

DIGIT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY DIGITAL IMAGING GROUP

Number 89 2021 Issue 2



Upcoming DIG events

Details of all DIG events are available on the Group's website at
tinyurl.com/sxzl487



Digital Imaging: Online

Saturday 26 June 2021
Online



Guy Tal
Creativity & Expression
in Photography

www.rps.org/DIGONLINE21

Digital Imaging: Online

Saturday 17 July 2021
Online



Leigh Preston
IS THIS IT?
Beyond Street Photography

www.rps.org/DIGONLINE22

Digital Imaging: North West

Sunday 26 September 2021
Frodsham WA6 7QN



Tony North DPAGB
The Art of Macro

www.rps.org/dignw-sept21

Digital Imaging: Yorks & NE

Saturday 2 October 2021
York YO23 1BW



Brian McCarthy FRPS

Images from a Small Shed

[www.rps.org/events/groups/
digital-imaging/2021/
october/talk-by-brian-mccarthy/](http://www.rps.org/events/groups/digital-imaging/2021/october/talk-by-brian-mccarthy/)

Event programmes continue to be disrupted as a result of the COVID pandemic, please check on the RPS website or with the Centre Organiser for the latest status of any event.

HELP WANTED

RPS DIGITAL IMAGING CHAIR

CAUTION - IT'S NOT A WALK IN THE PARK

BUT ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING VOLUNTEER ROLES YOU CAN IMAGINE

Especially if you have experience volunteering with photographic organisations, please consider helping Digital Imaging take advantage of the new opportunities before us. The role is a great volunteer opportunity, supported by a strong, hard-working team. It's hard work, but we all think it's fun.

We are also looking to fill other roles:

- Deputy Chair
- Online Event Programme Secretary
- Centre Organiser for our Eastern Centre
- Centres Liaison
- Social Media Manager

For some of the roles, if you don't have the time to take over the whole job, assisting someone who is already juggling the role would also be helpful.

Please contact Lyn Phillips by email at digsecretary@rps.org if you want to help or to learn more.

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Cover image: Chronos, God of Time by
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From the chair

Rex Waygood and Deborah Loth

Volunteers Week takes place 1-7 June every year in the UK. It's a chance to recognise the fantastic contribution volunteers make and say thanks. Many Royal Photographic Society members may even be unaware of the role that volunteers play in supporting the organisation. Much of what they take for granted is in fact carried out by volunteers alongside a small, dedicated and overworked team at RPS HQ.

This is as good an opportunity as any to highlight the work volunteers have done to keep the lights on for RPS Digital Imaging, particularly in this last year. Thanks to the efforts of committee volunteers, record numbers of members participated in the Projected Image competition and submitted work for the Print exhibition. Prints from last year's cancelled print exhibition were returned or disposed of, depending on members' preferences. Committee volunteers set up and ran a programme of online events attended by over 9,000 people in its first year. DIGIT, Accolade and the newsletter have continued publication, all edited by volunteers. We should particularly thank Ian Race for stepping up to the gargantuan task of picking up where Janet Haines left off as our Chair just before the pandemic kicked in. In these last 15 months Ian and the committee have achieved a huge amount for Digital Imaging. Although other commitments now make it impossible for Ian to continue, we hope we can look forward to his continued involvement with the group in the future.

Some of our main volunteers, the Centre Organisers, have shared retailers' frustrations with on-again, off-again lockdowns. After all their work setting up their programmes of live events early in 2020, it was tough to have to cancel them. And then to have to rebook speakers, rebook venues, rearrange for volunteers only to find again that the events could not take place. Even now, re-establishment of live event programmes is stymied by venues' limitations and uncertainty about the future. But most of the Centres adapted to meeting online.

Some of our volunteers have found themselves working almost full-time in their volunteer roles throughout the pandemic, and will most likely want to get out more as that becomes possible. So members can expect to see more calls for volunteers. Ask not what DI can do for you...

Of course we don't know what will happen next. We'll continue to offer online events so long as there is a demand for them. We'll badger our members to complete a survey to guide us in our thinking about direction and priorities. We'll organise our Projected Image competition for the autumn, as usual. We'll also be watching with interest as the RPS clarifies its new 'Photography for Everyone' initiative.

We want to keep the great experience of defeating the barrier of distance and connecting online, and we also want to get back to face-to-face socialising. For the summer, though, there needs to be a period of reflection about direction in the face of uncertainty.

So relax and enjoy the fine magazine put together by volunteer Gary Beaton, our DIGIT editor.

Stay safe and take care.

Editorial

Gary Beaton

Welcome to this latest edition of DIGIT. It has been a fascinating experience bringing together the varied stories and expertise to this issue and, as always, I have learned a great deal from our generous contributors; I hope that you, too, will enjoy the fare within these pages.

We cover topics ranging from a self-confessed photographic obsessive, through a minimalist view of a complex of architectural astronomical instruments, using the simplicity of silhouettes to help to convey a message, the use of one member's images in academic research and capturing successful images in a challenging environment to which few of us have access. Topping everything off, we have a DIGIT Challenge from Adrian Lines which shows the evolution of an image taken in a field to a fantasy world in just three simple steps.

As ever, I wish you good reading.



Broken Doll

Photography: A creative obsession



SHARON PRENTON JONES ARPS admits that photography has become a bit of an obsession but her images are winning plaudits around the world.

For me photography is a hobby: indeed, since taking early retirement five years ago you could say it has become an obsession. I have no formal training in photography, art or design - I just have an unusual mind and a 'have a go attitude' to photography and life in general. Through photography, I have met some amazing people, both photographers and the people that model for me. Many are now firm friends and have been really supportive throughout my journey.

Joining a local camera club was one of the best

things my husband, Rob and I did. We first joined Llandudno Photographic Society and are now members of Conwy Camera Club. As soon as we joined, we started entering club competitions, and fairly quickly began entering national and international salons. People were so willing to share their knowledge and experience and I listened and soaked everything up like a sponge.

Over the years, I have tried different genres of photography including wildlife and landscape, but I soon discovered that I don't have the

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Framed



Merlin

patience for wildlife, and landscape photography involved getting up far too early in the morning to capture the best light. Inevitably my style started to emerge where portraiture and composite work feature mostly. I strive to make my finished composites tell a story and look as if they could have been taken straight from the camera.

