

Crafting Reality: Painting With Light



A How-To Guide

by Eric Curry

PREFACE

This book is a practical and inspirational resource for demonstrating the photographic techniques and concepts of painting with light. Written in plain language, and with the inclusion of over 60 photos, I will show photo enthusiasts, from amateurs to professionals, how I create the works illustrated herein. You will see how you too can easily create your own amazing Paint With Light photos.



This shot "Summer Tractor" was created at night with only a small flash light and several 10 second exposures.

CRAFTING REALITY: PAINTING WITH LIGHT

A How-To Guide

Shortcut - A quick and dirty guide for shooting right away

In a dark environment, set your camera on a tripod. Using the camera's timer, expose a frame for about 12 seconds while you paint light from your hand-held flash light onto the side of a couch or piece of a car. Now shoot a new photo of about 12 seconds, this time paint light with your flash light onto the opposite side of that same couch or car subject. Do this a few times.

In Photoshop open one image, then open and display the LAYERS MENU. Now open a different image from the shooting session and "drag" or "copy and paste" it into and on top of the first bottom image. They stack up in the LAYERS MENU as you add each new layer. You now have two layers on the Photoshop Layer window.

In the layers menu there is a Blending Mode box just below the LAYERS label, (default is Normal). For the top layer you just added, click the "Normal" setting and scroll down to the "Lighten" setting. Now the top layer is overlapping the bottom layer; they should align perfectly. You will see that the new top layer is clear in the blacks, and anything you painted with light is overlapping onto the layer below. The layer below is also visible through this new top layer; think of it as two pieces of glass you are looking through.

When viewing the two layers basically at the same time, you can chose to erase or remove any part of the top layer that does not fit the combined photo. Erase slowly with several strokes of the Erase Tool until the overlapping frames look smooth and even. Repeat this process a few times with as many new layers / exposures as you like.

When finished, flatten the image. That's it!

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INTRODUCTION

Thank-you for purchasing my e-Book, *Painting With Light*. Herein I will demonstrate the simple techniques and concepts of how to "Paint With Light," along with an understanding of how to combine those exposures you made into a single wonderful photograph. More than that, it is my intention, through samples of my own photography and this book, to open a door in your mind's eye and allow you to truly see for perhaps the first time. These days anybody with a camera is a photographer, but it is up to those with vision to reveal truths about our world, allow others to finally see what you envisioned before your photograph was created. If I can inspire you in your own endeavors to create and share with viewers, then this book will have been successful.



This vintage Airstream Trailer was photographed in Hysperia , CA. using my painting with light technique, multiple exposures, and several large flash lights over the course of 4 hours.

Please Be Honest

This book is the culmination of over 30 years of professional photographic experience, along with five years of my own experimentation in the realm of "Painting With Light." It was a wonderful yet difficult journey to undertake, as I had nobody else to ask and get advice from. I am choosing to pass this information and insight on to you, the purchaser of this e-Book, in exchange for a couple dollars. If you like it and want to share it, then please send the link to your friends and fellow photographers so they can buy it too.

Do not give them this book for free. Maintain your integrity.

My History

I have been a professional photographer for a while now. Early in my career I specialized in still-life scenes and special effects, (glowing cans of soup and flying stereos shot in my photo studio) then transitioning on to industrial photography, (on location with jet aircraft and heavy industry). When I finally decided to begin this quest of creating a series of artistic images at night, using all that I have learned over the previous thirty years, my reach was modest. It was my hope to tell simple stories in these images, but over time my desire to tell ever more elaborate stories in my images grew, and with that so did the technical challenges as I reached for ever-more elaborate narratives embedded into the final photographs. What you are reading in the following pages is the culmination of not only 30 years of photography, but also a summation of the last 5 years of cutting edge Painting With Light discovery.

Painting with light has been around since the beginning of photography. Like many artists who came before me, I did not invent a new technique but simply rediscovered it, and maybe pushed it a bit further. My hope now is to share with you all of these interesting concepts and techniques. It is amazingly fun and wildly mind-expanding to glimpse all that is possible if you only allow yourself to think in terms of what you envision, not what you see.

Night Photography, Painting With Light

As a younger person it was fun to go out in the evening and capture long exposures of mandarin scenes. But printing the images revealed something that did not exist to the naked eye; the wonder of photography. There are many styles of night photography and painting with light to explore and enjoy. Let's start with the traditional long exposures as I just mentioned. With the advent of digital cameras it is possible to set up a tripod and expose an area of the street or cityscape, and in just a few short moments see what has been captured. It is fun and exciting to play with what develops in the viewfinder. It is also possible to capture long exposures of moving objects in the scene; the classic image that comes to mind is shooting a long exposure of a Ferris wheel at the carnival, or shooting a portion of a cityscape and the freeway, with car tail lights making long red streaks in the scene. And let's not forget long exposures of exploding fireworks. Fun, Fun, Fun.

Another form of night photography is called Painting with Light. This is broken down into two basic categories. One form of light painting involves a style where the camera can see the actual light source you are holding in your hand. As you wave the light about or spin it around on a string, the bright light source makes streaks in the camera. You are exposing the moving light and the overall scene as a single picture, so the effect is pretty neat and very pleasing to the eye. The creative possibilities are limitless.



Creating light painting art is fun and easy. Take long exposures of a night scene while moving a hand held light and allow the camera to record everything.

The other form of night photography is a style that involves making one very long exposure of the entire scene for about a minute, all the while panning the hand held light left, right, up, and down in order to cover as much of the area as needed. The point is not to see the light source, but only "Paint" light on to the overall scene and surfaces. This tends to give the photograph a sort of "Art Photo Look." Because light is splashing everywhere, even areas that you did not intend to paint, the overall effect is sloppy and "artistic." Can you hear the sarcasm in my writing?

The style I will address in this e-Book is in my opinion closer to the concept of actual "Painting With Light". In this style I like to literally take a flashlight and paint light onto a smaller surface or a portion of the scene, not the whole scene, in order to light up that section of the photograph. By creating multiple separate exposures, and painting different portions of the scene each time you expose a frame, you are able to control your lighting to an incredible degree. What I will be describing in this very narrow e-Book is that technique of painting with light onto selected portions of the scene using multiple shorter exposures. I will also describe how to recombine all or some of the images you captured on location back into a single amazing photograph.



This mundane scene of old farm tools resting against the barn looks wonderful when I control the lighting. Far more than a snap shot of hand tools at night.

Create What You Envision, Don't Copy What You See

This How-To book crosses the line from simple technical manual to advice on creativity. It is my hope that by reading this book you will not only fully understand the technical concepts and mechanics of how to shoot and recombine images in order to make amazing Paint With Light photographs, but that you will gain insight into the creative process as well.

So often during my public presentations and coaching of new photographers I advise them to think in terms of "concepts." Do not just go out into the environment and photograph neat stuff you happen to see, but take the next step and envision an idea first, then try to create that vision you see in your mind's eye.

In most of the photographs I created as part of the series " American Pride And Passion" there is a strong conceptual thread running through each image. I am trying to capture in a single print an entire story being presented in the photograph. It is up to the viewer to look, discover, and then discern the narrative buried inside the image. For you the, reader/photographer, will have far more success and fulfillment over time if you too think in terms of "Telling Stories" with your photographs. Do not only make great shots of cool stuff at night! That is great and those shots are fun to see but sometimes they tend to look like yet another "test" of a technique. Very quickly you too will master the technique of "Painting With Light" as I am presenting it to you here. It is from that point that you will really begin to understand the power and opportunities available to you when you start thinking in terms of "Ideas"; it will allow you to really make a statement in your photography.

The last word on this subject worth mentioning (I learned this the hard way) is that this particular technique is so unusual and visually powerful that it can be abused, so to speak. Viewers are not used to seeing reality presented in such a clear and yet incomprehensible visual language; viewers will often ask themselves, "How is this possible?" For me, I am not trying to make something so crazy and wild in terms of my lighting that nobody will believe it. I do not want to go overboard and make silly art or crazy lighting solutions that ultimately look like some sort of computer rendering or totally unbelievable illustration. Instead, I am trying to take reality and enhance it in order to allow the viewer to also see what I see in the photo. The character of my subjects, the integrity of a guy who restores an old car, or the passion of a man who is determined to be the best at his job that he can be. You will find your own voice too if you think in terms of ideas.

LOGISTICS: LIGHTS, CAMERAS, TRIPODS, TOOLS, ETC.

Cameras: Almost Any Digital Camera Will Work

It's true. You do not need a fancy digital camera with hundreds of functions and gobs of Mega Pixels. The only advantage high mega pixel counts give you is the ability to crop into your finished print a bit, and the advantage of making larger prints for display. Otherwise it is the same as a lower-end camera. There are a few features you really need in a camera for creating your own Paint With Light Photos, and I will review them now.

First, you need the ability to be able to manually open and close the camera's shutter. It's nice to shoot an exposure for as long as you want to. If the camera has an attachment for a cable release it is very helpful so you do not have to touch the camera physically, thereby avoiding shaking. If the camera has a Manual and/or Bulb Setting that is best; that way you can lock open the shutter for the amount of time needed for a long exposure. At a minimum, have a long timer built into the camera of about 10 seconds.

Second, you will want to manually focus the scene if possible. Auto-focusing cameras might miss a shot because you are lighting a section of the photo far away to the side of the frame and the camera might not "see" you. Next, you will want to be able to choose the color balance for the shooting session; daylight, tungsten, fluorescent etc. It is nice to be able to change from these different color balances in order to get a balance that fits for the lights you will be using that night, and also capturing the after-sunset horizon lights with daylight balance, for example. Lastly, you want to be able to see through the optical viewfinder of the camera; having the ability to frame and compose your shots in sometimes dim or dark lit areas is critical.

Overall, any camera that has a detachable lens usually will also have the features needed to make paint with light photographs. In terms of pixel-count, it does not really matter; use what you have, anything above about 8 Mega Pixels is wonderful. Any camera that has these above features will be more than adequate for the job. I use a Canon EOS 1 Ds Mk III, but I'm a Pro and use that camera for my professional shootings too.

Lenses: Which Lens Is Best For My Photograph

Wide Angle! There; are you surprised that a photographer actually answered that question finally? It is true, and here is why. I think that we humans literally see in a sort of Fish-Eye perspective. Think about it. When you hold a "Normal" lens up to your eye, you see the world relatively "Normally"; things are about the same size in the viewfinder as they are to your naked eye. However, that does not take into account our peripheral vision. Even while you are reading this little e Book, you are aware of objects and especially movement far off to your right and left side in your peripheral vision. I think that when you shoot scenes using relatively wide angle, or very wide angle lenses, and then also try to minimize the apparent perception of that wide angle lens you are using, you will much more closely approximate human vision in your photography.

Sometimes, of course, you want to highlight an object that looks great seen from a distance, for what ever reason, and I have done it and do that often. But all things being equal, I am going to be the first photographer in history who will actually go on record to say, "Shoot Wide!" If you look at the majority of my shots on the web site and in the series, they are mostly shot with a very wide lens, but it is not apparent as I try very hard to downplay the effect of perspective and distortion. Look closely at some of the shots, though, and you will come to realize that you are looking at a great deal of "volume" in the shots; it is a subliminal understanding. I am not trying to make a statement with the use of lenses by showing how cool this super wide lens is, I am using the lens as a tool to display the subjects and their environment to the viewer. It is like voyeurism, in that the viewer is less aware of himself or the photographer's statement, only the scene and the people.



This classic 63 Corvette was shot with an almost a fish-eye lens, yet the view is surprisingly non distorted as I try to play down the apparent wide lens effect. The message to viewers is the subject matter in the photo, not my lens choice. Lights: Which Lights To Use?

