

Still Life

Chris Ford

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Where to start.

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Definition

A Still Life (plural: Still Lives) is a work of art depicting mostly inanimate subject matter, typically common place objects which are either natural (food, flowers, dead animals, plants, rocks, shells etc.) or man made (drinking glasses, books, vases, jewellery, coins, pipes, etc.)

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Types of Still Life Photography.

There are two types of Still Life in Photography, found still life and created still life. Found still life are images of objects that haven't been moved by the photographer. Created still life are pictures of objects that are assembled in a visually pleasing manner by the photographer.



These are examples of Found Still Life photographs. Shot using available light with no input from the photographer. In both cases these images have been captured in Tourist attractions. The wheels were shot at the National Trust's Hidcote Gardens, the paint tins were shot at St Joseph Village, a reconstructed French village near Calais





Two examples of Created Still Life Photography. Simple arrangements of natural and of man made items. The first of sea shells on sand was in fact shot on a beach in Cornwall and the spoons were shot in my living room. As for the lighting the sea shells are shot using daylight and the spoons are shot using the light from north facing French windows





To get started in still life photography it is not necessary to buy lots and lots of expensive equipment. For example these images were produced with normal household lighting. The cyclamen was shot using a daylight SAD light, the feather a small pocket LED torch, and the candle is the only illumination in the image with the bible and glasses.



Equipment

Obviously a camera, the type is not really important, however the ability to change lenses may be an advantage. No special lenses are required a normal kit lens for most cameras is adequate. Depending on the subject and the space available to work in focal lengths from what would be considered a standard lens to a short telephoto are probably the most useful. The two images below were shot on a full frame DSLR and an entry level Mirrorless System Camera with effectively kit zoom lenses.

DSLR



CMSC



Lighting

The lighting used for these shots is a kit similar to the ad below. In my case the lights are less powerful being 150W. But as you can see it can be inexpensive to get started.

Home > Lighting and Studio > Flash Heads and Kits > Flash Kits

Interfit F121 200w Twin Head Softbox Kit

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The Interfit F121 studio flash light features a digital touch screen for accurate power adjustments with step-less dimming and accurate colour temperature. It is suitable for both professionals and hobbyists wishing to purchase quality studio lighting equipment at affordable prices. This kit bundles 2 heads with stands, softboxes, speedrings, and more. [More](#)

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Lighting.

Here are some examples of lights I have used in the past for taking photographs.

- 1, Red Head Photo Lamp.
- 2, large Torch.
- 3, Inspection Lamp,
- 4, SAD Daylight Lamp,
- 5, Church Candle,
- 6, Walkers Headlamp,
- 7, Pocket LED Torch,

Other useful items.

- 8, Studio Stand,
- 9, Background Support Pole.
- 10, Roll of White Plotter Paper.

With digital photography it is possible to adjust the colour balance for each individual frame to suit the colour temperature of the light source used



Useful Bits And Pieces.

There are lots of bits and pieces that are useful in Still Life Photography. Reflectors can be made of card or paper, some are shown in the picture that are white, gold, or silver faced. Black can be used to take light away, I have also included a mirror tile. In the background here is a white Lastolite diffuser/reflector and a larger version that has a reversible cover, which has a Black, Silver, White and Gold reflective surfaces. A working surface that can be adjusted in height is must, in this case I have a folding picnic table that has three height settings. In the past I have used empty bottle crates, Workmates, saw horses and the floor. On the table there are a few bits I have accumulated over time, rolls of tape (masking, gaffer and invisible), coloured gels (Large for studio lights, small for speed lights), Bluetak, staple gun, food colouring, glycerin, scalpel with blades, and hand clamps. Hanging down from the top is a diffusion material called Rosco 3000 or Tough Rolux. It comes on a roll 4 feet wide by 25 feet long. Tracing paper will do the same job as this stuff is quite expensive.

My Lighting

For most of my work I use flash. Flash has one big disadvantage and that is you cannot see the effect your lighting set up has, it happens too fast. However over other light sources flash has many advantages. It's very reliable, light output is consistent, colour temperature is daylight, it's powerful so small apertures can be used at low ISOs, it can be portable, flash duration can be very short to freeze action and flash equipment doesn't get hot.

