

Tips and Resources for Photographing Your Fiber Art

Being able to take a good photo of your artwork is important in this digital age. Whether you are answering photo calls for guild sales and exhibit promotions, wanting to share your artwork on social media, or submitting work to be considered for juried exhibitions or magazines, a great shot of your work is essential.

If you have the resources, and you allow enough return time, hiring a professional photographer is ideal. And this may be the way to go if you are submitting to a regional, national, or international exhibition, or a magazine. Two local resources are Dennis Ritter (dritter@emich.edu), who is located in Whitmore Lake, and Eric Law (shootmyart.com), who is located in Hazel Park. Dennis is AAFG Website Chair Liz Ritter's husband, and Eric gave a talk to our guild many years ago. AAFG members have reported excellent experiences with both photographers.

To take your own photos, you need a good eye and a little equipment.

Equipment:

- Camera
- Lighting source
- Staging Options
- Tripod (optional)

Camera

Digital camera or Smartphone

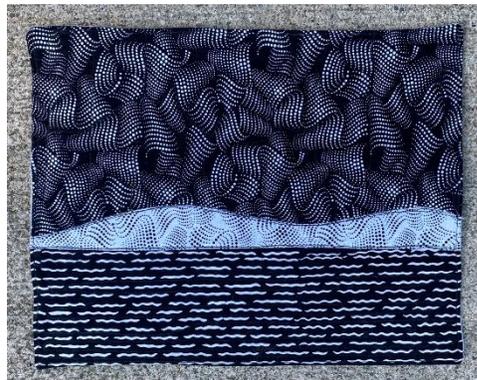
Most Smartphones are now equipped with cameras. Some of the newer cameras also have built in zoom lenses, however they do not work the same way as the zoom on a digital camera. A good rule of thumb: never manually zoom in or out by using your fingers to “pinch” the screen out or in. If you want to take a closer photo, simply get closer to the subject—unless it is a lion. In that case, pinch away!



Lighting Source

Lighting is particularly important. You can use natural light, or you can set up indoor lighting to mimic natural light.

Below are some photos taken in natural light. Notice the change in color. If you choose to use natural lighting, an overcast or cloudy day is best. The colors will be more saturated.



The photos on this page were all taken out-of-doors in natural light. All were placed down and shot from above. Some were taken on the sidewalk and some were taken below a covered porch. Notice the varying colors. The one on the lower right most closely resembles the actual artwork. It was taken on the sidewalk on a cloudy day.



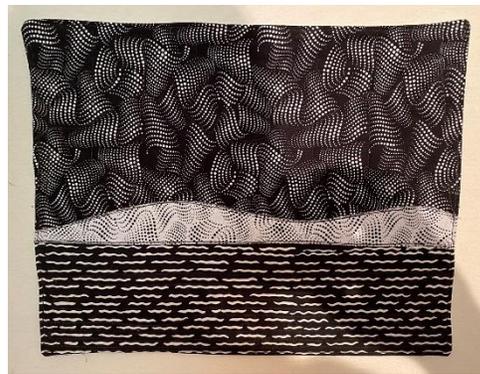
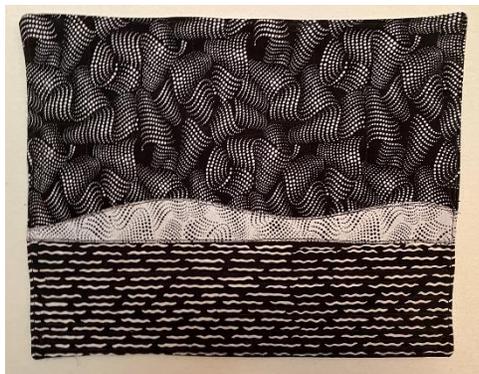
The photos below were taken out-of-doors; one in direct sunlight (L), the other on a cloudy day (R). Notice the difference in colors and the shade cast from the top of the frame on the one taken in direct sunlight. The other has softer edges.



To take photos indoors you need a good light source. The closer you can come to full spectrum light, the better. Ott Lights are great for this, but some smaller ones are not powerful enough.

The photos below were taken with a large halogen light and the artwork was pinned to a design wall.

The one on the left has the light coming from an indirect light facing the ceiling and the other has the light source coming from behind. Notice the shadow cast by the photographer on the work when the lighting comes from behind. Two lights propped on either side of the work you are photographing works best.



The photos below illustrate using one light source. The one in the upper left corner is the best of the four: there is very little shadow and it shows the organic edges. The others have too many shadows, including one showing the photographer's silhouette! Notice that the background does not compete with the image.



If you are interested in pursuing a good lighting system for your photography, google "lighting kits for photography." You will find a large selection of options in every price range.

Staging Options

Finding a way to set your work up for a photo shoot varies depending on if you are photographing 2D or 3D work. For 2D work, a blank wall you can tape onto or design wall you can pin into works well. For 3D work, you have different options depending on the type of work. If you are shooting garments, asking someone to model your work or using a mannequin is ideal. For jewelry and accessories, a model is optional. You can easily set up a photo shoot of just your work. The lighting may be different from 2D work or the same. Some people use a light box for small items.

Here are some good examples of photographing 3D work. These photos were shot using a neutral grey paper background. A roll of paper is hung over a worktable. It is unrolled to make the backdrop and cover the table (picture a curved L shape). The ends of the paper are weighted down to hold it in place. The paper could be taped to a wall for the same effect.



