

# HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH YOUR OWN ARTWORK

**FLEISHER ART MEMORIAL - JOE MIKULIAK - JANUARY 17 & 24, 2007**

## **OUTDOORS - PHOTOGRAPHING ARTWORK:**

Use any good camera. SLIDES CAN BE MADE FROM COLOR NEG, PRINTS, AND DIGITAL FILES.  
Learn how to work your camera before setting up your artwork. Consult the instruction manual.

### **THE BEST LIGHT**

2D artwork-a bright overcast day or large area of open shade. Never start at the end of the day.  
3D artwork- whatever light looks best. Direct sunlight may produce black shadows with no detail.

### **BASIC SET-UP**

Set up where color from green grass or a red brick wall will not be reflected onto the subject.  
Don't lean over your artwork with your camera. Hang paintings, pin works on paper to a vertical corkboard or homosote, put small objects on a tables.  
A non-distracting background is essential for anything except outdoor sculpture.  
Digital photos can be cropped later. Slide edges can be blacked out with photographer's "Silver tape."  
Use white, black, or gray seamless background paper available at photo stores. Not colored paper.  
Put objects on a table in front of a contrasting background paper, white foamcore, or deep shadow.

### **TECHNIQUE**

Move close and almost fill the viewfinder for 2D work. Leave a larger border around all 3D works.  
Many viewfinders aren't accurate. How close you can get is learned by experience.  
Look at your artwork as objectively as possible. Then look at the rest of the viewfinder.  
It is up to you to center the art and make the sides of viewfinder parallel to the sides of the artwork.  
Paintings and works on paper: avoid keystoneing and uneven borders.  
Use a tripod for quickest most accurate camera placement.

### **EXPOSURE**

Color negative film and digital cameras are forgiving of exposure errors-use auto settings.  
Use +/- exposure control (if your camera has it) to lighten or darken the image. Even try the flash.  
Color slide film is not forgiving. Use a camera with manual exposure capability – adjustable f stops  
and shutter speeds.

Choose "normal" exposure settings by using the Kodak gray card sold at photo stores. Bracket.  
**BRACKETING:** Turn the f-stop ring in both directions full & halfway between f-stops.  
i.e. make extra exposures at 1/2 and 1 f stop  $\pm$  either side of "normal" settings.

## **INDOORS - PHOTOGRAPHING ARTWORK USING ARTIFICIAL LIGHT:**

**NEEDED:**

Enough open floor space—at least 4 times as wide as the largest item to be photographed. Some way to shut out the daylight, or work at night. Using slide film? - Buy Tungsten slide film.

35mm SLR or digital camera with fully manual focus and exposure modes.

(Adjustable f-stops and shutter speeds.)

Photographic lights, light stands, special 3200K light bulbs. Expect long exposures. Need tripod. Hot lights must be at least 6 feet away from the item to be photographed. (And from you too.)

White, black, or gray seamless photographic background paper available from Photo stores.

Sold in 53" and 103" widths.

A Kodak gray card sold at photo stores. It comes with instructions.

**LIGHTING-For paintings and other 2D work:**

Set up lights an equal distance apart & at less than a 45 degree angle from wall.

Pointing lights at one another is good.

Check for even lighting by metering the gray card in the center and the 4 corners.

If the readings are not almost equal readjust.

Lighting should make the artwork look good – no hotspots or glare.

**LIGHTING-For sculpture:**

Does subject look best on a cloudy day or in bright sunlight?

Use diffusers to simulate clouds, direct lights for sunshine.

Center the object on the table in front of the background.

Evaluate the effect of the lights from the camera position. Adjust lights so subject looks good

Rotate the object/raise the camera. The subject should reveal itself just the way you want it seen.

Detail will be lost in deep shadows-try a white bounce card before using a second light.

All cameras lose detail in either bright highlights and/or deep shadows depending on the exposure.

Lighting should make the artwork look good –no important detail lost in shadow or blinding white-outs.

