

Professional Development for the Botanical Artist

As you are nearing the end of your studies you will no doubt be thinking about what to do next, whether this involves being a full or part time artist or undertaking further study, you should start to think about your future. During your studies you will have completed botanical works of your chosen plant material with various exercises along the way. You will have received feedback, which should enable you to build on your strengths and be aware of any weaknesses in your work. This is merely the starting point for your further development as a botanical artist. Of course, all students have different starting points and some progress faster than others, but this document aims to give you some advice on the possible pathways for your further development and touches on some useful points that will enable your work to reach a wider audience and to present yourself as a professional.

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Reflecting on your Work

Your first task upon completion of the course should be to reflect and assess your progress before planning your next work or projects. The course has taught you the techniques and process of developing botanical works, the approach is one that you should continue to use in your work, it is not intended to be a 'stand-alone' course or 'end point' but to be a 'best practice' approach for continuous improvement. At this point, ask yourself what your strengths and weaknesses are, and where improvement is needed. Keep a notebook and set yourself goals, be honest with yourself about your work, if you know there are areas that need improvement - work hard on them.

Do you need to undertake further study?

At this point it is important to decide whether you need further study or not, if your artwork is not yet of a standard that you are aiming for, it might be a good idea to undertake more study, but don't study for the sake of study. After identifying your weaknesses, decide which areas you need more training in, for example, if you wish to have a scientific approach to drawing plants, or maybe you need more technical skills in drawing and painting, choose a course that fits your needs.

At some point though you will need to get your work out into the open, you can of course study and paint professionally at the same time but be careful not to take on too much. One of the most common problems with those new to this field is trying to do too much too soon, signing up to multiple courses is a common mistake and can become overwhelming and confusing, with conflicting information from different teaching approaches, in worst case scenarios it can result in burn out or failure. Eventually you want to be creating self-directed work without being told what to do and not continually creating coursework. That said, if you need to study more do your homework regarding the right course – one that will *serve your particular needs*, be clear about *how* it will actually benefit your work.

Avenues for further study include certificates and diplomas as well as tutorials and one-off classes, but bear in mind that no current courses in Botanical Art/Illustration are actually accredited, therefore, none have any academic standing in terms of qualification, even if they say they are qualifications, they are in name only. This doesn't mean that they are not worthwhile and association with certain organisations can be beneficial in terms of opportunities. Thus, the priority should always be improving and developing your work. If you intend to apply for other courses and need any advice, I am more than happy to advise on which course might be most suited to you.

Making plans: What do you want to achieve?

As part of your reflection, ask yourself what it is that you want to achieve. Naturally the number one goal is to make continuous improvement with your artwork but if you want to be a serious artist you will need to take on other tasks and will find that a good bit of multi-tasking is required in order to succeed as an artist. You may already have some specific goals, such as exhibiting in a gallery or botanical art exhibition, there are numerous annual opportunities such as the SBA open or ASBA exhibitions for members, and now many new societies offer opportunities globally

and online, so joining societies is an option, but some are more beneficial than others. Perhaps you have a project in mind or even a solo exhibition in the longer term. Eventually you may want to exhibit with the RHS. Perhaps you want to teach others or to produce a publication?

Whatever you want to achieve you should start by **setting some-short and long-term goals, write them down and start to work towards these goals.**

First and foremost, though you need to have a small body of work that demonstrates your skills, and this is something that you should work on developing as a priority, you should already have a few works from the course to build upon.

Creating a portfolio: Developing your style and interests

This is one of the most important parts of this document as all artists need a portfolio or body of work, this should be a physical and digital portfolio, it's also worth getting good quality prints of your best botanical works because you may wish to sell them. Digital images should be high resolution and to size, they should be clean, accurate representations of the actual work, do not over edit or over clean the image as it will not match with reality.

