

TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS

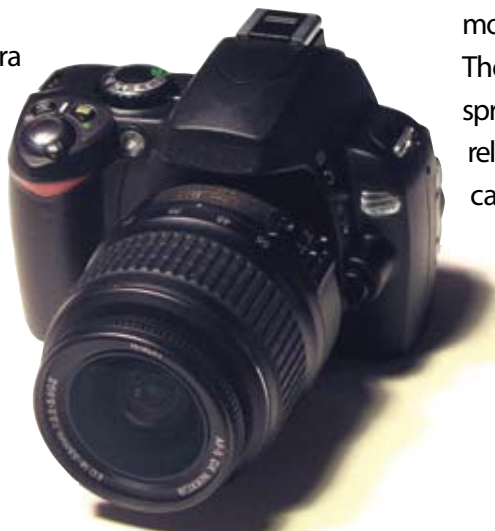
Many artists are notorious for braving severe topography, extreme weather and insects to seek just the right outdoor location. Sometimes such sketching and painting experiences are not possible. Maybe it's raining, the light or mood is quickly changing, there isn't any level space to set up your easel, you're moving in a vehicle and happen to notice that "great subject," or you need time to study details but the animals will not sit still. In these and many other cases, photography comes to the rescue.

There were several realist artists of the past, one being Gustave Courbet, who were introduced to the camera and its possibilities and declared it to be a "unique sketchbook." The role of the camera to artists is to help you remember and understand what you see. It is then your role as artist to go beyond the obvious and bring out the subjective feelings you have for a particular subject. Your own photographs will be your best source for paintings because they show the subjects you record and reveal your own sense of visual design.

DIGITAL CAMERAS

Some people have said that digital cameras are really micro-processors with lenses attached, and they aren't far off. The sensor in the camera captures the image information, and then the image processor in the camera goes to work. You can shoot on what's called the default or factory settings mode (that is how the manufacturer thinks your pictures should look), but you also can set up the ISO, saturation, sharpness and even choose whether to shoot in color or black and white.

A digital camera allows you to take hundreds of photos quickly



Digital SLR Camera

so you have plenty to choose from for reference; I would suggest a 64MB or higher memory card for this reason.

Once the image is captured on your memory card, the process is hardly over. After downloading the image to your computer, you can manipulate the image in a variety of ways, so much so that you can even correct flaws that would otherwise cause you to trash the picture. Apart from image fixes, there is a whole new realm of creativity where your imagination can run wild!

35MM SLR (FILM) CAMERA

The single-lens reflex (SLR) is the most successful of all camera designs. This remarkable achievement has happened through the recent advances in design and innovation.

There are many advantages with the SLR: It is lightweight, easy to handle and operate, compact, has eye-level viewing, a built-in exposure meter and an astonishing array of interchangeable lenses. The SLR receives the image through the camera lens onto an angled, moveable mirror that transfers the image to a glass screen. The image is identical to the one received by the film. A spring mechanism links the mirror to a focal plane shutter release, so when the shutter is tripped the mirror automatically snaps out of the path of exposure.

For shooting with a standard 35mm SLR camera, I use Ektachrome 160 Tungsten slide film. These slides produce fantastic color, are stored easily and can be quickly dropped into a carousel to view and reference with a slide projector.



Standard SLR Camera



COLOR VS. BLACK AND WHITE

Black-and-white photos help you see value contrasts, light, shadow and form. They encourage you to be interpretive in your selection of colors. If you are painting in a photorealistic style (producing a painting that looks like a photograph), color photography will serve your needs best.



DIGITAL MANIPULATION

Digital images make photo improvements easy! I took these photos from inside a building on a rainy day. The colors of the photo on the left are drab and the raindrops on the window are distracting. As seen in the photo on the right, I made this scene much brighter, intensified the colors and cloned out some of the distracting droplets by using Adobe Photoshop imaging software. It can be a time-consuming process to alter images on a computer, but it can also be a whole lot of fun.



Learning How to Take Good Photographs

No matter what your photography skill level, taking good photographs takes work.

Talking to other photographers and researching through books, magazine articles and online resources will be a big help in improving your skills.

