

An Open Letter to Art Show Directors about Proxy Exhibitors

August 20, 2007

Dear Show Director:

Nothing discourages quality exhibitors more than a show that does not enforce its own rules.

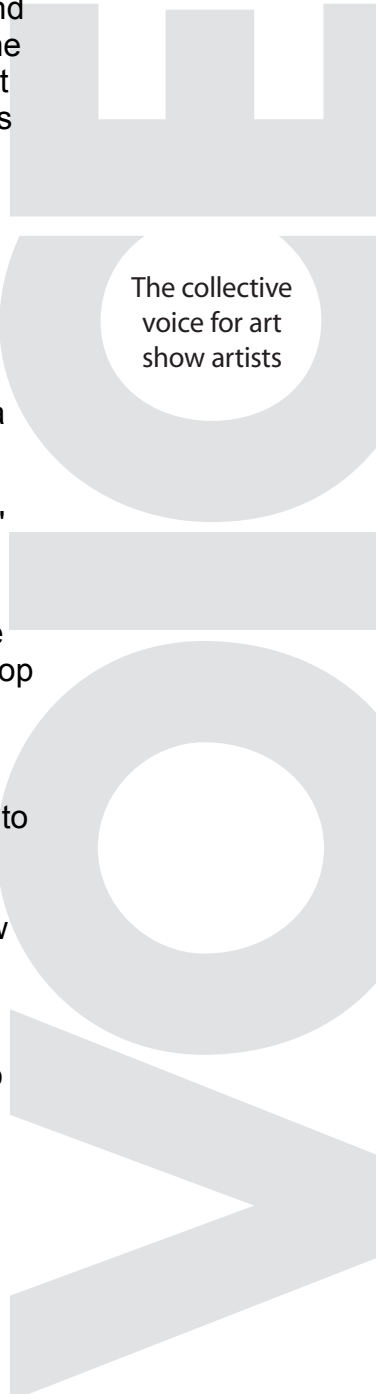
Artists and craftspeople are becoming increasingly vocal about this situation and are incensed when shows either do not have a rule in place or fail to enforce the rule requiring that exhibitors who are the primary creator of the work be present for the entire length of the show. The recent proliferation of proxy exhibitors has caused serious alarm in the art festival community. One of the NAIA's advocacies found on our website at http://www.naia-artists.org/work/naia_advocacies.htm urges shows to prohibit proxy exhibitors.

With the summer season in full swing, reports have been streaming in from shows all over the country regarding artists who are not personally present at particular events. Sometimes the show director is completely unaware of the problem. Other times, the director is aware, but fails to do anything about it in a timely manner.

Allowing proxies affects the artists' bottom line, the uniqueness of your patrons' experience, and even the long-term viability of your show. Remember—the presence of artists who display their *own* artwork is the foundation of your art show. We have found that when shows either do not have a proxy rule in place or do not enforce existing proxy rules, exhibitors with integrity will eventually drop out of that show.

The foundation of any successful show is built with an enthusiastic core of patrons. Patrons may feel cheated when they do not have the option of talking to the creator of the work. This is what makes the American Art & Craft show experience unique. A show that does not enforce its rules will eventually lose artists of integrity and the patron base that comes for the quality of the art show experience will find little reason to attend.

Rule enforcement sometimes means that serious action be taken. As a show director, you have an obligation to all of the artists who are obeying the rules to take action as soon as you are able to confirm the wrongdoing. The choice is simple: either be 'rude' to the proxy exhibitor by taking a firm stand against



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broken rules, or be rude to the two or three hundred exhibitors who are in compliance with the show rules.

What are some actions you can take to protect against proxy exhibitors?

- **Require ID at artist check in and examine it carefully.** If you allow an assistant to set up the booth prior to an artist's arrival, require that the artist check in with you personally as soon as s/he arrives—and before the show opens.
- **Re-check ID each day of your show.** Do it at random times during the day.
- **Get to know your artists.** Once an artist has been accepted to your show, familiarize yourself with his/her work. *(However, do take into account that an artist's work may change over time and their web site may not always be up to date. Likewise, an artist's web site that might show work unacceptable in your show, such as a wholesale or production line, does not necessarily mean that the artist intends to bring unacceptable work.)*
- **Visit the websites of other shows that are held the same weekend** as yours. Check their artist lists for any possible duplication.
- **Designate a couple of people** (they could be volunteers) **to act as "qualifiers"** to review your show each day, re-check IDs, and watch for irregularities.
- **Be open and friendly toward artists in your show that report problems,** and protect their confidentiality with the understanding that these reports must be conclusively confirmed before any action can be taken.
- **Develop an artist advisory committee** to help you to spot problems.
- And lastly, **if a problem arises, act on it swiftly.**

Artists notice rule-breakers. If you, as the show director, do not act quickly and decisively to enforce your rules, word circulates among artists—not only among those at your show, but also through the wider artist community. Likewise, show directors that enforce rules against proxy exhibitors are recognized and appreciated by artists.

We realize you are extremely busy during your show. But the livelihood of artists and the viability of your show depend on insuring that the artist juried in is the one at your show.

We welcome you to give us a call if you have any questions or if we can share further information with you about proxy exhibitors—or about any of the NAIA's other advocacies. A complete list of advocacies is on our website at http://www.naia-artists.org/work/naia_advocacies.htm.

Sincerely,



Sally J. Bright, NAIA Chair



Ardath Prendergast, Executive Director