

# How to professionally photograph your artwork

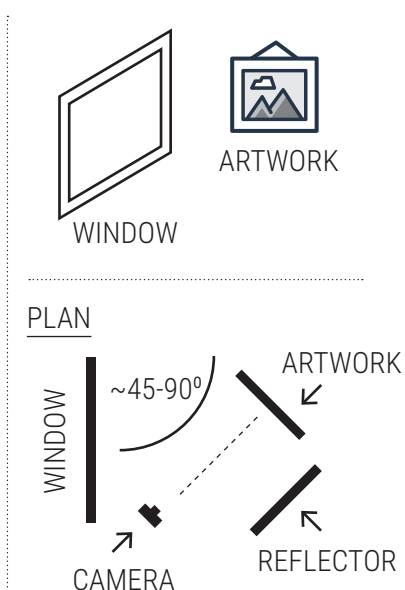
BY MILES NOEL | MILESNOEL.COM

This document is full of tips and tricks to help you produce quality photographs of your artwork. This can improve your chances of being selected for art competitions/exhibitions and for marketing your work digitally. The advanced setup covers how to create photos of sufficient quality to make prints.



## Basic setup

This setup is based on shooting with a camera phone using a single (preferably large) window with indirect natural light, in a white room. You may have to move things around to ensure you have enough clear space around the artwork and can work freely. The process is: shoot, review, adjust, shoot, review, adjust... Experiment until you land upon a setup that works for your work, then repeat for consistency.



### BASIC TOOL KIT

- 2 sheets of white foam core (Jacksons)
- Silver reflector, can use alfoil attached to card (optional)
- Clamps/clips to hold artwork and reflectors (Bunnings and Jacksons)
- Tripod and phone holder camp (for phone)
- Backdrops (optional)
- White paper/fabric (optional)
- Stand (optional)
- Photo editing app on your phone

## BASIC RULES

**The time of day** – A clear sunny day when no direct light is coming through the window is the optimum time for light. Avoid early and late when direct light is coming through the window, reflecting off non-white surfaces. Be mindful of shadows cast by bars in window. A south facing window is perfect. Direct light will create overexposed areas, but can be used to light transparent work to great effect.

**Intensity or quality of light** – Light will decline in intensity incrementally further from the window you get, so get as close to the window as possible and be mindful of light drop off. This is more obvious with large paintings, but a reflector can correct this.

**Positioning of artwork** - Prop your artwork on an easel or white plinth and move it to the position with optimum light. You can also just hang on the wall if in a good position. If in a bright environment with no stand, you can just get someone to hold it from behind if and crop them out.

**White balance** – objects/surfaces nearby that the light is reflecting off will tint the colour of the light. Green leaves outside a window, a coloured wall or a warm lamp will affect the white balance. The objective is ensure accurate colour rendition by light as 'clean' and close to daylight as possible

**Reflecting light** – Use reflectors to fill light and shape light as required.

**Texture of artwork** – Soft subtle work (like on paper) will look better with soft indirect light at a 45-degree angle directional to pick up small shadows of texture. Flat, bold and graphic artworks (like an acrylic painting) can handle more intense light, and are generally easier to photograph.

**Reflective quality of artwork surface** – A high gloss painting or a work behind glass will reflect the light source. You can overcome this by positioning the light (or work) at an angle and shooting through a dark backdrop

**Stability of camera** – Use a tripod in low light environments. Jobi tripod gripped onto light stand. Use timer to eliminate camera shake.

**Zoom** – There's nothing to be gained from using the digital zoom except reducing image quality. Get close and crop in, but not too close as there will be distortion, use your discretion.

**Positing of camera** – For 2D work, position camera middle center to avoid perspective distortion. This is where the tripod comes in handy as can easily adjust/refine. Use lines of artwork to square up image.

**Editing photo** – Now elevate the photo using the built in photo app or by mastering a paid third-party app (usually around \$5/month). The main things are to boost the shadows, contrast and colour vibrancy and correct any perspective distortion. Avoid intense filters. I use Adobe Lightroom, (app store, 7 day free trial).

## OBJECT/SCULPTURE

**Use light to show shape** – Directional lighting accentuates shape. A single light source is most dramatic, such as a spot light. Use LED panel to illuminate transparency

**Reflector** – Use a reflector to fill in shadows, either white foam core or silver reflector.

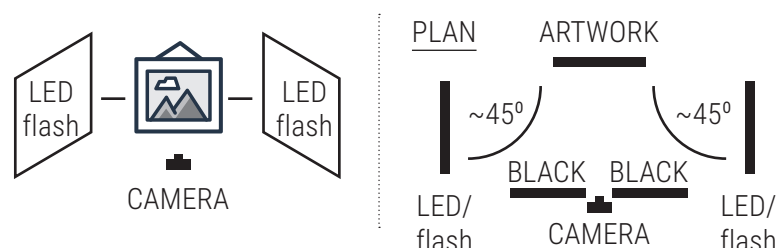
**Backdrops** – Simple background almost always best, doesn't compete with object. If getting creative with backdrop, think about contrast between object and background so it stands out.

## Advanced setup

This setup requires investing in some basic gear and knowledge of how to operate your camera in manual mode and using studio lighting. Process as before: Shoot, review, adjustment, shoot, review, repeat...

### ADVANCED TOOL KIT

- DSLR camera
- 50mm lens (or lens between 50-85mm)
- Tripod
- 2x LED panels or flash units with diffusers
- Shutter release cable
- Black fabric or card (if work reflective)



## ADVANCED RULES

**Camera settings** - Low ISO (~100), White balance 5000K (daylight), small aperture (large f-stop number f 11-16), then shutter speed for best exposure.

**Focus** - Ensure the artwork is in focus - may need to switch to manual focus and check.

**Lens** – You want the least distortion – The plastic 50mm prime is the most cheap and accessible, but 85mm is closest to what the eye sees – but is a tight crop. Most lens' perform best at an aperture of around F7-8.

**Camera and LED positioning** - Camera should be dead centre of artwork, LEDs / flash in middle of work each side at about 45° from artwork. Large works require more powerful and possibly multiple units.

**LED temperature** – Set LEDs to be around 5000K (daylight).

**Reflective quality of artwork (behind glass or high gloss)** – Shoot through black fabric or cloth.

**Existing ambient light** – Turn off any other light sources.

**Histogram** – Your objective is the capture the most even exposure possible, with most the of the data in the middle of the graph, not squashed up each end (under or overexposed).

**Post production** – Shoot in RAW and edit with Lightroom or Capture One software for maximum control. If you wish to experiment, Adobe offers a free 7 day trial Lightroom, and Capture One offers a one month trial.

**Flash** – Off camera flash is another way of lighting artwork but requires fine tuning and can blow out soft detail. Try bouncing it off the ceiling/wall or through a diffuser to soften it. Flash can be used in conjunction with natural light to fill shadows like a reflector.