

Photographing Your Artwork

Here are some recommendations about photographing your artwork that I have accumulated over the years. They come mainly from two sources: The first is an article that ran in *The Artist's* magazine in October 1984 (and has been reprinted several times) titled "Photographing Your Artwork" by Stanley Marcus. The other is a book titled *Photographing Your Artwork: A Step-By-Step Guide To Taking High Quality Slides At An Affordable Price* by Russell Hart, and published by North Light Books. Some of the recommendations are mine and come from years of working through trial and error. Both that book and the article are great resources for shooting slides, but the rules work with digital photography as well. I am not going to go in-depth in how to photograph your artwork. I'll leave that to the folks cited above. Instead, I'll offer some basic suggestions on how to shoot photos that are good enough to show your work on this website. Hope that it helps.

The Equipment - Here's what you'll want to have:

Camera - Either a digital or film camera will work - the difference is that if you use film, you will need a way to convert the printed image to a digital image. This can be easily accomplished. If you have a scanner, you can do it at home. If not, you can take it to the Wal Mart photo department and do it on their scanner. More on that later. The important thing about the camera is that you would like to be able to turn off the flash. (If you can't turn it off, you can always cover it with a piece of black tape) You can shoot pictures with the flash, but the quality is much better if you don't.

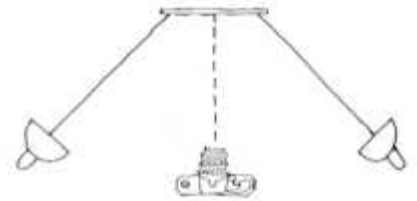
Lights - There are two good ways, one acceptable way and one bad way to light your subject matter. The best way is with photo lights. These are color-corrected bulbs placed in reflectors that are then placed on stands. Kind of costly if you aren't doing a lot of photographing. The next best option is to shoot your work outdoors in natural light. This is kind of tricky, as you can't control the light quite as well as with light stands, but with a little patience it can be done. The acceptable option would be to shoot them indoors, with any lights that can be directed toward the subject. Suggestions would be to use a pair of swing-arm lamps, or floor lamps with the shades removed. The bad option is to shoot using the flash on your camera. This will usually result in bad photos. That flash is good for family photos - bad for artwork.

Tripod - To do this right, you really need to place your camera on a tripod. If you don't have one, there are other options but the important thing is to set your camera up in a way that, once you get things set up you can keep them there. Another options that may work instead of a tripod is to place the camera on a tall table or counter-top. The important thing here is that you want to be able to stabilize the camera, while still being able to look through the viewfinder as you set up the shot. You can shoot it freehand, but it tends to get cumbersome.

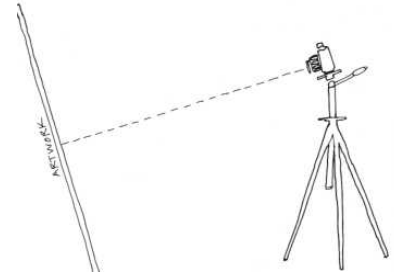
The Setup - Get Your Stuff Together and Ready To Shoot

Probably the most important things that you want to consider when shooting pictures are proper lighting and proper alignment.

Lighting - When lighting your subject, you want to ensure even lighting across the picture plane, while eliminating glare. The best way to do this is to set up your camera and lights as seen in the picture to the right. The important thing is to keep the camera, artwork and lights at the same height, while positioning the lights at a 45 deg. angle to the artwork. This angle ensures that all light is reflected away from your camera, thereby reducing the chance of glare. Even if you are shooting through plexi-glass, this should eliminate most, if not all glare. Another suggestion is to eliminate all other light in the room that you are shooting in. This too, will help eliminate glare. I usually just wait till after dark to shoot my slides.



Alignment - The next thing to keep in mind is the alignment of the camera to the artwork. If the lens of the camera is not parallel to the artwork, you will get distortion in your image. The easiest way to determine whether you are parallel is to look through the viewfinder (this is where the tripod really comes in handy). If the edges of your artwork are all parallel to the edges of the viewfinder, you are in pretty good shape. The image to the right shows the proper relationship between the camera and the artwork. Hanging the artwork on the wall will help in this too.



The Shoot

Once you have gotten to this point, the rest is easy - shoot your pictures. You may want to cover up anything that is seen through the viewfinder that you don't want to photograph. Anything that may distract from your image should be avoided. You can do this later, when you are preparing your images for the web, but why wait? Ensure that you turn off your flash. If you can't turn the flash off - cover it up with black tape. If your camera is able to operate in a manual mode, it is all the better, because if the camera thinks that the flash is being used, it will automatically compensate for it. If you are using a film camera, take several shots at different settings. There is nothing more discouraging than to spend the time setting up to take photos, only to realize that they didn't come out and you have to go through the whole process again. Document what the settings are, so that you can reproduce them next time you want to shoot images, If you are using a digital camera, make sure that you look at the photos (as a minimum through the viewfinder, a better option is on your computer) before you tear everything down. Again, it might be wise to try different settings (especially if your camera allows you to compensate for different lighting conditions). Document the settings for future reference.

Preparing Images for the Web

Film Camera - Have your film developed into prints. Before you have your prints scanned, it may be best to crop out any unwanted part of the image area. This can be accomplished later on the computer, but if you don't have access to, or the know-how of the software to do it, then you may just want to cover the unwanted areas with white paper before scanning. If you don't have a scanner at home, you can take your prints, along with a blank computer disk to the Wal-Mart photo department (or other such place) and use their scanner for a reasonable price. If you have the ability to set the image resolution when scanning, it is best to choose no greater than 100 DPI. If you really care why, read the section below - if you don't care why, just set it at 100 DPI or less.

Digital Camera - Transfer your images from the camera to the computer. Save them in a JPEG format at a resolution of no greater than 100 DPI (see "Image Resolution" below for why).

Digital Image Manipulation - If you have access to and know-how of image manipulation software, this is where you can enhance your images before sending them along. Programs such as Adobe Photoshop, Microsoft Picture It or Microsoft Photo Draw are common and allow you to adjust resolution, resize, crop, adjust color, erase distracting elements, etc.

Image Resolution - Image resolution is measured in Dots Per Inch (DPI) or Pixels Per Inch (PPI). Simply stated, this means that an image 1 inch by 1 inch, with a resolution of 72 DPI consists of a grid of 72 x 72 dots of light (on the screen) or color (on the printed page). The higher the DPI, the more refined the image. Most computer monitors cannot tell the difference of above 100 DPI. Therefore, you can scan an image at a higher resolution and it will look great in printed form, but when seen on the monitor, it will look no better than one scanned at 100 DPI. The big difference though is that the image is larger and therefore it takes more time to load the image. Ever gone to a website that had images you had to wait to load? The images were probably higher than 100 DPI. Keep your images below 100 DPI - They will look fine (but not so fine that someone can download them and reproduce them) and will load quickly.