My favorite book getting started was Kodak Guide to 35mm Photography. (I used the 1989 edition published by Eastman Kodak Company, but the newer edition from Sterling Publishing has great reviews as well.)

PHOTOGRAPHING INDOOR SUBJECTS



To create a dramatic painting, choosing the type of light source most desirable to you can be just as important as choosing the right subject matter.

Sometimes a subject, depending on how it's lit, can be more dynamic indoors drenched in natural light streaming through a window as opposed to outdoors in natural light.

There are other occasions when an artificial light source can evoke a much more dynamic mood than the natural light from the sun. You have to experiment.

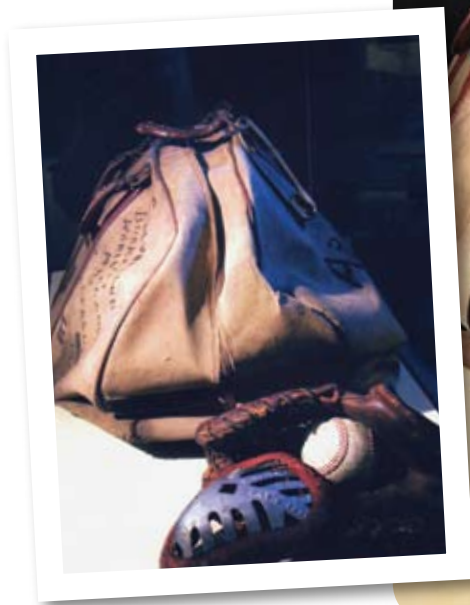
Your camera's flash unit can sometimes give you an extra light boost. A double light source can create interesting shadows. When shooting with a flash or double light source, let one light source dominate while the other complements and enhances the main source. Remember to experiment to see what looks best for your needs.

SETTING UP YOUR ARTIFICIAL LIGHTING

- **Backdrop**—Clamp white foamboard onto an easel to block out objects in the background.
- **Photo lamps**—Place 500-watt floodlights evenly on either side of the object.
- **Tripod**—Always use a tripod to avoid blurred photos due to camera movement.

USING MULTIPLE LIGHT SOURCES

Notice the subtle secondary light source on the right side of the bag. You can make more complex patterns of light and shadow by introducing a second or even a third spotlight and shining them onto the subject from different directions.



LEGACY OF FORGOTTEN LEAGUES
watercolor on 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed paper
19" × 15" (48cm × 38cm)



NATURAL LIGHT FROM A WINDOW

Try to make your lighting of the subject as dramatic and powerful as you can so you can produce a more dynamic painting. In most cases, natural sunlight through a window will by itself produce dramatic lighting with dynamic shadows, no matter what the subject. This bowl was shot at 1/15 sec at f8.



NATURAL, REFLECTED LIGHT

Notice how the sunlight streaming through the window onto the ceramic chess pieces has a slightly different effect on each piece. The light from the piece on the right is reflected onto the piece on the left. This photo was shot at 1/13 sec at f8.



ONE LIGHT SOURCE—ARTIFICIAL

When shooting with an artificial light source, you may have to move the light source around to get good shadows and lighting situations, especially if it's a single light source. In this photo, the lighting is directly overhead, causing short shadows. If you want longer shadows, the light would have to be moved. This photo was shot at 1/20 sec at f8.

You might also consider incorporating the light source itself into the composition. Table or floor lamps can create a cozy and intimate mood.

TWO LIGHT SOURCES—ARTIFICIAL

The lighting here is a two-light-source setup. This situation will usually produce much softer shadows when lit evenly from both sources. However, if one light is strong and the other gives just a hint of light, you will produce a more dramatic setting. This group- ing was shot at 1/15 sec at f8.



