

Fine Art Flower Photography

Kathleen's Equipment: Canon 5D Mark II, 100mm macro lens(lighter, more compact), 180mm macro lens(shallower depth of field, so easier to blur backgrounds, also lens collar so can rotate lens more easily) Canon 500D closeup diopter 77mm(buy 77mm and get step up adapter rings for all of your lenses that are smaller than 77mm filter size), Gitzo 3000 series tripod, without center column(Induro makes a less expensive Gitzo knockoff; it does have a center column, so you have to reverse it to get low to the ground, and possibly stand on your head to see the viewfinder!), Really Right Stuff BH55 ballhead(best ballhead made, in my opinion, and well worth the price) 1.4X Canon teleconverter, kenko extension tubes, Singh Ray Lb color combo warming polarizer(occasionally use to remove glare from leaves), 30 Inch diffuser and 12 Inch gold reflector(Impact and Lastolite are good brands, buy from B and H photo), small spray bottle with water or glycerin, Hoodman loupe, Fenix L1D Rebel flashlight with orange gel, Flowerpod.

*Notes; The Canon 500D closeup filter is made to use with regular lenses to decrease the focusing distance and make the regular lens work more like a macro lens. I actually use it more often with my macro lens to get even smaller details, and find it much easier to use than extension tubes. You can buy a flowerpod from Les Saucier at appalachianjourney.com, and he has a very good article called Making the Light Sing and Dance, in which he talks about the Fenix flashlight for macro lighting.

Recommended books: Fine Art Flower Photography by Tony Sweet, Photography and the Creative Life by Nancy Rotenberg.

Recommended location workshops and courses: betterphoto.com, online course on Fine Art Flower Photography with Tony Sweet, Light Photographic Workshops has various macro courses and instructors during the year and the California Photo Festival in October 2011(Please tell them I referred you if you sign up for a course, I get a discount on my next course and I plan to take more), any location workshop with Tony Sweet,tonysweet.com or Nancy Rotenberg, naturaltapestries.com. Nancy often co-teaches with Les Saucier and he is another macro specialist and great guy.

Flower Photography techniques and principles:

1. Flower portraits. Isolate and simplify! Ideally find a flower that is by itself and look for a background that is 2-3 feet away so you can blur the background enough so that it is not distracting. Look for color complements, red/green, blue/orange or purple/ yellow and position you camera in front of the flower to take advantage of these if possible. Bracket your aperture after you have set up your shot from f 2.8 up to f16 or 22(you do not gain much going up to f32, and

your lens may lose sharpness past f22, so do some tests with your macro lens) Out of focus and simple background are best. The greater the subject to background difference, the softer the background. Use live view to focus. Magnify in live view and manually focus right where you want it. Hoodman loupe helps to see the viewfinder.

2.Repetition: Make one flower the star with selective focus, try to have separation between the flowers, think about creating S curves or pleasing pattern through the frame, consider wide angle, get low and point up to the sky. If you have two flowers with one in the background, a wider aperture and selective focus helps draw the eye to the main subject. The same applies to images with multiple flowers.

3. Shoot throughs: Technique; place leaves or flowers very close to your lens, about 1-6 inches away and focus past the close stuff to your subject in the distance. This could be 6 inches or 3 feet away. This gives a soft wash of color in front of your subject for an impressionistic look.

4. Macro: Move in closer to whatever detail attracts you in a particular flower. The closeup 500D filter is very handy for this. I use it a lot more than extension tubes. Look for rhythm and use selective focus.

5. Sandwiching: This is a technique that gives a glow. Take one image sharp at f16 or f22, and take one wide open and blur the focus a lot. Now put the blurry one on top of the sharp one in Photoshop, and change the blend mode to overlay or soft light. You can also do this with one image by using the following technique:

- 1.Open original image.

2. Duplicate layer (ctrl or command J) and change the blend mode to screen

3. Duplicate that layer and apply gaussian blur(filter-blur-gaussian blur).

Choose a value that will make image very soft. This will vary with size of image. Try 20 to start. Then change blend mode of this layer to multiply.

4. Flatten image.

6.Multiple Exposures. Shoot at f16 or f22 so that you have well defined edges. Shoot 8-9 exposures. You may zoom out slightly with each exposure, or rotate on a lens collar,or both. You may pan slightly with each exposure. You want to pan in the direction of the subject, ie. vertical for trees. Nikon will do this in camera. For Canon or other brands, you have to put together in Photoshop. Stack as layer in Photoshop, and change the opacity of each layer to 1 divided by the layer number, so bottom layer is 100%, 2nd layer is 50%, 3rd layer is 33 %, etc. You can change the blend mode of the top 1 or 2 layers to screen, overlay, or soft light to

see if that looks better.

7. Work your subject: Shoot horizontal and vertical, shoot a group, then a portrait, the details like the edge of a petal or the inside stamens. Use different lenses, wide angle, telephoto and macro.

8. Reflectors, diffusers, and filters. Use a diffuser to soften the light and reduce shadows, a gold reflector to bounce warm light into a shadowed subject or foreground, and a polarizer to eliminate glare on leaves or petals if needed.

9. Play with effects in Photoshop. Experiment with filters in Photoshop like poster edges, posterize, and watercolor. Take images of subtle textures like script, sheet music, wood grain, etc. Layer these textures on top of your image and change the blend mode and opacity to get the effect you desire. Overlay and soft light are usually the best. Try them all.