

7 WAYS TO THROW A SHOW



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Forward

First off say you picked this up and you are not an artist. Don't put it down yet. Start thinking about collections and information. Think political or otherwise informed thoughts. Everybody has something that they want to share with other people. If you are one of those people keep this and every time you see the word artist, think me, and every time you see the word art, or work, think collection thought or idea.

What is throwing a show?

The term throwing a show refers to the idea that art no longer needs to take place in a traditional gallery setting to be acknowledged as a viable form of media. To throw a show infers that the artist takes charge of disseminating their work to the public outside of traditional gallery pretexts. Pretty much if you are creating work and you want people, friends, family, and the world at large to know what you are working on, “throwing a show” is how to get your work out into the public.

We will discuss 7 variations on how to throw a show, several of them are very close to the traditional methods of “participating in gallery exhibitions” others expand the ideas of show. All of these ideas can be modified. All of them are elastic. They are meant to be a starting point for creativity and expansion.

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MOVE

MARKET

PUBLIC

Before we get to “throwing a show.”

Always consider yourself in the curatorial role. As an artist one of the things that you do best is edit and reinterpret information. Information is visual or informational the context for presentation is always important.

Before you jump onto any one mode of presentation there are several questions to ask yourself, these questions do not have a wrong answer they are simply informative. Always be deliberate. Think why what when who where and how

-Why am I doing this? (For exposure? critical feedback from the public? something to do?)

-Why am I making this work? (Political? Personal? School?)

-What do I want to accomplish? (One show one person limited exposure? Many people large audience expansive exposure?)

-When do I want to do this? (Timeline for completion)

-Who is my audience? (If the audience is friends and family, posting work on flagpoles is not the best way to go, if getting a large public audience is the goal sending a limited email to friends is not going to get the results you want)

-Where do I want to do at? (Something that can be done in my house, in my neighborhood, something citywide, something regional, or even national)

-How am I gonna get it done? (Motivation, time, and cash)

Picking a method to “Throw a show” is choosing a method of communication. The method that you choose will affect how people view your work. What you are making, will inform how to best present your work. In my opinion this is a two way street. Throwing a show can inform your work; it can effect and change the mode that you create in. Political artists often use signs, or posters placed in highly visible public places. This is done for several reasons. The placement of these signs is a deliberate as a form of disseminating information or getting the word out. The design of the posters is often “eye catching” so that people look and notice a visual and written message. Sometimes content creates how you present your work and will inform the visual language you are using.

Throwing a show can be a way to make money. There are some methods that are more condusive to making money then others. If you are throwing a show to make money make sure that the means matches the ends.

Advertising is always important, always advertise. Every revolution requires propaganda. Spread the word for every 10 people you tell about your project or show maybe 1 of them will check it out, so run your mouth, drop emails, get on the phone, and spread the word.

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1 rent a space

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High end:

- warehouse
- Empty store front

Low end:

- your house
- Apartment
- Studio
- Your garage
- Backyard

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RENT A SPACE	○ ○ ○ ○
EXPOSURE	● ● ● ○
CASH GAIN	● ● ● ○
CASH EXPENDITURE	● ● ● ●
OUTSIDE HELP	● ● ● ○
HOME BASED	● ● ○ ○
TIME COMMITMENT	● ● ● ●
COMPUTER-LITERATE	● ○ ○ ○
HANDY WITH TOOLS	● ● ● ●

● ○ ○ ○ =LOW LEVEL ● ● ● ● =HIGH LEVEL

What it is all about

Showing work outside of the confines of a traditional gallery setting but having the possibility of a “gallery feel” This allows you to still have the components and benefits of a traditional gallery but not deal with gallery owners, submitting slides, and someone telling you what, when, and how. This can be useful because it eliminates profit sharing if you sell work. This is also useful if your work is not “Sellable.” Many artists are interested in having the traditional gallery feel without the traditional gallery bullSh*t.

Who the major contenders are

The Core: the artist and or several artists as a collective effort

The powers that be: rental agent and or landlord

Other concerned parties: roommates and other tenants of the building

Labor Resource: friends and family

Sometimes this project can get \$\$ but if you work with others as a group the cost can be lowered. If you are looking into renting a space the landlord will be a huge consideration, ask around for landlords/realtors that work well with artists. Any large changes that you make to a rental property can lose you your deposit, landlords do not always think change is good. Also, how you explain your idea will effect their decision, if it sounds like a party or a rave, chances are a landlord will not buy into you throwing a show in their space. Lastly, now will be the time to see who your family and friends are and start calling in favors, even a show in your apartment can go smoothly with a little bit of help, hauling around furniture, tech support, filling refreshment tables, talking up your work ect.