In keeping with the rules of the exhibitions and salons that I enter, my composite images are created entirely from photographs that I have taken myself. I do not use stock images: if I have an idea that requires a lion then I have to visit a zoo to take that element of the composite.

Planning

I find planning the shoot as much as possible beforehand means there is no stress on the actual shoot. Chatting over a cuppa before starting to take photographs helps gain rapport with the model, ideas start to flow and it becomes a joint and fun exercise. I like to use people who are fairly new to modelling for a photographer. Many of the featured models are local, and if I see a potential model in a café or shop I will typically give them one of my cards and ask if they would like a shoot at a later date.

Shooting

Models sometimes come a long distance and spend the day with us in our home studio, so it's important to keep them well fed and watered. We take lots of breaks for coffee and cake and just chat and have fun. They often bring a Mum or a friend along, and I always rope them into take behind-the-scene images on their phone, or ask them to throw fabric around to create movement in dresses. We are lucky having a studio at home, but also living in North Wales, we have mountains, forests, beaches and waterfalls all within a short drive from home.

The image named 'Framed' (see left) came from a day-long shoot with Amiee Sneddon. Amiee and her Mum arrived with a beautiful dress that was perfect for my ideas. The background was taken at Little Moreton Hall in Cheshire. Amiee was in our studio holding an empty picture frame purchased in a charity shop, with the original artwork removed – we've found that this is a cheap way of buying frames. A full explanation of how I created this image can be found on our web page: prentonjonesphotography.co.uk/news/deconstructing-a-composite-image-the-making-of-framed/.

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Pearl



The Changeling

Lighting and Portraiture

Through trial and error, I have discovered that soft skin tones are best achieved with lots of diffusion. We have purchased several Rotolights which I tend to use mainly on continuous light mode. In this way I can see exactly what I am shooting, especially with the Sony A7Riii full frame camera. They are a great combination, and the 55mm prime lens is amazingly sharp. The image named 'Pearl' (see left) featuring Paige Holland is an example of this.

I am continuously experimenting to capture different moods with lighting. A different lighting set up and colour was used for 'The Changeling' (see above) featuring Ellie Corcoran, as I wanted

her to look fierce and dramatic.

Post-processing

I love post-processing and spend many evenings in front of the TV with my laptop creating backgrounds ready for composites. I primarily use Photoshop including the RAW converter. When I discovered plug-ins, I bought everything and anything, but to be honest I don't use the majority of them now as I'm a bit of a control freak and like to adjust my images myself.

The plug-ins I do still use are *Topaz Re-mask* for cutting out. I have an old version of this, the newer version is called *Topaz AI*. I also love the NIK collection especially the darken/lighten

PHOTOGRAPHY: A CREATIVE OBSESSION

centre and detail extractor.

The image 'I Believe in Angels' (see below), also features Ellie Corcoran. The background is a local beach that has motion blur added and I have the colours desaturated. Ellie was taken on another local beach and cut out. The wings are from a swan, I remember sitting there for ages hoping that it would flap its wings and it eventually did. Ellie was colour matched then shadows and light were added.

Distinctions

Gaining distinctions followed, I loved the process

as it inevitably made me 'up my game' and try harder. An image can receive a Gold Medal in one salon and simply be rejected in the next. Yes, it's frustrating and, I must admit, annoying sometimes, but we are all human and each person has different tastes and styles.

In 2019 I decided to look for distinctions that required a panel of work and discovered that the Irish Photographic Federation required a panel of printed images. As Rob is Irish and I'm Welsh, the theme of Celtic Myths and Legends started to emerge. I was very excited and emotional when I was successful in gaining my Fellowship of the



I Believe in Angels

PHOTOGRAPHY: A CREATIVE OBSESSION



Sharon's successful Maitre de la Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique (MFIAP) panel

Irish Photographic Federation (FIPF).

Then COVID hit and everything slowed down for us as photographers. However, some good things came out of lock-down for me: instead of dithering about whether or not I should try for the Maitre de la Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique (MFIAP) and Master of the Photographic Alliance of Great Britain (MPAGB), I just heard my Mum's voice saying "If you don't try your best and then try everything you will never succeed".

The theme for my MFIAP Panel was Welsh Mythology. My original panel was prints which is why the images have a celtic border printed around them, to save on the weight of actually mounting each one. I sent them off to David Coates (who is the area FIAP Liaison Officer) and breathed a sigh of relief that it was now all done and in the hands of the Gods. However, the next day David rang to say FIAP had decided that, for this year only, the panel would need to be PDIs. They couldn't really do much else to be honest, how would they manage boxes of prints arriving from all over the world during the COVID pandemic? So, in my usual way I just thought 'just go with the flow'.

