

How to Photograph 3D Art

Below are some ideas on how to photograph 3D art for promotional purposes and/or for providing digital entries for art competitions. This also includes ideas and tips on how to professionally photograph art installations and public art.

If an artist were to follow these ideas when recording and presenting their 3D art, their chances for being accepted will surely increase.

At the end of this post is a link to a more detailed PDF article on this subject, along with additional ideas on how to photograph any 2D art.

This information was gratefully provided by the [Visual Resources Center, of the University of Colorado, Boulder, Department of Art & Art History](#)

1. Positioning Your Art

- For smaller sculptural work, place your art on a flat surface with a neutral colored background
- Don't place your art too close to the background, give it some space
- If your art is small enough and you want even diffused light, use a tabletop soft-box
- If using soft-box lighting, place the lights at 45 degree angles from the art, half way between the art and the camera, this will give even, diffused light
- Then move around one of the lights to start creating shadows, once you have reached a desired shadow leave the light and begin shooting
- Some pieces of art need three lights to create dimensionality. If needed, add a third light.

2. Camera Settings

- Set the ISO to 100 (this will reduce "noise" in the digital image)

- Set the camera to “aperture priority” (this will keep the aperture locked)
- Set the aperture to f/8 or higher (this will put more of the image in focus)
- Set the white balance if shooting in jpeg or tiff (Tungsten, Fluorescent, Daylight, Custom, etc.)
- Set the camera to timer mode (this is to minimize camera shake)

3. Setting up the Camera

- Set up the camera on a tripod, make sure the tripod and camera are level
- Place the tripod at a distance where the art fills almost the entire view, yet you are not too close to get distortions
- Shooting the work
- Get the entire image in the frame with a bit of background (you will crop it out later)
- Focus your image (manually or with auto focus)
- Press the button and let go of the camera, the timer function will open the shutter and take the shot
- Bracket your shot by going up and down one stop with the shutter speed
- Leave the tripod in place in case you need to come back and shoot more images
- Make sure to capture your piece from multiple angles if needed
- Image editing in Photoshop, Photoshop Elements, Gimp, etc.

4. Post Processing

- Open an image in Photoshop and set a white balance
- Save as a tiff
- Crop the image
- Correct any distortions if necessary
- Adjust color and contrast if necessary
- Zoom to 100% to check for imperfections
- If you have the storage space, save both your tiff and RAW images
- You can now make derivative jpegs from your tiff to match the requirements that are needed

5. Tips for Photographing Installations

- Shooting installations requires capturing full views of the work as well as details.

- Try shooting your full views with a wide-angle lens. Remember that distortions can occur at the edges of a wide-angle lens, so zoom in a bit with the lens when shooting. Always look at the image on the viewfinder to see if you have noticeable distortions.
- To capture the installation in focus you must keep your aperture closed down quite a bit. Try using only f/16 or higher and see what your results look like. Because you are using such a small aperture and lighting in installations are very often dim, a tripod is an absolute necessity.
- Make sure to get shots from a variety of angles and positions. When people walk through or into an installation they often can experience the art from many different views, make sure your photos can document that aspect of an installation.
- Be very aware of the backgrounds that may exist within the space of the installation. Make sure to avoid elements that may distract from the piece, or be sure to include them if they are part of the piece.
- While most installations can be shot with the current lighting, sometimes adding additional light can be helpful to highlight a certain area. If you are supplementing the current light with a lighting-kit, be sure to position the kit so it cannot be seen in the photo.
- Make sure to get lots of detail shots of the installation, and be sure to still use a tripod.

6. Tips for Photographing Outdoor Buildings or Public Art

- It is best to shoot at dusk or dawn when photographing buildings or outdoor sculpture/public art. There is better lighting and fewer people to get in your shot. Only photograph during the day if there is a very specific lighting reason to do so, for example shadows are an important element.
- Since you will be shooting in a low light situation (dusk or dawn), a tripod is absolutely necessary.
- Be sure to get multiple shots from many angles. And be very aware of the background of your shot. Moving to the side one or two feet may give you a significantly better shot.
- For larger building or public art pieces you may need a wide angle lens. Be sure to watch out for distortion at the edges of the frame. Zoom

in a bit or stand closer to your subject and it may help with the corner distortions.

- Your depth of field can vary quite a bit with outdoor photography. For large buildings where it is important to get the entire structure in focus, use a small aperture (f/22). For isolated sculptures where you want just the sculpture in focus and the background blurry use a larger aperture (f/5.6).
- While almost all public buildings are legal to photograph, a few are not (especially in foreign countries). Do some research to find out if you are allowed to photograph your site of interest.
- Be sure to bracket your shots. You may not get another chance to come back and shoot the subject again so be sure to have a variety of exposures from each shot to choose from later.
- Also remember to take a shot of any kind of plaque or ID that may be posted near the building or art to help you identify it later.

Many thanks to the Visual Resources Center, University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Art and Art History for providing this wonderful information. Here is a link of a PDF file which provides more detailed information along with diagrams [How to Photograph Art – University of Colorado Boulder](#)