

Create Impressionistic Images Digitally – Digital Ortons

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view a gallery of Digital Ortons here:

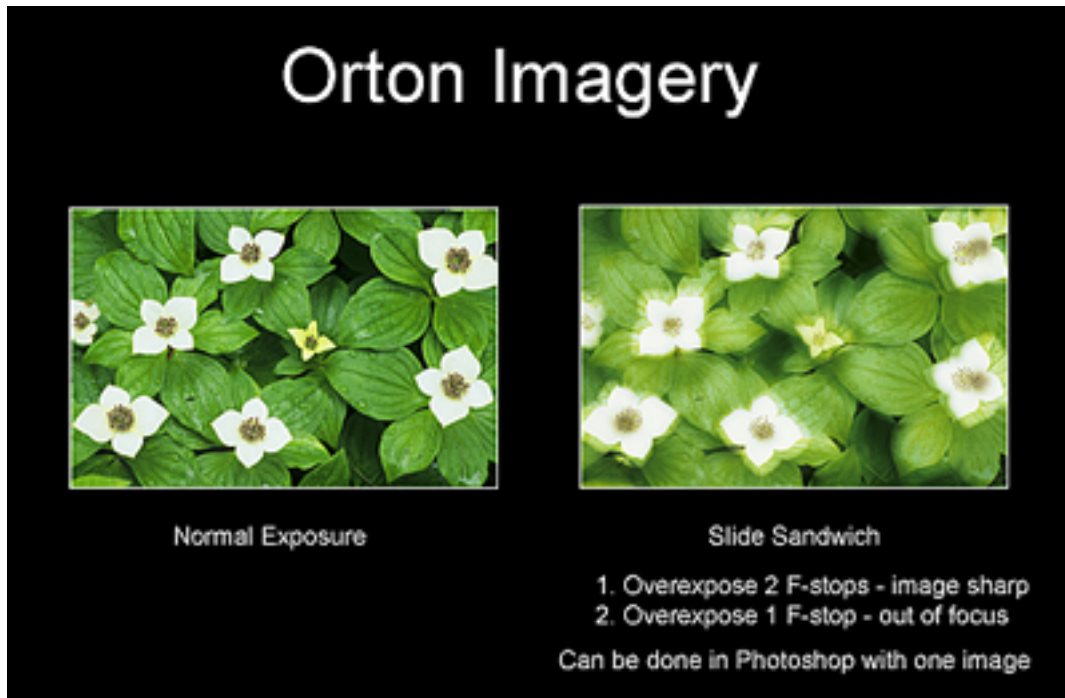
<http://www.moodsofnature.com/impressionismgallery.html>

Introduction

Impressionism first referred to a style of painting originating in France around 1870's and was characterized by the use of unmixed primary colors and small strokes to simulate reflected light. The objective of the style was to attempt to capture the subjective impression of light in a scene. A similar effect can be achieved in photography by combining two images to form a slide sandwich, where one image is over exposed by 2 F-stops and sharp and the other is over exposed by 1-Fstop and out of focus or blurred. This technique was first described by Michael Orton in 1992 and 1994¹ and also popularized by Freeman Patterson and André Gallant². After I played with this technique I found that a fair bit of film and experimentation might be required to achieve ideal results.

In order to achieve more control and use less film, I began experimenting making image composites using Adobe Photoshop. The advantage of using a computer and image editing program is that the effects of any type of manipulation on the image can be seen instantly, each procedure can be controlled precisely, and one only needs to start with a single properly exposed image – a scanned slide, negative or digital file. Using RAW digital files is even better as it will allow you to import and mimic an over and underexposed image from the same file. Below I describe a simple procedure that anyone can use to create what I like to call “Digital Ortons” using an image editing program and a computer³. The resulting digital files can be printed directly from the file or made into a slide on a digital film recorder at a professional photo service center.

To start you with you will need to open an image in Adobe Photoshop (any version from 4 and up should work fine, you can also use any other image editing program provided it supports multiple layers, a blur filter and blending modes).



This is an example of using the technique with slide film. The tricky part of the procedure is to determine how much to autofocus the image. Also the images must be taken with a tripod so they register properly when they are sandwiched together. The technique requires some experimentation and if you shoot slide film the cost for film can quickly add up. In 2001 I used photoshop layers in an attempt to simulate this process using a single image. Since then many others have created similar methods in photoshop to simulate an Orton sandwich – this is my procedure.

