

Expressions

Conversations in landscape photography



JOURNAL 4

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Conversations in landscape photography



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© Cover Image: by Margaret Martin

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It is hard to imagine we have reached our fourth volume of Expressions and infrared photography has had little mention. For some, infrared photography instils no interest and is maybe a step too far away from visual reality. For others, it is very much a way of wandering into another world of ethereal expression. In this volume, Paul Gallagher recounts how he revisited infrared and how his perception changed through the simple application of letting go of preconceived ideas.

There are many places we would like to visit that will challenge us and also find us submerged in an entirely new experience. From deserts to forests, to vast open plains, to standing on the edge of storm-driven seas, Paul Gallagher and Michael Pilkington have photographed many environments but one they visited recently introduced them to a new way of working and a place they had always wanted to visit. Last year they ventured to eastern Greenland and here we are able to see the results of their travels.

As we often hear, variety is the spice of life, or as Ansel Adams eloquently put it, "Photography, as a powerful medium of expression and communication, offers an infinite variety of perception, interpretation and execution". We stated in the first volume of this journal that we want to see as many ways as possible how photographers express themselves through their work. Here we are very fortunate to show the beautiful work of Margaret Martin and her Multiple Exposure and Intentional Camera Movement images.

In the pursuit of landscape photography, sometimes being as far away from people and the trappings of a busy life becomes an integral ingredient to celebrating the landscape. There are many parts of the UK in which we can escape, but one often overlooked is the absolute calm and solace found whilst nestled in the surroundings of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula at Lochaber in the Highlands of Scotland. We have featured the stunning work of two photographers, Katrina Brayshaw and Mark Lawrence as a means of whetting your appetite for this tranquil corner of mainland Scotland.

Lastly, we would like to thank you for continuing to read what we present to you in Expressions and hope you enjoy this issue.



Working in another light

by Paul Gallagher

Working in another light

by Paul Gallagher

When we are out there taking photographs, we are essentially capturing reflected light. A small part of the light that we collect is infrared light that is invisible to the naked eye. The most common use for infrared photography is for industrial, military and scientific purposes, but when used in the landscape, the results are often fascinating and 'other worldly'. Infrared photography was first used during WWII as it became a valuable tool in cutting through atmospheric haze making it easier to identify buildings that reflect very little, infrared light so appearing dark in an open landscape. In the thirties and forties, the movie industry embraced infrared-sensitive films and during the sixties infrared images were used for album covers.

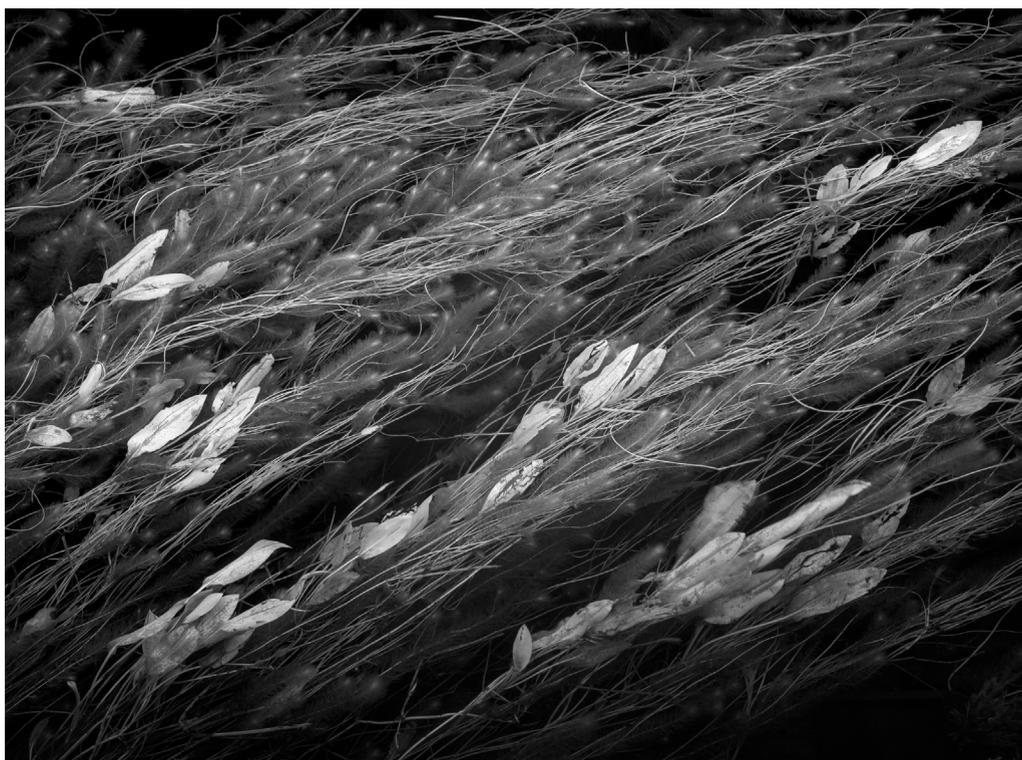


© Paul Gallagher

During the days of film, you could quite easily buy infrared film over the counter, load it in your camera and head out; but with the introduction of digital, this became a slightly trickier affair as digital camera manufacturers fit infrared cut-off filters in front of camera sensors which prevent the sensor from seeing infrared light.

The process of getting your camera converted to capture only infrared light is quite straight forward but certainly best left to the experts. Essentially the infrared blocking filter is removed allowing infrared light to be seen by the sensor, and in its place a visible light filter is fitted, allowing only infrared light to hit the sensor. An alternative approach, is to place an infrared filter on the front of your camera lens. These are still available but let virtually no light through making it very hard to compose, focus and introduce prohibitively long exposure times.

After you have had your camera converted to infrared you can use it as you ordinarily would and even use autofocus. The only difference will be if your camera is mirrorless, you will see the world in real-time infrared, whereas, through the viewfinder, a DSLR will present everything as colour. There are several choices of infrared filter that you can choose from that will give you subtly different results. The most common conversion is the 720nm conversion which gives the best black and white images. A filter such as the 665nm is good, if you would like to try colour infrared which is quite popular where the finished images will have blue skies and pink foliage. For me, the clarity and tonal range from the 720nm filter is perfect and offers a vast array of opportunities. The average cost of getting your digital camera converted to infrared is currently £350 and most people commit to this when they upgrade and convert their old camera body.



© Paul Gallagher

You may be asking what will objects look like if photographed in infrared? Firstly, water and blue skies absorb infrared light, so they appear very dark in the final image, hence that 'classic' infrared landscape image with almost total black skies and pure white clouds. Skin reflects a lot of infrared light so the person in the picture will look very pale indeed and, in some cases, ghostly! The most obvious consideration in landscape photography is how foliage appears. Chlorophyll in green leaves and grasses reflects a great deal of infrared light and is rendered in very pale tones.

About ten years ago Advanced Camera Services contacted me and explained that they were converting DSLR cameras into infrared and asked would I like to try one out. Of course, I agreed, but when the camera arrived all I could picture in my mind were the hard blacks and bleached whites of the infrared photographs I had made as a photography student many years ago. The camera I was sent was the Nikon D70 with a little 6-mega-pixel sensor.

Having agreed to do this, one day I headed to a place where I often went as a student, Formby Point in Merseyside, with the sole intention of exploring infrared again. It was springtime and there was a lot of sun about and fresh leaves on the trees and blue skies with white clouds which in general terms is regarded as good for infrared photography. I arrived home and uploaded the files to my computer and got exactly what I expected. The tones were very hard, high in contrast, and I was not particularly impressed or inspired to take the camera out again. Later that year I headed up to the north west coast of Scotland. I was still carrying round the little D70 IR converted camera. I had plenty of time to consider the results from my earlier trip to Formby Point and the conclusions I came to were, if I could subdue the contrast of the infrared image, then possibly it would produce photographs that were some way pleasing to me.



© Paul Gallagher

I began by heading out in what a lot of infrared photographers considered the poorest conditions: overcast days with hardly any direct sun. In fact, I was discovering that virtually no sun at all gave me the tones I wanted. I also soon discovered that the use of graduated filters became almost redundant. Because of the way the camera records this narrow bandwidth of light, there were hardly any situations where I felt the need to fit a graduated filter as the highlights were recorded beautifully.

Working with an IR converted camera that essentially sees what we cannot, poses challenges when you are trying to standardise your approach. I soon learned that the slightest introduction of sunlight, even soft sunlight, would throw the exposure to the right instantly, even if this was by no means apparent to the naked eye.

Subtle light is slightly exaggerated by infrared resulting in an image that displays beautiful luminosity in the highlights without the overbearing shadows associated with strong light. Therefore, if you can understand these subtleties, and learn to 'see' them, you can capture fleeting moments of light that IR will render as sparkling and retain shadows with rich luminosity.



© Paul Gallagher

So, the problem was the light! As ridiculous as that sounds, that was all that it was. The brighter the day and the more prevalent the sunlight, the brighter the highlights and I would then have a struggle on my hands when it came to processing the files. The other aspect of infrared that fascinated me was the narrow bandwidth of light that the camera captured. The resulting histogram was narrow, which led me to consider the flexibility of such a file if exposed in more subtle conditions. One afternoon I was driving through Applecross in the Highlands of Scotland when a storm was building across the Inner Sound, and the Isle of Rona and Isle of Skye were slowly vanishing in the approaching cloud. Although I had decided that if I were to explore infrared again, it would have to be in 'quieter light', this seemed to be taking things a little too far, but I was wrong.

