

How to Find, Prepare for and Participate in an Art Fair
Danielle F. Ducrest
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Introduction & Overview

Perhaps you want to sell your own art or you enjoy art, and you enjoy discovering what local artists have created. You can find art on display at many different venues, and you can sell and buy art at those venues, too.

Coffee houses, recreational centers, libraries, museums, gift shops and finished craft stores are all viable places to go looking. For example, in San Marcos, TX, where I lived until recently, the activity center regularly displays in their hallways two-dimensional paintings, drawings and prints. The Coffee Pot, Tantra Coffee House and Wake the Dead Coffee House all display art on their walls, and the art is often for sale. Wake the Dead also sells art and crafts at their register,

and the Coffee Pot sells magnets made by a local artist. Paper Bear—an art supply and gift shop—sells many artists’ work on commission.

If none of these sorts of venues are ideal for you, perhaps you’re looking for a day or week-long event instead. In the Texas Hill Country, I have found plenty of weekly, monthly and annual opportunities, including arts and crafts fairs, market days, music festivals, farmers markets, comic conventions, other conventions and conferences. In San Marcos, the Farmers Market on the Square, held every Saturday, has featured local farmers and local artists selling jewelry, hand-sewn purses and clothing, pot holders and handmade soap. Once a month, nearby New Braunfels, Gruene and Wimberley all have Market Days, attended by hundreds of vendors and thousands of shoppers. Some towns, including Austin and San Antonio, have weekly and monthly Farmers Markets, fairs, festivals and other events. Other events—such as conventions and art fairs—occur annually instead of monthly or weekly.

If you don’t live in Texas, events like these may still be available in your area. In this tutorial, I’m going to tell you what I did to find these events. My goal is to give you some idea of where to start looking and what to do when you find an event you like, no matter where you live in the US.

The advice here is targeted at vendors in the United States, but if you live elsewhere, you may find some of this helpful.

Since 2009, I have participated as an art vendor at several outdoor and indoor events. Sometimes I attended an event by myself, and other times, I shared a booth with between 1-8 other artists. Sometimes I was successful. Sometimes I wasn’t. A lot of factors affect the success of a sale: the presentation of the booth, the prices of the items, the US economy, popular trends and customers’ personal preferences.

I often learned about upcoming events through a Google search or through word-of-mouth. Other times, I saw fliers posted at coffee houses or at the public library. I would contact the managers of each event and ask for an application, and if they still had spaces, they’d send me a form. Each event charges a different fee to participate. There’s a lot of information already on the web about how to become a vendor. I want to share my experiences with you and review every step on the way to being an art vendor at day-long and week-long events. I hope you will find this guide helpful, and at the end, if you still have questions, comments or criticisms, please don’t hesitate to contact me at dfducrest@gmail.com.

Step-by-Step

1. Make art.

Some guidelines about how to prepare for events will tell you that you can make art before *or* after you register for an event. However, I’d suggest making the art first. Some events require photographs of your art with your application, so you need to have some art made before you apply. Some events occur very soon; for example, if you sign up to be a vendor at an event, and you have three weeks to make product, not only will those three weeks be highly stressful but you may not have enough product to sell.

2. Mat and/or frame artwork, if needed.

If you sell two-dimensional art, matted artwork is more professional and protects the art from damage. Mat board and a plastic covering is enough. You can buy pre-cut mats at arts & crafts stores, such as Hobby Lobby and Michaels, and online. You can also buy mat board and cut it yourself. Interior and exterior cutting tools are available for sale at Hobby Lobby and at other places. Polypropylene bags and cello bags can be purchased online. You can also inquire at your local arts & crafts store about whether or not they carry plastic coverings.

You may purchase and provide frames for customers, but you may not want to. Frames are expensive and difficult to keep in pristine condition, and you will be carrying them to and from events. Your customers may buy a framed piece of art from you, but they may prefer to go shopping for a frame of their choice. Matted but unframed art is more likely to be in your customers' price range, while framed art may not. Still, to appeal to as many customers as possible, and to give your customers as many options as possible, you could offer a mix of unframed art and framed art. The choice is up to you.

3. Determine the prices for your art.

It depends on the customers in your region, of course, but I've found many of my customers do not prefer to haggle and want a set, pre-determined price.

If you are uncertain how to price your art, compare your art with the art of your peers. To do this, you can scout art fairs for other artist's prices, if local artists sell artwork similar to yours. Etsy.com is a good place to go online for pricing research. For my jewelry, I charge the cost of materials + \$7.50 for every hour of personal labor—if a necklace's materials cost \$6 and I spent two hours creating the pendant, then the total cost would be \$21 (though I might round this down to \$20).

