

DIY Backgrounds for getting great photos of your artwork with your phone or tablet

You can take great photos of your artwork using your iPhone or Android camera. The resolution is as good as most point-and-click digital cameras. As an example, here are two photos that I took at the San Antonio Art League and Museum of the same painting which is going to be used in an upcoming catalog. I used my Nikon digital camera for the first photo and my iPhone 8 for the second one.



So if you have a fairly recent phone with a fairly decent camera, you're set. The trick, however, is to photograph your work with a good background in adequate light.

Here are some tricks you might want to try for taking good quality photos in your studio or your home with existing light.

Here is a photo of a small standing mixed-media piece that I took with my phone in my kitchen with a simple set-up for a seamless background.

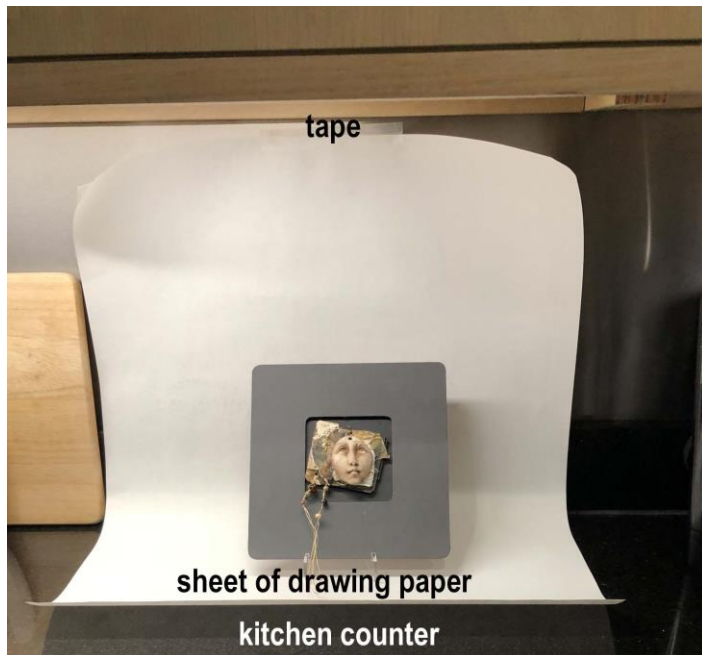


While the background has a few shadows, this is not necessarily a bad thing because the shadows “anchor” the object in space without distracting from it.

This is the super-easy set-up – a piece of large drawing paper, some tape, and a kitchen counter with a nearby window or good lighting (and most kitchens are well-lighted).



Here's what the art looks like placed on the paper, ready to shoot. The paper curves naturally and provides a seamless look. You could also use a piece of gray paper, or even black, if you have one large enough. This piece of paper, above, is 18x24" taped to the backsplash area on the short side.



Come in closely with your phone, make sure the object is aligned vertically and horizontally with the gridlines on the phone's camera, and press the button.

I always take three or four versions and pick the one that has the best alignment. You can usually get a pretty straight photo this way without using a tripod, but if you have one of those mini-tripods, you can try that as well.

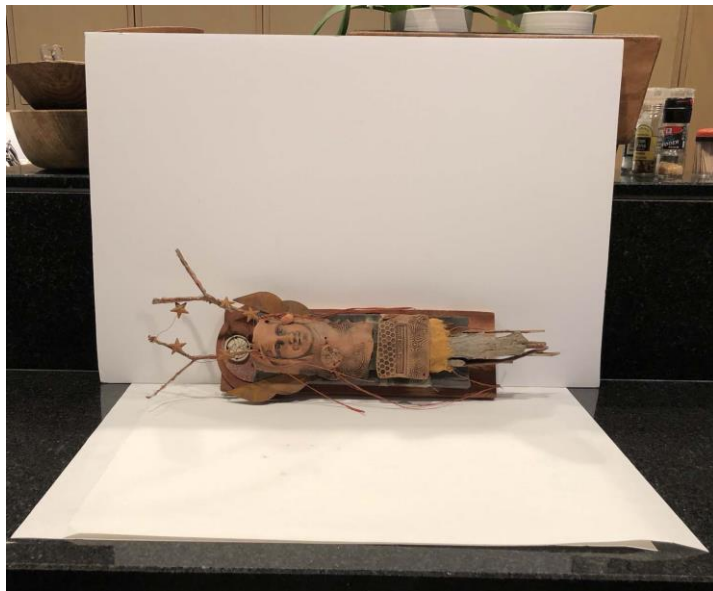
Here is a variation of that idea that gives you a bit more room for larger objects, again using the kitchen lighting as the source. I've placed a piece of 24x30 white foam board (vertically) against the raised counter and put several large sheets of white drawing paper in front of it so there is no gap between the foam board and the paper. This gives you a wider background for large objects such as this folding mixed-media/encaustic screen:



There will be a seam, but it is hardly noticeable, as you can see in the final photo.



You can even place an object sideways on this background, shoot the picture, then rotate the photo so it looks right-side up.



Finally, here's an idea that I came up with (*brilliant, if I do say so myself*) that gives you a handy spot to shoot hanging artwork whenever you need to. I have one of these in my laundry room at home and one in the studio behind the door to the encaustic room.

Basically, you mount a tri-fold white presentation board to the wall with tacks, double-sided tape, or even a staple gun, depending on the location. (This is the kind of board that kids use for science fair projects, available almost everywhere, and cheap.)

Here is the one I have in my laundry room. It's out of the way but very accessible. I made a little closure with those gold brads with spreadable prongs and some cord that wraps around them.



There is a nail in the board about a third of the way down in the center to hang work on. When I need to take a photo of a hanging piece, I open up the sides of the tri-fold and hang the work to be photographed on the nail.



nail



artwork hanging on nail
inside open foamcore display
board, ready
to photograph

There is a window opposite the tri-fold board, so the lighting is good, but even if you don't have a window, most laundry and utility rooms are well-lighted. Here is the result.

Your phone's camera is designed to do a good job of automatically reading the ambient light, so you should be able to get clear photos when you use one of these ideas for a clean, non-distracting background.

And don't forget that you can always lay a piece of white posterboard on a level surface outside, put your artwork on that, stand over it with your phone, and take a bird's eye view photo!

