Photographing Quilts

Tips, hints and techniques for taking and editing your quilt photos for websites, social media and calls for art.

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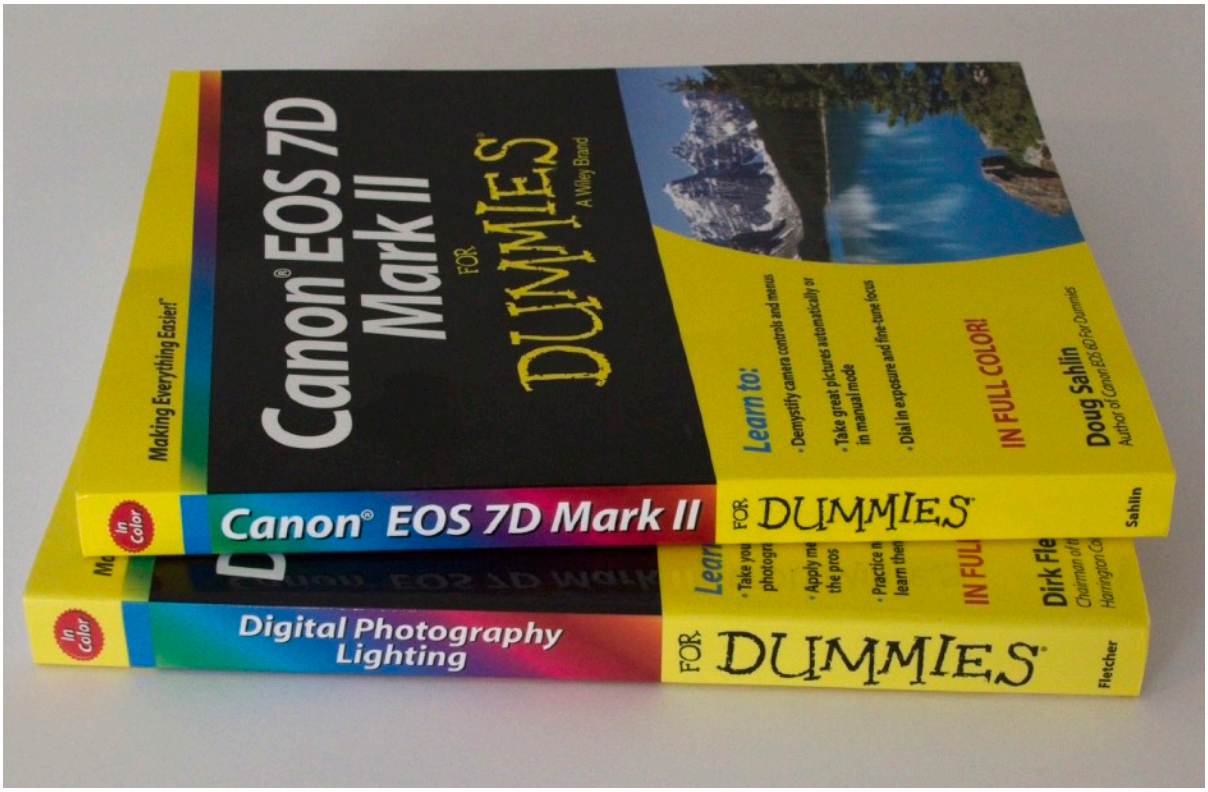
I can't stress how important it is to have a clear, sharp, in focus photograph of your quilt when you are submitting your work to a call for entry. When a juror is reviewing the work submitted to a call the only visual representation that have your quilt is the photo you submitted. They don't get to see the work in person first so they must use your photograph to determine whether or not your work is a good fit for the exhibit. When they are sifting through hundreds and hundreds of submissions and come across one that is photographed badly they may immediately reject the work. Harsh? maybe, but if the juror can't get a good impression of your piece from the photograph you submitted then chances are no matter how well your supporting artist statement is and how good a fit your pieces is for the theme of the exhibit it will get rejected.

You can take a good photograph of a quilt whether you are using an inexpensive point and shoot camera or a top of the line DSLR (digital single lens reflex) camera. Yes it's true that a point and shoot camera does not offer you as many technical options as a DSLR (interchangeable lenses, file format options, light sensitivity, shutter/focus speed options etc) but it is still possible to take a great photograph of your quilt *if you take your time and do it right*. The first step to taking a great photograph of your quilt is to understand the camera that you are using.

It doesn't matter what camera you have or how much you paid for it, you have to read the manual that it came with to be able to understand how to use it. Some point and click cameras offer more than just a "point and shoot" setting and will allow you to have full control over the cameras aperture, shutter speed and iso sensitivity. You may also be able to choose between image size and type. You may never use any of these options and only use your camera in full auto point and shoot mode but you should at least have a basic understanding of the other options available to you. The more you know about the camera you have the better your resulting photos will be. If you can't find your

manual visit the manufactures website for the camera that you have. You should be able to download an electronic version of manual for your camera and you might also find that there are user forums and helpful videos or articles available as well. I also recommend the for "dummies" publications. While I am not a big fan of the titles, the books are very comprehensive and easy to understand and



you may be able to find one that is specific to your camera model. You'll also find them written on the general subject of digital photography, lighting etc.

