

Photographing beadwork

A basic guide to using a digital camera

By Jane Marie Griffin

Most modern point and shoot digital cameras (non-manual) come with built in flash, auto-focus, anti-shake and macro settings as standard. Here are a few tips to get the most from your camera when photographing beadwork.

Background: Place your beadwork on a non reflective surface such as a large piece of mount board and make sure that there are no marks or fluff (or animal hairs!) on your background. A piece of fabric (make sure it is ironed) can be used but consider the weave of the fabric – do you want this in your photo? White or black backgrounds tend to work best with beadwork for that professional look.

Focus: Generally the auto-focus on your digital camera works when the shoot button is pressed half way down and when you press the button fully it will take the photo. You should always use this function to allow the camera to focus before fully depressing the shoot button otherwise your images will not be in focus. You also need to take care to make sure the right part of the image is in focus. When you line up your shot the centre of the image may be the background but you want the main focus of your image to be the beadwork. Usually on the LCD screen of your camera there is a small square box which indicates where the camera will focus. Move the camera so that the box is over the main focus point, depress the button half way to initialise the auto focus, then move the camera (whilst still holding the button half way) back to the centre of your shot and depress the button fully to take the image.

Detail Shots: Use the macro setting on your camera for close up shots but never use the flash on macro shots. You will also not be able to use the zoom when using the macro setting as the auto-focus may not operate properly, so do check your camera manual to see how close you can get to your beadwork.

Zoom: The zoom function can be used if you are a metre or more from the beadwork but always try to use the optical zoom and not the digital zoom, as you will lose definition in the photograph with digital zoom. Optical zoom uses the lens of the camera to bring the subject closer, while digital zoom crops a portion of the image and then enlarges it back to size, thereby losing some image quality.

Tripods: No matter how hard you try not to, you will move when holding the camera in your hands, so using a tripod will help to keep your photograph in focus. Another little trick is to take a deep breath and hold it until you have taken the photo – but do remember to breathe afterwards!

Lighting: There are two lighting options you can use for your beadwork. Either photograph outside on a nice day (but not in direct sunlight or you will create lots of shadows), or the other option is to invest in some lighting. Mini daylight studio lights can be purchased for as little as £15 each, but you could also use a day light work lamp to illuminate your work. It is also possible to add some extra light to your photo with the flash on your camera but you do need to be careful with flash as it can bleach out the detail. Another tip for lighting inside is to experiment with the scene settings on your camera. Many digital cameras come with scene settings these days; try the indoor setting or cloudy day to start with.

Photo Light Tents: If you are going to need to take regular photos of your beadwork then a Light Tent is a useful piece of equipment. Light tents are open 'boxes' made of a nylon fabric and come in a variety of sizes (40x40x40cm, 50x50x50cm or 60x60x60cm are more than adequate for beadwork). To use a light tent, you place your beadwork inside and shine lights towards it from the outside. The tent fabric will diffuse the light to give a soft all over lighting. You can also buy a light tent set from a well known auction website with two mini lights, a mini tripod and three or four different coloured background drops, all for between £35 and £45.

Symbols on your digital camera



Scenery



Macro



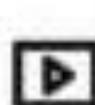
Flash



Erase



Portrait



Playback



Memory Card



Battery Charge