and value of a quality-printed portfolio of photographs. There's not much point in presenting poorly-printed photographs on a paper that the work will ultimately not be printed on. It's fundamentally important to demonstrate what the gallerist can expect to be working with—down to the quality of print and the specific paper.

If photographers have limited resources for presenting themselves and their work, I recommend prioritizing the portfolio of photographs above other assets. The business cards, catalogues, and leave-behinds are important, but secondary to the portfolio. It seems obvious, but it bears repeating: nothing is more important than the photography itself.

— Excerpt of an interview by Coralie Kraft







Virtual Exhibitions: Digital Spaces, Open Possibilities

IMAGE LEFT:© Asiko Artist. MIDDLE © Silvia De Giorgi. RIGHT © Adriane de Souza

The move to digital exhibition formats has been a long time coming. Online display has taken on many forms, with new ways of connecting and sharing seemingly blossoming overnight. There was always a sense of the next challenge: the transition from online presentations to physical exhibitions.

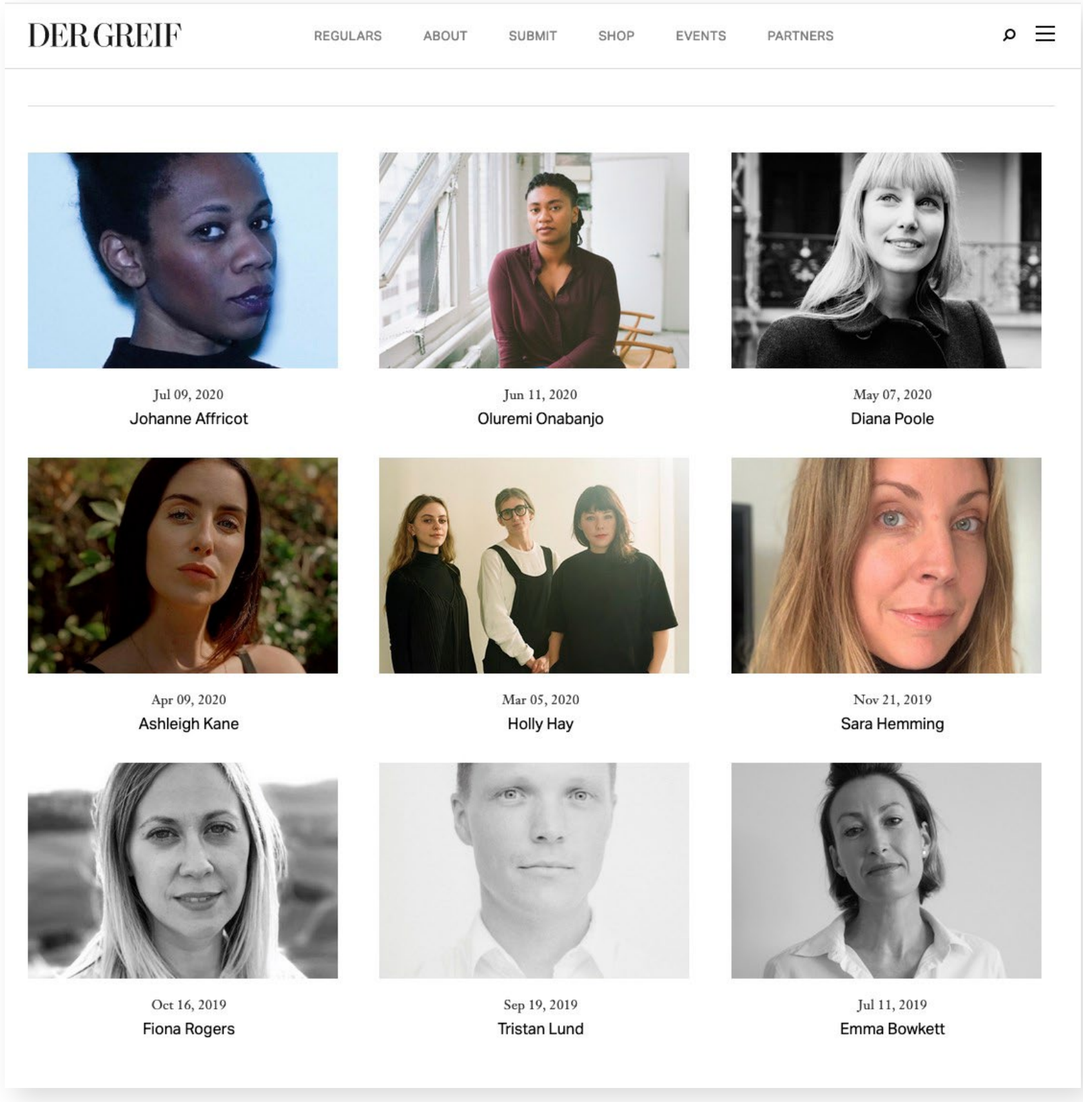
This time, of course, is different. In the light of a global pandemic, artists, curators, and institutions are turning to the internet to explore new ways of exhibiting online, both for the short term as well as the long. As many trends in the art world go, one size doesn't necessarily fit all, but a common theme of engagement runs through these formats: relating and meeting audiences where they are. In thinking of how one, as a photographer, can not only relate to these shifts, but also apply them to one's own work, it is worth looking at their various forms, benefits, and challenges.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY: THE ONLINE GROUP SHOW

One of the best places to start in showing work online, and broadening your community, is through group shows. This style of exhibition, for an online audience, is tried and true. Through open calls or open submission policies, group shows provide access to a wealth of editors, curators, and other photographers. In submitting work, it is important to consider where one is sharing it and what it is; by doing the research and submitting targeted, appropriate work one will find more success. The ease in submitting online can cause some photographers to pursue a scattershot approach. From a professional standpoint, this can be a problem, twisting and contorting one's work to fit any theme is a strategy bound to fail in the long run. Truly considering where your work ends up will lead to greater gains in connections and exposure.

Example:

Der Greif's 'Guest Rooms' — monthly open submission exhibitions around a theme curated by industry professionals.



AN ENDLESS REACH: THE ONLINE EXHIBITION

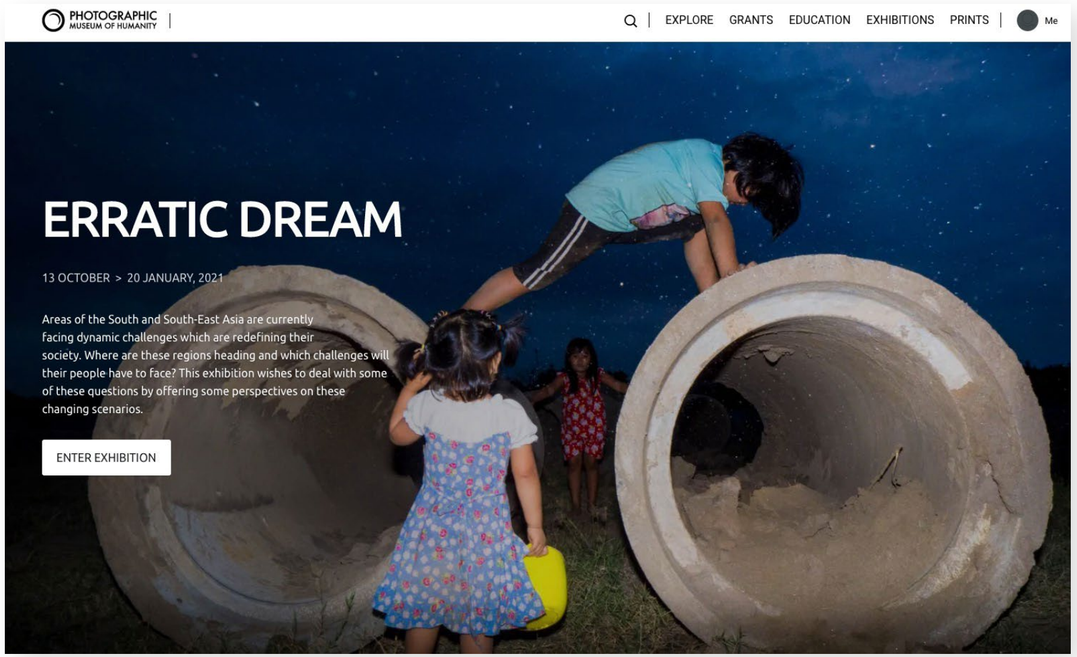
For gallerists and curators, the online show has some fundamental benefits: it offers a reach that a physical exhibition cannot. The cost of shipping, installation, and on-site insurance can all be minimized—if not completely canceled—since work is not being transported. Online exhibitions are also used by gallerists and curators to discover new talent in a synthesized, organized fashion.

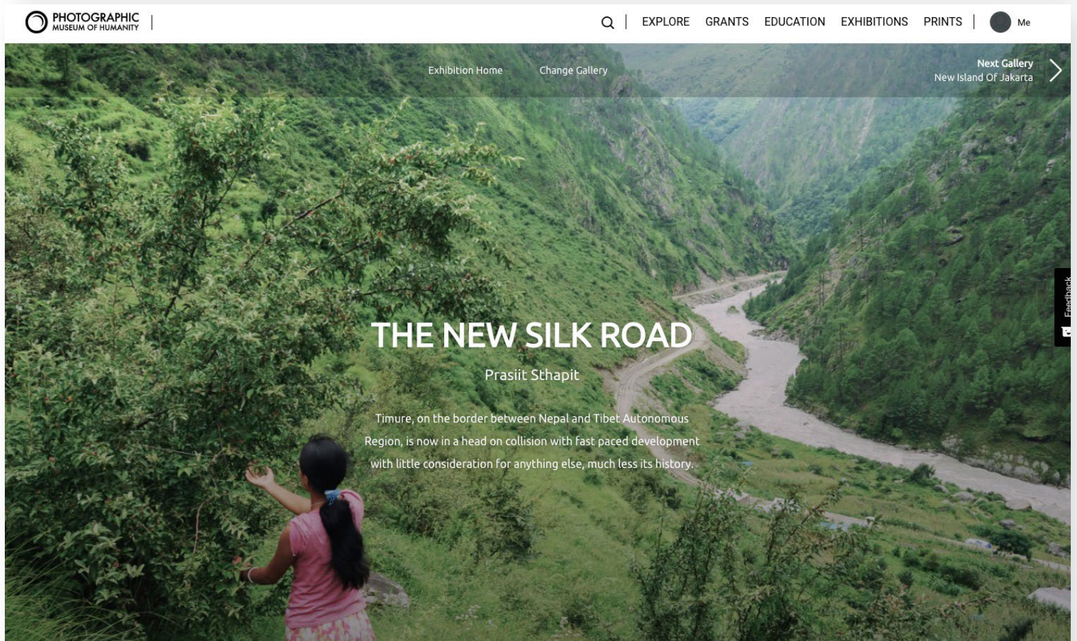
Example:

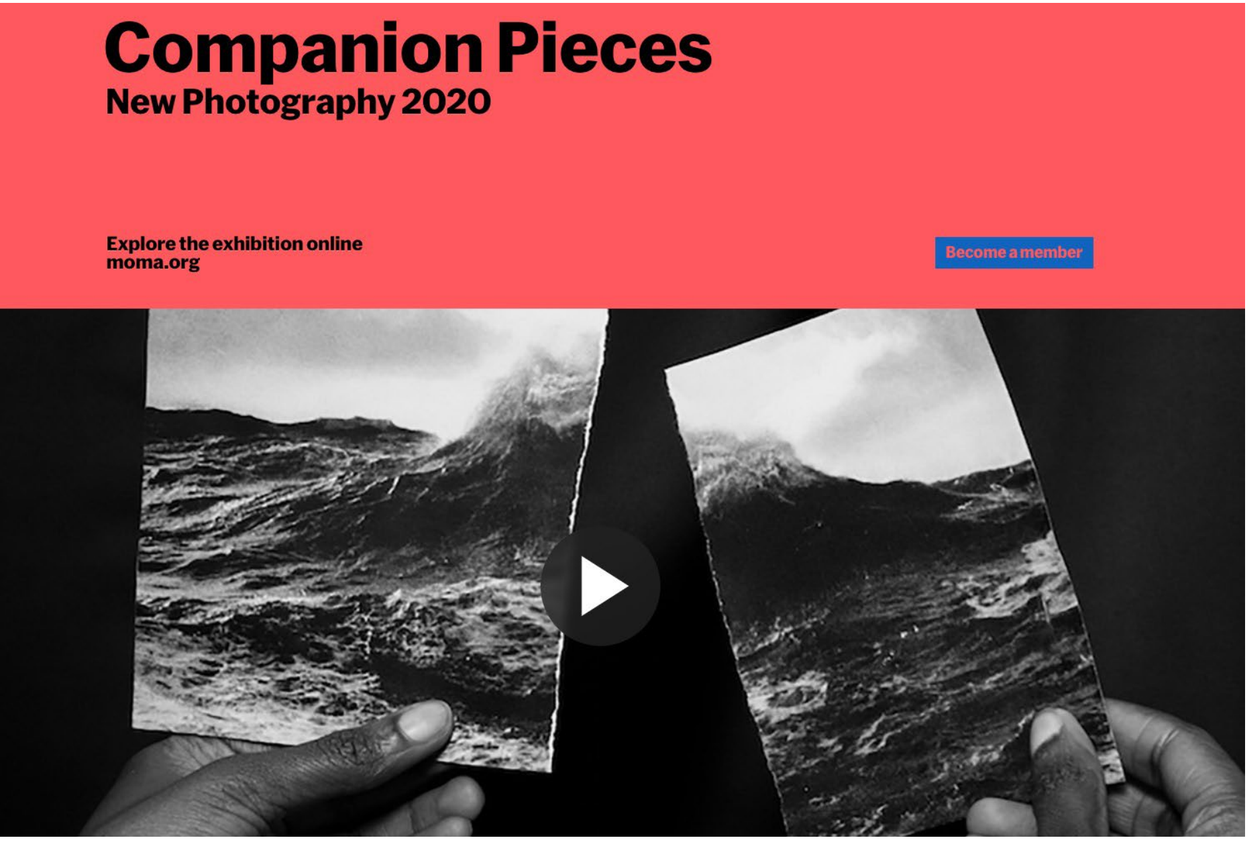
PHMuseum — curated online platform for contemporary photography.

