

Photographing Works of Art

If you are planning to submit a scholarship portfolio, the following information may be useful in helping you to prepare it. Remember that you can also shoot digitally, save your images as jpegs and burn them to a CD.

Equipment:

- * 35mm Single Lens Reflex (SLR) camera
- * Tripod
- * Cable Release (optional)
- * Hand-held Incident Light meter (if not built into camera)
- * 8" x 10" grey card (for built-in light meters)
- * Skylight, 81A, or 81B Filter (for daylight photography in open shade)
- * Two 500-Watt Photoflood Tungsten Bulbs, 3200 or 3400K (Kelvin)
- * Two Adjustable Light Stands with Reflectors
- * Daylight-balanced Slide Film
- * Indoor (Tungsten) Film

Digital:

Exposure and lighting are critical when shooting digital images as well as when you are using film. Make sure to White Balance your digital camera to the lighting conditions (daylight, outdoors, indoors) you will be shooting under. Consult your digital camera to set your White Balance (WB). This is critical as images shot with an incorrect WB will have a blue or golden orange appearance to them.

Film:

35mm slide transparencies are standard among art institutions and galleries for recording and presenting art.

Unexposed professional film, such as those listed above, should be stored in a cool place, such as a refrigerator, and sealed to keep moisture out. New film can be stored in a freezer and maintained indefinitely. The film should be allowed to come to room temperature overnight or a minimum of 1.5 hours before use.

Exposed film should be processed as soon as possible.

Daylight Exposures:

Diffused daylight under bright but overcast conditions is best for outdoor photography of art. If the day is sunny, open shade near a white wall is best. Partially cloudy days are least desirable due to frequent changes in light.

For shooting in open shade, a color correction filter will be necessary to eliminate the bluish cast of shadows in daylight. A Skylight, 81A, or 81B filter should be used, depending on the degree of color correction necessary. Tests and experience are the best way to know.

For shooting in open sunlight, a color correction filter is not necessary. Though good for color rendition, sunlight may create problems with too much brightness (exposures over 1/1000 second risk color distortion), cast shadows, reflected light, or glare. Glare can be corrected with a polarizing filter or by angling the work to the

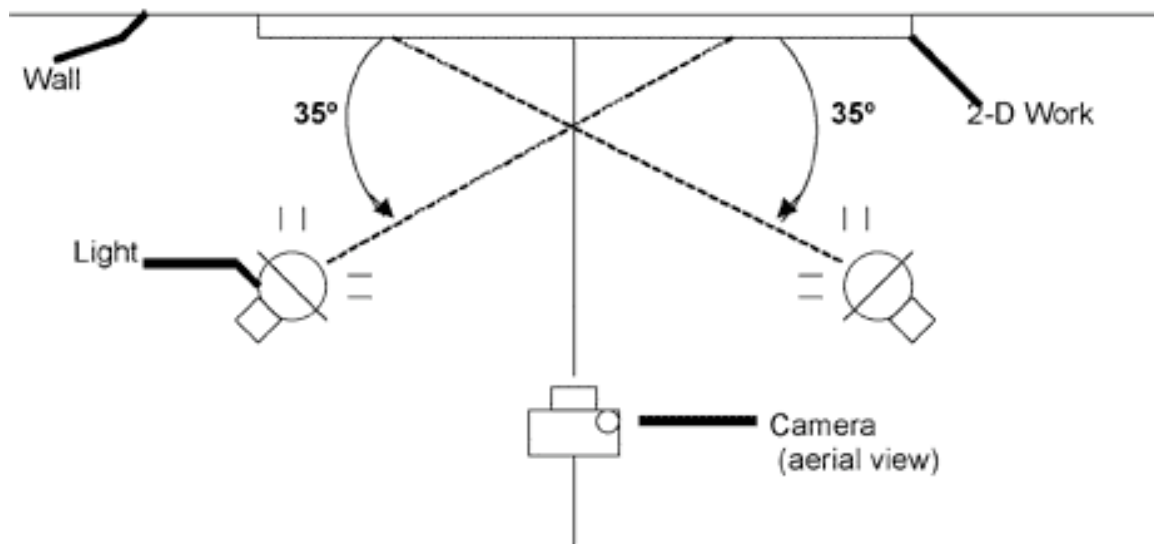
sun's rays. Mid-morning or mid-afternoon is the best time to achieve the most accurate color rendition.

