TIPS CARD PAINTING WITH LIGHT

FRAME UP USING A TRIPOD TO COMPOSE YOUR HOMEWORK

MASTER MANUAL MODE TO GET PERFECT LIGHT PAINTINGS

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USE YOUR AF ASSIST LAMP TO ACHIEVE SHARP FOCUS IN THE DARK

USE A FLASHLIGHT TO MAKE STUNNING LIGHT GRAFFITI

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How to use your AF assist lamp to achieve sharp focus

- USE YOUR ASSIST LAMP
  Most modern cameras have a built-in autofocus assist lamp that shines in low light to briefly light up your subject and help the autofocus lock-on. It may not be enabled by default, so dive into your settings menu and make sure it’s activated. Now, when you half-press the shutter to focus in poorly lit situations the AF assist lamp will fire out a beam of light.

- TURN ON THE LIGHTS
  If you’re still struggling to focus with your camera’s AF Assist Lamp it might be worth turning on your room lights. Alternatively you could ask a friend to shine a torch on your subject to help your camera lock-on.

- ENABLE LIVE VIEW
  To check your focus is sharp you can enable your camera’s Live View mode and hit the Zoom In button. This will digitally zoom in to your shot and make your subject larger in the frame so you can see if it’s in focus. When you’ve taken the shot it’s a good idea to play the image back on your camera’s rear LCD screen. Here, you can zoom in and check that the image is sharp. If it’s not, now’s the time to refocus and have another go.

- USE SINGLE SERVO AF
  AF-S or Single Servo AF is the autofocus mode of choice for stationary subject as it won’t refocus when you’ve locked on. Make sure you’ve set it.

- USE ‘LOOSE’ FRAMING
  Composite your shot a little looser than you would normally, to make your shot a bit bigger to create the extra space.

How to frame up using a tripod to compose your shot

- FRAME UP YOUR SHOT USING A TRIPOD
  Painting with light requires a long exposure, so you have time to trace around your subject with a torch light. These exposures can range from a couple of seconds to several minutes, so framing up with a tripod is absolutely essential. This will render your stationary subject pin-sharp, while recording the moving torch as an ethereal beam of light. A tripod with a ball head is a great choice as these allow you to easily recompose and can be locked off with a single twist of a dial.

- GET A CLEAN BACKGROUND
  Shoot against a dark, clean background and be careful not to shine your torch on this area, so the background remains dark and full of contrast. This will help your subject, and the surrounding light trails, stand out. This cements the viewer’s eye on the subject and not the background.

How to use a flashlight to make stunning light graffiti

- PICK THE RIGHT TORCH
  To create the best light paintings you’ll want to carefully choose your lighting tool. The large beam of a flashlight is fine for wide compositions, such as low-light street scenes, because the torch is much further away from the camera, making the trails appear smaller. But when shooting closer to your subject, like in our guitar still life setup, the beam is too broad. Instead, it’s worth investing in a torch that allows the bare bulb to be exposed. This will give you a much smaller light source, creating much finer trails.

- PAINT YOUR SUBJECT
  A torch with a candle mode that exposes the bare bulb is a great choice, as it throws out light in all directions. But, if you’re using a directional light source, this will only throw out light one way. This means if you use a phone light for your light painting, you’ll need to paint your light trails, then flip the phone over. It’s far easier to paint in subject to light it up in the same exposure. This will stop it coming out underexposed.

- WEAR DARK CLOTHING
  The torch will illuminate everything in your shot, even your hand, resulting in a bright blury area where your hand has moved. Wear dark clothing and gloves to stop yourself appearing in the shot. Move your torch as smoothly as possible for clean trails.

- INJECT MULTIPLE LIGHT TRAILS
  Switching off your torch at the end of a light trail can make it look jumpy. Instead, we recommend leaving the torch on, but putting a piece of black card in front of the camera lens until you’re ready to start painting again.

How to master manual mode to get perfect light paintings

- WHY SHOOT MANUAL?
  Your camera’s metering mode won’t be accurate in limited light scenarios or pitch black, so Manual mode offers much more consistent results. Here, you can set all of the exposure variables – aperture, shutter speed and ISO. Set the aperture to f/8 for a decent ISO to 400 and start with a shutter speed of 10secs. If the resulting image is too bright, reduce your ISO value a little, if it’s too dark, increase it.

- SHUTTER SPEED
  This is how long the shutter is open, exposing the sensor to light. If you shoot in a dark room at night, the shutter speed won’t affect the exposure much. Instead, the brightness of your picture will be determined by the brightness of your torch and how much light it throws onto your subject. It’s important to choose a shutter speed that gives you long enough to paint in your trail, or trails, in full, without stopping abruptly.

- WHITE BALANCE
  Changing your camera’s White Balance (WB) preset will alter the effective colour of the torch light. Try setting it to Incandescent for a white/blue look, or Shade for a more orange look. An LED torch will give cooler light than one with a regular bulb. Shoot JPEG and change the White Balance after each shot until you get a tone you like the look of.