If you take a look at some of the most successful botanical artists, you will note that most have a recognisable style and often a particular interest in certain subject, material or projects. You will see that some artists are much more scientific and at the other end of the scale, others are more floral, and design orientated, although all should be accurate in colour and scale with their representation of plants. Think about some of your favourite artists and ask yourself where you see your own work fitting in, all fall under the general banner of botanical art, but they are quite different. Think carefully about the type of work that you want to produce and the subject material that interests you and develop your own style.

A portfolio of work should definitely not include everything you ever painted or lots of coursework, coursework might have been interesting for you but seeing exercise-based coursework isn't very interesting for others. What you need to have is **a small selection of your very best work**, by this I mean work that shows **a full skill set with comprehensive illustrations** of plants in **attractive and or informative compositions**. That said, it's ok to include **a few smaller works or studies** but they generally have less impact, for examples studies of simple flowers or leaves don't really show off a full skill set unless they are either - large with impact or small and jewel-like with exceptional detail. Don't be mediocre and think carefully about the appeal of your subject choice.

When considering subjects for your portfolio and for exhibiting, it's ok to show some diversity but you will note that in the botanical art world, there are many paintings of certain flowers or plants: iris, tulips, hellebores, roses, peonies etc. are seen in many exhibitions, which is to be expected because they are all beautiful plants but working on these common subjects means it will be more competitive because many artists are painting the same subject, consider what your work has to offer that's different or better than others. There are lots of plants to choose from: look at collections of plants, species plants, native plants from geographic locations, interesting and historic cultivars, medicinal plants, plants and pollinators.... there are many subject areas to choose from. In addition, certain plants are far less represented in the botanical art world, having a small collection or theme of something unusual can be most interesting for the judges

on the exhibition submissions panels. If you want to get a good idea of what is popular, carry out a Google search of the 'plant name' + 'illustration or painting' if you find very few illustrations of a plant then you know it isn't well documented, on the other hand if you find many images you know it's a choice that many other artists will choose too. It is good for an artist to have a focus and perhaps you have an idea for a project or body of work but do check if anyone has done something similar. That doesn't mean you can't do it because we all do things differently but avoid doing work that is too similar a theme or style to another artist's work. For me, the worst approach is to be ignorant about what you are painting – always try to find the accurate plant name, it's part of your job as a botanical artist to know about and to understand your subject.

Don't feel like you have to churn out work at speed, take the time you need to produce good work quality work for your portfolio. If you make 2 – 6 comprehensive works each year that is good and it's better to have fewer good quality works than many average ones. You can supplement the larger works with some smaller works, and a sketchbook to give an overall view of your practice, 5 – 10 works is enough.

Whatever, you decide to paint, remember quality is the priority, don't include any weaker work as this will lower the standard overall, as an RHS judge once told me.... You are only as good as your worst piece of work!

Writing an artist statement and biography

You will need to write both of these if exhibiting and for websites, promotions or applications. Often, they need tailoring depending on the opportunity and audience, for example one written for a gallery or specific exhibition will vary from one written to apply for funding or a course, so you will probably need to adjust the statement and biography. You will also need to update your biography when you have something new that's worth adding.

An artist statement is about **your interests and work** and the concept behind it. It should reflect you as an individual, not be too generic and it shouldn't be too long, maybe 200 words and a series of sentences to describe '**what** it is, **why** you made it and **how** you made it' – it should add to the experience of anyone viewing your work.

Begin with **what** you do, here's an example of an opening sentence '*I am painter of native plants and draw inspiration from both the common and rare wild species that surround me in my home county of wherever*' then you could go on to add **why** this is your focus, perhaps you could say that are concerned about the fragility of nature and the threats to it and want to document the plants at a point in time because at one time many of today's rare plant were once common. Following on, explain **how** you portray these plants, so your medium and anything unique about how you portray them. If you have a specific project, you could mention that too.

