

**10 BIGGEST
MISTAKES
ARTISTS MAKE IN
THEIR
EXHIBITING
CAREERS**

And how not to make them in yours

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"10 Biggest Mistakes..." by Laureen Marchand

This article tells you what mistakes not to make in your exhibiting career. Would you like some help in figuring out what you can and should do instead? I'd love to talk with you. Just go to <http://www.laureenmarchand.com/artist-mentoring> and send me a message. I'm here to help.

The artist has a demanding job description. From your brain and heart and skill you make something that didn't exist before, that would never have existed without your imagination and commitment. Then you send the thing you've made into the world, perhaps to be dismissed, much of the time by people who don't understand what you intended. You re-create your identity every time you work at your art, and you rarely feel that you're entirely capable of it. Sometimes you wonder whether if your occasional uncertainty of purpose took over and you never made art again, anyone would really notice.

But if you stop making art, you won't have an exhibiting career to make mistakes in.

Mistake 1: Quitting. Many more students graduate from fine arts programs than go on to make a profession of their calling. Relatively few artists are still practicing 20 or 30 years later. If you stop making art, no matter how compelling the reason, you won't have an exhibiting career and no other mistakes will matter.

Mistake 2: Waiting for circumstances to be perfect. The ideal studio? No other demands? Enough time? Permission? Not going to happen. Can you find an empty closet, an unused table, a room in your basement? Can you shut the door, turn off the Internet, decide the laundry can wait? Can you grab 20 minutes a day or two hours a week, set a timer or an alarm, use your vacation days differently, exchange child care or lawn mowing or meal prep? Can you find someone to show your art or report your progress to or who can act as a mentor? Can you decide that the only person whose consent you need is your own? If you think you can't make art in short

blocks of available time in a corner of the den, that you need days in a row and people to recognize your art's importance before you begin, is this thought helping get you where you want to go? Don't wait. Start where you are.

Now you have a regular studio habit and a developing collection of artworks. What are you going to do next? If you want your work to be seen, don't make **mistake 3**.

Mistake 3: Waiting to be discovered. Be aware that if you wait for gallery representatives to approach you, you aren't taking full responsibility for the success of your own career. If a gallery representative isn't aware of your work, he/she can't help you find an audience for it. Making sure your work finds its audience is part of being professional.

You may struggle with the need to make your work known. You might not want to take time away from the studio. You may want your work to be appreciated without having to "pitch" it. You might get tired of the effort required to promote your work. But for most artists, an active exhibiting career doesn't happen by itself. You will need to create and maintain it. You will need to spend time and energy approaching and re-approaching exhibition spaces throughout your working life. Make plans to do so.

But if your exhibiting career isn't taking off the way you want to, you need to think about why that is. Many times it's because you're making one of **mistakes 4 through 7**.

Mistake 4: Not knowing what you want. What do you want to happen? Do you want to communicate or receive feedback or reinforcement? Contribute to a community? Sell artwork or related products, make income without selling, satisfy professional ambition? Your exhibiting career can provide you with response, information, fulfillment and new opportunities to go on creating. And if you know what you want from each exhibition experience, you're much more likely to get it.

Mistake 5: Targeting the wrong exhibition venues. Are you sending out exhibition submissions and proposals and not having them accepted? Make sure that you're targeting the exhibition venues that are right for your work. Different types of exhibition spaces have different characteristics, approaches, and audiences. Can the venue you're considering provide what you need? Can you provide what the venue needs? The artist who has been working and exhibiting for years will appeal to a different exhibition venue than the emerging artist. The artist who is experimenting and breaking new ground may find a different audience from the artist working in established media and methods. Do your research.

Mistake 6: Submitting inconsistent artwork. The work you present to an exhibition venue needs to be cohesive. It doesn't have to be repetitive or predictable, but it must show you have a vision, concentration and focus. If you demonstrate that you have a real understanding of the way you have chosen to work you will gain much more respect and attention than if you express more superficial knowledge of several themes and forms.

