

Hang ups

James Patten, *Director and Chief Curator*

Walk through any public art gallery or museum and you will see countless paintings and works on paper hanging on the walls and perhaps sculpture or installation art occupying floor space. If you have never thought about how it gets there, then the gallery has been successful. Our goal is to have you look at the art, not how we arrange it. And while there are no specific rules for installing art, there are a few things that can help when you are ready to commit to living with a work of art in your home or office.

As collectors, public or private, our priority is to ensure the work of art is protected. Sunlight streaming through windows can be so appealing that it is easy to forget just how damaging it can be to works of art, especially those on paper. Paintings are more resilient to light, but too much sun is damaging to all but the most durable materials such as stone, concrete or metal. Moisture is also a culprit that can affect the stability of any organic materials such as wood, canvas, or paper. Consistent temperature and humidity is key for art conservation. Avoid drafts and damp areas when hanging art.

How often have I found the perfect spot on the wall, only to find that there is insufficient lighting available? Installing track lighting is an effective way to ensure that you can light most areas in a room. Then there are

the tiny annoying impediments such as light switches, electrical outlets, smoke detectors, thermostats and a host of other blights on the walls of contemporary spaces. I have worked in public galleries where the contractors have located such obstructions right in the middle of the best hanging walls. Generally I try to avoid putting art too close to light switches where it might be damaged. But it is often best to ignore the little distractions and put the art where it looks best. You won't notice the small things once it is up and lit.

How does one know where a work of art will look best? That's the hard part. It depends on what else is in the room and what you want the work to do. Installing the entire room at once is best, as you can shift, say, five or six works around until they complement one and other. Start with the biggest work first and continue until the smallest finds its place. Standard gallery height with the centre of the work at 58 inches from the floor helps the viewer go seamlessly from one piece to the next. But if the work is big, or the wall short, flexibility becomes more important than sticking to this rule. Ultimately, it comes down to using your eyes to determine the ideal location. Have friends and family, especially those unfamiliar with the room, advise. An inch here or there and, presto, you too will find the sweet spot that will make your art come to life and look its best.

