



WHITE PAPER:

The CODAworx GUIDE to COMMISSIONING ART

The thousands of artists and creative teams featured on CODAworx represent a remarkable spectrum of artistic talent and vision. Whether you are looking for a large-scale public artwork or smaller works for corporate or residential spaces, this website can put you directly in touch with highly qualified artists from around the world. Any of these creative professionals can be commissioned to create a unique work of art – but with so many exceptional artists to choose from, finding and selecting the right one for your specific project can be a challenge. Once the artist has been selected, careful planning and communication can help ensure a great outcome.

Having watched art commissions unfold for many years, we can suggest steps to ensure successful partnerships with artists. This White Paper is a how-to guide for the art commissioning process. It suggests strategies to help selection and hiring go smoothly. It also describes steps that can establish shared (and realistic) expectations on the part of artists and clients.

Finding the Artist or Creative Team

By far the most important step in a successful commission is choosing the right artist for your particular project and budget. In this field where commission projects are often large and complex, many artists work in small companies or collective teams in order to cover the wide range of talent needed, including technology, engineering, and logistics. In this White Paper, when we use the word “artist,” that also includes “creative teams.”

Selecting the right artist for your commission is vitally important. It is worth investing time and energy in the selection process. Framing your goals and expectations in the beginning will serve to guide your stakeholders in selecting the right artist to meet your needs and desires.

Browse through the thousands of projects on CODAworx, which can be searched in a number of ways, including the purpose that art serves in your building or space. Every featured artist is actively seeking commission projects; some even have editions of work ready to install now. The artists represented on CODAworx have established careers with strong track records of delivering art on-time and on-budget. You will definitely gain from their professionalism and experience.

CODAworx offers a number of ways to support your search for the perfect artist. If you are well versed in commissioning art, you may want to broadcast your artist call and receive submissions through our RFP Toolkit – a software developed by CODAworx that helps you manage the entire RFP process. We also offer an art commissioning Concierge Service to lead you seamlessly through the process. Both of these options will result in a wide array of artists to choose from.

Narrowing the Field

Once you have reviewed the artist’s qualifications and narrowed your list down to a small group of contenders, it is time to speak directly with the candidates, either face-to-face or in an online meeting. Interviews are an important step in determining how connected and inspired an artist is about your project. Be thorough and specific when asking questions. Is the artist excited about the project? What does he or she see as the most important issues or considerations? Ask what drew them to your opportunity to get a sense of what they may propose for a solution should you pay them a design stipend to create a full proposal. Pay attention to your own comfort level with each artist to determine whether you have the basis to build a good working relationship. This is also the time to confirm that the artist has the necessary skills to undertake your project. Evaluate the artist’s style, approach, and personality.

If it feels like you might have trouble working together, take heed. But if all goes well and it feels like a good fit, ask for a list of references. These are important calls; don’t neglect to make them! Ask about the artist’s work habits, communication style, and the success of the artwork. And whether the project was delivered on time and within budget. If you like what you hear, you’ll be one step closer to hiring an artist.

Expect Professionalism

For most projects, you will want to request a proposal with full designs. A design fee or stipend is typically between \$1,000 - \$1,500 and is paid to each artist you request a final proposal from whether or not they are ultimately hired for the project.

Once you select an artist for your commission, have a dialogue to fine tune the design. Perhaps you want to add lighting or eliminate a detail. Now is the time to talk about those ideas. It is time to finalize your working agreement with this artist. As you discuss contract details, be resolved that silence is not golden and ignorance is not bliss! Be frank and open. Discuss budget and timetable, and tell the artist what you expect. Now is the time to bring up possible misunderstandings and resolve them before proceeding.

As your project gains definition, you will need to pay attention to its technical aspects, including things like building codes, lighting specifications, and details related to zoning and installation. You will often find the artist's knowledge and understanding of materials, code, safety, and engineering complete and reassuring.

Put It In Writing

It is a truism in any kind of business that it is much cheaper to get the lawyers involved at the beginning of a process rather than after something goes wrong. A signed contract or letter of agreement commits the artist to completing his or her work on time and to specifications. It also assures the artist that he or she will get paid the right amount at agreed-upon times.

CODAworx offers a Commission Contract Template that lays out the typical terms for agreements between artists and their clients. Whether you use our contract or one drawn up by an attorney, it is important to get the key terms down in writing so that everyone is on the same page from the beginning.

Payments are usually tied to specific milestones in the process. These serve as checkpoints and confirm that work is progressing in a satisfactory manner, on time and on budget. Payment is customarily made in three or four stages, although this will depend on the circumstances, scope, and complexity of the project. The first payment is usually made when the contract is signed. The second and third payments are generally set for points midway throughout the course of the project and are for work completed to date. If the commission is canceled during this period, the artist keeps the money already paid for work performed.

Final payment is typically due when the work is installed. If the piece is finished on time but the building or project is delayed, the artist is customarily paid on delivery but still has the obligation to oversee installation.

You will find that artists keep close tabs on the project budget. Be sure that the project scope does not deviate from what was agreed upon at the outset. If the scope changes, amend the agreement to reflect changes.

A Collaborative Atmosphere

With most commission projects, it is best to bring the artist into the design process early on. By involving the artist at the earliest stages, the space will be designed with the art in mind, and the art will be designed to enhance the space. As a result, there will be no unpleasant surprises about the size or the suitability of artwork.

Early inclusion of the artist also helps ensure that the collaborative effort will flow smoothly throughout all phases of the project. If the artist is respected as part of the team, his or her work can benefit the project's overall design.

Naturally, the scope of the project will determine the number of players to be involved with the artist. How will decisions be made? Who is the artist's primary liaison? Will a single person sign off on designs and recommendations? Are committees necessary? It is important that all individuals understand both their own responsibilities and the responsibilities of their collaborators. Without constant communication, things can easily fall through the cracks.

Seek Two-Way Understanding

Be sure the artist understands the technical requirements of the job, including traffic flow, intended use of space, building structure, maintenance, lighting, and environmental concerns. By fully explaining these details, you'll ensure that the artist's knowledge, experience, and skills inform the project.

Keep the artist apprised of any changes that will affect the work in progress. Did you find a specified material unavailable and replace it with something else? Did the available space become bigger or smaller? These changes could have a profound impact on an artist's planning.

At the same time, the artist should let you know of any special requirements for his or her work. Is a sculpture especially heavy? Does the work need to be mounted in a specific way? What kind of lighting is best? You may need to budget funds for certain kinds of installation or maintenance expenses.

Most artists experienced with commissioned projects factor the expense of a continuing design dialog into their fee. The ability to modify design or execution without compromising artistic quality is a mark of professionalism. We recommend looking for this quality in the artist you choose, and then respecting it by treating the artist as a partner in any decisions that will affect his or her work.

The CODAworx website is a cornucopia of artistic talent – filled with artists who are top-notch professionals with a depth of experience in site-specific artwork installations. Finding, selecting, and hiring this level of talent will enhance any project in countless ways, and by extension, transform the spaces where we live and work.