Getting started with Light Painting

PUBLISHED - 08 FEB 2016

Light painting is an exciting and vibrant photographic technique, which involves using a light source to literally paint light into a photograph. Check out these top tips from our Nikon School experts and have a go at creating your own light painting images...





• If you want to reduce the chance of yourself appearing in your images, you need to wear dark clothes which do not reflect any ambient light or the light of the torches or LED devices you are painting with. Choose a location that allows you to set a reasonably long exposure time so that you can actually complete your light painting / drawing before the camera starts to overexpose the image. The location doesn't have to be totally dark, sometimes having ambient light in the background can make for an interesting background.

• To ensure the best quality images, set a low ISO of 64 or 100 and lock your camera down on a tripod or sturdy support, setting your ISO this low should help you get longer exposure times.

• Frame and compose your image and then focus your camera on the location that you will be 'painting'. Now switch your camera and lens to manual focus so that this pre-focused distance does not change.

• Light painting images can be shot in either M, A or S camera modes, or Bulb mode if you need exposures of longer than 30 seconds. Perhaps the easiest setup is to use Shutter Priority (S) and select the length of the shutter speed you require to complete your light painting, and the camera will work out the required aperture to produce a correctly exposed image. You can also fine tune the exposure using the exposure compensation setting on the camera if required. You are probably looking at expsoures of 15 seconds or longer as a minimum shutter speed; you often need more time than you think to finish a light drawing.

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