Photographing Artwork for Your Digital Portfolio

Suggested Equipment:
- Camera (Preferably a single lens reflex style, interchangeable lens digital camera. However a point-and-shoot version with high resolution (5 megapixels or higher) will suffice.
- Tripod
- Bubble Level
- Tape measure
- Photo grey card
- Large piece of grey or black paper (larger than the artwork) for use as background

Optional Equipment
- Tungsten lights
- Hand held Light meter
- Softboxes or other light diffusion materials
- Dark grey seamless paper – available through photo retailers

## Two-Dimensional Artwork (outdoor without lighting equipment)
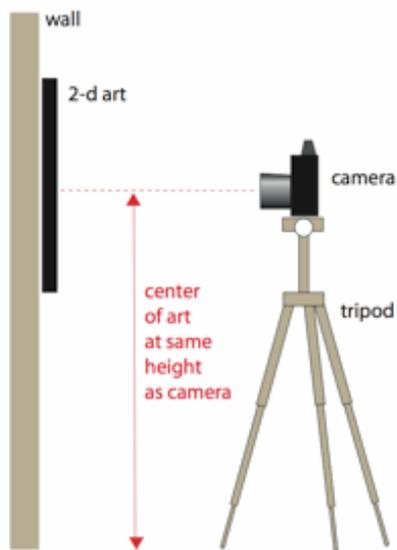
1. Begin by choosing a well lit but low glare place to shoot. Preferably in the shade or during an overcast day to avoid shadows and glare.
2. Hang your black or grey paper with the center approximately at eye level.
3. Start by hanging your artwork, approximately with the center of the piece at eye level, and then using your bubble level, make sure the artwork is level.
4. Using your tape measure, measure the height to the center of the artwork.
5. Set your camera on its tripod, and use the height you just measured to adjust the height of the camera. Measure to the center of your lens. Also be sure to level your camera using the bubble level to match your art.
6. Your camera's distance to the artwork should be determined by your lens's angle of view. Be sure to fill as much of the image frame as is possible without cropping out any of the artwork.
7. Examine the edges and corners of the art through the viewfinder to be sure there is no distortion or key-stoning (when one side appears longer than a parallel side).
8. Set your camera to its highest resolution setting, and to its lowest film speed rating for the highest quality images possible.
9. For proper exposure, use a hand held light meter. If this is not available use the photo grey card to take an in-camera light meter reading. Set your camera's aperture and shutter based upon your light meter reading. If you are using a

point and shoot camera, you will not have the option and will have to shoot using automatic exposure settings determined by your camera.

Note: As long as the light does not change significantly, this exposure will provide good results for each piece photographed. There is no need to re-meter. Please note that once the gray card is taken away, the meter may indicate overexposure or underexposure, particularly if the piece is predominantly dark or light. Do not make any changes. Now you are ready to begin photographing your work.

