

Prep to Use

notes

In a Portfolio

Sooner or later, you'll want to submit your work to a gallery to be considered for an exhibition or representation. Or perhaps you'll be applying to an advanced degree program. In either case, they'll want to see your art—in a portfolio.

The Best Portfolios

How your artwork is presented is as important as the work itself, and the best portfolios have several common characteristics.

First, they exhibit a strong artistic vision. In other words, it's immediately clear what the artist is intending to communicate through the work. That's done most effectively by presenting a vision that is consistent across 15–20 pieces of recent artwork. Include more work and the viewer will start to lose interest. Also, the quality of the work is preferred over the quantity. A portfolio of 15 pieces is stronger than one of 20 that includes five works of lesser quality.

The best portfolios demonstrate careful selection and ordering of the work. Nothing looks haphazard or "thrown together". And last, but not least, only high-quality images are used in putting it together. Remember, first impressions matter and you want to avoid anything that diminishes how the viewer sees your artwork.

Select the Work

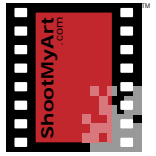
So what's the best way to select the work for your portfolio? Start by picking the best 30 pieces from the work you've created in the last couple of years. You may have many more excellent pieces than can be included, so the decision on which to include and which to leave out can be a difficult one. Then lay them out on the floor or lean them against a wall.

Now look for one common theme or subject, preferably in a single medium—this should represent your artistic vision. Set aside any work that doesn't fit. A portfolio is not the place to demonstrate the wide range of artwork you can create. From the remaining pieces, select the five strongest. These are "keepers". Then select the five weakest, and subtract these from the group...and repeat until you have 15–20 strong works for your portfolio.

Organize the Story

But you're not done yet. Your portfolio tells a story, and the order matters because it determines how the narrative unfolds from beginning to end. A good portfolio—like a good book—draws the viewer into the story and keeps them interested through to the end by the arrangement and pacing of the elements.

So start your story strong and put the best piece first. Then finish strong



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by putting the next-best work last at the end of the portfolio. The third-best piece goes in the middle to help maintain the pace of the story. Arrange the rest of the pieces for variety to keep the viewer's interest along the way. Now you've got a strong portfolio.

One last comment...the order matters any time you present more than one piece of your artwork. Whether it's an online gallery or a juried show entry, always remember to start strong and finish strong.

Present the Portfolio

The last step is to present the portfolio. No one will give the review of your portfolio the time it deserves if you don't take the time to make it look professional.

For a digital portfolio, you'll either upload the image files, email them, or burn a CD. Regardless, I recommend using the title of the work as the file name and adding a two-digit "image number" at the beginning. Most software used to view your portfolio will arrange the works by filename—in alphabetical order—and adding a number to the front of the file name will keep the images in the correct order. Be sure to include a leading zero for the first nine images so image "10" comes after "09", and include an underscore character for readability.

If the images are burned to a CD, use a printable CD with your name and contact information or write neatly on the top (the non-recordable) side of the CD. Never use an adhesive label on a CD. Also, add an index file with the title, medium, and size of each work in order, along with an artist's statement and resume.

For a print portfolio, use high-quality glossy prints. They'll give the best presentation of your work. Include the title, medium, and size on the back of each print. And use a premium portfolio binder for a finishing touch.

One last word of advice, the best time to put together your portfolio is before you need it. Then take your print portfolio with you when you travel and have a couple of CDs handy to leave behind at galleries you visit. Oh, and don't forget to update the portfolio periodically.

Prepare Your Portfolio

1. Follow the steps listed in this lesson and prepare (or update) a portfolio of your artwork. Be sure you have high-quality images of each piece that is included.
2. Name the image files as suggested. Check that they display in the correct order, make any fixes, then burn and label several CDs.
3. Make glossy prints of the images, label each on the back, and place the prints in order in a portfolio binder.