

IMAGE: LEE FROST

HOW TO MASTER

PAINTING WITH LIGHT

THE WORD 'PHOTOGRAPHY' DERIVES FROM THE GREEK 'PHOTOS' AND 'GRAPHE', WHICH LITERALLY MEANS 'DRAWING WITH LIGHT'. THAT'S WHAT WE DO EVERY TIME WE TAKE A PICTURE, BY ALLOWING LIGHT TO FLOOD IN THROUGH THE LENS AND FIX AN IMAGE ON OUR CAMERA'S SENSOR. NORMALLY THAT OCCURS INSTANTANEOUSLY, BUT WHAT IF THERE IS LITTLE OR NO AMBIENT LIGHT AND INSTEAD YOU LEAVE THE CAMERA'S SHUTTER OPEN AND ADD YOUR OWN? THAT'S WHAT PAINTING WITH LIGHT IS ALL ABOUT – USING ARTIFICIAL LIGHT SOURCES LIKE TORCHES AND FLASHGUNS TO SELECTIVELY ILLUMINATE A SUBJECT OR SCENE. THE NEXT TEN PAGES ARE DEDICATED TO SOME OF THE MOST AMAZING AND EFFECTIVE PAINTING-WITH-LIGHT TECHNIQUES FOR YOU TO TRY >>





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ESSENTIAL KIT



Camera: Any camera will do the job providing it has a Bulb (B) mode, you can use a remote release to lock the shutter open and you can focus manually.



Lens: A standard zoom (18-55mm) is suitable for portraits, still-life and most close-range/small-scale subjects, while a wider zoom (10-20mm) will be better for landscapes, star trails, architecture and urban scenes.



Tripod: All light-painting techniques involve long exposures, from seconds to hours, so a sturdy tripod is essential. Check out page 114 if you're in the market for a new tripod and ball head – our test reveals the best.



Remote release: Allows you to trip the camera's shutter and hold it open in Bulb mode for as long as required. Interval timers let you program a specific exposure time and even delay the start of the exposure so that you can get into position before the camera's shutter is open. Check out cheap Chinese models on eBay and Amazon – you can get interval timers for £15 (genuine Canon and Nikon ones are over £100).



Torch: Painting-with-light enthusiasts equip themselves with a whole range of torches for different subjects/purposes. Small pen/key ring torches and LEDs are ideal for still-lives, portraits, matchstick men and light balls, as well as checking camera controls in the dark. Visit £1 shops, filling stations, cycling shops and DIY stores for small torches, too. If you want to paint things like statues, trees, cars and small buildings that you can get relatively close to, a standard-sized torch

will be fine. You can get some fantastic LED torches these days from outdoor shops – pocketable but powerful. Finally, for big stuff, like buildings, bridges, rock arches, piers, jetties and landscapes, arm yourself with a torch that offers at least one-million candlepower. Prices start at about £7 for a rechargeable one-million candle model and go up to £30-£40 for ten-million candles. With one of those babies you could light up a town!



Flash: Electronic flash can also be used to paint large areas with light, such as the façade of a building. Any type of flashgun will do, though the more powerful the better. Fast recycling and fresh batteries also help, and if you have two or three flashguns, use them all so you can fire one while the other/s are recharging. Flashguns can also be set up inside buildings or around structures and fired remotely using slaves or infrared triggers to light different areas.



First-aid kit: If you can avoid it, don't go out alone at night and if you do, make sure you take a mobile phone in case of emergencies. It's also a good idea to take a basic first-aid kit along with you and, if you're doing any work with fire, wire wool or sparklers, a fire blanket. Remember, safety first at all times.



Appropriate clothing: It goes without saying that while this time of year is ideal for painting-with-light techniques as you don't have to work at unholy hours, it's a lot colder so make sure you wrap up warm. Wear dark clothing to avoid you being illuminated in the exposures and remember your gloves – preferably fingerless mittens so you don't need to remove them to work camera settings and to keep your hands safe while handling hot light sources.

BUILDINGS & MONUMENTS

While still-lives are a good place to start when painting with light (see over the page), the technique is hugely popular with something bigger, like an unlit building, monument, pier or bridge, yielding very impressive results. You'll need to equip yourself with a big one to two-million candle power light source (making sure it's fully charged) that can light large areas from a distance, or employ a couple of powerful electronic flashguns and use multiple flash bursts over a few minutes to gradually illuminate your subject.

