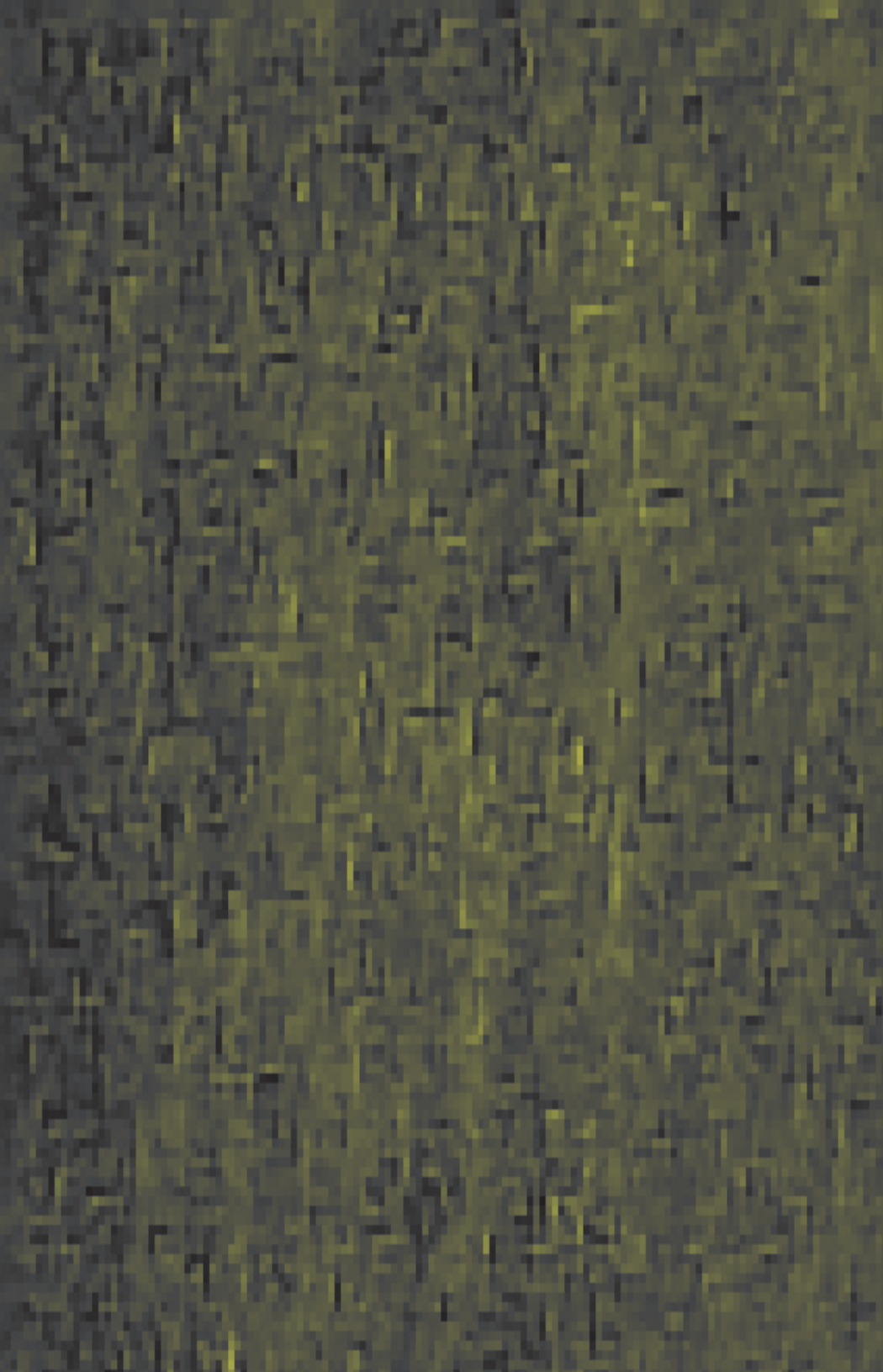


# FieldGuide

a practical handbook to starting an artist-run space

v001.4



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FieldGuide is a project of Drift Station, a curatorial collaborative currently based in Lincoln, Nebraska, USA and at 74.208.59.2351

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BUT  
WHY?

# AN INTRODUCTION

We go to films, galleries, and malls. Spaces, situations, aesthetic experiences (clothes, movies, concerts, images) are created for us. We become passive sippers of entertainment, ingesting what is provided.

Artists break this trend by being makers of things and experiences. But when it comes to showing our work, artists often fall into the mentality of waiting: for something to happen, for the right person to notice you, write about you, or show your work. A lot seems to ride on your ability to network and speak intelligently about your work, and not to mention a good deal of luck.

We advocate for no more waiting. Artists can and should become an integral part of bringing the arts to their communities. Creating an artist-run space means you and your collaborators, audiences, and peers have a space to play with where you can control the content and have a say in what experiences you are bringing to the world.

We function on the premise (and the reason why we created this book) that the more people do something, the more people will *do* something, creating a synergistic effect that will cascade throughout the community and the culture at large. This isn't a big thing but it also isn't an insignificant gesture. It's the battle between inertia and accepting the status quo as opposed to doing; we hope this book will serve as a field guide, helping in some practical way for you to enable and facilitate the art and experiences you want to see in the world.

As artists ourselves, both of us enjoy working for long periods of time alone, but we also enjoy being engaged with others, especially in our role as teachers and curators. Together as Drift Station our curatorial and artistic interests meld into something that is quite different from our studio work – our collaboration exists as its own entity. Because it doesn't truly belong to either of us, Drift Station allows for more play: we toss out and combine ideas with greater freedom and agility. Working together, we have gotten much better at getting at a core idea that we want to explore, something that is much more difficult to negotiate when working alone in the studio. Running a gallery has proved invaluable in our individual studio work as



a way of teaching us to be more ambitious, clearer of vision, and to take creative risks in format and inspiration.

This is all in addition to the sense of ownership in your community: of a building (or a part of one), of a corner or block, of a neighborhood and city. We have found this to be a transformative event for both our own practice, for other artists, and our community.

This book is meant as a practical how-to manual, a field guide in the wild. We wanted to share valuable information that we have acquired over the years and through various incarnations and space. This information is often gleaned through first-hand experience, mistakes, and trial-and-error. We hope that this guide might help offset some of those challenges and make it easier to just get started.

But more than anything, this book serves to show how it is possible with minimal resources for artists to start and operate a gallery space. It is a call to arms for artists and other creatives to take over spaces all around the world and in whatever fashion they can, to create exciting and challenging exhibitions, projects, and public activities, and to transform their communities into culturally meaningful and rich places to live and make art.

Angeles Cossio & Jeff Thompson  
August 2012

SPACE  
IS  
EVERY-  
WHERE

Opportunistic artists often develop a distracted look when passing an empty building. An empty storefront, an interesting-looking second floor, or an odd building runs through the mind and ideas for galleries, performance spaces, graffiti walls, pop-up stores, and any other possible permutation are projected onto the blank space. But actually getting a physical location and converting it into a usable space for curatorial projects is often the biggest hurdle.

As is the case with all the sections in this guide, it can seem too easy to simply say “go get a space”. The actual “how” of it seems daunting, and actually finding an affordable and usable location is perhaps the most challenging part of this entire process.

## PHYSICAL SPACE

Having a physical space has several important benefits: you can make an impact on the immediate community (block, neighborhood, city, region), support artists in the area through exhibition opportunities, and it means that actual people come to actual shows. Physical spaces also have a sense of importance and “real-ness” that online projects don’t. The downsides of siting your project in a building mostly have to do with money and agility. Buildings are expensive (ongoing rent or a large up-front cost to buy a building, the expense of renovating and improvements), shipping will be (mostly) a necessity if you want to show out-of-town artists, and you will be limited to visitors who live in your area. Being tied to a location can turn your gallery into a destination, but it also means it will be more difficult to move to a new location without losing your audience.

## VIRTUAL SPACE

Online shows are flexible and agile, nowhere and everywhere. They are generally much cheaper than a physical space, aside from domain and server costs. A show can have a global impact regardless of your personal location, making it a great way to network with artists and audiences around the world. The downsides of online exhibitions are essentially the reverse of the pros for physical spaces: no physical presence means no personal interactions or impact on community. You are also limited by your technical knowledge to works that are well-represented online, and to visitors with reliable internet access (still a real issue in rural and developing areas). The remainder of this guide is geared towards physical spaces, though many of the suggestions are also applicable for online projects.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY

In some cities, the art spaces are located within very close proximity and visitors are unlikely to travel far beyond for openings and events. Since your location will likely be a very important and long-lasting decision, consider the trade-off of pioneering new (and cheaper) locations versus a built-in audience.

## FINDING POSSIBLE SPACES

Look for empty spaces by driving/walking around, or look online. If you are having trouble finding online listings, look for the name of rental companies on the sides of buildings. Most have websites with listings including photographs and maps; they will not always list the rent, however.

