

Digital Photography – A Primer for Exhibiting Artists

Increasingly, art societies are accepting digital images of photographs as an alternative to, or in preference to, traditional film slides. This article is a primer for artists unfamiliar with digital photography. The intent is to provide artists unfamiliar with digital photography an idea of what is involved, and give resources for more information.

Getting Started

Camera

“Point and Shoot” cameras from the major manufacturers can give excellent results: leading brands are Canon, Nikon, Olympus, Fuji and Sony. Cameras typically are rated by “megapixel” capacity, which is the size of the image they can take. Most cameras made within the last several years are adequate; new cameras generally have at least 8 megapixel capacity. Quality point-and-shoot cameras usually have a street price starting around \$150. Digital point-and-shoot cameras are often very small, about the size of a pack of cards, and are handy to carry around.

Other types of digital cameras are the EVF cameras, which have fixed zoom lenses and electronic viewfinders, and the DSLRs, which are the digital variation of the traditional SLR camera. DSLRs generally start around \$400.

Other stuff not to be without

Memory cards

Digital cameras use memory cards to store images; usually the cameras are sold with a small amount of memory and most people buy an extra memory card to insert in the camera to store more images (or short video clips).

Extra batteries

Optional but don't be without an extra battery. Most point-and-shoot cameras use a rechargeable battery specific to that camera model; the batteries are much smaller than regular batteries. Always have a spare *charged* battery on hand.

Then what?

Cable

The camera will connect to the computer via a small cable, which is included with the camera. A new camera will also include software to install on your computer that allows the photographs to be transferred (“imported”) to the computer, so the images can be saved and manipulated.

Software

Software for digital photography often has two main components: the capabilities to manipulate the image itself, and software to organize the photos: since digital photographs are simply downloaded from the camera instead of processed by a lab, they tend to proliferate quickly, and before you know it, you have hundreds of photos.

Popular software packages for image manipulation include:

- *Corel "Paint Shop Pro Photo X2 :*
- *Adobe Photoshop Elements 7.*

Which have a street price of roughly \$100. Fully functional trial versions of each can be downloaded from: www.corel.com and www.adobe.com.

Photoshop Elements is a subset of *Adobe Photoshop*: many books will refer to *Photoshop*, but the full-blown *Photoshop* package is large, very expensive, very difficult to learn, and not needed for simple image editing.

There are many free programs for simple image manipulation; one of the best is *Picasa 3.0*, which is available for download at picasa.google.com. *Picasa* is intended for photo albums and photo sharing,, so its resizing capabilities are limited.

Fast Stone Resizer (PC only)

Less known but recommended is *Faststone Resizer*, a free program that has many options for resizing photographs. FastStone.org

Editing Photographs for Submissions

Background

Digital photographs can be stored in many formats: the formats vary a great deal in the size of the file stored on your computer, the amount of image information retained, and whether or not the file can be compressed, or reduced in size. Uncompressed digital photos can be extremely large, and this can pose problems if the photos are emailed, downloaded from a web site, or submitted to an exhibition.

Some common file formats are:

- **JPEG** –this is the format usually specified; JPEG files can be viewed by most web browsers. JPEG formats can be compressed, which means the files can be reduced in physical size. It is important to remember that when JPEG files are compressed, there is usually a loss of image quality. This is usually not important; but once a file is compressed, the lost image information is gone forever. **Always edit a copy of the original. Never, Ever Edit Your Original Photograph Unless You Can Easily ReShoot It!**
- **TIFF** – this is a format dating back to fax machines; TIFF files are used less and less these days and tend to be quite large.

MAC versions

In addition to *iPhoto*, *Corel Paint Shop Pro* and *Adobe* are available for the *MAC*.

What are Pixels, and Why Do I Care?

Digital images are commonly reported by pixel size: a [pixel](#) may be visualized as a dot of color, sort of like "dots per inch" in printing. Images will have two pixel dimensions, sometimes expressed in length x width, or as an aggregate, such as "600 dpi" which means that there are 600 pixels stored in one square inch. The pixel size determines the overall image quality: in general, computer monitors display 72 dpi; printing is upwards of 300 dpi.

So I need to photograph my art work. What do I do?

As in regular film photography, the camera image plane must be exactly parallel to the artwork; light should be as neutral as possible, no strong reflections nearby, and glass should be removed. Turn the camera flash off.

It is very important to make sure the image plane is exactly square to the camera when the photo is shot. Otherwise the painting image will appear to be a trapezoid; the only way to correct this later is to crop off the parts of the painting which are not strictly perpendicular. Many, many slides submitted to the WSNC come in this way. Use a tripod if at all possible.

The painting image should be cropped to remove the mat or frame, so that only the painting is shown. Jurors tell us that images that are improperly shot or cropped (showing the frame, mat, previous ribbons or your shoes) are at significant disadvantage when being judged for a show.

White Balance

White Balance controls on a camera adjust to different types of light (for those old enough to remember, the idea is similar to “tungsten” vs “daylight” slide film).

Cropping the image

Use your editing software to eliminate the mat and frame, and to square the image if necessary. It is extremely important not to enhance the painting image itself, in terms of color, contrast, etc. If the photo contains reflections, color imbalances, etc., reshoot the picture.

Saving to CD

Check the show requirements very carefully; requirements such as image density (dpi) must be strictly followed; some organizations also specify image size.

Currently most exhibits require the image(s) be sent by writing to CD. Most reasonably new PCs are capable of this and CDs can be bought at any office supply, electronics or “big box” store. CDs must be labeled according to show requirements. Currently images can't be emailed unless the exhibiting organization can accept online payment for entry fees (e.g. PayPal.)

For more reading:

For a very good, thorough introduction, refer to: [Photo.Net Introduction to Digital Photography](#)

Steve Meltzer, “Photographing Arts, Crafts and Collectibles”, Lark, 2007.

Steve Meltzer, “Capture the Light”, Lark, 2008

www.dpreview.com

[Imaging Resource](#)

www.photo.net

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