

## **How to Take Digital Pictures of Your Artwork**

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Taking good quality pictures of your artwork with a digital camera needn't be difficult or expensive. There are many compelling reasons to take digital pictures of your artwork:

- You've just finished a new piece for a client and want to take a picture of your work before parting with it.
- You plan to participate in a juried show which requires good photos or slides to secure a place in the show.
- You want to sell your artwork on-line on eBay or other auction site.
- You want to create marketing materials.
- You want to send a potential client or friend some examples of your work.

Whatever your reason, by following a few simple steps, you can achieve good results without much expense.

### **Digital Takes Off**

In 2004, digital camera sales exceeded film camera sales for the first time. Since I first touched a digital camera almost fifteen years ago, I knew that the instantaneous results that digital offered were too powerful to ignore. When you go digital, you can take many shots and instantly delete the ones that didn't come out. No more waiting for photo processing.

The good news is that if you are good with a film camera, you'll be great with a digital camera. Your eye for composition and color are just as valuable when you go digital—but you'll get results instantly!

### **Choosing a Digital Camera**

You don't have to spend a lot to take good pictures of your artwork. Most digital cameras \$200 and up take good pictures.

I suggest a camera with a resolution of at least 3 mega pixels (MP). Cameras with higher mega pixel counts (e.g. 4MP, 5MP and more) allow you to capture more detail and enlarge sections of photos clearly. Most digital cameras have an optical zoom capability of 3X which is adequate for taking pictures of your artwork. If you do really small work—such as very small books—make sure the camera you purchase had macro capability.

Cameras with larger LCDs—the TV-like panel on the back used to take and review pictures—are worth the extra expense.

New digital cameras include an entry-level memory card that usually holds only 20-30 pictures. I suggest you purchase a 256 MB or larger memory card which can hold 100 pictures or more.

### **Shopping List:**

Here's what you'll need to take good pictures of your artwork:

- 1. Digital camera (see above)**
- 2. Tripod (best for large artwork)**
- 3. 2 clamp lights (see picture)**
- 4. 2 60-watt light bulbs (Soft White)**
- 5. Backdrop**

You can use a solid-color (blue or black) sheet, tablecloth or even a large piece of paper.

- 6. Computer and digital imaging software**

I recommend Adobe Photoshop Elements. This software is bundled with many digital cameras or available separately for about \$100.00.



You will also need the following depending on the size and format of your artwork:

- 7. Table**
- 8. Two folding or other chairs**
- 9. Boxes or objects to prop up artwork**
- 10. Double-stick tape**
- 11. Masking tape** to hold down your backdrop
- 12. Extension cord(s)**

### **Understanding Light**

The "photo" in "photography" is Latin for light. If you light correctly, picture taking is easy.

I use a combination of natural sunlight and artificial light. Flash is not recommended as it leads to hotspots and poor color.

I like to take pictures in the morning (between 10AM and Noon) with artwork parallel to an east-facing window. Natural light beams should bounce nearly perpendicularly off your artwork. You will supplement with artificial light.

### **Setting Up**

Make sure your digital camera is charged up and ready to go. Follow these steps to set up your backdrop and take your picture:

1. Set up the **table** in front of an east-facing window.
2. Place a box or two on the table and drape your **backdrop** over it.
  - a. The backdrop set-up needs to be about 50% larger than the largest artwork you plan to photograph.
  - b. Secure the backdrop to the table with masking tape so that it doesn't move about.
3. Place your **artwork** into the scene.
  - a. The artwork should be perpendicular to the table.
  - b. You can prop up the artwork with appropriately sized boxes and secure it with masking or double-stick tape from behind. I've used everything from a Kraft Macaroni and Cheese box to big cartons! As long as the camera doesn't see it, it doesn't matter.
4. Set up **chairs** in front of the table—one to the right of the artwork, and one to the left. Angle the chairs about 45 degrees to the artwork.
5. Attach the **clamp lights** to the back of the chairs.
  - a. Adjust the lights so that the light hits the artwork at a 45 degree angle.
  - b. Adjust the chairs and lights so that the artwork is evenly lit across the surface.

