



DISABILITY ARTS CYMRU INFORMATION SHEET

Basic Tips for Photographing Artwork

It is extremely important to have good photographs or slides of your artwork. The photographic images you create will represent your artwork; make them as good as your original art. If they are of low quality, they will deter from the quality of your art.

If you are not comfortable with a camera, see if you can find someone who is. A second set of hands can also be most helpful.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED...

CAMERA

Almost any camera will work though you will find that using a film camera rather than a digital camera will considerably slow down your workflow, cost you vastly more and you will then have to find a way to get your prints or negatives scanned into a computer if you are going to distribute them.

It makes it easier if you can make manual adjustments and it is important that you can **turn off a built in flash**. You will want a lens that allows you to focus close enough to your object to fill the frame. If you're using a digital camera, remember to set it up to take photographs of a **high resolution**.

CABLE RELEASE OR SELF TIMER

Using a cable release or the self timer on the camera reduces the risk of camera movement, so the image will be sharper.

TRIPOD

A tripod is a must. It holds the camera steady, and makes it easier to compose and focus on your artwork. As with the cable release, using a tripod greatly reduces the risk of camera shake, improving image sharpness.

LIGHTING

1. Outdoors

When photographing art outdoors, take the shots as close to midday as possible. Put the art in the shade, avoiding direct sunlight. Make sure it is evenly lighted. Natural daylight is not the most predictable but it is the cheapest.

2. Indoors

You will need to buy some special **light bulbs** that will light your work well – they will help to ensure that the colours in the photo will be as similar as possible to your original artwork (this is called colour balance). Try...

- **photo lamps / tungsten balanced bulbs (try 250 watt, 3200 degrees K). They are inexpensive and retain their color balance for several hours.**
- **daylight bulbs (B2 bulbs). They closely match the color temperature of daylight. These bulbs are good if you mix daylight and studio light.**

CAUTION: These bulbs get extremely hot. Be sure to follow the instructions that come with the bulbs so you don't burn yourself or your artwork. Specialist bulbs are available from most photo supply shops, and are not expensive. You will need special **lamp fixtures** for these bulbs – they get too hot for standard household lamp fixtures.

You will also need to find a way to **fix the lights in place**. Use whatever you can (clamps, duct tape, light stands, your friends) to safely hold your lights still and shining on your artwork. Inexpensive light stands can be purchased at most photographic supply shops.

TAKING THE PHOTO...

2D WORK (PAINTINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, DRAWINGS, ETC.)

The simplest way is to photograph the piece laying on the floor or hanging from the wall.

If possible, remove the artwork from behind glass and out of the frame (the camera may pick up reflections from the glass).

Be sure your artwork is "squared up" in the camera, i.e. the camera lens should be parallel to the art and the camera aimed right at the centre. It is important that the camera is located directly perpendicular to the art work, not pointing up or down.

Make sure that the lighting is even by placing lights at 30 - 45 degree angles on either side of the art, pointing each light at the opposite side of the art. Check closely for reflections and even light coverage of the art work. You may need

to move the lights to slightly different locations and / or angles. If the piece is very large, you may need to add additional lights of bounce a light off the above surface.

View from above

View from the front

Fill the entire frame of the photograph with the artwork. Use a lens that will allow you to get close enough without distorting the image. If a background is absolutely necessary, use only a clean white or off-white surface like a wall. The photos or slides will look best when you see the artwork and nothing else.

Remember to **focus!**

3D WORK

Decide on the **background material and colour**. It is best if it is plain and curved, and in a neutral color. Grey and white work well. Be careful if you choose a bright color - light, when reflected off a color, takes that color with it and will change the color of your artwork. You can use paper, fabric such as a tablecloth or bed sheets, or you could just use a wall. The idea is to present the art without distraction or competition.

A photo of a 3D work looks good when the piece casts a **shadow** on the background. If black is used for a background color the shadow will be lost.

If it's a small 3D work put it on a table or stool. Large work can be left on the floor.

Decide what side(s) of your art work you want to photograph.

Place the art work on the background material and locate the camera position.

Use 2 lights. Put the main light a few feet to the left front and higher than the art work. Put the second light on the right side, also higher than the art work and twice as far away from the art work as the main light.

All other light coming from overhead room lights, open windows, etc. must be eliminated.

You can also add a third light should behind the art work, above it and off the right or left. It should be approximately the same distance as the second light but can be closer. Try some different distances for different effects.

FURTHER READING

How to Photograph Art	www.dallasartsrevue.com/resources/How-to-Photo-Art.shtml
MATT GREER PHOTOGRAPHY: How to Photograph Artwork	mgreerphoto.blogspot.co.uk/2008/06/how-to-photograph-artwork.html
How to photograph Flat Art	www.wetcanvas.com/Articles2/2810/87/index.php
How to photograph artwork for reproduction	www.guildsourcebooks.com/pdf/sourcebook/howto_photograph_artwork.pdf
Video by Saatchi Online on 'How to photograph your art'	www.saatchionline.com/artschool
How to Photograph Your Paintings (Digitally)	www.betterphoto.com/exploring/shootingPaintings.asp
How to Photograph your Artwork for a Portfolio or the Internet	emptyeasel.com/2007/01/19/how-to-photograph-your-artwork-for-a-portfolio-or-the-internet/
Photographing your Art: 3D	www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vz-3hKfgs5I
How to Photograph Sculpture	www.photographymad.com/pages/view/how-to-photograph-sculpture
10 Tips for Photographing Sculptures	www.fixthisphoto.com/10-tips-for-photographing-sculptures
How to Photograph Art or just about anything else	www.dallasartsrevue.com/resources/How-to-Photo-Art.shtml
Tutorial: Photographing sculptures in HDR	hdrphotographer.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/photographing-sculptures-in-hdr.html
Video: How to Photograph Art Installations	www.ehow.com/video_4959077_photograph-art-installations.html