

Minsterworth Photographic Club

Project Subject: Shadows

Timescale: Completed by March 2024

- This is a project
- It is not to be completed overnight – you have until February 2024
- Consider the subject and how to portray your desired effect
- Research other's work on line for ideas
- Document:
 - your ideas
 - your method of taking the image
 - the equipment you used
- Consider colour or black and white
- Do you want the shadow or the subject to be included?
- The finished result can be a print or digital image
- The final image must be your work – you must be the author
- Prepare to discuss your image and your method
- Take images of your setup

MC

Winter Challenge 2023/24

Create Shadow Art Photography Without Pro Studio Lighting

Control the light to bring out geometric shapes of everyday objects through skilful shadow transformation



(Image credit: Kim Bunermann)

The light conditions can either make or break your photography. Used in a controlled way, it can make familiar and everyday objects appear in a completely new light – literally!

This theme was particularly pronounced in the Golden Twenties when the ‘New Vision’ movement emerged. Before then, photography had been used to capture reality as accurately as possible, but as photographers began to use the medium more creatively, they pioneered new ways of creating images with a focus on light, shadows and shapes.

At that time, the invention of colour photography was still some way off so the resulting photographs from this era were mainly black and white. But although digital photography has changed significantly, with many more options, converting to black and white is still one of the most effective solutions for this photographic endeavour.

PRO ADVICE

Shoot in sunlight

You don’t need a studio setup to achieve abstract photo art – simply use the harsh midday sun and set up the scene in front of a window. This makes it more difficult to control the shadows, but you can adapt your setup to the available light.

The absence of colour provides contrast and brings geometric shapes into focus, ultimately creating abstraction in a photograph. As well as different perspectives, shadows are a central element, as they give objects an alienated appearance. You don’t need much equipment to create abstract scenes – just a few objects, some light, and an understanding of the interplay between light and materiality.



Before: Undefined shadows Without a hard light source pointed in the right direction, the shadows are blurry and geometric shapes are lost (Image credit: Kim Bunermann)

Final: Detailed structures

The hard shadows clearly show the details of the physical objects, creating an interesting interplay of light and shadow (Image credit: Kim Bunermann)



Shooting Steps

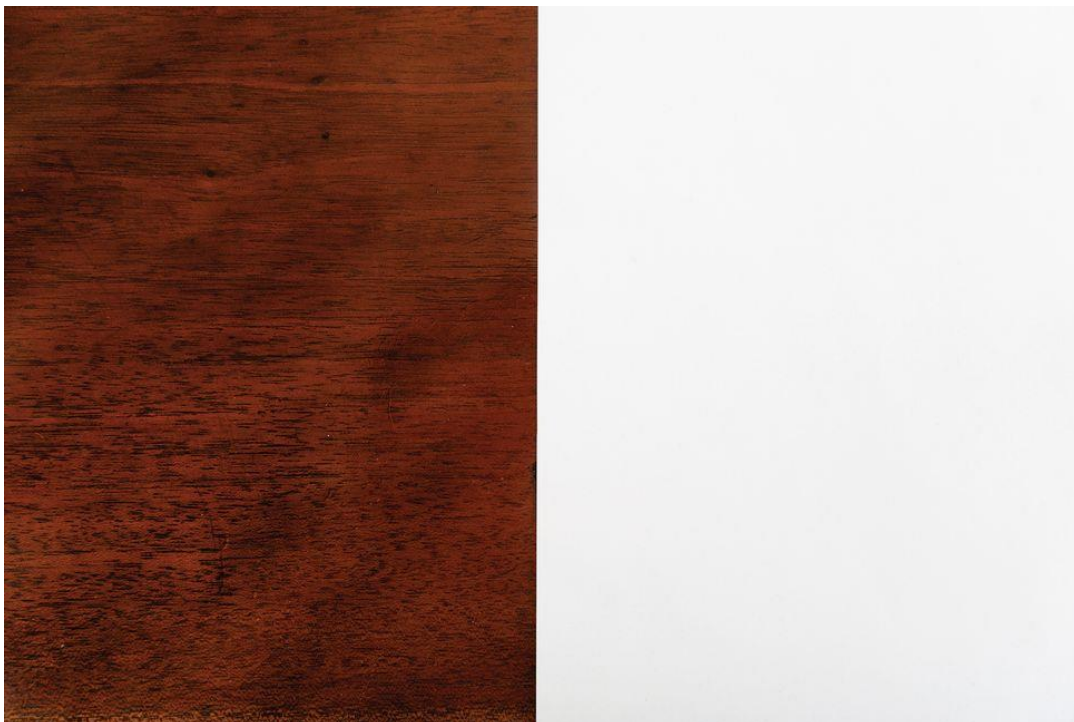
1. Find transparent objects



(Image credit: Future)

You will need a few objects, preferably transparent glass or plastic ones that let the light shine through. To achieve a more abstract look, choose everyday items that have an interesting material structure or features with a distinctive shape.

2. Decide on a background



(Image credit: Future)

To bring out shadows and details to the maximum, you need to provide contrast. A white background will help highlight the shadows, but to include even more elements, you can also use a bright background with a visible texture.

3. Choose a light source(s)



(Image credit: Future)

You don't need pro studio lighting, any source that has a defined cone light works fine. You can even achieve those results by using a flash or your phone torch. Having an assistant will help here so you can keep your hands free for shooting.