Lights: Which Lights To Use

There are a wide variety of lights that are available and appropriate for painting with light photography, from tiny AA battery-sized flashlights, all the way up to 3 Million Candle Power flood lights and beyond. Let's start small. For smaller scenes or a shot you want to create of a smaller area, it is possible and advantageous to use a smaller flashlight like a tiny AA Mag light. I used one of those for my old Tractor Shots and it was wonderful. If the environment is dark enough, like in a totally dark room, or out in the countryside at night without the glow of nearby city lights, it will work fine on a small scene. All you need the light to do is overpower the ambient light that is all around you. I used Mag Lights because they have the ability to focus the beam down to a small bright spot and can also be dialed out to create a broad beam to cover a larger area of surface for painting. For the background of the tractor shots, I used a "D" cell Mag light with 3 batteries inside. More than bright enough even for several trees and dirt roads over about 30 seconds of exposure.



These mag lights are more than strong enough if the environment you are shooting in is dark enough. They can also be focused for different lighting effects.

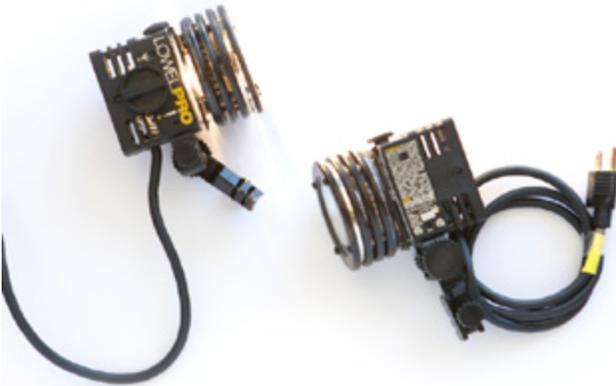
For larger scenes, or where you are in an environment that is not totally dark- like my pick-up truck photo located inside the din of city lights- I used a hand-held flood light like the ones used for camping or boating. These can be bought at any hardware store, Sears, etc. I personally use a light called Brinkman. You can Google them; they make a lot of Barbecue stuff, but also lights and battery packs. There are dozens of manufactures of lights that will work well; just look around and pick up a light or two and play with it.

It is nice when it comes to larger lights to have separate battery packs. If the battery built into a light wears down after about 20 minutes, the whole light is dead. If you can just change the battery, it is far more convenient. Sadly, I have found time and again that these large lights with built-in batteries do not hold up well. Maybe it is just me, but these big lights with built-in batteries have issues with the wiring or bulb or switch getting too hot, as I am using it pretty continuously over the course of a couple hours or so. It's too much trouble to be constantly fixing and troubleshooting these combo lights. Also, it is difficult to attach a big heavy light with battery to the top of a painters pole in order to get the light high above the ground.



I use Brinkman lights in addition to several other manufactures, any large light will do. Try to use lights with separate batteries so you can "mix and match" lights and batteries as they wear out over the course of an evenings shooting.

If I am in a location that has electrical power (and that is rare), I like to use small theatrical lights used by photographers in studios and on location. These are generally 100 watts up to about 250 Watts. Anything larger is too large to hold and gets too hot to the touch. The lights I'm currently using are called Lowel Pro, and they also have the ability to "Focus" the beam, making it brighter and more narrow, or dial them out to more of a broad beam that is not too focused. The advantage of using "Plug-In" lights is that the batteries do not wear down over time, and it is nice to be able to shoot for hours into the evening without worrying about how much "juice" you have left.



There are several different lights on the market that will work if you have the luxury of plugging into an outlet. They get hot to the touch but make up for it in the amount of light you can pump onto your subject

Mostly what I am looking for in a light is the ability to "throw" a beam of light. I want to be able to stand on the ground and "shoot" my light up to the top of a building or shoot the light across the scene to light up a side of a plane or car from farther away. By using basically spot lights, you will be able to literally "Paint" or "Shoot" your lights onto surfaces without having to literally stand on top or next to them.

It is sometimes also necessary to cover the front of a bright spotlight with a thin sheet of diffusion material. By covering the light with a piece of diffusion, you are taking that light and turning it from a spotlight into a wide floodlight that can cover a broad area smoothly. For larger lights, go out and buy some sort of thin plastic diffusion material that is heat resistant, as sometimes these lights get hot.

Plugs, Switches, Extension Cords

I realize this seems insignificant, but the inclusion of several different relatively short extension cords with "automobile cigarette lighter connections," and a simple "On-Off" switch built into the line, has helped tremendously. On location, it is most often the case that you will literally hold the light in your hand and point to the area being painted. It is convenient, easy, and fun to actually shoot light onto the surface of your subject as you create exposure after exposure, all the while changing the angle and direction of your light in order to skim sharp harsh light across an area, or pour broad soft light onto the surface in order to help reveal the overall three dimensionality of an object. Sometimes though, you need to move the light source farther away from your subject, and if you want to move sideways it is only a matter of stepping farther away.

On the other hand, if you want to paint an object from above, it is hard to "grow" in height, and the option of bringing some sort of scaffolding or even using a ladder and moving it around each time you want to move your overhead light source left or right in relation to the subject gets tiring and does not produce a nice even lighting on your subject. Instead, it creates multiple hot spots in each new exposure, as you are stuck at the top of the ladder and have no mobility and the light you are holding is trapped with you. The images you create lack that smooth even flow of light and are difficult to use afterwards. But there is a solution for lighting objects from a relatively high vantage point; place the light at the end of a long "Painters Pole."

Since the lights we will buy have only a relatively short electrical cord attached to them leading to the battery pack, you can only reach so far away from the battery you will be hanging over your shoulder. What I have done is to create a couple of extension cords that have a simple "On-Off" switch built into the line. That way I can have the on-off switch next to my hands holding the painter pole, and still have the actual light at the end of the pole up to about 20 feet away from me and the battery pack.

You will need to be careful how long you make these extensions, as the longer they are the more drop-off there is of electricity going from the battery to the light. I have noticed a significant drop-off of brightness at my light if I make an extension that is too long. Keep the total extension no longer than about 20 feet or so, otherwise your light at the end of a long extension will appear too dim and relatively useless.



The inclusion of a couple home made extension cords with switches built into the cord has helped tremendously and allowed me to reach areas with my lights that were out of reach before.

Snoots: Shielding Light From Splashing Everywhere

You will also want to create a simple snoot for your lights. I started out using cardboard that I taped together into simple tubes that were later taped onto the lights. This does not have to be fancy or precise; I used black cardboard to start as it is easy, light, and easily replaceable. Later on, as my photography got even more ambitious, I created plastic snoots that were glued together. These were designed to slid on and fit snugly over my various light heads in order to be able to add and remove them quickly on location. I also went the extra step and spray-glued black velvet on the inside of the plastic and cardboard snoots. This cut down any reflections from the very bright light that was reflecting off the inside of the snoot tube; it was a bit overkill and not necessary, but in keeping with my obsession to create something wonderful by controlling all aspects of the photography process.

Mostly I wanted a device to keep the bright light coming from my handheld flood-light from splashing back into the camera lens every time I did a new exposure. Especially if the light is facing anywhere towards the lens. It is not a big deal, but mostly I wanted the light coming from my handheld units to show up on the surface of the object I am painting, and not also show up as very bright streaks in the exposure. It just makes it easier to see each frame clearly without having to remove every hot streak of light from the light source.



Simple home made snoots that snap onto the front of my lights prevent stray light from splashing onto the lens most of the time.

Tripods: Stability Is Key

A good solid tripod is critical. I discourage shooting night photography and "Painting With Light" photography using flimsy tripods or tripods that are too delicate and cute. Anything that you can collapse down to a few inches long is too tiny. You want a tripod that is strong enough and one that can reach high enough that you can be at least 4 feet off the ground. The more mass or the heavier the tripod the better, even if it is more difficult to drag around. At some point you will also want to hang sand bags or some sort of heavy weight to your tripod in order to give it even more stability, so a delicate tripod is not good. Most newer tripods have that hook under the central column that you can hang a bucket from and fill that with weight.

Any tripod will do in a pinch, but if somebody happens to kick or bump your smallish tripod all the photos will be ruined. If you were using a sturdier tripod, the chances of an accidental nudge or bump are less catastrophic. I have had this experience several times and it is cheap and valuable insurance to protect the investment of a night's shooting. I also have a general rule that anybody who is drinking on set is not allowed to stand anywhere near the tripod. It's great for everybody present on location to be having a good time, but not at the expense of the night's shooting.



Having a relatively common digital cable release allows you to shoot totally alone without the help of an assistant to open and close the camera each time you expose the next frame. I have used this often, to shoot at night when I am flying solo.

Cable Release

There is a variety of cable releases available, sometimes known as remote shutter cables. These devices plug into your camera and allow you to open the shutter via this small unit that is attached to your camera with a thin flexible cable. The advantage of a cable release is that you do not have to actually touch your camera each time you take a picture. You only hold the cable release and the camera is tripped. These cable releases have the feature built in that you can open the shutter and lock open the shutter until you release it again. Some of the more advanced models have timers and automatic multiple exposure delays built into them, so you can set them to fire off a photo of say 10 seconds after a 10 second delay, and do this repeatedly. It is convenient to have even if you have helpers. I still prefer to have my assistant or friend open and close the camera via a cable release manually on my command, as in "OPEN!" "CLOSE!" "OPEN!" "CLOSE!"



Having a lot of battery power on hand is vital to a long evenings shooting. Whether you are using simple "D" cell flashlights, or large hand held spot lights, have battery power to spare.

Spare Batteries

What can I say? Batteries are the life blood of the evening's shooting session. If you are using Mag lights, or even the very large rechargeable batteries for your flood lights, bring enough batteries so you can shoot your whole session and then some. I have had several situations where I was running out of battery power and was not finished light-painting my entire subject; it is stressful and frustrating. Of course it is far better to always use rechargeable batteries and have several of them with you too. It does make a lot of sense to use the same type of light and battery connections so you can mix and match batteries and not have them tied to a single light only. All my batteries fit all my lights via that standard D.C. Cigarette Lighter connection you find inside of cars. This is the most convenient so I have the most flexibility. Additionally, I like to label my larger batteries in order of age: newest to oldest etc. That way I know which battery will have the most "Punch" and use them first.

Using a separate screen display, like a small DVD player, also helps me judge the overall exposures quickly without having to run all the way back to and behind the camera to see what we got for the last shot. After the exposures are dialed in to be about right, it is easy to judge that the next group of shots from a different part of the subject are too light or too dark by just looking at even a low resolution DVD screen display. Very helpful. If you want to complicate the process of having a screen display, you can use a laptop computer; it is definitely an option, but for me is too much trouble.