TIP: The very first thing you should do before taking a photo of your quilt is to clean the camera lens! You can use an air blower to blow off any dust and then a microfiber cloth to wipe away any smudges.

File Formats and Size

Most digital cameras will allow the user to select from several different file sizes and it's important to understand the differences between them and how they will impact how you can use them. You'll need to check your camera manual to determine what image types and sizes are available for you to choose from.

Digital cameras typically offer two different file format options: RAW and JPG and there is a big difference between the two.

JPG: This is the most common image file format that most people are familiar with. When you take a photograph in .jpg format the camera compresses all the color information it has and replaces individual pixels with blocks of colors.

RAW: When you take a photograph in RAW format the resulting file is not compressed at all. This results in a very large file size with all the data that the camera collects when you press the shutter button.

Image Quality		Pixels Recorded	Printing Size	File Size (MB)	Possible Shots	Maximum Burst
JPEG	L	20M	A2	6.6	1090	130 (1090)
	L			3.5	2060	2060 (2060)
	M	8.9M	A3	3.6	2000	2000 (2000)
	M			1.8	3810	3810 (3810)
	S1	5.0M	A4	2.3	3060	3060 (3060)
	S1			1.2	5800	5800 (5800)
	S2 *1	2.5M	9x13 cm	1.3	5240	5240 (5240)
	S3 *2	0.3M	-	0.3	20330	20330 (20330)
RAW	RAW	20M	A2	24.0	290	24 (31)
	M RAW	11M	A3	19.3	350	28 (31)
	S RAW	5.0M	A4	13.3	510	35 (35)
RAW + JPEG	RAW + L	20M 20M	A2 A2	24.0+6.6	220	18 (19)
	M RAW + L	11M 20M	A3 A2	19.3+6.6	260	18 (19)
	S RAW + L	5.0M 20M	A4 A2	13.3+6.6	340	18 (19)

Most digital cameras allow you to select the size of the image as well as the type. It's important to select the right sized file based on what you will ultimately do with the resulting image. In the chart below you can see that this particular camera which is a point and shoot allows the user to set the camera to select from 9 different options for .jpg files.

S = small

M = medium

L = large

If your camera is set to produce a small 3:2 file that means that the resulting image will be 7" x 4.5" and that is the largest you can print the image without it appearing blurry or pixelated.

Option	Prints at sizes up to
L 4:3	34×25 cm (13.5×10 in.)
L 3:2	34×23 cm (13.5×9 in.)
L 16:9	34×19 cm (13.5×7.5 in.)
M 4:3	24×18 cm (9.5×7 in.)
M 3:2	24×16 cm (9.5×6 in.)
M 16:9	24×13 cm (9.5×5.5 in.)
S 4:3	17×13 cm (7×5 in.)
S 3:2	17×12 cm (7×4.5 in.)
S 16:9	17×9 cm (7×3.5 in.)

When I take photographs of my quilts my camera is always set to take the largest size image that is available and I always shoot in RAW format. Shooting in RAW gives me more control when it comes to editing because I am working with all the data that the camera has recorded. If you are not comfortable working and editing a RAW file then set your camera to take the largest sized .jpg that it can.

Backgrounds

When you take a photo of your quilt for a juried exhibition submission it is not the same as taking a photo for an instagram or facebook post. The only thing that should be visible in the photo is the quilt itself.

You should always photograph against a flat, plain neutral *wrinkle free* (I know you have an iron!) background. Wrinkled sheets, placemats, blankets, curtains, and quilt batting along with picket

fences, brick walls, aluminum siding and the floor of your deck are not suitable backgrounds. Neutral means white, cream, gray and in some instances black where it's required to create contrast for the edges of the quilt you are photographing. A tone on tone print (yes even if it's white on white) is not a plain neutral background. Whatever your background is, it's important that it is a matte surface and not a shiny one that will reflect light back into the camera lens. I created a photo wall (image above) by attaching two large sheets of insulation board to the wall, covered them with canvas (to obscure the blue color and any writing) and then stretched plain white cotton over the entire surface.

Secure your quilt to whatever surface you photographing against so that it hangs straight and right against the surface. You can use double sided tape to keep your quilt flat against the wall to avoid having any gaps between the quilt and the wall. Whatever method you use, there should be no pins or hanging implements (and that includes hands and feet!) visible in the photo. It's always preferable to photograph your quilt secured to a flat surface but you can also hang your quilt in front of a neutral background using monofilament fishing line. However, you may have to weight the bottom of the quilt to help it hang flat and straight otherwise your quilt may appear to have wavy edges.

Lighting

Lighting can be tricky especially if you are taking a photograph where you are relying solely on household lighting. Light bulbs range in quality and color and the color of light they throw will have an effect on the photograph that you take. A soft white bulb will cast a slightly yellow glow, a cool white bulb is a bit whiter than a soft white bulb and a daylight bulb has a soft blue white glow.

