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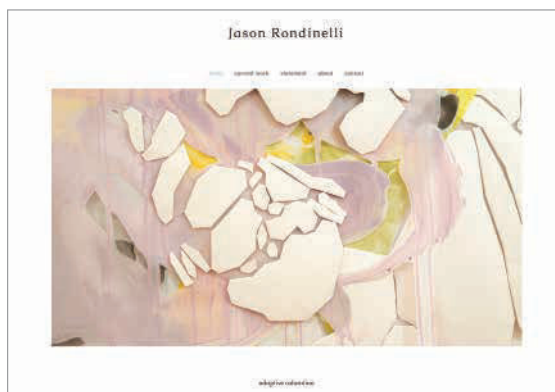
1 *halftone hormones*, 2015, by Jason Rondinelli. Acrylic on vellum and paper, 35" x 33.5".  
Copyright © 2015 Jason Rondinelli. Used by permission of the artist.

# YOUR WEBSITE: A VIRTUAL PLACE TO CALL HOME

BY GIGI ROSENBERG

## CREATE A WEBSITE THAT INVITES YOUR AUDIENCE IN

One of my artist friends compares Facebook to a cocktail party. You flit from conversation to conversation. You tell one friend you like her new haircut, then you announce good news to the cheers of another group of friends. The interactions may be superficial, like a party, but you've seen and been seen by many.



[2]

**I**f being on Facebook is that party, then having someone visit your website is like having a guest come to your home or studio — or at least that's how it should be.

Is your website as inviting as your studio would be if you were expecting visitors? How do you greet that website visitor, invite them in, and make them want to stay and engage with you and your art?

"Make your website a place," said art consultant Alan Bamberger ([artbusiness.com](http://artbusiness.com)), who's also an art appraiser based in San Francisco. When he visits an artist website, "I like to get a sense of the artist rather than just an impersonal portfolio."

Your website is your place, where you call the shots. Is it a place that supports your career and your ambitions for your art?

### YOUR WEBSITE AS A HUB

"Your website is where you have ownership," said painter Sara Jones ([sara-jones.com](http://sara-jones.com)). When Facebook and Tumblr change the rules, all you can do is either go home or follow along because it's their party. But on your own website, you have complete control. You create your visitor's experience with your images, the writing, the sequence and the design.

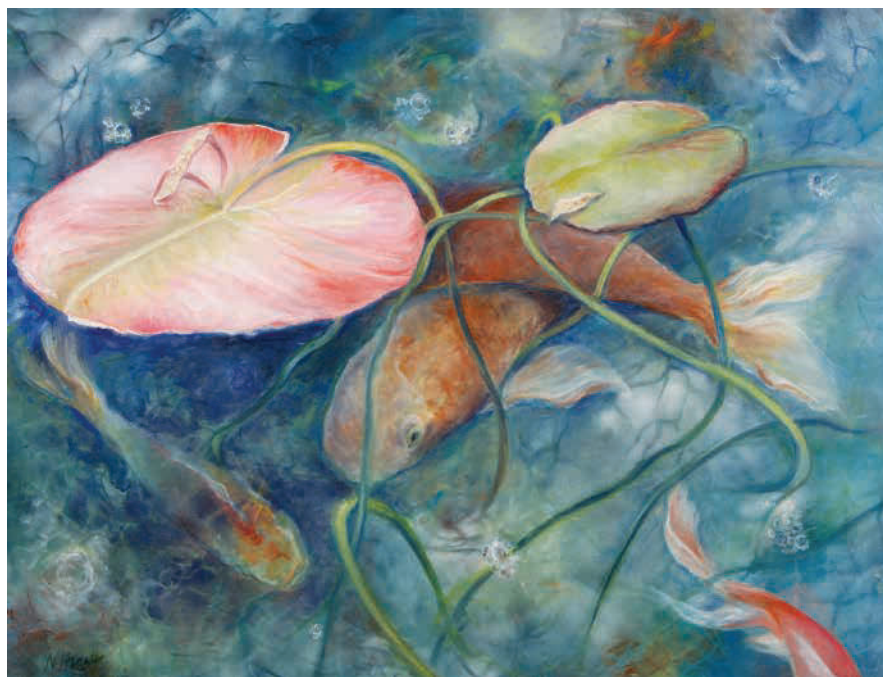
"Your website should be your hub," said Jones who's also co-founder of the creative agency Kind Aesthetic. "It should be where all of your information that you put out into the world originates. And, all information out in the world should lead back to your website."