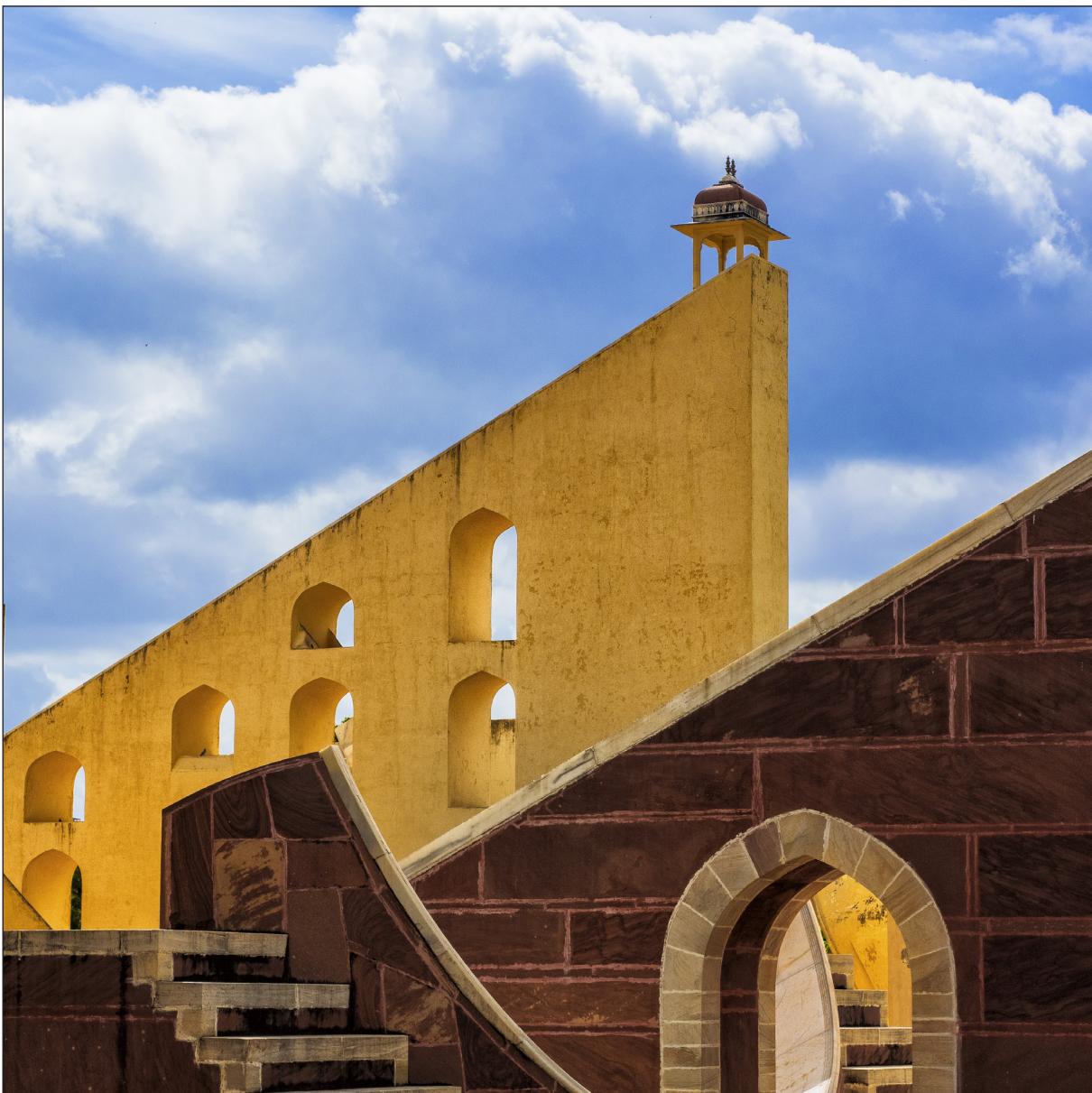
Similarly, my MPAGB application started off as a print panel and then, because of COVID, the submission was eventually PDI. There is no theme required for the PAGB distinctions as they require 20 stand-alone images rather than a panel. This made it even harder to select which image to include and which to leave out and there were constant, 'is this in or out' conversations going around in my head. Eventually the 20 images were chosen: some were older images, and some relatively new images with lovely memories and stories behind each one. I was successful in gaining both qualifications (MFIAP and MPAGB) within six weeks of each other in Spring 2021 - life was a bit hectic for a while!

Talks and Workshops

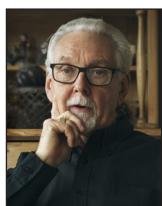
Rob and I regularly give talks and workshops to camera clubs. During the COVID pandemic we have given nearly 100 free Zoom talks, just our way of trying to help clubs during the difficult period. Zoom has been a great way of presenting to clubs in the UK, Ireland, and more recently Australia. Hopefully we will soon be free to travel again and more personal talks and workshops can resume.

Learn more about Sharon and Rob's work on their webpages at prentonjonesphotography.co.uk.

The pages are regularly updated with news, images and information about their workshops. They run 1-2-1 Workshops via Zoom, and offer others for small groups of six photographers to visit their home for the day, shooting models in the morning, and compositing the images in the afternoon.



A Visit to Jantar Mantar, Jaipur, India



BRIAN LAW ARPS considers dissociating function and form to create minimalist non-representational images with the emphasis on the interplay of curves and geometry

On a trip to India in 2019, I was fortunate to visit the Jantar Mantar in Jaipur. For those of you unfamiliar with it, the Jantar Mantar is a complex of 19 architectural astronomical instruments built during the 18th century. These structures, which are spread over a 1.8 ha site, include the world's largest stone sundial, the Vrihat Samrat Yantra,

which is 27m high.

When our party arrived at the site, around mid-morning, our guide provided us with a brief introduction to the place. Then, after giving the group a few moments to take photos, he brought everyone together for what turned into

A VISIT TO JANTAR MANTAR, JAIPUR, INDIA



a 45min lecture on the site's history and use. Needless to say, as a serious photographer, I skipped the lecture (I reckoned I could get the information from Wikipedia) and spent the remaining time taking photographs.

Whilst the instruments were built to study the heavens, the movement of the sun and planets, I was inspired to turn this idea on its head. What intrigued me was how the changing position of the sun and movement of the clouds, even in

A VISIT TO JANTAR MANTAR, JAIPUR, INDIA

the short time I was there, resulted in constantly shifting shadows bringing various parts of the architecture to life. Suddenly, unseen textures in the broad areas of richly coloured stucco and the detail in the brickwork were revealed. There were also a number of views through the arches and doorways which worked to isolate

interesting structural elements and create useful framing.

In a visit of just under 1 hour, I managed to get 79 exposures. But rather than recording the complex in formal architectural terms, my aim was to look beyond its use as an observatory. Through tight cropping in-camera, which



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tends to be my mode of operation anyway, I was interested in reducing the architecture to minimalist, almost non-representational forms.

Post-production was relatively straightforward, involving in the main further cropping to tighten the shot and give either a square format, or for images which possessed strong vertical

elements, portrait format in the ratio of 4:3. I always try to maintain a fixed aspect ratio for a collection of images, though I accept that this is not always possible. Having that standardisation makes presentation, in a book, an exhibition or a panel so much more pleasing and further helps to instil a sense of unity and coherence in the



A VISIT TO JANTAR MANTAR, JAIPUR, INDIA

collection. All of the images required standard tweaks along with the application of a little tonal contrast (Nik Efex) to enhance the brickwork textures and bring out the detail in the yellow stucco of the gnomon. Care was required to avoid generating halos especially at the junction of the sky and darker architectural elements.