Pricing is tricky, especially in the current US economy. Many customers will look but not buy, especially if your prices are too steep. You're more likely to make sales if you offer items for \$10 or under. It would be a good idea to have a mix of inexpensive and pricier items, but you will want many inexpensive items.

Deals and sales might attract customers as long as you can still make a profit with the discounted prices.

4. Create an inventory.

If you have to pay state or local sales tax, or if you have lots of product and need help keeping track of what you have, an inventory of your work and the prices at which you sell them can be especially helpful. I use an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of the price of individual materials, hours of labor, price with and without Texas sales tax, the price of an item on Etsy (which includes Etsy & PayPal fees), and what has sold and not sold.

5. Acquire any necessary permits.

The State of Texas requires all vendors to register for free for a Sales & Use Tax Permit. Other states require this or other permits, and some states do not. Some states, cities and parishes/counties will require a sales tax be tacked onto any items you sell. Texas vendors must fill out a Sales & Use Tax Form either quarterly or annually.

Visit your local government's web site for more information. Event applications will ask for any required permit numbers; perusing event applications can sometimes be a way of determining what permits you need.

6. Find events.

a. Locate events via the internet.

i. Do an internet search for art fairs, markets and other events

Go to Google (or any other search engine). Run a search for art fairs in your hometown. Look for art fairs in your town or in the surrounding towns and cities. You can also run searches for Market Days, Farmers Markets, music festivals, film festivals, conventions and conferences. If your art fits into a specific genre or medium, run a search for conventions that celebrate that genre or medium. For example: if you make steampunk jewelry, search for local steampunk conventions. If you make crochet hair accessories, search for local needlework conventions.

ii. Visit the web sites that appear in the search results. Review the information they've posted for both vendors and buyers. Check that they will accept the artwork you want to sell and if customers are likely to buy it over other products being sold at the event.

b. Find events by checking local listings.

Upcoming events may be advertised in local business magazines, fliers and newspapers. These ads are usually intended for customers, not vendors. Be prepared for the possibility that it is too late to apply, but if the event is repeated at a later date, you may be able to participate then. Contact the event coordinators for more information. Check that they will accept the artwork you want to sell, and if attendees are likely to buy your work over other products being sold at the event.

c. Find events by visiting the library and other public locations.

Check event postings at the public library or at local coffee shops. An upcoming event may be advertised there. These ads are usually intended for customers, not vendors. Be prepared for the possibility that it is too late to apply, but you may be able to participate at the event at a later date. Contact the event coordinators for more information. Check that they will accept the artwork you want to sell and if attendees are likely to buy your work over other products being sold at the event.

7. Scout the Event.

If the venue occurs weekly/monthly, do some scouting. Visit the fair, market or other venue and take note of the types of art media for sale, the number of customers, the frequency and types of sales, the location, and any other concerns you may have.

If possible, speak to the event coordinators about your interest in being a vendor. They can tell you if spaces are available or if upcoming events are booked.

8. Read over the application form and other vendor information carefully.

Some fairs have restrictions on the type of art they want. If you sell something the art fair isn't interested in selling, don't waste your time applying. If you have questions, contact them. Event coordinators are usually very open to communication. They want your art, and you want to sell your art; it's a mutually beneficial relationship, as long as you stay professional.

9. Consider the booth fee and any other fees.

Some events will require an application fee and a booth fee. Other events will ask only for a booth fee. A booth space is very rarely free. Booth fee rates can be low, affordable, or steep. Rates are higher when the event coordinator or committee expects a turn-out of several thousand or tens of thousands of people, such as at a convention or music festival. A higher turn-out increases your chances of selling your product, but your profit margin may be smaller due to the booth fee. Farmers Markets offer inexpensive booth fees to make the market accessible to small-time farmers and local artists. The downside to the low booth fee is that customers attend Farmers Markets first and foremost for produce, so while it may be cheaper to rent a space as an art vendor, you may not make as much profit as you would at other events.

10. Apply and pay all fees.

If you are confident you can sell enough to make a profit, or you're willing and able to take a chance, go ahead and apply. You should hear back soon if you are approved to participate, and if you are, you should receive further information about parking and event rules and regulations.

11. Buy display materials.

Unless your medium requires lots of tools and materials, your displays and the booth fee will be the most expensive parts of this venture. Again, **review the event application form carefully**. They may have some display materials available for rent or for free, such as tables, chairs and canopies. You may find this is the best option, though it may be cheaper to purchase your own. Sometimes, an event will require you to rent materials from them and will not give you the option to bring your own. Most of the time, an event will have no materials available, and you must bring everything yourself; this is the standard practice.

