Light the Artwork

notes

Overview

The lighting you use when shooting your artwork must evenly illuminate it for the best quality images. Sculpture, jewelry, and other dimensional pieces also require that the lighting reveal the form and texture of the work.

The basic techniques for photographing flat or dimensional artwork are simple and straightforward, with just a few lighting elements. I'll talk about those in a few minutes, after I first show you how not to light your art.

No Flashing

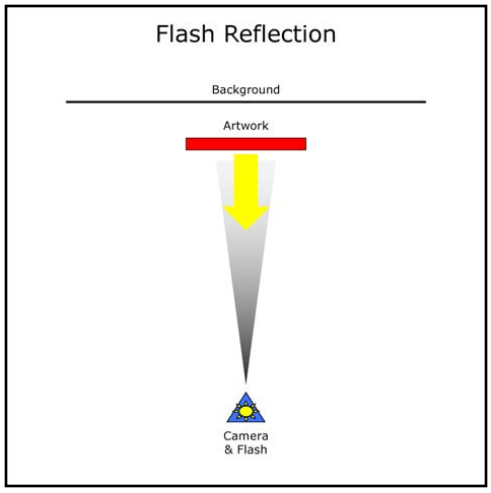
One of the big mistakes many artists make when photographing their artwork is to use the on-camera flash to light the artwork. But no flashing…and here's why.

Uneven Lighting

The first problem is that the flash usually causes uneven lighting of the artwork.

This happens because the flash on the camera is a small light source with a relatively narrow area of coverage.

Here's what results when you use the flash. The center of the artwork looks fine, but see how the corners are a bit darker. The effect becomes more noticeable with larger work. It's not the best presentation of your art.



The problem is not limited to paintings and other flat art, either. It affects dimensional art as well, particularly larger pieces.

Reflection

The second problem with the flash is that it will often create a reflection in the image of the artwork.

If the artwork is framed or it has a glossy or reflective surface, when

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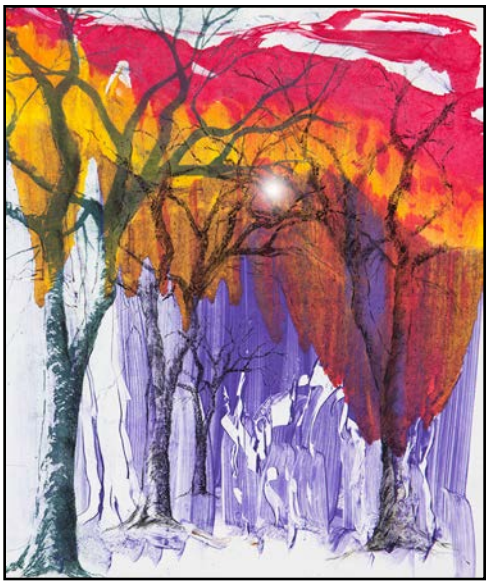
the camera is positioned directly in front of it, the light from the flash will reflect off the glass or the surface of the artwork.



The result is that a reflection of the flash is clearly visible on the artwork. Again, it's not the best presentation.

And dimensional art, particularly jewelry, is not immune to the problem. The reflection of the flash will create a white "hot spot" on the surface of the work that draws the viewer's attention away from the work itself.

Turning the Flash Off

Fortunately, most cameras and mobile devices let you turn the flash off.

On this compact camera, there's a quick way to do that. I just press the side of the dial next to the "flash" icon until the "no flash" icon appears on the screen.

On my phone, this is what the default camera app looks like.

I can control the flash by tapping on the "flash" icon. That brings up the flash menu.

I turn the flash off by tapping on "Off", and the icon changes to show that the flash is, in fact, off.

So, no more excuses that you don't know how to turn the flash off.

Turning Off the Flash on Your Camera

1. Locate the instruction manual or user guide for your camera. Look in the Index for "Flash" or in the Table of Contents. Write the page number where the instructions are found here: _____.

2. Turn on your camera and follow the steps listed in the instructions to turn off the flash. Sketch the "Flash Off" icon here:

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