ISSUE 84 - FEBRUARY 2026

Mobiography

FOR INSPIRING SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY

EMBRACING POOR WEATHER

TAKING BETTER PHOTOS IN POOR CONDITIONS

TRAVEL:

WALKING DOWN MEMORY LANE

CÁDIZ STREET PHOTOGRAPHY

TUTORIAL:

URBAN ROMANCE

CREATING GRUNGE INSPIRED DIGITAL ART

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHERS:

MIGUEL CASTELLANO & CHARNE ODENDAAL

PLUS: SHOOTING MOUTH-WATERING FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY + MORE INSPIRING PHOTOS

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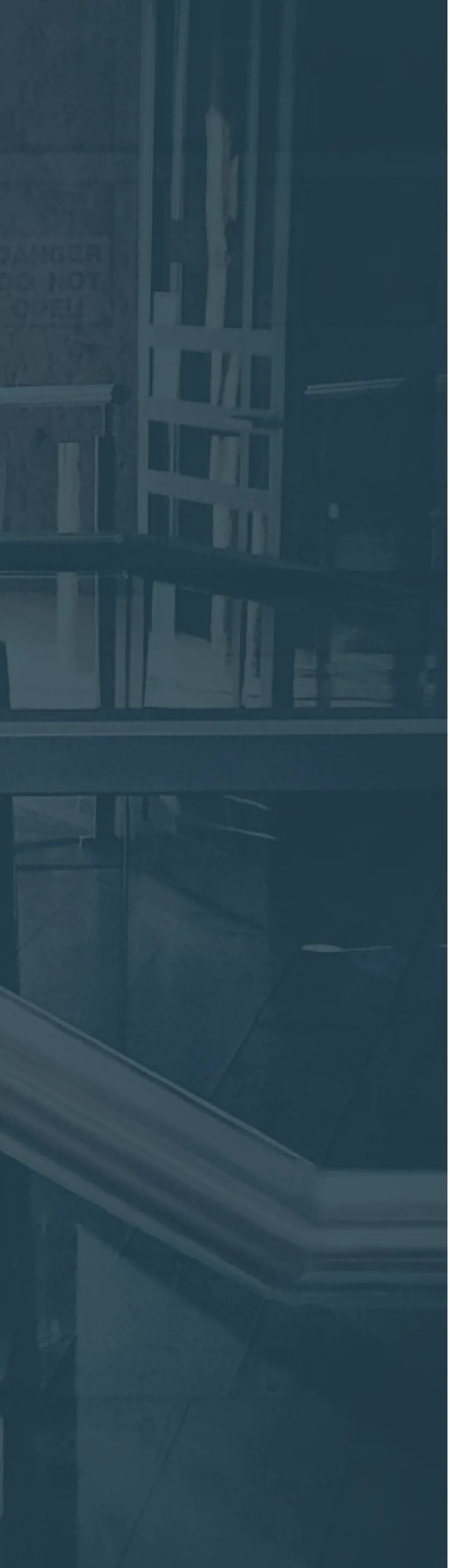

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'Untitled' by Brendan Ó Sé

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Featured Interviews:

Learning to See the Street: Miguel Castellano on Light, Timing & Attention

Slow Down and Look Closer: Inside Charne Odendaal's World of Macro Photography

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- Before You Eat: Shooting Mouth-Watering Food Photography
- Between the Sea and the Shadows: A Day Wandering the Streets of Cádiz
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- An Urban Romance Grunge Tutorial With Procreate
- 5 Inspirational Photographers to Follow on Instagram

From The Editor...

Welcome to the first issue of Mobiography Magazine for 2026! As we head into this new year, I've been working hard to pull together another wonderful collection of interviews, guides, stories, and inspiring examples of smartphone photography. My hope is that it will ignite your creativity and help you see the world from a fresh perspective.

Inside, I speak with two more smartphone photographers - Miguel Castellano and Charne Odendaal.

Miguel Castellano is a Spanish photographer whose work is rooted in street photography and the urban environment. Working in both black-and-white and color, Miguel uses shadows, shafts of light, and strong geometry to shape his images. Solitary figures often pass through his frames, caught mid-stride, giving his photographs a quiet sense of rhythm and human presence. Miguel talks about his approach to photography, his influences, and how smartphone photography fits into a practice built on attention, restraint, and trust in the moment.

Meanwhile, Charne Odendaal is a smartphone photographer based in Pretoria, South Africa. She has a deep love of photography which focuses in on the natural world around her. Charne captures the vibrant beauty of flowers, not just for their beauty, but for the tiny details they reveal when you move in close. In my chat with Charne, she talks about her journey into macro photography, the tools she uses, and the process she follows.

Also inside, I look at how and why we should embrace poor weather conditions and not hide away from them. Mark Myerson looks at testing the limits of your smartphone and how pushing past them is one of the best ways to discover new creative avenues and improve your photography. Brendan Ó Sé takes a nostalgic photo walk around the streets of Cadiz in Spain, sharing some of his memories of this vibrant city, and documenting the day from sunrise to sunset. Jack Hollingsworth combines his passion for photography, color, and food, sharing insights from over 35 years in commercial photography on how to take mouthwatering photos of food.

Finally, in her latest tutorial, Nicki Fitz-Gerald shows us how to use Procreate to transform a simple photograph into a painterly urban scene with a romantic touch. She begins with a simple image, softens the details, and using a limited color palette she layers textures to create an image that moves beyond realism into a more expressive form.

As always, I hope you enjoy this latest issue of Mobiography. Don't forget to share your photos by using the hashtag #mobiography on Instagram. And keep an eye out for our weekly challenges.