Photos above courtesy of Liz Ritter.
Photo to the right, courtesy of Helen Welford

Tripod

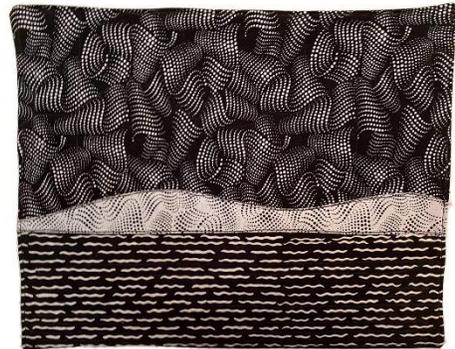
This piece of equipment is optional, but it is a good addition to your photo paraphernalia. One of the reasons we get blurry shots is because of shaky hands/arms. Using a tripod eliminates that issue.



A few other things to consider...

Organic Edges vs Hard Cropped

Because we work with fiber and the edges of our work are often organic in nature, it is best to photograph your work against a solid background. The photo on the upper right keeps the organic edges of the 2-D artwork; the photo below has been hard cropped and made to look perfect – the edges of our work are not perfect, they are part of the art. The exceptions: a framed fiber piece, or a detail shot of your work (photo below).



Background Choices

Decide what plain background enhances your work best. Backgrounds that are a solid color do not compete with your piece. Below are examples of grey, black and white backgrounds. Note: If you do not like the background that you used for the initial photo, it can be easily altered with a photo editing program, (i.e., Photoshop, Photoshop Elements, phone editing apps.)

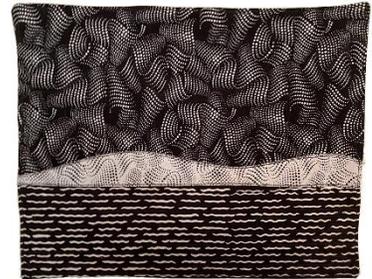
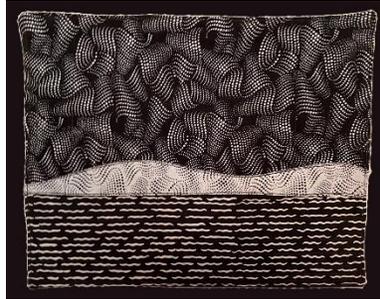
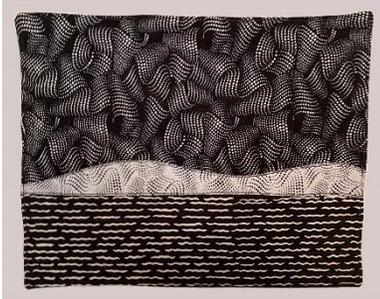


Photo No-No's:



←
Star Wars Intro
(keystoning)

→
Background
competes with
work by
introducing lines.



←
Lovely garden.

→
Fingers?



To recap:

1. Set up your artwork to enhance your piece. If you are photographing 2D work, hang the piece from a wall. If you use a portable design wall, set it up so it is perpendicular to the floor, not leaning at an angle. For 3D work, you can use a model for wearable art or a mannequin. Work can either be shot from directly above or straight on by using a light box. To eliminate distortion, take your photos straight on, not at an angle.
2. Light your work from the sides. Any light from above or behind you – especially from a single source – will cause a shadow.
3. Position the camera correctly. For 2D work put yourself directly in front of the piece, at eye level. Your camera should be located at the direct center of your work, and as far away as needed to capture the entire piece. Taking the shot from below center will exhibit signs of “keystoning” where the vertical lines move toward convergence at the top of the piece (like the introduction to Star Wars).
4. Take sharp photos. Make sure the camera is giving you the sharpest focus possible. There is no way to fix an out-of-focus photo. A tripod is especially useful to make sure the camera does not move while you are taking the shot. If you do not have a tripod, hold your elbows pressed against your body while you photograph to ensure as much stability as possible.
5. No flash. A camera’s flash has some great uses, but photographing art is not among them. A flash will undoubtedly cause a sharp glare, and an uneven distribution of light across the piece.
6. If taking photos out-of-doors, plan your photo shoot for a cloudy day. Be sure there is nothing competing with your artwork. Eliminate the distraction of seeing trees, fences, houses, power lines, etc.
7. Do not use a wide-angle setting. This will cause a distortion where the sides of your work will bulge outward.
8. Avoid hard cropping your work.
9. Keep a contrasting border – preferably an even color – around your piece.
10. Take a detail shot of your work, too.

Digital Image Size Requirements:

- Sharp images are best.
- Minimum size: 1200 x 800 pixels
- JPEG format only.
- Send as an attachment or put in a zip folder.
- The name of the file should match the name of your piece and your last name.
Example: chromacolor_richter (chromacolor_richter.jpeg) or ChromaColorRichter (ChromaColorRichter.jpeg)
- **FROM A SMARTPHONE.** If sending a photo from your phone camera, it is difficult to rename your file. So, include only **ONE IMAGE PER EMAIL**. Send the largest file possible (**ACTUAL SIZE IS PREFERRED, but use at least HIGH**). You should be able to choose that setting when you send the email. Photos can always be reduced to the correct size but enlarging will distort the image.

No PDF submissions please.

Helpful Links:

<https://www.textileartist.org/how-to-photograph-textile-art>

<https://www.quiltingcompany.com/7-tips-for-photographing-your-art-quilts-for-challenges-quilting-daily/>

http://www.adventurequilter.com/e-Learning/Articles/Photography_Quilts.html

<https://www.hollyknott.com/stq/>

<https://iphonphotographyschool.com/beginners-questions/>

<https://hollyknott.com/stq/lighting.htm>

<https://www.jimdo.com/blog/product-photography-with-diy-light-box/>

All images provided by Mary Valerie Richter, unless otherwise noted.