Although it sounds complicated, painting buildings and structures with light is actually really easy. For the best results, scout out and select your viewpoint while there's still some daylight around so you can see what you're doing, then head back to prepare for the shoot just before dusk. Set up your tripod, compose the scene and focus manually on your main subject. Stop the aperture down to f/11 or f/16, set the shutter to Bulb and attach a remote release.

The best time to shoot is as darkness falls but while there's still some colour in the sky, so about 20 minutes after sunset during the winter months. Once you reach that point, trip the camera's shutter, lock it open on Bulb, turn on your torch and start painting with light. You'll see exactly where the beam of light is hitting. Keep it aimed for a few seconds, but also move the torch around by wiggling your hand so there are no hard edges between lit and unlit areas in the final shot. After a few seconds, move into a different area and do the same. Repeat this until you feel you've illuminated the entire structure then turn off the torch, end the exposure and check the image on your camera's LCD monitor. If the image is too dark, you'll need to direct the torch beam for longer. If it's too light – or certain areas are too light – you'll know you overdid it and can give less light on the next shot. There are no hard and fast rules here, so whatever works for you and looks good is fine. You may want to go for fairly even illumination, but then again you can create some spooky

images if you intentionally light some areas but leave others dark – this works well on churches, towers, ruins, mine workings and other mysterious old buildings. If you shoot at dusk/twilight while there's still colour in the sky you should be able to get away with an exposure of one to two minutes.

The alternative to a torch is to paint with flash. Electronic flashguns emit a powerful burst of light and though it may not be enough to illuminate a whole building or structure in one go, you can use multiple bursts to build up the light levels. Modern guns recharge in a few seconds, though it's worth using two guns simultaneously if you have them, and carrying spare batteries. Use the gun/s off camera, set to full power and fire them by pressing the test button. To get an idea of how many bursts of light you need, fire one as a test then check the shot to see if you need to flash each area more than once. As with all painting-with-light techniques, it's always a little hit and miss when you first try it, but after a few shots you should be producing perfect results.

USING FLASH GELS

If you're working with electronic flash, experiment by using gels to add vivid colours to the light. If you only have one flashgun, simply carry a selection of gels in your pocket and, as you walk around, illuminate various parts of the scene by holding different coloured gels over the flash head. Sweet wrappers or translucent plastic work well, too.

This technique works well in urban locations such as derelict buildings, subways and tunnels. Try also illuminating the inside of a subject – a car at a scrap yard would make a good subject.

Working with one flashgun is limiting because you have to wait for it to recharge, which wastes time, plus you have to be thinking on your feet, deciding what to light up while the image is exposing. That's why some photographers work in teams to open their shutters at the same time,

each using different gels. An alternative is to set up several flashguns and gels, then synchronise them using slave units or remote triggers to fire at the same time.

How you ensure correct exposure will depend on your set-up. Some cameras allow remote multiple flash with TTL flash metering, so you can leave everything to your camera. If you use a single gun and fire it while wandering around a scene, set it to full power and manual mode, then work out the flash-to-subject distance by dividing the gun's Guide Number (in metres/ISO 100) into the aperture you're shooting at. For example, if the gun has a GN of 36 and you shoot at f/11, the flash needs to be around 3.25m away from the area you want to illuminate to achieve correct exposure. A colour gel cuts light a little, so reduce the distance to around 2.5m, then try a test shot. If you need to use the flash from closer or further away, you can adapt your approach and reshoot.





HOW TO MASTER... PAINTING WITH LIGHT



ALICE BARNES

LIGHT GRAFFITI

One idea we haven't touched on but is well worth trying is light graffiti, where you create random abstract patterns of light trails within a scene by moving around with a light source in front of the camera. Buy a multiple LED torch and put different coloured gels over the LEDs so you can create rainbows of light or work with a single bulb for more delicate patterns. Google 'light graffiti' if you need some more ideas.



ISTOCKPHOTO

FINE-ART PORTRAITS

For soft, atmospheric portrait lighting, painting with light is ideal – so long as you have a patient subject. The amount of time your subject can hold a pose will often determine how long your exposure will need to be. For a child, you might be looking at no longer than ten seconds, as children tend to fidget unless they're sleeping. If you can place your subject in a sturdy, supported pose – for instance, against a wall or lying down – you might be able to stretch the exposure to 30 seconds for better results. Your aperture needs to be small so you can control the light as much as possible, so aim for f/11 to f/16, and set the ISO as low as you can. Before you turn the lights off, pose your

subject and focus on them manually – you'll also need to trigger the camera using a remote release or using the self-timer. Turn off the lights, open the shutter and use a torch to paint like it's a brush over the top of your subject. Paint the face first as the expression is usually the hardest to hold for a long period of time, then work your way down the left side of the body, from head to toe, before moving to the other side of the camera to paint the right side of the body. If you have time, spread a little bit of light on the background to show some detail. Remember that if your torch is too close to the subject you may end up overexposing areas, so keep your distance. Finding the right settings for this technique can take time and quite a few tries.

