

EVERYONE'S GUIDE TO ART HANGING

Simple Steps to Better Art Displays, Whatever Your Level of Experience



PUBLISHED BY GALLERY SYSTEM ART DISPLAYS

GALLERY SYSTEM ART DISPLAYS

Introduction | About This Book



Photo by Blueprint22

Welcome to *Everyone's Guide to Art Hanging!*

This book is designed to help you create better art displays, no matter what level of experience you have, or what type of display space you're working in.

The included information has been collected over more than two decades in the art hanging equipment business, through dozens of conversations with people who have hands-on experience creating displays that attract, intrigue, and spark response in viewers.

We're sharing it here because there's a shortage of simple, practical guides to art display techniques, and hope that you'll find it useful as you create your own displays—in a gallery, home, school, office, or wherever you've got an available wall.

It's always a great moment when a painting is about to take its place on the wall

How this Book is Organized



The process of creating effective art displays is all about making choices, as Massachusetts artist Marilyn Swift is doing here.

Photo by Jonathan Sachs.

Everyone's Guide to Art Hanging is designed to provide helpful information for a wide range of situations.

A number of themes presented in the early chapters recur through the entire book, but feel free to use the links below to jump directly to any chapter that's of special interest — we've tried to make them as self-contained as possible.

In **Chapters 1 and 2**, we talk about the basic strategies for planning and hanging your display—things to consider in advance, and techniques you can use to help realize your goals.

Chapter 3 looks specifically at art hanging in the home, offering tips on things like gallery walls and keeping displays of family photos and other materials fresh and engaging.

Chapter 4 focuses on how businesses and organizations can utilize art displays in the service of their goals.

Chapter 5 is all about lighting—a critical element in any art display, as your works have to be seen to be appreciated.

Chapter 6 looks at creating effective groupings, including salon-style hanging, the increasingly popular approach of hanging art over an entire wall.

Chapter 7 offers some practical advice for artists who are showing their work at art fairs, open studios, and other events.

And lastly, we hope you'll take a moment to read **Chapter 8**, about our art hanging and lighting products, which can greatly simplify the process of making your vision a reality.

Thanks for being a reader, and we wish you and your displays every success!

Gallery System Art Displays

www.GallerySystem.com

1-800-460-8703

info@GallerySystem.com

Chapter 1 | The Mission of Your Art Display: Connecting with Viewers



Contrasts can be a powerful storytelling tool, as this museum display demonstrates. Placing the very traditional portrait next to modernist works opens up lines of questioning and comparison.



Figure 1.1 This simple but evocative display tells a story about the homeowner's upbringing in, and ongoing connection with, South Africa. *Photo by Jonathan Sachs.*

The term “art display” covers a lot of ground. It can refer to a museum presenting a lifetime of work by a famous artist, an end-of-semester exhibition featuring hundreds of student pieces, a collection of photos in an office, or a single print over the sofa in your home.

The common thread is that every display seeks to convey something to the viewer: how that famous artist evolved, how these students have progressed, a sense of excitement or calmness for office visitors, or a glimpse into the personality and perspective of the person who chose the living room print.

Connecting with your viewers is a two-step process – first catch their eyes, then engage their minds. There are infinite ways to accomplish this connection. Finding one that works in your particular situation is part of the fun.

This first chapter will explain some overall strategies for planning your display, and Chapter 2 will describe some proven hanging principles that will help you make the strongest possible statement.

What Setting Do You Have to Work With?

In an increasingly digital world, artwork offers a refreshingly tangible experience – physical objects in a particular place. Realizing the potential of this opportunity requires preparation, starting with an initial decision on exactly where you may “need” artwork.

No two settings are alike, which is part of the appeal and the challenge of this first step. It can be very helpful to envision yourself as a newcomer arriving at your location and going through the process of entering the space as if it were your first time. This will help you to imagine the all-important initial impression.

“Consider how people are going to walk in, what they are going to see first,” suggests Christine O'Donnell, owner and director of Boston's Beacon Gallery. “How will they walk around the space and where will their eye be drawn? That's really important.”

Identifying areas that attract the eye will reveal which walls are most in need of an art display. Keep those places in mind as you walk through the space, while also looking for secondary, smaller spaces that are available for art. A rough floorplan or quick sketch is helpful for keeping track of spots that have display potential; you can also use arrows to depict the natural flow through the space.

What Story Are You Trying to Tell?

Once you've identified one or more spaces for your art, you need to select the artworks to hang. A good starting point for display designers at this stage of the planning process, says O'Donnell, is to think about what story you are trying to tell.

A gallery owner might tell a story about an emerging artist, using examples of their work in various sizes. The manager of a residential building might use informal photos to convey a sense of lifestyle, while an artist's studio might display their most recent series.

Contrasts can be a powerful storytelling tool, as the museum display depicted on page 1 demonstrates. Placing the very traditional portrait next to modernist works opens up lines of questioning and comparison.

If you're a business or individual moving into a new location or are looking to freshen up the look of your art, O'Donnell suggests collecting all the works you have into a single spot. This, she says, can help you identify new, different groupings that suggest a "different narrative, or a theme." It's also an opportunity to think about different criteria for your decisions - if you had to choose works based on size, rather than content, what would you choose? A few small pieces? Something large?



Figure 1.2 This display at the Art on Cairncross gallery in Australia catches the viewer's eye with the large colorful work juxtaposed with the two smaller black-and-white pieces. And the group of four earth-toned works in the corner provide a clear "next step" for viewers, drawing them into the exhibition.



Figure 1.3 Corridors can be challenging display spaces, but this show at Wynwood Labs uses the unusual 3-D painting-sculpture works at left to good effect — their intriguing forms draw people into the exhibit and towards the works farther along the hall. *Photo by Blueprint22.*

It's also important to consider flow. If the primary entry brings people directly into a large, open space, you'll need to provide a clear focal point. A large bold piece can set the right tone for a central location. Or, if an arrival path involves walking through confined areas, it could be effective to use a sequence of several smaller works — they can distract visitors from noticing the lack of space while also being indicative of the bigger theme.

Chapter 2 | Some Basic Principles



Thinking about what pieces go where, and ensuring that they work together harmoniously

Hopefully you now have a sense of the constraints and potential of your space, and the usefulness of arranging pieces cohesively. Now you can start thinking about what pieces go where, and ensuring that they work together harmoniously. This chapter will provide some basic principles that you can use in the process.

Note that we say “principles” and not “rules.” This is partly because, as noted earlier, every situation is different. It’s also because, as artist Marilyn Swift of Gloucester, MA puts it, “This is art - why would you have rules?”

The guidance in this chapter reflects a great deal of combined knowledge, but we’ve sought to make it open-ended and not overly prescriptive, because you know better than anyone what your display is trying to accomplish!

Anchor Pieces + Supporting Players

In most cases, it makes sense to choose a prominent “anchor piece” for your display as a whole: something that can serve as the star of the show and set a tone. This item should command attention from people entering the space, and send a clear and inviting signal, drawing the viewer in.

The photo on page 5 provides an example from Beacon Gallery in Boston of how multiple anchor pieces can be used to draw visitors in. The Betty Canick work at right greets people entering the gallery, while the orange mixed-media piece by Adrienne Shishko at left attracts viewers into the



Figure 2.1 This group of three paintings at Beacon Gallery in Boston demonstrates engaging interplay between the central anchor piece by Adrienne Shishko and the complementary supporting works by Myra Abelson. Note how the serenity of the Abelson pieces brings out the energy of the central piece and vice-versa. *Photo by Christine O'Donnell.*



Figure 2.2 Combinations of portraits can offer many options for interplay, as this group of images of masked Mexican wrestlers demonstrates. The pair of central color works create a sense of conversation, while the flanking sketches bring out the form that underlies the bold hues. Note how the different-sized sketches prevent the group from seeming too static.

main space. **Figure 2.1**, previous page, demonstrates the anchor-support principle at work on a single wall. (Photos by Beacon Gallery owner and director Christine O'Donnell.)

If you're working on multiple walls or in multiple rooms, you can apply the same principle by placing an anchor piece in each area to create cohesive sub-stories.

If your display is very small, as one might find in a compact living room or office, the anchor piece might be the whole show. In cases like this, you'll want to focus on presenting it in the most effective way. We'll offer some tips on that below.

But in larger endeavors, once your anchor pieces are in place, you can think about supporting players in your story. These pieces can be placed near the "star." Sometimes, a supporting piece that's similar to the anchor piece can provide continuity; sometimes offering a contrast can be engaging.

The exact arrangement of the supporting artworks around the anchor piece will depend on the size and shape of available wall space, the relationship between the pieces, and the overall feel you're seeking to create (see **Figure 2.2**, above, and **Figure 2.4** on page 9). Creating pairs, triptychs, and other groupings can be a powerful technique. You might also find a salon-style approach effective, with supporting pieces above and/or below the central work. (You'll find more detail about groups and salon-style hanging in Chapter 6.)