**EXPOSURE FOR CONSISTENTLY GOOD SLIDES**

Determine normal exposure by metering the gray card in the same light that's on the subject.

Reset camera's ISO dial 2 numbers lower than recommended on the film box. (Set it to 40 for Ektachrome 64T)

Fill the viewfinder with the gray card and don't shadow it with your body.

Expect an exposure of 1/2 to 8 seconds. Choose corresponding f-stop around f 8 or f 11.

**SOME FILMS FOR PHOTOGRAPHING ARTWORK**

35mm FILM	BALANCED FOR	COMMENTS
Kodak Gold 200	Daylight	Color negative film - has more exposure latitude.
Ektachrome 100 Pro Film EPN	Daylight	Pro Films are available at photography stores.
Ektachrome 64T Pro Film EPY	Tungsten	Process slides in a local professional photo lab for same day service.

Evaluate your photos & improve your results the next time.

Slides? - Project them or look at them on a light box.

Digital? – Photos can be cropped and tweaked in Photoshop. Resist the urge to increase the contrast or saturation.

Color calibration is important for ideal results. Color and contrast are difficult to judge on LCD monitors and laptops.

Remember, the photo will never be identical to the original and should never be better than it either.

## LIGHTING

Use photoflood bulbs-250 (ECA) or 500 watts (ECT) or quartz halogen photo bulbs. They are 3200 degrees Kelvin.

They match Tungsten film or the Tungsten Color Balance setting on a digital camera.

Use the light bulbs in correct fixtures only. They are very hot. Keep them at least **6 feet** away from artwork and bare skin.

FOR PAINTINGS OR PAPER: use lights directly or with UV and polarizing filters.

FOR SCULPTURE: use lights directly or with filters, diffusers, umbrellas, bounce cards (white or black), or blockers.

Bounce lights against a white ceiling; combine bounce and direct light. Mixing tungsten & daylight causes color problems.

Be especially careful using filtering materials with tungsten lights - many filter materials can catch fire.

## LIGHTING FIXTURES

**SILVER BOWL** reflectors are cheap and popular but do not evenly distribute the light.

Do not use household incandescent bulbs in them and expect decent color.

Use ECA 250 watt photoflood bulbs from a camera store.

These bulbs turn brown quickly, which changes their color output. Use them for photography only.

**LOWELL TOTALIGHTS** are small and portable. I have found that they give the most even spread of light.

Put one on each side for paintings up to 4' wide by 6' high and two on each side for larger paintings.

Put the Totas at 22 ½ degrees from the painting (over 6ft, up 3 ft minimum, to over 15 ft, up 7 1/2ft).

**LOWELL DP, Omni, and the Smith Victor 710** are some bright variable spotlights.

Matching umbrellas, UV, and diffusion filters and barn doors are available.

Spots are excellent for 3D work but bright and hot.

**WHITE FOAMCORE** can substitute for the 2<sup>nd</sup> light to fill in shadows or highlight important features.

## DEALING WITH GLARE

Move lights around. Try placing them at less than 22 1/2 degrees from the subject, never 45 degrees. Try polarizing filters on the lens and in front of the lights. A little glare which follows the paint strokes can be OK.

## **BEFORE YOU BEGIN, INDOORS OR OUTDOORS**

Remember to use a non-distracting background.

Move camera around to make each painting parallel to the edges of the viewfinder or to the object's best angle.

Set manual cameras to the exposure measured off the gray card.

Bracket. Write down the set up and exposure. Evaluate the results.

This will give you a higher percentage of good photos faster, the next time you photograph your own artwork.

Never give away your best slide-have a PROFESSIONAL PHOTOLAB make duplicates.

There is no substitute for learning how to use the features of your camera. Read the manual.

Write down set up and exposure information - evaluate results - minimize wasted time and money.

Learning to use the gray card is essential for consistent exposures as the lighting set-up changes