Light Box Photography

Bringing flowers indoors, with the use of a light box, allows you to create arrangements that can yield beautiful art. The light box serves as a backlight, creating a translucent appearance of the flowers. The goal of lightbox photography is to generate am image of subject matter on a very white background.

Tools

Flowers: Try calla lilies, lilies, tulips, irises, cherry blossoms, etc. The possibilities are endless. Dying or late bloom flowers are also excellent subject matter.

Light Box: Any light box will work. It is important, though, that it has uniform lighting from edge to edge. Daylight balanced is also a plus, but not a necessity. My light box is a 12in x 17in "Light Pad" (#940) by Artograph. Its color temperature is 6500K and its cost was approximately $200.

Preparation

Using flowers or petals (even silk flowers), arrange them on a light box. The light box serves to backlight these delicate blossoms. Try these arrangements: one full frame flower, many like or differing flowers, petals only from various flowers, stems and leaves, overlapping petals to give differing depths of translucency, etc.

Photography

You may orient the light pad either vertically or horizontally. When the light box is horizontal (such as on a table) I shoot overhead on a tripod with your lens parallel to the light box. With a vertical light box (standing up), you can place an arrangement of flowers in a vase in front of the light box.

On a tripod, ISOs can be low (100-200). Experiment with the depth of field for the look you want. With a larger arrangement of flowers or overlapping flowers, a depth of field of F16-F22 might work best.

Have Fun

Try other objects on the light pad as well. Insects, glassware, leaves, fruit, etc. will also yield excellent results. Don't have a light box: Try placing a transparent shower curtain in front of a window and shoot flowers in front of the window.

Advanced Inspiration:

Harold Davis Translucent Flowers

To be more creative, and achieve a more dramatic translucent effect, consider using the techniques of Harold Davis. He creates flower translucency by using bracketed exposures. Compose your floral scene and then take a series of increasingly light exposures, +1, +2, +3, +4 etc. by either auto bracketing or exposure compensation. You want to take as many exposures so that the lightest exposure has nearly unnoticeable features. (Of course, you may like a single shot from this technique, perhaps the +1 or +2 exposure. These exposures are perfect for the addition of a texture layer.)

- Post Processing - See the reference below for details on post processing these images. You will be combining portions of the bracketed sequences to bring out the varying translucencies of the flowers. Any frames that are too washed out (i.e. +3 or +4) can be left out of the sequence.

Open the bracketed images in Photoshop as layers. Make sure all layers are properly aligned. On each layer, add a black layer mask. Then, on each mask, use a white brush (at varying opacities) to reveal the areas you want to appear.

- References –
    - Harold Davis details his process for lightbox photography in his book "Creative Garden Photography." You can also view Harold's work at www.digitalfieldguide.com . At this site, he also has a great article on light box photography under the FAQ tab.
    - You can also view the work of Padma Inguva at www.padmasworld.com/lightbox.