

# WHITE GLOVES: BEHIND THE SCENES AT A . . .

## . . . MUSEUM OR GALLERY & HOW YOU CAN APPLY THESE PRINCIPLES AT HOME

When you walk into a museum or art gallery, do you pay attention to the installation of the works of art? To the color of the walls, the pedestals on which the works sit, or the height at which paintings are hung? How they are lit? What about the order in which the works are placed?

Do you know that people who handle works of art often wear white gloves to help protect the art?

## INSIDE AN EXHIBIT

As you walk through a museum exhibit, the staff are probably working several exhibits ahead. Months, even years before an exhibit is installed, they are busy conceiving of how an exhibit will look to visitors. They are communicating with the artists, writing and designing catalogs, building pedestals, and arranging shipment of works.

In a museum, curators, exhibit designers, preparators, graphic designers, registrars, photographers, art handlers, editors and conservators are only some of the people involved in presenting an exhibition.

As an individual art collector approaching a work of art, you might play all of those roles. Examining the different responsibilities at a museum can help when you select and install works of art at your home or office.

## THE CURATOR

When you bring a work of art home, you may have spent some time researching the artist, the time period or style, or you may have even met the artist at a reception or a studio visit. You may have been following the artist's career for years and watched him or her develop. Or you may have a piece which has been on your wall for years that you would like to know more about.

This is the curator's job. Art curators are usually art historians and often specialize in one particular time period, geographic location, or style of art (Renaissance, Latin American, Bauhaus). They visit collections or artist studios and make selections based on their knowledge and background. A good curator will have an "eye" for interesting pieces. They may know of a piece's importance because of its time period, stylistic characteristics, or technical quality. The curator also works on exhibition catalogs, makes deci-

sions regarding the installation of an exhibit, and translates background and historical information into museum wall labels.

## THE REGISTRAR

A registrar is a person who keeps track of the works of art in a collection. They catalog it, making sure that they have all of the necessary information on each piece, such as title, year the work was made, when the museum acquired the piece, where it came from, donor information, etc. They also are responsible for inspecting works of art when they enter the museum and making condition reports.

At home, it is a good idea to keep track of your collection by keeping records of each work of art that you own. Information you should record are: the artist's name, title of the work, year it was made, where you got it from, when you purchased it, the amount paid, and an appraisal value. This information is also necessary for insurance purposes. If you have a large collection, there is software available which can help you catalog your works.

## THE EXHIBIT DESIGNER AND PREPARATOR

Exhibit designers work with the curator to design the exhibit. They consider size, shape, color, and materials as well as the space that the works of art are to occupy. They work with the curator to "place" the work, or to arrange the exhibit with consideration to all of the pieces involved.

A preparator is the person who handles the art more than anyone else. In addition to installing art, the preparator's job can also include building pedestals, painting, moving pieces, lighting arrangements, and maintaining the condition of displays.

## ART HANDLERS

Getting the piece home with you might require some help. It may need to be carefully packed and shipped from a gallery or artist's studio to your home.

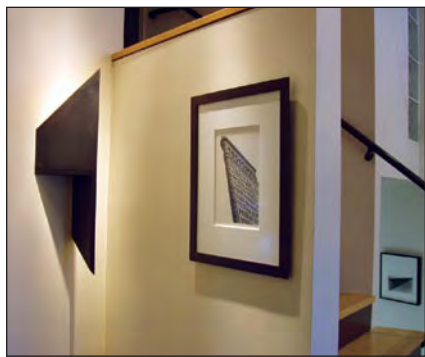
At a museum this is often taken care of by a preparator or contracted art handler. Art handlers build crates and carefully pack the work for shipping. An item such as a clay pot or a bronze sculpture requires special care.

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There are numerous regulations when sending art across borders. For example, only certain types of wood may be used for crates being shipped to Europe. Companies which handle art sometimes also provide climate-controlled art storage.



### WHEN INSTALLING WORKS OF ART IN YOUR HOME OR OFFICE:

Frame works of art in an appropriate manner. Works on paper should always be framed before hanging. Museums and galleries often use neutral frames and mats in order to emphasize the work of art. A well chosen frame dignifies the work of art.

Lean your pieces on the floor against the wall, then move them around until the grouping suits you. Begin with a central picture or object, then work your way outward.

Carry paintings by supporting the bottom and one side of the frame -- never by the hanging wire or top of the frame.

Less is more. Installing many works can look cluttered and cause the individual pieces to receive less attention. Consider rotating out your works of art in order to give more attention to specific pieces.

Consistent spacing between each item helps unify the design.

Works should be hung so that the center of the picture or grouping is about eye level, usually 54 to 60 inches from the floor. In areas where the work is viewed while guests are seated, a lower hanging level is acceptable. The most common error is to hang works too high.

Always use picture hooks rated for the weight of the works of art. Heavy pieces

should be attached with hooks installed into wall studs or with special anchors and screws. Use two picture hooks to provide support and to keep the piece level, especially if it is larger.

There are installation systems which avoid making holes in the walls. These involve long wires attached to a running board high on the wall. Paintings are then attached to the wires by hooks.

Use a level to adjust work.

Since works of art should be at eye level, placing a sculpture on a pedestal might make it more viewable. A vitrine (glass or plexiglass covering) can help protect a fragile piece.

Ideally, sculpture should occupy a space where it can be viewed from all sides. Placing a mirror behind a sculpture may help with this.

Illumination gives art importance. Track systems allows you to adjust lighting for individual works of art.

### ENVIRONMENT

Museums have controlled environments which may not be easily duplicated in the home, but the collector can take some precautions.

Fluctuations in humidity, heat, and stability of environment are dangerous for long-term preservation of art.

Never install in a location which receives direct sunlight, as this can quickly damage a piece.

Do not install or store art in a damp area.

Do not touch the surface of the work with cleaning solutions; do not use sprays, insecticides or pesticides near works of art.

It has been said that "art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life" (attributed to Pablo Picasso). Art can encourage you to feel, think, wonder, imagine, reflect, engage, contemplate, critique, or converse. Spend some time installing your works of art in order to give your collection the attention it deserves.

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Thanks to **Melody Mock** who has curated and/or directed close to 100 art exhibits in Albuquerque over the past ten years. She is now part of *The Collector's Guide* team.