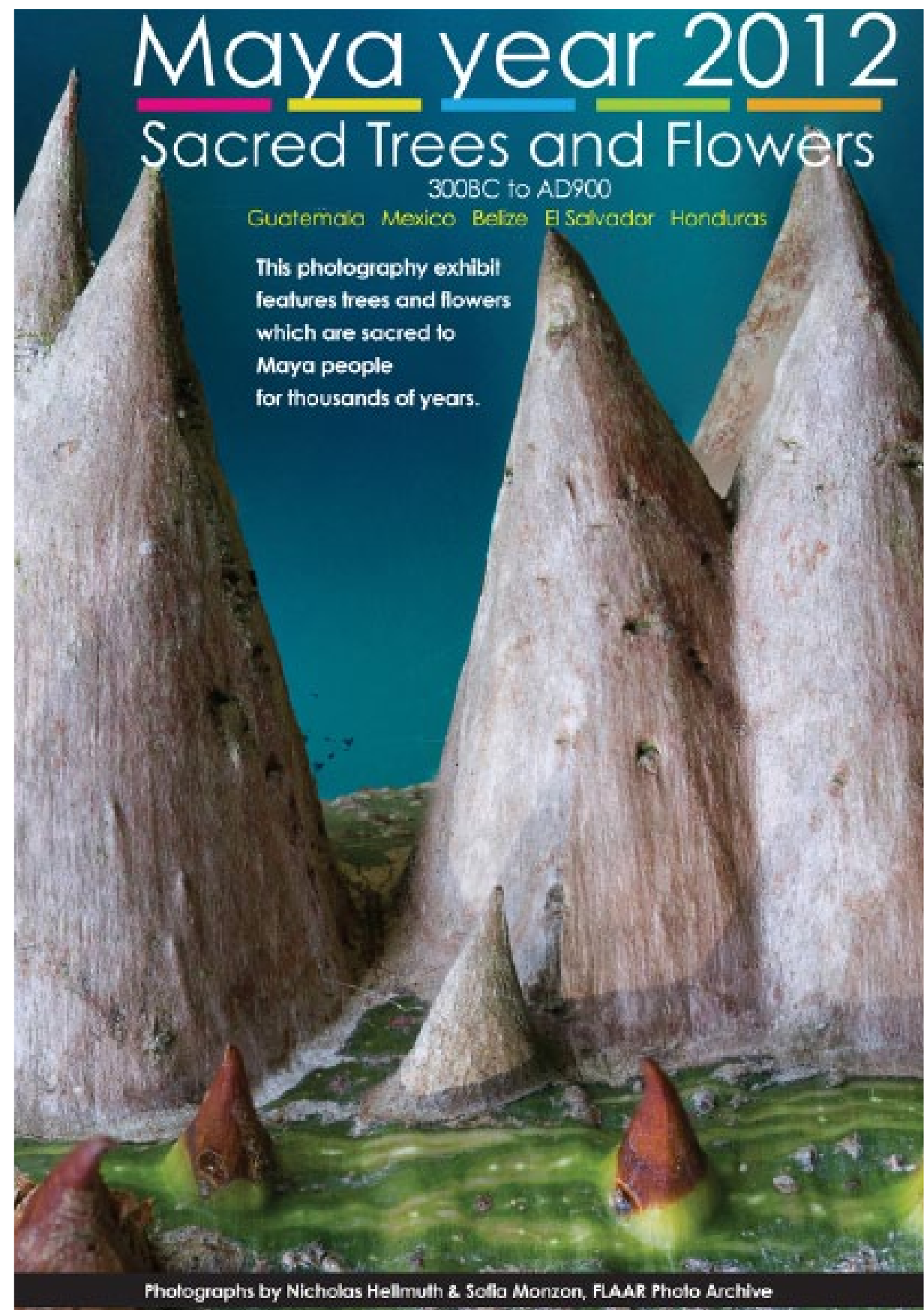




How to Organize the Printing of a Digital Photo Exhibit

Welcome banner for the
FLAAR Mesoamerica exhibition



This PDF is based on the preparation for the “Maya Sacred Trees and Flowers” exhibit at the Missouri Botanical Garden. The exhibit itself is from September through November 2012. The preparation included specialized photography in remote areas in Guatemala and in our photo studio. It lasted months of preparation.

