



Light Painting Part One – the Photography

A Post By: **Darlene Hildebrandt**



I teach a night photography class and I find that many people who've never tried it imagine it to be a lot harder than it really is to get spectacular results. In this two part series I'm going to take you through step by step how I created the image above using light painting techniques that are actually quite easy.

PART ONE – THE PHOTOGRAPHY

In this article, Part One, I'm going to go through everything you need to know so that you can go out and create some images using this technique. In Part Two I'll take you through combining multiple exposures, like I've done for this shot, using Photoshop to create the final photograph. It's really not that hard and I'll do it one step at a time so you can follow along with my screen shots after each step.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS ARTICLE

- Recommended equipment
- Camera basics (how to set up your camera)
- Finding a good subject
- Getting started (set up, preparation and starting points)
- Lighting, how to do light painting and some tips
- Potential problems and how to avoid them

EQUIPMENT FOR NIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

Night photography is not that difficult but there are a few essential pieces of equipment needed to do the job right. Here is a list of mandatory and optional items:

The “Must Haves”

- a DSLR, or camera with **manual settings that include “Bulb”**
- a camera that shoots **RAW format images** (not mandatory but highly suggested)
- a **sturdy tripod** that is not affected by wind
- an **electric cable release or remote trigger** (could be called either) with a locking mechanism or timer
- at least **one extra battery** for your camera (long exposures and cold eat up batteries quickly so you may run through two or more in a night)
- a **lens hood** or shade for your lens

The “Really Nice to Haves” – not essential, but sure handy



- a **digital watch or timer** (or remote that has a timer) I use my iPhone
- a **penlight or small flashlight** (your cell phone can work in a pinch) to be able to check camera settings and find an item in the bottom of your bag **OR a headlamp** like the kind hikers wear, is a better option for hands free operation
- a **powerful flashlight like a Maglite for light painting** (I use an incandescent one, LED will produce a bluer tone light)
- a **speedlight or portable flash** unit can also be used for light painting (you don't need a fancy one, even an old Vivitar 283 or 285 will do the trick)
- **rain covers for your camera bag, camera, and yourself** (weather can change quickly at night but you can get some great shots in bad weather if you're prepared – you dry easier than your camera, keep that in mind!)
- **A friend to tag along. Helpful if you're doing night photography in an urban setting.** It's someone to help pass the time, but also watch that your gear doesn't grow legs and walk off while you're digging in the camera bag for something. Or someone to stand guard over the camera gear while you're off painting with light in the scene.

CAMERA SETTINGS

- **File format** – shoot raw whenever possible lighting at night can be odd colors
- **White balance** – I generally choose “incandescent” or “tungsten” White Balance Preset when doing light painting because I know that will balance correctly for my flashlight. I let the rest of the scene fall where it may color wise
- **Focus** – your camera has a hard time focusing at night and will “hunt” unless you find focus and lock it for all your exposures. If your camera has back button focus capabilities I'd suggest using that, if not you can focus and then turn it to manual focus so it doesn't attempt to refocus when you hit the shutter release. You can try to focus using manual but keep in mind if your camera can't see in the dark, neither can you! So to achieve focus use your flashlight, and if you have a friend along, get them to light up the part of the object you want to focus on. Then either use your auto focus and lock it, or manually focus and then don't touch it!
- **Manual mode or BULB** – for exposure set it to manual. That way the camera is not trying to guess the correct

exposure. We'll be setting it and leaving it for the most part – just like our focus. For exposures longer than 30 seconds (30" on your camera) you'll need to find and use your BULB setting. On many cameras it is right after 30 seconds on the shutter speed scale, on some there's a B option on your mode dial on top of your camera.

- **ISO** – how low can you go?! This is where it gets counter intuitive because your gut may be telling you that it's dark out so you need a higher ISO, right? Well in certain situations like shooting the moon, a starry sky, or northern lights where you want a faster shutter speed – then you might need a higher ISO. But for this purpose and most of the times you are on a tripod it is always best to choose the lowest ISO possible. Noise in your image increases with changes in 3 things: higher ISO, long exposures and in blue or dark areas of your scene. We're already pushing the long exposure boundaries and night is ALL blue – so keeping the ISO low will minimize the noise best we can.



FINDING A GOOD

SUBJECT

Night photography can produce some great images, but it can be a bit tricky to find a location and compose your shots in the dark. It is best to go out ahead of time and find a spot, then return to it later, about 30 minutes before you actually want to start shooting. That will give you time to find it, get set up and be ready. Here are some tips for finding a good night subject suitable for painting with light.

