

Guide to Artwork Installation and De-installation

Safety First!

First, it is important to avoid damage to works by adopting a professional attitude with an emphasis on the safety of the object and other people.

The key points are appropriate care, attention, teamwork and communication. Remember to ask questions, no matter how small, and discuss any issues with the curator and team members.

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1. Before Installation

Check equipment

Ensure install equipment is gathered – preferably placed on its own table or trolley. A basic set includes pencils, plastic erasers, scissors, small and large levels, tape measures, small claw hammers, long nose pliers, cordless drill and screwdriver; ~14 day painter's masking tape; wall plugs for solid and plasterboard applications; and some ready to use wall filler and medium-fine sandpaper. Fasteners required would be to suit the size and weight of the works and the type of walls. A range of fasteners is available including various screws, nails and picture hooks etc. Other items include cotton blanket / bubble wrap, or foam blocks to protect/support works on the floor or when on tables, and suitable microfibre cloths and cleaning products for the wall and art work, like a paste cleaner and suitable spray cleaners (e.g. glass or perspex). Cotton gloves and/or nitrile/latex gloves for art handling. A cross-line laser level and tripod are useful, as is a pole measure.

Check gallery and/or wall(s)

Before commencing check that the gallery floors and walls are clean and in good condition following the previous de-install. Any marks can be spot cleaned with paste cleaner. Holes or damage may require sanding, filling and painting. All paint should be completely dry before the install commences.

Check work and frame and agree a fixing method

Carefully unpack the work, ensuring adequate support careful movements to support corners or ensure no creasing of paper. If the painting is placed on its edge or face up/down use protective padding or bubble wrap on the floor or table. Examine the work and frame to see if there any problems, e.g. damage, weaknesses, loose stretcher keys etc. Examine fixing points, does the picture have wire or cord, are there D-Rings? Are they sound or in need of repair? If there are any issues, please let the curator know. It is best to document the condition of the work and any issues identified.

Move to hanging place

The curator will plan the exhibition layout and will require paintings to be moved around. During this process, and other handling processes all movements should be planned, and an adequate number of handlers involved. The team needs to know: the weight of the painting, the path chosen for movement, and someone needs to keep an eye on the path and other people to avoid collisions. Move one painting at a time. Avoid transferring oil, dirt etc from hands by using cotton, latex or nitrile gloves. It is best not to pass a painting to another person - place it down first. Don't carry a picture by its wire on by one side. Two people should support the lower stretcher and the vertical sides with the front surface facing the handlers. It is best to place works on foam blocks or other suitable protection to avoid damage from floor contact.

2. Installation

Every installation, whether it be in a home or an exhibition, is unique and curatorial approaches will vary – varying from “freeform”, salon-style to constrained single rows. As a result, this following should be viewed as a learning guide to provide some initial pointers to installation. The important thing is that the whole layout is agreed in advance.

Determine horizontal work positions and spacing

In consultation with the curator/relevant manager ensure everyone has a shared understanding of the desired overall work positions. The main elements are:

- a) what works are to be grouped? (i.e. what wall positions will have a set of multiple works 2, 3, 4, 6 etc). If so, what is the minimum space - horizontally and vertically within the group?
- b) what are the desired horizontal first or last spaces? (e.g. if explanatory material needs to be attached to the wall).
- c) what is the desired inter-position space(s)?

The curator will often lay the works out with roughly correct spaces that can be measured, and an estimate made for the wall.

More precise measurements such as for even spacing between work positions, can be determined after measuring the width of works with a tape measure. In this process a group is considered as one work – i.e. horizontal measure as the width of the widest work(s) in a row plus the minimum gap. The relevant details required are the width of section/wall (**s**), number of works (**#works**) and total width of works (**w1 + w2 + ...**).

Once the height has been decided it is necessary to determine the horizontal position of the fastener from the section edge or previous work. This is done by adding an adjustment to the agreed horizontal gaps. For a work with one central fastener this will be half the width of the work. For a work with two fasteners, for the first fastener an “inside” adjustment is added.

One fastener – to centre (c):

$$g1 + w1 \div 2$$

Two fasteners – edge to first:

$$g1 + i$$

and to second from first:

$$w1 - i \times 2 \text{ (or one can simply measure the distance between D-Rings on the frame).}$$

A laser level on a tripod can be used to “paint” the eyeline on the wall. If a laser is used horizontal measurements can be made on that line; and vertical measurements (e.g. $h1 \div 2 - d$) can be made with a spirit level (or a laser vertical line). It is often best to use a spirit level when marking the distance between the 2 D-Rings to avoid issues with floor levels. A suitable pencil ~HB can be used to lightly mark the wall.

Where a work position is a group the horizontal gaps are generally calculated based on the widest work or row. Vertical heights for the upper works can be calculated by treating the group as one work. Lower work heights can be calculated by subtracting vertical distances (drops and gaps) from the upper fastener heights.

c) Determine fastener type and attachment method

Based on the nature of the work's fixing points, its weight and the type of wall agree a fixing method with the curator. For example, a light work on a plasterboard wall might simply require one or two picture hooks; or, a heavier work may require two larger hooks or stronger fasteners. If a wall is made of MDF (medium density fibreboard) screws will be needed. Some walls are plasterboard only and heavy items will require wall plugs and screws. The important thing is to choose the right fasteners.

d) Mount artworks

Once fastener locations have been marked with pencil the fasteners can be attached to the wall. Ensure that art handlers are not holding pencils or other implements that might mark the wall or artwork. It is best for two people to place the work usually one fastener at a time in a coordinated way.

A light clean of the Gallery/Room floor may be required, e.g. using a dry mop to removed plaster dust and items dropped during installation.

e) Numbering, catalogue and explanatory material

When works are attached to the wall it is useful to label each with catalogue information, for example, using a “sticky note” with work details. This is particularly so with open exhibitions. Labels are printed on self-adhesive sheets and are kept at the front reception. Labels should be attached only after consultation with the curator, and at a set height and position relative to the works, or on the floor or plinth etc.

f) Sales procedures if asked

Refer to relevant staff.

4. De-Installation

In a similar manner to installation the works need to be carefully de-mounted, moved and packed. The same considerations apply, such as ensuring adequate support, careful movements and the use of protective materials.

Generally, the first stage is to identify and re-pack any sold works. Cross-checking to catalogues may be required to ensure the work is correctly identified and labelled. A folder containing sold work information sheets used for sign-off on collection is prepared. All works need to be accounted for and signed-out when collected. Sold works are stored in an agreed appropriate safe place. Any damage or change in condition should be noted down.

After all works have been removed to safe storage wall repair can take place. Holes and damage are repaired by sanding, filling and painting. Marks can be spot cleaned with paste cleaner. Paint marks on the floor and other marks can be removed using a scraper and spray cleaners.