How to Finish & Present 2D Artwork

So…you’ve made a masterpiece! Now what? How do you finish and present it? To frame or not to frame? There are many questions that need answering when preparing your artwork to show, sell, or submit to a gallery. Read on for some useful tips and tricks for finishing up that masterpiece so others will be able to see and appreciate your artistic genius!

Paintings on Stretched Canvas

● **Traditional Frame**
  ● Choose one that compliments your artwork in a way that doesn’t detract from or draw attention away from your work. After all, your *art* should be the focus, not the frame.
  
  ● Make sure the piece is securely attached to the frame and wired properly (see below)
Creative Framing

- Try using atypical materials to frame your canvas. Attach objects to an existing frame, stack two frames together, or even attach objects (such as branches, wood, metal, etc.) to the edges of the canvas directly. Just make sure your work is clean, professional looking, and with any additional pieces firmly attached. Again, make sure that these choices enhance your work without detracting from it. Often the framing can be part of the artwork itself. But it should never stop the eye from progressing into the piece.
No Frame

It has become more and more acceptable to present unframed canvases as finished artwork. If you choose this route, be sure to address the following:

- **DO NOT leave your edges messy.** This makes your work look sloppy and unprofessional.

- **DO consider continuing the painting around the edge** of the canvas to the sides. If you do this, make sure your painting goes all the way to the back edge.

- **DO consider taping off your edges** with duct tape (painters’ tape often doesn’t seal all the way and will allow leakage; scotch or masking doesn’t work well either) before finishing your painting. Carefully pull the tape off after finishing your work; if it sticks, or is pulling up your paint, use a sharp utility knife to gently cut along the edge of the tape (after lifting it a bit so you don’t cut through the canvas).
• **DO consider Painting the edges a solid color** – BUT be careful. Choosing a color that is a strong contrast to the colors in your painting (such as black or a bright contrasting color) runs the risk of looking unprofessional (it shows every deviation in edge line), can “contain” the art too much (framing something too much that you wanted to feel open), or detract from the imagery by drawing your eye away from your artwork/subject.

Wiring/Hardware Tips for Hanging Any 2D Artwork:

- **DO NOT USE STICK-ON HANGERS.** They do not have longevity, and if they come loose, your beloved artwork will come off the wall and hit the floor. Keep in mind that some galleries will not accept work with these.
- **DO NOT forget to remove stand flaps.** If you intend to reuse a frame that was meant to stand on a table, remove the fold-out stand before wiring it to hang on a wall. Leaving it attached will make the frame hang unevenly on the wall.
● **Do NOT rely on the tiny, pre-attached hooks** on the back of cheap photo frames to do the job of holding up your artwork. They are unreliable, and very difficult to work with when hanging shows (gallery personnel will not thank you for presenting work with these – and some galleries will not accept them at all).

● **Whenever possible, avoid sawtooth hangers or eye hooks.** These are acceptable for tiny canvas paintings (8x10 or smaller) but are not reliable for other types of framing. If you do use eye hooks, attach them on the inside edge of the stretcher bars, NOT on the back, sticking out perpendicular to the canvas (it causes the painting to hang too far away from the wall).

● **Do use French Cleats** – but only for very large canvases or heavy artwork. These are stronger, but create more work for gallery personnel. (And are unnecessary for smaller, lighter work).
DO Wire your frames or canvases. The following list are things to keep in mind:

- **D-Hooks** (appropriate size for size/weight of artwork) are the best choice. Use appropriate grade/gauge wire for weight of your artwork. Double wrap around loop, then wrap several times around main wire. Trim excess – you don’t need (or want) to wrap the wire more than about 6 times, especially if you’ve done a knot or hitch). Tape ends to avoid fraying (which can be painful if you or gallery personnel get stuck). If you are using plastic-coated wire, be sure to use proper size of crimp tubes (and close using crimping pliers).
• Hooks should be attached 1/4 to 1/3 of the way down from the top of the canvas. Placing the hooks too far down the side will cause the canvas to tip out away from the wall when hanging.

• Wires should reach just under the top wood stretcher bar. Wires that are too long (extend higher than that) are weaker, will cause the canvas to tilt out away from the wall, and can end up being visible above the frame. You want to make sure both the wire, and the picture hook/nail are not visible.

Prints, Drawings, Watercolor, and other works on Paper:

• To Mat or Not To Mat
  • A mat is a great way to up your presentation a notch. If you choose to use a mat, be SURE your cuts are precise and that the mat itself is CLEAN and unmarked. Fingerprints, smudges, stains, or other marks on a mat show a lack of attention to detail and look unprofessional.

• If you choose not to use a mat, make sure your image does not go all the way to the edge. Leave some “breathing room” between the
image and the frame. Without it, your work tends to look cheaper and less professional. And if you do use a mat, make sure it is wide enough to look intentional. Generally speaking, err on the side of bigger, not smaller.

- **Don’t:**

- **Do:**

- **Colored or textured mats can be fun, but run the risk of overpowering your artwork (which, after all, should be the star of the show) and can end up looking garish or tacky.**

  - **Don’t:**

  - **Do:**
● The proper process for mounting artwork involves using archival or acid-free papers and adhesives, hinging (not fully gluing) artwork to the support board, and using a backing board and dust sheet.

● Frames should be in good shape, without dings, scratches, or dust. Glass should be clean and crack-free. Make sure joints are seamless.

● Ensure that your piece is properly wired. Tiny D-rings, fold-out metal hooks, and sawtooth hangers make it very difficult to hang in a gallery. Eyehooks make the frame sit unevenly against the wall. In addition, fold-out cardboard “hooks” should NEVER be used as they are flimsy and can tear, causing your work to fall to the floor.
  ▪ Don’t:
Do NOT present artwork in frames with fold-out stands as this makes it nearly impossible for the gallery to hang a piece evenly on a wall.

- NEVER:

DO wire your frames the same way you would with a canvas (see above).

- DO:

Do NOT submit artwork mounted only on mat board or foam core. Artwork will be rejected by galleries (unless it is a student art show) without proper framing. If you want the look of frameless work, consider using glass only frames (bound by strong clips). But be VERY careful to choose frames that have strong clamps and proper wiring. You don’t want your art to fall out. You might also consider the new process of printing on metal (see link below).
Useful Links:

How to Present your Artwork:
https://messyeverafter.com/self-employed-journey/how-to-professionally-present-your-art-for-sale/

Tips for Framing:
https://messyeverafter.com/self-employed-journey/tips-for-framing-and-hanging-your-art-for-shows/

Tips for Finishing the Edges of a Canvas:
https://emptyeasel.com/2012/01/17/5-tips-for-professionally-finishing-the-canvas-edges-of-your-paintings/

What To Do with the Edges of your Canvas:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbEkaiHo6OA

How to Wire a Frame or Canvas:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDb8wymwiH0

How to Wrap Wire While Framing: https://drawandpaintforfun.com/tie-picture-wire/

Choosing a Frame:
https://www.frameiteasy.com/learn/how-to-choose-the-right-picture-frame/

Matting and Framing:

Choosing the right color mat:

Printing on metal: https://www.shutterfly.com/ideas/what-is-a-metal-print/

Miscellaneous framing issues:
https://www.framedestination.com/blog/picture-frames/top-8-picture-framing-problems-solved