Flash tends to be a small point light source so to be of use it needs to be modified, hence modifiers. To make the light softer, make the light bigger. An easy way to make a light bigger is to fit a soft box, this will give a larger softer, rectangular light source that replicates a north light. The light from a north facing window. It can be bounced off a white card, wall, paper, or a sheet.

The picture contains a couple of speedlites, a mains powered studio flash, a battery powered studio flash and a flash head with a rectangular soft box.





How much room is needed?

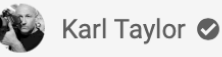
Still life photography tends to expand to fill the available space. Small sets (toy cars, jewellery, pens, mugs and cups) can be shot on a desk top with a desk lamp and reflector for lighting and the camera positioned where an office chair would normally go. I am very lucky I have a garden room with enough space to photograph a full length human figure. It's still not big enough!!

If you have a space, garage, shed, spare bedroom, that has enough room and that you can leave a set up without having to disturb it that is great.



4 Tips for More Creative Still Life Photography

36K views • 5 months ago



Looking for still life photography ideas? In this video, I look at examples of still life images, plus offer advice on what camera, ...



HOW I shoot DARK and MOODY still life photography | Photography vlog

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In today's video, I am showing you how to create a gorgeous dark and moody still life photograph using the flowers from my own ...

4K



7 how-to tips for shooting still life photography

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COOPH presents 7 simple tips and tricks for shooting beautiful still life photography. All it takes is a few household items and a ...



Introduction to still life Studio Photography for beginners.

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Flower still life photography

598 views • 1 week ago

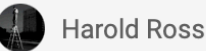


In this program I'll show how to create a mood picture by adding a narrative to an image. Using nothing more than an old flower decaying ...



Angle of Incidence

29K views • 4 years ago



This short video discusses one of the six lighting principles I teach during my light painting workshops. This principle is The ...

Still Life Tutorials

Youtube has hundreds of videos on photography and Still Life is no exception. There are videos from photographers of all abilities. There are photographers with little in the way of lightning equipment and minuscule studios to those with an unlimited supply of lights and modifiers and huge cavernous studios. There is something to be learned from most of them.

My favourites include:- Karl Taylor. Philip McCordall, Adorama Mark Wallace, Camera Club Live

easy

realistic

acrylic

beginner

flower

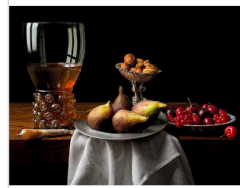
simple

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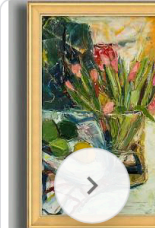
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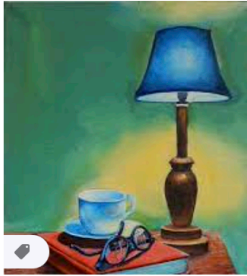
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40 Easy Still Life Painti...
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Spanish still life paintings ...
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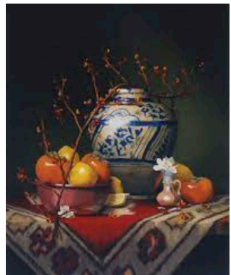
Still life painting, in oil from L...
artrabbit.com



life painter Duane Keiser paints ...
itsnicethat.com



Is there still life in Still ...
artuk.org



Inspiration.

The internet is a great place to search for ideas or inspiration. You have access to images from both photographers and painters alike.

aesthetic

fruit

flower

creative


glass

black and white


food

coffee


more



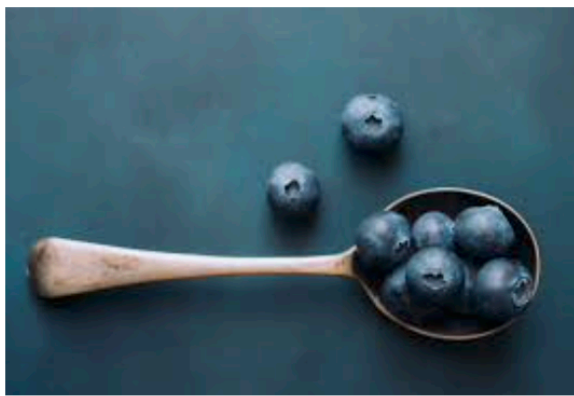
Still Life Photography: The Complete Guide format.com