- **Old barns and abandoned cars and trucks** in fields make great subjects, and often are appropriate for some painting with light. If you need to cross someone's land to get to there, make sure to get permission BEFORE you head out. Trespassing is not cool and could lead to a lot of problems including getting arrested, or worse, which you certainly don't want.
- If you want to **shoot the moon, star trails, or do light painting you'll need to get out of the city**. You may have to drive quite a while to get far enough away so that the city lights do not contaminate your shot. As you will be exposing for several minutes or longer, the city lights may show up on the horizon if you are not far enough away. (the city lights are a factor in my example in this article which gave me some limitations, and the orange fire in the sky – more on that later)
- **Start with a smaller subject that you can light in one exposure and work your way up to bigger ones** like this firetruck or an old barn that will take a few shots and need compiling. An old bicycle is a great starter subject. Buy one at a flea market or junk yard and take your own prop wherever you want and plop it into your scene. Just remember to take it with you as you'll want it again later and littering isn't cool either.



GETTING STARTED – SETTING UP

1. **Set up your camera on tripod** with remote attached or set up to fire the camera
2. **Turn off any image stabilization** (IS or VR) on your lens
3. **Turn OFF “long exposure noise reduction”** unless you have a lot of patience. What it does it takes a second exposure of equal length of just black, then merges it with your shot to get rid of the noise. But if you’re doing a 2 minute exposure, you have to wait another 2 minutes to review your image and be able shoot again. I don’t use it, and because we’re on a low ISO noise shouldn’t be a big factor
4. **ISO low – ideally 100 or 200**
5. **Aperture – start around f/5.6** – depending on your scene, then adjust from there if you want more or less depth of field. Keep in mind the smaller aperture you use, each stop you close down doubles the amount of time you need to be painting and exposing. So a 60 second exposure at f/5.6 becomes an 8 minute exposure at f/16!
6. **Shutter speed – start around 60 seconds.** I’ve done enough night photography to know that’ll get you pretty close for most moonlit scenes. You may have to adjust faster (shorter exposure) or longer depending on whether it’s a full moon, or there’s some stray light in the scene, and how bright your flashlight is.
7. **Focus using the flashlight** – then lock your focus.

LIGHT PAINTING – HOW TO DO IT

Basically what you do is set your camera on Bulb, open the shutter using your locking release and walk into your scene and start lighting the objects in the camera view using your flashlight. It sounds simple but can be quite tricky to get just the right amount of light in different places, not get yourself in the image, and still get a good overall exposure. Here are a few tips or starting points, then you just need to experiment and adjust as you go.

Setting up your base exposure

- **Before you start “painting” take a test shot**, without the flashlight, of the scene as it is with no additional light added

- **Review that image and make sure you have a good overall exposure** of the scene, with it perhaps just a little on the dark side (histogram should be mostly inclined to the left side)
- When you are happy with the exposure, **adjust your settings so that you have a long enough shutter speed** to easily get into the scene and light the subject with your flashlight before the shutter closes (at least 30 seconds). You may have to go to a smaller aperture to do so.
- **Once you know your exposure and your shutter speed is at least 30 seconds long, you can get started.** If you can bring a friend along they can press the shutter release for you, so you can go in and out of the scene without returning to the camera after each shot to press it again. Or a wireless remote comes in handy here too.



Adding the flashlight – tips for light painting

- **To keep yourself invisible, always make sure the flashlight is aimed at the subject**, and that you do not light up yourself, dark clothing helps too. Also keep moving during the whole exposure. Don't stand in one place for more than a couple seconds or you will show up as a ghost in that spot.
- **Don't aim the flashlight back towards the camera**, unless you want what I call "light bugs". Sometimes you can use that technique on purpose to create streaks of light and outline your subject, and that can work well also. See the image of the little red wagon above for an example of light bugs. I believe I accidentally had my headlamp on while I painted and it made the light bugs – but I kind of liked it so I kept it. Happy accidents are great!
- **Keep the light moving the whole time** so as not to create any harsh lines or bright spots. I like to make outlines of the shape of my subject or parts of it. Discover what works for you.

