

Art Freshers' Guide to the Art World

Career Spotlight: Artists

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Practical measures on becoming an established artist

We get asked a lot about how to be successful in the art world. In fact, we find ourselves asking that from time to time as well. The art world is a huge place with way too many possible avenues to walk down, and it's overwhelming to try and navigate the path to success when everyone seems to have different ideas on how to go about doing it. So we decided to make it easier for aspiring arts professionals to take concrete steps towards their own success stories.

There are dozens of career paths within art and culture that you can follow. For this edition, we're highlighting artists. As this edition expands, we'll be covering more professions, so check back often and subscribe to our newsletter in order to receive updates about our career spotlights.

For aspiring artists, the million-pound question is not so much "how do I make a million pounds with art?" as it is "how do I sustain a modest living and maybe a few creature comforts with art?" And the truth of the matter is, there is no magic formula. Those of us working in culture all seem to know at least a few people who are baristas by day and artists by night, whose talents are outweighed by the reality of living in an unkind, capitalistic society that forces us to contribute to the pointless production of economy in order to put a roof over our heads. But while there is no shortcut to success (wealthy parents and powerful spouses notwithstanding), there are practical measures every aspiring artist can take in order to make their path to success as smooth as possible.

1 Create an inventory of your work

Inventories are important for every artist to have to stay organised and on top of their creations. Especially if your work is object-oriented and positioned to sell, having an inventory allows for you to easily keep track of what you have and what you sell. Even if you only have a few works currently, it's always a good idea to start early so that you don't end up somewhere down the road with hundreds of works and no comprehensive inventory to keep track of everything. You can use an inventory software to organise your artwork, but if you're just starting out and trying to save money, you can do this manually.

You can start your own artist inventory by completing each of these below:

- Take high-quality photos
- Number each piece of work, e.g. with an SKU which is short for Stock Keeping Unit.
- Record materials used
- Record price
- Write a description and basic archival info
- Record the status of the work, is it lend, on show, sold?

To make it easier for you to start, we created this downloadable template that lays out everything you need to include. The template is licensed under Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0), which means you are free to share, copy and adapt with attribution to ArtRabbit, and share-alike.

[Download inventory template](#)

2 Create a website or online portfolio

It's more or less true that if you don't exist on the internet, you don't really exist. The easiest way to be discovered is through the internet, and an impressive online portfolio is a great way to win over followers, make a sale, or get included in a curated show. With a growing number of resources to create websites, you can make your own online portfolio without breaking a sweat with one of these easy-to-use services.

Some of these services include Wordpress, Squarespace, Cargo Collective, SiteGround. If you're primarily interested in selling your work, try out-of-the box e-commerce sites: Shopify, WooCommerce, BigCommerce, or Big Cartel.

3 Create your own business cards

A little old school, but people still use them, and when you're at an art opening and that 5th glass of wine has made it difficult to type your number into a stranger and potential patron's phone, handing over a business card is just so much easier. There are plenty of services out there, e.g. MOO or Printed.com. But as a creative, you can make your own from scratch. Do it with a stamp or painted on small pieces of paper

board, and because you're an artist, its DIY aesthetic will simply be a part of your charm.

4 Exhibit your work

You can start by partnering up with other artists, writers or practitioners and putting up your own show to get the ball rolling. If it's a paid-for space, rent it for a couple of days, and focus your marketing, resources and energy on getting people to come to your opening. There's no need to run a long exhibition. Exhibitions are great opportunities to build your portfolio, to network with like-minded professionals and potentially sell work, all of which is achievable with the opening night. Longer exhibitions are time-consuming, footfall is very limited and you waste your time by letting your work just sit around. Promote your exhibitions so lots of people get to see your work. You can [use ArtRabbit to list and promote your exhibitions for free](#) or place them on sites like Eventbrite and the Arts Council news section.

5 Enter competitions

While the rest of the professional world have job openings, art has open calls. If you have a body of work you're looking to exhibit, or if you have an idea that you want to realise, it's worth taking the time in finding the right opportunity to apply to, and to apply for many of them. Getting rejected from such open calls happens to even the most skilled artists, but practice resilience and refine your technique with each application and the time spent will soon pay off. Find opportunities to exhibit work, further develop your skills/craft, research or sell your art, and submit your work or ideas. Jump to our ArtOpps list to see where you can find the best open calls and artist opportunities to apply to.

6 Sell your work

Not all artists make art to sell, especially with the plethora of art disciplines that fundamentally rejects a commodifiable form (performance, installation etc). But all artists do need money to survive, and selling artwork is as good a way as any to get there. If you're interested in selling your work, here are some ways you can start your journey into the art business.

