

Night Photography Assignment

I kept hanging the moon
On the pine tree and taking it off,
Gazing at it the while. –Hokushi

You will need the following items:

- Camera
- Batteries and extra batteries are very important. Long exposures will drain your batteries much quicker than normal. You might consider buying an extra battery for your digital camera and/or carry your power cords
- Cable release or remote if available
- A camera bag carefully packed to not be too heavy, yet contains all the gear you need.
- Lots of film or extra memory cards
- Flashlight
- Warm Clothing
- Tripod (if available)
- Flash (optional)
- Penlight to paint with light (optional)
- Color acetate or cellophane (optional)
- Glow sticks (optional)
- Aluminum screening to create starburst effects is an inexpensive alternative to a star filter. Both filters can yield a magical quality to your photographs. (Note: star effects will only occur at point light sources in your photographs.) (optional)

What to do:

Using a tripod if possible, take long exposures in the dark. Try glow sticks and flash lights to make magical photographs. Use the 'B' setting on your SLR camera or the 'night' or 'fireworks' setting on your compact camera. Experiment.

Preparation:

Read handout on night photo. Visit one or two of following websites:

The Nocturnes
<http://www.thenocturnes.com/>

Common Obstacles in Night photography (for the technically obsessed only!)
<http://www.cambridgeincolour.com/tutorials/night-photography.htm>

Cambridge Gallery by Cambridge in Colour (inspiration for all)
<http://www.cambridgeincolour.com/cambridge-gallery.htm>

Michael Kenna uses night photography to make beautiful black and white images:
<http://www.michaekenna.net/>

Introduction to Night Photography

ISO & Night Photography

Which ISO to use in night photography depends very much on the effect you wish to accomplish. On a tripod, the difference between 100 and 1000 is a matter of picture qualities. Generally the lower the ISO the finer the grain on film and the less digital noise in digital. This leads to richer colors. With higher ISO's, the grain or digital noise will become more textural and the pictures can have an abstract quality. Consider trying a variety of ISO's. Think about the qualities you want to convey. All speeds and all types of film: color negative, color slide or black & white can yield exciting results in night photography.

Factors in successful Night Photography

The first challenge in Night Photography may be getting a meter reading! Meters are easily fooled at night by light sources in the frame and by the extreme contrast range and low light levels. Meter the best you can then, bracket. The next challenge with film is reciprocity failure. Reciprocity failure affects all films. It is when the normal relationship between f-stops and shutter speeds breaks down. This means that at exposures slower than 1 second, the film may be underexposed even if you do manage to get a meter reading! So, what do you do? BRACKET! We also have the large black areas and light sources causing us to get inaccurate meter readings. So film or digital - - BRACKET!

Bracketing Techniques

Bracketing with night photography is very similar to bracketing under normal shooting situations. As a rule with film night photography, start with your best guesses exposure (arrived at through meter readings and experience), then over expose. A one-stop exposure change would be a doubling of the time or a changing of one f-stop. Example: If you were to bracket a five-second exposure, you would use 10 seconds and 20 seconds. A six-second exposure would not have a significant effect on the image. Perhaps a better option would be to bracket your f-stops (use f-8 and f-5.6) to avoid reciprocity failure problems. Bracketing is essential to good night photography. Our meters are not very accurate in extreme conditions and batteries get worn out fast. Bracket widely for best results.

Tips for Long Exposures

- Choose a stable tripod
- On automatic, cover the back of the viewfinder window. Stray light can affect the meter.
- Use a cable release and/or self-timer
- Bracket, bracket, bracket.