"Having an online show can help artists reach a large, new and diverse audience, taking advantage of the host's network and its partners."

ROCCO VENEZIA, CURATOR







AN EXPANDED VIEW: THE ONLINE MUSEUM EXHIBITION

One of the strengths of online exhibitions is this ability to include additional material. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, despite reopening to visitors, has a robust online exhibition and programming arm, offering videos, curatorial talks, and virtual viewings. In working within a week-by-week format, the museum created a hook—they told viewers to come back for more. With this format, anticipation is built in, separating these photographs from the mass of images online. In the way a gallery exhibition puts emphasis on a press preview and opening, MoMA's online shows create multiple openings—and multiple deepenings—of the work. In pitching an online show, photographers should consider programming to extend the reach and depth of their exhibition.

Example

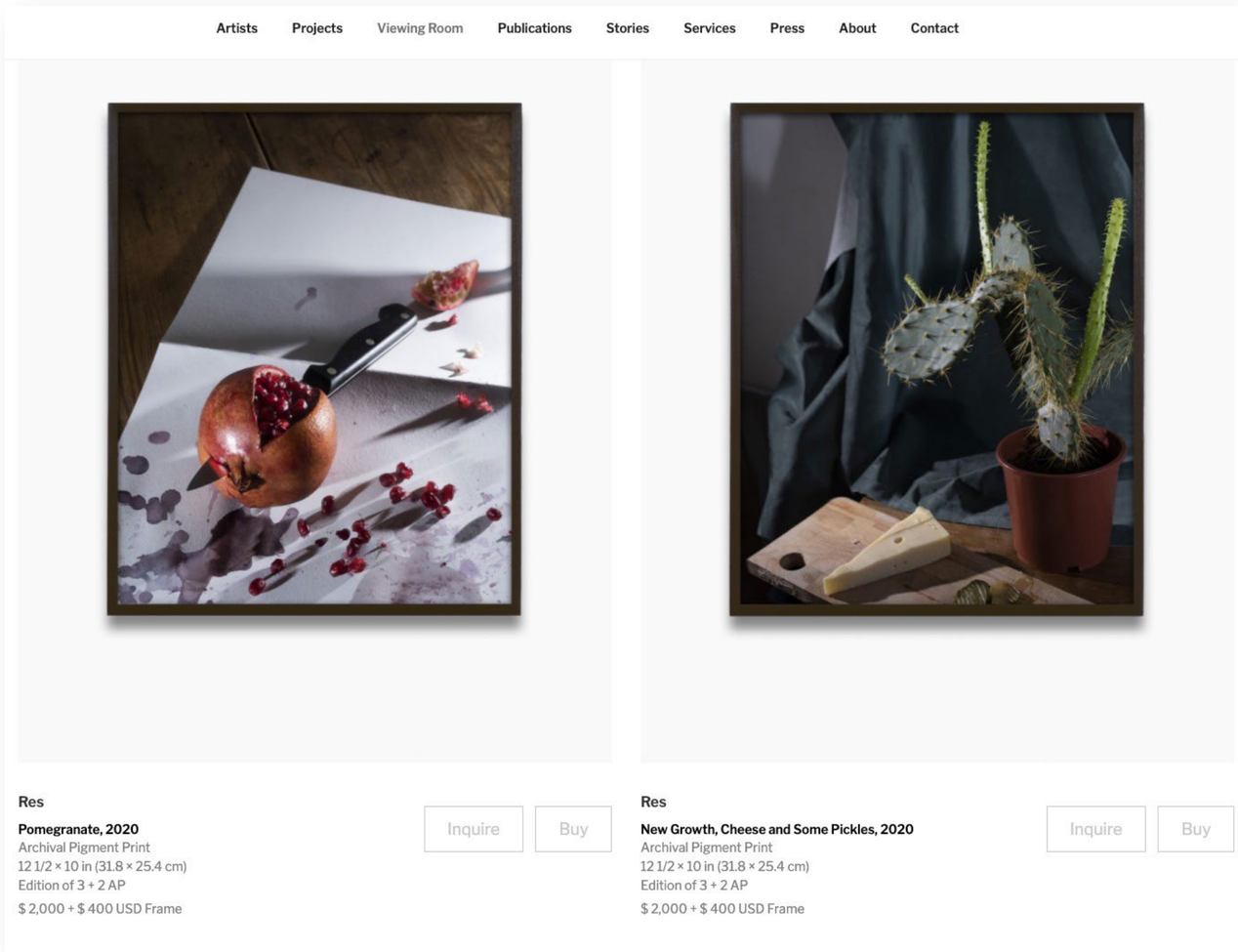
+ Museum of Modern Art in New York: Virtual Views

A CURATED EXPERIENCE: THE VIEWING ROOM

A viewing room is a smaller physical space within an online gallery where a limited number of selected artworks are displayed. Its purpose is to provide privacy and highlight one or a few artworks for sale. An online viewing room often has the same quality of "focus", presenting one or two artists only.

Example:

Zeit Contemporary



A LIVELY, INCLUSIVE PROGRAMME: THE ONLINE PHOTO FESTIVAL

Many photo festivals also approach online exhibitions with originality and vigor. From an audience's perspective, online exhibitions offer a chance for the work to be much more accessible. Pandemic-necessary lockdowns have shuttered museums and galleries around the world, or have forced them into shorter hours, limited capacity, and reservation systems—but the benefits of migrating online extend beyond our current situation. There are many individuals who cannot afford hefty museum admissions; whose schedules do not mesh with gallery opening hours; who are not geographically close to institutions, but do value them; and those for whom multiple trips to a museum pose issues of accessibility. All of these highlight the many ways in which our cultural fields need to change.

Example:

\+ Home Museum, an extension of Lagos Photo Festival



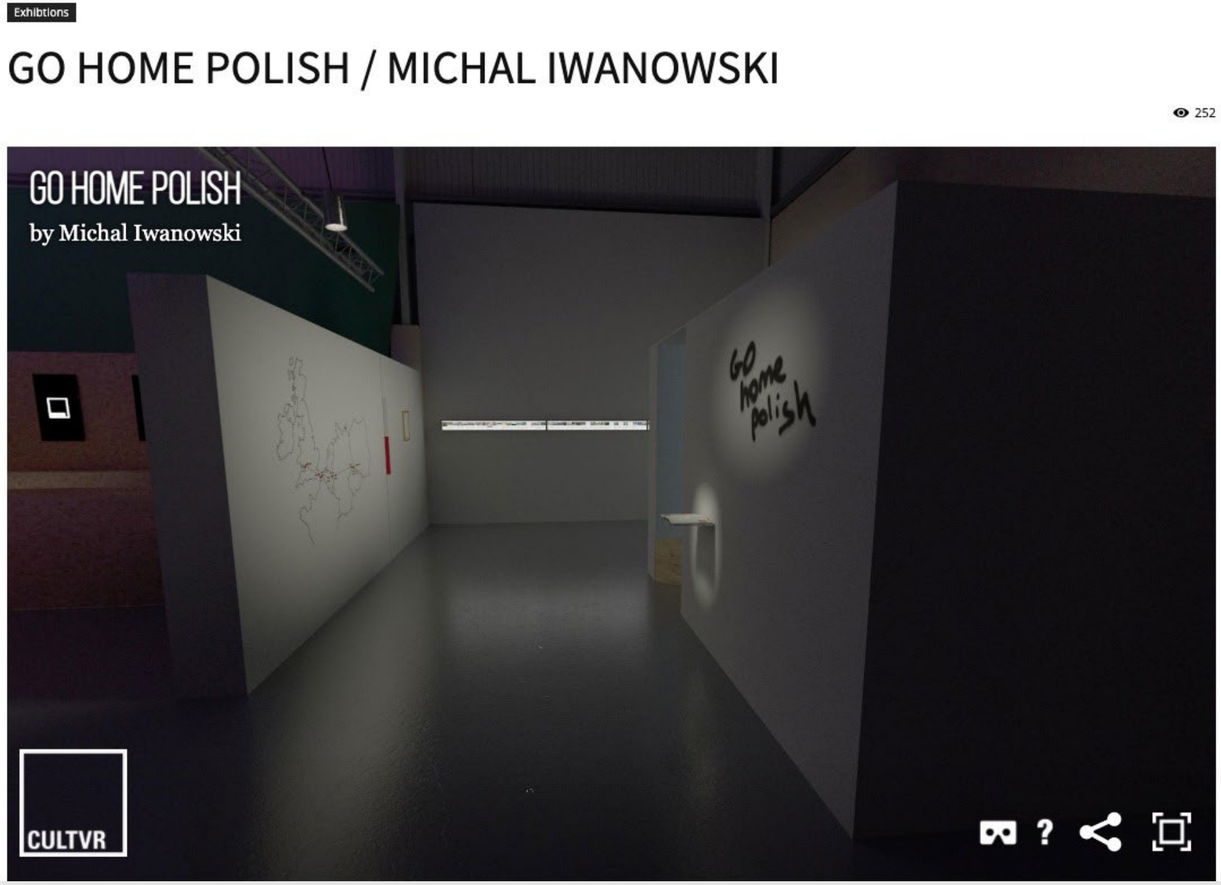
AN INDIVIDUAL FLAVOR: THE ARTIST WEBSITE

An artist's personal website, or a website for a stand-alone project, are some of the quickest ways to shape an online exhibition, because they acts as a blank canvas free of physical restrictions. With lower overhead costs for materials and looser timelines, artists can treat an online exhibition as a space of experimentation and a means for sharing their photographic personalities. Dana Lixenberg's *Imperial Courts, 1993-2015*, lives in expanded form online, not only as a photographic body of work but also as a documentary film and a space for residents of the social housing project to contribute. On a more playful side, the photographer Jason Fulford's website includes an interactive choose-your-own-adventure rabbithole, *3 Doors*.

An online exhibition has a more fluid form than one in a physical space. There is more ability to enliven the work. There are more diverse, broad audiences to connect with as well as more targeted audiences. Curators, editors, and gallerists can browse through these exhibitions, often more easily than simply finding an individual photographer's website out of the blue.

Glenn Ruga, of Social Documentary Network, articulates this point, saying, "Online exhibits can reach a global audience in great numbers. Not that they will, and often they don't, but potentially they can." This of course relates to one of the challenges of online exhibitions: just because you put something out there doesn't mean it will be found. Photographers can benefit from the network of an organization, but they must bring their own audience as well as reach out to desired contacts. The internet is endless and photographers need to be prepared to help guide their audience to their work.

Ruga also cautions artists to avoid falling into complacency when putting together an online show—you cannot think of them as less important or professional than physical exhibitions. Reflecting on the work of photographers, he says, "Their work will gain viewers and recognition in direct proportion to the effort they put into creating the exhibit, editing their images, preparing well-written and edited captions and project descriptions." We can be tempted by our motivation to rush through putting up work online, and it can be easy to fall into the trap of underestimating the potential of an online exhibition. Consider your online exhibition the same way you would a physical one: When does it launch? Is there programming to go alongside it? How might this extend your reach? How will your audience hear about it?



www.cultvr.cymru/go-home-polish-michal-iwanowski

NOT JUST AN IN-BETWEEN: EXPERIMENTING WITH FORM

A near universal point that everyone I spoke to agreed upon is the idea that online exhibitions should be deeply considered, and not just thought of as some in-between space. In advance of proposing an online exhibition, photographers should ask themselves why and how they want to show online and what makes sense—what fits the work? There is a propensity to fall back on a slideshow format for ease and familiarity.

