

Deja Vu

Photography E-Magazine

September, 2019

InFocus

Eva Polak

Featured
Artist
Talha Ghouri

Basic Principles
of Composition
and Design
George Digalakis



Cover Photo: George Natsioulis

Editorial

Can't believe I am already writing the editorial for 3rd edition. Feels like yesterday when we decided to work on a photography magazine. It's been a wonderful journey reading articles from some of the most creative and inspiring photographers and writers and interacting with them.

This magazine has been amazing in my own development as a photographer. Being an impressionist photographer it's an absolute privilege to have interviewed Eva Polak, who is one of very few photographers teaching this genre. My impressionist photography is hugely influenced by her work and tutorials.

A special Thanks to George Digalakis for being a regular contributor. A big thanks to all the artist who have contributed their work. Like always I hope their work reaches a greater audience and get the recognition it deserves. And finally a big thanks to Deja Vu Team for making it possible.

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As a photographer, artist, author and teacher, Eva Polak is well known for her enthusiasm and passion for impressionist photography.

She is an author of three books: Impressionist Photography Techniques – A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Great Images by Using Your Digital Camera, Transcended Light, and The Secret Life of Dandelions, outlining ways to use your camera for painterly effect.

Eva Polak has had three solo exhibitions and has participated in a variety of group exhibitions. Her photographs are in private collections in New Zealand, Australia and Europe.

As an educator, Eva has passed on her knowledge and experience to keen photographers through a variety of workshops.





Q. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your journey towards becoming a photographer?

A. It all started in December 2004 when my husband gave me a small digital camera for Christmas. I was spending most of my free time with my camera, always taking photographs, reading about photography or planning my next photo shoot. I was enjoying myself immensely and I even entered a few local competitions with some success. After a year or so, I felt that I was ready for my first SLR camera. I wanted to have more control and be able to experiment with shutter speed and aperture. I also started to attend photography workshops and presentations.

By the year 2007, I was a very competent photographer. On the one hand, I was enjoying making images, but I also felt trapped and increasingly frustrated with all the “rules” of traditional photography. Around that time, I came across an advert for a workshop at the Auckland University, “The Art of Impressionist Photography”. I was curious enough to enrol, not really knowing what to expect. That workshop really changed my life and my way of looking at photography. Almost from the first photo shoot I knew instinctively that this was what I wanted to do. Somehow everything made sense, as if I was born to become an impressionist photographer.

Q. How do you think photo-impressionism came about? How similar or different is it from impressionism in painting?

A. It may appear that impressionist photography is an invention of recent years, but in fact this genre is as old as the photographic medium itself. The pictorialist perspective was born in the late 1860s and held sway through the first decade of the 20th century. It approached the camera as a paintbrush to be used to make an artistic statement. Back then, photographers were more interested in the aesthetics of the image and the emotions that it brings. The purpose of pictorialism was to

demonstrate that photography was more than just taking photos by anyone with a camera. Each photograph was a carefully constructed single, original product of art, and the camera was a tool used by an artist to show artistic talent and the ability to create impressions. Sharpness and clarity were deliberately avoided. Special camera lenses and developing techniques allowed the creation of a soft tranquil quality in the images.

I believe there are many similarities, like fascination by the effects of natural light and colour. But I also recognise that painting is fundamentally different than photography. Each medium presents a different set of characteristics, challenges and possibilities. It is important to know and appreciate what a camera can and cannot do.

Q. How is impressionist photography different from traditional photography?

A. Simply recording the subject with a camera is easy, but taking great impressionist photographs requires a totally different approach. In fact, impressionist images are some of the most difficult to capture successfully.

Impressionist photography is full of surprises. It is not an exact science. When you use a certain technique, the outcome is not always certain. The technique takes on a life of its own – and anything can happen. Sometimes the result surpasses your hopes, but there is also the risk of failure. This is all part of the thrill of impressionist photography. This style of photography is dynamic, where anything goes and the possibilities are endless.

Impressionist photography has the ability to say a lot with simplicity. You might think of it as a form of shorthand. It is surprising how a minimal amount of visual material is needed to convey an idea.

Impressionist photography is a very subjective art. As an impressionist photographer, you will need to develop your own ideas on what makes a good image, and take time to consider exactly what a successful photograph looks like for you.



Q. Many photographers don't understand photo-impressionism. Do you think it's struggling to be accepted as an art form, much like its painting counterpart?