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When time of year

As long as you are thinking indoor any time of year

Where do you find these places?

A storefront space that has not been rented over a long period is a good bet for a one month rental. Also look into warehouse spaces.

The most underutilized form of show space is your own house, apartment, studio garage or even your back yard, now you can utilize the space in a whole new way. I have a friend who throws an art show/garage sale in her garage/yard in the summer, her friends, family, and the entire neighborhood, file through and check things out. Other people have cleaned out their entire house stuffing most of their furniture into one or two rooms, hanging work throughout the whole house and inviting the public. This worked well because the bedrooms became single gallery spaces for individual or several artists.

Why (what type of work is best)

Throwing a show like this opens itself to pretty much any type of work. However it is most useful for artists who are looking to eliminate the traditional gallery stigmas, hassles, and worries. Work that is generally offensive to the public, or does not “fit” in traditional gallery settings can be great for this type of show.

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How

Rent- What ever space you find.

If the landlord's name is not on the building check with surrounding businesses, if no one knows who the landlord is you will have to go to the county assessor's office. The county assessor keeps information about who owns properties, this may take a bit of detective work but a good space is often worth it.

Advertise- flyers, invitations, announcements, emails, word of mouth, at least 2 weeks before a show, people need to know all the specifics. Maps are good, a contact number/email for questions is also good.

Clean-yeah even your apartment needs a bit of a spit shine so that the mold in the bathtub doesn't detract attention from the work.

Renovate- a warehouse might need a new coat of paint or even walls. Lights are also a concern, work needs to be well lit.

In the house or in the warehouse/store front a gallery setting is all about the lights.

Hang- a few days before the show, work out the kinks. Think about how to hang your work, pay attention to utilizing space. Creating a good flow of work through the room, once the space gets full how will people be moved along visually.

Prior to opening night- it is a good idea to make signs telling people where you are at. Post them the day of.

Day of- any last minute preparations food light bulbs ect. Sit back if you have spread the word people will come.

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Cost

- Rent of space**
- Possible renovation fees**
- Hanging supplies (2d work)**
- Wall patching supplies**
- Paint**

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2 find space in local businesses

- Coffee shops
- Restaurants
- Doctor's offices
- ect

RENT

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FIND SPACE IN LOCAL BUSINESSES	○ ○ ○ ○
EXPOSURE	● ● ● ○
CASH GAIN	● ● ○ ○
CASH EXPENDITURE	● ● ● ○
OUTSIDE HELP	● ● ○ ○
HOME BASED	○ ○ ○ ○
TIME COMMITMENT	● ● ● ○
COMPUTER-LITERATE	○ ○ ○ ○
HANDY WITH TOOLS	● ○ ○ ○

● ○ ○ ○ =LOW LEVEL ● ● ● ● =HIGH LEVEL

What it is all about

This is a project for those with tact, finesse, and people skills. Ultimately this requires the artist to approach business owners and “sell” them on the artist’s work.

The owner will need to be shown how the work will enhance the setting of the store. Generally very few pieces of work get sold this way however it is great exposure.

Most of the time this type of “show” does not allow for an opening; however business owners may be ok with advertising because it is promotional for them to. This is an important selling point to business owners, enhancement of store, customer enjoyment, and added interest.

Who the major contenders are

The core: generally best for individual artist

The powers that be: store owner

Other concerned parties: customers and patrons of businesses.

When time of year any time of year

Any time of year, if you do it close to Christmas there is a better possibility of sales

**Where do you find these places?
business districts try your favorite hang outs, or
places to eat, places where you know the owner
or have a relationship with them as a customer
are the best finding a venue that you work “fits”
in is best. Burning guitars are not suited for a
doctor’s office although they might be great at
the local coffee shop.**

**Why (what type of work is best)
Typically two dimensional, framed, or ready to
hang work**

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How

Surveillance of business- go in check it out don't approach the business owner just yet get to know what the clientele is like see if your work would fit well in the space

Ask yourself what the business owner is going to get out of having your work in their store? Visual excitement is your work calming does it fit the general feeling of the space, is there other work for sale in the space...just a note, if the current artwork is bolted or screwed to the wall this is not the space for you.

