

ICM TUTORIAL

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I have made this tutorial to try and help you in your ICM abstract photography journey.

Please note I am just passing on the way I create my images, it is not to say this is the right or wrong way it is just a guide as ICM is all about finding your own technique and style.

First and foremost unlike conventional photography you are free from rules and you can shoot in all weathers, any time of day, you just work with the light you have. This freedom is what makes it exciting and allows you to create unique art. However this does not make ICM easy, quite the contrary, with rules you have guidelines on what makes for a good image, with ICM it is all down to practise, vision and creativity.

I will be covering four subjects accompanied with photographs to try and help you understand the process.

(1) Here are my recommendations that apply to all ICM images that you take.

Take lots of images of the composition that you have chosen. As a rule I will take anywhere between 200 to 500 shots if I think it will make for a good final image. ICM is very random in its results, however good you get, so be prepared to have a massive throwaway rate. If you get one good image from this number of shots you are doing well and sometimes you will get nothing, but remember with digital it costs you nothing.

After taking the shot look at it on the camera screen and assess if that is the look you are after. If not say to yourself, what do I have to change? Whether it be camera settings, camera movement, a longer or shorter lens, or do I have to move slightly to improve the composition? Remember they always look better on the camera screen than they will on your computer.

(2) Camera gear and my suggested settings.

You don't have to own an expensive camera or lenses for ICM. After all we are not after pin sharp images but if you are thinking about selling or exhibiting your work, better gear will pay off when enlarging your images.

The composition will determine the focal length lens you will need, whether it be a wide angle or zoom, but always focus on the subject as you would if it was a conventional shot.

A neutral density filter for me is a must, ideally a +3, 6 and 8, but start with a 6 stop which is the most commonly used. These are used to give you control over the shutter speed.

Camera settings I shoot in aperture priority. I don't care what the aperture is I just use it to control shutter speed. But I do try and stay away from the extreme f stops of the lens.

If you find you can't get the shutter speed needed due to lighting conditions, that is when you change the neutral density filter strength.

Shutter speed varies between app 1/3 to 1.1/2 seconds, this depends on the time needed to move the camera, bigger movements need a longer time and also the look you are after.

Learn how to read your histogram, it is your best friend. If you find you are clipping your highlights or shadows, adjust your exposure compensation.

White balance is not so important, as we can tweak the colours in post, but I will use anything from sunny, cloudy or even auto.

ISO always camera base rate.

(3) Choosing a composition.

I have thought long and hard about how I can best explain this, as it is impossible for me to teach you, as there is such a broad spectrum of ICM. However, a good starting point would be to look at other ICM photographer's work.

What they are shooting. Which photographers work do you like most. You will end up with one who inspires you, I know I have. Also try anything you think will make for a good image, shoot it and see what results you get. Follow your instincts and feelings. After a while you will know what will work for you when you see it and after time you will develop your own unique style.

But remember, it is not what other people like, it is what you like.

(4) Camera movements.

Now we come to different camera movements that I think suit different compositions. This is only a guide, remember it is all about experimenting and as I have said before let your feelings guide you. The most important thing with all movements is to try varying shutter speeds and amounts that you move the camera. Look at your composition and decide what you want the image to look like. In time you will learn what movement to use to achieve that result.

Each movement is accompanied with an image as an example.

(A) The most common is vertical up and down. Mainly used for trees or horizontal pan for sea or landscapes.

(1)



Image number (1) I have used a vertical movement to capture some moored boats, by moving the camera from down to up. If I were to move it from up to down the masts would go off the top of the image, but try both ways and see which one works for you.

The hardest thing to get right is the correct amount of foreground and sky. This is determined by your start and finishing points of the camera movement. The speed that you move the camera will determine the amount of blur. Slow movements result in a more detailed image, as does holding the camera still before moving it for the remaining exposure, fast will give you a more blurred abstract look. This will apply to all types of camera movement.

