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# art in motion

During opening weekend of the much-anticipated Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton, *Alberta Home's* Catherine Dunwoody spoke to Heather Hamel, manager of AGA's Art Rental and Sales Gallery. Hamel shared her tips on choosing art for your own home, the benefits of renting versus buying art, and why commitment-phobes make the best clients

**ABH:** How many years has the AGA offered an art rental service to homeowners in Edmonton?  
**Hamel:** The Women's Junior League started it in 1954 as a fundraising idea to rent artwork by local and Canadian artists. Back then they had luminaries like A.Y. Jackson and Lawren Harris from The Group of Seven participating, and the service has carried on ever since.

**ABH:** Why rent?  
**Hamel:** Purchasing art can be a huge investment, and art is a little different than other objects we surround ourselves with, because it's made with a certain kind of intention. You begin to read that intention over time, though sometimes you like a piece right away, or maybe it's the reverse for your spouse. Renting gives you the option to live with a work of art for a while and see.



Campbell Wallace, *The Street*. AGA Art Rental and Sales Gallery

**ABH:** How does the art rental program work?  
**Hamel:** We carry about 1,300 works of art that can be rented – about 35 per cent of our entire inventory. Most of it is flatwork, from paintings of landscapes to abstract post-modern work. Interested clients come into our space in the gallery to look at our racks, or access our website ([www.youraga.ca](http://www.youraga.ca)) to look at our image database. You can see about 300 works in an hour. It's all labelled, and our staff helps you find what you need.

**ABH:** Art virgins? How can you help them?  
**Hamel:** Either looking to rent or purchase, people often come in raw. We help them out a lot, get an idea of the space where they would like to install some work, ask about colour, area, sight-lines, and light. Once we have a better description of the space, and we can tell by listening closely, we can suggest what would probably work, or not. People send us photos and we can make quick mock-ups for them to give them a real visual of what that piece would look like in their space.

**ABH:** How is a rental price determined?  
**Hamel:** Our rental is approximately two per cent of the sale price, and clients pay that every four weeks. If they were renting for one year they would receive thirteen invoices. It's not a rent-to-own program, however there is a rebate and payment plan that we can offer if someone renting does decide they want to buy.

**ABH:** Are most of the pieces from Edmonton artists?  
**Hamel:** Part of our mandate is to link up local homeowners with their local art community, and to see how vibrant that it really is. We push the envelope; it's not 100-per-cent traditional genres, and we offer a wide range of subject matter and styles and traditions. Edmontonians are great; they really embrace this, and if they stay with art rental and like the program, their tastes really begin to change and grow.

**ABH:** How do we choose the right pieces for our homes?  
**Hamel:** Often, you want something to integrate into your space, so that it's not jarring when you walk into a room, or that you're pulled in a

negative way to look at something. You want to be pulled to it in a positive way. All of the rules that you would apply for your interior design are the same as when you choose a painting; you want to find a balance between your environment and the work you are bringing in, but you don't want to stifle the work either, and turn it into a poster when really, it's not.

Paintings are physical, and made with intent, and that intent will muscle its way into your environment, so you sort of have to make room for it. At the same time, we respect that people have their own environments.

**ABH:** Do you change up your rental selection seasonally?  
**Hamel:** We do all the time; we have a rapid spin of inventory. Most people see something new every month.

**ABH:** What's the rule of thumb for how high to hang a painting?  
**Hamel:** Most flatwork that goes on the wall is best seen when its midpoint measures 56 to 60 inches from the floor. That rule accommodates most people's height – it complements the work and the environment. That's how you see most work displayed in galleries.

**ABH:** Are art-renters more daring?  
**Hamel:** When people rent, they can take some risks and that really expands the notion of what they thought they wanted around them, and they begin to see that there are many modes of expression that they can share that with the artists. Renters take that risk esthetically and conceptually.

**ABH:** Do you have any clients that are longtime renters who never purchase?  
**Hamel:** Some people like the idea of having a rotating gallery in their own homes. They are doing their own domestic curating, and trying different themes, they love it. We have many, many clients that come in every six months to rotate six pieces out of their homes and are big supporters of the gallery through this. ■

— Catherine Dunwoody

PHOTO AGA photo (top) courtesy Robert Lemmetyer

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