Go home-select some of your best pieces, think about how you are going to approach the owner, choose a time that is not their most busy time of day, have enough time set aside so that you do not have to rush. If you call ahead you run the risk of being rejected before you even walk in the door, I suggest just going.

If you get the go ahead talk about expectations, what the circumstances for selling work are, if the store wants you to patch the walls be very precise about your expectations, and hopefully the business owner will be very precise with their's.

Hang work- know ahead of the hanging date what types of hanging equipment will be appropriate, whether you will be responsible for patching repairing and repainting the walls.

If it is appropriate advertise - A doctor's office does not want walk through traffic... A good line is "stop in to blank coffee house for a hot cup of Joe and check out new work by Joe whomever" flyers, invitations, announcements, emails, word of mouth.

Cost

- Framing costs... this can be astronomical if you have never framed a piece before look into it.
- Sale or reused frames are the best price bet however, businesses will want nice looking well presented work.
- Hanging supplies (2d work)
- wall patching supplies
- Paint

RENT

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MARKET

PUBLIC

3 use a civic space

- Park
- Street side

RENT

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USE A CIVIC SPACE	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
EXPOSURE	● ● ○ ○ ○
CASH GAIN	● ● ○ ○ ○
CASH EXPENDITURE	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
OUTSIDE HELP	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
HOME BASED	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
TIME COMMITMENT	● ○ ○ ○ ○
COMPUTER-LITERATE	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
HANDY WITH TOOLS	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

● ○ ○ ○ ○ =LOW LEVEL ● ● ● ● =HIGH LEVEL

What it is all about
Showing works spur of the moment, or planned.
With one artist or a group.

This always runs the risk of getting booted by the cops or someone asking you to leave. Avoid setting up shop in front of a functioning business without permission from the owner. This type of activity can be viewed as solicitation. If you are approached by a cop be polite, pack it up, and head home.

Who the major contenders are
The core: artist or artists
The powers that be: cops city officials business owners
Labor resource: You
Other concerned parties: The public at large.

When time of year
Summer

Where do you find these places?

Look for somewhere that gets foot traffic but is off the beaten path... a busy street corner is probably not a safe bet, the middle of a park on a summer day...much better.

Why (what type of work is best)

You name it, this type of show is good for just about anything including hand made craft items, large or cumbersome works may need to have a good pack up and evacuate plan.

How

Find a space that looks appropriate, take your stuff there and set up, neighborhood parks, work really well.

If you are going to advertise or organize other artists to participate, it is suggested that it be a word of mouth, or email.

Most often city parks have a limit on the amount of people allowed to congregate for a single purpose, however if people just show up... well then...

Cost

Nothing unless someone needs to bail you out of jail.

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4 utilize potential public showcases

- Utility poles
- Flyer distribution
- Bulletin boards
- Abandon free newspaper bins
- Newspapers
 - High end purchase an ad space
 - Low end insert a flyer
- Billboards

RENT

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UTILIZE POTENTIAL PUBLIC SHOWCASES	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
EXPOSURE	● ● ● ● ●
CASH GAIN	● ○ ○ ○ ○
CASH EXPENDITURE	VARIABLES
OUTSIDE HELP	● ○ ○ ○ ○
HOME BASED	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
TIME COMMITMENT	● ● ● ○ ○
COMPUTER-LITERATE	● ○ ○ ○ ○
HANDY WITH TOOLS	● ○ ○ ○ ○

● ○ ○ ○ ○ =LOW LEVEL ● ● ● ● ● =HIGH LEVEL

What it is all about

Getting your work out, without having a formal situation. Less physical confrontation with the public, this can be a great way to spread “the word” or advertise a website. However it can also be a fantastic way to influence visual culture. Using utility poles as a “gallery” can expose a vast amount of viewers to your media or message.

Who the major contenders are

The core: artist or artists

The powers that be: The law, editors

Labor resource: You

Other concerned parties: The public at large.

When time of year

If you decide to use telephone poles and color copies, the rainy season is probably not a good time of year, but there is always lamination.

Often things get swiped from poles, so make sure you are prepared for things to disappear, maybe even encourage it.

Purchasing ad space in newspapers, weekdays are less expensive than weekends. Billboards are high end and expensive however they are great exposure.