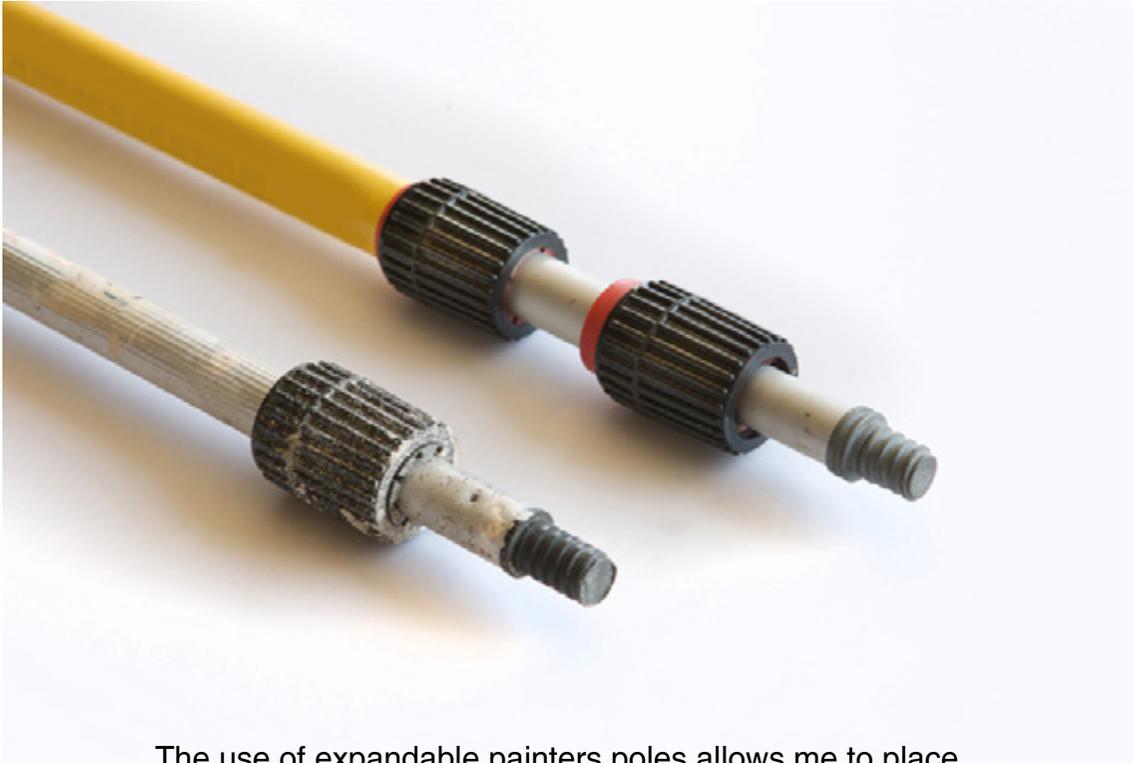
On location, simplicity is key. For me, I like using easy to use DVD players as my portable monitor, it allows me to view each new shot without having to walk around to the back of the camera to view the screen.

Portable DVD Player Or Laptop For Screen Display

It is often the case that the process of making another Paint With Light shoot becomes a sort of group activity. Sometimes volunteers just want to join me to help or learn some of the tricks. Very often I have a group of people with me that night that are volunteers from the entity being photographed (the factory or machine owners). These can be employees of the business I am shooting, or the friends and family of the guy who's car we are shooting that evening. You get the idea; it is often a group event.

It is always nice for all the helpers to also see what I get to see when viewing the camera's display each time I make a new exposure. By hooking the camera's video output feed to the input of a small portable DVD player, it is possible for the entire group present to see each new exposure every time I make a new shot. This is also a very prudent investment, as it allows all those interested to see each new exposure without having to stand near the camera or walk around and behind the tripod legs. After all, all those who want to be involved are so curious as to what we're doing, that sharing each

new exposure with the group is very fulfilling and allows the group to be part of the process as it is happening. It is also possible to use a Laptop for the same purposes, but I like to skip the additional complexity of using Laptops on location. Still, that is definitely a possibility.



The use of expandable painters poles allows me to place lights at the end of a very long reach.

Painter Poles For Holding Lights

Low tech solutions are often the best solutions. When you try to paint light onto relatively larger objects, it is difficult to stand overhead or on top of them, especially on location. It is not necessary that you light from above an object, of course, but for me, I like the ability to place my lights wherever I think will produce the nicest effect. Sometimes that means that the light will look best if it is dangling 10 feet above a car or truck, for example. Unless there is a natural cat walk or some sort of scaffolding available, the next easiest way is for me to tape my lights to the end of an extendable painter's pole. The kind of pole that can be expanded up to about 20 feet is an extremely useful tool and offers a lot of flexibility on location.

Using that pole I am able to extend physically not only my light, of course, but am able to broaden the range of lighting options and solutions that are applied to any subject. Remember what I said about creating what you envision and not just copying digitally what you see. This simple hardware is part of that process to a degree.

Accessories, Come Prepared (food, toiletries, drinks, tape, etc. etc.)

It is so often the case that being comfortable and satiated allows for far greater creativity and endurance. On location it is invaluable to have several essentials along for the trip. Not only just for my extended volunteer group of new friends who will help with the evenings shooting session, but for me too. Some of the essentials I have learned that make a night's shooting session go from a taxing and grueling experience into a comfortable and rewarding experience are as follows.

Enough food and drink for everybody present. I like to bring a variety of pre-made sandwiches and chips. Drinks including soda, water, and if we are shooting in the winter time, hot coco, hot apple cider, and hot coffee; after hours of sitting around watching me paint with light in 50 degree temperatures, everybody needs something hot to drink.

Several folding chairs so everybody watching the show has a place to sit; it's hard standing up for hours.

Usually there are always bathroom facilities, but if not be prepared!

Photographically speaking, plenty of Gaffer Tape, Clamps, sand bags, spare cables and plugs for your lights, extension cords, light stands, and anything else you can think of that might fit. It's always better to have it and not need it than to not have it.



It is helpful to scout locations in advance, in addition to exploring the options and possibilities, you can also determine where will be the best spot for your camera.

SHOOTING

Scouting Location In Advance

Anybody can make a great photo; you might get lucky and shoot a masterpiece by accident. For me, I like to plan and prepare for success. If you are just shooting for fun, it's wonderfully freeing to just go out and shoot night scenes, maybe include light painting on random objects you come across during your evening's foray. If you really want to stack the deck in your favor though, it is always best to have a plan in mind before you start shooting. Part of that is scouting locations and subjects in advance, at least during the daylight hours so you can see where you are, where is the best location for your camera, and even what might be any problematic background issues.

It is far harder to go out at night looking for subject matter because of the physical logistics of being able to see everything clearly, even getting around obstacles like fences and hard to reach areas. In daylight it is obvious; at night, not so much. You will also have the added benefit of seeing the subject in good light to really explore the best angle to shot it from. I find it extremely helpful to scout my locations early, then take the next day or so to think about how I will light the subject.

It is all part of having a plan, not just for what to shoot but how you will shoot it. Think about a possible horizon-line in the shot, where to place the camera, what props to bring, if any. This small amount of energy expended early will help tremendously, and will almost always lead to a successful shot. Think of it in contrast to the typical experience of a frenetic fashion photographer. Do you want to shoot hundreds of random frames, then spend hours looking for the picture that is slightly better than the rest? Or do you want to pour all that same amount of energy into a single wonderful picture?

Look For Dark Environments:

The Darker The Better

For the sake of this booklet, I am assuming we are all using continuous light sources; that means no Flash or Strobe (that comes later). Basically, the lights you will be using and holding in your hands are not super-powerful. They are bright maybe, but if you have an environment you are shooting in that has some street lights, or other sources of ambient lighting splashing onto the scene that you are trying to paint your own lights with, then it is difficult. Even a relatively dark environment with a streetlight a hundred feet away can turn into a very bright exposure over 10 seconds.

Remember that your light sources need to be far brighter than any ambient light already on the scene. I have often skipped or decided to not make a particular photo because the location where my chosen subject lived could not be made dark enough. However, I have covered up several street lights with cloth or blocked their light with large stands and cardboard. Usually for the hobbyist, it is easier to choose a location that is as dark as possible. The added benefit of shooting in a very dark location is that you can use smaller handheld flashlights because they appear far more powerful in total darkness, so it is easier to shoot and paint.

Simplicity On Location Is Helpful

I have had several assistants inform me that an electrical generator will produce a lot more power for my handheld lights, or that if I were to use a fancy laptop with the ability to capture the images I am exposing while we shoot I would be able to download them directly to the hard drive, or that we can even use several pocket wizards so I can open and close the camera myself. The suggestions were numerous. My advice is usually the same, which is to skip all the additional complex technology if possible. On location everything is harder. When some gadget breaks or some connection fails or a computer drops offline it is difficult to troubleshoot the fault and fix it quickly. It is often the case that I am shooting in crude locations with no access to even overhead lights, electricity, water, or even a very clean work space. It is important to keep the technology I am using to an absolute minimum so I can concentrate on the process of photography and try to make a wonderful picture. I hate the distraction of trying to figure why the camera is not shooting, not capturing to the laptop, or the image is not displaying on the laptop. Remember the golden rule of KISS, Keep it Simple Stupid!

Set Up In Daylight And Wait

This sounds so simple and silly, but again very helpful. After you have scouted your location and chosen the best angle to photograph your subject, it is fun to be able to show up at your chosen location with plenty of time to spare, ready for an evening's Painting with Light. I like to arrive early so as to have enough time to set up the camera and tripod at exactly the best location. If you are only shooting casually and for fun, it is no big deal to arrive late or at night and shoot away. For me, I want to create "spectacular" photos so I arrive early and set up the camera and tripod, then I have time to compose some of the props I arranged to have available in the photo. With plenty of daylight it gives me time to compose and arrange the scene we will be shooting later.

I try to be ready to shoot at least 2 hours before sunset so I have time to "contemplate" the scene we have created. Composition is a strong factor to a successful photograph and being able to clearly see through the viewfinder during daylight hours is extremely helpful. Additionally, I use a lot of volunteers in my photographic sessions and I never want to be in a position that I need to "Bark Out Orders" because we are all rushing to be ready as sunset is fast approaching. An added benefit of arriving early is that my works are usually collective endeavors, with lots of volunteers, and spending time together collectively composing the scene gives everybody a chance to offer input regarding composition and props. All input is welcome; I don't know everything.

Don't Move The Tripod Or Camera After You Start

Up to the point when you are starting to shot your first frames just after sunset, feel free to continue to tweak and play with the camera and props to move them about to get exactly what you want. When you start to shoot your first frames, it is too late to move anything from that point onward. After you are completely finished with the evening's session you will stack many of these photos on top of each other; if anything moves between exposures it is possible that the light you painted on the right side of a chair for example will not line up with the light on the left side of that same chair if it has moved between exposures. The worst mistake is if the camera gets moved or somebody kicks the tripod during the whole process. Nothing from before the kicking incident will fit with anything exposed after the tripod got moved! I recommend placing sand bags on the tripod legs, or using a plastic bucket filled with rocks or something heavy.

Turn Off Noise Reduction In Your Camera

My experience is that the noise that is produced by painting with light and using relatively long exposures is not an issue. We are not taking ultra-long exposures of the stars or the night sky per se, but are actually only making relatively short exposures of dark scenes that we paint light into. When you use the noise reduction function of your camera, the amount of time it takes for your camera to "process" the shot you just exposed will almost double the time it takes. If you want to make a series of quick 10 second exposures and you have to wait 20 seconds between exposures it is far too frustrating. Additionally, the images you create of a lighted portion of your subject will appear pretty normal, and should not appear as a dark noise-riddled exposure.

Color Balance

Most Digital Cameras have the ability to choose the light source you are shooting in. Usually it is perfectly fine to set your camera to "Tungsten" lighting as that matches most of the handheld flashlights you will use. It is also possible that the daylight setting will fit depending on the kind of lights you are using. The easiest way to see what might be a good fit is to do a couple test exposures on location. You can literally try several light balance settings with the light you will be using and see which one gives you a cleaner "white light" on the screen of your camera after each test. If you are using a Strobe or Flash to paint with light, then set your camera's color balance to the Strobe setting, etc.

ISO

I get asked so often which ISO is best or which one I like to use. Honestly it really does not matter too much. I like to shoot around ISO 200. If I am using a very powerful floodlight and the subject is too bright even during a short 3 second exposure, I'll cut the ISO down to 100. If I am using my flood lights and exposing for 8 seconds and the subject is still dark, I'll increase the ISO up to 600 if I have to. The only risk of using a very high ISO is that you will start to see noise in the exposures, especially with longer exposures of 16 seconds or more. I am never bothered by that as it is a part of the photo process and does not kill a photo per se.

