



Abstract

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Abstract – What is it?

The dictionary describes it as the following: “existing as a quality or idea rather than a material subject, (of art) using patterns of shapes and colours rather than realistic likenesses.”

The goal of an abstract – is to use components that, in their own right, are not recognisable but when brought together, create an image that the human mind can connect with.

So where do you start? There are many ways to turn what, in the first instance, is a real life and recognisable object onto an abstract image.

Using Different Camera Techniques

1. Zooming – Moving the barrel of a zoom lens (from min focal length to max focal length or vice versa) during a long exposure, tripod recommended.
2. Panning – Moving the camera as a whole (in any direction eg sideways, up or down, in a circular motion etc) during a long exposure.
3. Multiple Exposures – Exposing more than once on to the same frame of film (most camera’s have the facility to do this, (exposure usually needs to be reduced i.e.: underexposed (- sign on camera) by a stop or thereabouts per exposure for slide film.
4. Focusing:
 - a) Shifting the focusing ring during a long exposure, or using two different focusing points in a multiple exposure.
 - b) Deliberately keeping the subject out of focus (this is effective for making the object itself unrecognisable but using the colours or textures of it to render an abstract form).
 - c) Choosing a depth of field that will keep some parts of the object unrecognisable.

Using Camera Equipment

1. Filters – there is an extensive range of filters available for creating unusual effects (price range \$5 and up for 2nd hand or \$25 on up for new).
2. Teleconvertors allow you to extend the focal length of a lens (usually by either 1.4 X or 2 X the original focal length (price range \$50 on up for 2nd hand or \$250 on up for new).
3. Close-up Filters (or Close-up Lenses i.e. Macro Lenses) allow you to focus your lens at a much closer distance than is normally the case. They can be used together with teleconvertors to enable extreme close-up work – example a 75 to 300mm zoom

connected to a 2 X teleconverter with a close-up filter on the end will result in a max focal length of 600mm that can be focused at about 10 inches away from the subject, with this focal length at 10 inches from subject the area of view is about 1 x 1.5 cm. (price range for filters \$30 for Cokin +3 (new)

Close-up lens i.e. Macro lens are usually expensive \$800 on up for new.

4. Extension Tubes - (often called Bellows) allow you to focus at a closer range but you should note they reduce your zoom lens to only having a single plane of focus; this can make composing of an image very awkward as you lose the ability to zoom the lens and still maintain sharp focus. (price range \$200 on up for new)

Note: the ability to photograph in extreme close-up using any of the above equipment will readily create an abstract form from virtually any object.

Film Types and Processing – Some films are available (particularly slide films) which produce extreme colour saturation, this can sometimes aid in creating an abstract look. Cross processing can also create unusual effects.

Using Other Equipment to Create Effects

Light sources

1. Photographing under a household light bulb will create a yellow/gold cast over your subject, using different coloured light bulbs or coloured cellophane will also create colour casts over your subject.
2. Using highly reflective materials – example metallic wrapping foil (which is available in different colours). These can be used in different ways – they can be used to reflect a shaft of coloured light at an object rather than casting a colour over the entire subject – they can be placed underneath translucent objects (eg glass or water) to create a coloured background – different colours and or shapes can be combined and used together to create multi coloured backgrounds.
3. Pinhole lighting – placing a bright light source eg desk lamp or torch behind cardboard that has a pinhole or cut out shape in it and setting this up in a darkened room can create theatrical lighting conditions

Natural lighting – Natural lighting (particularly if you are indoors next to a window) can be very easily controlled and manipulated – by using Reflectors (these can be home made eg white or coloured card or paper, car sun shades, aluminium foil mirrors etc), Net curtains or opaque plastic shopping bags can be used to soften strong light, or blinds and curtains can be used to block light from certain parts of an image or to entirely darken a room.

Materials to create and effect (alternatives to using filters) –

1. Glass (textured, coloured, moistened, smeared with Vaseline (which can be coloured with paints or vegetable colouring), huffed on to fog, painted with translucent paints) can be used as an alternative or in addition to lens filters to create a wide variety of effects. Glass off cuts can usually be obtained from glass companies at little or no cost, or as a start you may have some opaque or textured glass in the bathroom area of your home.

