Shoot for the Moon

Monthly news and tips from
Landscape Photographer
Gill Moon

May 2022 Vol 20 - Photography Projects

Hello

Welcome to the May edition of 'Shoot for the Moon'

This month I will be looking at the power of a personal photography project. Over the last three years I have undertaken one short panel project for an RHS Portfolio competition and two larger projects which I published as books.

Photography projects are a great way of focusing your photography and channeling your creativity, they also help you grow as a photographer.

In July I will be running a Photography Project Masterclass which will be full of useful advice that I have picked up during my three recent projects.

I hope this volume of Shoot for the Moon gives you some inspiration to undertake your own project or join my masterclass!

Gill

If you would like to get in touch please email me at gill@gillmoon.com

Personal Photography Projects

This image forms part of a small collection that I have taken on a piece of waste ground near where I live. I am thinking that the small portfolio will form part of a wider environmental project about floral landscapes and the decline of insects.

To tie in with the introduction of a new 1 day Photography Project Masterclass which I will be running in July I wanted to discuss the power of a Personal Photography Project.

As we embark on our photography journey many of us feel inspired to get out for days when the mood takes us and we often travel to different places in search of specific images or classic views. There is nothing wrong with this but after a while I feel it limits creativity. This is where a personal photography project can really help. Thinking of a subject and forcing yourself to search for shots to fill a specific brief is an excellent way to stay motivated as a photographer. It also has an important part to play in the growth of your talent.

What is a Photography Project?
A personal photography project can take a variety of forms. It is essentially anything that has a theme or a focus to it. It can take the form of a small collection of images that take a day to put together or it can be a larger collection of work that is accumulated over a period of weeks or months that will ultimately form the basis of a book or exhibition. Photography projects can have the following outcomes:
- a small panel of images such as a triptych or square of 9
- a collection of images for a competition or for professional accreditation
- a larger body of work for a book or an exhibition.
- Focused portfolio images for a website.

Choosing an idea
There are a wealth of opportunities out there for any photographer so at first it might seem a bit daunting to think of an idea for a project. The best advice is to choose something that inspires you, something that you have a strong connection with and something that you are really interested in. There is no good deciding to do a 365 project (one photo a day) and then find yourself getting bored or short of time as the project develops. It is also worth choosing a subject or location that you can return to easily time and again, so try to pick a local location. This has real advantages as you won't have far to travel, your images can be more spontaneous and you will have a good opportunity to become really familiar with your area.

I have recently been working on two personal projects - 'Grounded' (now complete) focuses on Hollesley Marshes and 'Spirit of the Forest' (working title) which focuses on the oak woodland of Staverton Thicks.

Grounded - the inspiration
I began this project at the beginning of 2020 and had initially intended to record my visits to the marsh throughout the year. I had some images planned and specific shots in mind. When the Covid pandemic hit and lockdown happened in March I decided to rethink my project and it became a much more spontaneous thing. I did away with the planned shots and the tripod and instead recorded the marsh through my morning walks. I had initially intended for all the images to be in colour (because that is how I usually work) but I ultimately felt that they formed a more cohesive body of work if they were presented in black and white.
The project became a visual sketch book of images accompanied by some descriptive text which details the things your can't see in the photographs. Together these words and images detail my connection with a special place. Hollesley marshes is somewhere I have easy access to. It is somewhere that fascinates me, I love the wildlife and the open spaces and the fact that it is not a place that is often photographed. So to me it was the ideal place for a project.

Rooted - the inspiration
The dark oak forest of Staverton fascinates me. Ever since reading about it in the 'Gossip from the Forest" by Sara Maitland I have been compelled to capture the trees and the relationship between the oaks and the hollies and the creatures that inhabit the wood. It is an enchanting place that belongs in fairytales and this idea has formed the basis for my project.

If you are going to do a landscape project pick a location you have a strong connection with and somewhere that you feel will give you direction and motivation to get out with your camera.

GILL MOON
PHOTOGRAPHY
www.gillmoon.com

GILL MOON
PHOTOGRAPHY
www.gillmoon.com

Think about different locations and what each means to you. Do you feel connected with that landscape or do you just feel that it would supply you with exciting images? The best location to choose is one that inspires you on all levels and one that you care about. Don't choose a location just because you think it will make good images. To make a good project you need to care about the landscape you are shooting because if you don't this will show in your images.