When I photograph my quilts I have to do in the basement of my house because it's the only place I have room to pin up my quilts. Unfortunately there is no natural light at all and the only lighting comes from overhead lighting in the ceiling. So I use some stand lights. These lights are fairly

inexpensive and they make a huge difference in the quality of my photos. You can find several reasonably priced (around $50) stand light sets on amazon.com

When lighting my quilts I set up a stand light on each side of the quilt and position them so that the quilt is evenly lit across the surface. I spend a lot of time moving the lights around until there are no shadows, dark or bright spots on the quilt surface.

Image Requirements

Before you begin taking any photos of your artwork for a call you should review the image requirements. Each call for art is different so don't assume anything, you'll save yourself some time later when you are processing your images. You can see from the four examples below taken from actual calls that each one has different requirements when it comes to photo size. The one thing that they do have in common though is that they all require a full and a detail shot.

Example 1:
- Submit one overall digital image and one detail digital image for each piece of artwork.
- Digital images must be saved as a high quality JPEG file (No TIFF files).
- Finished images should be ***1800 pixels*** on the longest side

Example 2:
- Submit one overall DIGITAL image and one detail DIGITAL image for each piece of artwork.
- Save your digital images as a high quality JPEG file (No TIFF files).
- Finished images should be at least ***2100 pixels*** on the longest side and not more than 4200 pixels.
- Full-view and detail images should both be correctly oriented.
- The artist's name must not be visible in either image.
- Please don't use special characters in your image file name.

Example 3:
- Submit one overall digital image and one detail digital image for each artwork.
- Digital images must be saved as a high quality JPEG file (No TIFF files).
- Finished images should be at least ***3000 pixels*** on the longest side.

Example 4:
- Image 1: show the entire quilt.
- Image 2 and 3: detail images
- Must be saved as a high resolution JPEG file (No TIFF files)
- Finished images should be ***2400 pixels*** on the longest side.

I always use a tripod when I take photos of my quilts. No matter how steady your hands are you can never hold the camera exactly still and the smallest amount of shake can create a blurry image. If you don't have a tripod then place a chair or something in front of you that you can lean your elbows against to help steady your grip on the camera.

When you are shooting your overall image the entire image should be in focus with all the edges visible. You should position the camera as close as possible to the quilt while still being able to see all the edges so that you can avoid having to crop out too much of the image when processing the image. I take a lot of shots when I photograph my quilts. I don't just set up the lights, take a full shot a detail one and then call it done! I take a shot, adjust the lighting and then shoot it again. Sometimes I have to take a dozen or more shots before I get one that I like!

When considering what part of the quilt to shoot for your detail image choose a spot that highlights a technique or area of the quilt that spotlights your skill and expertise. DO NOT try to create a detail image by cropping a section of the full image! Put as much time and effort into taking good detail shots as you do your full ones. When I photograph my quilts I always take several detail shots so that if a call requires more than one I have several that I can choose from.

Pixels & Resolution

There are two parts to digital image size - pixel and resolution:

Pixel: Short for picture element, is a single point in a graphic image. Think of a pixel as a dot of color in a computer image. Put together lots of colored dots and they make the image that you see on your computer screen.

Resolution: refers to the number of pixels in an image and is measured in width and height and sometimes total number of pixels in the image. For example an image that is 1200 pixels wide and 1800 pixels high contains a total of 2,160,000 pixels (1200 x 1800).

Resolution is sometimes also referred to as PPI (pixels per inch) and DPI (dots per inch) but these are not the same thing and should not be used interchangeably. While they are both used to indicate the resolution or clarity of an image here's the difference:

PPI (pixels per inch) refers to how many pixels per inch are in a ***digital*** screen image. DPI (dots per inch) is a printing term used to refer how many physical dots of ink in a ***printed*** document.

High resolution vs Low resolution

For on screen viewing a low resolution image (72 PPI) typically looks great (and loads fast because the overall file size is smaller) but if you zoom in or enlarge the image it may appear blurry and pixelated.

A low resolution image printed will not look as sharp and clear as it does on screen. When you print an image it's really a collection of tiny dots of color that make up the image. If you print a 3" x 5" 72PPI image at 8"x 10" those tiny dots get enlarged and your image looks pixelated and blurry. For printing your images should always be 300 PPI.

When a call for art specifies that it wants a high resolution image you should assume that it is asking for an image that is 300 PPI. This gives the organizers the flexibility to enlarge the image without distortion when viewing it on screen as well as the option to use the image for print media.

What's a megapixel?

Megapixel is short for 1 million pixels. So an image that is 1200x1800 would translate to an image approximately 2 million pixels.

That means that if you are using a camera that says it is a 2 megapixel camera, the largest photo you can take would be one that measures height x width of approximately 2 million pixels.

A 5 megapixel camera then the larges photo you can take would be one that measures height x width of approximately 5 million pixels. That means you could take a photo 2560 x 1920 pixels.

A 20 megapixel camera can take a photo measuring 5472 x 3648.