## RENTING COMMERCIAL SPACE

Renting a commercial space can be very different from renting a living space. For commercial property, rent will sometimes be listed per month, but it may also be in square feet per month or even year. After a little research you will quickly get a sense how much rent will be in your area.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR (GOOD AND BAD)

When scouting a space look carefully – simple things can mean big expenses down the road. While you shouldn't expect the space to be perfect (unless you have a lot of money), there are a few things that you should at least notice.

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Heat       | What kind of furnace is it? Will it heat the entire space? Is there a thermostat to regulate? Many industrial spaces will have a single, huge heater that just blasts heat while on.   |
| Insulation | Is there any? Anywhere? A drafty building will cost a lot more to heat in cold climates.   |
| Electrical | Look for outlets: are they the ancient two-prong or modern three-prong type? Are there enough if you want to show video or other new media? Look at the breaker box: more breakers means you can safely draw more power. This is important if you want to have a band with a PA and a digital projector or other power-hungry events. We installed outlets every 4' along our walls, which has proved to be adequate. Look for ceiling outlets as well, which are useful for lighting and mounting projectors. |

Plumbing	Is there a sink and toilet? Hot water is not strictly necessary but nice in cold places. Having plumbing already in place will save a lot of time, effort, and money.
Door locks	Since you will have valuable art, as well as the possibility of video equipment and other expensive items, make sure your space can be locked securely.

COMMERCIAL LEASES

Commercial leases can also be quite different from residential ones. With a commercial space you are mostly on your own – the landlord won’t like-ly pay for anything, including the cost of putting up walls, electrical and plumbing, fire protection, or anything else. Many commercial leases are for longer than a year, some as many as 5-10 years, but you can ask for a shorter term.

NEGOTIATE

You won’t get what you don’t ask for – don’t be afraid to discuss and nego-tiate the rent, especially if you will have to do a lot of work to get the space

AVERAGE RENT IN VARIOUS US CITIES  
(commercial space in USD per square foot per year)

CITY	\$/SF/YR	CITY	\$/SF/YR
New York	\$28	Houston	\$14
Los Angeles	\$27	Greensboro	\$14
Miami	\$25	New Orleans	\$15
Wash. DC	\$23	Indianapolis	\$14
Seattle	\$23	Madison	\$14
Chicago	\$21	Minneapolis	\$14
Atlanta	\$19	Phoenix	\$14
Denver	\$19	Detroit	\$12
Philadelphia	\$19	Lincoln	\$12
Louisville	\$15	Billings	\$11
Salt Lake City	\$15	Des Moines	\$10

*Apologies to international readers - finding reliable data was much more difficult than expected (source: loopnet.com)*

usable. This usually comes in the form of a rent reduction, but it also might be things like the landlord paying for a dumpster during clean-out, fixing broken or old fixtures (plumbing, windows, etc), or for part of your construction expenses. If the space is too big, ask if the landlord would be willing to divide it into two at their expense.

*[ for suggestions from the US Small Business Administration on negotiating, see the Appendix of the digital download ]*

## FREE RENT

Asking for the space to be donated as a tax write-off is one that most landlords are not thrilled about at first, but may come around to with the proper coaxing. In 2009, the city of Palm Springs, California required owners of vacant storefronts to display art, whether it be a movie poster or an artist's exhibition (see the article "Palm Springs Wants to Fill Vacant Storefronts With Art" from the September 18, 2009 issue of the LA Times). Examples like this can be useful ammunition in persuading a landlord of a gallery's value.

*[ for a full URL to the LA Times article and others like it, see the Appendix of the digital download ]*

## YOU ARE A BUSINESS

While your project may not put a priority on selling work, your gallery is still a business in the eyes of the community and the government. Look for your local business development group and meet with them. You may also need to register as a business with your city, state, and the IRS, especially if you plan to sell work, have workshops, or anything that makes it look like you're a "real" business.

## ...AND AN ARTS ORGANIZATION

While you may be just starting, if you call your project an arts organization then you are one! Meeting with your local/regional arts council may be very helpful. Both business development organizations and arts councils have boards filled with wealthy people interested in the arts. Talking with them may be an easy way to find an under-utilized building or in-kind support.

WALLS  
AREN'T  
THAT  
HARD

One-off, temporary exhibition spaces are likely an “as is” situation, but if you plan to inhabit a space longer you will probably need to do some construction. “Building out” a space can be expensive and is a cost that you will not recoup when leaving. Careful planning can make your space flexible, easier to install exhibitions in, and can help you save a lot of headaches later.

## PERMITS

Depending on your tolerance for risk and how obvious your construction work will be, you may need or want to get a building permit from your city. The cost will vary depending on the work you are doing, but will likely be at least \$100 USD. An inspector will also come look at your work, so you will need to carefully research your local building codes. Not having a permit is certainly easier, but could mean that you will have to tear everything out if you get caught. It is a good idea to talk with your landlord as well – some insist on a permit while others have a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy.

## WHEN TO DIY, WHEN TO PAY SOMEONE ELSE

If you’re somewhat handy, building walls isn’t difficult. If you don’t need a lot of electrical or plumbing work, a handful of friends, some pizza and beers, and a few weekends can turn out a fantastic gallery space. Your local lumberyard or library likely has books on basic home construction, which will be much more detailed than this guide can provide. That said, consider the trade-off of your time versus the cost to pay someone to do it for you.

## ELECTRICAL AND PLUMBING

Bad plumbing can ruin your beautiful space and bad electrical can burn your building down. Neither are beyond the DIY-er and some great books are available, but we suggest that unless you have experience with either, you find a friend who does or hire someone.

## ELECTRICITY CAN KILL YOU

Our obligatory notice: the electricity coming out of your wall can kill you! Be careful: always make sure you turn off the breaker and check the wire with a continuity tester before working.



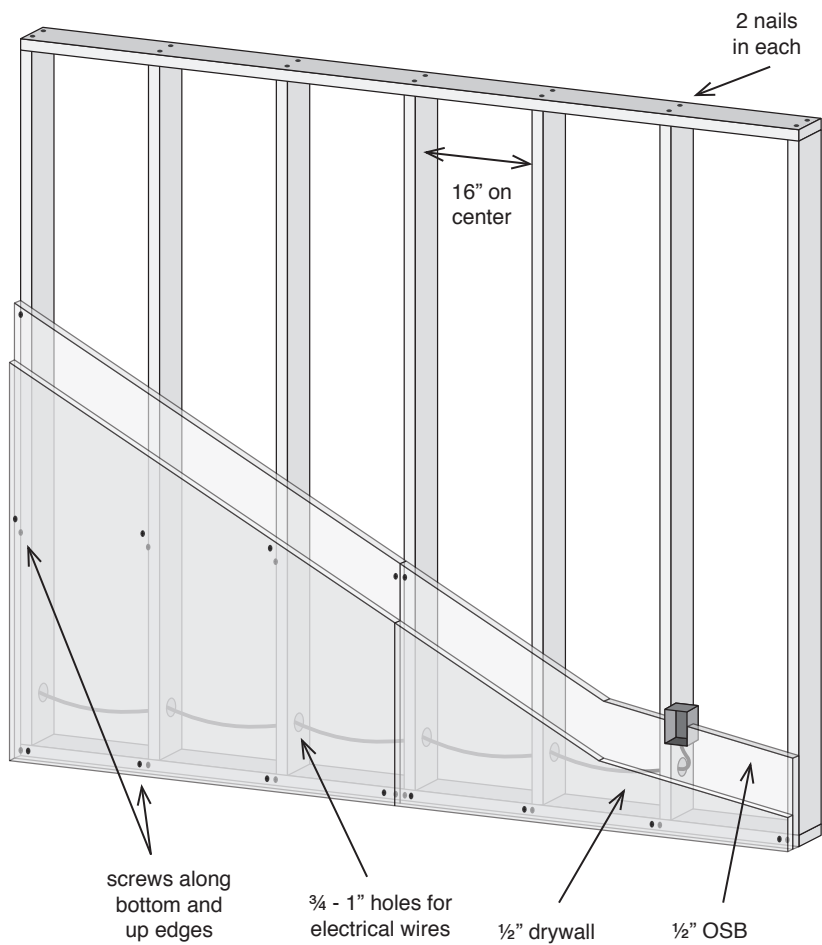
## WHAT DO I NEED: TOOLS

Tape measure	And a pencil: your most important tools. A tape measure shorter than 25 feet (7m) will make it difficult to lay out walls.
Circular saw	Will save you a lot of time, a good handsaw will also work.
Claw hammer	Studs are nailed together at the top and bottom. An air nailer and compressor will make you very happy and can be rented from big-box chains (don't forget the nails!).
Electric drill	For installing plywood and drywall; cordless will make you much happier.
"Mudding" tools	You will need at least two "mud knives" for filling the gaps between drywall panels. One should be small for scooping out of the bucket and filling screw holes, the other should be about 12" (30cm) wide for the seams.
Long ruler	For cutting drywall – at least 3 feet (1m), though a long strip of scrap plywood can also work well.
Utility knife	For cutting drywall and tape; use new blades if possible.
Hammer drill	Used to drill and drive anchors into concrete or brick. This is necessary for anchoring your wall sections to the floor, ceiling, and existing masonry walls. Can also be rented.
Level	Longer is better – you must make sure your wall sections are vertically level or you will be unhappy later!
Drill bits	At least one phillips bit for driving drywall screws and one masonry drill bit for whatever anchors you use.
Painting tools	You will need these each month, so invest in good ones. We suggest rollers and extension poles. Paint trays are for tiny paint jobs – instead, buy a metal screen that hangs inside your 5-gallon paint bucket.
Sawhorses	Use the plywood for the walls to form temporary work tables.

