

Give Your Quilt Its Best Shot...

by Vivian Kapusta

Thinking of entering your quilt in a juried show? Want to gain skill in taking good photos of your textile projects? It is essential that you give your quilt its Best Shot by submitting photos that showcase your quilt accurately.

To enter a photo in a juried show, you have three criteria to consider: the colour must be accurate to the project, the edges must all show and the stitching/quilting detail must be clear. The photo is what the jury members see and base their judgement on.

Do you have a quilt that is fighting the camera? The first thing you need to do is to “get up close and personal” with your camera. It is your friend! Examine the camera for different distance settings and look in the menu for changes in light from indoors to outdoors. Click to put the grid on, the vertical and horizontal lines will help you get the quilt straight. Experiment with different settings! Photos in this article were taken on FujiFilm EXR, a point and shoot camera.

For truly accurate colour, you need to take photos in natural light with no sun/shadows. In the real world, we often need to take photos with artificial light. The photos of my Golden Shadows show the difference. Using a flash will flatten the quilting. Florescent light gives a cool cast, incandescent light dulls the colours and natural light is warm and bright.

Preparation for taking the photo is important. Mount the quilt flat on the wall with pins that catch the back of the binding or hang with a sleeve and dowel on the top and the bottom. Wavy edges will lessen your chances of having your quilt chosen to hang in a show—the jury cannot tell if it is flat and/or square. A neutral background is essential. To eliminate camera shake, mount the camera on a tripod or sit the camera on a step ladder and if possible, use a remote control to take the picture. The camera grid helps you to aim at the centre of the quilt. Check to see that the sides are straight—a small camera lens will cause the illusion of a bulge on each side. If this happens, step further back to take the photo and crop the photo later. Distortion to the quilt shape will occur if your camera is tilted. If you don't have a suitable wall or location, think about a friend or a public location.

My favourite spot is a north-east wall, outside on a bright afternoon. Caution: reflection from snow will cause a blue cast—indoors or out. Solution: take the photos at night with bright indoor lights.

To check that your photo colour is accurate to your quilt, you may need to use photo editing software. The software often comes with your camera or computer. You can also purchase excellent software, for example—Adobe Photoshop. Load your photos on your computer and examine each photo for the correct colours and detail in stitching. Magnify the jpeg. Before you make any changes, do a “save as” of the original photo. Label the photo with a working name, example: good, best, etc. If the colour is very different from your quilt, go back and take more photos at different settings. Small variations can be made using the software by adjusting the contrast or the exposure (amount of shade/light). Sit the quilt by the computer and compare the colours. Strong differences in the colour can disqualify a quilt from being hung in a show. Once the colour is correct, you need to crop the excess from around the quilt, but do not close crop as all sides must still show the edge finishing. Any variation from a rectangular edge finishing should have a neutral background wall. Close up photos can be taken in two ways: a crop from your full size jpeg or you can set your camera to “close up” and experiment with how close you can come and still have a clearly focussed photo. Caution: make sure the colour is identical in both the full and detail photos.

Hints to control some common problems—If the “hills and valleys” of your stitching do not show, lessen the amount of light used to take the photo and have a little more light coming from one side. See: silk examples. This is also where small adjustments can be made in the software, using the exposure/midtones variations. You can use this for quilts that are quilted with the same colour value as the background—for example: white on white. Photographing shiny fabrics, metallics and beads are best with natural outdoor light and may need to have exposure adjusted in the software. See: beads

and embroidery examples. Courses are available in most communities for photography and software editing.

