

A step closer

YOUR PROJECTS CRITIQUE



They say a rolling stone gathers no moss, and this is certainly true of photographer **Eva Polak**, who has undertaken a project in capturing species of moss, producing beautiful results

Abstract photography gives me freedom, which I love. It's about taking risks and going places in my mind where I've never been. I don't have any specific plans for my photo shoots, I prefer to just remain open-minded and go wherever each session takes me. I adore working with natural light as different lighting conditions, times of the day and seasons can give me endless possibilities to explore.

These three images are part of a large project called *Parallel Universes* I started when capturing moss a few years back. Having just moved to a new house I noticed that our retaining wall was covered by moss. When I looked at it through my macro lens I was immediately transported into a fascinating world of shapes. Everything there was different, strange and alien. Each leaf extended to a tall, slender point and ended with a green or brown capsule.

I was amazed by how expressive these simple lines could be. But it was only when I sprayed the moss with water that I realized the infinite potential of this subject. I was able to

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create new shapes and add a lot of exciting effects.

My first image is a result of a very shallow depth of field. The golden globes and silvery spheres were created by strong light reflecting off the water droplets, producing highlights [1]. The main challenge for this image was to find a visual 'structure' for all these circles and an interesting focus point. This image reminds me of my childhood – having fun blowing colourful soapy bubbles.

Recently, I found a different species of moss. On one particular plant, tall stalks were tangled together, almost like an alien from the H.G. Wells movie *The War of the Worlds* [2]. It is quite a challenge to find the right angle to shoot from and still have enough sharpness in the image, especially when using such a shallow depth of field to separate the subject from its immediate surroundings.

My final image is more low-key. The soft light and dark blue background creates a striking image [3]. The grey sky reflected in the droplets gives the illusion of a strong light illuminating within them. Every time I photograph moss I can see something different and exciting. Looking back, I can see how my approach changed and how this influenced my images.

N-Photo says

Macro photography has a rather magical quality to it, because it's able to reveal a hidden world that we cannot see with the naked eye. It's clear to us that you have found that magic, and have captured it successfully here in your set of beautifully graceful images.

With macro, we often experience big shifts in focus because the depth of field is so shallow working at high magnifications. That means it's easy to compose your shot just-so, and then accidentally move forward or backward, throwing your subject out of focus. However, you have demonstrated a strong ability to retain that focus on the areas that matter most in the images [3].

1
Golden Globes
D810, 50mm f/2.8,
1/6400 sec, f/2.8,
ISO400

2
The Alien
D810, 50mm f/2.8,
1/50 sec, f/8,
ISO250

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You talk about finding the right angle to shoot from whilst retaining the sharpness in your second image [2], and it's obvious you've struck a brilliant balance between the two. The stalks and what look like seed pods are sharp in the centre of the image and framed with blurred stems at the bottom of the frame, which leads the eye upwards.

