

Photographing Your Artwork – Set-up & Lighting

I. EQUIPMENT

Camera with remote or timer

Always use a timer or remote when taking photos to minimize shadows and movement of the camera. For SLR cameras, use a 50-70 mm lens (not wide angle) to avoid warped images.

Tripod

Even if your camera is a cell phone, a tripod is essential to keep your shots consistent and still.

Lights

Minimum 2 controlled light sources (see Section II) and try to eliminate additional light sources.

Easel/Table

Place 2D artwork on an easel or hang it on the wall, while 3D artwork can be on the floor or a table.

Optional:

- Neutral/middle grey card to set the exposure of your images
- White card to set the white balance of your images
- Polarizing filter to remove stray light and cut down on reflections
- Light Meter to help set ISO

II. LIGHTING EQUIPMENT

The pro solution: Professional photographers use equipment called a soft box when lighting their subject. A soft box acts to soften and disperse the light of the bulb, preventing glare and harsh shadows. This is particularly important with low texture artwork, such as collage, drawings, photographs and anything framed with glass. In addition, most soft boxes have different settings to vary the strength of light (up to 1000 watts).

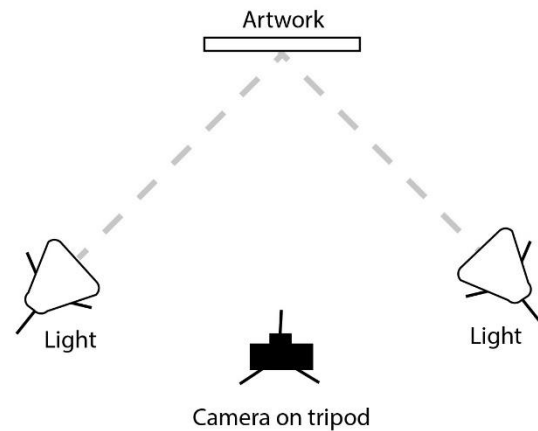
The budget solution: You can use inexpensive clamping spotlights (you will need at least 2) with a high wattage Tungsten bulb (minimum 100W) and then use one of these tips to soften the light.

- Cover the lamp with a translucent paper.
- Turn the lamps backwards (away from the artwork) and shine them off reflector boards. Reflector boards can be as simple as a large sheet of white foam core or poster board.

III. LIGHTING SET-UP (2D ART)

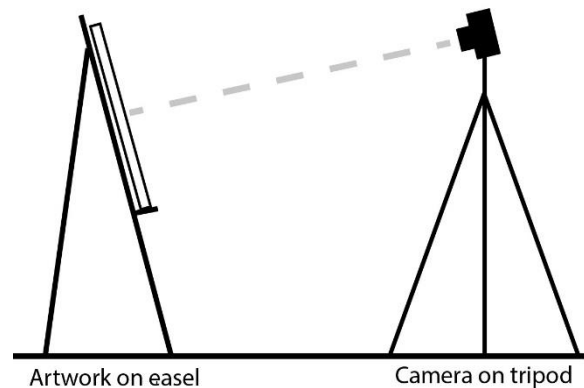
For 2D artwork, the goal is to have even lighting across the entire piece, without the glare caused by direct lighting. Hang the work on a neutral wall or place it on an easel.

- Set up 2 lights on 45-degree angles to your artwork. This will give you nice light coverage and exposure, while reducing reflections.
- Don't light the artwork directly with a flash, window or overhead lights.
- The further back you can place the lights and camera, the better.



Tips and tricks for photographing 2D artwork:

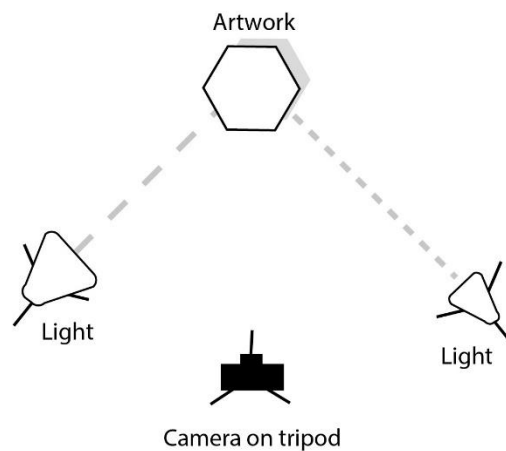
- When your artwork is on an easel, place your camera slightly higher than the artwork, so it points slightly downward, directly onto the angled work.
- For textured work add a third light and try lighting the piece from above to create shadows with the texture. Use a reflector board below the piece to change the effect of the shadows and add light to the bottom of the image – play with the reflector board angle and distance for different results.