Happy Shooting,

Andy Butler

'[LADY]BIRD' by @photosbyyulius

MOBIOGRAPHY GALLERY SHOWCASE

‘Looking Up’ by @doriea228169

‘Untitled’ by @barbaraethereal

‘Untitled’ by @jack__mallon

‘My boy’ by @camera_inmypocket

‘Shenzhen’ by @david_de_koninck

‘Watching you wake’ by @hd_ally69

‘Untitled’ by @wroclavska_l

‘Twilight zone’ by @edelvintage

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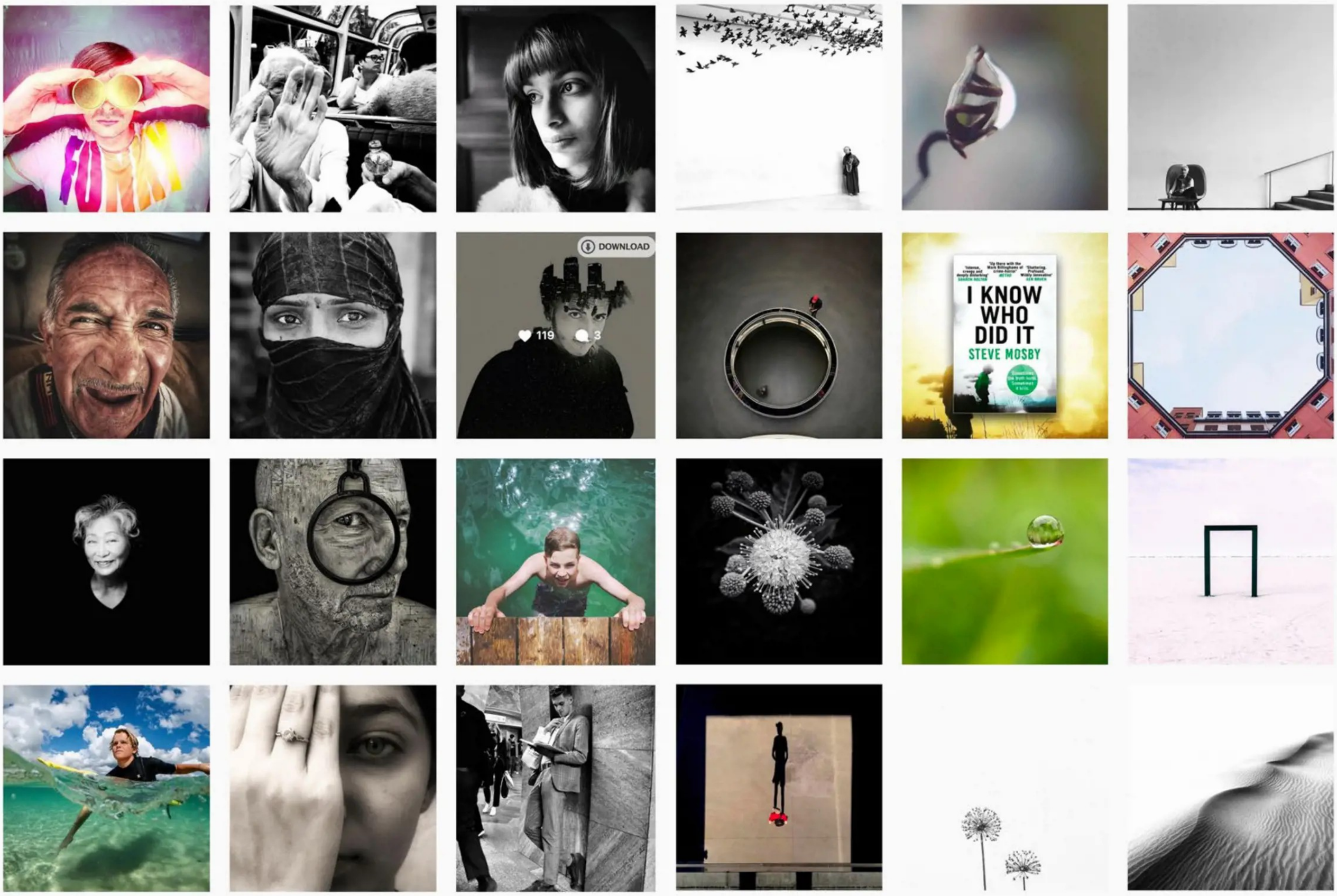


USE THE HASHTAG

#MOBIOGRAPHY

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR THE WEEKLY CHALLENGES

EMBRACING POOR WEATHER CONDITIONS FOR BETTER PHOTOS

By Andy Butler

Photo by @groda71

Clear skies and warm light. These are the kind of conditions most photographers associate with being ideal for photography. And it's understandably so, especially if you like to shoot landscapes or want to spend time wandering the streets with your phone, looking for the next decisive moment. Often, poor weather conditions can be somewhat inconvenient. After all, getting wet isn't very nice, grey skies can make a scene feel lifeless, and fog tends to hide the big vista you were heading out to capture.

However, just because the sun isn't shining, it doesn't mean you should give up and go home. Difficult weather has a way of stripping a scene back to what matters. It changes how places look and how people move through them. Light softens. Color deepens. Mood appears without much effort. Also, when conditions become uncomfortable, you stop chasing the perfect picture postcard views and start working with what's actually happening around you.

Photo by @groda71

Some of my favorite photos have been taken on days when the weather was far from ideal. So, with that in mind, today I want to look at why you should embrace poor weather conditions and not hide from them.

SEEING WEATHER AS A SUBJECT, NOT AN OBSTACLE

Often, when the weather takes a turn for the worse, it's tempting to try and protect the image we had in mind. We'll wait for the rain to pass or hope the fog lifts so we can carry on as if nothing had happened. There's been many an occasion when I've hung around waiting for conditions to improve - which usually never happens.

Instead of paddling against the current, try going with the flow. Once you let the weather take center stage, you'll often find things tend to improve. Rain, mist, wind, and heavy cloud don't just sit on top of a scene. They reshape it. A familiar place can feel entirely different once the weather and the light change in unexpected ways. At that point, the photo becomes more about the moment rather than the location.

Working with a smartphone makes things easier. You're less tied to a setup and more responsive to what's unfolding. Instead of fighting low contrast or uneven light, you need to start asking yourself simple questions. What's been removed from the scene? What's appeared that wasn't there before? What details do I have to work with right now? And where do I want to guide the viewer's eye?

Once the weather becomes part of the subject, it stops feeling like a problem to solve, and more like the glue that holds the image together.

Let's look at some weather-specific conditions and how to approach them.

OVERCAST SKIES

We often think of overcast days as being dull and lifeless. However, they can offer some of the most useful light you can work with. When the sky turns into a giant softbox, shadows become diffused, and contrast settles down. You're not battling between the extremes of light and dark, and nothing in the scene is fighting for attention anymore. At first, that calm can feel limiting, especially if you enjoy dramatic skies. But it can guide you toward a slower way of seeing things.

Without hard light carving things up, form starts to carry more weight. Lines, shapes, and spacing become clearer. In an outdoor setting, hills gently fade into the distance, and tree lines appear clearer. Along the coast, glare disappears, and textures feel more solid. On the street, buildings flatten out but become more ordered, and people sit more comfortably within the frame. On days like this, look for scenes with clear structure, strong verticals, repeating shapes, or a subject that stands out cleanly against a simple background, as these often work best.

Color behaves differently, too. Overcast light often deepens tones without pushing them too far. Greens feel heavier. Stone looks denser. Muted palettes make sense. I often tend to step back from shooting wide scenes on days like this and crop my photos a little tighter. A single subject against a simple background can say so much more than one lost in a wider view.

Today's smartphone cameras handle overcast light pretty well due to the reduced tonal range it has to wrestle with. On overcast days, I find myself thinking less about exposure and shooting more instinctively, trusting the phone to hold detail across the scene. These conditions also suit black-and-white photography particularly well, especially when contrast is allowed to build gently rather than being forced. And if you're lucky, a break in the cloud can bring a narrow shaft of light, which can inject some drama into an otherwise quiet scene.

