

Why use the Dian-Align?

The Dian-Align was developed especially for photographing works of art. While it is proudly indebted to the ingenious Zig-Align alignment system for digital photography, the Dian-Align was created especially for the demands of fine art photography, with museum professionals in mind.

The benefit of the Zig-Align in photographing works of art is indisputable. But, there is a disadvantage to using the Zig-Align for sensitive works of art such as oil paintings, pastels, and oversized drawings—in order to achieve parallelism the Zig-Align mirror must rest on the object being photographed.

As a curator, I am not willing to compromise the integrity of any delicate surface just to get a perfect digital image. Nor am I necessarily eager to expose a work of art to any risk associated with placing an object directly on its surface. When the variety of surfaces in a fine art museum collection is taken into consideration, the importance of not touching the work of art, even by museum staff, is as clear as keeping visiting school children's hands away from the art.

Many contemporary works of art have pristine surfaces susceptible to fingerprints and abrasion. Others paintings may have a ponderous build-up of oil paint resulting in a nearly sculptural surface. And, while beautiful, such surfaces are always at risk of loss. These thickly plied strokes are especially vulnerable to damaging abrasion, chipping, and breakage. Too often it is true that even the most experienced art handlers using the utmost care and caution make minor mistakes that expose art to unintended harm.

Why take that risk? And, is there an alternative?

When approaching our Digital Crocker initiative, the *Crocker Art Museum* curatorial staff chose the BetterLight Technology for our photography needs. But, we still had to tackle the need for achieving alignment between the camera and the object to prevent a “keystone” effect in the digital image. Not only were we not willing to compromise our standards of care for our collection, we were not willing to settle for less than perfect digital results.

Working with photographer Jesse Bravo, I suggested that we create another parallel plane on which to hang the Zig-Align. Doing so would free us from any worry about touching a work of art; instead, we would only touch the object placed parallel to the painting. This suggestion, easy as it sounds, required much experimentation and testing by Jesse Bravo. His efforts resulted in the development of the Dian-Align for photographers who wish to demonstrate a museum-level of collection care when photographing fine art.

The Dian-Align also allows Jesse Bravo greater efficiency and ease of mind in his task of digitizing our collection. Objects can be moved by art handlers onto easels, while Jesse need only adjust the Dian-Align and then shoot. This tool has also increased curator trust in the photographer and the project—an important aspect of any large initiative as important as our *Digital Crocker*.

Diana Daniels
Assistant Curator
Crocker Art Museum
216 O Street
Sacramento, CA 95814