

Tips on exhibition layout and design

The ARTWORK is most important. We want the artwork to look good and we want the viewing public to experience it in a meaningful way.

Simple is often best!

So, to create a successful exhibition we need to consider a number of factors:

1. LOGIC

A good exhibition design seems obvious and we understand that there is a reason for the placement or groupings of the artwork. Some examples of logical exhibition layouts are:

Chronological –artwork displayed according to WHEN it was made. (Usually in retrospective exhibitions)

Like With Like – artworks are placed together because they share things in common e.g.

- Medium - photos with photos, prints with prints etc
- Treatment - expressive, gestural paintings might go together
- Scale – artwork of similar size could be placed together
- Colour – monochromatic art works could possibly go together
- Genre – landscapes with landscapes etc
- Theme – artworks share ideas or style e.g. pacific art, pop art, kiwiana etc

When you think you have an idea how to group the artworks you then need to consider the space you have to work with...

2. USE OF THE SPACE

Where are the best spaces?

Are there dark areas or dead zones where people won't go?

Do some walls seem better suited than others to the display of certain artworks? E.g.

Small wall spaces work well with small-scale artwork and large walls cope with large artworks or a series of work.

3. LIGHTING

What are your lighting sources? E.g. Natural daylight, spotlights, fluorescent tubes, reflected ambient light

What is the quality of the light? Warm or Cool?

Can you direct it or modify it?

Is it adequate or do you need more light?

4. FLOW

Where is the entry point? (Stairs, elevator). People usually (although not always) move in a clockwise direction from the point of entry. You will most likely place exhibition information such as title, artist name and explanatory text near the entrance for people to read first as they arrive.

What is the first wall they see as they enter the room? This is a feature wall and you want to put strong work here.

It makes sense to display a sequence of images from left to right.

5. LAYOUT

Place the artwork on the floor in front of the wall where they are to hang. This helps you to visualise how the exhibition will look.

Move things around; try out different groupings and positions.

You may need to edit (take away) works if there is too much and it looks 'busy'.

If the number of artworks is overwhelming you can try to place them into sets or clusters. Your eye reads this set of individual artworks as ONE group.

So... 12 paintings in a row looks like more artwork than 3 grids made up of 4 paintings in each.

6. PLACEMENT

Think of your audience. Artwork needs to be displayed at a consistent and comfortable height

Adults eye level = 150 cm

Children's eye level = 120 cm (approx.)

You should hang work so that the middle is at eye level.

Sculptures may need to stand on plinths or platforms to raise them off the ground so that they can be seen at a comfortable height.

7. SPACE

Try to keep the space between artworks consistent. If some artworks are placed close together people will think that they are a pair. This may be the case and spacing gives the viewer a clue as to how to read the artwork.

To measure spaces accurately:

1. Measure the wall
2. Add up the total of width measurements of the artwork
3. Subtract the total art measurement from the wall measurement. What you have left is your space measurement.
4. Divide the space measurement by the number of spaces you require (always one more space than the number of artworks)

N.b. To make it EASY: consider groups or grids of artworks as ONE artwork.

STOP and THINK!

Is the exhibition successful?

Can it be improved?

Is the artwork level and spaces even?

Is there a good flow or rhythm to the exhibition, with one piece leading you on to the next piece?

CONGRATULATIONS on a successful exhibition!