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BellaOnline's [Web Design](#) Editor

Designing Aesthetic and Functional Art Sites

This new series continues by looking at art site design, a topic I am personally very familiar with both as an artist and an online art gallery curator. My online artist group site, [Pegasus Art Gallery](#) houses many fine artists from around the globe. The artist explosion on the web is quite phenomenal really. It is a rare artist who hasn't at least thought of opening an online gallery. When done right, this can be a very viable way to market their art. You, as a designer can help artists achieve their goal by creating aesthetic and eye-pleasing environments to showcase their own artistic masterpieces.



Ethics and Art

When I talk to artists about putting their work online, the most consistent barrier identified is the problems of protecting their art from theft. It is up to you, the designer to show your prospective artist clients how you can protect them from unlawful downloads and image or sound piracy. The ethical considerations of copyright, reserved rights, and protection from infringement are crucial for the design and development of any artist site, whether it features the art of one artist or hundreds.

Why do people "steal" art off of the web? The answer is not as simple as it would seem. Some people, especially those who are new to the web are not aware that downloading someone else's work without permission IS stealing. They figure, if it is online, it is fair game. Others might think it is okay to even display your work on their own websites! Others might be so enthralled with the beauty and masterfulness of the art itself, that they can't resist downloading a copy for personal viewing. Still others, do this fully knowing that it is wrong, but they figure they can get away with it. All of these people are acting unethically according to copyright law.

The first defence against copyright infringement is a clear copyright statement. You need to include a discrete but clearly visible statement on each page of your client's site, indicating copyright entitlement and that downloading or reproduction without permission is not allowed. Make this very clear, right from the start.

Disabling right-click downloading of images can deter some downloading, especially by people who are new to the web. However, this is only a moderately successful maneuver, since many know how to get around this precaution. As well, if someone stumbles across your graphics while doing an "Image"

search in Google, the no right-click code is no longer in operation, hence the protection is gone. Browsers like Mozilla Fox are not affected by the standard no right-click scripts either. This precaution may also offend some visitors, since it blatantly shows that the owner assumes that some if not all visitors are thieves.

Another way to protect art is to include a digital watermark within the image itself. While this does not stop people from downloading the image, it does render the image less usable by the download offender. This can easily be done in Photoshop, Paint Shop Pro or Corel Photo-Paint, to name a few popular graphic programs.

Certain programs like Java or Flash offer some deterrent to would-be art downloaders, since they make access to the graphics less straightforward. But, the expert viewer may well be able to contend with even this protection, and know how to access your Flash embedded images.

Last, but not least, use low resolution graphics on the web. This will discourage printing of images since the quality will be grainy and low quality. The web only supports 72 dpi resolution anyway, so the graphics will still look fine on the web.

Getting to the Heart - The Gallery

When one thinks of an art site, the primary section that comes to mind is usually the Gallery. This is the heart of any visual art site and demands prime consideration. When designing the art site, it is important to consider how the owner will maintain it. This will of course entail gallery updates as new art is ready to be published. Unless the artist is experienced in working with html and other code, or is planning to hire someone (perhaps you?) to maintain the site, it is best to choose an easy, user-friendly gallery setup. So what are your choices?

1. You can hand code the gallery, setting up partitions using java windows or tables within a page to display the images. Usually a thumbnail approach works best. Viewers can click on the smaller image to view a larger one if attracted. This would entail some experience to maintain since each new image would need to be added to the code.
2. PHP scripted Galleries can be used such as [Softbix Photo Gallery Script](#), which retails at \$35; or the free scripts, [Lin PHA](#) or [QDig](#) (Quick Digital Image Gallery), both from SourceForge; or the [Snaps! Gallery](#) from the Sonic Group (also freeware); or [PopPhoto Studio](#) which combines a sophisticated gallery setup combined with e-commerce and shopping cart tools for online art sales (retails for \$65). All of these gallery suggestions offer easy to maintain protocol for gallery maintenance, and require MySQL and PHP server capabilities.
3. Javascript based Galleries are also available: some suggestions include [Jalbum](#) a free web photo album generator that works nicely for art as well (is freeware). This album design is very easy for the artist to maintain on their own. [Image Studio](#) retails for \$19, and offers unique interfaces for gallery showcasing.
4. Flash-based Galleries offer an advantage to artists by offering more protection against image theft than other methods, especially for viewers that are not savvy to web coding. The [\(tl\) Image Gallery](#) by Tobias Lauchenauer is a freeware Flash MX 2004 based gallery; or the fully customizable [Flash Photo Gallery](#) by Hoover Web Design (costs \$50); or the versatile [Photo Graffix](#) Flash Image Display

System (retails for \$54) all offer quite user-friendly maintenance setups and Flash image delivery.

5. CGI and PERL based scripts can also be used to set up a professional looking Gallery. Some examples include: [Mojo Gallery](#) (retails for \$59) and is useful for multimedia display as well; and the clean looking, simple to use and versatile [emAlbum](#) (costs \$25).

The Bottom Line - Selling Art

Artists have different reasons for wanting an online art site, but the number one reason is usually to attract art sales. The best solution is to combine e-commerce and shopping cart capabilities with the gallery. This can be done by hand using a number of third party payment services such as [PayPal](#) or you can use integrated software. For instance, [Lightbox Photo](#) software acts as both a gallery or stock library combined with user registration, instant downloads and secure payment processing (retails for \$399 to \$599). As mentioned above, [PopPhoto Studio](#) also offers these capabilities and only costs \$65.

Putting the Aesthetics into Art Sites

Once you have selected the type of support code or software to use, the next step is the design of an aesthetic environment for the art. Don't just depend on the art itself for visual appeal. To fully present your artist client in a professional and appealing way, thought and creativity need to be applied to decide on the best visual representation for this particular artist and their genre of work. Spend time with your client to get to know them; request input from them to decide the best color scheme; font styles; graphical interface; basic layout, and so on. A good rule of thumb is to go for the "simple but elegant" approach if you want viewers to stay put and actually view all of the art. Make the experience enjoyable not boring. Also, keep the code clean so that everything works smoothly like clock work. If viewers click on one or two deadlinks accompanied by freezing popups - they are not going to stay! Check and double check your code before launching the final version. Usability is a big part of aesthetics!

Artists are excellent clients to add to your portfolio - they often network with other artists, so if they like the work you do for them you can probably count on referrals. One thing leads to another and before you know it, you have carved a niche!

Related Article and Examples

[Graphics and Ethics: What's the Connection?](#)

Beginner web designers have a multitude of graphical web resources available to them - all free for only a link back to the graphics site. Usually, as web development skill advances, designers turn to other venues to offer cutting-edge graphics. The most logical solutions come down to two choices. Make your own. Or buy them from a pro. There are other choices of course, ones that compromise one's online integrity and challenge the often unspoken ethical code of web designers. Simply, "Thou shalt not steal!"

[Pegasus Art Gallery](#) is an example of a large multi-artist gallery that uses mainly javascript to display the artworks.

Art Website Design Experts at Visions of Adonai design

The development of an aesthetic, user-friendly art web site is a must for any serious artist in this day and age. To present your art well - you need someone with an eye for line and design, someone who can create ambience, orderly presentation and a unique metaphoric environment for your masterpieces. At Visions of Adonai we offer careful layout and visual planning plus the expertise of June Kaminski, MSN for accurate and dependable copywriting and presentation. June works closely with artists of all kinds including visual artists, musicians, sculptors, faculty and students to create rich appealing galleries and information sites.



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