RAIN

Rain changes the atmosphere a place has, almost immediately. Streets empty, then fill again in short bursts. People tend to walk faster, with their shoulders hunched, and umbrellas open. Even in places you know well, behavior shifts, and that shift is often where the photograph lives.

Visually, rain will add layers to a scene. Movement becomes easier to suggest, whether it's falling drops against a dark background or blurred figures crossing wet streets. Reflections appear where there were none before. Pavements, roads, and steps take on a mirror-like quality.

When it's raining, I will often hold the phone low to the ground in order to capture the reflections created in puddles. That small change in viewpoint can completely transform an ordinary street scene into something far more interesting because you're seeing it from an angle you wouldn't normally expect. That change in viewpoint will immediately bring an image to life.

In nature, rain tends to deepen colors and bring out textures. Leaves will darken, and stones will gain weight. Small details start to stand out, such as droplets clinging to plants or collecting along edges. These make ready-made foregrounds when you move in close.

Another interesting approach you can take is to try shooting through rain-covered glass. I use this technique quite often, especially in cafés or on public transport. The distortions you get as light refracts in the raindrops, combined with the bokeh effect that's created from the background scene, will help create a truly magical abstract image. In these moments, the feeling of rain often matters far more than sharpness.

FOG AND MIST

I personally love foggy conditions because they have a way of turning an otherwise plain scene into something mysterious.
It quietens everything down, removes clutter, and simplifies the scene. Trees become shapes rather than objects. Buildings lose their edges. Roads and paths pull the eye into the scene without distraction, and a single figure, a lone tree, or a stretch of railings can carry an entire frame once the background fades away.

The downside is that fog can be hard to plan for. More often than not, it means getting up early and taking a bit of a gamble. But if you keep an eye on the weather reports, you can often take an educated guess if you know what conditions to look for.

It usually forms on cool mornings after a clear, calm night when the ground is cool, and the moisture in the air settles near the ground. Low-lying areas such as valleys, fields, riverbanks, lakesides, and coastal paths are the best places to find fog, with the autumn and winter months offering the best conditions.

I tend to gravitate toward woodland locations in such conditions as fog makes it easier to isolate a single subject, such as a lone tree, from what would usually be a busy background. In denser woodland, the effect is even stronger as trees fade quickly into the distance. This creates a natural sense of depth without needing wide views or dramatic lighting.

From an exposure point of view, fog is also pretty forgiving. Highlights tend to be soft, and contrast stays under control, which suits smartphone cameras well. The main thing to watch for is the position of the sun. Shooting directly into it can create a distraction, while keeping it behind you or to one side tends to preserve the quiet, muted feel that makes fog so effective in the first place.

Photo by @Mariko_klug

Photo by @Mariko_klug

FROST AND SNOW

Cold weather comes with its own set of challenges, from stiff fingers to batteries that drain faster than you'd like. For many, hanging around with a camera in cold weather can be far from appealing. However, I find that when the comfort level drops, the decisions we make tend to become more deliberate. You start shooting with intent rather than out of habit.

Like fog, snow simplifies a scene in a very direct way. Roads, fields, rooftops, and pavements merge into pale tones, leaving lines and darker shapes to carry the image. Color often becomes less important, making black-and-white photography the natural choice rather than a stylistic one.

Photo by @kreuz.quer.fotos

In cold weather, people also tend to move differently, and that change fits well with the stripped-back feel of snowy scenes. Movements feel purposeful. Postures tighten. There's often more space between subjects, which makes framing easier and scenes feel quieter. A single figure crossing a snow-covered street can say so much more, especially when the surroundings have already been stripped back.

In these conditions, I rarely stay in one place for long. I look, frame, shoot, and move on. Cold has a way of making you decisive, and that often shows in the final image.

DEVELOPING A WEATHER-FIRST MINDSET

Having a weather-first mindset will change how and why you head out. Instead of picking a location and hoping the weather cooperates, you start by noticing what the day may have to offer. Rain may pull you toward the streets. Fog will inject mystery into a landscape scene. And heavy cloud will invite you to explore form, structure, and mood. The weather becomes your starting point.

This way of working takes the pressure off your shoulders. You're no longer trying to force a scene to look a certain way. Instead, you respond to it. You'll start to notice patterns over time as certain locations seem to work better in specific conditions. Once you notice this, your planning becomes more intuitive. Even so, not every outing will produce a strong image, but each one will teach you something and sharpen your awareness. Eventually, stepping out when others stay in will feel natural.

Photo by @Mariko_klug

REMEMBER, LET THE WEATHER DO THE WORK

Good weather makes photography easy. However, poor weather makes it interesting. Unsettled conditions add character that can't be planned for or repeated. It can add mystery, mood, and interest in ways that good weather conditions can't. It also challenges you, and this is how you can develop as a photographer.

Letting the weather do the work means giving up a bit of control. You stop forcing scenes to match expectations and allow mood and atmosphere to lead. With a smartphone, this feels natural. The camera is already there, ready when the moment changes.

So, next time the weather forecast isn't looking too great, treat it as an opportunity to get outside rather than an excuse to stay indoors. Those are often the days when images feel more personal, more grounded, and alive.

