

Take the Shot

notes

Looking Good

Now you're ready for some of the finer points of shooting dimensional artwork, to get it—looking good.

The 3 P's of Presentation

The key to photographing your artwork for maximum visual impact is to follow the three P's of presentation.

The first is place—where is the work displayed and what is the background behind it? Your choice of location and background can either enhance the art or distract the viewer from it.

Then there's position—how is the art sized and placed in the image? The positioning of the work can either give it visual interest and energy or make it look ordinary.

And last is perspective—what is the viewpoint when looking at the artwork? The point of view can either make the work stand out or let it get lost in the crowd.

Now, let's go through each of the P's in more detail and look at some examples, both good and bad. Many of the photos shown are right from Etsy, which can be a great source of ideas for presenting your own work.

Place

You have several alternatives when it comes to deciding where to display dimensional work in your photos.

The first is on a tabletop or any other flat surface. You can use a tabletop display with most art—from sculpture to jewelry to craft items. And it's easy to set up.

The next choice is on a form or live



Take the Shot

notes

model. This is popular for wearable art—from clothing to jewelry to accessories. You'll want to consider carefully, though, if you're thinking of using a live model. I'll talk more about that in a minute.

Finally, you can show your art in place or use. This is a great choice for craft work—from fabrics to pottery to household items. The execution, though, is especially important if you want your artwork to look good.



Backgrounds to Use

Your choice of background behind the artwork is as important as where you display it.

A solid-color studio background is traditional and most pieces look good against one. The background can be white, black, or gray—but the tone you choose should provide enough contrast so the work is easily seen. Or you can use a graduated background for a more distinctive look.



Natural backgrounds, such as weathered wood or vegetation, are an excellent choice, too. They can complement the artwork and give the image more visual interest—but don't overdo it.



Whatever choice you make, keep it simple! Remember, the artwork is the star and the background should enhance the presentation, not distract from it.

Backgrounds to Avoid

So, what backgrounds should you avoid? Let's look at some examples.

Low contrast backgrounds will make the work harder for the viewer to see. There should be enough contrast so your piece "pops" in the image.

Take the Shot

notes



Brightly colored backgrounds will affect how the viewer perceives color in your artwork. Stick with neutral tones—white and gray—or very muted colors.

Avoid using a background with text or what looks like writing—the viewer will attempt to read it first, instead of looking at your work.

And don't use patterns, like a woven mat, as a background. A strong pattern behind the artwork makes it harder to see, and your piece won't stand out.

Above all, you want no distractions! Anything that catches the viewer's eye takes away from the presentation of your artwork.



Using a Model

There are several special considerations when displaying your work using a live model.

Take the Shot

First, shoot close enough to the model so the artwork is easily seen. Remember, the photo is about your work—not the model.

Avoid including the model's face and eyes in the image, if possible. The first thing we instinctively look at is a face, and you want the viewer to look at the artwork first.

Pay attention to the details and especially the background behind the model. Everything should enhance—and nothing distract—from the presentation of your work.



Finally, be sure to get a signed model release so there are no misunderstandings about how you plan to use the images. Blank model release forms are available free on the internet for you to use.

Position

The size and placement of your artwork in the image will give it visual interest and keep it from looking ordinary.

Use an asymmetric presentation with the work slightly off-center, instead of positioning it in the center. If there are multiple pieces, position them at different distances front-to-back and side-to-side instead of symmetrically in the middle.

Try presenting the artwork at an angle instead of parallel to the edges of the image. And don't be afraid to leave a portion of the artwork outside the image—this can be especially effective with jewelry and clothing to increase the size of the work.



notes

Take the Shot

notes

You can also arrange the work in interesting ways that have the effect of increasing its size. Again, this is a great trick to use with wearable items—rolling up a scarf, for example, instead of showing it full length.

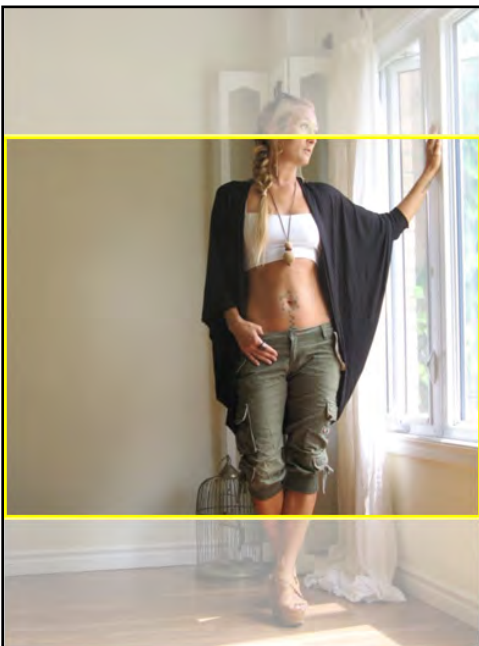
Just be creative in the presentation and your work will have energy!

Thumbnails

As you position your work when taking the shot, though, be mindful of what happens when you upload it to an ecommerce site like Etsy.

Images are cropped on most sites when they are shown as a thumbnail or in a gallery. With this image (top right), for example, a portion of the left and right sides are cropped off for a square thumbnail—and a portion of the artwork is lost as a result. This cropping tends to be the most problematic with vertical images. In the case of this image (left), a square thumbnail cuts off the model's feet. And a rectangular gallery image cuts off the top of model's head as well as the feet. The result is a presentation that is much weaker than in the original image.

So, I want you to pay attention to the size and placement of the artwork in the image when you photograph it. First, think in terms of a square image as you position the piece—as in this photo (bottom right). Then leave some extra margin at the top and bottom for the crop to a rectangular thumbnail—that way only the



Take the Shot

notes

background will be cropped off, not the art. Do that, and you'll never have a problem again with thumbnail or gallery images.

Perspective

The perspective you use when shooting your work helps your images catch the viewer's eye.

Dimensional art and craftwork is rarely seen straight-on. Instead, use a point of view for your photos. Shoot from slightly above the center of the piece. Turn it a little to the left or right to include some of the side. And as you position the art, be sure the most important elements of the work are featured prominently.

With a little thought and creativity, you can make the images of your artwork stand out from the crowd.



Presenting Your Artwork

1. Visit Etsy.com and look at the photos of the artwork that is similar to yours. Which images catch your eye? Why?
2. Print and collect the images in an "idea book" for how you might present your work. Examine each image carefully and make notes using the following questions as a guide:
 - Where and how is the work displayed?
 - How does the choice of display enhance the piece?
 - What background is behind the artwork?
 - Does the background strengthen the presentation? How?
 - Where is the piece positioned in the image?
 - What perspective has been used?
 - Does the positioning and perspective add visual interest? How?
 - Is the artwork easily seen in the photo?
 - Are there elements that enhance the presentation? How?
 - Does anything distract from the art? How?
3. Open the listing page for each work. How is the art positioned in the full-size image versus its placement in the square thumbnail and the rectangular gallery image? Why? Add this to your notes.
4. Visit a local retailer that sells work similar to yours. How do they display the pieces? Why? Add this to your notes, as well.