

Your Slides and the Jury— Understanding the Jury Process

by Bruce Baker

Most juries are anonymous or blind juries, meaning the jury does not know the name of the person who is being juried. In the past few years, however, there has been a movement to announce whose work is being shown. I have been on juries where a statement was read aloud. Some artists were very straightforward and sincere while others used statements that were very esoteric. I found the latter type of statement to be very distracting, particularly if the work did not match the description. If you are asked to provide an artist statement or a description, be sincere and keep it simple.

Scoring Standards

For most juries, the system that works the best to weed out work of lesser quality is to award scores of a one, two, four, or five, with five being a perfect score. After jurors have been seated for a while, they tend to award very few fives, keeping their perfect scores for only the most excellent work and images. There is no three. In other words, the jury cannot sit on the fence. Either they are for the work or they are against it.

Sometimes shows with a large number of applications score a one, two, five, or six, so they have more curve to the numbers. Some shows have so many people applying in certain media that it takes a perfect score to get into the show in those categories, especially such categories as jewelry, wearable art, and ceramics.



Deanna Chase

The jury in most cases sees the images twice in each media group. The first time is to rank the images in their minds so they know where the highs and lows are before they begin to score. For shows with lots of applications, the time the jury views them is very brief, and eight to ten seconds is not uncommon. In the amount of time that it takes you to tie one of your shoes, the jury has made a decision about your images.

Providing the Right Information

Your images are only an impression for the jury. If you provide too much complex information, they will not have time to figure it out. Questions are allowed during the first review, but they are discouraged. The only answers that are given to the questions that might be asked are the ones that you supply on the image description sheet. Questions are generally confined to: What is the object? What is the scale of the object? What are the materials? or What are the techniques being used?

If a question is asked about an image and the answer to the question is positive, this can be a very good thing. While the answer is being looked up, the jury will look at your images three to four times longer than all the other applications. They will then be more familiar with your images when they vote on them. If a question is asked and the answer is not given, that is a bad thing, so make sure that you have anticipated any questions a juror might ask about your images.

The second time the jury goes through the images it is to score them. This second round generally goes faster, and five to seven seconds is about all the time the jury has to cast the score. The images for most shows are media gripped, meaning that you'll look at all the glass images together and then move on to another medium group.



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Jury Psychology

The jury and the psychology of what is going through their minds is a key element that few people think about when they are sending in their images. This is a key point, and it's important that you know what the jury is thinking and going through in order to give yourself the best advantage. One thing to consider is how many images a jury has to look at in the course of reviewing a show. Sitting on a jury is a hard job, and it's one that's taken very seriously. There can be two thousand or more artists applying for some of the major shows, all of whom are competing for one hundred to three hundred spaces. Some shows can literally have a one-in-five to one-in-twenty chance of getting in. With those odds, you can see how important it is that you have top-quality images.

Let's say, for example, there are one thousand applications with five images each. That's five thousand images, and generally the jury looks at them twice. Essentially they are looking at ten thousand images, most of which are good. It is only the exceptional images that get their attention. Viewing ten thousand images in the course of a day or two is an enormous task and one that's fraught with burnout. The jury looks at one image set after another and are soon lulled into an image coma. It is only the images that wake them up that make an impression. If they are impressed or pleased or relieved that the artist has made their job easy by doing all the things I've discussed earlier, they reward that image set by casting a high score. If they are confused, not sure, or have not made up their minds before the next image set moves on, generally they will mark the image set down.



Lezlie Winemaker

Gaining an Advantage

In essence, a jury looks for any reason to score you down, and they get tougher as they go. Therefore, the best advantage you can have in getting into a show is to apply early, especially if you are submitting traditional 35 mm slides. If you are submitting to a show that uses Zapplication or JAS, however, the advantage of applying early is most likely lost. Most people wait until the last minute to send in their images right before the deadline. You cannot be guaranteed of this, but in most cases your images are more likely to come up early in the jury process if you apply early. Commit to having your images and your application turned around within a week of getting the application, and you will see better results.



Denise Billups Walker



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Remember, if a question is asked about your images, then the jury just viewed your images three to five times longer than anyone else's images who did not provoke a question. If a question is asked and the answer is not given or the answer registers as a negative with the jury, that is a bad thing. If the jury gets a surprise or is intrigued by the answer, however, that is a good thing, and they will reward you with a higher score. If you can give your images intrigue to make them provoke a question and the response to that question is good, this is a very good situation. When your images come up again to be scored, the jury is more familiar with your images, which can work in your favor.

In many applications you can determine the category in which your images will appear, and sometimes you can gain an advantage by the category you choose. Some shows are very particular about which category you place your work in and others are not. Reading the application thoroughly will spell out in which category you can apply. It is mandatory that you read the application carefully to make sure that you are following the policies and procedures as spelled out by the promoters.

For those artists whose work fits into a mixed media category, they should put it there if it is focused and uses all of the techniques that we've talked about so far. Mixed media is the category where all of the multiple artist disorder-afflicted individuals land. Usually their images are a scrimshaw on tree fungus, a piece of pottery, and a carved wooden spoon, and are all over the place. A well-composed set of images in the mixed media category will be a real relief to the jury, and they will reward you for your theme and focus.

One-of-a-Kind Work Versus Production Work

I know many artists who get too hung up on making the work in their images match the work they take to a show, and this is where their images start to lose their focus. If the work in your images is excellent, well-designed, and well-crafted, and the work you bring to a show is well-designed and well-crafted, you do not have a problem. Many people get around this issue by applying to the show with more than one application. Some shows do not allow this, and other shows have no rules determining how many applications an artist can send. Keep in mind you will have to pay for each application you send in. Your images need to be representative of what you're bringing to the show. If you have integrity and you do not bring work that is inferior to your images, you will not have a problem. I have known people, however, who send in five images of one-of-a-kind pieces. They get into a show and then arrive at the show with baskets full of inexpensive items. I believe this is dishonest and the quality of the work shown in the images does not match the work being shown. Then they *should* have a problem.

While we're on the subject of people who make art and also bring commercial or manufactured goods that are made off-shore to sell in their booths, this is definitely dishonest. These people should be kicked out of the show. More good craft shows are being ruined due to people doing buy-sell than just about any other reason. Resist the temptation to bring anything to a craft show that you did not make. There are many good flea markets and other sales venues to sell off-shore merchandise if you are inclined to do so. Don't mess up a good craft show by turning it into a flea market. **PGQ**

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Bruce Baker has conducted more than 600 workshops in the past three decades throughout the United States, Canada, and the Bahamas. Thousands of artists have taken his workshops on the topics of sales and customer service, booth design, and image presentations for juried shows. Those who listen and are willing to change the way they conduct their businesses have seen amazing results in getting accepted to better shows and experiencing increased sales. You can get this valuable information by purchasing Bruce's CDs from his website, www.bbakerinc.com.