A. My own photographic journey, and I'm reasonably sure mine is very common for most photographers, started with "rules-driven" image-making. Everything needs to be sharp, use the rule of thirds when composing, do this, don't do that, and so on. The list is long and exhausting. Most of us, when starting out in photography, had this idea that to be a "real photographer" one had to do "straight" photography.

After many years of trying, and being frustrated with all the rules, I took a hard look at what truly made me happiest and which artists' work I gravitated towards. I realised that for me, photography is about colour, simplified forms and expression – and less about perfection or meeting the expectations of others. Don't get me wrong. The basics of photography must still be learned, of course: how to set your camera, how to compose an image, how to use light to attract the eye, etc. But beyond the basics, the content and style are "invented" by the photographer.

Although Impressionism gives you a lot of freedom, it doesn't mean being thoughtless. Creating impressionist work doesn't mean just using special techniques. You still have to use your sense of composition and have a knowledge of light, colour and other elements of visual design to present your subject in the best possible way. I feel that impressionist photography is accepted and embraced by more photographers now. I think spreading

knowledge about impressionist photography is important, but I'm not trying to make everyone like this style. We are all different. Each of us is a unique mix of experience, preferences, temperament and personality, and they will lead us to make different decisions about what is important to us and how we should create photographs. "Viva la difference" has much relevance to art and photography. There is a style to satisfy every person.



Q. Do you have any particular thought processes you go through when you frame an image in the viewfinder? Do you always previsualise your shots or keep shooting until you feel you have got something interesting?

A. My inspiration comes from the beauty of everyday things around me. The natural world provides me with an almost unlimited supply of subjects. It is a gift to be able to share and express myself through impressionist photography.

I never go looking for specific subjects. When on location I rely on exploring, looking and experiencing, all the time being open to any ideas that present themselves. Usually, I find that I don't have to explore for very long, and that there is no shortage of ideas.

I like to start with observation and analysis; thinking about the subject, what I feel about it, how best to approach the subject, and finding the distinctive quality and mood. I keep these thoughts and ideas very much in mind as I'm photographing. I like my images to look spontaneous and candid despite my careful planning and preparation.



Q. Tell us about your workflow. How do you edit your images and which software and techniques do you use more?

A. My workflow is very simple, as my aim is to capture my images in-camera. After downloading them into Lightroom I usually add contrast, crop, and remove some unwanted spots. That's it.

Q. Do you have a favourite image that you've created? Can you tell us about it?

A. Many images are special to me, for various reasons. Nearly every image leads to a new discovery or improvement of my work, or steers me in a new direction.

‘City Lights’ is one of the first impressionist images I captured. It portrayed a rainy evening in central Auckland, a stranger and a fleeting moment. Who was he and where was he going? That will always remain a mystery.

“Little Purple Flowers” is another favourite image. It was taken in West Lynn Garden. Under mature trees I found bushes of asters bathed in dappled light. I wanted the image to have a quiet mood to emphasise the delicate, almost fragile look of the flowers.

