

Photographing Art

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These discussion notes provide information about photographing art, improving images digitally, and sizing the images for the LAA Web Gallery. They provide information about the photographic equipment, software, skills and knowledge that are needed.

The notes are divided into three parts:

Part A: Taking the Photo

Part B: Improving the Image

Part C: Resizing the Image

In reviewing this information consider:

A. What photographic equipment/software you have? *What you Need?*

B. What photographic skills/knowledge you have? *What you Need?*

C. Finally: Do you have the inclination, time, and motivation to photograph your art?

Part A. Taking the Photo

You need one 'adequate' image!!!

THE CAMERA – What kind? Any highly rated digital camera **that satisfies your needs!** –

How Expensive? <\$126-300 buys a solid digital camera, \$300-500 a better one
(About \$700 and up for a digital SLR)

Is my camera too old? – Microchips in digital cameras are like computer chips, if you have a camera 5 years old or more you can bet it is an under-achiever in today's camera world.

How to decide on a camera?

Determine Your Needs/Wants – List and read discussion below:

Use Consumer Reports annual ratings—and Amazon.com

(Find the best sellers in point & shoot digital cameras at Amazon & study the user reviews.)

ZDnet -- GOOGLE "digital camera ratings reviews" – etc. ☐ These should be treated with suspicion because advertising dollars can influence the results.

A good \$500-700 digital camera from 2003 – Probably not as good as a \$126 camera today --

What Features?

CAMERA -- Wants & Needs (Prioritized)

- *Optical Viewfinder – holding a camera with your arms extended is not a good way to get a crisply focused photo – you can get better results with handheld photos with an optical viewfinder.*
- *Optical Zoom 6x preferred, at least 3x*
- *Image Stabilization – adds 1-2 f stops – in English, it means you can hand-hold with a slower shutter speed and get a crisp image, which means you get better shots in lower light situations.*
- *Manual Controls & Focus – also creates more possibilities to capture more light.*
- *6+ Megapixels, Non-Issue in 2008.*
- *ISO Control -- increases light sensitivity and provides more low light capability –*

¹ Appendix A2 briefly discusses the use of scanners in lieu of cameras & photography.

[Bargain Hunters:](#) Check Canon A590IS -- \$126 at Amazon



Canon PowerShot A590 IS -- \$126 at Amazon.com
8 megapixels, 4x optical zoom, Optical Image Stabilizer,
2.5-inch LCD. Optical Viewfinder,
#1 in sales at amazon.com -- Rated best under \$200 by cnet.com
Rated #4 in compact digital by CR against competitors up to \$500

Below are a few interesting cameras from the current Consumer Reports ratings of point-and-shoot digital cameras. The 3 canons are 3 of the top 4 compacts. The Kodak is the top rated in a category limited to large zoom lens units; its price and features are surprising, but the lack of an optical viewfinder is a serious flaw.

Features & Ratings From Recent Cons.Reports Ratings	Canon PowerShot A590 IS	Kodak EasyShare Z1012 IS	Canon PowerShot A720 IS	Canon PowerShot A650 IS
Optical Zoom	4	12	6	6
35mm equivalent	35-140	33-396	35-210	35-210
Megapixels	8	10	8	12
Image Quality	G	VG	VG	VG
Max ISO - Best Quality	100	800	100	400
1st shot delay	G	VG	G	G
Next shot delay	E	VG	VG	VG
Dynamic Range	E	E	VG	E
Optical Viewfinder	Yes	NO	Yes	Yes
Image Stabilizer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Face Detection	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Manual C&F & Macro	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Consumer Reports Score	70	76	72	74
Amazon Price - Oct 08	\$126	\$230	\$345	\$474
		In Separate Zoom Cat.		Near DSLR

Light-use serviceable tripods start around \$20.
 #1 Selling tripod at Amazon.com is \$18 + change.
 The pictured tripod is around \$30 at Amazon.com.



