



Still-Life Light Painting

By Ande Savage

As photographers, we all are fascinated with light. Beautiful light can make the most mundane object a work of art. But to create beautiful work, you have to understand the laws of light and its limitations. You have to be able to manipulate those limitations. Light travels in a straight line and the angle of reflection equals the angle of incidence, along with the inverse square law. So, the trick is to be very close to the object. Light painting is not all that complicated, but you do need to think about how light works and how to bend the light.

What is the meaning of still-life photography? Traditionally, a still life is a collection of inanimate objects arranged as the subject of a composition. Nowadays, a still life can be anything. What is light painting? What is light painting photography? Light painting is the art of creating photos by setting long exposure times on a camera and using a moving light source to “paint.” In light painting photography, you open your camera’s shutter and keep it open as you draw in the air with a light source. Combining the two will give you still-life light painting. This seems straightforward. However, in still-life, you have to start with virtually nothing, or in other words, a blank slate. When you paint with light, you set up your objects in a composition and paint your subject with a light -- in the dark.



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Image from: <https://www.iphotography.com/blog/light-painting-photography-tutorial/>

Light Painting

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How To Create a Fine Art Light Painting

Seven Simple Steps:

1. Compose – Prepare, plan, and set up something interesting. Use the rule of thirds to create a nice composition. Do not center the main subject. Try to position focal points along the one-third gridlines.

2. Focus – Use a light to lock focus on your main subject, then turn your Autofocus to Manual. This will prevent your camera from trying to focus in the dark. Turn off the lights and start your exposure. See step #4 for camera settings.

3. Illuminate – But keep it tight & keep it right, because shadows are the secret to fine art light painting. This means you need to stay close to your subject and paint from almost a right angle, about 70 – 80 degrees. Avoid lighting the subject from the front or it will look like headlights or an on-camera flash hit your scene and that would not be fine art! Use a painting motion to stroke the light in selective areas. Keep at least 50% of the scene in shadow!

4. Settings

Here are the most basic settings you're going to need to set on your camera in order to successfully get that long exposure and create a light painting:

- **Mode:** Manual or bulb
- **Shutter speed:** 30 seconds
- **F-stop or aperture:** f/8 or f/10
- **ISO:** 100

Set Up Your Camera for Light Painting

- Determine base exposures
- Focus the image
- Begin the exposure

5. What Equipment Do You Need for Light Painting?

- **Camera.** You'll need a camera in order to create a light painting - [A DSLR digital camera](#) with manual settings.
- **Tripod.** In a long-exposure photograph, your shutter is open for a long time.
- **Remote shutter release.** When shooting with a long shutter speed, even the slightest movement can blur the image.
- **Light sources.** Examples of popular light sources for light painting include light painting brushes, flashlights, lasers, glow sticks, strobe lights, candles, LED lights, or even string lights.

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6. Light Painting Tips and Techniques

There are a number of different light techniques. Here are a few to keep in mind:

- **Paint from different angles.** Rather than shining a light from behind your camera (or directly at it), try painting surfaces from the side or above to bring out their textures.
- **Wear the right clothing.** Wear dark, non-reflective clothing.
- **Use a red filter for testing.** When setting up your shots, it's important to keep your eyes acclimated to the low-light setting. Instead of using traditional flashlights which will ruin your night vision, try attaching a red filter to your testing lights.
- **Experiment with different surfaces.** Reflective surfaces like metal, glass, and mirrors can create surprising effects in light painting. For other applications, rougher surfaces like stucco and wood absorb more light while transparent materials like cloth can filter your light source in interesting ways.
- **Experiment with movement speed.** How bright your light painting will be is dependent on how quickly you move your light source. For instance, the longer you hold a light source in a specific spot, the more time your camera sensor will have to absorb it, and the brighter it will appear in the finished photo. Experiment with fast and slow movements to create shading effects that add complexity to your photos.

7. Get Creative While Drawing with Light

Finally, the most important thing to remember with light painting is to experiment, have fun, and develop your own style. Light painting is a medium that provides so many ways to express yourself so dive in and see what grabs you.

I hope to be able to do a hands-on light painting. In the meantime, here is some info for you to read and watch. This will help you to learn more about this subject.

<https://digital-photography-school.com/beginners-guide-to-light-painting/>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKOx5VLP9uA&ab_channel=STILLLIFEPHOTOGRAPHY
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0sk0j-tGr8&ab_channel=STILLLIFEPHOTOGRAPHY
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8EBSb-rD1E&ab_channel=STILLLIFEPHOTOGRAPHY



Light Painting Example
Light in the Darkness
By Ande Savage

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Light Painting Examples

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Here are a few more examples of Ande's experiments in light painting



Apple with a Twist



Paint with Light



Western Rose