Digital Orton Procedure

1. Open your image in Adobe Photoshop, set the resolution depending on whether you going to use the image on the World Wide Web (72 dpi) or to make a print (300 dpi).
Select Image>image size – set the image dimensions and resolution.
2. Select Window>Layers to open the layers palette

3. In the layers palette select the first layer with your mouse pointer and duplicate the layer (right click and select duplicate from the pop up box or select the arrow on the top right of the layers palette and select duplicate layer from the pop out box). Unselect the eye on the 2nd layer so its not visible.
4. Select the bottom layer, then select Image>Adjustments>Brightness and Contrast and adjust the brightness to +100 to simulate a 2 F-stop over exposure. (You could also use the levels to increase the mid tone exposure level if you prefer – the results are similar).
5. Select the eye icon on the top layer to turn it back on. Select the top layer, set opacity to 50% and set the blending mode to multiply. Then select Filter>Guassion blur and start with values between +5 to +30 – the amount of blur you add is a personal decision and will also depend on the resolution of the image, but you can see the effects instantly on your screen. The more blur you add the larger the glow will be – experiment with varying amounts.
6. With the top layer selected, re-adjust the opacity slider in the layers palette to obtain the desired image density; good values appear to be between 60 to 80% (make sure you have layer 2 selected when you do this).
7. Flatten the image, select the right arrow on the top right of the layers palette and from the pop up side menu select flatten image/
8. Select Image>adjustments>levels – optimize the overall brightness of the image, then select Image>adjustments>Hue & Saturation and increase the saturation about +10 to +30 to obtain the amount of color saturation you desire. You may also want to apply the unsharpen mask.

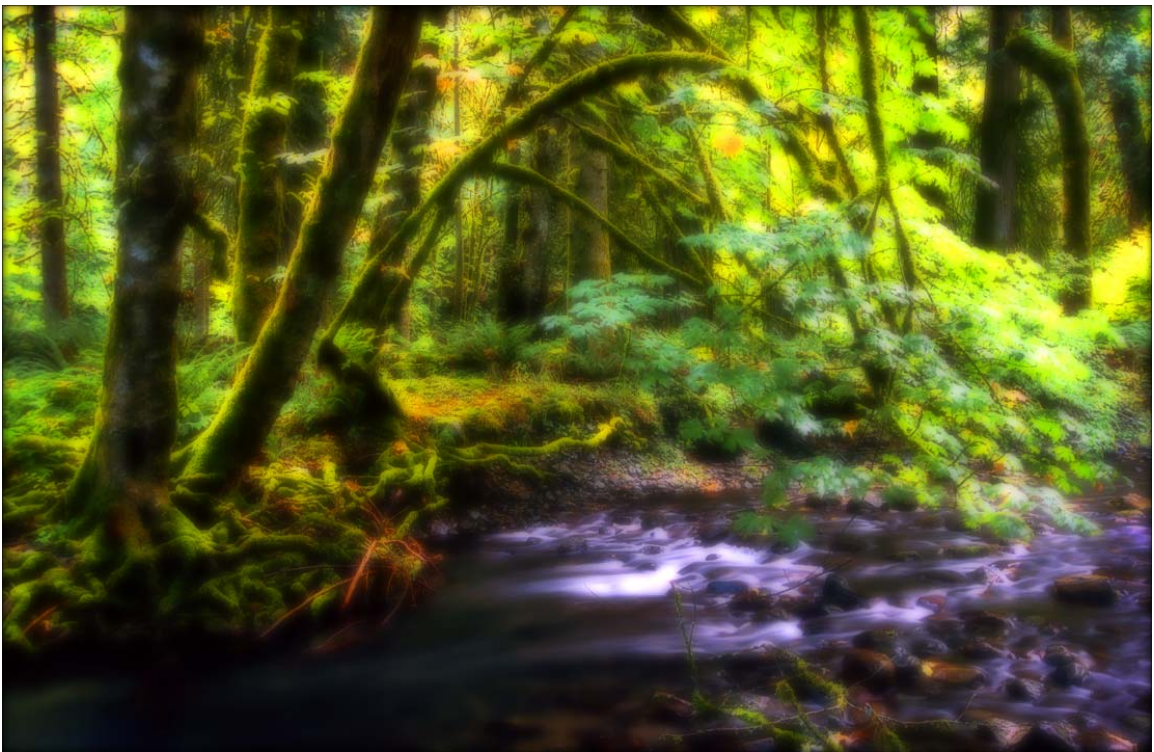
You can experiment with different blending modes (soft light, hard light, color burn etc), adding Gaussian blur to the bottom layer, adjusting levels instead of brightness, taking the blurred layer and scaling its dimensions larger to more closely simulate out of focus effect in the camera. It's also possible to use more than two layers in Photoshop just as it possible to combine more than two slide transparencies. You can repeat the entire process on the same image several times to exaggerate the effects. The main advantage is that you can use your existing image files and you only need a single image to create "Digital Ortons" and you can vary the amount of blur and amount of over exposure. If you would like to experiment with an impressionistic form of photographic imagery and own a computer with image editing software then this is a quick and simple way to achieve it.. Credit and inspiration for developing the Orton technique using film is owed primarily to Michael Orton¹ hence the name "Digital Ortons". Experiment with different images until you find ones that work best for you.

References

- 1) Michael Orton, (1992) Once upon an Island – out of print. Michael Orton, (1994) Popular photography, September issue, page 52. Michael also describes the use of this technique in his book "Photographing Creative Landscapes " Amherst Media, 2001.
- 2) Freeman Patterson and Andre Gallant (2001) Photo Impressionism and the subjective image, Key Porter Books Ltd, Toronto, Ontario, page 26-28, 2001.
- 3). Digital Orton imagery techniques have been described on the Net using Photoshop by various other photographers over the years.



Initial Image taken in Goldstream Provincial park, Vancouver Island, BC



Digital Orton – image after using procedure described above.