How to photograph small to medium 2-D artwork

Hanging your art
1. Place or hang your art on a flat surface (like a wall) with a grey, black or white background
2. Make sure the art is level
3. Measure up from the floor to the middle of the art. Take note of that height, you will need it later

Setting up the lighting kit
1. Set up the stands first, and then add the lighting heads
2. Place the umbrellas onto the lighting heads and then face the lights away from the art
3. The lights should be placed at 45 degree angles from the art, half way between the art and the camera, this will give even, diffused light (See the attached diagram)
4. Note: If you are shooting 3-D or highly textured art you will want a different lighting setup

Camera Settings
1. Set the camera to shoot in RAW (this will give you the most digital information)
2. Set the ISO to 100 (this will reduce "noise" in the digital image)
3. Set the camera to "aperture priority" (this will keep the aperture locked)
4. Set the aperture to f/8 or higher (this will put more of the image in focus)
5. Set the white balance if shooting in jpeg or tiff (Tungsten, Fluorescent, Daylight, Custom, etc)
6. If you have mixed lighting you can create a custom white balance or just shoot in RAW
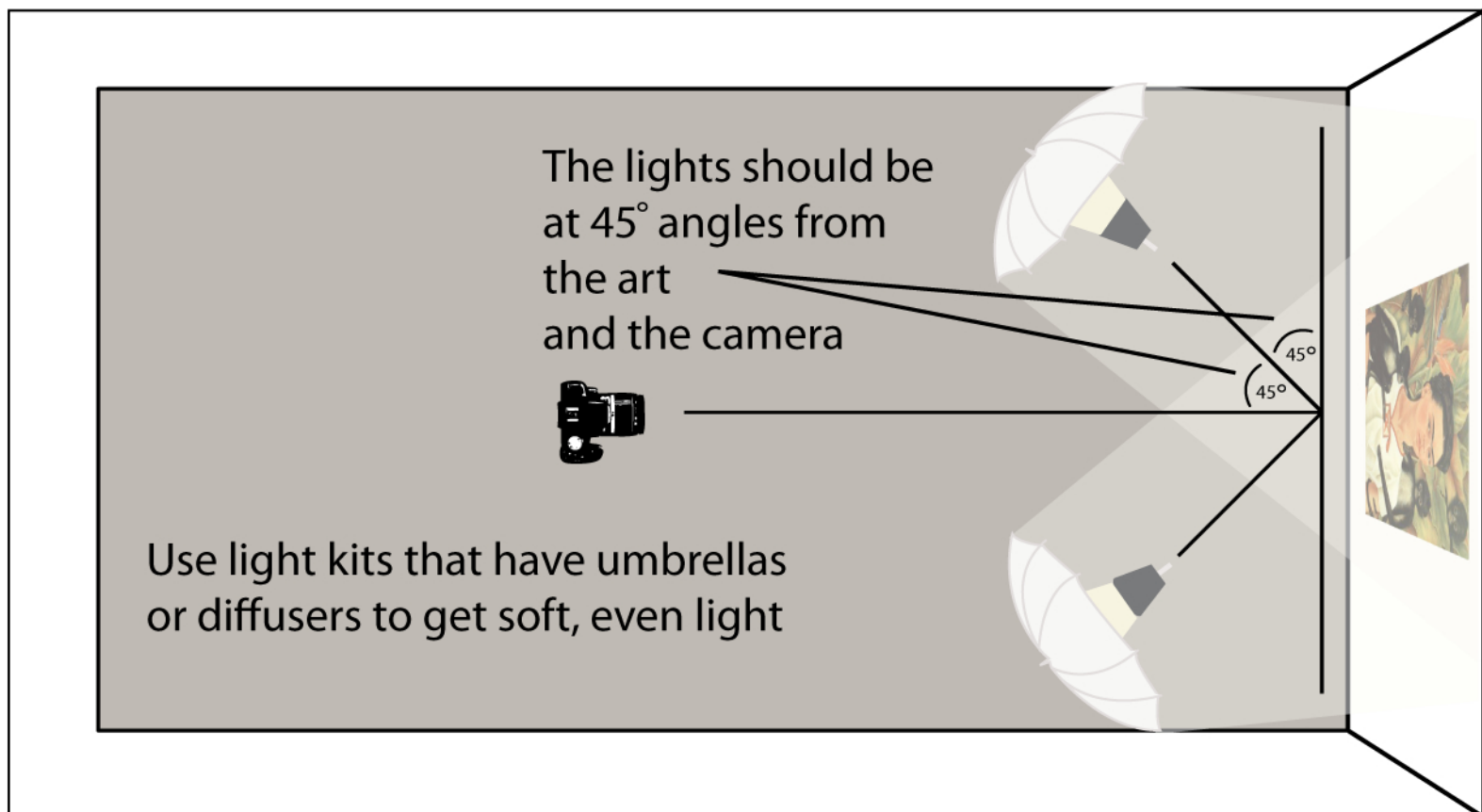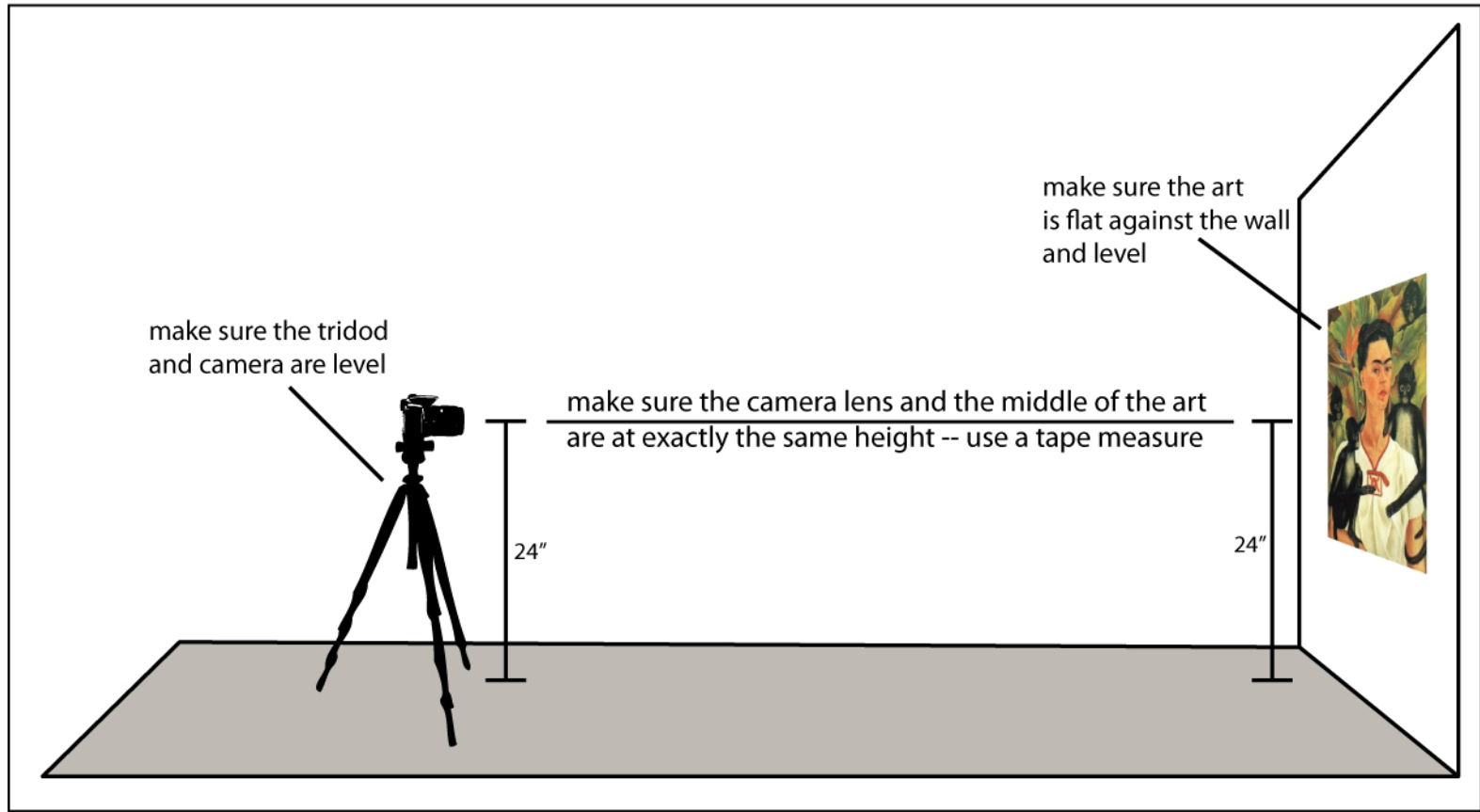7. Set the camera to timer mode (this is to minimize camera shake)

