How to Photograph Your Artwork

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These days, a visual artist should probably have photos of their work published online. Obviously there are two ways to obtain photos of your work. Take them yourself and perhaps also process them yourself for publication on the World Wide Web, or have a photography and web expert do it for you. I can provide such services for you. See my contact info at the end of this report.

Do It Yourself

Many artists have a digital camera and will opt to photograph their own artwork. However, most artists are not expert at lighting their artwork or at digital photo processing. They may need advice on lighting and will also depend on an expert to do the necessary digital processing of their photos, in order to publish them to a website.

A Webmaster, such as me, has the special skills, tools and knowledge to do a good job of online photo publishing. Some artists also have these prerequisite skills. Such artists will be able to email me one or more professional quality digital photo files of their artwork, ready to process and upload to our Kern River Valley Art Association website. Others may need help or advice.

Requirements for Publishing Photos Online

The following is advice and a description of the minimum requirements for photographs to be uploaded to any typical website.

The bottom line is that many faults with the photos of your artwork can be expertly corrected, such that the final viewer will never know that the original photo was deficient in any way. However, some types of faults can never be corrected by digital photo enhancement, or would require an impractical amount of time to do so.

Guidance is given below to help identify correctible and uncorrectable problems with photos of your artwork for online publication.

Lighting

Even Lighting

Photos of flat artwork must be evenly lighted from corner to corner. It is extremely difficult to correct uneven lighting during later digital photo processing.

Providing even lighting using artificial lighting is difficult. Although using sunlight to photograph your artwork is therefore best, there are a few techniques that can help you if you absolutely must use artificial lighting.

Whatever the case, inspect your photos carefully for problems - before sending them for publication. If you find problems, consider taking new photos to correct those errors.

Outdoor Lighting

Use a photographic light meter to measure the corner-to-corner light falling on your flat artwork. A good method is to measure the light falling on a white card placed over the center and each corner of your flat artwork.

Most digital cameras have a built-in light meter which you can use. Hand held light meters are available, new or used, online, at Flea Markets or online Auction Sites. These may be more accurate and convenient.

Indoor Lighting

One option for indoor lighting is to use the electronic flash on your camera. However, this will almost surely create glare if your flat artwork is behind glass! To help prevent this, try placing a white handkerchief or such over the flash unit on your camera. Or, if you have a gray or white ceiling and can direct your flash unit upwards, try bounc-flash. Or combine both methods.

Calibration Targets

If exposure and color accuracy are important to you, and they should be when photographing artwork, a Photo Calibration Target can be a big help.

Below are two examples of photo calibration targets. The Kodak commercial target on the left sells for about $60 online. The target on the right was downloaded from the Internet, following a Google Image Search. Of course you can also make your own target, print it on high quality glossy photo printing paper and glue it to a stiff cardboard backing.
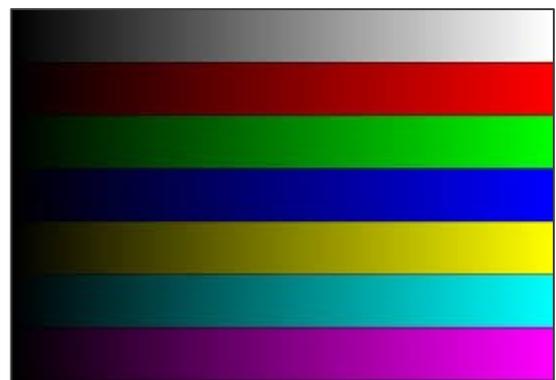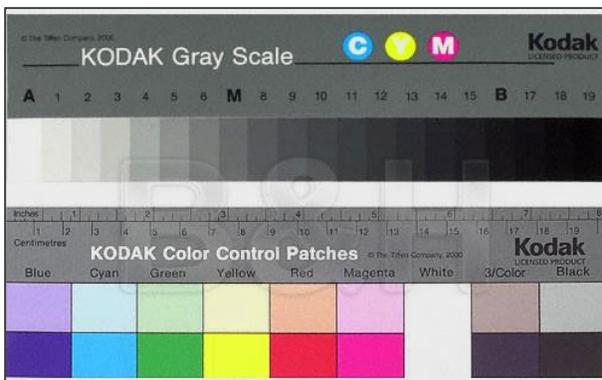
To use your target, place it where it will be just outside of your final image, but receives the same lighting. Tilt it to avoid any glare reflecting from it. After your digital photo processing is complete, crop it off your image.