It's a good idea to write down all of your key points first that reflect you and your work or intended work. Basically, if someone was to ask you what you do as an artist this is the type of statement you could make verbally. Once you've written it read it out loud and ask yourself if it actually represents you, better still ask a friend what they think about it.

An artist's biography is similar to a **Curriculum Vitae** and although there is some crossover with the Artist statement it is more factual and provides more detail about history, training/education and experience. Include information about you where you are from, your background if interesting, relevant, or related, what type of work you make and why, your mediums, any awards, exhibitions or publications. You can separate this into sections to make it clear and readable, for example first: A introduction about you and your background/relevant training, then what type of work you make and your interests and medium, then your achievements. Try to keep it to one page long if possible. Exhibitions could be in the form of a list but only do this once you have enough to warrant a list. Initially you may find this difficult as you haven't yet exhibited or achieved very much but that will change, and you can add to it over time becoming more selective about what you include.

Assessing and accessing opportunities

Look at the available opportunities for botanical artists and make yourself a calendar, you can even set up Google alerts for botanical art exhibitions and events:

- These include – joining societies
- Exhibiting open and member exhibitions
- Exhibiting in galleries
- Permanent collections
- Other types of work, such as illustration opportunities

Exhibiting: In open exhibitions, member's exhibitions and galleries

Open exhibitions

Success exhibiting in exhibitions can be varied, some exhibitions may have many works accepted, up to 75% of all works entered are accepted in some shows, this sort of exhibition usually show hundreds of works. Exhibitions such as the SBA annual open fall into this category, although they have greatly reduced the number of works shown in recent years, a large percentage are accepted, they select a broad range of work including floral art, botanical art and illustration. A large exhibition may mean that it's somewhat easier to have work accepted but your work can be lost in very large exhibitions, so you need to think carefully about how to make an impact. It's worth visiting such exhibitions and seeing how many works actually sell (post Covid permitting). Don't just limit yourself to botanical art shows, there are many open exhibitions which will accept botanical work, and this brings your work to a new audience and there is less competition from other botanical artists.

The cost of entry to an open exhibition isn't usually too high but varies, some are as little as around £20 per work. You will have to frame, deliver or ship the work, and for all works sold you will pay the standard commission fee, which can vary from 35 - 40% depending on the society, overseas artists will need to comply with VAT registration and will have to pay an additional 20% VAT on top of the commission. If the work doesn't sell you will need to arrange collection.

Such costs can make exhibiting financially difficult, and all of these points will need to be factored into to pricing. It's hard to make any money from such exhibitions but it can be a good

way to judge whether you are ready to exhibit and gets your work to a large audience if accepted.

Member's exhibitions

Some exhibitions are for member's only so you will need to join first, the ASBA (American Society of Botanical Artists) is open for anyone to join but the SBA is an online application which takes place twice a year, the number of members only exhibitions by the SBA has been small in the past and their open exhibition has been the most popular, however this may change in the future. Other Societies vary in membership criteria and fees, check their websites.

Most member's only exhibitions hang far fewer works and have a rigorous selection process. The ASBA have annual internationals that are very high profile with a smaller number of works, usually less than 50. They also organise several other exhibitions. Entry is usually under \$40 for up to three works, but shipping costs may be high, and selling works over a certain price can be difficult with customs, so again multiple costs need to be considered, however having work in a small prestigious exhibition is important for your career.

The RHS is one of the highest profile exhibition opportunities for a botanical artist. To be eligible for their exhibitions you will first need to submit 4 works to their picture committee and be accepted, check their website for details as the process can change. If accepted, you are then eligible to apply for space at one of their shows the following year. In fact, you have 5 years to apply to exhibit with them, if you fail to exhibit within that time you will have to resubmit to the picture committee and start over. If accepted you will need to apply for space at a show and prepare a minimum of 6 works, having a theme is a very good idea. There are various medal awards. There is also a bursary that can be applied for to help with exhibiting costs. You can sell your work at these shows.