COLOUR CASTS

All torches produce light that has a colour cast – it's usually very warm with conventional torches, but plain LEDs can be cool/blue. You can try changing the White Balance on your camera to compensate for this, but we recommend you just stick to AWB (Auto White Balance) or Daylight as the colour casts from the torch can look great. In fact, you're more likely to want more colour by placing gels or sweet wrappers over the bulb/LED. Electronic flash has no colour cast as its colour temperature is the same as daylight – 5500K.



INDOOR STILL-LIFE

The simplest way to try painting with light is keeping it small with an indoor still-life: you'll get an idea of what's involved before you turn your attention to bigger things. In terms of subject matter, anything goes. Flowers are good because they give you interesting shapes to work with and the petals are translucent so you can light them from behind as well. Musical instruments make great subjects too – a violin, guitar, saxophone; any instrument with an interesting shape will work. Shoes and boots, bottles, wine glasses, cutlery, and toys... Whatever you shoot, you'll need to work in a dark room so you can control the light with a torch. Small torches with concentrated beams are the best option as you'll need to light small areas selectively

to create interesting effects. Pen torches and key-ring torches are ideal. Buy several from pound shops and use gels or sweet wrappers over the bulbs to colour the light. Set up the props with the room lights on, then mount your camera on a tripod, compose the shot and focus manually. Set the aperture to f/8 or f/11, the shutter to Bulb, the ISO to 100 or 200, and attach a remote release to your camera. Turn off the room lights, lock the shutter open, turn your torch on and start to paint with light, pointing the torch at key areas of the subject. Try to keep the torch moving so the light isn't too harsh on any one area. You want the final image to look like it has been painted with light, so intentionally make some areas lighter than others. Take some test shots to determine the right exposure, shining the light from different

distances or for different lengths of time. If an exposure of four seconds at f/11 is required when you keep the narrow beam of your torch aimed at an object one metre away, for example, you can make some areas darker than others by shining the torch for just one, two or three seconds. Equally, if you want an area to come out really light, shine the torch on it for five or six seconds, or move in closer. It's all a little hit and miss, but you can check each image as you go on your camera's LCD monitor and within two or three attempts you should get it right. Another way to use a small torch for still-life photography is by tracing around the props, with the beam pointing towards the camera, to create fine light trails. Light spillage from the beam also casts a soft glow on the subject, though you can add more direct light, too.



1 Position your props – in this case, a pair of walking boots – and set up your camera. Compose the shot, leaving a little more space around the props than you need – you can always crop it later.



2 Set the camera's shutter to Bulb (B), the ISO to 100 or 200 and the lens aperture to f/11 or f/16. Attach a remote release to the camera. Now focus the lens manually on your props and turn off the room lights.



3 In darkness, open the camera's shutter, turn on your light source – in this case, a pair of micro LED bicycle lights (£2.99 from Aldi!) – then start tracing around the props and directing light onto them.



4 You may not get it right first time, but you'll get a good idea of what you need to do to improve on your first attempt – in this case, there isn't enough light on the props so the image appears too dark.

LEE PROST



JAN LEONARD WOLLETT | WWW.LIGHTART-ARTPHOTOGRAPHY.DE

PAINTING THE LANDSCAPE

Landscapes are ideal for painting with light. At its simplest, you could use a torch or flash to illuminate a single feature in the foreground of a scene, such as partially submerged rock on the edge of a loch or a boat on an estuary. If you compose a shot so there's a path or track leading off into the distance, you could walk along that path and shine a torch on it as you go, so it's well lit and acts as an illuminated lead-in line.

Don't just focus on the foreground, though. How about locking your camera's shutter open for a minute or two then walking into the scene and painting features with light that are further away – you could

pick out a single tree, or several trees and use a different colour gel over your torch or flash to light each one, for example. Old barns and stone walls work well, too.

