



Lightroom Bitesize: Digital Tilt-Shift Effect

Tilt-shift lenses are, for most amateurs, prohibitively expensive - with even the budget Lensbaby range starting at around £100. Their main purpose is to cure converging verticals – which is particularly useful in the photography of architecture.

However, recently there has been a surge in mimicking miniature scenes from real-life ones – much like images of model towns or model railways. This is because a tilt-shift lens can produce a very narrow depth of focus – similar to that produced by a macro lens when photographing miniature scenes (for those technical it is based on the Scheimpflug principle).

This tutorial shows how to create the same effect using Lightroom.

First you need to choose the right image because the tilt-shift technique won't work unless you have the correct viewpoint.

Most miniature scenes are (logically) viewed from above rather than on the level. Therefore a tilt-shift scene is more realistic if it is taken from an elevated viewpoint.

As an example, here is a scene of Arley station, on the Seven Valley Railway between Kidderminster & Bridgnorth, taken from the road bridge that crosses the line. This is an ideal type of image for a tilt-shift effect.

Note: Because we have memories of viewing model railways and model towns these type of scenes make very good tilt-shift subjects.





In order to replicate the narrow depth of focus we need to blur the background AND the foreground so that only a narrow band across the middle of the image is sharp. We can do this in Lightroom using the Graduated filter.

But first we need to create a 'model' look. Usually you are looking quite closely at a model and so we first need to get the image as sharp as possible using the sharpening tool.

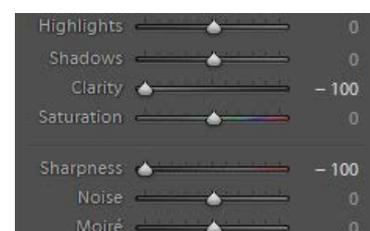
Then we need to boost the saturation – since models are usually painted in quite bright, garish colours.



Now open the Graduated filter tool.....



.....and set the Clarity and Sharpness to zero.





Click at the top of the image and drag downwards (personally I think it looks best if more of the top half is blurred than the bottom half).



You will notice three horizontal lines appear. These show the start, mid-point and end-point of the graduate. Drag down until the end-point is roughly in the centre of where you want it to be sharp. You will be able to see the blurring as you go so keep tweaking the position until you are happy with the result.

Now do the same at the bottom of the image, dragging upwards.





Top Tip

If you want to edit the position of the graduations, just click on a placeholder (the circle in the centre of the graduate) and edit.

To really emphasise the effect, repeat, but this time covering just half of each existing graduation so that the very top and very bottom are extremely blurred. You can repeat this as many times as required (and it is recommended that you repeat at least three times since it mimics the fact that the amount of blur when using a tilt-shift lens increases exponentially rather than evenly).

Note: The effect of the graduation depends very much on the resolution of your image. The blur will be far more pronounced with a small jpeg than with a full-sized RAW file.

For the final touch, add a slight graduated blur to either side - with maybe a little dark vignette for good measure.



So there we have it – a fake miniature railway scene. Not something you want to do every day but it's a bit of fun to try.

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by
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