



1

Workshop Logistics

Contract Norms and Honorarium Realities

by Kristen Kieffer

I taught my first serious workshop at the 92nd Street Y in New York City in 2003 after two smaller college gigs. I still remember the anxiety about driving into the city from Massachusetts; the large—in both size and rockstar status—bisqueware pots by past presenters residing on the shelves urging me to prove my place; and the joy I felt connecting with the participants and my hosts.

Today, 16 years and 67 workshops later, how and what I teach, as well as communication with a host venue has changed a lot. I have strong opinions about workshop logistics at this point, so in agreeing to write about the nitty-gritty details, I decided to check in with some fellow ceramic artists to delve deeper into why we teach workshops, what we expect in a contract, and what we charge. There was minimal variation in responses to the first question, but the answers overall reaffirm a desire and need for more consistency in workshop contracts and honorarium rates both between individuals and across venues. Hopefully this article clarifies those needs as well as sparks conversation toward change.

Workshop Primer

It would require a separate article (or series, preferably by several artists) to go into detail about how and what an artist presents at a workshop and how we prepare to do so. But it seems relevant to touch on what's required in brief as it relates to the pursuit of a fair honorarium.

There are basically two types of workshops: demo only and hands on. Broadly, the former requires the presenter to deftly demonstrate (usually 1–2 days for 7–8 hours each day) a variety of prepared, favored and/or specialized techniques, forms, and surfaces as well as discuss aesthetic decisions and technical reasoning, while simultaneously answering questions from audiences of one dozen to several dozen. Hands-on workshops are all of that in addition to working directly with participants (usually 8–18 people for 3–14 days) as they experiment with what they've learned. A PowerPoint presentation (a progression of the presenter's artwork, experiences, influences) and handouts (with technical, visual, and

inspirational information) by the presenter are standard fare, both of which require advance time to prepare and keep current. Each type of workshop requires the artist to have a predetermined plan for the timing and pace of each day, paired with what will be demonstrated to determine what's needed to prep prior to arrival at the venue (gather particular tools, samples, pieces at varying stages of completion, etc.).

Basically, teaching a workshop is the distillation (of decades, usually) of our own artistic pursuit, passion, and practice—both successes and failures—into a few days. It is not simply demonstrating tips and tricks. We each have hard-earned, unique, and very personal experiences and studio practices we willingly and wholeheartedly bring to share with our eager audience or participants.

Pros and Cons of Teaching Workshops

Like most full-time ceramic artists, teaching workshops is an important part of my income. Indeed, economic necessity—to diversify and supplement our livelihood—is usually the top reason we are also workshop presenters. We teach workshops because we like to do it, but most of us also need to do it.

We also teach because we enjoy helping others, meeting new people, and venturing away from our isolated studios to different locales. Workshop teaching can be emotionally rewarding and quite fun. Introducing new ideas, encouraging play, offering feedback, and nurturing excitement for the participants' return to their own studios is gratifying. It's truly humbling to connect with a diverse group who take time out of their schedules to travel and learn specifically from you. Other advantages to workshoping include visibility in our ceramics community, networking

opportunities, and new customers. For some, it is also about being a positive role model and connecting with fellow artists from underrepresented groups.

A component of presenting is selling work directly to workshop participants, which is part of our overall sales income. It is not a perk of teaching and shouldn't be offered as a means to offset low pay. Because not all artists can sell as much, or perhaps at all, compared to others (due to work style or price point, for example), and because no one wants a workshop centered on instructor pressures to perform for purchases, selling work is standard and separate from a fair honorarium for teaching. After spending days sharing every detail about our work, it is appropriate we receive 100% of our sales. And of course there's always great delight in selling work to admiring customers in person.

Last but not least is what it brings back to our own studios. A few days away sometimes gives us a chance to play. The need to be verbally articulate in presenting can clarify thoughts about our own work. And certainly we learn from the participants and our fellow presenters.

If making money is the top pro to workshoping, not getting paid enough is certainly the top con, closely followed by not getting paid at all if a workshop is cancelled. It can be demoralizing and frustrating to want and need to teach and get paid less than we require.

The other top two cons are leaving home and physical and mental strain. Time away from family, pets, and studio is tricky. Being gone for two weeks or even two days means logistical hoop-jumping and often financial expense for both the presenter and anyone left at home: from burdening loved ones with schedule



2

1 "The Textured Surface in Porcelain," visiting-artist workshop with Bryan Hopkins and Kristen Kieffer, Ceramics Program—Office for the Arts at Harvard, Allston, Massachusetts, September 15–16, 2018. Photo: Darrah Bowden, courtesy of the Ceramics Program. 2 Yunomi, 4½ in. (11 cm) in height, wheel-thrown, stamped, and altered mid-range porcelain, underglaze, slip-sponge, slip-trail, and inlay decoration, glaze, fired to cone 7 in oxidation, 2019.

changes to disruptions of our own studio work flow, and from paying for sitters to lost income from missed work. Leaving 5, 12, or 20 times a year is tough on home life. As my husband says, “You have to pay if you’re gonna take my wife away!”