Why (what type of work is best)

Anything goes. Message oriented work often makes a great poster. Generally these things disappear quickly.

How

Find a place that looks like it will work.

Decide on a visual layout for your “presentation”

If you are utilizing a street pole, is your target audience driving in a car? or a pedestrian? Be creative. Understand the linear effect of one image after another.

If you decide to buy a newspaper ad space call and get specifics about prices, color vs. black and white and what you would need to do to layout the image space, think about doing this with several people using smaller images to cut costs.

If you use newspapers they are private property, therefore so are newspaper bins, slipping flyers inside of them can be illegal. Also purchasing an ad does not mean that the newspaper company may not censor it.

Cost

- Color copies**
- Black and white copies**
- Staple gun**
- Color or black and white quarter page ad generally run about**
- Cost of ad or billboard space**

RENT

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MARKET

PUBLIC

5 Revamping an old idea

- Summer art show
- Craft fair
- Outdoor festival
- Outdoor market

RENT

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REVAMPING AN OLD IDEA	○○○○
EXPOSURE	●●●●
CASH GAIN	●●●○
CASH EXPENDITURE	●●○○
OUTSIDE HELP	●●●○
HOME BASED	○○○○
TIME COMMITMENT	●●●●
COMPUTER-LITERATE	○○○○
HANDY WITH TOOLS	●●○○

●○○○ =LOW LEVEL ●●●● =HIGH LEVEL

MOVE

MARKET

PUBLIC

What it is all about

Don't grumble, with a bit of creative thinking these shows can be some of the best exposure an artist can get. People attending these events are usually looking to buy work; however they are also inquisitive and interested in how things are made. There is always someone that is interested in talking about your ideas and concepts.

Who the major contenders are

The core: artist or artists

The powers that be: event planners

Labor source: You and a friend

Other concerned parties: event Attendees

When time of year

Summer, Christmas time Where do you find these places? Keep your eyes open for local festivals and craft shows, generally there is a registration deadline, ask friends if they have heard of anything happening in their neighborhood. Check out local cable programs on the community. Also community websites, and newsletters can be good sources for info.

Why (what type of work is best)

You name it, this type of show is good for just about anything generally hand made craft items go over really well, however if you think of the festival or market as an opportunity to simply get your work into the public realm. I myself have done several art fairs, the ones that I didn't sell at I managed to make contacts with other artists, eat an elephant ear, and make some pretty great trades. Most of my Christmas shopping is done by August.

How

Most events require registration. Make sure you fill all of the requirements, and get the application form in on time.

Generally there is a space limitation, and planned presentation is key. Inexpensive tables and tents can be purchased at big box retailers.

If your work is large, photos are also recommended so that people can see what else you have been working on.

Other tips, if the event is outside bring sunscreen, change, and a friend.

Cost

There is almost always a registration cost, but depending on the type of show there can be a large cost difference. Regional or large longstanding shows have higher entrance fees and often require sides of work. Smaller street fairs, or craft shows also have requirements. Look into “emerging artist booths”, that generally have a lower cost.

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6 mobile transportation units

- Car
- Truck
- U-Haul
- Bike
- Bumper stickers
- Stickers
- Clothing
- Bus advertisements

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MOBILE TRANSPORTATION UNITS	○○○○
EXPOSURE	●●●○
CASH GAIN	VARIES
CASH EXPENDITURE	VARIES
OUTSIDE HELP	●●○○
HOME BASED	●○○○
TIME COMMITMENT	●○○○
COMPUTER-LITERATE	●●○○
HANDY WITH TOOLS	●●○○

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What it is all about

Possibly reaching a large unintended and intentional viewing public, this method can blow up the idea of traditional gallery shows, or it can simply manipulate the idea of traditional gallery shows. There are so many artists that work directly with this method as art form itself that all of these suggestions may really modify your media and message. Be sure to consider what the method you use manipulates your concepts.

Who the major contenders are

The core: artist or artists, and if a vehicle is utilized, the driver

The powers that be: the public at large

Labor source: You, possibly others

When time of year

This is wide open. Summer fall winter spring.

Where do you find these places?

If you decide to utilize a vehicle U haul have services all over the U.S., rental agencies abound. I discourage the practice of slapping your own bumper stickers onto unknown people's cars. Buses most often have advertising space on the side of them, it can be expensive but split between several people it can be feasible.