Photographers must consider what will set their work apart on the screen. Why this format? Why this particular venue? Michal Iwanowski's work *Go Home Polish*, for example, takes the starting point of a journey across Europe as its form. The work is presented on CULTVR's site as an immersive VR experience, and the navigation through the site extends the projects original starting point of movement and migration. This melding of concept, content, and context is an important equation and will make an online exhibition stand out.

At this moment in time, online exhibitions have felt like a welcome respite from the uncertainty of the pandemic. One can still see art and experience where beauty, information, and concept meet. But it would be a shame to think of them solely in this light; now more than ever the future and the present of online exhibitions looks bright.

— Excerpt of feature by Magali Duzant





Conceptual Curating

INTERVIEW WITH NATASHA CHRISTIA

Natasha Christia is an unaffiliated curator, writer and educator based in Barcelona, whose research focuses on unearthing missed connections and narratives in archival collections and artists' projects. She has partnered with a number of artists and institutions to exhibit new and unexplored facets of different works, and she also worked as the Director of Kowasa Gallery in Barcelona from 2005 to 2014. In this interview, Natasha speaks about how she works with artists in her unaffiliated role, and how her pursuits differ from mainstream curating.

LensCulture: A lot of the curating we see in photography could be interchangeable with project management—the conceptual layers don't take precedence over the facilitation of displaying the stuff. In contrast, your work is grounded in conceptual collaboration. What draws you to an artist and their work, and how do you approach creating this sort of partnership?

Natasha Christia: I agree. I think that around 75% of curating in our photography community is just that: project management. But the themes and subject matter that I'm interested in come to me in a very natural way. My own experiences, readings and encounters naturally guide me towards people and partnerships, and then I have human encounters with individuals, allowing me to be open with them as artists, in both a personal and historical sense.

LensCulture: It's interesting how you refer to these encounters as partnerships, because there is definitely a hierarchy in our industry between curators and artists, the implication being that artists should somehow be subservient or deferential to a curator.

Natasha: My main concern is that when I work with an artist, they do not have to pay me or be under some sort of financial burden to work with me. Over the last few years, I always make sure I share my artist fee with them, because I think it's so important that artists are compensated for our collaboration.

Cover Images - LEFT: *You Are What you Eat.* Featured artworks by: ©Sinem Dişli, Andy Sewell, Klaus Pichler, Simon Brugner and Ksenia Yurkova. Krakow Photomonth 2019. Installation shots: © Studio Luma. Krakow Photomonth 2019. RIGHT: *AMORE: An unfinished visual trilogy by Valentina Abenavoli.* Void Athens-Athens Photo Festival: June 22-July 15, 2017. Artworks: © Valentina Abenavoli. Installation shots: © Myrto Steirou / Void.



AMORE: An unfinished visual trilogy by Valentina Abenavoli.
Void Athens-Athens Photo Festival: June 22-July 15, 2017. Artworks: © Valentina Abenavoli. Installation shots: © Myrto Steirou / Void.

LensCulture: In that same vein, there seems to be a bit of a misconception about what exactly curation is, because it takes on so many different forms. Can you speak a bit about how you approach your collaborations?

Natasha: There needs to be some sort of reciprocal respect—if I am not activated in some way by the work, or by a conversation with the person, it is very difficult for me to enter a conceptual, creative space with them. The exchange has to be enjoyable, but there also has to be an intellectual and ethical connection—a sharing of principles—and an openness to ideas and our perceptions of the world. Yes, the work itself is important, but the person who makes that work is even more important.

When I start thinking about a new project, I do a lot of research. Once I have a sense of what I would like to explore, I compile a list of names of artists who might work well in this exploration. I might have a list of 35 people, but in the end I only work with two or three of them. I write to people, letting them know I'm interested in their work, explaining my own project a little bit, and then I arrange a Skype conversation. After this first round of conversations, I pause to let some time pass, and normally if I don't remember what we've talked about, I know that the collaboration won't work. It's definitely not personal—it's just intuitive.

LensCulture: I think that sort of exchange facilitates the way you create new conceptual pieces together, as a team. You don't work with static projects.

Natasha: In many cases, I invite people to open up a project and re-vision it, or think of how we can reinforce a certain dynamic of the work. It becomes a mutual learning process. On top of that, there is the delicate issue of ensuring that the production is executed in the way that the artist expects, and I am always on the side of the artist when it comes to that execution. A lot of times, when curators work with organizations, they are trained to take the side of the institution, but my priority is to create work in the interest of the artist and the exhibition.



LensCulture: You worked at a gallery in Barcelona for many years. How would you say the way you work now differs from how you created exhibitions in that space?

Natasha: Working for a gallery is a very different experience, because a gallery is a commercial space for selling artworks. The gallery I worked at was also a bookstore, so I was able to touch objects and learn a lot about physical prints and twentieth century photography, providing me with different insights. But, in a gallery space, the assemblage of works is more aesthetic—the print itself is what matters. The aim is to sell, so there isn't as much room for conceptual curation.

However, this position opened me up to the world of contemporary photography, familiarizing me with different types of narratives, stitching together my background and readings in new ways.



Lukas Birk: Sammlung — bis jetzt. Artworks by Lukas Birk.
Installation shots: © Marktgemeinde Lustenau, Galerie Hollenstein — Kunstraum und Sammlung, Photographer: Miro Kuzmanovic



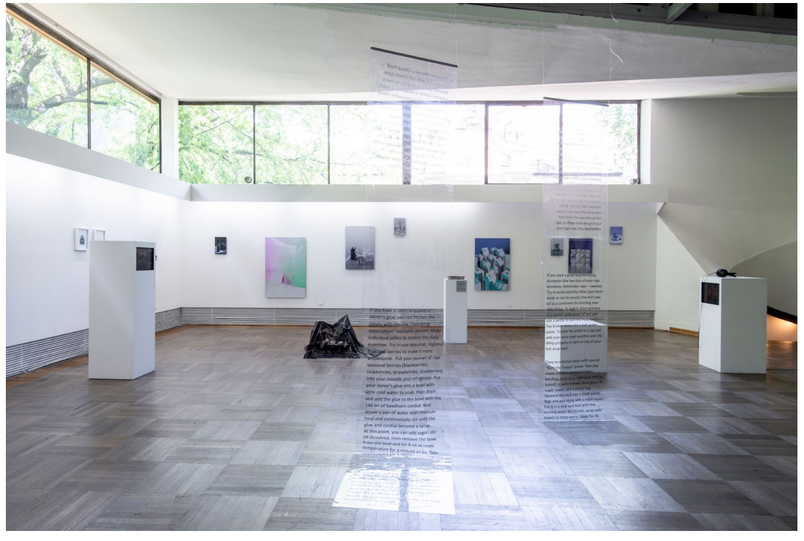
Lukas Birk: Sammlung — bis jetzt. Artworks by Lukas Birk.
Installation shots: © Marktgemeinde Lustenau, Galerie Hollenstein — Kunstraum und Sammlung,
Photographer: Miro Kuzmanovic

Since then, I have continued to produce content that helps me grow, and as I grow, the subsequent content grows as well. There are so many other creative and intellectual spaces, such as the world of film, where I also had a lot of important experiences, and all of these things tie into other narratives. The downside of the photo world is that we often close ourselves off from those worlds.

LensCulture: I completely agree. There is a primary, pointed focus on photographs in our industry, and that's an issue because so many other histories inform the power of a photograph. That is why I am interested in the way you curate—it's not just about the image, it's about the stuff in and around the image.

Natasha: In 2007, I read Geoff Dyer's *The Ongoing Moment*, and that book impacted my thought process around photography a lot. He brings the whole world into his discourse on photography, which made me realize that we can work in different ways that stray from this static history. Many people in the photography world are bothered when people work with photography or image-based content in more conceptual ways. What people don't understand is that when I put together a project, it's like building a body—I need to fit every organ and part in place. In the end, the resulting presentation might seem minimalistic, but there are levels at play that people are meant to engage with. I am more interested in the general audience and how they interact with this work. I don't do this work so that it can be published as content in a photography magazine or to attain approval from a small group of people in the industry. And after this year especially, I am interested in that praise less and less.





You Are What you Eat. Featured artworks by: ©Sinem Dişli, Andy Sewell, Klaus Pichler, Simon Brugner and Ksenia Yurkova. Krakow Photomonth 2019. Installation shots: © Studio Luma. Krakow Photomonth 2019

LensCulture: What are the benefits for artists who want to work with curators? I think it's important for artists to learn how to relinquish their work a little bit and let it engage with other interpretations.

Natasha: I don't think you should work with writers and curators for validation. Many people work with others for the sole purpose of getting some sort of promotion and platform in the photo industry, but to be significant, it has to be an exchange that nourishes you and makes you better. When you work with a curator, your exchange should become a field of shared values, principles, ideas for growth and creativity. Be open, because everything that we do is choral work.

LensCulture: You mentioned that you reach out to people on your own, but do you have any advice for artists who are interested in working with a curator, specifically regarding how they should approach initial contact?

Natasha: Approach the person, and say you would like to work with them! In my case, if I am interested in the work, I will meet with the artist and speak with them. It is difficult to send an email that says: *This is my portfolio, please consider me for future exhibitions*. I think that doesn't really work, so more personal contact is very important. Specifically, try to align your work with a particular project. Steer away from: *Look at my website, I have these works and I would like to exhibit them one day.* You could send an email like this, and if someone is interested they might save it, but in the end it is a very vague approach.

LensCulture: Do you have any practical and ethical advice for curators and people working with curators?

Natasha: It is very important for curators to be clear, presenting their framework of collaboration with artists and institutions in a detailed manner. Curators need to be very direct with people about what their curatorial work consists of, because as you said, there are people who think that curatorial work is project management, and there are people who think that curatorial work is picking out the names of five artists and writing an introduction, leaving everything else to the festival team.

For me, content, concept and form are one. It is crucial for me to be there. I know some people who curate are not interested in the way things are presented in the space, and this is something that freaks me out, because for me, the role of the curator is to work with space. It is not just a question of conceptualizing and editing a series of images, but thinking about format, the environment and the experience. As a curator, I want to have control over things like educational activities and public programs, because in many cases we forget about these aspects of curation in photography. In general, it is important to draw the framework for your boundaries and limitations, not only as a curator, but also as an artist. And make sure to do it in written form, not orally. Good agreements make good friends, and in this way, many misunderstandings along the way will be avoided.

— Interview with Cat Lachowskyj



Roger Grasas. HaAretz. PhotoEspaña 2019. Centro de Arte Alcobendas. May 17-June 23, 2019.
Artworks © Roger Grasas. Installation shots © Roger Grasas.





03. PREPARE TO BE SEEN

IMAGE LEFT © Jon Henry. RIGHT © Alena Kakhanovich

Ok, so you've identified a shortlist of galleries that you feel are a good match for you and your work. Next, it's time to get your artistic house in order.

Marketing is often the very first point of contact a gallerist will have with your work and your professionalism. How you present yourself and your work can even give a sense of your personality, which is an important element in the relationship. This chapter aims to equip you with the necessary marketing assets and know-how to not only attract the attention of a gallerists, but keep them interested. In this chapter, you'll learn how to produce your:

+ Written materials
+ Portfolio
+ Website and social media
+ Leave-behind marketing
+ List of Works

Use the reader tasks on page 81 and 85 to draft or refresh your materials. If you would like feedback as you go, keep an eye out for information about the *LensCulture Fine Art Project Review,* our new feedback service offering professional written reviews on your project statement, project images, and artist bio.

Now, let's get organized and give your professional identity a spring cleaning!

YOUR WRITTEN MATERIALS

Every artist needs to prepare key texts to support their work: a project statement for each body of work in their portfolio, a CV and resume, and a biography. Beyond exhibiting, these documents will be requested time and time again throughout your artistic career, so they're important to spend time on and revisit as your career unfolds.

If you find writing about your work challenging, you're not alone. Our hope is that we can make the task a little less daunting by walking you through a methodical process from start to finish, breaking down each text step-by-step. Use this information to make a first draft of your written materials or as a prompt to review and refresh your existing materials. Your texts are living, breathing documents that evolve alongside your practice. Update them frequently so they're always ready to share.

This section has been written in consultation with Jennifer Yoffy, founder of Yoffy Press and author of 'Crusade For Your Art: Best Practices for Fine Art Photographers'. www.yoffypress.com

PROJECT STATEMENT

Can be written in first or third person
Length: 100 - 250 words

Your project statement provides context for a specific body of work, and you'll need one for each project in your portfolio. Project statements should be both informative and engaging; they function as an invitation for the reader to look at the work and understand your intentions.

