



Cambridge Arts Open Studios — *in your space.*

Janet Malenfant, May 2019

Congratulations — you're ready to participate in Cambridge Arts Open Studios! For many people this is a big decision. Cambridge has very few studio spaces available so many artists work from their own homes or in studios outside of the city. Working from your own home could mean having a dedicated work space or it could mean the kitchen table. Either way, the thought

of opening your home for two days can be intimidating. With some planning there are rewards:

- * Artists who show in their own space have the flexibility to determine when and how they set up their work.
- * Meeting your neighbors - they may not know an artist works nearby
- * Establishing your community as a place where art lives

Each year Cambridge Arts faces the the challenge of procuring venue space in this densely populated and highly developed city. While Cambridge Arts works hard to accommodate all artists who need to be in a common venue, there is a limited amount of space available. For every artist who choses a common venue over showing in their home, a 'bridge' to another artist in the community is lost. These links are an important part of any city wide open studio event and demonstrate to our community that we are indeed a vibrant city where arts and culture are valued and celebrated.

I've participated in Open Studios for twenty years and for all but three of those years I've shown my work in my own home. I'd like to encourage you to join me by sharing some tips on how to enjoy a successful open studio. While I do show in my single family home, I'll also review ideas for showing in your condo, apartment, porch or back yard.

For first timers there are two main concerns:

“But there are no other artists showing near me.”

This is the bridge that I was talking about. If everyone thinks this way, then your presence in the neighborhood is important. I guarantee there are other artists there thinking the same thing. The Cambridge Arts staff work tirelessly to establish links between artists in every neighborhood and will gladly connect artists living in your area.

“I’m nervous about being alone.”

That one’s easy! Arrange for a friend or family member to join you so you feel more comfortable. In the twenty years that I have participated in open studios I have not once felt threatened in my space. You could even offer to have another artist show with you if there’s a footprint big enough for you both.



You have a small apartment or condo

It’s not impossible to show your work in a small space! A few things to consider:

- Be sure that there is nothing in your lease or condo rules that prohibits inviting people into your home to show your work inside the building. Let your neighbors know what you’re doing and maybe sweeten the deal by having a preview cocktail party with them the night before or coffee & tea on Saturday morning with a 10% discount on a purchase.
- Find a designated space to show your work, like your living room or dining room and make that your ‘gallery’. You may have to pile things like a few chairs or items from a book case into your bedroom for the weekend. I find it’s worth it to declutter and allow your art to take center stage. If your very cool collection of snow globes says a lot about who you are, keep them in place! If you have art that you did not create in your space, I recommend putting it away for the weekend so that it does not compete with your own work.
- Now you can envision where your art will go. Do you have space for a fold out table? Do you live in an older apartment with picture rails at the ceiling? A book case that you can empty and fill with your work? A place for an easel or a grid wall? (see *Resources below*)

- If you are a 3D artist or jeweler, you can use one table or a series of smaller ones to lay out your work. Consider using boxes to add height and interest to the tables.
- If you can, try to set up the night before *especially* if it's your first time showing at home. Arranging furniture, moving items to other rooms and setting up your work can take more time than you anticipate. You may also want to make a nice music playlist, put out a vase of flowers and some snacks and make a guestbook.
- Signage will be important. Use standard signage guidelines located on the Cambridge Arts Open Studios website. Make sure entry instructions are clear (ie: Ring Buzzer, come to second floor).
- Corden off areas where you don't want people to go. I use a cord at the bottom of my stairs with a sign that says 'private', and shut the door to my back room. If you don't want to share your bathroom be prepared to tell folks that your bathroom isn't available — "*plumbing issues, sorry!*" — and let them know where the nearest bathroom is.
- Have a partner or buddy(s) spend the day with you so you aren't alone. This is great if you've never shown in your home before.
- Coordinate with nearby artists to help each other send visitors along! I have signs in front of my house to point visitors to the nearest artists in either direction from my home.

You can show in a house and can invite another artist



I show in my single family home and over the years I've fine tuned how I use my space for open studios. My studio is on the second floor and rather than invite people up to that small place, I enjoy showing paintings on my first floor. Adding picture rails along my ceiling has made hanging my work easy, flexible and it looks great. A few years ago

I had a book case made with adjustable shelves to show my work. My nearby friend, Liz, joins me to show her work and occasionally we'll have another artist if I have space available. My work generally hangs on the walls and she uses tables to show her work.

