

Preparing Paintings for Entry into a Hawaii Watercolor Society Show or Competition

By Colleen Sanchez

During the past few years I have gained a lot of experience in photographing and editing my own artwork in order to prepare digital files for submissions, personal record keeping and blogging. This year I also volunteered to work with our artists' digital file submissions for the 2011 Members Show. That was a real eye opener, the majority of our artists' files had to be resubmitted and or edited again to fit the HWS specifications. I think it is very important to submit good quality images that truly reflect the actual paintings for shows and competitions. This gives you, the artist a much better chance of getting a painting selected as you put your best paintings forward.

In this **2 Part Article** I will share a simple version of instructions with our HWS Members. If you are an experienced photographer you probably won't need this information. I'm interested in helping those of you who rarely take or edit photos and have been confused in the past by all the technical language regarding art submissions, it sure used to confuse me. Part 1 will discuss Photographing your Watercolor Paintings and Part 2 will discuss Editing and Submission Guidelines to Meet HWS Show Submission Specifications. If you adopt these easy to follow steps you should be able to submit a true representation of your work and also save the volunteer who prepares the files for the juror many hours of work.

Note: If you are not able to prepare and submit to the HWS specifications please find someone to help you photograph and prepare the submission file/s.

Part 1

Photographing Your Watercolor Paintings

Tools and Equipment:

- A good quality digital point and shoot camera or a Digital SLR camera - it helps if your camera is at least 8 pixels or higher. Note: Until recently I had done all my photography with a small point and shoot 8.1 pixels Sony Cybershot digital camera with wonderful results
- A camera tripod, even the small table top tripod that comes with most cameras may work
- Light source – use Daylight bulbs if photographing inside your home
- Optional if using a DSLR – use a Macro lens
- Access to a computer

Setting up Your Camera:

If you are not familiar with the following instructions for setting up your camera, refer to your camera manual to assist you.

- Image size: Set to the largest size your camera can produce. Most point and shoot cameras take photos in the JPEG format. My point and shoot can be set at; up to an image size of 8m (it can also be expressed as Fine, on some cameras). The 8m equals an image size of 3264 x 2448 pixels. Your camera will take the least amount of photos if you have it set correctly. Do not confuse these numbers with file size, that is something else entirely and will be discussed when we get to the editing stage in Part 2. If you are experienced with a DSLR you may be shooting in the RAW format and won't have to concern yourself with image size at this point.

- Shooting Mode: You can shoot with your camera in the Auto Macro Mode and get decent results or if you are more experienced, set your camera up manually to get the best shot based on your lighting. Don't despair if your camera does not do Macro, the regular lens will be sufficient.
- Flash: Disable the flash option even if you are shooting on Auto.

Taking the Photograph

- Make sure your painting is not matted or framed.
- Tack your painting flat to a wall outside in a shady area or a wall or board inside your home away from direct window light. Daylight bulbs are best when shooting inside if you need additional light.
- Set up your camera on a regular tripod directly in front of your painting. If you are using the mini tripod you'll need to be innovative in how you do your set up, maybe a step ladder to set your mini tripod on will come in handy.
- Look through the view-finder or at the display window. Try to make sure your painting looks as square as possible when looking through the view-finder or at the display window on the back of your camera. Try to fill your frame with your painting so less cropping needs to be done later at the editing stage.
- If you are using the Auto Macro shooting mode go ahead and take several shots of your painting. If you are experienced, this is when you will make your lighting and manual camera adjustments and take several shots of your painting.
- Upload photographs to your computer and save them to a separate file folder you have created just for your paintings.
- Congratulate yourself for a job well done and take a breather.

Notes: Sometimes we artists get a little nervous with all the technical things we seem to have to contend with these days. When I first started I actually took some fantastic shots of my paintings laid down on my off white living room carpet. As long as no direct light from the windows shines on the painting it seems to work out fine. Still, photographing outside in the shade is my favorite method. Just practice in different areas until you'll find the right place for you. You never know, you may just get a little addicted to that camera. Stay tuned - Part 2 will cover the whole business of editing, resizing the image, file size, renaming the file, and the best way to do the submission.