Collections and Florilegium

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, in Pittsburgh, is a permanent collection of botanical works of the highest regard, some of the best botanical artists have work in this collection. Their international exhibition takes place every three years, though you can only exhibit once, and selection criteria is tough. Work is kept in their collection and is now in their online database, they also print a high-quality collectable catalogue for each exhibition. Many exhibiting artists donate their works to the Hunt as it is one of the most prestigious collections, having works in permanent collections is highly desirable but not very lucrative, the Hunt do purchase a few works, but budget is limited, so many artists are happy to donate to this important collection.

There are various Societies in different countries as well as Florilegia and you may wish to get involved with one, the latter usually requires donation of the work and copyright, but some are highly prestigious with many publishing the works in high-quality, limited-edition books. Although it may seem counterproductive to give work away, you should consider the educational purposes of such organisations and the associated benefits and kudos of having work in permanent collections.

The best way of learning about what the best exhibitions are is to visit or look at them online (if available) or to send off for catalogues.

Illustration work

There are also opportunities for botanical artists as commercial illustrators, this can be highly lucrative with many companies using botanical illustrations in their products or in advertising campaigns. Such companies include those who produce toiletries and beauty products, food and beverages, household wallpaper, soft furnishings, and fashion. You won't normally be approached by the company but by a design company who is managing the project.

The downside is that this is usually high-pressure fast turn-around work, if you can't work under pressure, it's probably best not to get involved because they won't give you more time and contracts are strict with milestones, so you need to be aware of what is expected of you at every stage. The contract usually involves a complete buy-out of all global rights and you will be limited in how you can share any work from the project, it is normal to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) before even discussing the work, which means you can not disclose anything about it until such times that the design company give permission and the product or campaign is live. Fees will be higher if the work is needed in a hurry with a 'rush fee'. Some companies will tell you what the budget is, and others will ask you to put forward a quote. There are several aspects to the quote for, if they ask for roughs first, there is a fee charged for this, if they are unhappy with the roughs, there is usually a clause that states they can terminate the contract and pay only that fee. There is the fee for the artwork, and a fee for the copyright. Sometimes work is licenced but usually it's a buy-out. I will deal with licencing artwork separately.

Most companies and organisations will find you, rather than you approaching them, but it pays to be prepared should such a company approach you. In order to get on the ladder with this type of work you have to create a very public profile, with websites and social media. Make a good job of the work and they will come back to you.

Exhibiting in galleries

Botanical Art Galleries are few and far between and many are by invitation only. However, many fine art galleries do exhibit some botanical and floral work, so it may be worth looking for one that reasonably local, if a gallery accepts you, keep in mind that most galleries prefer that you do not exhibit with another gallery within a certain distance, or not at all. Galleries can take large commissions up to 60% so be careful with pricing.

Being an artist isn't an easy choice, there will be some disappointments and setbacks to deal with and we have to learn not to take them personally but to use them to improve. If you are dedicated and work hard it's one of the most rewarding jobs.

How ambitious should you be with exhibitions?

If you have an exhibition in mind, take a good look at previous works entered and be honest with yourself. Ask yourself if you think your work is at the same or similar level of quality, if there are any areas of the work that you know are not right, don't enter it – the judges will no doubt spot the same errors. But there is no harm in trying, especially if judges give useful feedback (although most don't), but if you aim too high and keep being rejected, perhaps it's time to review your strategy.

Don't enter multiple works on the 'off-chance' of being accepted but prepare one or two good pieces and start well in advance, not two weeks before the deadline, I try to work a year in advance, which is why you need an exhibition calendar. Don't enter work you have shown elsewhere over and over.

What type of work should you enter into exhibitions?