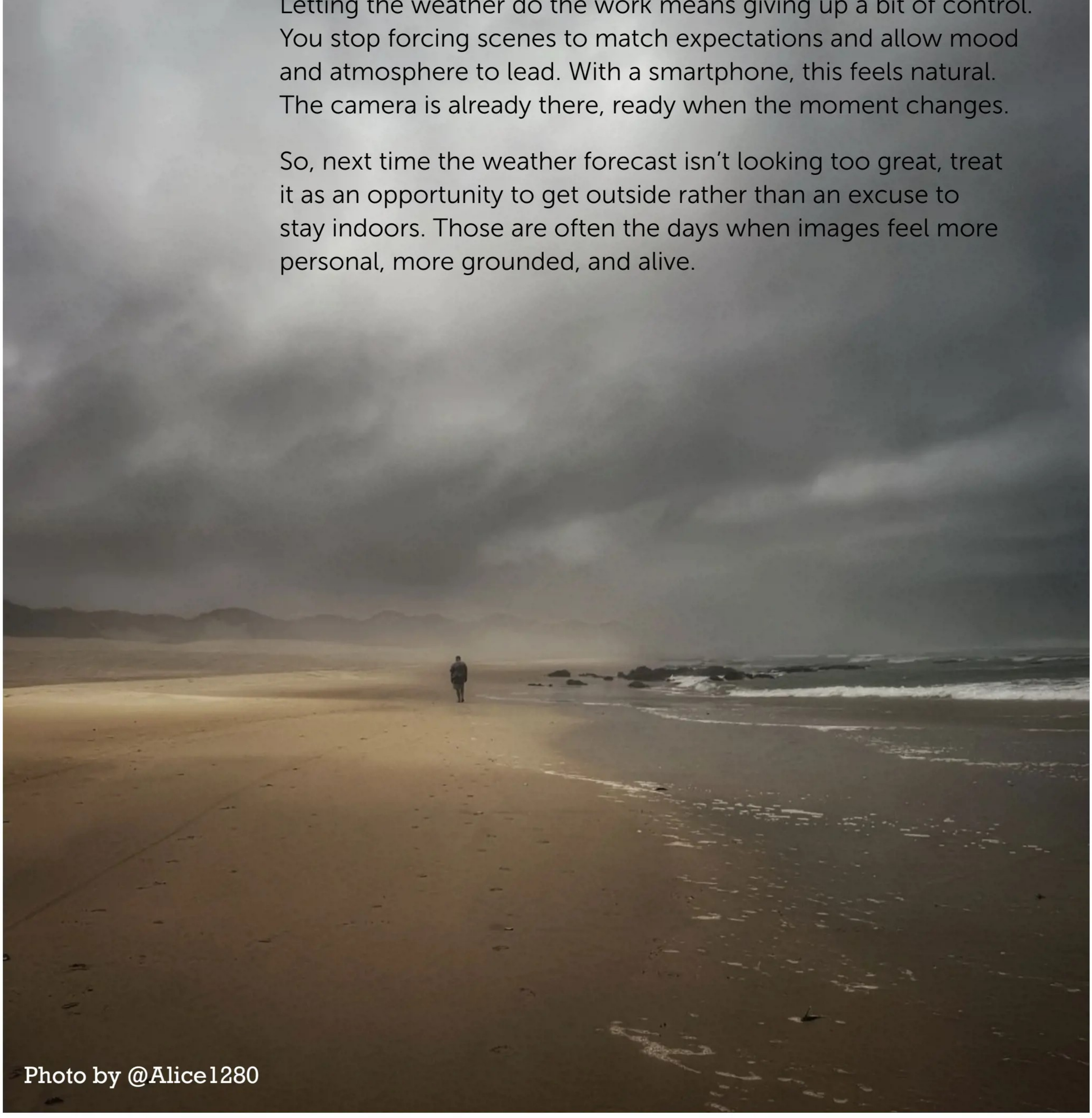
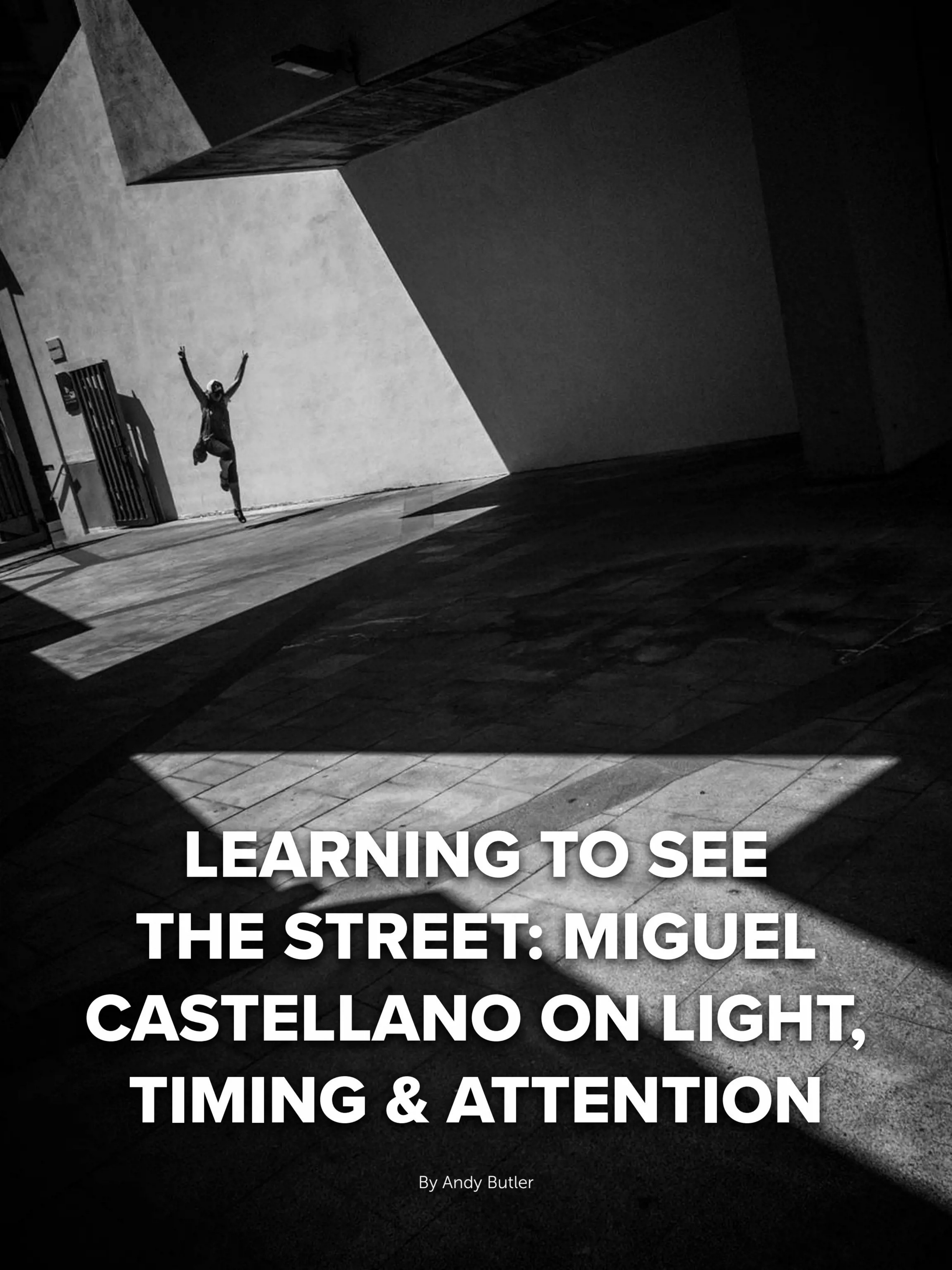


Photo by @Alice1280



LEARNING TO SEE THE STREET: MIGUEL CASTELLANO ON LIGHT, TIMING & ATTENTION

By Andy Butler

Miguel Castellano is a Spanish photographer whose work is rooted in street photography and the urban environment. Working in both black-and-white and color, he uses shadows, shafts of light, and strong geometry to shape his images. Solitary figures often pass through his frames, caught mid-stride as they move through the city, giving his photographs a quiet sense of rhythm and human presence.