Finding a Subject Indoors

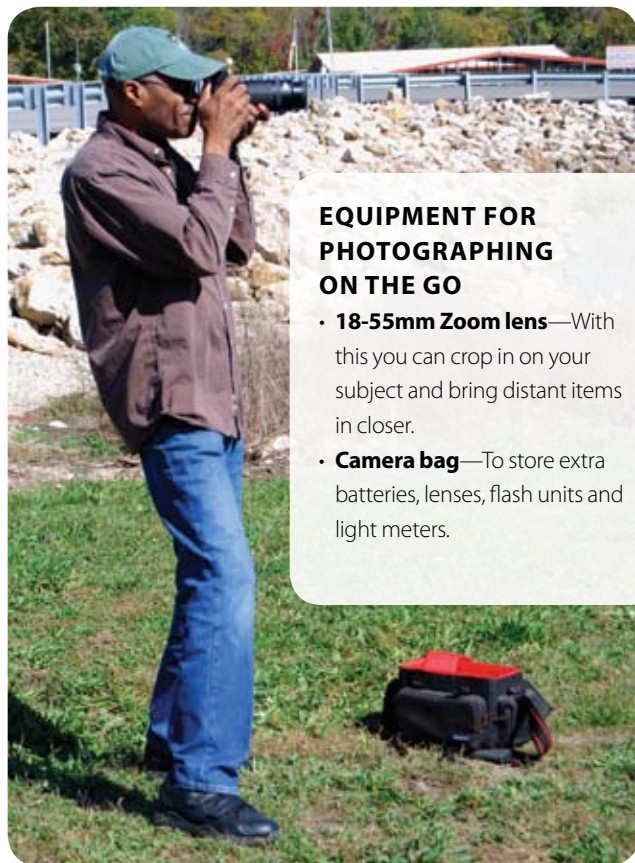
There are no hard-and-fast rules as to the best place to photograph your images. But there is one place you can always photograph without being told you are trespassing, and that is your own home. Believe it or not, there are some great subjects within your own home to photograph for painting, and you don't even have to set up anything special—just photograph what you see.

PHOTOGRAPHING OUTDOOR SUBJECTS

Photographing outdoors is generally not as restrictive as shooting indoors. All of nature is at your fingertips.

Parks, markets and busy downtown streets are great venues for photographing people. Rural countryside offers a wide variety of pastoral subject matter. For wildlife artists, the city zoo is an excellent inexpensive venue for photographing subject matter. Not everyone can afford to go on a wildlife safari in Africa. Take advantage of every opportunity available for your use.

Vacations are a great way to get photo reference material. Since you're there, you may as well put your camera to good use. Once you have returned to your studio, you can arrange the photos according to painting potential. You should look for a photograph that will take you as far as possible in evoking that special feeling as the painting develops.



EQUIPMENT FOR PHOTOGRAPHING ON THE GO

- **18-55mm Zoom lens**—With this you can crop in on your subject and bring distant items in closer.
- **Camera bag**—To store extra batteries, lenses, flash units and light meters.



NIGHT OR DUSK

Shooting in low light such as this will require the use of a tripod. Set your camera to a very slow speed (1/8 sec at f8 or f16).



NIGHT VISION 4—TABLEROCK LAKE
watercolor on 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed paper
18" × 24" (46cm × 61cm)



SUNSET

Because of the angle of the sun when setting, the light is usually most prominent on top surfaces. Notice the top edge and seats of the boat. To photograph this situation you will need a tripod, setting your camera to a slow speed (1/60 sec at f4).



DIRECT SUNLIGHT

Direct sunlight on the subject produces very strong shadows. For photographing subjects in intense and direct sunlight, it's best to shoot at a fast speed (1/250 sec at f5.6 or higher). In general, take pictures in bright sunlight with the sun coming in from the side or at an interesting angle to your subject. This situation usually produces dramatic compositions.



REFLECTED OR INDIRECT SUNLIGHT

In this photo there are no hard-edged shadows, only soft shadows indicating that the light is not direct, but bouncing or reflecting off another object onto the subject. Since it is still bright sunlight, shoot these situations at high speeds (such as 1/160 sec at f8).



SUNNY SHADE OR "CLOSED SHADE"

This kind of lighting is produced when your subject is in the shadow of an overhanging structure such as an awning or building structure as shown in this photo. This type of photography requires shooting at a slower speed than with direct sunlight, probably 1/125 sec or slower at f4 or f8. Shooting at a slow speed generally requires the use of a tripod to steady the camera when you are depressing the shutter button.