

Landscape

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The Dark Side of Photography

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Intentional Camera Movement

Finding photographic art in everyday landscapes through unconventional capture techniques is an alternative way to engage with the natural world. One of the techniques that has gained momentum lately, is ICM. Deborah Hughes analyses this interesting concept





Photo Impressionism, Intentional Camera Movement (ICM), Multiple Exposure (ME) and other alternative image gathering and manipulation techniques are growing photographic genres that photographers as well as the viewing public either love or hate. Traditional landscape photographers in particular may have a difficult time with abstract and artistic photography even if they are intrigued by the resultant images. The legacy of Ansel Adams and his movement of non-movement as well as the years of hard work required to hone camera skills and develop a personal vision have become a trained muscle memory not easily

shaken. But that's what we are going to do here – shake it up.

We explored the topic of photography as art beyond simple documentation in a previous article so I will pick up from that foregone conclusion here with a bit of history on artistic vs. straight approaches to landscape photography. I will discuss why anyone would even think of introducing blur or capture images off-tripod or, worse yet, toss a camera into the air, as well as offer some techniques and resources for those who might like to give it a go.

Since photography's inception, painting and photography have been like feuding

siblings in the family of art. Painting, the older brother, with his well-established reputation for carrying on family traditions, feels jealous of his precocious younger sister, photography, whose tools and immediate images threaten his status and inheritance.

From an early age, her attention to detail and literal interpretations seemed to mock his eons of studied calculations. Though he's co-opted her tools for his own work and promotion, he bristles when her brushstrokes of light catch the

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eyes of the elders.

Photography attempted to mitigate this rivalry of form and function through the Pictorialist movement, which began in the 1860s. Its proponents sought to establish photography's place in the art world

beyond the mechanical documentation of reality. Peter Henry Emerson, author of *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, promoted artistic image

gathering techniques through use of in-camera composition, and lens choice, as >>

» well as darkroom and printing processes. His book became the go-to guide for practitioners of pictorialism in Europe and America and spawned groups such as the Linked Ring in Great Britain, the Photo Club of Paris, the Kleeblatt in Germany and Austria, and Alfred Stieglitz's Photo-Secession in America.

Pictorialist groups were generally exclusive and often divisive due to demands for strict adherence to the techniques of one style or another. Once cameras and other photographic equipment became economically accessible to the amateur photographer, many Pictorialists turned their noses and cameras toward more realistic and futuristic compositions. This mirrored the shudder of scientific advancements and the wallop World War I handed down to the

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very sentimentality, optimism, and romantic sensibilities that Pictorialist photography evoked. As the Pictorialist movement lost its initial momentum and highbrow status, some photographers like Stieglitz and Paul Strand moved on to embrace a more modernist approach, composing abstract images with bold lines and dark shadows.

In keeping with the perception of the landscape photographic artist as a member of an elite, Ansel Adams and Edward Weston formed Group f/64 in 1932 with strict adherence to sharp, stark scenes – a marked departure from the soft focus, painterly style of Pictorialism. The club's manifesto stated: The Group will show no work at any time that does not conform to its standards of pure photography, which is defined as possessing no qualities of technique, composition or