Teaching is both physically and psychologically demanding, and doing so away from home is even more so. Days of standing on a cement floor, a different studio setup, travel itself, and sometimes a bad mattress can all result in aches and pains. Disruption in exercise, sleep, and eating routines also takes a toll on well-being. Multi-day workshop instruction is basically performing and requires being on for long hours, often even after the workday has ended as presenting and/or socializing invariably continues into the evening. Even though this can be enjoyable, it adds to fatigue. A venue that neglects to gather and prepare everything presenting artists request and expect from our needs list prior to our arrival—especially after a long day of travel—adds to stress and strain. Lastly is time involved in preparation for demos and packing of tools, clothes, and artwork, as well as email and paperwork ping pong with the venue. All of these very real demands placed on artists reemphasize the need for fair compensation.

Contracts and Disparity

Part of the goal of this article is to identify the norms of workshop contracts, logistics, and honorariums. Because there is no published standard or even suggested guidelines for pay rates (in the US)—and since conversations about money are taboo—most of us have winged it regarding what to request for a workshop honorarium and when to say no by asking peers and mentors,

experimenting, or simply accepting what’s offered and hoping for the best.

The minimum standard contract includes an honorarium plus travel, lodging, and meals paid, provided, and/or reimbursed by the venue. Some artists prefer an agreed-upon honorarium paid separately from expenses while others are happy to receive a lump sum. (The latter can work in the artist’s favor, but not always, as small and unexpected expenses add up quickly, cutting into net pay.) Travel should include mileage and/or a plane ticket, parking, round-trip checked baggage fees for tools, and any other incidentals (airport shuttle, car rental, tolls, etc.) required for an instructor to economically get to and from the venue. Some artists ask for an additional \$100–200/day to cover travel time, especially if it entails more than 6 hours each way.

Currently, there is great disparity in pay rates, primarily between nonprofit and for-profit workshop venues. Basically, the former dictates the honorarium amount, and the latter requests the artist’s pay rate. So an artist might have a workshop booked at a large, well-known nonprofit venue that pays \$950 for 5 days, and another booked at a small art center or university that pays the artist’s requested rate of \$1500 for 2 days. That is a huge disparity, equaling a difference of \$550/workshop and \$560/day. Some of that imbalance comes down to loyalty. Most of us (lovingly and/or begrudgingly) teach at nonprofits because we have a connection to that institution—it’s where we were an artist in residence, fell in love with clay, met our spouse, etc.—so we are, in essence, agreeing to donate our time. In addition to venue devotion and basic financial need, an artist might accept a low-paying invitation to teach because

of proximity to home or family, desire to be around the energy of other artists, inexperience, fear of a missed opportunity, a boost to the résumé, and/or just to experience a new studio and its community.

There will always be both new and seasoned presenters who are willing to work for less pay, making a push for parity or a fair minimum more difficult. Hopefully this article will inspire more openness between artists about our honorarium rates and contract expectations, which until now have been unnecessarily mysterious and opaque. Institutions compare, and so should we. (I know from my own experience that some venues justify low pay because it’s the going rate of peer organizations, and that often those rates stay the same for too many years.) To be clear, no one is calling for a boycott of our beloved nonprofits. However, when a venue declines an artist’s need for higher pay because it has restraints and needs to keep the doors open, it indicates a lack of recognition that artists do too.

If a venue’s offer to teach includes pay that’s too low or a contract that’s inadequate, it’s certainly worth negotiating before accepting or declining. When we do opt to decline, we should professionally outline why. Simply saying no will not create change nor



3



4



5

3 Large Pear Jars (*Cherries and Chintz*), 12½ in. (32 cm) in height, wheel-thrown and altered mid-range porcelain, carved, underglaze, slip-sponge, and slip-trail decoration, glaze, fired to cone 7 in oxidation, 2019. 4 Participant Jackie Geiple slip trailing during Kristen Kieffer's "Altered & Ornamented" workshop at Mud Queen Pottery, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, September 6–8, 2019. Photo: Audra Masloff Doughty, Mud Queen Founder and Co-owner. 5 Pierced bud vases, to 10 in. (25 cm) in height, wheel-thrown mid-range porcelain, pulled handles, pierced, underglaze, and inlay decoration, glaze, fired to cone 7 in oxidation, 2019.

will it help an institution understand that there are contract norms as well as rates and conditions working artists require to survive.

Real Numbers and Realities

The hope in openly discussing actual numbers is to illustrate the current honorarium disparity among artists as well as between institutions, and begin a necessary conversation about minimums and the pursuit of better equity.

