

May 18,2000

Photographing Artwork

What follows will be a brief summary of the suggested techniques for creating a consistent archive from your original paintings or artwork.

It is important to create a simple procedure to follow, so that you can photograph your work as it is finished so you won't need to gain access from the new owner or bring it back from storage.

Once you have a copy in the form of a negative or a slide you should regard these as originals, which should be kept safe and not circulated or presented. From these originals you make the necessary duplicates or prints which are sent and hopefully returned to you.

The following are only guidelines intended to make you more comfortable with copywork that you need to do on an everyday basis, and is not intended to take the place of really critical work performed by a professional photographer.

Basic Requirements

The majority of artwork presentation can be created using a good quality 35mm camera with manual controls or overrides and a well corrected lens in the normal range, preferably a standard fixed focal length lens like a 50mm. Critical work may need to be done by a professional using a large format on sheet film.

In addition your will need to use at least 2 and for larger pieces of artwork, 4 light sources.

Your will require a sturdy tripod and preferably a hand held meter. (Most of this equipment is rentable through Ginn Photographic)

Kodak EPY or Fuji Tungsten 64 are good choices of film for 35mm slides and I suggest Kodak T-Max 100 for black and white and Fuji Reala 100 for creating colour negatives.

In addition:

A Carpenters level

A measuring tape

A set Kodak Colour Separation Guides (This is included at the bottom of the image, designed to allow for accurate reproduction reference at the printing stage)

A soft clean paint brush to dust the artwork before starting the shooting stage.

Procedure

Lighting. First thing you need to do is, work from only one type of light source. So get rid of any overhead fluorescent light and if your using a tungsten light source to match a specific film (EPY requires 3200K lamps called Photofloods) you need to also eliminate daylight.

Next you will need to create a consistent background in which to place the artwork. Depending on the format, this can be either a piece of plywood painted matte black or a wall that you cover with black flock or background paper.

Your background system should allow for mounting the artwork securely and slightly in relief so that the frame shadow won't show. Spend a little extra time with this set up and keep it clean and it will save you hours of masking afterward.

Next get everything really level, that is both camera and painting. Purchase a level that will give you a good long bead, and use you tape measure to ensure the height of your lens is exactly the same height as the center of the painting. If you get someone to hold a pocket mirror in the center of the painting and you can see yourself through the lens you're in the middle.

Next, set up your lights to allow a 45 degree angle from the art work at approximately the same distance away as the camera. You will need to use your light meter to measure the intensity of the light at the center of the artwork. If your work has a lot of relief as in oils or acrylics you can use a technique called "cross polarization", which requires the placement of polarizing gels over the light source and a polarizing filter over the lens. This technique is amazing for reducing glare and reflections, but don't do this unless you must, since it cuts your lights output by four.

Exposure

This is often tricky so do a little testing before you have to rely on it.

I recommend using a Kodak Grey Card. This card is placed at the artwork and you take a measurement that is the basis for your first exposure. Then you "bracket" by opening and closing your aperture 1/2 to 1 stop each for your second and third exposures.

More Information

Consult with our photo counter associates

Kodak Publication M- 1, Copying and Duplicating. Photographic and Digital Techniques,



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