- **For a more defined and abstract look to your light painting you must come in a REALLY close** to the subject! By that I mean about 1-2 feet away from the subject. YES you are going to get right into the scene. But if you keep moving, and keep your light moving you will not show up in the photo. (see the b/w of the old shack above for an example of this look and technique). Also make sure your flashlight beam is focused to a small area – that’s why I like the Maglites, they focus down to a small spot.
- **For a broader more even light keep the flashlight beam wide and stand back from the subject** a bit (4-8 feet) and light it from the side to create a nice cross light and texture on the subject. (see the color image of the old wooden shack below for an example of this affect)



Light painted from a few feet away from the shack with a wider beam flashlight

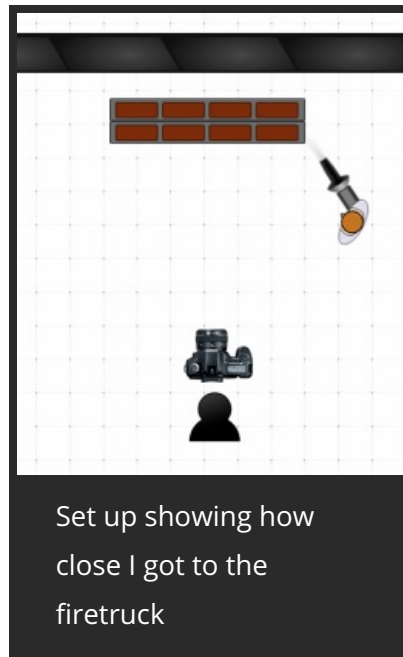
REVIEW YOUR IMAGE AND DO IT ALL AGAIN

Back in the days of film, painting with light was much harder. There was no way to determine if any of the exposures were correct or not. To paint a whole scene you had to get it right in one frame or exposure. Now with digital we have the benefit of testing and seeing what we’re doing and compensating on the next shot. You can even paint a scene in stages, or sections, and build them all into one image later in Photoshop. I’ll cover how to do that in Part Two.

The things you want to look for in your first image are:

- **How did you do with your flashlight painting?** If it was too bright in one area and not bright enough in another, just be conscious of how much time you spend on one spot and adjust accordingly.
- **If it is overall too dark or light,** you may need to adjust your exposure time or your aperture.
- If the flashlight isn’t showing up well enough **you might need a longer exposure time** (just go from 30 seconds to 60 and try again) to allow you to paint slower and cover more areas better.
- **If you want the light more even,** back up and use a wider beam.
- **If you want it more focused** and like outlines, get closer.
- **Did you get any light bugs** you didn’t want? (turn off your headlamp!)
- **Did you get a ghost of yourself** or a body part?

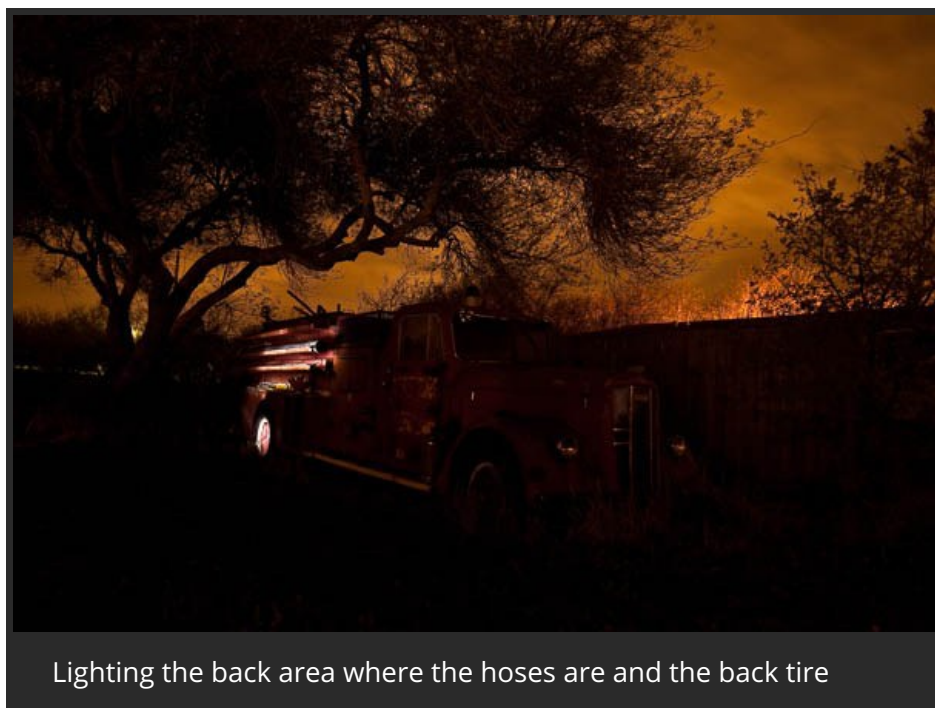
- **Generally look for any problems** or areas you want to correct. Take note and do it again, and again, and again – until you're happy with it.



