

# Making A Scene

---

Ways to Create and Photograph Scenes of Your Own Making

Photography is often used as a way to document what is happening. Whether it's capturing a treasured family moment, or snapping an amazing interaction of wildlife, photography often reacts to something that is already happening. However, photography can also be used to create something completely new. From creating a scene from scratch using small objects on a table top to creating full set pieces for use in the studio or outdoors, making scenes to photograph can be a fun and rewarding experience.

# Your Assignment

- The purpose of this exercise is to stage a scene using real props, costumes, and set pieces. Don't assemble bits of your scene together in Photoshop, but rather build something interesting and new in the real world. Include a process shot or two in Best of the Month if you are interested in sharing your process with the club.
- Don't feel like you must spend a lot of money on costumes and set pieces. Use things from around the house and yard. The only real limit is your imagination.

# Staged Scenes for You to Try

- Building Scenes with Props, Actors, and Costumes
- Photographing Scenes With Pets
- Using toys or miniatures to add a bit of magic to your shots
- Creating Scenes in the Studio
- Tabletop Photography
- Stage Lighting
- Forced Perspective Scenes

# Building Scenes with Props, Actors, and Costumes

- One of the easiest ways to create a scene is to get someone to dress up, go out to an interesting location, and get your actors arranged to tell a story.
  - There are many historical locations in and around town. Why not get dressed up in period costume and create a historical drama?
  - Halloween is coming, which brings opportunities to create images straight out of a monster movie.
- Sometimes you don't even need fancy costumes and sets to make an interesting image – sometimes an unexpected juxtaposition makes for interesting scenes.
  - Try dressing up kids as adults, and put them into adult situations, like reading the paper over a steaming cup of coffee, or cooking something in the kitchen.



Here we have a pair of actors out in Barkerville creating some interesting historical moments.

# Photographing Scenes With Pets

- Some people don't have children or significant others to cajole into posing for images, but that is okay, as you can create some unusual scenes with your pets.
- A few pointers to make pet photography a little more simple:
  - Set up the scene, lighting, and camera before putting your fuzzy friend into it. Animals have short attention spans, and won't usually be patient while you make any needed changes.
  - Have lots of treats handy. Some pets are easily bribed with treats.
    - Also, it's important to note that "handy" means "in your pocket" and not "leave the open bag on the edge of the table so that you knock it off and trigger a cat treat free-for-all".



- It is very important to remember to put the bandanna on the cat AFTER you are ready to start.
- Of course, none of this guarantees that your pet will not rampage and destroy your carefully constructed scene, or that your pet will not glower at you for the entire session.





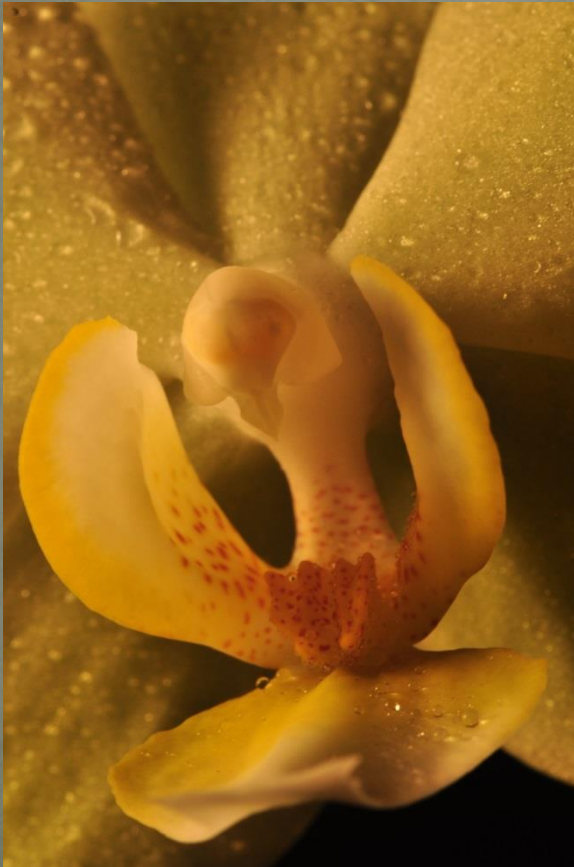


She may LOOK like she feels dead inside, but she got a treat between each image.

# Creating Scenes in the Studio

- There are a few different ways to set up a scene in the studio.
  - Some people build human-sized sets, and use people in their images.
  - Others create entire miniature landscapes to trick the eye into believing in fantastic places.
- The main advantage to studio shoots of this nature is that the photographer is in complete control of all elements of the finished image.
  - This is also the main drawback of this sort of photography, as it can be a lot of work to build sets, set up lights, and find costumes.

- Working in your own home or studio allows you the time to set up a scene, and practice techniques such as portrait or macro photography.
- Some techniques, such as capturing images refracted in water droplets, is very difficult in the field. Practicing this at home allows you to experiment to get the results you want. It also avoids some of the more irritating aspects of shooting in the field, such as poor light and poor weather.



A spray bottle of water was used to mist these orchids and create interesting water droplet effects.

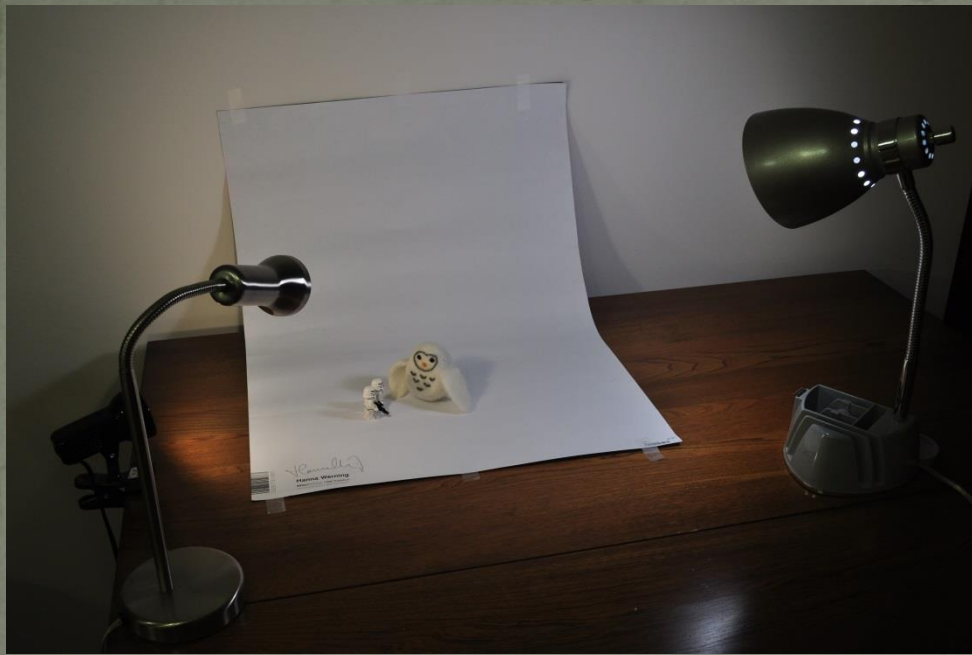
# Using Toys or Miniatures To Add Some Magic to Your Shots

- Instead of building a full miniature scene, just taking some toys outside and building a little scene in the lawn or garden can result in fun and unique images.
- Incorporating plants, animals or water features can be useful in creating an image that tells a thrilling adventure story.
- Even setting up on a rock pile can be interesting! Maybe there was an avalanche, maybe your tiny heroes are scaling a giant mountain.



# Tabletop Photography

- Often used for the product photography used in advertisements.
- It's a fairly simple way to practice different lighting effects, and different photography techniques that you may be interested in.
- Things to try:
  - Play around with lighting sources. Try using more than one light, or try bouncing lights off of the walls or ceiling. Don't worry if you don't have an expensive studio light setup or off-camera flashes, as desk lamps and flashlights can be used. Be aware, however, that different light sources can do weird things to your white balance, if they are different light temperatures.
  - Diffusing light helps to remove harsh shadow. You can try setting up sheets of paper to diffuse or reflect light. A white umbrella can also be a good light diffuser.
  - Try different colours of light as well. You can get coloured cellophane at an art store, or even use colourful candy wrappers.
  - Try making a light table. All you need is a sheet of Perspex or glass, a table turned sideways, and some kind of light source.
- Don't forget to use a tripod. This makes it a little easier to make changes to your scene, as you don't need to set down the camera, and then and try to line up the shot again.



- One common table top technique is the infinity curve, which is a surface that has no visible corners when photographed.
  - One way to create this is to tape a large sheet of paper to your wall, and let it curve down to your table top or photographic surface.
  - Then set up your scene, and zoom in to get rid of the corners, and any edges of the paper.

Try different angles and different zoom levels to remove corners from your image as well. Macro photography is a great way to get close enough to render corners invisible.



