



Still Life Photography

Vicki McLead
Ida Grove, Iowa

Photo Above:
Painted wooden shoes

Watering cans



Still life photography is a representation of chiefly inanimate objects and the ability to put those objects together to create a pleasing image. This type of photography has many forms: there is the standard still life that tells a story, a close up that shows detail and the abstract that takes a part of an object and emphasizes its texture, form or color. These elements make this an exciting form of photography and can bring out the creativity in the photographer.

An added benefit is that you don't necessarily need a large space to do this type of photography. Your kitchen table can be adequate, and if positioned next to a window you will have a light source of natural light. If you do have a room you can devote to photographing stills, it would be best if the walls are painted white, as this will have a neutral effect on your objects; where as color on the walls will reflect onto your subject. Example: if your walls are painted bright yellow everything will have a tint of yellow reflected onto it. With a white wall the reflection will be natural and can also be used to bounce light. With a dedicated room you can also have a table and your lights or strobes set up, and then have total control over the lighting.

What You Will Need

First of all you will need a camera. Any camera will work whether it is a point-and-shoot or SLR type camera: either digital or film. The advantage of using a digital camera is that you are able see the results right away and make changes if needed. It is a necessity to have a good sturdy tripod, as you don't want your camera to move around, or fall down. The use of this tripod will allow you the ability to get sharp focused images especially in low lighting conditions. A remote shutter release is suggested and typically used but not necessary

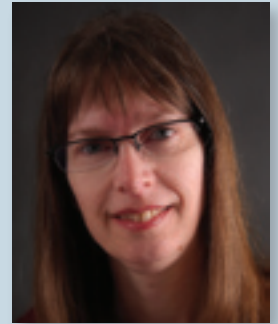


Pears and scale

as long as you have a steady hand and don't jerk the shutter button when pressing it. If this is not possible or you do not have a remote shutter release then the self-timer on your camera can be used. A lens of 50mm or longer is adequate for use in still life photography, along with macro lenses for close ups.

It is not necessary to spend a great deal on lighting; a window with natural daylight is the cheapest lighting there is because it is free. The

best type of natural light would be from a window that faces north because the light won't be as harsh. If you don't have a north-facing window, you may diffuse the light with a white sheet or shower curtain. Anything that is semi-translucent or white will soften the harshness. For focusing this light, white or silver reflector cards can be used to reflect the lighting into the shadow areas. White reflector cards produce soft lighting that is very pleasing while silver cards will result in a