Think about the reasons that promote a connection - is the landscape familiar? Does it hold special memories? It's it somewhere you are fascinated by and would like to get to know better? These are all good reasons for choosing a location.

What is your story?
Your project will work much better if you have a goal or an objective in mind. This will help you establish your story and will consolidate your images into a cohesive body of work. So for my Grounded project my story was my interaction with the landscape through the turmoil of 2020 and the Covid pandemic.

For my Rooted project the story was about the relationship between two tree species, the hollies and the oaks, and also the relationship between man and nature.

Once you have a story idea you can plan out what images you would like to include within your project. Try to give your story a beginning, middle and an end and work out how the pictures relate to that plan. Think about the timing and whether you are looking at a seasonal approach or something more abstract.

For my Grounded project I have laid the book out in seasons because I felt this made sense with the story of the year. For my Rooted project I used a different approach and picked out human conditions that I could relate back to the forest community. My sequence was laid out under the following chapters; time, nature, spirit, change, conflict, mortality and hope.

For my Grounded project I wanted to convey the idea that I had captured a moment in time rather than a landscape image. I decided that I would convert all my images to black and white which gave the project a cohesive feel and I also felt emphasised the sketchbook nature of the work.

Make your project personal.
A photography project will work much better if you make it personal. Think about what the landscape means to you and try and weave a personal angle into your story.
With Grounded the story is all about my connection with the landscape captured through images taken on a morning walk. Individually each image captures a moment in time but collectively they form a sketchbook of a treasured place. I have also added words to my project to make the whole thing more personal.

To sum up
Think of a project idea that you feel connected with and inspired by.
Work out what you care about and what you feel a connection with.
If you are picking a location do it based on what you care about rather than whether you think the landscape looks attractive or will produce good images.
Choose a location you can return to time and again.
Plan your story - think about what you want your images to say and try to be creative with your planning, composition and shooting.
Tell a story - every image should have something about it, it should speak to the viewer and combined your project should tell a story. Make sure you have an opening shot that sets the scene.
Set yourself a goal or objective.
Do something that is out of your photographic comfort zone as this is likely to increase your creativity.
Make your project personal.

The following images are from Grounded - a year of nature connection on Hollesley Marshes.

GILL MOON
PHOTOGRAPHY
www.gillmoon.com

GILL MOON
PHOTOGRAPHY
www.gillmoon.com
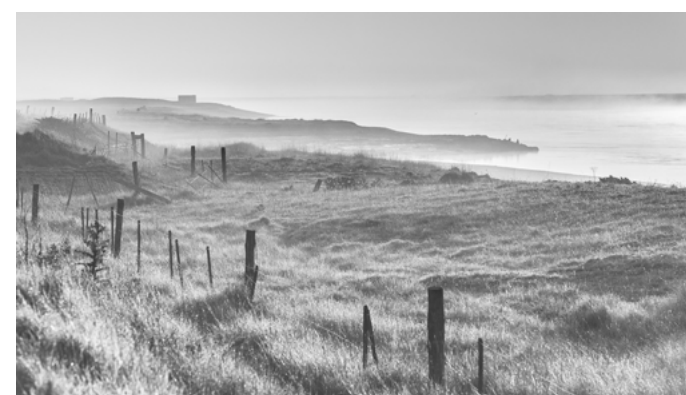
Photography Project Masterclass

DISCOVER MORE

Photography Project masterclass
Saturday 30th July 8am – 4pm

Photography projects are a great way to take your image making to the next level. On this workshop we will look at what is involved in tackling a photography project from single day projects to longer term collections which could be used for a book or an exhibition.

The day will be split in two halves. The morning will take place on the beach at Sizewell where you will be challenged to come up with an idea for a short project which will involve 3 – 9 images which you will shoot during the morning.

The afternoon session will take place in my studio at Hollesley where we will look at choosing and sequencing images for a panel. I will show you how to layout a panel or triptych in Photoshop and we will discuss how to process and select our images so that they form a cohesive body of work.

The procedures we cover in the afternoon will be applied to producing a small panel or triptych but can also be applied to bigger projects such as books or an exhibition.

The workshop is suitable for 4 people with 2 Mac's available for your use in the afternoon on a shared basis. Alternatively you are welcome to bring a laptop with you if you would prefer to work on your own.

This is a creative workshop and is suitable for all levels but some experience of Lightroom and Photoshop would be useful.

GILL MOON
PHOTOGRAPHY
www.gillmoon.com