

# How to Exhibit Your Work

Ignacio Palacios explains the process he went through to host his first solo exhibition at Gaffa Gallery in Sydney.

When I came to Australia four years ago, I saw some very beautiful photographs of Karijini National Park and I knew I just had to go there and see it for myself!

The workshop run by Peter Eastway, Christian Fletcher and Tony Hewitt was the perfect opportunity to photograph this hidden gem in the Pilbara, which I consider one of the best kept secrets of the Australian outback. I was very surprised that not many Australians have ever heard of this place.

When I enrolled in the workshop, my plans were not ambitious. I wanted to take a few shots, learn some craft from the 'masters', meet other landscape photographers and have a good time. However, when I got back, I decided that I had enough quality material to prepare an exhibition and perhaps even publish a book.



In this article I would like to share the process I went through and the outcome to encourage or perhaps to warn anyone thinking of embarking on a project like this.

## Planning the Exhibition

The first thing I did was select a gallery and a date. I had attended a few exhibitions in the Gaffa Gallery in Sydney, including Peter Eastway's exhibition of Antarctica and, as it was close to my office in the city, I thought it would be a good place.

They charge a rent of \$500 per week and also take 25% commission for each sale. Other galleries don't charge rent, but take a 40% or 50% commission. This is worth considering, depending on your real chances of selling your work. It is important to book the gallery a few months in advance as some are very busy. I sent my application in August and it was accepted, so I booked for two weeks in February after the summer school holidays.

The second thing I did was try to find some sponsors to reduce costs. This was a very time-consuming process and I was rejected by many companies including WA Tourism, Tourism Australia, Qantas and Pentax, but the Karijini Eco Retreat (the resort where we stayed during the workshop) supported me by buying some of my Karijini pictures for marketing purposes and they also ended up buying some of my books (so big thanks to Gumala Aboriginal Corporation, owners of Karijini Eco Retreat).



Other sponsors included Better Photography Magazine, Kayell/Canson, Epson and Australian Traveller. They all helped in different ways and I am very grateful. *Australian Traveller* was interested in my story and an interview was published in their magazine on the same date as the opening. That was quite fortunate as I was able to advertise my exhibition and made some sales through people who had read the article.

Other considerations were:

- How many photographs should I hang?
- Will I have enough room?
- Limited editions or not?
- Limited editions of 5, 10, 20, more?
- Framed or unframed?
- What type of paper?
- What type of frames?
- All frames same colour/material?
- How big should the prints be?
- Whether or not to publish a book?

I selected and framed 25 pictures, but I did not use all of them for the exhibition. I decided to print five of them big (around one metre on the longest edge) and the rest a smaller size (A2). I wanted some consistency, but I also wanted to differentiate between the big and the small prints, so I decided to frame the big ones with a black matt and a silver frame, and the small ones with a white matt on a grey wooden gallery (black) frame.

All of the photographs in the exhibition were taken with a Pentax 645D medium format digital camera for exceptional image quality. I also decided to use two types of paper for the exhibition (Canson BFK Rives 310 gsm paper and Epson Ultra-Premium Luster 240 gsm). Both Canson and Epson were sponsoring my exhibition, but I also love both types of paper and I used them for different subjects.

I decided to make limited editions of 10, for no particular reason. I thought limited editions of 20 was too many for a fine art photography exhibition, but I felt that 5 was not enough

because I had hopes that some of the prints could sell more than five times.

My price strategy was to make the big frames a lot more expensive to make the smaller frames appear cheaper. The big frames were priced between \$1300 and \$1500 and the small ones were \$300 (framed) or \$200 (unframed).

I sold most of the work framed, but a few sales were unframed. Given that the cost of framing an A2 photograph is around \$150, I thought that \$300 for framed limited editions was a good deal for the purchaser. If you take into account the cost of printing, paper and the 25% + GST commission that the gallery takes, there is not much left in it.

I printed the small photographs with my Epson Stylus Pro 3800 and Epson's Ultrachrome K3 ink set. For the big prints, I used Created for Life printing lab and used both Canson BFK and Fujiflex paper which claims to have the highest colour gamut of any photo medium available.

### Installing the Exhibition

If the gallery is in the city, make sure you find a loading zone near it or you will pay a fortune in car parking fees. Fortunately,





Gaffa has a loading zone just in front, but you can't hang the works in 15 minutes and so the parking fee is something to consider in your budget!

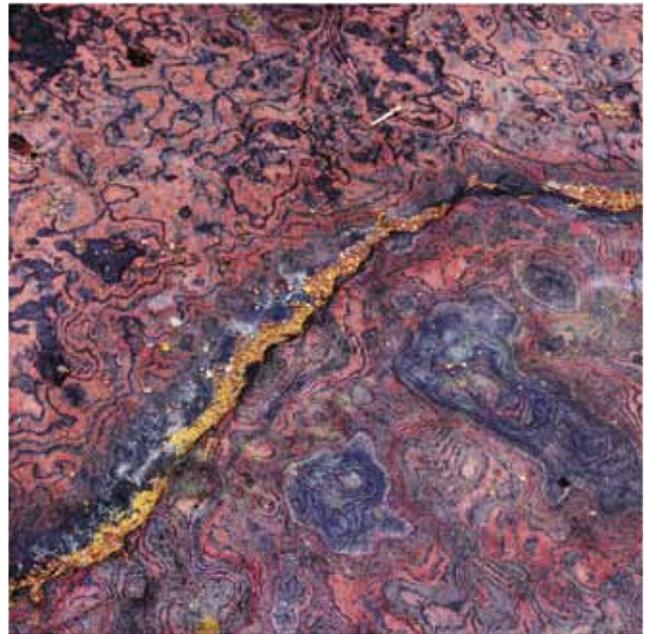
As well as installing the frames, I set up a few tables with promotional material and a list where people could write their details so I could email them with promotions about workshops and events. I also created a document with captions, prices and the size and the paper type for each of the prints hanging. That was quite a bit of work and I don't think many people read it. I only got one person registered on the form.

If you don't have anyone to help you during the installation, you have to budget for a handyman. Gaffa did the lighting and also helped me lay out the photographs, initially on the floor until you are happy with it and then on the wall.

There is a lot of planning around the opening night, but it's important if you want a lot of people to come and you want them to stay as long as possible. I used social media, creating a Facebook event which I updated frequently, as well as advertising in *Better Photography* magazine. To keep people happy, during the exhibition I organised sandwiches and drinks. About 70% of my sales (12 limited editions) were made on the opening night.

### Exhibition Costs

Framing the photographs was the main cost of the exhibition (around \$3800). As I had to sign the matting, I had to go to my



framing supplier quite a few times until the frames were ready. There were also a few mistakes made, so allow at least four or five trips to the framing shop until you collect all the frames. It is also a good idea to use a van as framed work takes up a lot of space and to transport them in the back of a car could scratch the frames.

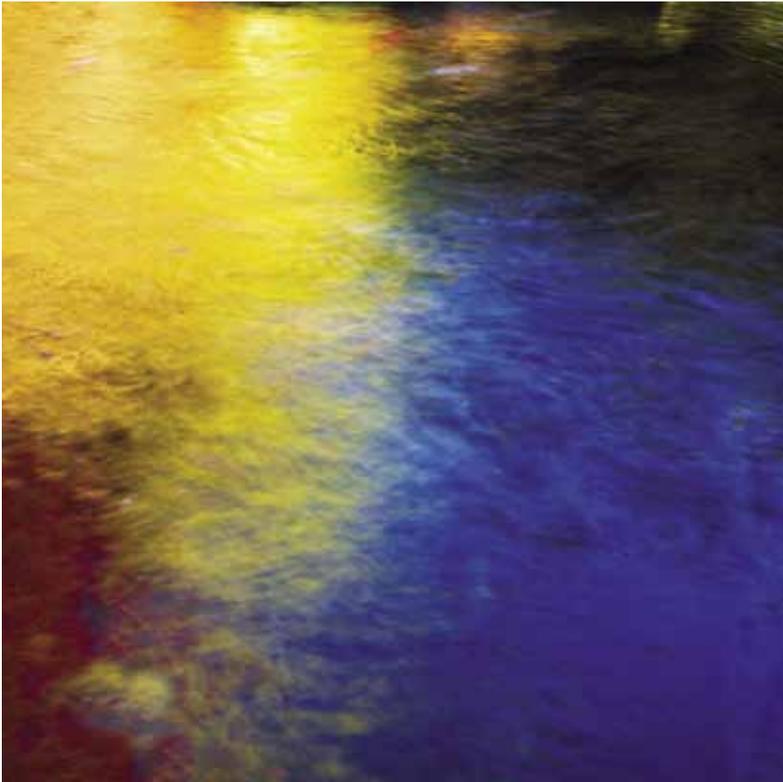
In addition to the framing, there are plenty of other costs to consider:

- Advertising and press releases;
- Framing tests using different framing shops, framing materials;
- Printing and printing tests (ink and paper). It takes a few attempts until you have all the photos ready to frame as not all of them always come out with the perfect colour and sharpening;
- Gallery rental;
- Producing and printing the exhibition flyers, invitations, envelopes and postage;
- Printing promotional material like business cards, etc;
- Hanging materials and packaging materials for the work sold;
- Handyman to help you hang the work (allow \$50 per hour for four hours); and
- Food and drinks for the opening.