Two-Dimensional Artwork (indoor with lighting equipment)
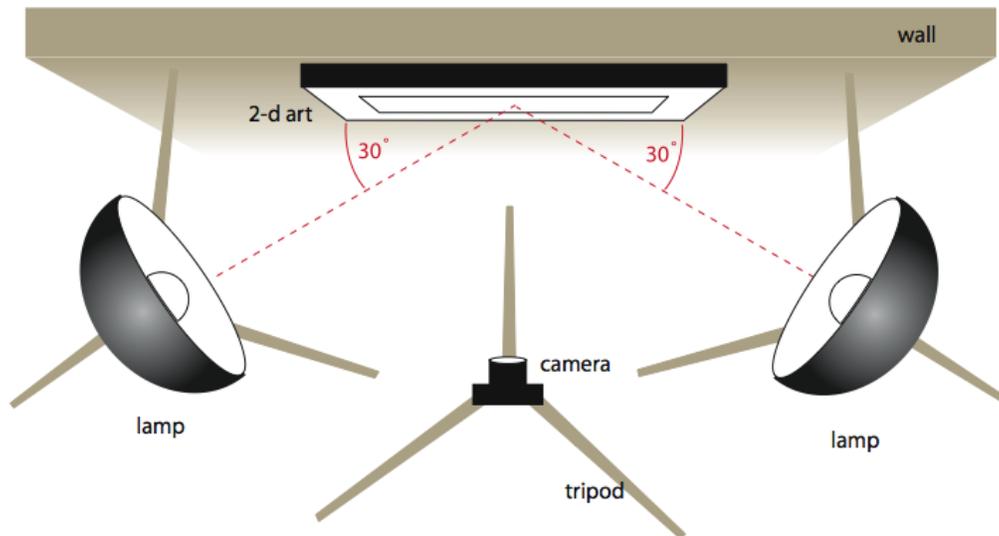
1. Start by hanging your artwork, approximately with the center of the piece at eye level, and then using your bubble level to make sure the artwork is level.
2. Using your tape measure, measure the height to the center of the artwork.
3. Set your camera on its tripod, and use the height you just measured to adjust the height of the camera. Measure to the center of your lens. Also be sure to level your camera using the bubble level to match your art.
4. Your camera's distance to the artwork should be determined by your lens's angle of view. Be sure to fill as much of the image frame as is possible without cropping out any of the artwork.
5. Examine the edges and corners of the art through the viewfinder to be sure there is no distortion or key-stoning (when one side appears longer than a parallel side).
6. Set your camera to its highest resolution setting, and to its lowest film speed rating for the highest quality images possible.
7. Now set up your lights.
   For best results, whether using strobe lighting or high quality tungsten lighting, place lights at an equal distance from your artwork, at approximately 30° - 45° angles, being sure to avoid glare. The height of your lights should be on center with your artwork.
8. For proper exposure, use a hand held light meter. If this is not available use the photo grey card to take an in-camera light meter reading. Set your camera's aperture and shutter based upon your light meter reading. If you are using a point and shoot camera, you will not have the option and will have to shoot using automatic exposure settings determined by your camera.
   Note: As long as the light does not change significantly, this exposure will provide good results for each piece photographed. There is no need to re-meter. Please note that once the gray card is taken away, the meter may indicate overexposure or underexposure, particularly if the piece is predominantly dark or light. Do not make any changes. Continue using the reading from the gray card. Now you are ready to begin photographing your work.

Three-Dimensional Artwork (outdoors without lighting equipment)
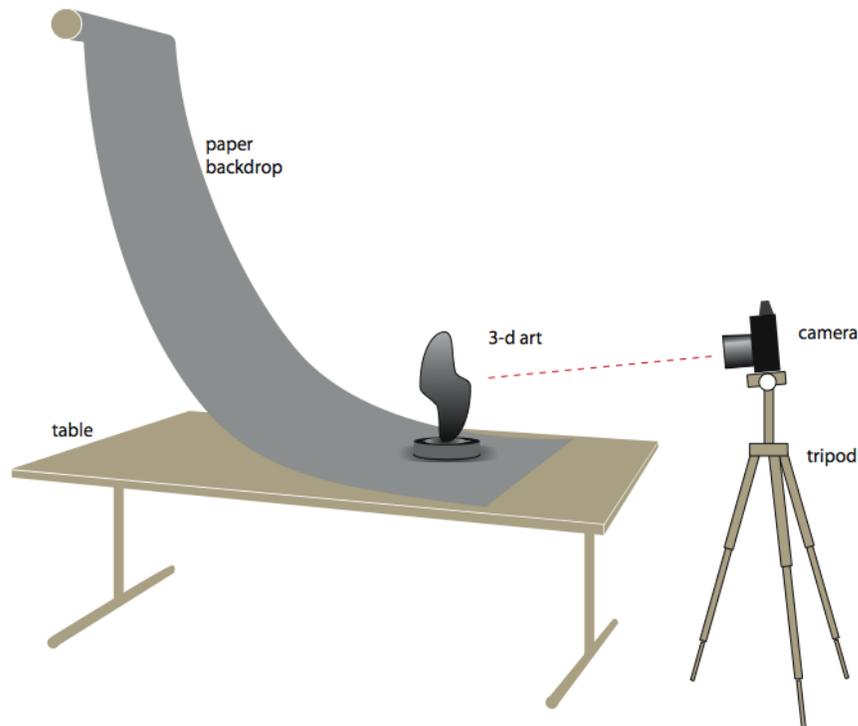
1. Begin by choosing a well lit but low glare place to shoot. Preferably in the shade or during an overcast day.
2. Place a table up against a wall. Use pushpins or tape to attach fabric, paper, or other background to the wall above the table, allowing it to sweep down covering the table. Make sure the fabric arcs gently between the wall and the table.
3. If the artwork is producing a lot of glare, the light may be diffused by holding sheets of tracing paper or vellum in between the light and the subject. This will soften the light and prevent unwanted highlights.
4. Set your camera on its tripod, the height should be a low angle so that you are looking as directly into the piece as possible. Also be sure to level your camera using the bubble level to match your art.
5. Your camera's distance to the artwork should be determined by your lens's angle of view. Be sure to fill as much of the image frame as is possible without cropping out any of the artwork.
6. Set your camera to its highest resolution setting, and to it's lowest film speed rating for the highest quality images possible.
7. For proper exposure, use a hand held light meter. If this is not available use the photo grey card to take an in-camera light meter reading. Set your camera's aperture and shutter based upon your light meter reading. If you are using a point and shoot camera, you will not have the option and will have to shoot using automatic exposure settings determined by your camera.
   Note: As long as the light does not change significantly, this exposure will provide good results for each piece photographed. There is no need to re-meter. Please note that once the gray card is taken away, the meter may indicate overexposure or underexposure, particularly if the piece is predominantly dark or light. Do not make any changes. Continue using the reading from the gray card. Now you are ready to begin photographing your work.