## WHAT DO I NEED: MATERIALS

2x4's	Also called "studs", you'll need at least 9 for every 8 linear feet of wall. While they come in metal, wood is
-------	--

2x4's cont...	much easier to work with. Keep in mind that where a section of wall meets another, the studs will double-up.
Nails	For framing walls: 10d/16d (3/3.5") nails should be right for most everything; buy a big box – you'll need two for both the top and bottom of every stud.
½" OSB	This goes underneath the drywall and makes hanging art a breeze – no looking for a stud, you can hang anything anywhere! ½"-thick should be fine, and comes in 4x8' sheets. OSB stands for "oriented strand board", and is a super cheap plywood used for floors. Two sheets will be needed for each 8' section of wall.
½" drywall	Screwed on top of the plywood, this gives an easy to paint surface. Available in lots of different thicknesses and types, ½" thick is much easier to lift and hang. Like the plywood, you will need two sheets per 8' of wall.
1½" drywall screws	Used to hang the plywood and drywall. Get a bucket, not a box – you will use a LOT of these.
Joint compound	Also called "mud", this is what fills the seams and screw holes in your drywall panels. Premixed is much easier and comes in 5-gallon buckets (keep tightly covered!).
Sanding pole	Use with mesh sandpaper designed for drywall.
Drywall tape	Applied under the mud across seams, this keeps the mud from cracking. Available in paper (harder to apply but cheaper) and adhesive mesh (easier to use).
Corner bead	Plastic or metal strips screwed along corners to protect the drywall and make a clean edge. You will need enough to cover any corners or entrances without a door – can also be used along the top of a wall that doesn't reach the ceiling.
Primer	PVA primer is a cheap sealer for unpainted drywall.
Paint	Finish with interior latex paint - comes in 5-gallon bucket. Cheap paint doesn't cover well, but is cheap. Be sure to get flat, not semi-gloss or eggshell finish.



*A simple 8' section of wall - basically all you need to know!*

## ALL ABOUT STUDS

Called “dimensional lumber,” a 2x4 is actually 1.5” thick x 3.5” wide!

- 96” (8’)      Height of a standard residential wall; most common length.
- 120” (10’)    10’ tall walls often feel more spacious for big artworks.
- 92-5/8” & 116-5/8”    Shorter than 8- and 10-foot walls respectively to accommodate top and bottom stud; saves a ton of time cutting!

## HANGING AND MUDDING DRYWALL

Nothing beats a friend showing you how, but here are some tips:

- Cutting      Drywall is cut with a regular utility knife – mark your cuts on the face (lighter-colored side) with a pencil, cut along a straight-edge with your knife deep enough to go through the paper, tap the back of the sheet and the drywall will easily break along your cut, cut through the remainder from the opposite side.
- Hanging      Drywall is simply screwed into the studs – a little practice will make finding the center stud easier. More screws are better than less; too few and your seams will crack.
- Mudding      Or filling the seams; we recommend looking at some online videos to simultaneously make you feel more confident and pathetically bad at mudding. See the Appendix of the digital download for links.

## LIGHTS

Lights will be necessary unless you are fortunate enough to already have them installed. Inexpensive “clip lights” – light fixtures that take normal bulbs and have large metal reflectors around them – make great faux track lights. Interior halogen bulbs (spot/flood) work much better than normal light bulbs.

While probably illegal in your area, a matrix of extension cords can be used to hook your lights together. Be careful you don’t run too many lights on one circuit – this can be a fire hazard.

TELL  
EVERY -  
ONE  
EVERY -  
THING

Depending on your geography and the goals of your project, having an audience of anywhere from a handful to a few hundred is fantastic. Whatever your reach, getting information to your audience about your exhibitions is critical.

## EMAIL IS THE NEW POSTCARDS

Before everyone did everything via email, galleries would send out huge stacks of postcards each month announcing new shows. Supplanted by digital technologies, postcards seem environmentally irresponsible, awkwardly one-dimensional, and offer no direct or easy connection to further information. Email can reach more people for much cheaper, especially if you want to cultivate an international audience.

## FACEBOOK IS THE NEW EMAIL?

Some (many) think that email is to Facebook what postcards are to email: inefficient and antiquated. Facebook has a built-in audience of millions and allows a more informal way to show your visitors what you are working on, the details of the way you operate, and can create a sense of build-up for events where multiple emails might get annoying. We still find email an important tool, however. It can be focused on the content of the shows, and is a more formal way to get your information to newspapers, blogs, and critics.

## OTHER PIPELINES OF PROMOTION

Look around and see how similar venues are promoted in your area – in Lincoln, Nebraska hanging posters is the norm for exhibitions and music events, while in a larger city this might not be feasible. Look for organizations that promote arts events: perhaps your local paper or free weekly publishes a list of shows. Most cities have a core group of fantastic arts and culture blogs that list events.

## PRESS RELEASES

An official press release may feel too formal for your project, but for others a Facebook post might feel too casual. Like your website, promotion projects the image you want to create for your space, whether it be a punk rock DIY or blue-chip wannabe. Press releases can be tricky. They need to give a pithy and intriguing synopsis of the show, so it's best to keep the language simple and direct with artspeak kept at a minimum. Be sure to include information about the gallery, including your online and offline con-

tact information. A sample press release is in the Appendix of the digital download .

## WEBSITES

Some galleries have their sole online presence on Facebook – you can post photographs documenting past shows, have information about your hours and location, and everything else. However, you are stuck with Facebook’s template, you can’t have your own domain name (see the sidebar on the next page for website terminology), and you can’t embed downloads or other non-Facebook approved things.

## BUILD vs TEMPLATE

If you’re already a web design genius, you will obviously want to craft your own site. For the rest of us, Content Management Systems (or CMS’s) can be extremely useful for making good-looking and properly functioning websites. Free tools like Wordpress (which has a self-hosted and a Wordpress-hosted option) and Indexhibit are fantastic and have themes designed specifically for artists.

## EMAIL OPTIONS

A regular email is usually in “plain text” format, meaning the font, size, color, and layout will vary depending on the recipient’s email program. Emails sent as HTML (essentially tiny webpages) allow for much more formatting control, embedded images, and dynamic links. ConstantContact is an excellent, paid service that sends emails and manages your subscription list. MailChimp is another popular option that has both paid and free options (if under 2,000 subscribers).

## OPENINGS

How you want to run opening receptions is up to you: we tend towards the short and sweet model with the focus primarily on the art. Sometimes we schedule performances or other extras during an opening as a way of supporting local musicians. Follow the norm in your area for date and time (First Fridays, Second Saturdays, etc). We suggest putting out literature about previous shows (catalogs, etc) and an email signup sheet. Food is never frowned upon!

## BOOZE

Your choice as to whether or not to have drinks at your opening is up to

## WEBSITE TERMINOLOGY AND TOOLS

Domain	The address of your site (ex: driftstation.org). Your domain name has to be registered, usually about \$15 USD per year, depending on the type (most common is .com and .org).
Server	The place your website files are stored: packages vary depending on how many visitors you expect to have and how many files you will store on the server. With Vimeo/YouTube being high quality, free services, small server space should be just fine (and you can always upgrade later).
Hosting	You will need to host your site through a company, with whom you will also probably register your domain name. We suggest 1and1 or Go Daddy, who come recommended from lots of friends and personal experience.
FTP	File Transfer Protocol is the means (software) for uploading files to your site. We suggest Filezilla, which isn't fancy but is free.
CMS	Content Management Systems make building and maintaining websites much easier for those without web experience. Look into Wordpress or Indexhibit for easy systems that have templates for artwork (both are free, but you will need a domain).
Screen vs print resolution	While image resolution for printing is generally 300 pixels per inch (ppi), "screen resolution" is 72ppi. Compressing images for the web makes the file sizes much smaller and your pages load faster.



you: you can hire a bartender, provide it for free or by donation, ask that people just bring their own, or have none at all. Drinks definitely lighten the atmosphere and give people a reason to stay, but aren't necessary for a great gallery either.

Wine is typical, though many people are much happier with a beer. Be sure to also have water or and other non-alcoholic beverage for those that don't drink.

## HOWEVER...

Be aware that serving alcohol without a license is illegal. Many galleries get around this by offering drinks "by donation", asking for visitors to chip in as they see fit (note: this too is probably against the law). We like this system, because it lets those who can afford it to give a little more. Generally, breaking even on the night should be the goal, not making money. If the police do come, be polite and respectful, and always ask for ID for anyone who looks underage.

## WHEN TO BE OPEN

Unless you have a reason to be in your space, it may be hard to justify regular hours. Balance the interest in your shows with your own time commitment. Generally, listing the gallery as "open by appointment" will be easiest, allowing you to schedule visits with the press and other interested people outside of openings. If you experience a lot of foot traffic, you may want to consider being open during those times.