As a professor of photography at Rollins College for several years, as director of the technology imaging technology research center at Bowling Green State University and as research professor teaching digital photography at Universidad Francisco Marroquin (Guatemala City), I enjoy sharing my learning with other people about how to improve photography techniques.

Every year I work at improving my photography, I can understand that some commercial photographers are shy about telling everyone how they accomplish their great images (because they would be teaching competition to take jobs away). On the contrary, I am pleased to see other photographers learning from my work.

There is no one-single way to do good photography. If you put several experienced photographers in front of a ceiba tree or water lily, about half will do really good photographs. I can probably accomplish good results because I have learned from my own mistakes. For example, I have been photographing ceiba tree spines and water lily flowers for decades.

Yet Sofia Monzon, a graphic designer who has worked with FLAAR for about three years can achieve many photographs of a ceiba tree that are significantly better than mine. Not better camera or better resolution, but a better perspective. Indeed I used a photograph taken by Sofia for the announcement of the entire exhibit.



FLAAR Mesoamerica exhibit at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, Missouri.

Plan your exhibit

Before thinking of printing pictures (no comma) you have to organize the theme for the expo. What ever the theme is about, define it, and have an aim for the project, is it educational? Artistic? Something more?? Make it clear before you start shooting.

Having a purpose will help organize the process of taking the pictures, because now you know what you want to take, and what do you want to show and what message you want to share with the viewers. If you are going to exhibit, a clearly organized plan is advisable as a path to follow from the beginning, and not to be changing directions based on fruitless last-minute decisions.

The aim of our project was to exhibit sacred trees and flowers that are involved in the Maya culture from thousands of years ago. For our inside-organization we created a tabulated list where we indicated the file name, a preview small image of the picture and the size we want them to be printed at. Divided by columns we filled the information on each cell, so we could easily distinguish each file, and organize the process.

To give a list is an excellent idea, because they can print it and have more control of your images status. If you are planning to give a list to the print shop, be sure its clear all the information, for example, numbered pages, alphabetical order, and more. If you give a bunch of names in an unorganized table, they will get confuse, and time they could be using on processing your pictures they will be using it on trying to understand your mess.

Its important to deliver the pictures with a range of enough days, so the print shop has enough time to prepare the files. It also gives a safe-time for errors and last-minute arrangements. It's important to have constant communication with them for questions and answers.

Choosing a location

One of the main aspects for setting a photo exhibit is choosing a location. The space should be an adequate to provide great lighting (natural or artificial) an exposed and lit wall, space for people to walk through the exhibition. Also you need the place to have a convenient access and adequate parking space or transportation for people to assist.

When choosing your location, contact their manager and ask for exhibit floor plans to organize according to the hall dimensions and wall heights, the quantity of images to set up. This will help to start organizing the size and amount of pictures you want to exhibit to estimate the costs of printing and mounting.

We had our exhibit at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, Missouri. MOBOT is well known as one of the biggest botanical gardens worldwide with over 79 acres of natural exhibit, featuring Japanese strolling garden, orchids collection and more.



Chinese exhibition at the Monsanto Gallery Hall, Missouri Botanical Garden

The space designated to our exhibit was the Monsanto Gallery Hall. It's an open space with white walls to set our images and where the people circulation is constant. In the hall we had 4 walls among the space to distribute our images, so after analyzing the space we started making decisions on the history we wanted to create with the images.

We established 5 Themes for the exhibition, according to the images, their purpose and their category. After that, each wall was designated to a specific category, in order to organize the images and create a common thread between the themes.





How to prepare the image for printing for an exhibit.

This report is in three parts:

- How to do the photography (you can't print an image for the exhibit until you have the great photo).
- How to select a printer, ink, substrate, lamination or coating, etc.
- How to mount the exhibit on the wall.

Printing the photos is an entire enterprise unto itself. The main portion of this report will be on all the decisions that need to be made relative to the choice of printer, ink, media, mounting, etc. But before you can hang a print on the wall, what about the image itself? the actual original photograph?



What camera to use to take the photos?