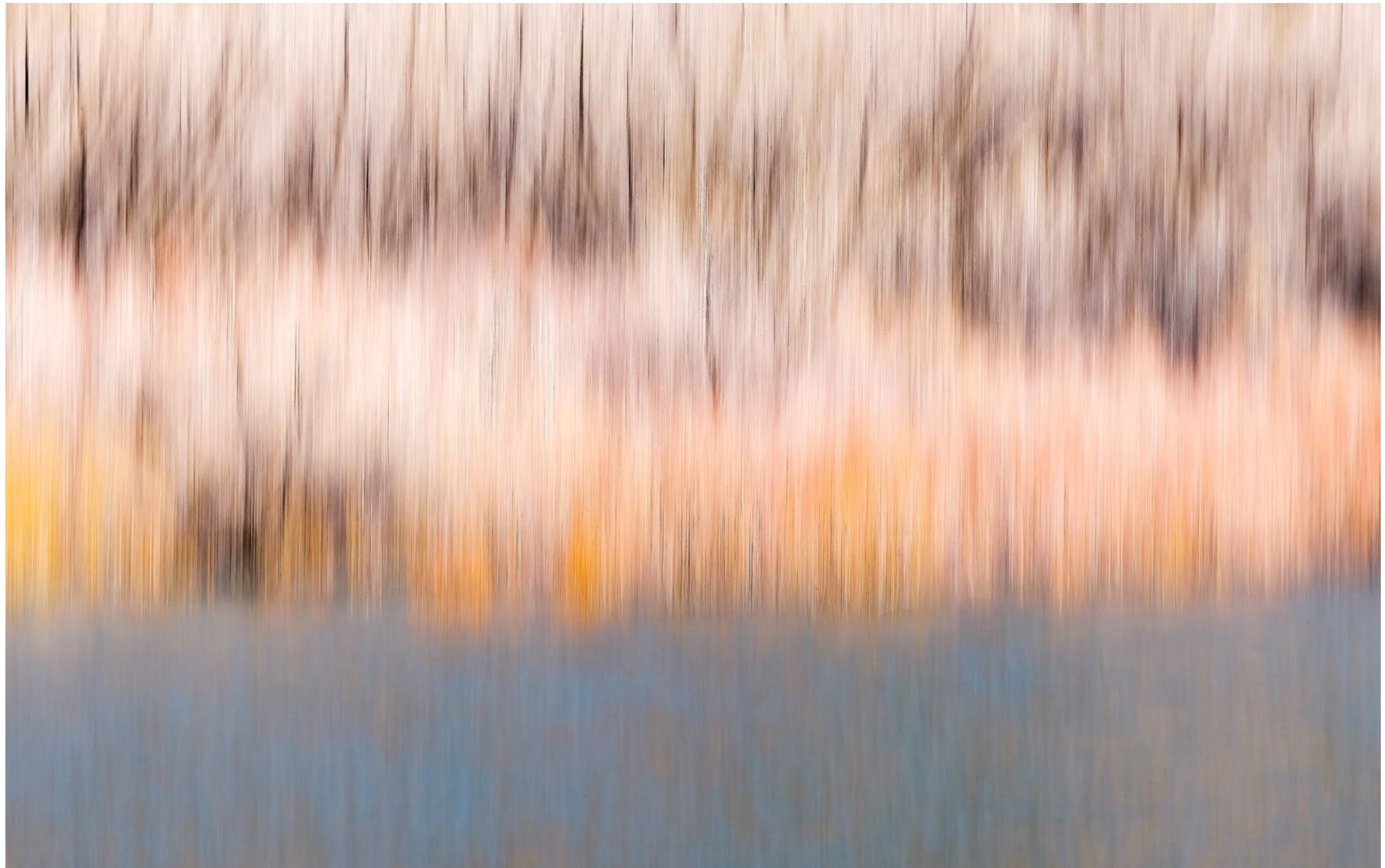
idea that is derivative of any other art form. The production of the Pictorialist, on the other hand, indicates a devotion to principles of art which are directly related to painting and the graphic arts. The members of Group f/64 believe that photography, as an art form, must develop along lines defined by the actualities and limitations of the photographic medium, and must always remain independent of ideological conventions of art and aesthetics that are reminiscent of a

period and culture antedating the growth of the medium itself.

Purity as an ideal, whether applied to art, photography, or the artist/photographer, is a flawed premise from a rigid perspective. By the time Ansel's selective breeding locked the chastity belt around 'straight' photography with f/64, the bodily fluids of chemicals, compositions, and the heady need of the artist/photographer to experiment, had promiscuously passed in

and out of art and photography circles for some time. With the instantaneous share of the world wide web, cameras attached to every electronic device, wireless remote shutter release, and tethered capture, today's blue-blood landscape photographer dons an Ansel Adams Edition® photo vest at dawn primed to shoot at f/\$64,000.

What is it then that prompts some to jettison the weight of tradition and technology and literally throw it all in the air? »



» **Movement**

Camera movements, environmental movements, and the movement of the human heart.

Landscape photographers travel the world to get a piece of the ever-shrinking frame of natural habitats sans evidence of human impact. We long for bygone days of wide-open vistas with the promise and possibility of further movement into virgin territory. A scraped inscription on a backcountry bridge regularly inundated by flash floods and four-wheelers alike captures the sentiment – **keep it like it was**.

But there is no going back. Even if we could return to the undefiled, there would likely be differing opinions and agendas staking claims as to when and where we would go back to. Whatever Garden of Eden is yearned for, it was doomed even before Adams's first bite of the Yosemite apple. My thoughts here are not a negative

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judgment or trashing conventional landscape photography – I do my share of light chasing – but aim to encourage thought and discussion throughout the community of landscape photographers.