## Setting up Your Camera

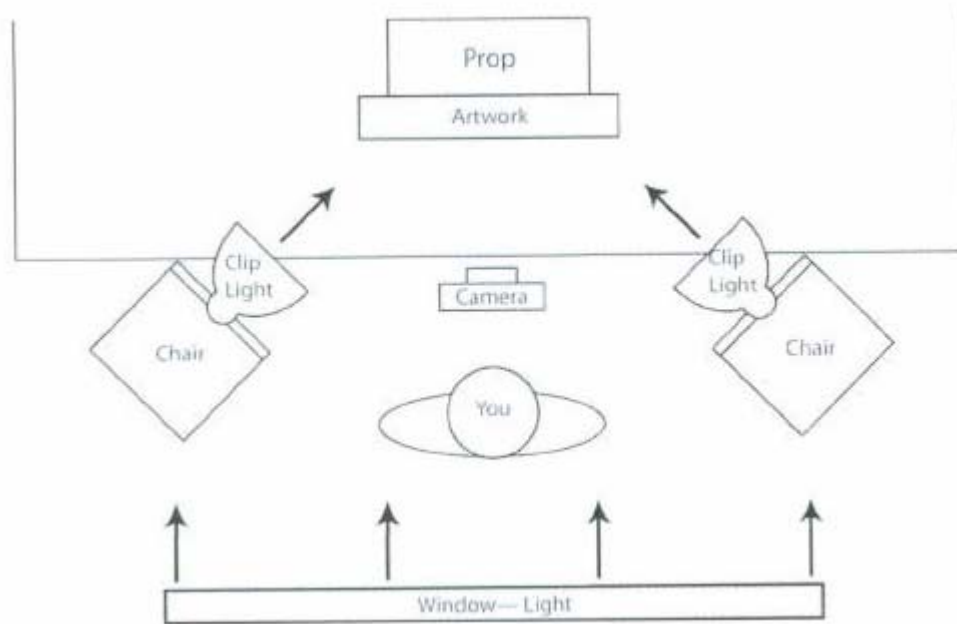
The user interface on every camera is a bit different, so you may need to consult your camera manual to set it up correctly.

- **Turn OFF Automatic Flash**
- **Set the camera to full-rated resolution**  
In other words, if you have a camera that is capable of shooting 2560 pixels by 1920 pixels, set it to that. That is not always the default.
- **Set the compression to JPEG-Best Quality.** JPEG is a lossy\* format, but the JPEG-Best setting offers a good balance of file size and quality. This setting may be called something else on your camera, so consult your camera manual.
- **Set exposure to automatic** (Usually the default). You can experiment with setting it to daylight, etc., but I've had good results on a number of cameras with the automatic setting.
- **Set to auto-focus** (usually the default).

## Take the Pictures

If you have large artwork, or are unsteady with your hands, set up your tripod and attach your camera.

1. Sit or kneel with your **back to the east-facing window**.



2. Move the camera in/out or use the zoom function to **accurately frame** the artwork in the LCD of your digital camera.
3. Take several shots, holding the camera **absolutely steady**. Shake or movement leads to blurred pictures. For small artwork, you can even set the camera directly on the table while taking the picture.

### Reviewing Your Pictures

You can review your pictures in the camera's LCD. Use the magnify option to look at the detail. How is the color? Is the picture sharp? Is it framed correctly?

To better evaluate your pictures, plug your camera into your computer and look at the images at full resolution. The larger screen on your computer offers a much better way to evaluate pictures.

### Digital Enhancements

With digital imaging software such as Adobe Photoshop Elements, you can do some amazing things to improve your picture:

- **Toning**  
You can adjust the color of the image to remove color casts
- **Cropping**  
Remove unnecessary areas of the picture
- **Cloning and Re-touching**

Remove blemishes, hot spots, and shadows. I recently had to clone in a piece of the background when my best picture revealed the backdrop slipped a bit and my kitchen table was showing!

If you are submitting a photo to a juried show, make sure you **do not digitally alter your work in such a way that materially changes the appearance of the artwork**. You can fix letterforms pixel by pixel in Photoshop Elements, but it is unethical to do so.

## Printing Pictures and Slides

There are many ways to get good quality prints and slides from digital pictures:

### 1. Inkjet Printers

Hewlett-Packard, Epson and Lexmark all make photo-quality printers that give excellent results. Make sure you select the right media (paper) for your printer.

### 2. Digital Printing Kiosks

Walgreens, CVS, Wal-Mart and others have digital printing kiosks. Just take your camera's memory card with you—or burn your digitally enhanced pictures to a CD. The on-screen instructions are easy to follow. You can get a print for only a dollar or two.

### 3. Photo Services

You can upload your digital pictures to providers such as shutterfly.com or ofoto.com and create everything from prints to digital story books. Most of these services offer free trials.

### 4. Slide Output

If you need slides for a juried show, your choices are more limited. I've had very good results with imagers.com. This company will make slides of your digital pictures for about \$1.00 each with a 5-day turnaround.

## Conclusion

With the world going digital, it makes sense to sharpen your skills so that you can take good pictures of your artwork. The digital world allows you to do more with your photos, and do it faster. I hope you will use your digital camera and get good results when you submit your artwork for *Exploration*, the CCC's annual juried show.

\*A lossy image is one where the image after compression is different from the original image due to lost information. The differences may or may not be noticeable, but a lossy conversion process does not retain all the original information. JPEG is an example of a lossy compression method. (Definition from [integraltech.com/terminology.cfm](http://integraltech.com/terminology.cfm))