

PCQC Video Presentation

Fundamentals of Photography II with Joel Sartore—National Geographic

Lesson 14: Art Photography: Still Life

Still lifes don't move; they are composed and are like paintings. The objects of a still life can be anything, from flowers, to foods, to pen collections, to anything you can imagine. The objects of a still life can be manipulated to set up the composition; lighting can be added, and photos can be taken at various angles and elevations.

Lesson Takeaways

- One classic technique is to shoot the photo from above but you can also experiment with other angles, either side angles or below angles. Always pay attention to the lighting, shadows and backgrounds.
- Take your time to craft scenes carefully. Try different arrangements and come back later with fresh ideas. Experiment with different backgrounds such as black velvet or a pure white sheet.
- **Found still lifes** are those that are naturally occurring, already composed, and are discovered by you. **Constructed still lifes** are those you compose yourself. To get the desired effect wait for the right light or use reflectors, a shade, or a flash. Sometimes you can slightly manipulate a found still life to get the effect you are looking for.
- Try to have your still life highlight a single point of interest.
- Often you may want to use a tripod and cable release for your photograph. A tripod will let you shoot using a very low ISO and very small apertures so you get a good depth of field. At other times you may want to focus on one particular item in your composition requiring you to use a large aperture to get a narrow depth of field. Pay attention to framing your composition and consider every inch of the photograph. If something is in your picture, it should be there because you want it and not by accident.

Assignment

- Set up a still life in your home based on a theme. Arrange objects on a complementary background. Experiment with lighting, depth of field, angles, shadows, colors etc. Come back to your arrangement the next day to try new ideas.