

How I Created an Award Winning Image Without a Camera



ABOUT ME

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By Debbi Swanson Patrick

I started practicing the art of scannography in 2008 after meeting photographer Ed Martin and seeing his stunning work at a photography club meeting. He explained how he went from working in an old enlarger to using a scanner to create his luscious still lifes.

I asked if I could come to his studio and learn his technique. At 80 years old then, with a long ponytail and wearing his signature pink rhinestoned ballcap, he couldn't wait to show me. Here's what I learned in Ed's fun zone and how I created my first image, which also won an award.

MY FIRST IMAGE

Like Ed, I gathered local flora and some of my personal trinkets. The shape of the pine boughs evoked a pitcher as I played with them, so I created a mini "pitcher of life," with samples of organic and inorganic funny/odd things, like the bloody rat head on a piece of cheese and cracker provided by my engineer/artist husband who had a wicked sense of humor.

When Ed saw that image, he wrote me an email that I keep in my portfolio. "I love it. Can we trade?" That endorsement sent me on my way.

THE METHOD: CREATING MERIT WORTHY "OPTIMISM"

I use an Epson photo scanner 4490. Other scannographers use different scanners with success, so it does depend on the results you like. To create an image, I either remove the lid or raise it, and work in a lowlight environment to reduce any stray light. Sometimes I shield the scanner with cardboard to block the light. Like with a camera, make a perfect exposure by setting the adjustments on the scanner software. A deep black background is what I usually go for, giving the image an old masters look, but I also use fabrics as backgrounds. I use Lightroom for all the basic adjustments and Photoshop for fun and games.

THE PROCESS

I collected the sunflowers, and had my toy box of goodies at the ready. I dug in for things that complemented the sunflowers in color, style, texture, etc.

I began with placing the flowers, added the jewelry and sun

elements for the sunflowers, decided to flip one flower over, then added the crow's skull, the bracelets, which created a "frame" to contain the image, and the other man-made materials, like the glitter balls. The color palette is focused—yellows, golds, brown, silver. Composition likes odd quantities, hence the three flowers instead of two or four. "Optimism" took on a steampunk quality which I love.

I scan previews throughout my design process, viewing on my monitor until I get the first composition worthy of a full resolution scan. I scan at minimum 300 dpi, usually 700 dpi, sometimes 1200 depending on how large the image may be printed. I'm printing a lot on metal now, some images as large as 40x50, so high resolution is critical.

Scanner depth of field is very short, perhaps a half inch, so use this to your advantage to focus clearly on certain elements.

After capturing the first image, I play until and if I find an even better composition, and then scan that. The process can be fast, an hour or so, or several hours, with breaks. Fresh flowers have time limits, but different stages of wilt can be striking.

"Optimism" went on to win a Merit Award at PPLAC in November 2012. Judge Tim Meyer loved the light and the composition. This was my first meeting, and consequently, my first submission. Thrilled? You betcha.

TIPS

Don't edit the huge scanned file. Make a manageable size, say 20MB, and edit that in Lightroom or Photoshop.

Beware of dust and detritus that spew from lovely flowers. It requires a lot of cleanup. It may be worthwhile to spray some especially dusty flowers like lilies with a plastic coat to minimize the fallout. I do this with beetles and other insects to help preserve them. Some flowers are especially delicate, such as cactus flowers, and after just a bit of handling they begin to wilt, crease, and turn brown where damaged. This can add to your image depending on the look you're going for.

So when you don't feel like dealing with focusing, f-stops and apertures, turn on your scanner and make some extraordinary art!