Hello! You are listening to Curator on the Go Podcast and I am Liza, your host! Today I decided to have a solo episode and discuss the question that I am asked every day – should artists work with an art gallery or sell independently or with help of an art agent, art dealer or any other professional outside the traditional gallery setting? Let’s dive into discussing the pros and cons of working with the gallery and how artists can be successful by selling independently via social media, website, newsletter, by working with an art agent, etc.

Every artist has to choose at some point in their career whether they want to be represented by a gallery or sell works independently. So... Let’s start by examining the advantages and disadvantages of working with an art gallery.

If you are considering to be represented by a gallery – make your research first. There are two ways that you can sell work through a gallery. The art can either be sold on a commission basis or the gallery can choose to buy the artwork up front. The majority of gallery-artist agreements work on commission. Commission sales mean that your artwork is displayed in the gallery for a certain time. Neither you nor the gallery makes any money until the artwork sells. At this point, the two parties split the sale according to the commission split agreed upon in the gallery contract.

There are also other ways how some galleries structure their fees: for one-time exhibition, some charge artists for the wall space in addition to the percentage from every sale that occurs at the gallery. For others, they require you to buy a gallery membership (one time or monthly payments) as well as require you to bring your followers and clientele to buy through their gallery. Say it costs $300/month to display in the gallery, but they only take 30%. By charging a monthly fee to display, they are essentially covering their costs without having to worry about the art selling, which means it’s taking away their incentive to promote the art. Make sure your art is well-promoted by the gallery for the exhibition.

Typically, art galleries ask for between 30 and 40 percent of a sale. Some may be higher and some lower, it just depends on the individual gallery and the local art market. Also, sometimes collectors want to get a discount. In this case, artists should be willing to split any discounts galleries are forced to offer buyers to close the deal.

Rarely, but it still happens, if artists sell the works online or at other event, gallery might ask the, to share the percentage from sale too. This happens if you have an exclusive contract and no matter where you sell your works, you need to share the percentage as the gallery works to promote your art and get your name out to the world. This usually happens when artists who sell via a big-name gallery and do not need to spend much time on self-promotion and marketing.

[Artists](https://www.liveabout.com/what-do-artists-do-1122810) can have a hard time grasping the fact that galleries do need to make money as well. It can be painful to see 40 percent of a sale for *your* work go to someone else, but you have to remember that they have expenses too. I have been working as a gallery manager for the last 5 years and I know how hard it is to have a gallery with all the expenses like rent, bills, maintenance, etc. However, this doesn’t mean that galleries should try and make money from everyone: clients and artists.

As an [artist](https://www.liveabout.com/amateur-vs-professional-artists-2577980), you should remain aware that some people will want to take advantage of you. Remain vigilant, don't agree to anything if you're uncomfortable without seeking an outside advice first. There are great gallery owners and not-so-great gallery owners. Your job is to weed out the bad ones.

For example, one Toronto-based gallery Stuck Contemporary was selling works by mane local and international and hasn’t paid them for the sold works from the last few years. This is unacceptable! Period. It took me some time to overcome the anger I had and I am glad the artist shared this story on social media and others, who were affected, spoke up and shared their experience. The same thing happened to Schwartz’s Engine Gallery where artists confirmed that the gallery owner owed them nearly $27,000 for missing or sold artwork. People who work with artists (whether it’s a gallery or an agent or a client – doesn’t matter) should be respectful and appreciate the time and resources artists put in producing art and making a choice to pursue art full-time!

There is also never a guarantee that your artwork will sell in a gallery. A lot of it depends on the customers the gallery attracts, the amount of [marketing](https://www.liveabout.com/books-on-marketing-and-selling-art-4007383) they do, and how much people like your work and want to take it home.

Any gallery you are going to work with needs to have a strong online presence. That means they need a calendar of events, up to date artist bios and portfolios, pictures of the actual gallery space, functioning social media buttons and a newsletter signup link. You want to know they make it very easy for people to keep in touch with them. The less steps a buyer has to make to buy the art, the better.

What kind of price point are they selling? Find a gallery that is selling art for something at least relatively similar to your own price point.

