



# The Image – Monthly NEWSLETTER

## The Abertawe Photographic Society –

Based near the heart of Swansea, Abertawe Photographic Society is an established, friendly and welcoming club, who's members both amateur and professional all share a common interest, in all aspects of photography.

Whether you are a complete beginner or a seasoned snapper, interested in digital techniques or 35mm film, there is a warm welcome by a likeminded group of people sharing in the search for the perfect image.

By sharing, not only our enthusiasm but also our skills, techniques and knowledge, we all grow as a club and by trying new things we all get the opportunity to stretch our boundaries. All members are encouraged to take part in club events.

The Society meets every Tuesday at:  
**Greenhill Community Centre**  
**Chapel Street, Dyfatty,**  
**Swansea.SA1 1NB.**

## This Month's Events: April

4<sup>th</sup> Open Night/show Images from Last Week

4<sup>th</sup> Hand-In for 3<sup>rd</sup> Monthly Comp.

11<sup>th</sup> Wildlife & Spring/Summer in Finland – Cate Barrow

18<sup>th</sup> Third Monthly Competition

25<sup>th</sup> B&W My Way – Brian Coleman

## Painting with Light

Thanks to the knowledge and skill of Jeff Driscoll, and Ferenc Bliszko, we have done this technique a few times during club night, but I thought that it would be useful to write an article about it so that members have at least an aide memoir to the technique.

Painting with light is a fun technique that gives great results. It is called painting with light because this is what you are actually doing while taking the shot. It does not take a lot of experimentation and is in fact quite an easy technique to carry. What is important is that you make simple planning arrangements before the shoot, which is not too difficult a task; just make sure you have the following items:

1. A camera capable of long exposures – with Your DSLR you will be able to see the results in “real time” and make corrections as you go. Shooting in RAW is best, but not essential.
2. A tripod, as you will be carrying out long exposures you will want to ensure camera does not move.

3. A remote shutter release able or remote camera controller.
4. A torch or other movable light means, such as a hand held strip light, etc.
5. A dark studio or outside location. Shooting at home is fairly simple to achieve, as long as you wait for night time. An outside location may not be so simple, especially in urban areas with bright street lighting or moving traffic. You can actually find designated “Dark Sky” areas on the internet.

OK, so you have planned and organized your equipment as listed above, so how do you carry out Light Painting, here's how:

- Set your camera on the tripod and take a sample shot with flash / lights on. This will help you verify that your composition is OK.
- Set the exposure to a relatively long value, you may want use the BULB setting. Stop down the aperture as much as you need. This is the time to turn off any lights.
- Make the click. Once the shutter is open use your flashlight to light the stuff that you want to “paint”. You can use the flashlight as a brush, and “smear” the light, just like you would have done with brush and paper. Or, you can use the light as a pen, and do precise work. Areas where you go slowly will be more lit then others. Be careful not to linger too much over the same stop – you will burn out areas, i.e. over-expose them, and end up with bright-white areas.

Once the shutter closes, check your image to see if the effect you wanted has been achieved. If not, shoot again making any necessary corrections to your setting or movement of your torch.

Another method is take a series of images and exposes different areas of your subject with each shot. With this series of images you can stack them in Photoshop, which will automatically choose the areas in each image for the final stacked image, very clever!

There are various tutorials in YouTube that may help you, here's one of many:  
<https://youtu.be/LBFpH8rCzRQ>

## Tripods

I know that all of you have tripods, but they are often bits of kit that are taken for granted, so I thought I would put together some perhaps obvious advice, or maybe not so obvious advice.

Tripods are essential for making sure that your camera remains in exactly the same place when shooting in low light, Macro, etc., and sometimes in exactly the same elevation and angle when wanting to stack images, in Photoshop for example. So

whether you are photographing the grandkids in the front room or trying to photograph the water spout erupting from Worms Head in an almost gale force wind will determine what type of tripod (or monopod) you should choose.

So what should you be looking out for when choosing a tripod?

**Leg Construction** - All tripods, as you will know, have three legs, but there the difference will end. Most tripods are made from aluminium, but the thickness and strength of the legs varies greatly. Very light aluminium tripods are usually a bit too wobbly, but are light to carry, but perhaps best avoided. On the other hand the better quality ones can be quite heavy.

Generally, more expensive tripods are constructed with Carbon Fibre legs, and provide the best weight/stability ratio, with as much as 30% off the weight, but with even greater rigidity. The downside is of course the cost, and may be double the price of comparable aluminium legs. However, if you're going to be lugging around your tripod a lot it may be worth the additional cost.