Bigger features on the coast are ideal for painting with light. Natural rock arches, sea stacks and headlands look fantastic when illuminated with light from a powerful torch against the cool twilight sky, and the use of a long exposure also means that the sea will be nice and smooth. Jetties and old piers are worth attention, too, or the skeletal remains of sunken shipwrecks that often appear at low tide.

Torchlight tends to be more atmospheric than flash for these subjects, and the warmth of the light also contrasts well with the

coolness of the twilight sky and sea.

For subjects that are relatively distant and inaccessible, you'll need a powerful torch of at least two-million candles, otherwise the beam just won't reach. Where you can get closer – to a wreck, say – a more modest torch will be fine as you can wander around and paint with light from just a few feet away.

You need to take care when shooting on the coast as the sea can be dangerous. Be aware of tide times and make sure you know a quick route back to safety. It's going to be dark by the time you're done, and that's the worst possible time to discover that you're getting cut off by the incoming tide. Make sure you have a spare pocket or head torch so you can see your way, too, just in case.

MATCHSTICK MEN

Lowry painted them, two blokes called Brian and Michael sang a really annoying song about them, and now you can create your very own matchstick men. All you need is a small LED torch, a dark night and some imagination. With your camera set up and the shutter locked open on Bulb via a remote release, walk into the scene (wearing dark clothes so you don't appear in the pictures) and draw a light-trail matchstick man – sitting on a bench, standing on a wall, on a seesaw in the park, balancing on one leg, doing a handstand, holding hands with your kids, walking a matchstick dog... It only takes a few seconds to do a quick light sketch – then use the torch to paint light on parts of the scene so your matchstick man isn't lost in a sea of blackness. Remember to draw him with the torch in clear view of the camera, and wear dark clothes so you don't appear in the image yourself.



MICHAEL BOSANNO



LEE FROST

CREATE SPHERES OF LIGHT

Instead of using a light source to illuminate something that exists, such as a statue or building, this technique involves creating spheres of light as an added element in a low-light scene. Think of it as creating light sculptures that only exist in photographic form – because they never actually exist in reality. We're not sure where this technique originated, but one of the best-known exponents of it is Australia-based photographer Denis Smith (www.denis-smith.com.au). The basic idea is that you set up your camera outdoors at night or indoors in an unlit space, lock the shutter open on Bulb, then walk into the scene to a predetermined spot and spin a small LED torch tied to the end of a length of string so that circular light trails are recorded in the image. Instead of standing still, however, you rotate gently round on your feet while continually spinning the light so that by the time you've rotated your body through 360°, dozens of light circles have recorded to create a sphere.

The string must be kept at a constant length and the torch rotated vertically so that the light circles are the same size. You'll need to rotate your body through 360° on the smallest turning circle you can, by shuffling round on the balls of your feet. Wear dark clothing and a hood or hat to reduce the risk of a ghostly image of you being recorded and ideally attach the string to something like the clasp on a dog lead that rotates on one end – not only will it give you something to grip onto, but the torch will swing more freely and evenly to create a smoother sphere. The more you practise the spinning technique, the better your results will be.

Outdoors, shoot as it's starting to get dark but there's still colour in the sky.



1 Choose your location while there's still enough daylight to see what you're doing and get your camera set up on a tripod – set the camera to Bulb, the aperture to f/8 and ISO to 200. Manually focus on where you'll stand.



2 Trip the shutter and lock it open with a remote release (or ask a friend to), walk into position, turn on your torch and start spinning it in a circular motion while moving slowly through 360° to create the sphere of light.



3 The first shot may not be perfect, but it will give you an idea of where you're going wrong. Here, the exposure isn't long enough but the sphere is looking half decent. The key to a good sphere is smooth and even spinning.



4 That's more like it. Still not a perfect sphere but not bad either, and the exposure is spot on. Light spillage from the torch has revealed detail in the sea and rock, while the last traces of colour in the sky are clearly visible.

Choose locations during the day and decide where the ball of light will appear in the scene – on the end of a pier or jetty, a rocky ledge on a hillside, a beach and so on. The possibilities are endless – let your imagination run wild.

The time it takes to make the image will be dictated by the location and light levels, but ideally you need to spin the torch for at

least a couple of minutes to get a good sphere. After dark you could leave your shutter open for ten to 15 minutes and create several light balls in the same scene, using a different coloured gel over the torch for each one. On a clear night you'll get star trails recording, too, and pick up distant light pollution that can add surreal colours to the sky.