Three-Dimensional Artwork (indoors with lighting equipment)
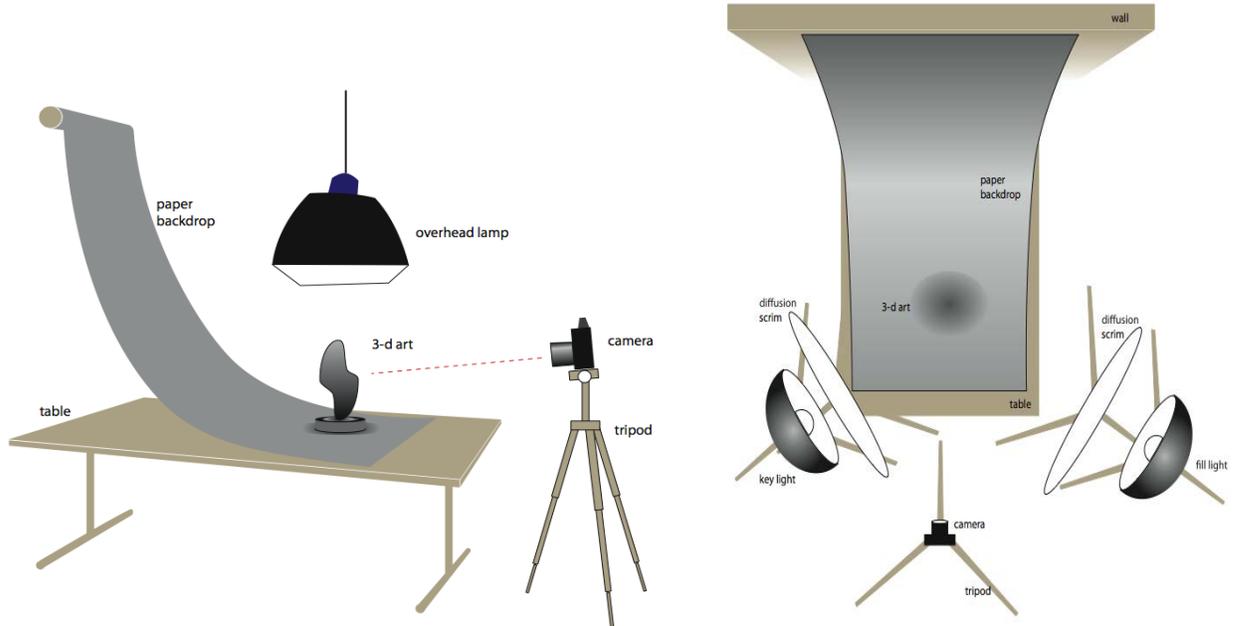
1. Place a table up against a wall. Use pushpins or tape to attach fabric or other background to the wall above the table, allowing it to sweep down covering the table. Make sure the fabric arcs gently between the wall and the table.
2. Place one light on the work as the main or "key" light preferably coming from an angle and from above. The second light should be further away from the subject to help fill in the shadows created by the first light on the opposite. Avoid creating distracting shadows on the background.
3. If the artwork is producing a lot of glare, the light may be diffused by holding sheets of tracing paper or vellum in between the light and the subject. This will soften the light and prevent unwanted highlights.
4. Set your camera on its tripod, the height should be a low angle so that you are looking as directly into the piece as possible. Also be sure to level your camera using the bubble level to match your art.
5. Your camera's distance to the artwork should be determined by your lens's angle of view. Be sure to fill as much of the image frame as is possible without cropping out any of the artwork.
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Color balance
Be sure that your light source and your camera's white balance setting are the same. With daylight use the daylight color balance setting; tungsten/ incandescent light (clamp-on lights or incandescent bulbs) require a tungsten/ incandescent setting. If using strobe lighting (flash), your color balance should be daylight.

