

Student Guide to Photographing Art Work

When you step back and look at your artwork with satisfaction, you might think, “Done!” Really, you have one more important step. Documenting your artwork and submitting to a teacher, to a college, to a contest, etc. This step can be, surprisingly, important. The quality of the photo will affect the results. A person can only judge what appears on their screen. If the work is blurry, too dark, partially in shadow, or distorted it makes it difficult to be evaluated and represents you and your work poorly.

So, first, factor in time to photograph and edit your artwork. If you finish work at 11:45 pm at night for a midnight deadline, you may not be in the best situation to best document your work.

Camera!

Most artist’s reach for their digital single-lens reflex camera. If you have one, great, use it. These days many cell phones have good cameras that will work and is what we will assume for these instructions.

Lights!

For indoors, find a place in your home with the most natural light. We want to use natural light because it helps prevent images from taking on a yellow or blue tint, which can happen with artificial lights. Also, avoid uneven light.

Another option is to go outside and find a lightly shaded area. Overcast days can also work really well. The clouds act as a light diffuser, a device photographers use that helps evenly spread light by reflecting it off a surface or filtering it through a translucent screen. Indoors, you can use a white sheet over a window to act as a diffuser.

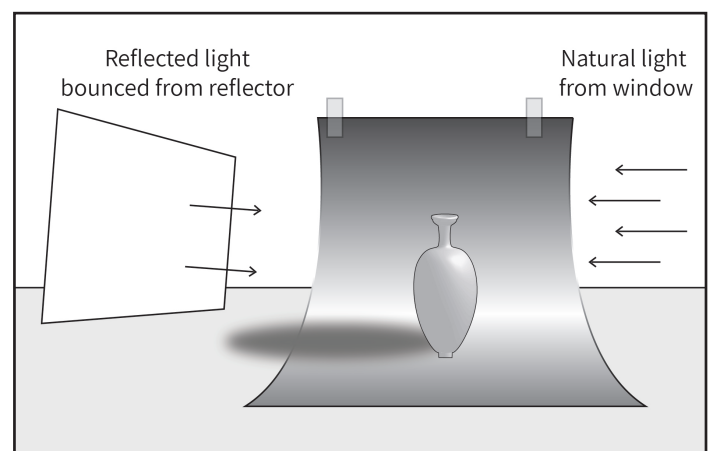
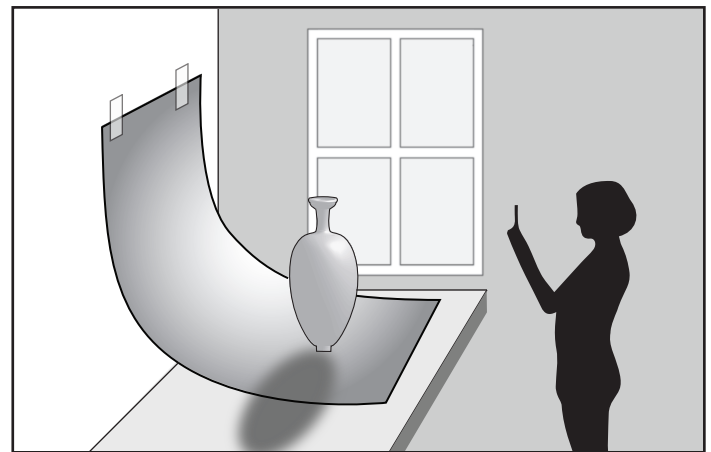
You can lay the work on the floor or ground but **avoid casting a shadow** on to it. Another option is to tack the art on to a wall or a large piece of cardboard that is propped on a chair.

You never want to photograph directly under the sun because it will result in overexposure and/or weird shadows, particularly with textured work.

When you are ready to take the picture, turn your flash off and make sure the image is in focus.

About Three-Dimensional Art

Special considerations are needed with 3D artwork. While you want flat and even light with 2D work, you want some directional light to help articulate the form with 3D pieces. You do want to avoid the sculpture being completely lost to shadows on one side. You may use a light reflector. A light reflector bounces some light to your artwork. You create a simple light reflector by covering a sheet of cardboard with some aluminum, or even use a white board.



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Think about the background for 3D work. You need a neutral backdrop, such as white, gray, or black paper or cloth. Cloth should not be wrinkled.

You want to take multiple shots of the sculpture. As 3D works may be experienced differently from different angles, photograph a variety of sides and take close up as well. Take some vertical and horizontal photos.

Editing

Most cameras have some basic image editing capabilities. Other options may include Photoshop or online editing sites like Photopea and Pixlr. Review the images asking yourself these questions:

Is the image in focus? **Tip: Zoom in**

Is the light even across the image? **No shadows?**

For 3D: Is the space used well? (As in the object isn't too small, too large, or unbalanced)?

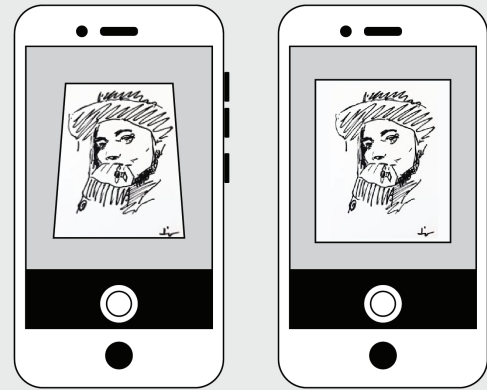
Is the form articulated well?

For 2D: Did you position yourself and camera parallel with the art work so as not to get an angle (called keystoneing)?

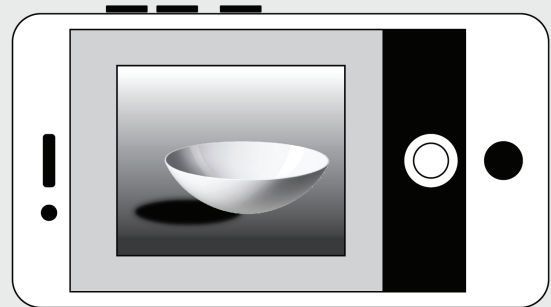
Once you have found the work to pass the above consideration, you can move on to editing. For 2D work, you want to crop the image to just the image itself, no background. If needed you can alter the overall brightness, contrast, and saturation. You can color correct if needed, using your artwork as the reference. The goal is to represent your artwork as close to reality as possible.

When your editing is complete, save as instructed. If no convention has been mandated for naming the file use your name and project name. Most likely you will be saving as a JPEG. So, a sample name might look like JohnSmith_Portrait.jpeg.

Things to Keep in Mind



- Don't shoot at an angle, like the image on the left. Take care to center the camera over the art work.



- Horizontal objects usually should be formatted horizontally.
- The frame should comfortably fill the art work with some breathing space.
- Consider the cast shadow when framing.



- Avoid uneven lighting. In this situation adding a reflector to the left side of the set up could help even out the light.