Think about the subject carefully, check if there is a requirement or theme for the exhibition? As already mentioned, certain subjects are commonly painted, tulips, hellebores, camellias, peonies, hydrangeas, cardoons, roses, certain fritillaria, iris as well as seed heads and dead leaves etc. are all beautiful but be aware that you probably won't be the only one painting such a subject, which means it will be more competitive. If you choose an obvious botanical subject, it MUST stand out, either being the best in terms of painting excellence or maybe a more interesting species or cultivar or unusual composition - and always be sure that the plant name is correct. Think carefully about subject choice and who you might be competing against. The next point is to be yourself, don't be drawn into painting 'in the style' of another more famous artist, especially one with a very specific style, doing so generally means that people will remark on the fact that it looks like the other artists' work. We all have influences, but they should remain just that – be aware of these points.

Pricing original artwork

This is a difficult area, and I'm sure everyone would like someone else to tell them exactly how much to charge, however, there are many factors to consider and it's something that you have to work on. Commission for painting's has already been mentioned and mostly varies from 30 – 50% but remember that this will be deducted from the cost of the framed work. If overseas, you may have additional taxes as well as the transportation costs, for example, in the UK an overseas artist will have to pay an additional 20% VAT and will be required to register for VAT. Then of course there are all the hours spent painting and what you consider a reasonable rate for your hard work, some artists are faster painters than others, if you are very slow it's going to be difficult to achieve a decent rate and you will need to consider how to make a return for your efforts, such as selling prints. There is also the time spent framing and delivering work to exhibitions and galleries – all of these factors are relevant. A very important consideration is demand, price is also determined by how many people might want to purchase your work and

therefore how desirable it is. Serious buyers will want to know that you are a serious artist, that this is something that's not just a pastime that you will tire of, so you need to present yourself professionally. You might want to work on the hourly rate, but you also have to look at the market to determine what is reasonable, for example, what other artists charge with similar experience and work, some charge by size but I don't think this is particularly helpful as some smaller works can take longer than large ones in terms of content. Let's consider the hourly rate:

For example:

A painting might take 20 hours to complete (that's a pretty quick painting), say you wanted £15 per hour, which really isn't very much, and much lower than an art graduate rate, the total is **£300 for time**

It might cost **£80 to frame**

The exhibition **entry fee is, say, £20**

Delivery £50 either in person or via courier – a very conservative estimate plus all of your time

So far that's a total of £450, this could be your selling price

Let's say you are lucky and sell your painting and the commission is 40% = **£180**

This means that for an on the wall price of £450 you receive £270

If you are overseas and exhibiting in the UK you will have to pay an additional 20% of the selling price in VAT, which is a another £90 leaving you with just £180

The lesson here is to be very careful in factoring in all costs, you could find yourself at a loss if not. The means you are giving away your work as funds are absorbed in the chain. But this has to be balanced with **what is considered to be a reasonable 'on the wall' price, taking into account your experience**. I strongly advise you to account for all costs and don't give your work away by charging a rate which is too low, it's always nice to sell but it doesn't help anyone in the arts business if you sell too low – it means it's not sustainable. But also, if you price too high you will be in a difficult position, so in the early days you will probably be taking a little less than you would like, but over time this will increase.

There are other scenarios that you will need to quote for, being asked to give a workshop or a commercial illustration are two such scenarios (the latter has other associated costs discussed later).

For guidance on fees the **Scottish Artist Union** suggest the following rates of pay for 2021

Rates of Pay should apply to a wide range of freelance and short contract employment from consultancy work, project planning and development, to all aspects of workshop delivery (set up, execution, clear up) and other freelance activity.

Please Note. Rates exclude the artist's expenses for a specific project and VAT where relevant. We have rounded up the rates to the nearest £0.05/£0.10.

Hourly Rates 2021

£23.00 per hour for a new graduate artist.

£30.70 per hour for an artist with +3 years' experience.

£37.85 per hour for an artist with +5 years' experience.

