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A brief extract from

The Photolearn Artistic Nude tutorial

My approach to this Tutorial

Every kind of photography - and especially studio photography - seems to attract people who have an almost unlimited supply of money, which they then spend on equipment that they really don't need in the mistaken belief that the best equipment will automatically produce the best results.

With each of our studio tutorials (Portrait, Glamour, Still Life and Studio Equipment & Lighting) we have assumed that our reader's resources are limited and that most people don't have a large studio with unlimited camera and lighting equipment. Based on this, most of the lighting setups in the other tutorials can be achieved with an absolute minimum of lighting.

This tutorial is different, because many of the techniques used involve 'alternative' light sources instead of traditional photographic lighting. This doesn't mean that conventional studio lighting can't be used for artistic photography, what it *does* mean is that beautiful results are possible without it. A nude model has been used to illustrate this tutorial but these techniques are just as relevant to clothed subjects, so don't be put off if you don't have nude models available.

As a matter of policy, each of our tutorials stands alone so you don't need to buy any other tutorial to get the whole picture. Because of this we have included all relevant sections from our Portrait Lighting tutorial, even though the studio lighting, when used for artistic nude photography, is generally far simpler than for portrait work.

A couple of definitions:

Artistic nude photography is photography that depicts the human form in an artistic way, capturing the beauty of form. Unlike glamour photography, artistic nude work has no sexual content and is not intended to titillate

And **Alternative lighting** is simply lighting that's not actually intended for photography. This includes any type of lighting, and most of the lighting used in this tutorial is likely to be found in the average home.

We don't pretend that the photos that illustrate this tutorial are wonderful examples of photography, that's very definitely not our intention.

A great deal can be done to improve shots on computer, and this applies at least as much to artistic nude as to any other kind of photography, but no post processing work has been carried out on these photos except for changes to colour – we feel it is important to show you the photos exactly as they were originally taken.

Cameras and lenses

The ideal camera for this type of photography is a digital, ideally a single lens reflex fitted with a mild telephoto lens. The shutter speeds and aperture must be capable of being set manually.

Digital cameras are ideal simply because this type of photography often makes use of unconventional lighting arrangements (either alternative lighting or studio lights used in unconventional ways, for example with extremes of contrast) and it can be difficult or even impossible to meter accurately, especially for beginners. A digital camera will show you what works and what doesn't, and nothing else can do this quite as well.

An alternative is a **medium** or **large format** camera fitted with a Polaroid back, but even this isn't always ideal, especially when using a 'painting with light' technique, because it is impossible to achieve exactly the same results twice.

This doesn't mean that *only* a digital camera is suitable, simply that it will be much easier for you to learn the techniques, practice and get acceptable results if you have one. Once you have perfected your technique you may want to use a film camera, especially if you produce the prints yourself, because taking the pictures is only a first step and wonderful effects can be produced by skilled darkroom workers, using techniques such as Cyanotypes, Bromoil and similar.

Light Meter

A good flash meter is very useful where studio flash is used, but some lighting sources are extremely difficult to meter accurately and so metering the light is less of an issue than with most other types of studio photography. For many shots, 'correct' exposure is less of an issue than with more conventional photography but it is still important, which is one of the reasons why digital is ideal

Models

I have used one model for most of the example shots in this tutorial. As it happens she is young, beautiful and slim. There's section on finding models below, but it's probably better for most people to ask a friend or partner to model for them at first. The great thing about artistic photography is that there is no absolute need for the model to be a classic beauty – the photography is about shapes rather than detail.

Finding your models

This is nowhere near as difficult as many people think! How you go about it will depend largely on your personality, the type of work you want to do and on your budget. Here are some suggestions:

- 1. Your partner.** If your partner is happy about modelling for you this may be an ideal solution.
- 2. Friends.** Many people ask their friends to model, but it can be a great strain on friendship, especially if the friend needs to be persuaded or isn't too happy about the

finished results! If approaching friends/people you know, it can be a very good idea if they are approached initially by a member of the same sex.

3. Friends of other models. Once you've built up a bit of experience and have photographed a few people it's a very good idea to mention to your models that you're always looking for new people and to give them business cards.

