



Gill Moon Photography Photo Club

March 2023 Challenge 3

Abstract and Detail Photography

Hello

and welcome to my new monthly photo club challenges.

Each month I will be setting a new challenge for club members to work with. The challenges are not designed to be competitive but they are designed to be fun and inspiring and help you grow as a photographer.

Every other month we will be looking at the work of different photographers who are 'masters' in their chosen field of photography. We will examine how they make their images and discuss how you can use their techniques in your own work. I hope these will be inspiring sessions.

Every monthly challenge will be followed by a 1.5 hour Zoom session (which is entirely optional) on the last Wednesday of every month where we will discuss some of the submitted images and talk about what worked and what didn't. I hope this feedback will be useful.

Thank you very much for being part of the Photo Club and I hope you will find it a fun and rewarding challenge.

Gill.

Abstract and Detail Photography

This month's challenge is all about abstract and detail photography. These are really two different things but for this challenge we will group them under the title of **creative close up photography**. To define this I am talking about small scenes rather than wider landscape shots.

This type of photography is all about observation and connection and expanding our vision as a landscape photographers.

Simply searching for abstract and detail images helps us grow as photographers because it teaches us how to see more deeply.

What do we mean by abstract landscape photograph?

I love this quote by American Photographer Minor White who said

"One should not only photograph things for what they are but for what else they are."

For me this sums up abstract photography perfectly. By creative vision we can change a mundane subject into something extraordinary simply by how we see it.

Abstract photography is a way of depicting an element or scene without creating a realistic or traditional image. To do this we need to remove any context so that the viewer doesn't know exactly what they are looking at.

This can be seen in the first image which shows a shot through a coastal stream in Scotland. The movement of the water and the light bouncing off the surface creates the patterns and the colour is created from the seaweed which is floating below the surface. The abstract feel comes from the shapes created by the dancing sunlight and the colours lying beneath those patterns.



This shot was taken with my 105mm macro lens shooting at F5.6 with a shutter speed of 1/1600 second. I attached a polariser to eliminate any glare off the surface of the water and allow me to see through to the seaweed below.

How to take abstract photos

To achieve a good abstract image you need to think about the subject and how you are going to portray it. Observation here is key. Think about your composition. Whilst all the usual rules apply you will get better results if you simplify what is in front of you. Think about the angle of view, the direction of the light and how you can capture the shot whilst retaining an air of mystery.

Look for details

There are a wealth of potential subjects out there that could be explored using abstract photography. The key is to look for compelling shapes, textures or patterns that you could focus on to create an interesting image.

The following two images show some old fishing nets on the edge of the river at

Southwold.



Fishing nets - camera settings: F5.6 at 1/8000 second, ISO 400, shooting into the light and over exposing in camera and in Lightroom.



Fishing net reflections - camera settings: F5.6 at 1/1000 second, ISO 400, shooting into the water and focusing on the moving reflections. Again I over exposed in camera and in Lightroom.

I over exposed both images to create a dreamy effect. Both images were shot at 200mm focal length using the backlight to

help with the dreamy feel.

For both shots I have used a low viewpoint to look across at the nets and their reflections. This gives a more intimate feel to the shots compared to standing above and looking down.

A low viewpoint will also help emphasise any texture and will allow you to make the most of any bokeh.

The next shot is completely abstract - nothing is in focus. I have deliberately defocused the lens to capture the bokeh in the river. In this shot the out of focus highlights have become the subject of my image.

Shooting with a wide aperture and blurring the background will help to isolate the subject but it will also help to emphasise the abstract nature of what you are photographing.



Water sparkles - This image was shot at a 200mm focal length, F5.6 at 1/8000 second at ISO 400. The whole scene is out of focus but it makes an interesting abstract which is all about mood and emotion.

Lens choice

Using a long lens or even a macro lens will allow you to get up close and create an abstract feel to your images. Most of the shots in these notes were taken with either a 70-200mm lens or a 105mm macro, although it is possible to use other lenses.