Moving back to our topic of ICM, finding photographic art in everyday landscapes through alternative capture techniques is also an alternative way to engage with the natural world.

Considering the speed of light, the phenomenon of photography itself is a layered visual story of past, present and future where we can see through each

other's eyes the space and times we move through, where our taste for the new can co-exist with the palimpsests of the past. Landscape photographers who love the Pictorialist style, ME or ICM may continue to shoot 'straight' for fear of losing their place or to gain acceptance within the landscape photography community. There is time. There is space. There is light.

Learning about how the human eye sees and perceives is a valuable tool when first attempting to color outside the lines of light and tradition. An extraordinary read by Richard D. Zakia, *Perception and Imaging: Photography – A Way of Seeing*, addresses how we perceive different visual phenomena such as pattern, light/dark contrast, negative space, symmetry, color, etc. He synthesizes the principles of time, space, and light with compositional considerations from the viewpoint of the photographer as image-maker as well as the viewer of the photographic image/print.

Though his ideas are relevant for conventional landscape as well as other genres of photography, his chapter on Camera as Space Vehicle piqued my interest. He invites us to move: imagine the camera (unrestricted) by the person holding it. Move it about as if it were a space vehicle in three directions and three different rotations (pitch, yaw and roll) to arrive at the best composition and unusual perspective.

In his thought-provoking book, *Art & Physics*, Leonard Shlain proposes that avant-garde art presages leaps in scientific understanding, particularly physics. Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey experimented with serial photomontage, which spawned the movie industry and was embraced by Futurist painters. Cubism further dismembered the art world with its reorganizing of objects in »



» the context of movement. Even earlier styles of painting motion can be found in some of the Paleolithic cave paintings in France and Spain. Shlain notes that what underlay Cubist space and Futurist time was the concept of simultaneity. Though Newton, Kant and virtually all of Western thinkers since the Renaissance proceeded on the assumption that events must be processed in sequence, Einstein's relativity theory muddled the precise sequencing of events in frames of reference moving relative to one another. The speed of light, however, brought all of these different frames back together in one still (luminous) moment. At c (speed of light in $E=mc^2$) there is no sequence because there is no time: time comes to a halt and consequently there can be absolutely no movement. At lightspeed in spacetime everything is simultaneous.

I often use the movements and metaphors suggested by Zakia and Shlain while composing ICM images where I consider the camera as a dance partner. I set the scene with the subject's shape and color along with its fit into the frame of the desert dance floor. My camera bodies are equipped with hand grips

that firmly, yet lovingly, lead the lens around to the rhythm of whatever music is available – the trill of birdsong, a reedy wisp of wind, the percussive thud of my own sandals on sandstone. Incorporating the simultaneous views of past, present and future into image-making often blurs the subject and its meaning as we commonly know it, yet adds an emotional element to evoke a sense of wonder. Another movement metaphor might be to envision your camera in the role of a baton in the hands of a symphony orchestra maestro. Or make up your own metaphor and rhythm.

In discussions with other photographers who have chosen to step off the tack sharp edge, suggestive essence and mood were primary in their original experimentations with camera movement techniques and continue as a full immersion into the body of their current work.

I met [Mark Wade](#), a southern California photographer, through a Google+ Photo Impressionist community where his carefully crafted ICM and ME images caught my eye. Mark did not start out aiming to make art; his initial interest was in capturing the movement of light. Letting



go of the standard protocols for 'proper' photography, he followed his taste for the dramatic to capture images that moved him beyond realistic depictions of the landscape.

