Take the Shot

Overview

With the camera set and the lighting ready, it's time to take the shot...and capture the best image of your art that you can.

But getting the shot right means more than just clicking the shutter. Taking the time to control the exposure and depth of field and to manage the composition and presentation of the work will pay dividends later when you post the photos online or use them to enter a show. And that's what we're going to cover next.

Expose It Right

The place where many artists fall short when photographing their work is settling for photos that are either under or overexposed. A juror or potential buyer won't see your art at its best if your image is too dark or too light...just expose it right.

Why Exposure Matters

Here's why the correct exposure matters. If you underexpose, the image will be too dark and the colors in the artwork will look dull. If, on the other hand, you overexpose, the photo will be too light and the colors will appear washed out.

With the correct exposure, it will look like ... well, the artwork. This is how you want people to see your work!

And taking the time now to get the exposure right will save you time later. It's easier to fix the exposure in the camera than it is when editing on the

Underexposed: Too Dark

Overexposed: Too Light

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computer.

Automatic Exposure Mode

The quickest way to set the exposure is by using the camera's automatic exposure mode.

Many cameras, like this one, have a dial on top that let's you set the exposure mode. Others may use a button or menu to set the exposure mode. The exposure mode will usually show on the display. For photographing your work with automatic exposure, use the "P" or "Program" mode.
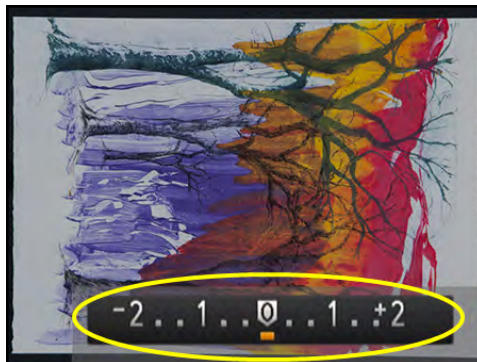
You may be tempted to use the "Auto" mode … but don't. In "Auto" mode, the camera controls many of the settings, like white balance, that you want to be able to set. If you find that you cannot get to a particular setting, check to see if the camera is in "Auto" instead of "P".

Also avoid using any of the "Scene" modes. These are pre-determined settings for different types of photography, like portraits or landscapes, and are never appropriate for artwork.

Exposure Compensation

Sometimes, though, the camera needs some extra help or it will over or underexpose an image. That's when you use the exposure compensation setting to override the automatic exposure. Here, the image is clearly underexposed.
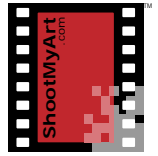
The exposure compensation is set using the button with the "+/-" symbol. When I press it, I get an exposure scale with plus values on the right side and minus values on the left. Then I can then use the dial to adjust the exposure up or down until it's correct.

Let's look at a couple of examples.

Increase the Exposure

What if the image looks underexposed? This can happen if the art is

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particularly light, and the camera tries to compensate by decreasing the exposure—making the image too dark.

Then I can dial up the exposure compensation setting until the exposure is correct.

Decrease the Exposure

And if the image appears overexposed? This happens if the work is particularly dark, and the camera tries to compensate by increasing the exposure—making the image too light.

Then just dial down the setting until the exposure is correct.

Then Set It…

When I'm satisfied with how the image looks and ready to lock in the setting, I just press the "+/-" button again. The exposure compensation value that has been set will show on the display, and it will remain at that setting until changed—even after the camera is turned off.

Now I'm ready to take the photo with the right exposure.

Setting the Mode and Exposure Compensation on Your Camera

1. Locate the instruction manual or user guide for your camera. Look in the Index for "P" or "Program AE" or in the Table of Contents for a section on shooting modes. Write the page number where the instructions are found here: _____.

2. Turn on your camera and follow the steps listed in the instructions to set the camera to "P" or "Program" mode.

3. Now look in the Index for "Exposure Compensation" or in the Table of Contents for a section on image brightness or exposure adjustments. Write the page number where the instructions are found here: _____.

4. Follow the steps listed in the instructions to adjust the exposure compensation.

5. Make any other notes here: