

Basic equipment and camera settings for portraits and still life with stationary subjects.

- Digital camera with automatic and manual setting options - always use a tripod
- ISO 200 / 400, set to 'A' for aperture, f5.6, set to highest quality image
- TIFF or RAW formats are better than jpegs for quality (not all photo software will handle RAW)
- Natural daylight or lamp with daylight bulb
- Silver foil
- Photo editing software on your computer
- Good quality A4 printer with capability to print glossy and matt pictures - most modern printers have this
- Cardboard box - painted matt black, and / or white inside (for still life)

### PORTRAITS



Start with your subject close to your light source then gradually move them away, taking pictures of each. Use your finger to direct their eyes. Take the pictures with lots of different poses, look at them on the computer, then refine your favoured poses and lighting with new photos.

Use silver foil to reflect some light to the shadow side of the face for good modelling. If you are taking a shot with deep shadows try to get some light onto the cheek and eyebrow, on the shadow side - see the picture.

### STILL LIFE



Placing the objects into a box gives you the option to control the lighting by turning the box and placing a lamp in different places. By moving the box closer or farther from natural daylight you can vary the strength of light to create even tone or moody pictures with deep shadows. Take lots of pictures to get the ideal image. Use silver foil to reflect light onto shadow areas and create modelling. Try to minimise highlights. It is easy to over do highlights on reflective surfaces, making the picture too busy.

### PRINTS



Don't be tempted to produce very large photos and set them very close to you. This would be the equivalent to painting from life with your nose right up to the subject. Paintings from photos need to feel as if you were stood a distance from your subject. Consequently, you could never count individual hairs or see the full detail of the iris from a natural distance. Painting too close to the pic will force you to paint the photograph rather than a natural subject form a comfortable distance.

### SETTING THE POSE AND KEY FEATURES

Close your eyes and try to visualise someone you know well - hard isn't it? This is because we only remember one or two features that help us to recognise someone. Remember seeing someone you know with a very different hair style or a new pair of glasses, it takes some time to reconcile yourself to the new look when you first see them. Look for the key, memorable features on a face and make the most of them. Someone with a large nose for example, is best shot at an angle that creates a recognition point for viewers. Bright strongly coloured eyes should be well lit and if someone always wears glasses, always try to put them in.

For the pose, you will notice, if you observe someone that they stand or sit in a particular way. Some people slouch, some sit rigid, some people lean their head to one side, place their hands together in front of etc... Look for these clues, as painting someone in an unfamiliar, unnatural pose will get comments such as "I can see it's them, but there is something not quite right...."

Don't let subjects smile inanely or the picture will look like a holiday snap - if they are normally a serious person that's the way to go. Be careful with teeth - yes they can be tricky to paint, but a gleaming set of teeth will distract from the eyes. Avoid people getting 'dolled up' for the occasion- keep it natural and always reassure sitters by sharing some of the photographs to discuss. Focus them on the ones you prefer by talking about lovely lighting on their face, how natural they look and how a particular picture will work well for technical reasons. I find that this always does the trick!



### STILL LIFE COMPOSITION

Aim for a triangle arrangement wherever possible, as this directs the viewers eye. Experiment with different textures such as cloth with hard lined objects, matt objects with reflective objects, and strong colours with muted colours. Of course the sky is the limit in terms of how you translate a photograph of a still life into a painting and always keep in mind the kind of style in

which you want to paint. Choosing a photograph just because it looks nice is not going to compliment your picture necessarily. Most of my work has strong shadows and lights to create depth and intrigue, whereas you might prefer light and impressionistic results in a room setting for example. This approach to photographs will work for all.

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*Mike Skidmore*