Choosing Aperture / F Stop

This is the classic question that all professional photographers love to tease amateurs about. "There is no best or favorite Aperture!" I disagree. When it comes to painting with light, I like to shoot about F 16 or so. If it is too wide open, then the whole scene might not be in focus from the foreground to the far background. Increasing the F stop increases focus or the depth of field overall. If you go too far and shoot at F 20 to F 22 it will take a lot of light to actually illuminate the scene you are attempting to paint.

Focusing For The Whole Scene

I realize this might sound a bit simplistic, but I do get asked often by people during my presentations about focusing, so here goes. Basically, once the photo session begins you cannot and do not want to change the focus. As a matter of fact, I go the extra step and use a piece of gaffer tape and tape down the focusing ring and the zoom ring of the lens so it cannot change or shift over the next 2 or 3 hours of our shooting session. Even if it did not shift on its own, it is possible to accidentally rub against or touch the focusing ring, as we are so used to constantly fiddling with them. Tape is a good insurance device. When setting up in the daylight hours it is easy to see what is in focus and what is slightly blurry, of course, and my general rule is to focus on the primary subject matter. I might pull the focus a bit closer to me to include some of the foreground props to make sure they are sharp also. It is best to literally rack the focus back and forth several times to get a feel for where you want to critically place the focus.

Also, make sure to turn off your camera's Auto Focus. You want to manually focus on your subject yourself. If the camera is determining the focus for each shot it might miss the focus if you are standing to the side and painting light on an obscure section of the photo that the sensor cannot see. Or the focus might change from the foreground to the background as you move about the scene painting with your lights. The change of focus is not so critical but the actual size of objects changes in the frame as the camera chooses where to place the focus, close or far. Be sure to manually focus and set it one time permanently.

CHARTS, GRAPHS, EXPOSURE TABLES, FORMULAS:

Skip It!

I do not think I have ever seen a How-To book that did not include some sort of mathematical formula for calculating some critical value, or one that was not chocked full of graphs and exposure tables etc. For me (and I assume I am reasonably normal, although my wife refutes it) this seems somewhat overwhelming, especially considering the complexity of determining these critical values on location or under less than ideal circumstances. Things are always harder on location, even in your backyard. My advice to you the amateur, or even the professional photographer, when trying to determine the best exposure for any given situation is to simply bang off a frame and look at the display. Is it about right? You will be determining basic exposures for several different areas to be photographed; sunset shots, car parts shots, persons to be photographed, ambient light from a streetlight, and many other elements that might go into making your "Paint with Light" final photograph. For me, it is too much of bother and too confusing to refer to anything other than the camera's display and common sense. Is the exposure too light or too dark? That's it.



While the information displayed in the camera's charts and graphs is helpful, I find it easier to just look at the test exposures and determine if the shot needs to be lighter or darker. On location everything is harder, use common sense and skip the fancy calculations.

Basic Exposures

As a general rule, I like to keep my individual exposures of any particular areas of the scene to around 6 seconds or so. Remember that during the exposure you are only painting light onto a small portion of a subject. If you do not have enough time to smoothly and evenly paint light onto the whole section of a fender, for example, then that exposure will look choppy and sloppy. You are trying to have enough time to Paint or Brush your light evenly over the entire section you chose to paint in that frame. When you want to expose a frame that is the entire side of a car (or in my case, a mini submarine) you can use longer exposures of 10 - 16 seconds or so. Keep in mind that you want to be able to brush the light back and fourth two, three, or four times during the entire exposure in order to avoid bright areas or hot spots. It is literally just like a painter air-brushing paint onto a surface. Several light coats is much better than one thick coat of paint (isn't this totally cool), Also, optimally you want the painted light portion to be normally exposed while the remaining portion of the frame you did not paint with light should be very dark in relation to the painted area.



The jet fighter is a good example of light painting, the jet is light and evenly lit while the background is dark. The Low Rider car is a bad example of light painting in that the car is not exposed well in relation to the background. The shot was done before it was dark enough and the ambient twilight is showing up in the overall exposure.



In The Beginning, Shooting At Night

Expose the overall scene before it is totally dark, as it is helpful to see where everything is in the frame. In the beginning of the shooting process, after I have chosen a suitable subject and location, set up my camera and tripod, composed the scene to a degree, just as it is getting dark, I try to capture a few frames of the overall scene. It is smart to bracket these exposures, usually during twilight or even before, so you can shoot several frames of the scene you will be painting with light as the next few hours tick by. If you chose to, change the camera's color balance to "Open Shade" so everything does not go too bluish. Later on after shooting a few of these images you can change the camera's color setting back to "Tungsten" so it is appropriate for your hand-held flashlights.



This scene of the final composition of our B-25 was shot just after sunset. Over exposing the dusk shot and color balancing in order to avoid the "blues" I create an overall image of the "whole composition."

Capture Sunset Before The Real Fun (Light Painting) Begins

What I mean by this is that sometimes, during the composition of the photograph, while you are setting up your camera and balancing all the factors that go into making a good picture, it is always nice to include a piece of the horizon-line in the distance. For me, this inclusion of depth and space makes the final image richer and even more compelling. If you can compose the shot to include the horizon from that area of the sky that will include the sunset, or anywhere near the sunset sky, you can capture those beautiful colors that linger low on the horizon till long after sunset. I get in the habit of shooting overall frames of the scene just after sunset, and continue to do a shot or two every 10 minutes until I have a full rich pallet of different horizon light that fade up to black at the top of the frame. Even long after sunset, I will shoot a 10 second exposure for just that portion of the photo. It's amazing how beautiful the horizon can be with a long exposure even 20 minutes after the sun actually sets. Feel free to play with color balance too during this particular process. Technically "Daylight" is the correct setting, but if you switch to "Open Shade" or even "Tungsten" for these after-sunset shots, your colors will exaggerate wildly. Remember to bracket too; shooting digital images is free, so shoot away.



This frame of the distant horizon was exposed long after the sun actually set. Including a distant sunset horizon is a useful element to have as part of your final composition and can add greatly to your finished photo.

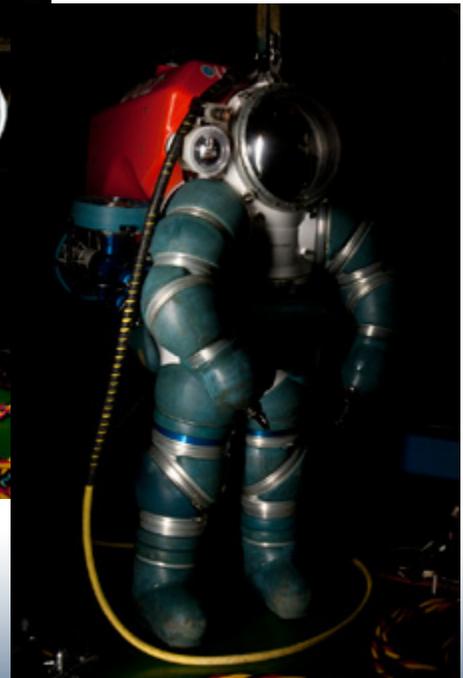
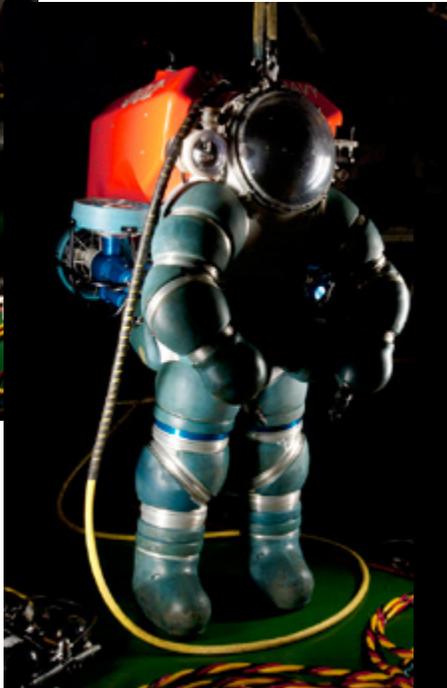
Gauging Exposure

Even for me, a professional photographer, I like to keep it easy. No calculations or fancy meters etc. All you need to do is snap off a quick exposure of say 5 seconds. Then look at the back of the digital camera to see if it is about right. If the image is super dark or under-exposed you can increase the ISO, or you can open the aperture, or increase the time that you literally "paint" with the lights in the exposure. It's also possible to get a brighter flashlight. I find it best to usually increase the ISO depending on the overall subject etc., and open the F stop to about F 14.

On the other hand, if the test image or subject is too bright during your first few test exposures, cut the time you paint with light down, close down the F stop, decrease the ISO number, or even pull the light you are using farther away so it feels less bright on the subject.



These three examples demonstrate an overall too bright exposure on the left, a normal exposure and a dark exposure on the right. Get a feel for your camera and the subject matter and use common sense to make the process easier and fun.



Lighting The Subject, Include The Environment

Here is the meat of the process of painting with light. What you are doing is capturing the scene you chose or created with several exposures, or hundreds of individual frames during the shooting process. The experience is wonderfully fun and a kind of magic, I think.

Each time you shoot a piece of the subject- the left fender of an old car for example- go ahead and do that exposure a few times so you have one frame that was lit slightly from the side, one exposure where the light was directly overhead, and one exposure where the light was skimming the fender. That way, when it is time to add all the different shots you did on location together, you have several shots from that specific fender to choose from. You might only use one of the shots you created of that specific fender, but it is nice to have choices.



These three examples demonstrate how I might light the same object from different angles in order to get slightly different looks over all. I can choose to use one or more of these images later when I am "building" my photo in Photoshop.

Your overall scene is not made up exclusively of the primary subject. You also have ground, maybe a tree, rocks and a back wall, or even part of a sky or horizon. These are all part of what makes the shot successful so keep in mind that those elements are an integral part of your concept and finished image. Paint those elements you think add something to the photo; you do not need to necessarily cover every inch with light, but at least think about what you do and do not want to include in your shot.



Using a tightly focused beam of light I can skim light across the surfaces of the grass or the back wall, highlighting the textures and using those textures as part of the composition.

It is, of course, possible to use your large flashlight to paint the entire scene in one very long exposure. Sadly this will usually result in a lot of digital noise in the exposure because any shot over about 40 seconds is generally going to have noise issues. Also, if you wind up shooting just one, two, or three big exposures, any mistakes you make in a particular area of the subject is already tied into the whole frame and can not be removed easily. Again, say you held the light too long on the fender. That whole shot is ruined because of the fender's over exposure. By slicing up the overall image into manageable bite sized pieces you are gaining control of the whole scene. Sure it is more work to do a lot of individual exposures, but this way you can pick and chose the individual shots or frames that work best for each part of the subject you painted individually.

Shutter Operation

It is far easier to have a friend or assistant to open and close the camera on demand. I literally say "OPEN" and the camera assistant will open the camera. After I exposed that frame, I shout "CLOSE" and my assistant will close the shutter via a cable release; I have to shout because I am sometimes far away or it is a noisy environment. It is far faster and easier with an assistant to have the flexibility to shoot quickly and move onto the next exposure after you finished painting a specific area, and not have to wait for a 10 second exposure to finish. Plus, you do not have to walk back to the camera to start the timer again. A few seconds over hundreds of exposures really adds up over the course of an evening. Another option, of course, and I have done it many times, is to set the camera on manual and lock the shutter open while I run around exposing individual part of the scene, then run back to close the shutter, minimizing noise build-up in the exposure. It is a bit tiring but totally doable if the scene is not too large.

