

Symphony of Light



Burmis tree

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For more information on "Painting With Light" visit the New Member website/mentors at <http://psa-newmember.org/>

Light painting is a technique that selectively illuminates subjects with light while the camera shutter remains open. A photographer paints a scene with light just like an artist paints canvas with paintbrushes. Light painting is a fascinating technique. While it can become vastly complex, it requires such simple items as a flashlight, sturdy tripod and a camera capable of long exposures. The exposure time can vary from a few seconds to a few hours; but on average, it spans several minutes.

Let's start with flashlights—they are not created equally in terms of size, intensity and temperature of the light. The smallest lights could be tiny enough to fit inside the palm, and the largest ones could have a power of millions of candle lights. It is possible to use laser beams, sparkling lights, LEDs, and military lights. The only limit is imagination. Try to free the imagination and experiment with gadgets and lights that are absolutely unusual. Anything goes. While it is possible to create a beautiful light painting with a single humble Stinger® flashlight, an abundant choice of light brushes will assure that the light arsenal suits every scene or every fantasy.

Once light to illuminate your scene or subject

is obtained, you can then introduce color to the setting by covering the source of light with theatrical gels. The best gels to use are those made by Roscoe®. You can mix and match and experiment with the colors forever—Roscoe makes quite an impressive palette. While multitude of colors could be striking, the usage of over saturated gels tends to get noisy and boring. Avoid producing gaudy photographs with colored blotches, which fail to capture genuine interest and make a lasting connection. Find subtle colors when using Roscoe. Or better yet, try a more "organic" approach to color management in light painting. Do not overdo it and do not interfere with the scene being painted to a great extent. Be mindful of the available landscape, and make sure the emphasis doesn't contradict with what the original creator had in mind. This is the most difficult part of light painting: finding that balance between conveying the original mood and letting the imagination conceive the magic.

While experimenting with gels, avoid usage of explicit colors in basic form (such as Red, Green and Blue for example). Build gels with subtle hues that will not shift the original palette of the landscape; or better yet, find a color gamut to



Colorful wagon



Sleeping car



Red rock



Night watch

compliment it. Work with shifting the temperature of the light source and, depending on the natural color of the subject that is being painted, warm up or cool down the temperature of the light.

It is also possible to use strobes (off-camera) for effective light painting. You could make use of old Vivitar® and old Nikon® strobes. Slave the array of strobes required for the light painting and then activate the chain with multi-channel radio transmitters and optical triggers, which can be fired multiple times during the exposure. Strobes could also be gelled to change the color of the light. Use strobes for highlighting the subjects and illuminating structures from the inside, or when including people in light painting.

As far as the process of exposure goes, there is no guaranteed recipe. The duration of time you hold light over a certain spot depends on the overall exposure, ambient light, ISO, aperture, intensity of the light, required effect, density of the gel (if used), luminosity and color of the subject.

It is said that a photographer should “see or envision” the picture prior to firing the camera. In light painting, it is imperative to visualize the painting process before taking the shot. One of the reasons for conjuring and keeping a “painted”

picture in your head is simply because there is a need to remember which parts of the landscape have already been painted. If light is applied with one color to an area, and then a spot is repainted -there is a risk of burning that part (not having image details left on the sensor or film).

It takes a long time to learn how all the parameters interact with each other. The more subjects incorporated into the painting, the more different the light sources and gels are deployed – the more difficult it is to bring it all together. It is best to experiment with small tasks and then gradually introduce more light sources and subjects.

Use strokes to cover the whole surface of an object with light. It is better to use smooth slow strokes, but not too slow, so you can go over an object 2-3 times so the coverage is even. Normally, do not stand between the camera and the object painted, although it is still possible in some cases. Always remember how much the camera can cover and try not to step into the shot.

It is important to wear black clothes because you will move a lot in front of the camera. Cover your face with a black baklava. The camera won't pick up your image if you move fast enough

A word on composition: While there is certainly a “WOW effect” in night photography, let alone light painting, the classic rules of photography



Hoodoos 1



Forgotten train



Teepee

apply. If the composition is not strong, the image will not have a lasting effect after the initial “wow” is gone. You will waste time light painting if the composition doesn’t work.

While subjects can include anything at all, it is helpful to be far from the city and its light pollution. Besides, intimacy with nature is very inspirational, and history is full of examples of how it helps to free imagination and boost artistic processes.

Think of light painting subjects such as abandoned buildings and machinery; interesting trees, rocks formations and any interesting landscape that catches your fancy. Or **make** any landscape interesting by using your imagination coupled with light gadgets.

Arguably, light painting could become the most creative form of photography—it is up to you on which level you bring it.

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Tips for Painting with Light:

- If you have digital camera, set the temperature to tungsten (3200 K). Most modern DSLR cameras allow setting a custom color temperature. Try to increase it a bit, for example to 3900 K or more—you will find your favorite temperature zone.
- If you shoot with film – use tungsten-balanced film and 82B and 82C Cokin warming filters that increase temperature.
- While it is tempting to do so at night, don’t go higher than 100 ISO
- If you light-paint around the full moon, you can increase the depth of field by adjusting F-stop. But, if you open the aperture, you might not have enough exposure time to paint the scene.
- Remove all filters from your lens, including UV filter.
- Try to paint the same scene using different equipment and techniques. You will be amazed at the differences. It is the best way to learn how to create different moods.
- To capture star trails, make sure that your cameras face Polaris. If you don’t know how to find Polaris, bring the compass and point your camera to the north.
- You can even create compelling light painting during the day, provided you have enough stacked Neutral Density filters on your lens.