[2] Website home page of Jason Rondinelli

Jones and Andrea Wenglowczyk, her co-founder, advise artists on how to create successful businesses including website creation. Through Delve (delve-art.com). “A website should link to all social media and your newsletter and be the home of your blog,” she said. “It’s important that your hub is always ‘happening.’” After all, if a curator were visiting your studio, you’d want it to be a vibrant place full of work ready to go out into the world.

Artist Nanci Hersh’s (nancihersh.com) website is a vibrant place where as soon as I land on her home page, I see a large, professional photograph of one of her paintings on the wall of a living room. So, not only do visitors experience a captivating photo of the art, they also see what it might look like to actually live with her art.

From her home page, I can click on upcoming news and events or read about one of her series. When I scroll down, I can learn more about exhibitions or sign up for her email list. If I’m still engaged,



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I will find her latest blog posts and ways to connect with her on social media at the bottom.

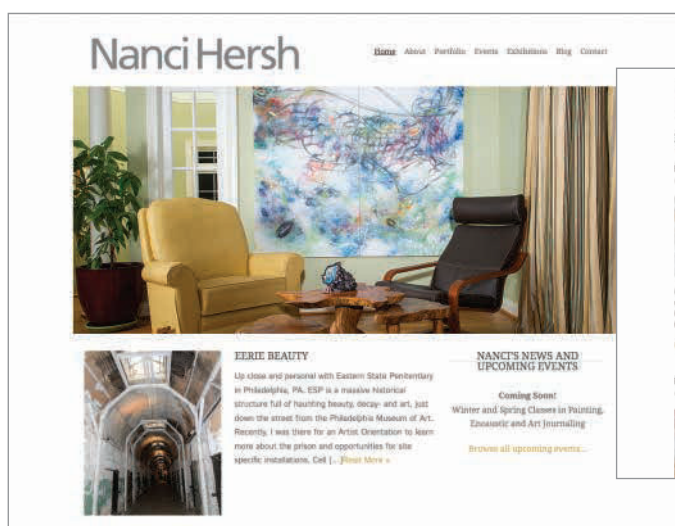
The clean, organized design doesn’t make a visitor feel overwhelmed. Instead, the experience is like walking down a path that keeps offering more inviting options. Yet from this one page, which feels alive and exciting, a student, curator, collector or magazine writer can find what they’re looking for.

“You want to present your work exactly the way you would if you were having a conversation with that person,” Jones said.

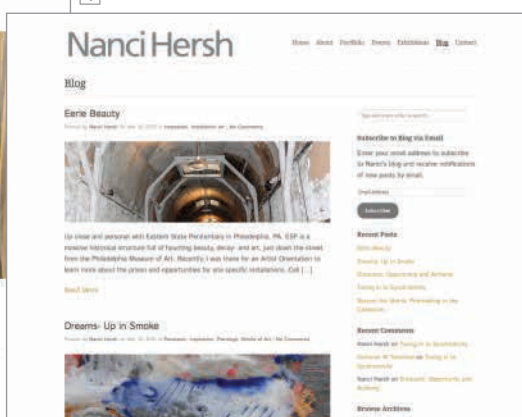
## WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