The last option is to use handheld slave units to open the shutter remotely. If you set your camera for 10 seconds, for example, then remotely trip open the shutter, you can paint for 10 seconds before it closes, then you do it again. For me that is a bit too many gadgets to have to deal with as my hands are generally full of lights, batteries, and extension poles. Remember, you want to keep your head in the game of lighting your subject; it is physical and requires concentration if you have a full scene. You do not want to get distracted with too many gadgets.

Have A Lighting Plan

"The Quality of Light!" My old photography instructor Charlie Potts, from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, used to speak this phrase to us young photo students. I was too young and arrogant to understand how prophetic his words were. Now, after 30 years shooting as a professional, I can share with you the secret to great photos. It is the quality of the lighting that makes a photo. You can find the oldest dirty boot in the mud and turn it into a photographic masterpiece if you light it well. With that in mind, have in your mind's eye an idea of what you are actually going to do on location when you light your subject and the scene. I use the lighting in the finished photo as one more tool or element, like an additional prop, to help me tell the story of what is happening in the photo. I literally will think of the lighting for days, if not weeks or even up to a year, as sometimes these shots take a long long time to come to fruition.

Being able to think about how you will light a scene is critical. You can always just make a bunch of exposures, of course, lighting from top, bottom, side, back, etc., but if you have in mind what you are trying to do with the quality of lighting then it will be easier and more fun on location. Remember the Kiss sentiment I mentioned earlier.

Well, on location things tend to get a bit confusing. After you have shot a couple dozen frames you might ask your self, "Is that all, are we done?" It is only after you return home that you realize you forgot to expose the inside of the engine block, or forgot to light the top of the old car or skipped the exposure that would have been really great to have if only you'd thought of it on location. So again, have a plan in your mind. At least loosely, so you do not show up and then for the first time put on your creativity hat. It is a challenge to be sure, with all the equipment, tripods, camera batteries, composition, planning, and waiting, etc. After all that, you are now in a position to really be creative; everything else was only leading up to this point in time. This might sound silly but I believe in speaking from the heart (I apologize). I truly believe that at that moment when we will start to expose the first few frames, I like to take a deep breath, compose myself and bring myself down to the hear and now. To literally live in the moment. It is my attempt to get into a sort of "Zone" in my head. The only thing in the world is this photograph and light painting happening right now. I must keep in mind the story I am trying to tell in this scene and how the light will promote that vision.

Basic Lighting- Stand To The Side

At the cost of belaboring the subject, I want to share a somewhat esoteric perspective of lighting. To actually light any particular scene all you need to do is attach a strobe unit to the top of your camera and "Click the Shutter." There, you have copied a scene and everybody knows what it is, it is recognizable. The biggest hurdle as I see it, is that a photograph is basically only a two-dimensional image, height and width. We humans see in 3 dimensions because of our two eyes and depth perception, so anything like a photo or painting begins as a poor semblance of reality. I think that what we are trying to do in photography is help the viewer see and understand the three dimensionality of the scene we are capturing. By including an abundance of carefully placed highlights and shadows onto what is on paper a two-dimensional object, we can give the appearance of three dimensions again. This is basically photography in a nutshell. As creative photographers and artists you are adding something more to the process, to bring our particular perspective and apply it to the scene being captured created.

Generally speaking, I try to light my subjects with a degree of side light. What you are trying to do is create a sense of highlight, mid tones, and shaded areas in any particular subject. The reason photos taken with flash on camera look so flat and dead is that there are no shadows, everything is filled up with light. By selectively lighting some areas and purposefully letting other areas fall into shadow you will create much richer textures on the surfaces you are shooting. This will help tell the story of your subject. Whether the surface is old, dried and full of cracks, or is a new shiny painted surface that reflects beautifully your lights, you are trying to capture that quality. Always you are trying to capture the textures and likeness of the surfaces and help the viewer see its three dimensional form with the quality of the light you paint onto those surfaces. So basically, never light your subject while standing at or too near the camera; this is not "Flash on Camera" like a crime scene photo.



See how lighting an object while standing near the camera creates an overall flat and "dead" image. If you stand to the side or light from above you are creating highlights and shaded areas of your subject as the photo on the bottom demonstrates. It adds a much fuller and richer look to the image.

The Quality Of Light: Floods And Spots

Just like a painter has several different styles of brushes to create any given effect from the brush stroke, broad, sharp, pin point, rough. etc., you too will use your single handheld light to create different effects from that same light. In a previous chapter labeled "Lights: Which lights to use" I described several different lights, from very small AA Mag Light flash lights, up to and including 2 Million candle power handheld flood lights. I even included ultra powerful plug in photography lights of 250 watts. These have generally all the same effect of projecting light in a beam. They are all basically spot lights in that they shoot a beam of light and are all universally very useful for pushing the light far away when you want to put light onto the side of a building, or when trying to light a tree when you are standing on the ground. You need to "project" your lights in a relatively tight focused beam onto surfaces and areas to be painted, without having to literally stand next to the subject being painted.

Some of the uses of a tight beam of light that come directly from the handheld flashlights is when I need to skim light across the ground in order to pick up the texture of the grass, or highlight the texture of the rough dirt surface. It's also advantageous to use a tight beam from these light sources if I need to project a beam of light across the exterior surface of my subject, like the outside skin of an aircraft or the face of a trailer.

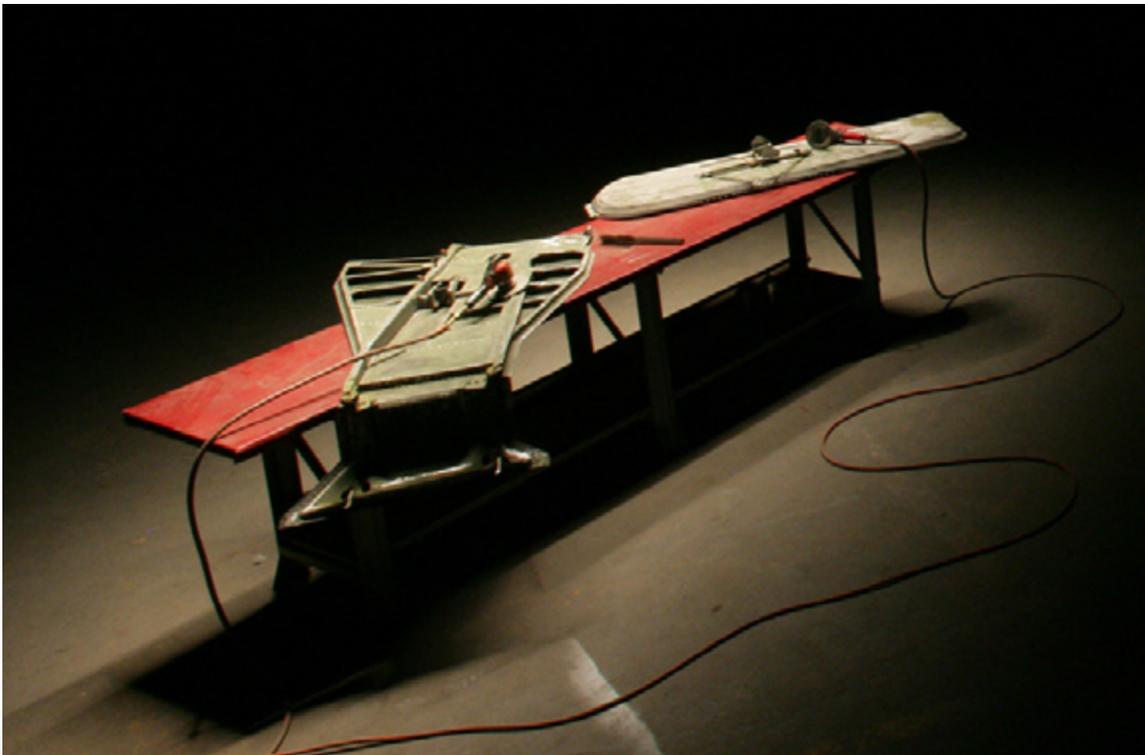


It's amazing to see the difference the quality of light will produce. This same nose view of an airplane looks completely different depending on whether I am lighting it broadly with a smooth flood of light, (left) or whether I am standing to the side and skimming a tight narrow beam of light across the skin, as demonstrated in the image on the right.



The effect of skimming the light at a very shallow angle is that it will highlight all the tiny rivets and textures that stick up from what might generally appear as a smooth surface. Lighting and exposing those portions of your subject will help you later in creating your final photo that not only shows a pretty picture of your subject, but these tiny details that you are literally pulling out of thin air will add greatly to the overall effect of looking "too real." It is generally impossible, in traditional photography with a single exposure or single snap shot, to light subjects as we are doing now (unless you are Steven Spielberg with an unlimited budget). Go ahead and play with this seemingly harsh light quality and pull everything you can from your subject; you can choose to not use these images in post production, but for now on location, get everything you can from the details and textures of your subject matter.

There is a different quality of light that is also extremely useful, it is the other half of the solution for making full and rich photographs. It is "Floods" or floodlights. If spotlights are a focused beam of light shooting forward, think of "Floods" as a bare light bulb, where the light goes everywhere, not just in one direction. Having two sets of light is not necessary for achieving the flood lighting effect at all. I simple cover the head of one of my spot lights with a thin film of frosted plastic. By using varying densities of frosted plastic acetate, it is possible to turn your narrow beam spotlight into a broad wide-angle floodlight. Sometimes I put what is the equivalent of a half layer of frosted acetate onto the front of my spot light in order to broaden the beam just a touch, or sometimes very much.



Here is a perfect example of a well lit and evenly "painted" work bench. See how the subject stands out brightly from the dark background and is standing in a pool of light. It almost looks like art.

It is sometimes easier to use the analogy of a painter when it comes to illustrating what we are attempting to do as light painters. If a car painter using a spray gun is trying to paint the fender of a newly repaired car, he will use a broad smooth even flow of paint applied over a few passes of the paint gun. Adding a few thin layers of paint (or in our case light) on to the surface of the fender will render a much better result. For us as light painters, trying to use a narrow focused beam of light when we are very close to our subjects sometimes results in choppy and uneven lighting. Having a bright focused beam of light, it is sometimes hard to control the beam as it is very bright and you still want the ability to create exposures that are about 5 seconds long in order to make a couple passes of your light onto the surface of your subject.

If you use your very bright spotlight and transform it instead into a very bright floodlight by covering the head with frosted material, it is far easier to "evenly coat" your subject with a pleasant even and ultimately controllable light. The change in character of the floodlight is that you need to be pretty close to the subject in order for the light to actually reach the surfaces you are painting with light. It is not possible to stand 20 feet away from your subject and project this broad floodlight a great distance. That is not a bad thing, it's just different. Get up close and personal.

So in summation, by covering the flashlight, or your million candle power light with a thin film of frosted plastic, you are in effect turning that tight focused beam of light from a spotlight into an overall broad floodlight.

Lastly, you will want to cover the outside edge of the light with a "Snoot" or some sort of tube that only allows the light to travel forward. Even on my broad floodlights I use a snoot or tube in order to prevent the head of the light from splashing light into the camera lens. Over the course of a 5 second exposure if the handheld light is facing towards the camera lens, the bright path of light created by having the camera "see" the light head will cause lens flare and possibly ruin the shot if the "streaking" created by the moving light head overlaps the surface that you're trying to paint.



Sometimes, when the camera can see your hand held light source, the resulting "streaking" will be too powerful and ruin the exposure. If possible, try to keep the streaking head of light from touching the subject you are painting. You can always remove the offending portion of the exposure you do not like, but it is hard to do so if there is overlapping lens flare on your subject.