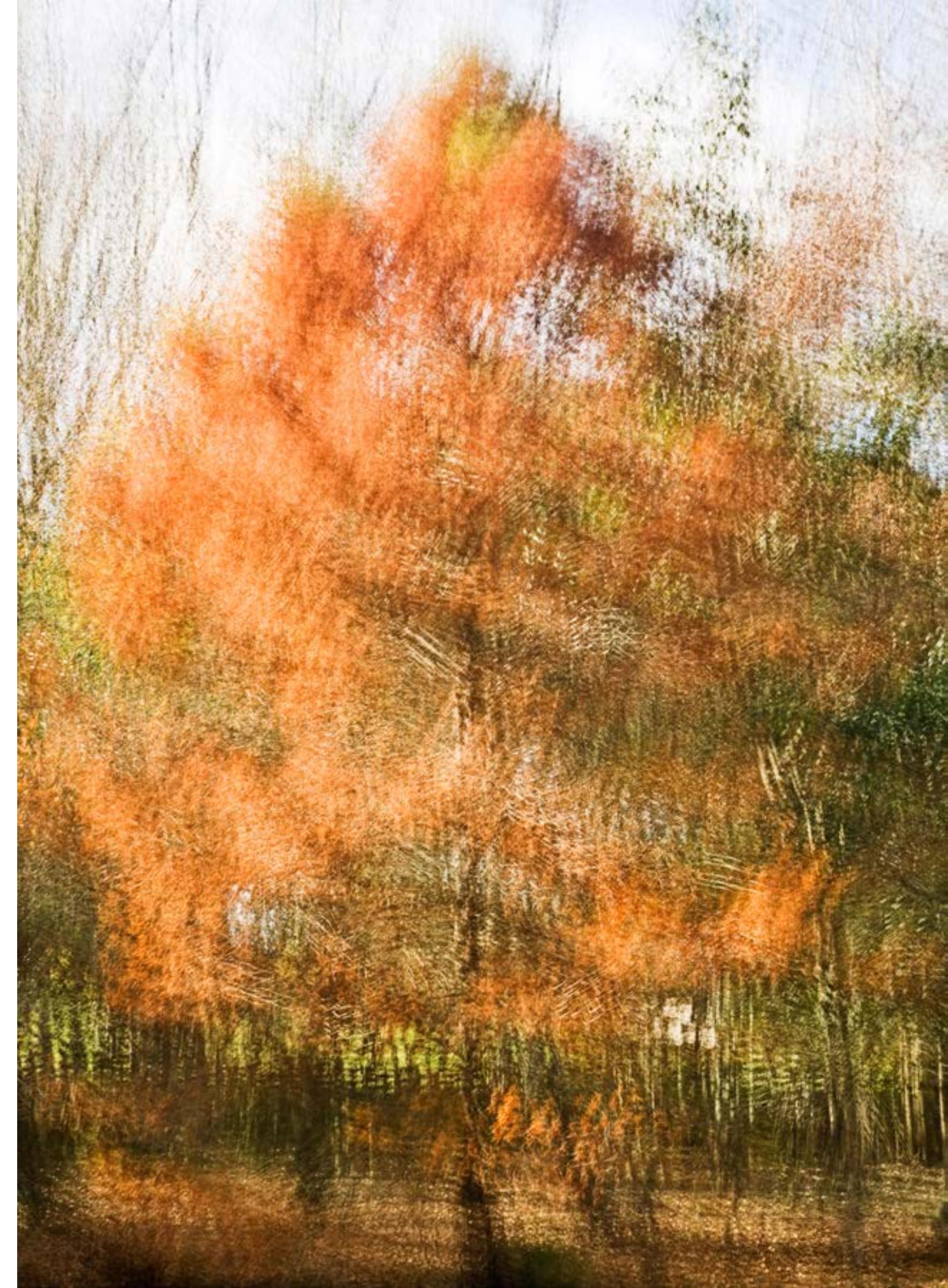
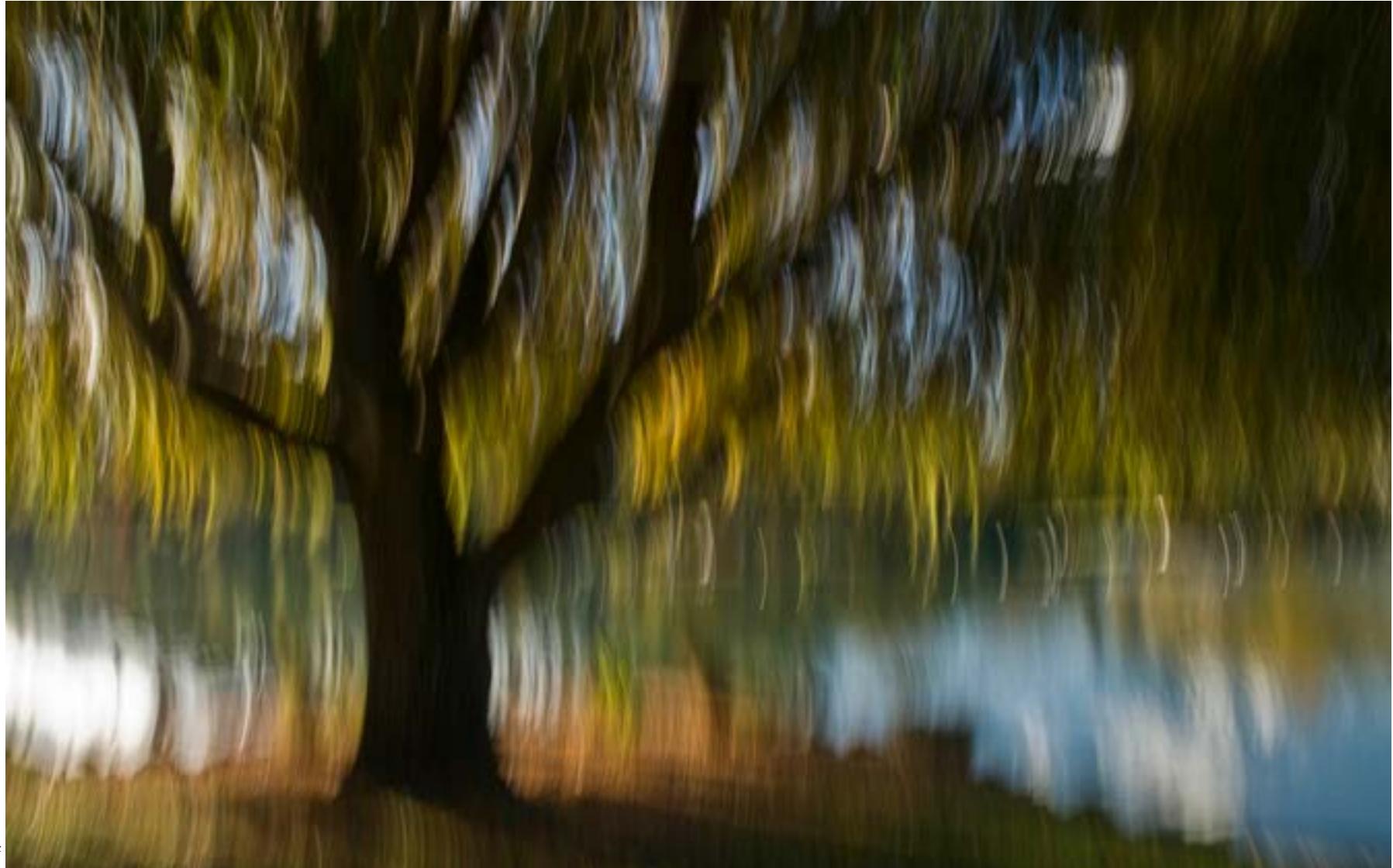
“Dance with me” is part of a large body of work. Dance is a perfect subject to be captured in the impressionist style. The moving body conveys feelings or ideas that cannot be put into words. Being able to capture that through my camera gives me enormous joy and great satisfaction.

