

Learning from a Review

1. Think of the review experience as a first date: you are getting to know about the reviewer, and in turn, the reviewer is getting to know you and your work. Gallerists are looking at the work, but they are also looking at you—are you someone that they want to have a long relationship with, are you articulate and professional, personable and motivated, and more importantly, are you someone who is going to consistently create new and interesting bodies of work.
2. Write every reviewer a personal thank you note. Send a CD or additional information *if requested*. Add them to your mailing list (try to get an e-mail and a hard mailing address), and keep them updated as to your progress and success, but don't take advantage of the connection.
3. Write the hosting organization a thank you note and express your appreciation for creating opportunities for photographers. Small gestures mean a lot.
4. Take a few minutes and find a quiet place to write down everything you've learned and what feedback the reviewers have given you. Trust me, you won't remember everything unless you write it down. You might consider bringing a small tape recorder and ask the reviewer if you can use it.
5. Nothing happens overnight (on occasion it does!)—Museum and gallery exhibitions are booked out for sometimes up to 3-5 years. I am having a show 5 years after the reviewer saw the work.... patience is a virtue in this world. What is most important from this experience is that you now have your work in a reviewer's visual rolodex.
6. Promoting your work takes more time than producing your work. Be prepared to promote a body of work for years, making it crucial that your images be of a quality worth the time and effort it takes to get them seen.
7. Work on the quality of your prints. Ultimately what sells is the physical print, and though you may have a killer image, if the print is not top quality, it's not going to sell. Gallerists have shared that when they accept work into shows from CD's or online jpgs, sometimes when work arrives at the gallery, they are horrified with the quality. Believe me, that photographer has lost his or her chance for a future relationship. Ask reviewers what your prints look like—are they saleable and fine art quality?
8. Remember that it's not all about you. The more you network and show goodwill to other photographers and to the photo community, the more the world will open up for you. You can't always be the prom queen, or even get invited to the prom, but you can celebrate those who do. At some point, your turn will come and they will celebrate in kind.
9. This is very small insular community. Gallerists talk to curators, editors talk to gallerists, photographers share information regularly. How you conduct yourself is really important. Know your boundaries. Understand that gallerists are trying to make sales at events like photo fairs or at openings and are not interested in seeing your work at that time. Show support, go to openings, meet people, and when the time is right, ask about the best way to show them work.
10. Remember that everyone is looking for the next new thing—that's inevitable and make your peace with it. But also remember that building relationships and goodwill goes a long way too. If you make good work, beautiful prints, support your community, and show up READY, you will make your mark.