



AMERICAN TAPESTRY ALLIANCE

## Get Your Work Out There: EXHIBIT!

Jeane Vogel

Professional artists and rank beginners have the same need: we want our work to be seen by others. And we *don't*. We don't want ANYONE to see this. What if it's no good? What if it looks like everyone else's? What if no one likes it? What if every flaw announces its presence with a scream? On the other hand, what if it IS good?



*"Eiru, Goddess of Ireland"*

2019

*21" x 18" Wool warp and weft*

I'm not a fan of Andy Warhol, but I love his comment that it's not up to us to decide if the work is good. We create, others decide. We create because we are compelled to do so; we have no choice. Showing our work on an Internet group site is fine. Submitting our work to a juried exhibit can be terrifying. So, why do it? Why subject yourself to potential rejection?

For hobbyists and artists who produce work for themselves, there might not be a good reason to exhibit, as the experience is not for everyone, and certainly not for the faint of heart. But for artists who want to grow, who want to find out how their art compares to that of others, who want to know if their work is saleable, or who want to learn best practices, exhibitions are excellent learning experiences. The rewards of exhibiting are personal to each artist, but nothing beats seeing your work displayed and strangers gathered around to discuss it. For professional artists, exhibits broaden our audience and can lead to the next show. Even better is seeing that red dot — the universal gallery sign that a work has sold. That is priceless! For all artists, exhibitions build confidence, inspire us and others, and feed our need to communicate our visions. Art is communication and does not exist in a vacuum. From the first moment an artist dipped her hand in the cold ash of fire and left her mark on a cave wall, artists have used whatever materials and techniques are at hand to tell our stories. Art isn't a pretty picture; art is a profound personal message communicated from artist to viewer, sometimes throughout millennia. Art demands a relationship and can't do that if it is stuck in a closet.

If we look at the work of our hands and imagination as something pretty, maybe we don't need to show it to others. But if we perceive art as an urgent message that's seeking viewers, how can we *not* exhibit? Submitting work to be judged against the work of others is a frightening prospect. Fear of rejection is a poison dart to creativity. That fear can be boiled down to one simple component: *you don't like me!* That's what we do to ourselves, as our work reflects ourselves. If you don't like my work, you must not like me. I'm worthless, stupid, bad.

It's hard to remember that it's the work, not the person, that is liked or not, and art is subjective. The same work can receive multiple rejections and acceptances in the course of a year or two. It's not personal. And when you think about it, it's not the rejection that's so difficult, but fear of it. That we MIGHT fail is the first barrier that stops us from submitting work to a juried exhibition or seeking out a new gallery. Not understanding HOW to submit work is the second barrier. The first obstacle requires a leap of faith; the second is easy to hurdle.

### **Where to Exhibit**

Many new artists often look to public venues to hang their work. Coffee shops and restaurants are always looking for art to hang on their walls. That's when artists hear the biggest lie they will ever hear: *This will be great exposure.* It won't. Talk to any professional artist: rarely (if ever) have opportunities to exhibit or sell result from hanging work in a coffee shop. Ever. What *will* happen? Work will be ignored at best, covered in grime at worst. For fiber artists, public places where food and drink are served are nightmare exhibition venues.

Ok, then where to exhibit? Emerging artists have many opportunities. Local artist guilds often have member shows. Some public libraries and bookstores host shows. Every artist crawls before she walks, and walks before she runs. Crawling is important. Most member shows are not juried and are an excellent way to start the exhibition practice. When you're ready to walk — to jury — what's next?

### **What's A Juried Exhibition?**

Juried exhibitions can be local, regional, national, or international. Member organizations, non-profit arts groups, galleries, and some museums host juried exhibitions. A jury is a way to select a limited number of artworks from a larger group of submissions, and there is usually a fee. The jury can be one person or a group, generally independent of the sponsoring organization. Most juries are *blind*, meaning that artists' names are not revealed during the jury process.



*"Bring Them Home", 2019*  
9" x 8", Cotton warp, wool weft.

In the good old days, artists would photograph their work on slides and mail them with a check and application form. These days, everything is digital. Exhibitions start with a *call for art* or *call for submissions*. The artist fills out a form, agrees to terms of the exhibition, uploads images,

pays the fee, and whoosh—the submission is done. Sounds easy, right? Appearances can be deceiving.

### **Finding Calls For Submissions**

Every local arts organization that hosts exhibitions announces calls in their newsletters or Web sites. Start locally and speak with agency and show directors. Most times, gallery directors will do what they can to guide you through the process. If you are not skilled with computers, enlist the help of a computer-savvy friend, as everything is online these days. If necessary, learn the computer. It will be your friend, eventually. Beginning the process with local exhibits has the added advantage of delivering your accepted work in person, rather than shipping it. Almost all juried shows have jury fees; \$10.00 – \$50.00 is typical.