Setting up the camera
1. Set up the camera on a tripod, make sure the tripod and camera are level
2. After attaching the camera, bring the lens to the exact height of the middle of the art (this is the measurement you took when hanging the art)
3. Place the tripod at a distance where the art fills almost the entire view, yet you are not too close to get distortions (See the attached diagram)
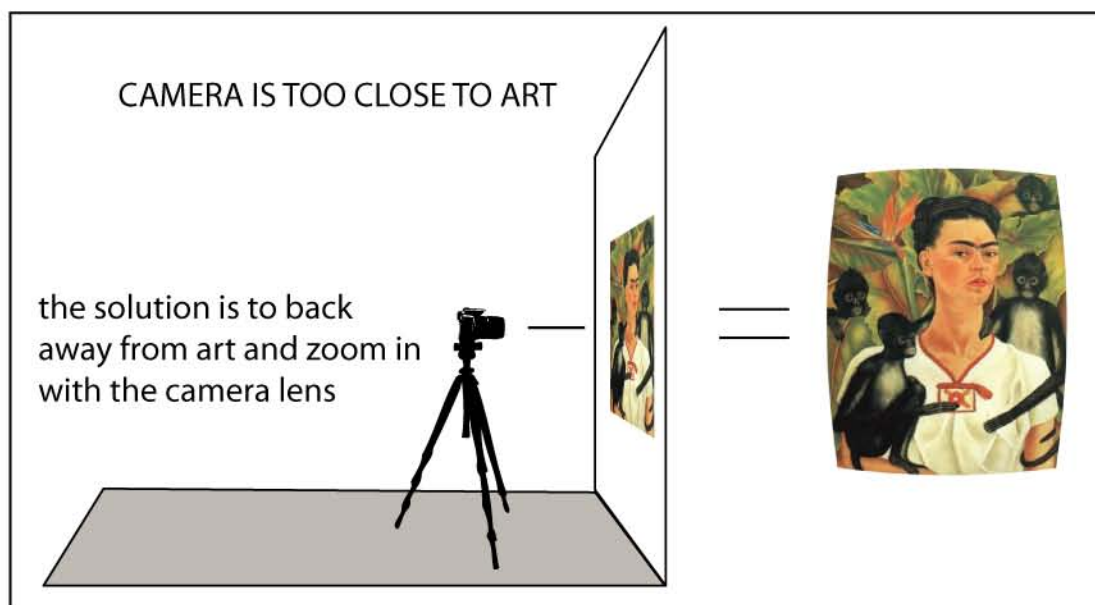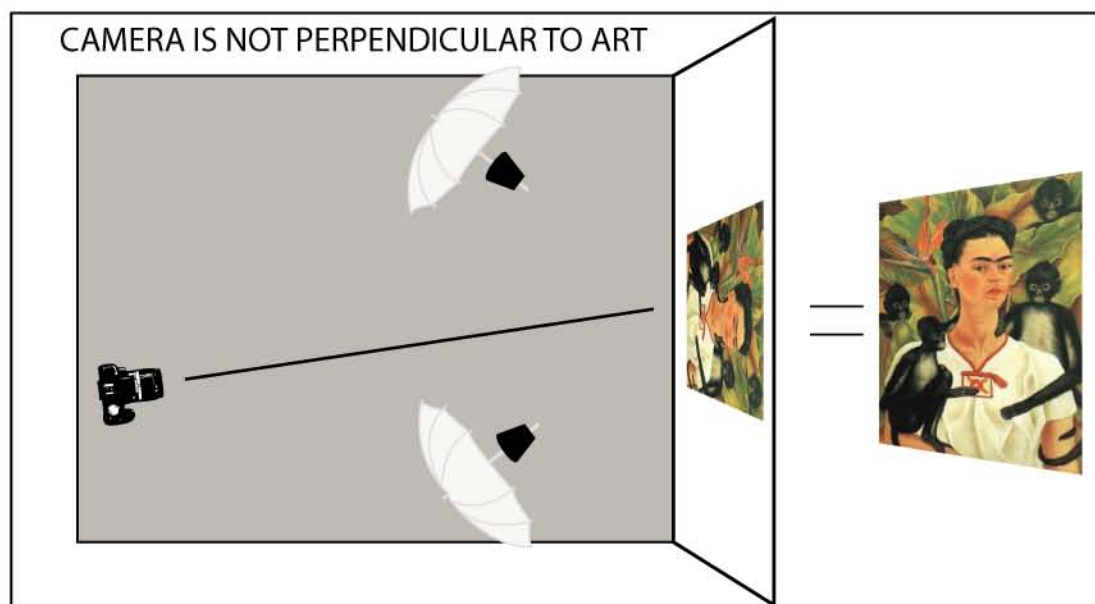
Shooting the work
1. Clean the camera lens with a lens cleaning cloth
2. Turn on the light kit
3. Get the entire image in the frame with a bit of background (you will crop it out later)
4. Focus your image (manually or with auto focus)
5. Press the button and let go of the camera, the timer function will open the shutter and take the shot
6. Bracket your shot by going up and down one stop with the shutter speed
7. Leave the tripod in place in case you need to come back and shoot more images