While one part of his work focuses on capturing these fleeting street scenes, Miguel also pursues a second body of work titled Abstract Ground. This quieter color project shifts his attention to the patterns, marks, and textures found on the ground, revealing form and balance in surfaces most people pass without noticing. In both approaches, observation comes first, and the smartphone has become his tool of choice, allowing him to respond quickly and intuitively to the world around him.

I've followed Miguel's work for some time, and wanted to learn more about his approach to photography, his influences, and how smartphone photography fits into a practice built on attention, restraint, and trust in the moment.

COULD YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY AND HOW YOU DISCOVERED SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY?

My relationship with art in general and photography in particular began as a quiet curiosity at a very early age. I was influenced by my grandfather, an amateur sculptor, and my mother, an amateur painter. My first encounter with photography came through my parents' record covers, and later through the ones I bought myself. Those images fascinated me, and I wanted to emulate them, which led me to take photography courses at community centers in my neighborhood, and later at the photography society in Zaragoza, the city where I grew up.

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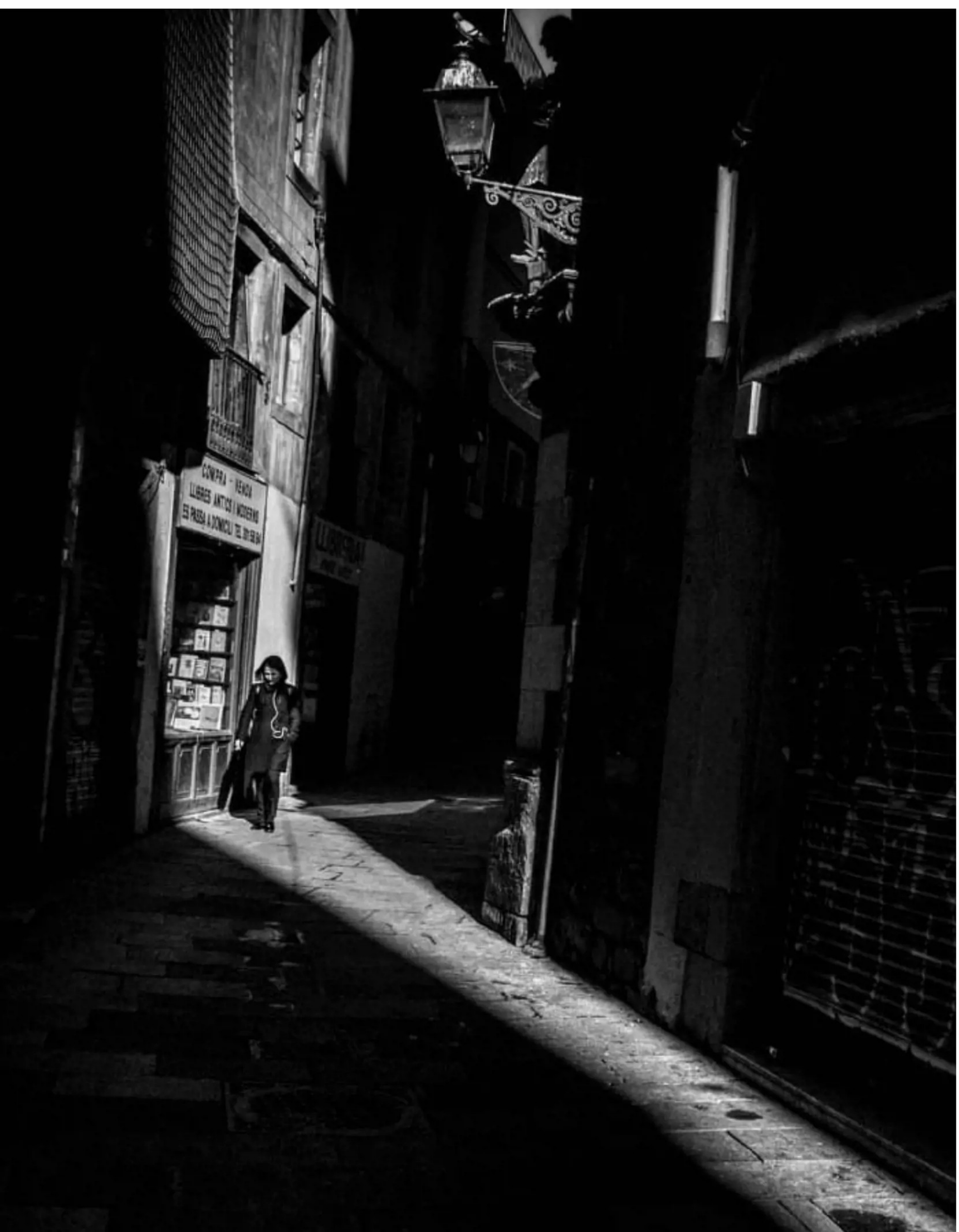
I began with traditional analogue photography and later moved to digital. Over the years, I've developed my work both individually and as part of photography collectives, such as Aldebarán in Zaragoza and Plec in Lleida. As time passed, I realized that even when I didn't have a camera with me, I continued to look at the world through the eyes of a photographer. While walking down the street, I'd instinctively notice how light transforms everyday elements: a corner, a face, a shadow, lines, or a reflection.

This often led to frustration when I encountered an interesting scene but didn't have my camera with me. However, the arrival of smartphone photography was the perfect solution to this problem. Its immediacy and accessibility mean I no longer miss unrepeatable moments. At the same time, current smartphone camera technology allows me to produce high-quality images without sacrificing the technical capabilities I value in SLR or mirrorless cameras.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE STREETS THAT FASCINATES YOU AS A PHOTOGRAPHER?

The street provides the raw materials I need: movement, chance, geometry, silence, shadow, and emotion. It's a constant interplay of space and light that reflects the relationship between people and their urban environment, and that relationship is what truly captivates me.

For me, photography has become less about technique and more about observation and presence. What attracts me to the street is its ability to reveal the human in its purest form. The street does not pose, pretend, or wait. It's an unscripted theatre where light changes roles every minute, and people appear and disappear as if guided by an invisible rhythm.



I'm particularly interested in the point of friction between order and chaos: rigid architecture and the life that flows through it. Elongated shadows, figures crossing a beam of light, reflections that distort reality and suddenly create unexpected beauty. I'm not interested in documenting the street like a journalist, but in getting closer to its breath, its pulse.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY AND RECOGNIZE FLEETING MOMENTS?

My approach is a combination of attention and waiting. I love walking aimlessly through the city, feeling the vibration of what is happening around me. I rarely plan a specific image in advance, but over time I've developed a sensitivity for recognizing spaces and situations that have photographic potential.

I place great importance on the environment, which is usually the first element I respond to when considering a shot. A textured wall, shadows interacting with illuminated areas, or architectural shapes that suggest something might happen within the frame. Often, I stay in one place, waiting for a chance to introduce the human presence that completes the scene.

