

Painting with Light

Artist's Statement

I have always loved blues music. Three chords, a rough beat, the steady rhythm and a scratchy amplifier are all you need to create compelling music. Simplicity and repetition does not equate to boredom. When a chord progression is simple, there is room for experimentation and exploration. As you add in instruments to create tonal layering and allow each instrument to riff off of the same basic structure, the result is a compilation of complex solos, soaring horns, growling base, and wailing guitar all anchored in the same notes.

This method of layering and riffing on a single theme is what I hoped to capture in “Painting with Light.” The ingredients for each piece are basically the same: neon lights, long exposure, and improvisation. However, each composition differs because of the experimentation and exploration between the bounds of camera and subject. Each photograph is unique while sharing the same composite parts with the others.

I have been drawn to experimentation with neon lights because they seem to mirror the role of the blues instrument with which I am most familiar—the guitar. Both the guitar and the lights have an electric, vibrant hum. The guitar, much like the smeared light, is the first thing to jump out at the audience. Just as the guitar often creates a catchy, repetitive hook that is bright, disjointed, and loud, the neon lights jump out boldly to catch the viewer’s attention, jumbling together within the frame. As the other instruments fill in the melody, the guitar is free to leave the main progression in sweeping, painterly riffs. Similarly, bending and spinning from the main structure, the twirls and spins of the camera create a painterly effect that moves beyond the basic structure of the physical subject.

The various colors in the photographs complement each other in a cohesive whole, much like the guitar, bass, horns, and keyboard come together under the same tonal progression while still maintaining their individual voices. The loss of any one part of the whole, both in tone of music and color of light, would degrade the image or song. The layering of instruments and riffs can also be compared to the word ‘OPEN’ in the compositions. The word appears often within the photo series, but always in a different form from the one before. This mirrors the musical textures and melodies of my photographs, as if they were all based in the same three chords but still maintain their own unique grooves.

Painting with Light is dedicated to the local businesses and entertainment establishments that were able to overcome the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Although my own images only encompass a single street in Provo Utah, I hope that the repeating motif of 'OPEN' and the accompaniment of Joe Jackson’s “Steppin' Out” will encourage people to return to their evening activities and patronize their local small businesses.

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