STOCKPHOTO

FUN PORTRAITS

You don't have to stick with inanimate objects when painting with light – the technique can also be used on people. You literally have endless scope here, so experiment and have fun. A handy technique to use outdoors in low light is to combine a burst of flash with a slow shutter speed, so the flash illuminates and freezes your human subject, while the slow shutter speed records the ambient light in the background – such as the red sky at sunset or a floodlit monument. Many digital cameras, especially compacts, have a 'night portrait mode' that should give you perfectly balanced results. If your subject is moving, the slow shutter speed will also record blur behind the frozen flash image and this can look great. In fact, you can always ask your subject to intentionally move to get the slow-sync flash effect – ask them to jump into the air, for example. Alternatively, try something wacky. How about a wide-angle portrait with your subject pulling a face while you trace around their head with an LED to create light trails and use a coloured LED or gelled torch to light their face? You could also wave a sparkler around in the background to add lots of light trails, or shine a torch on the back of their head so the light radiates out in the background.



MICHAEL BOSNANING

TIME IT RIGHT

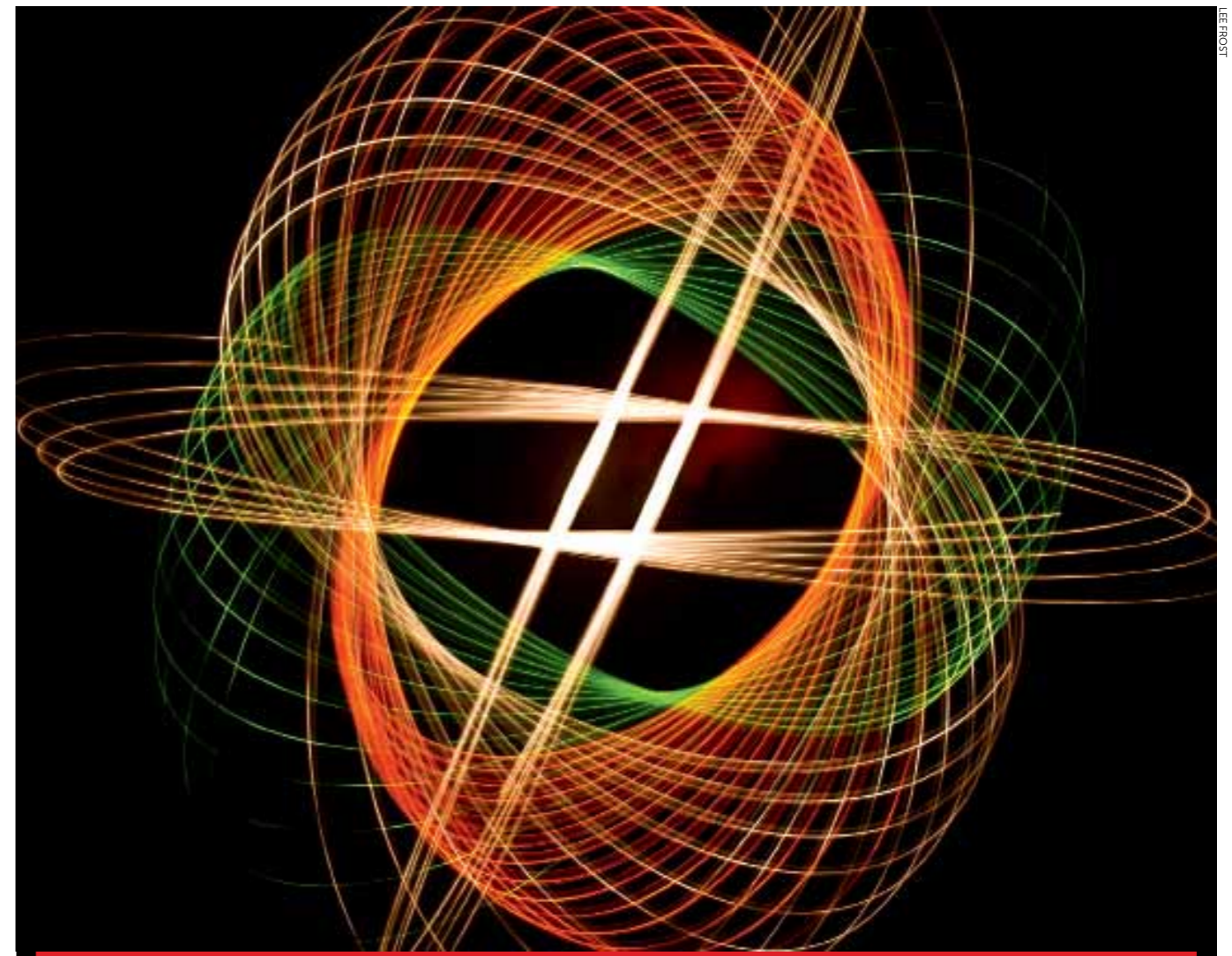
You need long exposures to paint with light because it's a slow process – putting light into selected places bit by bit instead of opening the shutter and letting it all flood in at once. As you're adding your own illumination, ambient light needs to be limited so that you don't record it. Twilight is about as bright as you can get away with when shooting outdoors – any earlier and there will be too much daylight left for the light painting to show, or for you to achieve exposures that are long enough without overexposing the shot, so wait until you can barely see any colour in the sky before you get to work. Techniques such as painting a building with flash or a powerful torch usually take a minute or two, and you'll be able to achieve that at ISO 100 and f/11 or f/16 at twilight, if there's no artificial light around. Creating 'balls of light' can require exposures of five to ten minutes, so it needs to be pretty dark before you start, and star-trail shots take hours. Once the sky darkens to the point that you can no longer see colour with the naked eye, you'll be surprised at how well your camera's sensor can still record it – especially if there's a town or city in the distance creating light pollution. It sounds horrible, but it can look amazing, so keep shooting!