This image of the rock patterns below was taken with a 24-70mm lens at 46mm. This allowed me to get physically closer to the rocks than I could with a 70-200mm and gave me a greater depth of field than I could achieve with a macro lens.

Work out what you want to achieve with your image and pick the lens accordingly.



Rock patterns - This image was shot at a 46mm focal length, F16 at 0.6 second at ISO 100. The scene was quite harshly lit as the sun was shining so I bracketed my shot and this is a combination of 3 exposures.

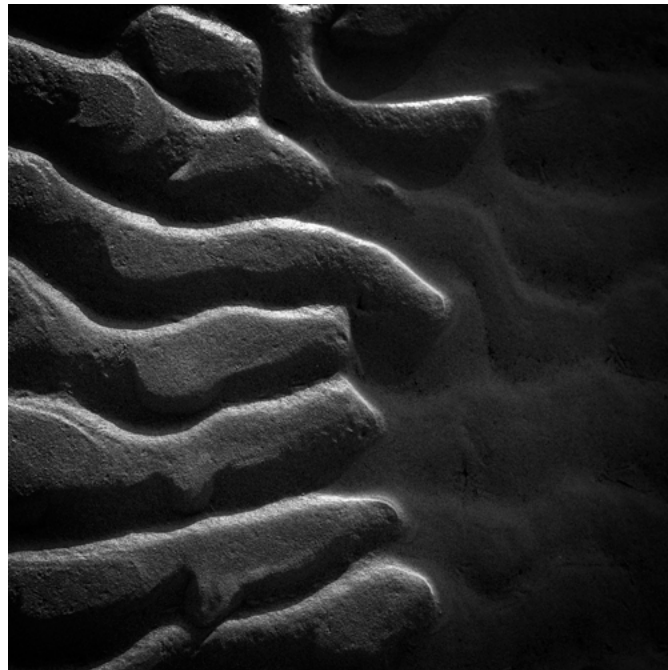
How does light affect the scene?

Diffused light works well with patterns in nature - in rocks, plants and macro subjects where harsh light and harsh shadows would detract from the composition.

Harsher light with more of a dynamic range is good for patterns and textures and working

with areas of shadow and light. Sand patterns are good examples of this.

Backlight can work with silhouettes and is great for vegetation and creating bokeh.



Sand patterns - This image was shot at a 70mm focal length, F9 at 1/250 second at ISO 400. This image was taken on a bright sunny day where the light was emphasising the shadows between the sand ridges. This shot is essentially all about light, shadow and pattern.



Sea kale- This image was taken using back light to enhance the veins in the sea kale leaf. The brightness is created by the sun. This image was shot with a 105mm macro at F5.6, 1/500 second, ISO 200. I composed the image so that the veins spread out from the bottom left corner of the frame.

When you are composing your images think about line, shape, form, tone and texture and try to create a compelling arrangement of elements within your frame. Composition is just as important with abstracts as it is with wider landscape scenes.

This image below shows a decaying sea kale leaf on the beach at Bawdsey. I loved the muted colours and the delicate close up texture but I also liked the fact that the shape seemed to form a face or a mask within the leaf. It was this shape that I found intriguing and compelled me to take the photograph.



Decay - This image was taken with my 105mm macro at F5.6, 1/100 second at ISO 500. The really shallow depth of field and plane of focus created by the macro lens meant that I could isolate the 'face' from the rest of the leaf.

Abstract photography could also incorporate elements of ICM or multiple exposure but on an intimate scale and I will explore this in the inspiration section at the end of the notes.

How to take close up detail photos

For the purpose of this exercise detail shots are close up 'portraits' of something that you can easily recognise but that also portray a sense of place - so not abstract in nature.

Close up detail shots can be natural in origin or they can be man made. Below are a few examples with the shooting information underneath.