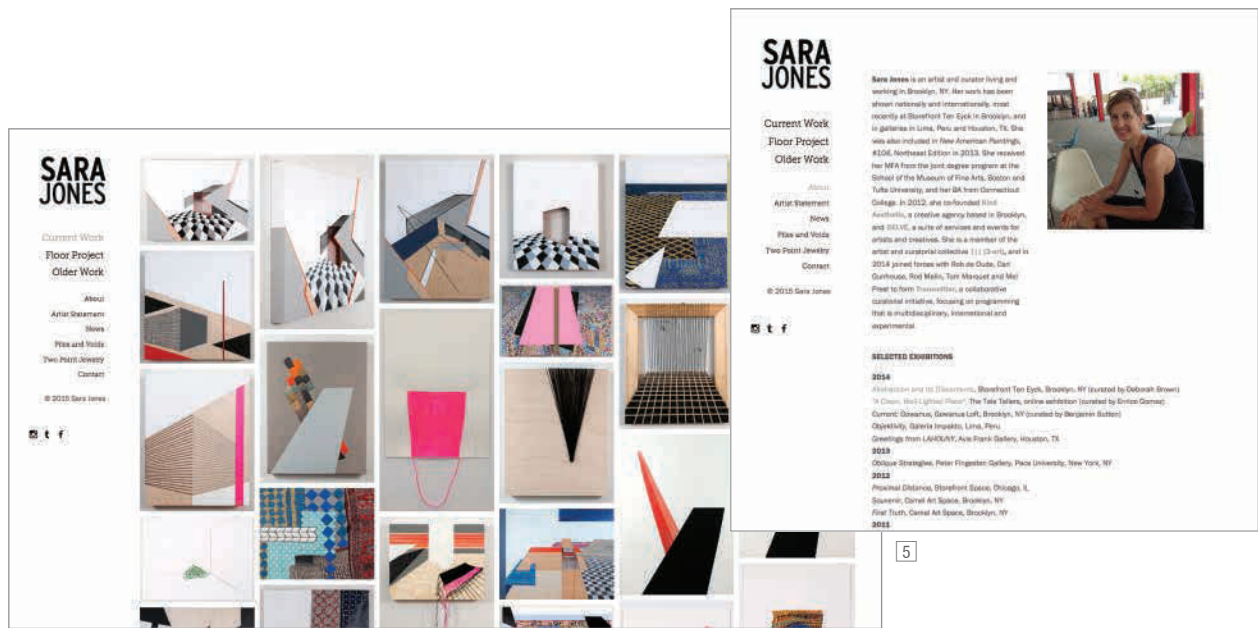
Before you can start that dialogue, you need to identify your audience. Who are the people coming to your website? What will they be looking for? What do you want them to be able to do once they get there?

For example, Hersh also teaches, so she includes information about her classes on her home page but “I want my work to be the focus of the site, not my teaching.” So the teaching is secondary to her primary emphasis on her work. When you look at her home page, the art stands out from her workshop schedule.



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Artist Jason Rondinelli (jasonrondinelli.com) wants his audience to easily scroll through all of his work without having to open up another gallery page. So, on his home page, he has a big photo of one work and then more works just underneath it.

He also wants curators to be able to recognize him at art openings and gallery talks so he added a photo of himself on his “about” page. This photo does double

duty: Not only do we see him but we catch a glimpse of his dynamic art-making process.

Now, as a website visitor, I’ve seen him in action and if I run into him at an art opening, we’ll have something to talk about. *What are you making in that photograph?*

Painter Shirley Williams (shirleywilliamsart.com) has had a

website since 1996. When she did her latest revamp in 2014, she knew her audience: potential clients, gallerists and collaborators.

“My goal is to communicate, engage and inspire, and open doors to sales and career opportunities,” Williams said. (See the sidebar on Page 33 for Williams’ top five website tips.)

Not only does Williams present photographs of her artwork and herself at work in her studio, but she has several artist videos and interviews. So, after a visit to her website, I feel like I already know her as an artist. I’ve seen her pouring paint, giving an artist talk and talking about her work in her studio. Our conversation is well on its way.

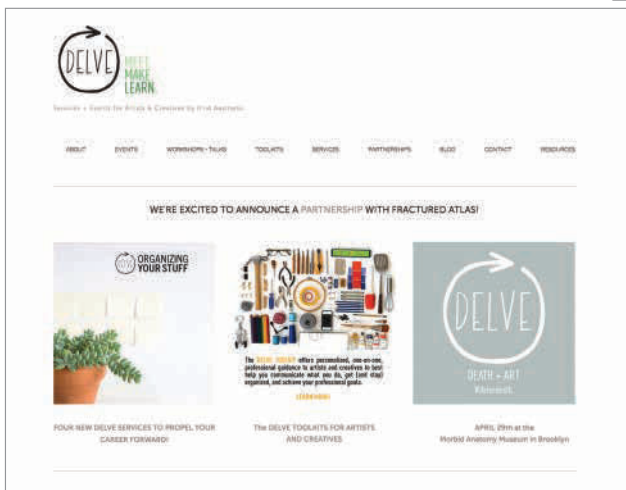
After you’ve identified your audience, ask yourself what you want them to be able to do or access on your site. “If your goal is to get a gallery, then if a curator comes to your site, can they get everything they need?” Jones said.

