

Taking Professional Photographs of Artwork (At Home!)

Stuck at home wondering how to get good photos of your artwork in the middle of a pandemic? Check out these quick tips from Momentum 2021 Co-Chair Aunj Braggs, and OVAC's Programs and Media Assistant Lauren Fourcade.



"Hello OVAC Members! I wanted to provide a quick and easy guide for taking semi decent photographs of your artwork. Without knowing how, it can be easy to run into a pitfall. Ultimately it is rather simple to take a good quality image. I will be hitting on a few points I learned while in college that really helped me step up my game. I will include tips on lighting, angles, cropping, and editing."

Aunj Braggs, Momentum 2021 Co-Chair

"Starting with the right equipment will set yourself up to take the best image possible, but you don't need anything super fancy. Two lamps with shades on them or even a translucent shower curtain can help diffuse your light source, for example. In this guide, we'll teach you how to take high quality photos with what you already have at home."

Lauren Fourcade, OVAC's Programs and Media Assistant



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LIGHTING

Top Tip! Avoid harsh lighting; instead, choose overcast daylight or a DIY diffuser.

“Even if you get all the other factors right, bad lighting can ruin your photo. Without proper lighting, you lose detail and everybody is trying to see those details! The best lighting comes from dawn, dusk or an overcast day. If you do not have the option to go outside, try to avoid lighting that creates a glare or shadow on your image. I simply place my image near a window during the day and the lighting really brightens the piece. It is best not to take images of your work at night or in a dimly lit room.”

Aunj Braggs

“To avoid a glare on sheer or reflective pieces, use two sources of soft light (ex. lamps with shades on them). Position the lights on either side of the piece, and turn off all other light sources in the room. You want diffused lights, not harsh lights. You can use natural light on a cloudy day, lamps with shades, or even put a cheap translucent shower curtain in front of your light source. Never use the flash!”

Lauren Fourcade



ANGLES

Top Tip! Check that the edges of your piece run parallel to the camera frame before shooting.

“Okay so the lighting is on point, and you are ready to take your shot. The angle at which you do this makes a huge difference. Even if you are using a professional grade camera, a bad angle will make it nearly impossible to make a professional grade image. For example, if you have a 2D piece with straight edges and your camera angle points down, you will end up cropping out a huge chunk of your piece in the editing process. The best angle is shot straight on, with the edges of your camera frame running parallel to the edges of your work. The easiest way to do this is to place the artwork straight up on an easel (or hang it on the wall) and level yourself with the art before capturing the photo.”

Aunj Braggs

“Make sure your lens is level with your piece and pointed directly at it, in order to avoid harsh angles and distortion. If you are using an iPhone, do NOT use the zoom. Move your camera closer to the image if necessary. If you are using a digital SLR camera, stay at 50mm or above in order to avoid distortion. Remember, the more background you have to crop later, the more detail you lose in the image, so try to have the image fill the entire frame. If you are shooting an image of a 3D piece, choose a plain background with a neutral color. You’ll still want to get really close to the piece, so that the focus is on the detail rather than the background.”

