




Still Life Photography

By Paul Potgieter

Submitted for the subject
Visual Communication III

2005

I hereby declare that the work contained in this mini-thesis is my own independent work and that all sources consulted or cited have been indicated in full.



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This mini-thesis on fine art photography consists of the following four essays:

- 1. The History of Still Life Photography*
- 2. The Working environment of Still Life Photography*
- 3. Techniques in Still Life Photography*
- 4. Discussion of Own Portfolio*

THE HISTORY OF STILL LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

By Paul Potgieter

*An essay submitted for the subject
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1. Introduction

Still life photography started in the early 1800`s, the first recorded photograph was taken in 1826. At first still life were paintings. The first still life photographed by Niepce was of a “table set for a meal”

Still life photography is the photography of ideas and the representation of those ideas through photography. It is the creation of new ideas about photography. It is also the realm of imagination, the territory of fantasy, the province of persuasion. Its images intrigue one’s mind and catch the eye.

At first there was no photographer who was just a still life photographer. Roger Fenton, a still life photographer, is actually known for his work in the Crimean War, and Edward Weston, also a still life photographer, is mostly known as a portrait photographer. It wasn’t until the 1830`s, however, that photographer Irvin Penn made still life photography popular. He was the first true still life photographer who was just as good at photographing still lifes as he was at photographing portraits. Penn was also the first still life photographer who photographed trash.

Later on a direct link developed between still life photography and the early days in Hollywood, which caused the photographers to each develop their own style of photography. These unique styles ranged from using old photogramme technique to the use of special lighting effects.

The beginning and evolution of still life photography will subsequently be examined with special emphasis on some of the greatest still life photographers, from the pioneers right up to the present day.

2. Still life photography's beginning in the 1800`s

The first still life photograph was of a table set for a meal, made by Nicéphore Niépce at a time when most of the world did not even know that there was such a thing as photography. Niépce collaborator, Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre, also made still lifes seem to be remarkably good and actually full of life, as demonstrated by the works of Joan Cumberta, Lee Friedlander, Jan Groover, and Abelard Morrel.

During the 1840`s Roger Fenton was particularly known for his coverage of the Crimean War, which is a pity, because it only formed a small portion of his output in areas other than still life photography and also somewhat obscures the major part he played in promoting photography in general. One of his fields of photography was still life. Fenton had many difficulties during the time he was a photographer because the wet plates were extremely impractical: Flies, dust and heat all affected its performance. Fenton died an early death on the 8`Th of August 1869 at the age of 49 after contracting cholera.

*Still life photographer Andreas Feininger was born in Paris, the son of a great painter and composer. He attended technical schools in Weimar and Zerbst, Germany, studying to become an architect. In 1925 he became interested in photography and taught himself the basics of photo technology. In 1939 he went to New York where he wrote over twenty one books. He considered his book *Forms of Nature and Life* (1966) to be his best work ever. It contains images of stunning still life's found in the natural world.*

Imogen Cunningham was born in Portland Oregon in 1883. She studied chemistry at the University of Washington. After graduating she worked at the Curtis Studio, Seattle, Washington where she printed hundreds of Edward S.

Curtis`s negatives of Indians on platinum paper. Later on she studied photographic chemistry and opened a studio in Seattle.

In 1915 her photography became directed towards the flowers and plants in her garden when she had to stay home to look after her family. The work of Imogen Cunningham is greatly respected in America. She loved photographing natural forms and still lifes.

Edward Weston, born in Highland Park, Illinois in 1886, was known as the Californian Photographer. When starting out as a photographer Weston was so poor that he did not have any paper to waste which meant that he had to become proficient in all the technicalities of developing and exposure. In fact, it was through his poverty and not being able to afford to use more than two sheets of paper on any negative, because of that he became the greatest perfectionist of his day. He acquired a complete mastery over tone values and detail that has made him an idol of many photographers. Even when one looks at his original work, such as the prints of two shells or fungus, it is a moving experience in texture and definition: They are as breathtaking as when they were first created in 1921. Weston presented the physical texture of objects. He had the ability to convince the viewer of his personal attitude towards the subject. According to Cecil Beaton & Gail Buckland (1975:159) Weston wrote in one of his diaries: "The camera should be for recording of life, for rendering the very sustenance and quintessence of the thing itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh".

Most of Weston`s life he was short of money, he seldom laughed and hates cities and noise. He found his ideal home in Carmel where, after suffering from Parkinson`s disease for ten years, he died.

In 1963 Albert Renger-Patzch, a well-known photographer, confessed to his friend, the historian Fritz Kempe, that he was not interested in portrait photography for the longest time, but photographing objects did to an even greater degree start to interest him in still life photography. Patzch has been

characterized as the photographer of beautiful things, giving form and dignity to even ugly things. His approach to reality was based on an objective attitude.

According to Patzch (1997:7) One should in photography surely proceed from the essence of the object and attempt to represent it with photographic means alone, regardless of whether it is a human being, landscape, architecture or still life. With all his photographs, like those of plants in the 1920`s and those of trees and rocks in the 1950`s and 60`s, Patzch insisted on representing the reality of nature. He also photographed industrial products and machines with the same decisiveness as he did nature. In his choice of detail Renger-Patzch didn't only consider the plastic appearance of the subject, but also the flat picture surface. He used a lot of cropping in his images in order to make them more visually pleasing.

3. Greatest still life photographer: Irvin Penn

Probably one of the most famous still life photographers has to be Irvin Penn. According to Szarkowski (2001:1) Penn is neither naïve nor artistically unlettered. Penn understands that anything written either by him or of his work in still life will be regarded as a most serious claim, now and in years to come.