(2)

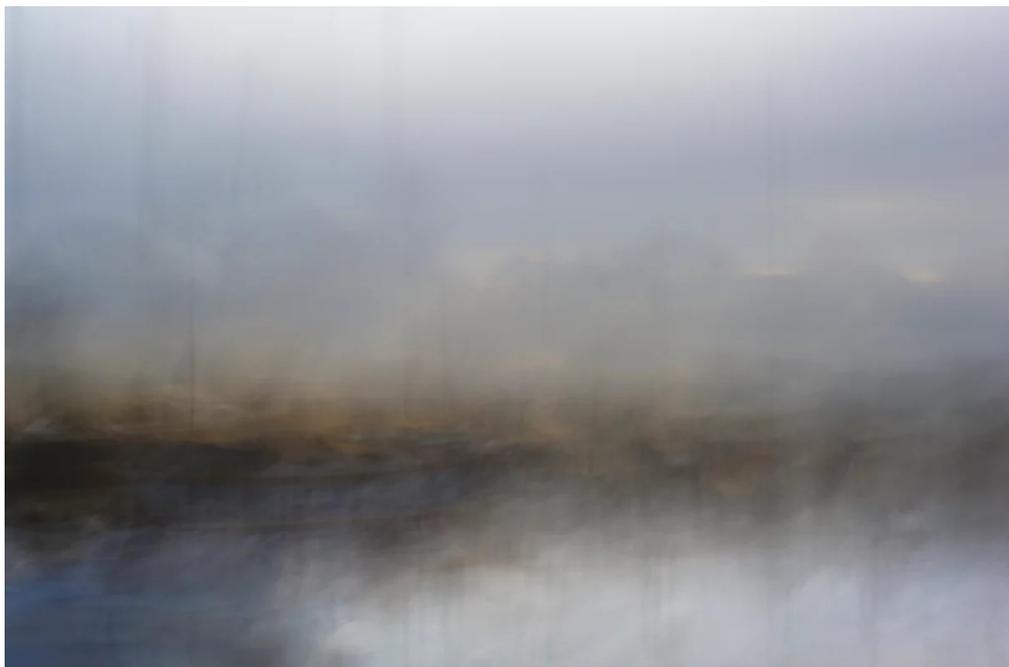
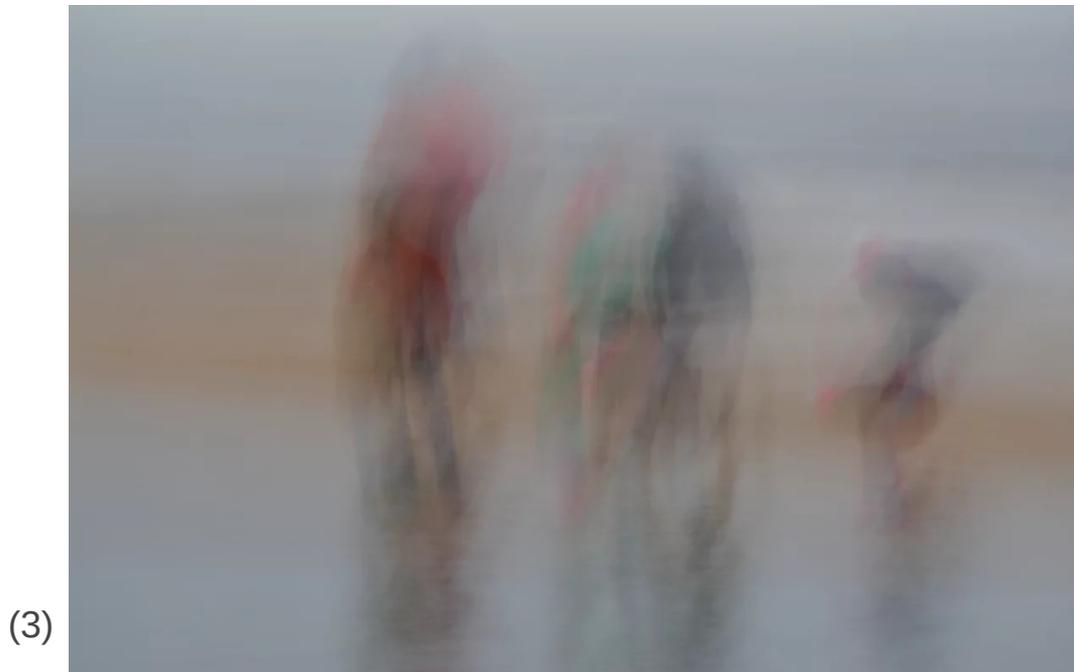