Using a carefully selected viewpoint, along with the tight crop, I was able to dissociate function and form and concentrate the viewer's attention on the fascinating interplay between curves and angles. Many of the instruments had sweeping marble curves with their detailed calibration and these, along with the grand arches, contrasted



A VISIT TO JANTAR MANTAR, JAIPUR, INDIA

wonderfully with the angular gnomon, the multiplicity of steps, and other linear aspects and geometry of these constructions.

Jantar Mantar was a fabulous place for photographic exploration and experimentation. Given that the clouds and light were constantly changing during my visit, one moment there

were dark moody skies and the next moment, a bright blue backdrop, I could easily have spent all day there and never come close to getting bored.

See more of Brian's work at brianlawphotography.co.uk and on flickr.com/photos/30598704@N05 (BrianLaw53).





Trudging home

Photographing Silhouettes



COLIN TROW-POOLE FRPS details his approach to photographing silhouettes. He also offers instruction on how to tackle, adapt and combine this much loved, but under-utilised area of photography.

Silhouettes are a stunning way to convey emotion, drama and mystery. The simplicity of featureless outlines, set against lighter backgrounds offer a profound capability to communicate visually, with easily recognisable shapes assisting the clarity of message. Not that a photographic story always has to be clear, however, and in any event, the identities of silhouetted people are invariably disguised.

Anonymising subjects can of course be advantageous, not just with respect to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), but being unable to recognise a person is subconsciously intriguing. It invites the viewer to fill in the gaps, the outcome of which will partly be dictated by the individual viewer's mindset.

Much has been written about silhouettes, such

as the picturesque conditions or romantic places to take them and there's an abundance of publications concentrating on sunsets, beach scenes and bright colours etc. Whilst not wanting to decry these endorsements, I would nevertheless caution their overvalued legitimacy and suggest that as recommendations they're just a creative starting point.

Silhouette opportunities would have to be regarded as widespread and are particularly found in high contrast areas such as illuminated canopies, subways and walkways. Architectural interiors, with their ubiquitous doors and windows are also excellent backdrops for the creation of silhouette photography.

One of the many the benefits for using interiors is that they are not weather prohibitive and are

PHOTOGRAPHING SILHOUETTES



The Cleaner

PHOTOGRAPHING SILHOUETTES

often wonderfully fertile ground for the inclusion of people or interesting shapes. Opportunities are not just confined to architectural interiors however, as the bright external facades, particularly of modern buildings can also provide an ideal back-drops, as can be the low urban sunlit streets of our cities. Monochrome works perfectly with silhouettes, particularly when high contrast is utilised, the scene is simplified and the subjects are isolated.

Whenever we photograph silhouettes, the same compositional conventions (lead-in lines, thirds, repeating patterns, etc.) relevant to other genres continue to apply, but such mantras should, at best, be regarded as 'advisory' and not rigid rules to be slavishly followed. Often, some of our most pleasing images are the ones that defy convention. For example, deliberately placing subjects towards the edge of the frame (and introducing tension), whilst not to everyone's taste, offers the viewer a less traditional and perhaps more personal arrangement. Of course, this approach is not for compositional purists



Cycling

and these alternative focal points will inevitably challenge the long-held traditions of some photographers!

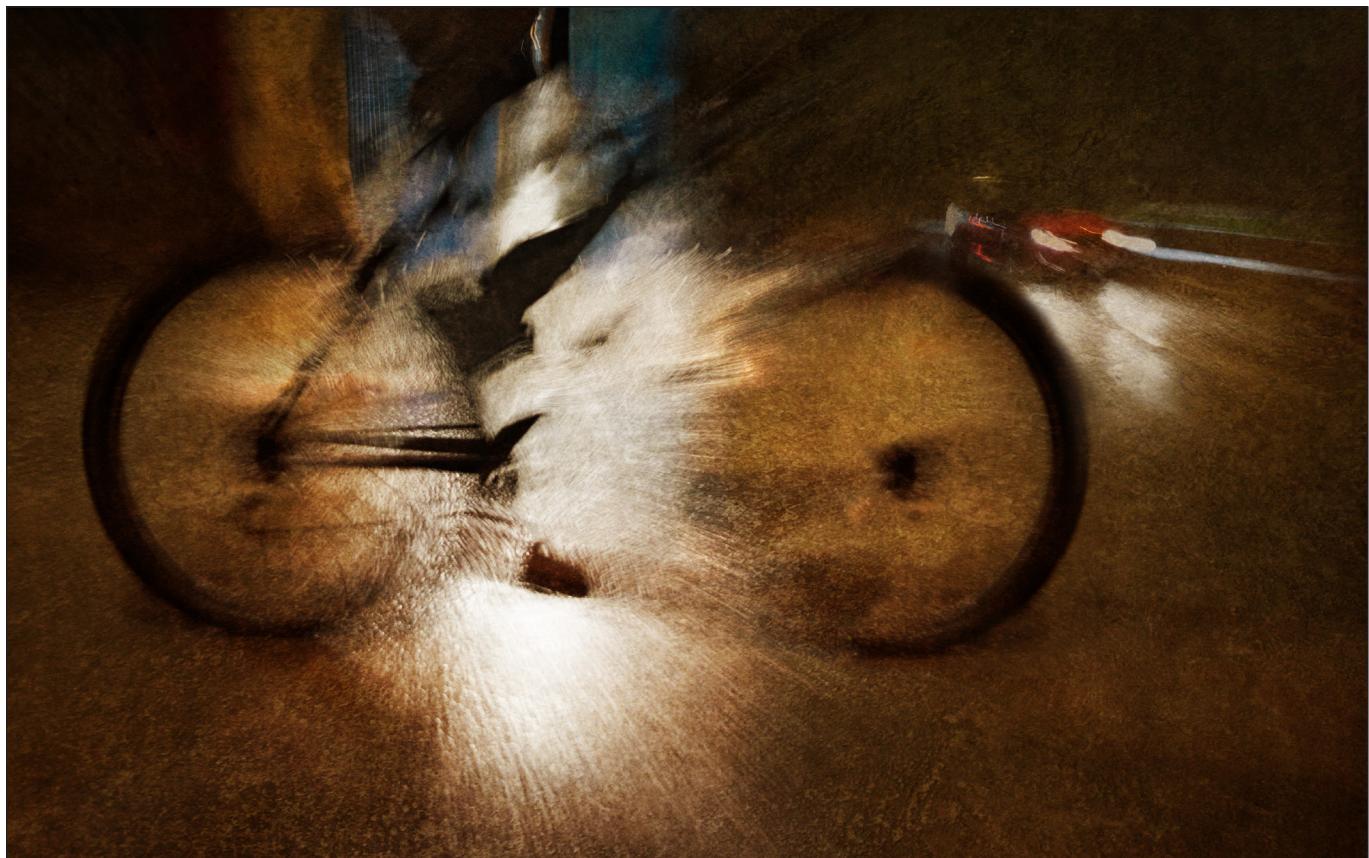
Similarly, there are no laws stating that silhouetted figures can't be composited into an image. In fact, cutting and pasting into a high contrast monochrome picture is a relatively straight forward process and the prerequisite demand for congruent shadow-lighting is a lot less critical than with some of the other genres. Naturally, there are times when the main focal point of the silhouetted picture works best when compositional conventions are followed. Take the two monochrome cyclists (see below), for example, it's reasonable to allow visual space for the bikes to move into, and as a result, the positions they occupy - approximately a third in - appear to be the most aesthetically pleasing.

