

# THE NEXT WAY TO ENJOY ART?



Art has much to recommend it, but perhaps its biggest drawback is that it costs something, and some of it can be quite expensive. That can be just as much of a problem for the artists who create it as for the people who would like to own it, but now a Los Angeles-based tech company has a kind-of solution. Enplug, which was founded in 2012 and creates digital signage software that facilitates secure communication between businesses and nonprofit organizations and their employees and customers, has developed a free platform to which artists upload images that homeowners then display on their television or computer screens.

There is no direct link between digital signage software and displaying art, but Enplug's chief executive officer, Nanxi Liu, says she loves art and

has become "more involved in the local art scene in Los Angeles." That involvement has led her to befriend numerous artists and realize "that they are having a hard time reaching people," particularly during the pandemic lockdowns. This led her to wonder how tech might be able to "promote artists and art during the time while people are stuck at home." She says, "Most people have a flat-screen TV now, so instead of just showing news and whatnot, what if it can show art, too?"

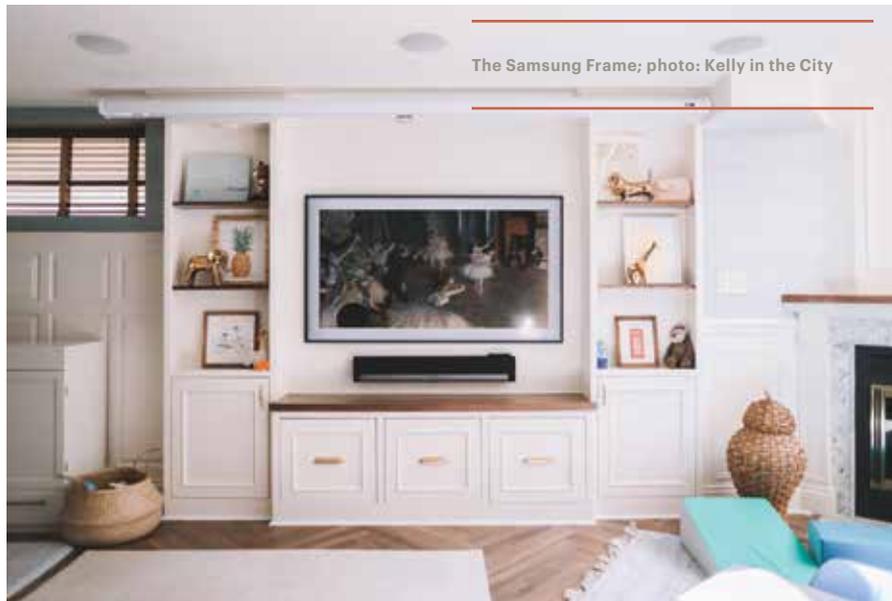
Liu notes that displaying artwork through Enplug is similar to streaming a television program. The content, be it a TV show or digitized artwork, lives in the cloud and can only be displayed when the television is connected to the Internet. This is a form of borrowing imagery and, for the individual artists' protection, "the viewer cannot download,



Artcast offers an array of images to enjoy.

\$3,000 (roughly double what a standard TV with similar specifications would cost), and there's a subscription cost of \$6 per month and additional fees for each streamed artwork.

For those uninterested in spending large amounts of money on new equipment, a non-smart TV would require connection to a personal computer via an HDMI cable, or one could use a WiFi stick such as Google Chromecast or Roku or Amazon Fire Stick to wirelessly cast images to the television. Until recently, these images accidentally burned themselves into the screens if they were left on too long, but that problem seems to have been solved. On all of these devices, the screened images get compressed but generally look good, or good enough. As flat-screens become ever wider, however, it makes sense to pre-test the art images to ensure that the quality does not deteriorate.



### THE FINE PRINT

Enplug's Liu notes that her firm is not interested in monetizing the product by charging end users, but, in this day and age, it is safe to assume that their personal data is likely to be mined now or in the future, or possibly sold to, or shared with, a third party. As with any such domestic device (think Amazon's Alexa), users must weigh these risks for themselves.

Liu claims that Enplug has "thousands of artworks" available for streaming, but most are actually from museums whose images are in the public domain; she herself mentioned the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum during our recent conversation. "We have a couple of contemporary artists, and we're trying to welcome and get more of them on the platform." (Interested artists are welcome to visit the artists' page on Enplug's website to learn more.)

Similarly, Artcast is seeking to build up its reservoir of contemporary artworks. As with Enplug, its participating artists do not receive royalties or other payments when their images are streamed, but information about the artists (including links to their websites) is offered to users, who may ultimately (hopefully) go on to purchase their original

share, or sell the content that is being displayed, so the artists' copyright remains intact."

Interested art lovers can go to Enplug's "dashboard," where they see all of the artworks available for selection. Then, Liu says, "They choose and schedule multiple artworks to create their own playlist. They can even select different frames." For those with more than one screen at home, the art images can run on all or some of those screens.

### EVER MORE OPTIONS

Enplug is the newest entry in a growing field of companies offering the opportunity to project artworks onto screens in one's home, office, restaurant, club, lounge, bar, hospital, or university. Google's Chromecast, for instance, allows subscribers to display art on a smart TV by uploading photographs or other art images to a gallery in Google Photos, then switching to Ambient mode. Apple TV+ lets users upload images to an album in iCloud, then choose iCloud integration in their settings and select images from the album as screen savers. (The uploaded images require iCloud storage, which costs an additional \$2-\$4 per month.) Artcast offers consumers several options — Apple TV+, Roku, or Amazon Fire TV — as well as a library of images from commercial galleries, museums, and individual artists' own uploads for a monthly subscription of \$2.99-\$4.99.

Yet another option is the Samsung Frame, a smart flat-screen TV with a wooden frame that gives the impression of looking at a framed painting when an artwork is streamed on it. This is more of a niche item because of its significantly higher cost; the hardware ranges from \$600 to nearly

works. If such sales do occur, no commission is required by the provider.

This approach to free exposure may not be to every artist's liking, as it allows viewers to make use of their images without compensation, with only a hope that sales will result. In fact, some of the dilemmas highlighted here are already being debated, most recently by a 3-year-old organization called Working Artists and the Greater Economy that objects to having contemporary artists' work displayed for free in galleries and museums. As usual, the tech industry has moved swiftly (and legally) around such potential roadblocks, so now it remains to all of us, as viewers and consumers, to decide if we want to participate. ●

**Information:** [enplug.com/apps/art](http://enplug.com/apps/art), [google.com/chromecast](http://google.com/chromecast), [apple.com/tv](http://apple.com/tv), [artcast.tv](http://artcast.tv), [samsung.com](http://samsung.com), [wageforwork.com](http://wageforwork.com)

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** As a publication dedicated to enjoying and understanding original works of art, *Fine Art Connoisseur* is not generally in favor of replacing direct encounters with art with virtual ones. We have decided to publish this article, however, because our readers deserve and need to know what's happening in this fast-changing terrain so they are able to make up their own minds.

**DANIEL GRANT** is the author of *The Business of Being an Artist* and other books published by Skyhorse Press.