A row of pieces can also be quite appealing. However, this often works best when the pieces are not identical in size and shape. Why? Because when our eye sees a row of uniform items, like a perfect line of soldiers or rows of cars in a parking lot, we tend to see them as a collective unit and not as individuals. While we want a cohesive theme for our display, we also want each piece to have its own presence and identity.

Again, every wall is different, and every combination of artwork requires its own unique arrangement. Take your time and experiment to find the best combinations. Test your ideas by stepping away from the display area for a few minutes and then walking back into the room with “new eyes,” to see the space as you would when you would first arrive.

Avoid Overload

It's always tempting to show as many pieces as your walls can accommodate. But your display's story will come through most clearly if you're a tough editor and don't include too many works. Many displays, like the one in **Figure 2.3**, inadvertently overwhelm the viewer. This can result in sensory overload and disengagement, which is the opposite of what you're trying to accomplish.



Figure 2.3 While there are some good ideas at work in this display, like groupings of related works, the overall effect is overwhelming. There's no clear line for the viewer's eye to follow, and the pieces' individual identity tends to get lost in the crowd. Photo by Flickr user Sheba_Iso, used under Creative Commons.



Figure 2.4 This display of paintings does a good job of giving each work room to breathe while also bringing out connections (colors, subject matter, etc.). The combination of different sizes and shapes makes for a dynamic feeling and avoids excessive uniformity. The technique of hanging some works closer to the floor can be very effective if there will be young people attending a show.

A good way to avoid overload is to pay attention to the space between works. Adequate breathing room will help viewers focus. About 8 to 14 inches is a good starting point for separation between pieces or groupings, but the exact distance you'll want to use is situation specific. Take your time and experiment, especially when works of significantly different sizes are involved.

Sometimes intimate clusters work well. Sometimes a particular piece will simply need more space of its own. Use your eyes and instinct to strike a balance, with each work having room to itself while also maintaining connection with its neighbors.

Prepare Your Pieces

You wouldn't go to a party or other public occasion without giving at least a little thought to your clothes and hair. Likewise, a piece of art that's going on display deserves to look its best, be easily hung and adjusted, and be protected.

Framing is a long-established approach to display-readiness, and it's well worth the investment. Some pieces will fit into simple off-the-shelf frames. For more options, a local framing shop can help you settle on what's best for your specific piece(s) — from a minimalist frame to a Baroque-style ornate gold one. They can also provide D-rings or a hanging wire on the back to simplify the hanging process.

Incorporating a piece of glass into a frame can go a long way towards protecting and preserving a valued work, and better varieties also offer shielding from ultraviolet light. Protective glass is especially important



Figure 2.5 This collection celebrates a runner's first marathon, bringing together photos, a race number and medal, and other items that evoke a memorable accomplishment. Note the clever use of frames within a frame, and that the number bib is attached to the backing with safety pins — the same method used to attach it to the runner's jersey on race day. Photo by Flickr user James Abbott, used under Creative Commons.

if you intend to hang a piece of artwork where it will receive sunlight, as colors and many materials do degrade in UV light over time. Do consider the work itself, however — some artworks, especially those with significant texture, can lose their impact behind glass. A framer can guide you in the right direction.

Keep in mind that multiple items can go in the same frame. This can be very effective for collections of small items, like vintage photos, baseball cards, or matchbooks, or for uniting related things, like a family member's military photo, decorations, and diary pages (see **Figure 2.5**).

Mats with backing boards can be a less formal (and less protective) alternative for photos, prints, and other paper items. But be sure to consider how you'll hang or otherwise display them. There are a variety of clips and clamps that can be used in conjunction with hooks for hanging, or you can place matted works on a shelf (shallow "picture ledges" can work well for this purpose). O'Donnell notes, however, that any works permanently attached to a backing board will lose value, so be aware of what you are mounting. This hanging method is not recommended for paper items, photographs, or valuable prints.

Another option is to simply place a piece directly on the wall and hold it in place with clips, putting push pins right through it, or even nailing directly into the walls. Some artists who work on unstretched canvas like this approach, and while you probably wouldn't use it for a precious or valuable work, it can be suitable for items that will only be shown temporarily, or when a sense of simplicity or rawness is part of the desired effect.

What is "Eye Level"?

One final consideration is how high off the floor pieces should be hung. The traditional advice is "at eye level," but adult eye levels vary by more than a foot. If viewers are apt to be sitting, or your audience includes young people, there's even more variation.

While hanging height depends on the space, there are some general rules bandied about by museums and art galleries, where viewers are generally standing. One is that artwork should be approximately 60 inches (or 5 feet) as measured from its center to the ground. However, this can come across as a bit low if you have soaring ceilings, or if many viewers are 5'10" or taller. Rather than holding to a particular measurement, focus on making each piece's height feel right for you and the space.

Pro Tip: Whenever possible, and especially when hanging multiple pieces in a row, make your measurements down from the ceiling rather than up from the floor. This will provide more-accurate results, especially in older buildings, because ceilings tend to be more level—floors are more prone to settle over time.



Figure 2.6 While many artworks benefit from framing, others may not. This woven piece, which incorporates magazine pages, feathers, and other items, is a good candidate for unframed display, to preserve the irregular edges and sense of depth provided by the incorporated objects. Photo and artwork by Flickr user Shannan Sinclair, used under Creative Commons.

Consider hanging works slightly higher if the room is likely to be crowded, or if it's somewhere food is handled, like in a store or café. The additional height provides more visibility and better protection. On the other hand, if the display space is primarily for sitting, like a living room or waiting room, consider a slightly lower placement. If you are decorating a playroom or other area where your audience is mostly children, consider placing some kid-friendly pieces just a few feet off the floor.

Always keep context in mind. If you're placing a large work just above a mantle, side table, or other piece of furniture, don't let it float in space. Instead, hang it at a level where it feels grounded and attached to what's beneath it. You may also need to take into account how pieces look in relation to nearby moldings or shelves, which do not always align with floor and ceiling. Sometimes a piece of art won't look straight unless it's a little crooked.

Again, the point of all these guidelines is to help support you as you make decisions for your particular space, not make placement more difficult. Go with what feels right, and know that whatever you do, you can always move the artwork around later. In fact, we encourage it!

Try Before You Commit

A good last step, once you've got a sense of your display's composition and height, is to evaluate it with an in-place rough draft. Block out the shape and location of each piece, using brown paper cut to size, or an outline of blue painter's tape. If you can, keep it up for a while and see how the height and composition comes together, especially when seen from different vantage points. (If you like the idea of a preview but not the hassle of breaking out your arts and crafts supplies, check out Chapter 8 on Gallery System art hanging equipment.)

Chapter 3 | Art in the Home



photo by Margot Hartford

Art in your home can make a powerful personal statement and have profound effects on the look and feel of your rooms

The walls of your home are a powerful place to express your personal style, interests, and even life philosophy. In this chapter, we'll offer some tips on using artwork to achieve a look that reflects you.

We noted earlier how the term “art display” covers a lot of ground, and the same holds true for what constitutes “art” in a home setting. Paintings, prints, family photos, drawings, vintage magazine covers, advertisements, textiles, and many other types of material all fit the bill. This diversity is one reason why art in the home can make such a personal statement and have such a profound effect on the look and feel of a room.

At the same time, home hanging typically poses several special challenges:

- Wall space is often scarce and fragmented
- Viewing angles can be constrained by room size and shape, furniture, and other factors
- Artwork needs to fit the context of a home's colors, design scheme, level of formality, and general mood
- Effective lighting can be difficult
- Care must be taken to keep artworks out of direct sun, which is damaging to pigments and materials

Fortunately, the basic approach to planning and hanging described in Chapters 1 and 2 is just as valid in a home setting as it is in a gallery. Upfront consideration of your space, and of what story you're trying to tell, about yourself, your family, your experiences, or whatever else is important to you, will help the decision-making process immensely.

Thus, after evaluating which areas of the home need wall décor, identify the pieces that are truly meaningful to you — the ones you really love. They may not be the fanciest ones, or the most prestigious, but these beloved items deserve special consideration, and will be good candidates for the “anchor pieces” that will star in your home's displays.

The photo on Page 10 shows how a short dividing wall in a California Victorian house provides a great setting for a big, bold painting that's set off well by the overall neutral color scheme. Note that there is adequate clear space around the light switches at the painting's right, so that they do not seem jammed in. Also, in the background at far right, two smaller works bring color to a sitting area. (Photo by Margot Hartford)

As Christine O'Donnell, founder and director of Boston's Beacon Gallery, notes,, it's most important that pieces in your home work for you. “Don't worry about what others think. You are going to be living with the artwork day after day. Choose your favorite pieces, find others that go with them, and hang all those things together in a way that inspires you.”

Here are a few suggestions:

Tip #1: Consider What's Public, What's Private

Consider your beloved pieces and think about which would be most interesting and appealing to a broader audience, and which are most meaningful to your family or people you live with, while always staying true to your own tastes. Consider which rooms or areas have higher foot traffic and which are more intimate, like the nursery in **Figure 3.1**. This will allow you to start sorting in a way that will help you offer something suitable and appealing to each audience – including yourself!