2. Mirrors – mirrors or mirror tiles can be set up to create reflections – they can also be used to create the effect of motion if you position yourself at an oblique angle to them (this is due to the light refraction properties of the glass which sits on top of the actual mirror foil, at an oblique angle the glass and the mirror foil both reflect a copy of the object, this generates a slight double image)
3. Fabrics – these can be used as a screen to photograph through (if they are an open type of weave) to create a texture over an image, or can be used to create a multi coloured or textured backdrop. Some fabrics also have reflective properties these can be used to create highlights or possibly a textured feel to a multiple exposure. Note: Black pantyhose stretched over the front of the lens make an effective diffusion filter (other coloured pantyhose will add a colour cast as well as diffuse the image).

Useful Equipment

1. A tripod is not only useful but essential for most long exposures, it also enables you to maintain your viewpoint while you organise and arrange objects.
2. An eyedropper is a useful and brilliant way of applying water droplets to exactly where you want them and in the size you require. It is also good at removing them. (this is done by pushing the air out of the dropper by squeezing the black rubber and keeping it squeezed while you position it over the droplet, then allow the air back in this will suck the droplet back up into the eyedropper).
3. Patience and Time to spare – abstract work usually takes a great deal of thought and time to create – but – it is also the fastest way I know of to learn about – what your camera can and can't do – using lighting effectively – understanding composition – using depth of field with effect – using perspective to create depth – how to generate a sense of motion, mood, feeling sense of colour or texture in an image. It also allows you to study an image that is not recognisable as a thing and therefore gain an understanding of how all the above factors come into play (when creating any sort of image abstract or not) in terms of allowing people to visually connect with it.
4. Abstract imagery connects with the subconscious mind rather than the conscious one for the simple reason that when you view an object, which is not recognisable, the mind does it's best to identify what within the image seems familiar to it. The subconscious will recognise and identify shapes, textures, colours, mood, feeling, motion etc. These factors need to be taken into account when creating and composing your image.

Composition, the all important factor!

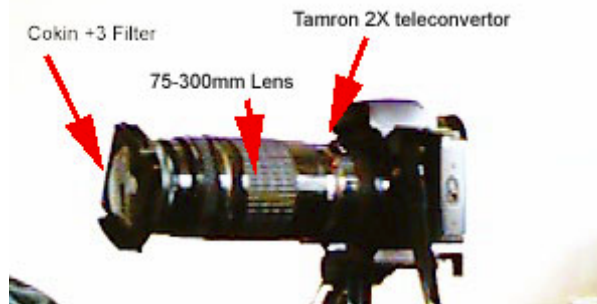
As expressed above – when an abstract image is viewed something about it must trigger the mind. One goal is to enable the eye to go on a visual journey around the image – this can be done by – considering the placement within the frame of any bright highlights or splashes of colour, - by using a line of texture or colour to lead you through the image. From a visual journey point of view the mind recognises shapes most readily – in particular – triangles, diagonals, circles and squares. As an image is usually presented within a square or rectangle frame to begin with (i.e. as a print or slide) using a triangle, diagonal or circle composition may well work the best.

Points to remember:

The human eye – like a moth – is drawn to brightness, for this reason highlights can be used effectively in an image to draw the eye around it, but be careful not to over use them, as too many strong highlights soon become glary and confusing. Subtle shifts in tone or colour can also be used to create a journey, as your eye will follow a like colour until it runs out. These methods can also be used to generate a sense of depth and a third dimension. A two-dimensional approach can also be effective, however two-dimensional images will usually require a more graphical approach eg: using strong lines and shapes and definitive colours to create a pattern that will lead the eye around the image.

Examples:

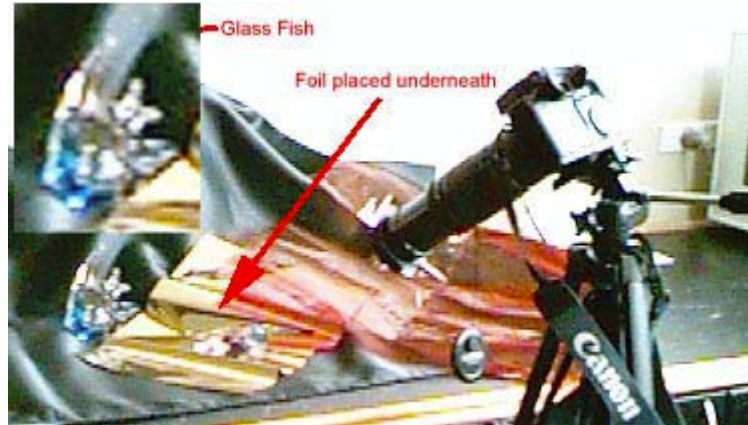
1. Working close-up (on the kitchen bench with the comforts of home close at hand)
2. with Canon EOS 100 camera, 75 – 300mm lens with Tamron 2X teleconverter attached and a Cokin +3 close-up filter on the end of the lens – Film used Fuji Velvia or Sensia Slide film.