Local silkscreen companies around town might make deals, but generally print in bulk. If you want to only make one or two shirts, computer do it yourself packets come in handy.

Why (what type of work is best)

Anything.

How

For this section I'm going to deviate from the norm a bit and give examples that I feel are explanatory of some of the ways this method can be used

-Rent a uhaul, hang a traditional gallery show on the interior of the truck, drive it to public places, other gallery openings, parks ect. Allow people to check out the art work, many people might be wary at first, so tell some friends so they can show up and check it out.

-Use your car as a work in progress I have a friend who owns a white neon, now it is spotted with yellow and black, he also has two racing helmets and scarves to match the car. Eventually he would like to "do something" with it. If you have a beater car why not? You will never loose it in the parking lot.

-Clothing design companies have been using t-shirts to disseminate visual culture since the t-shirt was invented. Silkscreen companies generally only print runs of larger numbers; however the advent of the "iron on" can make anyone a t-shirt designer.

Cost

Depends on how far you take it

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7 web distribution

- EBay
- Personal websites
- Email

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WEB DISTRIBUTION	○ ○ ○ ○
EXPOSURE	● ● ● ○
CASH GAIN	● ● ● ○
CASH EXPENDITURE	● ○ ○ ○
OUTSIDE HELP	● ● ○ ○
HOME BASED	● ● ● ●
TIME COMMITMENT	● ● ○ ○
COMPUTER-LITERATE	● ● ● ●
HANDY WITH TOOLS	○ ○ ○ ○

● ○ ○ ○ =LOW LEVEL ● ● ● ● =HIGH LEVEL

What it is all about

The internet is the new showcase for art that is a world wide, creating art without physicality and utilizing a global market. The internet gives artists a whole new way to look at getting their work “out there.” Suddenly there is a method to communicate ideas as entities all their own. Websites can be used to show art or as art themselves.

I encourage people looking to use websites as a means to throwing a show actually think of the website in its entirety, that it work as a cohesive unit. If you have spent a bit of time looking at websites of people’s personal art you can pick out what is working and what isn’t. Does research into what you feel makes a successful site and how you can showcase your work and ideas successfully.

Using email itself as an advertising tool or even a way to show new work is fantastic. Using a digital camera and the appropriate formats you can send images directly to people giving them a look at what you have been producing. This is a great way to produce feedback from other people. When I was running a gallery I had a guy inquire about having a show with us. He told me that he had never had a show but had sold “quite a bit on EBay” when I inquired how much he had sold he estimated it to be about a piece a week, and the going rate was around \$50. For artists who are not as prolific, eBay is still a great way to get your work into the global market. I also recommend online trading cooperatives.

Who the major contenders are

The core: artist or artists, and a computer

The powers that be: anyone else who has computer

Where do you find these places?
If you don't own a computer often public libraries, and community media centers will provide limited free access. Community colleges often offer basic classes in web design, but make sure you have the required computer skills before taking the class, or contact the professor. If you are interested in having a website but don't have the time and know how, there are plenty of design firms, and freelance designers, that create web sites.

Why (what type of work is best)
Pretty much the sky is the limit.

How
I recommend some basic computer skills, either taking a class or asking a very computer oriented, and patient friend for help. Emailed images need to be sent as attachments and often if the resolution is too high, or the file size is large they will take to long to download. The internet has helped to create generations of people who want what they want when they want it, so anything that is difficult to access usually gets trashed.

Also remember on EBay you will be responsible for shipping work, explore options on how that is done safely and effectively.

Cost
-A computer
-Internet access
-Web address fees

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It is the responsibility of the artist to get their work out into public culture. Creating work and then storing it under your bed does nothing for you as an artist and it certainly does nothing for the public at large. Throwing a show allows you to inform yourself in a constructive manner. It gives you access to feedback from other people and a chance to examine your work in an external environment. The perspective shift between your work in your studio, and your work in public will give new contextual force to ideas and concepts. Get it out there, inform visual culture, throw a show.

This book was written, designed, and produced as part of Civic Studio. The Civic Studio is a project funded by the Johnson Center for Philanthropy, Grand Valley State University.

The project is physically situated in a neighborhood and focuses on the issues surrounding studio practice, civic life and space. The Civic Studio explores how situated activity effects artists and residents, focusing on experiential information.

For more information about this project please look at our website. civicstudio@gvsu.edu or contact Paul: wittenbp@gvsu.edu

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