Online

Use existing platforms with large user bases to sell your work. This allows you to take advantage of an existing audience and existing sales tools. If you get lucky and editors spot and like your art, you might even get featured in their newsletters, socials or homepage.

Remember that if you decide to sell on various platforms at the same time, you need to make sure you offer the work at the same price across platforms. This is also where creating and maintaining an organised inventory sheet to keep track of available work comes in handy.

There are many more but these are trustworthy, well-established platforms that have been around for a long time, and they have sophisticated UX flows making it easy to use for both creators and end-users or potential buyers: [Absolut Art](#), [Artfinder](#), [Etsy](#), [Saatchi Art](#), [UGALLERY](#).

Markets, fairs and trade shows

Find local and national arts and crafts markets, art fairs and trade shows where you can book a small booth, or partner up with other artists or groups to sell in a booth. Start local, talk to friends and colleagues, and see what their experience is with your local markets and fairs. On a national level, you can try [The Other Art Fair](#).

7 Sell Art Commissions

Offer art commissions to generate some income. You might even end up creating something that can be added to your portfolio, and no matter what, you get to practice your craft.

8 Pricing suggestions

Pricing is a tricky one. Why is a urinal placed upside down priceless and yet a photorealistic watercolour is unable to fetch more than £100? The art market is constantly in flux, with highs and lows that can make the most precarious stock market look like a fixed mortgage in comparison. So how should you price your art? You don't want to undervalue your work, yet you want to be able to sell. The best thing to do is to look at artwork like yours by artists at similar stages of their career, and see what their work sells at. When comparing, consider things like dimensions, medium, achievements. Do your research and you'll be prepared to confidently price your work.

It's common practice for new artists to price work like a retailer based on time, labour, cost of materials and cost of framing, packaging and delivery. For that, you will need to set yourself a reasonable hourly wage first, multiply that by the number of hours it took to make the work and add that figure to the cost of your materials and packaging.

Example:

Cost of material = £70 Cost of framing/packaging/delivery (i.a.) = £20 Your hourly rate = £20 Time spent on the artwork = 15 hours

The formula is like this¹:

$(\text{Expenses} \times 2) + (\text{Your hourly wage} \times \text{time spent}) = \text{Price of artwork}$
 $(£90 \times 2) + (£20 \times 15) = £480$

9 Networking

Network, network, network. It's possibly the most important part of running not just an art business, but any business. Start with your website and business card that you can easily give out. Visit local art openings and art events. Find openings near you where you'll be in the same room as other artists, curators, collectors and the like.

¹ [Source for the formula: Saatchi Art](#)

([You can use ArtRabbit to be in the know about openings!](#)) Network with collectors, art school lecturers and other artists, and start building your web of contacts, followers and potential patrons this way.

10 Build a Client Base

Start an email schedule so that you can inform your friends, family and fans about your activities. If you start getting a large base for your emails, there are plenty of useful email newsletter tools you can use. Be sure to follow up with people you've spoken to about your work, their work, their interest in buying art or anything else that can turn into a lead.

11 Know Your Audience

To market your art more effectively, you need to figure out where you and your work fit in. The better you know your own art and where you can place yourself, the better you can sell it. Identify your target demographics and market to them. You can do this by attending art critique sessions, listening to peer feedback, and doing market research of who's buying works similar to yours.

12 Use Social Media

Once you've identified your target audience or market, promote yourself and your work through social media. Here, it's also beneficial to be organised, so that you know exactly what you're telling your audience, from which platform and when. As every platform is constantly evolving, it's best to read up on the latest updates to their algorithms and try out different strategies in order to find your ideal rhythm.

13 Find a gallery

Finding gallery representation is really hard and oftentimes based on luck. Gallerists like scouting their own talent. They attend exhibitions, events, degree shows, look to Instagram or surf the web, so make sure you've covered all of the above points. What you definitely shouldn't do is walk into a gallery and demand representation or send unsolicited work. It's not gonna work and you'll come across like a telemarketer disrupting a romantic dinner with a call about a product that no one wants. If galleries accept work, they will say so on their website, and you'll know then that it's appropriate to send some over.

Here are some articles with sound advice on finding representation:

- [How Do Artists Get Gallery Representation on Artsy](#)
- [Approaching galleries and finding opportunities on Artquest](#)
- [How to Successfully Find Gallery Representation as an Artist on My Modern Met](#)

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