Digitally Photographing Three-Dimensional Artwork with Artificial Light

Step 1. Find a location to photograph your artwork. Make sure there is sufficient room for all of the equipment that is needed. Make sure you have plenty of extension cords, tape, film, extra bulbs, and fabric or paper to cover any windows without blinds.

Step 2. A seamless background of paper or fabric is needed. The backdrop should be clean and if it is fabric, ironed. Three dimensional artwork needs to be photographed sitting on top of the backdrop paper or fabric. If the artwork is small and can fit easily on a table, pin or tape the paper to the wall above the table. Pull out the paper on the table until there is an even value from the top of the paper or fabric to the bottom. When paper or fabric is draped over a table, there will be a shadow at the curve where the paper meets the table. Pull out the paper until this dark shadow is gone. Place the sculpture on the table towards the center and away from wall. Angle the sculpture to where there is a ¾ view of the artwork when you look through the viewfinder of the camera.

Step 3. Mount the camera to the tripod and center the lens to the center of the artwork. Try to get as close as possible to the artwork and center the image within the viewfinder of the camera. Make sure the sides of the artwork are parallel to the sides of the viewfinder. Allow some of the background behind the artwork in the composition. This will allow room for the slide mount. You do not want the slide mount to cover up any portion of your artwork. Make sure to pay attention as to whether your composition should be vertical or horizontal.

Step 4. Set up the lights. For three-dimensional work you will need 2 lights placed on either side of the artwork at approximately 35 degree angles. The light on the right should be aimed for the left side of the work and the light on the left should be aimed at the right side of the work. You may use either 250 or 500 watt bulbs. Just make sure that you use one watt or the other, not both. You cannot use one 250 and one 500 watt bulb. If you do, you will have one side of your artwork darker than the other. Sometimes for three-dimensional work, especially if it is large, you may need a third light placed above the artwork and aimed down. When lighting three-dimensional artwork, remember that it is THREE-DIMENSIONAL and that all of the artwork's three-dimensional qualities have to translate to a digital image.

Step 5. Turn off all other lights in the room and close the blinds and doors to prevent any other light from coming into the room. Any extra light will cause inaccurate light readings on your camera's internal light meter and prevent you from taking the best images possible.

Step 6. Clean up everything. Be sure to turn your camera off.

Step 7. Transfer the files from the memory card to a computer. Save the files at a ` minimum resolution of 300dpi. You also need to think about the actual size of the image that will show up on the screen. Try to save your images around 5x7" with a 300dpi resolution. This will prevent distortion when viewing on the computer screen. If you are using your digital images on a website save them at a lower resolution. Do not place 300dpi images on a website. This is to prevent others from copying your images and using them for their own purposes. You may be tempted to 'fix' your images through Photoshop. Be careful when doing this!! Do not over sharpen your image or change the color too much. The result will be an image that appears as though it were digitally manipulated. The goal is to have an image that is a realistic and accurate representation of your work. Save your images not only on your computer, but make back-up CD's as well. CD's have a self-life of about a year before the information on them begins to deteriorate. It is advisable that you re-save your information on a yearly basis to new discs. When saving your files, be aware of how you label them. Make sure that they are easily identifiable by title.