The process of writing a statement allows you to get the swirl of elusive ideas and concepts that make sense in your own head out and organized in a concrete, meaningful way. Project statements come in many shapes and forms. Some are practical and straightforward, others are more poetic and allude to the emotions or atmosphere that is present in the work, sometimes without directly talking about the work. In this section, we have provided a framework through which you will be able to identify key information relevant to your project that will then help you write a solid first draft.

FIRST, BRAINSTORM

Answering some key questions before you start writing can give you some momentum and side-step the dreaded writer's block. Starting a stream-of-counsciousness brainstorm exercise can also give you clarity when it comes time to write.

Make a list of adjectives

Print out your work or arrange it on a screen so that you can look at it carefully. Think of as many words as you can to describe it. The thesaurus is your friend! You'll come back to these words when you start to write.

Physically describe the work

What materials are used, what format is the work in, and what size is it?

How was the work made?

Does the technique add important context to viewing the work? Why did you feel it was important to make the work in this way? If you are using an alternative image-making process, is it relevant to your work conceptually or contextually? If so, why?

Why was the work made?

Can you describe your intentions, inspirations or motivations behind making this work?

Is there a broader social, political, cultural or personal context that you are exploring or responding to?

What is the work about?

Does your work explore themes, ideas, or something else?

How do you want your audience to feel or react?

Ultimately, you can't control how your audience will interpret your work, but you can try to influence them through your project statement. Make some notes on which direction you'd like them to take.

Why should your audience care?

Why is what you are saying significant and valuable? What are you wanting me to think about that deserves attention? Why is your voice the best one to transmit this information?

How does this work link with your broader artistic practice?

Is it part of an ongoing interest or investigation of a particular topic? Does it reflect a new direction, or build on an existing body of work?

How does this work relate to broader themes in relation to art and photography?

Does it challenge existing understandings, theories or ideas?

THEN, MAKE A DRAFT

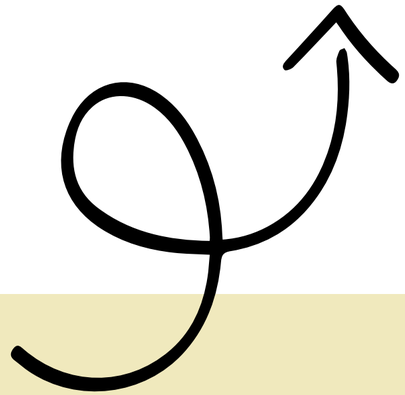
Once you have this information in front of you, you can start weaving it into a draft statement that tells a cohesive story. It can be helpful to study project statements from other artists to gain some inspiration and ideas. Examine how they structure and order the information, consider the tone and language they use. Does it work for you? What would be appropriate for your voice and your work?

The point is not to sound overly intellectual or fit in every idea or experience you've had while making the work; your aim is to provide insight that helps your audience better understand your project. Check out the tips on page 80 to avoid common mistakes with project statements, such as jargon and art speak.

Project Statement or Artist Statement?

You'll notice that a project statement is sometimes referred to as an artist statement. This can be a little confusing because an artist statement can also be the overarching philosophy and motivation behind an artist's work, not just a single project. If you're not sure what type of statement is being requested by a gallery, ask for clarification.

TIP: *Stuck for words? Many of us feel more confident speaking than writing. Try recording a conversation with a peer instead. Get them to ask you about the project and play around with different words you could use. From there, use your responses as a foundation for building some written text.*



Want feedback on your project statement?

LensCulture Fine Art Project Review provides a unique opportunity to get a written professional review of your project statement, project images and artist bio from international gallery and industry professionals. Fine-tune your materials and get valuable guidance on how to better present your work to galleries, curators, collectors and the overall marketplace.

Find out more!

CV & RESUME

Length:

+ Your CV can be as long as your experience requires
+ Your Resume is a summarized version of your CV, ideally 2-3 pages
+ Occasionally you may be required to submit a 1-page Resume

Written in **third person**.

Your CV is a comprehensive and exhaustive document that lists information relevant to your artistic career history. It is a very important component in your suite of professional materials, and is the one document gallerists and curators rely on to find out about your experience and achievements to date. Keep it simple and factual, and be ruthless in cutting out any detail that doesn't directly relate to your practice. At the beginning of your career, it's ok not to have an extensive resume or exhibition list, and many galleries enjoy discovering new talent. So be honest, don't inflate your resume, and be proud of where you're at.

Your resume is a summarized version of your CV and only includes the most important information. Your bio is a narrative version of your resume (see page 79).

Key inclusions:

Name & Contact Details

Jane Doe (b. 1983, UK)

hello@janedoe.com | janedoe.com
+44 123 456 789 | IG: @janedoeart

Education history

Include the name of the school, the name of the program, and the year you graduated. Include education that is relevant to your practice.

Victorian College of the Arts, Master of Fine Arts, 2015

Exhibitions

If you already have some exhibitions under your belt, great! List the year, title of the show, gallery and city, starting from the most recent. If you have a long list of exhibitions, separate out the list into solo and group exhibitions. Tip: Use 'selected exhibitions' to imply a curated list of exhibitions, whether you have a lot of exhibitions or not.

2019 Beyond Boundaries, Aperture Gallery, New York

Collections

List the public institutions that own your artwork, such as museums, corporate collections, municipal collections or agencies. If you only have artwork in private collections, don't list the individual collector unless they give you permission and they're well known in the industry.

National Gallery of Art, Australia

Private collection, Hong Kong

Awards

List the awards, grants, prizes and other honors that you have received for your work.

2020 British Council Grant

2018 Taylor Wessing Prize for Photographic Portraiture, Finalist

2017 ING Unseen Talent Award, Winner

Press

List reviews, interviews, journals and media articles in which your work has been featured, including print and online.

Sebag-Montefiore, Clarissa. "From Manus Island to sanctions on Iran: the art and opinions of Hoda Afshar". *The Guardian*, 13 November 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/nov/13/from-manus-island-to-sanctions-on-iran-the-art-and-opinions-of-hoda-afshar.

Publications

List details of your monographs or publications that have featured your work. Cite your sources consistently, using a recognized citation guide.

2019 Buchakjian, Gregory: "Personal Spaces, Public Places", *On Photography in Lebanon*, KAPH 2018, p. 223-242

Tip: Many commercial galleries publish the CVs of the artists they represent on their website. Have a dig around to get some ideas about different layout approaches and ways of presenting the information.

BIOGRAPHY

Length:

Aim for 200 words, but sometimes you will be required to have a 100-word version. Write in third person.

Your biography is a summary of your resume, written in narrative form. It is a short paragraph that describes your experience and career. Many artists get confused about the difference between an artist bio and an artist statement, but there is a simple distinction: the artist statement is about your work, and the bio is about you, the artist.

Take the information you gathered in your CV and then shortened into your resume. Now, build it out into sentences that thread together to tell a story. If there is something unique about your practice, your bio is the place to emphasize this. Your CV has all the nitty, gritty detail, but your bio can be directive in terms of the specific achievements and experiences you would like to draw attention to.

Tip: If you are early in your career or haven't exhibited your work much, there can be other ways to talk about your work. Is there a personal story that links you to your work that you could draw from?

Want feedback on your artist bio?

LensCulture Fine Art Project Review provides a unique opportunity to get a written professional review of your project statement, project images and artist bio from international gallery and industry professionals. Fine-tune your materials and get valuable guidance on how to better present your work to galleries, curators, collectors and the overall marketplace.

Find out more!

COMMON MISTAKES

Avoid these common mistakes, which can unnecessarily confuse your audience and misrepresent your work:

+ Art speak, jargon, technical terms and overly intellectual language.
+ A long word or phrase when a short one will do.
+ Clichés and common metaphors. It's better to be original.
+ Sweeping generalizations and vague language. Say exactly what you mean. Analyze every single word and make sure you are not adding "fluff". You should sound like yourself, just more polished.
+ Over-explaining—be succinct and to the point.
+ Passive voice—always use active voice.
+ Pompous or self-important language. Let your experience and achievements, not your words, speak to your talents. If your work is brilliant, it will be obvious to your audience.
+ Foreign phrases, scientific words or theories, unless absolutely necessary and specifically linked to you work.
+ Typos! Proofread, then proofread again to avoid small mistakes and show professionalism.
+ Changes in formatting and style. Keep it consistent across all written materials.
+ Explanations of theoretical photography movements.

TASK 03: DRAFT YOUR WRITTEN MATERIALS

Use the advice provided in this section to draft or refresh your project statement, CV and resume, and biography.

+ Project Statement
+ CV
+ Resume
+ Biography

Tip: Combined with feedback, taking a break from your text for a few days can do wonders for seeing your writing in a new light. When you return with fresh eyes, you'll likely see where improvements can be made, so don't be afraid to take out the red pen and start cutting unnecessary words or phrases. Shorter is always better!

FEEDBACK, REVISION AND EMBRACING THE RED PEN

The best pieces of text have gone through several rounds of feedback and drafts before the gallerist or curator gets to read them. Getting the perspective of others can be immensely helpful for improving your writing and ensuring it communicates what you are trying to say with minimal confusion and maximum engagement. Be selective about who you ask. It's important your reviewers are not only skilled and experienced, but willing to be frank with you and provide constructive critique.

By now you hopefully have a solid draft of your written materials ready. Becoming skilled at writing about your work and your practice takes time, and it's natural to feel awkward when you're first starting out.

Pairing your work with clear, concise and compelling writing is an essential part of artistic career development, so congratulations on taking the time to work on this important aspect of your professional identity — you're absolutely setting yourself up for success.

PERFECTING YOUR PORTFOLIO

Your portfolio is the most important component of your tool kit for communicating about your work to gallerists and curators. It is a collection of your best or most relevant work, presented in a considered and professional way that aims to provide the best possible window into your work for your audience.

Your portfolio can be presented in physical form, such as a box of loose prints, or a book, and should also be available on your website. It could also be presented digitally for viewing via tablet, laptop or smartphone, if that is a suitable platform for viewing your work (for multimedia or interactive work). This section looks at important considerations for pulling together your work and creating your printed portfolio, an integral component of sharing your work with gallerists and curators. Go to page 91 to read about presenting your portfolio on your website.

SELECTION AND SEQUENCING

Make a selection

Start with a wide edit of your work. You can do this on a large screen or you could print your work out and lay the prints on a table, or stick them up on the wall so you can step back from them. Then start to cut down your wide edit to a tighter selection of around 20 images per project. You may want to adjust this tighter selection to appeal to the specific person you are showing your portfolio to.

It can be tempting to add all of your best work into your portfolio, but what is more important is that your selection is coherent and speaks to your practice. You might include one or two distinct projects, or your work might be better suited to a range of individual works linked by a broader theme. Go back to the brainstorming you did in the writing section of this chapter and to the notes you made in your gallery research task: who is your audience and how do you want them to feel when looking at your portfolio? Keeping those ideas at the front of your mind will guide what work makes the tighter cut, and what does not. Take your time with it and allow yourself a few different versions, revising and reviewing each one until you arrive at a selection you feel very comfortable with.

Tip: Weed out your weaker work first for the 'no' pile, then identify your strongest work for the 'definitely yes' pile. This will leave you with the 'maybe' pile, a much smaller group of images from which to make your final decisions.

Sequence your selection

Once you have arrived at your selection of artworks, it's time to order them very deliberately, taking the gallerist or curator through the series in a considered way. Imagine your sequence is like a film. How can you start with impact? How can you take your audience on a journey through the series that keeps them interested, right through to the very last image? How does each image relate to the one before and after it? Similar to the process of selecting images, working with small prints on a wall or on a table can be a wonderful way to experiment with different ways to order your work and to get a physical sense of the flow from one artwork to the next.



Get feedback

Making a selection and sequence for your portfolio can be a difficult process, as it requires you to look objectively at your work and make decisions about the success of individual artworks separate to the personal emotions and experiences of making it. It can be very helpful to seek a second opinion from another photographer, mentor or professional at this stage, to get a different perspective on the choices you've made.

TASK 4: ORGANIZE YOUR PORTFOLIO

Use the advice provided in this section to draft or refresh your project statement, CV and resume, and biography.

+ Make a selection
+ Sequence your selection
+ Get feedback

Tip: Ask a fellow photographer, mentor or someone with professional experience working with photography to look over your work and tell you how they respond. Use their feedback to inform future revisions of your selection and sequence. Learn more about LensCulture Fine Art Project Review on the following page for written professional feedback from an industry expert.

LensCulture Fine Art Project Review

LensCulture Fine Art Project Review provides a unique opportunity to get a written professional review of your project statement, project images and artist bio from international gallery and industry professionals. Fine-tune your materials and get valuable guidance on how to better present your work to galleries, curators, collectors and the overall marketplace.

