

Studio Visit Dos and Don'ts

By Karin Campbell
Phil Willson Curator of Contemporary Art, Joslyn Art Museum

**AMPLIFY
ARTS**

BEFORE THE VISIT

DON'T:

— — —

Be afraid to reach out to see if someone is available to meet.

- Follow the advice from the resource guide regarding how to hook that person. Sending a link to a website and saying: “Hi, I’m so-and-so, how do you like me so far?” won’t cut it. Once contact has been made and the invitation has been extended...

DO:

— — —

Determine the parameters of the visit.

- How much time does each of you have? Seems like a given, but on numerous occasions I've reached the end of a studio visit when I have a hard stop time and an artist has been upset because they feel like they should have gotten more time. On the flip side, I've also had artists seem like they're rushing me out of the door because they weren't clear about their personal timelines.
- Where will you be meeting? How will your visitor get in? Do you have each other's contact information?

DO:

— — —

Set up your space.

- Have seating available, but be prepared to move through the space as well. Create a hospitable atmosphere. Sometimes I only do one or two studio visits in a day when I'm traveling, but when I'm at Bemis, I'll do 10 visits in one day, allotting a half hour for each.
- In either scenario, it's nice to have a place to set down my coat and bag; have a drink of water or coffee, or even a snack.

DO:

— — —

Have the work that you most want to discuss out and waiting.

- Think through it. What do YOU most want to talk about to the person visiting you? You don't want to have to waste time digging through a stack of drawings, for example, to get to the one you really want to discuss.

DO:

— — —

Figure out your elevator pitch.

- If you can't tell me about your work in under 3 minutes, how are we going to keep a conversation going for a half hour or longer?

DO:

— — —

Research your and prepare some questions.

- Do little homework on who you're meeting with (curator, dealer, etc.). For example, I recently made a studio visit with a Bemis resident who works almost exclusively in with fiber. He knew I had curated a major Sheila Hicks survey and brought that into our discussion, which enriched the conversation. Often, if I'm making a studio visit, I have some level of interest in or prior knowledge of an artist's work. When I make regular studio visits at the Bemis with current residents, I may not know the work when the list of people with whom I will be meeting is first sent to me, but I do my homework before walking in the door.

DON'T:

— — —

Freak out!

- Most curators or other arts professionals are not walking in the door to judge you. We want to expand our knowledge of what is going on in the art world, and while some of that happens through reading, research, etc., MOST of that goes on by being out in that art world and meeting people. Looking at art in person and talking to artists is leaps and bounds more enjoyable than staring at a computer. I personally decided to become a contemporary curator because I love working with artists. I consider it a huge perk of my job that I get to be invited into artist's studios or work spaces.

DURING THE VISIT

DON'T:

Start off my saying “so, what do you want to see/talk about?”

- The visitor is on your turf—take the reins. And no one should know your work better than you do. Be authoritative. On that note...

DO:

Sell yourself.

- If you're particularly proud of a specific work, project, line of inquiry, etc., tell your visitor about it. However...

DON'T:

Expect to walk away with the promise of a purchase, exhibition, etc.

- Believe it or not, studio visits can be nerve-racking for curators as well. Feeling pressure is not enjoyable and detracts from good conversation, learning more about your work, etc.

DON'T:

Feel like you need to show completed work.

- You've gotten the curator in the door, now exploit the heck out of that time. For example, if you have a work in progress and are unsure about the direction it's going or if it's successfully conveying what you're hoping for, ask for feedback, but...

DO:

Be prepared for true feedback.

- Most curators I know—present company included—aren't gifted in sugar-coating and will tell you what they think.

DON'T:

Be afraid to make work while your visitor is there.

- I remember the first time that an artist made work while we were having a studio visit. She drew almost the time entire time and it gave me butterflies. It was exhilarating to watch. This can help with nerves and might make you more comfortable in opening your doors for a studio visit. You use your studio to work, so if it feels right, then work! If it's distracting, then don't.

DO:

Tell me what kind of work you like, what artists you're looking at, etc.

- Educate me! I always ask whose work an artist likes during a studio visit.

**AMPLIFY
ARTS**

DO:

Get off topic.

- Some of the most compelling conversations I've had with artists during studio visits have been tangents.

**AMPLIFY
ARTS**

AFTER THE VISIT

DO:

— — —

Send a follow-up thank you note.

- Emails are great, handwritten are even better.

DO:

— — —

Feel free to ask more questions.

- If the conversation during the studio visit sparked something, pursue it. However...

DON'T:

— — —

Badger the person who has made the studio visit.

- This has happened to me. I had one individual send me one email a week for about 2 months to inform me about every new thing he had done in his studio. To be blunt, it was annoying. That being said...

DO:

— — —

Send updates.

- If you have an email blast list to send out periodic updates on what you've got going on, ask the studio visitor if you can add her to your list.