

Belmont Art Association Meeting: November 17, 2020

Location: Our fourth Zoom meeting was brought to order by Co-Chair Naomi Ellenberg-Dukas. She and Co-Chair Dari Paquette shared leading this well-attended and organized meeting. There were 14 people virtually attending:

Attendees: Nicole Bernstein, Julliette Carignan, Naomi Ellenberg-Dukas (Co-Chair), Irene Fairley, Kay Hudgins, Susan Kottler, Liz LaManche, Dari Paquette (Co-Chair), Debbie Page, Derrick TePaske, Fleur Thesmar, Ian Todreas, Erin Sandler-Rathe (Executive Director, Lexington Chamber of Commerce), and Jane Wentzell (Recording Secretary)

Meeting

1. Survey Results: Naomi reported on the results from the Constant Contact survey that she and Dari sent out after our September meeting.

The first question on the survey asked for feedback regarding scheduling our meetings. Respondents were evenly split between Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, so it was decided to vary the meeting night from month to month to enable the most number of people to attend while we are still interacting virtually.

Dari reported on the second question regarding activities that members may be interested in attending or leading. There was interest in plein air painting or drawing, and Paul Beckingham volunteered to organize this. There was general interest in Zoom lectures and workshops and little interest in Zoom classes.

There was some confusion about the Art Walk idea. Would this be setting up a yard sale or outside studio? Would we need a tent and probably a permit from the town?

Any virtual or outdoor in-person event would require volunteers to work together with Dari or Naomi, because a virtual event takes as much time and effort to arrange as a real event. Dari and Naomi are volunteers and are already fully committed. In order to plan more events, the BAA needs more volunteers.

2. Transformer Box Murals 2021: Dari and Naomi applied for another Belmont Cultural Council Grant to paint more boxes. Dari made a photo collage of the box paintings completed this summer by Liz LaManche and Ian Todreas, and they requested a larger allocation per box since the previous award barely covered the cost of the paint and other materials. Artists should not be expected to volunteer their time for so much effort. Dari reported that kids love the dogs Ian painted on the box at the corner of Trapelo Road and Slade Street.

3. Online Gallery: Dari reminded people to email images of their work to add to the gallery on the BAA's Facebook page, "Creating During Covid-19." This is an ongoing gallery which she updates whenever she receives new artwork images. She also posts images to the BAA's Instagram account.

4. Belmont Gallery of Art Call For Entries: The BGA has a new virtual gallery and has a Call For Entries deadline of December 3rd at 9pm for a portrait show. The entry fee of \$15 can be paid via PayPal. Details are on the BGA's new website, virtualbga.org. Acceptance notifications for "Facing You: A Portraits Show" will go out on December 8th.

5. Presentation: Social Media Toolbox Panel Discussion

Four presenters discussed their experiences with selling art via e-commerce.

Erin Sandler-Rathe: Erin Sandler-Rathe has been the Executive Director of the Lexington Chamber of Commerce since May 2020. Prior to that she was president of the Bedford Chamber of Commerce and on their Board of Directors since 2015. Erin spent considerable

time working in HR and subsequently ran her own small boutique business. She currently works as a consultant to small businesses and non-profits specializing in social media, web design, marketing and branding. Erin is also an instructor at Middlesex Community College, presenting courses in entrepreneurship, social media and branding. Before the pandemic she owned a store selling artwork and used social media to draw attention to the art in her store by going live on Facebook once a week. Naomi has been taking her six-week mini course about using Instagram.

Erin emphasized what she calls the Four Cs: Content-Consistency-Character-Connection. You need to attract your audience consistently by regularly issuing new posts. You can share tangential content, such as using “National _____ Day” to keep feed relevant to current events. Character: differentiate yourself. Analytics show that video is a way to maximize impact on a low budget. Connection: people follow artists on social media with whom they feel a connection. Interact with followers. Twitter is not worth the effort because you have to post all the time.

Fleur Thesmar: Dari introduced BAA member Fleur Thesmar as a top seller on Instagram. She has over 2K followers on Instagram. Fleur is a French artist who has been living and working in Belmont since 2015. Prior to her relocation, she worked for 20 years as an engineer in the high tech industry in France. Her move triggered a renewed interest in her lifelong love of painting, and she took studio art classes at the Museum of Fine Arts. She has been exhibiting locally, nationally and internationally since then, working in watercolor and a variety of other media. Fleur has built a successful online presence, with over 2000 followers on Instagram, and sells her work through her website, <https://www.fleurdefrance.com>, Etsy, and other sites.

Fleur uses Instagram as a tool for self-promotion to drive users to her website, where she keeps up a blog, and to her art products on Etsy. Fleur said that developing an internet strategy and keeping her eyes on her goals has served her well.

Social Media Strategies for Artists: determine who you are- what are your goals-who do you want to interact with and why?

Selling work: Etsy and Instagram. Instagram is best for brand recognition, socializing, building art community. It also provides integrated shop solutions. Etsy is best for makers but is expensive.

Drawbacks of Instagram: You don't own your content; Instagram has its own marketing goals and content policy. Only a percentage of people are on Instagram, so you don't reach everyone. Instagram can also cut you off— if someone says you stole content, you can lose everything. Consider cross channels like Google Marketplace plus local sites to reach more people. If you sell art, you can do so independently on your website. The more platforms, the more the coordination work.