The composition was simple. Looking out over a small headland towards to Inner Sound in the background was the approaching storm and situated in the foreground was a small stand of pines. Without any filters at all I placed the camera on my tripod and made the exposure. When I got back that evening, I looked at the file and after it was converted to black and white I was faced with an image of beautiful tones and subtle greys. The storm clouds were rendered wonderfully and the pines had a subtle pale glow as the low levels of infrared light had been reflected from the many green needles on their branches. It was apparent that if I had taken this same composition on my D800e and converted it to black and white, I would have had a challenge with retaining the brighter detail in the skies set against the darker shadow tones of the pines.

You need to remember to use your camera as you usually would and feel free to use autofocus and the camera's internal light meter. One of the most important things to remember when shooting in infrared is not to expose fully to the right as photographers are often told. The reason for this is that the histogram from an infrared converted camera is narrower and shooting to the right will push many of the image tones into highlights which are difficult to separate later in image editing. My recommendation is to keep your histogram distribution out of the last right quartile of your histogram band.

Use the custom white balance that will be set by the technicians that converted your camera and never alter it. If your white balance is altered or set wrongly your image will appear a strong red or blue which make image evaluation on the back of your camera and processing tricky. Your preview image and raw file should display a sepia tone. Avoid vast areas of green such as fields of barley or grasslands. These contain huge amounts of chlorophyll and will offer virtually no tonal variation in your finished image, appearing as a block of pale grey.



© Paul Gallagher

If you are used to looking at a scene where you would ordinarily reach for your graduated filters, firstly try an exposure without them. Remember the camera sensor cannot see all the wavelengths of light your eyes are seeing and will probably cope very well without them enabling you to simplify your approach. Lastly, when you convert your image file to black and white, the initial image you will be faced with will look pretty lifeless and flat. Do not give up here. Look at it as a benefit whereby you are not grappling with highlight and shadow problems and continue to tease them out arriving at a beautifully toned final image.

Infrared for me is the platform that has replaced my beloved black and white film I used for over thirty years, and my converted infrared camera goes everywhere I go, and I can switch between colour and infrared as and when I choose, which for me, is complete freedom. If you ever search online for infrared photography, the results will mostly look the same. Photographs made in sunlight with deep blacks and bright whites. I am not stating there is anything wrong with this, but I am convinced that there is so much more to infrared than a single approach in the same way there is not one approach to making any black and white photograph.



© Paul Gallagher



The wilderness of Greenland

by Paul Gallagher

The wilderness of Greenland

by Paul Gallagher

Greenland is vast and that sense of space is apparent the moment you arrive at its shores. It is an island covering 2.2 million square kilometres, eighty percent of which is covered by permanent ice sheets consisting of hundreds of glaciers that carve icebergs into its surrounding seas.

Getting there is relatively straightforward with regular flights departing from Keflavik International Airport in Iceland, and you know you are arriving somewhere remote when you realise your plane is landing on a gravel runway serving a tiny airport nestled on the edge of the ocean. From here, most of Greenland is explored by boat or helicopter. The Inuit people of Greenland are settled in small communities close to the edge of the sea and the vast majority of them are traditionally involved in the fishing industry and have been historically.

It is fascinating to disembark your boat and spend time wandering around these villages where the Inuit people are very warm and welcoming, and it soon becomes clear that life is hard living in such a remote and often bitterly cold part of the world. My first visit to Greenland was last November and I soon became aware that the adventure was going to be very different to any other landscape in which I had worked.

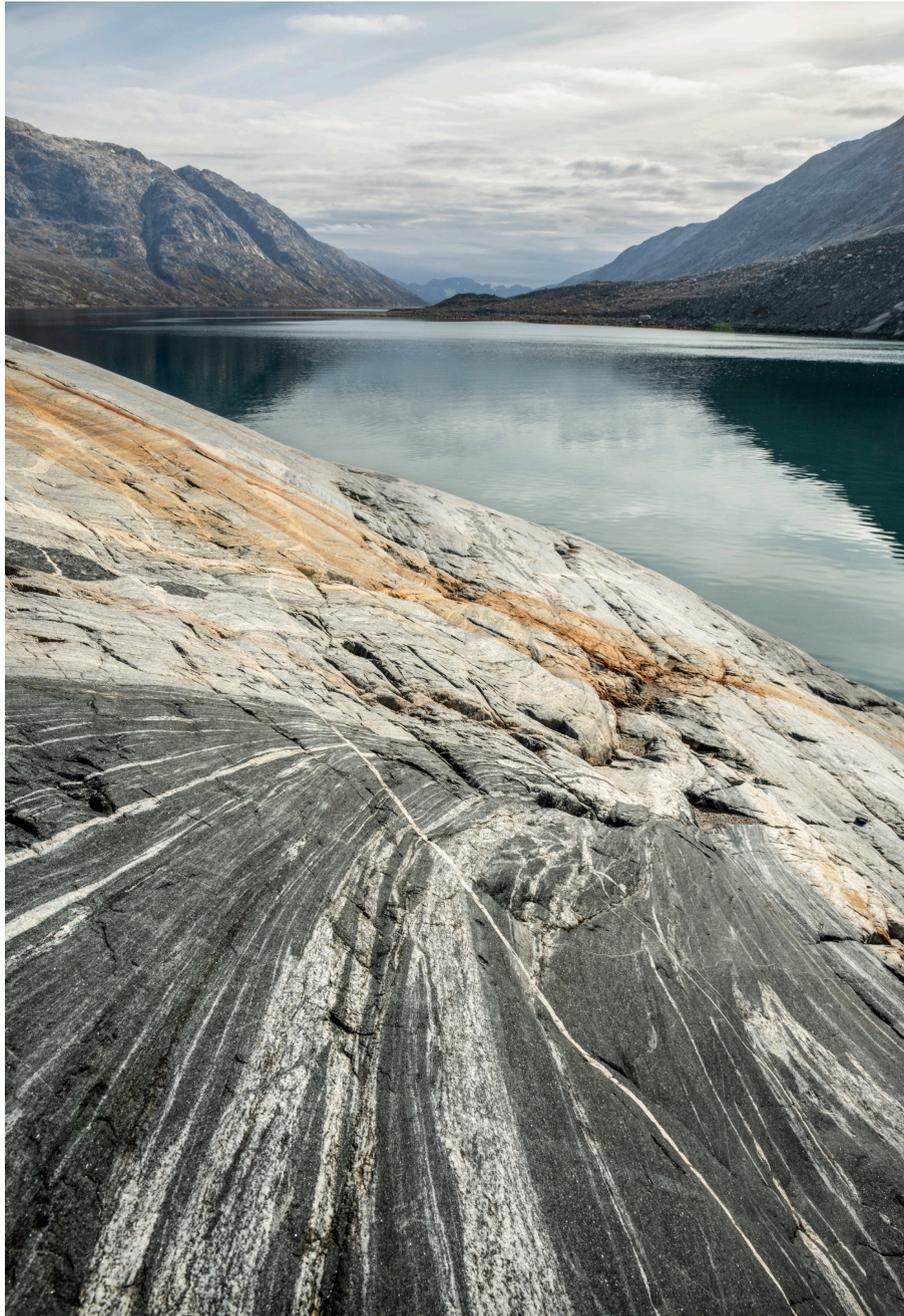
Firstly, I had never photographed from a boat before but soon realised the advantage it offered when photographing the huge icebergs. The skilled skippers of the boats are used to getting close to icebergs and can provide the most incredible vantage points from which to photograph. It is hard to describe seeing a glowing blue mass of ice floating in the open sea and it taking ten minutes in a boat to get close. When you do eventually arrive at its side, they can often tower above your boat several stories high. It may sound obvious, but the blues of the icebergs are quite transfixing. They seem to display an inner glow, even without the presence of sunlight, and their different shapes and profiles are limitless.

To head inland was to navigate the boats up many of the fjords. Because of the extensive ice sheets covering Greenland, each fjord led to an active glacier and the closer we got the more icebergs we had to navigate around. It is only when you are at the base of vast ice sheets can you gain some semblance of the scale of the glaciers. On occasion, we would land the boats on the edge of the fjord and explore the freshly glaciated bare rock, often revealing spectacular geology that extended upward to the mountains above.

For me, Greenland was entirely different to anywhere I had been before. It felt remote, but the people always felt welcoming and observing how they lived and the challenges they face was fascinating. The landscape is as pristine as anything I have experienced before and the silence of the place brought with it an inner peace and tranquillity.