During the second half of the twentieth century Penn has been one of photography's innovators and has distinguished himself from other photographers in the oldest and most successful genres: Portraits and still life. Though we are in a new century, Penn will continue to surprise and delight us in both these areas of work.

Before Penn only Edward Weston comes to mind that was just as good in both genres. In painting it is also unusual for an artist to be equally good in both areas. Portraiture and still lifes require very different talents: Still life is a

genre in which the artist has total control over the subject while in portraiture the artist's control is compromised by the will of the subject.

Penn said that for the portrait photographer the challenge might be to suggest how the particular unique wonder now playing the part of the sitter differs, in some significant or at least amusing way, from the three billion other potential sitters who are in principal equally wonderful. With still life the problem is stood on its head: we are given apples and pears and dead game, objects seldom addressed in ringing poetic apologues except occasionally, as with the author of the songs of Solomon, who wrote: "Comfort me with apples for I am sick of love. In general, the stuff of still life, although in principal unique, interests us chiefly as exemplars for a more or less undifferential class" (Penn, 1987:5)

A still life by Penn appeared on the cover of Vogue Magazine in October 1943; however a few months later he volunteered for the American Field Service and the still life idea seems to have been put aside until he returned from the war. By 1947 Penn was again producing dazzling still lifes. Although one cannot compare his magazine still lifes with those that had come before, one can say that their character was parallel to the character of his portraits and his fashion pictures, which is to say that they were very surprising and produced an awareness that they were very surprising and produced an awareness that we were suddenly in an unfamiliar territory.

All still lifes claim that raw materials, if properly seen, contains the necessary plot elements so that the viewer can construct his/ her own story. The summing up of an artists work in still life is likely to be compared to the work of his greatest predecessors. There is no way to avoid this unfair contest between a living artist and the platoon of dead masters averaging hundreds of years of age.

According to Szarkowsky (2001:7) It would be more useful to compare Penn's still lifes not with the great French but with the great Spanish masters, especially Francisco de Zubarian and his predecessors, and particularly Joan

Sanchez Cotan, whose great mysterious still life Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber in the San Diego Museum of Art exhibits a sensibility that seems to him to have much in common with Penn`s work.

Penn has a love for the weight and substance of every grape in the bunch, meaning that he uses every aspect of the image he wants to capture. This quality seems especially evident in his black and white work, and it is perhaps nowhere more moving than in the still life photographs he took while residing in New York, where food and light he used makes a perfect combination of flesh and spirit. As a young man he had some training in art. He gave up his employment as art director for Saks Fifth Avenue, a position that most artists in 1941 would have clung to like a drowning man to a raft, in order to go to Mexico. He went there to see how good a painter he was, or might become. At the end of that year he decided that he was not good enough and put away his brushes and linen canvas, preserving the linen for table cloths.

Before the seventies Penn`s still lifes was made mostly for Vogue and showed only good things to eat and drink. In the early seventies he started focusing more on his private work. He turned away from food photography and started photographing trash. In 1972 he presented enormously surprising images of cigarette butts. The shock of these pictures was derived from their terrific and chilly elegance. After the cigarettes there came the miscellaneous gutter trash, the old bones, the skulls of human beings and other mammals. Also there were the frames of old machines and steel blocks. Nevertheless, the goal of his pictures seems to have been the rediscovery of the possibility of order under circumstances that are never quite propitious, and of materials that are less than promising. One`s next meal for example, is not intrinsically a subject of high philosophical nobility. The poets even to this day have done relatively little with it, which is some measure of the historic achievements of painters.

Irvin Penn`'s pictures celebrated the pleasures of this life for more than 40 years while always acknowledging the bad side, e.g. "the worm in the apple".

4. Still life photography and the early days in Hollywood

There is a direct link between great still life photography and the early days in Hollywood. Long before there were computer special effects, set designers patiently reconstructed the real world in miniature. Set design allowed directors to enhance the world as we know it. Each photographer has his or her own style. Some let the object which is photographed tell the story while others assemble an informal tink tank as a source of information.

A couple of years ago Paul Tillinghast explored the possibilities of the Polaroid camera. After exhaustive experimentation he created a photographic format that he used for commercial applications. He decided that he would create composite photographs around the concept food. Today he still has his own magazine called "Test" in which it is clear he had extended the possibilities of studio photography.

Bill Westheimer was inspired by the photogrammes which Man Ray produced in the 1920`s. Westheimers work was originally unique full colour photographs that were sold through art galleries. However, later on in his career he got focused on getting assignments. Depending on the assignment, he would mostly shoot separate still life images and combined it with his photogram technique.

The photographer Walter Wick was seen as a magician of sorts. His photographs revolved around the impossible. Even though he had done his fair share of advertising work, most of his photographs ended up as covers for magazines such as Newsweek. Wick avoided the "Star Wars" look that so

many people associate with special effects. Instead he carefully blended whatever was necessary into his still lifes.

Jay Allen Lefkowitz allowed the client to explore what is possible in a shot. He would quickly do a set-up and shoot it. This allowed the client to see what he really can do and helped to resolve any problems clients might have had before the final shoot. Once his shots were fully propped, it was shot in 4×5” format with Ektapan film.

Chip Forrelli incorporated a certain glow in his work. While flying back to New York from Canada he noticed an unearthly glow in a landscape. After a great deal of experimentation in his studio, he finally was able to recreate it. Even though his work was mostly advertising still life he incorporated this glow into most of his work. He actually started out working as an architect but found that the studio photography offered the amount of creativity he wanted in his work, so he switched.

5. CONCLUSION

Still life photography didn't come into existence overnight. It took many decades of hard work and the devotion of some of the greatest photographers in history.

