

How to Take Great Photos of Your Artwork

Your works are high quality, so photographs of them should be, too. If the photo is too small or out of focus, or if there are problems with color, lighting or shadows, then you are not showing a true representation of your work. Your piece will appear poorly constructed, the colors will be misrepresented – you may as well be showing a picture of somebody else’s artwork.

Remember, this will often be the first sample of your work that people will see, and if the images aren’t good enough, it will more than likely be the last.

Getting Ready to Photograph your Artwork

Buy or Borrow a Good Digital Camera.

- Your camera should have a few basic settings:
 - Ability to select ISO (always use the lowest ISO setting. The higher the ISO number the grainier the image. Some recommend a setting of 200 ISO)
 - Good Auto Focus
 - Ability to adjust white balance – The type of light you’re shooting in may produce white light with slightly different color tints. The white balance setting make white objects appear white in your images.
 - The auto balance setting is the simplest option

Buy or Borrow a Tripod

- Using a tripod allows for zero camera movement which in turn will result in the sharpest image possible
- Pay attention to the way you’re positioning your artwork.
- Avoid shadows and messy framing, by making sure that the piece is level against the wall.
- Whenever possible, you should fill the frame with your work, trying not to show any background.
- When your artwork is non-rectangular or 3-D keep the background simple without distractions.
- Frame the piece against a neutral color – white is the perfect background. Colorful backgrounds can alter the color of your piece by reflecting onto it.

Lighting

- Use bright, indirect natural lighting. Natural light fluorescent bulbs can also be a good choice
- Avoid deep shadows and dappling effects.
- Position the lights and the artwork carefully before taking the photo.
- Make sure there are no shadows concealing parts of the piece, and that there are no problems with high contrast, which will give you an image with very dark or very light patches that will detract from the impression of the work itself.
- Soften the glare and intensity by diffusing the light source.
 - For example: by bouncing it off a white surface such as paper.
- Avoid direct sunlight; aside from the fact that it’s probably not good for your artwork, direct sunlight can create what are known as ‘hot spots’ on reflective surfaces.
- Do not use a Flash – Flash can also create a reflective “Hot Spot”. It is extremely difficult to predict the full impact of using a flash, and you don’t want to risk highlighting the wrong areas of your images.

- Avoid mixing light sources, as different style bulbs give off different colors.
- If the work you are photographing is behind glass, it is best to take out of the glass. If you can't you will need to angle the light and camera to minimize reflection and glare.

Setting Up Your Camera to Photograph Your Artwork

Be sure to clean your lens. Having a speck of dust on the glass can mess with your camera's automatic focus in the most annoying of ways.

- The tripod should be set so that the camera is the same height as the center of your artwork.
- If your work needs to be on a slant to stand up against the wall – tilt your camera to match the angle.
- Set the zoom lens so that there is minimal distortion (For two-dimensional art wide angles distort the images).
- Position the camera at some distance from the object, and then zoom in as necessary. This might not sound obvious, but it will give you far greater control over the images you can take, and will help you maintain your own perspective.
- You can try different levels of zoom for different shots. However, note that when your camera switches over from optical zoom to digital zoom, you may be risking the sharpness and overall quality of the image.
- Set the ISO to the lowest setting
- Using the RAW setting of your camera. RAW will mean that you have all of the information saved, in as high a quality as possible. From there, you can work with the images and re-size them or make other changes, if necessary.

Photographing your Artwork

- Make sure the camera is firmly attached to the tripod.
- Use the timer so that the shot is taken shortly after you've pressed the button, so that you won't accidentally cause the camera to shake.
- The best way to ensure consistency throughout your portfolio is to take the photographs of each piece in the same photo-shoot. It may be tempting to snap your pics the minute each piece is complete, but when you aren't taking each photo under the same conditions, you'll find a noticeable inconsistency throughout. Similar exposure, contrast, lighting, and color correction means there's less to distract the person leafing through your portfolio, so that they can concentrate on the works themselves.
- Take lots of shots – and choose the best

Label Your Photographs

Make things easy for yourself; label each image clearly, consistently and with full detail while you still know all these things without having to think about it. Title, medium, dimensions and year are all pieces of information you're likely to need attached to these images at some point, so if you include them in the image title or description now, you'll save yourself time and effort later.