

# Five Lessons in Approaching Galleries

by Susan Hood

Beads by  
Stephanie Sersich  
and Dustin Tabor

Photography by  
Tom Eichler,  
Robert Diamante,  
and Dustin Tabor

In our lives there are “Ah-hah” and Yesssss” moments that shape our thoughts so deeply as to alter our future actions. Watching Stephanie Sersich and Dustin Tabor at one of the International Society of Glass Beadmakers (ISGB) Gatherings create a collaborative bead is an engraved image in my memory. This single bead echoed in my mind, with everything else from that Gathering fading to the background.

Fusing talented minds in a collaborative project was the basis for a bead show. I wrote a proposal to organize my thoughts. In doing this I was taking my first gigantic step from behind the safety of the craft show table and entering a completely new realm as curator.

## Lessons to Learn

I asked Adrianna Afford, the owner of Argyle Fine Art in Halifax, Nova Scotia, if she could offer good advice on which galleries might consider my idea, since she had handled my work in the past. Her response? “I’m a gallery owner. Send your proposal to me.” The Argyle is a high-end, prestigious gallery, and yet I had never considered approaching her with my proposal.

**Lesson 1:** *Never set your sights too low.*

I submitted the proposal and began waiting. September, October, November. I was getting anxious, and even rejection was looking good. I could present my idea to another gallery. The waiting game means fine-tuning the original proposal for the next time around. In mid-December I called the gallery.

Galleries collect submissions and review them as a group, planning a strategy for up to five years. Scheduling is influenced by shows that are seasonally appropriate, provide flow from show to show, and take into account the availability of the artist or the amount of work expected to be created for an exhibit.

**Lesson 2:** *Ask for the reviewing date of submissions.*

## Making a Timeline

When the acceptance call came, I had a timeline ready. If international artists would attend, having the show following The Gathering in Rochester, New York, August 2010 was crucial. Considering the size of the world, participants will be “in the area,” more or less. Working around The Gathering in Rochester, New York, was a good model, preceding each of the ISGB deadlines by a few weeks.

Dates were set for advertising, submissions and website preparation, and I made check lists and gave myself lots of lead time. (A little side note: Send your proposal to friends, acquaintances, and clients. Volunteers will surface and love to be involved with a show.)

## Choosing a Name for the Exhibit

*Fusion.* The underlying idea was fusing the public to lampworking, lampworkers of the Maritimes to the rest of Canada, Canadian lampworkers to the United States, and then North Americans to the rest of the world. Unfortunately Fusion is overused and gives the wrong impression when associated with beadmaking. *Lampworkers Don’t Make Lamps* was my favorite, but too long.

I sent pleas to my “wordier” friends. *Glasswork Alignments* and *Performance Adornments* were creative but didn’t capture the essence of the show. *COE 104* was a great idea and glassworkers would understand, but the idea was introducing the public to our passion. Using names of tools associated with beadmaking produced *Mashers* and *Torch*, but neither was right. I chose *BEADS+BEADS=BEADS!*



## Fire Issues

As the enormity of what I was committing to hit me, I received a boost of confidence from the gallery owner. My anxiety level was at an all-time high when Adrianna stepped in and said everything would be fine. I wasn't feeling fine! I was ready to quit, and any excuse would do. I felt the fire issue would be my out.

The Historic Properties offered a unique challenge. Fire codes did not exist when the building was constructed: Having a canopy set outside for demonstrations rather than endangering the timber and stone structure was the answer. I phoned Lisa St. Martin, who has negotiated with fire marshals across the United States. Her advice and experience convinced me that it was not a daunting task, and I whizzed through what I had considered to be one of my biggest hurdles.

**Lesson 3:** Contact people who have done the job before.

## Juror Selection

Since this was the first lampworking show in the Maritimes, all of the beadmakers I asked to be jurors wanted to participate in the show. I went further afield and asked collectors from across Canada as well as the director of the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council. Using the Internet, photos can be sent, adjudicated, and discussed at ease.

## Advertising

When I was ready to begin advertising the show, I contacted all of the businesses and art organizations that send me e-mails and asked to be included in their e-flyers. There are closet lampworkers everywhere buying materials from these suppliers. To save computer time, I added a page to my website rather than setting up a new site for the project. Rather than work from scratch, I used application forms that I had previously filled out for other shows as a framework and added my specific details. Later at the Miami ISGB Gathering I promoted the show by passing out flyers.

The bead release program is my all-time favorite and innovative advertising method to draw the public-at-large to a bead show. My students have volunteered to donate beads, and friends will distribute them across the Halifax waterfront for six weeks leading up to the show. Found beads can be registered on a blog, brought to the show and entered for draw prizes.

**Lesson 4:** Use methods that have worked in the past.

## Accommodations

If you're not a Maritimer, then you are a "Come from Away." Our tradition of hospitality would have CFAs, as they are affectionately called, billeted. Traditionally we are crafters in Atlantic Canada, but lampworking has only become popular in the past five years. Visiting artists would encourage and share with newer beadmakers while enjoying Maritime hospitality. It would also save visiting artists' money.

## Funding

Costs would be for frames, advertising, and canopy rental. I knew sponsors were willing to support the show with products and perhaps cash, but not pay for the entire project. Sponsors were chosen from the list of the businesses I buy from, studios I work for, and ones that I promote. This is a win-win proposition for them. Although not immediate, exposure of the general public to lampworking will generate a larger customer base in the future. No need to beg; just remind them who their customers are.

The gallery owner suggested we go to Nova Scotia Tourism and Culture and apply for funding through a government grant or private associations that promote the arts. This takes time to research as each program has specific requirements. Initially I was told that my idea didn't fit into any category. It hadn't been done before and was outside their scope of specifications. Breaking the exhibit into smaller units and applying for one part, such as the demonstration aspect, would fall under the criteria for their grant funding. In writing to the sponsors, I requested a letter of confirmation of support to send along with my grant application.





*Lesson 5 Gallery owners are extremely willing to share their expertise and want to represent artists who understand the business from the gallery's side. Grant applications are their specialty as they work with artists.*

Here I am, a year and half into *BEADS+BEADS=BEADS!* Some days I'm overwhelmed with the prospect of the show falling flat on its face, but then I receive an e-mail from someone I've never met who has dreamed of coming to Nova Scotia. The possibility of participating in the show is so exciting that she can't wait to apply. I hope you will join us.

FLOW

To learn more about *BEADS+BEADS=BEADS!*, to be held August 6-20, 2010, go to [www.glasssharpgallery.com](http://www.glasssharpgallery.com)

### Checklist for Approaching Galleries

- Write a proposal.
- Approach a gallery.
- Refine the original proposal.
- Apply for funding.
- Create a timeline.
- Make a budget.
- Advise acquaintances of the plan.
- Make an advertising plan.
- Coordinate volunteers.
- Chose jurors.
- Approach the Fire Marshall.
- Contact sponsors.



Susan Hood's passion is glass. The lampworking bug bit her in 2001. She works full time in her studio or on the road creating beads, teaching, and giving workshops across Canada and at her *Bead and Breakfast* in Nova Scotia. Susan is best known for her unique *Phantasea Shells*. You can view more of her work at [www.glasssharpgallery.com](http://www.glasssharpgallery.com).



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Pictured: Salem's Pickrel Weed Column with Orb by Paul J. Stankard  
Top left: Salem's Field Flowers by Paul J. Stankard