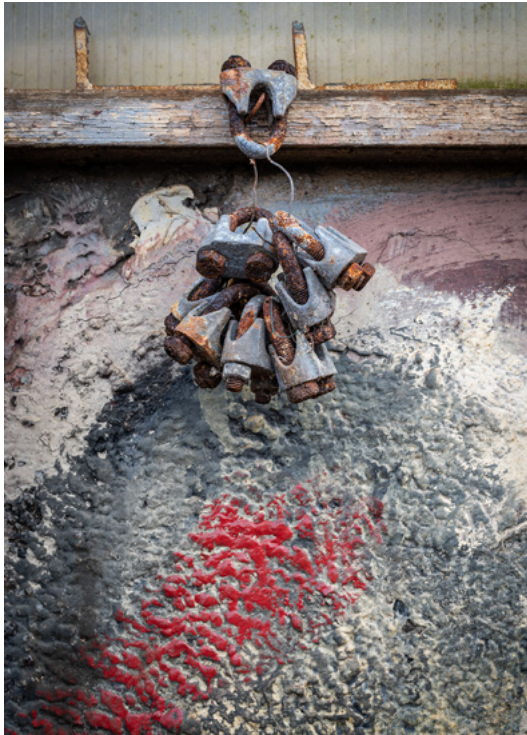
Oak Leaf - This image was taken using backlighting to create the golden glow through the leaf. The image was shot with a 70-200mm lens at 200mm at F8, 1/250 second at ISO 400. This created some lovely bokeh in the background which complimented the colours of the leaf.



Bullrushes - This image was shot using a 70-200mm lens at 200mm. I have focused into the light to try and create a soft effect around the edge of the bullrush. I have also focused through some of the foreground vegetation to create a soft frame to the bottom front edge of the image.



Snowdrops - this image was taken with my 105mm macro lens at F5.6, 1/250 second at ISO 400. It was a handheld shot with a really low viewpoint looking up at the flowers to give some soft bokeh in the background.



Padlocks - This image was taken with a 50mm lens as part of a 50mm challenge. As a result I haven't cropped it at all. The camera settings were F8, 1/125 second at ISO 400.

Sometimes with smaller scenes you may need to focus stack your images especially if you are using a macro lens where the plane of focus is so shallow. This image of an oak twig which I found on the woodland floor is a result of 10 focus stacked images. These were combined in Photoshop by opening all 10 images as layers. Having highlighted all 10 layers I selected Edit > auto align layers. Once they had been aligned I selected Edit > auto blend layers choosing the stack option.

The original camera settings for all 10 images were F4, 1/15 second at ISO 100.

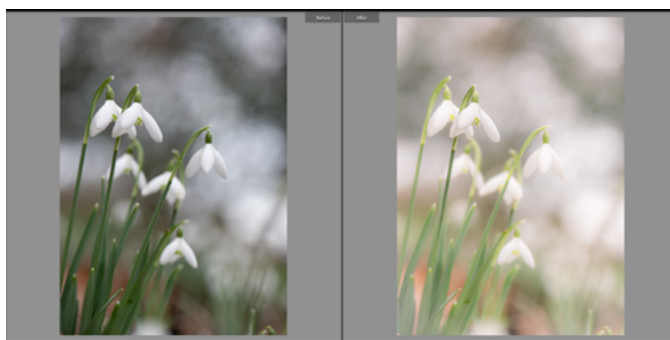
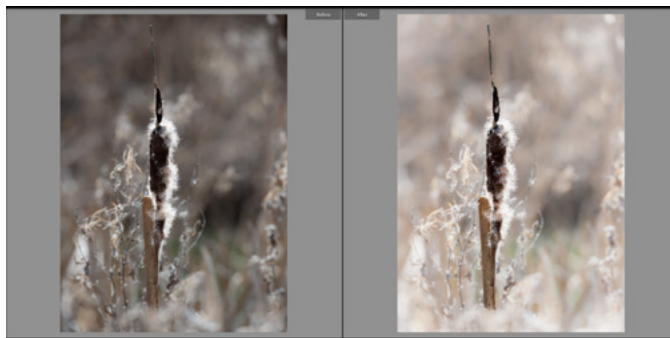


When shooting details like flowers I often employ the technique of 'shooting through' to create areas of out of focus colour usually in the bottom front of my image.