What interests me most is the brief moment when space, light, and human presence align to create a composition and a story that exists for only a second before disappearing. At other times, I work purely on instinct, reacting immediately when something strikes me visually. This balance between intuition and conscious observation is what allows me to capture the ephemeral.

COMPOSITION FORMS A STRONG ELEMENT IN YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY. WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH?

Classical compositional principles from painting and photography are very present in my work. I don't see them as restrictive rules, but as tools that help me express my vision more clearly. They allow me to bring order to the visual chaos that's inherent in street photography.

Composition helps me offer a harmonious interpretation of what I see, often revealing something unexpected to the viewer. The photographers I admire the most are those who surprise me and show me a new way of seeing the world. Before taking a photograph, I try to sense the balance of the space: intersecting lines, visual weight, and emptiness.

Architecture and urban geometry provide a structure on which light and people leave their marks. I also recognize that I have a very minimalist eye and try to actively avoid visual noise or unnecessary information overload. I use silence - empty space - a lot to allow the image to breathe, giving the viewer a place to rest before engaging with the action. Playing with scale is also important to me, whether through a small figure within a large structure or a shadow that becomes more dominant than the subject itself.

LIGHT AND SHADOW PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN YOUR WORK. HOW DO YOU USE THEM?

For me, the balance between light and shadow functions as another compositional element. I use it to guide the viewer's attention and to reinforce the emotional atmosphere of each image. Hard, contrasting light can suggest isolation or intensity, while softer, diffused light can evoke calm or melancholy.

I often think of light as if it were music, where each tone, each degree of contrast, changes the emotional rhythm of the image. I'm very interested in how contrast transforms each photograph. I'm drawn to extreme contrasts, moments when the sun creates strong geometries or reduces figures to pure silhouettes.

I frequently work at the edges of the day, when the light is softer. But I also enjoy the challenge of harsh midday light, when shadows become dense and almost solid. In these situations, light becomes a structural, almost architectural element. Beyond contrast, a dialogue emerges between what's visible and what's hidden. Sometimes a shadow says more than a face, allowing me to suggest rather than show, which gives the image a deeper narrative power.

YOUR PROJECT 'ABSTRACT GROUND' EXPLORES A MORE CONTEMPLATIVE APPROACH. WHAT INSPIRED IT?

'Abstract Ground' is about seeking out the beauty hidden in our everyday urban environment. After spending a lot of time on the street, surrounded by noise and movement, I felt curious to look down, towards the ground, towards fragments of the world that no one usually looks at, in search of something interesting.

My interest in contemporary abstract painting, particularly artists such as Rothko, Mondrian, Pollock, and Scully, strongly influenced this project. I began to see asphalt, road markings, and traces of paint as landscapes of form and color that speak about time, erosion, and memory.

In this project, the pace is slower, almost meditative. I'm no longer searching for decisive moments, but for texture, matter, and abstraction. While my street photography thrives on chance and human energy, Abstract Ground is rooted in silence and contemplation. The two approaches balance and inform one another.

HOW HAVE PHOTOGRAPHERS LIKE KLEIN, LEITER, AND CARTIER-BRESSON INFLUENCED YOU?

I've always believed that, more than the technical courses I've taken over the years, what's brought me closest to the essence of photography is looking at books and exhibitions by great photographers. Each of them has taught me something different about how to look at and interpret reality, and they've definitely shaped the way I photograph.

William Klein inspires me with his energy and rebellious attitude toward the image. I like the way he breaks the rules and shows the street as it is: chaotic, lively, and full of movement. Thanks to him, I understood that a photo doesn't have to be perfect to be powerful, and that blur, grain, or proximity can convey a truth stronger than impeccable technique.

I'm drawn to Saul Leiter's sensitivity and poetic gaze. His use of color, reflections, and visual layers made me understand photography almost like painting, something built calmly and attentively. Leiter taught me to see beauty in everyday life, even on grey days or through wet glass. From him, I learned that an image can be gentle and deeply emotional at the same time.

Henri Cartier-Bresson's idea of the decisive moment also left a strong mark on me: that exact instant when everything aligns, and the photograph happens. His way of observing and anticipating gesture, composition, and rhythm helped me develop patience and attention. He taught me that behind a powerful image, there is intuition, but also visual discipline.

In my work, I try to combine Klein's energy, Leiter's poetry and color, and Cartier-Bresson's precision and balance.

DO YOU PLAN YOUR STREET PHOTOGRAPHY OR WANDER FREELY?

Most of the time, I walk without a plan, allowing myself to respond to what I encounter. Wandering aimlessly is essential for keeping my curiosity alive, and I genuinely enjoy the act of walking and observing.

If I capture a good photograph, all the better, but simply going out in search of one is already very rewarding. That said, there are places I return to intentionally, either because of their symmetry or because I understand how light behaves there. Knowing a space allows me to wait and trust that something meaningful may eventually happen.

WHAT'S DOES YOUR SHOOTING AND EDITING PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

I take photos using the original camera app on my Samsung Galaxy. For editing, I work exclusively with Snapseed, which I find very practical. I start with subtle adjustments to exposure, contrast, saturation, and shadows. Later, I use the brush tool extensively as it allows me to correct light, shadows, exposure, and saturation in specific areas.

My process is more about reduction than addition, always trying to avoid visual noise and highlight what's essential in each image. I'm not interested in transforming the scene, but in refining it until it reflects what I felt when I took the photograph. For me, editing is not about embellishment, but interpretation.

HAS SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY CHANGED YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH PHOTOGRAPHY?

Definitely, smartphones have given me a freer and more spontaneous relationship with photography. With a traditional camera, you tend to plan and rationalize too much. With a phone, that barrier disappears.

The simplicity of smartphone photography has allowed me to focus more on the image than on the technique, and I believe this has helped me develop my eye and take better photographs. Often, less is more. Having my phone with me at all times also means I don't miss images I would otherwise lose.

Being able to edit photos shortly after taking them allows me to work with a fresher, more immediate impression of the image, which helps me interpret it more faithfully than if I edited it much later on a computer.

IS THERE A STORY THAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY?

One of my photos took me up to seven days to take. It was photographed on a bridge in Lleida, where dense fog is common in autumn and winter. While driving, I passed a bridge over the river where the fog was so thick it made the bridge appear to disappear.

I wanted to return and capture that moment on foot at the same time of day, but it took several days of waiting for similar fog and light conditions, enduring intense cold. Fortunately, the perseverance was worth it. Moments like this make you realize what your passion for photography can lead you to do.

FOLLOW MIGUEL CASTELLANO

Instagram: @miguelcastellano_photo

Instagram: @mcst_abstract

Website: miguelcastellano.wixsite.com/photo

THE STORY BEHIND MY FAVORITE PHOTOS...

