

Guidelines for Art Exhibition in the Home and Office

*Open the Door to the Beauty Around Us ...
And, Hang it on Your Wall.*

Robert Chaplin (of R.L. Chaplin Photography, Inc), a good friend of ours and very talented fellow South Florida nature and wildlife photographer, composed his carefully-researched thoughts on displaying your fine art photography. We thought his comments would be helpful, and have included them with his permission. We have amplified and added to those comments where appropriate. If you have any questions about these guidelines, you can contact us.

Collecting art from places we visit can take us back to that memorable place in time. It can sooth after a stressful day, inspire creativity, and give our home or office a feeling of warmth and comfort. The way the art is displayed has an effect on the way it is perceived. When possible, the art should be well lighted and not too high above the angle being viewed. What follows are some ideas and observations about displaying art in your home or office.

Arranging Your Art

When planning out or just reassessing you space for art, one question might be “Is the space I have best for a few large pieces or for several smaller works?” And as your collection grows, you could try to group pieces that are connected in some way, like style, color, or motif. At some point, you may want to consult a professional to help curate and manage your collection. They may also have suggestions on high-quality hanging and lighting systems to facilitate display and occasional changes.

Display art at eye level

This is easier said than done. When displaying art where there is no furniture or obstructions, we can assume that the viewer will be standing. Using an average height of 5' 9" for men and 5' 3" for women, and subtracting 4" for eye level you end up with 5' 5" for men and 4' 11" for women. Let's split the difference at 5' 2". Using this calculation, when possible hang the center of the art at 5' 2" above the floor. This is a good height for viewing even when sitting.

Remember, these are just guidelines. To a point, the farther a viewer can stand from an image the higher the art can be placed. A viewer may be standing four to five feet away from the art if the image is over a sofa. Art can be placed even higher when it is placed over the headboard of a bed because the person viewing the art will be standing seven to eight feet from the art. Use your best judgment. It is after all your art, your home, and your office.

Light Your Art

Have you ever purchased a piece of art only to get it home and feel it is not as vibrant as it was in the gallery or shop. This is due to the lighting. Galleries often have neutral-colored walls with accent lighting illuminating the art. Whether it is photographic art or a painting, the subtleties of color, hue, and contrast are revealed under proper lighting. Depending on where you place the art, proper lighting may not always be possible. Sometimes you are stuck with whatever fixed fluorescent or incandescent lighting is installed in the room. This is especially the case in an office setting.

Quality art is not cheap and proper illumination will enhance your enjoyment. Lighting can be as simple as adding track lighting. The track lighting does not need to be elaborate; you want the person viewing the art to notice the art, not the lighting system.

Some things to consider; certain lights can be deleterious to your art. Paintings and photographic art cannot withstand the effects of ultraviolet or infrared light. Both of those are found in fluorescent light and sunlight. Some art is sealed with a lacquer or framed under UV filter glass to protect against fading, but it is best to avoid or minimize exposure to UV light. Halogen lights are a good choice for lighting art. There are UV filters that can be placed over some halogen light sources.

If you have the option of movable lighting, position the lights so as to accent key elements in the art. Installing the lights on a dimmer will give you the ability to change the mood or feel of your art.

Framing

Some artists want their work to stand on its own. But the reality is people will often purchase a photograph or painting because they like the art while the frame complements their home. Frames should complement the art, and never compete for attention with the art. If you like the image but the frame does not go with your home or office decor, ask the artist if another frame is available. If a different frame is not an option, ask if there is any reason that you cannot have the art reframed after you get home.

Photography is sold framed and unframed. If unframed, it is typically mounted in a mat board that is sized to fit common-sized frames. Sometimes art on canvas, whether it is a painting or a photograph, may be sold gallery-wrapped. A Gallery wrap is where the canvas is stretched so the image is visible all the way around the sides of the stretcher moulding and can be displayed without an extra frame. If you like the canvas art but the gallery wrap does not work for you, ask the artist if it can be framed. The only difference between gallery-wrapped canvas and canvas in a frame is along the sides of the canvas on the stretcher. If the artist intends to use a frame, his image may not wrap all the way around the stretcher. Be careful if you like the art but not the frame and are considering displaying the art unframed. You may find that the art does not wrap around the sides and the piece will look unfinished.

Final Thoughts

Quality art will complement any home or office. How it is displayed will have a great impact on the overall appearance of the art and room. Take the time to carefully consider how your art is going to be displayed. One of the first things our guests see when they visit are the walls. Allow your art collection to capture your guest's attention.