

free guide to print and keep for reference

Photographing your 2-D and 3-D art A Mini Gallery™ guide for artists

This is a guide containing some general advice for taking photographs of your artwork. It is specifically intended for use by those who do not have experience as professional photographers and do not have professional facilities available to them. Although primarily aimed at **www.minigalleryworld.com** membership applicants it may be useful for all artists.

No photograph of your art will ever be as good as seeing the real thing. However it is crucial to have good photographs of your art in order to market it effectively and professionally. There is nothing more off-putting than seeing a terrible picture. It may well be the first and last impression the viewer has of you and your art so you will do yourself a disservice if you don't put in the effort to present your art properly.

Your camera

It is essential to have a camera which is capable of taking good photographs. A digital camera is recommended.

The camera should be suitable for the purpose – web cams, video cameras and mobile phone cameras are not.

A digital camera of 3 mega pixels and above is usually adequate however it is worth taking time to research what is available and investing in the best camera you can afford.

Try to get as much advice about what is the best camera for you. Visit your local camera shop if you can - there are often special offers / sales and should be easy to purchase a 6/7 mega pixel camera for about £115. Check on the Internet to see if there are any offers online. **If you are buying a new camera you should look for one that is 4 mega pixels or above which also features optical zoom.**

Read camera reviews and compare prices:

<http://www.cameras.co.uk/>

http://www.reviewcentre.com/consumer_reviews10.html

<http://www.digicamreview.co.uk/>

Your scanner

Some artworks, usually smaller pieces, can be scanned in a flat bed scanner and certain items will produce better results if scanned rather than photographed. Domestic flat bed scanners are usually A4 or A3 in size. If you scan larger artworks you will need to do so in sections and then 'sew' the sections together.

Scan at a resolution of at least 300 DPI.

If you are scanning make sure that the artwork is definitely lying flat against the scanner bed and that you are not allowing scanner shadow to occur.

Your tripod

Taking photographs using a tripod is recommended as it will improve your photography. Using a tripod allows you to avoid camera shake where your hand doesn't stay perfectly still and you can also use it to help you use a consistent set up arrangement each time you photograph your art.

Focus

You need to ensure the artwork is in focus **across the whole surface**. For example remember that if you have any other item in your camera screen when you take the photograph the camera may focus on that instead. Also if one part of the artwork is closer than another there may be just part of the artwork which ends up out of focus.

Shine / reflection / shadows

- Don't photograph an artwork when it is framed under glass except for taking specific framed or in situ images. Glass will cause reflection and/or will distort the appearance of the artwork underneath.
- Mounts, frames etc will cast shadows so **photograph the artwork before you mount or frame it**.
- Varnish, particularly gloss, can cause shine so it is advisable to take some photographs beforehand too.

Quality settings

When you take the photographs use the **highest quality settings and the highest resolution** on your camera which is often Fine or Super Fine. Don't use 'economy' or any compression setting etc.

Do not use macro, 'night time', 'underwater' or any other peculiar setting which is designed for a specific purpose and is not going to work in this context.

Lighting

Even daylight offers the best conditions for taking photographs of artwork. Pick a place that is bright but not to the extent where the glare is excessive as that may wash out the colours.

- **Low light levels can cause noise** on the photograph. This is a **mottled or blotchy effect** which covers the entire surface. Sometimes it is easiest to see if you take a close look at a portion of the artwork which should be one colour. If this happens the artwork will need to be photographed in better lighting as you will not be able to edit the problem out in an image editing program.

- If you have a light source e.g. a window to one side of the artwork then you will find that there is a **gradation or fading** of colour/tone where one end is lighter than the other.

- Be wary of **shadows** cast by objects, people, buildings etc.

- Change your **EV setting** to +0.5, +1.0 or +1.5 before you take the photograph if necessary.

- **If at all possible avoid taking photographs indoors**. If you need to take them indoors ensure that the conditions are as bright as possible and the lighting is even. Adjust EV and white balance settings accordingly. You could consider buying a light tent which costs around £50.