Still life photography evolved from a "table set for a meal" made by Niepce in the 1800's to the great still life images that we see everywhere and make up a great deal of advertising.

Each photographer had created his or her own unique technique for photographing still lifes. And instead of the early still lifes that was just "still" objects, still lifes evolved into today's still lifes that radiates "life". This is what photographer Kan (1972:1) meant when he said that he strived to create "still photography that moves".

Photographers developed their own style and own unique point of view. Their unique vision may have evolved out of an unusual technique or a particular sense of style. However, in each case it was the guiding force behind their work. The result was a world where the laws of nature are temporarily suspended.

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Working Environment of Still Life Photography

By Paul Potgieter

*An essay submitted for the subject
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1. Introduction

One of the primary challenges commercial photographers have, is how to give their subjects characteristics that isn't necessarily imagined. For example, how to give a toothbrush, an object we have looked at with boredom and indifference twice daily for our entire lives, a look that will not only revitalize it but also cause us to see it in a new light and, yes, buy it. When first photographing objects, the photographer will have only just begun to imagine the wide range of possibilities open to him or her to capture objects in a new, unfamiliar or even strange light, all in search of redefining our world.

When examining photographs of equipment on the cutting edge of science and technology, like telecommunication products. Laptops, Cd's or microchips, we find not by accident, that the lens is somewhat more free to explore. Deep saturated colour, especially in shots of these high tech objects, can often be eccentric as the object itself. But if the purpose of the still life photographer is to give new life to an object, colour is just one of the tools to be used. The field in which the project is presented must also be considered for choosing appropriate techniques.

According to Lachapelle (1999:1) an image has to be great to begin with; one can't make it great after the fact.

Granted, new techniques in image manipulation have produced some great results and can enhance the artist's vision and correct minor mistakes.

However, talent and vision prevail over short term trends.

2. Advertising Photography

Advertising photography falls under the still life category. Everyday we see advertisements in magazines and newspapers, and being a photographer in this extremely busy environment one has to be able to think and perform well under pressure. Press and advertising photographers have to deal with hundreds of people a day. They must always be ready for a challenge and able to create new and fresh ideas for photographs. Since people's trends change, one must keep up with the different trends and be able to adapt to the changes. Though this form of photography the photographer has a great deal of responsibility, for in the end it will be his or her picture that may or may not influence consumers to buy a certain brand of goods.

These days digital photography is completely replacing film. As technology advances, so does digital cameras also evolve and become better. Digital photography has one big advantage over film photography because of the fact that one can immediately see the resultant image; an unsatisfactory image may simply be deleted. With film, on the other hand, the process is so much slower, because film has to be developed before an image can be seen and this could turn out to be more expensive, especially for a person just starting work in photography.

Film, however, is preferred by the still life photographer. Most advertising photographers work on large format since one picks up better detail on one's image, and large format film can be blown up to enormous size, while digital images may pixelate.

Digital photography will save a lot of money and should be the obvious choice for a starting photographer.

3. Natural still life photography

One of the most aesthetically pleasing fields of photography has to be natural still life photography.

Gardens and scenes from nature spread before us in rich colours, textures and forms. They will never appear the same on two occasions, so the camera provides us with a means of capturing their fleeting images on film.

The changes in nature that accompanies the change in seasons provide us with a good example of this phenomenon. Spring brings us new life with the delicately expanding buds and tender new shoots and flowers bursting forth in rich colours.

Summer is the season of cool green shade with the promise of shelter from the heat. Autumn gives us clear blue skies that provide us with the perfect background for the rich hues of turning leaves.

Winter is often considered to be bleak and uninteresting; it actually exposes the skeleton of a garden, revealing its contrasting forms and textures.

Flowers appear differently through the lens at different times of the day. The mornings cool, soft light gives emphasis to greens and blues, while the strong harsh light of the midday pales the brightest of flowers in comparison. Evening light casts a warm glow in contrast with lengthening shadows.

Through photography it is possible to relive the refreshing coolness of a forest shade or to imagine the heat rising in waves from a field of lavender that grows in a hot, arid climate. One can almost smell the fragrance wafting on the warm breeze. These changing moods can only be captured through the medium of photography.

In the job market the competition is very fierce, and mediocre images simply won't sell. There are very little opportunities for a photographer nowadays as the market is extremely competitive, and those photographers that have a job won't simply roll over and let somebody else have it, therefore it is very important that one considers all the factors responsible for creating a good quality image that someday might sell or land one a job.

In natural still life photography the most important aspects to remember is that one's framing, composition and light is correct.

4. Copyright in the working environment of still life photography

One of the most important aspects of the working environment simply has to be copyright. Copyright is a form of protection, regulated by the copyright Act, that gives photographers the exclusive right to use and reproduce their works. Essentially all original works created or first published after January 1 1978 are protected by copyright. Many works created prior to 1978 are also protected by copyright.

Copyright gives the creator of a work the power to control the work. The owner of the copyright has the exclusive right to control if, when, how and how often his work can be used or copied.

Copyright is not a single right, as the word may suggest, but is a bundle of rights. Any part of the bundle can be retained or sold, leased or given away, either individually or in groups. The ability to dispose of any portion of the bundle of rights is reserved exclusively to the owner of the copyright. For example, if a company is authorized to use a particular photograph in a brochure, the brochure is the only place that the photograph may be used.

The use of the photograph in a advertisement without permission would be a violation of the exclusive rights of the copyright owner.

So, who owns copyright? It is generally the person who creates a work that is the owner of the copyright. Thus photographers own the copyright to their work. The only exception to this rule occurs when a work is created by an employee as part of his employment duties. Or when a work is created under a written "work for hire" agreement.

