

The Photograph ... It's Your Image by Dotti Stone

A few years ago I was asked to submit an article about photographing mosaics to a mosaic group for its website. What is included here are many of the tips that were in "The Photograph ... It's Your Image." The bottom line being, if you want the viewer, a potential client or maybe a judge, to appreciate the work and the value placed on it, the image needs to reflect this. It is important that art work look as good as possible, whether for the newsletter, to submit for an exhibit, for a portfolio or promotional materials. i.e. business cards, brochures, fliers. The photograph does more than capture the art work; it sends a message about the value placed on the work, and the professionalism of the artist.

In a nutshell the photographs should be sharp (out of focus photographs, even a little, will not be printed in the LRA newsletter). There should be no date stamp. The exposure needs to be correct ... not too dark, not too light. Tripods are very helpful. There should not be reflections on art work photographed through glass. No frames, mats or background behind 2-D art work should show.

Images may look fine on a computer monitor, but file sizes for computer use and printing are different. The images used in the newsletter are inserted at 300 ppi (pixels per inch), a minimum standard for commercial printing. The LRA newsletter still goes to a commercial printer for about 40 + copies and until this changes the images must be much larger than those suitable for an on line newsletter, website, Facebook, blogs or any other online usages.

Preferably, the images sent for the newsletter should be at least 1000 pixels in width, and more is better. 1000 pixels will yield the equivalent of a print image a little over 3 inches in width. Ideally, images should be even larger. They can easily be reduced but enlarging a small file degrades the image. If an image is received 450 pixels wide, that equals a 1 ½" wide print (at 300 pixels per inch). Another problem arises when the art work is only about half or 3/4s the image area. Automatically, the size is reduced due to cropping out the extraneous background and that include eliminating the frame.

The most frequent requests your editor has to make are for larger files and/or sharper images. Re-photograph images that are not sharp. Turn off the date stamp if this is frequently used and have the quality setting set for the highest quality, no t for the most images that will fit on the memory card. Try to eliminate reflections if photographing through glass – it is best to photograph art work before framing – photograph should be of art work without frame. Sculpture, fabric art and other art that might fall into a 3-D or sculptural category should have a very simple background.

Be sure no computer settings are controlling the size of the image being emailed when repeated requests for larger files are made. Ideally, send the full camera file (with no adjustments made to the image) as an attachment. Resizing and perspective control will be done before the images go into the newsletter.

If hiring a professional photographer be sure you it is one who is experienced photographing art work. Photographers specialize just like doctors, lawyers - a photographer works with kids, families and weddings may know how to keep backgrounds uncluttered and elicit expressions, but may not be the best choice for products.

Those who are used to submitting files for exhibits probably already understand these guidelines, but there are those who are just starting to try exhibits requiring electronic files or are using equipment that make have some setting that change the full size to a smaller one when emailing. Many people can take reasonably good images and can learn how to improve in areas where difficulties are arising. The important thing is to have the photographs be an accurate representation of the art that has been created. That said ... a photograph of art work is never the same as seeing it in person and for that reason the quality of the image is extremely important.

Your work deserves to look as good as possible. And remember The photograph ... it's your image!