Sessional Rates 2021

Day rates are based on an 8-hour day, minimum 'call' is for a 4-hour session. Additional hours over 8-hours should be at a minimum of the appropriate hourly rate (see above). Consideration should be made for additional/overtime hours in any given day - for example (Rates of Pay x 1.5) for additional hours or (Rates of Pay x 2.0) for out of normal hours/weekends/holidays.

New Graduate Artist 2021

4-hour minimum call - £94.55

8-hour day rate - £189.15

3+ Years' Experience 2021

4-hour minimum call - £122.60

8-hour day rate - £245.15

5+ Years' Experience 2021

4-hour minimum call - £151.45

8-hour day rate - £302.90

These variations in rates relate to qualifications/experience, which is defined by 'years as a working artist,' and would be evidenced by a professional CV, indicating the artist's records and/or unique attributes.

These typical Rates of Pay are provided for guidance purposes, artists are at all times free to negotiate rates of pay different to those set out above. Rates assume appropriate professional conduct by the Artist. Use an online currency converter, but rates will vary in different countries.

Private Commissions

You can of also sell directly but your pricing should **always be consistent** with your prices in exhibitions. **Never complete a commission without agreeing a price in advance**, otherwise you can find yourself in a very awkward position if its more than they are prepared to pay. You can also ask for a deposit of say 10-25% in advance, that way you know they are serious about the commission. Always be clear about what you are being asked to create, including the size and delivery date, and put all the details in writing via email to confirm, this saves any problems at a

later date. It's sometimes a good idea to provide a drawing of the initial composition for approval before proceeding with the actual painting. I tend to sell work unframed unless someone asks specifically – it's much easier and frame choice is very personal.

It can be difficult to estimate how long a commission will take but over time this will become easier, and you can probably work it out a price by the hour

Prints and cards

Always, make sure that you have a good quality scan or image of any work entered for sale in an exhibition and of every saleable work that you complete. It needs to be a minimum of 300dpi, preferably more, and actual size of the artwork - it's best to get this done professionally, rather than using home scanners or cameras, unless you have professional equipment and the knowledge to do it. It's often cheaper to pay a professional than spending precious painting time trying to do such jobs.

Having good quality images of your work means that you can supplement your income by selling prints and cards, however it's hard to know what will sell until you try the market. Fortunately, today it's possible to do 'on demand' printing, so just a few can be printed at a time, which means a much lower investment is required. When choosing a printer it's best to get one with a good reputation, in the UK this means a member of the Fine Art Trade Guild who have a strict set of standards, they launched the ArtSure scheme in 2015 www.fineart.co.uk. Prints will need to be on archival paper with lightfast inks and you will need proof for colour checking, so make sure they offer this service.

Limited Edition or Open Runs

Often prints are advertised as limited edition of say 50 and they are signed and numbered by the artist with a certificate of authenticity, this cannot be changed or added to and should preferably be set with the printer. The lower the print run the higher the value, I suggest no more than 100, preferably less. The other option is to have an open print run and to sell for a lower price.

On top of the individual print cost from set up to print, if exhibiting and selling prints you will still have to pay commission and other expenses. If selling direct and online, there will be postage and packaging costs, sending overseas will require insurance and other costs, so again be careful with pricing. If done properly prints can be a good way of getting a better return for your originals.

Greetings cards don't make a lot of money, but they can supplement your income and are very good ways of promoting your work. The average card sells for around £1.50 - £3.50

Joining Societies

Being a member of a Society can bring some additional opportunities. There are Botanical Art societies all over the world as well as regional ones in countries, you will need to look at what a society offers to you, as mentioned previously some require a juried application, (SBA) and

others are open (ASBA) - all require a fee. Some societies ask that you become involved in some way as they rely on volunteers, you may be required to contribute in some way, such as stewarding at an exhibition or taking on some role.

