

Floral Abstracts: *Another Look*

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Floral photography continues to evolve, and with this evolution comes new techniques and experiments. Long-time PSAers will no doubt remember how the late Mary Ellen Schultz gave floral photography a fresh, innovative look by using her “shooting through” technique, which was done by placing surrounding color in the foreground near her lens (even touching it at times). Her technique created an even softer, more painterly, effect that remains popular to this day. (See Figure 1)

Although continuing to embrace traditional methods of floral photography, the objective here was to find an even deeper approach into the world of floral abstracts: in this case, by magnifying the subject even more, distilling it to its most basic element(s) of design. For example, the subject itself could be a simple line a mere millimeter wide, amid a splash of colors. (See Figure 2) To accomplish this, *the subject must be magnified*

until it is not recognizable as a flower. The more magnification there is, the more opportunity there is for originality.

Here are a few tips to help the adventurous photographer get started:

Use two or more pots of flowers set up with two, eye-level, platforms. **Projector tables work well here because you can easily separate them with different heights.** Placing flowerpots on top of these surfaces makes so much more sense than positioning a tripod for each composition, especially when working at extreme magnifications.

Start by placing the flowers in the sun with backlighting, and then physically move around, studying the light while determining a more specific lighting choice. Looking through the viewfinder, simply rotate the pots to find a composition.

Figure 1, Floral Study 2990





Figure 2, Floral Study 3911

Work with a wide-open aperture and the lens set to its minimum focus. A 35mm SLR digital or film camera with an 80-200mm macro zoom lens will provide the most flexible options. Use extension tubes, or add close-up filters for additional magnification. Note: Shorter macro lenses in the 50 – 60mm range are not as effective because of their closer working distance coupled with their wider angles of view. Of course, always experiment with what you have.

Isolate lines within the color areas by shooting directly into the edges of your subject. Flowers with larger petals, such as gladiolas and flags, provide a less stressful starting point.

Frequently there are gaping holes within the petals. They can be annoying, so turn this negative into a positive by placing one color of flower in the foreground and another color in the background. Use a color wheel to determine the choices for secondary and tertiary colors.

Be precise, because magnifying the subject unfortunately magnifies poor technique. Care must be taken to shoot when the subject is perfectly still and properly focused. Patience is a necessity.

Critique your work with a discerning eye. Strive for clean, *understated* (See Figure 3) compositions that target specific design elements such as line, color, shape, and texture. Generally, the most effective images are uncluttered and have visual clarity.

Be aware, as this approach can be challenging. Long periods of time can elapse before a composition “jumps out” at you. Other images just

happen, such as the one here titled, “Eve.” (See Figure 4). It was created from two orchid stems within 15-minutes. Others have taken an hour or more to develop. Another challenge is keeping your tripod perfectly still while you work. In extreme cases, a single millimeter of movement can instantly cause the loss of a carefully crafted composition—one that may be lost forever!

When successful, the rewards far outweigh the challenges, because in the end you will enjoy

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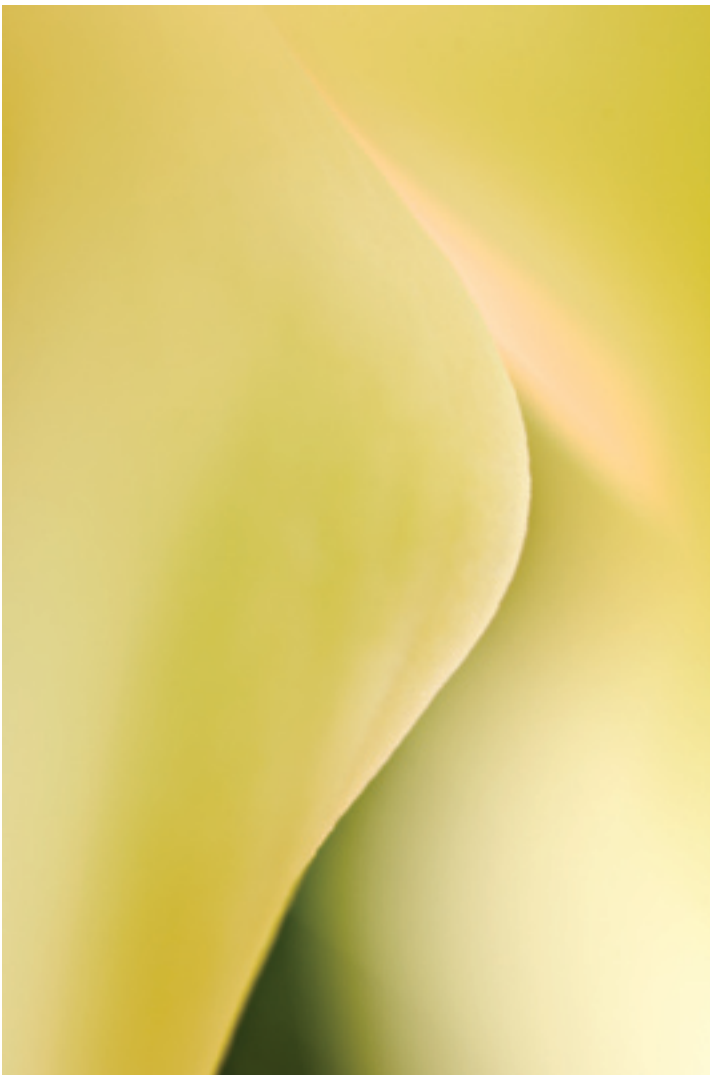
Figure 3, Floral Study 4400

Floral Study 4382



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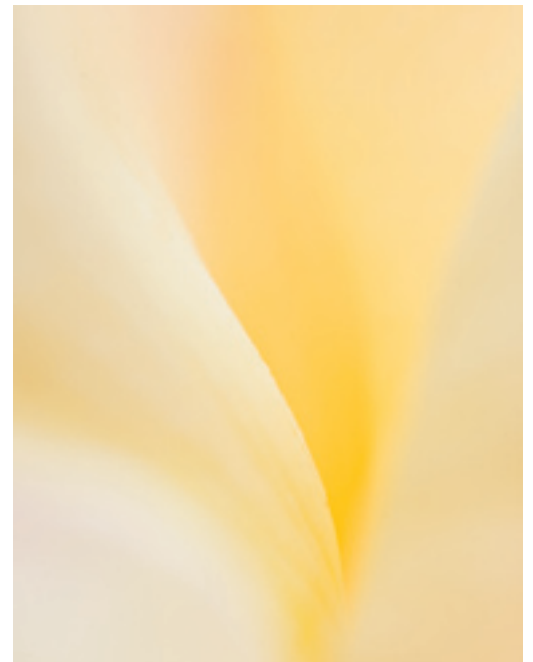


Eve/Floral Study 3494

unique, one-of-a-kind, images. Another benefit is its low cost. No need for traveling to exotic locations! Spontaneity is also an advantage. Just shoot at home when you feel the urge.

Give it a try. Spoil yourself. Go into your yard, set the camera on a sturdy tripod, bring in a variety of potted flowers, and then lose yourself for 3-4 hours in an abstract world of unbelievable beauty. You will more than likely be surprised well beyond your expectations! ■

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Floral Study 3846