WHAT DO YOU GET

Written feedback // Professional. Personalized. Actionable.

+ Constructive and informed written feedback on your project images

+ Professional written feedback on your project statement

+ Professional written feedback on your artist bio

The feedback you receive is tailored specifically to your submitted work and your career goals, informed by a pre-review questionnaire we ask you to complete after submitting your work.

Confidence // Give yourself the best chance of success

First impressions count. A professional review provides an opportunity to dramatically improve your project and supporting written materials before you connect with gallery professionals and other experts. Knowing your work has gone through at least one cycle of feedback and rework can give you a huge confidence boost, because you've taken the time to properly prepare, giving yourself the best possible chance of success. The project review process can also provide you with new insight and skills to apply to projects in the future.

LensCulture Fine Art Project Review is part of our mission to help photographers move ahead creatively and professionally, no matter their level of experience or location. We are proud to offer this tailored and practical online review service to our community and connect photographers like you with the expertise and insight of industry professionals worldwide.

BOOK YOUR PROJECT REVIEW NOW

PRINT PORTFOLIO CONSIDERATIONS

Budget

Being clear on the amount of money you are comfortable spending to create your portfolio is an important first step of your research, as this will inform many of the choices you make in terms of approach, size, paper stock and production value. It is possible to spend thousands of dollars on your portfolio, and some people do, but you can also make a highly effective portfolio for much, much less.

Size

Your portfolio should be a size that is easy to handle, post, and/or carry for both you and the gallerist or curator. Standard print sizes are a good place to start — for example, 5 x 7", 8 x 10", 11 x 17" — but you could also work with international paper sizes such as A5, A4 or A3. Choosing a common size means there will usually be more options, and often more affordable price points, when it comes time to print and present your work. The other decision to make in terms of size it the orientation of the portfolio: does landscape or vertical suit your work best?

Tip: If your presentation box will be used for long-term print storage, it should be archival and not made from materials that will release chemicals that will damage your prints.

Paper & Printing

The type of paper on which you print your work and how you print it is important, and speaks to your process and considerations in taking an image from your screen or negative into the physical world. Connect with your local professional photographic printers (or book printer, if you choose to go down that path) to understand the options available to you in terms of paper weight, paper finish (lustre, matte or gloss), and the associated prices.

Presentation

There are several ways to present your portfolio to a gallery: as loose prints in a presentation box, such as a clamshell; as prints inserted into sleeves within a pre-bought portfolio folder or binder (be careful of reflection); or as a book (only if you intend to exhibit a book object). Most gallerists prefer loose, high-quality prints with the image printed on the same paper stock that is to be exhibited and sold. They want to be able to handle the work and see it clearly, shuffle it around and hold it at different angles to easily ascertain the exact look and feel of the final work. If your work is of a large size, print a detail of one image at full size, so the gallerists can get a sense of the work at that scale.

Do your research, get plenty of quotes and samples, and speak to your peers about quality and reliable local suppliers you can work with before you decide on the right approach for you. Partnering with a designer can be a wonderful way to craft a cohesive look for your portfolio, regardless of the presentation approach.

EXPERT INSIGHT

What do you look for in a portfolio?

"Bring the best prints you can make to the meeting, and get some guidance on that if you have any doubts. Have an organized presentation of work, whether a single project or individual images. One thing I look for is growing evidence that this is the work of [blank, fill in your name]. Make your work distinctive and avoid projects that anyone could do if they also showed up in that place. Really critique that about your work. Have both an intellectual and physical perspective on the project."

SUSAN NALBAND
FP3 Gallery, Boston

"Handle the material presentation of your work with care. Large-format print portfolios are uncomfortable for the reviewer to handle and difficult for the photographer to carry. Do not make your life difficult. It is more essential to have your images printed on the final paper and layout, even if in miniature, and with decent post-production work done (ready to show on the wall)."

NATASHA CHRISTIA
Unaffiliated curator, writer and educator, Barcelona

EXPERT INSIGHT

What do you look for in a portfolio?

"Clean, simple presentation, which allows the images to be seen as intended, is the ideal way to view new work. Your photographs are what you want to present. Anything that takes attention away from your photos or makes them difficult to access – too large to handle, digitally or physically – will be detrimental to your success."

Michael Dooney
Jarvis Dooney Galerie, Berlin

"Think of the portfolio as your own exhibition, and how you would want someone to read your work. Do you want them to look at it as a sequence of images, where the narration and editing needs to find a synchronicity? Is it a book that allows one to go through the pages in a particular rhythm, hiding and revealing itself within the folds of a page or a PDF format? Think about how one image follows another, and how the story or intent is woven through. If there are video or audio elements to go with your work, try to create a multimedia presentation of it as well. Along with this, always have the individual files ready with you, be they digital or print, so that I am able to see your vision while also looking at the images as independent pieces in themselves."

ANSHIKA VARMA
Independent Curator and Founder, Offset Projects, New Delhi

LEAVE BEHINDS & OTHER SELF-PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Physical self-promotional materials, commonly referred to as ‘leave-behinds’, have become an essential marketing tool for the contemporary photographer. They can take the form of a small catalogue, a business card, a postcard, an artist book, a sample print, or any other physical object that might represent you and your work, making a lasting impact on the recipient. The most important element of ‘leave-behinds’ is contact information and a visual that relates to the work being pitched or advocated for. Be realistic about your budget and focus on the key information that needs to be communicated. Having a high-quality portfolio is always far more important than a fancy leave-behind that costs you a lot to produce.

Tip: Business cards are not dead! If you choose to produce a business card, adhere to the standard sizings, so it can be easily stored by the gallerist.

REFRESHING YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Website

Websites have become an essential marketing tool for photographers seeking to attract the attention of gallerists. Your site should offer visitors all the information they need about you and your work, in an engaging way that is easy to navigate.

Think of your art practice as a house. Your website is the front door and often your first opportunity to greet potential collectors, gallerists and curators. How would you like them to be greeted? Take the time to make sure your website is contemporary, functional, informative, and regularly updated with the gallerists' needs front of mind.

Find a design

Remember your project statement? Go back to the words you brainstormed about your practice. Is there a way you can use those descriptors to inform the look and feel of your website? Use the words to inform your choices in terms of color palette, fonts, and the visual way in which your site comes together.

The easiest option when it comes to web design is to use a template from one of the many web design and hosting companies. Many companies offer templates specifically for photographers, and you can usually tweak the design yourself using helpful tutorials. Another option is to hire a web designer to design and build a custom site specific to your needs. Collaborating with a designer can lift your work to new heights, but keep in mind that the most important job a website does is give your visitors the information they need with minimal frustration. In most cases, a template is perfectly fine and the most affordable place to start.

Tip: Your website should be able to be viewed easily on mobile devices, tablets, laptops, and desktop screens. It's also important to test your site on a variety of web browsers to catch any glitches.

Upload the content

Earlier in this chapter you spent time working on your portfolio and written materials. Once you have your web design, it's time to present that work specifically for an online audience.

Visuals

Ensure your portfolio is organized clearly and the images have been resized for web so that they load quickly.

Give the individual images as much real estate on the screen as you can so that a visitor to your site can really appreciate the work. If you have installation views from a previous exhibition, include them. Likewise, if there is a way to show the scale of your work, do that.

Since the sequence is important for your portfolio, find a way to present your work in a way that allows the flow of images to be experienced on screen and through the navigation.

Written materials

Some of the information in your bio, resume and project statement can be used as text on your website, for example on your 'about' page or on your project page. You should also add your CV or resume, biography, project statement and list of works to your site as downloadable PDFs. Gallerists will often print these documents as part of their artist research.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Love it or loathe it, social media can play an important role in an artist's marketing efforts. Most importantly, social media can be used for building an audience around your work that reaches far beyond your local community. Having active and engaged followers can be a valuable asset to gallerists and curators. Why? Because it's important for gallerists to see that you know how to connect with others about your work and promote yourself.

We could write an entire book on the use of social media, and of all the topics in this chapter, we feel it's probably the one you feel most familiar with. Instead, we've spoken to numerous gallerists and curators to understand what they look for when looking at an artist's social media activity. Here is what we found:

Be strategic about how you brand yourself on social media. Go back to your artist statement brainstorming and make sure all of your activities align.

Be personal (but not too personal). A mix of personal and professional content can help gallerists get to know you, which is important in terms of building a potential long-term relationship. Find a balance between being personal and authentic, and avoid oversharing.

Be consistent across all the platforms that you use in terms of aesthetics and voice.

Curate carefully, and be intentional about what you post. Consider your feed as a whole. Gallerists like to see consistent aesthetic choices made, particularly on Instagram.

Be authentic! Only you make your work, and you are the only you. Be yourself and find a way to use social media that matches who you are and what your work is about.

Connect and participate, don't just broadcast. Use social media to have genuine conversations with your peers, colleagues, artists you admire, and galleries you'd like to work with. Virtual relationships can lead to in-person collaborations and opportunities in the future.

Set the tone, provide a hook. Use social media to get visitors back to your website. To use our metaphor earlier, if your artistic practice is a house and your website is the front door, social media is the free taxi ride that takes your visitors to the front door.

Use hashtags. Many gallerists and curators use hashtags to discover new work on a specific topic, theme or genre. Use them to link your posts into specific conversations, but use them sparingly. Adding your image to a hashtag with millions of other posts is perhaps not the best way to get noticed.

Post consistently. Those who post consistently (and frequently) get their posts seen by more people and often get more engagement because of the way that platforms program their feeds.

Tip: Social media isn't for everyone. It can be an attention stealer, a time waster, and an unhelpful distraction, not to mention addictive. It you decide to opt out, consider how else you might be able to engage your audience. For example, mailing lists are a fantastic way to speak directly to your community.

EXPERT INSIGHT

How to approach Instagram

"Remember that what you put up matters, always. Keep business and social posts in different areas. You want people to know you're human, but keep the cats and dogs (unless that's your project) on their own page for your long-lost cousins and old friends to see. Try to only put up work that moves your practice forward and makes people want to come back tomorrow to see what you're doing. You can share your techniques, or keep them as your secret. Make them think, 'How did she do that?'"

SUSAN NALBRAND
FP3 Gallery, Boston

"Instagram is definitely a great tool to get a glimpse into an artist's world, but for me, it is only an introduction to an artist. I always follow it up with a visit to the photographer's website or an email to get an understanding of their voice and concerns, isolated from the noise of social media. A photographer's IG can offer a space to be able to see one's consistency in their work, whether it is with a vision or subject, or experimentation within their medium."

ANSHIKA VARMA
Curator and Photographer, New Delhi

EXPERT INSIGHT

How to approach Instagram

"I'm not much of a mobile phone person, and I don't find the stream of random images (on Instagram) very useful for discovering work that needs time and context to be appreciated. If I already know a photographer, then I'll follow them on Instagram. It's a good way to get updates and see behind-the-scenes between new bodies of work."

MICHAEL DOONEY
Jarvis Dooney Galerie, Berlin

"I am not a front-line consumer of Instagram. Although I am alert, I tend to look more at artist websites, interviews, or online portfolios where works are presented in a more systematized way. What I appreciate when it comes to a feed or a website is the concise and brief description of the project, an easygoing and smart visualization, and most importantly, the quality and sequencing of images."

NATASHA CHRISTIA
Unaffiliated Curator, Writer and Educator, Barcelona

LIST OF WORKS

An important part of preparing to be seen is to demonstrate that you are ready from not just an artistic perspective, but a business perspective. Your List of Works is a document that details all of the artworks in a given project or series. It is a practical resource for gallerists and curators, serving as an inventory of your work, containing key information all in one place. The document can be arranged in a number of different ways, but should be easy to read and access. For each artwork, include an image of the work, plus the artwork title, date, medium, dimensions, and available editions.

Tip: Upload your List of Works to your website as a downloadable PDF, so gallerists and curators can find and print it easily as part of their research.



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04. MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: © Namsa Leuba, Justin Keene, Adrián Fernández Milanés, Oye Diran.

Once your portfolio, written materials, and online presence are in order, it's time to start making yourself known and forming relationships with gallerists and curators.

Getting your work noticed is not only about targeting key individuals, it should be part of an ongoing and holistic drive to build a genuine community around your work—one where you give as much as you benefit. This chapter outlines some ways to make authentic connections and find supporters for your work in a professional and respectful way.

The tasks of marketing yourself takes time and is the product of consistent and cumulative effort over years as your career develops. Enjoy each step of the journey and, most importantly, be sure to balance the task of marketing yourself with actually making the work. It is the single most vital ingredient for making yourself known as an artist.