Personally, I think the ASBA is one of the most inclusive societies and has a very high standard of juried exhibitions, also, it doesn't ask too much of members and has some paid roles for those running it, and therefore not entirely reliant on volunteers, of course there are still many volunteers but if you don't have time, you won't feel pressured into becoming involved. Anyone can join for a fee and at very least you receive a good quality quarterly journal as well as the opportunity to submit for their exhibitions, previously there have been opportunities to be in publications and they have an annual conference, which the previous two years has been online due to Covid – meaning it was more accessible. You can also submit articles for consideration in their journal and might even be asked to present or teach a class at their conference.

Thanks to the ASBA initiative a worldwide exhibition of botanical art took place in 2018, and as a result many new societies formed all over the world, so much choice is available globally. The list is too long to include all here. New smaller societies such as ABBA (Association of British Botanical Artists) or ISBA (Irish Society of Botanical Artists) are worth considering and open to accepting International Members.

Create a public profile

Once that you have a portfolio or a small body of work you need to reach an audience with your work. These days social media is a great way of reaching an audience because the world is much more connected than it used to be.

Social Media

Instagram is probably the most influential social media site these days if you can achieve a good following but that's not easy and takes time. However, if you post good content people will follow and as a result rewards can come your way, with companies approaching you to trial their materials etc, but there are some rules about promotion so you need to make yourself aware of these, if someone gives you something to promote you must make it clear that that's the case. In time you may also receive some commissions, and I have received some interesting and large illustration contracts and commissions through Instagram, as well as many sales. Here are a few tips:

Post progress of work shots but be selective, nobody wants to see endless WIPs with updates every five minutes, especially if it's coursework, that can be pretty dull, and will may annoy the tutor or school if you give away all of their course assignments! If posting coursework don't post exercises but do post artworks made in the process, but be sure that it's OK with whoever runs the course first.

Colour always attracts most attention as do interesting photographs with plant subjects, colour charts etc. Graphite can be more difficult so make the images interesting. Multiple shot posts are useful to show some stages of work.

Bear in mind that most of the time people don't read they just look at the images - so images should have:

1. Impact
2. Be clean and clear – don't post dark photos of small subjects
3. Avoid gimmicks – flashing lights and emojis aren't very professional, so avoid them.
4. Add good captions, information about materials is always welcome
5. Use relevant hashtags for the image to reach more people who might be interested. You need to do this with the post or as a comment, but if adding in a comment make sure they can be added immediately. Think about the subject, for example if it's a medicinal plant you can use that hashtag e.g., #medicinalplants#herbals#botanicalart etc. if you use certain materials tag or hashtag the brand.
6. Finally, post regularly but not for the sake of posting, post when you have something good to share. There are lots of Instagram tutorials, but most are not relevant to artists.

Don't muddle up the personal and the private, create a separate account for personal images. This is your professional page; people don't want to see images of your lunch or your pets!

It a great way to get feedback but be aware that likes don't necessarily mean all that much in the real world and it takes time to gain a following.

Facebook is also a good way of connecting with other artists, groups, organisations and networks as well as with potential clients, it's particularly good for art tutors. You will need to create a Facebook Business Page to promote your work and should make fairly regular posts, you can build a following by sharing your practice, people tend to read more on Facebook, so you can also add more written content to posts. Most large art organisations have Facebook pages so it's a good way of keeping up to date with new opportunities and you can share your work to such groups. You can also advertise any new work, share video or activities and should look at other successful artists pages to see how they promote their work.

There are many other social networks and online avenues to explore, such as LinkedIn, YouTube etc. but those mentioned above are probably the most useful.

Websites

It's always good for an artist to have a website, in fact it's essential for a professional, but it takes thought and planning and there are certain requirements that you must meet regarding data protection under the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) in the EU which came into force in May 2018. These are laws which you must comply with if you hold any information about people who visit your site, that includes visitors via third parties, for example through Facebook. You will need a Privacy Policy and Cookie Policy which users have to accept or manage when they visit the site, failing to do so is breaking the law and can result in large fines. I cannot provide advice on this personally as it's a legal matter, other than letting you know that you need to organise this on your website, you would be surprised how many websites are not compliant, if you enter a website and are not alerted to Privacy or Cookie policy, do not enter

the site as they are not protecting your personal data. You will need to discuss this with your web designer or if using template style sites, such as Wix.