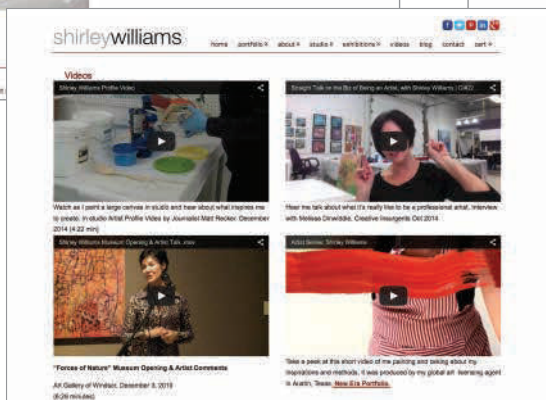
## START ON PAPER

Whether you’re designing a website from scratch or planning a revamp of your current site, start your process on paper.

First list your audience. For whom are you creating the website?

Imagine each one of them coming to your website. What will a curator need? What will a collector be looking for? What experience do you want to provide each type of audience member?





Make a list of what you want them to be able to find and/or do on your site. Write each item on its own sticky note. For example, the curator wants to find: artist statement, short and long bio, and images of artwork. So, you should have a sticky note with one item per note.

Then, make a list of everything you have. Your list might include artist statement, bio, videos, blog, artwork and so on.

Clear a wall space in your studio and stick the notes on the wall. Do you notice anything missing? Maybe you realized that you want to have both a short bio and long bio but you don't have a long bio. Write down any missing items down, one to a sticky note.

Resist the temptation to organize these notes into website pages right away. This is just a gathering of your materials, like you gather your paint and brushes before you head to the canvas.

Let your sticky notes rest.

## TAKE A WEBSITE FIELD TRIP

While your notes are marinating, take an Internet tour of other artist websites. You can start with the ones listed in this article. Visit your artist friends' sites, check out the most famous artists, the most obscure. Look at sites of other businesses and artists who work in other fields.

You're not looking to copy someone else's site because every artist's work, background and goals for the site are different. You're looking for ideas, solutions and inspiration.

"Bookmark the ones you find attractive," Williams said. "List what you like and don't like about them. You'll have a much clearer picture of the website you're hoping to build."

You may see a typeface, a way of organizing series of artworks, a contact form, an artist headshot, an action photo, video clip or press release that captures the spirit, look and feel you seek. Notice when you feel drawn in and when you

click off the site after a few seconds. What made you stay? What turned you away?

Hersh's "about" page shows three photos of her – one scuba diving, one in the field and one dressed up for an opening.

"I wanted my website to reflect my personality: Open, warm, welcoming and accessible," she said. Her "about" page does just that.

## CURATE YOUR IMAGES & GET PERSONAL

Return to your wall of sticky notes. What do you notice? Maybe you realize you're trying to shove too much on the site. Some artists make the mistake of using a website as an archive, and if it's not organized well, it can be overwhelming to visitors.

Would you invite someone into your studio and show him 20 years worth of work? Probably not.

"Make sure all content is relevant to your work and art career," Williams said.



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Rondinelli suggested asking a friend or mentor to help not only choose the work but sequence it. “I found it very challenging to curate my work,” he said.

When Bamberger works with artists, he helps them organize the work into categories, price the work, if necessary, and write about themselves in a way that feels personal and engaging.

“Write in the first person in language that anyone can understand, without art words,” he said. “If you do a good job presenting what you stand for and why you’re in this, your audience comes to you.”

He advises artists to answer hard questions when describing their work.

Bamberger starts with the basics: Why are you showing this work in public? Why are you an artist? What do you stand for?

What do you have to say?

He encourages artists to be specific about what the work is really about to give the viewer a doorway into understanding it.

“When I go to an art show, I like to go in blind to see how the art impacts me,” he said. “Then I ask the artist, ‘what’s your side of the story?’ because I want the whole thing.”

