

How To Successfully Photograph Your Own Artwork - A Last Resort -

Learning how to document your own artwork can be time consuming and expensive. Having good quality slides of your work, however, is an absolutely essential first step in seeing yourself as a professional artist. Nine times out of ten you will not have the opportunity to show your original work. Remember that the purpose of sending slides is to generate interest in seeing the actual work. Your slides must adequately reflect the color, detail, texture, and size. Hiring a professional fine arts photographer is the best way to accomplish this. Get referrals from other artists or galleries. Always ask to see examples of the photographer's work before you hire someone. It's also a good idea to discuss their policies regarding copyright, pricing and dissatisfaction before the work begins.

If hiring a professional photographer is out of the question for you, then this set of guidelines should assist you in achieving the best possible results.

FILMS

- Remember that in photography the most important element contributing to the success of your results is matching the film to your light source. If you are using a daylight film, you must shoot the work outdoors, tungsten film must be shot with tungsten lights, indoors, removing all sources of natural light.
- Because of the inconsistency of outdoor light, I recommend the Kodak Ektachrome (EPY) 50 ISO. This is a slow speed film, preferable to a faster speed because, in general, the faster the ISO, the more

- unstable the color, and the greater the noise (grain) will be visible. You may have slides that started to change color after six months. This is usually due the faster ASA films that are being used so frequently.
- - Ektachrome film is temperature matched to be used with 3200 Kelvin bulbs. You will have to buy two of these (500 watts each) at a photo store. It's also nice to have light stands, but you can use inexpensive clip-on hoods and clip them to a chair or other nearby objects. Also, there must not be any other light source in the room. Turn off any other lights; and, if daylight is coming in, curtain it off.

SET UP

- Set your artwork up on a plain white wall. Set your 35mm camera up on a tripod. Be sure to fill the frame, no extraneous information. 35mm is not very much space. You want to use every millimeter to represent the artwork only. Try to always shoot your work prior to framing in order to avoid problems with glare and hot spots.
- If you using a camera with zoom, or better yet, an SLR, use a lens (or lens equivalent) of 50mm or larger to avoid barrel distortion. With shorter lenses, the edges of your artwork may appear stretched or otherwise evidence unintended lens abortions. To accomplish this, either change the lens on your SLR to one over 50mm (if you own one), or use your camera's built in optical zoom feature (not digital zoom).
- Double check to be certain there are no shadows appearing through the viewfinder. Also check for reflections, focus, etc. Now you are ready to set up your lights so that the work appears fully illuminated. Use your light meter (either hand-held or in the

- camera) to scan the piece for even lighting. Then use a Grey card (available in photo stores) to get an accurate reading.
- You will probably have to shoot at a very slow shutter speed, which is fine, as long as your camera is on a tripod and you use a shutter release cord. I have found the sharpest focus to be two stops from the widest aperture opening. On an SLR camera, this could be an aperture from f5.6 to f11. On a Point-and-shoot, these options are generally not available.

AFTER THE SHOOT

- Your first roll of film should be considered an experiment. Get out a pencil and pad and write down how you shoot each frame (shutter speed and f-stop). Bracketing means to shoot one or two f-stops up and down from the meter reading. This allows you to get a range of variations so you can pick the best exposure before you make a lot of dupes.
- When you take this first roll in to be processed, ask for it unmounted so you can roll it out and compare it with your notes to select the best possible slides. Be sure to use a good, professional photo lab.
- Once you have selected the best slides at the best exposure, you can shoot your work consistently and know what you're getting. Remember that in-camera originals are far superior to duplicates; so, as long as your camera is set up, take advantage of it and shoot six to ten of each piece. Good luck!!