For example, freelance photographers own the copyright to the images that they allow newspapers or magazines to publish. However, in the absence of an agreement that provides otherwise, a newspaper or magazine own the copyright to all works that their staff photographers create as part of their employment responsibilities.

The only way that copyright can belong to the creator in these situations is if there is an assignment of the copyright. Of course, any photographs created by employees in their own time, would belong to the authors of the works.

Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between an independent contractor and an employee as defined by the Copyright Act. Most employment situations imply a regular salaried employment relationship between the parties. However, there is no precise standard for determining whether a person is an employee or an independent contractor under the Copyright Act.

The copyrights to works created under written agreements belong to the employer. The law requires that there is a written agreement between the parties. Unfortunately, work for hire agreements can be very simple documents that masquerade as invoices or receipts.

Most photographers will not operate on a work for hire basis. They feel to do so would deprive them of their right to fully exploit their talents. Also, they feel they will be treated as employees without having employment security or any employee benefits.

The next obvious question is whether two or more people can own the copyright to a single work. The answer is yes. Copyrights can be owned jointly. If two or more people create a work with the intent that their individual contributions merge into the final product, they will be joint owners of the copyright. The determination of joint ownership can sometimes create difficult situations because joint owners become equal partners of each other with respect to their joint works.

Each joint owner can deal with a joint work as if he owns the property independently of the other. Unless otherwise agreed, neither joint-owner can sell or assign his rights to a third party without notice of the joint-owner.

If a copyrighted work is used without permission it is called infringement. The Copyright Act provides stiff penalties for infringing copyrighted works. Under appropriate circumstances penalties can include monetary damages, all profits earned by the infringer from the unauthorized use for the copyrighted work and attorney's fees. A court can also order the destruction of all infringing copies.

Even if one changes a few things in a copyrighted work and uses it, it is infringement. The right to make copies is reserved exclusively to the copyright owner. The idea for a work of art however can be copied. It is the expression of the idea that is fully protected. Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between an idea and an expression because the idea can get lost in the expression.

If someone infringes one's work one does not have to catch him in the act. It is also not necessary to have definite proof that an infringer copied a work in order to prove copyright infringement. Infringement can be established simply by proving that the alleged infringer had access to the copyrighted work and the offending work is substantially similar to the original.

The concept of substantial similarity is another tricky copyrighting concept. For example, making an illustration directly from a photograph without permission is risking infringement; if the illustration were substantially similar to the photograph, there will be an infringement. The degree of similarity between an original work and a copy can cover a broad range from an exact copy to substantial similarity. The degree of similarity is a question for the court to decide. Common sense and good judgment prevail.

The owner of a copyright can always claim whatever damages he has actually sustained as a result of the infringement plus whatever profits were earned by the infringer from the unauthorized use of a work.

However, copyrighted work may in some instances be used without risking infringement. The concept of fair use permits the use of copyrighted materials for certain purposes. For example, a newspaper can publish copyrighted works for purpose of reporting news and a teacher may make multiple copies of certain works for classroom use without risking infringement. In order to determine if the use of copyrighted works is fair or an infringement, one must determine how much of the copyrighted work is used and the impact this use will have on the potential market for the copyrighted work. If large portions of copyrighted work are used or if the use lessens the potential market for the work, there will be infringement.

According to Epstein (2004:3) copyright protects original works of authorship that are fixed in a tangible form. The only essential condition that the law

requires is that the work is original. For example, if a photographer were to make an exact copy of the Mona Lisa, the resulting image would not be protected by copyright because an exact copy does not constitute an original work. However, if the same photographer were to photograph several people standing in front of the Mona Lisa, that picture could be copyrighted because there is some element of originality in the image. The law does not require much originality, but there has to be some. Also, only those parts of a work that are original may be copyrighted. Therefore the copyright would not extend to any other part of the Mona Lisa that might appear in the photograph.

No one can acquire rights to work that are not their own or that are no longer protected by copyright.

Unfortunately ideas cannot be copyrighted. The only thing that can be copyrighted is the expression of the idea. This is sometimes a tricky concept. Copyright protection can extend to a written description of an idea or to a sketch for a proposed photograph that might be drawn by an art director of an advertising agency.

However, copyright protection does not extend to the idea itself. Only the tangible expression of the idea is protected, that is, the particular literary or pictorial expression of the idea conceived by the author.

For example, no one can claim the exclusive right to photograph the Statue of Liberty. This landmark has probably been photographed from every conceivable angle since it was first constructed. However, if a photographer were to combine an image of the Statue of Liberty with a picture of recent immigrants, the combined photograph, if it is original, would be a unique expression and thus be protected by copyright.

A copyright originates at the moment a work is created. For a photograph, the copyright is created at the moment the image is developed. If a photograph is taken with a modern digital camera, the copyright originates at the time the image is saved on a computer disk or on a hard drive. As long as the work exists in tangible form or can be understood or reproduced with the aid of a machine, it is copyrighted.

Conclusion

A still life photographer has a variety of different fields to choose from and there is most certainly work for the starting photographer. If he pays attention to the copyright law and produces only original images, the still life photographer has a wide range of possibilities to explore and in the end find work that best suits him.

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Techniques used in still life photography

By Paul Potgieter

An essay submitted for the subject

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1. Introduction

Still-life photography is one of the hardest photographic genres to define. Portraits, nudes, architecture, lingerie and food all raise certain expectations, which play a decisive role when it comes to defining those genres but still life is another matter. It ranges from advertising shots, to the most personal of work. Since this is the case, one must continuously strive to be, and beat, the best.