4. Test the light



(Image credit: Future)

Darken the room and experiment with the light. Adjust its height or move objects to see what influence different positions have on the shadows. The further away and higher the light is positioned, the more distinct the shadows will be.

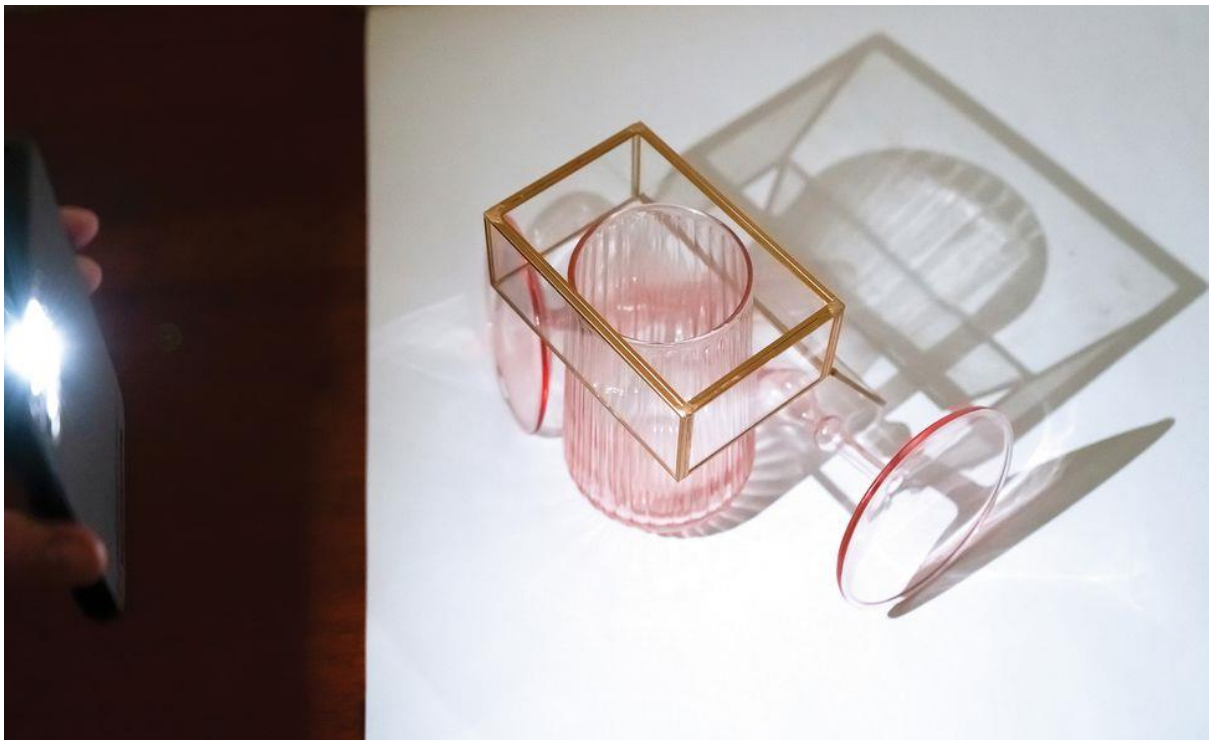
5. Create the shot



(Image credit: Future)

Try different perspectives before mounting the camera on a tripod. Shoot in manual mode with an aperture of f/8 and compensate the exposure with slower shutter speeds. Use manual focus, as the Auto Focus may not work in low-light conditions.

6. Be creative



(Image credit: Future)

Take your images to the extreme by alienating the scene from reality. Hold transparent items with structure in front of your light source or combine the objects in such a way that the shadows combine to create further layers in the photo.

Other Ideas...



Some tips!

1. Look down, not ahead

In general, you are going to find shadows on the ground or against walls and other surfaces. This requires a bit of a different approach, since as photographers we tend to look around, not down, to compose images. So, the next time you are out with your camera try to remind yourself to actively look for shadows and see what you find.

2. Wait for dramatic light

The best shadows are created by light that is lower on the horizon, which creates strong, long, and dramatic shadows. You're generally going to find this type of light outdoors closer to sunrise and sunset, when the sun is lower in the sky (rather than directly above you). If you are photographing indoors, you can use a lamp without the shade to create a strong light source, which will result in strong shadows. The closer your light source is to the ground (or to the level the shadow-casting object is, such as on a table), the longer of a shadow you will end up with.

3. Include the subject or not?

Whether to include the subject within the photo or not is a personal choice and primarily depends on the type of image you want to create. Including the subject tells the viewer who the photo is about, while leaving the subject out tends to add more mystery as the viewer will be guessing who or what is casting the shadow. You can try both approaches; then decide which result creates a better final image.

4. Look for patterns

Images that combine shadows and patterns can turn out very dramatic – so keep an eye out for any patterns and shadows that you can capture on camera. Patterns exist everywhere, so it's just a matter of being aware of them and identifying photographic opportunities. Some great examples include power lines, rock formations, buildings, birds, bugs, flowers, etc.

5. Get inspiration

If you're not sure what you can "do" with shadows and photography, check out some online photo galleries of shadow photography, particularly the work of Alexey Bednij, who has created powerful, dynamic images using shadows and patterns. By viewing what others have created using shadows, you can get a better idea of what types of shadows to look for and how you should approach the scene to capture it on camera.

Final tip: As long as you are comfortable using it, try to capture shadow images using manual mode, which give you more control over the exposure. The automatic exposure meter on most cameras will attempt to "lighten" the shadows, resulting in an overexposed image.