Photo Editing Software

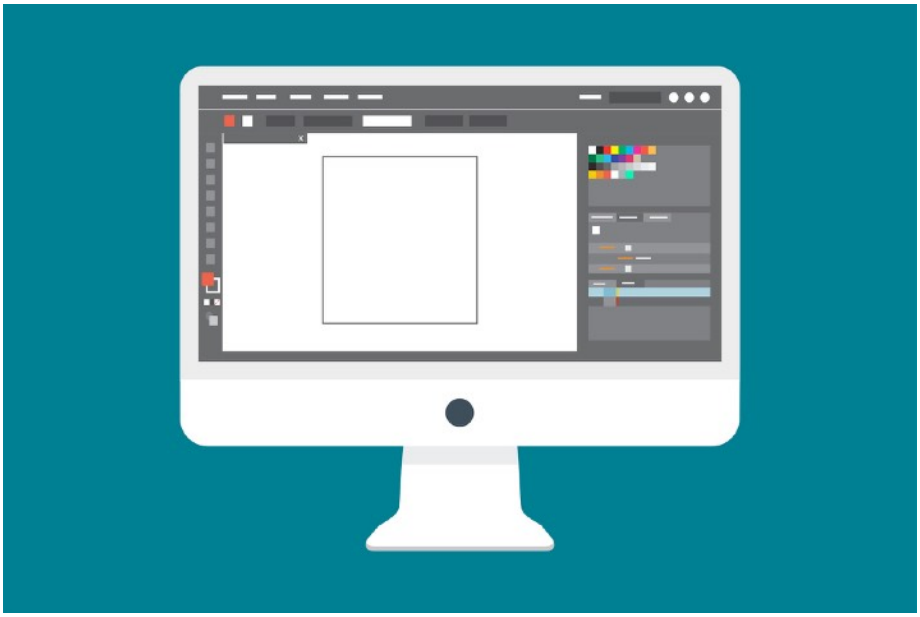
Most cameras come with some basic photo editing software and there are a lot of others that you can buy. I primarily use two pieces of photo editing software:

Pixelmator: is very pretty intuitive to use and comes with a full suite of pretty powerful imaging editing options. You can download a 30 day trial version to try before you buy. It only comes in a Mac version. https://www.pixelmator.com/pro/

On1: is a great alternative to the Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop tools. It contains a suite of very powerful photo editing tools. It is fast becoming a favorite among professional photographers as a cost effective alternative to the Adobe suite of applications. https://www.on1.com/

If you are only interested in being able to do very basic editing and resizing of your photos but are not willing to invest in buying software then here are plenty of free online programs you can use. They will allow you to do some very basic editing quickly and easily. Some of the free ones allow you to upgrade to a paid version but if you are only doing basic editing and are willing to put up with having ads on the screen then the free versions may work just fine for you. Fotor (https://www.fotor.com/) is really easy to use and available for both Mac and PC users. It offers both a free and paid version and the free version gives you enough options to do some basic editing.

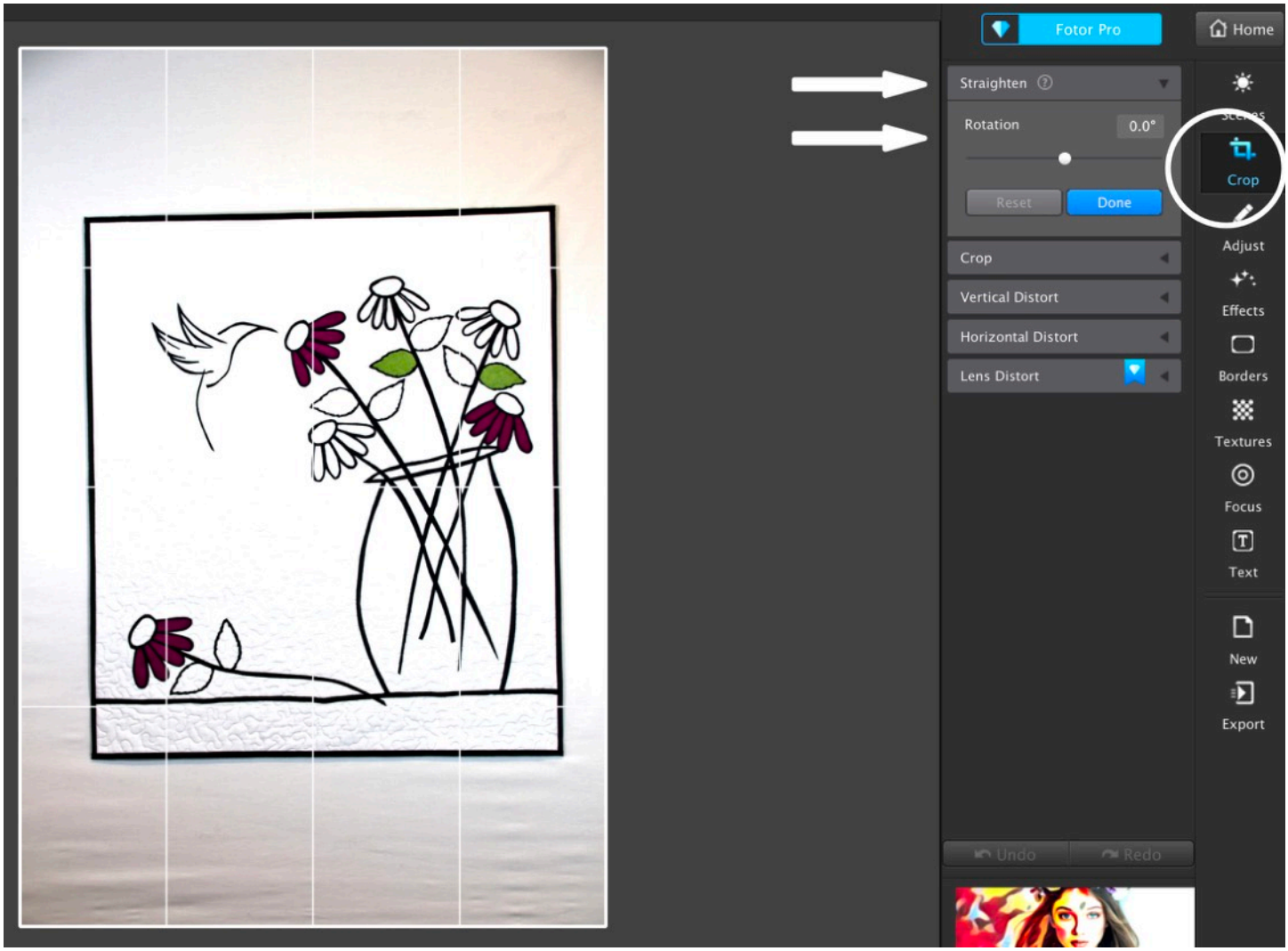
I recommend downloading and using the desktop versions and not the web based one because the web based application converts your files to low-res (72PPI) versions. While this is fine for images that you will use on websites and social media it is not appropriate for images that you will submit to calls for art that call for high quality or high-res images.