Because of the extreme competition and the obvious need to produce a unique image, since the very first picture was taken people started experimenting with different kinds of techniques since the very first picture was taken. The techniques used by still-life photographers, as well as the equipment used to create those techniques, form the focus of this inquiry.

Since digital photography is starting to dominate the market, today one simply cannot be competitive without going digital. Subsequently some of the techniques used to manipulate an image once it has been converted into digital format, are also discussed in some detail concerning its relevance to still-life photography.

2. Studios & Settings

A basic problem for the amateur – and indeed for the professional, if other work demands the same space – is the opportunity to leave a still life substantially set up, whether overnight or longer. On the bright side though, many still life's require very little space for themselves: even a diningroom table may be big enough.

The lights and the camera can be removed and replaced, if need be, without disturbing the essential integrity of the composition, though a Polaroid reference of the set-up can be a useful guide when it comes to re-creating the lighting and camera angle.

It can also be a useful exercise to go looking for “found” still life's; that is, for compositions which present themselves in everyday life. One photographer might find inspiration in the garden, with rusty watering cans and weathered planters. Another might see pictures in the kitchen, weather in well-worn utensils or in the sleek lines of something new.

3. Cameras, lenses, film and filters

Surprisingly many still life's are shot on 35mm film, and roll film, while over half of all still life's are shot on 4 × 5 and 8 × 10 inch.

The preponderance of cut film reflects a number of things. One is the ease of focusing and composing on a big ground glass, another is the usefulness of camera movements. Studio-based still-life photographers are normally addicted to monorails with all the movements they can get, including back rise and cross.

According to Hicks (2003:6) large format cameras are for lazy photographers – one can always get the effect one wants, one way or another.

The way in which large formats can both render texture and “see into shadows”, however, make it very popular among photographers, and accounts for a third possible reason for its popularity.

The former is fairly easy to understand – 8 × 10 inch, in particular, can capture texture in a way which all but defies belief – while the latter is easy to recognize but hard to explain.

The popularity of cut film also reflects the fact that, normally, still-life photographers spend more time setting up than they do actually shooting.

Often as few as two sheets of film may be the fruit of several hours or even days of setting up, so another technique that a still life photographer may use is to shoot a few spares if he or she suspects that the picture might be useful for more than one application. A reportage photographer simply could not afford to shoot 4 × 5 inch with the profligacy which is required by modern newspapers, even if he or she could carry the weight.

Polaroid is nonetheless of fundamental importance to most still-life photographers. Today it is quite usual to work towards precisely the right set up and lighting by using several generations of Polaroid, and once again, this explains why 4 × 5 inch is so popular. Polaroids are big enough to see and they are also affordable.

After all, an 8 × 10 inch Polaroid costs close to three times as much as a 4×5 inch Polaroid, and even if one uses only half a dozen Polaroids this can add up to a fairly significant expense. Some major photographers freely admit that, if cost was no object, they would shoot almost exclusively on 8 × 10 inch, but budgetary constraints force them to use 4 × 5 inch.

This may also explain why relatively few amateurs shoot still life's: 4 × 5 inch is still not widely regarded as an amateur format, though it seems to be gaining ground surprisingly fast, which may be a reaction to automation and electronics. Old-fashioned large format cameras are by no means idiot proof, but if you are not an idiot, it gives you unparalleled opportunities for control.

Another important aspect of still-life photography is the type of filters one will use to create the desired result. Miscellaneous devices and effects filters are considered in the paragraphs that follow.

3.1 Soft focus attachments

A recurrent vogue in certain types of photography, such as portraiture and still-life photography, is for a soft-focus effect given by the spreading of the highlights of a subject in adjacent areas. Special lenses using residual spherical aberration to give this effect are available; but these are expensive and limited in application.

A soft-focus attachment is a cheap alternative for use with any lens. Two basic types of attachments are available, one having a number of concentric grooves in plain glass and the other having small regular or irregular deposits of refractive material, randomly scattered over a flat glass disc.

The former type gives diffusion effects that depend on the aperture in use, the latter type operates independently of the lens aperture. The softening of the image results from the effects of scattering and refraction due to the presence of the attachment. Various degrees of diffusion are available.

The use of soft-focus attachments at the negative printing stage gives results different from those given at the camera exposure stage; in particular, the

effect of diffusion at the enlarging stage is to spread the dark areas, whereas diffusion at the taking stage spreads the light areas. Also available are devices termed “haze effect” and “fog effect” filters, which find particular application in landscape photography.

3.2 The Multiple-image prisms

These are prismatic attachments, made of glass or molded plastics material, which give an array of repeated images of a single subject. These additional images are typically in horizontal, vertical, slanting or symmetrical arrangements. The central image is, however, generally of poor quality and the remaining images may be severely degraded.

3.3 The Split Field Close-up

This uses half of a close up lens in a semi-circular shape in front of the lower part of the camera lens, thereby allowing simultaneous focus on both near and far objects with an indistinct region between them.

3.4 The Centre-focus lens

This is a glass disc with a clear central region and the outer annular region lightly ground so as to give an image with normal central definition and blurred peripheral detail.

3.5 Star-burst and twinkle devices

Star-burst and twinkle effects are produced by a filter bearing closely-spaced engraved lines, which by scattering and diffraction cause the directional spreading of small intense highlights to give a “star burst” effect to these regions, without seriously affecting overall definition.

Occasionally, diffraction gratings are used alone or in tandem to produce small spectra from every small highlight or light source in the picture area.

3.6 Graduated colour filters

Graduated colour filters are filters tinted over about half the filter area, with a gradual transition between the coloured and clear areas, so as to give selective filtration of parts of the subject. For example, a graduated yellow filter may be used to filter the sky in a still life placed outside, leaving the foreground unaltered.

