

Making Photos With a Story

from small things



Manawatu Camera Club APG Open Night
by Paul Robertson

THIS EVENING we are exploring image making using Set Design and small items (toys), with the aim of developing an image, or set of images, that tell a story or send a message. The 'story' can be anything you like but since we are using toys; you might like to make it a fun or humorous story in this case.

Set Design (also known as scenography, stage design, scenic design or production design) is the creation of theatrical, as well as film or television scenery. In this case, however, we are using the concept to set up and make interesting and unique photographic images.

Some example images are provided in this tutorial to get you started with ideas. The images are by Paul and his friend Rod Lowe, who lives in Sydney.

What your images can be used for:

- The sheer pleasure and fun, and the artistic challenge of making them.
- Photographic competitions and exhibitions.
- Advertising and promotion (not always for advertising the items used, necessarily, it could also be for an advertisement for a billboard, or in magazine or newsletter, about pretty much anything - 'Say No To Family Violence' for a serious message, for example).
- Images for your children or grand children using their own toys to entertain and amuse them, and to decorate their bedrooms with framed prints or decals.
- Making a children's book – either for private family use, or for publishing (for profit).
- Making fun AV slide-shows or time-lapse videos.

COPYRIGHT: Be sure to seek written permission from a product's manufacturer before attempting to publish a book for profit, or for advertisements.

What you need:

- Set the scene - an idea for a story or message from a single image or a set of images.
- Props (small toys, such as Lego people or other figurines, and toy cars and so on)
- Set Design/Backdrops (printed on paper) or full scenes (such as a Lego village or children's play



Rebellion

by Paul Robertson, Palmerston North

This image was made using a backdrop illustration created in Adobe Illustrator and laser printed on a sheet of A3 paper. The figures are Blokheadz - these were free giveaways during a Z Energy promotion in 2015. The backdrop is taped to a box and folded for the ground.

set - a sand pit, a kitchen play set and so on).

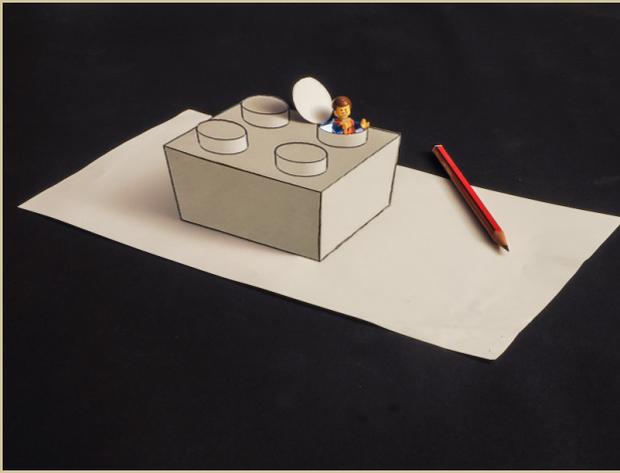
- A camera and a tripod, and good photography skills.

What to use for backdrop images:

- Photos - roads, streets, buildings, abstracts and so on.
- Artworks - such as simple pencil drawings or full colour art using crayons or paints and so on.
- Illustrations and designs - made in the computer such as in Adobe Illustrator or any free drawing software package.

(At APG we are using custom-made backdrops from Paul's photos and designs that he made on computer, and colour laser printed on A3 paper.)

Once you have your story idea and your backdrops created and printed, then it is just a matter of setting things up with the props and taking the photos.

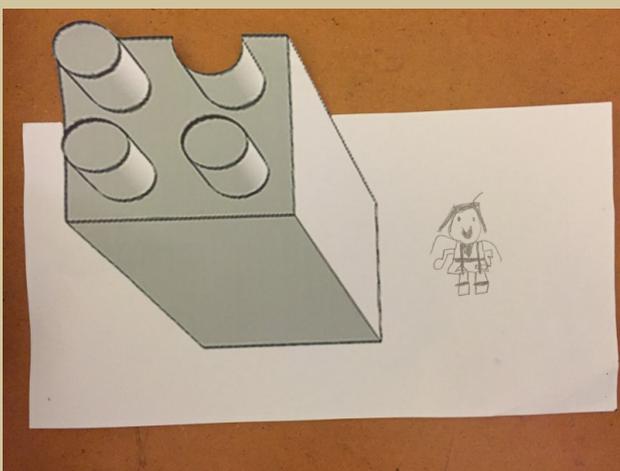


Magic Pencil

by Rod Lowe, Sydney

This image was taken in-camera with just a little shading added later. The backdrop is a flat piece of paper with a hole cut out for the lego figure to sit in and the photo was shot from an angle to give it a 3D effect.

The drawing (shown below) took a couple of goes hand-drawing the stretched lego block before it was close to what Rod wanted. Then he used "Sketchup" to draw the final version (to make the lines straight), printed it out on a sheet of A4 paper and cut around the shape. The black background is a piece of cardboard which Rod also cut an oval hole in so he could insert a small cardboard tube for the Lego figure to sit in. An LED light was used to illuminate the tube hole from underneath. The block was missing the shadow so that was added later in Photoshop (that was the only digital manipulation).