- **Always avoid using flash** as it inevitably makes one area of the artwork brighter than another and often results in dark corners and bleached centre.

Aim to take the most important photographs you need when the natural daylight available permits. During the winter the sunlight is weaker and the sun lies lower in the sky which makes it a particularly difficult time. If it is dark outside it will be even more difficult indoors; using domestic light bulbs etc inevitably leads to poor results.

What you see in your screen

Fill the camera screen as much as you possibly can with the artwork leaving just a small gap at the sides so that there is a little background to crop out.

- **Do not use the digital zoom** to achieve this.
- **Do not use a macro setting.**
- Take the photograph straight on with the **centre of the camera lens in front of centre of artwork.**
- Line up the artwork so that it is straight.
- If you are too close the edges will bow. Beware of the "fish eye" effect.
- If the optical zoom is too close the edges will bow.
- **Don't prop artwork up against objects or furniture without making absolutely sure the alignment between camera lens, artwork and light source is correct.** If you prop up the artwork on books etc you will often find that it creates a **trapezium effect** as it is leaning at an angle and you are standing straight. If this happens you should take the photograph again. Although you can crop out the background fully you will lose quite a bit of the artwork. Instead tip the camera forward on the tripod to line up and check the lighting.

Photographing white

It is difficult to photograph white paper / areas of white paint and achieve results which appear white. The lighting is so important as any unevenness will be very noticeable and if the lighting is not bright enough the white will be grey. You will need as much lighting as possible and you may also want to try scanning the artwork to see if that is easier/produces better results.

Saving the photographs

When you save the photographs on your computer it is a good idea to do the following:

- Create a folder or folders for your original photographs so that you know where your highest quality original files are and they are not confused with ones you have edited.
- You should always keep at least one good original file per artwork. You may need it in the future for competitions, prints, creating other versions for other purposes. Before selling an original artwork double check you have a good original photograph while the artwork is still available to you.
- When you use one of the original photos to create a file for uploading to your Mini Gallery take a copy rather than use the only one you have to edit.
- Burn your image files on to at least one CD or DVD so that you do not have a crisis if you should have a major computer disaster.

Image editing software

The photographs should be good enough that you do not need to do much editing other than a small amount of cropping to make them neat.

- If the entire image still appears a bit dull at this stage then you can use the brightness tool. Subtle enhancements can help but avoid bleaching out the colour completely in Photoshop or similar programs.
- Save the edited image file in a new folder of prepared images.
- Save it at 100% quality. Don't compress the image.
- Save it at around 1,000 pixels wide or high.
- Save it with the title or some memorable words or code in the file name so that you can locate it easily.

If you manage to achieve even lighting but find it a bit lighter or darker than in reality you can use a program like XnView (free software from www.xnview.com) to adjust the white or black point levels. If the photo needs to be whiter adjust the 'White point' slider. If it needs to be darker adjust the 'Black point' slider. These levels can be found under Image -> Adjust -> Levels... Using these options you can also determine if the lighting is even – sliding the 'White point' slider and 'Black point' slider the colours should remain even whilst getting lighter or darker.

XnView can also be used to perform most editing tasks required to get your pictures ready for the Internet including accepting images from your camera or scanner, cropping, rotating etc etc.

Top 10 tips to remember

Virtually all fundamental problems with photographs of artwork can be eliminated by following these 10 tips:

1. Use a good camera that is fit for the purpose.
2. Use a reliable tripod.
3. Keep the camera lens central and perpendicular to the artwork.
4. Fill the screen without using digital zoom.
5. Use the best quality settings and resolution.
6. Use natural daylight.
7. Use bright even lighting with no flash or shadows.
8. Photograph without mount, frame, reflective varnish etc.
9. Save files at maximum quality.
10. Do not use compression.

We hope you have found this guide helpful.

Please print and keep a copy for reference.