Photographing Your Art:
How to do it, common errors to avoid

Steve Toll
Photographer

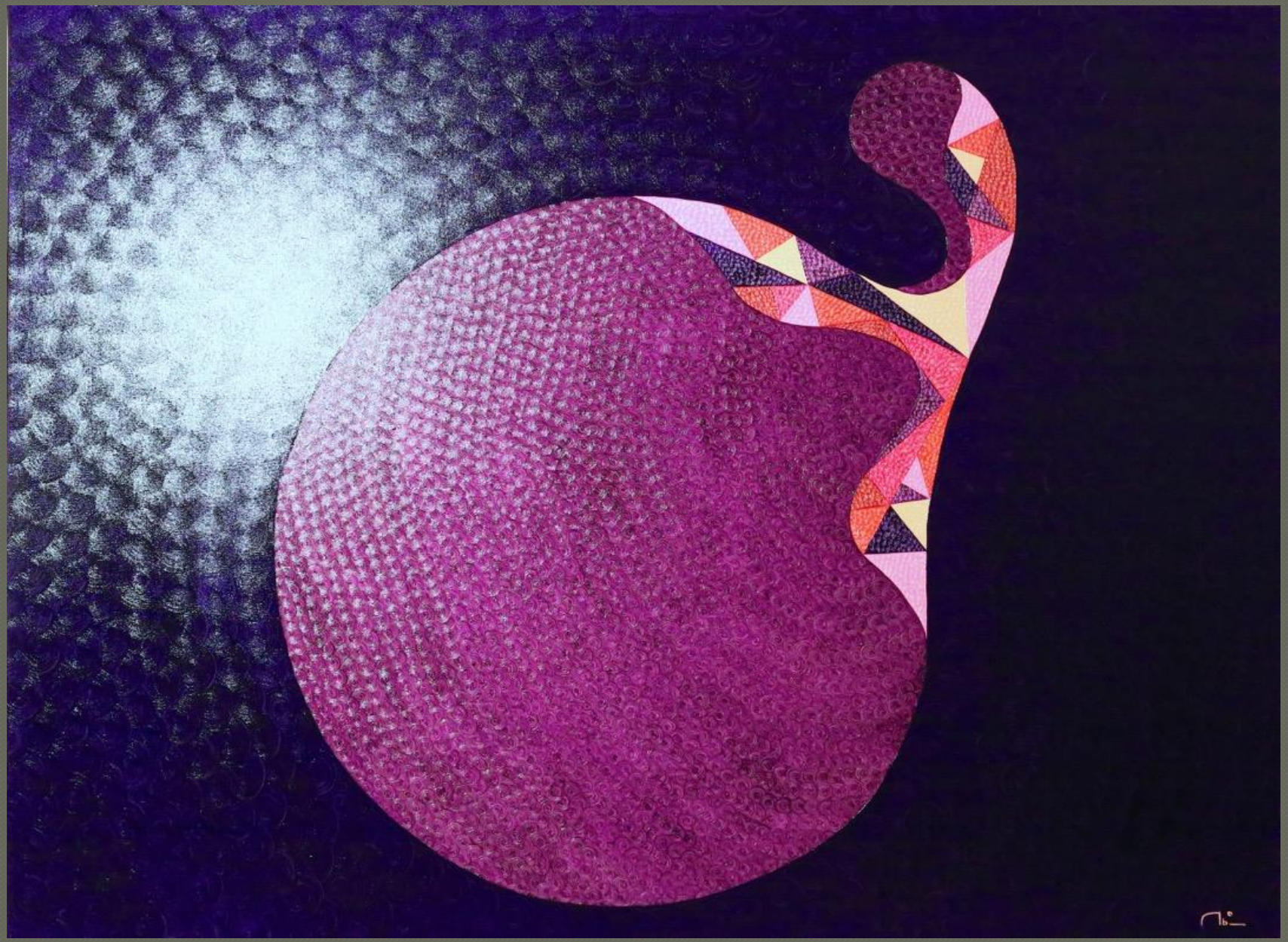
stevetoll.zenfolio.com
steve @ tollhouse.org

Why do you need good product photos?

- Good product photos are critical to how you present yourself and your art
- Potential customers will be deciding whether to visit you based on the images you present
- Bad photos reflect poorly on the quality of your art

Let's look at some examples

- Images submitted from past years



What's a good image?

- Well composed
- Well exposed
- Clear / sharp
- Accurate color

Some Good Examples

Well composed

Well exposed

Clear / sharp

Accurate color

What do I need to give SVOS?

- **For the directory and website:**
  - **Jpeg (.jpg) file type**
  - **Resolution: 300 dpi**
  - **1800 pixels (6”) wide**
  - **sRGB color space**
  - **Smaller versions will be generated automatically if needed**
  - **See svos.org/image_guide.php for more info**

Equipment: What do I really need?