LEE FROST

WIRE WOOL SPINNING

Feeling brave? Then here's a technique that will get your adrenalin pumping. Common or garden wire wool creates zillions of sparks if you set it alight – and it burns really easily, too. To create images of this, take a metal kitchen whisk, stuff it with Grade 0 or finer steel wool and attach the whisk to a length of cord or steel rope. A dog-lead clasp on the other end will make it easier to spin. Outdoors at twilight, under a bridge, in a tunnel or any other 'safe' location, light the steel wool, then with your camera's shutter open, start spinning the whisk around until the wool burns out – this takes 20–30 seconds usually. The results look amazing, far better than anything you'd get with a sparkler. Obviously there's a fire risk here, so never try this technique where sparks could set anything on fire. Beaches are ideal as you're close to water and sand isn't flammable. Neither is concrete or tarmac. But dry grass is, and so are trees. You are, too, so wear protective clothing – a waterproof jacket and overtrousers are fine – plus cover your hair with a hood or hat and wear glasses to protect your eye from the sparks. Ideally, take a friend along when doing wire wool shots and maybe even carry a small fire extinguisher, just in case. It's a fun technique, but you have been warned!



LEE FROST

STAR-TRAIL SHOTS

If you point your camera to the night sky and lock the shutter open on Bulb for two or three hours (at maximum aperture), you can capture fantastic star trails, created by the rotation of the earth on its polar axis. It's a natural form of painting with light. More importantly, when you do shoot star-trail images, it's a good idea to include features in the foreground to make the composition more interesting. However, as you're shooting in pitch darkness, in order to prevent those features recording in silhouette, you'll need to add some light. Use either flash or a torch – or both – to paint the foreground with light. You can do this on the frame that will also record the star trails, but that's hit and miss because you won't get to see how the painting looks for several hours. A better option is to do a few shots where you paint the foreground with light in a shorter exposure then, without moving the camera, open the shutter to record the star trails on another frame. Afterwards you can merge the star trails with a light-painted shot in Photoshop.



STOCKPHOTO

PHYSIOGRAMS

The idea behind this wacky but simple technique is that you suspend a small pen torch on the end of a piece of string in a darkened room directly over your camera, set the torch spinning and use a long exposure to record the patterns of light trails created as the torch spins in ever-decreasing circles. The result is a pleasing kaleidoscope of coloured circles. Here's a quick step-by-step guide for you to try out the technique at home.



1 Tie a small pen-light torch to a length of string, then attach the other end to a light fitting on the ceiling so you can suspend the torch a few feet above ground. The length of string will depend on how high the ceiling is, but approx 1m is usually fine.

2 To ensure you get smooth spheres, the torch needs to be suspended on its central axis so it's balanced. If the torch doesn't have a central fitting point, create one by taping a loop of string to the rear end, then attach the length of string to the loop.

3 Mount your camera on a tripod approx 1m beneath the torch so it's looking straight up. Use a wide-angle lens around 28mm, set focus to manual and focus on the torch. Set the shutter to Bulb (B) and stop the lens down to f/16 or f/22.



