

HOW TO MAKE A LIGHT PAINTING

What is light painting?

Light painting is a photography technique which uses long exposures to create magical images in dark spaces. You can create patterns, pictures and words or just highlight objects in your photos using light.



ABC Open Central West NSW

Equipment

ESSENTIAL

- Light source – sparklers, glow sticks, torches, mobile phones
- Manual camera – a camera where you can adjust the shutter speed

MORE ADVANCED

- Coloured cellophane or gels – you can shine your light through cellophane to make specific colours.
- Tripod – the long exposure means the camera must stay still so that you don't get blurry images. You can rest it on a stable surface like a table but a tripod will be much easier to move around.
- Shutter release remote control – to eliminate camera shake and 'click' when you are away from the camera.

- External flash – useful for lighting specific objects and areas such as faces
- Neutral density filter – to reduce external light so you can create light paintings during daylight or in brighter conditions.

Method

There are two main ways to make a light painting:

1. Use a sparkler, glow stick or other light source to 'draw' images.



ABC Open Wide Bay QLD

2. Use a torch or flash to selectively light all or part of an object in the scene.

Both can be used in combination with long exposure to make striking images in the dark.



Marcel Wiegerinck -
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/besie/5077939269/>

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Key Steps

1. Find a dark location where it will stay dark for the duration of the shoot. If a car drives past with its headlights on your shot could be ruined.
2. Determine the effect you want to make and choose your light source.
3. Put your camera somewhere steady. A tripod is ideal but you can also put your camera on a solid surface like a table.
4. Use your camera in manual mode and set your exposure to a long value. A shutter speed between 5 seconds to a couple of minutes is fine. The longer the exposure the more time you have to paint your picture.
5. For the sharpest image and to minimise ambient light, set your ISO to as low as it goes (e.g. ISO 50, 100, 200 are low settings) and your aperture to a small opening (f/stop numbers like 11, 16, 22)
6. Click and paint!

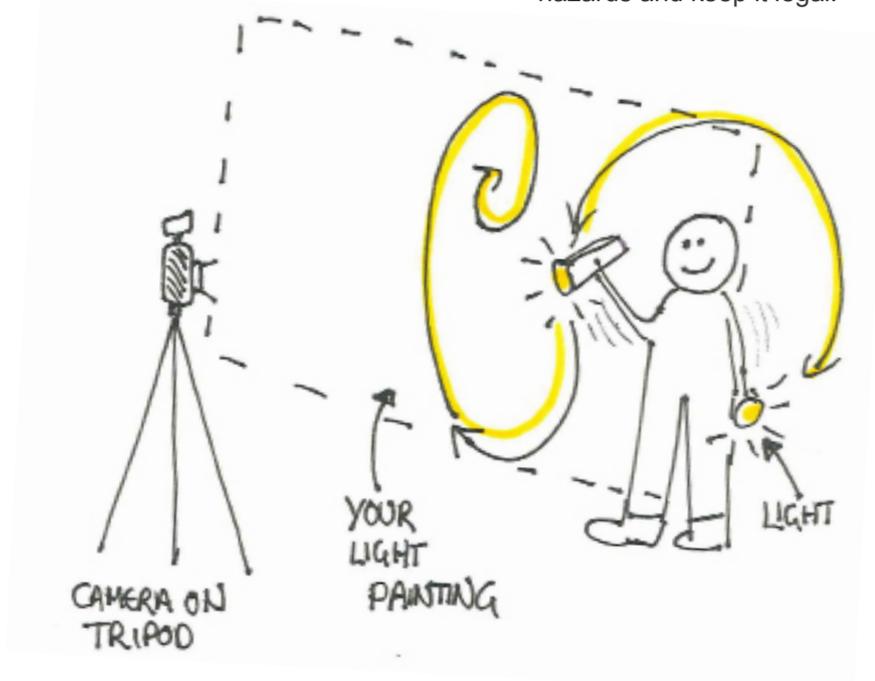
Some tips

- The longer you shine a light in a certain area the brighter it will be. Try aiming your lights towards the camera but not directly at the lens as this could 'burn' the image.
- To create gaps in your lines you can switch your torch on and off.
- If you don't want your body to show up wear dark clothing.
- To create a message, write the words backwards so that they appear the correct way in the photo. Practice a few times before you try the photo.
- Partner up - it's possible to make light paintings on your own but much easier and more fun if you do it with a friend.

SAFETY

You'll likely be running around in the dark so make sure you know the area is safe and you're aware of all potential trip hazards before you start.

If you are using sparklers be aware of potential fire hazards and keep it legal.



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Effects to play with

Draw pictures:



Credit: toma g -
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tomag/5564145585/>

Graffiti your name:



ABC Open Southern QLD

Put your town's name in lights:



ABC Open Goldfields WA

Trace objects:



ABC Open Goldfields WA

Use wheels to create amazing orbits:



ABC Open Goldfields WA

For more light writing tips and information on how to contribute head to the Snapped: Light painting project page: abc.net.au/open