General Rules for Photographing Artwork

- #1 *Shoot Square to your Subject* – Position your camera so that a straight line projecting from the center of your lens lands on the center of the art forming 90° angles in all directions.
- #2 *Shoot in indirect natural light* – Pick a spot inside or outside your house with the best indirect natural light – shooting outside on a cloudy day can provide very good light.
- #3 *Use tripod & shutter release or timer* – Later remarks on this subject.
- #4 *Remove any glass covering the art before shooting.*
- #5 *Best spot for shooting 2D art is mounted flush on a wall, smaller pieces are often shot on the floor from above.*
- #6 *Turn off your camera's flash.*
- #7 *General rule for adding lighting* – Set up, two 5500 degree Kelvin fluorescent lights with reflectors, position to right and left midline of the art.

NOTE ON LIGHT: Light temperature is measured in degrees Kelvin – around 5500 degree is a nice soft natural light (e.g. indirect sunlight.). The low 3000 range is a warm light, emphasizing red and orange tones and is commonly found outdoors around sunrise and sunset and from tungsten lighting. The typical fluorescent light is a cold light bringing out blues and greens, newer fluorescent lights are available which are in the range of soft natural light.



The main user criticism of this light is that 26w is not bright enough; but used as an auxiliary light with existing natural light it should provide significant improvement, it is notably inexpensive.

The tripod is important for two reasons:

1. It provides a steadier camera which produces a sharper photo.
2. It allows you to shoot at a slower shutter speed which lets you capture more light which leads to richer colors and better reproduction of the image before you.

(Not using a tripod to shoot artwork indoors with existing natural light produces an image which will need more post-production work with software. Serviceable, light-use tripods start around \$20+ -- Slik and SunPack are significant low end manufacturers.)

IF YOU HAND-HOLD THE CAMERA

Try to make yourself as stable as a tripod.

Hands & Arms, Left hand holding/supporting the bottom of camera, upper arms against ribs, don't tense muscles.

Leaning against a wall – or Seated – To create more support and stability

Breath – Inhale normally, then exhale about 1/3 volume and shoot

Gentle Pressure on the Shutter Release

Most people can get an 'adequate' handheld photo, if not evaluate:

Camera?

Lighting?

Software/software skill?

Tripod?

Camera Settings

Full Automatic

Camera 'Modes' - A big camera variable, explore what your camera's various modes do.

Mixed Manual/Automatic – e.g., Tv or Av – Tv is the old shutter priority that lets you adjust your shutter speed while the camera makes other adjustments automatically.

Av is similar except aperture is the variable you control.

Manual – Even if you don't want it today, it is a nice feature -- you to want more from your camera before long.

3D Art – Jewelry, Carvings, Ceramics, etc. -- **See Appendix A1**

- Create studio setting – You can use a table in a well lighted area, place high back chairs around the edge of the table and drape a neutral colored sheet or other cloth over the high back chairs and onto the table top. (There are also inexpensive studio kits which produce very good results.)
- Depth of Field (*of focus*) – aperture controlled
- Light & focus & steady camera
- Artificial light – Set up & angles for 3D is one light at 45 degrees to side and second light angled downward from above and in front of the object, both for the effect on the object and to prevent competing shadows in the background. With a translucent shadow box the lights are normally placed one to each side – picture of a 16" Photo Studio-In-A-Box at right.



NOW THAT YOU HAVE CAPTURED IMAGES:

Insure that you have a rational filing system that keeps *Stuff* in a way that you can find it next week or a year from now! I use a chronological filing system; files for every year and sub-files within each year. All versions of the same photograph will be in one chronological file. (Copies of any photo may also be in other special purpose files.) The name assigned to various versions of a photograph should help you identify what it is. My system works for me, provided as a sample:

- 0810_2202 Original Image – I assign the 2 digit year & 2 digit month to replace the camera assigned alpha designation and keep the camera's 4 digit numbering sequence --
Keep the original image intact and always use **“SAVE AS”** – to avoid degradation
- 0810_2202a 1st set of digital adjustments – |
2202b 2nd digital adjustment – e.g. decided it could be better, started from original
- 0810_2202aC 1st crop
- 0810_2202aC1 2nd crop
- 0810_2202aCsm sized I use 'sm' for e-mail versions – 'LAA' gallery, 'LAA-TN' thumb nail

Select the best IMAGE! (or 2 or 3)

Open your images and PICK 1-3 you will process digitally before making your final selection.

The ones you pick should first be your best focused images, as a second criteria select the 1-3 images with the most pleasing color and lighting – [*“Great, but just a tad out of focus”* = Loser!]