Mistake 7: Not following the instructions. If the exhibition venue provides guidelines on how to submit artwork, follow them. Canada is a large country with a small population and very many creative individuals. That is, there are more artists than exhibitions available. Making the curator's or dealer's task harder won't make your artwork stand out or seem more attractive. Even if the exhibition venue doesn't state guidelines, that doesn't mean it doesn't have preferences. Find out what they are.

Whether your exhibition experiences are successful or not quite so much as you wanted, you can make your exhibiting career better if you don't make **mistakes 8, 9 and 10.**

Mistake 8: Making assumptions. It doesn't matter whether you're dealing with exhibition submission preferences or responsibilities in a contract or expectations for action. Do not guess. Discuss everything. Clarify. Ask

questions. If you aren't sure what's required, find out. If you develop new questions or concerns over time, state them. Neither you nor the exhibition space can provide what isn't asked for. And never take one "no" for the whole answer. Don't assume that because one venue turned down your proposal, they all will. There's an audience for every artwork. Part of your job is to find it.

Mistake 9: Ascribing intent to the unintentional actions of others. The gallery that hasn't got back to you? The owner just found out that the building the gallery has been in for 14 years is being torn down and the gallery has to move. She isn't even sure if the gallery will be operational in six months. That juried exhibition you didn't get into? It had space for five artists and 40 submitted really good proposals. The jurors liked your work. They just couldn't take everyone and they felt really badly about it. That exhibition opening reception that wasn't as well attended as you had hoped? The organizers did everything they could think of to promote it and actually thought the turnout was good given that you live out of town and your art isn't well-known. They really wish you appreciated what they tried to do.

Almost no one in your exhibiting career will set out deliberately to thwart you. Happy exhibiting artists don't take things personally.

Mistake 10: Being difficult. If you get a reputation for being argumentative, dissatisfied, ungrateful, self-centered or unreliable, that reputation will follow you. As Austin Kleon said in *Steal Like an Artist* (Workman, 2012), "Be nice. The world is a small town." You don't need to change your vision or be a doormat or abandon your principles. But if you honour your commitments, abide by your agreements and respect the venue's knowledge and expertise, your exhibiting career can be everything you want it to be.

About Laureen Marchand

Born the eldest child of an oil worker and a farmer's daughter, Laureen Marchand was persuaded by her itinerant and uncertain early years of the all-importance of connection. She has brought this value to her entire artistic career both in and outside the studio. From representing the significance of ordinary relationships and everyday events in her narrative artworks of the late 20th century, to finding beauty in the loss of beauty in her old-rose paintings, to exploring our bond with our surroundings in her rare landscape pieces, Marchand shows us how essential our relationships are.

Laureen Marchand lives and works in Val Marie, Saskatchewan, gateway to Grasslands National Park and one of Canada's most beautiful and remote regions, where she paints full time. Always aware of the darkness behind light, Laureen explores in her paintings the relationship of appearance to reality. Her exhibition career spans 30 years and more than two dozen solo and two-person exhibitions as well as over 40 group shows. Her paintings have been recognized by the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Canada Council, are held in many public and private collections, and have been represented in exhibition catalogues and reviewed in newspapers and magazines. Laureen Marchand has contributed widely to Canada's artistic community as organizer, teacher, mentor, writer, and curator. She holds the Canadian Artists Representation "Tony" Award for service to the visual arts in Saskatchewan and the Centennial Leadership Award for Service to the Province of Saskatchewan.

Laureen Marchand offers mentoring to a small number of very carefully selected clients. Most sessions take place via Skype or phone. Being aware of the importance of both mentor and client being a good fit for each other, Laureen provides an introductory coaching session where you and she get straight down to work on your goals. This is the only way both she and you can **know** for sure whether she is the right coach for you. There is no charge for the introductory session – and no guarantee you will be offered mentoring afterwards. For more information, please go to <http://laureenmarchand.com/artist-mentoring>