

Photographing Your Artwork – by John Raleigh

Some practical tips to getting better photographs of your artwork.

The Environment

- If photographing indoors, a room with neutral colored walls is best. All of the colors of your surroundings effect the light falling on your artwork and final image.
- All lighting has an associated color temperature. Daylight is generally easiest for your camera to deal with. Be aware of the kinds of lighting sources illuminating your artwork. If you can see your artwork it's being lighted by a light source and all light has a color temperature.
- The distance from your camera to your artwork can be important. Too far away and you'll lose detail. Too close and you might get too much detail. Try a normal viewing distance first then vary if desired.
- Direct sunlight is difficult to deal with. If you're shooting outside try working in shade or wait for a cloudy day, when light tends to be more even.
- The more control you have of your photographic environment the more consistent and repeatable your results can be.

The Artwork

- No glass is best. Photograph your artwork before you frame it.
- No varnish is best. Varnish can be highly reflective and increase the difficulty of shooting your artwork. Photograph before varnishing if possible.
- No frame is best. Some deep frames make it impossible to eliminate shadows on the edges of your artwork.
- Solid support for your artwork a good idea. (easels, music stands, etc. work well)
- Deciding what is important for your artwork's presentation is important. (all of the below)
 - Color — Photographing in a good environment will help with color accuracy
 - Texture — Make sure the texture of your artwork is visible in the photograph if it's an important part of your piece.
 - Relief (for 3D work) — Three-dimensional artwork requires more care with lighting. Shadows are important elements in helping the viewer understand sculptural details.
- Background (if not rectangular) — If your artwork is not a regular rectangular shape (four 90 degree angles) then you must consider your background, especially if you don't know how to photoshop it out of your image. So choose carefully and check to see if it's in or out of focus, your choice, but generally out of focus is less distracting.

Lighting

- Make sure you have enough light but not too much. Enough so that colors are distinct but not so bright that it's causing unrealistic results and hot spots (areas of extreme over exposure).
- Source (natural / artificial / both) Use whatever works for you and your camera.
- Color (light sources produce different color lighting measured in degrees Kelvin) Your digital camera can compensate for the color many different light sources. Make sure you select the right camera setting for your conditions. Automatic white balance works well with most modern digital cameras.
- Direction of the light illuminating your artwork is critical. (and most important for texture and 3D artworks) Side lighting is best for showing surface detail. Experiment with positioning your light source relative to your artwork to show the desired surface texture.
- Evenness / balance, or not. Generally, even lighting is a good thing, unless you need to

exaggerate surface texture or relief, then having unbalance lighting shows these details.

Watch for detail and color in the shadows when experimenting with uneven lighting

- Shadows are important but dark or black shadows don't often show artwork at its best. Shadows can be effectively reduce by using a white card to reflect light into them. Experiment with the distance and angle of the card relative to your artwork.
- Reflections and Physics 101
 - Angle of incidence = angle of reflection. If your light source (i.e. a camera flash) is located on or near your camera you will probably have that light reflected directly back at the camera creating a hot spot on the surface of your artwork. Position your lighting so that it reflects away from the camera, not right back at it. On camera flashes are not usually effective unless they can used indirectly by being pointed, not directly at the artwork, but being bounced off a ceiling or white card reflecting light back toward the artwork. This diffused lighting can be very effective.
 - Polarizing filters can eliminate reflections but will also effect the apparent color of your artwork. Use these carefully.
- Use of a reflective device (white card or equivalent) This is a great technique for helping to balance lighting intensity or getting some light into shadow areas. Hold the card opposite your light source, reflecting light back onto your artwork. This technique can also be used with natural light outdoors or indoors.

The Camera

- Chose a camera (digital) that produces good quality images. (there are many including most modern point and shoot cameras and smartphones)
- Read the camera directions (I know, this is really boring, but it's useful) You want to make sure you're getting the best image possible.
- Turn off the flash (or block it from lighting the artwork directly) As I noted above, on camera flashes are generally not useful.
- Set the image quality to the highest jpeg (often called FINE) or choose Camera RAW
- Support (a tripod or equivalent, perhaps most important after camera) Camera support is critical and maybe even the most important element in the process. Even an inexpensive tripod is better than none. It will help with aligning your artwork to the camera and eliminate camera motion.
- Positioning (distance from piece, may depend on lens) If your camera has a zoom lens try to photograph your artwork with the zoom in the middle of its range. The image quality is generally better there.
- Controls (via camera menus and/or external controls)
 - Color balance (start with Auto White Balance or equiv.) Most cameras do a pretty good job of compensating for different lighting conditions. If you're comfortable with your camera menus, you may be able to match the lighting conditions more precisely but automatic light balance is usually pretty good.
 - Exposure (Bracket – multiple images both over exposed and under exposed) Take different exposures of your artwork. Sometimes the screen on the camera doesn't give an accurate representation of your image on a computer screen.
 - Flash units, off camera, can provide a great deal of control especially if more than one is used. When using 2 off camera flashes make sure they are equidistant and at the same angle to the artwork and if they have adjustable power setting then start with both at the same setting. You may need to adjust the angle of the flashes to the artwork to eliminate reflections.
 - Focus (auto / manual) I prefer automatic whenever possible. The choice is yours, but you