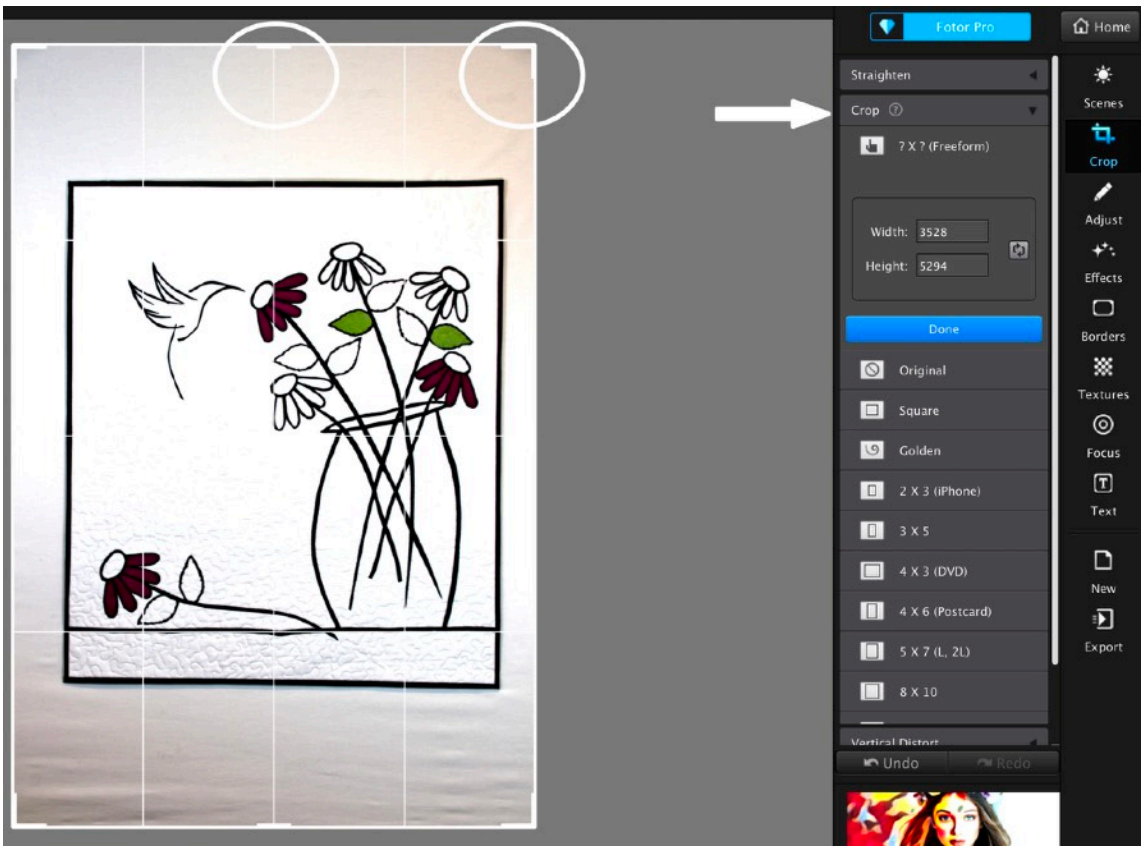
Crop, Refine, Resize

It is likely that the photo that you take with your camera will need some editing before you can submit it to the call. At the very least you will need to adjust the size to meet the requirements.