'Make yourself known' has been written in consultation with Natasha Caruana, practising photographic artist and Founder of Work Show Grow, an online educational community for creatives. www.workshowgrow.com

TASK 05: GALLERY RESEARCH - PART II

Through research completed in Chapter 2 of this guide, you identified several potential galleries that would be a good match for your work, your level of experience, and your career goals. By now you should now know the different roles within that gallery, and who currently occupies those roles. As you prepare to introduce yourself to these galleries and the key people within them, it's time to deepen your research and do further detective work.

Use the prompts below to deepen your research for each gallery you feel is a good match for you and your work:

Desktop research

+ How does the gallery communicate and engage with the public?
+ Sign up for newsletters and follow them on social media so that you'll be informed on upcoming events.

What public events does the gallery host?

+ Are there panel discussions, weekend events, artist talks, openings, or other events that you could attend?

TASK 05: GALLERY RESEARCH - PART II

Does the gallery accept submissions? If so, how?

+ Does the gallery have annual open calls?
+ If it is not listed on their website, call and inquire.

Is there anyone in your circle who is well-known or represented by the gallery you're interested in connecting with?

+ Use LinkedIn. Check in with your fellow alumni. Ask your mentors.

How does the gallerist or curator participate in the photography community? Are there ways to connect?

+ Follow key individuals linked to the galleries on social media platforms. Like some of their posts to signal to the platform algorithms that you want to see more of their content.
+ Does the curator or gallerist attend festival events or participate in portfolio reviews?
+ Are they on a jury panel, or are they giving a talk in person or virtually?

In-person research

Visit the space, collect marketing materials, and look at the exhibitions closely. Gain an understanding of how work is arranged and curated, which artists are showing, and what kind of work they are making. Become an expert on that gallery.

GET ON THE RADAR

We've compiled a list of ideas and tips for initiating relationships with gallerists and curators. Keep in mind that not every suggestion listed in this section will be appropriate for the gallery you're looking to connect with. Do your research and always be strategic about your approach before you jump in.

Show up & participate in person

Your research will have uncovered a range of public programming offered by the galleries you'd like to connect with. Where it's possible to do so, turn up! Be present at these talks, openings, workshops, and artist meet-ups. Being genuinely interested is a great way to participate in the community and to start making connections. Often, moments will organically present themselves for a conversation, without you having to force them.

Tip: Read the press release before an exhibition opening and research the artist. Find out more about the speakers if you're going to a talk. Equip yourself with information that will help you engage in conversations.

Show interest & support using social media

Going to an exhibition opening or talk at a gallery? Use your social media platforms to share your experience with your community before, during and after the event. Authentically participating in gallery events and initiatives, using your own platforms to encourage dialogue about the programming, can be a great way to digitally say, 'Hello, I'm here' without being obvious or overbearing. Genuine conversation and interest is always welcome.

Tip: Tag key accounts where it's appropriate to do so, but don't spam by tagging someone you don't know or someone who has no link to the work.

Get introduced via personal connections

In the gallery world, who you know can be enormously helpful. Your connections can help you get on the radar of key individuals through casual meetings and social events, or direct introductions and endorsements. Is someone you know already exhibiting with that gallery? Be up front and let your friend or colleague know who you'd like to meet, and go from there.

Tip: Use LinkedIn to see who's connected to each other.

Meet one-on-one

Portfolio reviews can be a valuable way to meet key people in the industry and present your work in a one-on-one setting, in person, or online. They can be long and intense days, so if you do decide to sign up, prepare yourself as best as possible to make sure you stand out from the crowd. There are costs involved with portfolio reviews, and for many participants, the investment is worthwhile because you can see many reviewers in a short period of time. If the cost is prohibitive to you, find out a little more about the reviewers. Are there other ways you could meet them? Many reviewers will not make unsolicited meetings with photographers, but there might be other avenues to connect with them.

Tip: Ahead of a portfolio review, prepare as much as you can beforehand. Research the person you are meeting with and show a genuine interest in their work.

Send an email

For photographers who do not live near a city with an active photography community, contacting key individuals by email can be an option for introducing yourself and your work. Emails can also be a very good way of following up on an in-person meeting. That said, curators and gallerists are likely to get high volumes of unsolicited emails, and some will not open or welcome them, particularly if their submission requirements are clearly outlined on their website.

If you do decide to email, keep your emails clear and concise, with links to your work and a short project description. An important component of emailing a gallerist or curator is demonstrating that you understand who you are writing to, their role, and your interest in their work. Mutual respect backed by good work is a wonderful foundation for a professional relationship.

Tip: Always send a polite follow-up email a week later if you haven't heard back, but don't get disheartened by no response and don't take it personally. Bulk emails that CC or BCC multiple recipients are not good practice, unless you have built a mailing list and the people on your list have given permission to receive emails from you.

Submit your work to competitions & open calls

Competitions and open calls can be an avenue for getting your work seen by influential people in the industry, regardless of whether you win or are selected for an exhibition. Look at the jury closely and read the supporting text to get a sense of the type of work they are seeking. Is your work likely to be something they're interested in? Is there a theme and does your work fit within it? Can you afford the entry fee, or is there a free option for submitting your work? Be scrupulous where your work and your money goes.

Tip: Do your research and make a decision for yourself that suits your budget, your work and your objectives.

Do It Yourself!

Be bold and take some initiative. Put on an event that profiles you in the community with key individuals you would like to meet and build relationships with. Put on your own group show with some friends. Host a panel discussion in person. Host a series of live interviews on IGTV. Be inventive and find ways to connect with, and work alongside, key people in the industry. Give them an opportunity to know you, and give something back to the community while you're at it!

EXPERT INSIGHT

How do galleries and curators find artists?

"I still prefer email when compared to the various social media platforms. For me personally, it is less likely to get lost within the deluge of popups, notifications and other digital distractions online."

MICHAEL DOONEY
Jarvis Dooney Galerie, Berlin

"Networking is a very complicated endeavour, not just for photographers, but for all of the agents involved in our field. Sending an email is fine, but you should not expect a reply unless the person is genuinely interested in your work."

NATASHA CHRISTIA
Unaffiliated Curator, Writer and Educator, Barcelona

"Having an in-person connection is paramount for developing professional relationships. Portfolio reviews are, without a doubt, the most efficient way to get your work out there and to connect with people who can offer you opportunities. Portfolio reviews involve a layer of networking between photographers that is very neat to see – people share work, trade prints, and are excited to meet each other after only knowing of one other online. After the reviews, I know that photographers work as advocates for their peers, often passing on information about opportunities they learn about. Portfolio reviews are community-builders of the highest order."

LAURA MOYA
PhotoLucida, Portland

EXPERT INSIGHT

How do galleries and curators find artists?

"For young artists, what I say most often is that everything takes time. You have to be patient, work hard, and allow yourself to be open to what might come. You have to be persistent, but not annoyingly so. It will happen. Your time will come, but you cannot rush it. Begin with your local gallery, and then build things from there."

ANNA WALKER SKILLMAN
Jackson Fine Art Gallery, Atlanta

"Being able to confidently and succinctly speak about your work is no easy feat, but it is as important as having strong images. As a gallerist, if you cannot sell yourself and your work to me, how am I going to sell it to a collector? I want to feel your passion and hear your thoughtfulness. I want to be moved. Practice as much as you possibly can, and then practice more. Speak out loud about your work – to yourself, to your peers, to anyone who will listen. This cannot be stressed enough. You must be comfortable talking about your work, and you must be able to explain it in a compelling way."

JENNIFER YOFFY
Founder, Yoffy Press, Atlanta

EXPERT INSIGHT

How do galleries and curators find artists?

"I am old school, so I prefer face-to-face human exchanges. I value when people who contact me have paid attention to my field of research and are therefore aware of whom they are addressing addressing their request to. This applies not just to curators, but to any kind of contact with galleries, festivals or institutions. Study their profile well before contacting them, and contact them only if your work responds to their line of research, and if you feel intrigued by it."

NATASHA CHRISTIA
Unaffiliated Curator, Writer and Educator, Barcelona

"I often place a public call for works that I share on my social media or through an email network. Many photographers also share their works-in-progress via emails throughout the year, and consistent communication over time helps me understand the relationship between the photographer and their photograph. I also try and follow interesting works I find on Instagram or photography platforms on the internet, but I like to observe the work for a while before making any curatorial decisions."

ANSHIKA VARMA
Photographer, Independent Curator and Founder, Offset Project, New Delhi

INTERVIEW WITH ANA SAMOYLOVA





Establishing Gallery Relationships

Ana Samoylova is a Miami-based photographer whose work explores themes of environmentalism, consumerism, and the sublime image. She explores photography through prints and exhibition installations, and is currently represented by three galleries: Dot Fiftyone Gallery (Miami), Galerie Caroline O'Breen (Amsterdam), and Galerie Peter Sillem (Frankfurt). In this conversation, she candidly speaks about her involvement with galleries and navigating the muddy waters of representation.

LensCulture: I want to start by going back to your MFA studies, because it's a path that a lot of artists take in order to explore their work and bring a sense of legitimacy to their practice. When you were in school, did working with a gallery feel accessible to you? What was your perception of galleries at this stage in your career?

Ana Samoylova: It was all incredibly opaque. No one in my MFA program explained that world to us, and I think many graduate programs are like that. People generally understand the application of your MFA as either a pathway to teaching, or miraculously figuring out how to operate as an artist. In my experience, many people who do MFAs disappear and fade away. It's more common for people to not make it than to make it, and that opacity about galleries doesn't help.

LensCulture: How did you maintain involvement in the industry after your MFA came to an end?

Ana: As a student, I knew that it was up to me to do research and figure out the structure of the industry on my own. I got a teaching position right out of grad school, but I realized early on that I didn't want to teach full-time. There is the initial fantasy of getting a tenure track position, and when I achieved that, I quickly understood that it didn't fix my problems. I'm not the kind of person who can coast, so I was giving my best efforts to something that was essentially meaningless to me. In the same way, there's this fantasy that a gallery is going to solve your problems. As artists, there is an antiquated perception of galleries as dealers who apply for grants for you, giving you a spectacular show that's covered in the press, generating sales—ultimately, we think that galleries will make our careers sustainable. The truth is, those days are long gone.



LensCulture: How, then, did you begin partnering with galleries? What were the considerations you made before establishing a collaboration with them?

Ana: After my MFA, I started showing my work at a lot of juried events and open calls, which also meant I started getting a few sales. For galleries, working with an artist is a business partnership, because as an organization, they are also trying to survive. They need to believe that the work is strong in a conceptual sense, but they also need to be sure it is sellable, so being able to demonstrate that I had sales was crucial.

That being said, it took me some time to find the right fit. Once I started to see what was selling, I could have gone into tunnel vision, only focusing on making simpler things that appealed to buyers. We see this all the time at art fairs, which are never the best indicator of "good art"—a lot of it is really decorative. Some people want to move in that direction, but the important thing is understanding what you want for yourself. I have always made strange, challenging work, so when it sells, it's always a miracle for me. In the end, I would say the two main factors that helped me appeal to galleries were: getting my work into private collections, and then getting press coverage.

LensCulture: A lot of artists think that all press is good press, and there's a sense that getting your work paired with any text is good, even if it's a regurgitation of your own artist statement. What's your take on this notion?

Ana: Not all press matters. I have been approached by others to use my work in their publications, and they will literally copy and paste my artist statement. You have to be very conscientious of this kind of editing, and start asking yourself what the point of it is.

LensCulture: That's important for artists to know: you are allowed to have standards for how your work is presented. I think that maps on to working with galleries, as well. Good quality partnerships take patience and mutual understanding, and many artists simply focus on getting into *any* gallery. What were some of the criteria that were important for you when you were looking at galleries to partner with?

Ana: The fact is, there are way too many artists for the number of galleries that exist. And even then, there are too many galleries that end up being flukes. Many places do calls-for-entry where artists have to pay a fee, and that's when you start entering a grey area. But if we aren't thinking about those types of institutions, and you want to approach a gallery to be a permanent part of their program, you have to look at their existing artists. Are they artists with whom you've already shown your work, or artists who you've been compared to? Are there parallels without being too similar, so that you can remain distinct?