MAKING A MULTIPLE IMAGE COMPOSITE – SHOOTING FOR IT

Now that you're ready to progress to a larger subject we'll look at how to shoot multiple images of the same subject, so that you can merge them together in Photoshop later. The **ONLY** thing you're going to do different than what you just did in the lessons above – is paint the subject in sections. That's it!

For the firetruck image I actually shot about 30 different exposures. I didn't end up using them all but I wanted to make sure I had my bases covered and had options. That's the beauty of putting them together later – you do **NOT** have to get it perfect in one shot! Let's take a look at a few of my images from that shoot.





Lighting the side panel and running board, notice how I've highlighted certain areas



Lighting the front grill and headlights – to get headlights to look like they're on, put the flashlight right up to the glass and just rotate it around for a bit. Notice the light bugs on the right here? We'll handle those in part two.



Lighting up the windows from the inside! A little of the tree branch too.



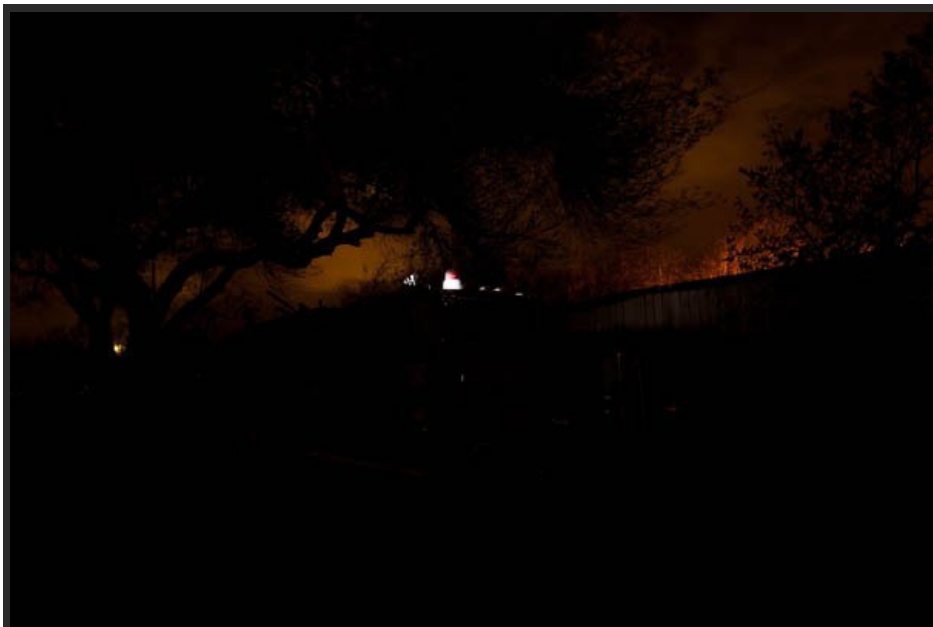
Lighting the fence behind the truck to give it separation

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Tuning on the cherry light that makes it a firetruck! Don't forget the details like this!



Lighting the "cherry" from behind to make it glow red

You get the idea right? Cover it well, then just to be sure, do it again. I think we were there (my husband was the button pusher, I ran the flashlight) about an hour and a half just doing this one shot. It was such a unique subject, and we had full permission to be there and be photographing it at night that I wanted to take full advantage of it. That it was a beautiful night and this stuff is just so much fun for me that once I get started, I lose all track of time.

Wrapping up

Well I was a bit long winded on this tutorial, I hope you are still with me. I wanted to make sure you had all the details you need to go out and try this yourself. I fully expect you to do so and be ready with some images for Part Two when we are going to take our multiple shots and combine them to get something that





looks like this in the end.

Action plan steps

1. get the right gear
2. find a good subject, get permission if need be
3. set up your camera using the starting settings
4. take your base exposure test shot
5. add your flashlight and light painting
6. review and continue

CHECK OUT PART 2 OF THIS SERIES HERE



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Darlene Hildebrandt is the Managing Editor of dPS. She is also an educator who teaches aspiring amateurs and hobbyists how to improve their skills through articles, online photography classes, and travel tours. Get her free ebook **10 Photography Challenges to help you take better pictures** or join a **photo tour to some exotic places**.

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Some Older Comments

Darlene Hildebrandt

August 15, 2013 07:43 am

@Jay okay but with the DX6490 you do have ability to shoot 16 seconds. That's enough
http://reviews.cnet.com/digital-cameras/kodak-easyshare-dx6490-digital/4507-6501_7-31091603.html

Jay Bird Bryant

August 14, 2013 09:03 am

I have three Kodak s. Older models. My newer one is a "Slice" the one behind that is a DX6490. I do have one 35mm that is not working. Konica A1 or AE1. Anyway, I battery went bad and corroded a terminal. It was a great camera. Bought it in 1986. Old school but it never let me down. It did have the "B" sitting. Thanks for asking though, I do appreciate it.