## GET A CAMERA, LEARN HOW TO USE IT

High quality images go a long way to a professional presentation of your project. Images taken with a cell phone might be fine for candid shots of the opening reception, but to properly document the shows you at least want to use a tripod and do a little color correction. You likely have a friend who is interested in photography, so if you don't know how or don't want to take photographs of your shows properly, ask/bribe them to take images for you.

That said, it will pay off in the long term to learn how to properly document your projects in a way that shows off what you do and what your space looks like. If you want to curate shows in other venues, this kind of documentation will be critical.

THAT  
THING IS  
INTERES-  
TING WITH  
THAT  
OTHER  
THING

This isn't a guide to curatorial practice, so this section will not cover how to put together exhibitions. Instead, it focuses on the pragmatic aspects of operating a space including shipping, hanging, and other details.

## WHERE TO FIND ARTISTS

Surprisingly, this can be quite hard if you live outside of a major art hub. New York and LA are teeming with artists that are glad to drop off a piece for a weekend. "Artist-run" generally also means no money for shipping, so the challenge compounds. To find artists to show, we suggest going to lots of shows in your region and note artists whose work you like, talking to your friends and the artists you show for suggestions, and open calls. Juried shows can reach a whole pool of artists you would never have found otherwise. Find some good art blogs with an emphasis on emerging artists and check them daily. Also never hesitate to send an email to an artist: most artists (emerging or not) are usually thrilled to exhibit their work and flattered that you are interested in them.

## LOAN AGREEMENTS

Depending on your preference for paperwork, you may or may not want to have artists sign a loan agreement when sending or delivering their work. While it may seem unnecessary, a loan agreement can protect friendships when something bad happens. A sample agreement is in the Appendix of the digital download.

## COMMISSIONS ON WORK SOLD

We firmly believe that the exhibition system is far too slanted towards benefiting galleries and making money: artists should be paid for their work fairly. Since the goal of an artist-run space is rarely to make money (definitely not a lot of it, if any at all), setting the commission on works sold is an important philosophical stance. While a commercial gallery would split 50/50, we ask for only 10% on works sold. Our hope is to help an artist make more great work, and recover a little bit to cover what we call our "light bulb fund".

## ARTIST FEES

In the United States, artists are rarely paid simply for showing a piece whereas it is more the norm in Europe. We were shocked recently to find out that even the Whitney Biennial does not pay artists. While you probably don't have any funds to support artists this way, like commissions on sold work this is a political and philosophical issue to consider.

## INSURANCE

There are two types of insurance to consider for your gallery: liability in case of an accident to a visitor and insurance in the case of damage or theft of artwork while on display, being hung, and sometimes during shipping.

Liability insurance is generally good business practice, and some landlords will specify this as a requirement in the lease because it indemnifies them if, for example, the building collapses during an opening.

Insurance on artworks is less common for artist-run spaces. Most artists understand you not being able to afford to insure their works, but in the case of especially fragile works or pieces made from very expensive materials, an artist may hesitate to show the piece if it cannot be insured. Don't forget that insurance needs to extend before and after the show to include installation and de-installation. Some galleries also insure works while in transit, though this is rare and can be done through your shipper instead.

We have never insured works due to the expense and (knock-on-wood) have never had any issues. If you decide not to insure works in the show, be sure this is clear in the loan agreement.

## SHIPPING

Notice a theme here: you don't have a ton of money. Asking artists to pay for shipping for a show has always struck us as unfair. Our compromise, when we do have work shipped, is to pay for return shipping back to the artist.

## THE TOOLS OF INSTALLATION

Installing shows requires a few tools, most of which you will have already acquired when building your space:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Drill  | For driving screws and drilling holes as needed.  |
| Hammer | While we rarely use nails for anything, a tack hammer is sometimes quite useful and much easier to handle.                      |
| Gloves | Latex/nitrile or cotton; for handling works.  |
| Level  | Very important! Used to get pieces straight, align pieces that are hung in a grid, etc etc etc; a small plastic one works well. |

Knife	With a sharp blade; for opening boxes, cutting tape, etc; we especially like the Olfa brand but a standard utility knife will work just fine and is much cheaper.
Tape	For wrapping works/closing boxes; get brown packing for boxes and white “artist” tape for wrapping the actual work itself.
Drywall screws	Same as you used in the build-out, we use these to hang everything from paintings to prints and monitors. They are strong, easily adjusted, and bite well into the plywood behind your drywall.
Picture hangers/nails	Made of brass, these hooks have angled holes for nails (black with little brass rings around the head) and are used to hang work with wire behind them; expensive but reliable.
D-rings	While professionally framed work should already have them installed, D-rings attach to the back of frames and canvases for easy and sturdy hanging. Having a few on hand will make your life easier when a piece shows up without.
Windex	For cleaning the glass on framed pieces (and windows, and the bathroom, etc!); available in professional grade as well.
Storage	A place to store boxes and packing material – easy to overlook, you’ll need to store the packing that came with the work.

## 58 or 60 INCHES?

This is the big debate: do you hang work the center of each piece at 58” or 60”? We hang at 58” because it feels more intimate, especially for smaller works. Recently, when installing a show that we curated at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha, Nebraska, USA (who hang their exhibitions at 60”), we settled on a middle point of 59”, a poetic compromise...



Money permeates this entire document, from finding a space to opening receptions. Since the first question is likely “what is this all going to cost me?” we’ll jump right to the chase, followed by some suggestions for off-setting those costs.

## SO, WHAT IS THIS ALL GOING TO COST ME: STARTUP AND BUILD-OUT

While this obviously will vary depending on the state of your space when you move in and how big it is, the table below is intended to be an approximation for a small space (400 sq feet or 20x20 feet), assuming that you have all the required tools, that you will build four walls, and that the plumbing is in place but requires basic electrical work.

<i>qty</i>	<i>description</i>	<i>cost each*</i>	<i>total cost</i>
72	92-5/8” studs (vertical)	\$2.60	\$187.20
20	96” studs (top/bottom)	\$2.80	\$56.00
12	½” OSB plywood	\$7.20	\$86.40
12	½” drywall	\$6.50	\$78.00
1	bucket of drywall screws	\$40.00	\$40.00
2	5-gallon bucket joint compound	\$10.00	\$20.00
1	rolls joint tape (adhesive mesh)	\$8.00	\$8.00
2	5-gallon bucket PVA primer	\$42.00	\$84.00
2	5-gallon bucket cheapest white paint	\$40.00	\$80.00
12	outlet boxes (plastic)	\$1.50	\$18.00
12	outlets (white)	\$0.75	\$9.00
12	outlet covers (white)	\$0.50	\$6.00
2	spool of wire (outlets to breaker box)	\$100.00	\$200.00
15	clip lights	\$9.00	\$135.00
15	halogen lightbulbs (3 boxes of 6)	\$20.00	\$60.00
5	extension cords to run clip lights	\$3.00	\$15.00
Subtotal			\$1082.60
+10% cost overrun (better to assume higher cost)			\$108.26
GRAND TOTAL			\$1190.86

## SO, WHAT IS THIS ALL GOING TO COST ME: PER SHOW

Once everything is built, your monthly expenses will vary depending on the kind and scale of exhibitions you mount, and what kind of openings you want to throw. Below is an approximation for a small-ish show of mostly local artists (or media works sent electronically) and an opening of about 150 people.

<i>qty</i>	<i>description</i>	<i>cost each*</i>	<i>total cost</i>
2	return shipping, two boxes/small works	\$15.00	\$30.00
1/4	roll packing tape (re-using packing)	\$4.00/roll	\$1.00
1/8	spot paint (5-gallon bucket)	\$40.00	\$5.00
1/16	bucket of spackle	\$16.00	\$1.00
20	drywall screws for hanging work	basically \$0	\$1.00
30	posters (b/w printing, 11x17")	\$0.45	\$13.50
1	email, Facebook, website promotion	\$0.00	\$0.00
1	monthly website hosting (incl domain)	\$15.00	\$15.00
2	roll paper towels (bought in 12-pack)	\$1.30	\$2.60
3	roll toilet paper (bought in 12-pack)	\$0.50	\$1.50
2	large trash bags (1 trash, 1 recycling)	\$0.36	\$0.72
2	cases cheap beer of your choice	\$15.00	\$30.00
2	bags ice for beer and ice-water	\$5.00	\$10.00
2	big bottles cheap wine	\$15.00	\$30.00
200	cups (bought in 1000-pack from Uline)	\$0.05	\$10.00
1	1 month rent (varies; factor yourself)	--	--
Subtotal			\$151.32
+10% cost overrun (which always happens)			\$15.13
GRAND TOTAL			\$166.45



## \*A NOTE ON ESTIMATED COSTS

The estimates for building materials assume a baseline price at a big-box store and do not include delivery (which we can't recommend enough).

The estimates for monthly expenses are from a big-box retailer or online; buying in bulk will save a lot of money in the long run but requires a higher up-front cost (try Uline for janitorial supplies at much cheaper prices).