Getting more followers: Promotions are not free. Engage personally. Do your own research. Algorithms change often. Selling work takes a lot of time. Try to post every day. Keep your bio up-to-date. Use Linktree to link your Instagram account to your website. Look for new hashtags and friends. Be regular and organized about posting. Use sunlight +/- filters and use good photos. Keep it personal by showing photos and videos of yourself making art.

Ian Todreas: Ian is a long-time Belmont resident who makes his living as a communications consultant in the environmental sector. He works primarily in watercolor. His portraits (of both people and pets) and landscapes try to capture color and character in the world around us. Stay current with Ian's work by visiting www.updoggallery.com or following Updog Gallery on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram @updoggallery. Ian welcomes comments and requests for dog portraits on commission: ian@Todreas.com. Ian has a combined following of about 1200 across all his platforms.

Ian's advice:

Don't spread yourself too thin. Pick one platform and stay with it, one where your people are, people you want to learn from. Follow artists you admire. Ask for feedback.

Primary goal of social media use for artists: to share yourself. Show pictures of yourself on social media in order to get increased social engagement. People will buy your art only when they make a personal connection with you. Paid promotions on Instagram and Facebook doesn't necessarily help. Social media is good for building your brand and online library, building awareness of your work. Instagram and Facebook are not as good for actually selling work. Ian's attempts at selling his urban sketches via social media were not very successful. The images on Instagram are small and people are scrolling, so you need that personal connection. The photo Ian posted of himself holding his dog is his most popular picture! In line with the first two presenters, Ian emphasizes the need for consistency, content, and selfies.

Liz LaManche: Liz LaManche is a street artist and public artist interested in making our city spaces more welcoming for all. Locally known for City Hall's 2014 "Stairs of Fabulousness" and the "1000-foot Tattoo" at Boston Shipyard, LaManche's urban interventions add color and meaning, with a goal of bringing people together in a shared experience. Her website: Earthsign.com

Liz spoke about the three main social media platforms in turn: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. She also touched on other marketing platforms. Etsy, Saatchi art and Fine Art America are for actual selling; you need to promote via social media to guarantee reach. Patreon requires a membership to allow people to view artists' technique and tutorial videos. It charges a percentage of the monthly income that artists earn on Patreon. Again, you need to vigorously promote this on social media to reach patrons. Bigcartel, Fine Art America and Redbubble are print-on-demand companies for selling prints and other merchandise. Artists earn a variable percentage of sale price. Use hashtags—get them from other artists whose work you admire. Nothing you post online guarantees you millions of viewers. Algorithms change constantly. Flickr is for photographers. They will make prints for you. Again, no guarantee people will see your photos. You have to promote them through social media! Reddit is good for "How to" discussions, opinions, announcements, techniques, interest communities, etc. You can also reach out to contacts with a personal newsletter.

Facebook is for staying in touch with people, friends, local events, professional networking, NOT for selling art. Post events, photos, and selfies to Facebook. Use live video. ALWAYS use a photo when posting. Tag others for visibility. Facebook likes selfies and prioritizes them. Facebook live is also very good to use. A direct message history makes your posts pop up on viewers' screens more often. You can see when your friends are available to get your posts and message them when they are online. Businesses and Google Ads haven't had

good results for sales on Facebook, but referrals work well. Liz recommends looking at Jeannie Motherwell's FB page as an example.

Instagram: super easy with iPhone. Good for promoting work. Use selfies and in caption say "DM to buy!" Use video. Integrate Instagram posts with Facebook. Make sure your website link is in your bio. Look at sources you like that have a large following; follow them and use their hashtags. Research the relevant hashtags for your art. The algorithms for visibility are constantly changing, so do your research and pay attention. *SEO = Search Engine Optimization. Spur interest in your feed by tagging relevant people to reach their audiences. Caveat: if you tag people not at your level, it can be off-putting. She recommends looking at @josephconradfermartist, @msjenniferhicks, @11janestreetartcenter as good examples and hashtag sources. Liz also recommends a few Instagram add-ons such as Snapseed, a free Google app that works well for photo editing and enhancing for Instagram, and Repost to repost with credit to the original poster. There are also other reposting apps for Instagram. A \$15/year marketing app called When To Post tells you the best times to post.

Twitter: a good professional tool for professional network punditry, but not as useful. Retweet content and gather #hashtags. Tag others for visibility. Good for businesses and curators, opinions, announcements, process shots of work.

Slides from Liz's presentation are available to view at: <http://earthsign.com/files/social-media-tips.pdf>

6. Next Meeting: Dari announced an exciting December meeting, Thursday, December 17, 7-9 pm, via Zoom. We will have a presentation that builds on tonight's excellent material. Frédérique Rigoulot and Meredith Holch of the Belmont Media Center will discuss the best techniques for artists to make videos of their artwork with their smart phones for posting on social media, including time-lapse and editing. Also, Ian Todreas wants to introduce his concept of "Paint Pals." Naomi will send out a Constant Contact email with the meeting RSVP. Naomi wants the meeting RSVP deadline to be noon on December 15th, two days before the meeting, to make it easier for her to manage sending out the meeting link. Some people noted that since Naomi is sending the Constant Contact announcement only to our members, that she could put the Zoom link in the announcement since a second level of security may not be necessary. This was not resolved.

Recording Secretary: Jane Wentzell, 617- 489 - 0412
Edits and additional notes by Dari Paquette