

# WHY I DON'T EXHIBIT IN TAOS

I have lived in Taos for 4 years now, and have never exhibited publicly. People ask me why. Well, I will tell you. To start with, there aren't any galleries I *want* to show with. None of them respect their artists, they treat them like employees, and they take very high percentages. Of course this doesn't apply to the co-ops, but the co-ops are not high-profile galleries. For an artist like me, co-ops are not a viable option. I have tried them and they generally don't attract my clients. You will say that high-profile galleries must take larger percentages, to pay their higher rents and cover their higher marketing costs, but that isn't so. For one thing, most of these galleries pay little more in rent than the co-ops and they don't spend much on advertising. They have raised their percentages over the years only because they found out they could. I have been working in this region for over 20 years now, and I remember that not so long ago (1990), high profile galleries in Taos were taking only 1/3. Shriver Gallery was here in Taos for years, for example, and they took 1/3 from the artists they represented. Soon after that, the galleries went to 40% and now they are generally at 50%. Why? Higher costs? No. Rents have fallen in Taos over the last decade. The market is so poor now that many rents are subsidized by the town or by the landlord. More advertising? No. There is probably *less* advertising now than in the 70's or 80's. Local galleries advertise only locally, if at all, and there is really no high-profile publication in Taos. Many places rely on *TaosNews*, which still doesn't know how to print artwork.

Which all goes to say that the galleries have destroyed their own market over the decades by sheer greed and ignorance. They have taken more and more from the artist, which has driven the best artists out of the galleries or out of market. The galleries are left with inferior artists that they can manipulate, but these artists don't attract the best clients, so the market naturally deteriorates. They drove me and a lot like me out of the markets over the past decade, and although they initially scoffed, saying they could do as well without us, that hasn't turned out to be the case, has it?

Some will say the economy has killed the art market, but the art market in Taos and many other places was falling apart before the crash in 2008. Taos was in a slump when I got here in 2007, and it has only gotten worse. Even if the larger economy recovers, art will not recover. The art markets were in a fall due to other factors, some of which you will come to understand better by reading on.

As I don't show at local galleries, I also don't enter local shows. The Taos Fall Arts Festival is coming up next month, and as usual it is run by a gaggle of morons. It will take me a while to list all the reasons I will not enter either the Taos Open or the Taos Select. First of all, although they charge entry fees and take 40%, there are no cash prizes. So why enter? There is no possible benefit to the artist. The sales at these shows are minuscule, and are limited to low dollar items like jewelry or photos. Second, they don't insure the works or have any security. Instead, they say, "The TFAF and/or The Convention Center (Town of Taos) will **not be responsible for loss or damage of any artwork, no matter what the cause.**" What if the cause is gross negligence or theft? Of course, clauses like that in contracts aren't legally binding, but the very fact that they would include such garbage is offensive. Third, they require payment of submission fees via Paypal, and Paypal is a ripoff. Why not take checks from locals? Fourth, for Taos Select, they actually require two fees, a submission fee and an acceptance fee. Why not a kiss-my-ass fee? Fifth, they include this term in the contract:

If, after you submit your entry and sign this agreement, you have the opportunity to sell the artwork and wish to take advantage of that opportunity, the proper course of action is to send the 40% commission to the TFAF when you deliver the artwork to the buyer. **Failure to abide by any rules or requirements in this prospectus may result in your disqualification from future TFAF exhibitions.**

Oh No! Banned from showing with the Taos cronies? Whatever shall I do? Just to be clear, it is absurd that these people would think the artist owes them 40% for a sale the TFAF had nothing to do with. The artist should be allowed to enter an alternate piece, that's all. That's what shows like this did for years, back when they used to respect artists.

Sixth, the contract contains this:

YOU MUST BRING YOUR RECEIPT FROM CHECK-IN DAY TO PICK UP YOUR ART. If not picked up, this work will become the property of Taos Fall Arts Festival, Inc. Pickup will be on this date only.

Again, that sort of shit in a contract isn't legally enforceable, but the fact that these people would even say that is reason enough not to enter their shows.

Seventh, the judges for the Taos Select include “Shanan Campbell Wells, EDAC, who is Principal and Creative Director of SCW Art Consulting, a firm specializing in creating unique aesthetic environments through art.” Sorry, I have no desire to have my work judged by an art consultant. Eighth, this show, like all similar shows nationwide, is run by a bunch of hacks and amateurs, and they tend to stick together. The entries and awards, such as they are, won't be judged by quality, they will be judged on who knows who, and who is least threatening, and who has done the most handshaking over the past year. This ensures once again that all the real artists don't enter, so that the hacks and amateurs can eat all the lousy food at the opening and give all the prizes to each other and get their pictures in the paper.

It doesn't have to be like this. Local shows don't have to be clubby little amateur hours run by hobbyists. I have visited these shows, and they are an embarrassment to Taos and to art. But there is enough talent in and around Taos to put together a real show, one that would draw top clients and make Taos look good, not bad. That is what a Fall Arts Festival should do after all, right? If the town of Taos is going to underwrite an Arts Festival, it needs to underwrite one that actually welcomes the best artists of Taos, and treats them as assets. As it is, the best of Taos will just remain in hiding.