## COLLABORATION AND COMPROMISE

Splitting the costs of starting and running a gallery have pros and cons. Essentially: costs divided amongst 10 people means you have 1/10th of the creative control, but can also mean you are able to accomplish projects 10x larger and more complex than you could alone.

## USING RECYCLED BUILDING MATERIALS

Depending on the size of your space, buying used building materials can save you money and is great for the environment. Your local area may have an architectural salvage or used building materials store, though inventory is generally hit-or-miss in terms of selection and quality. These stores often have used electrical and plumbing supplies as well. Another plus: supporting a local business rather than a big-box chain.

## SELLING WORK

Unless you want to spend a lot of energy schmoozing and promoting, you aren't going to sell anything, especially if your gallery is dedicated to non-commercial work... at least this has been our experience and that of most artist-run galleries we know. Geographic location also makes a big difference: there are a lot more collectors in New York City than Bismarck, but also a lot more competition!

## BECOMING A NON-PROFIT

If you want to raise funds, apply for grants, or take donations that people can write off on their taxes, you will want to look into becoming a non-profit organization. In the United States, the official designation is 501(c)(3). The process of registering is fairly complex, and we suggest

getting help from your local arts council if possible (who may also be able to offer you fiscal sponsorship through them instead). However, choosing not to become a non-profit can give you a sense of agility and flexibility. The tradeoff for not being accountable to anyone is the potential loss of funding and support for programming.

Below is a breakdown of what this process will mean for your organization:

Form a board	A non-profit requires a board to oversee the organization – this would certainly include you, but should also include invested members of the community; the level of commitment for the board depends on the scope of your projects.
Record keeping	You will need to keep detailed and organized records of all income and expenses, including keeping receipts.
Donations	You can ask for donations that will be tax-deductable, either money or “in-kind” (ie: stuff), but you could also ask your landlord to donate your rent! Donations made while your application is pending can be written off once your status is approved.
Grants	<p>As a non-profit, you will be eligible for a lot of grants (locally and nationally). The trade-off is the amount of time and effort that go into these applications - if you’ve never written a grant application before the process takes a good bit of practice.</p> <p>Good documentation (see previous chapter) will also be critical in securing grants; funders want a clear picture of what kind of shows and events you create before giving you money.</p>
Visibility	You will now be “on the radar”. Running a loose DIY space means you can do whatever you want whenever you want to – being an official organization means you will likely need to do everything by the books (permits, alcohol, etc).

There are some costs to consider as well:

Filing fee	Applying to be a non-profit requires an up-front filing fee of \$400 in the US; you may want an attorney’s help with this
Taxes	You will want an accountant for your yearly tax filing – you don’t want to get audited and non-profit taxes can be

Taxes cont...	more complicated, especially when keeping track of expenses, donations, grant income, etc.
Time	While it seems odd to consider this a cost, think about the number of hours you will put into filing for your non-profit status and writing grants. Is this worth it in the long run?

The main IRS page for 501(c)(3) is not very helpful; we recommend starting with the links on this page:

<http://www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=96109,00.html>

## OTHER FUNDRAISING OPTIONS

Lots of funding options exist, from silent auctions to crowd-funding sites like Kickstarter. In fact, Kickstarter expects to provide \$150 million USD for projects in 2012, more than the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts. For full details, see:

<http://idealab.talkingpointsmemo.com/2012/02/kickstarter-expects-to-provide-more-funding-to-the-arts-than-nea.php>

## GET HELP AND SAY THANK YOU!

Volunteers can turn what might otherwise be hours or weeks of toil into an enjoyable process, whether it be help building walls, cleaning, or assistance during an opening. Asking friends is fine for short-term needs, but a more formalized arrangement can help save repeated requests (and friendships).

Check with local college and university art departments to see if they have an internship program. If you do take an intern, be ready to find work for them to do (which can be work in and of itself). Remember that their tasks should help them learn how a gallery works, but that doesn't mean that menial labor isn't part of it. It's valuable to learn everything that goes into mounting exhibitions and running an organization, from prep and installation to cleaning the bathroom and mopping the floor.

If you can, buy your helpers lunch or a coffee. Most importantly though, remember to say a hearty and sincere "thank you" for everything anyone does – kind words go a long way.

OUR  
THANK  
YOU

Hopefully this publication will help spawn new art spaces and curatorial projects. We'd like to thank those that have helped, inspired, and have otherwise made our projects possible:

Wyatt Nash, for showing us the way

John Badami, for generously letting us have his space for the last two years

Abbey Arlt, our fantastic intern!

Jacob Francois, Scott Cook, and Matt Blache for helping build out our space in Lincoln

Bryan Klopping, for cleaning the horrifyingly dirty basement when we moved in

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln, for loaning us projectors, video monitors and other equipment

All the artists that have participated in our projects

The curators and galleries who generously responded to the interview questions found in the appendix of the digital download

... and to everyone who has supported Drift Station by coming to shows, sending words of encouragement, and who have created other fantastic projects across the world!

# APP - ENDI - CES

## SAMPLE LOAN AGREEMENT

Included in this PDF is a sample loan agreement that can easily be adapted to your needs. You can also download the document as a Microsoft Word file for easier editing:

<http://www.driftstation.org/exhibitions/fieldguide/sample-loan-agreement.docx>

As a reminder: while we have had this agreement vetted by a lawyer, we can't ensure that they meet the legal standards in your area or for your exact needs. If the stakes are such that a faulty agreement will be disastrous, we suggest you have an attorney look it over.

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Like the loan agreement, we have attached a sample press release in PDF format with a Microsoft Word version available as well:

<http://www.driftstation.org/exhibitions/fieldguide/sample-press-release.docx>

Normally we do not send out a press release in this format (rather we just use email and Facebook), but this is the traditional format and can easily be adapted to other media.

If your exhibitions tend to get a lot of media traction, we also suggest having links to high-resolution images for download.



GALLERY + PERFORMANCE SPACE  
LAT. 40°48'35"N, LONG. 96°40'31"W

# DRIFT STATION

1746 "N" Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68510 USA  
[www.driftstation.org](http://www.driftstation.org) | [mail@driftstation.org](mailto:mail@driftstation.org)

## LOAN AGREEMENT FORM

This is an editable PDF, click on the fields to edit

EXHIBITION TITLE	<hr/>
EXHIBITION DATES	<hr/>
DATES OF LOAN	<hr/>
ARTIST/LENDER NAME	<hr/>
STREET ADDRESS	<hr/> <hr/>
CITY, STATE, ZIP	<hr/>
COUNTRY	<hr/>
TELEPHONE	<hr/>
EMAIL	<hr/>
WEBSITE (for promotional purposes)	<hr/>

SHIPPING ADDRESS FOR RETURN OF ARTWORK (IF DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE)



## ARTWORK INFORMATION

# \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

ARTIST \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

MEDIA \_\_\_\_\_

SIZE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SALE PRICE/NOT FOR SALE \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach any special instructions for installation of the work.

-----

# \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

ARTIST \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

MEDIA \_\_\_\_\_

SIZE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SALE PRICE/NOT FOR SALE \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach any special instructions for installation of the work.

-----

# \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

ARTIST \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

MEDIA \_\_\_\_\_

SIZE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SALE PRICE/NOT FOR SALE \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach any special instructions for installation of the work.

# TERMS

1. Although Drift Station ("The Gallery") believes it takes reasonable measures to protect artwork, there can be no assurances that the artworks will not be damaged. The lender-artist hereby releases and discharges The Gallery, and The Gallery shall not be responsible for or held liable to lender-artist, for any damage, impairment, modification, vandalism, loss or theft of the artworks during transit, installation or de-installation of and the artworks or during the run of the exhibition. The Gallery will not provide insurance for the listed works, so lender-artists requiring insurance must provide their own insurance for the artworks for each phase of the exhibition.
2. The artworks listed above will be carefully handled during installation and secure throughout the exhibition. Every reasonable care will be taken in the packing for return shipment.
3. The Gallery shall receive a 10% commission on all works sold to cover basic gallery expenses. Inquiries regarding sales will be directed to the artist/lender. Contact information of the artist/lender will be given to the patron unless "The Gallery" is notified to the contrary.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, you may give out my contact information

\_\_\_\_\_ No, do not give out my contact information

4. Unless specifically excluded in this agreement or in a separate writing submitted with this agreement, in consideration of the exhibition of the artworks lender-artist hereby authorizes The Gallery to photograph the objects lent under the terms of this agreement and to use those photographs now and in the future for publicity purposes and on the Drift Station website, including uses in catalogs, promotional, advertising and other materials to be distributed or made available to the public online.
5. Lender-artist agrees that no artwork will be removed from the exhibition prior to the close of the exhibition.
6. Unless noted below, "The Gallery" will assume that objects lent under the terms of this agreement may not be handled by the public.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, objects may be handled (please include instructions)

7. Special instructions or terms for the loan:

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---

---

I (we) have read the conditions above and agree to them.

