

Clay Fest

So You Want To Be a Clay Fest Poster Child...

After five years of designing and producing the Clay Fest poster, postcards and print advertising, I think I've heard every possible variation of the question: "Why isn't my piece on the poster?" I take this to mean why it's not the big image - the "master shot" - rather than one of the smaller images that fill in the space.

While I can't address the question as it regards to each and every one of your publicity submissions, I can take a little time to tell you what I look for, not just for the poster, but for publicity purposes in general. Some of this is obvious; some will be obvious in retrospect. Some may be surprising. Who knows? Some of it may be dead wrong. But here it goes.

Quality of the pot This one seems obvious. We want the best looking work out there representing our show. How your best work compares to someone else's best work gets into thorny problems of aesthetics that I hope to address below, but we should at least be starting with pictures of our best efforts.

Quality of the photograph This is every bit as important as the quality of the pot itself. I've been on show juries where we gave a dark or otherwise eccentric image the benefit of the doubt, but I can't do that here. The photograph needs to be well lit, in focus, with good contrast (range of light and dark tones) and depth of field (parts at different distances from the camera are equally sharp). If the photograph wasn't taken by a professional - and there are a number of them around who shoot jury slides for artists - it should at least look like it was.

Quality of the scan If you're not firmly ensconced in the digital age, bear with me. The going might get a little bumpy here. I need to explain resolution. If you know what that is, skip to the last paragraph of this section, unless you want to laugh and point at my explanations.

Resolution is the measure of how much information is in your scan. It's measured in what printers call "dots per inch" (dpi), though computer geeks (and Adobe PhotoShop) use "pixels per inch". The more dots per inch, the bigger you can enlarge the image without loss of detail. The computer monitor shows only 72 dpi, so a lot of scans made for web sites use that as their default. For printing, we need more than four times the resolution, at least 300 dpi, or else the pictures will look blurred or blocky ("pixilated"). I can resize large low-resolution images to something crisper, but, for example, a 15x20" picture at 72 dpi winds up less than 4x5" at 300 dpi. And you can't just use "Image Size" in PhotoShop to change the resolution. Unless you change the image size to compensate, the program just interpolates pixels by averaging what's on either side, and this doesn't make the image crisper. Sorry.

The size of the image is as important as the resolution. If your slide is scanned at 300 dpi, but at actual size, I can still only print a 3/4" x 1-1/4" image from it.

So what I need for the poster is an image at least 10x15 inches with resolution of 300 dpi. Postcard images can be smaller, around 5x8". Bigger is okay; scaling down is easy.

Quality of the slide I really recommend that you have your slides scanned when you make them. Have the photo processor make you a disc, and ask for "high-resolution" or even "Super-high-res" if they make it. Better still, some photographers now have a digital camera back for their lens set-up, and will show you on-screen previews before committing your work to slide. Ask for a copy of the digital pictures on disk. A 6 mega-pixel image direct from the camera is higher resolution than most photo processors can give you.

After years of sending out images to scan or borrowing OPA's slide scanner, I've finally gotten my own scanner this year, so I can accept your slides and scan them myself. If you do send slides, make sure they're clean, dust-free, and travelling in a plastic slide sleeve.

Background The stories I could tell you. I've gotten pictures of pots shot on doorsteps. Nestled in leaves. Hanging on the garage wall. Sitting on drapery of blue, or red, or a velvet so black that shadowed parts of the pot simply disappear.

I highly recommend either a neutral gray seamless backdrop big enough to show some "fall-off" (darkening with distance from the lens) or a graduated backdrop that's light gray in the foreground bottom and dark gray to black at the top (my choice).

Neutral backgrounds don't detract from the pot in the foreground, and make it much easier to fit together pictures of different pots on the same poster or card. We're not distracted by clashing backgrounds.

Cropping Here's where a good publicity slide differs from a jury slide. When you're trying to get into a show, you want the pot to pop out at the jury. You want it big, you want it cropped as close to the edges as possible. This drives me nuts.

I need some neutral background showing all the way around the slide. I sometimes have to fit the image into a space it wasn't designed for. I sometimes need extra background on which to overprint the headline or inset smaller pictures or place the Georgies logo. With a little extra breathing space around the edges of the pot, I can copy and clone background to suit, and you'd need a plate-maker's magnifier to catch me at it.

Format and Contents What do I need? A tall thin pot? A short wide one? Solo or in groups? Yes.

Tall pots are easy to make into posters. Short wide ones seem to work well as master shot for the postcard. Exceptions abound: my favorite poster is actually the 2003 horizontal format with a grouping of Joe Davis pots. The 2000 poster also uses a group of pots, as does the 2004 postcard. Groups are tricky to shoot, though. You need to be sure the pots are visually related to each other, and the shot is composed as carefully as a still life.

So don't worry what I need; give me good stuff and I'll find a use for it. Which leads us to that thorny definition.

Aesthetics How do I define "good stuff?" Admittedly, that's hard to pin down. Something to bear in mind, though, is what we want the images for.

This isn't a beauty contest, or a merit award. We're choosing pictures to publicize Clay Fest. So I'm trying to find a balance. I want the pot to be broadly representative of the show. I want it to be striking, attention getting. But I need it to be accessible. I want the non-potters looking at our poster to say "ooh", not "huh"? Our primary audience is the general public, not all of whom are as well trained in ceramic aesthetics as we'd like. Or as they will be after attending Clay Fest.

Quantity and Returns I'd love to have a wide variety of images to choose from. On the other hand, 700Mb of jpegs per potter is far more than I have time to sort through.

If you have the ability to edit your own CD-ROMs, pick out the best 6 - 8 images and make me a disk. If you're sending slides, 3 - 6 would be good. If your computer skills only extend to burning a copy of the disk your photographer gave you, include a note with some suggested picture choices.

Oh, and if you need your disc or slides back, make sure and let me know when you submit them and I'll

bring them down to the show for you.

If after reading all this you have specific questions, you can email the Poster/Graphics Chairperson at graphics@clayfest.org.