Jay Bird

Darlene Hildebrandt

August 13, 2013 04:10 pm

@Jay - what cameras do you have? Most, even some point and shoots have a Bulb setting. It could just be hiding on you.

Jay Bird Bryant

August 13, 2013 12:54 pm

You are right about would been much easier with digital. I am 75 Y.O. now and it is sure as hard to somethings now-a-days. I have three cameras none of which has a bulb sitting. I am not very good at layering. After my grand-children got out of high school it seemed my photo days are about over. Lost my best subjects. I had and old program that ran on my XP that allowed me to doctor up a photo anyway I wanted. But, alas, it did not work on win 7. Ole brain just can't seem to think it through like it once did. Have fun out there! You never know when that "perfect" photo will crop up.

Jay Bird

Darlene Hildebrandt

August 12, 2013 05:42 am

@Jay yes I did a similar technique in photo school in about 1987 or so. It was harder with film because you had to get it all in one shot and didn't know what you were getting until much later. Now with digital there's instant feedback and the ability to layer them together which makes things much easier on the shooting end

Jay Bird Bryant

August 11, 2013 07:49 am

Paint flash has been around a long time. I discovered this in an old photo book back about 1975's. Understand, the equipment is those days are very antiquated compared to day. I used a Minolta Press camera. One of those kind you see in old movies that the press people used. It came with plates for cut film, 120 format, Polaroid and f stop of 32. My flash unit was old "flash cubes" that did not need batteries to flash. They had magnesium and all it took was a tooth pick to set them off. Later I used a flash unit that was battery powered. I would sit the camera on a ti-pod, using a cable to "lock the lens" in a wide open position. I had an assistant hold a 3x5 index card over the lens. Using which ever flash I would walk down the side of the scene and say "uncover" in which the card was removed. I would pop the flash and say "cover". Walk down a few feet and repeat the process. I was totally amazed at the results. I went on to incorporate this into my motor vehicle accident investigations. It was much better for the DA's and a jury to look at one photo instead of a bunch. It did not matter long the scene was. The developed film would never show me in the picture as the next flash would wipe me out. Bulb settings, and able to lock the lens open is a must, along with a very sturdy ti-pod. Anyone can do this. Try it! The results are great. I used this professionally as an Accident Investigator for years. I was lucky to have access to the Sheriff's Office Photo lab and the officer named "Ray" would process the pic's. They all made me look good. I had a saying in those days, "Photos by Jay, processed Ray, with Rick's OK. The lab teck's were the best! Jay Bird

Darlene

June 11, 2013 01:14 am

@Philip that image of the old truck is really well done, professional quality. Excellent job!
@Duncan you're most welcome.

Duncan G.

June 11, 2013 12:02 am

Thanks Darlene,.. I've enjoyed and used your posts on flash painting .. also seeing every one else's work,..your tut has been a great help for me .. Thanks again Duncan G.

philip hallam

June 10, 2013 08:39 pm

Devonport in my home state of Tasmania, Australia.

Darlene Hildebrandt

June 10, 2013 10:48 am

@Philip - great job on both! Devonport as in CA, NZ or AUS?

Philip Hallam

June 8, 2013 07:29 pm

Hi Darlene,
Last nights effort in combining light painting with the night sky. I'm hooked!!!!!!
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/76371166@N06/8984298951/>

Philip Hallam

June 7, 2013 11:13 pm

I tried to light paint the foreground in this one.
<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B6JeipkyqEabTG9wQndCTml1R3c/edit?usp=sharing>

Philip Hallam

June 7, 2013 10:31 pm

A very concise and easy to read tutorial Darlene. I couldn't wait to get out and have a go and here is my first effort. I learned to drive in this truck when I was 10 years old on the family farm and I am happy to say that I seem to be in better condition than the truck is today!
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/76371166@N06/8821938352/>

Darlene Hildebrandt

May 22, 2013 02:50 pm

@george the truck was in a rural area over on the Portland side near our RV park

Jim

May 20, 2013 11:45 pm

@jeffrey,

Thanks anyway.
Jim

Jeffrey

May 20, 2013 11:32 pm

@jim

Sorry Jim, the one I saw was a combo but it was not led/Incandescent.
It was incandescent flood/spot combo.
No Luck.

