



# Still Life with Imperfection

Photographer Emily Minton Redfield offers a new take on Old World masterpieces.

by Colleen Smith

**E**mily Minton Redfield's art photography focuses on still-life works with rich Dutch masters' ambience.

During a visit to the Prado, Madrid's world-class art museum, Redfield's viewing of still-life paintings by seventeenth-century Dutch masters inspired her to pivot from commercial photography toward fine-art photography. During the COVID lockdown, she found time to explore her new riff on Old World still-life motifs, working not with paints and brushes, but with her cameras.

**You had a successful career in commercial photography, with architecture, garden, and lifestyle photos published in numerous magazines, books, and catalogs. Why the evolution to art photography?**

I lost my hobby when I made it my profession. Although I could have shot more personal work along the way of my 32 years shooting home design, I chose to focus free time on family, friends, health, and fitness—particularly in the mountains. I shot a lot during our travels, another favorite pastime. During COVID, I had the time and mental space to begin shooting in earnest for myself. The process of creating and shooting these still lifes brought me such joy that I knew I needed to continue in the vein of making more art.

I'm just now an empty nester; it felt like an auspicious time to dive into art photography, which comes from my own curiosities.

**You hold a degree in psychology. How does your training support your role as a photographer?**

My academic pursuit of psychology stemmed from a desire to understand human nature. This interest in how people live has been satiated by going out into the world and shooting folks in their homes. Our interiors and architectural shoots are a very intimate and invasive process. Homeowners have me there for ten hours or more, rearranging their furniture, going through their cupboards for props, documenting their valued space. I think that

my good social skills have helped me gain entrée into the sacred space of home.

**In your emerging series of florals, you address themes of impermanence and the ephemeral. Your artist statement notes that this series reflects your status as a middle-aged woman aware of the fleeting nature of human life and the futility of vanity. What is beautiful about decline? How does your art help us accept the inevitability of death?**

With the passage of time, all things of carbon matter travel from the lovely to the flawed. I also am a hospice volunteer, giving some grace and dignity to the end of times, so that glimpse of life has brought me acceptance. Contemplating my own body's decline has been a contextual theme. I'm interested in revealing the quiet splendor of these phases. I'm continually drawn to the Japanese term *wabi-sabi*, the ancient art of seeing beauty in imperfection.

**What in your life has most influenced this art?**

My still lifes, I've come to realize, are reflective of the refined classical beauty of how I was raised. As the daughter of a sophisticated, acclaimed interior designer dad and a polished art history major mother, my Southern world was rather image conscious. The classical beauty of these still lifes reimagines the often glamorous world I've been surrounded by. I've been creating pictures at odds with-



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**Afloat, a portrait of deconstructed flowers, was shot in a backyard pond.**

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**Amsterdam, a tulips still life, was shot with a sliver of light through a curtain during COVID. Minton Redfield got the bugs from eBay.**

that ideal—showing beauty in imperfection and the ephemeral. This polarity interests me.

**How do you stay inspired?**

I stay inspired by going to museum exhibits, of painting and photography, as well as perusing photography publications like *Lenswork*, *Aperture*, and *Shots*. I'm constantly sourcing visual ideas from TV and film, even Instagram. There is a wealth of imagery to mine for inspo. It's a matter of noticing.

**How do you keep your**

**photography fresh?**

Everything has been photographed at this point, so it's about creating one's own point of view, which happens when you point the camera at a subject a certain way. I have honed my creative voice most recently by taking a six-week summer sabbatical to study at the Maine Media Workshops, where I reinvigorated my practice. I exploded some of my more precise ways of seeing, habits that had been built over many years of shooting. I layered in various new approaches

and techniques, but most importantly, put more of myself in my work through writing exercises and soul searching. After years of shooting in a very orchestrated way, capturing spaces in their finest hour, I was called to shoot more intuitively, organically and to have my photography infused with more personal meaning. I wanted to expand my visual acuity, and this time was fruitful in that I was insistent on going with a beginner's mind, ready for exploration. It helped reshape me into a stronger photographer. Apparently, an old dog is never too old to learn new tricks! 🐾

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