Tip #2: Assess Your Wall Spaces

Available wall space is very often the biggest limiting factor in home displays, with windows, doorways, radiators, furniture, light fixtures, and other items all cutting down on potential display areas.

But don't panic – there are always ways to leverage the spaces you do have. Taking the time to make an informal assessment (or more-formal measurements) can help ensure that you make the most out of what's available without cramming pieces into spaces where they don't really fit.

Relatively large areas can be sometimes be found on interior walls, above sofas and mantelpieces, in entryways or corridors, or between windows. If some of your beloved anchor pieces are on the large side, the possible locations will probably narrow down fairly quickly.



Figure 3.1 Family photos are often better suited for the more-private areas of a home. This nursery display is a good example; the collected images of a mother, father and baby are quite personal and might seem overly intimate if featured in a living room or other more-public area. *Photo by Flickr user Tabitha Blue, used under Creative Commons.*

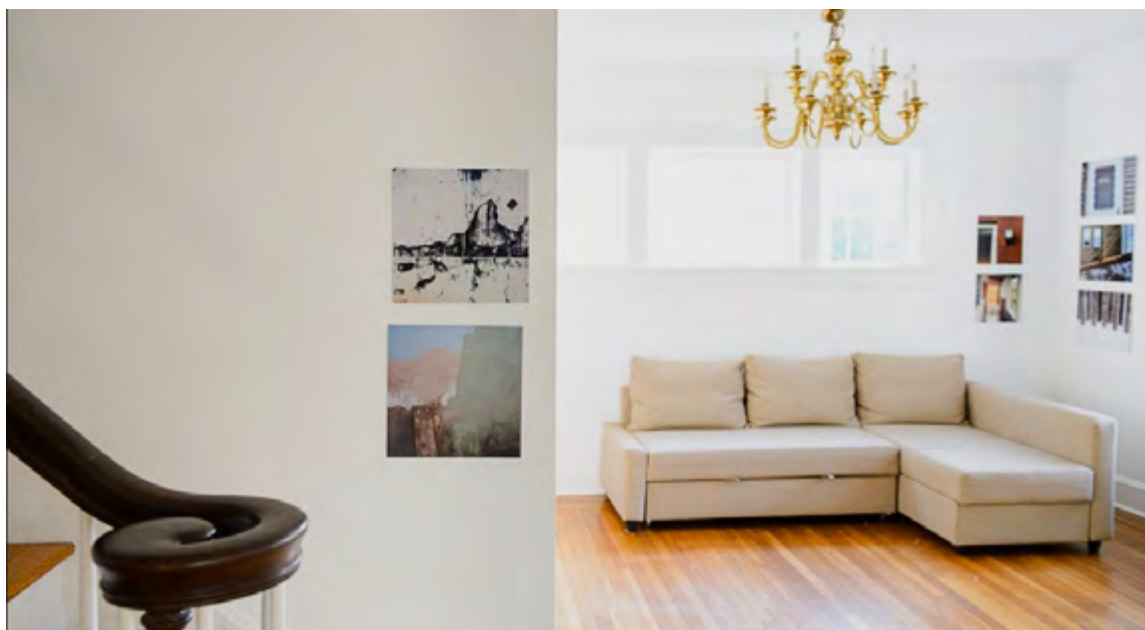


Figure 3.2 You don't need large-scale artworks to create an inviting environment in your home, as demonstrated by these elegantly understated displays of photographs by Ananda Lima. Well-chosen clusters of smaller images can have substantial impact, and the five images above the sofa make excellent use of the corner space between two windows. *Photo by Ananda Lima.*



Figure 3.3 Here's a closer look at the corner grouping from Figure 3.2. The photos of doors, windows, corridors and fences combine into a comment on space and dimension, barriers and openings. The asymmetrical arrangement creates a strong vertical line in the right-hand column, with the square prints on the left adding visual punctuation. *Photo by Ananda Lima.*

At the same time, surprisingly good use can be made of spaces that might at first seem awkward or unusable. Note in **Figures 3.2** and **3.3** how photographer Ananda Lima uses a tight corner as a setting for a compelling combination of images.

This type of approach can be used to good effect for many types of material: collections of work by family members, memorabilia, photos of friends or relatives, magazine pages, etc. When skillfully combined, even relatively small items can create the feel of a big piece. (See Chapter 6 for more information about creating effective groupings.)



Figure 3.4 A striking image of a seaside rock formation anchors the center of the bottom row of this gallery wall, while supporting photos of other far-flung locations (natural and manmade) make the collection visually engaging while also providing a story line about photographer Guy Ivie's travels and interests. Use of a Gallery System art hanging system simplifies the arrangement process and makes later changes easier. *Photo by Guy Ivie.*

Tip #3: Don't Be Afraid of Change

Remember that when we see the same thing in the same place day in and day out, we stop really SEEING it. Sometimes putting different pieces in different places can make them more visible.

O'Donnell notes, "I get tired of always having same things up at my house, so I'll change it up from time to time. I love all the works that I have but enjoy seeing them in different lights or different rooms. Putting them in a new context can help you see things in a new way — different aspects might come out, or you'll see different colors when you put new things next to each other."

Keeping your displays fresh is especially true if you have a family member who is an artist. Rotating their work can help show their evolution or harken back to old favorites and provide a fuller sense of their oeuvre.

Tip #4: Making a Gallery Wall Sing

Gallery walls, which feature arrays of pieces in multiple rows and columns, are a hot trend in interior design these days, and a descendant of the salon-style approach to hanging art, which we discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

A bit of planning will help make your gallery wall appear as a cohesive whole and not a random collection. As discussed in Chapter 2, choosing an anchor piece with strong supporting players can be a wise strategy. An excellent example is photographer Guy Ivie's arrangement in **Figure 3.4**.

Don't neglect the potential to tell a story. If you're hanging family photos, for example, consider having some sort of logical organization that gives the viewer a visual route. You could go chronologically from top to bottom or side to side, cluster groups of relatives or friends together, or find some other organizing principle that speaks to you.

When arranging multiple works, it's essential to experiment before committing to final positions. Try laying out your arrangement on the floor or a tabletop and trying different combinations until you find one that feels logical or unified. (An art-hanging system, which allows easy positioning and adjustment of complex arrangements, can be a very useful tool in this situation.)

Most often you'll have diversely sized and shaped pieces in your gallery wall, so you'll need to find a combination that holds together both from a distance and up close. Having some sense of a grid is usually a good strategy, but don't feel that you have to force things into perfect rows and spaces – see Chapter 6 for more detail on this. And remember, as noted in Chapter 2, if a display is TOO orderly, viewers can lose sight of the pieces' individual character.

Chapter 4 | Using Art Displays for Your Business or Organization



FlickrUserMinisterio de Cultura de la NaciónArgentina

*You don't have to be in the art business
to reap the benefits of intriguing displays*

You don't have to be in the art business to reap the benefits of intriguing displays. If your company or organization has a physical location and visitors, a powerful, engaging visual statement can:

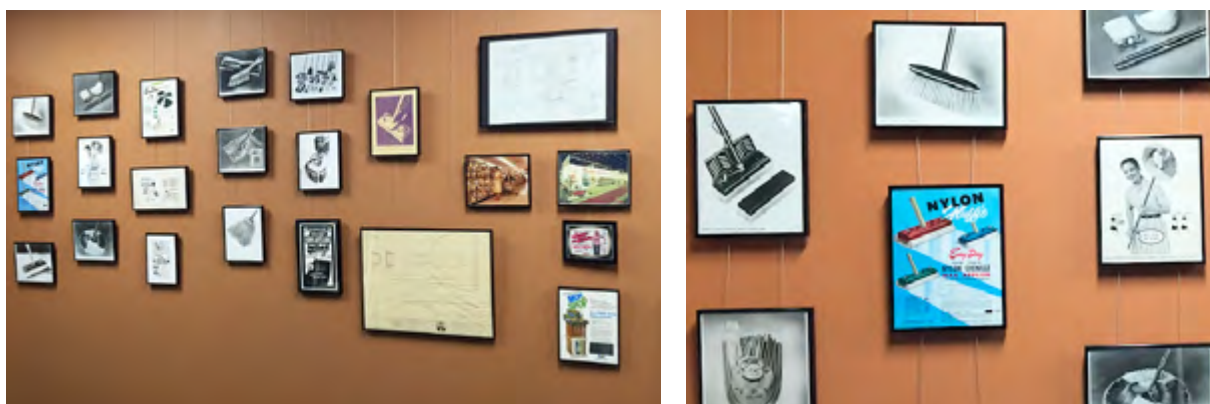
- Support your sales or outreach process
- Reinforce your brand identity
- Bring in new customers and patrons
- Cultivate your community connections
- Showcase client successes

Every enterprise is different, but all need to present a compelling message to customers and partners.