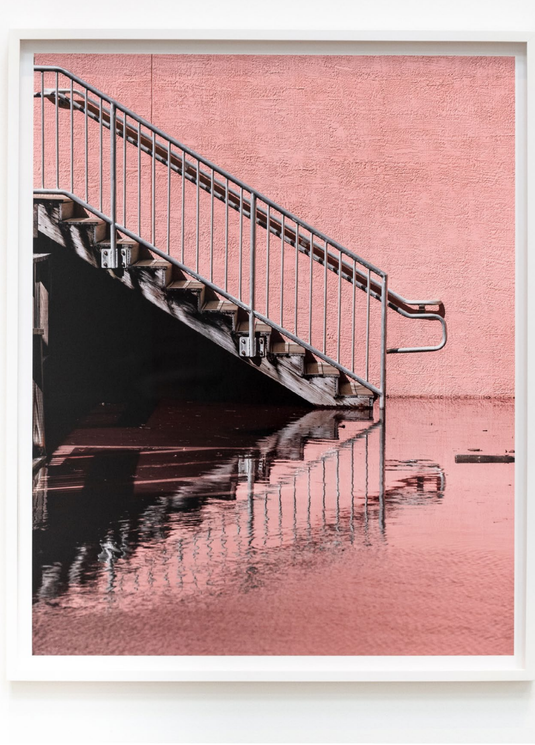
Usually galleries try to diversify, having mediums other than photography, but in a gallery that only represents photographers, they likely specialize in collectors who understand the medium. There are pros and cons to both of these situations. In a multimedia gallery, you might be one of a few photographers, meaning your images can stand out, but many of these galleries don't push photography as much as other pieces. In the general hierarchy of works of art, photography falls quite low on the spectrum of desirability for a typical collector who might understand a painting, but doesn't understand why an edition of five prints is as expensive. On the flip side, in a photo gallery, you are shown alongside a number of other photographers who might be more compelling for collectors interested in the medium.

LensCulture: There is so much information out there for photographers about how to pitch to curators, editors and galleries, and it often focuses on things like the length of a PDF, the length of an email, or the formality of your pitch. How do you approach your partnerships with galleries and other institutions?

Ana: Something I learned after I left the cozy bubble of academia was that outside of that world, nothing is guaranteed. You have to build a network for yourself, and I do hate that word because it sounds so business-like. But for me, it was actually about breaking down my own ego, where I thought things would just come to me. In reality, they don't. I'm from Moscow, and when I moved to the US I lived in the Midwest, but not Chicago; and then the Northwest, but not New York; and now I'm in the middle of the jungle in Miami. I realized that because of my location, things wouldn't come to me.

On top of that, I'm conditioned as a woman. There are some very aggressive players in this field, and that never felt natural to me—but there are ways to collaborate and meet people that are not aggressive. So when I say "network," I mean understanding that the career of an artist is not a solo endeavour. You also have to realize that your work is not for everyone. I have done my fair amount of reaching out, and if they don't respond, I don't take it personally! It's not about aggressively getting coverage for yourself. Rather, it's about framing your work as content for their publications, or a possible collaboration with you later on. And for the artist, the goal should be the contextualization of your work.







LensCulture: You've partnered with three different galleries, and I was wondering if you could speak about that decision. I remember when you were looking for your Amsterdam gallery, you did so much research.

Ana: I did! I went to Amsterdam while I was working on my project *FloodZone*, and I immediately noticed that the Netherlands has it figured out when it comes to photography. Amsterdam as a port for photography felt tangible, and that sparked my curiosity—there were so many museums specializing in the medium. I asked everyone I knew, with an understanding that there was a foundation of support for my medium, specifically. For example, I researched the same thing in Moscow, but the community just isn't there, and somewhere like France has particular tastes when it comes to photography. In the end, Amsterdam resonated with me when it came to what the institutions were doing. You have to find the right place.

I asked whoever I knew to put me in touch with people, and at some point a collector was visiting Art Basel in Miami Beach, and he came to my studio for a group visit. He was from Amsterdam, and I told him that I wanted something there that could keep me tied to the city. The next time I went to Amsterdam, I contacted him and he put me in touch with galleries directly. My advice is: go through collectors who buy from specific galleries, because their word weighs a hell of a lot more than cold calling, which I don't think works at all. He called up five galleries, and I had five meetings, and three out of the five gave me the green light. I went with my intuition when it came to who I settled with, which was the one that felt the kindest and most personable.

LensCulture: What are some red flags or things to keep in mind for photographers who are interested in working with a gallery?

Ana: This is why a network of peers is important. If anyone has strange stories about a particular place, it's important for you to know about them. I've had a lot of friends talk me out of galleries, too. Yes, galleries can be volatile, but galleries can also continue to operate and be successful after they have failed many people, even financially. There are so many cases where a work is sold and the artist is never paid.

LensCulture: That's so awful.

Ana: Exactly. So in that regard, you don't want to work with just anybody to get on the inside. You need to know where your losses could manifest. Are you responsible for shipping the work round trip? What happens if a piece is lost?

LensCulture: How has partnering with galleries affected your workload and your process, if at all?

Ana: It's not that I can just sit back, even with three galleries, and do nothing. In Europe, they have their own collector base, so they take on a lot of that promotion, but in the US I am very much hustling for my gallery. I bring my collectors to them, and they come to a show; I reach out to editors, and then I get press. Galleries don't have time to do all of that for you—they have their own contacts, and I have mine.



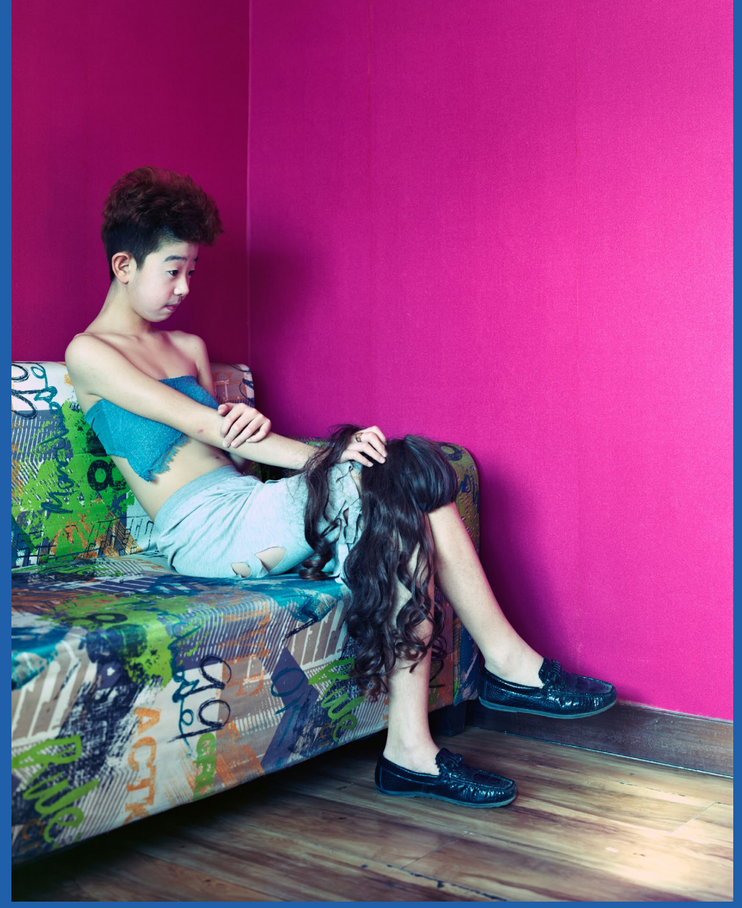
Again, my work is not formulaic, so it's not a minimal abstraction that anybody would want over their sofa. At the same time, I am not going to give up my complexity just to suit whatever sells, even though I have learned what sells with my work! So, it doesn't necessarily change your process, but it does validate your work, to an extent.

LensCulture: What are some final important points for photographers to consider about working with galleries?

Ana: It's important for people to understand that partnering with a gallery is a merging of contacts, and a gallery's contacts remain anonymous for the most part, while your contacts go in their rolodex. Once you start working with galleries, they expect you to not sell out of the studio, so if you have a history of studio sales, prepare to give up on that and prepare to have your cost consistent, because no gallery is going to work with an artist who slices half off the price in the studio while they are spending money promoting the artist. Once you are with galleries, you are selling through those galleries at a fixed price.



Interview by Cat Lachowskyj





INTERVIEW WITH RONGHUI CHEN

Artistic Evolution through Exhibiting

Ronghui Chen is a photographer based between Shanghai and New Haven, where he is currently pursuing an MFA at Yale University. He grew up in Lishui, a small village in China's Zheijang province, and started making photographs in high school. His project *Freezing Land*, recently published as a photobook by Jiazazhi, is an exploration of northeastern China's youth culture and the tension between rural seclusion and urbanization. In this conversation, he shares how exhibiting his work has helped him better understand his practice as an artist.

LensCulture: When you first started photographing, what was your understanding of galleries and exhibitions? Did they feel unattainable and distant?

Ronghui Chen: When I first started photographing in 2011, I thought that galleries and exhibitions were just about the art market and money. I never thought that I could show my work in a gallery or attend a fair like Photo London, and you couldn't find much photography in China's galleries at the time. If anything, I thought that my work might have the opportunity to be exhibited at a photography festival. In China, the local government is willing to invest in holding photography festivals because they can attract many visitors to a given region, and photographers have the opportunity to exhibit their work and receive rewards, like money or project support.

LensCulture: At what point did you realize that exhibitions could be an interesting way to present the subject matter in your work?

Ronghui: In 2015 I went to Austria, where a large retrospective on Joel Meyerowitz was on display. It was the first time I had ever seen an exhibition solely consisting of photographs, and it was also the first time I saw large-format photographs made so beautifully. I had only seen his work on the Internet before that point, which was so different than seeing it in real life.

Cover Images - LEFT: Untitled, (Doilies #1), 2016. From the series "Mental Maps" © Marina Font.
RIGHT: Cheese Balls, 2012, from the series "Emergent Behavior" © Thomas Jackson





LensCulture: When was your first exhibition? What did it look like?

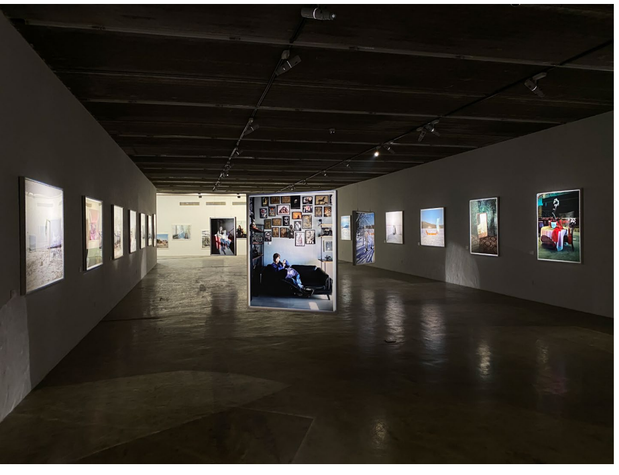
Ronghui: In that same year, I had my first solo exhibition at a non-profit organization in Shanghai attached to a cafe. At first I felt a little frustrated, because it wasn't a traditional white cube, but I soon realized that there were more than enough possibilities for interesting interaction. I primarily exhibited news photos about the refugee crisis in Europe, and the integrated space minimized the distance between my photographs and the audience. I also held two sharing sessions to introduce my work, and the exhibition ended up attracting more than 10,000 people.

LensCulture: How have you exhibited your work since then, and what are the things you pay attention to when considering an exhibition of your work?

Ronghui: After the first exhibition, I started getting more exposure, and I held three solo exhibitions and participated in more than twenty group exhibitions around the world, from China to Arles, New York, Amsterdam, and Paris. Photographic exhibitions often need to re-export works, because transporting photos is very expensive, so I usually re-export photos locally. This means that I find a way to make samples for the curator, so that the output is more accurate, and then I make adjustments according to the venue. I pay more attention to the lighting conditions than the size of the wall, because the lighting in different scenes allows viewers to have multiple experiences of the work. For example, some of my exhibitions in the Netherlands and France were in churches or historical relics, so I make the works have a dialogue with these sites, and then I'll adjust the size and materials. If it is in a fully-enclosed white box, I choose my fixed output size and paper.









LensCulture: How has exhibiting your photographs changed how you think about your work?

Ronghui: I think that a photograph is complete only when it is finally printed, rather than when I press the shutter. When I work, I think about the exhibition situation, because that is how viewers interact with my photographs. I want people to see how I think and view things as an artist. Many details of an exhibition, such as the size, location, and sequence of images, slowly form in my mind as I walk through a space. Of course, sometimes when I have the opportunity to exhibit at a good museum or gallery, I wonder whether I have enough good work to present. When I was in New York, I would often visit bigger museums and galleries, and I would imagine that it was my exhibition on view, thinking about how I would present my work in the space, and how the audience would see my work.

LensCulture: So when you make images, do you think about how they will look exhibited?

Ronghui: I focus on ensuring that I am making a good photograph. Exhibiting is not the purpose of the artist's creation, but a way for the artist to display their work. As long as my work is good enough, I can definitely find a way to exhibit it. Good curators also help artists sort out a good context or sequence to display work. That being said, my creative methods determine certain exhibition factors. For example, I have always liked shooting with large-format cameras, so my print size is relatively large.

LensCulture: Do you think exhibiting your work shaped how you put together your first book, *Freezing Land*? Do you prefer seeing your work as a book or in exhibitions?

