

SOLA

RECOGNIZING MATURE FEMALE ARTISTS IN WA

RESOURCES

Talking About Your Art for Mature Women Artists

For artists with lengthy careers, talking about art should be easy after so many years creating it, right? Yes and no. Artists usually talk about their work during gallery openings or when in their studio, but how do you talk about it outside of those spaces? Or if you had an opportunity to share your work on a quick 60 second elevator ride, for instance? How do you talk to neighbors or family if they are not knowledgeable of your art or the arts in general?

No matter the scenario, talking about your artwork and career with others is an essential part of an art career. And for several reasons we'll outline below, it isn't always the easiest thing, but doing it well may make or break an opportunity.

Mature Women Artists Now

Women, in particular, have had their ideas and needs dismissed for a very long time and self-promotion can be uncomfortable. Is an inability to talk about your successes inhibiting you in the next phase of your art career? Or in a current project?

In 2022, Support of Old Lady Artists (SOLA) expanded what we do for mature women artists to make it easier for women to step into greater opportunities in the arts. We created a pilot project that brings established women artists together monthly in a SOLA Community Call, both to build community and explore what women need at this unique moment.

In February, this online gathering participated in a luxurious *three minute* elevator speech in a supportive group environment. Framed around who they were, what they did, and where we might see more, it was a fun way to practice conversational skills after a couple years of lockdown due to the pandemic. Below are some key takeaways and tips, but first.

Think about it.

You've worked hard to create a body of work and get your name and art out in the world all these years. It's essential to prepare a succinct and clear speech designed for those brief encounters with people in elevators, on planes, or events outside of your gallery receptions or studio visits. Prepare for a fast-moving opportunity around 60 seconds — and a longer chat will be a breeze.

Keep in mind, your new ‘friend’ may not know anything about art, and it’s also worth noting here that they already placed you in a category based on many factors including gender and age. Nevermind any social bias they have about “Artists.” With that awareness, your goal is to be authentic and confident. Leave them knowing you are a superstar and they have to find out more!

SOLA’s Tips to Make Great Connections with Your Art Audience

- **Speak clearly and slower than you think**

Take a breath and measure the pace of your words for clarity. Allow space for your words to guide the listener along. A relaxed pace is not only pleasant, but allows them to be a part of the conversation, even if that is just allowing room for their own imagination to fill in the blanks. Holding space for their questions is great conversational skills and potentially creates a longer engagement.

- **State your name**

Even if you are wearing a nametag or your name is listed on your personal online cube on Zoom, always state your name clearly and confidently. Everyone’s learning process is unique. Not only do people like to hear how you pronounce your name, they will remember it better if they hear it in addition to seeing it. Another helpful trick is to repeat names out loud and sometimes write it down after you meet for a truly memorable combo.

- **Smile and Smize with confidence**

Life can be difficult and we often have no idea what someone else is going through. A simple smile can help comfort another and it also activates the “rest and digest” part of our nervous system that calms us down.

Model Tyra Banks came up with “smize” in 2009, which means to “bring expression to the eyes.” Eye contact shows confidence and that you are engaged. Whether wearing a mask or not, allow your eyes to say, “It’s nice to meet you,” with a gentle nod or tilt of the head. Stand tall and center yourself over your feet in your special power pose. Best to keep your hands visible while clasped in front of you or down at your sides, not crossed over the chest.

- **State what you do: simple, positive and clear**

This is a grand opportunity to intrigue your new acquaintance. After creating art for many years, you have come to understand that your individual act of creation is more than just a “painting” or “sculpture.” Share something you enjoy about your work and steer clear of personal challenges with a specific tool or the industry. And no excuses or industry jargon! Use words that are more general and clear so your new friend feels included with words they recognize.

Spend this brief opportunity on a specific topic rather than a bunch of ideas. A great tool one participant on the call used was to ask friends and family to share keywords they'd use to describe her work — even better if these ideas and descriptors are from others not in the arts.

Here are some examples to pick one topic from or inspire your own that best highlights the unique artist that you are.

- What does your work mean to you or what do you hope it will do for them?
- What is your unique thread, style or gift to the world?
- Is there a social aspect or family lineage component that is important?
- Why have you created work for ___ years?
- What materials do you use?
- Where do you make your art?
- What size is your art: huge or tiny?
- Is your work in public locations or private collections?

A key takeaway when talking about your work at your gallery shows and events is when someone replies with, “Oh that gave me chills.” You affected them viscerally and that could be a key to how to make an impact in brief encounters.

Someone on the SOLA Community Call shared their experience as a lead docent at Seattle Art Museum where they were challenged to describe a piece of art to someone without sight. Think about how you might do this as you try to describe your art to someone who has never seen your work. Materiality, narrative, historic reference, parallels; all help people connect with the art and you — and perhaps themselves.

- **Where to view the work**

You know you've done a great job when they ask where to see your artwork. This is why the second most important thing after a clear and confident presentation is online representation in any form that works. More on online portfolios in a future SOLA post, but an easy to remember URL is all you need here.

A business card is a great investment to leave behind. Yours should have an image or detail of your work, your name, email, and an online presence. Email can be optional if it is easily accessible at your online link. Include it if there is room, but it is also good to leave white space for you or them to write on.

Do not pull out your phone and start flipping through images to find something you want to show them. IF they ask to see something, have a bookmark saved on your main screen to click to a specific image. Just choose one, only one, to show them while saying a venue name and/or online site where they can see more and purchase your work.

About Those Accomplishments

We covered this a bit already and is a slight outlier to the speech itself, but since it is so deeply rooted in many of the challenges that successful women face, we have more to say.

Most artists, and especially women, often find it difficult to speak up about their accomplishments and ideas. A balanced approach is needed, of course, but if it is uncomfortable to share all that you are in a setting where others want to know, you may want to give this notion a little more attention and bust out of old paradigms. Is it easier to share about and do for others instead of yourself? How is your life balance supporting others' ideas and accomplishments alongside your own? Do you make enough time for your professional/personal needs and desires?

- ★ Practicing your elevator speech, or any speech, is essential for success. Speaking up confidently will help combat past programming that says women should take a back seat to their counterparts at work, home, or life in general.
- ★ Ageism is one of the most prevalent and unchallenged social biases. Humans categorize each other; it's a base response in our ancient cells to distinguish prey from aggressor. In the least, your conversational partner has made some conclusions based on your clothes, age, gender, among other things.
- ★ Clarity and confidently sharing your accomplishments is a way to fight systemic bias. Confidence about who you are and what you have to offer conveys that you are ready to take on the next big thing.
- ★ Enthusiasm to share your success conveys you still have much to give and a plan to thrive doing it.

Historically, success in the art world is based on provenance. Each artwork has a record of where it was exhibited, received awards, and been published; these all elevate the work in the eyes of the viewer / collector / curator. Likewise, you are the archive of the many successful experiences in your career. Your accomplishments elevate your career in the eyes of your peers and the general public. SOLA is eager to hear you share about your unique lives. As an advanced artist with a long career already, you have worked hard to get where you are at. As a mature woman you have experienced enough to know every moment is a gift, don't waste your elevator ride to the next level.

Additional online resources

[How to Craft Your Elevator Speech As An Artist \(renee-phillips.com\)](http://renee-phillips.com)

[GYST Article: Elevator Speech for Artists — Getting Your Sh*t Together \(gyst-ink.com\)](http://gyst-ink.com)

[An ELEVATOR PITCH for ARTISTS \(colinruffell.com\)](http://colinruffell.com)