**Leg Sections** – tripod legs are made in sections, usually three but sometime four. This allows you to have the tripod standing at three to four times its collapsed height. Each section is locked in place, so a three section legs allows less locking and unlocking to a four section. However a Four section tripod will collapse to a smaller size, making it easier to carry, and to pack into a suitcase for travelling.

**Leg Locks** – Leg locks allow for the unlocking to extend them, then locked again before use. There are two main types of leg lock. The most popular is the quick release lever, which is the speediest system to operate. Twist action legs locks are slower to use, more prone to slippage and less easy to see at a glance whether they're locked, but there are no chunky attachments to stick-out and add bulk.

The tripod manufacturer Gitzo produce a premium twist lock for their tripods, and are reputed to not suffer from these issues as much, but they are more expensive.

**Leg Angle Adjustments** - Most decent tripods enable the legs to be opened out at a range of angles right up to 90° to the centre column. This makes it easier to set the tripod up on uneven ground, or to splay the legs wide for low level shooting. Benbo tripods allow you to set all the legs simultaneously any angle via a single lock.

**Feet** - Tripods generally come with rubber feet, but if you often shoot in muddy fields you may prefer spikes for a firmer grip, some tripods do offer both, with rubber feet that screw up to reveal spikes.

**Centre Column** - The centre column enables the camera to be raised a bit higher still, once the legs are fully extended, but its best to avoid using it if possible as it reduces the stability. They can be handy though for turning horizontally like a boom arm, making it easier to point the camera directly downwards towards the ground. Most columns have to be removed and re-inserted to achieve this, whilst most can also be inserted upside down for ground level photography.

Some centre columns feature a hook on the bottom to hang your camera bag – the extra weight helps stabilise the tripod, especially in windy conditions.

**Tripod Head** – I must admit that I bought a tripod to suite my needs as well as my pocket, but then bought a pan and tilt head, which is easily screwed onto the top of your tripod via a 3/8" UNC screw. So it may be worth investing in a good tripod head, whether it be ball and socket or pan and tilt, is essential for quick operation, firm support and flexibility.

**Ball heads** - Ball and socket heads, or ball heads for short, allow your camera to be quickly adjusted in all directions and then clamped still in one single movement. This makes them ideal for when speed is of the essence and when your subject, or composition, needs adjusting across more than one plane.

Over recent years the ball head has overtaken the traditional three-way head due to their flexibility and often that they are lighter units too. More advanced ball heads sometimes offer resistance control to allow for finer adjustment, spirit bubbles for levelling, and quick-release plates for easier attachment.

**Pan and tilt heads** - Pan and tilt heads, as their name suggests, provide their principal adjustments with a horizontal pan and a vertical tilt, and often add a third sideways movement for levelling or portrait shooting (a three-way head). By loosening all of the adjustment screws it is possible to move freely in any direction, much like the ball head, but by tightening one you will limit movement in a particular axis.

This makes these heads ideal for tracking subjects such as cars or wildlife. Their precise control over each axis also makes them suited to landscape and studio photography.

**Panoramic heads** - These specialist heads are designed to allow the camera to rotate around the exact 'nodal' point. By doing this, it makes the process of stitching images together, to form a panorama, much easier as it avoids parallax errors (foreground in relation to background).

To correctly set these heads up requires some preparation and the positioning will vary for different lenses. Many photographers will mark the positions for each lens. The weight and added bulk of these heads mean they are not suitable for general use but, if you want a perfect panorama, you should definitely consider one; that's unless your camera already has a panorama function.

**Supports** - Apart from tripods there is a wide range of other devices designed to help steady your camera and avoid camera shake. Depending on the type of photography you are doing, or where you are taking it, using a tripod isn't always possible so these devices offer a support in other ways. Beanbags are a popular choice for nature and travel photographers as they allow you to shoot from a low angle or steady the camera easily on a rough surface or ledge. Joby's Gorillapods are also a handy alternative and have bendable legs that

can wrap around objects to position your camera almost anywhere.

**Monopod** - A smaller and lighter alternative to a tripod, monopods are ideal for panning subjects and anywhere else where a tripod is impractical.

Finally, if you're thinking of buying a new tripod here's a few tips:

- Don't buy cheap, flimsy tripods. It's a false economy.
- Test the stability in the shop before buying, by extending the legs and pressing down from above. Carry out twisting and back-and-forth movements to see how much the legs wobble.
- If you plan to carry one on hikes very often, try to spend a bit more on a carbon fibre model. Your back will thank you.
- With tripods, the less plastic there is the better. Avoid plastic heads especially.
- Keep a small support, such as a tabletop tripod in your bag for emergencies. It's amazing how useful they can be.