

Choosing the Right Size Artwork for a Wall

A simple guide to scale, placement, and visual balance

by Evan Stuart Marshall

Many people don't hesitate because they dislike a painting — they hesitate because they're unsure about size. The most common concern I hear is:

“I love it, but I don't know if it will work on my wall.”

Fortunately, artwork size follows a few dependable visual rules. You don't need perfect measurements — just a sense of proportion.

1. The Two-Thirds Rule (Your Best Friend)

When hanging art above furniture — a sofa, bed, console, or desk — aim for artwork that spans about **two-thirds to three-quarters the width** of the furniture below it.

Example:

A 90-inch sofa → ideal artwork width ≈ 60–68 inches total

This could be:

- one large painting
- two medium paintings
- a small grouping

The goal is visual balance:

too small looks lost, too large feels crowded.

2. Eye Level — Where Art Actually Belongs

Most people hang art too high.

A reliable guideline:

The center of the artwork should sit about 57–60 inches from the floor.

That's roughly average eye level in a standing position.

If the piece hangs above furniture, adjust slightly downward — the artwork and furniture should feel visually connected, not floating apart.

3. Big Art Is Safer Than Small Art

People usually fear going too large.

In reality, the mistake almost always goes the other way.

A painting that feels slightly large tends to look confident and intentional.
A painting that's too small almost always feels accidental.

When unsure, choose the larger option.

4. Spacing for Groupings

When hanging multiple works together:

- Leave **2–4 inches** between small pieces
- Leave **3–6 inches** between medium pieces
- Keep spacing consistent

Think of the group as one larger artwork — the outer edges should form a simple rectangle overall.

5. Vertical vs Horizontal Walls

Tall, narrow wall (between windows or doors):

Use a vertical painting or stacked pair

Wide wall (above sofa or bed):

Use a horizontal piece or grouping

Large open wall:

One larger work is often calmer than many small ones

6. Distance Matters

The farther you stand from the wall, the larger the artwork should be.

- Hallway viewing → medium scale
- Living room seating → larger scale
- Large open rooms → surprisingly large scale works best

Artwork should be readable from where you normally sit.

7. When in Doubt

You don't need to guess perfectly. A simple method:

1. Measure the wall width
2. Multiply by 0.6–0.75
3. That's your target artwork width

Or tape paper to the wall at the approximate size — you'll know immediately if it feels right.

Final Thought

Artwork isn't furniture — it doesn't have to match exactly.
What matters is visual comfort.

If a piece feels balanced and calm in the space, it's the right size.

(If you ever want help visualizing a painting in your space, feel free to reach out — I'm always happy to help people find a comfortable fit.)