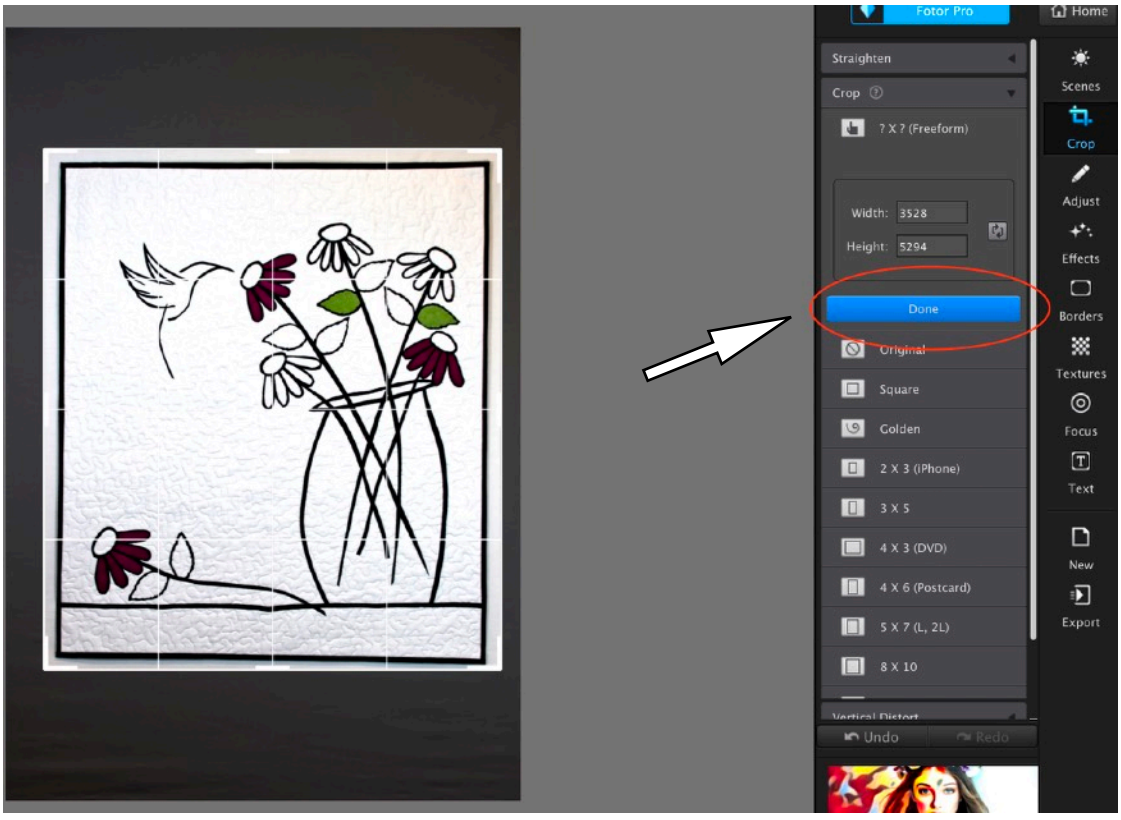
Here is a basic walk through using the free Fotor desktop software for a Mac to straighten, crop and resize a photo. Open Fotor, select Photo Editor and then select the "click here to start" area. Browse



For this example I am working with my Coneflower quilt. You can see that the top edge of the quilt on an angle so the first thing to do is straighten the image. Select the Crop option in the right hand toolbar and then select the Straighten option. Use the slider bar to change the angle of the image and straighten it. When you are finished click the "done" button. This will apply the changes.