Vicki McLead



Watercolor cupcakes



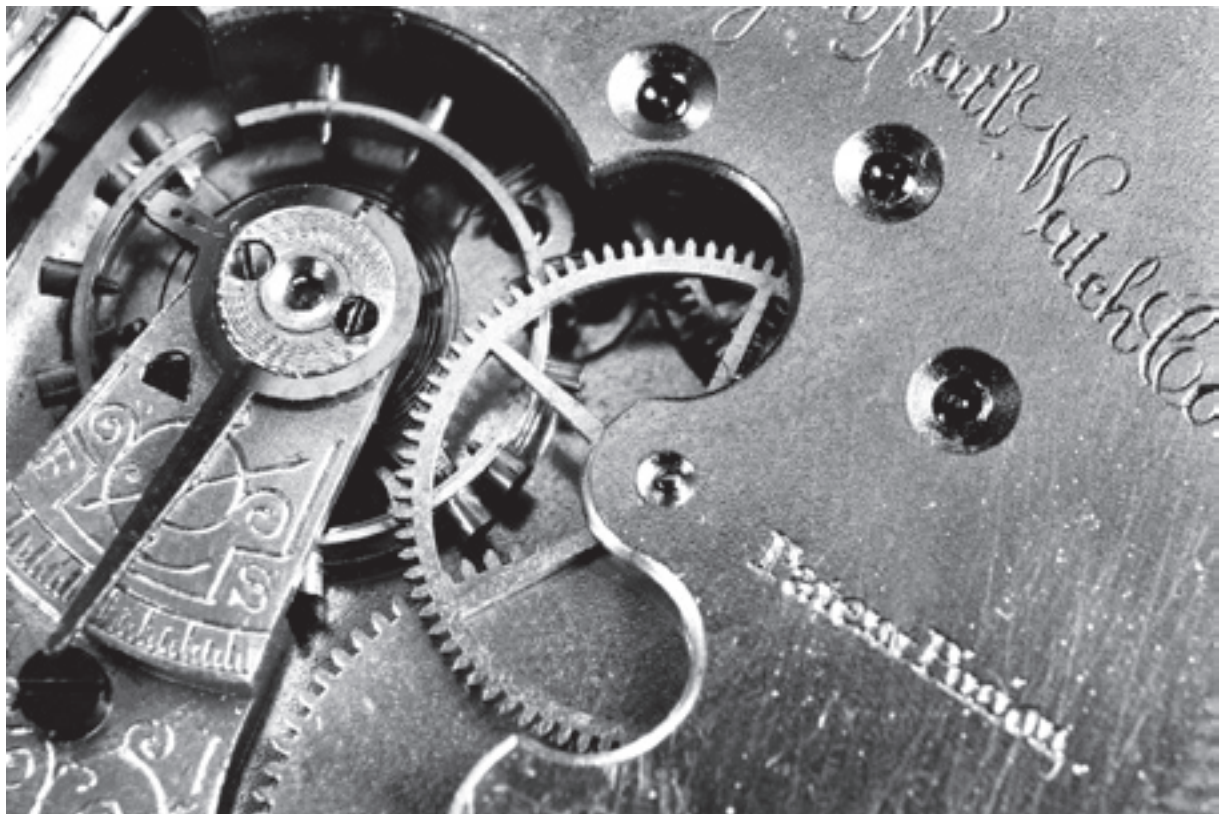
White teapot and fruit

Photos © Vicki McLead

harder or brighter light. You can use the standard photographic reflectors that are available at camera stores and online; they come in several sizes and colors such as white, silver, black, gold and translucent. A less expensive alternative would be to use foam core board, this can be cut to any size

you need, large or small. Aluminum foil can also be wrapped around a piece of foam board and used as a silver reflector card.

Another source of lighting is artificial light, such as tungsten or color corrective lighting. Tungsten lighting is like any household lighting.



Pocket watch gears



Daisy

This type of lighting when used with a softbox or with a photo umbrella attached will produce a nice wrap around effect. Typically one light is used as the main light and a second light is used as fill. Reflector cards can be used to fill in unwanted shadow areas if desired when positioned anywhere from 45° to 90° from the light source. Keep in mind that household lighting will render an image with an orange tint when used with daylight film, or daylight white-balance setting on your digital camera and you will need to make a color correction. With film cameras either buy tungsten film or use a blue 80A color correction filter on the lens. For digital cameras, simply set your white balance to tungsten. There may still be a slight orange tint, but it can be corrected in your photo editing software. Color corrected lights such as the 3200K light bulbs, available at photo supply stores or online, can also be used. They have the standard screw base that will fit in household lighting systems or special photo lighting fixtures; just make sure they can handle the high wattage. These bulbs can also be used with soft boxes, but be aware that these lights get very hot, as they are usually 250 to 500 watts. With the use of color correction bulbs there is no need for corrective filters, and for digital just set your white-balance to tungsten.

Backgrounds can be cloth, paper or a painted wall. A simple trick is to use yard goods from the local fabric store or bed sheets as your backdrop, they are adequate in size and you can get several colors without spending a lot of money. Alternately you can use large rolls of colored art paper; usually available at art supply stores, they provide a nice smooth surface. The background can contribute or take away from the still life, so choose it carefully. You don't want the background to distract from the main subject; it should be flattering or enhancing to the whole image.



Chess pieces

Composition

Here you can bring out your creativity by arranging the objects in a way that relate to each other or tell a story. A good start is to use three items in your still life, anything more than that can be overwhelming to the viewer, however many award-winning images have more than three items, or just one. A single item can make for a strong image especially if dramatic lighting is used. The use of Rule-of-thirds, leading lines and framing of the shot with surrounding objects can add impact.

Now that you have the fundamentals, what do you photograph? That is the fun of still life photography; you can use anything. Ordinary items around the house with the right composition and photographed correctly can be an artistic and creative image. Don't limit yourself: still life's don't always have to be the ones you set up in your studio or home they can be *found* items, meaning anything that is in its own element. For example: a couple of watering cans on a bench at a flower garden would be considered a found still life. Set up your tripod and take several shots, move around and try different angles then move in close. The possibilities are endless. ■

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