---

Signature of Artist/Lender

---

Date

---

Signature of Artist/Lender

---

Date

---

Drift Station

---

Date

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# FieldGuide

a practical handbook to starting an artist-run space

## FieldGuide Book Release and Closing Party

Friday, September 7, 2012 | 7.00-10.00pm | Free

Drift Station is thrilled to announce **FieldGuide: A Practical Handbook to Starting an Artist-Run Space**. This 40-page book covers topics on how to start and run a DIY gallery and event space including how to find a location, building walls, promotion, and fundraising. On Friday, September 7 Drift Station will have a book release party for **FieldGuide**, where print copies will be available free of charge. A digital edition will also be released on September 7 for those not able to attend the release party.

**FieldGuide** is intended as a practical how-to manual, filled with information that is usually gleaned through first-hand experience, mistakes, and trial-and-error. We hope this guide will help offset some of those challenges and act as a call to arms for artists and other creative to take over spaces all around the world and in whatever fashion they can, to create exciting and challenging exhibitions, projects, and public activities, and to transform their communities into culturally meaningful and rich places to live and make art.

Thank you to everyone who has supported our work over the last two years, and please join us on September 7!

### CONTACT:

Angeles Cossio and Jeff Thompson  
Drift Station  
[mail@driftstation.org](mailto:mail@driftstation.org)  
[www.driftstation.org](http://www.driftstation.org)



*A sample image of the book – higher resolution images available on request*

## ARTICLES ON VACANT BUSINESSES

*Palm Springs Wants to Fill Vacant Storefronts With Art*

David Kelly | September 18, 2009 | LA Times

<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/sep/18/local/me-palm-springs18>

*Luring Artists To Lend Life To Empty Storefronts*

Diane Cardewell | October 13, 2009 | New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/13/nyregion/13galleries.html>

## LINKS OF INTEREST

### SPACE IS EVERYWHERE

US Small Business Administration's Guide to Leasing Commercial Space

<http://www.sba.gov/content/leasing-commercial-space>

Interesting Infographic on Trends in Commercial Real Estate

<http://realtybiznews.com/leasing-commercial-the-growing-trend/9877908>

### WALLS AREN'T THAT HARD

How to Mud and Tape Drywall (parts 1 and 2)

<http://youtu.be/yKt1M58bdM4>

<http://youtu.be/srKtxBUZJJw>

Rolling Joint Compound with a Paint Roller

(Note: we haven't tried this, but will!)

<http://youtu.be/yi-Hp3dasq8>

### TELL EVERYONE EVERYTHING

ConstantContact

<http://www.constantcontact.com>

MailChimp

<http://www.mailchimp.com>

Review of ConstantContact and MailChimp Outlining Differences and Pros/Cons

<http://www.briangerald.com/constant-contact-aweber-mailchimp-email-marketing-newsletter-review>

\$

Uline: Janitorial, Cleaning, and Packing Supplies

<http://www.uline.com>

IRS Page on Becoming a 501(c)(3)

<http://www.irs.gov/charities/article/0,,id=96109,00.html>

Kickstarter and the National Endowment for the Arts

<http://idealab.talkingpointsmemo.com/2012/02/kickstarter-expects-to-provide-more-funding-to-the-arts-than-nea.php>

## TERRIBLE “YAHOO ANSWERS” TO STARTING A GALLERY

Whatever you do, do not follow any of this advice!

Q: “I have been exploring my dream of owning and running an art gallery in Austin, Texas. Any good advice? I would like to specialize in paintings.”

A: “To run a successful art gallery you really need to know the art scene, art history and the art. Being a gallery owner also means that you should prepare yourself to be very sociable and travel more than you think! You should get an MA in Fine Art if you haven’t already! Not only the knowledge, but the contacts would be indispensable. And you of course need to LOVE art!”

<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080516225829AAEgX3u>

Q: “Do they charge the artist that is showing their work? do guests going to view the art pay an entree fee? if the art is being sold, does a percent of the money go to the gallery?”

A: "Either buy the paintings outright from the artist (usually a lot of work or all of their output) or display paintings for a fee & commission on sales. You do it whatever way you like or can negotiate. The gallery usually does framing as well. Difficult business!"

[http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;\\_ylt=ApKFS8LGJ9Huq1ev6QbmGhcjzKIX;\\_ylv=3?qid=20110729021011AABcsvA](http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;_ylt=ApKFS8LGJ9Huq1ev6QbmGhcjzKIX;_ylv=3?qid=20110729021011AABcsvA)

Q: "My father does photography and we thought about opening an art gallery. How much would it cost to open an art gallery and what would be the monthly expenses?  
Please and thank you."

A: "HOW.... on .... Earth .... do you expect anyone to tell you that? If you are THAT naive about business, you better just forget the whole idea.  
A location in a bad area in a small town might cost \$500 a month, a shop in a nice area in a larger town might cost over \$5000 a month. Then you have operating expenses, which will again vary greatly. You have business license, accountant fees, insurance fees, and how are you planning on working with any displaying artists? How much will you take from any sells? Are you going to charge for wall space? I hope you don't think your Father "doing photography" is going to finance and support this whole thing.

This question is simply another variation of the never ending "what do I name my photography business" questions seen on here almost hourly by totally clueless people as pertains to business knowledge. An art gallery is a business much like any other. I suggest you get in some business courses / classes if this is something you want to pursue in the future."

[http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;\\_ylt=Ar9MvFWFIfS0Hw0YPFzKwk0jzKIX;\\_ylv=3?qid=20111123133849AAiMvke](http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;_ylt=Ar9MvFWFIfS0Hw0YPFzKwk0jzKIX;_ylv=3?qid=20111123133849AAiMvke)

Q: "I love art/ the arts and i've always wanted to run an art gallery of my own work or others'. What goes into starting this type of venture?"



A: “It isn’t what goes into it that will bring success...it’s who goes into it once it is built: customers. The key is to have the demand for what you want to offer. Do the market research upfront. Too many people get into retail thinking they have a good product. Well, it might be good, but if there is no demand, there are no sales. Price point is next. Can you offer value and still make margin? If you charge a 50 percent commission, you’d better work at getting people to see and buy. Advertise, direct mail postcards, mailing lists...marketing, marketing, marketing. It’s work. There are few, very few, “build it and they will come” success stories, especially in the art world today.”

[http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;\\_ylt=Ar1HZ5Fb1DoxggqRo4ZWa.cjzKIX;\\_ylv=3?qid=20070405113508AAkaBvm](http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;_ylt=Ar1HZ5Fb1DoxggqRo4ZWa.cjzKIX;_ylv=3?qid=20070405113508AAkaBvm)

Q: “I’m a photo-communications major/ art history minor. I eventually want to open my own gallery and I really have no idea what I need to do to reach this goal.

I think my next step is to get an internship or job at a local gallery and start learning. Any other tips?”

A: “thats a good question. don’t have an answer for you but wish you luck”

[http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;\\_ylt=ApKFS8LGJ9Huq1ev6QbmGhcjzKIX;\\_ylv=3?qid=20100512192854AADbHUW](http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;_ylt=ApKFS8LGJ9Huq1ev6QbmGhcjzKIX;_ylv=3?qid=20100512192854AADbHUW)

## FULL INTERVIEW RESPONSES FROM CURATORS OF ARTIST-RUN SPACES

A big “thank you” to those that took the time to respond to these questions. We hope to add more over time, so please check back and if you run an artist-run or DIY gallery space please get in touch.

### ACTUAL SIZE

(Los Angeles, California, USA)

*Please tell us about your curatorial work, your organization, and what you do there.*

Actual Size Los Angeles is run by four artists; Lee Foley, Justin John Greene, Samia Mirza and Corrie Siegel. We are located on 741 New High Street in a small Chinatown storefront, and we have been open since April 2010. We collaboratively direct and curate exhibitions and events, though we also work with with other curators and artists on selected projects and initiatives. We present work by a diverse range of artists, and hope to enrich the cultural landscape of Los Angeles by supporting investigative work and critical dialogue. Through studio visits, conversation and correspondence, we encourage artists to take risks and to expand on traditional concepts of the exhibition. We attempt to activate the space through events that involve different audiences and invite viewers into the culture of the artist's work. Our events range from openings of solo and group exhibitions to projects that make use of the space as a multi-faceted resource for artists. In addition to formal exhibitions, we provide haircuts, hold lectures, screenings, musical performances, BBQ's, brunches, and arm wrestling tournaments.

What is the reason you do curatorial work and/or started an art space?  
Our mission was to create a gallery that presented work formally and that encouraged critical discourse, but that was also welcoming and flexible. We wanted to create a space that would enable us to engage in other artists practice in an active way and also unfold and share the studio conversations and experiences we were having as working artists.

*How do you/your organization support your curatorial work?*

Our organization is funded by membership fees, sponsors, donations and sales.

*What challenges do you face in running your organization and/or putting*

*together exhibitions?*

We think that the gallery should always present challenges to us that help us to grow. Each show and event we do is different, so we learn constantly from the process.

One of the challenges that we try to explore and understand as a group is how Actual Size is or can be an extension of our own studio practice, as well as a venue for our work. however we might define it. We often play multiple roles in this project and in addition to supporting other artists and the collective's ideas we have to remind ourselves to step back and question our own individual interests and practice.