The Mechanics Of Exposing Everything

I have been doing this at a somewhat advanced level for a few years now and have learned several tricks to help in the process of shooting objects and scenes at night while painting with light. It is my intention to share with you all that I have learned, so you do not have to reinvent the wheel from scratch. Unlike ignoring your parents' advice, do listen to my insight and save yourself some grief. Generally when you have a full scene (for example an old car and some equipment scattered about) it can seem a bit overwhelming at first. Where to start? I find that as a general rule, I start from the center/top and work my way down then out to the sides, and finally do the background surfaces and far walls etc. So literally your first exposures can be the top of your subject if it is not too big; climb on it if you have to. Light the top of the car or truck or jet aircraft from above, if possible.

I will literally light the entire top of this theoretical old car in a single long 10 second exposure, if possible. I'll light the top maybe 8 different times, over 8 different exposures, moving my light back and fourth during the entire exposure. When I feel that I have got a good few frames of the top of the car, then I'll move on to exposing with my flashlight the sides of my subject. Again I'll do several separate exposures of each new section I am concentrating on, eventually working my way down to the bottom of the subject and do the same yet again. Each time you light a new area of the subject remember to do a few frames or exposures of that same area so you have some variations to play with in Photoshop during post production.



In a dark environment I can light the top of my subject and have the resulting images look like they were shot in a photo studio. This is just one of maybe eight different exposures I might create for this section of the car, each time changing slightly the angle of my light.

After the primary subject is fully lit with all the ideas and angles of lighting you think appropriate, it is time to move on to the ground immediately surrounding the subject. The location where it is sitting is critically important and needs to be lit as well. Remember that these photographs we are making of neat stuff at night are not objects floating in black space. One of the lessons I learned early was that if the subject is not "attached" to the ground with an appropriate shadow splashing below it, or at least a physical surface connecting the object to the ground, it looks totally fake.

Do not be afraid of sloppy lighting or having the beam of light bounce around a lot. I personally embrace mistakes, odd shadows and lucky accidents in the lighting. It is often the case that one of those frames where the light splashed onto an area not intended would up being critical to the overall success of the finished picture. Later on in Photoshop you will have the ability to easily remove any splashing, reflections, or other mistakes that were captured in the exposure. Now is the time to expose, be creative and play with this wonderful tool and all the capabilities that are finally opening up to you with the advent of digital photography.



The same Corvette now lit from above and below while the ground is exposed also. See how the scene is becoming more than just a shot of a cool car? A story is beginning to unfold.

After the primary subject and immediate surrounding ground or surface is exposed, you can move onto the distant ground and vertical surfaces including, trees and structures etc. It is sometimes hard and not always necessary to actually light everything you see in the viewfinder. Sometimes you want the distant ground to go dark or black; great. Other times you'll want to at least paint with light a single fence or wall or tree that is prominent in the scene as a compositional element. As simple as it sounds, I will actually walk up to or under a large tree that needs to be lit and just pump light into the underside of the tree for about 30 seconds or so if needed.

When dealing with large backgrounds and big areas, you cannot paint broad areas of background with your limited lights. The light will seem weak and totally inadequate for such a big chunk of the scene. Instead, I break it into small more manageable sections. First, I'll focus my lights for 30 seconds onto a tree that I want to include, then I'll switch to the part of a wall I like then the other half of the wall if needed. Also if you have floodlights that shoot a beam like the kind I am using, you can skim your light onto different areas of the ground and break that into separate exposures too. I'll usually skim my light onto the right side of the foreground, then do the left side of the foreground, then move further back. Shoot far more frames on location than you need, like a painter mixing a pallet of colors before he paints.



The final scene in all it's glory. By breaking up views of background walls, floors, ceilings and car parts into different sections, it is possible to "Paint Light" onto each area separately and control the overall quality of light. I am telling stories, not capturing scenes per se.

It's surprisingly easy over time to remember what you exposed and what you missed. Extra eyes from the person opening and closing the camera can help keep track of it all. That person controlling the shutter has the advantage of sitting on one spot and looking at the scene unfurl over time. The human brain has this unusual ability to remember where you have painted and what portions were missed. I rely on my assistants and camera operator often to help remind me about any skipped portions of the photograph.

Include All Existing Light Sources

I always plan on and make sure to include all the separate light sources that are naturally in the frame. Say there is an overhead fluorescent light inside the factory you are shooting in. When you do your light painting you will turn off those lights, but at some point during the shooting session make sure to include several exposures of those same overhead fluorescent lights that you turned on later. Bracket those exposures so when you compile the scene later in Photoshop, you have at least one exposure that includes the overhead lights. Those types of details from extraneous light sources in the background or overhead etc. add a lot of detail and character to any scene. After all, we are not trying to create a shot in a vacuum, you are in this particular location for its character and esthetic. Include the existing lighting sources from the location as part of the overall light solution, just be sure to keep those exposures separate from all the other Paint With Light frames so you can play with them separately afterwards in Post production.

This applies, of course, to the overall light coming from the Moon or some far away overall light splashing onto the scene. Usually I want to overpower any ambient light I cannot turn off; if it is moonlight it is possible if your lights are strong enough, and should not be a problem. But after you are finished, be sure to include several frames of the overall scene lit only with the moonlight or the overall light of the surrounding city if that is present. Make several exposures of that idea and bracket the heck out of them; play with different color balances too in the camera settings as you never know what will work. You have the benefit of seeing what you get as you expose different color settings and lengths of exposures.



This very long exposure of an abandoned tractor lit with only moon light is ethereal, it almost looks like an overcast day time shot. During one of those long exposures, I can paint light onto the tractor with a small flashlight (right) and create something that is so interesting and unusual. The possibilities are limitless.

Shooting People (With Cameras)

Well, you have finally made it through the meat and potatoes of technique, and the mechanics of "Painting with Light" onto an object, including the environment. This last portion of this section is a bit tricky, but it follows the same basic principals as the other sections you have already read. You remember my instruction of lighting your subject from the right side, the left side, maybe from above and behind. The intention is to create a "Pallet" of exposures that can later on be stacked on top of each other in Photoshop in order to create one single wonderful photograph.

Well, shooting people is basically the same with one big complication! It is easy to understand that if you were shooting several different frames of say a mini-submarine, that you can shoot from all directions over the course of a couple hours and all the individual frames will line up with each other. Since your camera is on a tripod (and nobody kicked it) the frame you shot early in the evening will still line up with the frame you shot two hours later. You are free to use any exposure you captured and mix and match them in order to get the exact look you envisioned for the subject and its environment.

The problem with shooting people is that, "they move." A person cannot hold still for very long, much less for hours like a static mini-submarine. When putting a person back together in Photoshop, it is my experience that the right side exposures of the person do not necessarily line up with the exposures of the left side of that same person if there is too much time in between exposures. Plus you have the added complexity that my mini-submarine might be made up from 30 different exposures, where as a person can only be made up from maybe 1- 5 exposures total. Otherwise the person's body parts have moved too much in between the first exposure and the last exposure. What to do?

This exposure was too long and my Cowboy subject moved slightly during the five second exposure. You can see that his feet are sharp while his top torso is blurry because he has nothing to hold on to or lean against.



First you might notice that in my photography, the power of the photographs and persons depicted in them does not come from "Freezing" a powerful moment. Nobody is "captured in mid-stride" or while they are jumping through a doorway. Instead, the power comes from the integrity of the persons and the overall scene, from the lighting I think.

The techniques I have used and that work well for me are simple and a bit old fashioned. First, it's nice to have a person sitting or leaning against a stationary surface so they have a place to be. It is far easier to hold still if they are sitting or leaning against a wall. It gives you more time to light all sides of your subject, and it gives the subject the ability to "feel" if they are moving out of position.

Even if your subject does not have an object to sit or lean against, it is nice to have an object they can feel a bit; one that touches their body, like a part of a fender or a piece of equipment so they can "feel" where they are supposed to be holding still against for the 1 or 2 minutes you are exposing the different parts of their body. I also have tried to compose my subjects while they hold onto a piece of doorway, aircraft hangers, large tools or parts of equipment that are stationary, anything that will help them maintain a static pose for about a minute.



Giving your living subjects something to grasp, sit or lean against increases greatly the ability to create sharp exposures of people. Exposing people with continuous lights can be tricky.

It sounds crazy but I have noticed that in my shooting with a very high resolution camera, that the exposures of the bottom portion of a person are sharper than the portion of a person near their head because the feet and shoes are locked and stationary on the ground, while the shoulders and chest are actually moving ever so slightly as a person breaths! Amazing. Nobody will see this slight movement but I can see it on my monitor; it's fascinating.

While lighting sections of people, do not waive your light back and fourth a few times for each exposure like you might do for a piece of car or a portion of a building. For persons, try to make single smooth passes with your light one time only for each frame exposed. If you are lighting the left side of your subject, for example, make the light travel from the bottom of his shoes to the top of his head in a single "brush stroke with your light" in about 2 seconds. If you have a strong enough light it is no problem and totally doable; create 2 or 3 different exposures/frames of about one or two seconds each, then move onto different sections of your subject.



These two successful frames of my Fireman subject were exposed for only two seconds each. The ladder was attached to two stands in order to make it solid and stationary.

I have previously advised you to not touch your camera after you evening's photo session has begun. But for persons I usually increase the ISO up to about 400 or 500 or more. I usually do not like to change the F Stop as that might change the critical focus, and of course never change the focusing from when you started. It is, however, okay at this point to increase the ISO so you are sure to get the people in quick clean exposures with as short an exposure on the body parts as possible.



The two halves of the Fireman can be combined easily as there was very little time between exposures, and no time for my subject to move out of alignment. Notice that I am conscious of the lighting on the subject and trying to blend this light into the overall scene.

Another option available for shooting people is to, of course, just set up two or three strobe lights around your subject and freeze them with one overall shot. This is definitely an option if you want to really cleanly capture your subject in one shot and make sure he will "fit." You do not have to go through the bother of recombining the body parts back together again in this method but the flip side has consequences too. First of all, if you shoot with strobelsights, then you have to deal with bringing different sets of lights and all the corresponding equipment to support it (packs, stands, umbrellas, electrical extension cords, etc. etc.). It is far too complicated for my limited abilities to have to drag all that equipment out on location. Keep it simple and enjoy the process of painting with light.

You will also have to make sure that the balance of the lighting on the right side, left side, top and bottom, etc. of the person is totally balanced in each exposure. It is far harder to take a shot of a guy and change afterwards the basic exposures on his left side, for example, in order to make that guy fit into the overall shot you have previously painted with light. When I do these shots on assignment for advertising, then there is

room for strobes and stuff, along with paid assistants and vans to haul all the necessary hardware, but for shooting in a sort of left-handed maner, one light source used multiple times is easier overall.



For ease of shooting living subjects it is definitely an option to light your people with multiple light sources (left) then "Paint with Light" the rest of the scene later on. That way, you only have to blend your living subject back into and on top of the reconstructed scene.



The last thing to keep in mind is that during the post production process when you are recombining the persons back together in Photoshop, it will be different. Since the persons did not exist during the entire Paint with Light process (they were added later) the people will have "stuff" behind them. During your normal photographic shooting over the course of an hour or so, the tractor, race car, or submarine highlighted as your primary subject of the photograph was always in the shot in the same place, so there is nothing behind those static objects in the frame. All the stuff in the photo did not move so nothing is transparent.

When you finally shot a person and then recombined that person in post, there will be part of the original scene visible behind that person. To avoid visual sloppiness I like to keep the area behind my persons a bit dark by just darkening it in the post production process; it is easier to put a person into a scene if the background is a bit darker to begin with. If you have a lot of detail behind the person it is easy to add a "Solid Black Mask" of the outline of the person's shape, and literally add that as a separate layer in Photoshop. So, ultimately you will wind up with the Layers Pallet in Photoshop that shows the person layer you created stacked at the very top, then the black mask of the person below that, (this blocks light from traveling through the person from the background objects), then lastly all the layers that make up your entire scene you painted with light.