PHOTO #1

This photograph was taken on the streets of Barcelona and represents a decisive moment when there's no time to think. The male figure in the advertisement appears to be spying on what the girl is writing on her smartphone. To take the photograph unnoticed, I crouched down pretending to tie my shoelaces and quickly took the shot with my phone.

PHOTO #2

The second image was taken in Barcelona on a rainy day, when the water on the ground created interesting reflections. I waited a long time for human movement to give it meaning. After taking the photo, I flipped the image during editing to give prominence to the reflection, creating an almost dreamlike atmosphere.

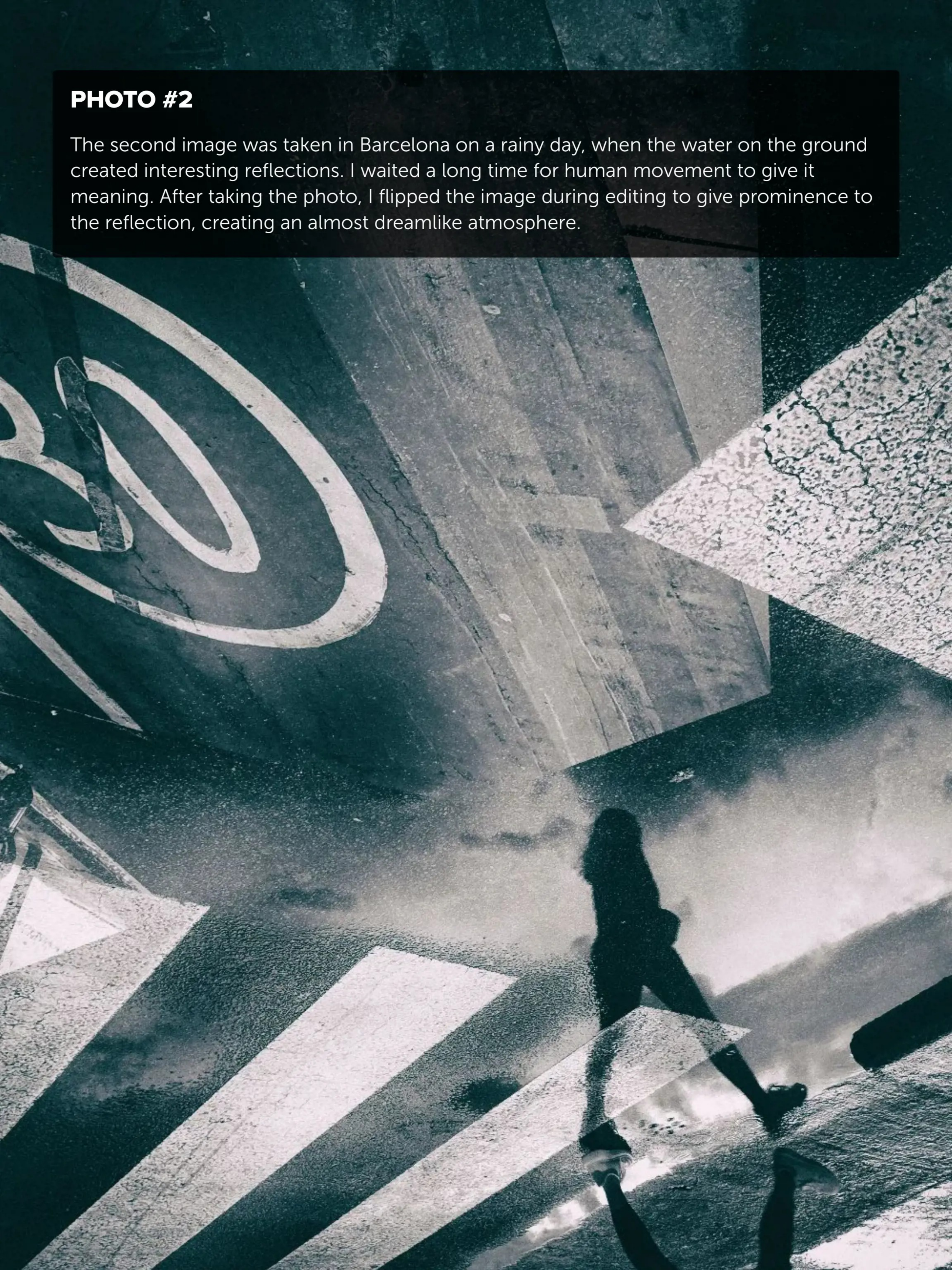


PHOTO #3

The third image was taken in Superkilen Park in Copenhagen. I took several photos that day with both my smartphone and a compact camera. This was the first image I captured with my phone, quickly pulling it from my pocket. It ended up being the strongest image of the day. Although it breaks some compositional rules, I was drawn to the dynamic lines and their relationship with the moving figure.