Also, the words gallery and gallerist can have negative connotations-commercial, power grubbing, apathetic. Even though Actual Size is hosted in a pretty modest space, the white cube gallery construct has powerful implications. Sometimes when individuals approach the gallery they have assumptions about what the exhibition means and what the gallery should be doing. We try to uphold a high exhibition standard and professional demeanor despite limited funds and time. Sometimes artists we have worked with assume this is our full time job and they do not see that we are artists just like them who have decided to donate our time and often our own money to help their exhibition to happen.

*What strategies do you use to deal with them?*

Once collaborators understand that we are working artists just like themselves they are generally very positive, thankful and understanding.

What do you see as the future for presenting artistic projects? Will we see spaces become increasingly virtual? Will we be leaving behind the gallery representation system? Popup spaces?

There are so many ways of engaging in critical discourse as well as generating creative communities and disseminating ideas. We are inspired by all of these models for sharing, creating and conceiving of art. We consider ourselves very lucky to have such a supportive, engaging and innovative creative community that surrounds Actual Size. The internet has made it possible for us to collaborate with artists and communities around the world, whether it be 70 librarians singing us children's songs on skype in Denmark, to showing work from international artists, and collaborating on projects via the internet.

The anchor to our project however, is the physical space of the gallery,

whether or not people visit it, it has been very important to us to have a localized meeting spot and gathering point so that we can work together with our audience to see the gallery and the work we present in new ways. Through staying in one place we have built an wide audience that might have not found us if not for our physical presence in the community.

*What advice would you give a curator interested in opening an art space?*  
Do what you love, collaborate with good people that you are challenged and energized by and make sure the project is something that can facilitate your growth and be fun.

*Where can people find out more about what you do?*  
[www.actualsizela.com](http://www.actualsizela.com)  
[www.samiamirza.com](http://www.samiamirza.com)  
[www.justinjohnngreene.com](http://www.justinjohnngreene.com)  
[www.corriesiegel.com](http://www.corriesiegel.com)

## GEORGE SCHEER/ELSEWHERE

(Greensboro, North Carolina)

*Please tell us about your curatorial work, your organization, and what you do there.*

I currently serve as co-founder and director of Elsewhere, a living museum and experimental residency program set in a former thrift store in downtown Greensboro, NC. Elsewhere was founded in 2003 and established itself as a non-profit. My job at Elsewhere is to work with a 6 person curatorial staff, supporting the museum and residency program, development and fundraising. The unique quality of Elsewhere is its things. Literally the former store is filled to the brink with stuff, a vast collection amassed by my grandmother Sylvia Gray. Nothing of the collection is for sale and artists utilize the collection to create new works. Generally, my job is to tell the story to many different people, cultivate new platforms for global artists to engage with local participants, and to work with artists, curators, and cultural organizations in Greensboro and beyond to expand the image of what is possible within this world of things.

*What is the reason you do curatorial work and/or started an art space?*  
I am most interested in the conditions of possibility that ignite the creative process. My practice as curator is to arrange those resources – personal, conceptual, material, organizational – into new platforms for

creative process. When we started Elsewhere we weren't artists, arts administrators, and we didn't even know what a residency program was. Our interest was in literature and writing and thinking about how the context for this sort of creative practice was not yet fully realized. For us, the seemingly infinite arrangement of a massive set of things, applied as a collection, meant that in each level or organization and arrangement was a trace of the community that arranged it and the conditions that made it possible. We believed that every subsequent change would lead to another more responsive approach, and that this form of site-specific responsive culture was a beautiful way to create a story. Figuring out the multiple dynamics of arrangement and organization, and understanding those dynamic as they unfolds within a community as a collaborative story is how I got involved with Elsewhere.

*How do you/your organization support your curatorial work?*

After years of working for free, having part-time jobs, and all sorts of other gigs, we eventually developed a financial basis from which to support a curatorial staff and produce the programming and projects that we want to do. A non-profit is a business, and we try to be as diversified about our income streams as possible. We rely heavily on grants, individual donations, and museum memberships, but also admissions, a paid residency program, tours, education programs, space rentals, etc.

*What challenges do you face in running your organization and/or putting together exhibitions? What strategies do you use to deal with them?*

The challenges are immense...where to begin...its super hot in the summer, too cold to operate in the winter, there is never enough money, the more money there is the more needs and responsibilities there are, the museum is almost impossible to explain and it always has to be explained to at least 5 different audiences at the same time. Every artists is an adventure, every program is scramble, most of the time everything comes off looking amazing and seamless, but when you are in charge you notice every mistake. When you want to be an artist it is time to administrate, and when you want to administrate there is someone who inevitably wants to work our a conceptual point.

I guess we try to be as responsive as possible, letting idea lead to idea, collaboratively sourcing solutions from our team, and seeking endless reflection toward the betterment of everything. I have a tremendous amount of faith in the creative direction of the work and the team that leads Elsewhere. I also try to remember that this is about art trying to save

the world from inside of a thrift store, and not one of the other millions of desperate mechanisms of late capital attempting to do good and mucking the whole thing up...so what could really go wrong.

*What do you see as the future for presenting artistic projects? Will we see spaces become increasingly virtual? Will we be leaving behind the gallery representation system? Popup spaces?*

There are of course many plausible and exciting futures for presenting art. I think the gallery is proving insufficient for supporting artistic creativity and funding it, however, so long as artists are leading the charge, so to speak, in developing the kinds of creative spaces that they wish to engage with, then I think we will see more and more variations in the forms through which art can be presented. I think we will see new forms at the convergence of public art, civic and public space and sites of conflict and contestation.

A lot of artists are attracted to working with a mix of site-specific, civic minded, socially and politically challenging creative ideas. There will be need to support artists in these kinds of projects and make available to them new spaces through which to platform work. As a curator and director, I see my role as developing the kinds of relationships between artists, audiences, and sites that encourage a shared inquiry into the creative context, that make the creative process more accessible to all those involved, and press these spaces of insight to be differently accessible and meaningful in a larger sense.

*What organizations/curatorial projects (local or not) are you particularly excited about right now?*

I'm really excited about Center for Urban Pedagogy. I got to go around Brooklyn with CUP and a group of high schoolers asking questions to neighbors about their experience with noise, and I thought it was amazingly brilliant. I'm also really into what my longtime collaborator Stephanie Sherman is doing with Provisions Library. They have a host of projects including research artist residencies on topics like "Parks and Passages" and "A Case for Space," while they also work on a cultural project to transform a former railroad under Dupont Circle.

*What advice would you give a curator interested in opening an art space?*

I would also ask, why space and who does it ultimately serve. I would encourage them to think about the relation the space has to the work one hopes to support or exhibit. What relation does the space – physical, conceptual, historical – hope to have with the artists, audience, and the

surrounding community in how they think creatively and engage artistic process. I would encourage a close reflection on how the space develops over time in relationship to all these components that take action inside.

*If you were creating a guide like this, what information would you suggest including?*

Some business models, budgets, contracts and so forth would be helpful. I think understanding the various functions of the artist space and the forms of governance would be important. I also think comportment manuals that relate the behaviors and ethos of artists and organization would help show the kind of collaborative relationships that may be possible.

*Where can people find out more about what you do?*

[www.goelsewhere.org](http://www.goelsewhere.org)

[www.kulturpark.org](http://www.kulturpark.org)

## POSSIBLE PROJECTS/POSSIBLE PRESS

(Atlanta, Georgia, USA)

*Please tell us about your curatorial work, your organization, and what you do there.*

In 2009, we began Possible Projects and Possible Press in Brooklyn, later relocated to a storefront in Philadelphia and now to Atlanta. Possible Projects' programming focuses on selective group shows and solo presentations of emerging artists. Possible Press is a free newsprint publication of curated artists' writing. Possible Press' mission provides visual artists a voice through written form, and, in turn, allows readers to glean information not normally evident from solely looking at artists' work. Each issue is an edition of 2,000 and features one centerfold artist. There are usually 10-15 artist contributors per issue.

*What is the reason you do curatorial work and/or started an art space?*

We had always wanted to start a space because in addition to creating work we've always had interests in curating exhibitions. We follow a lot of artists' work and particularly enjoy when artists are allowed freedom so it felt like a natural progression to create a flexible space.

Our first space in Brooklyn was chosen more for its cheap rent than location but when relocating to Philadelphia we decided to enhance our visibility with a local storefront. We have just relocated to Atlanta as of June 2012.

Having a child gave us a whole new perspective on living near family. We are currently planning how Possible Projects and Possible Press will grow, develop and reinvent itself in a new city with new spaces and new people.

*How do you/your organization support your curatorial work?*

Our projects are self-funded. In time, once we have achieved the proper and necessary stability required for most granting agencies, we'd like to be able to apply for local and national opportunities. At the moment it is a labor of love and completely dependent on our own financial stability.

*What challenges do you face in running your organization and/or putting together exhibitions? What strategies do you use to deal with them?*

That's hard to say—we had a lot of great core support with a regular audience of friends. We've even received local reviews and online write-ups. Everyone is supportive, but one challenge (besides financial challenges), is in negotiating the space between verbal and physical support. For example, a lot of people who supported our programming never even visited our space, so there was a disconnect there. We've never carried any expectations and so to receive any attention we did was overwhelmingly positive. However, while it was really beneficial at times for us that Philly is a laid-back city, this can also drain the energy of young and hopeful art endeavors.