Updated Feb. 2012

Proper setup of camera and lights for shooting 2-D work

make sure the tridod
and camera are level

make sure the art
is flat against the wall
and level

make sure the camera lens and the middle of the art
are at exactly the same height -- use a tape measure

24"

24"

The lights should be
at 45° angles from
the art
and the camera

45°

45°

Use light kits that have umbrellas
or diffusers to get soft, even light

Updated Feb. 2012

Common distortions when shooting 2-D work

CAMERA IS NOT AT CORRECT HEIGHT

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CAMERA IS NOT PERPENDICULAR TO ART

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CAMERA IS TOO CLOSE TO ART

the solution is to back
away from art and zoom in
with the camera lens

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Updated Feb. 2012
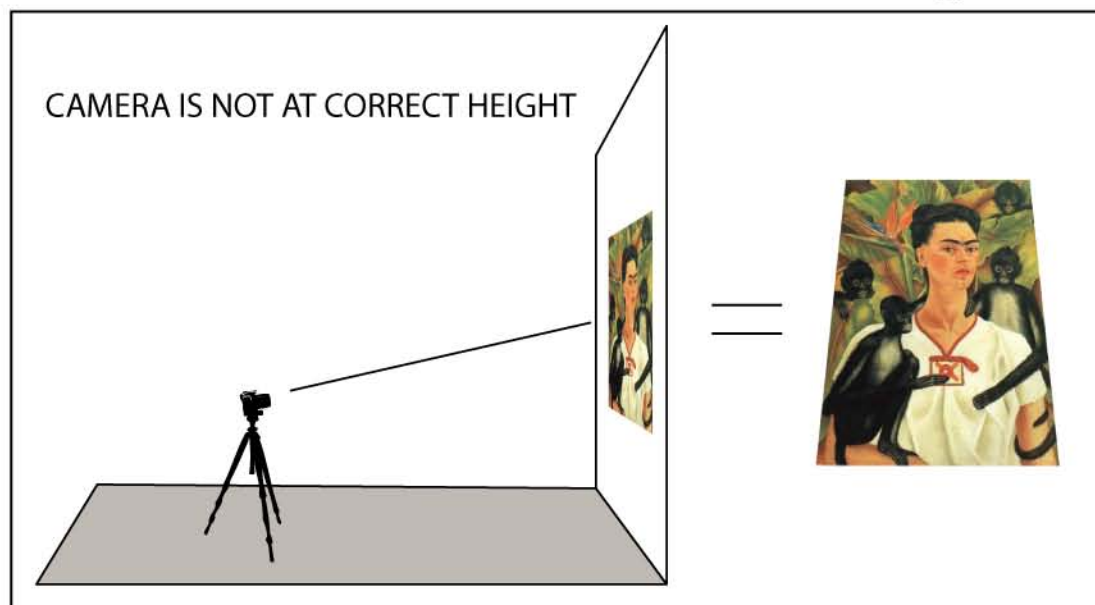
How to photograph small to medium 3-D artwork