4. Dance Schools. Many dancers are very happy to do nude modelling, either in return for some really good shots of themselves or for payment. Dancers usually make good models, partly because they are usually very fit, attractive people and partly because they are usually happy and confident about their bodies. Be very careful though to check that they are old enough for the type of photography you have in mind! Unless you have personal contacts with the dancing school, the best approach is normally to ask if you can pay to display a small leaflet on their notice board.

5. Gymnasts. As above, but be aware that gymnasts often have scars.

6. TFP. Time for prints is a time-honoured way of getting models for free! There are advantages and disadvantages on both sides, and to be honest most of the advantages are for the photographer and not the model.

The photographer gets a model without having to pay and the model gets photographs that can be used as part or all of a portfolio in return for his/her time.

Some photographers may abuse the system by producing very poor quality work and/or by only providing the model with a very small number of photos. When I arrange TFP with models I make sure that the photos are of the best possible quality and I supply the full set on disk. This, in my opinion, is only fair.

Models also abuse the system and a common problem is that they may make arrangements and then fail to turn up. You simply have to accept that a large number of wannabe models are nothing more than time-wasters and will let you down. To find TFP models, advertise for them, free, on sites such as <http://www.themodelsclub.co.uk>
Be fair to your models - don't ask anyone to work on a TFP basis unless you have enough skill and experience to produce photos that will be useful to them!

7. Internet model listings. There are hundreds of these sites, where (mainly) wannabe models advertise their services. Be warned though that the same reliability problems can exist and there is no model agent to contact if the model lets you down.

8. Model agencies. This is by far the most professional solution, although also the most expensive. A reputable agency will make all the arrangements and will also do everything possible to sort out the mess if the model you have booked cancels or fails to turn up. Unreliable models are much less of a problem with agency-booked models because the models know that if they let you down they will lose their career with their agency.

Some models (and some model agencies) charge extra if a signed model release is required, to allow the photos to be published. You should be aware of this, and find out whether or not you will be asked to pay extra! Always get the model release signed before you pay your model, and preferably before you take the shots - it can avoid problems.

Bear in mind that modelling rates, like most things in life, are negotiable!

Should you keep your distance?

According to almost all books and magazine articles, you should also keep a 'safe zone between yourself and your subject, especially a nude one, and touching is a no-no but I simply don't agree.

There are different types of touching and I always touch my subjects as necessary to adjust hair, change the angle of the face etc. And after more than 40 years I am still waiting for the first complaint or look of discomfort!

My reasons for touching are simple; every single part of the shot needs to be perfect, and the best way of getting the pose perfect is for me to adjust it myself.

Professional models and celebrities know exactly how to adjust their pose on photoshoots (usually they just move, in very slow motion, so that the photographer can take the shot at the right moment) but most people simply can't do this and a request to "tilt your head down very slightly" often results in the chin very nearly hitting the shoes, so it is far easier, and better in my view, to help.

Chaperone?

Most models aged over 18 prefer not to have a chaperone present and although there are advantages for the photographer in having someone else present because of the protection it gives them against false accusations, personally I find the presence of a friend or parent distracting to most models, and it often inhibits them too.

I don't allow boyfriends to be present - this suits most girls, who often want photos that they don't want their boyfriend to know about and I cover the situation by stating, in writing "Please feel free to bring a parent or friend of the same sex with you. Sorry, but we do not have facilities for people of the opposite sex". This may help the model to feel reassured and because it is in writing she can show her partner and satisfy him that although she doesn't have a problem with him being there, it just isn't possible.

I am often asked on the 'phone "Is it OK if I bring someone with me?" and the standard answer is "No problem, but it has to be a friend or parent of the same sex, not your father, brother or boyfriend".- 19 out of 20 models then turn up on their own, reassured no doubt that they are safe.

If they do bring someone along I take the view that if I am going to have the inconvenience of their presence and the model is going to feel inhibited, which will affect the quality of the photos, then I may as well have the protection against false accusations that a chaperone provides, so I sit the chaperone down, in the studio, in full sight of everything that happens. If the chaperone leaves the set for any reason, e.g. to go to the toilet, then everything stops until she is back in her seat! This also applies of course if the model is a child.