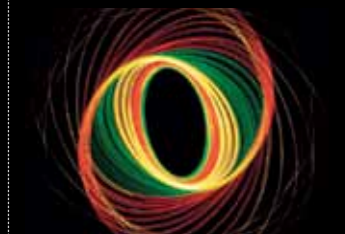
4 Turn the torch on, the room lights off, then set the torch swinging in a circular motion. Peer through the camera's viewfinder and when the swing of the torch is small enough to appear in the viewfinder, lock the shutter open on Bulb.



5 Each swing of the torch will record as a spherical light trail, but because the motion of the torch is gradually slowing down, each sphere will be a slightly different shape and size, getting smaller every time. This is what you'll get after 20 to 30 seconds.



6 After about 20 seconds, cover the lens with a piece of card, grab the torch and turn it off, place a coloured filter on the lens, switch the torch back on, set it swinging in a different motion so a second pattern records with a different colour.



7 You can repeat step six as many times as you like until you're happy with the image. The more light trails you record, the more interesting the result. It's actually quite addictive because no two shots are ever the same, and they look great every time.



JESSICA VALLARDE

ADD A BIT OF SPARKLE-R

Still have sparklers from Bonfire Night or New Year's Eve? They're perfect for painting with light. You've all seen cheesy shots of someone twirling a sparkler around, surrounding their face with spitting, crackling light trails. Well, forget that – it's too obvious. How about tracing the outline of a car or tree with a lit sparkler, then popping it with a weak burst of flash? Try photographing a person outdoors at night with a burst of flash but then fill the background with fire by waving a sparkler all over the place while

walking around behind them. You could use a sparkler to make it look like it's raining sparks and capture someone cowering under a brolly. Or create shapes, such as a Christmas tree with a star on top. Surround a kissing couple with a love heart, spin the sparkler while walking in front of your camera to create a spiral, spin it while rotating to create a sparkly orb. In all cases you'll need to set the shot up outdoors at night so it's dark, use a tripod, lock the shutter open on Bulb then do your sparkler thang. Keep going until the sparkler runs out, then dash back to the camera and close the shutter. Simple.



FRIEDRICH SCHLOSSER

MICHAEL BOSNANO

PAINTING A CAR WITH LIGHT

Finding a large enough light source to illuminate an entire car can be a problem, which is why light painting works so well. Moving one light source around the car also means you can create long, thin catchlights that highlight the shape of the bodywork. Try it: you can use any constant, bright light source such as a handheld LED lamp or long fluorescent or neon tube light. Position your car in a dimly lit area and select a low ISO and narrow aperture to extend the exposure time. You'll need about 20 seconds to light the whole car: start at one end and, in one smooth motion, walk slowly around the car, positioning yourself between the light and the camera so that the light source doesn't show in the image. Give each wheel a quick blip of light to bring out the details.

OTHER LIGHT SOURCES

Painting with light offers endless scope for creative experimentation, so what you can achieve is limited only by your imagination. You can use any number of things to create the light: torches, flashguns, LEDs, light ropes, EL wire, matches, car headlights, candles, firelight, sparklers – the list goes on. You can shoot in total darkness and add all the light to the image yourself, or mix light painting with man-made illumination in urban areas: it's up to you. You can even use your mobile phone or tablet to light-paint. There are dedicated light-painting apps available – try Holographium, a text-based piece of software that projects 3D letters as you move your iPhone, iPod Touch or iPad across the frame, creating hologram-esque floating words and images.

LIGHT STENCILS

It takes practice to learn how to control your freehand light painting – quite often it can look a mess until you get the hang of working blind. One way to get a neater finish is to use light stencils, which allow you to 'stamp' rather than 'paint' your images with light. Creating the stencils is fairly easy to do at home, though it does take time and patience.