However, with these two images, the compositional arrangements were not made purely on the trajectory of the bikes. Backgrounds, lead in lines and natural framing were also significant considerations.



Keeping mobile

PHOTOGRAPHING SILHOUETTES



Road cycling



Dodging the fireworks



Igniting the firework

PHOTOGRAPHING SILHOUETTES



Stepping out

It is not solely photographs taken during the day that provide opportunities for silhouettes, but twilight and night photography can just as easily be utilised. With twilight conditions, there's obviously greater illumination, enabling the dark outlines of subjects to be captured and simplified against the relatively light skies. With night photography, light sources are largely confined to the moon, street lighting and passing vehicles. At night, it's inevitable that higher ISOs, wider apertures and slower shutter speeds are required, but rather than view the conditions as a barrier, it could also be perceived as an ideal opportunity to amalgamate silhouette photography with intentional camera movement (ICM).

In 'Road cycling' (see previous page), the blurred silhouetted colour picture of the lone cyclist, ICM has been creatively used. Rain and reflections provide the image with an added artistic dimension and the background vehicle contextualises the scene.

Night photography can bring technical challenges, particularly when illumination sources are somewhat transient. Take pyrotechnics for example: exposure readings are much more difficult to calibrate, and clearly in such instances, there's only limited opportunity to compose and focus, let alone bracket exposures.

Smaller apertures can assist with the depth of field leeway of a moving subject, and it will also help to keep the outline of the silhouetted figure more sharply defined. Additionally, a decreased f stop will reduce the risk of chromatic aberration caused by extreme latitudes of light, but if we want to freeze the individual then shutter speeds have to be high enough to allow all this to happen in the first place.

With changeable lighting conditions I have found that by using aperture priority, whilst deliberately underexposing the scene by two stops, a greater freedom and spontaneity to photograph is facilitated. Other benefits of the programmed two stop compensation approach, are that it reduces the risk of the highlight areas burning out and it inevitably results in the desired silhouette effect being achieved. The downside of course, is that by intentionally underexposing in this way, we increase the risk of background shadow detail being lost. That said, if we shoot RAW files, this is normally retrieved with post capture editing software.

There is so much that we can do with our photography these days and silhouettes are just one glorious aspect to our wonderful craft. I hope to have provided you with insight, instruction and inspiration to have a go.



Brutalist stairs

Photographs as metaphor for working in Higher Education



BRIAN O'CALLAGHAN LRPS reflects on the use of his photographs by Dr Chiara Cirillo as part of a research project into Contemplative Pedagogy.

Along with many photographers I wonder if my work '...is born to blush unseen', like Thomas Gray's flower blooming in the desert. I am unconvinced by that inner voice arguing that I work first and foremost for myself. I seek an audience and affirmation in the form of feedback in competitions, courses and distinctions.

Yet, I am concerned that taking photographs to please a judge has a negative impact on my

output. Most of us have sat through club evenings listening to judges evaluate work by commenting on leading lines, the rule of thirds, odd numbers being preferable to even, blown highlights and 'It would be better if the single figure in the landscape was wearing red'. Feedback is helpful, but taking photographs that anticipate the comments of the competition judge can be stultifying.

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Photographer

When I evaluate the impact that this judgement has upon my own photography, it seems disproportionate. In any one year I might enter 20 or so different photographs in some form of competition. A few more will have enjoyed a fleeting moment in the sunlight of social media and are then retired to the infrequently visited basement of my catalogue, where they endure the company of tens of thousands of unregarded pictures.

So it made a refreshing change when my good friend and former colleague Chiara Cirillo, invited me to contribute in a small way to a research project she was undertaking.

I make no claims for the artistic or technical merits

of the images used for the project. They are the sort of pictures that most of us take all of the time. Almost all have been acquired by simply carrying a camera around. They have usually been identified as 'keepers' during the initial evaluation when importing from the memory card. Often they are opportunistic shots of something that caught my eye. On other occasions I have been experimenting with settings, an unused lens or seeking a particular effect.

Dr Chiara Cirillo is Associate Professor of Second Language Education at the University of Reading. She is conducting research into Contemplative Pedagogy in UK Higher Education. Chiara explained that contemplative pedagogy brings

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to the classroom meditative exercises borrowed from both western and eastern traditions of religion and philosophy. She said that some of the benefits were believed to include stress reduction, improved cognitive ability, focus, and a deeper engagement with the subject.

As part of her research, Chiara proposed to conduct online interviews with a number of academics at UK universities who were exploring these methods. Participants would be asked to prepare by undertaking a task. One of these tasks was to use pictures that would be provided as a springboard for a discussion about an aspect of their working environment, perhaps their seminar group, department or university. Were these environments conducive or inhibiting to contemplative pedagogy?

Chiara and I selected the photographs by sitting down together with a laptop and scrolling through my Lightroom catalogue. It was the autumn of 2020, just before the second lockdown was announced. I had screened out the duds with my own grading system to reduce the choice to somewhere near to manageable proportions. Chiara explained to me that she had previously seen sets of pictures being used for free association and reflection, so she knew what she wanted. Nevertheless, she approached the task with a degree of freedom, serendipity and intuition, which went with the spirit of the research topic. Having reflected on her initial selections

she asked me for a number of specific subjects, a bird in flight, a clock, a closed door for example. In the end there were about 40 images that Chiara printed like postcards, bundled together into a pack and dispatched to each participant.