© Paul Gallagher



© Paul Gallagher



© Paul Gallagher



© Michael Pilkington



© Michael Pilkington



© Michael Pilkington



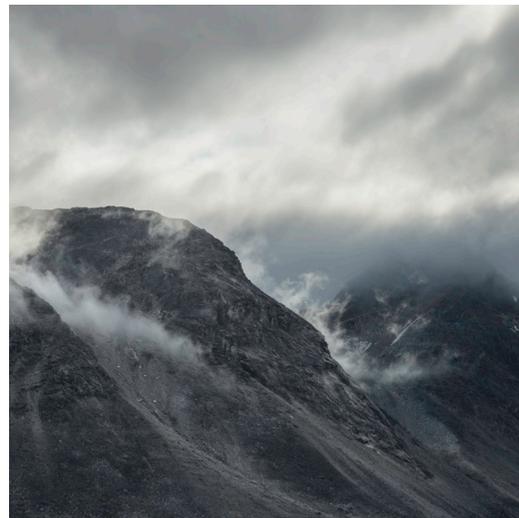
© Michael Pilkington



© Michael Pilkington



© Michael Pilkington



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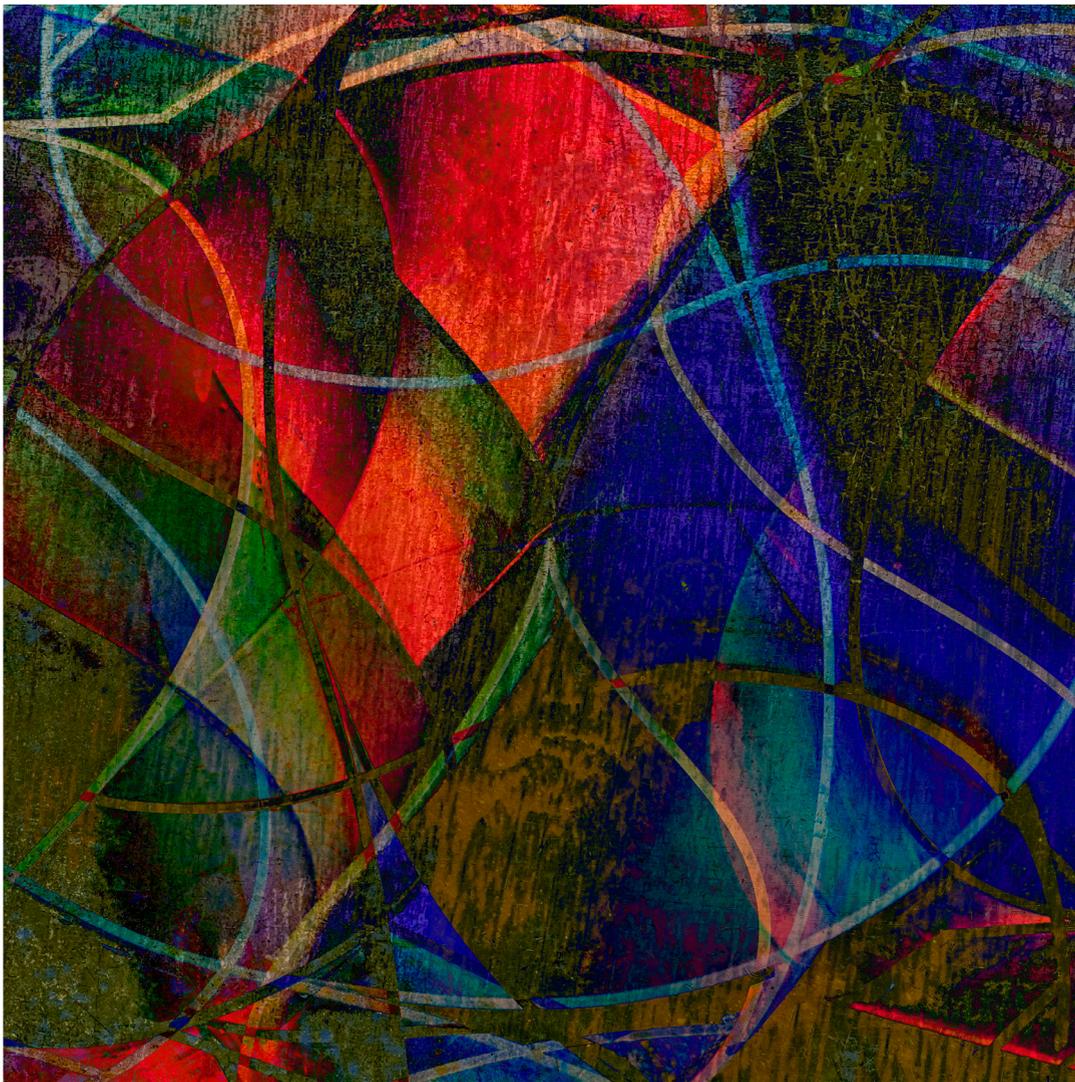
© Paul Gallagher



Featured Photographer: Margaret Martin

Margaret Martin

From time to time, we happen upon work that makes us stop, look and engage. Being a passionate landscape photographer, it is all too easy to delve into books and magazines that portray the landscape in its literal beauty, but like all visual arts, it's good to be malleable in our vision and enjoy other explorations. This is what we see in the work of Margaret Martin. Having worked portraying the landscape as we all encounter it, she embraced her freedom and the work we see in this section sets out an altogether different proposition: true freedom of expression. The resulting images are transfixing in their form, colour and beauty.



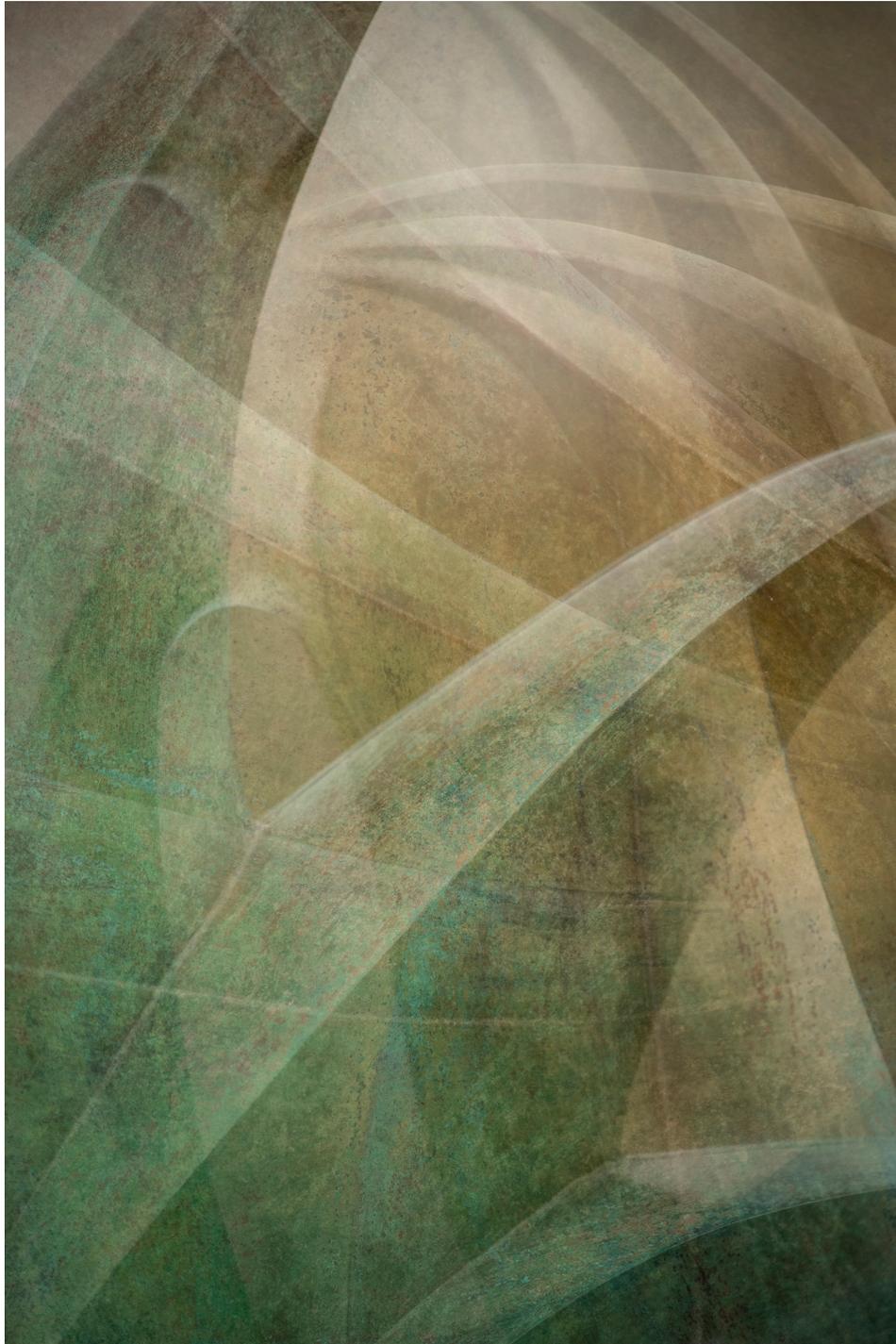
© Breaking Free by Margaret Martin

Where did your photography begin?

Although I had a camera from my early twenties I mostly used it for holidays and later for photographing the family. It was not until the early 2000s that I became more serious, with the increase in popularity of digital cameras. I bought a bridge camera and spent a lot of time on plants and flowers. I was enjoying this as I love gardens and thought my photographs were quite successful so I decided to improve my knowledge of photography. I signed up to a course at Reading College. I soon became aware that my bridge camera was not going to be good enough to get the best out of my course. I bought a DSLR whilst most other people with simpler cameras just left. I did not find it as easy to use as my bridge camera! I learned to work in RAW and in manual which I have found useful as it now just comes naturally to me. During the course I tried different genres but found I was not particularly interested in studio work.

When I retired I decided to try landscape photography as we had always enjoyed the outdoors and walking. My husband would probably say that that was the end of the enjoyment of walking as he believes photography ruins a good walk. This was when I learned most about using my camera and about using tripods and filters. Although I have never really enjoyed using tripods or filters I do think that it taught me to look around a location, think and take time to compose my image. I have never been very good with big landscapes and as time went on I began look more for smaller details. I began to do more cityscapes, long exposure and learned more about night photography with Doug Chinnery and Charlotte Gilliat. I do try a bit of street photography but it does not come naturally to me.