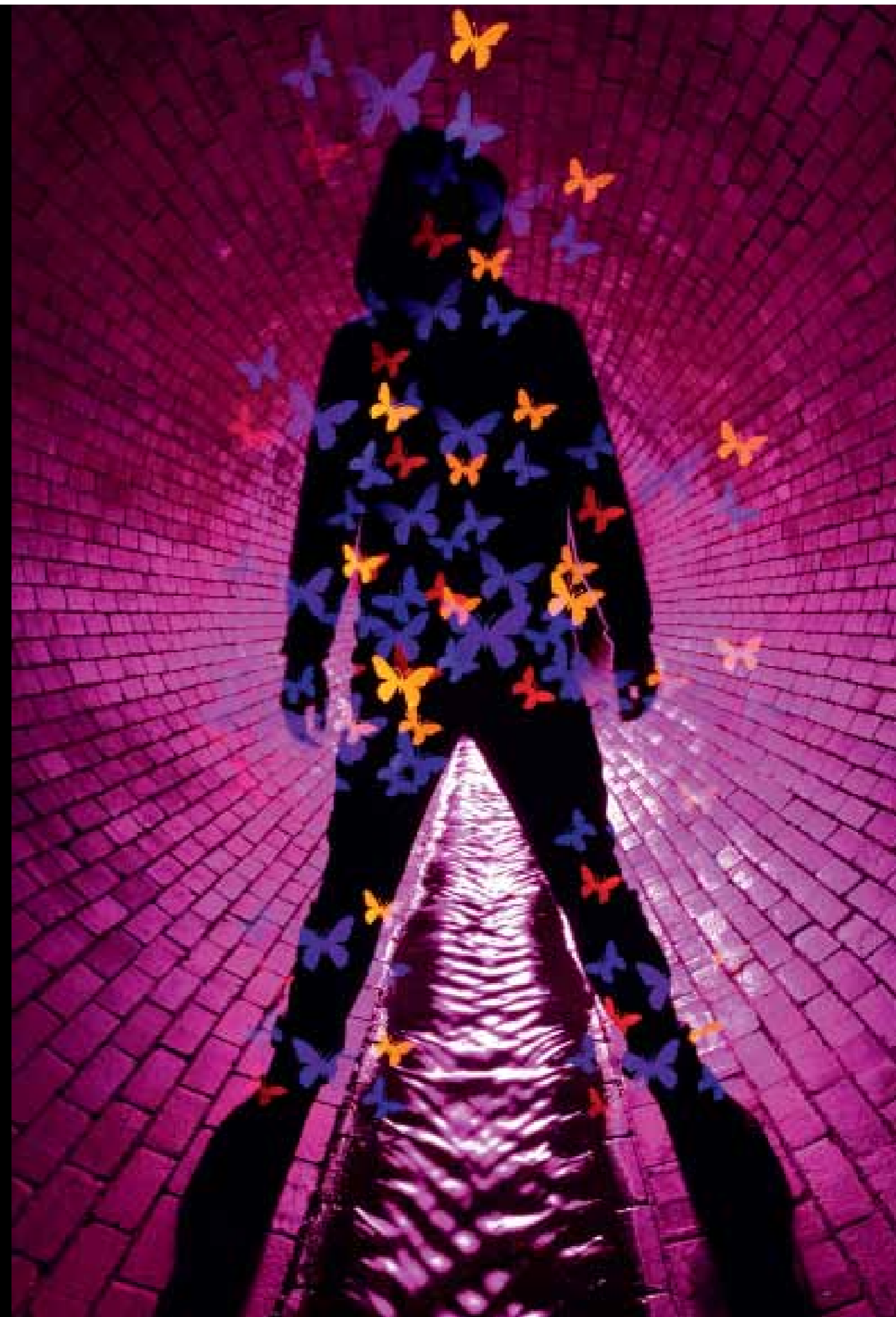
1 Just about any image can be used to make a light stencil. Draw your image on paper first so you can refine your design before transferring it on to cardboard using tracing paper for cutting out. Using an art knife, carefully cut out the design, making the edges as clean as possible for a crisp outline, and leaving about 3cm around the edge. Spray-paint the cardboard black as well as a shoebox and its lid. This shoebox will become your makeshift lightbox.



2 Next, add some colour to your design by attaching coloured cellophane or sweetie wrappers to the back of the stencil. The more layers of cellophane you add to each stencil, the richer the colour will be in your image. Cut a window in your shoebox lid, leaving a 2cm border so you create some crossover when you insert the stencil to prevent light bleeding out. Line the inside of the shoebox with aluminium foil and cut a hole in the back smaller than the head of your flashgun.



3 Set your camera to Bulb mode, ISO 100 and an aperture of f/7 to f/18 depending on depth-of-field and how strong your light source is. Mount your camera on a tripod and focus on an area of the scene manually, then open the shutter with a remote release. Place your flashgun to the hole in the back of the shoebox and during the exposure, constantly move around the scene, firing the test button with the stencil pointing towards the camera.



TIGRAB