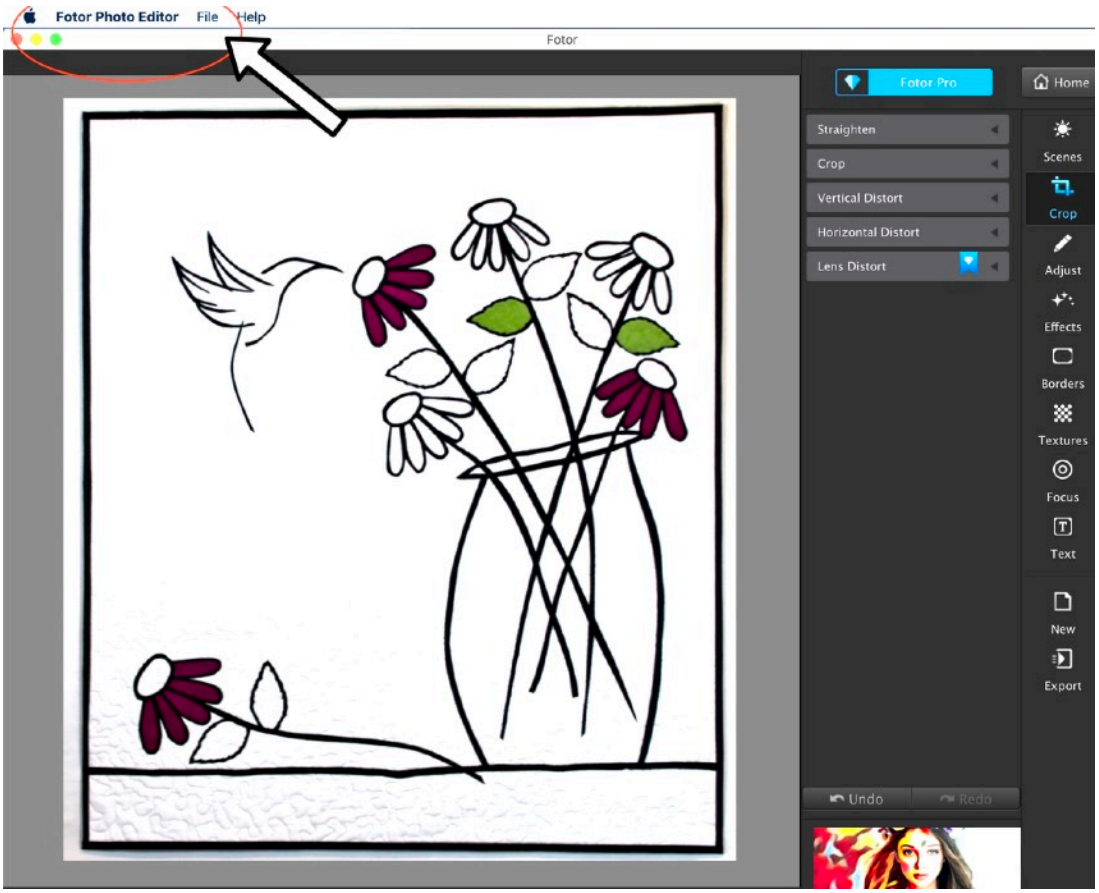


Now that the the quilt has been straightened I can crop out all the extra background area at the top, bottom and sides. Select the "crop" drop down arrow and use the bars in the corners, top and sides to crop out the extra background area. Remember that the edges have to be visible so don't crop so close to the edge that you eliminate all the background area.



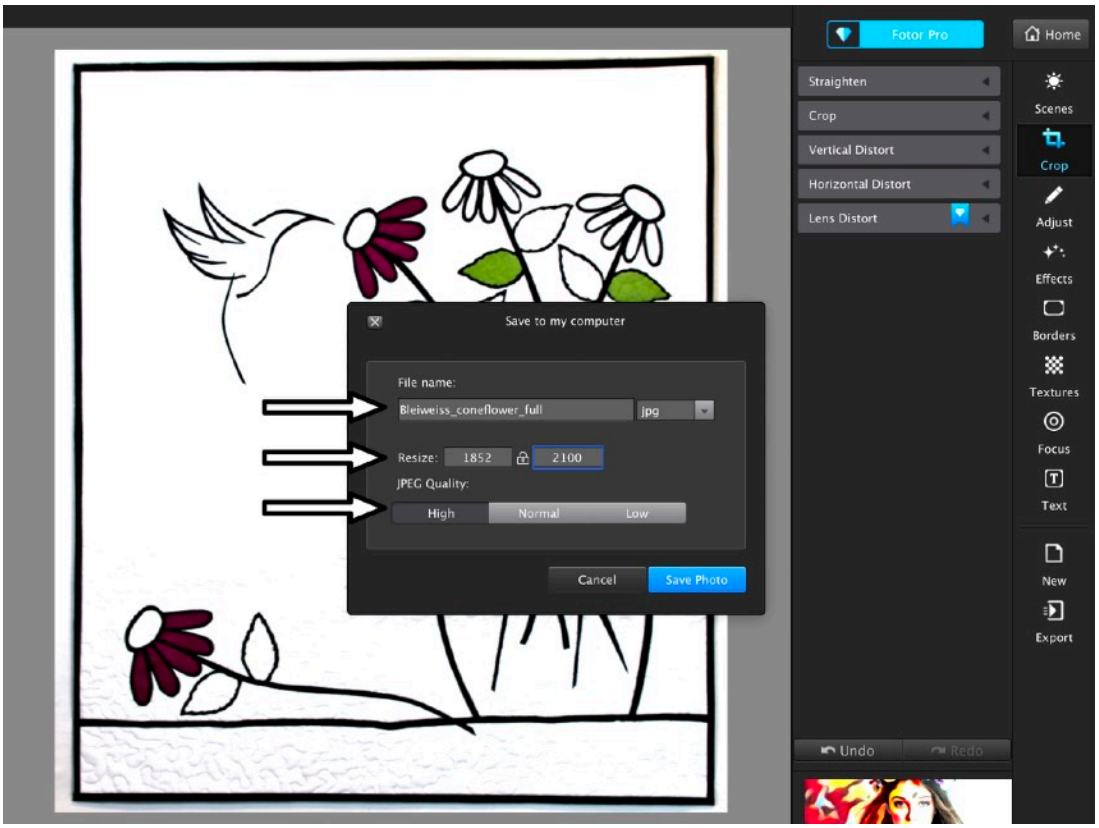
You can see in this photo that I have cropped out most of the extra background but some is still visible to provide contrast for the edges of the quilt.

When you are finished click the "done" button. This will apply the changes.



The last step is to resize and save the image.

From the Fotor main toolbar select File - Export.

