

Entering Exhibitions

Exhibitions are an excellent way of showing your work to others and come in a variety of formats from a small local group who want to show their work in order to encourage new members to join them, to large juried exhibitions open to professional artists across the world.

Exhibitions can also be within an informal space (such as a house or café), a formal gallery and, increasingly, online.

If you are wondering why you should consider entering a piece for an exhibition, the answer is simple. Why not?

On the plus side, it showcases your work, makes you think about your art practice and can be exciting! On the minus side, your tapestry might be rejected – but more of that later!

The British Tapestry Group eNews often includes information on upcoming opportunities (including our own exhibitions) and, if you use social media there are many other sources of information as well.

Expressions of Interest

Exhibition organisers will often ask for an initial ‘expression of interest’. Submitting an expression of interest does not commit you to entering but is there so that the organiser can get an idea of the potential numbers of submissions and the space requirements.

Juried or non-juried?

Exhibitions can be juried or non-juried. Juried exhibitions simply mean that you send either the actual work or, increasingly images, and the jurors select pieces for the exhibition based on both the images and the selection criteria given to them by the exhibition organisers. Sometimes the entries are anonymised so there is no bias. Jurors are often people well-known to textile artists who bring their expertise to the process, can help to raise the profile of the exhibition, and so increase footfall. Organisations will try to get a balance of jurors and as an incentive, jurors will often be invited to submit a piece of their own for exhibition.

Non-juried exhibitions are open to everyone so there is often no selection criteria although sometimes there may be a theme or a size requirement.

When considering whether to enter an exhibition, there are two key rules:

1. Read the accompanying information carefully.
2. Read it again.

The main things to note are:

- There can be requirements on the theme, size, materials, or number of entries. Make sure that your proposed tapestry complies with these as it will not be considered otherwise.
- Check all the details for sending your entry for selection, e.g. size and number of images required and any artist statements or supporting information such as design sources, etc.
- Check to see if there is a cost to enter the exhibition and an additional cost if your piece is chosen. This may influence your decision whether to enter or not.
- Factor in packing materials and postage charges – particularly if you are entering an exhibition outside the UK as unless you are very keen to enter a specific overseas exhibition, additional postage and import taxes can be expensive.
- Make sure you keep a record of any deadlines, so you don’t inadvertently miss submitting your work.
- The final hang of the exhibition is decided by the exhibition organisers and it is their responsibility to ensure that all the work looks at its best. For example, sometimes work arrives that does not have the correct fixings to enable it to be hung. So again, it is important to read the exhibition instructions and to ask if you are in anyway unsure.

You will probably also be asked for supporting information, such as an Artists Statement and/or a Personal Statement – these can be the hardest things to write!

There is lots of information on the internet although it can be a bit confusing as there appears to be no hard and fast rule on Artists Statements. However, an Artists Statement is about *your* art so you should have an explanation of the piece which could include the colours or techniques used, the subject matter, how it links with your art practice and in fact anything which will help the audience appreciate the subject at greater depth. As you may not be there at the time, it is your opportunity to communicate directly to your audience.

The one thing to say, however, is to keep it short, as if you give too much information (or it is too complex) your audience could quickly lose interest and move on elsewhere - the entry details will usually say the word count.

Being accepted

If your piece is chosen, then congratulations!

However, make sure you reread all the entry details etc again, so your work arrives on time and with the required fixings to enable it to be easily hung in the exhibition space.

You may be asked for a Personal Statement to accompany your work. This is your autobiography or CV so you could consider including a brief resume of further education or training (if relevant), groups that you belong to, exhibitions you have shown at and contact details. There is no hard and fast rule: include what you think your audience might find relevant and it is an opportunity to reveal you as a person and not just an artist.

You should be given a deadline for sending in your tapestry so make a note of it: the earlier the better in case there are any problems. Wrap your tapestry carefully and make sure that every piece is well labelled – including the paper you use to wrap your tapestry in – so that it comes back to you in perfect condition. Use Tracked postage: occasionally items do get lost and it is worth the extra expense if only for your peace of mind.

If your piece has not been selected

Although as an artist you can invest a huge amount of personal time and mental energy making your work, you shouldn't take it personally if your piece is not accepted – many now famous artists were initially rejected so you could consider yourself in good company!

The selection process should be anonymous and jurors who follow the criteria for the exhibition and as professionals will aim to be objective, using their experience to determine which pieces have been selected. It is important to remember that the decision will be made by those jurors for that specific exhibition.

Your initial thought may have been that your piece wasn't good enough, but it may have not been selected for any number of reasons including not enough space for all of the entries or not following the brief properly – which is why you should always read the exhibition criteria carefully. You may in fact be both surprised and pleased to find that when you enter another exhibition you find that the exact same piece has been accepted this time simply because it is a better fit in both the space and the ideas or techniques.

So, try to focus on the positives: why your art is important to you and what you learnt during the process. Through your art you are communicating what is inside of you and whilst not everyone wants to listen to you, rejection from an exhibition should never define you as an artist. If you keep entering exhibitions the feeling when you do get accepted is absolutely wonderful so pick yourself up and have another go!