IV. LIGHTING SET-UP (3D ART)

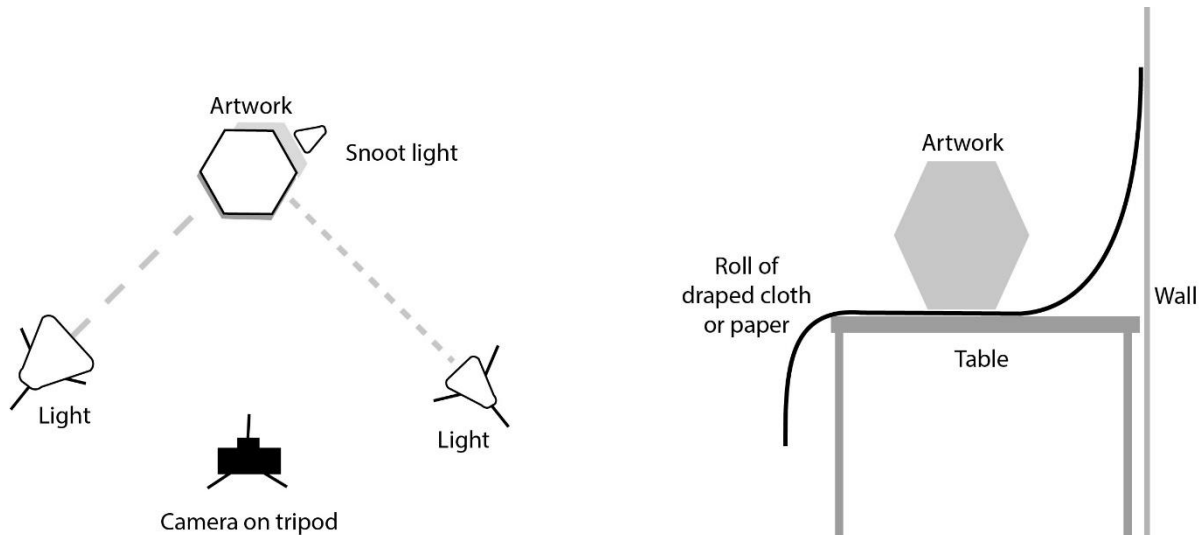
For 3D artwork, the goal is to give the most dramatic lighting as possible, highlighting the features of the piece. Try shooting the piece from different angles and distances to represent the piece as a whole and important details.

- A 45-degree set up may be too symmetrical to best represent three-dimensional work, so try reducing the wattage of one light, or move one light closer or further back. This will give you a stronger shadow on one side.



Tips and tricks for photographing 3D artwork:

- Add an intense light source directly above the piece to ground the piece with a shadow
- Add a snoot light (small, intense hidden light source) either behind the piece as rim lighting or in front of the piece to a highlight spot
- Depending on your work, you may want to emphasize or minimize the shadow of the table/surface next to the wall to provide a horizon line. To minimize the shadow, use a roll of paper or cloth draped down the wall and over the table to create soft edges



V. NATURAL LIGHTING SET-UPS

This is a less controlled method of lighting and will work best for 2D pieces without glass. It is hard to recreate the same conditions, as light intensity and colour change dramatically with weather, seasons, and time of day.

- Use North facing window as your light source and preferably a cloudy day, for a softer, more dispersed light.
- For non-reflective surfaces, face the artwork directly towards the North-facing window, with the camera and tripod between the windows and artwork.
- For reflective surfaces, avoid glare by hanging the artwork at a 90-degree angle to the window (on a side wall) and use a reflector board on the other side of the artwork to bounce light back, so it is lit from both sides.