POST PRODUCTION

I wanted to include a mini introduction for you the reader concerning this aspect of Paint with Light Photography. It is often the case that photographers do not enjoy, or are fearful of, Photoshop processing and production; they consider it drudgery. I understand that and share those same sentiments sometimes, but not in this case. All that you have accomplished so far, all the planning and night shooting have been leading up to this point. This final aspect of combining the separate elements you created on location is an exhilarating and rewarding process and will open your mind up to a new world of possibilities.

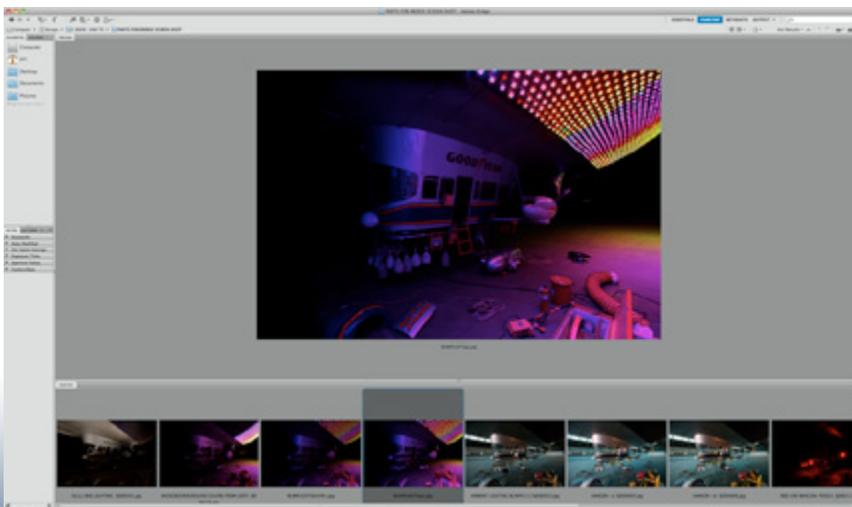
Here it is now finally time to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts; you will be making photographs that have never been seen before and the process is rewarding and super creative. I relish and so very much look forward to this final step, the culmination of all my previous work. If you are not in a hurry, it can be very much a Zen experience. Get into the zone in your head, take your time, explore the different looks of using various exposures to change the character and flavor of the overall shot. One word of advice: **SAVE WHAT YOU CREATE OFTEN!**

Using Photo Editing And Management Software (Optional)

There are several different types of software out there that will help you deal with the large volume of images and exposures you created as part of these Painting with Light photographs. It is not unusual for me to actually shoot hundreds of different exposures on location in my attempt to fully capture all the separate elements of a scene. I'm crazy, of course, and have clearly gone "Over the Edge" you do not need to be so rabid about the whole thing but you might still find a photo editing program helpful in dealing with the large volume of individual exposures you might create.

I have been using Aperture and recently made the switch over to Bridge as a way to view, color balance, label, and then download to a separate folder, all the images I want to include in my final photo. I will scrub through the photos looking at large thumbnails of the individual shots, then pick out the 2 or 3 best exposures of a car fender, for example. It is possible with this type of program to be able to quickly scan and review all the exposures made on location in order for me to get a sense of what I have to work with. As I select different groups of images (left fender, top of car, horizon light, etc.) I do a critical color correction of the files selected, label them, then move them to the folder I will use for creating my masterpiece. It is nice to have different groupings in that folder, with all the components of the scene clearly labeled, so that I can grab a set of images and only use the best one or two frames for each portion of the subject being created.

Of the 7 shots selected and color-corrected for the left fender, for example, I might only use one or two of those same frames as I am building up my shot. It's nice to have choices and I always have the ability to go back to the Bridge program to view everything in case I am missing a critical small portion of a scene. It is very helpful to shoot in Raw then output the images you worked on into Photoshop so there is no loss of data in the image.



This screen shot of my monitor shows the Bridge program running. The large image at the top is an exposure I might want to adjust or view in detail while all the frames scrolling along the bottom are different frames exposed on location. Bridge is very useful for managing large numbers of exposures.

Using Photoshop To Recombine The Images

After initial photography is completed, it usually takes me about fifty hours to recombine all the desired images back into a single photograph.

There, that's the bad news first. Keep in mind that when it comes to this series of photographs, I tend to become more of a perfectionist, so my interest in making the final image sparkle is powerful. I will often shoot over eight hundred separate frames from location, and the final completed photo that you are seeing might well include over 200 or more of those exposures, so ultimately there is a lot to choose from and manage.

For all the readers of this article, I want to emphasize that this technique does not need to be this complicated at all. It is absolutely possible to make a "Painted with Light" photograph with only two or three separate Photoshop layers (exposures). For myself, because the concepts and settings are so very intricate, I tend to go a bit overboard here and there, but it is by choice not by necessity.

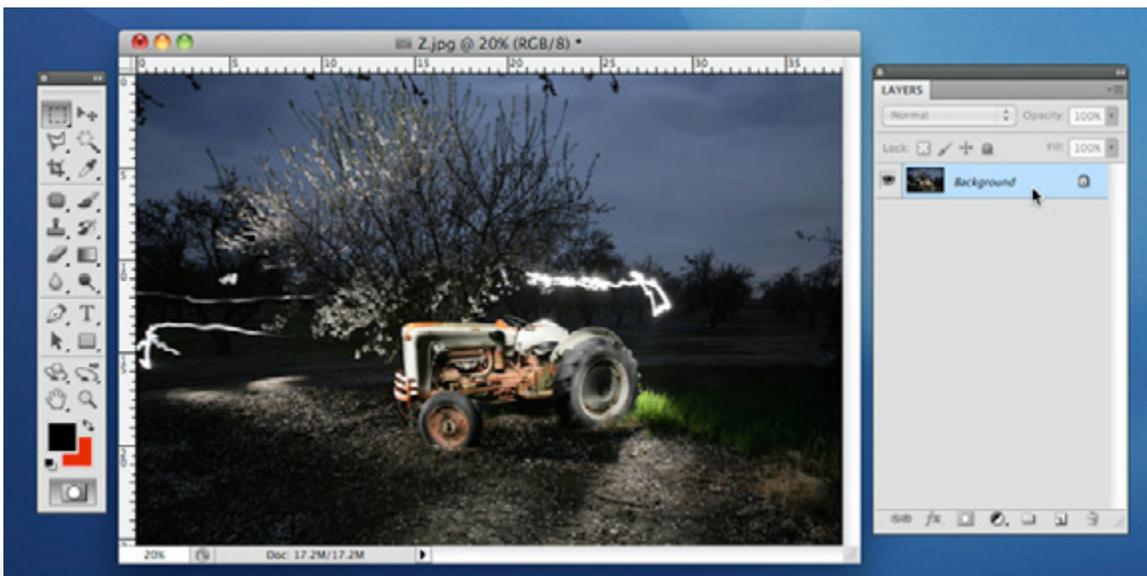


It is absolutely possible to make a combination photo with only two or three separate exposures. Here you can see that I have just a few frames exposed of the tractor at night in the field and am able to combine them in to something pretty unique. It does not have to be complex, keep it fun and easy.



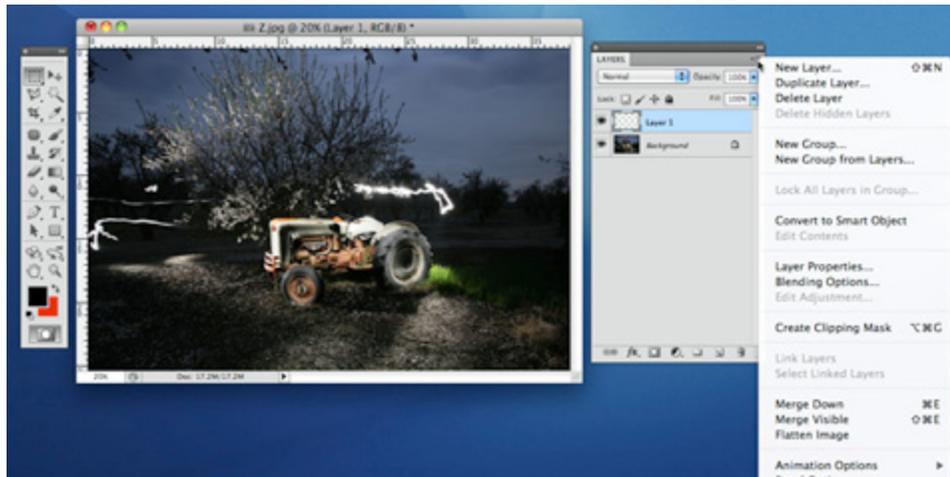
Finished Tractor Shot.

The basic layering process in Photoshop is simplicity itself. After exposing a few images on location, you are ready to start the recombination process. First things first Open one image in Photoshop, and then open the LAYERS window. The Layers window will show your images as you "stack" them one on top of another. Every time you add another image to your Photoshop file, it will appear as a new layer and on top of the previous layer.



This is one image opened in Photoshop and the Layer's menu is opened, revealing your only layer so far.

For convenience, now that you have a first layer, and it is in the camera's original size or pixels per inch (do not bother to change it), it is easy to add another new bottom layer to the Layers window. Go to the dialogue box at the top right corner of the Layers window and choose "ADD LAYER". Even though the layer will appear above your first image layer, go ahead and drag it to the bottom of the stack of two layers. Fill in that image on that layer with solid black. Literally just paint in black everywhere, or choose Fill - Foreground color from the EDIT menu at the top left of the screen, whichever is easiest for you.



Now you are creating a "New Layer." This new layer you are making starts off at the top of your stack of what is now only two layers.

Now, going back to the first image that you opened in Photoshop with, go ahead and erase any parts of the image you do not like. I erase any streaks of light that were captured by the camera during the exposure, or if I happened to accidentally paint light onto me or my shoes, then I'll remove that portion of the image too. Basically, I will remove any portion of that exposure that is not part of the area I intended to paint with light. Often I will wind up with an image that is only seeing a relatively small portion of the original whole frame; everything else will be removed.



Here is a "before and after" view of the light streak image. Using the erase tool, or the Layer Mask option, remove the offending streak of light, then move on to other frames as you stack exposures one on top of another.

As you have finished the first bottom image frame, you will notice that on the top left side of the LAYERS window there is a BLENDING MODE BOX. The default setting is Normal. Leave that Normal for now but notice that it is there.

Next, it is time to add another one of your exposures to the stack of images in the LAYERS window. For this tutorial, choose an image that has light painting on a slightly different portion of your subject you are making. You are trying to combine in the computer two different images with light painted on different portions of the same subject, so choose images where you can see an overlap of light painting. You can also choose complete opposite sides of the same object but it is fun to see how objects overlap and interact.