I mention this only because there are some photographers who allow chaperones to be 'present' but do not allow them into the studio - unless the chaperone is able to see and hear everything that happens, they are not providing proper protection to the model and they are not providing protection to the photographer either.

Where the model is a child (this is not nude photography of course) I insist that the chaperone is a mother, grandmother or legal guardian. I will not accept anyone else, unless I have a written request from the mother asking me to vary this rule.

Changing room

In my opinion it is essential to provide models with private changing facilities. Whether she is happy to be photographed nude or not, she is still entitled to her privacy - and anyway, unless there is a changing area where personal possessions can be left, something is likely to be left behind.

If you don't have suitable facilities it is usually possible to erect a simple screen and this will work just as well. The alternative is to leave the room whilst the model is getting changed but I can't recommend that - there will be small, expensive items there that can be easily stolen.

The rules of artistic nude photography.

The only real 'rule' is that the model is nude. We photograph our models nude because almost any human body can look beautiful if photographed with imagination, creative lighting and a good viewpoint. There are no other rules!

Other people may tell you differently, but their statements, like my own, are nothing more than opinions - you must decide for yourself!

Here are some of the popular 'rules' and my own view of them

1. The model must be in an unnatural pose

Use any pose that works, but have some consideration for the model, who will have to both hold the pose and look natural whilst doing so. A natural, comfortable pose is more likely to look right.

2. The face should not be shown

There is something to be said for trying to create the look of a 'headless statue' but even if you don't want the model to be identifiable, or if you feel that the presence of the head will detract from the artistic effect, a more natural result is often possible by including the head but leaving it unlit - there are examples of this below.

3. If the face is visible then there should be no eye contact

The thinking behind this 'rule' is that it is difficult to obtain an 'art' look if there is eye contact, which can introduce a sexual element to the shot. This makes sense, but eye contact can work in some situations - try it and decide for yourself.

4. The shots should be in black and white

This probably goes back to the days when nearly all fine art photography owed as much to the photographers' darkroom skills as to camera and lighting skills, but modern technology has changed this to a degree. Although monochrome often does look best, experiment with natural colour, muted colour, false colour and sepia as well as black and white. Several of the example photos below are shown with various options.

Light sources

Almost any type of light source can be used for this type of photography, ranging from ordinary candles to a laser beam.

Candles

Candles can provide the light and they can also be part of the photo itself, as in the examples below.

The example shots are simple, designed to get you started on this type of photography, but more sophisticated techniques can be used too. For example, I've used simple T lights, with the flames forming part of the shot, but you could also use large candles which, once they've burned down a bit, won't show the flame.

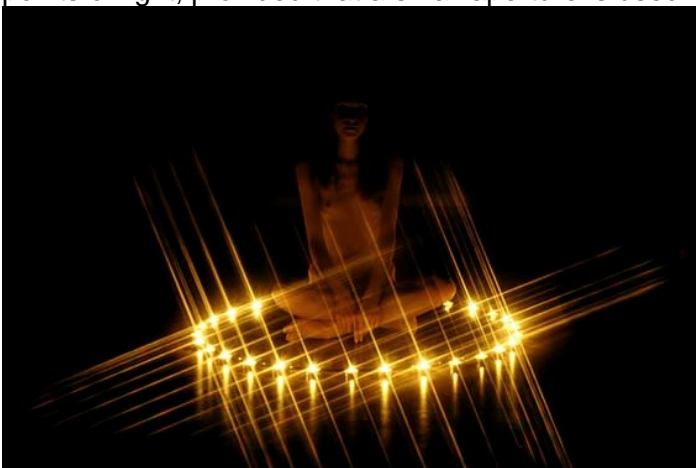


T Lights were used for this shot, arranged in a circular design around a smoked glass table top. There were no other lighting sources (for this shot) and the exposure was 4 secs at f11, 100 ISO

Note the position of the legs - this would be an explicitly-sexual shot if the lights hadn't cast such a strong shadow. Below: The same shot in colour. The colour hasn't been corrected, so it's very warm.



