# **Improvised Light Table as an Imagemaking Technique**

## **Tracing Pictures**

We all have experience tracing pictures at some point in our lives. Unless we used very thin paper, however, we probably struggled to see the various lines of our original. This is why artists, architects, and graphic designers use light tables. By back-lighting the images, they make sure that even the smallest lines are visible.

## **What Is a Light Table?**

A **light table** is a tool used by graphic designers to shine diffused light through an image and a piece of paper laid on top. This means the light has to be bright enough to shine through two layers of paper. When used in this way, a light table aids tracing images, sketching a variation of the original image, or even painting an image without the pesky black lines of the original.

| light table  ***Artists, graphic designers, photographers, and architects all use light tables.*** |
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Light tables can also help you create patterns for embroidery and cross-stitching when you lay a piece of fabric over the image instead of the second piece of paper. Other professionals use it for viewing photo slides.

There are also similar products. A **light panel** is a more portable version of a light table that can be set on a counter or desk. With the introduction of LED lights, we also have light pads that are even thinner and more portable than the light panel. Finally, we have a **light box**, which is exactly as it sounds: a box with lights. You've probably seen a light box mounted on the wall in your doctor's office to help when viewing X-rays.

| xray  ***Medical personnel even use light boxes in their work.*** |
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## **Improvising a Light Table**

If you don't have a light table but want to use this technique right away, you can always improvise. On a bright day, you can tape your original image to a window and let the natural power of the sun do the work. However, standing against a window for extended periods of time might be hard on your feet. Also, working on a vertical surface might tire your arms or cause liquid pigments to run. Think about these issues when starting your project.

| improvised  ***Even with a little shade, the sun is bright enough to shine through both pieces of printer paper.*** |
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## **Build Your Own Light Table**

If you can't stand long enough to use a window or your materials are not cooperative on a vertical surface, you can actually build your own light table. You just need a few tools, materials, some familiarity with DIY projects, and a sense of adventure.

The most important part of this project is acrylic sheeting. Several sources recommend using #2447 sheeting with a 1/4-inch protective backing. You'll want this to be a translucent white instead of clear. This should give you the sturdiness you need. Cut this to the size you want for the table's surface.

Next, cut 1X2 boards so that they create a rectangle, with the outer perimeter matching the acrylic sheeting. Basically, if your acrylic sheet is 36 inches by 36 inches, you will want your rectangle to be the exact same size. Remember to cut two sides shorter by two inches to account for the width of the other boards.

Next, screw four metal braces in the corners to hold the boards snugly together. Flip it over so your braces are on the bottom. Next, pre-drill holes in your acrylic sheeting where you will want to attach it to the frame. Screw the sheeting onto the frame. To prevent the screws from damaging the plaster, use a rubber washer so the screw can create a tight hold without damaging your light table.

At this point, you can build legs for the table if you wish. With legs, you are free to set any kind of spotlight under the table, pointing up at the surface. If you need something that can sit on a table or desk, it gets a little more complicated.

For a desktop version, you can put eye-screws in the frame, about 1/4-inch from the bottom, spacing them about 1-3 inches apart based on your preference. You only need to do this for two sides, the top and bottom or the left and right. Tightly string some picture wire between the eye-screws.

Next, take bright LED lights, like you'd find on a Christmas tree, and wrap them around the picture wire. You can use more picture wire, twist ties, or zip ties to affix the lights to the eye-screws at the ends. The tighter you wrap the lights, the more illumination you will have on each wire. Once you are done, just plug them in and enjoy your table. However, be sure to only use LED lights, as incandescent bulbs can heat up and cause problems.