

# AbaF

## Documenting art work

It is of vital importance that every visual artist documents their work to the very highest of standards. Whether you plan to send this documentation to galleries, curators, editors, funding bodies, magazines, on-line publications or for personal archives this material must be excellent in every facet.

The visual art world today is an immensely competitive one and as such standards of quality are extremely high.

Whoever the end user of this imagery is, it is most likely that when they view your work through the medium of your documentation that they will have never seen your work before. They will view it for maybe as little as 10 seconds. What your work looks like, its visual qualities must be communicated as clearly and cleanly as possible.

If you follow the steps set out here is it possible for you to produce digital documentation of your artwork to a standard that will enable you to be highly effective in the task of communicating the quality of your artwork.

### **White balance**

It is of vital importance to understand how white balance affects your camera's sensor and how it captures color. Most high quality digital cameras have a white balance setting; if your camera does not it will try to guess a balance on its own. Naturally it is much better to have this option in order to produce quality images.

Theoretically, midday light on a sunny day is meant to be the "standard" 5,500 k (a term for measuring the colour temperature of light) for white light, or in other words - the cleanest colour without sifting into either warmer or colder tints. At the beginning of the day and toward the end the colour temperature of daylight shifts to a warmer, reddish tone.

When you move inside the colour of the light is relative to the light source. Tungsten or bulb light is warm (reddish-yellow) and fluorescent (yellowish-green). It is possible to counteract the colour shifts that occur both during the day and inside (depending on the lighting systems) by adjusting the white balance on your camera. If the white balance setting is on AUTO then the camera is attempting to set a lighting balance that does not shift way from a "standard" white by guessing where the white is in each shot. While this can work to a degree it is better to understand how to manually adjust your camera's white balance. For instance, if you are taking your images in shade the SHADE setting will give your colours an extra boost.

While setting the white balance to TUNGSTEN when using tungsten lamp interior lights will adjust for the reddish tone and shift the lighting as the camera sees it to a more natural colour.

The most common digital SLR white balance settings are:

- AUTO
- Natural (daylight)
- Shade
- Overcast (heavy cloud)
- Tungsten
- Fluorescent
- Flash

### Choosing the best file format on your camera

Most professional photographers only shoot in RAW format rather than jpeg. Shooting this way gives you the option of making adjustments later. Files, once colour corrected and modified can then be saved as jpeg's for distribution.

### Documenting artwork

As a visual artist you will be required to often document your work in a variety of places and locations. Below are some tips for documenting your work in a variety of situations:

#### 1. Documenting artwork outside

By far the easiest is using daylight outside.

- Use a tripod to steady the camera
- Set your white balance appropriately (as above depending on the light) i.e. overcast, shade etc.
- Use the shady side of the house on a sunny day in a neutral colour area. Smooth even light, no shadows. You can use direct sunlight if the artwork is 2D or if a shadow on 3D work does not cause problems.
- Keep the work free of distracting backgrounds and fill the frame

#### 2. Documenting artwork in a gallery

Use the existing lights by the following methods.

- If you use the lights in the gallery you will have to balance that light back to daylight.
- When you walk into a gallery it may be very difficult to tell (as our eyes adjust so well to colour changes) if the space is lit with white balanced lights or if other (tungsten or florescent) lights are being used. It would be best to ask the gallery staff about the colour temperature of their lights and then adjust your camera's white balance appropriately. (As above)
- Use a tripod to steady the camera
- Keep the work free of distracting backgrounds and fill the frame

#### 3. Documenting artwork in a studio

- When using spotlights on a stand to light a work, place them at a 45-degree angle either side of the work so as to eliminate shadows
- Use a tripod to steady the camera
- You could use a single light source if you wish to produce shadows
- If you use lights you will have to balance that light back to daylight. (As above) These are usually tungsten but some are balanced to white.
- Keep the work free of distracting backgrounds and fill the frame

#### 4. Documenting 3D or sculpture artwork in a studio

- When using spotlights to light a work, place them at a 45-degree angle either side of the work so as to eliminate shadows if you want a smooth shadow less picture.
- Use a tripod to steady the camera
- You could use a single light source if you wish to produce shadows to highlight forms or texture. If your work has certain surface qualities the light you use should compliment this. You may be very aware of what makes your work distinctive but a viewer that sees the work for the first time may not notice unless you present the work in a light that heightens these qualities.
- If you use lights you will have to balance that light back to daylight. (As above)
- Keep the work free of distracting backgrounds and fill the frame

### Exposure

Take your light readings without the light sources visible in the frame. In other words if you are using a lamp to light your work make sure you take the light reading by framing just your work in the shot and not the lamp.

Use the averaging meter setting on your camera unless there is a specific tonal area in the work that needs to be highlighted, in this case some cameras will allow you to set the exposure reading to a spot in the center of the frame. Just be aware of how your camera is taking the reading.

If you have photographed your work outside or anywhere other distracting objects or surfaces are visible make sure these are not visible at the edges of the work; I cannot over emphasize this enough, so much that is distracting is often left in the frame.

### **Saving Digital Files**

It is important to save your RAW files somewhere accessible as an archive; any changes you make to the RAW file on screen should then be saved as a jpeg and not to the basic RAW file.

All files you intend to send out should be saved as jpegs (quality=12 Max, format option=Baseline Standard) with Your Name\_ Title of work\_ Year of work.

For example, Alex\_Painter\_AnArtwork\_2010.

In most cases do not send high-resolution files to galleries or dealers etc, unless you are asked to do so for very specific and well-understood reason.

If your images are loaded onto a CD then make sure that there are only those files that need to be viewed and no other clutter.

Generally it is good to have 3 file sizes of each work in digital format:

- One primarily for email purposes that is low-res that can be easily emailed and received but not easily reproduced (18cm wide at 72 dpi)
- Or for Power Point 18 cm wide for landscape format or 18cm high portrait format at 95 dpi. (At this resolution the files are larger but work well on Power Point).
- The other in a high-res format that is suitable for reproduction purposes i.e. invitation, catalogue, advertisement etc. These files should be saved as TIFF files. Most requests for high-res images are around 300dpi at around 18cm wide in size. These files are often sent on CD but you may have requests for them to be sent as attachments. You never send files this size unless you have been specifically asked to do so and you know exactly what the end user will do with it.

It is very important to remember that when send images as attachments to someone for the first time, in order to introduce yourself to them DO NOT send large files. Send only the small file size as outlined above so that someone opening the file on his or her computer can do so quickly and easily. It is very off putting to receive an attachment that is 2, 3 or even 20 megabytes in size that takes minutes to open and clogs up the receivers email.

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