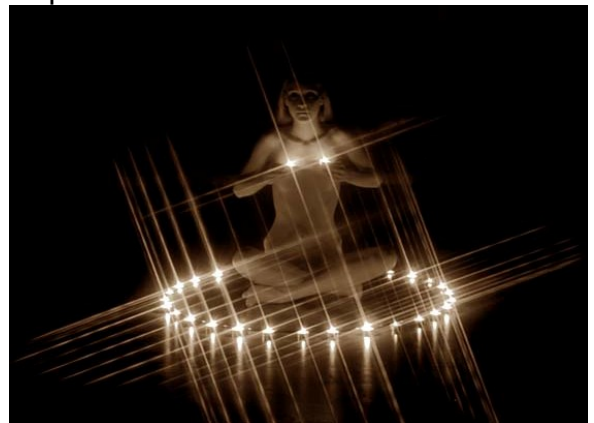
The same shot (below), but with a crosshatch grid 'filter' fitted to the lens. Sharp flare lines form around points of light, provided that a small aperture is used



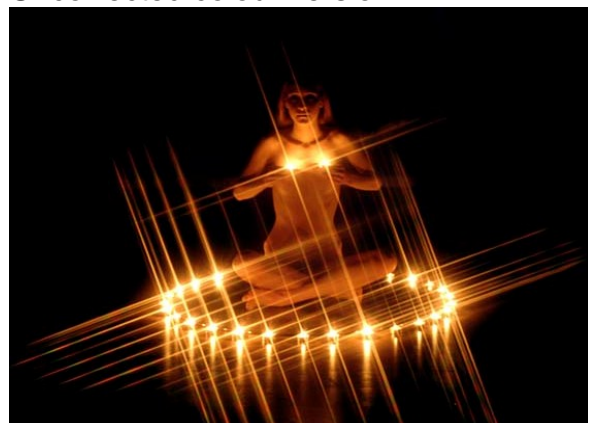
The T lights do a good job of illuminating the lower body but of course the light falls off as it gets higher, one way of overcoming this is by adding some further lighting to the top half, in this case by asking the model to hold a T light in each hand