WORKING WITH DIGITAL

Working with a digital camera has marked benefits and shortcomings depending on your intent for the photographs you take. Especially if you eventually plan on emailing the photographs of your artwork, digital captures of your work

streamline the process significantly. The shortcomings of digital appear when you must have your artwork on slide. While it isn't impossible to transfer a digital image onto slide, the cost is more prohibitive and the processes rather circuitous as compared with using a 35mm camera with slide film. If digital still appears appropriate for your work and intentions, the following are tips and suggestions to make the most professional captures:

FILESIZE

If you're emailing your photos, it is often suggested that you limit the size of the entire email to under a megabyte. This ceiling is recommended to keep download time minimal for broadband connections, and keep download time reasonable for those with dial up.

MEGAPIXELS

Megapixels refers to the image sensor of your digital camera -- specifically, the number of effective pixels it can capture. Consumer cameras range as high as 12mp, and professional cameras as high as 36mp+. If you're intending on photographing your artwork simply for onscreen viewing and review, a 2mp camera can be as effective as a 10mp. However, if you plan to print your image after photographing it, especially if this print is over 8" x 10", more megapixels are needed to accurately replicate your work.

COLOR CALIBRATION AND WHITE BALANCE

Cameras vary in their capacity to acclimate to different lighting conditions. More expensive digital cameras sometimes have the capability to set the white point based on a photograph you take of something that should be white. For more information on in camera white balance, refer to your manual.

POST PROCESSING

After you take your digital photographs, it is often customary to edit them on a computer to remove extraneous information (cropping) and do after-the-fact color correction. With your digital camera you may have received photo-editing software such as Adobe PhotoDeluxe, or Adobe Photoshop. While it would be impossible to effectively cover all the features of either of these programs, a few operations are worth discussing:

- Cropping

The first operation on your photo that you should do is to crop. Cropping is to remove the space around your art in the photograph. The tighter the crop when you originally took the photograph the better, but removing extraneous information in post-processing is a must. To crop in most programs, you want to select the part of the photograph you wish to keep using a marquee tool, and then select the crop command from a menu such as image. Most programs included with your digital camera will have a crop tool that allows you to draw a box around what you want to keep. Make your crop tight but be sure not to crop out any of your artwork.

- Color Correction

The process involved in correcting colors varies dramatically between programs, and indeed, the process itself is an art form on which entire books have been written. For the present job of correcting your photograph, using your photo editing program's auto color correction is likely your best bet. This command executes an algorithm designed to determine the extents of the colors captured in your photo, then tweaks the boundaries to make sure the white and

black point are correctly set. The process isn't without its flaws, but often the result is good. You are the expert on your art; so if the color looks wrong, undo the operation.

- Resizing

The final operation necessary before you email or otherwise deliver your digital photo is to resize it appropriately. This operation depends on the final intent of the image. If you plan on showing your work on the computer screen, and don't plan on printing it out larger than 3" x 5", a resolution around 800x800@150dpi will accurately display your work while keeping file size low. If you want, you can reduce these dimensions even more, but you run the risk of losing so much quality that the image appears distorted and fuzzy. If you plan on printing your photograph however, it is best to leave the image at its native resolution.

To resize your photograph, find the image size command in your photo editing software. This command is often under the image menu if your program has one. If you're given the option of setting the resolution and DPI, using the numbers listed previously depending on your use, enter in for either the width or height the size you want it to be. You need only enter one of the two dimensions, as the other dimension should change based on the original ratio. Make sure that "constrain proportions" is enabled (if the option is given), as you only wish to scale your photograph, not distort the ratio of height to width.

- Saving

Once you have made all the changes to your photograph, you must save your file. It is good practice to save your edited file as something different than the original so that you keep the original intact, especially if you're sizing down your photograph or making substantial edits. You may have the option of which file type you wish to save as -- jpeg generally provides good quality with a small size; exactly what you want if you're emailing this photo. If you're unconcerned with file size and want the best quality, TIFF files are the best choice.

EMAILING

Now that you're ready to email your photo(s), open a new message using the email program of your choice, and attach the files that you have edited. Finding the attach files command varies between programs, but once you find and click it, you will be given a file dialog box allowing you to select which files are to be attached. Find the files you edited, and click okay. Compose a message for this email, and send away.