Daylight exposures may be made indoors near ample windows that are admitting north light, providing that the light is bright and uniform in illumination (exposures at F4 or less, or less than 1.2 second shutter speed risk color distortion). A predominantly white room is best for color accuracy. As in open shade, a filter will be needed for color correction.

Artificial Light Exposures:

Indoor photography with artificial light offers the advantages of convenience, comfort, maximum control of light, and least physical risk to the artwork.

Artificial light is provided by 500-watt Photoflood tungsten bulbs with a color temperature rating of either 3200 or 3400 K, depending on the type of film used (check the label). The bulbs should be mounted in adjustable light stands. The bulbs should be discarded after 2-3 hours of use since their color temperature gradually alters, distorting film colors. Quartz Halogen lights have the advantage of maintaining a consistent 3200 K throughout their life.
Setting up your lights and camera



Studio lights should be placed as shown above so that illumination of the artwork is completely uniform. Each light is placed on either side and the same distance from the object. The lights are directed toward the opposite third of the artwork and placed at a 35-degree angle to its surface.

Larger works may well require four lamps in order to uniformly illuminate a larger surface area. Place two lights on either side of the artwork, spaced and angled as above, with one light high, aimed down and across the work, and one light low, aimed up and across the work.

Paintings should not be photographed in frames that cast shadows on their surface, and works on paper should be photographed unmatted. Photographing works under glass is best avoided, but reflections can be minimized by darkening the studio

behind the camera and shooting with the lens placed through an opening in a dark cloth or panel.

Photographing 2-D Work:

Mount the work to be photographed as flatly as possible on a wall or large board. Works on paper should be mounted as unobtrusively as possible, using rolled tape on the back or straight pins. The artwork should be mounted on a smooth, clean, and uniform surface. A white background works well and a non-reflective black cloth (such as velvet) offers the effect of masking out the background when the slide is projected. The darker background also tends to intensify the effect of color.

To avoid distortions in the image when photographing 2-D work, the center of the lens must be centered in relation to the artwork and the film plane or back of the camera must be parallel with the picture plane (you can check plumb-ness by placing a level on the camera lens and adjusting the camera/ tripod accordingly so that the camera is leveled perfectly straight up and down). Raise or lower the camera on the tripod until the center of the lens is at the center of the artwork. Move the tripod back until the work fills the viewfinder squarely. Be careful to allow enough of a margin around the art so that the slide mount does not cover its edge when processed. On the other hand, the impression made by an artwork in slide form will be greatly diminished if the slide is taken from too far back.

Another method is to position the work flat on the ground (on a suitable background material) and shoot it from above, either hand-held or on a tripod. This method is especially useful when you're shooting several pieces since it saves the time and effort of mounting the work on a vertical surface. Position yourself over the work with the camera lens centered over the image, the film plane parallel to the picture plane, and the edges of the artwork square with the viewfinder. Artificial lighting can be set up at the same angles as for vertical shots. In either daylight or artificial light, be careful to avoid casting shadows across the work.

Photographing 3-D Work:

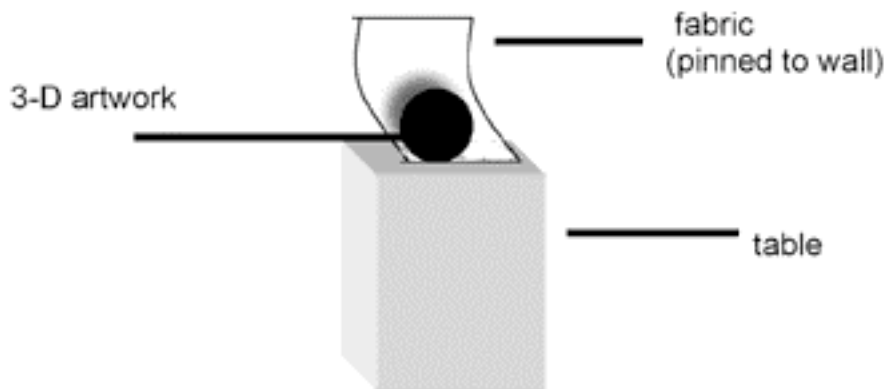
Unique considerations in photographing 3-D artworks include the choice of background, point-of-view (composition), and lighting to present a 3-D object through a 2-D medium to maximum effect.