Take, for instance, the display wall (Figures 4.1 and 4.2) at a Massachusetts supplier of household products. It features a range of historical items—design drawings for early products, vintage advertisements, trade show booths from the 1960s—that create an engaging look at the company's history while also conveying a sense of marketplace experience. It's a popular stop for visitors, and an excellent conversation starter for the company's sales team (and the use of an art hanging system makes it easy to adjust or add to the display).

In this chapter we'll look at how our overarching principle of “what story are you trying to tell” can be applied to:

- Retail Stores
- Food and Beverage
- Service-Oriented Businesses
- Senior Living Facilities
- Community Organizations



Figures 4.1 and 4.2 By offering a look back at its heritage of design innovation, strong branding, and fun promotion, Butler Home Products makes this wall at its Massachusetts headquarters into an engaging experience for visitors and employees alike. Use of an art hanging system from Gallery System makes it easy to achieve an artful arrangement and add new pieces as desired. *Photos by Debbi Silverman.*



Figure 4.3 By offering original artworks, this home furnishings shop generates unique atmosphere, cultivates connections with its local creative community, and creates an opportunity for high-value sales to its customers. *Photo by Flickr User Sonny Abesamis, used under Creative Commons.*

Retail

Success in today's brick-and-mortar retail world requires more than putting well-selected products on your shelves. It's important to provide an engaging in-store experience that informs and inspires your customers and opens the door to all-important upselling and cross-selling. And visual imagery is an ideal tool for the job.

As Francesca Nicasio noted in a VendHQ blog post, "Listing out features or specs rarely seals the deal in sales. This is because the human mind is more responsive toward stories or images. To effectively upsell or cross-sell something, you need to make people see the value or benefit of the purchase."

Art displays can be particularly helpful at stores selling furnishings and other items that will become part of a home environment. The pottery and gift shop in **Figure 4.3** also shows and sells artworks, which has the double benefit of creating good in-store atmosphere and providing an additional product line.



Figure 4.4 Fox Fine Jewelry has hosted art exhibitions for over 20 years and is now a popular venue for local artists. Owner Debbie Fox notes that use of an art hanging system makes it easy to try different layouts while avoiding wall repairs. *Photo by Debbie Fox*



Figure 4.5 A wall of Hemingway-related images and memorabilia creates interest and atmosphere at this Florida restaurant and pub. *Photo by Flickr user Roger W, used under Creative Commons.*

Likewise, a recent feature in jewelry store trade journal *InStore* cited more than half a dozen jewelers who feature art exhibitions that range from shows by local artists to works by a proprietor or friend of the store. “Integrating art into the decor, selling it as part of the inventory mix, and hosting exhibitions are all ways that retail jewelers can not only attract a crowd, but also add a layer of interest that keeps shoppers lingering and looking longer,” noted the article.

Figure 4.4 shows this in action at Fox Fine Jewelry in Ventura, Calif., which hosts new exhibitions every couple of months, with up to 30 pieces of art. Owner Debbie Fox notes, “We found the key is to feature local artists and host opening receptions, which typically draw about 75-150 people. Friends, family and collectors of the artists attend, and we’ve made countless jewelry sales as a direct result of our art gallery.”

Food & Beverage

Creating a sense of place is essential for restaurants, pubs and cafes, and well-chosen artworks can play an outsized role in the process. Whether you’re emphasizing local and artisanal ingredients, fun and camaraderie, upscale refinement, or cozy conversation, well-chosen and displayed paintings, prints, photos, or memorabilia can have a profound impact on how it feels to enter and spend time in your place.

One example: a Key West restaurant’s energetic wall display (**Figure 4.5**) that pays homage to literary luminary Ernest Hemingway, using photos, paintings, ephemera, and even a stuffed swordfish. The display works both for atmospheric purposes (even if you don’t look closely you get a sense of history and heritage), and as an engaging attraction for the many visitors who are fans of the bearded writer.



Figure 4.6 This large painting gives a strong impression of warmth and rusticity to its adjoining table and the room as a whole, evoking a cozy atmosphere for restaurant patrons. *Photo by Helge Høifødt, used under Wikimedia Commons.*

Another approach that creates a calmer, cozier atmosphere in this Norwegian restaurant (**Figure 4.6**) is the use of a single large painting above a table. Its warm tones and evocation of village life set a comforting tone both at the table and in the room as a whole, while nearby photos of notable guests add personality.

To build broader and deeper local connections, many cafes and restaurants provide space for rotating displays by local artists or art groups, as seen in **Figure 4.7**. This type of program also gives artists and their families and friends a reason to visit, creates goodwill among the creative community in your city or town, and creates a steady source of fresh material for your space.

Services

Any organization that provides a service, whether to consumers or businesses, has to cope with the challenge of selling something that's not tangible. Whether it's insurance, interior design, personal training, event planning, or any of the hundreds of services offered today, it's essential to help customers envision the results they can expect and demonstrate that you're a trustworthy partner for achieving them.



Figure 4.7 This coffee shop in New York State has an active display program for local artists and arts groups — in this case, participants in the Opening Minds through Art studio program for people living with dementia at a nearby Jewish Home Family senior living facility. By opening its walls to ever-changing displays, the shop keeps its interior fresh and engaging, while also attracting new customers and cultivating the local creative community. *Photo by Jewish Home Family.*

One of the most effective ways of accomplishing both these goals is by showcasing work you’ve done on behalf of past clients. When you use your walls to visually display your success stories, as the tattoo studio in Figure 4.8 has done, you literally enable your prospective clients to “put themselves in the picture,” and think about how they will be better off after working with you. Giving great work a place of honor on the wall is also an excellent way to reward and encourage your employees.



Figures 4.8 Services can be made visible to prospective clients through the use of wall displays, as evidenced by this tattoo studio, which offers its patrons a look at hundreds of possible designs. *Photo by Flickr user Tony Alter, used under Creative Commons.*

Senior Living

Communities that offer independent living, assisted living, and/or memory care often find special value in visual communication, which can endure even when verbal communication skills decline. In addition to simply hanging engaging, evocative art in public spaces, senior living communities have successfully leveraged art displays in other creative ways, such as:

Providing gallery-type space for work produced by participants in art-making programs (**Figure 4.9**). The work of an artist only begins in the studio; the act of showing is central to the creative process, opening new avenues of audience connection and developing a sense of accomplishment.

Participating in arts-oriented programs for people living with dementia. Research has shown that even after the onset of Alzheimer's or other dementia-causing illnesses, people are able to express thoughts and emotions and share memories visually. Programs like Opening Minds through Art, based at Miami University of Ohio, and the Alzheimer's Association's Memories in the Making provide structured ways of tapping into these capabilities. They have been shown to improve their participants' sense of well-being and enhance their connections with families and caregivers.

Giving residents the opportunity to hang artworks of their choice in the corridors outside their units. One example is Pennswood Village in Pennsylvania (**Figure 4.10**), where the individualized displays "create unique spaces and appeal to a sense of artistic creation and presentation" for residents.



Figure 4.9 A high-traffic hallway at a Jewish Home Family senior living facility in New Jersey provides a popular venue for display of work done by participants in the Opening Minds through Art (OMA) program for people living with dementia. OMA helps unlock participants' abilities to express themselves visually even when other communication skills have declined. *Photo by Jewish Home Family.*



Figure 4.10 A resident at Pennswood Village in Pennsylvania stands in the corridor outside her apartment, alongside artworks that she chose for display.

Community Organizations

Libraries, hospitals, schools, and other community-oriented organizations need to leverage every budget dollar to produce tangible benefits, and art exhibits are a proven, cost-effective method of doing just that. They attract new and repeat visitors, generate press coverage, produce word-of-mouth buzz, and enhance interior spaces—and there’s growing evidence that having art in medical facilities can help foster patient comfort and better outcomes.

People who manage these programs also cite a wide range of additional benefits, from simply creating a more enjoyable atmosphere in their facilities to the ability to host auctions and opening events that attract donors, patrons, and the community at large.

In Boston, for example, the Massachusetts General Hospital’s Cancer Center’s long-running **Illuminations** art program has improved the treatment experience of cancer patients at the hospital’s oncology facility.

While some facilities have rooms dedicated to art display, it’s not essential—exhibits can be incorporated into lobbies, corridors, waiting rooms, or other under-utilized space. The John Spoor Broome Library at the California State University Channel Islands campus enhanced a wall in its children’s area with the playful display in **Figure 4.11**, which features small details from a range of favorite juvenile literature.

Here are some additional tips for creating a successful display program:

Form a Team. “It’s good to gather a group of people who will be supportive of the project,” says Stefanie Ryan of the Massachusetts General Hospital. “It’s a lot of work for one person, and you really need a committee to help select the art, hang the shows, and maybe come across an interesting artist in their travels. It’s a very unique committee to be part of.”



Figure 4.11 Plywood discs, created by California State University — Channel Islands art students and displayed with an art-hanging system, draw visitors into the Broome Library's Children's Collection.

Start Small. Choose one modest-sized space to work with, and do a trial exhibit, perhaps with an artist or artists you're acquainted with, before soliciting submissions. Once up and running, set a manageable exhibit schedule.