Materials you may need to buy and bring with you to the event include:

a. A 10'x10' canopy

--Other sizes of canopies are available, but the standard rental space at an event is 10'x10'. Some events may have other rental space sizes; the event application form should have a list.

Buy a canopy with straight sides, not sloping sides; some events do not take kindly to booths that take up more than 10'x10', and you may overstay your welcome at that event due to an oversized canopy.

Some places in the US that sell inexpensive canopies include:

--Academy Sports & Outdoors

--Wal-Mart

--amazon.com

--eBay.com

You can also search for local businesses that offer canopies for rent, such as party rental suppliers. This can be expensive, though, and it may be cheaper to simply buy your own canopy.

My 10'x10' canopy folds up and fits easily in my car. Be sure to measure the interior of your vehicle and make sure your canopy will fit.

- b. Concrete blocks, weights and/or stakes to secure your canopy in strong weather
A strong breeze can flip a canopy onto its side. Vendors have used:
 - i. weights designed to fit around the legs of a canopy frame;
 - ii. plastic buckets filled with concrete that dangle on ropes from the canopy frame
 - iii. stakes to stick through dirt, though this third option is useless if your booth space is on pavement
- c. Folding tables & other surfaces
How many tables you need depends on how much product you have. Be sure to buy tables that can fit in your vehicle and in your booth.

Instead of tables, you can be creative and use other display surfaces, including but not limited to shelves, easels, coat racks, hanging baskets and stools.

- d. Table cloths
An uncovered table is unattractive and unprofessional. A table covered by a cloth creates an attractive surface for your artwork. Use a color and material that compliments or enhances your art. Also use a color and material that compliments your other display materials. Don't use a color that will camouflage your art.
- e. Walls
You may have art that needs to be hung. Metal mesh walls can be expensive, but they may prove to be a good investment since the proper display can go a long way toward selling your product. Felt and carpeted walls are also available, or you can make them from scratch using fabric from a fabric store and wood from a home improvement store.

You may just want some canopy walls to keep out rain or create some shade. Waterproof canopy walls can be found at the same places that sell canopies. Canvas can be purchased at fabric stores and adapted for use as canopy walls.

- f. Displays
You can be creative with this part, or you can use standard professional displays.

If you have jewelry, you'll need special displays for earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and/or rings.

If you have two-dimensional artwork, table easels, full-sized easels or decorative boxes are all good ways to display your art.

If you buy walls for your booth, you'll need hooks on which to hang your art.

At outdoor events, the wind can work against you, so be sure to have some way of securing your art and your displays so nothing falls over or flies away. Jewelry displays can collapse in strong winds.

- g. Chairs
It's good to have a chair or stool for yourself (or one for you and each of your business partners). I've also found it's helpful and courteous to offer at least one chair

- for customers who want to rest for a moment (It doesn't hurt that sitting down keeps the customers around art they may be tempted to buy, too.).
- h. Optional: floorboards/rugs/carpets
Typically, art fairs are held outside, and grass or pavement forms the floor of most booths. But you can bring rugs or portable flooring. It can be a nice touch to your booth, but it's not necessary.
 - i. Optional: Price tags
Not all vendors use them, but I've found customers appreciate price tags. Some customers don't want to ask about the price of every item at your booth.
 - j. Optional: A dolly
This is not necessary, but it is very helpful. Making several trips from your booth to your car can be time and energy-consuming. A dolly cuts down on the number of those trips.
 - k. Optional: Shopping bags for purchases
On rainy days, plastic bags to protect purchased art are very useful. Small bags for jewelry are a good idea for small pieces. Tissue paper is useful for wrapping fragile items. There are cloth bags available online and at craft stores, as well, but plastic and paper shopping bags will work, too.
 - l. A receipt book
I find that most customers don't want a receipt, but it's good a receipt book just in case they do.
 - m. A money pouch or cash lock box
Make sure this is something you can carry. If you are working a booth by yourself, you'll need to take this with you on bathroom trips.
12. Other things you will need:
- a. Water and food
A water fountain or a food vendor may not be nearby, so be sure to bring several disposable water bottles or one water bottle and a couple gallon jugs of water. You may get hungry, too, so packing a lunch is a good idea; however, there may be food vendors at the event. Check first to make sure food vendors will be present.
 - b. Cash to make change
Go by the bank before the event, take out some 20's from the ATM and ask a teller to make change. You'll need several 1's, 5's, 10's, 20's, and other bills if you need them. If your prices do not round to the nearest dollar, you'll also need coin change.

