

Photographing art quilts

Tips from a pro

by Frank Klein

There are many ways to photograph art quilts successfully. I am going to share my techniques to produce quality high-resolution overall and detail images of these works. While I use professional photography equipment, any fairly recent model digital camera should be adequate if you follow these recommendations. (Your phone cannot possibly result in the highest quality images of artwork.)

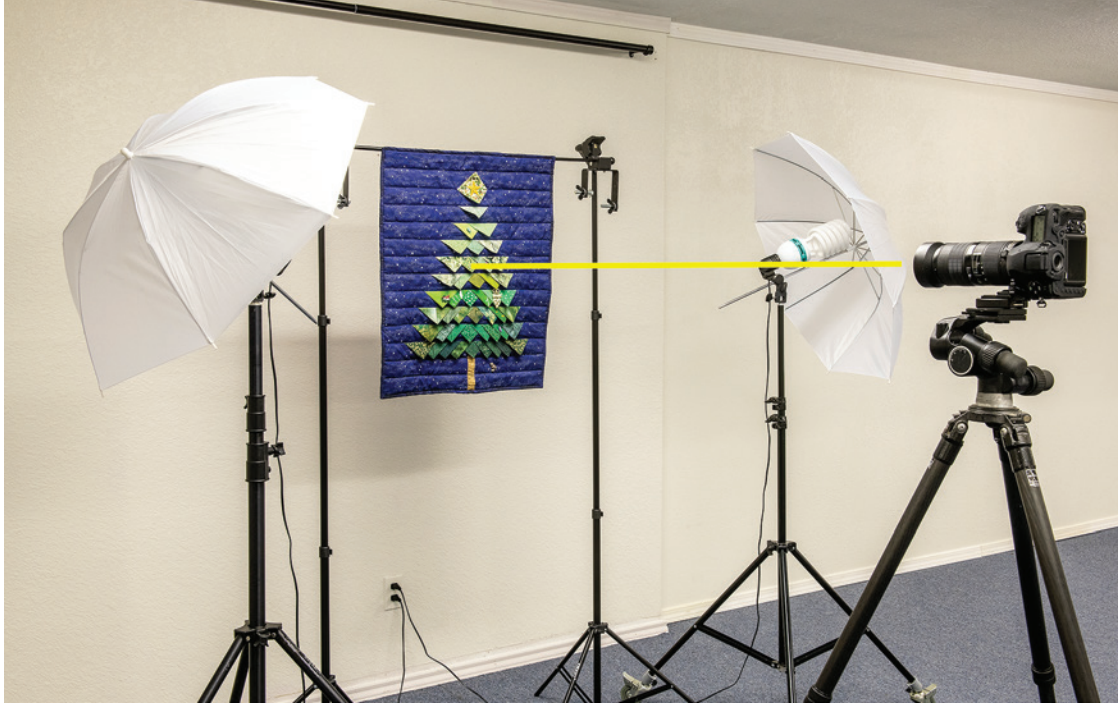
Preparing quilts

Make sure the quilt is free of lint, dust, hair, and loose threads. Prior to photographing, lay your art quilt

on a clean, large, flat surface covered with acid-free material such as a cotton tablecloth or bedsheet.

Position a nylon window screen, 24 x 24 inches, with all four edges covered with duct tape, on the quilt. To clean the quilt section by section, I use a Miele Micro SMC20 vacuum cleaner with a Miele round dust attachment, moving slowly with light pressure over the screen in up-and-down strokes at a low suction setting. A lint roller can also be used for light cleaning.





Positioning art quilts for photographing

Most quilts have sleeves sewn on the backs and can be hung for photographing. However, smaller quilts without sleeves can be laid flat on a surface. All quilts use similar lighting setups with minor adjustments regarding the height and width of the quilts.

Lighting Setup

Natural light can be used, but for more consistent results, you should use artificial light. To obtain even lighting, use two identical lights in your set-up with

the same wattage. Place them on each side of the quilt, at the same distance from the center of the quilt at a 45-degree angle. Move the lights far enough apart to eliminate glares and adjust the umbrellas. If needed, move the lights back and forth and up and down to enhance three-dimensional effects and texture. This same lighting setup was used for all quilts.

Large and medium-sized quilts:

Light stands can be used to hold lights or converted to backdrop stands with a crossbar attachment. I hang



Guidelines for positioning quilts of the same size

Both quilts shown were made by Lucille Gaebler Klein: *Mother's Christmas Tree* (2004) and *2003 Wall Hanging* (2003).

Small quilts can be photographed with the camera positioned above.

Whether photographing a quilt on the wall or on the floor, be sure camera is positioned at an exact 90-degree angle to the quilt to avoid keystoneing.

the quilt with a crossbar through the back sleeve over two light/backdrop stands. I use professional light stands and crossbar for this (see sidebar), but for a more affordable option, a long curtain rod can be installed against a white or neutral background wall with a quilt hung flat against the wall.

Small quilts:

I place the quilt on a white foam board placed on the floor or a low table. Drawn guidelines help in positioning quilts of the same size, allowing for quick processing. The image is shot from above. The smallest quilt we have photographed measures 6 x 8 inches.

Photographing the quilts

Carefully set your camera on a tripod so that the center of the quilt is at eye level with the lens. Use a cable release or wireless remote control, or self-timer and mirror lock-up (if available) to eliminate all camera vibration. Fill the camera frame with most of the image, leaving two to three inches of space around the edges to allow future adjustments and cropping. Some quilts have embellishments and fabric that can

Technical Specifications

Camera: Nikon D850

Settings:

ISO: 100-200 (a low ISO setting to reduce noise)

Aperture: f/11-f/16. Set camera to aperture priority and manual focus with mirror lock-up to produce maximum depth of field

Lens: Nikon ED AF Micro Nikkor 70-180mm f4.5-5.6D zoom lens set to manual focus

Polarizing filter to reduce glare, if needed

Tripod: Gitzo GT3543LS Systematic Series 3 carbon fiber tripod (long) Manfrotto 405 3-Way, geared pan-and-tilt head with 410PL quick-release plate

Lighting

EMART 600W photography photo video portrait studio day light umbrella continuous lighting kit EM-ULK45

EMART photography fluorescent light bulbs, 125W 5500K white daylight balanced cfl grow light bulbs for photo video studio lighting.

Light stands

Impact heavy-duty air-cushioned light stand kit LS-96HABI with 2 light/backdrop stands, Impact heavy-duty 9-foot adjustable background crossbar BG-CB9DB, and Impact locking 3-caster set for 25mm legs LSA-LW25P.

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produce reflected glare. A polarizing filter can lessen glare.

It is crucial to place your camera sensor parallel to the quilt to prevent keystone. Keystone is a distortion caused by not having the camera lens at a 90-degree angle to the quilt. If the camera is tilted upward, for example, all of the vertical lines in the resulting image will converge toward the top. The yellow lines in my accompanying photos illustrate the importance of positioning the camera.

For each quilt, I take photos of the full front and back, one or more details, and the label. Detail shots are taken of areas that best capture the composi-

tional and stitching skills of the artist. It isn't necessary to make detail shots look like works of art in themselves; they are solely for informational purposes.

These techniques will help to showcase your own art. A sharp, in-focus photograph will expand your vision and you might see things that you have never seen before.

[Ed. note: We plan to publish a resource list of professionals who photograph textile art in an upcoming issue.]

Frank Klein is a photographer and art collector. He uses photography to share his artworks with the world.



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