Choose Cool Stuff. Remember that art should draw a person to it, and make them want to look, counsels Ryan. "You can always put up lots of landscapes and flower paintings, and we avoid aggressive images, but it has to be interesting and engaging. For our current exhibit we have some beautiful quilts, and portraits made of buttons, and it really helps people get out of the moment."

Equip Yourself. Many institutions find that a picture-hanging system like the Gallery System is extremely useful—the wall-mounted system allows quick hanging and easy adjustment of a wide variety of art, and requires no custodial assistance for nails or wall repairs. A few small hand tools (pliers, wire cutters, screwdrivers) are also useful, as is a spool of picture wire.

Seek Feedback. "We put comment cards out, especially around our fifth anniversary, to judge how we were being received and what kinds of work people liked," says Ryan. "We had thought abstract art might not do as well as others, but it came in not far behind representational painting and photography."

Chapter 5 | Lighting for Your Art Display



Art is made to be seen, and for almost all indoor displays, effective lighting is an essential ingredient

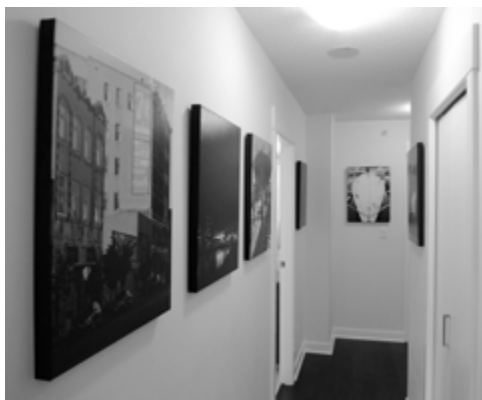


Figure 5.1 Here's an example of how poor lighting can undermine the impact of an art display. The works being shown are interesting and arranged well, but the ceiling lights create glare at their tops and shadows at their bottoms, making it hard for viewers to see what's going on. The person who posted the photo noted that he was planning to add a ceiling track light to improve the situation. *Photo by Flickr user Reg Natarajan, used under Creative Commons.*

Art is made to be seen, and for almost all indoor displays, effective lighting is an essential ingredient. Clear, balanced illumination enables viewers to fully appreciate what they're looking at, while shadows, glare, and distorted colors obscure the artist's skill and presentation.

The bold lines and colors of the painting by Australian artist David Hart on Page 27 are brought out to excellent effect with well-positioned lighting, part of a Gallery System art hanging system with integrated light wands.

While your regular room lighting might be adequate in some cases, dedicated art lighting is almost always helpful. In this chapter, we'll review some of the principles involved, talk a little bit about light bulbs, and help you choose the lighting option that will present your display to best effect.

Big-Picture Lighting Considerations

Bear in mind that "best effect" will vary depending on what's being displayed. Some pieces, especially those that are rich in detail or working with bold colors, look great under intense lighting that brings out every element. But impressionistic works that explore shadows and blur shapes might come across better with diffused illumination that creates a wash or generalized glow. A bit of experimentation can help you see what approach helps deliver the message that the art is seeking to convey.

Ideally the ambient lighting in your display space should be at least a bit lower than the light on the works, so brighter rooms will require brighter illumination of the displays. If possible, try to remove or reduce any sources of harsh or glaring light; if there are windows to the outdoors, shades or blinds can give you a more controlled light environment (and bear in mind that sunlight is harmful to pigments and materials, and that artworks shouldn't be placed in direct sun).

That said, unless your space is completely dedicated to art display, you'll likely have other considerations that come into play. If you're lucky enough to have a lovely outside view or pleasant sunshine in your room, you can certainly strike a balance with your art lighting—especially at night.

As you make your lighting plans, keep in mind the angle at which the light will hit your artworks. If the light source is too close to the wall, you're apt to get shadows, while if it's too far out the light can create glare on the surface of the work. And of course, you want to illuminate the entire work, with no dark corners.

A Bit About Bulbs

You might think that light is light, but it's not. Different bulbs produce different wavelengths, spectrums, and patterns, all of which can significantly affect the appearance of the works being lit.

Some important points to consider:

Color temperature: this is the relative “warmness” or “coolness” of the light, measured in degrees Kelvin. Warm golden light is in the sub-3000-degree range, bright daylight is greater than 4600 degrees, and cooler, crisper light is in between (3000—4500 degrees). While some art professionals feel that warmer light is more suited to traditional works and cooler light to modern works, this is another situation-specific call. In general, a midrange color temperature around 3000 degrees will offer solid versatile performance. Ideally, use the same temperature bulb in all your fixtures to avoid distracting color differences.

Color Rendering Index (CRI): This is a measurement of how accurately colors appear under the light. Aim for a CRI of 90 or above to ensure you’re not distorting the look of the pieces on your wall.

Beam shape: Art-lighting fixtures typically direct light in one direction, rather than creating all-around illumination, so they use reflector-type bulbs (such as PAR and MR16 types). Some reflector bulbs generate a wide cone of light (flood-type; as wide as 50 degrees or more) and some a narrower beam (spot-type; as narrow as 10 degrees), and it’s important that they match up well with their placement relative to the works you’re illuminating (see **Figure 5.4**).

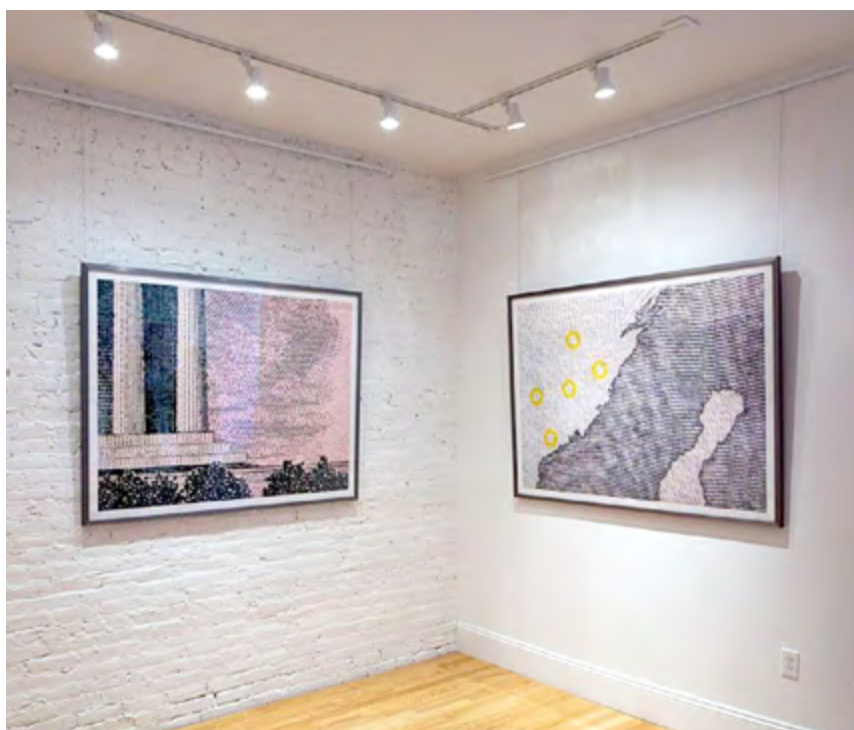


Figure 5.2 This Boston art gallery’s ceiling-mounted track lighting does an excellent job of clearly illuminating the works on display. The light is in the midrange of color temperature, striking a good balance between creating warmth and bringing out detail, and the multiple bulbs create a well-balanced field of light with no gaps or hot spots.

Photo by Jonathan Sachs.

Light source: In recent years there's been strong movement towards LED-based lighting. It has many advantages, including low energy use, long lifetimes, and a range of available color temperatures. Also, LEDs do not produce ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which can damage pigments and materials over time. Be careful if you're considering traditional halogen incandescent bulbs, as they often produce substantial UV. In the past some manufacturers offered specially shielded art-safe halogen bulbs, but these have become difficult to find in recent years. Fluorescent bulbs can also generate UV, and often distort color, so in general LEDs are the safest option.

All these factors loom especially large in lighting systems that do not have replaceable bulbs, like many of the newer LED-based fixtures. Systems with replaceable standard bulbs offer more flexibility going forward, including the ability to adapt to different types of displays and sizes and shapes of artworks. While manufacturer specifications offer some guidance, there's no substitute for a firsthand test of the exact fixture and/or bulb you're considering.

Choosing Your Approach to Lighting

A good first question is, do you have a long-term relationship with your display space (e.g., ownership or extended lease), or are you apt to move on soon? This quickly determines whether electrical wiring and permanent fixtures could be a wise investment, or if the emphasis should be on equipment that can move with you.