In 2009 I joined a camera club. My main aim was to meet other people interested in photography and expand my knowledge. I did make some good friends but I am not sure how much the club improved my photography. I do enter competitions but I don't feel a great compulsion to do so. One thing that was really beneficial at this time was joining a group posting one photograph a week. It meant I used my camera each week and was always looking for the next subject or location. I carried this on for two years and it definitely improved my work.



© Light from above by Margaret Martin

Who has been the biggest influence in the different genres you have explored?

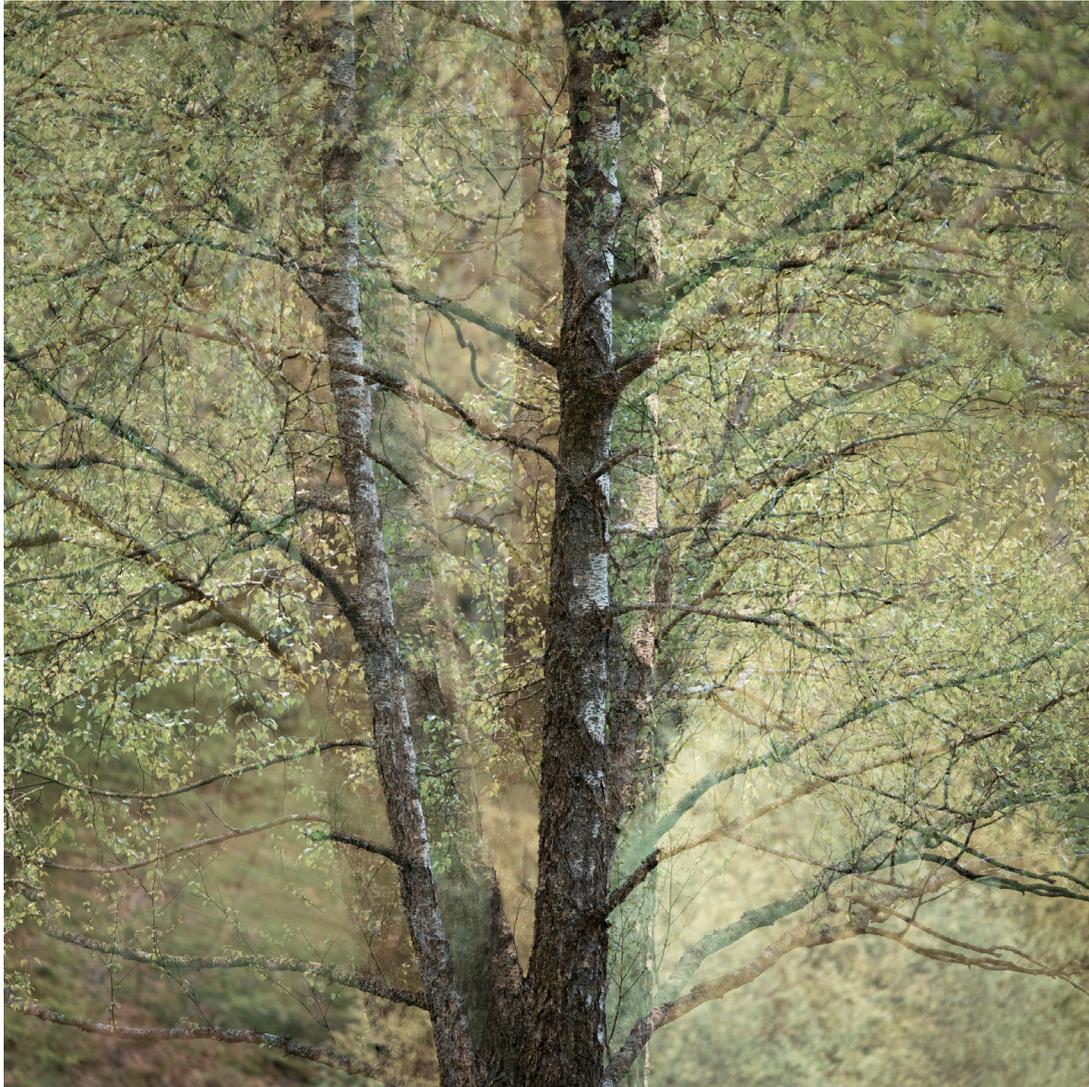
Though many people will have influenced my work over the years, in ways big and small, Valda Bailey and Doug Chinnery have had the greatest effect. They have helped me to develop into the photographer I am today.

They promote the relationship between photography and art. Before becoming a more serious photographer I enjoyed art and the work of a number of artists. Firstly, people like Turner, Van Gogh, Kandinsky and the Impressionists; then, many other more modern ones, mostly those with an interesting use of colour and shape. I enjoyed visiting galleries and exhibitions and still do. I would draw if I was able but my camera replaces the paintbrush. An artist friend of my husband who was visiting our house said, "I thought you did photography, but this is art."

I often buy photography books but they are usually of lesser known photographers who are working in a way that interests me.



© Fez from Tannery by Margaret Martin



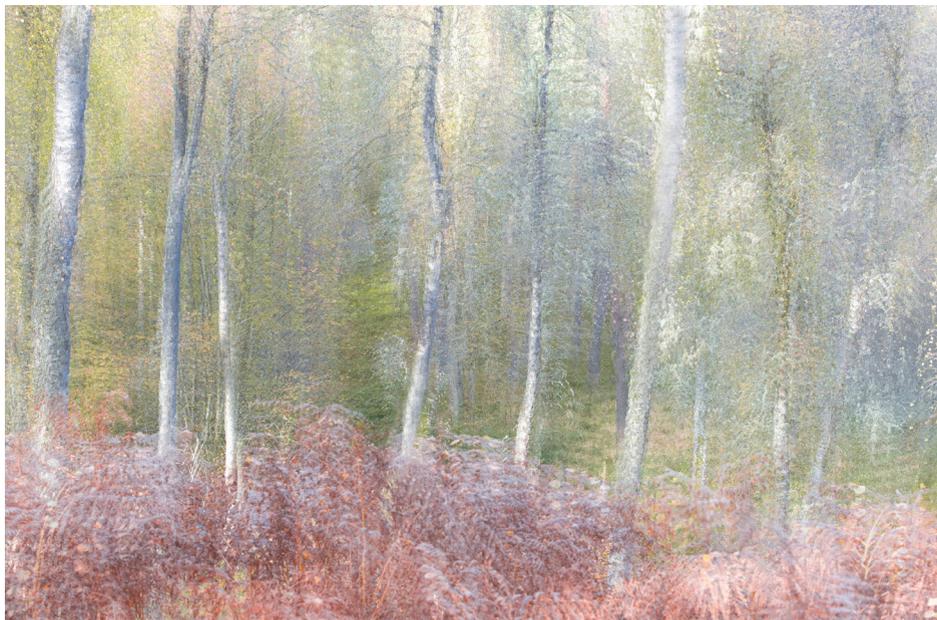
© Birches by Margaret Martin

How and why did you enter a more creative direction in your photography?

By 2015 I was thinking that I was never going to be any better at landscapes because I had lost interest in dawn and sunset and I was never going to spend all the time planning that a good landscape image demands. Whilst on a night photography workshop with Doug Chinnery, he was talking about the work of Valda Bailey. Once home I looked at her website and knew immediately that there was something there that I had to try. She was pushing the boundaries of traditional photography and producing more expressive images. Her work, and Doug's, were about colour, light and form and based on multiple exposure and ICM. The finished effect was more like painting, than the usual photograph. It was an effect I really liked.

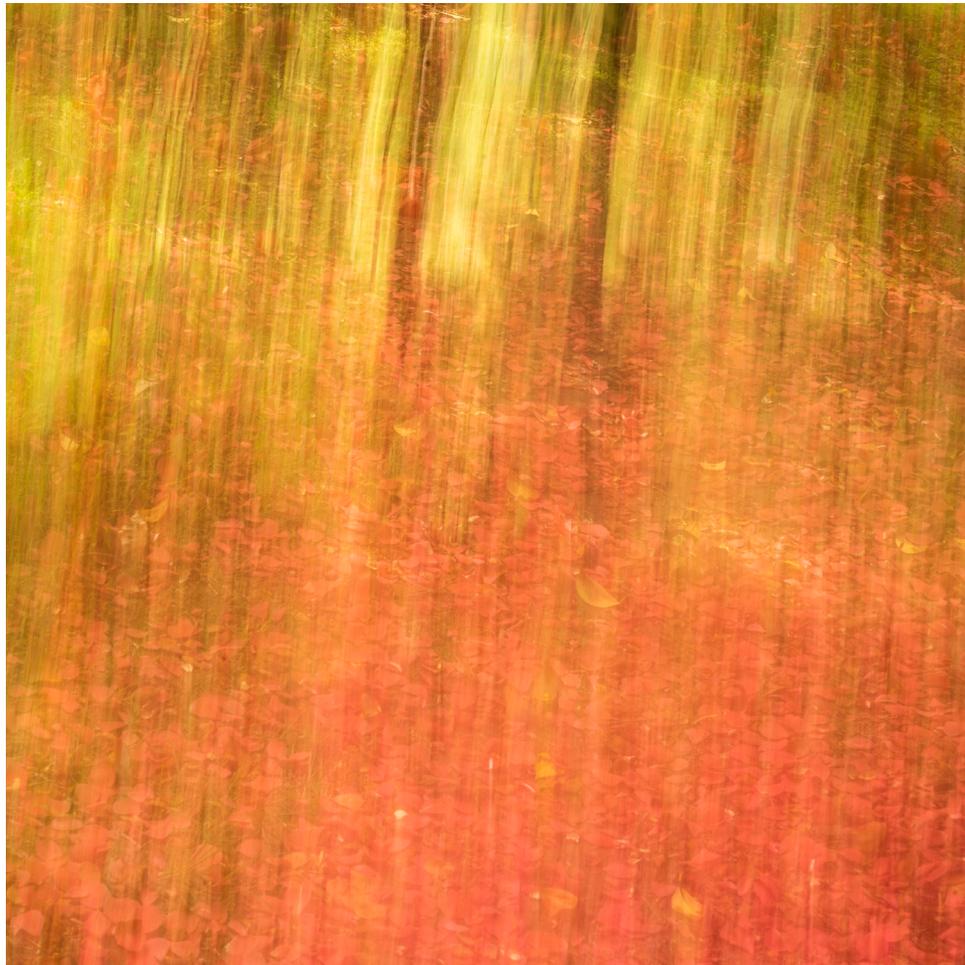
In 2016 I was able to find a place on a workshop with Doug and Valda and that was a turning point in my photography. Although someone can teach you the basics of how to do ICM or how to use your camera for multiple exposure, it is more difficult to teach you which things will go together to make an image or how fast to move your camera. Those are decisions you have to make yourself.