Part 2

Editing the Digital Photograph of Your Painting

Note: Experienced and non-experienced - don't concern yourself with canvas size at all as you edit and resize. All digital image files will be burned to a CD using a program that will automatically place images on a white background for submission to the Juror. As I stated in Part 1, if you are experienced you probably don't need the rest of this tutorial.

If you do not have access to a Software Editing program like Photoshop Elements or a comparable one and you are not able to prepare and submit your images to the HWS specifications please find someone to help you photograph and prepare the submission file/s. If you are interested in entering exhibits going forward it really is worthwhile to purchase a program like Photoshop Elements – at \$99.00 it is a great investment. I also purchased a book

to fast track learning of the program and it was well worth the expense. I did do some experiments with free photo editing software hoping to save people on program costs, but using them for our purposes is so confusing and time consuming, and to actually understand and work out the calculations most likely will not give you the required result.

I work on a PC so I cannot promise that all of these steps work exactly the same using a Mac.

Terms - Some of the terms used can be very confusing to anyone anticipating entering a show, mainly because sometimes the terms used may describe more than one thing – I will try to give a simplified definition for us amateurs:

Image Size – this refers to the image size you see on your screen, look at your image in Photoshop, at the bottom left you will see the size in inches, if you click on the arrow you can look at other specs of your file too.

File Size – this is the actual size or space the image file takes up on your hard drive and for our submissions we need a file size of 1.8MB or less. If the files sizes are too large we don't have enough space on a CD to hold all of our artists files to forward to the Juror.

Painting Image Size – sometimes you may see this as image size only, that can be very confusing, and you need this information when you rename your final image file so we will be informed of your original painting size, for example, jones-stormysea14x21.

Tools and Equipment:

- Access to a Computer
- Quality Photo Editing Software

Editing the Photo:

- If you followed the directions in part one, you have already saved your uploaded digital photo files to a special folder for your paintings. Now go to Start > Pictures > your paintings file. If you import directly to Photoshop, open the program and find your paintings file. I don't import directly from my camera to Photoshop because I want to delete any inferior pictures first so they don't take up space on my hard drive.
- Take a good look through the painting photos you shot and choose the best quality image that most closely represents your painting.
- With your selected image file go to Open (top right) > Photoshop Elements Editor > and your file will reopen in Photoshop ready for editing. If you are already in Photoshop Organizer choose the Edit option. Now, Go to file > duplicate; you will preserve your original as a backup and only work with this duplicate copy for editing purposes.
- Use the program editing tools either from the icons on the left or the options on the top bar. If you are brand new to this, use the guided edit. Straighten image if necessary and crop out anything in the background. We only want to see your painting - nothing else should be visible. With your original painting nearby as your reference you can make any color, contrast or other corrections to you match your original painting as closely as possible. Once you are satisfied with the edits you are ready for the next step.

Resizing, Renaming Saving the Final Image:

- Go to Image > Resize > Image Size
- Under Document Size (second section), change the resolution to 72 pixels/inch
- Under Pixel dimensions (first section) change the longest side to 1920 pixels
- On the lower section make sure the following sections are all checked: Scale Styles, Constrain Proportions and Resample Image Bicubic
- Click OK
- Go to File > Save As and now you will rename and save your image
- Rename the file – “lastname-paintingtitle0x0” no spaces please
Example: sanchez-morninglight16x20
- Format must be jpg – if asked for the number of passes go back and choose “baseline”
jpg
- Check ICC Profile box
- Click save
- Jpeg Options box opens – in older software versions choosing Quality to Maximum should get the correct file size of no larger than 1.8MB. Newer software versions, (I have Photoshop Elements 8) that allows you see the file size just under Preview. Make sure the quality you choose by number e.g. 10, 11 or 12 or Large, Maximum does not exceed a file size of 1.8MB
- Click OK
- Success, you now have a submission file

Submitting your files/s:

If at all possible it is best to submit your digital files via email. If the file is not correct the artist can be contacted to resubmit a corrected file. Make sure that you send as an attachment and do not resize your file, send the original size. If however your file is burned to CD, errors cannot be corrected in time to meet our entry deadline and an inferior quality file may go to the juror. Our goal is to submit the best quality digital files so all of the artists have an equal opportunity to accurately show their paintings to Jurors.

You will always find information regarding exact submission requirements in a HWS newsletter before a show.

Good luck with your submissions everyone – Colleen Sanchez