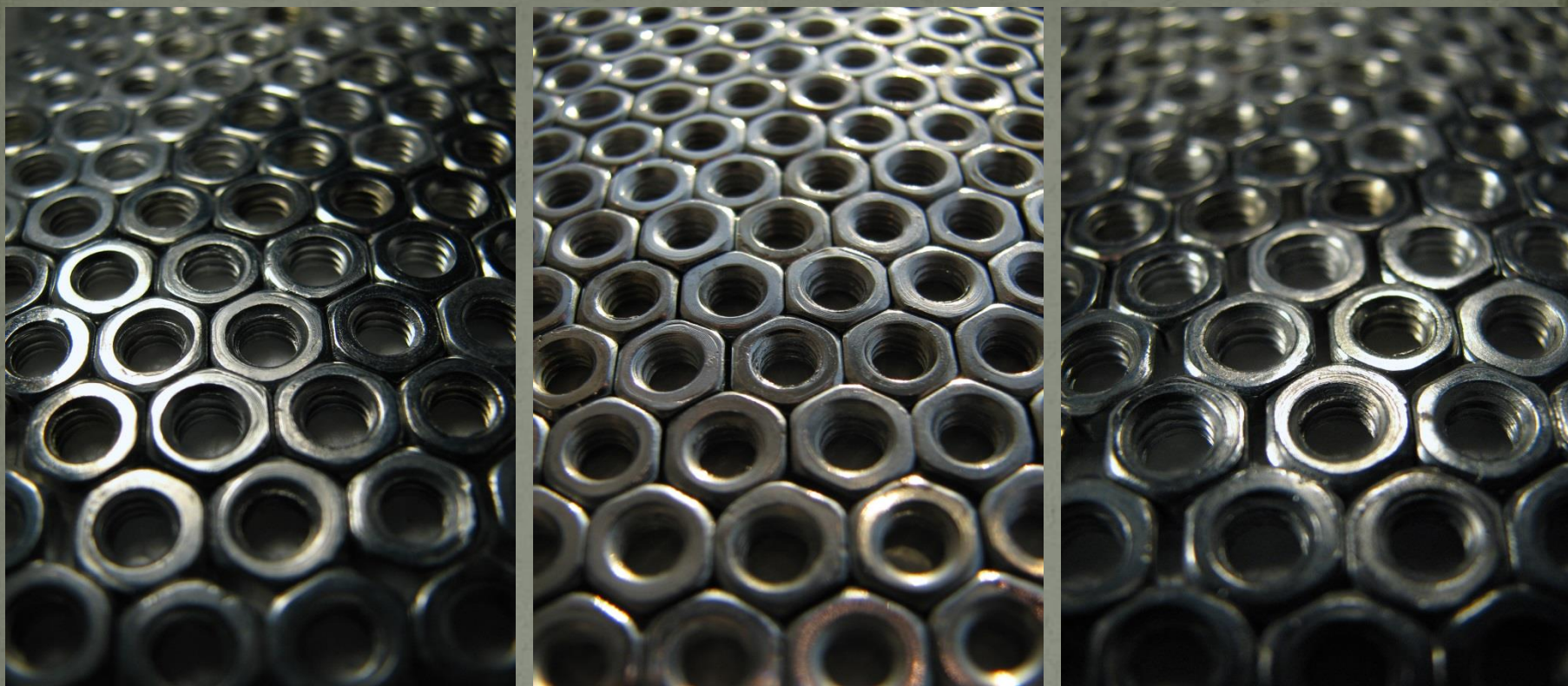
# Stage Lighting

- The most important factor in your created scene is the lighting.
- Play around! Try getting different effects with flashlights, or light painting. If you are working inside, move lamps around to throw light where you need it. Use white sheets to diffuse light, or mirrors to bounce it where you want it to go.



No, that Lego droid didn't light up on his own. That's a strategically placed reflection of the outside light from the house in the background.





These three shots are all of the same scene. Only the position and type of the lights used to illuminate the scene were changed. The centre image was lit by the late evening sun coming in through a window behind the scene. The other two images were lit using desk lamps in different positions.