50 Incredible Still Life Photographs t... photoblog.com




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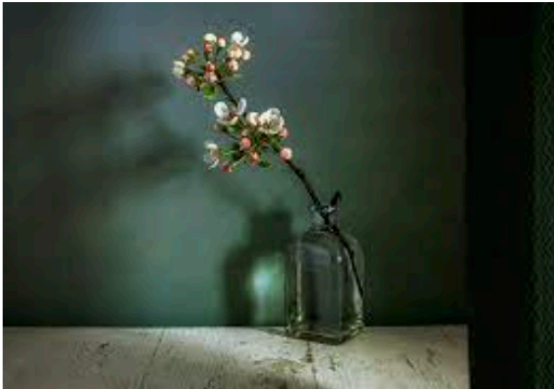
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1x - Magazine - Still Life Art is Still ... 1x.com




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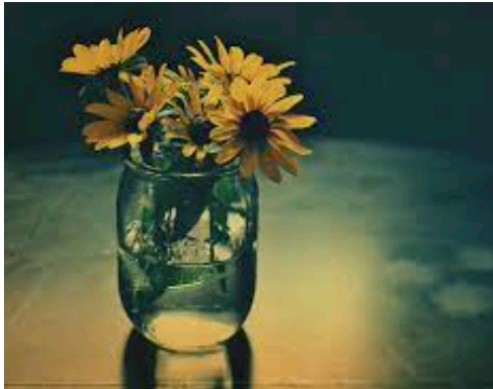
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
Still Life Photographers Who Give a ... widewalls.ch



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A good subject to get started with is food. This for example is our weekly supply of fresh fruit, a chopping board and an old curtain. Food and drink is always popular with photographers, if you are careful (hygienic) you can always eat it afterwards. Why do you think that food and wine feature so much in still life photography? This scored 17 in a recent club competition.



An experiment.

White on White.
Every element in the image, except for the scones and knife handle are white. It is quite difficult to photograph a group of pure white objects with white fore and back grounds. I was quite pleased that I had managed to shape the items and keep detail in the sugar and not blow out any highlights. The competition judge was not quite so enamoured of it complaining about the layout of the crockery and the lack of lighting on the scones. 15 scored.



A Quality Shoe.

Shot in the garden room as an exercise to try and simulate a spotlight. It is shot with a single studio flash head fitted with a snoot. Because the shoe leather is polished there is quite a strong specular highlight on the toecap of the shoe which is a bit distracting. The competition judge thought it had been shot in a shoe shop and awarded it 16. I rather liked the fall off of light and the mood it gave to the subject.



Wine and Cheese.

This is a composite, the still life is shot in my garden room using flash, a large scrim and white card reflectors. This was a special bottle of wine and you will have noticed it is unopened but there is wine in the glass. The wine in glass is plain water with food colouring and I should have made it darker, or opened cheaper bottle of red wine. The background is the servants hall in a French chateaux called Chenonceau. I can't remember the judges comments but it scored 16.





In this shot I used the bottle and glass with the white card behind but because the foreground reflection was too bright I took the foreground from the other frame. I then took a vertical crop from the right hand side of the interior picture. The light from the spherical lamp, although it cropped from the final picture, mimics the light from the white card in the main shot. The judge considered it a product shot and gave it 14



I called this “Devotion” the only lighting is from the candle but I had to cheat. To get enough illumination on the bible and the glasses meant that the candle was overexposed. I took another shot with shorter shutter speed and used the flame and candle top and blended the two images together. The sharp eyed will notice that the candle in the set up shot is longer. It is the same candle I just shortened it in Photoshop. I don’t think the judge was too impressed it got 15.





This is a composite shot of the five frames shown below. The background is an out of focus image of my kitchen, kitchens tend to have a lot of stainless steel and glass, hence the highlights. The judge didn't like those! The knife was cut out and a radial blur added, the carrots were also cutout, rotated to suit and then I added a field blur to simulate depth of field. For the reflection I changed the blend mode to Overlay and I think adjusted the Opacity as well. The judge scored it 18





This is a series of pictures taken as an illustration of light painting. Shot as a demonstration for a U3A Practical Photography group Zoom meeting. Starting with an image created with a simple LED torch, then a couple of images where the torch has been diffused using a tissue, then a couple more where the torch has been diffused using a white plastic bag. (The bag can be seen in the top left of the picture.)

Not exactly still life, but using the same equipment and the same space, still life can be used to expand into other areas which include some movement. Water droplet and smoke photography are just two examples.





Or Dancing Flowers

Still Life

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The End