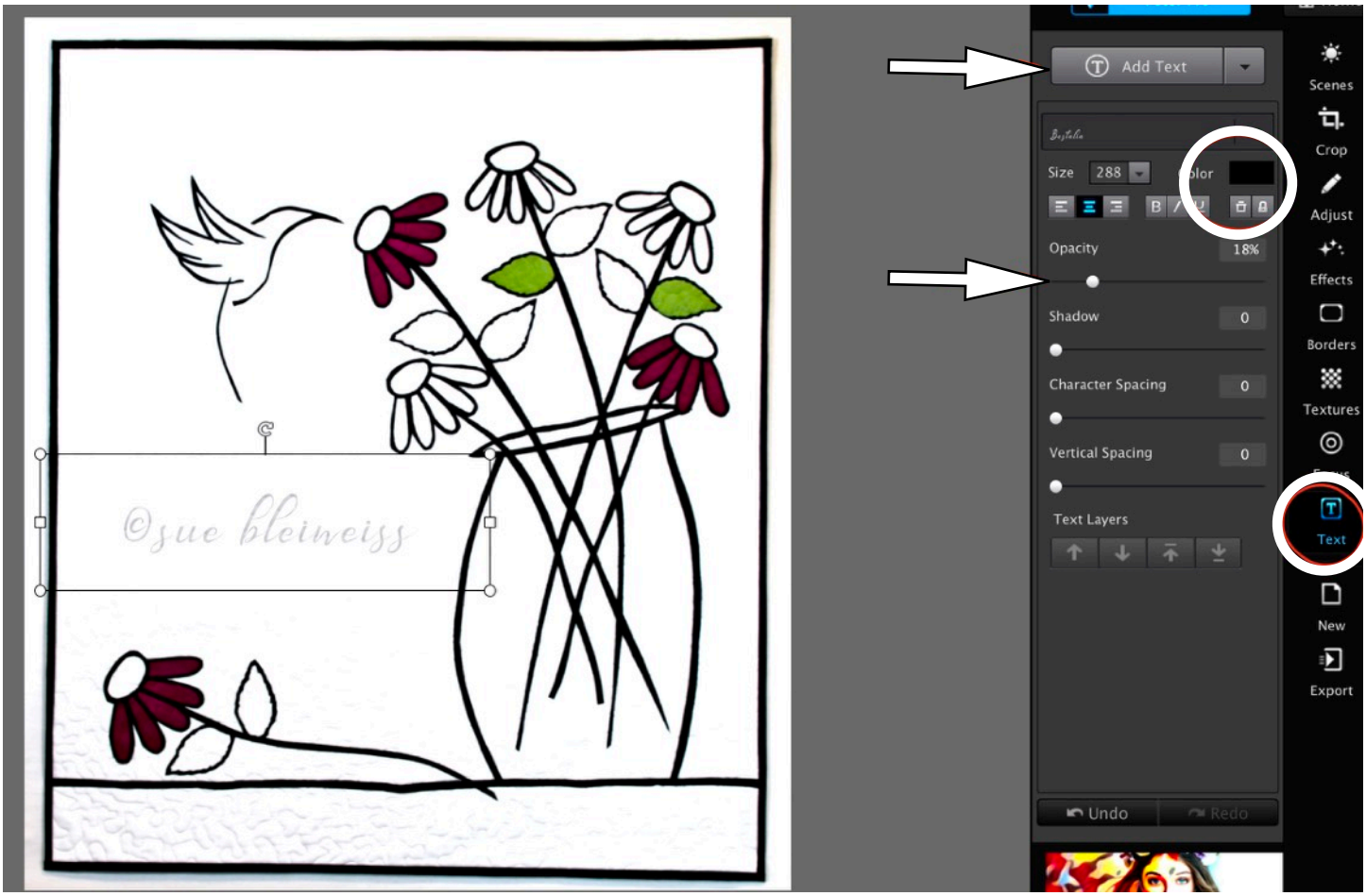


Give your file a name in the file name box and make sure .jpg is selected in the file type drop down box.

In the resize box change the larger of the two numbers to the pixel size specified in the call that you are preparing your image for.

Make sure that the JPEG quality is set to high and then click the save photo button.

If you would like to add a watermark to your photo select the Text button in the right side menu bar. Click the "add text" button and it will add a text box to your image. You can change the color, font, and size of the text as well as change the opacity of the text. Click on the small boxes on the text box to change its size and move it around on your image. When you are finished use the export option to export and save your image.



Do not put a watermark on an image that you intend to use for submission to a call for art!

Resources & Recommendations

Book recommendations

The camera manual that came with your camera or the "for dummies" book for your particular camera. If you can't find your camera manual visit the website of the camera manufacturer. They usually have pdf versions that you can download.

Photographing Arts, Crafts, and Collectibles by Steve Meltzer

Digital Essentials by Gloria Hansen

Digital Photography Lighting for Dummies

Software resources:

Pixelmator: https://www.pixelmator.com/pro/ - for Macs only

Fotor: https://www.fotor.com/ - (free and easy to use but I don't recommend the online version. Use the download version).

Other:

I use a Proline tripod which you can buy on Amazon: https://tinyurl.com/y4ukqaye

The exact stand lights that I use are no longer available but you can buy similar ones, reasonably priced on Amazon. https://tinyurl.com/y383e67x

I also have a set of umbrella lights that I occasionally use: https://tinyurl.com/yyr8e5yh