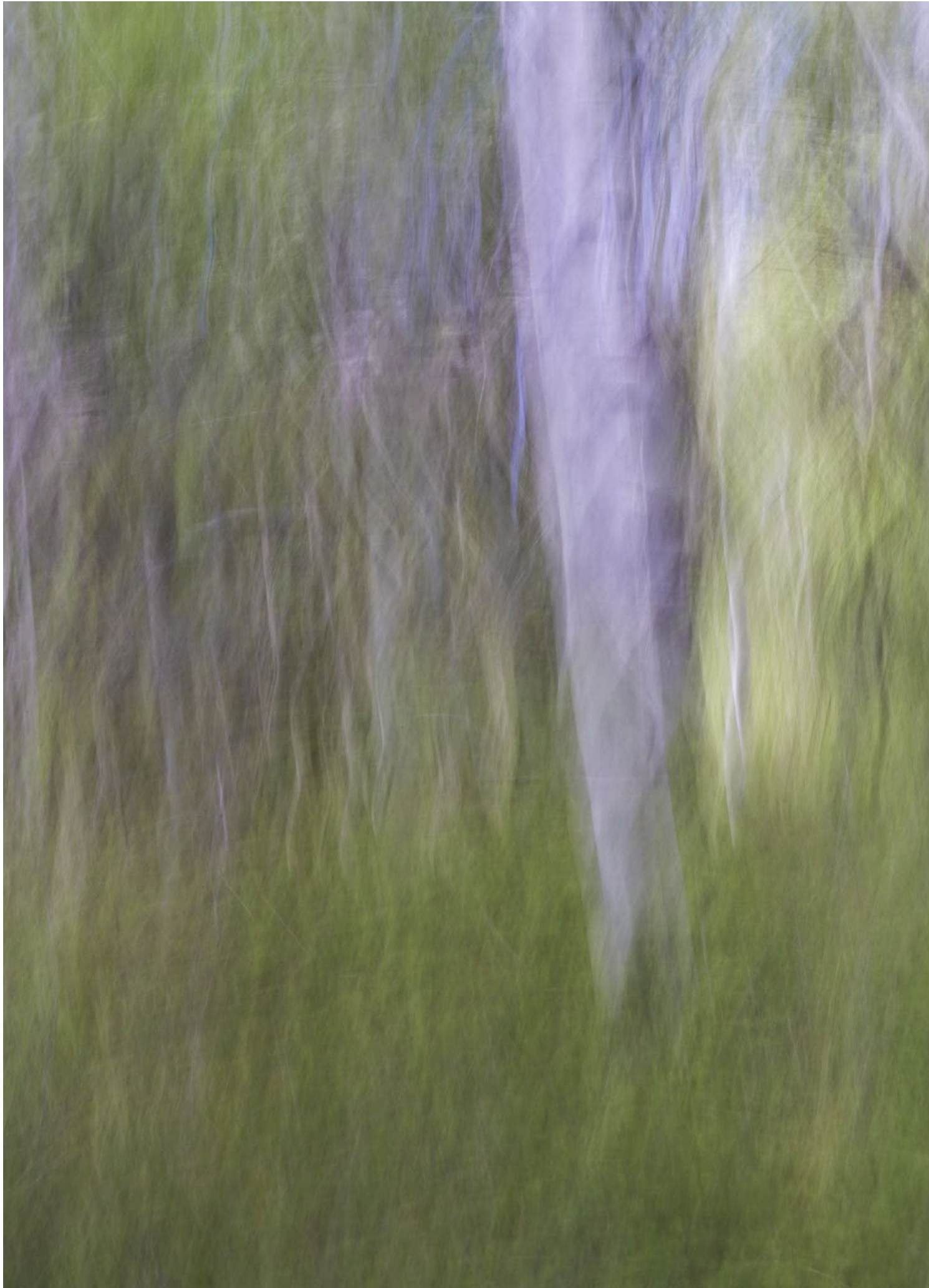
Mark's vision built upon his realization that the works of photographers he felt drawn to were not subject-centered. He notes: "classic art such as Van Gogh's *Starry Night* or the

dappled renderings of Monet teach us that suggestion is a powerful truth". Mark was impressed as a young man by Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*, which hung in the family dining room. He notes: "The subject (*Blue Boy*) is elevated not nearly so much by the genius of detail and light as it is by the essence created in the background which supports whatever the 'subject' may be."

Though Mark's mentor was a former Marine combat-trained photographer/editor turned instructor who forbade fixing in Photoshop or shooting in RAW, Mark feels that this rigid training enabled him to

develop a strong symbiotic relationship with his camera and its shortcomings. This knowledge allowed a freedom to explore the use of elements from different perspectives in order to create a cohesive message using both in-camera ME as well as composites produced in Photoshop. Though he prefers to capture and create his images in-camera, he enjoys the options offered by editing software, as they let him fine-tune his photographic stories.

[Valda Bailey](#), a UK photographer, popped up in my Facebook news feed as a featured photographer through the »



» group Landscapes by Women. Valda's impressionist photographs exude the subterranean quality of layered dreams that straddle REM sleep and waking. There are differing, though not necessarily conflicting, perceptions in some of Valda's images where I want to stay in that cloud of unknowing, yet sense that waking will provide an equally sensual view.

Valda sights the day she came across the work of Chris Friel as a turning point from the picture postcard, calendar views of straight landscape photography to more artistic and impressionistic renderings of the natural world. As a painter, she dropped her brush and picked up the camera with the realization that ICM and ME allowed her to express her vision in a way she couldn't quite master on canvas.