Positioning your art
1. For smaller sculptural work, place your art on a flat surface with a neutral colored background
2. Don't place your art too close to the background, give it some space
3. Note: If your art is small enough and you want even diffused light, use a tabletop soft-box

Setting up the lighting kit
1. Set up the stands first, and then add the lighting heads
2. Place the umbrellas onto the lighting heads and then face the lights away from the art
3. At first place the lights at 45 degree angles from the art, half way between the art and the camera, this will give even, diffused light (See the attached diagram)
4. Then move around one of the lights to start creating shadows, once you have reached a desired shadow leave the light and begin shooting
5. Some pieces of art need three lights to create dimensionality. If needed, add a third light.

Camera Settings
1. Set the camera to shoot in RAW (this will give you the most digital information)
2. Set the ISO to 100 (this will reduce "noise" in the digital image)
3. Set the camera to "aperture priority" (this will keep the aperture locked)
4. Set the aperture to f/8 or higher (this will put more of the image in focus)
5. Set the white balance if shooting in jpeg or tiff (Tungsten, Fluorescent, Daylight, Custom, etc)
6. If you have mixed lighting you can create a custom white balance
7. Set the camera to timer mode (this is to minimize camera shake)

Setting up the camera
1. Set up the camera on a tripod, make sure the tripod and camera are level
2. Place the tripod at a distance where the art fills almost the entire view, yet you are not too close to get distortions (See the attached diagram)

Shooting the work
1. Clean the camera lens with a lens cleaning cloth
2. Turn on the light kit
3. Get the entire image in the frame with a bit of background (you will crop it out later)
4. Focus your image (manually or with auto focus)
5. Press the button and let go of the camera, the timer function will open the shutter and take the shot
6. Bracket your shot by going up and down one stop with the shutter speed
7. Leave the tripod in place in case you need to come back and shoot more images
8. Make sure to capture your piece from multiple angles if needed

Tips for photographing museum artwork

1. Make sure you have permission from the museum to photograph their contents.
2. See if the museum allows tripods (or monopods).
3. If you need to hand-hold your camera try raising the ISO up to 800. This will give you some more digital noise, but it will reduce camera shake.
4. Try experimenting with the aperture setting. The bigger your aperture, the faster the shutter speed will be (less shake), but less of the image will be in focus. Remember that a larger aperture is a smaller number (ex f/4.0).
5. If the piece of art is behind glass, use a polarizing filter to reduce glare, and try shooting the work at a 45° angle. Then fix the distortion of shooting at a 45° in Photoshop.
6. When taking the pictures, tuck your arms in close to your sides to give the camera the most stability as possible. Also try breathing out and then as you shoot the picture hold your breath. You can also try gently running you finger from front to back over the shutter button as opposed to pushing it, this will also minimize camera shake.
7. Also remember to take a quick shot of the museum ID tag so you can identify the piece of art later.

Tips for photographing installations

1. Shooting installations requires capturing full views of the work as well as details.
2. 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 view-finder to see if you have noticeable distortions.
3. To capture the installation in focus you must keep you 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.
4. 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.
5. Be very aware of the backgrounds that may exist with in 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.
6. 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.
7. Make sure to get lots of detail shots of the installation, and be sure to still use a tripod.

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Tips for photographing outdoor buildings or public art

1. 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.
2. Since you will be shooting in a low light situation (dusk or dawn), a tripod is absolutely necessary.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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).
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.
7. 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.
8. 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.