HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH YOUR OWN ARTWORK

FLEISHER ART MEMORIAL - JOE MIKULIAK – February 11 and 18, 2010

PHOTOGRAPHING ARTWORK INDOORS OR OUTDOORS

USE A GOOD CAMERA WELL

Digital camera with white balance control, exposure compensation (+/-), and histogram.

The histogram, available on many digital cameras, is used to evaluate exposure.

Learn how to operate your camera before setting up your artwork. Consult the instruction manual.

35mm SLR with fully manual focus and exposure modes. (Adjustable f-stops and shutter speeds.)

Slides can be made from color negatives, prints, and digital files or directly, using slide film.

SET-UP FOR ARTWORK

Lighting should make the artwork look good – no hotspots, shadows, glare, or color problems.

Set up where nearby color (green grass, red bricks, yellow wall) will not be reflected onto the subject.

Don't lean over your artwork with your camera. Use a tripod whenever possible.

A non-distracting background or equivalent is essential for anything except outdoor sculpture.

Hang paintings, pin works on paper to a vertical corkboard or homosote. Consider a copy stand.

Put objects on a table in front of a contrasting background paper, white foamcore, or deep shadow.

White, black, or gray seamless photographic background papers available at Pro Photo stores.

Calumet at Reed and Delaware Ave. WebbCam at 241 N. 12th Street.

CAMERA TECHNIQUE

Move close and almost fill the viewfinder for 2D work. Leave a larger border around all 3D works.

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 for distractions.

It is up to you to center the artwork and make the sides of viewfinder parallel to the sides of flat art.

i.e. Paintings and works on paper: avoid keystoning and uneven borders by:

Make camera and flat art parallel. Use a level. THEN NO TILTING CAMERA UP OR DOWN.

Move camera left-right, raise it up-down until art work is parallel to the edges of the viewfinder

DETAILS

Flat art should be evenly lit – no hot spot, shadows, glare or light to dark gradation.

Information may be lost in dark and/or white areas. Black shadows may hide parts of 3D artworks.

Use white foamcore to bounce daylight into black shadows or the darker side of 2D work.

Black cloth can absorb light to lessen reflections onto bright 3D highlights.

EXPOSURE

Use auto exposure with color negative film and digital cameras. They are forgiving of exposure errors.

Color slide film is not forgiving. See other side for how to expose slide film. Turn Off Flash.

BRACKET

Digital?- Evaluate the histogram. Use the camera's ± control to make the image lighter or darker.

Slides?-Turn the f-stop ring in both directions full & halfway between f-stops.

OUTDOORS - PHOTOGRAPHING ARTWORK

NEVER START AT THE END OF THE DAY

Sunsets contain mostly red light and are quickly followed by darkness.

THE BEST LIGHT

2D artwork-a bright overcast day or large area of open shade is best.

3D artwork- whatever light looks best. Direct sunlight may produce black shadows with no detail.

Use your digital camera's white balance control for sunny day, cloudy day, or shade. Experiment.

Photography of art indoors next to open windows can work with small pieces.

Using daylight and tungsten light together always produces unattractive, two-toned results.

INDOORS – PHOTOGRAPHING ARTWORK USING TUNGSTEN LIGHT

NEEDED:

Enough open floor space-at least 4 times wider than the largest item to be photographed.
Photographic lights, light stands, and special 3200K light bulbs. Most fluorescent bulbs distort color.
Some way to shut out the daylight, or work at night.
Using slide film? **- Buy** Tungsten slide film**.**
Fujichrome T64 (The "T" stands for Tungsten film.) Ektachrome tungsten is discontinued.
Expect long exposures. **Always use** a tripod. **Get** a 6" carpenter's level.
Buy a "Digital gray card" sold at Pro Photo stores. Include it once in every group of photos.
Your digital camera should have a tungsten or incandescent setting on white balance control. USE IT!
Use 250 (ECA) or 500 watts (ECT) 3200K photoflood bulbs or special 3200K quartz bulbs + reflectors.
SILVER BOWL reflectors with ECA bulbs are cheap and popular but do not evenly distribute the light.
Household incandescent bulbs in any bowl reflector may not provide decent color.
I use Lowell Tota ($120) and DP ($325) lights that use quart halogen bulbs ($15-$30 each)
All these bulbs are very hot. Keep them at least **6 feet** away from artwork and bare skin.
Diffusion filters should not be necessary with 2D work. Filter materials can catch fire.
Use bulbs <u>in approved fixtures only.</u> Some cheap bowl reflectors have cardboard sockets!

LIGHTING-FOR PAINTINGS AND OTHER 2D WORK**:**

Set up lights on left and right of 2D work, at an equal distance & less than a 45 degree angle from wall.
Try 22 ½ degrees from the painting (i.e. over 6ft, up 3 ft , over 8 up 4, to over 15 ft, up 7 1/2ft.
Put one light on each side for paintings up to 4' wide by 5' high, two lights on each side for larger work.
Check for even lighting by looking, then metering the gray card in the center and the 4 corners.
If the readings are not almost equal, readjust lights. Pointing them at one another is good.

LIGHTING-FOR SCULPTURE:

Does work look best on a cloudy day or in bright sun? Diffusers simulate clouds, direct lights the sun.
Center the object on the table in front of the background.
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.
Again, mixing tungsten & daylight causes color problems. Most fluorescent tubes are bad.
Evaluate the effect of the lights from the camera position. Adjust lights so subject looks good.
Rotate the object or raise/lower the camera. The subject should look the way you want it seen.
Lighting should make the artwork look good –no <u>important detail</u> lost in shadow or blinding glare.

EXPOSURE FOR CONSISTENTLY GOOD SLIDES

When you need many slides-shoot slides. (Why this instead of having slides made from digital files?
When you know what you're doing, they are cheaper and you control the results.)
Use a camera with adjustable f stops and shutter speeds.
Reset camera's ISO dial 2 numbers lower than recommended on the film box, ie set it to 40 for 64T film.
Determine normal exposure by metering the Photo gray card in the same light that is on the subject.
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. BRACKET.
Have slides processed at Professional lab like Philadelphia Photographics, 1021 Arch St. 2nd floor

DIGITAL COMPENSATION

Color and contrast are difficult to judge in the viewfinder, on LCD monitors, and laptops.
In camera, I look at the histogram. On monitor, I look at gray card for a neutral color balance.
Photos can be cropped and tweaked in Photoshop. Resist increasing the contrast, super-saturating color
Present your artwork to your audience as well as can possibly be done by photography

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