

# THE art OF EXHIBITION

**Y**ou've been shooting for awhile and have perfected your printing, so now it's time to step back and really look at what you've created. When you have a body of work that you feel good about, it's time to think about presenting your photographs to outside eyes. Whether you decide to present your work as an exhibition or a portfolio, there are a number of choices to be made. What to display? Should the exhibition be an overview of work you've shot or should it tell a single story?

Photographer Fredric Roberts' *Humanitas* exhibition and companion books, *Humanitas* and *Humanitas II*, demonstrate the steps a photographer takes in the creation of a coherent and dynamic presentation. With *Humanitas II*, Roberts moved away from film to shooting digitally. After a month-long shoot in India, he had 3,500 images. Every night after shooting he downloaded the day's work onto a laptop computer, and as a precaution, backed up the work onto four separate hard drives. At this point, he did a preliminary edit, deleting any obvious mistakes or bad shots.

On the plane ride home, he began the next stage of editing, separating out anything he didn't want or like. The rest of the work was organized and labeled based on location, events or subject. For Roberts, it was important to move through the remaining work quickly and flag the images that he wanted for a more thorough selection process. This brought the number to 1,500 images. The process was repeated again and again. At this point, Roberts turned the work over to the curator Deborah Willis. He was ready for professional input to create the final grouping.

The curator did the final edit, working with 875 photographs to select the final 144 for the book and then down to 26 images for exhibition. From 3,500 to 26 final photographs, this emphasizes the importance of choosing the best work to tell the story.

## Editing

The single most important step after making the image is to edit. Choosing photographs to exhibit or

Putting your work on display, whether in a gallery, museum, local coffeehouse or your living room, is a rewarding opportunity to tell a visual story

*By Deborah Klochko / Photography By Fredric Roberts*







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*In his books **Humanitas and Humanitas II**, Frederic Roberts tells the story of human relationships; he ventured to South Asia to capture the people in that region in all of their ways of life. The title **Humanitas** refers to the development of human virtue in all of its forms to its fullest extent. In assembling the images and the gallery exhibitions for the projects, Roberts and his collaborators sought to tell a story that the viewer could move through. The art of putting together an effective collection of photography lies in the ability to present work in that kind of flowing manner.*



to include in your portfolio is as challenging as making the image. The starting point for curating an exhibition of your work is editing your body of work. You may be a great photographer, but no one wants to see every image you've shot.

Editing is the opportunity to reflect on what you've photographed, to select images that are the strongest and the best at telling the visual story that you'll be presenting. Decide the concept you want to present. If you take a thematic approach, begin by laying out the work that best fits the idea. If it's a broad theme, such as nature, it helps to group the work into sections. It makes a stronger presentation to sort the photographs that deal with similar subject matter. This allows for a more thoughtful approach rather than including one of everything you've ever done.

As they say in real estate, location, location, location. Where you're exhibiting your work will determine the num-

ber of photographs in the final selection and how you'll lay out the work. If it's a gallery exhibition, there will be more wall space than you might have in your living room. But before you finalize the number of photographs that will be displayed, you need to take into account the size of the mats that will be used.

### **Framing**

Matting and framing can be the most expensive part of creating an exhibition. For photographs into which you've put this much effort, and for which you have a high regard, always use archival materials. There's basic terminology that you need to know if you're cutting your own mats, buying them pre-cut or taking the photographs to a professional framer. You'll hear about archival materials. Basically, it means any materials that won't chemically react with the artwork with which they come in contact. You want

your photographs to last as long as possible, and archival materials for display and for storage are the way to go.

An over mat serves multiple purposes—it keeps the image away from the glass or plexi, protects the image while it's being handled and aesthetically frames the photograph. Select a white- or cream-colored mat board. Colored mat board can be distracting, and how many museum or gallery exhibitions have you seen that use colored mat board? Mat board comes in different thicknesses—the thinnest is 2-ply; 4-ply is most commonly used; and if you can afford it, use 8-ply—it makes a deep, beveled edge when the window is cut and looks elegant. The back and the window side of the over mat should be held together with archival tape. There are several ways to attach the photograph to the mat. I prefer clear archival photo corners as opposed to a more permanent approach like cold or dry mounting.



not have many choices in how the work is lighted. A gallery or museum space has more flexible lighting that can be adjusted for the best presentation of the work.

