



As Marcel Duchamp proved with his 'Fountain', any object can be made to look decent and any object can pretend to art if set within a clever framework. That the clothes make the man is an old truth. Any object has its environment, its inevitable setting.

Paintings have been framed ever since the portable image was invented, i.e. since imagery ceased being permanently fixed into or onto a specific wall and became mobile, hung according to the whim of the owner. The frame entered the scene as a natural substitute for the architectural surrounds of the *fresco* or *a secco* mural. And until the modern art movement, the frame never left the scene. In fact it's such a natural accompaniment to imagery that the sudden absence of framing has given to modern painting an important and surprising new dimension.

The frame greatly influences our perception of the framed artwork. A well chosen frame can revive an intrinsically bland work whereas a miss-match is capable of rendering a masterpiece invisible. Let's say that the average effect lies in between these two extremes. The framing is not all-important but of sufficient consequence to be looked into more closely.

The frame delineates a painting; it encloses a given space and serves as gradient transition, enclosure or obstacle. It can strengthen your appreciation, lead you astray or call for attention. The delimitation of space effectuated by any frame accommodates our natural tendency to simplify our understanding or perception. No doubt this is the reason why the frame was happily dispensed of by the modern iconoclast movement.

The success of framing lies in its discretion. If you look at a picture and you notice the frame, the framing is amiss. A frame well-chosen blends with the painting; it enhances, supports and serves the framed object and doesn't steal the show. Bear in mind that our perception of the elaborateness of a frame is relative to the epoch.

Even the most exuberant of historic frames were seldom exaggerated; they just adequately framed yet more exuberant paintings. In regard to the object, the frame should always be in some way subdued in design or colour. Period framing is always to prefer and in most cases the one that was initially conceived to go with the art.

If your painting has lost its original frame, or if the latter is in an irreparable state, look for period replacement and do not frame 'against' the style.

There are simple rules. A dark painting takes a dark frame, a light painting a light frame. A large frame should be simpler in ornament than a thin frame.

The colour is always in some way assorted and either replicates the basic tonal value or contrasts with an appropriate counter-value. Ornament and elaboration is period dependent and is to be seen in relation to the structural outset of the painting.

This sounds all very simple and evident and yet we can't help noticing how many paintings are literally obliterated by insensitive framing. As the frame is indispensable to traditional painting we should train ourselves to be better aware of its effects on the art it serves.

- <http://brugesfineart.com/wisetoart/2008/07/18/the-frame-makes-the-painting/>
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