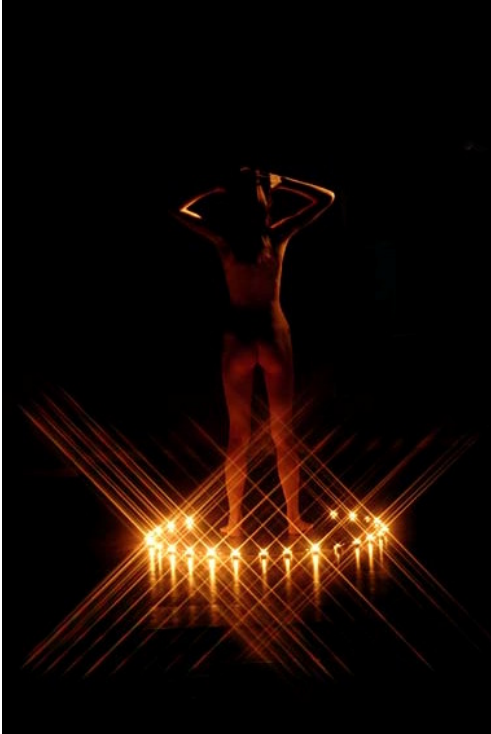
Sepia version



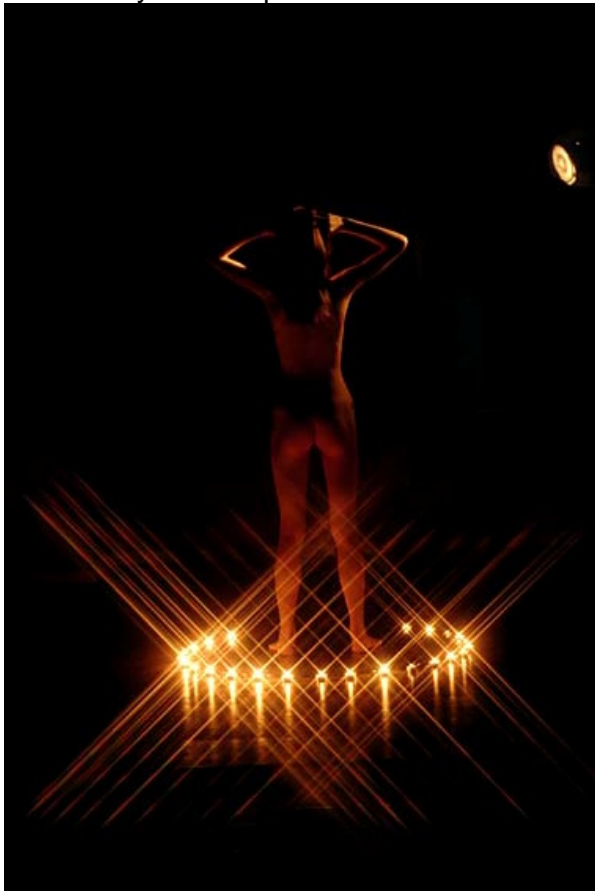
Uncorrected colour version



Much the same lighting arrangement, but the problem of light fall-off is greater with the model standing, so a lamp has been added top right.

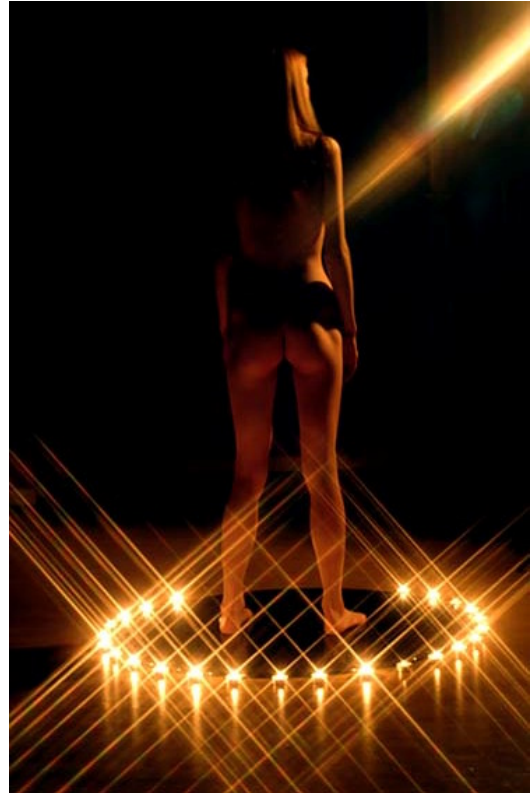


The same shot below, but with the extra light left visible in the shot to show its position. Note that it's fitted with a honeycomb to prevent flare

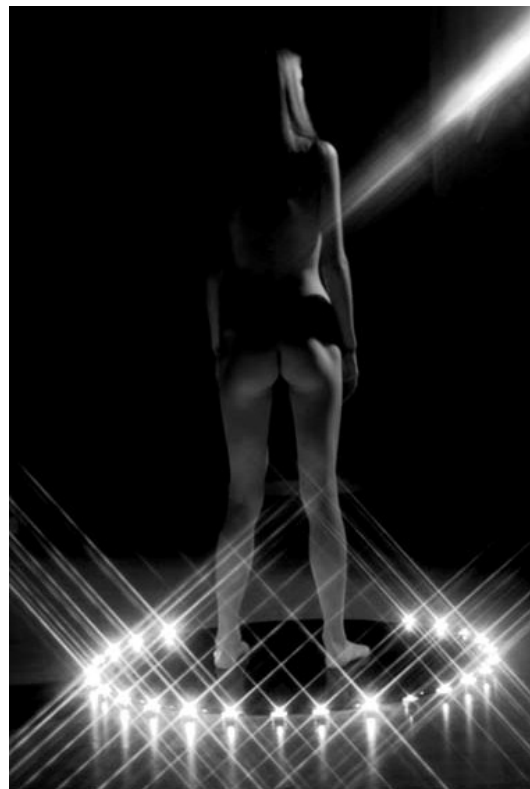


The crosshatch filter used in some of these shots is a plain filter with a grid pattern engraved on it. When used at small apertures it produces these sharply defined flare lines, but when used at larger apertures the lines are less