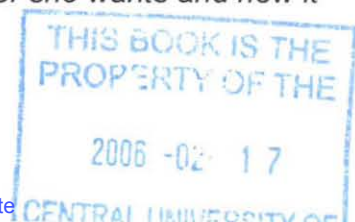
Pairs of differently coloured filters can be used in tandem in opposition to give selective filtration to different zones of the scene. Filter holders to allow both sliding and rotational movement are necessary.

4. The Team

One might reason that this does not qualify as a technique, however this is a technique since it is a method one uses in order to create an image.

It is quite possible to work on one's own, but it is often vastly easier to work with an assistant who can move things while the photographer looks at the image on the ground glass. Amateurs can press wives, children or friends into service without necessarily demanding too much of their time. Assistants spend most of their time doing nothing, but when they are needed they are indispensable.

Some still-life photographers work with stylists, and others are heavily reliant on model-makers and set builders, but it is worth remembering that in both cases the photographer has to work out what he or she wants and how it



needs to be done: The job of the stylist, model-makers and set-builders is to execute the photographer's vision to the highest possible standard.

5. Techniques used by some well paid still life photographers

5.1 Bill Westheimer

In the twenties the photographer Man Ray, pioneered a new type of photography he called the photogram. Basically it involved creating a picture in the darkroom without using a camera but just the enlarger. Inspired by Ray Westheimer originally began his career making unique full colour photographs that were sold through art galleries.

When Westheimer realized the unusual commercial applications, he focused on getting assignments. Most of Westheimers clients came through his sophisticated direct mail marketing.

Westheimer's client mix was composed of editorial, book jackets and corporate work. Art directors approached Westheimer with an initial idea. But so much of what Westheimer produces depended on darkroom magic that the final photograph was always a major enhancement of the first layout.

Depending on the particular demands of the assignment, Westheimer sometimes shot a separate still life and combined it with the photogram technique.

5.2 Walter Wick

It is said that Walter Wick sees himself as a magician of sorts; his photographs revolve around the impossible. Though he has his share of corporate and advertising work, most of Wick's photographs end up as covers for magazines.

He avoids the hard-edged Star Wars look that so many associates with special effects. Instead he quietly blends whatever is necessary into the photograph to achieve an old-fashioned brain-teaser.

For Wick, his arsenal of special effects includes multiple exposures, model making and making objects appear on fire, floating or balancing. For Wick there is no limit to what can be done.

5.3 Chip Forelli

Several years ago while flying home from a shoot, Forelli noticed an unearthly glow coming from the landscape. The image stayed with him and he tried to duplicate it in his work.

After a great deal of experimentation he finally figured it out, and these days most of his clients come for "that glow".

Digital Manipulation of images

6. Classic photo effects

Until recently, certain photographic effects such as solarization, lith and bas relief, were the domain of those with advanced darkroom skills – however, digital imaging has changed all that.

Now such classic techniques are available to anyone with a computer – and one does not need smelly chemicals or a darkened room. All one needs is an ordinary image and an image manipulation program offering solirization, lith and bas relief options – which most of the popular ones do.

6.1 Lith – pure black and white

Lithographic film and printing- lith for short – reduces monochrome images to pure black and white. This is easier to do on the computer than in the darkroom, with the added advantage that one can control exactly what will be black and what will be white.

6.2 Reticulation – visible grain

In conventional silver hilade photography, the grain-like effect of reticulation is caused by processing incorrectly, but the result can be highly attractive. This effect can also be emulated on the computer.

6.3 Solirization

This dramatic technique is hard to control and difficult to repeat in the darkroom. On the computer however, one can simply dial in the same settings and get the same result time after time.

6.4 Bas-relief – embossed effect

The metallic-embossed effect called bas relief, in which the image seems to stand out 3-dimensionally, is not easy to create and control in conventional photography, but is easily achieved digitally.

There also are lots of filter effects like mosaic, watercolour, ripple, spatter, twirl, and glowing edges to experiment with.

7. Conclusion

It is obvious that one must be up to date with the latest techniques to stay competitive. Not only should one keep an eye on continuously evolving techniques, but also on changes in equipment and studio lights and basically knowing what type of camera to use for what kind of shoot – does one need to use a large format like the 6 × 7 or 8 × 10 or the normal 35mm camera. Another important factor that one should keep one's eye on is the digital manipulation software available, so as to make sure that one is up to standard with computer editing skills.

Simply stated one should be able to know when to use what technique if it is necessary to do so in order to enhance the overall appearance of the image.