Zoom in on your images to look for sharpness, pick the most detailed elements of the artwork to zoom in on to select the best focused – Delete any photo right here that is not sharply focused, keep your computer clutter down!!!

The images you pick will most likely not be images you would print “as is” – Probably too dark, etc., etc. -- Shooting hand-held with natural light inside your house unaided by flash or other artificial light puts limits on what your camera can accomplish.

With experience you’ll shoot fewer pictures and make selections quicker with more confidence.

PART A SUMMARY -- Shooting the Photo – Shots, Shots, Shots

You need one good adequate image!!!

“Make adjustments as you shoot --

The more shots you take, the more likely you will get one good image.

Make sure you have ENOUGH LIGHT!

Make sure you have a STEADY CAMERA!

Intelligently analyze and control the camera settings and conditions.

If you did not end up with an adequate image on the first attempt, try again!

APPENDIX A1 and **A2** follow on the next two pages.

Photographing Art -- Part A. Taking the Photo

Photographing Art -- Part B. Improving the Image

Photographing Art -- Part C. Resizing the Image

Are available at the Landings Art Association website, <http://www.landingsart.org/links.php>

APPENDIX A1 – 3D Art Photography by Susan Kunze



This is a particularly nice 3D art photo by LAA's Susan Kunze, notice the near and distant parts of the necklace are sharply focused and the nice controlled lighting and highlights, etc., etc. When I saw it in the LAA newsletter, I called Susan to ask her about it and find out about her experiences. Susan reports she is very much an amateur photographer but through a Yahoo discussion group she learned about a Desk Top Studio Kit available at Wal-Mart for \$56 – After some work, *Shazam*, Susan is now producing awesome photos like this.

SUSAN'S COMMENTS & TIPS: "Finding *Studio In-a-Box* through the Yahoo discussion was a big break through in photographing my jewelry," – "I take a lot of pictures, I bracket them with multiple shots," "I think something that helped me get better "product shots" was to *slow down*." "I actually use PaintShop Pro more than CS2," "Black Velvet is really hard to keep lint free and perfectly black - touching it up after the shot with software is wonderful!" – Susan likes her several year old Sony Cybershot 5.1 mp, 3x -- That she acquired when she realized her husband had moved on to another camera.

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION: Photo Studio In-a-Box model SIB-075 by American Recorder. Soft light box: eliminates shadows and glare; 16"W x 16"H x 16"D white nylon shadow box, High-output lights: 2 studio quality table-top Tungsten lamps with color correcting lenses, Camera stand: adjustable aluminum mini tripod for use with all compact cameras. (-- also available at Amazon.com for around \$40 --)

APPENDIX A2 – Scanning 2D artwork instead of using photography.

After discussing scanning with Peggy Hale and Bill Jessup, it is clear that scanning is sometimes an excellent alternative to photographing 2D artwork.

- For some types of art scanning may produce a better final image.
- If you are not inclined to photographing your own work, it may be less hassle and more convenient to have your work scanned than try to locate a photographer to provide finished images to your satisfaction.
- If you are inclined to photographing your own work, it still may be less hassle and more convenient to have your work scanned than worry about lighting and square image, etc.
- You may decide you would rather invest in a very good scanner than invest money and energy in photography. See Note 1 below.

But, keep in mind:

- There are probably still advantages to touching up a scanned image using Photoshop.
- If you need your image digitally sized, like for the LAA Gallery, you still need Photoshop. (OK, I know there are other image editors.)
- For some 2D artwork, a photograph is superior, e.g., some oil paintings when photographed with effective lighting have a greater sense of depth due to shadows formed by ridges of oil.

NOTE 1: Without significant scanner research, below is selected data on one highly recommended high quality scanner.

Epson Expression 10000XL Scanner, The high performance 2400 dpi, large-format scanner for professional photographers and graphic artists. \$2300-\$2800 internet sources.

Selected Features

- Convenient large-format scanning (12.2" x 17.2")
- Extraordinary image quality with 2400 x 4800 dpi resolution
- Smooth gradations with 48-bit color
- Enhanced color with ColorTrue II Imaging
- 3.8 Dmax for precision reproductions
- Powerful performance with fast scanning speeds

