

Tip: Using a Compact Hanging Screen and Magnets for Temporary Installation of Oversized Unframed Works on Paper

Conservators search for solutions to temporarily hang oversized unframed artworks to meet demands such as condition checks, imaging, and curatorial reviews. The paper conservators at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) recently devised a system to secure oversized artworks (fig. 1) to a rolling hanging screen in their storage vault (fig. 2) with rare earth magnets. The use of magnets for temporary installation is often used by conservators. However, the advantage of using the rolling screen is that the art-handling team can remain stationary, placing magnets while a team member rolls out the rack during the installation process. This method is easily executed, with lesser handling of the artwork. It is also less physically demanding for the art handlers.

The first step is to mark out the installation position on the screen—low-tack blue tape is useful for this application. Use the solid metal ribs for attaching the artwork, particularly at the top edge, which bears the most weight (fig. 3). Prior to installing the artwork, place magnets on the screen just outside of the marked area (fig. 4). Magnets of various strengths and shapes can be used based on the object's needs. Space the magnets 9–12 in. apart (fig. 5). Fewer magnets can be used at the sides and the bottom if the artwork does not have tight curls. Start with the rolling rack partially retracted; align the artwork using the positional markings; open the roll slightly to place magnets at the top and bottom right corners, as well as the right edge (fig. 6). Once the artwork is secured, a team member can slowly extend the rolling rack. As the rack is extended, installers continue to place magnets along the margins of the artwork. Let the rolling rack do the “walking”—installers can remain stationary as the artwork unfolds. Reverse the process for deinstallation.

Tips to keep in mind when using this installation method:

- If using this method for photography, choose a rack at the end of the room to allow enough distance for the

Tips presented at the Book and Paper Group Session, AIC's 46th Annual Meeting, May 29–June 2, 2018, Houston, Texas



Fig. 1. Rolled oversized work on paper.

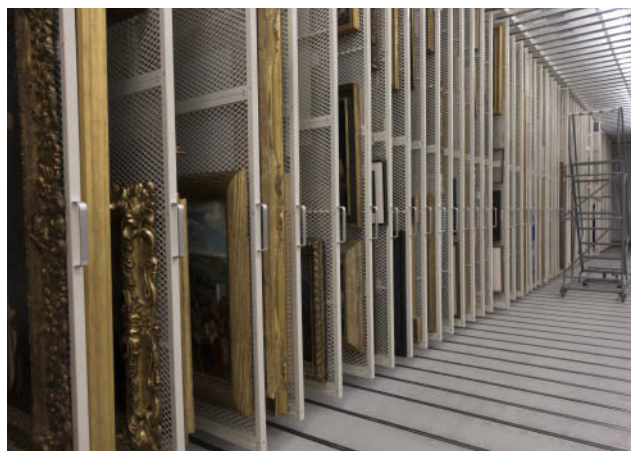


Fig. 2. Rolling art storage racks at MFAH.



Fig. 3. Installation position marked on the screen.



Fig. 6. Installation.



Fig. 4. Magnets on the screen just outside of the marked area.

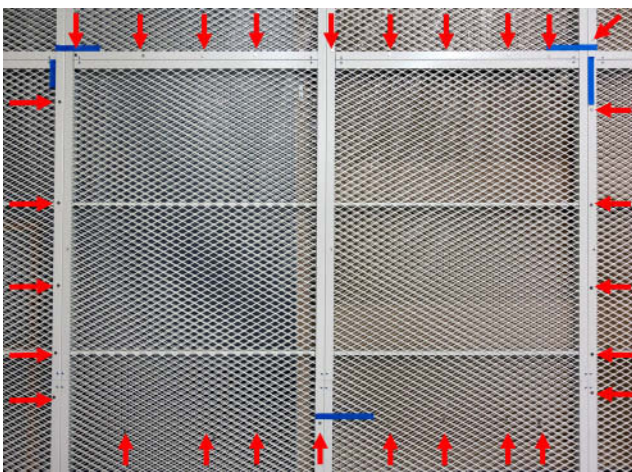


Fig. 5. Spacing of the magnets.

camera and lighting setup. It is also helpful to place a floor marker where the rolling rack should stop—this helps with centering the work as well as camera positioning.

- Use the solid portion of the rack instead of the mesh if possible.
- When shorthanded, installers can also extend the screen in situ by pushing on the mesh section of the screen.
- Communication is crucial to ensure the rack unrolling speed is in sync with the placement of the magnets.
- For larger works, more people will be needed. A stepladder will also be necessary.
- When removing magnets (particularly when the work has a strong curl), remove center magnets on the edge first to avoid uncontrolled magnet release (i.e., flying magnets hitting the installer).
- This type of rolling rack system can be incorporated into the design of a photography studio or conservation lab.
- This type of temporary installation is easy to set up. However, it is beneficial to gather all interested parties. For example, cover condition check, conservation imaging, and curatorial review in the same session. This method of installation has also been used for behind the scenes outreach activity with a donor.

TINA C. TAN
 Conservator of Works on Paper
 Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
 Houston, TX
 ttan@mfa.org