Sunlit Birches was my first multiple exposure image that achieved any level of success. I was trying to make an image of some bracken, but it was just not working. Then, when I looked at the background of the image, I could see that something interesting was happening there. I abandoned the bracken and concentrated on the trees and at last an image was formed. I realised that the path I had decided to follow was a difficult one but extremely exciting. I have never left a workshop feeling so exhausted or exhilarated.



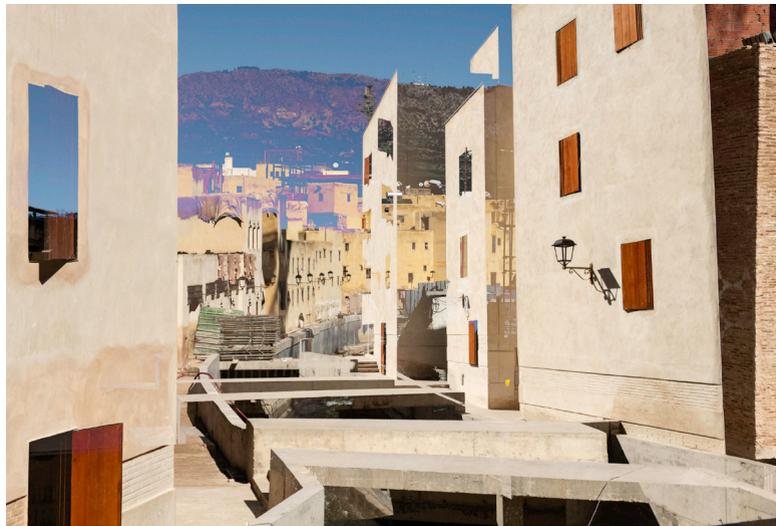
© Sunlit Birches by Margaret Martin

When I returned home, I was keen to put my new images into club competitions. That was when I learned that judges were not quite so enthusiastic about this way of working as I was, neither were some members of my camera club. In a talk I attended by Andy Page he said that you had to be thick skinned to use this type of image in competitions. How right he was, though things are definitely improving now, but my heart does sink when I see we have a judge who just does not 'get' my work.



© Petals by Margaret Martin

Initially the work I did was more realistic, in as much as there were recognisable elements in the image. For example, in *Two Views of the River Fez* it is obviously a picture of buildings, if not quite as you might see them. It was two exposures from a bridge over the river Fez. One facing one direction and one the opposite. Most of my work retained a certain level of reality. I found making more abstract images very difficult. It was not until 2019 that I made a stand-alone abstract image that I was really pleased with.



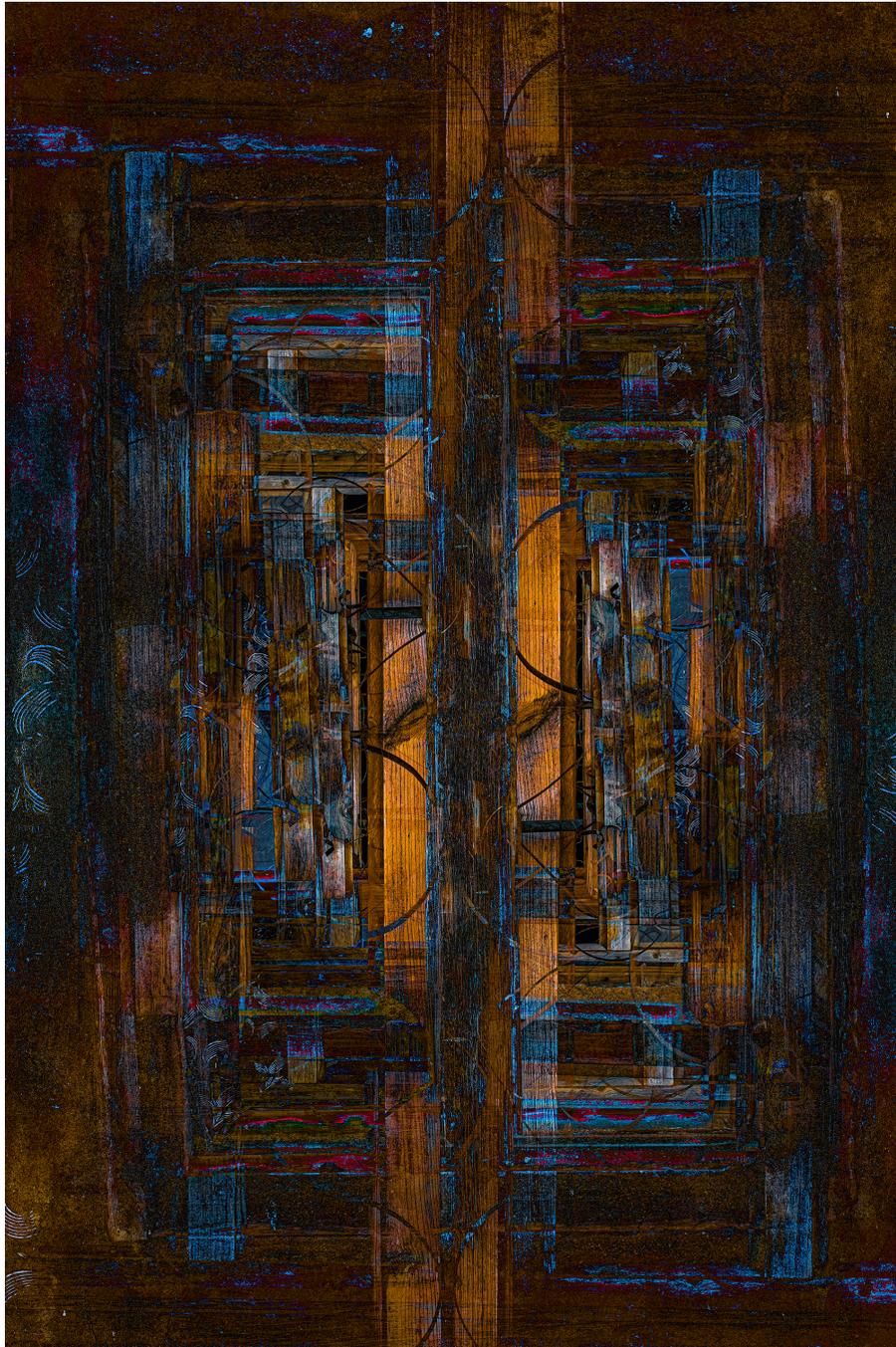
© *Two Views of the River Fez* by Margaret Martin

Abstract in Grey was based on the shapes within a metal sculpture. As I could not see the image as it developed there was a lot of guess work in getting shapes in the right position. I wanted to make a panel of these images, and did make one, though I was never able to recreate the colours in my first image. That's the reality of the genre.



© *Abstract in Grey* by Margaret Martin

In 2018 I bought the Nikon D850 which is the only camera I have had that I really loved. With it came an increase in what I could do to create an image and also an increase in the difficulty of producing one. There were a lot more things I could do and therefore more decisions to be made. Also, all the time, I was learning more techniques I could use.



© Interwoven by Margaret Martin

Quite a lot of the work I do now is experimental; an answer to the question 'what if..?' or trying out different creative techniques. I am attracted by colour, light and shapes and I try to create as much of my image in camera as I can. Spending hours on the computer is not something I especially enjoy but is unavoidable to produce the images I do now. I find that this sort of image can be made anywhere and does not depend on travelling to far-flung places. I enjoy travel but am no longer doing it to find the latest interesting landscape. I do a lot of work in London which is fairly local to me.



© Luskentyre by Margaret Martin

I still like traditional photography and enjoy other genres but I don't usually go looking for the fantastic stand-alone shot and often work in projects. Several projects might be on the go at the same time and take different lengths of time to complete; sometimes only a few days, sometimes a year or more.