When it came to the interviews, participants responded in a variety of exciting ways. As might be expected some had put a lot of work into preparing while others had not, instead responding spontaneously during the interview process.

The most diligent participant had created a grid of twelve images on a cork board and used these as a means of metaphorically exploring the nature of higher education. Others used individual images in the course of the discussion to help explain how they felt about their place in their institutions or the university system as a whole.

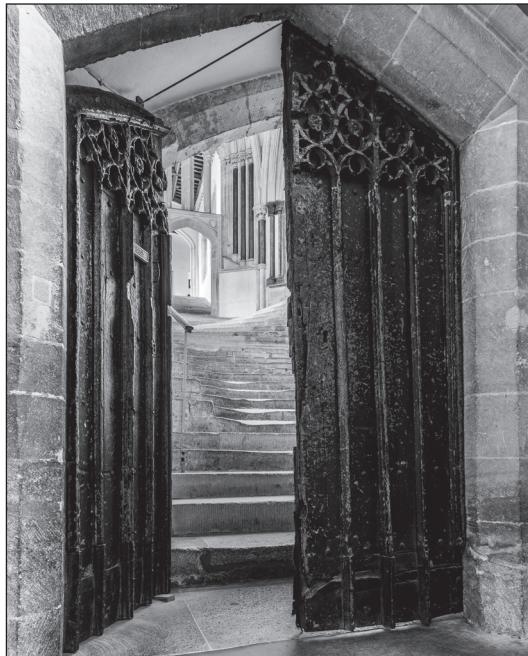
The picture of the mother and child was taken in late September 2020 on Southwold beach. The weather was bright but cold and a number of people seemed to be taking a last chance for a holiday as the number of Covid cases rose alarmingly. I was drawn to the colourfully dressed figures isolated on the seashore looking out at the waves. Participants in the study saw the mother as teacher and guide, the sea as an ocean of learning and as a metaphor for uncertainty and no easy answers.

The photograph of the half-closed medieval door and the staircase rising beyond was taken in



Mother and child

PHOTOGRAPHS AS METAPHOR FOR WORKING IN HE



Door

Wells Cathedral in pre-Covid January 2020. It was one of the few in the pack of 40 that had been entered into any sort of competition. It had formed part of a triptych showing the journey from the cathedral up the stairs to the chapter house. It was interpreted in different ways by the interviewees. Some saw it in positive terms as a doorway that opened onto a stairway of learning opportunities. Others saw the door as an institutional barrier that excluded young scholars from gaining access to the established institutions of the university: full-time jobs, opportunities for research and publication. People reacted similarly to images that included gates and bridges. Some see these structures as a means of access, others focus on the barrier in their way. The concrete brutalist architecture is an image taken on the steps to the underground carpark at Reading Magistrates' Court. Perhaps unsurprisingly people reacted to this as dystopian, harsh and technocratic. I had taken the picture as part of my coursework for the Open College of the Arts, Foundations in Photography. It was an exercise in light and shade.

An image of City workers beneath the Millennium Bridge comes from my Licentiate panel. It was interpreted as a metaphor for isolation, working in silos without regard for colleagues. In contrast to this, a picture of three young men building a sandcastle was picked to illustrate teamwork and collaboration. It was, like the photographer in the beach hut, a grabbed shot as I walked along the elevated promenade at Southwold. A photograph of a photographer taking a picture of something we cannot see, encouraged one participant to reflect on identity and her place in the educational



City workers

system, a metaphor for learning and research.

As a photographer, it is important to reflect on and to learn from this experience. One take-away is that other people don't necessarily pick what I consider to be my best work. This is in part because our selection criteria are different. I still have one eye on what a judge, or my peers, would think of an image. The truth is that the images have been through several different filters. First, I excluded what I thought of as the duds. Chiara chose a selection that she felt would elicit responses from the participants in her study. The participants chose images that worked for them as metaphors for aspects of their working lives. Beyond that, when I interviewed Chiara about this process, she selected examples that she felt worked well and excluded pictures that participants did not respond to; and I have highlighted a subset of those, partly as a means of telling my own story and to exclude images I was least happy with. No doubt the editor will apply yet another filter before publication.

It is revealing to have my work used and evaluated by people who approach it from a completely different point of view. In this case they are very obviously bringing their own experiences to bear on the image. They are not trying to understand what I, the author, was trying to say by creating it. The images must have said something to them. But they are bringing to it their own experiences and interpretations. They are telling that story to a researcher, who in turn interprets that account as part of her project. At each stage some meaning is lost and new interpretations added. It is an unsettling but enriching experience.



Arctic sunrise Boeing 737

Photography from the flight deck



MARTIJN KORT is an architecture and cityscape photographer from the Netherlands. Besides being a photographer he has been flying for the last 17 years, and capturing stunning images from the flight deck. He shares his images and his techniques for taking photographs in this demanding environment.

Sitting at 38,000 feet with only a few centimeters of glass and aluminium between me and the harsh outside conditions with temperatures of -56°C, I'm always gazing into the distance. Seeing the world passing by and taking up the ever changing views. When in those moments the light is just right, my photographer's heart takes over. I want to capture those unique moments and share them

with the world.

Taking the camera to work

I'm Martijn Kort, a photographer and pilot. In the beginning I never took a camera with me on the flight deck as it was very difficult to capture the images that I wanted. But as camera technology improved it became more and more of an interest

PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE FLIGHT DECK



Departing Funchal in a Boeing 737

to me to capture the amazing sights we tend to see as a pilot. In this article I want to share some of my work and share with you some of the technical aspects of capturing images in very difficult light conditions. The technique I use is similar to that which I use during my architecture shoots and, in fact, it can be useful in any photographic genre.

The most interesting time to capture any image from the flight deck is during sunrise/sunset or during night time. When the sun is up high, during the middle of the day, the light is very harsh and the contrast between the inside and outside of the airplane is way too big to capture any good images. As photographers we are always looking for good light and we tend to get very active during moments with perfect light, at least I am...