The following cameras were used:

- 21 megapixel Phase One P25, Zeiss lenses (made in Germany), Hasselblad
- 21 megapixel Canon EOS 1Ds Mark III; original Canon lenses (no after-market)
- 18 megapixel Canon EOS T2i, original Canon lenses
- two point and shoot underwater cameras

There may have been a few photos taken with our Nikon D300. We have the new the new Nikon D800E on-order now for over three months. This is 36 megapixels. We use only Nikon lenses: never a Tamron or any other. Sigma are okay but the top line of Nikon lenses tend to be better.

We now have a 14 megapixel underwater camera, a brand new Canon G1X with Canon-branded underwater housing. This just arrived and we have not yet used it to photograph water lilies underwater.

If I were to win the lottery I would use a Phase One digital back with 80 megapixels (yes, they do exist, but cost is about \$45,000, not including lenses). We feel that the photos in this exhibit look acceptable with the equipment we have. The primary items on our wish-list (so we can do better photography)



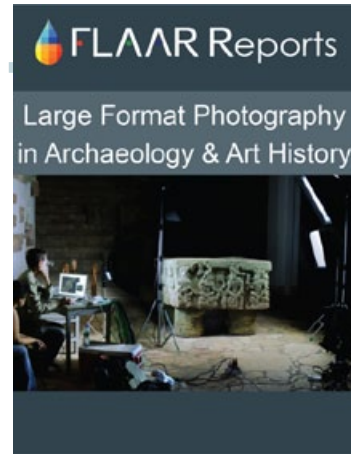
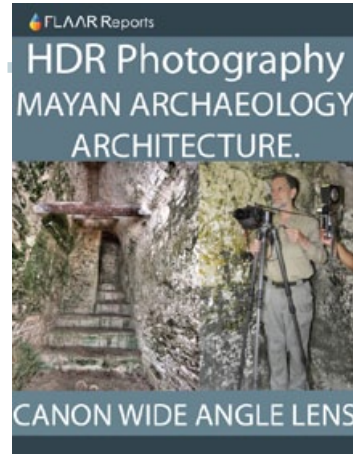
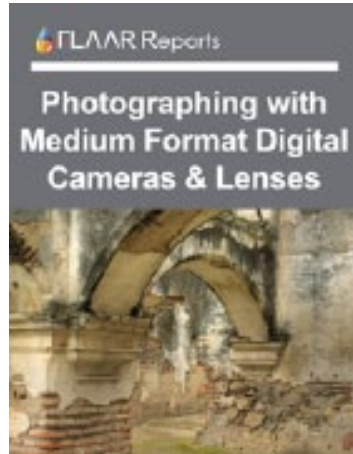
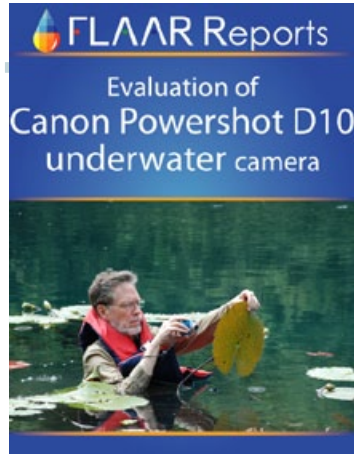
Nicholas taking photographs at "La Aurora" zoo in Guatemala City.

is a Schneider enlarging lens mounted on a bellows to be a macro lens via a Novoflex system. We will test this at Photokina 2012 later this month in Cologne, Germany. And a 500mm prime lens is needed to enable us to capture kapok or flowers which are high above ground level.

You can take a perfectly good photograph with a Nikon or Canon. You can achieve remarkable resolution with a Phase One or Hasselblad. If you have photogenic subjects you can do acceptably even with a compact camera (the polite way to call what is a point-and-shoot kind of camera).

So we do not exposure any one brand. You should use the brand of camera that you prefer. But lenses are a bit different: most (but not all) Nikon, Canon and Leica lenses and Zeiss lenses are better than after-market lenses like Tamron and even Sigma. But if all you have is Sigma lenses you can still do acceptably in most cases.

Same with tripods: cheap tripods with no recognizable brand are junk and cause as many problems than they solve. We cover all this in the many digital photography courses that we taught already ten years ago.



If you wish to learn more on photography visit our website www.digital-photography.org to download our free FLAAR Reports

Nicholas photographing ants at a field trip in Guatemala