There are several reasons to share your space if it's large enough. For me the best reason is that it's more fun and there's some great energy. We create a group flyer and share our client email lists for more visibility. Another benefit is that two artists at one location is a definite draw for people following the map. Here are some tips:



- Meet a few times beforehand to figure out how you'd like to use the space together.
- Share responsibilities such as snacks/drinks, preparing a joint email/flyer to send to friends/client lists.
- Set up on Friday so you aren't rushing around Saturday morning or inconveniencing the person who owns the home.
- Move out as much furniture or clutter as possible to other rooms. I know not everyone can move furniture but do the best you can. That magazine rack, your yoga ball, that book case filled with books needs to be put away. These things take up valuable space for showing work and the visual clutter takes away from what people have come to look at.
- If possible set up designated areas for each artist to have their own business cards, guest books and portfolio books.
- Make an agreement about when everything will be cleaned up at the end of open studios. My visiting artist likes to clear her entire collection of work on Sunday evening. Others might decide to take a break and do it the next day.

You are showing in your garage, porch, driveway or back yard.

These are all wonderful options for someone who does not want to show inside their home. They require excellent planning, but on a nice weather weekend they can be remarkably fun!

— Bad weather... the truth is, you need to plan for what happens if it's pouring buckets. If you are in a garage, you're likely alright as long as your work isn't near the door. A covered porch might be fine depending on your work and how it's deep the porch is. A tent could work if you have side panels. Have a plan B which will almost always will be to move inside. Review the notes for showing in an apartment or home and just be prepared to do what you need to do.

— Tents are highly recommended for backyard display. You can buy them for under \$300 (new) and they can often be found for less on places like Craigslist or NextDoor. You could post in NextDoor Cambridge or ask on a community listserv to see if someone would loan theirs to you.

— Keep your work safe. In most cases, you will have to plan on taking your work inside for the night to keep it from being stolen or damaged in bad weather. Have a plan in place to do this. If the weather looks questionable you can buy sheet plastic at a paint store to have on hand to throw over your work quickly.

— Have clear directional signage in place to guide visitors from the sidewalk to where you're showing your work.

— Display becomes important. Try visiting outdoor art shows like SoWa to learn how people display their work in an outdoor tent. Grid walls or homemade folding walls in addition to tables are great options. (*see Resources below*)

— Get creative: rent a POD for a weekend and have them put it in your driveway, work out of your minivan, use your garden shed or create a space in your basement. I've seen some very imaginative use of space over the years and applaud unique spaces. Tiny houses are the rage... make your Tiny Open Studio a 'thing'!

Creating Community

Cambridge Arts Open Studios is a special event that showcases the art makers who live and work in our city. We are in every neighborhood and our art can be seen in a variety of settings. I hope you'll consider showing in your own space so we can all

benefit from a map that shows visitors that art lives throughout our entire city. You'll be creating bridges and community, and you'll meet new neighbors along the way.

About the Author

Janet Malenfant is an artist living in Cambridge and working out of her home studio. A painter and mixed media artist, Janet is a Cambridge Arts Open Studios Committee Member and Artist Mentor.

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Resources

Canopy Tents:

www.ecanopy.com

Amazon, Costco, Sams Club and sports stores are great resources for purchasing inexpensive tents.

If you have a tent and just need sidewalls:

<https://www.amazon.com/slp/tent-sidewalls/tsm9ewd6qq5b6bq>

Grid walls:

https://www.uline.com/BL_453/Gridwall-Panels-and-Bases

Amazon also features grid walls. Keep an eye out for 'store closing everything must go' ads... they often sell store fixtures that could work to hang art in small spaces or tents!

Explore and Research:

Do an internet search or Pinterest search for art display booths. Pinterest is LOADED with ideas.

You can search my Pinterest Board: 'Open Studio Display Ideas' to start exploring:

<https://www.pinterest.com/jemalenfant/open-studio-display-ideas/>

Visit the Cambridge Arts Open Studios website:

www.cambridgeartscouncil.org/openstudios

Click on the link 'For Artists' for valuable information such as printable marketing and signage materials, Marketing Tips and updates on Artist Workshops & Meet Ups. You can also call the Cambridge Arts Council to speak with a staff member directly with any questions you might have: 617-349-4380.