A Simple Overhead Camera Set-up Using Materials at Hand!

The pandemic posed a personal challenge: I was determined to not have it get in the way of my creative well-being. Exhibiting, selling artwork, and attending workshops online has never appealed to me - I have always enjoyed participating in Art and Craft shows in person - I love interacting with people and it fed my creativity. During this lockdown, with the help of my family, I have not only been able to create, build and enable online shopping on my website (www.daintlymade.com using Weebly) but I have also devised a way of demonstrating and conducting online watercolor workshops for small groups (https://daintlymade.weebly.com/workshops.html). It took a lot of time but was an amazing learning experience!

I was quite nervous about conducting online classes because I did not have the slightest clue about a video set-up. A functional filming station needed an overhead view for the participants, good lighting, and minimum shadow. And I wanted to make use of things lying around the house to set-up! I didn't want to invest in sophisticated gadgets.

Here is what I did.

First on the list was to find a suitable location with good natural light. I chose the dining table because it is placed right in front of a window. The table is large enough for me to work on, and most importantly, a chandelier hangs right above - a necessity for the next part!

Next was rigging an overhead camera to provide a clear overhead view of my page for demonstrating. My solution was a webcam (a cell phone is a good alternative), a yardstick, a clamp, and some duct tape! (That's right, duct tape!) I first measured how high the camera needed to be for a good view; about 18 inches was good for my set-up. Then, I positioned the yard stick at that height and used the duct tape to fix it to the center of the chandelier and perpendicular to the table. I then attached the webcam to the tip of the yardstick with a clamp. Last bit was to connect the webcam to my computer with a USB cable. My set-up was now ready! I was able to easily toggle between screens to either demonstrate my artwork, or face my online participants as needed.

You can always take this arrangement a notch up using a tripod stand, a professional camera, and other mounting and lighting equipment. But, why not explore what you already have? If I can do this…anyone can!

Here's a YouTube link with my set-up https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRfvnhn9mjo

The full set-up

The overhead view

What participants see

Meghana Mitragotri

Participants' paintings as a result of my workshop