Ronghui: When I was first working on *Freezing Land*, I wanted to present it as an exhibition, not a photobook. In fact, I had the idea to make a photobook after quite a few exhibitions of the work. In this era of rapid change, publishing a photobook is even more difficult than making an exhibition. With a photobook, I have the opportunity to present my work in its entirety, which is different from an exhibition, where I only have the opportunity to show a small sample of my photographs. In an exhibition, I show new possibilities with each installation, such as adding archival materials, video, or some other multimedia interaction. I want everyone to find something new in the exhibition environment.

LensCulture: Have you ever thought about gallery representation? Do you think it is necessary for emerging artists?

Ronghui: I think it is a complicated situation. When I was in China, I was in contact with some galleries, and I also cooperated with some agencies. There, many people, including those in the art system, do not understand contemporary photography that much, so galleries are a good way to disseminate the idea that photography is an important medium in contemporary art. For me, working with galleries is a current choice, but it wasn't necessarily a goal.





I think the biggest advantage of gallery representation is more people seeing my work offline. Galleries participate in photography fairs and exhibitions, such as Photo London or AIPAD, and although the Internet is very convenient, offline viewing and online viewing are completely different experiences. I want to ensure that people can see the materiality of my photos, rather than experience them as electronic images.

LensCulture: What's next for you in terms of exhibitions? Is there anything you would like to try in an exhibition space that you haven't yet?

Ronghui: In my latest solo exhibition I added more media, including videos and text. I hope to find a more powerful way to present still photos in future exhibitions, because I think there are many possibilities for still images.

— Interview with Cat Lachowskyj







How to Approach a Gallery

INTERVIEW WITH KAYCEE OLSEN

Kaycee Olsen is an art advisor who designs exhibitions, coordinates museum acquisitions, and represents a myriad of photographers. Before Von Lintel, Olsen was the director of Kopeikin Gallery and ran her own gallery, Kaycee Olsen Gallery, also in Los Angeles. In this conversation, she speaks about fostering a relationship with a gallery and how to tell if your work has appeal.

Cover Images: From the series “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” © Jeff Sheng

LensCulture: What do you find rewarding about working with an artist?

Kaycee Olsen: I enjoy having a relationship with the artist and working on shows alongside them. It’s an incredible feeling when you work together to decide on the direction of an exhibition—such shows are very much the byproduct of that relationship. Also, as a gallerist, you form very close relationships with your collectors. Sometimes, the collectors even end up fostering the artists directly; they’ll be supportive about buying work from new shows to donate to museums, or they will help raise money to publish books. The life-cycle of an artist and an artwork is very interesting to me, so I truly enjoy that aspect of the job.

LensCulture: If a photographer does feel ready to start a relationship with a gallery, how should they go about it?

Kaycee: Here are my tips: first of all, you should go to the shows. It sounds simple but it helps a lot if the people working there recognize you. As a gallerist, one often receives cold calls or unsolicited submissions, and you can tell that these artists have never looked at the gallery’s program because they’re not a good fit at all. This is not a comment on the value of their work—but it’s essential to know your audience and who you’re showing your work to. Ultimately, the number one thing is that your photography should be a good fit for the gallery’s program. You should be able to say, “Yes, this makes sense in relation to their other artists.”

LensCulture: How do you tell if it makes sense?

Kaycee: When I worked for Von Lintel, almost every photographer we represented had an experimental process (with the exception of Edward Burtynsky). All of our artists pushed the medium in new directions—even Joni Sternbach, who uses a vintage process of wet-plate collodion, takes an old format and makes it new again. Klea McKenna is another great example. She's a camera-less photographer who makes photograms in all sorts of ways.

Another piece of advice is to make sure that your outreach is personal. If you can't make it to the gallery, make sure you're addressing the email to the Director, and make sure you know what you're talking about. How you approach a gallery is a very delicate process. It can make or break your relationship. I now have relationships with a lot of artists whom I met at portfolio reviews—I gave them feedback and then kept the door open to continue our conversation. At the time, none of them became people that we added to the program at Von Lintel, but if I meet someone who runs a gallery where they might be a good fit, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend an artist to that gallerist. In short: the more eyes you have on your work, the better.



15.01.29 #4 Henry (2015)
© Joni Sternbach. Image courtesy of the artist and Von Lintel Gallery

LensCulture: Did any of the galleries you have worked for have a system for appraising proposals from hopeful photographers? How does that process work?

Kaycee: It's very organic. Sometimes I would go to studio visits, and if I liked the work enough, I would share it with the owner of the gallery I worked at. I would also receive recommendations from our own artists, and that's honestly what I like best. I'm always asking the artists I work with, "Who are you into these days? What's new?"

LensCulture: Once you represent someone, how do you decide which series or which pieces are sellable or a good fit for the gallery?

Kaycee: Usually, galleries carry the artist's most recent work. That's generally the case for shows as well. At Von Lintel, if we saw something recent that we liked, we'd say "We'd like to do a show of that work," and then give them parameters for when we thought the show would take place. Then, they continued to work on the series and we would move things forward in the gallery. Sometimes an artist goes in another direction, and that's fine, but if we've already agreed on a show, we would often say directly, "Hey, this is great, but for the show I'd like to see something more in the direction we discussed before."

Galleries are usually not afraid to make suggestions. We never liked to give anyone firm directions, but everyone likes to know what is going to sell, and if we have an idea about that, we'll definitely vocalize it.



Konstrukt 83 (2012)
© Christiane Feser. Image courtesy of the artist and Von Lintel Gallery



© Klea McKenna. Image courtesy of the artist and Von Lintel Gallery

LensCulture: And some collectors will also donate to museums, right?

Kaycee: Yes. When I worked at Von Lintel, we were very fortunate to have good relationships with collectors in town, and we knew that everything they bought would eventually end up at the Getty or at LACMA. We had a great relationship with the curators at those institutions—they're thrilled to receive the work. Sometimes a collector will even say, "Tell the curator to come and pick whatever piece they want for the museum collection." That's a best-case scenario!

—Excerpt of an interview with Coralie Kraft, updated by Serge J-F. Levy





Navigating the Artist-Gallery Relationship

INTERVIEW WITH DINA MITRANI

Dina Mitrani is the founder & director of Mitrani Gallery in Miami, Florida. After more than 20 years in the fine art world—both in Miami and New York—Dina decided to open a gallery focusing exclusively on photography in November 2008. In addition to running the gallery, Dina also served as an art consultant and advisor for both novice and established collectors at private and public institutions. In this interview, she offers advice on how to advance your photography practice, including tips about creating an eye-catching CV, working with collectors and clients, and more.

LensCulture: You've worked with experienced and inexperienced collectors and clients. How do you match a client with a piece of artwork?

Dina Mitrani: First, I need to understand the client's aesthetic sensibility—what are they looking for and why. I also need to consider where the work will be placed, what size would be best, and what their budget is. After all of those considerations, it's a process of making suggestions that I think might work. Sometimes a client knows exactly what they want; other times, it's a longer process of looking. In every case, I say that the image must be something the client loves to look at.

Clients should also consider an artist's career trajectory. A photographer's CV should show active participation in competitions, group shows, local museum events and exhibitions, photo-magazines, juried competitions and blogs, and anything that will show that the artist is not only making work, but also making sure that the work gets seen by their peers, professionals, and the general public. This is usually the most difficult thing for artists to do, especially introverted ones, but necessary to exemplify the artist's efforts to further their career. Even if the artwork is really good, it will not receive the recognition it deserves if it stays in the studio.

On the client side, I advise inexperienced collectors to start looking at art—not only in commercial galleries, but in museums and art studio complexes, where the artists are always happy to talk about what they do and how they make their work. All of these experiences help inform a client's choices. It's a process, but it's fun!

Cover Images - LEFT: Untitled, (Doilies #1), 2016. From the series "Mental Maps" © Marina Font.
RIGHT: Cheese Balls, 2012, from the series "Emergent Behavior" © Thomas Jackson



Universus #26, 2014 © Tatiana Parcero

LensCulture: Do you ever source photography for clients outside of your gallery? If so, how do you find it?

Dina: Having run the gallery for nine years, I have met many artists locally as well as throughout the country at photography festivals where I review portfolios. Sometimes, I see work that may not quite fit within my gallery's program, but it's still good, so I keep files on these artists. At times I have corporate curatorial projects like hotels, and I may include their work in those projects. I also occasionally receive inquiries from designers looking for specific images for a client's home. Many times, if my gallery artists don't fit what they are looking for, I may offer work by artists that I do not specifically "represent."

LensCulture: Is there anything you wish more photographers understood about the art market?

Dina: The art market is a complex place, and can be frustrating, but do not give up. Make your work and continue to promote it. Apply to festivals, group exhibitions, and online competitions. And remember that too many editions or sizes of one image is not better. Less is more. Also, an easy-to-navigate website is very important, as is the updated CV. If there is an artist I am interested in, I usually ask to have 10 to 15 low-resolution jpegs to add to a file on my computer. When I am looking for something in particular for a client, I usually scan all those files to see if something fits.

LensCulture: What do you look for in a project or photographer when you're considering them for your gallery? How do you find the majority of the photographers you work with?

Dina: Since I opened the gallery, the program has narrowed to focus on more conceptual and narrative photography. I am also interested in pushing the boundaries of the photograph and presenting works that combine different methods of art-making, like when a photograph is intervened with thread, paint, or drawing, and the final image is harmonious and impactful. Most of the time, the image itself must have a sort of visceral impact—something that enters my eyes and continues into my gut. Then the cerebral element must work. The artist's intention must come through the work. For me, art must have some element of the emotional—it should be moving.

LensCulture: Is there anything that will make you quickly dismiss a project? Is there anything photographers should steadfastly avoid when it comes to presentation or approaching you?

Dina: A person's manner, attitude, honesty and gratitude is very important. Many times, I may have an initial response to the work, but the personality of the artist is just as essential. The relationship between a gallerist and an artist is very much a partnership where both work together to produce an exhibition, hang the show, market, and ultimately sell the work to both private and public collectors. This means open, honest and easy communication is crucial. It's a bit like a marriage, which means both sides should give and get something from the arrangement.



Untitled (coffee cup), 2004 © Peggy Levison Nolan

—Excerpt of an interview with Coralie Kraft

05. WRAP UP

© Madhavan Palanisamy



Congratulations! You have reached the end of our *Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries*, a mighty resource for getting started with galleries. No matter where you're at with your gallery journey, we hope you arrive on this page feeling clearer about your direction and goals, and more confident in your work and professional materials.

Over the last four chapters, you've learned about

+ the different gallery types and how they work
+ what gallery is right for you and your career goals
+ how to prepare your portfolio and written materials to be seen by gallery professionals
+ strategies for making yourself known & building a community around your work

By completing each task, you have

+ become more clear on your career goals
+ discovered several galleries to approach with your work now or in the future
+ created or refreshed important professional texts to support your work
+ benefited from professional written feedback on your bio and project statement (optional)
+ allowed yourself the time to consider your portfolio deeply and prepare your images for presentation
+ identified ways to connect with galleries and your photography community

Well done! Working on the professional side of your practice is vital for your photography career. Investing time and thought via a methodical process of reflection, feedback and action will set you up for increased success, no matter the direction you choose to take it. With that in mind, be sure to take a moment to reflect on everything you have discovered through the chapters and tasks of this guide, and feel proud of the work you've completed. Bravo!



Enjoy the journey

Photographers' Guide to Working with Galleries provides a unique insight into the process of getting started with galleries, but we are fully aware that there is more than one path to success, and success itself is how you define it. The research and interviews we conducted while making this guide highlight how intimidating the gallery world can be for photographers, and perhaps even reading this guide makes you feel like there are many things to get right (or potentially get wrong) as you develop your own approach. With that in mind, we want to finish with a reminder to breathe, enjoy the process. and take things at your own pace. The most important thing is that you be yourself and make work that feels good for you. Take time to celebrate yourself, and if you're ever unsure of what step to take, always return to the thinking you did about your work and goals in the first task of this guide.

LAST CHANCE

LensCulture Fine Art Project Review

Before we say say goodbye, we'd like to remind you one last time about our *LensCulture Fine Art Project Review*.

First impressions count. This is a wonderful opportunity to dramatically improve your project and supporting written materials before you connect with our team of industry professionals, including curators, gallerists, and exhibiting photographers, who are here to help you by providing thoughtful, critical feedback and personalized advice.

Knowing your work has gone through at least one cycle of feedback and rework is great for your confidence, and the process of preparing and improving your materials is a wonderful way to gain new insight and skills that can be applied to projects in the future.

Sign up today and you'll get written professional feedback on:

+ Your project images
+ Your project statement
+ You artist bio

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PROJECT REVIEW



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Go on, get out there and make remarkable images.

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