Foam Core Board Photography Tutorial
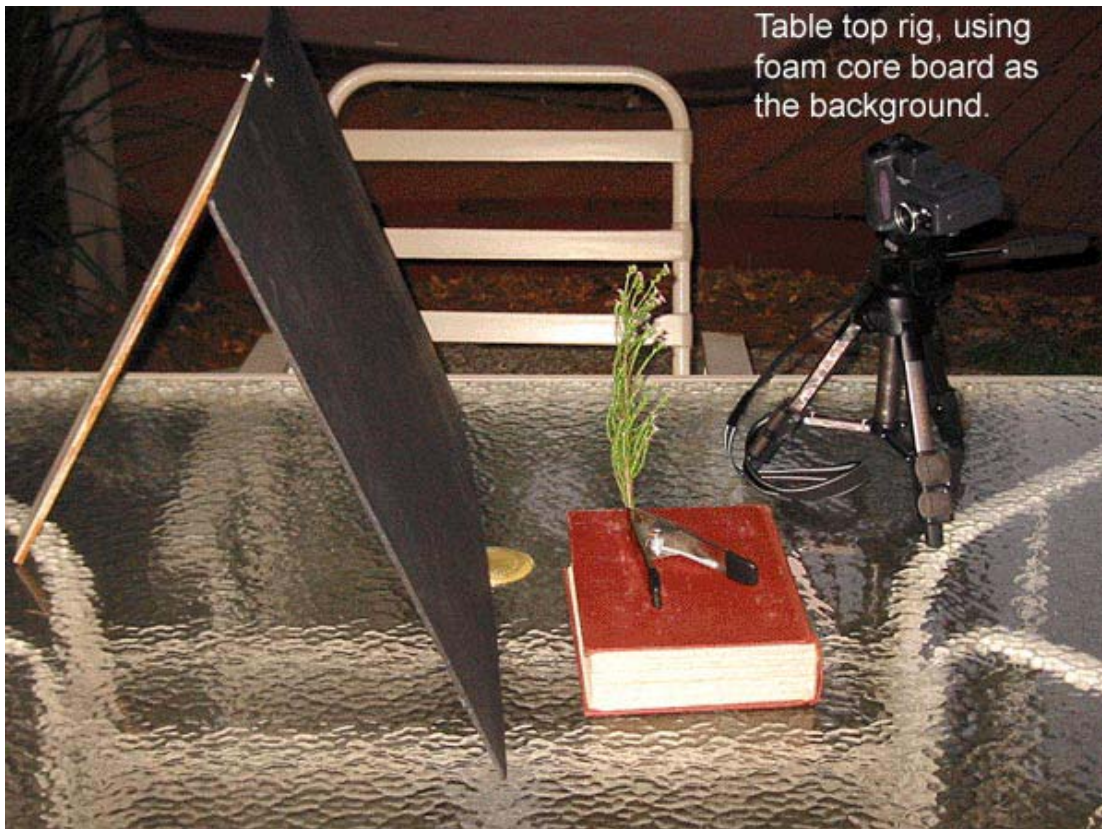*by Uncle Frank*

Back last winter, a group of us formed the Foam Core Addicts Society. Some of the newer NTF members have noted the "FCAS Member" tag appended to posters' signatures, and questioned what it was about, so here's a tutorial on the technique.

The starting point was an attempt to create a table top rig for macros that would fit with my meager budget. I found that natural light worked fine, if it was low level and diffused, but needed a way to isolate the subjects from distracting backgrounds. I tried fabrics and various papers, but they blew around on my outdoor rig, so I finally seized on foam core board (fcb), which is an inexpensive and readily available art supply. Here's a link to an Office Depot ordering form that describes the product.

http://www.officedepot.com/ddSKU.do?id=477794&pp=301001&sid=NJR7467PVGGL9LBQPC3 CVM1RRAMUEMN9&bc=3:14:1402:1402001&level=SK

Using a sheet of "black" fcb, which is really dark gray, a stick to prop it up, a couple of cheap clamps, a thick book, and a table top tripod, I completed my "studio" for under $40. Here's a picture of the setup:

Table top rig, using foam core board as the background.

And I was really delighted when my low budget approach resulted in images like this:

As the technique developed, I realized that having an evenly colored fcb background made it was easy to {select} it in Photoshop. That allowed the possibility of adding a gradient to it, or even replacing the background with another picture.

The following pics show the steps in completing what's become known as an "FCB pic".

Original Capture

Crop & Rotate

Clone out unwanted elements in bkgrnd

Select bkgrnd, and reduce output level

Touch-up & Sharpen;
Then, Frame & Sign.

fdr photo

So there you have it. FCB pics were quite a craze around here in February and March, so we started a club. In order to join, you needed to submit proof that you had mastered the technique, and to date, 57 people have qualified. I'm proud that many of them still affix "FCAS Member" to their signature blocks.

By the way, we're still accepting applications, but prepare to get roasted a little during the process :-). The Applications Committee has raised the bar quite a bit since the early days, and you need a pretty good macro as well as a nicely processed background to get past them. But you get a FCAS Secret Decoder Ring if you qualify :-).

Warmest Regards,
Uncle Frank