Color Casts

Color Casts are easily corrected during digital photo processing, if they are even throughout the scene. A "Color Caste" is a color shift affecting your whole image that offsets it from the rendering that you intend. Color casts in photos are not usually mistakes.

Be sure to properly set the camera's "White Point" for your lighting situation if you're your camera has this setting, to help avoid color casts.

Most cameras will accurately render any scene's colors, unlike your human visual system which is easily fooled - or you could say it is very flexible, in accommodating both very cold (blueish) and very warm (reddish) scenes as if they were both neutral white lighting.

For example, you will perceive white objects as neutral white in the blue light of a sunny day's sky lighted shadows, or even under the very warm light of a burning candle. Because of this, a photo will often have a different overall color from that which you desire. For example, you've probably seen photos make under cold fluorescent lighting that have a strong green or blue green color cast.

Digital image processing software makes it easy to change the overall color of an image – especially if there is a color calibration target included.

Glare

Very smooth surfaces, such as polished metal or glass act as mirrors and can reflect your light sources directly into your camera's lens, producing visible glare.

When photographing flat artwork mounted behind glass, it is best to remove the glass temporarily to avoid glare and reflections of the environment.

There is little else that can be done to fix glare or reflection problems. If your camera lens can be fitted with screw on filters, you can purchase and use a "Polarizing Filter". Glare light is often polarized (see the [Wikipedia](#) explanation) as it is reflected from your mirror-like surface. If so, a Polarizing Filter may be able to block it.

Polarizing filters are also great for increasing the saturation of your photos, by lessening the light reflected from waxy leaves, water, metallic and ceramic surfaces and other such items.

Geometry

Unless your camera is exactly perpendicular to a flat artwork that you're photographing, your image will be of a 2D trapezoid shape instead of a 2D rectangle. Correcting such geometric errors is one of the steps in digital photo processing.

Resolution

Resolution in digital photography refers to the potential "sharpness" of the image. Since digital images are made up of Pixels (Picture Elements) arranged in rows from left to right and top to bottom, the more Pixels an image is made up of the higher the resolution - also, the larger the image can be made without visible blurring.

Focus

Focus is about the optical position of the camera's lens Vs the digital light-sensitive chip where the digital image is sensed and recorded. Most of today's digital cameras have an "Auto-Focus" feature that makes proper focus very easy. Also, flat artwork is naturally all going to be in focus at the same time.

The focus of a digital camera image cannot be improved during digital processing. However there is a trick, called "Unsharp Mask" in *Adobe Photoshop* which can fool the eye into perceiving improved sharpness – provided that the image is not too much out-of-focus to begin with.

Image File Format

Digital image files can be saved, in the camera or later, in several digital file formats. A complete discussion of these is beyond the scope of this report. However here is some basic info about one image file format, JPEG.

Briefly, the most common format is called "JPEG" (Joint Photographic Experts Group). JPEG is shown as "*.jpg" in the 3 character file extension standard, where "*" is the filename.

JPEG is a "lossy" format, meaning that redundant pixels in the image are deleted from the image to make the image file smaller. The amount of this "Image Compression" can usually be selected by the camera user. The more advanced digital cameras also have a setting called "RAW" which provides very large file size images with no compression at all. RAW digital images require special software for processing and this software is unique to each camera manufacturer. Search the camera manufacturer's website to locate the RAW image processing software.

KRVAA Photo Publishing Contact

Please contact Jim Coe at *the.jim.coe@gmail.com* with any questions or comments.

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