Whether you're curating the exhibition for a gallery or a wall in your home, the process is the same—edit, presentation, layout and lighting. After all of your hard work, it's now time to step back and enjoy the show. **OP**

*Deborah Klochko is the Director of the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, [www.mopa.org](http://www.mopa.org). See more of Fredric Roberts' photography at [www.fredricroberts.com](http://www.fredricroberts.com). The Fredric Roberts exhibition, Humanitas—Images of India, will be at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego from May 3-September 14, 2008, before it begins a national tour.*

## ART OF EXHIBITION

Be generous with the size of the mat you select; there's nothing worse than looking at a great photograph that's covered with an over mat that's too small. It detracts from the image and the viewing experience. There are standard sizes that will help you to select the right mat for the photograph. An 8x10 image can go in an 11x14-, or better yet, a 16x20-inch mat. For a 16x20-inch image, try a 20x24-inch mat, and for an 18x24-inch image, go for 24x30 inches. When cutting the window in the mat, the sides will be the same width, and the bottom should be about half-inch wider than the top.

The backing board should be archival as well, and there are a number of different products from which to choose. Backing board adds strength and protection for the matted work.

You want to protect the image both front and back. Glass vs. plexi is based on a number of factors—including mat size and cost. The larger your matted image, the heavier it will be with glass, and framing quality glass can be expensive. Whichever you use, remember that glass and plexi require different cleaning solutions. Never use a glass cleaner on plexi! There are special cleaning products for polishing and reducing static on plexiglass. Anything used for cleaning glass will damage plexiglass.

The choice between a metal or wood frame is up to you. Metal frames are easy to assemble and can be ordered precut if you're assembling them yourself. They can easily be reused. However, there are many more style choices with wood frames and a range of widths as well. Learning to cut mats and frame your photographs takes time, special tools and a large, clean work area. Think about having your work matted and framed professionally. Your time can be put to better use shooting and printing.

### Laying Out The Exhibition

The order and groupings of your work can influence how your audience engages with the exhibition. Laying out the work is like writing—the place and relationships of the images to one another are like structuring a sentence. The spaces between the individual photographs and the groupings reads like visual punctuation. With thematic presentations, try to group the related images together with even spac-

ing between each frame. A good place to start is three to five inches separating each piece. When there's a change in subject, a wider spacing helps prepare the viewer for the change. Think about the entire wall as you're organizing the work. Keep the grouping tight, working toward the center of the room rather than trying to spread out. It's not about covering as much wall space as you can; it's about creating an exciting viewing experience.

### Installation

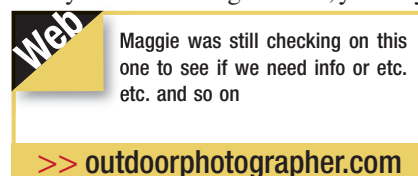
Decide what you want the centerline to be. This is the viewing height of the work, and it should be at a comfortable eye level. The centerline is the distance from the floor to the center of the frame. The standard is 58 inches, but I find 56 inches more comfortable. For installation, it's better to hang from two points, even if you use picture-hanging wire. This will keep the work level. To figure out where the nails will go, measure the height of the frame and divide by two to get the center. Add that number to 58 inches (if that's the height you're using). After measuring the distance from your hangars on the back of the frame to the top of the frame, subtract that number from the previous total. This is the height for the nails. Of course, measure between the hangars to space the nails correctly.

Let's say your frame is 20 inches wide and 16 inches high, and you want the center to be at 58 inches. Sixteen divided by two equals eight inches. Add eight inches to 58 inches, which equals 66 inches. If the distance from the hooks to the top of the frame is two inches, that number is subtracted from 66 to give you 64 inches. Measure 64 inches from the floor, and that's the location for the hangars. Be sure to measure the hooks to the top of the frame every time, because there's no guarantee that they'll be placed exactly the same for each picture.

After the work is on the wall, make sure it's level, and make any adjustments. Clean the surface of the plexi or glass, touch up scuffs or marks you've made on the wall and move on to lighting.

### Lighting

If you're exhibiting at home, you may



Maggie was still checking on this one to see if we need info or etc. etc. and so on

>> [outdoorphotographer.com](http://outdoorphotographer.com)