

# CAPTURING YOUR WORK WITH PHOTOGRAPHY

BY MARCIA YOUNG

HERE: Deanna DiMarzio (DeannaDimarzioPhotography.com)  
taking a photo using natural and reflected light.

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any artists and craftspeople feel that too much emphasis is put on the kinds of photos that they present of their work. It seems like the work should speak for itself, right? Actually, here are some reasons why images of your work are critical:

- Photos frame the level of your work. If the work is high quality and displays superior craftsmanship but your photos do not capture that quality, your work will be devalued and underappreciated.
- Your work is fundamentally tactile, and although the best way to experience it is by seeing it in person, that limits your ability to share it with the world. Good quality photos make it possible to connect with other basket makers and enter exhibitions or submit your work for consideration to any venue.
- High quality photography helps you communicate effectively with others. Remember slides? The first people who used slides had to fuss with projectors and figure out how the system worked. It was the best tool we had at the time. Now our best tool is high-resolution photography saved in a digital format. Commit to learning a few basic skills to take all of your images to the next level.
- The world wants to see what you make. This includes your family and friends. Individual pieces are sold, given away, or lost over time. High quality digital files create a record of the skills and creativity that you have worked so hard to develop. The files are the foundation of your creative legacy.



## IF YOU TAKE YOUR OWN PHOTOS

While the best option for having quality photos is to take your work to a professional photographer, sometimes that isn't possible. If that's the case, there are ways to improve the quality of the photos you take in your studio.

We recently talked with John Polak, a professional photographer who has specialized in three-dimensional photography for over 30 years. Here is his advice for improving the quality of photos of your work.

**NBO:** Without a professional photographer, what's the best way to approach lighting? How about backgrounds?

**JP:** The best way to light your work is to set up near a window and let the natural light hit the work from the side or slightly from the front. Use a piece of white foam core to fill in the shadows from the opposite side. Make sure to turn off all other light sources, such as lamps or overhead fluorescents.

The background should be simple and complementary, as should the surface on which you place your object. In many professional photographs you see a transitional light-to-dark background, but I've noticed a trend toward lighter backgrounds that seems to be gaining in popularity.

**NBO:** Barring natural light, what is the best way to approach lighting?

**JP:** If using natural light is not a possibility, then light your work from a single light source placed above and somewhat to the side of the object. If possible bounce the light off a piece of foam core and use another piece of foam core (white) to fill in the shadows from the opposite side.



Use a tripod because your exposure times will probably be too slow to hand hold your camera.

Another important guideline is to get out your camera's instruction book and learn how to white balance your camera. I can't stress enough how important that is.

**NBO:** What are some of the primary reasons for amateur-looking photos?

**JP:** I think the biggest sin is poor color in your photograph—you must white-balance your camera. Second, get close to your object. The photo is about your object, not the background. Third, use a normal-to-short telephoto lens for your photos. This will eliminate a distorted view of the object. The last rule is to experiment. All rules are meant to be broken from time to time. Don't settle; push yourself to get better photos.

**NBO:** What kinds of photos are expected by galleries, publications, and exhibitions?

**JP:** Take as many photos as you need to tell the story of your work. Some pieces may only need one photo, while others may need three or four or even more to tell the complete story.

## IF YOU WORK WITH A PHOTOGRAPHER

- 1 Select a photographer who has experience photographing three-dimensional work.
- 2 Talk about backgrounds. Do you want dark or light? Does the photographer have a preference and why?
- 3 What kinds of shots do you need for each piece? Have several taken for each piece, both full shots and detail shots. What is the most interesting or unique detail about each piece? It may be obvious to you, but the photographer may not see things the same way. Tell her what you want to be sure she catches it during the photo shoot, so she is conveying the essence of your creations.
- 4 Ask for at least two sets of images. One set should be as large as possible, at least 300 dpi. Keep that set for submissions. The second set should be low resolution (72 dpi), so you can easily email them or post them online and share a quick snapshot of your work. John Polak provides his clients with three sets of images: tiffs, high-resolution jpgs, and low-resolution jpgs.
- 5 When you receive your files, take the time to open up each one and write a general description that includes the materials, techniques, and year it was made. Label it with the file name like this: PamHolland\_EggBasket1.tiff



## BUILDING A LIGHTBOX

The goal of developing a portfolio of quality images that accurately conveys your work can be reached in several ways. Many people have found lightboxes to be a helpful tool. They offer a great solution for smaller pieces, help diffuse the light, and create a clean, uniform, seamless background with diffuse light. You can then use flashes, desk lamps, and other light sources to create the desired lighting effect.

- 1 Select a cardboard box that is larger than the work you want to photograph. Keep in mind that you need to give the work room to breathe. Secure the bottom of the box closed with packing tape. Use more packing tape to secure the bottom flaps on the inside.
- 2 On the outside of the box mark lines about 1 inch inside the edges of the two sides and the top. Cut the marked rectangles out.
- 3 Cut the front flaps off with a box cutter.
- 4 Cut a section of white fabric or white tissue paper large enough to fit over each of the cut openings. Tape it to the outside of the box. Start with one layer of fabric. After completing the box and making some test shots, you may find that you need additional layers of tissue paper to achieve the right lighting.
- 5 Fit a matte-finish white poster board to the bottom and back inside of your box. The width should be the same as the width of the box and the length twice as long. Curve the poster board toward the top of the box without creasing it, creating a curved infinite-looking background.
- 6 Add your lighting. Photo lights, flashes, and even standard desk lamps can be placed on either side or above the box to produce the desired lighting effect.