It is usually up to you to accept checks, cash or credit. Some events may have a policy that all vendors accept cash or checks.

If you have a smartphone, apps and attachable devices are available that read credit cards. You can also rent credit card machines, which you can find online.

Optional: if you accept credit cards, post a sign at your booth. Some customers prefer to use a credit card and may be more inclined to visit your booth if they know the option is available.

If you accept checks, there's always the danger that customers' checks will bounce. Asking to see a driver's license or photo ID to match the name on the card with the customer's information on the check is a good practice. Writing the customer's ID number or driver's license number on the check is a good idea, as well.

c. Business cards or postcards

Some customers will not buy, but they will want business cards so they can contact you at a later date. It's also good practice to give buying customers a business card so they'll remember who you are and will be able to contact you to make another purchase.

On the card, it is a good idea to include at least your name, an e-mail address, and either a web site address or an online shop address, such as an Etsy shop.

If you purchase business cards, be wary of using VistaPrint. They have been known to charge monthly for a one-time-only transaction.

Some artists distribute postcards instead of business cards. Both types of cards are good ways to advertise your art and your business.

d. Optional: A banner

This isn't necessary, and many vendors don't use them. Still, a banner hung at your booth can be a good advertisement, and your business name may be more likely to stick in customers' minds. A banner can help customers find you at multiple events, as well.

e. Don't forget to bring the product you want to sell.

13. Practice setting up your canopy and displays.

There are various types of canopies, and each of them must be assembled differently. I would strongly suggest practicing setting up and taking down your canopy. This will save you time and energy on the day of the event.

If you're not certain how to arrange tables and displays inside your booth, experiment before the event. Most of the time, customers will be entering your booth through one wall, and the other three walls will not be open. The event coordinators may assign you a corner booth, giving you 2-3 walls free. Other arrangements are possible. If the booth spaces are pre-assigned, ask your coordinator where your booth will be. Before the event, practice arranging your tables and displays so you'll be prepared for any and all possibilities.

14. Get to the event on time.

The event will have scheduled time available for vendors to set up their booths before the event begins. Fair coordinators ask that vendors arrive, register and have their booths set up within this allotted time. Sometimes, vendors are late, and the coordinators do not mind. However, I would advise always being on time. The coordinators will remember who is late and who is on time, and this can affect whether or not you are invited to participate at a later date.

15. Set up your booth.

Some events will have volunteers who can assist you, but many events do not, so do not rely on being able to ask for help. Make sure you can handle everything you bring.

16. If you're in charge of a booth by yourself, it's a good idea to get to know your neighbors (It's a good idea to get to know your neighbors, anyway, since art vendors are awesome people). You can help each other watch your booths. When you have a pressing need to go to the bathroom, this is a good thing. Don't rely on this, though, because sometimes it's not possible to make friends with your neighbors.
17. Bring your cash with you whenever you leave your booth.
18. Sell your work.
19. I hope this goes without saying, but just in case: be courteous to customers, coordinators, other vendors, and event volunteers. The staff reserves the right to ban you from attending future events if you do not behave yourself.
20. Pack up your booth.
Vendors will often start packing up about half an hour before the end of the event. If your neighbors start to do this, it is safe to do the same, or you can keep out your displays until the official end of the event. You may get additional customers at the last minute.
21. Once you've returned home, count your earnings and take inventory of your remaining products.
22. Fill out any tax forms and send them. And then you're done.

This is an expensive business. You have to invest time, money and effort before you can make a profit. With the economy the way it is right now, it can be difficult to be successful. People are less likely to buy non-essential items than they were before the recession (essential items would include food, clothing and household tools). Still, if you enjoy art and connecting with artists and art enthusiasts, or if you find your niche of customers, fairs and markets can be fun and profitable. Good luck.

A Little Bit About Me

My name is Danielle Ducrest. I'm a Cajun girl, born and raised in Lafayette Parish, Louisiana. I have a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. I'm an artist and a writer. While I write fantasy fiction, I also have a passion for beadwork, digital art and graphic design. I make beaded bobbin jewelry and other beadwork, as well as other kinds of art. My jewelry, monotype prints and photographs have been available for sale at art fairs, festivals, market days and farmers' markets in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 in Louisiana and Texas.

My Etsy shop, Clockwork Bits & Bobbins at clockworkbobbins.etsy.com, is where you can find my beaded and steampunk jewelry and other beaded items. My photography, digital art and other art can be seen online at [RedBubble](http://danielleducrest.redbubble.com) and [DeviantArt](http://danielleducrest.deviantart.com). Prints of my art are available at both of those online galleries. You can learn more about me at my [web site](http://danielleducrest1.angelfire.com).