Backgrounds should be clean, uncluttered, and unobtrusive as possible. A backdrop of seamless paper or fabric is well suited for this purpose. Larger objects may require photo backdrop paper, sold by photo suppliers and available in 12-yard rolls, either 54" or 107" wide. White, grey, black, and solid-color backdrops are available and should be chosen to contrast and highlight the works of art.

Presenting multiple viewpoints of a single object is most often necessary to represent some sense of the object as it actually appears. Viewpoint and framing should be carefully considered to emphasize 3-D characteristics in relation to the picture plane of the slide. The image should be framed closely enough to create visual impact but with just enough surrounding space to indicate its three-dimensionality.

Lighting should be strong enough to characterize various planes and modeling but not so harsh as to lose color and form in dark shadows or intense lights. The object should be angled to the light to create the maximum effect of form and dimension.

photographing 3-D artwork



Camera Settings:

Set the ASA on the camera to correspond with the ASA of the film. Note that Kodachrome 25 can be "pushed" for richer color saturation by setting the ASA on the camera (or hand-held light meter at 40 rather than 25, and having the film processed normally).

F-stops 8 or 11 are considered the best aperture settings for color accuracy. Settings of F4 or less risk color distortions.

Set the shutter speed on the camera, in conjunction with the F-stop, to achieve the correct light exposure, as outlined below. Avoid shutter speeds of longer than 1/2 second or shorter than 1/1000 second, due to possible color distortions at these extremes.

Setting the Exposure:

The correct light exposure can be determined by means of either a hand-held incident light meter or a camera with a built-in metering system.

When using a light meter built into the camera, hold a Grey Card as near to the surface of the work as possible and take a light reading through the lens so that the grey card completely fills the viewfinder, adjusting the F-stop and shutter speed accordingly. Despite what may appear to be an over-or under-exposure when the grey card is removed, the camera is in fact correctly adjusted to the light falling on the object, and the exposure will be correct. The same aspect of the lighting is measured by a hand-held incident light meter.

When working under artificial light, only one reading is necessary per session. Because of gradual and imperceptible changes in sunlight, however, readings should be taken periodically when working out-of-doors.

To insure the best possible reproduction, bracket exposures by taking three photographs: one at the meter reading, one at an F-stop above and one at an F-stop below. Each of the three will be generally accurate, but you might well find that one exposure creates a stronger impression.

As another measure, the individual piece can be taken into account. For works with predominantly dark tones, you might expect to open the F-stop by half a step. For works that are very light overall (such as a simple line drawing on white paper). Use

a smaller F-stop, for example: close the aperture to F8.5 or F11 if the light reading is for F8.

Making the Photograph:

Use a cable release to minimize camera movement (and blurry slides).

It's a good idea to expose as many original transparencies of the same image you expect you'll need (and you will probably need more than you think). Duplicate slides made from originals are more expensive per slide and generally lower in quality.

Detail shots are important for representing characteristic textures, details, or formal relationships of the work that aren't evident in an overall view. Compose details to effectively present important close-up aspects of the work, adjusting the light if necessary to reveal texture or surface.

Labeling Slides

Slides should be clearly labeled with artist's name on the front of the slide and numbered.

Labeling information can be neatly written directly on the slide mount with a Sharpie or can be typed or written on self-adhesive labels, which are attached to the mount.
Slide Presentation and Storage:

Always show quality work over quantity.

Slides should be stored in a cool, dry, and dark place to protect them from fading, color alteration, or other damage.