

# Picture Perfect Art Lighting

by Iain McIntosh

**W**hen lighting artwork there are many factors to consider to gain the perfect viewing experience and light the entire canvas well. There are various light sources available to do this, however using an adaptable and maintainable lensed LED system is by far the best option. Historically, halogen lamps and tungsten filaments have been used but with the development of LEDs over the last 10 years this is the way to go now.

High CRI lensed LEDs will remove damaging heat and UV whilst extending the life by up to 50X longer, giving a greater coverage, bringing out the richer colours and increasing the texture and definition in your art.

Not all LED Art Lights are the same and I will go through the key points that need to be considered when selecting them.

## COLOUR TEMPERATURE

This is very important when lighting art. Most pieces should be lit with a 2700K warm white light to bring out the rich colours within the piece. Cooler colour temperatures can be used, but these are rare.

## COLOUR RENDERING INDEX (CRI)

When lighting art you want to use the highest CRI that you can. 98 CRI is currently the highest LED level in the marketplace and will allow the rich reds and blues to show their true colours as well as adding depth and definition to your paintings.

## LED LENSING & SPACING

This will be determined by the canvas dimensions with a spacing of up to 10" each with pre-selected lensing as required, from say 15 through to 60 degrees to give a uniform coverage across the canvas. This will remove the points of glare, hotspots and low light levels experienced with older technology. Over illuminated areas will cause long-term damage to your painting.

## LIGHTING LEVELS

Dependent on the composition of the art, examples are sketches, water colours, oils, pastels and acrylics, different intensities of light will be required for each. An oil painting should be lit at <200Lux whereas a paper sketch should not exceed 50Lux. These can be controlled by dimming or other screening methods.

## PICTURE SURFACE

Artwork can be open to the elements or behind glass (standard or anti-glare). The position and angle of the head can remove all reflective points when lighting a painting with glass.

## ART LIGHT HEAD

The width of the head should not be more than 10-12" less than the canvas width to ensure the edges are lit. If it looks too small, it probably is. To the rear of the art light should be a swivel knuckle. This will allow the cowed front to conceal the light sources from view. Multiple art light heads can be used successfully to light very wide paintings although single heads of up to 120" are available from some suppliers, if required.

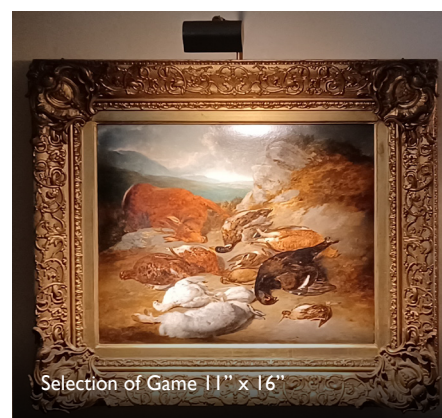
## PICTURE HEAD STYLE

The two most popular styles are the fixed or variable position LED art lights with the variable giving greatest flexibility and thus a far superior coverage. This will feature a rail system and will allow lensed LEDs to be attached as required to light any canvas size.

## ARMS

Properly sized arms are required to position the head at the correct height and projection for the painting.

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## LED DRIVERS

Careful selection and positioning is required here to ensure the driver runs at a low temperature and doesn't damage the artwork if attached to the frame.

## PICTURE LIGHT COLOURS & FINISHES

Many options are available, and your selection should complement your artwork.

To conclude, when art is lit correctly it makes such a difference. There are many options available in the marketplace, but many do not consider all the above details. As you can see it is not easy to light a fine painting well. You need to consider how to cover the entire canvas evenly at the right intensity, not too bright, in the right colour temperature and with the highest colour rendition possible. All these points together will bring out the texture and rich colours in the artwork. Only when fine art is lit correctly can you truly, fully appreciate it.

So many clients have told me that although they had looked at a painting for years, had never noticed a feature in the painting such as an animal, a facial expression, or some other hidden gem until it was lit well. This happens all the time and that is why it is so important to light your art correctly. Being able to see all those finer details within your painting will make you appreciate it even more.

You don't have to use art lights to light your art, but if you do, make sure you consider all these points.

If I can be of further assistance in helping you here, please do make contact. 🌐

### Heritage Lighting Matters

01622 920021

[www.heritagelightingmatters.com](http://www.heritagelightingmatters.com)



Hondecoeter  
50" x 70"



Abstract 50" x 40"



Claesz  
18" x 22"



## Case Study

### Upgrading Art Lights in a Listed Building

At the end of 2022 we were contacted by a private listed property owner in the Southwest of England to review their art lighting for them. Their existing art lights were not lighting the art properly and were beginning to fail. The internal fittings were becoming brittle due to the excessive heat that the halogen lamps were producing, and the paintings were only being lit across the top section, causing over illumination at the top and very little or no lighting further down.

We were able to remotely survey the paintings by gaining the following 3 pieces of information:

- Canvas size (height x width)
- Power supply (dimnable or non-dimnable), and a
- Picture of the painting.

With these details we could quickly produce a quotation to supply and fit to each of the paintings required, with no survey costs being incurred. An individual price was offered for each art light after applying a volume discount. This pricing policy allows our clients to gain a discounted price and schedule their lighting program at a time and speed to suit them.

When we light a painting, we light the whole canvas, with no hotspots or glare to give the highest level of definition and resolution. Our high colour rendition LEDs bring out the rich colours in the painting and lets you see little gems that were hidden before. Our art lights produce no damaging UV or heat, reduce the running costs (by up to 93.7%) and lower the maintenance costs as they last up to 50x longer than their halogen counterparts. We offer non-dimnable, room dimmable and individual dimming art lights as required.

Lighting art in a Listed Property does not have to be a problem. In many applications power is already available behind the painting with a clock-out point. This allows us to upgrade the lighting quickly and easily and the art light can be attached to the back of the frame. This involves no adjustment to the fabric of the building. Where there is no localised power available, we will find the most appropriate solution to achieve the supply of the power. This may be as simple as running a braided wire in one of the 12 colours that we offer to the nearest supply point. This can be concealed behind objects, furniture, etc. to minimise its presence. Other solutions are flat, narrow wire options that can be painted to blend in or the use of hanging rails that can be either powered or not, as required, to complete multiple hangs in a room. There are many solutions available, and we will always select, discuss and agree the best option before proceeding.