

WORLDCON RUNNERS GUIDE

ART SHOW

Introduction: The Art Show is the fixed area of a Worldcon where fine art is displayed. Art Panels (sometimes 4'x4' pegboard or sometimes wire frame grids) are used to hang paintings or prints. Tables are used to display three dimensional art, such as sculptures or jewelry. Panels can be organized in zigzags or rectangles or other shapes. A control desk is usually an L-shaped area where the art show director manages the show with their staff and volunteers. An art show typically starts setting up one or two days prior to the start of Worldcon. It may open for business on Day 1 in the afternoon and run into the early evening. On Days 2 through 4 it is usually open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. except when there is an Artists' Reception in the evening; then it will stay open later. The art show usually closes on Day 4 to prepare for the auction, if any, and art purchased or won at auction can be picked up on Day 5. The art show will start tearing down on Day 5 and finish on the last day the con has space.

Key Problem Areas: The perennial major problems of the Worldcon art show are:

1. *Changing the number of bids to get to auction.*

Worldcon Art Shows use slips of paper, roughly 4 inches wide by 6 inches long, that contain the artist's name, the media type, the name of the piece, the minimum bid price, the direct sale price, and lines below this information for bidders to place their membership number (or bidder number, if different) and the bid price. The number of lines for bids should equal the number of bids that force a piece to go to auction later during the convention. The Art Show Director determines the number of bids to go to auction. Registering with the Art Show for a bidder number, or recording your membership number, along with your contact information should you win a bid, is very important.

Whatever philosophy you want to use to determine how many bids are necessary to get a piece to auction is fine. But once you have determined that magic number, ***do not under any circumstances change that number once the art show has opened to the public.***

Every time this rule has been violated, the committee has gotten lots of grief with little to show for it.

2. *Long, slow checkout lines to pick up art.*

Some Worldcons handle checkout lines well; others, poorly. Study how different conventions do this and pick the best system you can find, or ask online. There are lots of past Art Show Directors who would be willing to give you details.

Other problems that have sometimes occurred include:

3. Aisles too narrow.

If the aisles between panels are too narrow, a number of problems result. The first and most important is that the dreaded Fire Marshall will not approve the plans, or when s/he shows up on site (and Murphy's law says s/he will), s/he will shut down the art show and if s/he gets angry enough, possibly other areas of the convention as well. Connected to this is that fans in wheelchairs will not be able to get through easily.

An aesthetic problem caused by narrow aisles is that you can't stand back enough to see the art properly. This results in lower sales and raised gripes from both attendees and artists. It is not enough to have good art at your art show, it must be properly viewable!

A worst-case example would be the 1995 NASFiC, which had a maze of zig-zagging panels that at one point had only twenty-six inches of clearance at waist level. Stuart Hellinger (a New York fan) noted that you were awarded a piece of cheese if you made it to the end.

A best-case scenario would be something like the Midwest Gencons, which have ten feet of space between panels. Unfortunately, not all concons have that much space to work with.

4. Lighting is too dim.

This is an especially dangerous problem if an SF con has not used those facilities before.

If possible, see the room when another convention is using it, to get a feel for how well lit things are when the room is in use. Also, be sure to inspect the room a couple of weeks before the con to make sure all the light fixtures are functioning, and if a number of them are out, have the hotel liaison kick the facility hard.

5. Room is measured incorrectly.

You went and believed the hotel again, didn't you? **sigh**

Never trust the hotel! Especially never trust their floor plans! Floor plans often lie. Sometimes they are drawn up from the initial architecture plans before the facility is actually built. Sometimes they are affected by remodeling. Sometimes they were just drawn wrong by the graphic artist, or the graphic artist was given bad information by the hotel's sales staff. Sometimes the measurement numbers have a typo in them. Sometimes there are pillars or electrical junctions poking out into what looks like clear space on the floor plans. Whatever.

Please note that the above may not affect how the Fire Marshall views your proposed layout. Fire Marshalls review a lot of layouts, and they may not catch an error made due to a misreading of the plans—they are more concerned with sightlines and clear paths to

exit doors and such. So don't trust the Fire Marshall to catch an error in the hotel floor plans, either.

For critical rooms (dealers, art show, masquerade/Hugo ceremonies), have your own people take their own measurements well in advance of the con (a year out, at least) and compare them to the floor plan figures.

6. Poor security.

Art show thefts do occur. Most occur during the day. An art show is especially vulnerable if you have no bag check system, by which people must check anything that could hold purloined art. This check must be at the entrance, and must be easy to use. A typical system uses numbered cards (playing cards have sometimes been used) and clothespins; the attendee is given a number (or card) that matches the one attached to the item – this avoids the problem of someone deciding they would like a new purse (and its contents). For night time security at a large art show with lots of expensive items, sleep-in fan security is not adequate – what happens if a theft occurs? Preferably, you should have armed, off duty police officers; at a minimum, use bonded professional security. Whatever you do, the after-hours access list should be kept to a VERY few people – the more people who are (even theoretically) allowed in after hours, the uglier things will be if a theft does occur and the concom (and police) start having to figure out and interview possible suspects.

Print Shop

The situation regarding prints in recent years has evolved into a tradition of having prints available in a Print Shop that is adjacent to the art show proper. The tradition that has also evolved is to have the Association of Science Fiction & Fantasy Artists (a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity incorporated in New York state, aka ASFA) run the print shop in return for a portion of the proceeds.

Artifacts

One of the best ways to expedite rapid checkout for pickup of art is to have the system computerized. The best software that was out there (when this guide was initiated) was a program called Artifacts. Artifacts has been used at several regional conventions (ranging from 500 to 3000 in size) and at least one Worldcon. There are other software systems used to run art shows as well. Check with your local or regional conventions or research online using social media (for example, the JOF group on Facebook), email lists (such as the SMOFs list), etc.

Best of all, Artifacts is free! Contact:

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