There's a lot to learn from my sample survey of 30 artists (about 10 didn't respond). Most have taught at least 50 workshops, some less and others significantly more. (I primarily inquired with vessel-makers to simplify one factor of comparison.) Because it would require more research, time, and space than allotted here, the numbers don't include how long or often anyone has gotten their current requested honorarium, nor does it illustrate personal need and circumstance, or the popularity of a particular artist. Why an artist asks for more or less money than another is both speculative and variable. For example, some artists (usually those in demand) are willing to wager asking for a higher rate and potentially not getting hired versus others who prefer asking for less, theoretically guaranteeing the job. (The former could actually be making more money and teaching fewer workshops than the latter, however.) Racial and gender conceptions of self-worth, likability, ambition, and assertiveness could also play a role in requested honorarium differences—another reason openness about rates is important.

Folks were split on the idea of forming a ceramics union, but everyone agreed there should be an established and fair minimum as well as parity. Venues that declare they always pay the same set rate to all their artists should offer their best standard rate to everyone. (Artists do hear when a center randomly offers more to a peer.) Venues should not limit or prorate honorariums by the number of enrolled participants such that the instructor is offered less pay if fewer students register. (A presenter does not do less prep, travel, or instruction for a smaller group.) And lastly, venues advertising artists equally at multi-presenter workshops should compensate those artists equally.

More Survey Takeaways

- Several studio potters have begun to hold workshops in their studios or online, allowing them to stay home, set their own pace, and make more money (despite start-up expenses) as both host and presenter.
- Though a couple of female studio potters are asking the top rate, most are asking as much as \$400/day less than their male counterparts despite having the same or more experience. Stated another way: male studio potters ask for more at the start of their workshop career and/or steadily increase their rates more than many of the women.
- While experience (number of workshops taught) doesn't necessarily equal quality instruction, the stats highlight that experience has absolutely no bearing on how much money an



6

6 *Deluxe Clover* cups, 4 in. (10 cm) in height, wheel-thrown mid-range porcelain, hand-pulled, sculpted, and built handles, underglaze and slip-trail decoration, glaze, fired to cone 7 in oxidation, 2019.

artist requests, despite many believing that experienced artists should be paid more. Answers showed that some artists who have taught 10–12 workshops are asking the same rate as those who have taught 50–60, and others who are asking as much as \$400/day more than presenters who have 2–10 times the number of gigs under their belt.

- Though non-adjunct professors tend to teach workshops for different reasons than studio artists (to promote their program and/or build their application toward tenure or promotion, for example), and don't necessarily depend on the income, their requested honorarium rates are important for comparison because it impacts the norm. Male professors in the sample—with rare exception—have the lowest rate, asking \$200–600+/day less than studio artists, while female professors were mixed at even to low for their requested rates compared to studio artists.
- Several US nonprofits currently pay workshop instructors the equivalent of about \$190/day while Canada has a minimum per day rate for artists which is more than twice that, at \$422/day USD for 2020.¹ (Unfortunately, even that is still too low for 1 to 3-day gigs, and only increases 2% annually at +/- \$9.) Conversely and according to the survey, the median honorarium rate artists request when asked is \$750/day. (To non-presenters this may sound high, but in comparison to expert lecturers in other fields, it's actually quite low.) An honorarium of \$1000/day was the top rate, \$650/day was on the low end, and \$500/day was the rock bottom rarity. Around half the respondents scale their requested rate to receive more per day for 1–2 days, a little less per day for the third and fourth day, etc., in part because preparation and travel for a two-day workshop is the

same as for a five-day workshop. (For example, asking \$950 for 1 day and \$650 for each additional day vs. a flat daily rate of \$750.)

Final Thoughts

Ideally, a workshop is a celebration of education and interchange with the three principals (instructor, venue, participant) feeling fulfilled at its end. A lot goes into a workshop well before anyone arrives, beginning with the agreement between presenter and venue, requiring the balance of different needs. The prevalent expectation and stereotype that ceramic artists are generous with our knowledge, time, and resources belies that we are independent contractors who deserve fair compensation for providing expert services in our field. We want and need to teach workshops and give to our community; we also want and need to be paid fairly for our work. American computer scientist, Navy Rear Admiral, and pioneer in computer programming Grace Hopper (1906–92) once stated: “The most dangerous phrase in the [English] language is, ‘We’ve always done it this way.’” If ceramic artists in the US for 2020 are asking some variation on honorarium rates of \$650–1000/day, but some institutions are still paying less than \$200/day, maybe it's time for a new way.

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¹ Canadian Artists Representation. “CARFAC-RAAV Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule.” CARFAC.ca. www.carfac.ca/tools/fees (accessed December 10, 2019).