Image number (2) was the same composition but panning the camera. It makes no difference if it is left to right or right to left, but see the different image it produced from image number (1)



(B) Is just a little shake almost as if you can't hold the camera still. I use this for people, as in image number (3) or if I just want to soften the image. Sometimes I will use this on landscapes or trees, as in image number (4)

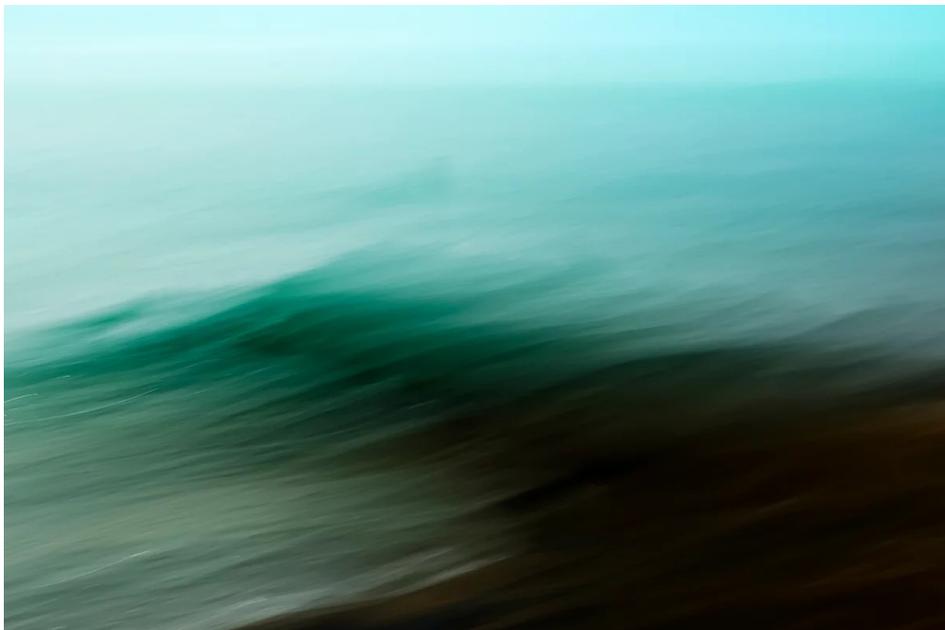


(5)



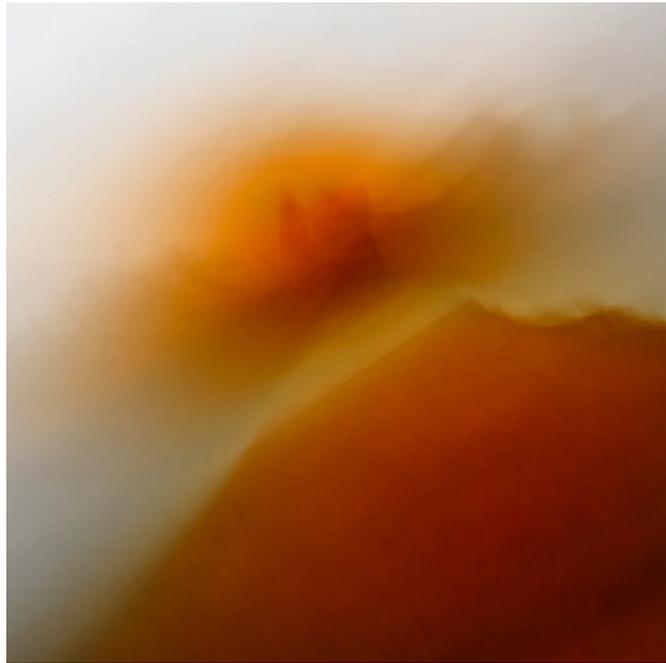
(C) Pulling things into the image like clouds or water, in image number (5), I focused on the ruins, pressed the shutter and then moved the camera into the sky, pulling the ruins into the sunset, but try both ways start at the sunset moving the camera into the ruins, to see what works best.