With guidance from Doug Chinnery, as well as Chris Friel, she began a journey of experimentation and discovery to interpret the landscape in unexpected ways. She cites Susan Burnstine and Ernst Haas as photographers, and Paul Cezanne, Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Klee as painters, as well as others whose work continues to inspire her vision.

Of her creative process and subject matter, Valda states: "I gravitate towards the landscape partly because it surrounds me, it's convenient, and partly because my personality is far more suited to being out in the world on my own. My relationship to the landscape and use of impressionist techniques is governed by the weather, my state of mind, how much time I have available to shoot, as well as other images I have been looking at. Traditional landscape photography holds no appeal for me so it isn't really something I relate to. Impressionist techniques engage a very different thought process when it comes to camera settings,

filters, tripods etc. The calculations, decisions, and sundry bits of kit needed for conventional landscape compositions are an impediment to my creative process and hold no interest. Others may enjoy the more structured process and happily spend time comparing lenses and immersion in technical data – everybody has different objectives. Shooting the way I do suits my personality and I believe that people should be free to pursue the approach that works best for them."

There are no hard and fast rules to abide by when practicing ICM, ME or other artistic capture methods. As suggested above, the sky's the limit with regards to how you move with your camera, though I personally refrain from launching my camera into the sky using the technique called Camera Toss – for obvious reasons.

A camera with manual controls is necessary to create most ICM images. Start with low ISO, slow shutter speeds (slower speeds = slower camera movement), and a corresponding aperture to expose the composition to fit your personal vision – an overexposure that bathes the subject in stark white or a dark, moody and mysterious dream. You can also play with really slow shutter speeds and stop-and-go movement. Though alternative capture techniques can free a landscape photographer from the tick-tock of sunrise/sunset and/or storm chasing, the use of polarizing or 4-6 stop Neutral Density (ND) filters are useful to achieve the slow shutter speeds necessary for full sun image-making.

The best lens to capture your abstract visions will be similar to traditional landscape photography. If you want to incorporate expansive vistas into your compositions, a wide-angle lens would be appropriate. If you want to fill the frame with softened >>

» detail, a telephoto or macro lens with a close focusing distance would likely fit the bill. One positive aspect of ICM image-making is that your lens need not be equipped with image stabilization or be manufactured with the highest quality glass, which dramatically reduces the cost and sometimes weight of your kit. Weight is a significant factor when handholding for long periods. Also, you may want to consider using a zoom lens, as zooming in and out can create interesting effects. This technique requires practice though unless you want to produce images that take your viewer on a dizzying merry-go-round spin.

For ME, you may want to use a tripod if you desire precise lines and/or repetitive patterns or you can use the grid or autofocus points on your screen or in your viewfinder when handholding. Depending on your artistic vision, you can play with blur and sharpness to paint and overlay light on shadow. Some cameras allow for selecting a stored image on your memory card as well as capturing a new image on which to build your ME. Some only allow layering on a new image. If you are looking to acquire a camera with ME capabilities, make sure the model captures multiple and not just double exposures.

The ME settings will vary by camera. My Canon 6D offers an Additive setting and an Average setting with up to 9 exposures. With Additive, each new layer adds one stop of brightness to the preceding layer except for overlays of black on black, which are unaffected. With the additive setting, you will need to decrease exposure for each bright layer exposed over a layer of similar brightness unless you desire an overexposed effect. With the Average setting, the camera automatically adjusts areas of overlapping brightness to prevent overexposure. Some

professional level cameras offer bright and dark settings, which maintain bright areas in dark exposures or dark areas in bright exposures. Most point and shoot cameras do not offer an ME function, but the ME effect can be created with a series of composited images in Photoshop.

One important piece of equipment is a high volume memory card or multiple cards for ICM and ME, particularly when you are first learning and gaining a sense of what's pleasing to your eye, as it often takes several exposures to get the movement and composition just right. I wait and cull images during post-processing, as it's often difficult to see the subtleties of movement on the camera's display.

For me, ICM and ME add additional levels of cross-bedded engagement with the layered rock formations and canyon country where I live. These artistic image capture techniques, whether or not they become your primary modes for capturing artistic images, can reboot and re-energize your creative vision with a sense of play. Like nurturing a long-time love, partners (you and your camera) need to step outside the everyday, time-tested rituals to keep your relationship to your work fresh and exciting.

As your mother used to say – go outside and play! ➡

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