Jim

May 20, 2013 11:43 am

@jeffrey,

Thanks! I'll definitely stay tuned!
Jim

Jeffrey

May 20, 2013 10:12 am

@jim

I thought i had seen one at our local hardware store. It is one of the chains, True Value.
I will check it out and let you know, stay tuned.

Jim

May 20, 2013 01:15 am

@joern,

Thanks for the link. Interesting product. Probably can't find in the US, though. But I'll try.
Jim

George

May 19, 2013 11:48 pm

Great article Darlene! I dabble in light painting some and live in the Corpus area and actually gave a presentation on it to the CC Camera Club last month. Where was the fire truck?

joern

May 19, 2013 03:45 pm

@Jim: The model is "Mellert SLT TL280 S" and I bought it my local DIY store (I live in Germany). You can find some information here: <http://www.mellert-slt.com/index.php?pid=5537&lid=4>

Jim

May 19, 2013 05:40 am

@joern,
Where did you get the flashlight with 2 modes, LED and incandescent? Brand?
Great photo.
Jim

Darlene Hildebrandt

May 19, 2013 03:58 am

yes awesome job Joern!

Joern

May 18, 2013 02:35 pm

@Jeffrey: Thanks! There was a small door on the backside through which I could climb in. My flashlight has two modes, one is incandescent the other mode is LED. That gave the blueish effect.

Jeffrey

May 18, 2013 10:47 am

Nice job Joern,
How did you light the inside of the trailer?
or did you even light it inside?

michele (mike) annunziata

May 18, 2013 02:07 am

Brava no words :)))

Joern

May 16, 2013 06:28 pm

When I recently stumbled over it, it immediately raised my inspiration. I wanted to try quickly! A few days later, I gathered together the required material (luckily I work for a camera manufacturer and could borrow some nice stuff :-) and found my photographic object. When it came to shooting, it turned out that this tutorial was SOOOO valuable. All the little tips and tricks helped incredibly lot. The result? What I can say. I didn't expect something that nice to turn out at the very time:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/misterpen/8729784728/lightbox/>
Now I tasted blood! I have want more and started screening the neighborhood for nice objects :-)

Darlene Hildebrandt

May 16, 2013 01:49 pm

@mike - the second half of how I did it is here: <https://digital-photography-school.com/light-painting-part-two-photoshop>

you did mean "she" right? ;-)

Mike

May 15, 2013 11:57 pm

Does anyone know how he put he images together in photoshop?

John Reveley

May 14, 2013 08:02 pm

I read this section and got excited about trying it out. Unfortunately it got really cold outside in the last few days so I tried it out indoors. Took a shot of our grand piano painting the keys and music and a few items in the room. I had a night light on behind the piano to give the background lighting. Very cool effect. The only problem was, I did occasionally show up in the photo. I solved that problem by wearing darker cloths and moving around more. Than I thought to myself, wouldn't it look cool to have a ghost sitting at the piano. Got a very spooky picture!!

Darlene Hildebrandt

May 14, 2013 01:29 am

@Mark yes the police may ask what you're doing but unless you're doing harm I don't see an issue. I'm talking more about going on someone's property then you want to get proper permission first.
@Katie, thank you I'm so glad you liked it. I try and make my articles as comprehensive as possible. They usually start out short and become epic by the time I'm done LOL.
@Connie the 2nd curtain sync is really only applicable when you're using flash. It has to do with when the flash fires, at the beginning or the end of the exposure. Part two should be published later today, it's all queued up to come out! Check back later.

Connie

May 12, 2013 07:15 am

I've been out and photographed some light trails and moving vehicles using 2nd curtain sync which was great fun but have yet to try lighting things with torches. This tutorial has inspired me to go out and give it a go. When is part 2 coming out?

Katie Star

May 12, 2013 07:08 am

Great tutorial. Thank you for such a comprehensive guide on how to paint with light. (So many tutorials seem to miss out the vital bit of knowledge or piece of equipment) I now feel confident enough to go out and give it a go. I am looking forward to part 2.

Mark

May 12, 2013 02:32 am

I like taking night shots just using available light but I haven't tried much light painting. Thanks for the great ideas I'll have to try some more. I'm looking forward to part 2.

About being careful where you shot A few weeks ago I stopped to take some pictures of a local businesses neon sign. It was 11 at night. I was about to leave when I had to play 20 questions with a cop. Lucky they just ask a lot of questions and let me go so. After all the trouble the pictures didn't come out like I wanted. I guess I need to be more careful where and when I'm taking pictures.