Some groups use their own submission systems, but most exhibits are advertised through one of four online art submission and jury systems: CaFE ([www.callforentry.org](http://www.callforentry.org)), Entrythingy ([www.entrythingy.com](http://www.entrythingy.com)), Juried Art Services ([www.juriedartservices.com](http://www.juriedartservices.com)), and Submittable ([www.submittable.com](http://www.submittable.com)). If you intend to exhibit as part of art or craft fairs, there's also Zapp ([www.zapplication.org](http://www.zapplication.org)). Each site is free to register, each is different in its own way, and each has hundreds of art opportunities. In addition to exhibits, most of these sites advertise competitive artist residencies, grants, contests, and public art opportunities. The experience can be overwhelming, so take it a step at a time.

### **Image Selection and Preparation**

Many exhibits have themes, and some have limitations as to which media is accepted. Some accept only work from artists who live in certain cities, states, or regions. It's important to read the call. That advice seems obvious, but too many artists submit work without reading all specifications. Read the call, then read it again.

Most shows identify the juror or jurors. Review their work to get a clue as to what they might consider but be aware that a juror who works in cut paper might be irked by seeing only cut paper submissions, and may *love* something completely outside her practice. Jurors are selected for their breadth of knowledge and skill, but they choose work that matches their understanding of the show theme and their personal vision of the show's appearance. (As a personal aside, it can be a thrill when a well-known artist is a juror and selects your work. I'm still riding high from the time that renowned artist Judy Chicago chose my work for an exhibit.

JUDY CHICAGO LIKES MY WORK! I'm flattering myself, but she chose it and that's enough for me!)

There are a few basic rules for submitting your work:

1. Select work that fits your interpretation of the exhibition theme, if there is one.
2. Explain that interpretation in the *Description* or *Artist Statement* section.
3. If there is a size limitation, observe it. Be aware that size includes framing.
4. Take good, sharp, well-lit images of your work. Review the many available tutorials concerning photography of your work. Barbara Burns provides great tips for photographing your work for submissions in another article published on ATA's website.
5. Title the work. Your title is a glimpse into your intent. It doesn't have to be profound, but a good title can influence a juror.
6. Photograph your work without a frame unless the frame is part of the art, not just part of the presentation.
7. Measure the work's final presentation. Unless specified otherwise, *Dimensions* of the work are measurements of the final presentation.
8. Write a good artist statement that explains your inspiration for creating your art. Be warned: more than half of artist statements begin with "My work is drawn from nature," or "I have been weaving since I was a little girl." Don't go there. Think deeply about what you want your work to say.
9. Keep track of everything. I use a simple spreadsheet that lists show names and dates, show venues, deadlines, submission dates, submission titles, announcements of jury results, actual jury results, shipping costs, shipment dates, tracking information, and juror names. You will be surprised at how often you will refer to that spreadsheet. For quick reference, I color-code rows in green if accepted, red if not. Do not be surprised to see more red rows than green but learn from each submission.
10. Add your name, title, and contact information to your work.
11. Do not call and ask for special treatment.
12. Meet deadlines.

Whether you enter a few local fiber guild shows or submit work regularly to exhibitions, sending your work out into the world can be scary. It can be paralyzing. What if the work is no good? What if it's great? No one wants rejection; we all want acceptance. That's human. Exhibiting artwork will bring rejection. It's not personal – remember that. Make it a mantra. *It's not personal*. Then celebrate acceptances with abandon. What's the first step? Just do it...screw up your courage, gather your best work, pay the fee, and submit to a juried show. Do it again, and again, and again.

Will you get rejected? I can almost guarantee it. Will you be accepted? If the work is good enough, yes. Will you learn from the experience? If you're brave enough, you will.

Talent, vision, execution — these traits are all vital parts of being an artist. Exhibiting our work is the prize we receive for creating it.

*Jeane Vogel is an award-winning artist in photography and mixed media and has exhibited her work in juried exhibits and fairs since 1980. She recently started weaving graphic tapestries and showing in juried exhibitions. Jeane is the executive director of Webster Arts in St. Louis, Missouri, an organization that hosts a national fine art fair in June and eight juried national and local exhibitions throughout the year. Her work can be seen at <http://www.vogelpix.com>. She writes about art and travel at <http://www.jeanevogelart.com>.*

About the Work:

*Eíru, Mother Goddess of Ireland*, flames of great ritual fires including ancient petroglyph symbols. 21×18 inches (54x46cm). wool warp, weft, 8 epi. Signature piece of 4-woman exhibit, *Feminine as Divine*, spring 2019, Erica Popp Gallery, St. Louis, MO.

*Bring Them Home*, inspired by immigrant families seeking sanctuary who are imprisoned and separated at the U.S. border. Wedge weave inspired by Diné (Navajo) weaving, 1870-1890. 9×7 inches (23x18cm). *Bring Them Home* was selected for ATA Small Works International 6: Beyond the Edge exhibit, 2019.