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Discussion of own portfolio

By Paul Potgieter

*An essay submitted for the subject
Visual Communication III*

October 2005

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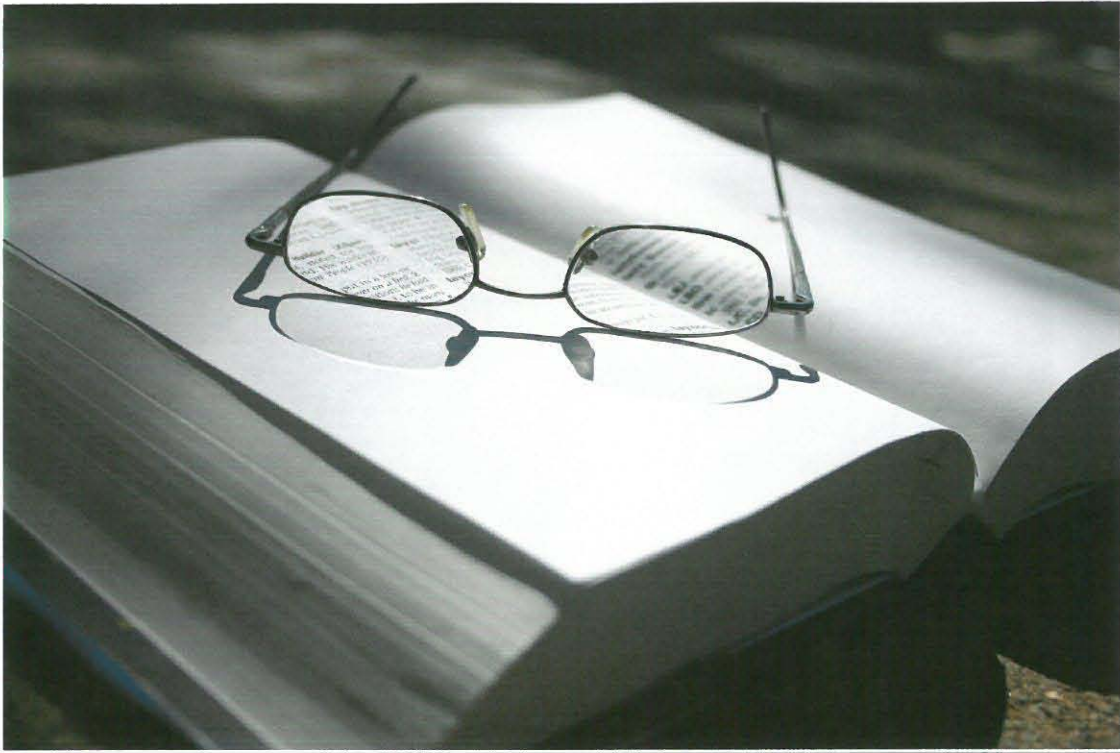
Introduction

Each still life photographer has his/her own unique style of photography. Some use old techniques like the photogram technique, while others like to play with different angles, and some prefer using alternate light sources.

As a result of the enormous amount of competition, each photographer should be able to bring something new and exciting to his particular field of photography. A new unknown photographer should have the ability to compete with photographers that have been in the photographic business for up to twenty years.

This is accomplished by using ones ability and talent to create ones own unique style of photographs.

Up till now there has been an in depth study done about the history, working environment and different techniques involved in photographing still life's. In this section we will be looking at the authors own images and techniques used to create still life images.

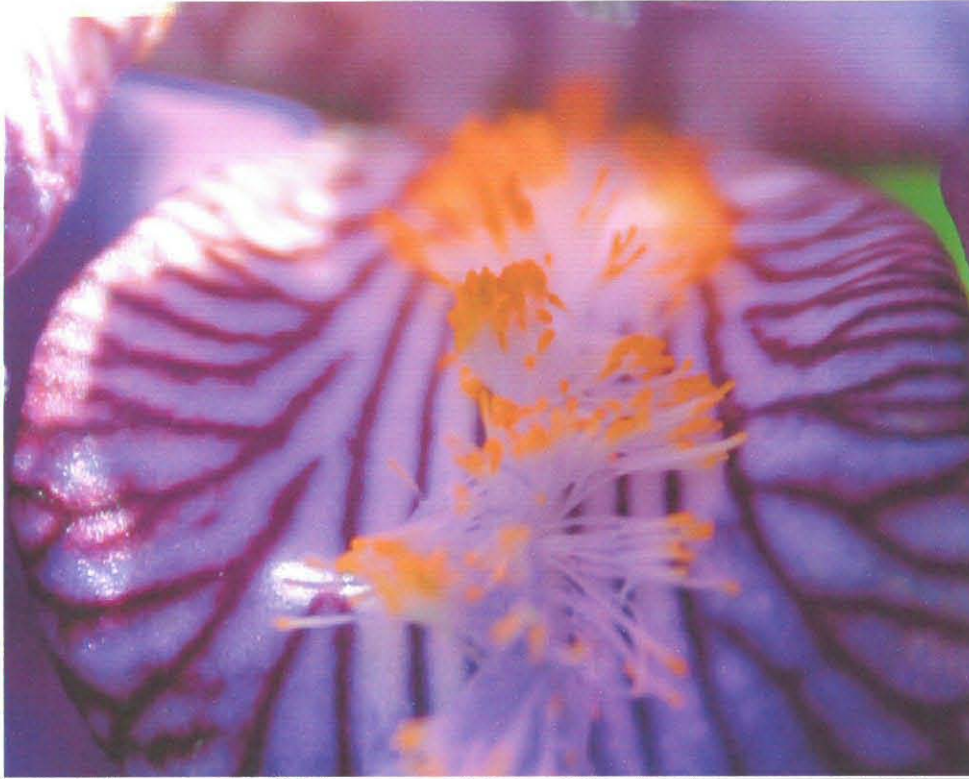


1. Plate 1; The deeper meaning by Paul Potgieter.

In this image I wanted to show that there is a deeper meaning in everything, this is accomplished by placing a pair of glasses on the empty pages of a book and then letting one see the script that should be on the page through the lenses of the glasses. Thus implying that you can't judge someone by what you see on the surface and that one should take a deeper look at it.

I created this image by firstly taking a book and placing white paper on it; secondly I placed a pair of glasses onto the blank pages of the book. The book with the glasses on it was then placed outside in the shade of a tree in order to get the dramatic effect I wanted. I then took the image at a slight angle using my 35mm Digital camera.

After the image was transported to the computer I used the digital manipulation software I had available to edit in the text into the lenses of the glasses.