Thanks

Darlene

May 11, 2013 02:25 am

@jim try your local hardware store, they likely carry them or something very similar. Doesn't have to be that exact brand, just one that focuses and is bright.

Jim

May 11, 2013 02:24 am

Darlene, I'm trying to find a Maglite Incandescent Flashlight. Website gave local retailers...they only have LEDs. Tried to find and order the right unit on Maglite website...I can find the description of the Incandescents, but can't find them on the order form. Do you have a link that would help in ordering? I am looking for one with 3 or 4 "D" cell batteries. Thanks!

Duncan G.

May 11, 2013 02:01 am

I started use the flash light photography method about two months ago,...I surly love the self imaging I create ,... fore most I'm always learning a new way to show light ,...Heres my camera settings Manual mode / ISO 100 / f / 11 ,... change from White auto into Incandescent .. with a cable release /tri-pod and several different strengths of flash lights .. p.s. along with several tissues for defused shade ..Oh ask permission to enter / take a friend along for safety

Darlene

May 11, 2013 01:43 am

@leo yes that is correct however higher ISO also contributes to noise so keep it as low as possible helps control the noise when shooting at night. If you do have the time and patience to wait for the long exposure noise reduction by all means go for it. It can just make for a really long night if you're doing 5-10 minute shots.

Martina Tierney

May 10, 2013 06:30 pm

Not at all long winded Darlene, this was a great tutorial, beautifully explained in stages. A natural teacher!

Darlene

May 10, 2013 04:35 pm

@dhiraj - aha that's coming up in Part Two very shortly! Stay tuned and keep reading
@Andrey - you did that with light painting!? that's a very well light bottle which is very hard to do.
Impressive!

Andrey

May 10, 2013 03:54 pm

My first attempt in light painting
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/moisseyev/6612179175/in/set-72157628662608029>

Dhiraj

May 10, 2013 03:40 pm

Nice stuff Darlene. Just one question..How did you merged all these pics? Using Photoshop CS5 or something else

Darlene

May 10, 2013 03:26 pm

@Dan - I dunno those look kinda cool actually! I like the starbursts. The umbrella ones, not so much LOL.
@Geoffrey the driveway may not work, there will likely be too much light already hitting it in the city unless you live somewhere with no street lights. So you won't get it dark enough.
@marshal thanks for that!
@colin that's cool thanks for sharing!

Colin Burt

May 10, 2013 11:49 am

Another sort of light painting can be achieved using a pen torch suspended from the ceiling by two strings , joined at a third or so of the way down, and anchored a couple of feet apart. Leaving the torch about four feet up from the floor. Naturally, in a pitch dark room ! When switched on and lightly shoved the torch swings in a pattern which declines over time and a camera on the floor below, on a bulb exposure, will capture interesting patterns like this one.
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/67900028@N08/8508057899/>
and it's neighbour on the same Flickr page .

Marshal Linfoot

May 10, 2013 11:35 am

Love your tutorials, Darlene. Full of useful information and always clearly written. This one looks like a lot of fun and I can't wait to take some small, funky objects out to a nearby park and try it out. Thanks so much for sharing!

Jeffrey

May 10, 2013 07:18 am

Nice job Darlene!

Very cool, I love the finished firetruck.

Jim

May 10, 2013 05:10 am

This is excellent. Other light painting tutorials I've seen aren't nearly as specific and complete. Thank you! I look forward to Part 2.

Leo de Groot

May 10, 2013 04:38 am

An excellent article, Darlene! It covered the sport extremely well.

I have done some lightpainting, and just wanted to make one comment which relates to turning off long exposure noise reduction. To my understanding from my Nikon manual this does not refer to the usual digital "noise" and hence can not be countered by using a very low ISO value. What it refers to is fogging of some corners in particular of the image on long exposures. This occurs because the camera electronics produce some heat, and the resulting low levels of infrared radiation will slowly fog the image in areas of the sensor most impacted by this radiation. To counter it, the camera does indeed take the second exposure you indicate, but does not open the shutter. In doing so it is registering the fogging effect only, and then it uses this data to subtract the fogging from the actual image you took so that it does not appear in your shot. That is why the second exposure must be as long as your original exposure, in order to duplicate the fogging as exactly as possible.

All this being said, this fogging problem becomes progressively more pronounced as the duration of the exposure increases. As a result, you will likely not notice it in shorter exposures such as 30 seconds, and it likely is thus safe to turn off this long exposure noise reduction unless your exposures become significantly longer.

I am greatly looking forward to the second part of this excellent article!

Leo de Groot

Geoffrey_K

May 10, 2013 12:53 am

Thanks for a fun tutorial. I cannot wait to try this when it gets dark. Going to shoot my truck in the driveway to get an idea how to do this properly before I trapse through the woods to find an old barn.