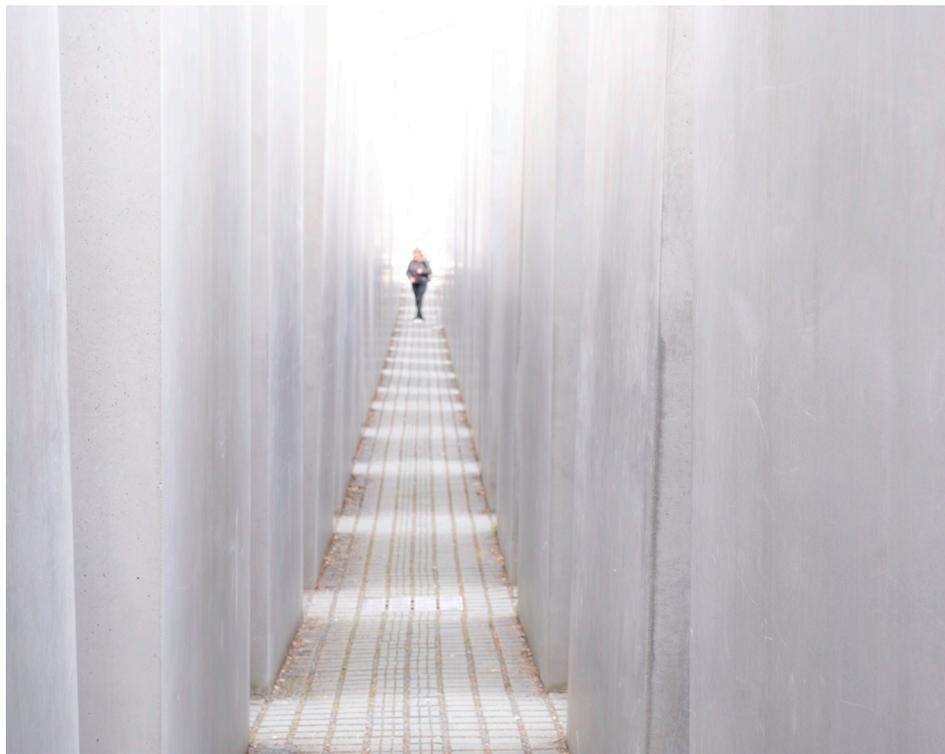


© Buttermere Valley by Margaret Martin

What were the biggest Challenges initially in this pursuit?

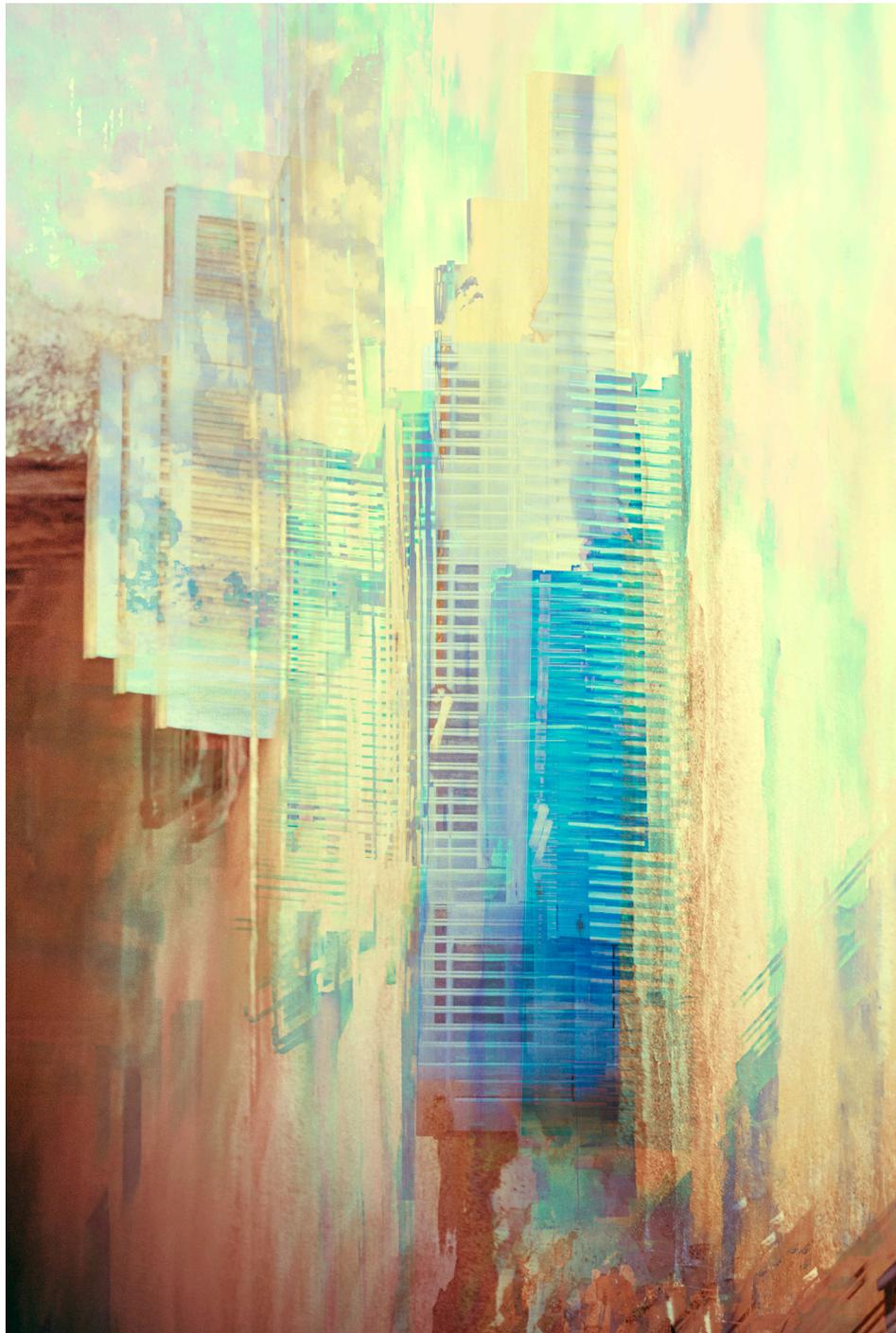
Starting to make my own multiple exposure and ICM images was very challenging. Someone can show you how to use the correct camera settings and how they might bring things together but it is not like putting your tripod up in the right place, getting the settings correct, composing the image and waiting for the light. A lot of things go wrong before you get anything approaching a good image and there is a lot of repetition. In many ways it is, perhaps, more like an artist creating a painting than taking a photograph. It is using photography to create something new and, initially, requires a lot of thought as you have no experience of how it might turn out. You are showing people something that is not there. For me it makes the commonplace interesting.

My other problem was that my abilities in Photoshop were minimal and I did not know how to use layers, so I had to get everything more or less right in camera. I had been collecting textures to add to images after an interesting talk by Viveca Koh which included adding textures to images. I liked the idea but did not have the skill to do it.



© Untitled by Margaret Martin

Just when I thought I was beginning to get to grip on multiple exposure I bought the Nikon D850 which had more blending modes. This meant instead of only having average blend I had lighten and darken too and a whole new challenge emerged. This is how it seems to be with multiple exposure. There is always something else to learn and that keeps it interesting and exciting.



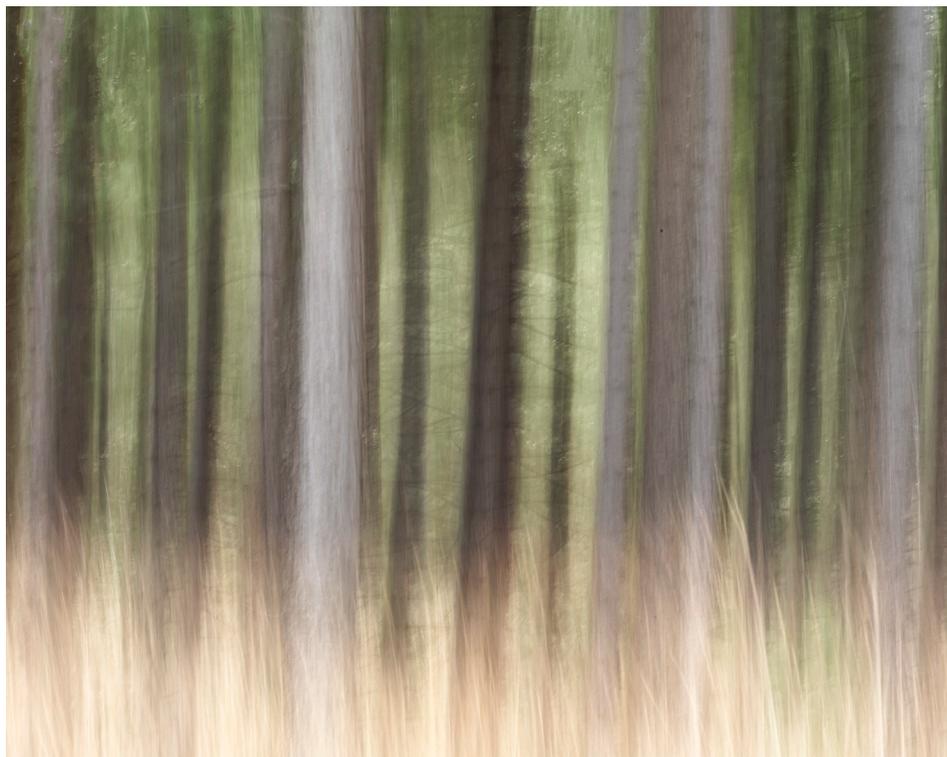
© Shutters by Margaret Martin

How will your work evolve now and what gives you the greatest pleasure?