Figure 5.3 This Canadian gallery's lighting comes from wands that are integrated into a Gallery System art hanging system. It's easy to adjust as displays change, and the system can be removed and re-installed at another location should the need arise. *Photo by Teyjah McAren.*

SUMMARY OF SHORT-TERM ALTERNATIVES					
	Cost	Suitable for How Many Works?	Quality of Illumination	Ease of Adjustment	Aesthetic Appeal
Battery Picture Lights	Low to Medium	Few	Low to Medium	Low	Medium
Plug-in AC Picture Lights	Low to High	Few	Medium	Low	Medium
Plug-In Ceiling Track Lights	Medium	Few to Moderate	Medium to High	Medium	Medium to High
Utility Lights	Low	Few to Moderate	Medium	Low	Low
Hanging System w/ Integrated Lighting	Medium	Unlimited	High	High	High

Next, consider:

- ♦ How many works and/or walls do you need to illuminate?
- ♦ How many hours per day or week will the lighting need to be on?
- ♦ How often will your displays change?

Solutions for Short-Term Spaces

First, let's look at options that are at least somewhat portable, and do not require electrical wiring or other modifications.

If you only need to light a small number of works, individual picture lights can be effective. These attach to picture frames or the wall above the work, with power supplied by household AC current or batteries (see **Figure 4.6** for an example). Battery lights don't have as much illuminating power but might be adequate if you only need occasional lighting (for parties, special events, etc.), and the works are relatively small.

AC-powered picture lights come in a wide range of shapes, sizes, and prices; for a short-term space choose the type that plugs in to a wall outlet rather than hard-wired models. Installation is relatively simple, but you'll need to manage the cords in an aesthetically pleasing way and switch each unit on and off separately.

If you have more than a few works to light, need to adapt to exhibit changeovers, and can make a few discreet holes in the ceiling of your space, consider plug-in ceiling track light systems. These also require cord management, but each one typically provides 3 - 6 adjustable lighting heads that can be positioned for best advantage.

If your budget is especially tight and you're working in a loft or other less-formal environment, you might be able to use inexpensive clamp-on utility lights, especially if there are exposed pipes or beams near the ceiling that they can clamp onto. While utilitarian in appearance, the lamps cost only

SUMMARY OF LONG-TERM ALTERNATIVES					
	Cost	Suitable for How Many Works?	Quality of Illumination	Ease of Adjustment	Aesthetic Appeal
Hard-Wired AC Picture Lights	Medium to High	Few	Medium to High	Low	Medium
Hard-Wired Ceiling Track Lights	High	Unlimited	High	High	Medium to High
Ceiling Can Fixtures	High	Moderate to Many	Medium to High	Medium	High
Hanging System with Integrated Lighting	Medium	Unlimited	High	High	High

a few dollars each, can accommodate a wide range of bulbs, and are nicely adjustable -- but be sure they are securely fastened in place and have plenty of airflow.

A high-quality alternative for short-term spaces, especially when many works and multiple exhibitions are involved, is a wall-mounted art hanging system with the option of gallery-grade integrated lighting, like Gallery System's Original Gallery System. Once installed on the walls, this type of system eliminates wall damage from nails or hangers, while also providing light wands with top-quality bulbs that can be positioned at any desired location and adjusted to suit a wide range of works. You can also skip the hanging aspect, and use it only for lighting purposes, as a wall-mounted track light. And when it's time to move on, everything can come with you for use in your next space.

Permanent Installations Offer More Options

If you're fortunate enough to be in your space for the long haul, a number of options open up.

As in short-term spaces, individual picture lights can work if you have only a few pieces that will not be swapped out. In a long-term situation, you can opt for hard-wired fixtures that draw power from wires hidden in the wall and can be controlled via a wall switch. An electrician's services are needed, but the end result is sleek.

If you're planning regular exhibit changeovers with more than a handful of works, the traditional exhibition-space standard is hard-wired ceiling-mounted track lighting (see **Figure 5.2**). With good reason—these track lights offer plenty of illuminating power, expandability, convenient control, no visible wiring, and the ability to freely move and aim the lighting heads. In addition, most systems use standard bulbs that are available in a variety of beam widths, color temperatures, and CRI values, so you get much more control going forward.

The downside is the need to invest not only in the equipment itself, but also in installation. An electrician's services will be required, and walls and ceilings often need patching after the wiring goes in. Even a basic setup with 4-6 heads on an 8-foot track can end up costing \$1000 once everything is finished.

Another hard-wired ceiling option is recessed can-type fixtures. They're more discreet than track lights and can be equipped with a wide range of bulbs. While most offer some aiming ability, their fixed locations make them less flexible than track lights, and the per-light cost will likely be higher.

Again, if you're displaying many works and your exhibits will change frequently, you're already a good candidate for a Gallery System art hanging system, and the addition of lighting can provide excellent functionality at a relatively low incremental price increase. Per-light cost is on par with individual picture lights, and the Gallery Lighting Option light wands offer more-flexible positioning and interchangeable bulbs. They're also easier to reach than ceiling-mounted fixtures and can often be adjusted from a stepstool rather than a ladder.



Figure 5.4 This renovated California home uses ceiling can fixtures to light a seating area, including the wall art. While the overall effect is good, note that the bulbs being used have relatively narrow beams (spot-type, as opposed to flood-type). This results in the semicircular bright spots above the paintings; bulbs with wider beams would minimize or eliminate this effect.

Photo by Margot Hartford.

Chapter 6 | Groupings and Salon-Style Hanging



Mixing and matching images can create a combined work that's greater than the sum of its parts

Starting in Chapter 2, and throughout this book, we've talked about the importance of combining "anchor pieces," the stars of your display, with supporting pieces that can provide contrast, enhancement, or other interesting interplay.

By the same token, it's also possible to combine multiple pieces in a way that creates a unified impression. By mixing and matching images in interesting ways and creating a combined work that's greater than the sum of its parts, you can help fulfill the bigger mission of catching the viewer's eye and engaging their mind.

And even more broadly, you can create groups across an entire wall using the salon-style approach to hanging. It's an intriguing alternative to displaying works in a single row, and increasingly used in museums, galleries and homes. Indeed, the popular gallery wall approach to art hanging could easily be seen as a type of salon-style hanging.

In this chapter we'll look at ways of bringing multiple works together effectively, both in small groups and across entire walls in salon-style settings.

Why Use Groups?

Many artists and photographers have multiple works in that feature a common subject or theme; this can lend itself to a cluster of related images. As we saw in Chapter 3 (**Figures 3.2 and 3.3**), photographer Ananda Lima made a virtue out of a tight corner by creating an elegant, effective group of several modest-sized images.

An especially important point is that skillful grouping can create the feel of a big unified piece out of smaller elements. That's an example of the power of a coordinated group. And if your display space has nooks and short walls, you can turn them to your advantage by using them to frame an engaging collection.

And if you have the luxury of more space and larger works, the possibilities are even greater, as seen in another grouping created by Lima that's shown on Page 34.

Any one of the four portraits would be striking, but when seen together in a grid they create a sort of meta-portrait, showing multiple aspects of a person simultaneously.

Moreover, even if you have large, expansive wall spaces, displaying in groups can be helpful in breaking up all-in-a-row displays. As referenced in Chapter 2, you have to be careful with unbroken lines of works that are the same shape and size, because the human eye starts to see the line and not the images.

It's also worth noting that the process of creating groupings is a great chance to look at your artworks with a fresh eye, and perhaps discover some themes that you might not have noticed.

Putting Your Pieces Together

Some trial and error is almost always involved in selecting images for a group and working out the best arrangement. Anything from a simple one-over-one or side-by-side pairing to a three-by-three grid or freeform cluster can work.

Lima says she generally begins by mentally visualizing a grouping, and perhaps making a rough sketch, especially when multiple walls are involved.

Her considerations include “how the pieces look together in terms of color and composition, how they interact visually and conceptually, how the grouping will direct the gaze. I like having repeating patterns or lines or colors across the pieces. It's great if the space itself can participate, by having lines going towards the images, or framing them as a group.”

This designer's-eye approach was clearly also used in the exhibit in **Figure 6.1**. The traditionally composed central portraits command immediate attention, while the offbeat flanking images (in contrasting horizontal format) reward the viewer who lingers.



Figure 6.1 This well-composed group is a fine example of visual storytelling, with several strong characters and an intriguing mix of color, shadow, and shape. *Photo by Flickr user Steve Evans, used under Creative Commons.*



Figure 6.2 By avoiding a standard grid layout, this arrangement creates multiple lines of connection between the individual works and leads the viewer's eye into the display space. Photo by Flickr user David Meyer, used under Creative Commons

While grids are often effective, don't feel bound to them—the sequence in **Figure 6.2** has a dynamic flow that draws the viewer into the gallery and along the line of images.

Lima creates her compositions by placing photos under consideration near the space where they will hang, and testing arrangements on the floor or a table to see if they gel as a unified whole. “Finally, I place them on the wall, which is the most telling part of the process,” she says. “Each step usually results in rearranging, or even rejection of certain pieces.”

Attention to detail and careful hanging are essential when placing your group on the wall, especially for grids. A crooked or out-of-line image will distract the viewer and undermine the effect. Lima and many other artists and gallery owners find that a wall-mounted art hanging system, like Gallery System's Original Gallery System and GalleryOne, greatly simplifies the process, and facilitates in-place experimentation.