Lauren Fourcade

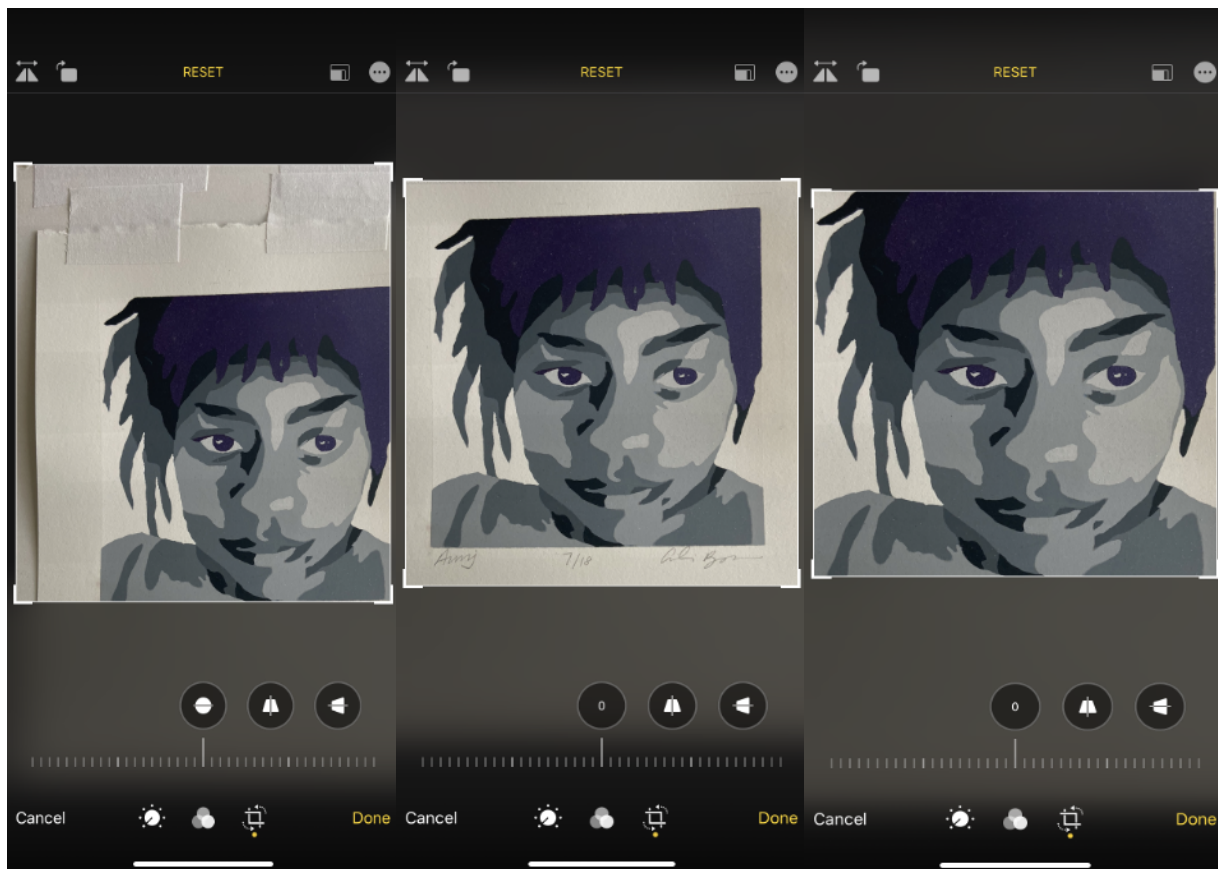


CROPPING

Top Tip! Use straightening and cropping tools to get rid of unnecessary background.

“This is the easiest part, if you’ve done your angles correctly! Most smart phone camera apps offer straightening and cropping functions. Once your image is straightened on top and bottom, it is time to bring in those sides. Bring the sides in just enough to not cut out the details of your image. This is how you will know if you need to go back and try photographing your image again. A little lost detail is okay (let’s be real: it is hard to get a perfectly straight image), but if you are seriously altering how your image looks in real life, you may want to try photographing your piece again.”

Aunj Braggs



EDITING

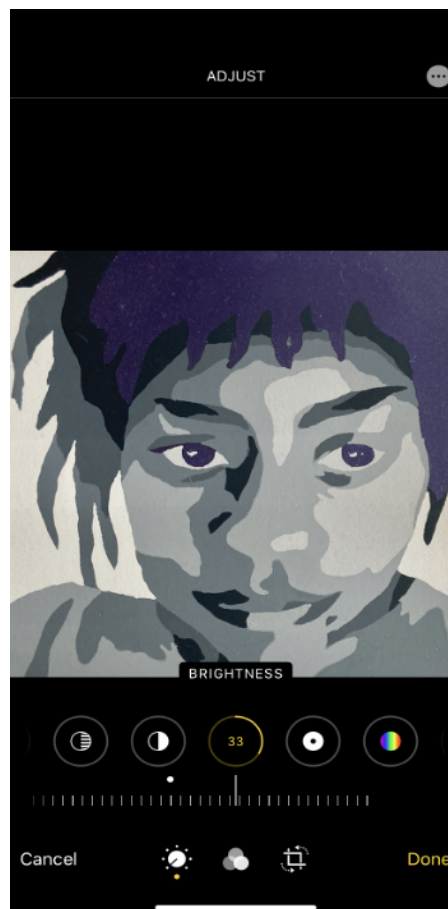
Top Tip! Set your artwork next to your screen while polishing the color of your image.

“If you have taken all these steps and your image is looking right, then you are done my friend! Editing comes in if you could not get the best lighting. It is easy to turn up the brightness of your image, but be careful to not overexpose it. Editing is for getting close and cleaning up a few things, not for attempting to totally transform a horrible photo. If you are using a smart phone, some simple edits include; brightness, definition, vibrance, contrast, shadows or saturation. When editing my images, I keep the actual piece in front of me to make sure the colors are as accurate as possible. Now if you are an editing wiz, feel free to use Photoshop (or something similar) to edit your images, as you can accomplish a multitude more on there.”

Aunj Braggs

“If you notice that you cannot get your image colors to match your piece no matter what settings you try, it may be due to different colored lighting when you were taking your photo. If you chose to use the two-lamp lighting method, make sure they are the same hue. Experiment with different lighting settings to see which method gives you the most accurate colors.”

Lauren Fourcade



SUMMARY

"Okay folks, that is all I have for you in this beginner's guide to taking professional images of your work. Always remember you want your photos to not be hazy, blurry, crooked, or dimly lit. You want your photos to look fresh out of a magazine, clean and crisp. If you can hardly see the detail in your image, then no one else can either. Last but not least, if you are using your phone, wipe your camera lens clean!"

Aunj Braggs

"A good image can be the difference between getting accepted or rejected for an exhibition, so don't rush! Practice makes perfect, so build in a good amount of time for taking photos. You don't want to wait until the day of the deadline to start experimenting with lighting. That being said, once you get the hang of it, you'll be a pro in no time!"

Lauren Fourcade

More questions? We're here to help! Contact Aunj or Lauren:

Aunj Braggs, Momentum 2021 Co-Chair, aunj2021@gmail.com or 918-402-0623

Lauren Fourcade, Programs and Media Assistant, lauren@ovac-ok.org



Aunj Braggs, *Self Portrait*, screen print on paper, 5" x 7", 2016