

"Inspiration does exist, but it must find you working." – Pablo Picasso

Abstract photography – 'a means of depicting a visual image that does not have an immediate association with the object world and has been crafted through the use of photographic equipment processes or materials' (Wikipedia) i.e. image-making that doesn't aim to represent reality but rather visually explores the elements of design. Those elements include – LINES (diagonal, repetitive, curved, intersecting); SHAPES (squares, triangles, circles, triangles); TEXTURES; PATTERNS; COLOURS; FORM; SPACE. We can do this in a number of ways:

1. Start with everyday objects

Try to look at familiar objects in different ways and produce an appealing image. A Macro approach can be very helpful as can shooting from different angles.

2. Shoot through objects

Using a makeshift lens "filter" can help you achieve truly unique and abstract images. Shooting through translucent glass, water, or even a car window on a rainy day can result in distortions and light diffractions that will create unusual but visually interesting images.

3. Multiple Exposures (ME)

- a. In this technique, both images are exposed normally and then added together. This means that the brightest parts of the final image will be made from the brightest parts of either of the two component images, a fact which can effectively be used to make each image cut out the other. Set the camera's multiple-exposure setting to take two photos and blend them in the Additive mode. For the best results, you will need two images with light backgrounds. N.B. not available on all cameras.
- b. Burst of flashes in strobe mode to capture fast-moving action - build up your image by firing a flash several times during a long exposure, under low ambient light.

4. Capture Motion

a. Intentional Camera movement (ICM)

Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) photography is an abstract style of shooting that has no rules. It involves moving your camera over a long exposure (from 1/3 or 1/2 second to multi second exposures). Movement techniques include: panning (vertically, horizontally and diagonally), zooming – vary the speed of zoom for effect, rotation and random movement. Start with Shutter or Manual Priority mode and a low ISO, focus manually and turn off both autofocus and IS.

b. Moving Subject

Lit subjects moving randomly in the dark can produce interesting abstract effects.

5. Customise your lighting

Manipulate your lighting to create shadows or highlights that add depth, mystery, and interest to your images.

6. Explore camera settings

Play with unusual camera settings to create interesting results: shutter speed, white balance and a change of mode can enhance your artistry.

7. Use of Software

Start with your usual software: experiment with all the options, push the buttons as far as they will go! For a more considered approach, combine multiple images in Photoshop or manipulate white balance, temperature and tint in Lightroom. Photosplit provides a very useful app for abstracts and Snapseed also offers some interesting effects.

8. Freelensing

This technique involves detaching the lens from your camera and holding it manually in front of the camera body. By tilting the lens in different directions, you can change the area of the image that is in focus, resulting in some very creative effects. N.B. Take care not to allow dirt into your exposed camera body!

What are the elements of a good abstract photograph?

- Simplicity, Composition, Angle of View, Lighting, Harmony, Mystery

In conclusion, let your imagination run free to create an effect disconnected from the obvious

*"The most astonishing possibilities remain to be discovered in the raw material of the photograph" –
Laszlo Moholy-Nagy*