

Photography Newsletter, Issue 1
December 12, 2010

I have made a recent foray into photography. So far, I have been taking artistic nudes. I find the human body to be beautiful and a work of art. Besides, all you really have to do is get the lighting right and you're set. Maybe a little bit of touching up with software. Funny, I am having trouble doing simple things like having one thing in focus and the rest blurry. I have adjusted the settings *ad nauseum* and can't get the effect I want. More practice will make it happen, hopefully.

If you are a photographer, you will find this issue a bit elementary, as I want to introduce simple concepts first. Besides, it's in line with the level I am currently exploring.

The Basics

Lighting

I have found that for starting out, the most important things are lighting, shutter speed, the f-stop, and ISO.

As for lighting, I use the bare bones: two umbrellas, a reflector, and two soft boxes. I use the soft boxes most.



Basic soft boxes.

Some photographers use large soft boxes or octodomes (around 8') to get the desired effect. I have found that simply using a soft box with the occasional umbrella provides adequate lighting for my purposes. Books discuss a wide array of options, but I can't spend a lot of money on these things.



Standard umbrellas.

Background

I also have black and white muslin backgrounds. Muslin is most typically an unbleached or white cloth, produced from carded cotton yarn.



A black muslin background with stand and carry case.

Camera Settings

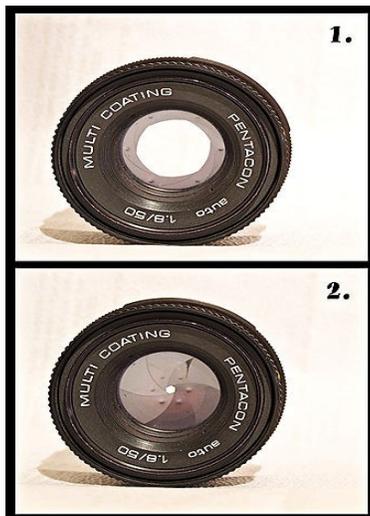
These are the basic camera settings that I mentioned: shutter speed, f-stop, and ISO.

Shutter Speed

You can control the amount of light that reaches the photograph by first adjusting the shutter (a photographic device that administers the exposure by limiting the time over which light is admitted) speed. The longer the photograph is exposed to light, the more light gets in the photograph.

Aperture

Another way you can control the amount of light that reaches the photograph is by adjusting the aperture, or f-stop (it is measured in f-numbers, and is currently referred to as an f-stop). The aperture is a hole in an adjustable diaphragm set between the lens and the shutter.



A large (top) and small (bottom) aperture. Typical f-stops are f/1.4, f/2, f/2.8, f/4, etc.

Contrary to what you might think, increasing the aperture allows less

light to reach the lens, making the photograph appear more dark. The lower shutter speed causes the photograph to be lighter.

ISO

ISO stands for International Standards Organization, and it is a standardized industry scale for measuring sensitivity to light. The ISO measures the sensitivity of a digital image sensor. ISO is measured in numbers, with the lowest number being the least sensitive to light, (e.g. ISO 50 or 100), and the highest number being the most sensitive to light, (e.g. ISO 6400). Lower ISO settings limit the amount of light in a photograph. Most photographers like to use a low ISO for natural light. A standard ISO is 100. Going to 200 would double the amount of light that is in the photograph.

Other

A main necessity for any photographer is the tripod. It holds the camera still so that you do not get blurry photographs.



A standard tripod.

In addition, a table-top tripod can be used to capture an object or person on the floor, or mounted on a table, chair, etc. to get the right stable shot.

Richard Avedon (1923 – 2004)

Richard Avedon is considered one of the best photographers in the world. He set up his own studio in 1946, and began providing images for magazines including *Vogue* and *Life*. In 1966, Avedon left Harper's Bazaar to go to work for Vogue. He photographed most of the covers of that magazine from 1973 to 1988. He did fashion advertisements – such as those for Gianni Versace and the Calvin Klein Jeans campaign featuring a 15-year old Brooke Shields.



Sotheby's

Stephanie Seymour

In addition to his fashion work, he began to branch out and photographed the Civil Rights Movement in 1963, patients of mental hospitals, protestors of the Vietnam War, and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

His portraits can be easily identified by their minimalist style. He often has subjects look directly into the camera posed in front of a sheer white background. Sometimes, to get a creative shot, he would try to evoke emotions by discussing uncomfortable topics. This allowed him to capture sides of someone's personality that others may not have been able to create.



Avedon is also distinguished by his large prints, which sometimes measure over 3 feet in height.

Avedon became the first staff photographer for *The New Yorker* in 1992. He has won many awards for his photography. He had numerous museum exhibitions around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Judy Garland.

Alice Mayer, Mayer Photography

My favorite contemporary photographer is Alice Mayer of Mayer Photography. In her past life, she was an environmental policy manager, so her shift to photography was taking a risk and it turned out beautifully. I actually have the privilege of knowing Ms. Mayer, as she was once my boss. I remember, working in Washington, D.C., that I was sick of people calling pigeons "rats with wings", so I asked

her to take a photograph of a pigeon that captures its inner beauty. She took this:



She met my challenge.

Alice Mayer has over thirty years' experience as a photographer, with her expertise in photographic design, capture and expression receiving recognition long before she became professional in 2002. Ms. Mayer studied black and white photography at the prestigious Corcoran School of Art and portrait photography with notable artists including Dennis Craft and Frank Frost. She is a member of the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP), Advertising Photographers of America (APA), Professional Digital Imaging Association (PDIA), Professional Photographers of America (PPA), and an award winning member of Professional Photographers of North Carolina (PPNC) and Wedding and Portrait Photographers International (WPPI). Her art is on display in collections in Alabama, Arizona, California, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia.

Ms. Mayer takes many different types of photographs. My favorite are the delightfully weird "[Doll Studies](#)". She says, "I can't say where the notion came from, but I keep returning to the photographic study of simple dolls. The clean lines of these toys show off interestingly in many different

environments. I like the fact that they are little human replicas, yet I have them doing things that I might not suggest for a live model. The doll studies represent a flight of whimsy."



Ms. Mayer also takes portraits, photographs weddings, and takes photographs when she is out and about. She has a great [abstracts gallery](#) and [abandoned collection](#) as well.



Abstract.



Abandoned.

I encourage you to [check out her work](#).

What I've Been Up To

As I mentioned, I have been doing artistic nudes. Three shots so far. Each one was finalized on the third shot, so it didn't take long. My use of shadows and light turned out well. I will continue this genre as well as take photographs of my favorite subject matter, old barns and old buildings. I will have to get over the frustration of not getting what I want with minimal effort. But if the book tells me to use certain settings, that should get me the effect I am looking for – but that hasn't worked.

I will be buying a telephoto lens next month. That will give me more options. Right now I am using the kit lens, which is 18 – 55 mm.

Thanks for reading. I plan to do this newsletter regularly, perhaps bi-monthly.

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