Q. You've inspired so many photographers to create beautiful and painterly images. Who are some of your favourite photographers or even painters, who've influenced or inspired you over the years?

A. I like to think my way of creating images is a continuation of the way the Impressionists approached their work. I have always felt their influence, both for the beauty of their work and for their philosophy. But my ultimate inspiration is light. Light excites and emanates the energy that transforms mundane objects into something special and magical. Observing and experiencing light is my journey. I let the light guide me and make each moment a new discovery. Impressionist photography is a perfect way to see and experience light.

Q. How would you describe your personal style and vision? And what influences or pushes you in that creative vision you've developed for yourself?

A. When I first started photography, my intention was to produce a copy of the scene in front of me. Basically, this was fine; I learned a lot of my craft that way. As time went on, however, I wasn't satisfied with creating just straight photography and I started to explore other ways of making images. I realised that what I really wanted to do was to capture the essence of the scene. I wanted to translate my feelings and emotions about the scene in front of me into the image. Seeking out new subjects, developing projects and experimenting with the vastly different qualities of light, have always played an important part in my creative development, ultimately making me a better artist.



Q. You've authored some wonderful books. Can you name a few and the inspiration behind writing them?

A. I've written three books about impressionist and abstract photography, outlining ways to use your camera for painterly effect.

Impressionist Photography Techniques - A Step-By-Step Guide to Creating Great Images by Using Your Digital Camera is the ultimate beginner's guide to impressionist photography.

Transcendent Light - the Essence of Impressionist Photography is for beginning and aspiring impressionist photographers to learn all they need to know to start creating images that are full of light and emotion. The book covers the use of elements and fundamentals of design to create beautiful, balanced impressionist images. It's full of helpful tips.

The Secret Life of Dandelions is a guided tour through creative macro Impressionist photography, with a series of exercises that will help turn your camera into a powerful tool of self-expression.

I wrote these books as a way to share my creative process with others and what I've learned in my creative journey. I'm getting a lot of satisfaction from teaching others. Running workshops and writing books allows me to deepen my knowledge and expand my artistic horizons. I let the light guide me and make each moment a new discovery. Impressionist photography is a perfect way to see and experience light.