Being able to shoot during sunset or sunrise, the contrast between the inside of the airplane and the outside is more in balance. You can also capture the lights from the buttons, giving it an extra magical feeling. Another advantage relates to colour theory. The warm sunlight is casting a red and orange glow on everything it hits, while the rest of the sky (being in the shadow) has a deep blue color. Orange and blue are complementary colours, which helps in creating a pleasing balanced image.

So while cruising along at 38,000 feet, if the sun

peeks through some fluffy clouds on the horizon, illuminating the top of the clouds in front of me while the complete sky turns orange and red.... I'm freaking out! These magical minutes of perfect light just need to be captured.

When trying to capture moments like these, there are many things to consider. The airplane is moving at a speed of around 600 knots; the air is never completely still and I have no place to put a tripod. On top of this, the light inside the flight deck is very dim, requiring a slower shutter speed or a higher ISO. The longer the shutter speed, the easier it is for the image to become blurry because of the movement of the airplane. When selecting a higher ISO there is a risk of getting extra noise. There is always a trade-off in moments like these. Knowing the technical abilities of the camera and gear you use is very important as it will enable you to make good decisions on how to capture the image in a technically perfect way.

With modern cameras it's much easier to capture good images in these challenging conditions. Back in 2012 I got myself my first full frame DSLR.

On a side note, all the images are taken when I am not in control of the aircraft, or with the camera mounted and it fires away automatically. Safety is of course the first thing I will consider before taking any photo.



Boeing night landing

It had a pretty good high ISO performance for that time. But nothing compared to what the mirrorless cameras from 2021 are capable of. Still, I was able to capture some good images. That being said, only about 1 in 10 turned out sharp. This has to do with the fact the airplane is always moving and sometime I move too.

Technique

I want to capture images that cover the complete dynamic range, from the highlights to the shadows. When shooting during daytime the cockpit is very dark compared to the outside. It's impossible to capture the complete scene in one shot. But using the bracketing function on the camera I can capture several images each of which are exposed for a different area of the scene. Later I can merge these in Lightroom or Photoshop into a single exposure.

In order to merge these different shots successfully, there can't be any movement in between the shots. As I'm shooting hand held most of the time in the cockpit, I need to select a fairly high shutter speed so the possible movement between the shots is minimal. This means that I always have to choose between possible movement (slower shutter speed) vs

more noise (higher ISO). I can't change my aperture as the depth of field needs to be sufficient to capture close-by objects and the outside world. This means a lot of shots can be thrown away afterwards, but that's why I love digital photography.

Let's dive into exposure bracketing as this is a great technique to use when the dynamic range is greater than your camera can capture.

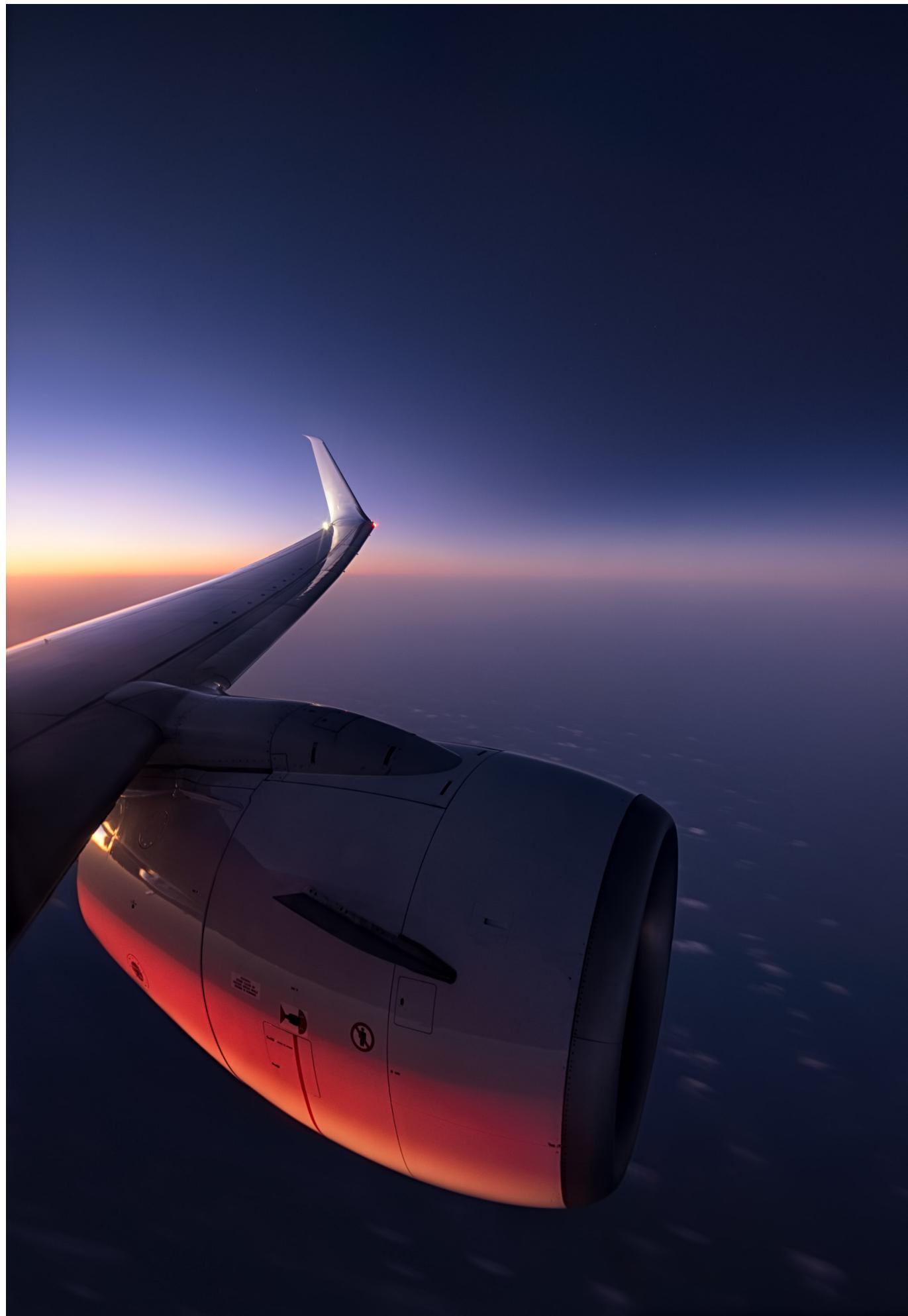
Increasing the dynamic range

Dynamic range, in simple terms, is how much light your camera can capture between black (shadows) and white (highlights). This is expressed in stops.