“The Journey” Winner Gold Medal



“Colour-me-doo” Winner Honours
at the North shore salon of photography 2000
Abstract Slide Category.



The set up for taking these images

For these images I used coloured (reflective foil wrapping paper underneath the glass fish to reflect coloured light back up through the mostly clear glass. I also used an extreme close-up approach (as described in the equipment notes above) to home in on a small area of the glass (approx 1 x 1.5 cm). Glass has some very interesting properties in terms of the way it reflects and refracts light (particularly when a polarising filter is used). It can readily create things that are not actually either visible or for that matter even real, this is particularly true when photographed in close-up.

The following images were also captured using the same technique as above except using the crystal base of an ornament.



“Gasper”



“Oyster pattern”



Coloured glass (especially recycled glass, which has a texture to it,) can also produce interesting results:



"Molten Blue" Use of a polariser has created a 3D effect.

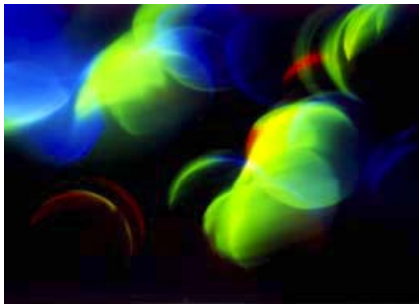


"Unity through Division" Extreme Close-up

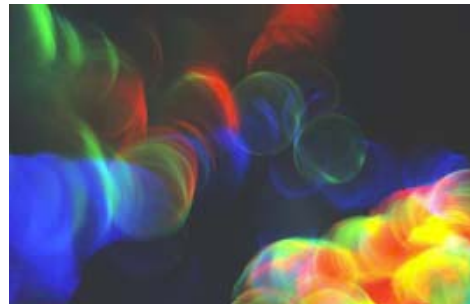


"Tears for Spring" Double exposure

Reflective materials: “Light Fantasia (an image from my Associateship Set) and “Light Patterns” are in fact an extreme close-up (done as above) of some reflective plastic – I have deliberately kept the pin-point-sized coloured highlights of reflected light coming off the plastic out of focus to achieve this effect (it is a characteristic of a mirror lens to turn out-of-focus highlights into rings – this is also the cause of camera flare). I also had to use a shallow depth of field to ensure the highlights stayed out of focus.



“Light Fantasia”



“Light Patterns”

Natural objects (in this case a white rose) can also be used to create abstract work.

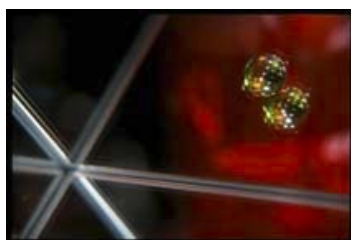


“Petals soft and creamy.”

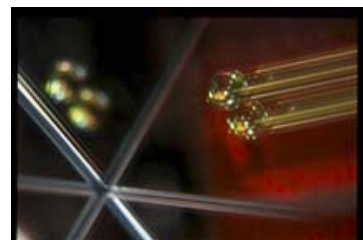
An experiment with mirrors one day produced these images



“Boris the Alien” Paint mixed with water was aerated using an eye dropper



“Speedy Ball 1” Reflection photographed at oblique angle to mirror



“Speedy Ball 2” Same as Speedy Ball 1 but with addition of super speed filter tiles

Although the “speedy ball” images are not strictly an abstract if I had seen fit to use this as part of a double exposure it soon would have become one. The key factor to creating a successful abstract image is to keep working at it (this is where the patience and time factor comes in), set yourself and assignment – pick a small selection of objects and equipment to use and play around with it. Take as many varied images as you can and then analysis them – ask yourself – which has the most effective lighting – which has the greatest sense of depth or graphical quality – which has the strongest sense of mood or feeling – which takes my eye on a journey. After you’ve studied them and analysed what techniques worked and which didn’t – set too and do some more – and remember – given the number of ways it is possible to create an abstract image there is always an endless supply of possibilities the only limitation – is your imagination and the time you’re willing to spend to create them.

HAPPY SHOOTING

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