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. Load the slide film in the camera. If you have kept the film in a cold location such as the refrigerator, make sure that the film has been out of the refrigerator for at least an hour. Set the film speed on the camera to the speed of the film you are using and set the shutter speed of the camera to $1/60^{th}$ of a second.

Step 4. 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 5. 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. Make sure you are using the correct light bulbs in the lights, daylight bulbs for daylight slide film and tungsten bulbs for tungsten slide film. 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 film.

Step 6. 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 light meter and prevent you from taking the best slides possible. Place your gray card as close as possible to your artwork. Take a light reading with your light meter or take a light reading with your camera by gently pressing on the shutter release button (the button you press to take the picture). If you look in the viewfinder you will see a series of numbers representing the aperture size of the shutter and a red light. Your goal is to change the aperture setting on your camera until the red light rests at the setting for $1/60^{th}$ of a second. Once you have this reading you are ready to start taking slides. Focusing three-dimensional artwork creates challenges in accurately showing depth. To focus three-dimensional artwork, first focus at the point that the closest to you. Look at the reading on the lens. Then focus on the point furthest from you. Look at the second reading on the lens. Then, split the difference between the two settings and set your lens in between the closest focal point and the furthest focal point. Make sure everything is in focus and take a picture. In addition, take a picture at one f-stop below and one f-stop above what the camera is telling you to. This is called bracketing and this way you will be sure to have at least one good exposure.

Step 7. Clean up everything. Be sure to turn your camera off. Bring your film to a photo shop to be developed. Daylight slide film can be processed anywhere, but tungsten film must be processed at a reputable camera shop. The chemicals used to process tungsten film are different from those used to process daylight film.