Let´s take some pictures of LEGO®

By Stefan Matthies

Have you ever thought of taking photos of your favourite building toy?
Photos of your favourite movie scenes made out of a Danish playing system?
Making portraits of your favourite mini figures because you like them so much?

Well, think no longer. Instead try it yourself. Oh, you have but weren't happy with the results? Maybe the backdrop felt strange? Or somehow the pictures revealed some nasty shadows that hid the faces or special details of your models? Then maybe this little article might give you some help for creating images that´ll make you proud (no matter whether you're using a mobile phone, a compact camera or a rather expensive DSLR).

Some Basics

When preparing for a photo session there are some simple rules you may want to take into consideration:

Depending on the subject you want to shoot, you will have to think of an angle that gives your photo a more realistic touch. Of course it´s easy to snap from above but moving your camera lens to the eye level of your minifigs lets the viewer more easily dive into the scene.

Shot from above…

…and from eye level

Maybe you're lucky enough to have a LEGO® room just for yourself or you have to make do with the family dining table. Either way you still may want to take care of an appropriate background, as the top endings of the back of a chair or some tea mugs may distract the viewer's attention from your masterpiece. Instead try to put some cardboard in the background.

A neutral backdrop

One of the greatest problems will be the lighting. Using a built-in flash may light up your model but let the rest seem too dark. Putting up a desk lamp may give you enough light but may seem too bright on your picture and even create unwanted shadows, too. At this point you will want a lightbox. The main idea of such a thing is to gain as much control over the light and shadows in your pictures as possible. It gives you the chance to highlight the model and illuminate it by soft light, and also provides a neutral background. You can go and buy one, or have fun building one (customized for your creative ideas) yourself.
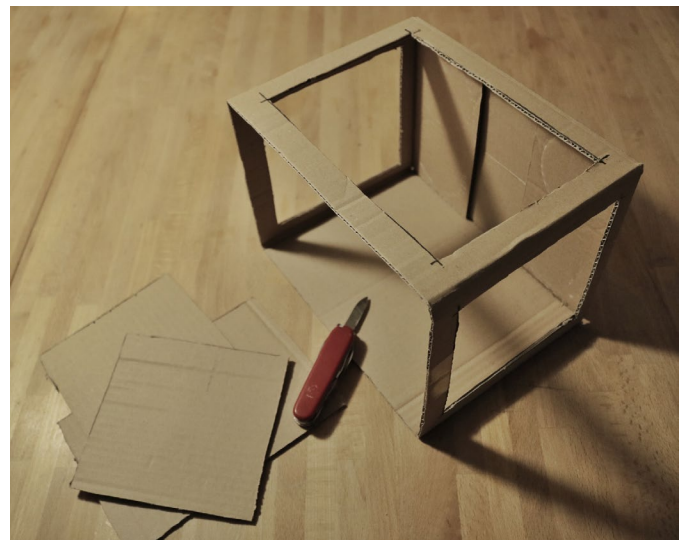
A Lightbox

The list of needed materials:

1. a cardboard box (the size depends on the models you want to take photos of)

2. a pair of scissors

3. a pen

4. a knife of carpet cutter (maybe it's needless to mention but please, take care…)

5. a piece of coloured cardboard

6. some sandwich wrapping paper

7. adhesive tape

First, you'll have to mark the 'windows' that will be cut out. Leave at least two to three centimetres towards all corners to prevent your box from becoming unstable.

Once you're done you can start cutting out the three sides.

For your next step use the scissors to fit the cardboard background inside your box and put it inside your box. But note: Don't push it in the lower corner; rather let it down like a curtain so it can reflect the light nice and smoothly.

The last thing to do is to cover the cut-outs with sandwich paper and fix it in place with tape on the outside.

Congratulations, you've just built your first light box!

In order to take some decent pictures you should place some lamps left and right of your box (and maybe one above it). That way you will be able to avoid shadows where you don't want them (or create some where you wish to).

Set-up with two lamps…

…and the result

BUT BEWARE: Even in times of LEDs and EU regulations dealing with the power of lamps, you must always remember that most lamps are producing heat when operating!
Take care not to set your studio / family table / home on fire!

With all types of lamps you will have to think of the temperature of the light source: Some bulbs are rather bluish (cold light) whereas others may appear rather yellowish (warm light). Should your setup not create the kind of tone you were looking for you can fix that in most image-editing apps. But whatever lamps you will be using, make sure you're using two matching ones.

Here's one picture I took, with the help of a lightbox and three lamps, for an article I wrote for our blog (StuckInPlastic.com) some time ago:

Were the Women Of NASA (LEGO® Ideas #21312) the first toy photographers?

I'm hoping these tips will help or even inspire you to try some toy photography yourself. If you want to, please share your images with us by using the hashtag #SiPlightboxHBM on Instagram. And of course you're always welcome to follow us on our blog www. stuckinplastic.com .

P.S. As mentioned before, the size of your lightbox depends on the size of your model, not the other way round. Should your model (maybe a MOC) be too big for the box then you know it´s time to build a bigger box!
#