This is the effect you'll get if you don't use a honeycomb. The 'shaft of light' has resulted largely from the use of the crosshatch filter - without this attachment the glare would have been uncontrolled

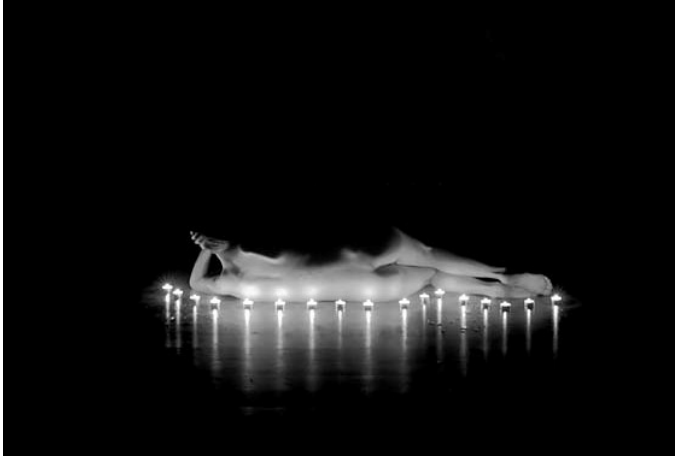


And converted to black and white...



clearly defined – you'll have seen this technique used a lot (probably too much!) on TV quiz shows. A good source of supply of specialist filters is <http://www.srbfilm.co.uk>

A less formal arrangement with the T-lights, arranged here to fit the contours of the body



Obvious but important - exposures must be made in total darkness!

Exposure

Exposure is difficult (but not impossible) to measure with this type of lighting. A meter built into the camera can be used provided that the measurement is taken only of the subject - if the measurement includes the lights it will indicate far less exposure than is actually needed, or incident-light measurements can be taken from the body and pointing at any one light. Either of these methods can be used if shooting on film, but bracketing the exposure is strongly advised. If a digital camera is used it is usually better to experiment.

Colour temperature

If you don't understand the importance of colour temperature, please read the section under 'Colour temperature' further down.

If you do understand it, you should appreciate that the colour temperature of candles is around 1000 deg. K compared to 5,500K for daylight/electronic flash, so the very 'warm' orange colour is inevitable. This can be corrected on digital cameras by adjusting the colour balance, or adjusted afterwards on computer. The effect can be lessened, but not fully-corrected, if using colour film by shooting on tungsten-balanced film.

However, in practical terms it cannot be corrected by using colour correcting filters on the camera lens. These filters are available but they restrict the passage of light to such an extent that their use would result in extremely long exposures.

Painting With Light

Painting with light is a generic, not a specific term and is used whenever a portable light source is used to apply light to a specific area of a subject during the course of a long exposure.

In architectural photography for example, when photographing a subject that's impossible to light in 'one hit' such as the interior of a large church, the camera would be set up on a time exposure and the photographer (or a few assistants) would walk around during the exposure firing flashes or even pointing torches at areas that needed specific lighting.

In the context of artistic nude work, the light source is normally a small torch and the photographer simply shines the torch at the subject to provide light where it is needed. The torch used in the examples below is a Maglite, especially useful because the beam is adjustable.

Other light sources can be used too, for example light brushes, where the output from the light source is transmitted along fibre optics, or slide projectors, or even a laser (but be very careful to avoid the eyes, which can be permanently damaged). None of these alternatives have been used for the photos shown here because the objective with this tutorial is to explain and teach the principles rather than to cover every conceivable possibility.



The technique is to mount the camera on a solid tripod, set the aperture to whatever works with the light source (try f11 with 100 ISO), set the shutter speed to whatever suits the time needed to light your subject (probably around 30 seconds) and then to shine the light where required, keeping it moving at all times. This sounds easy and it is - but the results are unpredictable even with experience!

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