Going Bigger with Salon-Style Hanging

If you visit museums or galleries, there's a good chance that you'll see an exhibition hung salon-style, with art placed both higher and lower than the traditional eye-level single row. With some forethought and planning, you can bring salon techniques into your gallery, studio or home. (It's worth noting that the popular “gallery wall” concept is a cousin of salon-style hanging, so many of the same principles apply.)

The salon-style display dates to an influential annual exhibition in pre-Revolutionary Paris and offers several advantages for viewing work. Higher-hung pieces can be seen by everyone, even when the room is crowded, and the alternative perspectives on art display provide an intriguing historical throwback. In addition, more artworks can be displayed in a given space, and the non-linear approach allows exhibition designers to highlight connections or contrasts between multiple works, styles, periods, or artists.



Figure 6.3 A classic example of salon-style hanging on a grand scale, at the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery.

For all of its benefits, it's easy for salon-style displays to look chaotic, disconnected, or overwhelming. A sense of order and clear, logical visual lines are essential. If you invest some time in planning and execution, you can achieve an orderly, yet visually stimulating salon-style display.

The Grand Salon at the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery (**Figure 6.3**) is an excellent example of successful salon-style presentation. Note how each of the three groupings has a clear focal point—the “anchor piece” principle that we've referred to throughout this book.

On the left, a large painting anchors the center. On the end wall, a large equestrian portrait is surrounded by smaller landscapes, seascapes and urban scenes as well as indoor portraits. Together they provide a new perspective on what's going on in the central piece, with its combination of landscape and portraiture.

Look closely, and you'll see that the Smithsonian gallery uses a picture rail art hanging system. The works hang on cables suspended from a wall-mounted molding, with columns of two or three paintings sometimes sharing cables. This system guarantees consistent vertical alignment and also helps create at least some form of grid—both important factors in keeping the arrangement harmonious and pleasing to the viewer's eye. (Gallery System offers a line of instantly adjustable picture molding hooks and hangers.)

As noted in our earlier discussion of groups, while grids are important for consistent and harmonious alignment, they do not have to look rigid, as seen in **Figure 6.4**. One pleasure of well-executed salon-style hanging is asymmetry and variation; a less-formal display that still looks polished and intentional. The playful salon-style display of self-portraits illustrates this effect.

If you've read elsewhere in this book, you'll know that we're advocates for thinking of displays in terms of a narrative—"what story are you trying to tell?" This principle is especially important in salon style exhibitions, because they are at their best when they allow the viewer to reflect on the similarities and contrasts between pieces -- both in subject matter and in medium.

To achieve this, you'll need to test your ideas; as with smaller groups, some trial and error is inevitable. Some designers suggest making a paper template for each work to evaluate the wall arrangements, which can be a useful technique. An even better approach is to utilize an art hanging system, which allows efficient and effective experimentation with the actual works right on the wall.

We'll close with one logistical note. Generally it's desirable for artworks to hang almost flat against the wall, but salon-style exhibits are one of the exceptions to the rule. For pieces hung higher on the wall, it is better for the viewer, as well as historically accurate, to have a modest amount of forward lean. This makes the works more visible. Do be sure, however, to keep the angles consistent and the display harmonious; unintended variation can distract the viewer and undermine the overall impression.



Figure 6.4 This salon-style display of portraits has enough of a grid layout to feel orderly and composed, but the variations in size, frames, and style make the overall impression organic and accessible. *Photo by Flickr user Mark B. Schlemmer, used via Creative Commons.*

Chapter 7 | Hanging for Artists



Displaying work effectively is a prime way for artists to draw people into their creative world

Most artists and photographers focus their energies, rightly, on creating great work. But developing the ability to show your work well is important, too, whether privately in your home or studio, or at public events like gallery shows, art fairs and open studios.

Putting your work in front of an audience is, in many ways, the culmination of the creative process, and an opportunity for you to get new perspective. It's also a prime chance for people to fall in love with your work, which can lead to sales, new creative connections, and other advances.

All the principles discussed in earlier chapters—thinking about the story you want to tell, catching the eye, engaging the mind, using anchor pieces and supporting pieces harmoniously—still apply. But in this chapter we will look specifically at ways artists can draw people into their creative world.

Thinking Strategically with The Funnel

Start by considering who will be looking at your display, and the environment they'll see it in:

- Is the display just for friends and family, or a broader group?
- Will the venue be busy? Quiet? Formal? Casual?
- Will people primarily be there to look at art, or for some other reason?
- Will other exhibits and/or activities be competing for attention?

This information will help you craft a display strategy that supports your artistic mission in that specific time and place. If you're fortunate, you'll have the walls to yourself and a focused audience, but it can also be fun and rewarding to attract passers-by at a fair or festival.

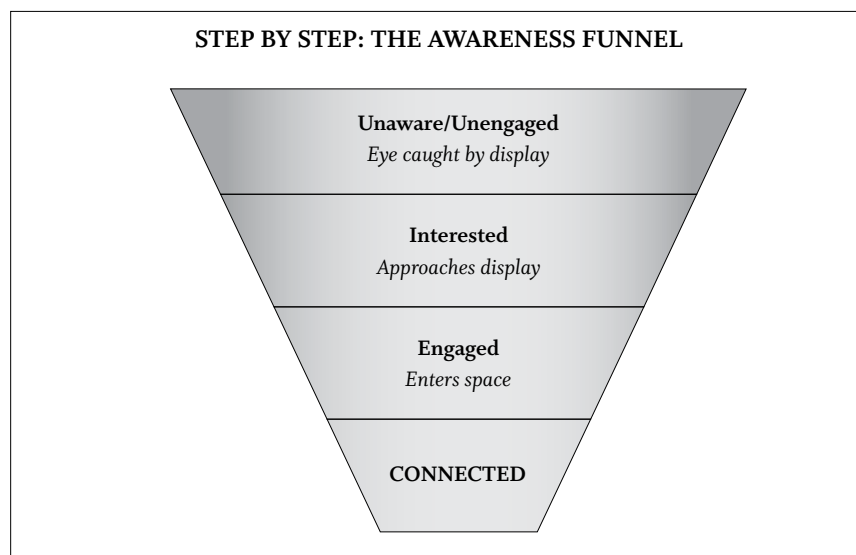


Figure 7.1 The Awareness Funnel is a way of envisioning how people develop a connection with your art, and the steps you can take to facilitate the process.

Whatever the case, the goal is the same one we've spoken about throughout this book: catch the eye with a strong, intriguing visual statement that causes viewers to approach, linger, and take in the "story" you want to convey.

One way of visualizing this process is to think about a funnel (**Figure 7.1**). The very wide top represents the universe of people who don't know about your work. This is likely to be a large percentage of the attendees at public events, and a smaller but still significant portion of the people who visit your home or studio on more-private occasions.

When you offer those viewers a clear, intriguing initial presentation, typically with one of your anchor pieces, many will linger for a moment. Some will be interested in what they see, and they move to the middle level of the funnel.

To continue the process, it's important to provide a clear path for extending that initial engagement. This is where your supporting pieces come into play, offering an extension of the initial idea, or a contrast, or a variation. If they're well selected and presented, they help the viewer settle in for an extended visit—they will have reached the bottom of the funnel, and your display will have succeeded in creating a new connection.

Making a Strong First Impression at Your Next Art Event.

We've spoken earlier about the useful exercise of walking into your display area as a newcomer would, to see where the eye is first drawn. This has special importance at public events where you're apt to be competing for attention and need to find ways of standing out.

For instance, a big outdoor art fair, as seen in **Figure 7.2**, can mean visual competition not just from other exhibitors but also from performers, food vendors, nature, and the attendees themselves.



Figure 7.2 Art fairs can be a great venue for getting your work in front of new audiences, but you have to find ways of making your display stand out. *Photo by Flickr user Rob Bixby, used under Creative Commons.*

This can be a little daunting, but don't despair. Instead, seek to distinguish your work by creating a comfortable visual oasis for the eye—something clear and simple that offers respite from the chaotic surroundings.

One of the most powerful tools for attracting the eye is judicious use of open space. Next time you're visiting a busy shopping street or mall, take some time to consider the carefully composed display windows. In general, the more unique and special the merchandise, the more empty space there will be. Your art is unique and special, so give it room to breathe.

If you're showing at your home as part of an art walk, or at an open studio in an arts building, things will likely be less chaotic, but the same general principles (which we've spoken of throughout this book) apply. Choose a primary anchor piece, a single strong image that best encapsulates your style, and use it as your "billboard" in a prominent spot, ideally with some empty space around it and a neutral background. Remember the first order of business—to create that initial moment of intrigue that leads to a deeper connection. Don't try to do everything at once.

You'll often see this approach used at the entry to museum shows, where a work that's distinctive, immediately appealing, and representative of the subject matter is set off with plenty of surrounding space, extra lighting, and other cues, like a backdrop or explanatory text on the wall.

If your works are on the smaller side, or sight lines are shorter, you can also consider creating an anchor piece from a pair, trio or other grouping of works. Well-chosen combinations of images can be greater than the sum of their parts, and there are many options for arranging them, including rows, columns, grids and triptychs; see Chapter 6 for advice on creating effective groups, and some good examples.