2. Plate 2; Summer by Paul Potgieter

Since summer was nearing its end, I decided that an image of the beautiful flowers in the landscape was essential. Since straightforward shots are almost always done of flowers I decided to go a bit closer and create something new and exciting.

This image was taken in the early morning using natural light only. I used a close up filter with my normal 35mm Film SLR camera with an 18 – 55mm lens. The negative was then scanned into the computer. The only digital manipulation that was done to the image was cropping out certain unwanted parts of the image and adjusting the saturation in order to get a more brilliant colour.



3. Plate 3; I Spy by Paul Potgieter

Since I am also vastly interested in taking portraits, I wanted to try to combine a portrait with a still life.

The image was taken in the studio using my digital SLR along with studio Flash. The subject was illuminated from the left using studio flash and from the top using a soft box.

The only manipulation that was done to the image was by adjusting the contrast in order to make the colour of the eye more definite and thus keeping the attention of the viewer on the eye itself.



4. Plate 4; Untitled by Paul Potgieter

For this still life I wanted to experiment a bit with advertising photography.

I placed the subject outside under a tree on a wooden chair. The image was taken at a slight angle using a 35mm Digital camera. Only on camera flash was used.

After the image was transferred to the computer, I realized that the colors were very dull and uninteresting, so by means of an image manipulation software program, I discarded the image colour and adjusted the brightness and contrast of the image.

However I still was not satisfied with the result so, I decided to use one of the many different filters available in manipulation software. I decided to go with the "Film Grain" filter at a radius of 4 with the intensity set to 10.



5. Plate 5; The vineyard by Paul Potgieter

I wanted to incorporate some degree of movement into my image, so I decided on using a liquid to create this feeling.

Firstly I placed the wine glass on a mirror surface under a vineyard using the natural light that shines through the leaves as the only lightsource.

The camera, a normal 35 mm SLR, was then placed at a slight higher angle than the glass itself on a tripod. An assistant then poured the wine into the glass while I photographed the image.

For this image I decided on a faster shutter speed to freeze the flow of the liquid rather than blur it with a slower shutter speed.

There was no digital manipulation done to this image.



6. Plate 6; Reflections by Paul Potgieter

In this image I wanted to experiment with different lighting effects.

The image was taken in the studio, using natural light that was reflected off the surface from a CD.

The subject was placed on a white backdrop near to a window; I then set up the 6 × 7 camera at the appropriate angle on a tripod.

By manipulating the position of the CD in the light I got a spectrum of colours which I then shined through the base of the glass in order to get the different colours.

Since I had to control the position of the CD and take the image at the same time, I used a cable release in order to release the shutter. There was no digital manipulation done to the image.



8. Plate 8; Violet by Paul Potgieter.

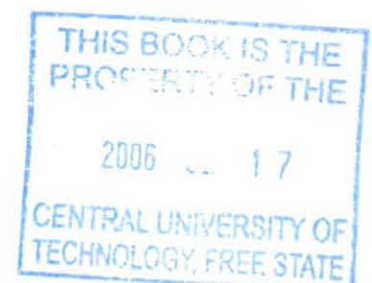
With this image I wanted to create something that is visually pleasing with brilliant colour.

The image was taken at about 12 am using my Digital SLR.

Firstly I placed the subject on a mirror which was placed outside facing upwards towards the clear blue sky. I then got down to my stomach in order to get the lowest angle possible.

The image was taken at an F-stop of 5.6 and a shutter speed of 2000. Since it was taken in the middle of the day the image colours were a bit dull, in order to correct this, I adjusted the brightness and contrast of the image by using image manipulation software.

However no other digital alterations were made to the image.





9. Plate 9; Addict by Paul Potgieter

In this instance I wanted to incorporate a documentary type of feel into the image, I wanted to place emphasis on the modern tendency to get addicted to prescription drugs.

The image was taken with a normal 35mm SLR camera and black & white film.

In order to give the desired feel to the image I decided that it would be best to place the emphasis on the pills itself, thus the only thing that is in focus in the image is the pills.

By using Depth of field and my on camera flash I managed to create the image I desired.

No digital manipulation of any sort was used on this image.



10. Plate 10; Ten by Paul Potgieter

Due to the fact that South-Africa has just celebrated ten years of democracy, I had the desire to create something that could be a symbol of piece and unity, so I decided on the praying hands.

In this image I used black and white film, in order to help me promote the deeper meaning of the image; the black and white film used implies the black and white people in South Africa.

The Bangles on the one hand shows the black community while the other hand represents the white community, the hands are placed peacefully together, showing that over the past ten years we have united into one great country.

The image was taken with my normal SLR camera; it was a straight forward photograph using natural light only.

There was no digital manipulation done to this image.

Conclusion

Photography is a vast and interesting field, and that only a select few photographers have the creative ability and devotion to make it in the tough and highly competitive work environment.

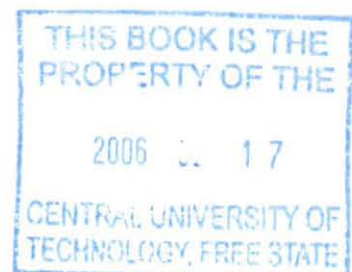
Since the earliest of days photographers has continuously strived to be the best in their particular field of photography, either by using different techniques, different lighting sources, different angles or simply by being creative.

In my photography I have aspired to use as much of the different methods available to create visually pleasing images. I also believe that an image should be perfect the moment that you release the shutter of the camera, and that image manipulation software should only be used to enhance the characteristics of an already great image.

Thus still life photography should most definitely be considered as an art form, since artists use their brush and paints in order to create an image – We as photographers use our cameras as the “brush” and the film as our “paint” and by combining these two, just like a Painter, we create art.



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