



International Art Medal Federation  
Fédération Internationale de la Médaille d'Art

# Guidelines towards Best Practice for Medal Commissions and Competitions



**Medals have been associated with honour and glory since they first appeared during the Italian Renaissance. Originally made to commemorate individuals and events, they have been presented as prizes and awards since the eighteenth century.**

The commissioning of a medal provides considerable benefits to any organisation or private patron. It projects a recognition of high achievement and reflects the acceptance and wish of the client to mark a significant occasion by an act of generous patronage of the arts. The commissioning is an important event and these guidelines seek to demonstrate the best practice towards ensuring a fair and equitable basis for client and designer.

The commissioner must first choose whether to select an individual artist or to establish a competition for the best design.

The process of commissioning a medal can take up to six months and if a competition is to take place additional time must be allowed.

## **Finance**

There are three main areas of finance to cover fees for design and execution, prize awards and production.

**Design** : A design brief can be extremely time consuming and this should be recognised in the contracts with the artists. It may be decided that a competition should be open to anyone with no design fees paid, but the inclusion of invited artists receiving a fee will more readily assure a high quality of submissions.

**Prizes** : As in any competition the award of prizes bestows prestige and recognises the achievement of the successful artists. They are also a powerful indication of the value the client places on the commission. In many countries such prizes can be offered tax free which is a particular incentive to all parties.

**Production** : The cost for this will be conditioned by such factors as the size of the edition, which could depend on the intended circulation and the chosen technique, either cast or struck.

## **Competitions and Commissions**

There are two main types of competitions, one when any member of the public may submit entries or one other, when specific invitations to experienced medallic artists are made. For those open to the general public, with no fees paid, adequate prize money must be provided. It is important to remember that the preparatory design work for any medal commission can take many hours of research and drawing and the prize money must be such that professional artists can make a judgement as to the benefits of being successful against the time spent on submissions with the possibility of no reward.

For competitions, when specific artists are invited to take part, a schedule of fees should be outlined which cover the various stages of the design. These being, design drawings, initial relief interpretations and final patterns for casting or striking. This recognising the expertise of the artists and ensures the client of a professional and efficient completion of their brief.

Some 'Open Competitions' may be organised where no fee is payable but to ensure some quality entries the client may wish to also invite experienced designers being paid a fee for their participation.

The normal submissions for such competitions are drawings from which designs can be created in relief. The selection process may then consist of selecting one winner from the submissions, or a procedure whereby a short list is made of artists to prepare models of their designs. This offers a wider opportunity and would be covered by appropriate fees.

Commissions offer good publicity opportunities with the publishing of entries on appropriate web sites being very effective.

## **THE BRIEF**

This should be as precise as possible, indicating the purpose and subject of the medal and selection criteria that the client will apply. The requirement to include any inscription or image must be made clear but it is often advisable to leave the artist as free a hand as possible. Any successful commission depends on a good co-operation between artist and client and the basis of this, should be established by the brief, which should include the following.

1. The name, occasion and purpose of the competition, along with the techniques (cast or struck), materials and dimensions required. If the medal is to be an award for particular achievements the criteria to be used for the selection of the recipients should be stated.
2. Any requirement to include any inscription or image must be made clear but it is often advisable to leave the artist as free a hand as possible.
3. The composition of the jury with details of their names and background such as artist, critic, sponsor. Practising artists or designers should be well represented within the jury and ideally be representative of established artistic groups.
4. A timetable indicating dates for receipt of designs and stages of selection.
5. The recommended size for drawings, which should include the titles, dimensions and materials chosen by the artist.

6. The limit, if any, of designs required from each entrant.
7. Instructions as to how the entries are to be submitted to ensure anonymity and details as to return or retention of unsuccessful submissions.
8. The chosen selection process and its various stages including reference to announcements of results.
9. A request for information from short-listed artists to provide information concerning materials and estimates of production costs.
10. The number and value of prizes to be awarded with an indication as to the copyright assignment and arrangements for production costs.
11. Production and Copyright

## **Examples of the detailed information for the above headings are listed below**

**These are for guidance only**

The competition will take place in 3 stages following the timetable as follows:

**Stage 1:** Designs will be submitted as drawings on paper giving overall dimensions. To ensure anonymity, each submission must be sent within an A4 envelope containing the design drawings with no identification marks but information, such as title, technique to be used either struck or cast by sand or lost wax cast should be attached. A sealed envelope in the outer envelope should contain the name and address of the artist along with a photocopy of the design. A short explanation (max 100 words) of the idea behind their design should also be included. There is no limit on the number of entries an artist may submit. **Entries must be received by ?**

**Stage 2:** The jury will select a short list of 6 entries for further consideration out of which 3 will be selected for development into models of plaster or other strong material suitable for moulds to be made from. **These artists and the selected 3 will be informed by ?**

**Stage 3:** The jury will make the choice of the medal to be issued and will also select the second and third place. The three artists must provide at this stage an estimate as to the possible costs for the production of the medal in an edition. **The finished models must be received by ?**

10. Payments and Prizes:

The participants of the first stage will take part in the competition without payment. All the 10 submissions chosen for further consideration in stage 2 will be paid a fee

of .....?

The winner of the first prize will be awarded the sum of ...? , the winner of the second prize .....? and the winner of the third prize ...?.

Suggested Payment schedule :

- 1/3 on award of prize or commission
- 1/3 on completion of original pattern
- 1/3 on completion pf production
- If production is postponed or abandoned the last 1/3 should be paid on completion of pattern.

11. Production and Copyright:

- Copyright remains with the artist unless otherwise negotiated.
- No alterations to the design can be made without the artist's approval in writing.
- Alterations to the pattern are to be done by the artist unless by agreement.
- Alterations during production are to be approved by the artist.
- The artist grants the organisers the right to reproduce the work in print.
- The organisers undertake to acknowledge the artist's name whenever the work is published or exhibited.
- The artist's signature will be on the work and should not be obscured or removed.
- The artist shall make the original pattern unless an agreement is reached to allow a nominated artist to undertake the work.
- An agreement should be made to allow the artist to follow the production and approve all finishes, patina, packaging and presentation.

An additional sum will be payable to the artist for preparing casting patterns. The amount of this will be negotiated between the executive and artist following negotiations concerning the edition size and place of production.

Further information may be obtained from the following sources:

*British Art Medals 1982-2002*



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[www.fidem-medals.org](http://www.fidem-medals.org)