My multiple exposure journey is nowhere near finished so I will be developing my use of it and trying to use it in more creative ways. I am continually learning from talks, from artists and from other photographers, experimenting and trying to achieve different effects I have seen. There is always something new to learn. Multiple exposure is not so much a style as a way of working and each persons work has a different look. That is one of the things I really enjoy about it.

I want to practise ICM more as I feel I have not done enough lately, and I could get a lot more out of it. I used to use ICM a lot, but I am really feeling out of practice and am not producing the results I used to. I also want to include some black and white ICM. I had not thought of using it in this way but saw some lovely examples recently

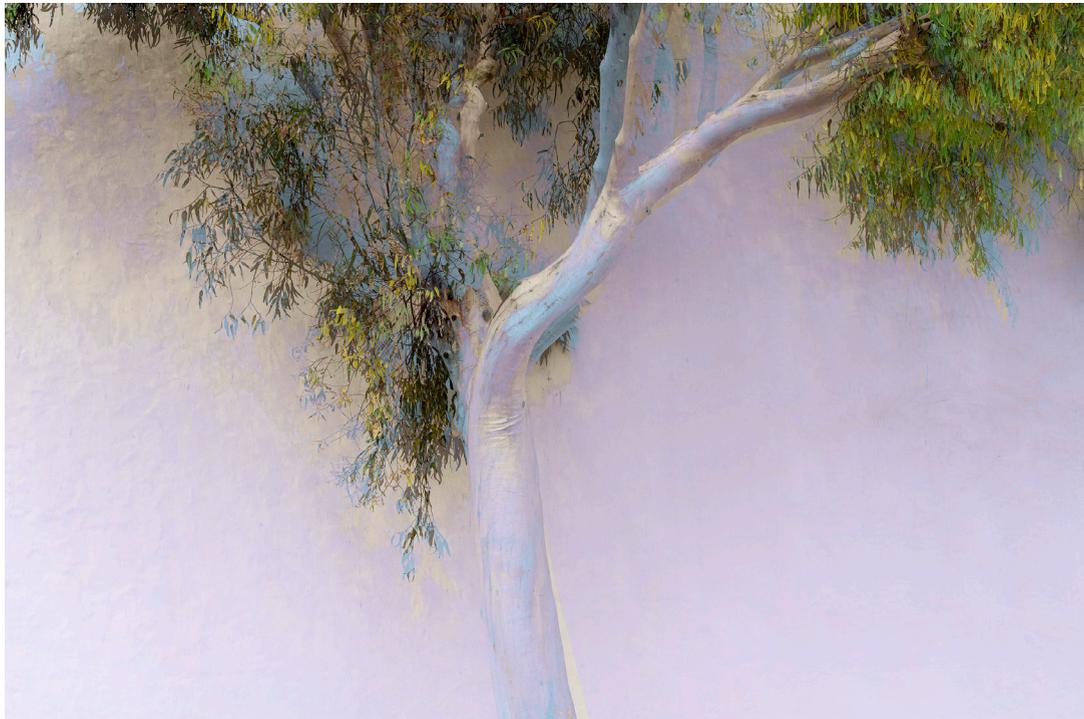
Though creative photography plays a big role in my work I still keep coming back to other genres I tried in the past and hope to keep improving.



© Wareham Forest by Margaret Martin

I would like to develop my use of infrared. I like it for black and white images and in the past have tried combining infrared images with coloured multiple exposures and thought the results were worth investigating further.

To achieve most of this I will have to further improve my Photoshop skills. I can use Photoshop layers for what I need to do at the moment but I would like to be better.



© Eucalyptus by Margaret Martin

Two things give me great pleasure. The first is when I see things that might make an image and they start to work. Being totally absorbed in what you are doing and the excitement of seeing things come together is like no other.

Also when my image is printed, I don't think it is really finished and that is when I decide if it is a success.



Ardnamurchan, Scotland

by Paul Gallagher

Ardnamurchan, Scotland

by *Paul Gallagher*

From time to time, we all need to get away. It's not because we all dislike our careers or where we live is unpleasant, but the general pace of life, running from one day to the next, becomes tiring. When this happens, packing a bag (camera or not) and leaving the daily routine behind is refreshing. Some folk go to cities, others to ski at breakneck speeds down black runs, whilst a lot of photographers I meet want the opposite; to be surrounded by nature, silence and wallow in tranquility.

I made my first visit to Ardnamurchan many years ago, passing through on my way to the Isle of Eigg. Almost as soon as I arrived, a storm followed me and standing upright was in the forethought of my mind as opposed to contemplating compositions. I retreated home the next day as forecasts declared the conditions would last for at least two days, and my ferry to Eigg had been cancelled.

The peninsula is a short crossing on the Corran Ferry which many of us have driven past leaving Glencoe heading north. Ardnamurchan is a coalescence of deep lochs, craggy, sandy beaches, pine forests and ancient oak woodlands. The roads are winding and narrow, often with passing places, and there are very few shops and hotels making it less appealing to tourists who are often beckoned away to the valleys surrounding Ben Nevis and the road leading to the Isle of Skye.

This, for me, is ideal. It means Ardnamurchan stays quiet, and in the simplest of terms, that is why I cherish being there. When you are there, you don't need to convince yourself to slow down; Ardnamurchan slows you down. Nothing about the place instils any sense of urgency. Your surroundings live at their own pace and often the fastest transitional event is the light changing as the day passes on.

If you want big mountain peaks and river rapids, then these ingredients won't be found. If you seek out palpable grandeur on a scale like Torridon or Skye, then this corner of Scotland may disappoint, but if you are a photographer that is inclined to wait a while until the landscape whispers to you and reveals itself, then Ardnamurchan is waiting peacefully and patiently to welcome you in.

I want to extend a huge thank you to Katrina Brayshaw and Mark Larwence for allowing us to share their beautiful images of Ardnamurchan.



© Katrina Brayshaw



© Mark Lawrence



© Katrina Brayshaw



© Mark Lawrence



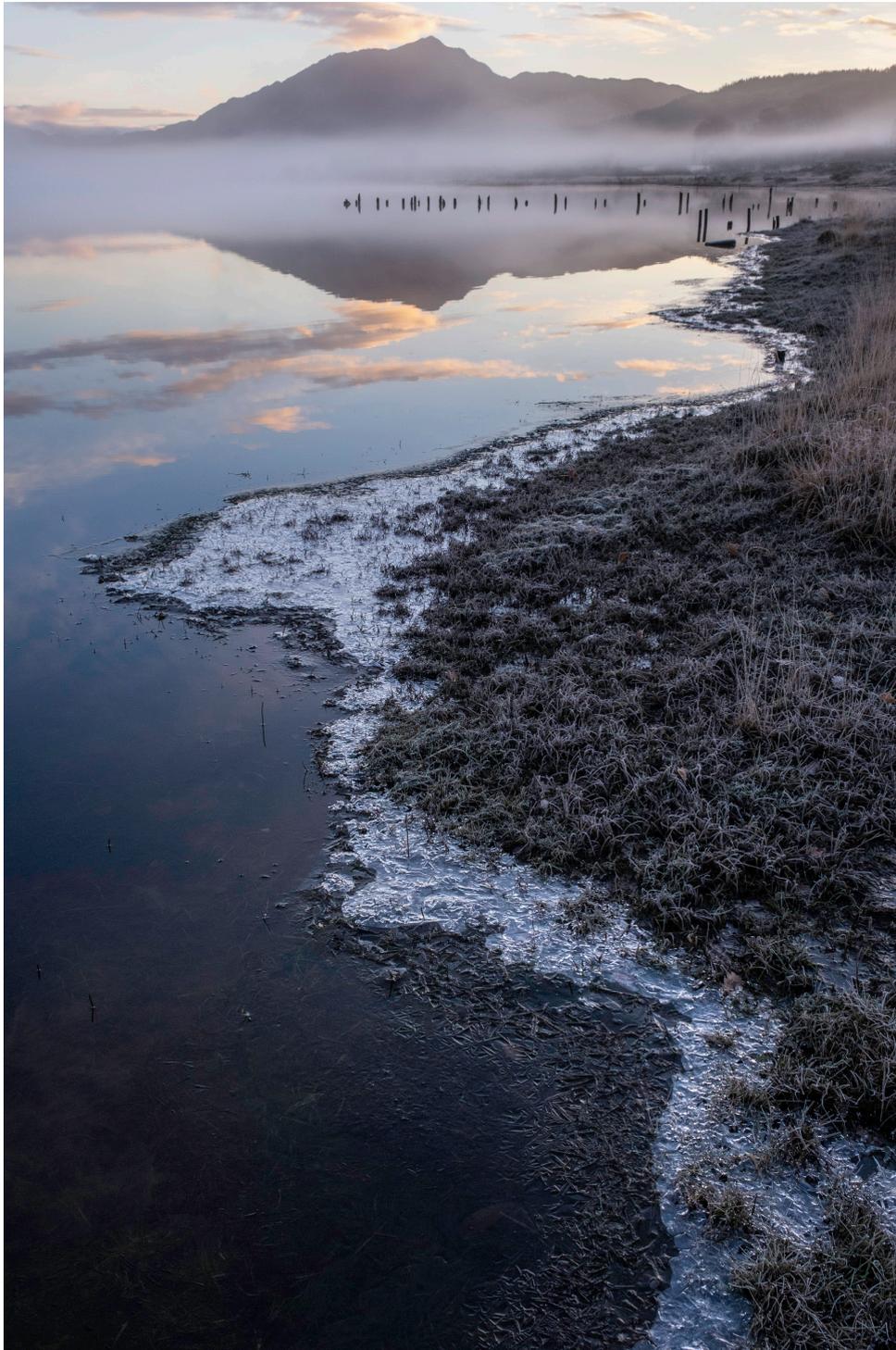
© Katrina Brayshaw



© Mark Lawrence



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© Katrina Brayshaw



© Mark Lawrence



Editing an infrared image

by Michael Pilkington

Editing an infrared image

by *Michael Pilkington*

This image was taken some years ago when travelling across the Arizona plains. We were driving along a freeway and to our left these incredible storm clouds started to form. Slowly, the clouds got thicker and more threatening, with shafts of light illuminating some of the lower clouds and patches of plains below. After a while, and continuing to watch these developments, the temptation became too much and we stopped the vehicle.