Taking all the above into account, the total cost of the exhibition was around \$8500. This does not include any of my time taken to retouch photographs, obtain sponsorship, write invitations and design fliers, etc. This also does not include any of the tuition fees and travel costs incurred in getting to Karijini.

### Red Hot West: The Book

I thought a lot about publishing a book for the exhibition. I worried that having a book during the exhibition would encourage people to buy the book and not the 'expensive' limited editions, but in the end I decided to do it just for fun. It turned out that during the exhibition, I actually sold more frames than books.



I decided to print in China. I did not do a lot of research on where to print because I did not have much time and the book had to be ready for the exhibition. I decided to order the job with a company that a friend of mine had used before.

To bring costs down, I had to print 2000 copies. Printing a 64-page book, A4 format (210x297mm) with matt lamination and spot UV on the cover cost me about \$2 per unit, but the cost of the designer, the ISBN registration, bar code, shipping and GST on importation increased the cost to \$2.56 per unit. This does not include other overheads like the travel costs, workshop tuition fee, and my time to retouch the photographs, design the layout and write the captions.

In addition to the size and number of pages, there are other decisions to make when creating a book:

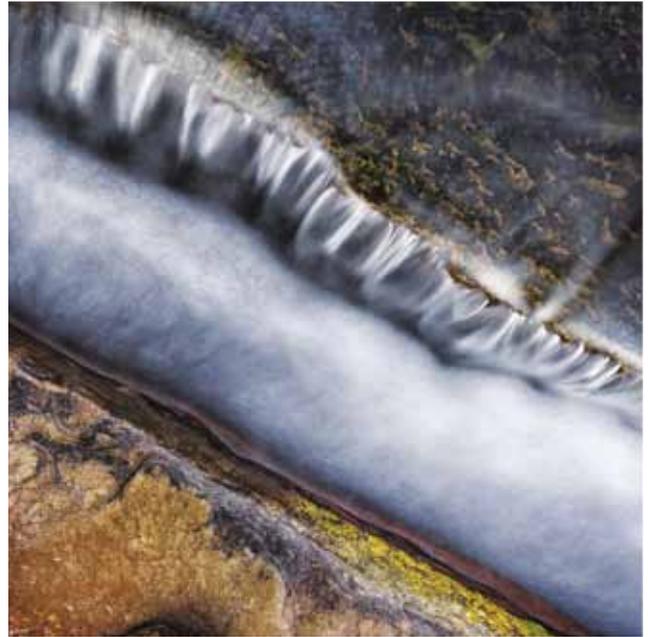
- Page layout;
- Paper type and thickness (gsm);
- Binding with or without flaps;
- Lamination and whether you want to apply spot UV on the cover (make some of the cover photographs glossy);
- Shipping (FOB, CIF, FIS). I ended up using FIS (Free into Store). Don't ask me why!

Most distributors take a 65% commission of the RRP, which in the case of my book is \$29, so this means that you will never get rich selling books, in particular a "pretty picture book", but I learnt a lot in the making, which was the main objective.

Taking the above into account, the total cost of producing the book was around \$5500 (again, not including my time or costs incurred in getting to Karijini).

### Post Exhibition

Sales were better than expected (12 out of 20), but I did not want to end up with a whole lot of frames and 1998 books in my garage, so after the exhibition I advertised my book and work through social media. I also prepared a power



point presentation where I offered the remaining frames at a discounted price and was able to sell four more this way.

There were also a couple of nice surprises. I decided to enter three photographs of Karijini in the International Loupe Awards in the medium format section, and I came second with a picture of Hamersley Gorge that I had taken using focus stacking.

Another surprise was that *Australian Geographic* selected some of my Karijini photographs for its 2014 desk diary.

It is very difficult to make money in an exhibition and you will be lucky to recover costs. I was not expecting to make many sales, so it was a nice surprise to recover the costs. However, this is totally dependent on what costs and overheads you take into account in the calculation and what sales you allocate directly to the exhibition.

In my case, the total cost of the exhibition and book was around \$14,000 and sales generated from both (at the moment) are in the order of \$13,500. I am confident that more frames and books will sell over the next year or so.

I have learnt that there is no magic recipe to make a successful exhibition. I could have done this exhibition in another gallery and sold nothing, or sold everything. Some decisions that worried me so much like paper types, framing type, sizes etcetera were perhaps not that relevant.

The important thing is to attract as many people to the exhibition as you can, and hopefully they like your work, can afford it and want to support you. I was really happy with the turn out, nearly 70 people during the opening and 12 prints sold, but after the opening only a few random people came and I did not make any more sales.

This project has been a great way to promote myself, not only my travel and landscape portfolio, but also my wedding photography and children/family photography. However, an exhibition and a book was a lot of work and although I have another exhibition in mind, I need to take a break for a while.

*If you are interested in buying a copy of my book, go to: <http://www.iptravelphotography.com.au/books.php>*