Basic Object Photography on a Budget
Welcome to the William J. Hill Texas Artisans and Artists Archive. In the 19th century, Texas artisans & artists created ceramics, furniture, textiles, metalworks, photographs, paintings, and works on paper in this growing region. Many significant and beautiful objects and art were produced, but far too little is known about these artists. Their lives, practices, and products are captured in the census records, city directories, newspapers and primary sources included in the Hill Archive.

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Browse by category below, or search for a name or term, to learn more about these individuals and their work.

- Occupations
- Texas Cities & Counties
- Names & People
- Objects
- Archival Materials, Ephemera, & Tools

- Census Records
- City Directory Records
- Newspaper Articles & Advertisements
- Research & Publications

https://texasartisans.mfah.org
Essential Equipment

**CAMERA(S)**
- Canon Powershot G15 (point-and-shoot)
- Nikon D3300, DSLR camera
  Lenses: 35mm, 18-55mm, 55-200mm

**TRIPOD**
- Oben AC 1300
  3-section aluminum tripod

**COLOR GUIDE**
- DGK Kustom Balance

**ART BOARD, PAPER ROLL, LEVEL**
- Stanely level
Ideal Equipment

**BACKDROP STAND**
Impact Background Support with adjustable 12 ft. crossbar

**LIGHT STANDS**
Impact Light Kit adjustable 6 ft. stands

**COPY STAND**
Testrite Copy Stand capture area up to 22” x 37”

**REMOTE SHUTTER**
Vello FreeWave varies by camera model

**LIGHT BOX**
Impact Light Shed 2’ x 2’ x 3’ (collapsible)
Other Useful Equipment

Circular polarizer helps reduce glare from glass

Museum putty or similar, for keeping objects in place

Tabletop tripod, fits in spaces the full tripod does not

Kneeling pads for working on the floor

Teflon & felt furniture sliders to move large items onto paper

Wooden or felt covered blocks to support objects in various positions

Gaffer tape, for securing paper to walls, floors, etc.

(rice-filled socks) weights to secure light stand & tripod
Setting up
Choosing a Work Area

Consider:

- Lighting
- Space
- Permanence
Choosing a Set Up

Consider objects by size:
- Floor set up
- Table-top set up
- Width of object vs backdrop paper
- Space between object and camera

Lighting:
- Space for extra lights, if needed
- Does existing lighting help or hurt
- Are the objects reflective?
Seamless Background

Paper roll on background stand

Light box fitted with seamless paper or poster board
Seamless Background
Seamless Background
Seamless Background

dirt spots, stains

wrinkles

bunches, outlines floor boards
Seamless Background
Oversized items

Background paper fully under object and taped partially up wall to hide baseboards and patterned carpet
Oversized items

Poster board, art board, and other paper can be used for close-ups when not working with a full backdrop.
Lighting

Enhance the object by brightening dark areas, avoid creating shadows, hotspots, and glares.

Light 1: brightening up left side, as overhead lights are not evenly distributed.

Light 2: adding light to the bottom half of the table, which is shadowed by the table top.
Lighting

Enhance the object by brightening dark areas, avoid creating shadows, hotspots, and glares.
Lighting

This sunroom has 3 walls of frosted glass, ideal natural lighting!
Outdoor Lighting
Outdoor Lighting

Excellent set up for reflective ceramic glazes, natural light is always preferred

Seamless background created using paper, tape, and clips
Outdoor Lighting
Outdoor Lighting

Chairs look so inviting in dappled lighting
Light Box
Light Box
Copy Stand
Copy Stand
Tripod as Copy Stand
Tripod as Copy Stand

tripod + level + sock weights = copy stand!
Tripod as Copy Stand

Level the camera, level the object
Small supports as necessary

Pointers for holding pages
(disposable chopsticks)
Taking Photographs
Equipment during Photography

Color card: use in every picture if possible

Remote shutter release, keeps your hands off the camera

Levels help prevent image warping/distortion
Getting Started

- If using phone or tablet camera, clean with a lens cloth (often)
- Have object information at hand to reference potential areas of interest to photograph, pencil & paper to record anything noted during photography (see form handout)
- Never depend on zoom function, physically get closer; have extra cameras ready for capturing strange angles
- Have extra equip on hand (table on right)
- Prepare area for a series of objects (table on left)
  - Start smallest to largest
  - Group similar objects/materials
Getting Started

Work small to large
Similar-sized/type items
Consider the Object

What is this?
Use Props or Supports

It’s a bonnet!
Work in Contrast
Consider Final Image
Use Gridlines
Use Gridlines
Composition

Composition: Bad

- Background color too similar, cannot distinguish object edges
- Object too close to edge of frame, cannot straighten or crop
- Ruler touching object
- No color card present

Composition: Better

- ✔ Contrasting background color; can distinguish object edges/details
- ✔ Color card is present
- • Ruler is too close to crop out
- • Object is close to edge, not straight
- • Object is not centered in frame
Composition

Composition: Best

- Contrasting background color; can distinguish object edges/details
- Color card and ruler can be cropped out
- Object is centered in frame
- Object is straight
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Captain's Chair</th>
<th>Chair</th>
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Consistency

- Spoon
- Spoon
- Spoon
- Fork
- Fork
- Forks, Set of Six
Sets of items

Spoon (set of three)

© Museum of Texas Handmade Furniture
Moveable Parts
Open/closed items
Oversized Objects
Oversized Objects
Oversized Objects
Oversized Objects

Tape edges of paper down to slide objects on without tearing
Immoveable Objects
Immoveable Objects
Immoveable Objects
Immoveable Objects
Immoveable Objects
Immoveable Objects
Immoveable Objects
Immoveable Objects
Mirrors & Reflective Objects
Lenses

18 mm

35 mm

55 mm

55 mm

85 mm

200 mm
Lenses
Lenses
Putting it into Practice
Live Demonstration