When I am photographing flowers I am often after a dreamy effect and with this in mind I will apply a few techniques in Lightroom or Photoshop to enhance the dream like quality.

These techniques will usually involve reducing the clarity and dehaze in the background of the image. I will also work with the colours to make sure I have combinations that work with the effect and feel I am trying to create in my image.

I have included a couple of examples of this below. These screen shots show the before (on the left) and after (on the right) images in Lightroom.



For both images I have lightened the backgrounds and also warmed them up slightly. I have reduced the shadows in the background and made the blacks much less evident. By taking out the blue tones in the shadows I also feel I have enhanced the dreamy nature of the shot.

I believe post processing is really important. It helps enhance the mood of the image and can help convey the exact emotion you want to put across. Blue shadows create a cold image which, in my opinion, is much harder to connect with. Warmer shadows create a softer feel and a more gentle mood.

Colour combinations in images are really important and I will often find that an image

fails purely on the combinations of colours within it. If colours don't sit well together within the frame you are not going to want to look at them on your wall.

Inspiration

It is always a good idea to study other photographers work. The internet is a fantastic resource for learning and there are a host of inspiring photographers out there. Below are some examples of photographers who practice abstract and detail photography.

David Southern -Close up detail

David is a Northumbrian based photographer who specialises in close up detail found along the Northumbrian beaches where he lives. His images feature rocks, pebbles seaweed and sand and show the beautiful abstract patterns that are present in the geology all around us.

I find Davids work really inspiring and can highly recommend his book Shoreline.

For David's intimate shoreline images please see www.southernphotography.co.uk/gallery_750565.html

Linda Lashford - Detail and Abstract

Linda is a photographer and writer and I came across her work last year when she was publicising her new book 'From the Seahouses.'

Her work has a real softness to it and I love the emotions that it portrays. When you look at her work please look at the following two galleries which I think illustrate her abstract and close up work best:

The Mutability of Rain
<https://lindalashford.photoshelter.com/portfolio/G00006Thlfa0TElg>

and
Ring of Bright Water
<https://lindalashford.photoshelter.com/portfolio/G0000N2cZnDH.zTA>

Mark Cornick - Abstract

Mark is probably best known for his ICM seascape images but for the purpose of this challenge please look at his ICM images taken in Kew Gardens. String Theory is an abstract botanical series of photographs which have been created by combining the techniques of Intentional Camera Movement and in-camera Multiple Exposure.

The images in this portfolio are absolutely beautiful and are all about shape and colour.

www.markcornickphotography.co.uk/stringtheory

Henrik Spranz - Close up nature and macro

If you like creative flower photography and close up nature images then please have a look at Henrik's work. His images have been described as having a 'dream-like state of whimsical and wispy perfection with pastel colours'. They make creative use of bokeh and are delicate and beautiful.

I suggest you look at his nature and macro portfolio.

www.spranz.org/index/G0000Tt2XmBbxcJc

Mike Curry - Abstract

Mike is a Yorkshire based award winning abstract photographer. The most relevant portfolios to this challenge are his 'Fleeting Reflections' www.mikecurryphotography.com/portfolio/fleeting-reflections and 'Detail' www.mikecurryphotography.com/portfolio/details

I also suggest you look at the amazing winning images from CUPOTY (close up photographer of the year) where you will find plenty more inspiration.

www.cupoty.com/winners-04

March's Photo Challenge

This month's photo challenge is to produce two photos:

1. an abstract image where the subject matter is not immediately obvious.
2. a close up detail which is more of a close up 'portrait' of your subject in its surroundings.

The Zoom session for this challenge will take place on Wednesday 29th March between 7pm - 8.30pm.

The final image in these notes features a fallen tree trunk which I found in an ancient Suffolk woodland. The bark has decayed leaving the exposed inner timber and the moss is encroaching to cover the stump.

This is an 11 shot focus stacked image. Shooting information: F8 at 1/20 second, ISO 200, taken with a 105mm macro.

