

SHOOTING YOUR ART - PHOTOGRAPHING TIPS

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One of the most important things an artist can do to attract attention to their work is to have neat, professional-looking photographs in their online portfolios. Having photography flaws like flashbulb glares, focus problems, and poor color quality subtracts from the beauty of the work and makes it look unprofessional. Here are some tips for photographing your art work that will help you create a high quality portfolio.

CAMERA

1. Use a 35mm SLR (Single Lens Reflex) camera. Taking pictures with a point-and-shoot camera is often disappointing and non-representational, the colors are not exact, the camera crops the image in strange ways and the image may come out lighter or darker than expected.

2. The most significant feature of a digital camera is the number of megapixels. (One-million pixels, a unit of measurement in an image. This number will determine the quality of the image. Think of it as the number of dots in your picture. A low density of dots will result in a poor image. In printing it is recommended that images are 300 to 600 dpi for optimal clarity.)

2 megapixels or less - typically found on smaller, inexpensive camera or in cellphones or PDAs) and not recommended for capturing fine artwork. This is OK for emailing your images.

3 megapixels - This is a compromise between picture quality and low price for casual photographers. The result of these images are good 4 x 6 prints.

4 megapixels - Better, almost photo-lab quality 4 x 6's and 5 x 7's.

5 megapixels - Better quality for enlargements - 8 x 10's and even 11 x 14.

6 megapixels and up - Best image quality.

CABLE RELEASE OF SELF TIMER

Using a cable release or the self timer on the camera reduces the risk of camera movement during the exposure. Reducing camera movement will improve image sharpness.

TRIPOD

Using a tripod holds the camera steady during the exposure. Also, by making the camera stationary it is easier to compose and focus on your artwork. As with the cable release, using a tripod greatly reduces the risk of camera motion or movement and improves image sharpness and clarity.

MEMORY CARD

A memory card is a critical component of any digital system. The size of the card - meaning the amount of information it will hold (256MB vs 4 GB) depends upon the size/quality of images taken. Shooting in RAW or large formats will take up more space on the card than small format jpeg photos. Best quality = less images on the card.

LIGHT METER

1. *In Camera*: Follow the instructions for your particular camera. This meter is a "reflective" meter and reads the light reflecting from your scene.

2. *Incident*: Follow the instructions for your particular meter. This is a hand-held meter and reads the light falling onto your scene.

3. *Reflective meter*: Follow the instructions for your particular meter. This meter is also a handheld meter but reads the light reflected from your scene. These meters can be more precise than an in-camera meter. It could be a "spot meter" reading only a small spot or degree angle of the scene. The best use of this meter is with an 18% gray card.

LIGHTING

1. *Natural light* is always preferred over *artificial light*.

Use north light in the shadow of a building.

A room with a large window on a sunny day.

Anywhere on an overcast day.

2. Photograph in diffused natural sunlight, never with direct sunlight.

3. Never use the flash mounted directly on the camera. If this is all that is available, the flash must be diffused to eliminate hot spots. This can be done by placing a white piece of paper or dense plastic in front of the flash.

REFLECTORS & LIGHT MODIFIERS

When shooting 3D work, foamcore or matboard reflectors can enhance the light quality by reflecting or shading the light on your art.

IMAGE CAPTURE

Photograph the artwork unframed without any plexiglass or glass protection.

Plexi and glass act as a horrific reflector that will ruin the image.

Fill the frame - the artwork should take up 95% - 100% of the viewfinder. Shoot the artwork as large as possible to maximize the resolution of image.

RAW OR JPEG

Raw files will not be sharper than the JPG files. Any major exposure or color correction is easier to make when shooting in RAW format.

The secret to using JPG files is to set a proper White Balance, make a proper exposure. Using Auto White Balance (AWB), may not bring consistent color from one file to the next, so set a custom white balance.

Read your camera's manual to do this - it's not very involved on most of today's cameras.

Take several shots of the artwork. The first shot should have a piece of white paper in it to set the white balance when editing later with photo imaging software.

TECHNIQUES

1. **Focus!** Out of focus images are more difficult to correct than exposure problems. On manual SLR cameras using a slightly higher F-Stop to increase the depth of field will minimize the chance of focus problems. Sometimes this means taking longer exposures.

2. Use a lens that will allow you to get close enough to the artwork to "fill the frame" without distorting the image.

3. To soften the shadow side of a 3D object place a reflector fill near the object opposite the light source. (A large piece of white foamcore or mat board makes a great reflector.)

4. Bracket your exposures. A 3-step bracket (normal exposure, underexposure and overexposure) is usually sufficient.

5. If the artwork is small enough to fit on a scanner, scan it: the quality will be better than most photographs.

6. When photographing paintings, check that the edges of the painting are straight (parallel) with the sides and the top/bottom edges of the viewfinder. If they are not straight then your camera is not positioned squarely in front of the piece, or your artwork needs to be tilted up or down.

SOURCES:

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