- **Almost any digital camera is OK**
  - **Don't need high res**
  - **But color accuracy is important**
  - **Cell phones can be fine**
  - **But check your results**
- **Lighting**
  - **Need enough for subject to be well-lit**
  - **Natural, room or spot lighting can all work**
  - **Flash not recommended, unless you can use it well**
- **Tripod – recommended**
  - **Avoids blurring, aids composition**
  - **Can use Gorilla-type, beanbag, or any stable support**

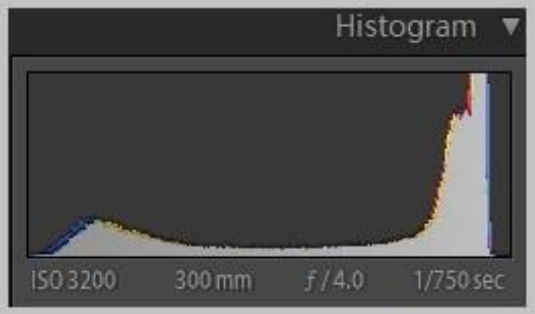
Lighting is Critical

- **Make sure your subject is well lit**
- **Avoid flash – unless you know what you're doing!**
  - **Flash "hotspots" (reflections) and flash shadows are hard to avoid and hard to fix**
  - **Use a diffuser or reflector for indirect light**
  - **Fill flash (low intensity) can help reduce shadows**
- **Natural light (or natural color lighting) is best**
  - **Avoid direct sun – too much contrast**
  - **Overcast / indirect light can be good**
  - **Can use reflector or added light to lighten up shadow areas**
- **Light from front or side angle**
  - **Front provides most light, but can be flat**
  - **Sidelight enhances detail**
  - **Avoid backlight except for glass or translucent subjects**

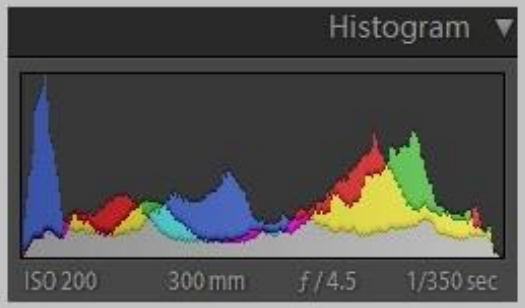
What Camera Settings Should I Use?

- **Mode – use Auto, Program, or Aperture mode**
  - Mostly, use Auto or Program mode (standard for cell phones, point and shoots)
  - Use Aperture to control Depth of Field (background blurring)
- **Auto focus – use center or center weighted**
  - Pick your focal point, then re-compose if necessary to shoot
- **Flash – don't use direct flash**
  - Use fill (reflected) light or fill flash if some parts are too dark
- **Color/white balance**
  - Wrong white balance will shift your colors – common problem
  - Use Auto White Balance only if your colors look right with it
  - Otherwise set WB for type of light on subject (sun, shade, etc.)
  - Use true color lighting if available to avoid color casts
  - Can edit afterward, but easier to check on the spot

Check Exposure Histogram



Difficult exposure



Good balance

Adjust exposure +/- if needed

Composition

- **Fill the frame with one piece**
  - **Get rid of mat & frame but don't cut off the art**
  - **Move or zoom if needed**
  - **Leave a little room around the edges**
  - **Crop and straighten afterward with editor if needed**
- **Avoid perspective distortion**
  - **Shoot straight on (horizontal and vertical),**
  - **Use perspective correction in editor if needed**
- **Avoid distracting backgrounds**
  - **Re-position or block out distracting elements**
  - **Blur with wide aperture (f/4 or lower)**

Post Processing (Editing)

- Get it right in camera as much as possible
  - Some problems can't be fixed with editing
- Shoot in raw mode (+jpg) for more editing options
- Common adjustments
  - Brightness (exposure), contrast, color, cropping, rotation, perspective, sharpening, cloning/deleting, resizing
  - Do general adjustments first, then local adjustments
- Can't fix:
  - Out of focus, depth of field, motion blur, bad framing or composition
- Be careful with sharpening
  - Over-sharpening can introduce annoying artifacts like 'halos'
- Save to sRGB for uploading to SVOS
- Software
  - Lightroom, Photoshop, PS Elements, many other low cost options

Other Tips

- Use your best image(s) for the catalog
- Use new images every year
- If photography isn't your strong suit, have a pro do it for you
- It pays to have good images for the directory
- Look for Image Guidelines on SVOS website
  - http://svos.org/image_guide.php

Questions? Contact:

- **Steve Toll**
- **steve @ tollhouse.org**
- **stevetoll.zenfolio.com**