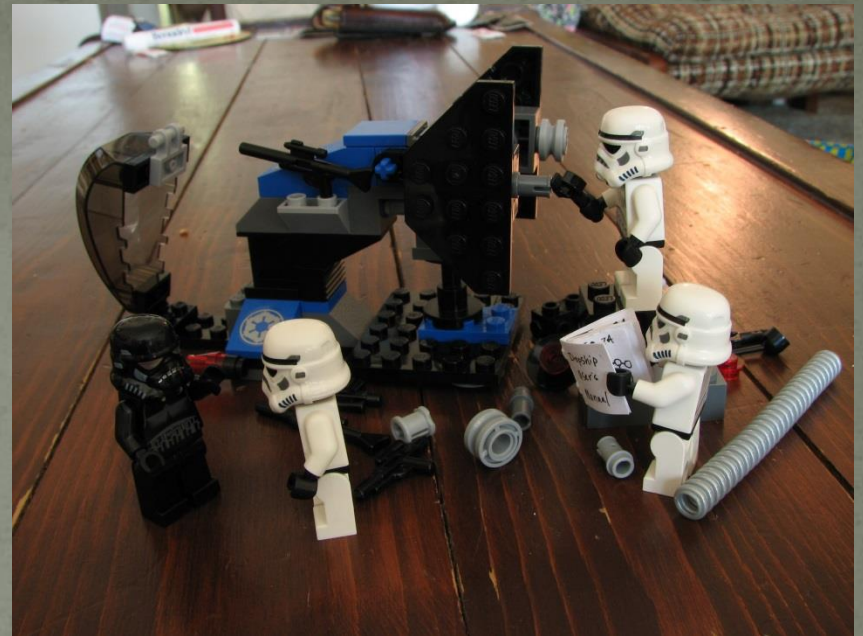


Since photography is just recording light, try using light in creative ways! In this image by Mike Kohut, a glow stick was used with a long exposure to create a unique self-portrait.

# Miniature Scenes and Forced Perspective

- Forced perspective is a technique that exploits an optical illusion to make something appear further away, closer, larger, or smaller than it actually is.
- Forced perspective was used extensively in movies before computer generated effects were created.
- There are a few different factors to consider when making a forced perspective shot.
  - Moving an object closer or further away to manipulate the perceived size. Close objects appear larger than far away objects.
  - Object that are further away appear to be dimmer as the light from them needs to travel further to reach the viewers eye. In order to make a forced perspective scene believable, it is necessary to increase the amount of light on far-away backgrounds.
  - Ensuring that foreground and background elements have the same lighting and shading patterns helps the viewer to believe that they are in the same location in the scene.
  - Blurring elements can lend an illusion of depth to a forced perspective image.

When creating a small scene for a forced perspective shot, the first step is to lay out your scene. Doing this from the comfort of your own home is ideal, especially if you are setting up a winter shot, as is the case with these stranded Storm Troopers. Make sure that they are set up on a table or a board that can easily be moved to the location for the shoot.



Next, take your set up scene into the great outdoors! You may have to right any bits that have shifted or fallen over in transit. Now comes the tricky part, placing your scene so that it looks like it is part of the great outdoors. This will take a bit of trial and error, and you can expect to flit between the camera's viewfinder and your table for a little while. It is important to think about how to place both the scene and your camera in order to make everything click. Using a tripod is really helpful, because it allows you to only move what's absolutely necessary. It may be useful to use your camera's Live View feature to put the scene up on the camera's LCD to make it a little bit easier to see what elements do and do not work in your shot. Using a tablet to look at your images might also be useful for making last minute adjustments.



# Tools & Supplies

- Third Hand: Useful for holding things in place behind the scenes.
- Tweezers, or needle-nosed pliers: Really handy for moving small elements into place, or removing extra bits of fluff or hair from small scenes.
- Spray bottle: Good for misting objects with water droplets.
- Syringe or eyedropper: Good for precisely placing water droplets.
- Glycerin/soap: handy for giving form to water droplets, or for making soap bubbles.
- Flashlights or lamps: Use to give your scene extra flash or sparkle.
- Light box, or Perspex/glass sheet and a small table: these are handy for providing a light source underneath a subject.
- Tripod: Vital if your scene is in low light, or requires macro.

# Web Resources & References

- [Photographer Dad Meticulously Recreates Vintage Scenes from the 20th Century With His Kids](#)
- [This Photographer is Debunking the Construction of Femininity One Picture at a Time](#)
- [Adorable Hamster Bartenders Serving Tiny Food and Drinks](#)
- [David Talley on Set: Entropic](#)
- ['Strange Worlds' Photographer Aims to Trick the Eye](#)
- [10 Amazing Artists Working With Miniature Models](#)
- [Macro Tutorial - Water Drops Photography](#)
- [Fine Art Photography and Water Reflections](#)
- [Forced Perspective \(Wikipedia\)](#)
- [Crafting Scenes of Iconic Americana](#)
- [5 Tips for Creating Excellent Forced Perspective Photographs](#)
- [Photographer Creates Adorably Wacky Lego Scenes](#)
- Information on Tabletop Photography from Digital Photography Guidebook, page 64  
Tabletop Photography
- Except where otherwise noted, all photography and editing by Dana Schwehr.