*What do you see as the future for presenting artistic projects? Will we see spaces become increasingly virtual? Will we be leaving behind the gallery representation system? Popup spaces?*

There are already more virtual spaces than when we began our space a few years ago. In addition, we have seen local arts criticism increase online - in both visibility and quality of critical discourse - and become more artist-run, perhaps due to an increasing dissatisfaction in the established modes of criticism or just due to a loss in local arts criticism - a lot of newspapers have cut out their arts writers all together. As physical spaces close, others will take their place cyclically. The hard thing about self-funding is that you feel there is a timeline to sustainability. We hope to see more popup spaces or temporary uses of unused or vacant real estate. Not only do these shows inject a livelihood into areas that are failing commercially, they also provide unexpected surprises and necessary breaks from the traditional white cube gallery space.

*What organizations/curatorial projects (local or not) are you particularly excited about right now?*



We were very excited about all of the small artist-run spaces in Philly and other cities that have a tight-knit community of artists and arts professionals, such as Atlanta which we are still learning. Very early on we met the guys behind Extra Extra (now recently defunct) and Bodega, both in Philadelphia, and were impressed by their programming. Our space was roughly in the same neighborhood so it was nice to sort of have this ongoing conversation with them. There is a close-knit group of female arts professionals (artists, writers, and curators) in Atlanta that are starting a curatorial collective, which sounds exciting. Over a broader spectrum, we are really inspired by models such as The Suburban in Chicago, a famously small but conceptually tight program run by Michelle Grabner and her husband Brad Killam; Pied-à-terre in San Francisco, curated/directed by McIntyre Parker, for its persistence and dedication to minimal presentation and unique vision of what an exhibition space can be; the Green Gallery in Milwaukee for its amazing exhibition spaces (old and new) and consistently rigorous programming; and the OUTPOST Gallery, an artist run gallery operating since 2004 in Norwich, England - they have this amazing website and a well-founded sense of local community.

*What advice would you give a curator interested in opening an art space?*  
Be ambitious and realistic at the same time. Work within your means, especially if you are self-funding. Don't show what you think people want to see, but rather what you want to show. Have an opinion.

*If you were creating a guide like this, what information would you suggest including?*

While this is most-likely unfeasible as spaces are opening and closing all the time, it would be really nice to see a list of artist-run organizations by city/state with short capture information. The New Museum's recent publication, Art Spaces Directory, while not exhaustive, highlighted many great organizations internationally. We'd like to see a similar directory focused on the very local.

*Where can people find out more about what you do?*  
[www.possibleprojects.com](http://www.possibleprojects.com)

ISOLATION ROOM  
(Saint Louis, Missouri, USA)

*Please tell us about your curatorial work, your organization, and what you*

*do there.*

The Space is called Isolation Room. It's a Gallery in a kit 7' x 7' x 9' MDF Cube with a single artwork housed inside, located in our dining room in South St Louis.

*What is the reason you do curatorial work and/or started an art space?*

The space was started because it was a chance to have full autonomy with no overhead. It's like a fantasy league highlight reel of all the artists you ever wanted to show but were too afraid to ask.

*How do you/your organization support your curatorial work?*

It's so cheap to run that this isn't a factor. Low cost is a feature not a bug.

*What challenges do you face in running your organization and/or putting together exhibitions? What strategies do you use to deal with them?*

Getting visitors over to see the shows. People are intimidated by the domestic threshold, but once over that hurdle feel right at home. Press has been good so far.

*What do you see as the future for presenting artistic projects? Will we see spaces become increasingly virtual? Will we be leaving behind the gallery representation system? Popup spaces?*

I could tell you but I'd have to shoot you. The first rule of Isoroom is no one talks about Isoroom. The "artworld" is very top down and represents a sort of cultural imperialism that supports kleptocracy and money laundering. I'd guess that art will always remain a plaything of the rich and museums will be the dumping grounds of their inflated treasure troves.

*What organizations/curatorial projects (local or not) are you particularly excited about right now?*

"Doccupy" in Kassel is embarrassing the hell out of Documenta's curator Christov-Barkargiev she recently released a letter saying she supported them but I'm not buying any of that. Viva Doccupy, you dirty smelly hippies!

*What advice would you give a curator interested in opening an art space?*

Have lots of money. Or have a plan that involves no money. Or such up to a billionaire.

*If you were creating a guide like this, what information would you suggest including?*

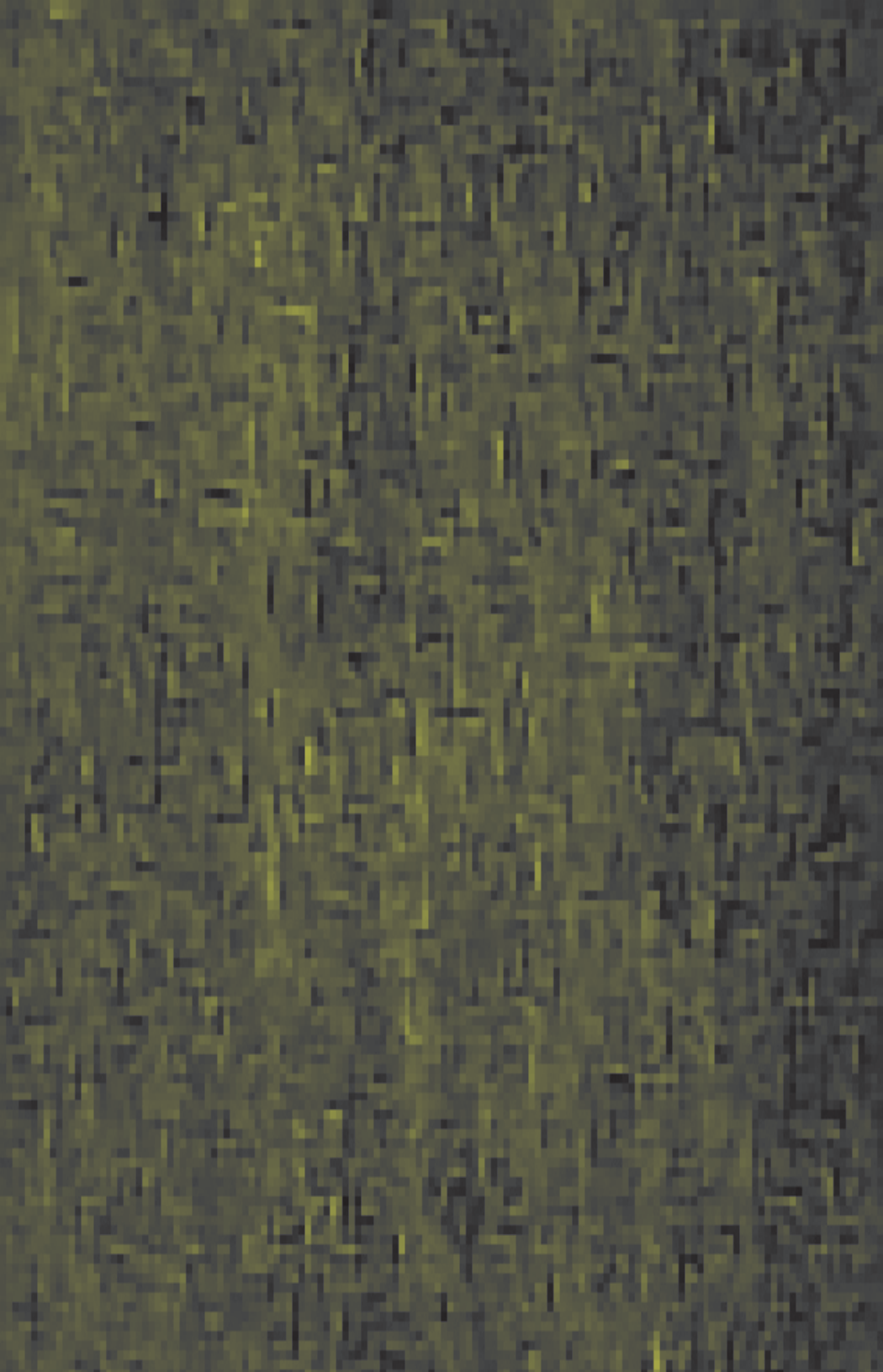
Limited edition art projects that come with the guide like Parkett does.  
Each guide becomes a collectible.

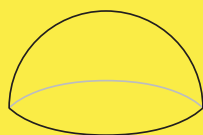
*Where can people find out more about what you do?*  
[www.isolationroom-gallerykit.com](http://www.isolationroom-gallerykit.com)

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Drift Station (Angeles Cossio and Jeff Thompson) is an artist-run, alternative curatorial platform dedicated to exploring new and experimental forms of curatorial practice. We are a curatorial lab, where projects begin as philosophical and artistic inquiries that cannot be met in the studio.

[www.driftstation.org](http://www.driftstation.org)





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