



PHOTOGRAPHING YOUR ARTWORK FOR GICLEE PRINTS

At some point you will want to have good digital pictures of your artwork. Aside from assisting in preserving your intellectual property rights and also for insurance purposes, it is a necessary step for good giclee reproductions of your artworks. For many artists, with a large gallery of paintings, the cost of having artwork scanned may be somewhat daunting due to the expense. This is why photographing may be an alternative.

Photographing your artwork does not require any great expertise or talent with the camera. It essentially requires a decent SLR (single lens reflex) camera system with a 50-55mm lens, good lighting conditions and camera positioning.

The Camera

The first step is to have a decent SLR (single lens reflex) camera with a 55mm lens. Keep in mind that if you are not using a camera with a 50mm lens or greater you may get barrel-like distortion. A lot of people do not realize that this occurs but it is noticeable when you are shooting artwork due to the typical square or rectangular shape.



You may wonder if you should use a digital or film based camera. While some traditionalists may disagree, we prefer to use a Digital SLR. Overall we have seen better results from amateur photographers that shoot their own artwork digitally versus them using film. With digital, the number of mega pixels of the camera does come into play so we recommend at least a 6 mega pixels Digital SRL camera or greater. Both Nikon and Canon make some popular and fairly affordable consumer based Digital SLRs. If using film based SLR, then you should use the slowest film possible. The slower the better since less graininess will occur. Graininess is a common problem we see from film based images.

Lighting

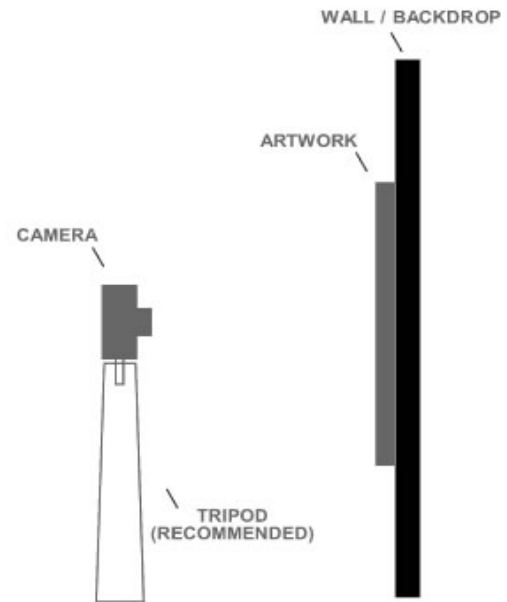
Artwork can be shot indoors or outdoors. The main factor to consider is the angle and lighting color. Of course you will want to use a white light source to prevent modifying the color of your artwork but for the low budget photographer, a nice sunny day should work best. Try to photograph in the middle of the day, between 10 AM and 2 PM.



Shooting

The angle of your shot is very important. You will want to place your artwork flat against a background or on a wall. Black velvet material is an excellent backdrop since it can absorb light. If a black background is not available, try a white background. You may need to make some color adjustments later to your image in a program like Photoshop. Make sure your artwork is exactly at a 90 degree angle to your camera so that the lens is pointing directly at the picture. If you can print out and include a gray scale strip as well as a ruler above your artwork then you will have some additional referencing tools at your disposal for post photo production. The artwork should take up as much of the camera lens view as possible. This can be more difficult than it seems so a tripod may help if you have one. Avoid using a flash since this may cause glare to appear on your picture. It may take several shots before you are satisfied. This is where the digital is most advantageous because you can shoot an image and preview immediately afterwards on your computer or camera's LCD screen.

Very important to note is that if shooting digitally, use your camera's highest quality settings and resolution. If you have the option to shoot in RAW or TIF, use these formats over JPEG.



Post Photo Production

Once you have photographed your artwork, open up the file with a good image editing program like Photoshop or Paint Shop Pro. If you are using film, you will want to scan the negatives or have a transparency made and scan them. Do not have your local photo processing place make a photo CD unless they can do so at a high resolution - 200 to 300 pixels per inch (PPI) in relation to the size of your artwork is best. Once you have opened your image file you may need to do additional resizing and cropping. Use the ruler and grayscale you included in the photo to make adjustments accordingly. If you are not familiar with this end of things, you may have to seek the assistance of a professional or someone at least well versed in digital imaging. After adjusting color and size you will need to crop excess parts of your photo outside of the range of the artwork so that your final copy is just of the picture. You may need to resize up or down. If resizing up, do so in increments of 10% and in bicubic resample mode. This better preserves the resolution quality than sizing up in one step. Your final resolution should be 200 to 300 PPI. Many professional printers recommend 300 pixels per inch but realistically at 200 PPI there will not be a noticeable difference. If printing on canvas, even 150 PPI yields excellent results. It is very important to note that the more you have to resize up, the greater the loss of quality occurs in the image. Hopefully you will be able to start off with a high resolution image in the first place.



Additional Things to Consider

The big advantage to doing this digitally is that you can get instant results from your photography session. With film you have to have it developed and then see if you did it correctly. This can be frustrating for the amateur photographer since they may find that all their shots were off in some form or fashion. If you do not have a good DSLR then purchasing one may set you back but you can save a lot of money in the long run.

Conclusion

At Art Exhibits Marketing, we do lean toward shooting digitally so photographers may disagree with certain elements of this article. Keep in mind these instructions are meant as tips to get you started and the final results may vary from individual to individual. You may find certain things mentioned do not work well for you. If you are just getting started, use this as a starting point then tweak your technique as you go along.