

# Photographing Your Artwork

Although most art fairs, grants, galleries and museums have gone digital and many only accept digital submissions, the information below will cover both digital and film processes.

**Note:** For print and web layout as well as grant and art fair submissions, the image should include the artwork only. The frame should be included only if it is a part of the artwork. It is best to shoot the work before it is framed. For 3D work, the image should include the artwork against any neutral background. No other objects should be included in the final photo.

## 2D work:

### Placement of the object:

1. Place object in a vertical position, either on a wall or on an easel. It is best to have the work up against a black background, preferably with a texture such as felt or velvet, etc. This texture will absorb some of the reflecting light. The work does not need to be perfectly perpendicular to the floor, it can be placed at an angle, but you must adjust your camera/tripod to the exact same angle so the lens and the surface of the work are parallel. You may purchase an angle finder at any home improvement store for under \$20.

### Adjustment of camera settings and lights:

1. Check to make sure your digital camera or film has the same white balance as your lighting (there are three traditional light temperatures: daylight, tungsten (most indoor light) and fluorescent (most office lighting). If you are shooting with a digital camera, you will want to have your white balance (color temperature) set to the same white balance as your light source. If you are using an electrical light source they will be either tungsten or fluorescent, most cameras indicate this with a light bulb illustration for tungsten, or a fluorescent tube-like illustration for fluorescent. The sun illustration indicates a daylight balanced light source.
2. Using a tripod, place your camera parallel to the artwork by using the angle finder. The surface of the artwork and the camera lens must be parallel. Try to fill as much of the viewfinder with your artwork as possible. If using a zoom lens do not zoom in to create a wide angle view. Try to keep your zoom between a 45mm and 65mm focal length.
3. Be sure your object is in focus through the viewfinder.
4. Use a small aperture opening when manually adjusting exposure to ensure sharpness throughout image.
5. Light meter your object across the surface at the corners, middle and sides of painting and adjust light as needed to create even meter readings. Based upon the meter reading, you should adjust your lights to get even coverage then adjust your camera settings to the appropriate aperture (indicated by your F-stop) and shutter speed. (You can purchase an inexpensive light meter on E-bay for under \$50)
6. Be sure your lights are far enough apart and not entering the lens creating flares. Try to have a light source on either side of the artwork. Use a diffuser and/or polarizing filter to diminish specular highlights on a thickly painted surface. If you do not have the standard photography light diffusers, you may create one of your own by stapling a white semi-opaque fabric over a simple stretcher frame. Use a dark piece of cardboard or other opaque material to block light flares from entering your lens, if necessary.
7. Use either the timer on your camera or a cable release to trigger shutter.
8. Take picture (Bracket if using film. Bracketing when using film will allow you to get the best exposure if your camera settings are slightly off or are not completely accurate. Usually you will bracket up half an F-stop and down half an F-stop)

### 3D work:

#### Placement of object:

1. You may want to create a box of sorts to surround the object even if it is simply a framed box. This will enable you to add lighting and light diffusers over the object and on both sides.

#### Camera and light settings:

2. Check to make sure your white balance is the same as your lighting (and film). (see above)
3. Position camera where you are revealing as much information about the object as possible.
4. Be sure your object is in focus through the viewfinder.
5. Use a small aperture opening when manually adjusting exposure to ensure sharpness throughout image.
6. Place a backdrop under and behind your object.
7. Use an overhead light source to light both the object and background.
8. Use side light to assist in creating form and to lighten shadow area where the overhead light cannot reach. A little shadow is fine as long as it creates a sense of texture and three-dimensionality and not simply darkness. You may have to play around with adjustments with light, diffusers and reflectors until you get the image just as you like. It is okay to have shadow and highlights as long as you can see detail in either area.
9. Use reflector or third light on opposite side, if necessary, to even lighting across the front of object.
10. Use other reflectors and materials to further manipulate the light, as necessary.
11. Be sure your lights are outside the range of the viewfinder and not entering the lens creating flares.
12. Light meter to indicate how much the light drops off from top to bottom and left to right of the object, adjust lights as necessary.
12. Take picture (bracket if using film)