The human eye can see about 20 stops and the best camera can capture about 15 stops. If the scene has a greater dynamic range than the camera can handle, you can solve this by making several exposures. The different exposures are later combined into one photo. This way you can make a well exposed photo in all circumstances, even with the simplest camera.

The term High Dynamic Range (HDR) is often used when talking about exposure bracketing. You may remember the very oversaturated photos

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from the beginning of the HDR era. I'm not going to do that, but the same technique allows you to take nice, correctly exposed photos.

Most cameras have an automatic bracketing function (AEB/AB/BKT). This allows you to automatically create different exposures, and

later in post-processing combine them into one correctly exposed photo.

How to set up the camera

How you set this depends on the camera you are using. Each brand uses a different symbol and sometimes also a different name. One speaks



Night approaching



Thunderstorms from the cockpit

PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE FLIGHT DECK



The Boeing 737 MAX

of Bracketing (BKT), another about Automatic Exposure Bracketing (AEB) and yet another has only a +/- symbol. Check your camera's manual to see how to activate it.

How many stops you can capture also varies by brand and type of camera. Normally the choice is between 1, 2 or 3 stops. between each exposure. In addition, it is often possible to choose from 3, 5 or 7 shots taken.

It is important to shoot in aperture priority or manual mode. ISO must be fixed value, not AUTO. This ensures that the camera can only adjust the exposure by varying shutter speed and not by changing the ISO or aperture.

During daytime with a reasonably balanced distribution of light, using bracketing is often straightforward. Have the camera measure the correct average exposure (via matrix or zone metering) and set the bracketing to 2 stops to begin with.

In the more tricky situations, such as a cityscape in the blue hour, or inside of an airplane for example, you need to work a little differently to find the right settings.

The camera will probably misjudge the average exposure, so you have to determine this yourself. You can do this by using the histogram and

change the settings until there is no more clipping on the highlights. From this point you can start bracketing and in most of the cases all data is captured so you can later merge the shots in Lightroom into a HDR image.

Merging in Lightroom

Once the photos are loaded in Lightroom you can easily merge the different exposures. You do this by selecting the three exposures and then right click, 'Photo Merge' -> HDR.

In the new screen you have a number of options including ghosting which enables artefacts caused by movement to be removed.

A unique view

I hope you feel the same as I do when viewing my images. Seeing the beautiful light or the magical views makes me more aware of the beauty of our planet. Just before the pandemic hit us, I changed jobs and I no longer fly as a pilot. The timing was perfect but I still miss those magical few minutes of perfect light while being high up there. It's a one of a kind view.

See more of Martijn's work at martijnkort-photography.com or [@martijn_kort](https://www.instagram.com/martijn_kort) or [@flightdeck_views](https://www.instagram.com/@flightdeck_views).



FINDING UNICORNS

Adrian Lines ARPS

The starting image was taken at an arranged shoot and was part of a sequence of shots, where the handler moved around and interacted with a trained horse in an open field environment.

It was shot on a Fuji XT-2 with a 50-150mm f/2.8 lens. When shooting a live action sequence with multiple subjects, I ensure that I use a small aperture to increase depth of field, and also try and maintain a high shutter speed. The easiest way to do this is to use the Auto ISO feature of the camera, which allows the shutter speed and ISO to drift as necessary within a defined range.

When selecting an image to process, I start by shortlisting maybe four or five of the best images from the group of shots, looking carefully for good technical quality as well as interesting content. Sometimes a small change in head position or body pose can make a big difference to the final image.

I selected this particular image as I found the outstretched and open hand created both a physical and emotional connection between the horse and handler which I thought gave a good starting point to the narrative.

I initially replaced the background with an image of some woods, but still found that due to the aspect of the horse and handler, that the image had a lot of space at the bottom of the image. To make better use of this space, I decided to create the illusion of a reflection in water. This was basically achieved by copying and merging the current layers, and then vertically flipping them. To ensure that the reflection didn't dominate the image, I reduced both the brightness and contrast of this new layer.

I decided that making the final image appear to be during night time would create additional atmosphere and also allow me to use light textures to simulate mist and moonbeams.

DIGIT CHALLENGE

I created the mist effect by lassoing a section of a cloudy sky and turning it into a brush tip with the 'Define Brush Preset' option. Photoshop has a powerful option generally described as dynamic brushes. These dynamic functions are accessed whilst in brush mode, and are activated by clicking on the 'paintbrush in a folder' icon that appears at the top of the screen with the other brush options.

The options I use in the brush settings are Shape Dynamics, which allow you to jitter both size and angle of the brush tip as you paint with it, Color Dynamics which allow you to jitter the brightness and tones, and Transfer Dynamics, which allows you to jitter opacity and flow of the brush texture.

Whilst keeping the primary brush opacity down to 10% I gradually paint in the mist effect using the dynamic brush.

To ensure that the mist has a feeling of depth, I apply it on a number of different layers at different scales. For the nearest layer would have the largest brush tip used and the furthest layer the smallest.

It was at this stage, that I decided that turning the horse into a unicorn would help the narrative. I didn't have a handy unicorn horn lying around, but I did have a sea shell that had the correct basic shape, although it was somewhat squat, but stretching the image of the shell easily fixed it.

The final colour palette was created by applying a new layer, flood filled with a suitable blue and the blending mode of that layer changed to 'color'. I then pulled down the opacity to about 30%, so the tones correctly matched that of a night time scene.

Towards the end of the process I added a vignette by using the select tool to pick the boundary of my vignette, feathering the selection to 250 pixels, inverting the selection and filling the selection with 100% black. I then set the blending mode of this layer to 'soft light' and reduced the opacity to about 50%. I find this technique produces a subtle vignette which is not overtly visually obvious.

My final part of the post process is to add a 'Curves' adjustment layer and a 'Levels' adjustment layer. These allow me to correct the final Histogram of the image following all the adjustments, to ensure that I have a good range of tones, starting at 100% black and finishing at 100% white.

The evolution of the final image



All previous issues are available from the Digital Imaging Group magazine page of the Group's website at rps.org/digitarchive

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