When the artist does a good job of answering that question by showing what they’re trying to accomplish “it makes the art so much better,” he said.

That’s the kind of connection to your audience that you need to create.

## DESIGNER OR TEMPLATE?

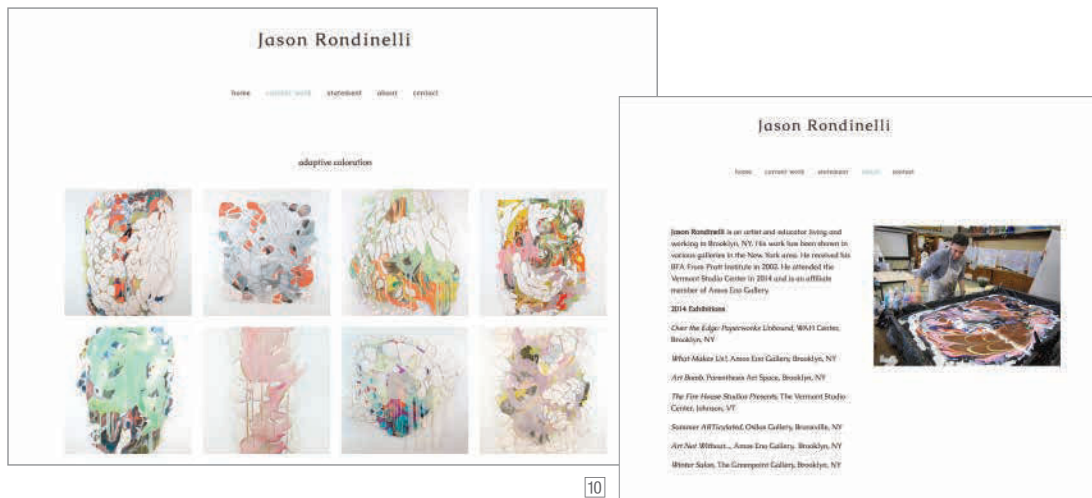
Nowadays, there are so many attractive templates available for websites through places such as Wordpress.org,

## Five Tips for Your Website from Artist Shirley Williams

1. A simple dark grey font on a white background looks best with artwork and is the most reader friendly.
2. Stay sophisticated with simple, uncluttered graphics.
3. Keep the colors to an absolute minimum to show your artwork at its best.
4. Make sure all images are compressed jpg files roughly no larger than 700 pixels wide and tall. This ensures the site will load quickly. Also, compressed images are harder to copy illegally.
5. Connect your site to Google Analytics. Look to see which pages are the most and least popular. Eliminate pages no one looks at and beef up the ones everyone likes.

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Squarespace.com, FASO.com, FolioLink.com, and Artspan.com that most artists don’t need to build a website from scratch.

With some technical skill, a savvy artist could make her website on her own with a good template. However, there’s nothing that takes the place of an experienced website designer, even if you have the designer work from a template.

A designer can modify a template so that it’s customized to your needs. She can also help organize any loose ends that arose after that sticky note exercise. A good designer will help you create an experience for your visitors and make your website that hub of Internet activity for your art business.

If you decide to hire a designer, get at least two quotes and look at examples of work they have done for other

artists. “It’s imperative to have a good rapport with your designer,” Hersh said. “Can you communicate freely? Do you like what they have done for other people? Are they available for questions along the way?”

If your budget can’t afford a designer, then use a template and keep things simple. Gather a group of trusted advisors who can help you choose the artwork, edit and proofread, and critique versions of the site as you’re making it, before you launch.

“Your website will and should be a work in progress,” Hersh said. “Decide at what point you are ready to put it out there. Be realistic. If you wait for perfect, it’ll never happen.” **PA**

*Gigi Rosenberg is the editor of Professional Artist. She’s also an artist coach and the author of The Artist’s Guide to Grant Writing (Watson-Guptill, 2010). She’s been a guest commentator on Oregon Public Broadcasting, performed at Seattle’s On The Boards, and been published by Seal Press, Poets & Writers, and Parenting. Visit [gigirosenberg.com](http://gigirosenberg.com) or reach her at [grosenberg@professionalartistmag.com](mailto:grosenberg@professionalartistmag.com).*



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