Laying your pieces on the floor or leaning them against the wall are traditional techniques for assessing layouts, and can be effective; a better approach, especially for groups, is experimentation on the wall where you can see the images as they'll appear in the show. An art hanging system can be a great convenience for this phase of work, as it allows easy repositioning and adjustment, as well as accurate alignment and grouping.

Whatever approach you end up taking, repeat the "arriving newcomer" exercise to ensure you're getting the desired effect. Be sure your work is hung straight and with proper alignment. If the venue will be crowded, consider hanging your works a bit higher to make them more visible.

Cultivating the Connection

Your display should provide viewers with at least one obvious "next step" that eases them into further engagement beyond the initial anchor piece. The exact approach will vary depending on the shape of your display area and available wall space, but you'll ideally want one or more of your strongest supporting pieces to be visible from the area near your "first impression" display.



Figure 7.3 Placing these two circular portraits at the entry point to a gallery room creates a strong and intriguing visual signal that leads viewers into the rest of the exhibition. *Photo by Flickr user Fargo-Moorhead CVB, used under Creative Commons.*

If you have adjacent space on the same wall, you can try flanking the central work or works (at a respectful distance) with the supporting pieces. It can also work to have the follow-on pieces on an adjacent wall, or even in a separate area, as long as there's an obvious connection and easy visual path to them.

You might consider using these supporting pieces to pose a question or invite comparison. Check back to Page 1, which shows an unexpected but artful juxtaposition of Old Master and Modernist. The combination invites consideration of the differing approaches and is likely to generate strong opinions—and interest in seeing more. Note the use of a wall-mounted art hanging system, which can greatly facilitate the creation and fine-tuning of this type of display.

Or consider the engagingly paired portraits in **Figure 7.3**. The man and woman have commonality but are also conveying distinct impressions; the tension between the two generates viewer interest by raising questions and ideas. And once they pause to consider that, it's a natural step to the bust and other paintings to the left, including the triptych.

In situations where the layout requires the viewer to go into a different room or area, it can be beneficial to think of offering a secondary anchor piece that can draw viewers in—see Page 5 for an example. Again, this can reinforce the concept of the initial anchor piece, offer a contrast or comparison, or open a whole new line of thought, as long as it catches the eye and starts the engagement process.

Supporting Successful Engagement

As you consider the entirety of your exhibition, be aware that overcrowding is a common problem that will undermine your message. When the human eye sees too many images in too little space, the brain lumps them together, and the individual works are lost.

So, winnow things down and leave room. A good rule of thumb is that the total space on either side of a photo should be at least equal to the photo's width (i.e., a 24-inch wide piece should have at least 12 inches of space on either side). See **Figures 2.2** and **2.4** for visual examples.

Likewise, long uniform rows can also blur together. Instead, create clusters of related pieces and leave space between.

And remember, not everything has to go on the wall. It can be very effective to supplement your displayed works with ones in nearby portfolios, bins, or boxes for your visitors to browse through. You can even provide a chair and a few non-messy snacks to help facilitate their engagement with your work; this type of connection is a big victory.

Chapter 8 | Why Use a Hanging System?



Elegantly simple Gallery System art hanging systems are trusted by thousands of art professionals, homeowners, artists, and facility managers across the US and around the world

Gallery System art-hanging systems make it much easier to hang, adjust, and update your art displays

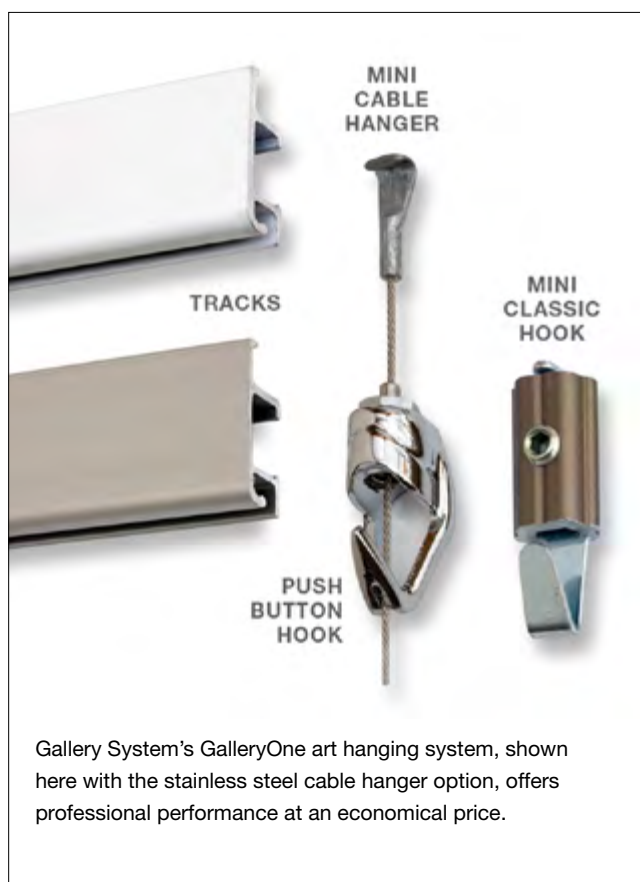
There are just three simple components:

Tracks (in white or paintable anodized aluminum) mount on your wall, typically eight to ten feet above the floor. Track sections can be mounted end-to-end to span a long wall or cut to fit a short space.

Hangers (clear plastic tape or stainless steel cable) are inserted into the track, and hang close to the wall. The hangers slide horizontally along the track to any position along the wall.

Hooks attach to the hangers and slide up and down to any desired height. When locked in place, they are ready to securely hold your art.

End result: you can place hanging hooks exactly where they're needed, with no nails or wall damage, and adjust them at will when you want to reposition or replace the artworks. It's convenient, economical, and allows you to achieve new levels of precision in hanging.



***Instantly place a hanging hook
at any desired location on your
wall — call for a free sample
of Gallery System's elegantly
simple art hanging systems.***

We pride ourselves on personal service as well as product quality—contact us today and we'll gladly send a free sample of our hanging systems and provide experienced, expert advice on getting the most out of your display space.

Phone: 1-800-460-8703

Email: info@gallerysystem.com

Web: www.GallerySystem.com

Social: [#GallerySystem](https://www.instagram.com/GallerySystem)



Here's what some of our customers have to say:

"[Gallery System] is really freeing! It's made it so much easier to put pieces up and live with them for a little while to see if things are working. Then if they aren't, I can easily swap out pieces, move things around, and play with it until I get it just right."

Artist and Designer Laurie Baars

"We hang a new show about once a month, and can easily take down 25 pieces and put up 25 new ones in less than half a day. The artists love how fast it is, and that they can have so much control over the hanging process. And the walls remain perfect at all times."

Christi Tasker, co-proprietor, Casa Wynwood, Miami FL

"Our Gallery System has been a great investment. The easily adjustable hanging systems enable program leaders to quickly create professional-looking displays without assistance from our facilities staff, and ensure that walls remain undamaged."

**Carol Silver Elliott, President and CEO,
Jewish Home Family elder care and services, New Jersey**

"Using a hanging system in my own home has been a game changer. On one wall I hang one or two finished pieces. On the other I hang works in progress...If a detail of a painting just isn't sitting right with me in the studio, I'll hang it in my home where I can look at it throughout the day; sometimes on the fifth walk-past I see what's missing, and it clicks!"

California landscape artist Haley Coleman

Acknowledgements

Gallery System Art Displays is deeply grateful to the many people who have shared their expertise and perspectives on art hanging with us over the years. In particular, the remarkable Christine O'Donnell, owner and director of Beacon Gallery in Boston, has been a font of knowledge and expertise, an outstanding writer and editor, and an inspiring source of collaborative energy.

We are also the beneficiaries of the skills and perspectives of Ananda Lima, Marilyn Swift, Laurie Baars, Haley Coleman, Guy Ivie, Jonathan Sachs, Carol Silver Elliot, Stefanie Ryan, Teyjah McAren, and Christi Tasker, as well as the many Flickr users who have generously made their work available under Creative Commons.

Equally essential were the contributions of our Gallery System team members:

Peter Dunn who researched and wrote most of the material; Debbi Silverman who provided additional writing and photography; Anne Silber, who brought great artistic and literary skills to the project; Marissa Rosen, whose broad vision and sharp eye for detail have greatly improved the book; Christine Regan-Davi, who was instrumental in conceptualizing and refining the content; and above all, Ron and Jane Orner, our founders and leaders, who have brought wisdom, spirit, creativity, and warmth to every aspect of our enterprise.

Everyone's Guide to Art Hanging, first edition, April 2020

All material copyright © 2020, Gallery System Art Displays. All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information, address the publisher at:

Gallery System Art Displays
88 Milk St.
Westwood, Massachusetts 02090 USA

GALLERY SYSTEM ART DISPLAYS

www.GallerySystem.com

@GallerySystem

1-800-460-8703