- won't forget to focus if autofocus is on.
- Depth of field (especially for 3D) Depth of field (the closest and farthest distances where a subject is in focus) is not generally important for 2D artwork. The opposite is true for 3D pieces. Be aware of how much of your artwork is in focus and adjust accordingly. For cameras where the f-stop setting is able to be set manually, then the higher the f number the greater the depth of field.
- Fill the frame/screen of the camera or use as much of it as possible (less space around painting = more data) Make sure you haven't cropped off any of your artwork.
- Alignment check vertical and horizontal. The plane of the camera sensor (formerly called film plane) should be exactly the same as your artwork. The [Keystone Effect](#) results if your camera is off axis.
- Zoom lenses are handy for framing your artwork and modern zooms are of good quality. They are especially handy if shooting artworks of different sizes in one session.

Note: Most art organizations do not want or need the artwork's frame included in images submitted to contests. Some websites that are selling completed artworks require the inclusion of the frame and some even want the works shown in a defined environment. So, make sure you understand the organization's submission guidelines.

The Computer

It is inevitable that you will be faced with adjusting your images on a computer or tablet.

- Evaluating your image (learn critical viewing)
 - Exposure / contrast
 - Lighting
 - Reflections / highlights / dark areas
 - Shadows
 - Focus
 - Color
- Cropping
- Correcting alignment and/or distortion (Possible with some software programs, not all)
- Correcting color
- Sizing (for submission)
 - See the following URL for many image resizing options available either online or perhaps already on your computer. <https://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/how-to-resize-an-image/>
 - Apple Preview. This handy program is free with Mac OS

Resize an Image: Select Tools > Adjust Size to bring up the Resize dialog, which will allow you to resize the image. It supports many measurement units, including pixels. By default, it will resize the image proportionally, maintaining the original aspect ratio to ensure the resized image doesn't look stretched or smooshed.

Image-resizing tools like this one are useful for shrinking images so they don't take up as much visible area or on-disk space. They're not ideal for enlarging an image as the blown-up image will be lower quality — for this reason, enlarging an image is almost never a good idea.
 - *Windows 10:*

To resize a picture using Paint

1 Open Paint by clicking the **Start** button , clicking **All Programs**, clicking **Accessories**, and then clicking **Paint**.

- 2 Click the **Paint** button, click **Open**, click the picture you want to resize, and then click **Open**.
- 3 On the **Home** tab, in the **Image** group, click **Resize**.
- 4 In the **Resize and Skew** dialog box, select the **Maintain aspect ratio** check box so that the resized picture will have the same aspect ratio as the original picture. If the **Maintain aspect ratio** check box is selected, you only need to enter the horizontal value (width) or vertical value (height). The other box in the **Resize** area is updated automatically.
- 5 Do one of the following in the **Resize** area, and then click **OK**:
 - To resize your picture by a certain percentage, click **Percentage**, and then enter a percentage to reduce the width by in the **Horizontal** box or a percentage to reduce the height by in the **Vertical** box.
 - To resize the picture so it's a specific size, click **Pixels**, and then enter a new width in the **Horizontal** box or new height in the **Vertical** box.
- 6 Click the **Paint** button , point to **Save as**, and then click the picture file type for the resized image.

Type a new file name in the **File name** box, and then click **Save**.

Pixels, etc.

The number of pixels that make up a digital file is the most important measurement. That same number of pixels can be presented in different size formats. Examples below.

- 72 dpi > 1800 pixels > 25-inch print or screen presentation (roughly, new variations in device screen pixel density make this more complicated to predict)
- 150 dpi > 1800 pixels > 12-inch print or screen presentation (roughly)
- 300 dpi > 1800 pixels > 6-inch print or screen presentation (roughly)

- Computer screen resolution required is generally 72 dpi
- Prints of good quality should be 150 dpi or greater
- Commercial printers generally require 300 dpi as do some art organizations

Again, if you are submitting digital images to a contest or exhibition, make sure you understand image formatting requirements.

General Info

- The smaller your painting, The closer you will need to be to it and the more detail you can get as a result
- Images almost never come out of a camera the way you want them to be without adjustment
- Have a good photo editing software program at hand and experiment with it