To make the photos some things you will need to think about are:

- The composition.
- The camera angles and distance or zoom.
- The depth of field (low f/stop number for more background blur/shallow depth of field, or a high f/stop number and longer exposure if you want broader sharpness in your images).
- Lighting (such as using small LED lights, and/or ambient light, and maybe one or more light

reflectors might also be helpful). And try some Light Painting, experiment with moving small lights in and around your scene during a long exposure to add more interest and motion effects or other special effects.

ALSO:

Use a tripod and manual focus to get the focus perfectly on the main part (focal point) of your image (hint: consider the 'Rule of thirds' and so on), where the characters and/or *action* is located within your Set.

TIPS -

Keep it simple – the image: Avoid clutter and distractions and try to avoid making your image too busy.

Keep it simple - the story or message: Trying to convey a lengthy or complex message will confuse, or not be recognised by, the viewer. Consider making a diptych or triptych if you wish to convey something more than a very simple message.

Composition: Carefully consider the focal point and general composition. Try shooting from different angles, and vary the Depth of Field and give some thought to selective focus to assist with this.

Lighting: Try lighting your set with different lights and of various strengths, and from various distances and angles. Avoid bright hotspots and dark shadows - a second light source or light reflector may be helpful.

Special Effects: Try some light painting, smoke trails (incense sticks are ideal for this), scatter falling glitter or white powder, or long exposure in conjunction with lens zooming. However, still remember to keep the two 'Keep it simple' tips in mind.

What are the limits?

There is only one limitation, your imagination.

Further reading...

Editing Guide

By Nancy J. Miller, M.S.

www.tealpublishing.com/teal-dabblers-blog/editing-guide

There are many layers of editing to create a polished interesting story that will entice your audience. This guide helps me systematically get through the layers when editing a story. Some layers you can self-edit, ask friends to read for interest, and hire an editor to do final editing or content editing if needed. When I wrote my first draft of *Vegetable Kids in the Garden*, my daughter whom I hired to edit the story said, "You didn't think



Beam Me Up Scotty

by Rod Lowe, Sydney

This image was created from several layers superimposed on the background. The lights were done using a piece of cardboard with pin holes and a light shining from behind. The circular base was created using an inverted coffee plunger basket lit from underneath and from above in the centre. The Lego figure was lit from above and also from below and then made slightly transparent in a separate Photoshop layer. All shot in the dark with long exposure.

you could write a children's story in three hours did you?" My other daughter thought the talking dancing vegetables sounded like they were on drugs. After content self-editing and rewriting, my editor helped me with the flow, content, and grammar. A year later, after hiring Russel Wayne to create amazing illustrations, I publishing the book. I was pleased I took the time to publish a book I was very proud of.

1. Does the title fit the theme of the story?
2. Is the title and story unique?
 - Google the title
 - Search the title on Amazon for similar titles
 - Look up the theme on Amazon to see what else has been done
3. Do the illustrations (children's book):
 - Fit the story theme and tone
 - Bring the story to life
 - Fit the age of the audience
 - Follow the order of the story
4. Is the story:
 - Interesting to read
 - Educate or develop character if desired
 - Unique or classic (old story done in a new way)
 - Appropriate and interesting for age intended
 - Characters and scenes consistent
5. Make sure the story:
 - Makes sense
 - Flows easily
 - Scenes and characters are easy to follow
 - Follows a timeline when needed
 - Has correct grammar and spelling
 - Has had someone else to read it
 - Is edited

Nancy Miller, M.S. is a Career Counsellor, Creativity Coach, and writer. Nancy will assist you with story ideas, organizing your book whether fiction or nonfiction, and choosing a method for publishing and printing.

Spike Milligan

A writer of children's books, originally for his own children.

Terence Alan "Spike" Milligan KBE (16 April 1918 – 27 February 2002) was a comedian, writer and actor. Milligan was the co-creator was the main writer and a principal cast member of The Goon Show and he is credited as a major influence on the members of Monty Python's Flying Circus. He is also noted as a popular writer of comical verse; much of his poetry was written for children, including Silly Verse for Kids (1959).

Children's books by Spike Milligan:

- Bald Twit Lion (1968)
- Badjelly the Witch (1973)
- Dip the Puppy (1974)
- Sir Nobonk and the Terrible Dreadful Awful Naughty Nasty Dragon (1982)
- A Children's Treasury of Milligan: Classic Stories and Poems (1999)
- The Magical World of Milligan (2009)



Cherry Picker

by Paul Robertson, Palmerston North

This photo was taken at a Lego show in Palmerston North in 2016. Therefore no set up was required since it was already there ready and waiting to be photographed at a show. Camera is on a tripod and set to Manual Mode and Manual Focus. Exposure 1/10sec, Aperture f/4.5, ISO-100, no flash.