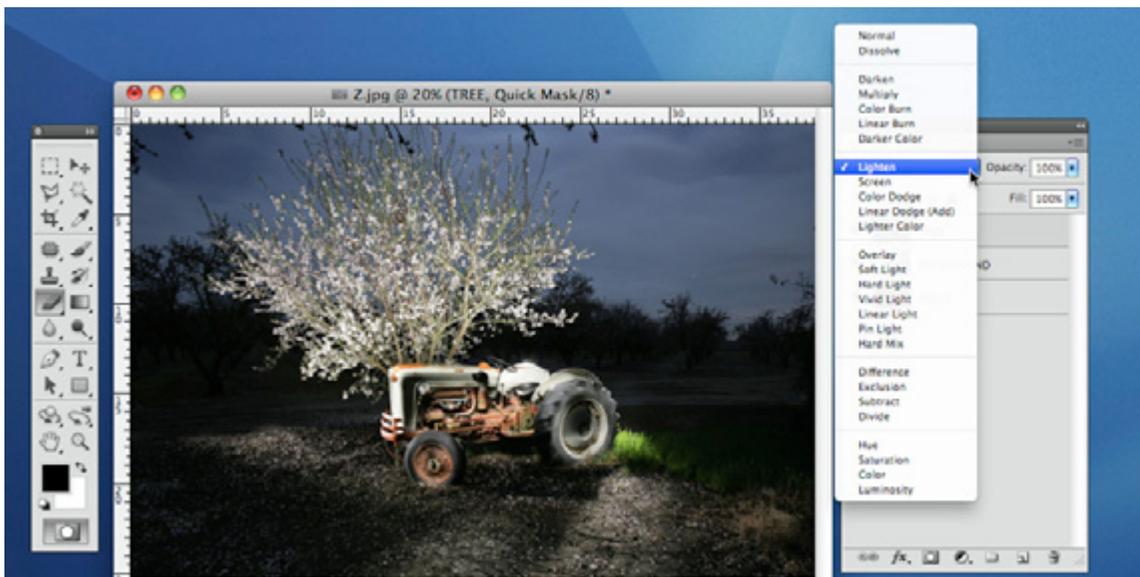
In this screen shot you can see that the new top "trees photo" layer is still Normal, you can not see through it yet to see the background tractor photo underneath. It just looks like a regular exposure you shot on location.

There are different ways for PC and Mac users to "Copy and Paste" or "Drag and Drop" images from one file to another. For me, a Mac user, I "Copy" and then "Paste" the image into the new Photoshop file I am working on. As you add or drag each new image on top of the previous image in the stack, you need to make sure that they correctly line up with all the previous images. New images to the stack line up automatically if they are imported via a photo management program like Bridge, which I use.

If you are adding one image at a time, and you sometimes need to bump or slide the image a bit to make sure it is exactly lined up with previous images below, place a check next to the "SNAP" option. This will allow the whole image to Snap into place as it nears the correct borders or frame of the photo in Photoshop. It is convenient and pretty neat.

Now that you have added a second new layer to the stack of exposures, you will see that that new layer is on top of the previous image. It appears as a normal image and you cannot see through it. If you lit it well and did a reasonably good job of exposing the image when you were on location, you should have an overall pretty dark scene with only the portion you "Painted With Light" standing out as a relatively bright and well-lit area on top of the otherwise dark background, along with everywhere else in the frame. If you did a really good job, the rest of the frame should look totally black except for the portion you "Painted." Now this gets really fun!

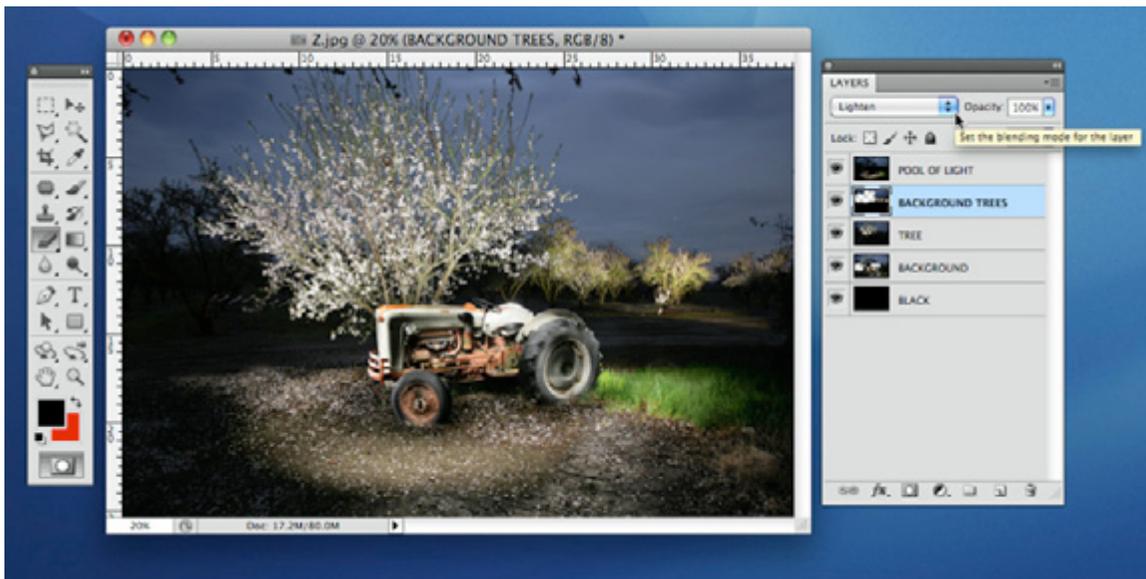
Before you start to erase or remove portions of the photo you do not like, go back to that same BLENDING MODE BOX near the top left of the LAYERS window. Click on the "Normal" setting and drag your cursor down to the "Lighten" mode. SURPRISE!!!!



This shot reveals the process of turning the top "Tree" exposure from a normal solid image, into a transparent layer in order to see the light painted images underneath. Notice that the whole image is not clear. You only see detail underneath that is light or has exposure. This is also why you want to keep as dark as possible everything you do not paint with light, or that you purposely choose to include, such as the overall moon lit environment.

You will see that the new top layer that was normally solid has become transparent, but only transparent in the blacks and areas where there is lighter "imagery underneath" this top photo. It is amazing that this new top layer still appears as a normal photo, but you can also see through it to the photo underneath that was painted with light too. It is this unique feature of

Photoshop which I have utilized to make these unusual Photographs. At this point you can erase any portions of the top current layer you do not like. Again, just like the layer underneath where you erased portions of the shot that had light splashing onto areas you did not intend to "paint", you can repeat that step and remove anything from this top layer that does not fit the overall blending of the two images. Where your light painting overlaps from one frame to the next as the layers stack up, you have the ability to delicately remove or erase portions of any layer that is causing a problem with too bright a highlight or reflection. As you play with new layers stacked on top of previous images, go ahead and play with different BLENDING MODES. In the BLENDING DIALOGUE BOX, the settings I use most are Lighten, Screen, and Overlay. Try them all and get a sense of what the effects are; I've used them all at one point or another.



Using the technique of stacking images in Layers, it is possible to build up photographs using multiple controlled separate exposures you painted with light. Creating something that is far greater than the sum of it's parts.

Using Photoshop To Recombine People (Dr. Frankenstein)

This is by far the trickiest part of the whole painting process. People are a real challenge sometimes, but offer so much more character to your photos too. The basic issue or problem with shooting people and then recombining them in this process, is that people move between exposures. It is far better to have your subjects (persons) holding very still by leaning against something solid, sitting, or lying down. Also, when you did shoot people, if the total exposing process was restricted to only about one minute in total for any particular pose, then you will have better luck putting all the different exposures (left side, right side, top, back side, etc.) cleanly back together.

When starting to make a person, I look for the cleanest biggest piece of my subject that is well exposed, not blurry, and has the best composition. I'll start with that left side of a man, for example, then add new portions of him as the subject grows. Remember, as you add new portions of your living subject, be sure to change the Blending Mode Setting to "Lighten" in the Blending Mode Box, so you can see through each new body-part in order to see how they overlap and align with each other.

It is not unheard of for me to actually cut up or very slightly move an arm or leg in order to make it line up exactly with its opposite half of the same arm or torso. Since I light my subjects with what is basically right and left side light, if a body part moved in between exposures, it will appear that a leg or arm is either too wide or too thin when recombined. If I cut out the offending portion of the appendage and slightly nudge it back into place it will save the overall image of the man. But all the while I am matching every new portion added to the subject and making sure it lines up with the original first left side exposure. You need something that is fixed and consistent in order to build out from with your human (or living) subjects.



The first image on the left is our subject lit from only the front, adding that image to an exposure of him lit from the back side creates a full and rich view of our subject in the environment.

If you did a very good job of exposing the subject, this process should be straightforward and not any more difficult than creating other static objects in the photo so far. However, it is often the case, as you become more ambitious in your photography, that not all of your people will be sitting.

When recreating a person in Photoshop, I find it far easier to turn off the photo you have made up to this point; it only adds visual confusion and clutter, so to simplify the scene work on a solid black background when you make people. That way, body parts (arms, legs, etc.) pop out and you're able to see when something looks strange or weird by being disproportionate.

After you have made and finished your person, who is made up of between 2 and 5 exposures in layers, it is time to go ahead and add a new layer to the LAYERS window. Add a new layer which appears at the top of the stack, and drag it to the bottom of the stack of body parts of your person. On this new layer you will make a simple black figure that is in the shape of your person. You can simply airbrush the shape of a person in solid black, or cut out the shape of the person's outline and fill it in with solid black. This new layer is going to keep its original "Normal" setting in the BLENDING DIALOGUE BOX. By keeping this solid black shape of a person underneath the person you created, it will keep the overall scene from showing up through your person. In other words, you do not want to see through the human subject and see a car or tractor parts that are behind him. This black shape prevents that.



The left image reveals the black mask or shape of the man that is part of the stack of body parts. This black shape on a separate layer at the bottom of the stack prevents portions of the train from being visible through him. The image on the right reveals the final image with what appears to be a solid subject standing in front of a train.

One very tricky part of this overall "situation" is that a person might be made up of only 5 exposures, maybe less. Your primary subject in the photo could be made up of a dozen or more exposures and have a great deal of detail included. The trick is to make your living subject appear as though he actually does exist and belong in the overall scene. Oftentimes, after the overall shot is finished and fully combined, then the person subject is also finished. I will play with contrasts and warm or cool values to the person and overall scene in order to make them appear more homogeneous to the viewer. Even though you are creating what are ostensibly powerful scenes, you still want your subjects to almost "get lost" in the shot.

By that I mean, the lighting on people, cars, ground, and dogs, etc. should appear all the same. Other than the quality of the lighting, nothing should stand out in the overall scene as looking "wrong." What you are selling to the viewer is the story in the photograph, not the contrast of a subject or a person. Everything has to work together in order for the shot to be believable. If any particular area of the photo appears as though it is manipulated, viewers will dismiss the photo as being "Fake."



This final shot reveals how our living subject fits into and becomes a homogeneous part of the overall scene. Notice that I am not lighting the man too fully, I want the light to appear as though it is naturally falling off towards the bottom of his legs, somewhat getting lost in the subdued ground lighting.

Conclusion

The virtues I value most in my own creative endeavors are persistence and attitude. Some artists are blessed with an innate ability to draw or paint, others have the god-given talent of music or the ability to write prose. Still others can intuitively create works of art seemingly unaided by formal education or training. I had none of those imbedded talents. For myself, I was blessed with a passion for photography; the creativity and skill flowed from my desire to learn, develop and enjoy my particular passion along with a positive attitude.

For you, whether you're an amateur shooter or a seasoned professional, I'd like to offer this insight into our shared passion of photography. After you have gotten past the simple mechanics and technique for Painting with Light, I'd like to suggest that you think in terms of ideas. Do not simply strive to make pretty photos of objects, but instead endeavor to create full and rich scenes that tell stories. The story you envision might be very simple but have a theme nonetheless, and your photos will excel because of your underlying message being imparted to the viewer.

I have found in life that practice does produce results. Practically speaking, start off with a simple test; shoot three frames with a flashlight in your living room tonight, then combine those back together. You will learn volumes from that simple trial shooting. After that very first baby step, you too will be in a position to start conceptualizing a photo long before you expose the individual frames.