Dan

May 7, 2013 09:06 am

A very interesting read. I've once dabbled into light painting (impromptu decision while driving around with some friends) when I got really bored. However, I used a flashgun instead of a torch; and the

effects were... well, interesting.

I tried it again a couple of other times, in different conditions but using the same subject:

https://fbcdn-sphotos-f-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-ash4/2047_581505465208541_838530112_n.jpg

https://fbcdn-sphotos-g-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-ash4/475907_642529582439462_1819787658_o.jpg

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https://fbcdn-sphotos-d-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-prn1/66809_314264908700017_2009699737_n.jpg

(this one is a complete technical failure but so fun to make; quite blinding)

Darlene Hildebrandt

May 7, 2013 05:16 am

@Mridula - define "so little gear" for me? how little do you use? If you have a camera and a lens already, all you need is a tripod, something to trigger it (or you can use the built in timer in the camera if you don't go longer than 30 seconds) and a flashlight. It's really not that much.

@sam I'm hoping to finish Part Two this week! Don't quote me on it though LOL

Sam

May 5, 2013 10:38 pm

Great article...

I've worked on the 'photography' part and it is real fun!

Is PART 2 coming up anytime soon?

Any hint as to when?

Matthew Bamberg

May 5, 2013 06:26 am

Can't wait to see the result in Part II.

Maria

May 4, 2013 09:26 pm

Dear Jeff, That's amazing!

I'm total amateur, could you please explain: you were standing in the water for the shots where words are on the liquid? Or you just face flashlight towards the sea?

Mridula

May 4, 2013 04:30 pm

The pictures are so beautiful but I use so little gear that even this seems daunting. But it is just me.

<http://blogs.gonomad.com/traveltalesfromindia/>

Darlene

May 4, 2013 03:28 pm

@Leopoldo - he he, thanks for that!

Leopoldo

May 4, 2013 02:06 pm

Great tutorial, well structured, easy to follow steps learned two things: Light Painting an how to structure a tutorial. Thank you.

Leopoldo García

Venezuela

Darlene Hildebrandt

May 4, 2013 09:42 am

@Jeff - cool shots, nice fire spinning! You have a great location for doing that, the beach - nothing to set on fire. On the prairie here I haven't got a spot near me to do that safely.

@Cramer - yes it can be a bit of work but you can tackle smaller subjects like the little wagon or shack and do them in a single image. Night photography and doing this type of thing is one of my favourite things to do partly because the average person doesn't know how to do this. So if you want to take your photography to another level, give it a try!

Cramer Imaging

May 4, 2013 09:37 am

This is an interesting subject. It looks like a lot of work but appears to have some rewarding results. I might have to try this. Thank you for sharing the information. I look forward to reading the second part of how to create this in Photoshop.

Jeff E Jensen

May 4, 2013 05:54 am

Ah, one of my favorite topics! I love light painting, it always amazes me what can be created at night.
<http://jeffejensen.blogspot.com/2013/03/when-all-else-fails-paint.html>

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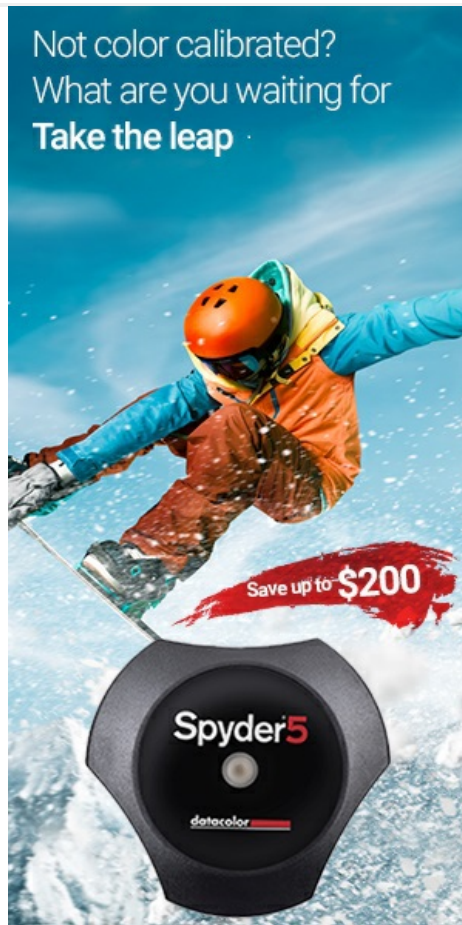


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