My first thought was to capture this dramatic scene in infrared. Infrared will reveal more cloud detail than the eye perceives in visible light as it only captures a narrow bandwidth of light. This is especially true for what would appear to be skies with little or subtle detail in them. When the skies are already quite dramatic it will only emphasise them further. Waiting for some candidate clouds to be lit up and a small area of the grasslands to be highlighted, I took the image I wanted.



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When you first encounter your infrared raw file, it will not look like anything that you will want it to finally look. Most likely, if you use a 720nm filter like I do, it will have sepia-like colours. What we most often want to do is to create a black and white image from this.



Original raw file without any changes

The first thing we need to do is simply convert the image to black and white. I prefer to do this in Photoshop for two reasons. Firstly, doing this in Lightroom or Adobe Camera Raw converts the file to a Grey Gamma file which in my opinion does not have as much subtle control as the Prophoto colour space. Secondly, it appears that these programs also apply some kind of preset that greatly changes the tonality in the image.



Black and White Conversion

As you can see from the previous image, after converting to black and white, it looks washed out. This is typical. There is little tonal variation to speak of and this is what we now have to address.

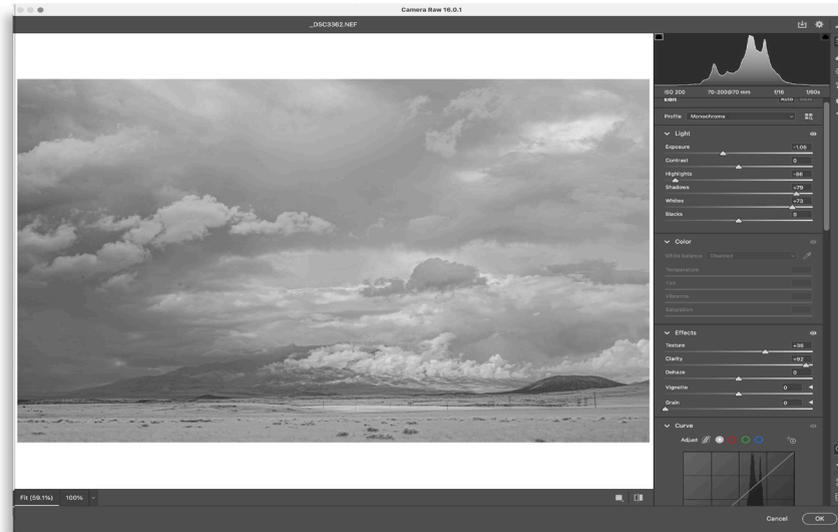
The next step was to bring down the exposure as the histogram is positioned slightly to the right. This will increase the depth of the shadows. I have also reduced the highlights and set the white point, by moving the slider to the right until it starts clipping. This creates separation in the brighter parts of the image. Lastly, I have further darkened the shadows.



Initial Adjustments

Overall, we are starting to see some separation of the tones. However, looking at the histogram, we see that many of the tones are in the middle of the histogram which is ideal for us to use our next tool: the clarity slider. The clarity slider is used to apply 'mid-tone contrast'. When moved to the right, it will separate out the mid-tones, moving the darker tones into the shadow area of the histogram and the lighter tones into the highlight area of the histogram. The net effect will be to bring definition and contrast to the image. I have also added some texture using the texture slider. This further helps with bringing out definition which we can see in the image on the next page.

It is quite usual when editing infrared files to have to push the sliders quite aggressively. In Lightroom and Adobe Camera Raw, many years ago, this would have potentially caused artefacts to appear and the file to deteriorate. These programs, along with modern camera files, are now very sophisticated so you can move them to their extremes without worrying about these problems.



Adding clarity and texture

The overall appearance of the image is now starting to go in the direction we want but it is still rather pale and lacking in overall contrast.



Using the curve to increase contrast

I am using the Point Curve (which can be found in Lightroom or Adobe Camera Raw) to increase contrast. This is preferable to the contrast slider as that slider will increase highlights as well as darken shadows in equal measure. I don't want the highlights to be affected as they are exactly as I want them to appear. I am simply pulling down the curve in the shadow area and returning back the highlights to its original position. With some additional localised adjustments to balance out the sky and lift the pool of light in the middle of the image, it is now complete.



A schoolboy error

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I was in the Yorkshire Dales in November 2021. I remember visiting Malham Tarn Walkway, which is an area that is effectively a flood zone for Malham Tarn itself, with board walks that allow you to navigate a circuit around the area. It is an interesting location that has some small rivers running through it, some ponds, a few Silver Birch and many shrub-like bushes which I think are some kind of Willow.



© Michael Pilkington

Given that you are confined to the boardwalks you really need to use a long lens to capture your images as your subject matter can be several paces into the wetland. I attached my favourite lens, the Nikon 80-400mm, to my Nikon D850 to start work. I mostly work on a tripod, especially with the longer lens, so when coupled together, I was ready to explore. Off I went, happily clicking away until I moved from the first spot I had selected. Swinging the tripod, with camera and lens attached, onto my shoulder I began to move onwards. It was then that I heard a thud and the weight on my shoulder became somewhat less. The camera and lens had not been attached to the tripod head properly. It, I imagine, did a swallow dive onto the boardwalk hitting it lens first. 'Oh Cripes' I thought to myself or something similar to that. Picking up the camera, I saw that the lens had twisted at the bayonet

connection by quite a few degrees. It was impossible to remove. 'That's a nuisance' I thought to myself, or something like that. Basically, the camera and lens were rendered unusable. Wrecked. Annoying. A schoolboy error; not attaching the camera to the tripod head properly and more importantly not checking it. Needless to say, I check this attachment very carefully now as I am somewhat paranoid that I will experience the same drama and certainly don't want to have to deal with the insurance company again who, for the record, were super unhelpful, difficult and subsequently lost my business, or the company that repaired the camera to a rather poor standard.

Fortunately, I had my Nikon D810 in my camera bag which has been converted to infrared. So with only a 35-70mm lens I was limited to taking images of subjects that were closer to me than I had planned. Having constraints like this can actually be a blessing. It can make you work harder and more creatively than perhaps you would otherwise have done. You are confronted with a slightly unscheduled opportunity to change the way you see your surroundings, and if like me, this bore fruit.

Over the past few years I have been exploring chaos and complexity in the landscape. Shooting long exposure and minimalist images that previously inspired me had become a little tedious. In addition, my love and fascination of woodlands and trees had also grown tremendously. As an aside, my wife was looking through my images with a view to me printing one as a gift for some friends she will be visiting. The brief was simply: "sandy beach with interesting waves probably in the summer, or at least sunny"! I could not find one! A significant part of my portfolio of images is rough seas with rocky shorelines, mountains and trees, all in overcast and inclement conditions. To this day I am still trying to persuade her that this is what she should have printed. She remains unpersuaded!

Back to the image I am writing about. I was attracted to the twisted and gnarled tree and the yellow grasses within which it was situated. Now this scene is not one you would normally think of for the application of infrared. However, I considered that the tones of the smaller branches and the grasses would be similar and the trunks and larger branches, being dark, would separate themselves from the rest of the scene, especially in its final incarnation as a black and white image. It also spoke to my attraction to more complex images, images that are less obvious and require more effort to consume. I guess it is an image that you either like or you don't, and I hope you do.

End note

“The whole point of taking pictures is so that you don’t have to explain things with words.”

Elliott Erwitt

Do photographs actually need an explanation? Pressing this point further, do photographs need an emotive title, one that on first reading will influence the viewer’s experience of first seeing it? There is no doubt that they are very popular in club competitions and often positively encouraged.

There are two schools of thought at play here. Some see the image title as complimentary to the image, a kind of helping hand for the viewer with a whisper in the ear setting out how the photographer would like you to see it. Others would step away from such a practice in disbelief deeming words presented like this as interference with the viewer’s experience.

Whichever choice you may make, caution should be exercised as the reliance on an emotive or lyrical title can only serve as something that shores up what may be the slight inadequacies of the photograph itself. Next time you are making an exposure or editing an image, try to image a line of viewers being provided with no title at all. Without any words of reference or influence, would you feel comfortable? Then as you look at your own image, take pleasure in imagining how those people will perceive it and how they will create their own narrative. This is what photography should do.

If you would like to comment on what you have read, you have something to add, or you have any questions that may help you on your way in your photography, then please get in touch. You may have had an experience you would like to share that you know others would be fascinated to hear, or you may want to contribute as a featured photographer or submit an article. Just follow the email link below and feel free to drop us a line with your thoughts or equally leave a comment on our **Facebook** or **Instagram** pages.

Lastly, if you have any photography friends who you think would like to read Expressions, please tell them to head to our aspect2i website where they can download their own copy entirely free via **aspect2i.co.uk/journal**.

We hope to hear from you soon and what you have to say!

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