The second point with a website is that it should never be static or outdated, you will need to update from time to time, once a month at least. Make sure all of your links work and that there are no error pages.

If you decide to go ahead with a website there are a few options, you can employ a designer or you can build your own using a template company like Wix or you can use WordPress, which is a little more of a learning curve. Whatever you decide you will need to write and structure the content and pages first, websites are all about good content. Look at good examples of other artists' websites for structure. To give you an idea, you will need the minimum following pages:

- **Home** - this is your landing page
 - **About** - which can include an artist's statement biography,
 - **Gallery** - you can also split galleries, for example, one for watercolour and one for graphite. I recommend being a specialist, so if you do other types of artwork as well as botanical, it's best **not** to include them in your website. Art collectors can be put off by this they prefer specialists rather than artists who paint anything and everything.
 - **Shop** – if you decide to add e-commerce to your website to sell originals, prints and any merchandise.
 - **Contact** – a page with contact details for email enquiries. You might want to purchase an 'info@' or 'enquiries@' email address, which looks more professional.
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- You can also have **subscribers** – to send out email updates, but only do this if you are going to regularly send out news.
 - A **blog** is another useful addition, here you can tell people about your work, people love to hear the stories behind your work, such as why and how you made the work.
 - **Link your website to your social media** – but only if they are for business, not your private pages.
 - **Be sure to include a Copyright statement** on the website to state that the work cannot be used or reproduced anywhere without the artist's permission.

A good starting point is to **collate good quality clean images** for your website, and to **write all of the text for each page**, then you can start to **design the site**.

You will need to **buy a domain name** this can be your name plus art, artist, botanical artist or whatever you decide, but it shouldn't be too long and should preferably be a .com for international reach and sales. You can easily check the availability of web site names by Google searching 'available domain names'.

Whatever you decide **the site should be easy to navigate** with the minimum number of clicks for the user to find what they want.

Creating a website is a topic too large to cover in detail and I've only covered some of the basics. The best advice is to do your homework regarding how to get your website into Google ranking etc. It takes time and work to build a following but it's worthwhile.

Protecting your artwork online: Copyright

Finally, these days much of your promotion as an artist will be online. There are many benefits to the 'online' artist and the world is much more connected because of social media, on the whole I believe it is a good thing and broadens our reach. However, like all opportunities there will be risks, these have to be balanced on a cost: benefit basis.

Often artists worry about their work being stolen, the simple and best actions for ensuring your artwork isn't taken and used elsewhere is to make sure the images are 72dpi in resolution, this doesn't stop them from being used online but does mean they can't be printed, your images do not need to be any higher resolution than this. You can also add a watermark with your name and copyright symbol to your image but try to make it discreet as often such watermarks completely obscure the artwork and looks terrible.

From experience at some point it's inevitable that someone will share or use an image that belongs to you, or even copy one of your works, but mostly it's through ignorance and not for profit, you can contact and politely ask that they remove the image, there is no need to publicly vilify the person, which I've seen on social media and is often uncalled for, it's actually a matter between the artist and the person who took the image. Malicious acts of stealing are few and far between, but you still have to be cautious but keep it in perspective. The reality is that it's difficult to earn a living out of art so it's not the best thing to steal if looking for big profits, that said the more successful you become, the more likely it is. The best way is to educate regarding copyright, so always make it clear on your website and social media that all images and content is your copyright, that way you can direct any copyists to such statements if you need to ask them to remove the image. There are other avenues, such as reporting the matter to Google or Facebook or wherever the copyright breach took place, but it's best to try to resolve the matter with the individual, organisation, or company first.