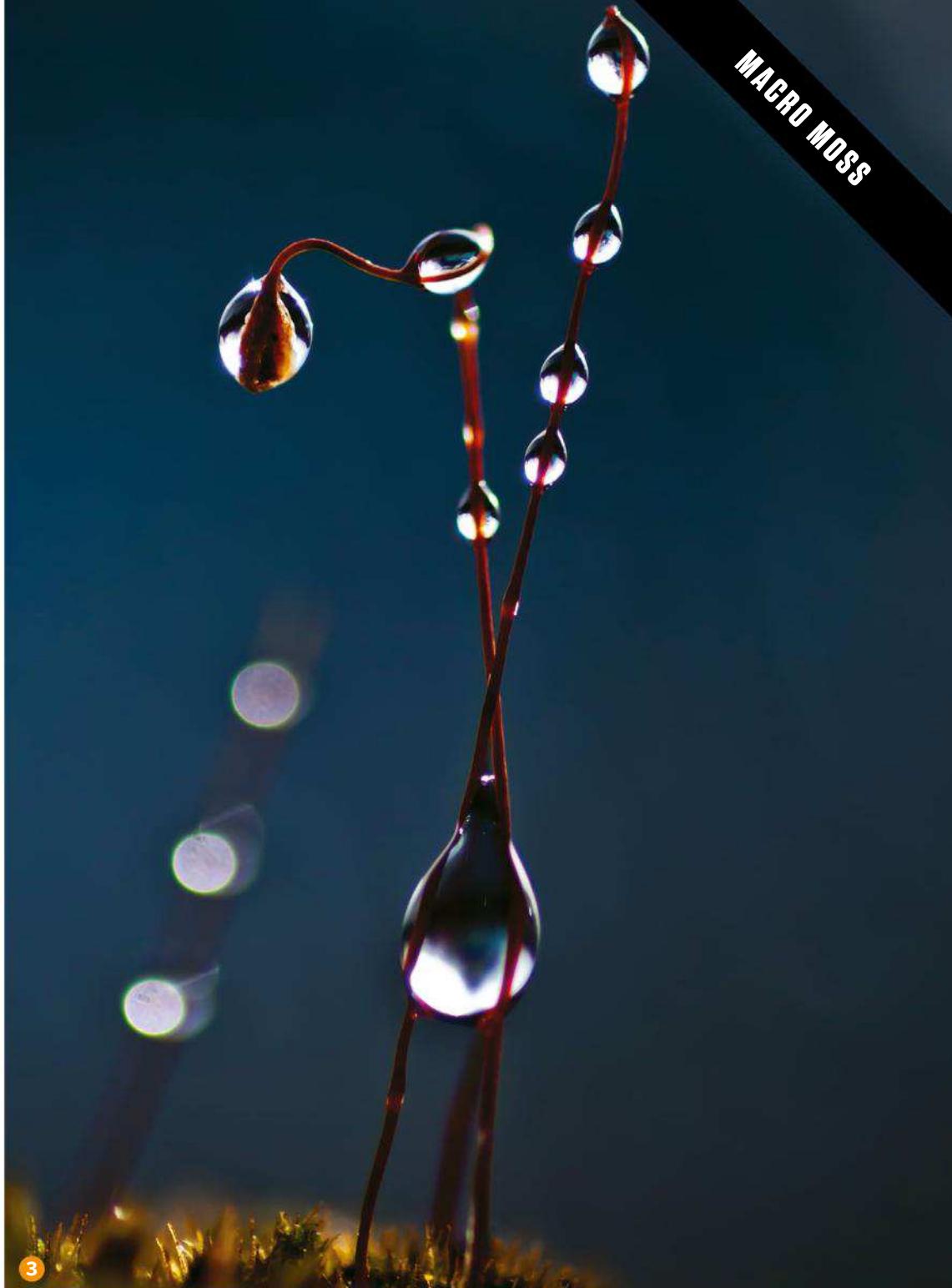
In your first image [1], with the red background, the bokeh has a special quality to it. They have bright rims around the edge of the circle and there are lots of them in varying sizes, almost making them look like jewels. There's even some colour refraction at the top right in this bokeh, with an emerald green, serene blues, regal purples and other striking hues.

These shots are simple, uncluttered, well-balanced, and enchanting in equal measure. Those that might quaff at a subject as common as moss are surely converted into realizing that simple, everyday subjects can be beautiful and unique. A really strong set of images, Eva. Congratulations!

3
Blue Subtlety
D300, 50mm f/2.8,
1/320 sec, f/2.8, ISO320

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These shots are simple, uncluttered, well-balanced, and enchanting in equal measure



TECHNIQUE TIPS

The N-Photo experts say...

HERE'S WHAT
YOU NEED TO GET
SHOTS AS GOOD
AS EVA'S

FIND A NICE BACKDROP
Keep an eye out for colourful backdrops to shoot. Whether it's a moss stalk in front of a leaf, or a blue sky behind a flower. You can do the same by contrasting light and dark between the foreground and background.

EMPTY THE FRAME
Anything that isn't in the frame doesn't exist, so remove anything (or reframe the camera) that doesn't add to the shot you want to achieve. Dead grass blades and extraneous twigs are often a bugbear of many macro photographers.

ENGAGE CONTINUOUS BURST DRIVE
In this mode you can fire off multiple shots in rapid succession when holding down the shutter release button. Combine this with a rocking motion, back and forth, to ensure at least one photo has perfect sharpness.

USE A NARROW APERTURE
Depending on how close you are to your subject, you may want to set a narrow aperture of f/8 or f/11 to increase the depth of field. This is crucial when zoomed in, as depth of field can be reduced to just a few millimetres.

NEXT MONTH: MORE OF YOUR IMAGES CRITIQUED!