Avoiding glare

- Move lights to alternate positions changing the angle of reflection.
- If shooting artwork with a lot of reflective surface, use black or white paper or mat board to help eliminate the reflection.
- If lights are causing glare, increase the angle of the lights or move further to the sides of the artwork until the reflection is no longer visible.
- If available, the use of an overhead diffused light source (like a softbox) will greatly aid in photographing 3D works and help create a gradated background for your work.
- The use of white foam board or mat board can greatly help in evening lighting with 3D works. Use these to help reflect the light onto your objects. This can even replace the use of your fill light.

Preparing your digital images for submission

Image size and resolution

- Be sure to check the specifics required for the portfolio you are submitting. Be sure not to submit an incorrect size, resolution, or file format. Some general rules of thumb for resolution are as follows:
  - Professional printing 300 dpi
  - PowerPoint, PDF, or web presentations 72dpi

File format

- While there are many formats the most common are jpeg and tiff. These are accepted and opened by the majority of computers and applications. Use these to be safe. Jpeg is the most common as it requires the least amount of disk space and can be shared the most easily.
- As there are a countless number of image editing applications, it would be too difficult to describe all of them and their functions; there are a few universal functions that will be applicable to you.
  - **Crop** – use this tool to cut away excess image or background that is unnecessary to describing your artwork.
  - **Resize** – this allows you to set image size and resolution (again, check the specifics outlined).
  - **Brightness and contrast** – be careful with these and use with caution. These tools can ruin an otherwise acceptable image and once you've gone to far you can't go back. Your monitor may not be very accurate, if you have the ability to check numeric values of RGB (red, green and blue) be sure that your image highlights don't exceed 245 and that your shadows don't go below 15 for each of the colors.

Saving and naming your images

- Chances are that as an artist you'll submit some of the same digital images of your work to different organizations for exhibitions, competitions, publishing, and/or portfolio reviews. This means you should be organized with your images. You can categorize them in folders by date of completion, medium, or whatever works best for you. You should also follow a consistent naming convention for your image files. Some suggestions are listed below:
  - You should keep an uncompressed version (TIFF format) of your files on your hard drive or archived on external media.
  - If you want your work to be quickly and easily shared with your identification, save your files as such: "LastNameFirstInitial_CompletionYearAbbreviatedTitle_AbbreviatedMedium.jpg" (Example: *JacksonM_2009Woman_ch.jpg*)
    - It a good practice to keep the number of characters in a file name to 30 or less.
    - To avoid problems in databases and on the web, it is best to avoid using spaces.
    - Notice that the first letter of each word is capitalized to allow easier reading.
    - Underscores are the only permitted special characters. (Dashes are usually okay too.)
  - When submitting artwork on a disk or through Email, you may want to include an image description sheet with corresponding numbers to your images.
- Save your files in a folder that is clearly labeled and easy to find on your disk. Double check once you burn your disk to be sure that all the images are there. You don't want to be overlooked for a simple error.