Do they sell something other than art?There is nothing wrong with displaying in a combo galleries: places where they run a completely separate business while also displaying art for sale. Places like this should be taking no more than 20-30% commission at the most as their commission is your way of paying a gallery for all that they do: bringing in potential art buyers that might be interested in your work. For example, if you showcase your works at coffee shop - the vast majority of the venue’s marketing and promotion is going to be about getting people to come in to buy coffee. If someone happens to walk in and buy a piece of art, fantastic, but they aren’t actively pursuing it.

So…

**Raise your hand if you feel pressured to have gallery representation as an artist.** If we were all in a room right now, it’s safe to say at least 90% of you would have your hand up.

What are the ways to sell art without gallery representation?

The most obvious one, via Social Media. Studies show that more and more [buyers are turning to social media](https://www.artworkarchive.com/blog/how-social-media-is-changing-our-art-experience). Use your social media channels frequently and complete them with professional profile pictures and “about” sections. Select one or two platforms and do them exceptionally well.

**Next one is Art Fairs.** Buyers of all kinds attend art fairs to see what catches their eye. You will need to make a research and find out the ones that works with your media and budget, but always see art fairs as an investment in your career. There might be times where you are not going to sell anything, but you will still be able to network and build your contact list that will lead to future opportunities. One of the artists I interviewed for this podcast, Monica Shulman, went to Art Basel this month and exhibited her works at Pulse Art Fair (). She will be can on the podcast to share her experience and do/don’t to Stand Out at an Art Fair in my upcoming episodes.

Third way is an **Artwork Archive. If you listened to episode 13, Toronto-based artist Jacques Descoteaux mentioned this platform and how he uses it to track his art inventory and showcase his works to potential collectors. Your Public Profile page** acts as a mini online gallery that you can instantly show to potential buyers. Track your inventory, art for sale, and what’s been sold. Generate invoices and other professional reports for your buyers. Artwork Archive gives you the tools you need to manage your own art business successfully.

The fourth way is to have your personal **custom website.** Creating a website for your art business is an easy way for customers to find your art online. The key is to remember that potential buyers will judge your art business from it. Also, don’t forget to promote! Buyers won’t remember or be able to find your work online unless you are actively promoting yourself and including links they can buy from.

Next one is **Newsletter. This one I personally have struggle with and I know many artists too. It’s easier when you** built up your contact list and now it’s time to use it. But how not to sound to salesy or not to overload your clients with too much information and what information to share?

In your newsletter, give supporters something to be excited about. Try hosting a giveaway or present them with first dibs on your new artwork. Recap your latest residency or reveal your latest inspirations. Sharing this exclusive window into your creative life and chance to buy your artwork will make others want to join your mailing list, too.

You can also sell via Retail stores, interior designers, art agents or dealers. Find someone who is passionate about your work, active in the community as well as good at networking, trustworthy and can represent you and your brand in the best possible way. Work with someone who can guide you on your artistic path and be your friend but at the same time who is serious about the job and knows the art market well enough to build up your reputation and career.

Last, but not least, is getting art **commissions.** But, if you’ve been hired to create a custom work of art, you need to be prepared and realistic about what goes into the process. Examine your schedule, personality, and artistic goals to make sure it’s the right fit for your art business. Turn commissions from a headache into a lucrative business strategy.

If you are an artist and want to sell art on your own to avoid paying galleries or agents – you have to become your own PR manager, take care of all email/phone/in-person correspondence with clients and reach out to them, be super active on social media, and do solo/group exhibitions at places with lover commissions or at your studio. You also can hire an agent and focus on painting while he/she takes care of the rest. Apply for calls for submission, aim big and never give up on your dreams!

Before I end this episode, I would love to share with you exciting news. I am curating a group show “In the Mood” at Blitz Art Gallery in Toronto this month. We hanged all artworks yesterday and the show is ready for you to enjoy. We are hosting a RECEPTION night this Saturday, December 14th, 6 pm to 9 pm. Gallery’s address is 101 Richmond St. East, Toronto. Hope you can join us for an evening of art, the expiration of mood and its role in the creative process, and support 6 amazing artists who are part of this show! Feel free to email me at liza.curatoronthego@gmail.com if you have any questions about this event, directions or if you what to get a digital exhibition catalogue to preview before the show.