

Photographers search high and low for innovative new techniques to make their portraits stand out from the crowd, from finding truly unique models to placing them in distinctive settings, but they all tend to share one thing in common: their goal is to showcase a human touch. With this eye-catching technique, however, you can turn that convention on its head by turning your models into exquisitely beautiful porcelain statues. It combines the natural human intimacy of a nude photograph and the simple innocence of porcelain sculpture into a surreal beauty unlike any other photographic style - and we'll show you step-by-step how you can create the same effect during your next shoot.

As with any photoshoot, setting the scene correctly is crucial. Set up a light-colored backdrop, ideally the same pure white as we used in our sample shots, and cover a simple folding table with a white cloth. This cloth should also be a bright white so that it can act as gentle reflector to fill in some of the deeper shadows - in this case, we used a spare cover from one of our reflectors to ensure a good fill. A small footstool or backless chair behind the table gives your model extra freedom to pose the upper body without unnecessary fatigue, but you could easily adapt the scene to handle a standing model if you choose.

The main light should be set up very high, approximately 2 meters above the model at an angle of roughly 4 o'clock relative to the model (see Issue 4 for a full explanation of how to use the 'clock-face' lighting system). Obviously, this isn't a typical lighting setup for portrait photography, but it is necessary to help create the final surreal effect during post-production. In many wax museums and sculpture galleries, the statues and sculptures are often lit in this fashion to highlight the fine detail work and three-dimensionality of the sculpting, and we want to begin our post-production work from a similar basis. In this case, a more harshly-lit image will give us much more flexibility than a traditionally-lit portrait, but it is important to ensure that the fill light from your tablecloth prevents the shadows from getting so dark that detail is lost.

When selecting a model for this type of shoot, there are some important points to keep in mind to make the shoot a success. To really boost the porcelain effect, the model should have the lightest possible skin, and should be either blonde or have another very light-colored hair type. If you can't find a blonde model, you may be able to get away with using a blonde wig. Propping should be kept to a minimum, although some subtle jewelry might be effective as long as it has a light-colored, soft matte finish, such as wooden beads or pearls. Dark jewelry and hair will spoil the porcelain effect, as will any type of clothing or fabric.

The posing for this type of shoot can go two ways, depending on your personal style. The safest option is to pose the model looking away from the camera, as very few

sculptural photographs depict the piece staring directly into the camera lens. With that in mind, however, you can also choose to highlight the slightly unnerving and commanding gaze of the model/sculpture with a head-on photo. Experiment with both options, and don't be afraid to do a quick mid-shoot review to see which effect you prefer.

Now let's move on to the post-production magic! You can work in Lightroom or Photoshop, but we do offer you a downloadable preset for Lightroom that can make post-production extremely easy. Even working by hand without the preset, it's fairly simple to achieve the correct effect. First, increase the exposure by 1 f-stop, and don't worry if this creates a few small areas of clipped highlights. Then decrease the Contrast slider to -80 and the Clarity slider all the way to -90, and you'll begin to really see the potential of the porcelain effect. Because of the unique nature of porcelain, statues crafted in the material seem to possess their own inner glow - this is the effect the contrast softening achieves. All the fine details that were made extremely noticeable by the initial high-angle lighting have now been smoothed out by the Clarity reduction, leaving us with a much softer image reminiscent of an expensive soft focus lens.

If you prefer not to use the Clarity slider to adjust the softness of the model's skin, you might want to try the external filter 'Imagenomic Portraiture' (available for both Photoshop and Lightroom) or Photoshop's built-in 'Surface Blur' tool. The final step in the process is to reduce the Vibrance slider to -80, which almost completely removes the model's natural skin tone. That's all there is to it!

The images you produce with this technique are incredibly eye-catching, and are sure to capture attention wherever you show them, anywhere from social media websites to more professional creative photo contests. They offer a great balance of simple setup, painless post-production and a strong visual impact that viewers love. Now that you have become a bit more familiar with how the final images are created, a whole new world of porcelain possibility will open up to you as you start to experiment. The potential poses could create a beautiful gallery all by themselves, and if you were to combine them with even more creative backgrounds, the possibilities become endless. Just remember to keep all your props and backgrounds as light colored as possible to keep the porcelain effect consistent!

This porcelain technique also offers aspiring photographers a relatively innocent way to start adding nude shots to their portfolio, as the sensuality that is traditionally associated with nude portraiture is removed - or, at least, altered - by converting the models into statues. If you're not completely comfortable working with nude models, you could easily limit the technique to a more conservative head and shoulders portrait and still have great success with the technique. Enjoy, and good light!