(6)



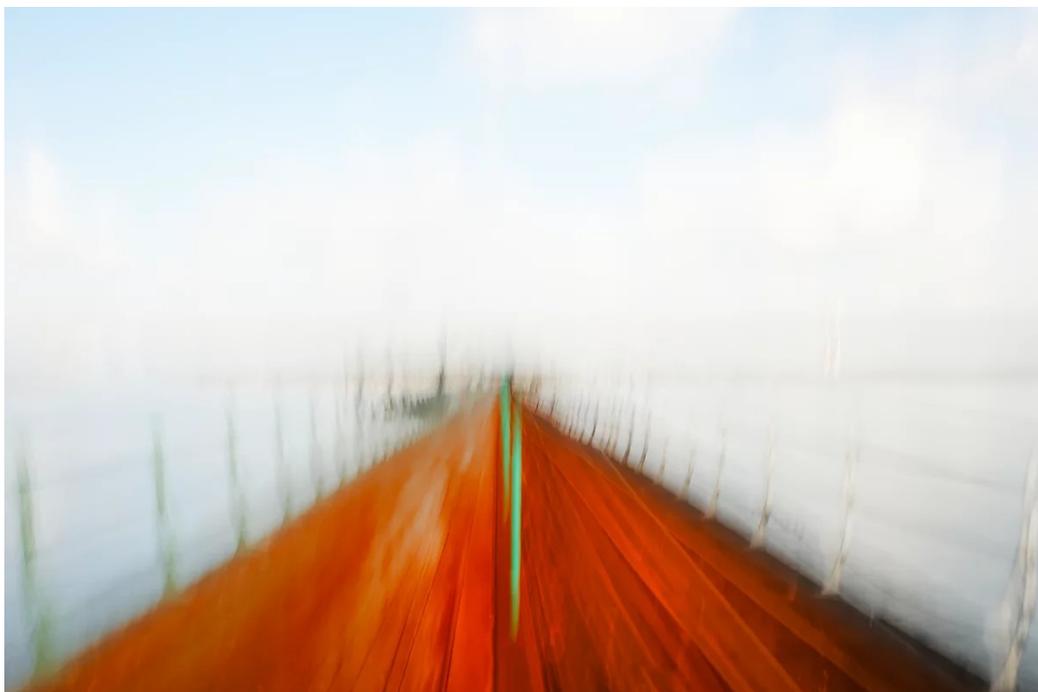
In image number (6) there was a breakwater of rocks and by moving the camera I pulled the water over the rocks. So if you see a composition that you want to pull something else into it, imagine you could pick it up and move it into the composition and the direction you would use. That is the direction you move the camera in. I hope I have explained that OK?

(7)



(D) Extreme movements twisting the camera with a flick of the wrist and moving it left or right, up and down, all at the same time. I don't use this movement very much but image number (7) is an example of the results.

(8)



(E) Following lines, if you are taking something like a forest with a winding path or river, it sometimes works to follow the line of the path or river with the camera movement.
In image number (8) I followed the straight line of the pier.



(9)

(F) Last movement. Sometimes you don't have to move the camera at all if you have a moving subject like people or in image number (9) a moving train. The subject makes the blur, but I will often give the camera a little shake to soften the background.

To summarize.

Throw away the rule book.

Shoot lots, learn from your failures and success.

Keep checking your image on the screen and ask yourself is it what I am after, or how can I improve on it?

Use your histogram.

Try different movements and shutter speeds.

Experiment with different compositions and subjects.

Look at other ICM photographers and artists work to get ideas and inspiration and you will develop your own style.

Let your feelings guide you and be at one with your camera. It is your paintbrush.

Results are very random with ICM, but the reward you get when you see that one image on the computer that works, makes all the hard work and time worth while.

Most importantly enjoy yourself.

I hope this may have been of some help to you.

Any questions that I can help you with please feel free to ask.

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