Your last task is to size the photo. Photoshop is the easiest to check image size and alter it. You can do so in cm or inches and also by dots per inch (dpi). Other software will resize by percentage. To check the size of the photo: on your computer, place the cursor arrow over the photo. You should get a data message in a little square. The list may vary with your computer, see jpeg example for what mine shows: date, type of file and size in kb/MB and pixels. A usable quality jpeg for entering a show is in the range of 700 kb to 3 megabytes at a 4"x6" size. If it is needed for publishing, use 3+ megabytes (MB) at 8"x11". 72 dots per inch is fine to email or put on a blog/website. 300 dots per inch will give a clear photograph at any size for publication. If you win a prize, the show may want to publish your work! Save your photo in a jpeg and label: last name, first name, title, size of quilt and full/detail. If you are sending by email, do not allow your program to make the jpeg smaller. If you are putting on a CD for mailing, be sure to click “finish” or “save”. Check your CD to be sure it will open.

If you are new to digital photography, I would recommend reading the article called Demystifying Digital Photography, by checking the CQA/ACC website: <http://www.canadianquilter.com/pdf/DigitalPhoto.pdf>

Your experience will build your skills and it will pay off in the end!

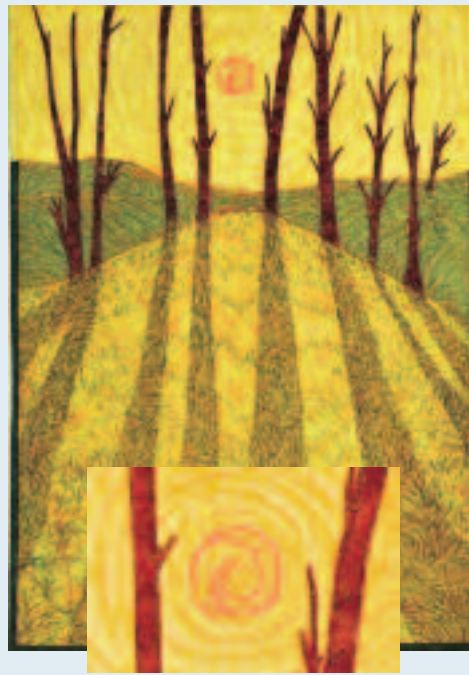
If you choose a professional photographer: state the three criteria for the photos you need and ask to see samples of past work. Textile photography showing detail of thread/stitches needs specific lighting and skills.

I hope that I have convinced you of three things: it is important to experiment with different settings, you get the best colour and detail from natural outdoor photography and you can build your skills!

So, good luck in getting your piece into a juried show! You have spent many hours sewing and quilting. Honour your quilt by gaining the skills needed to create photos that will showcase your work to its best advantage!



Golden Shadows - florescent light
(the detail shows the reflection from shiny fabric)



Golden Shadows - outdoor natural light



Golden Shadows - incandescent light



Silk - incandescent light



Silk - incandescent light- surprise colour result!



Silk - outdoor natural light



White on white - indoor flash



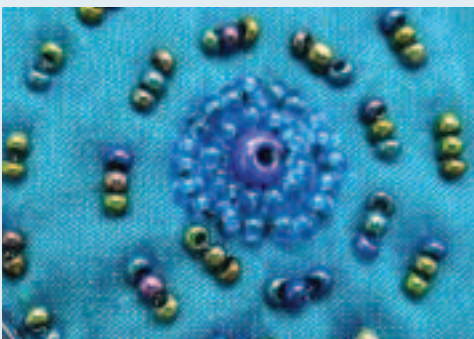
White on white - natural indoor light from window



Embroidery florescent light



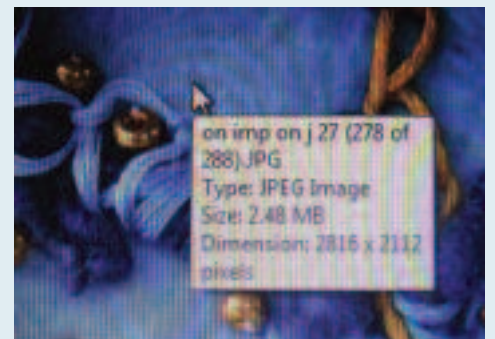
Embroidery natural outdoor light



Beads florescent light - colour too blue



Beads natural outdoor light



jpeg data square