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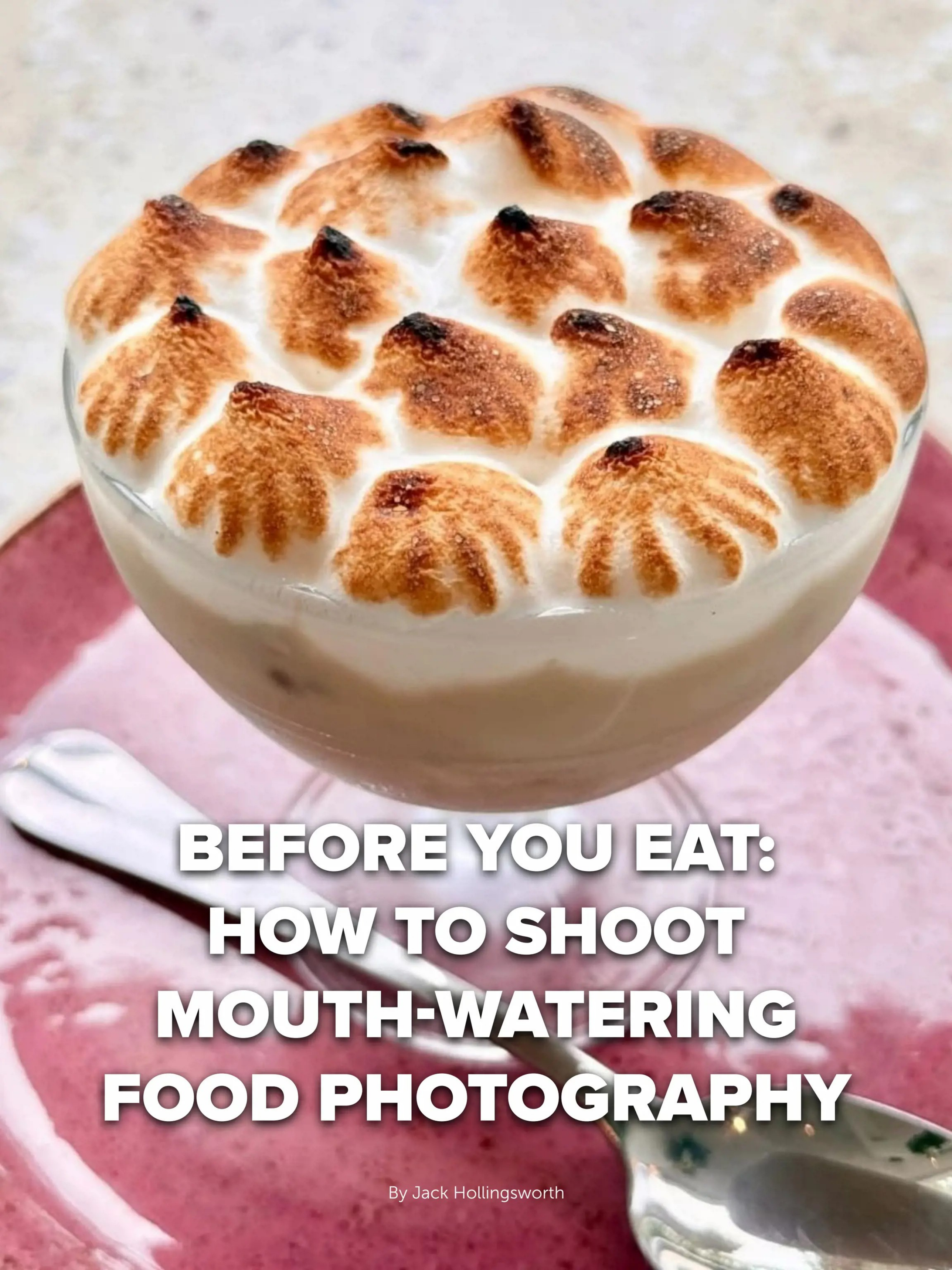


BEFORE YOU EAT: HOW TO SHOOT MOUTH-WATERING FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

By Jack Hollingsworth

I've been photographing food for most of my adult life, not because I set out to become a food photographer or wanted to chase trends, hashtags, or perfectly plated plates. As a professional photographer, it sort of came with the territory - editorial work, travel assignments for cruises, hotels, and restaurants. When you spend decades working in those sorts of environments, food photography finds you whether you like it or not.

What surprised me wasn't that I kept photographing food after switching to the iPhone in 2011, but how much more I started to enjoy it.

Food became my quiet practice. It didn't involve clients, or meeting other people's expectations. There was no pressure: just a plate, a table, some light, and a phone.

And somewhere along the way, I realized something important. Food photography isn't really about food. It's about attention.

That realization became the foundation for a new project that I've been working on quietly behind the scenes - a small book called Before You Eat. It's written for everyday smartphone photographers, but the ideas inside it come directly from fifteen years of shooting exclusively with phone cameras in real-world conditions.

Today, I'll present a more technical, Mobiography-friendly version of that concept which should hopefully help you shoot better food photos.

WHY FOOD IS THE PERFECT PHONE-PHOTOGRAPHY SUBJECT

Let's start with the obvious. Food doesn't move, it doesn't complain, doesn't blink, and doesn't care how many times you photograph it. That alone makes it an ideal subject for phone photography.

But the main reason food works so well is this: food exists in the same visual world phones are optimized for - close distances, natural light, rich color, texture, and contrast.

Modern phone cameras, whether iOS or Android, are computational monsters at close range. Multi-frame HDR, local tone mapping, smart sharpening, and aggressive noise reduction all work in your favor when the subject is static and well-lit.

Food checks every box, which makes it an ideal training ground, not for becoming a food photographer, but for becoming a better photographer.

THE REAL ENEMY: SPEED

Most bad food photos are not badly shot - they're just rushed.

The plate arrives. The phone comes out. One quick shot from wherever you're sitting and the job's done. As a result, the outcome is often flat, pale, or disappointing. This isn't a camera problem. It's a timing problem, and food photography punishes impatience.

The single most important habit I teach people, whether they're beginners or seasoned mobile shooters, is learning to pause before even touching the shutter. Five seconds. Sometimes less.

In that pause, your eyes adjust and you start to notice the direction of light. You start to notice clutter creeping in from the edges. And you get a sense of the angle that feels most natural instead of one that's forced.

This is where phone photography quietly separates itself from traditional camera culture. Phones reward attention more than preparation.

LIGHT FIRST. ALWAYS.

If there's one technical principle that matters more than any other, it's light direction.

Simply put, overhead light kills food. It flattens any texture, drains the color from the image, and creates shiny highlights and muddy shadows. Ceiling lights are the enemy of appetizing photographs. In contrast, side light is the hero. Look for windows, open doors, or natural light skimming across the plate. You don't need to move seats or ask for a table by the window, and you certainly don't need to rearrange the restaurant.

Most of the time, you only need to rotate the plate.

Turning the dish so light comes from the side instantly reveals texture. Crusts look crisp. Sauces gain depth. Ingredients separate visually instead of collapsing into a single tone. Smartphones love this kind of light because it gives computational processing something to work with - micro-contrast, gradation, and real depth.

This isn't styling. It's alignment.

CAMERA HEIGHT BEATS CAMERA MODE

Here's something that might annoy some people. Standing up to shoot food is usually a mistake.

I understand why people do it. Overhead food photography is everywhere online. But most of those images are carefully staged, lit, and styled. That's not what you're doing at a table.

You see, when you stand, you block light and draw attention to yourself, so you rush, and disconnect from the moment.

When you stay seated, everything improves. Your phone naturally sits at a slight angle which helps to create depth and layers within your composition. This approach matches how you actually experience the meal.

From a technical standpoint, this angle also works better with smartphone lenses as you avoid extreme perspective distortion. You let the computational pipeline do its thing without forcing it into unnatural geometry.

As a result, seated photography feels calm because it is calm.

DISTANCE MATTERS MORE THAN ZOOM

One of the biggest mistakes I see people make (even the most experienced smartphone photographers) is staying too far back.

We photograph food politely. We keep our distance, we include the whole table, all the context and all the distractions.

Food wants intimacy.

Moving the phone closer does more than cropping ever will. Zooming reduces data and increases engagement.

At close distances, smartphone cameras will emphasize subject separation more naturally. Even without portrait mode, the background falls away, textures become more tactile, and colors become much richer.

If something gets cropped - good. Cropping requires confidence, and I believe most people stop moving closer one step too soon.

CONTROL FOCUS. CONTROL EXPOSURE.

Phones make decisions fast. Sometimes too fast. When you tap to focus, it isn't just about sharpness, it's about telling the camera what matters to you the most.

When you tap on a particular part of the dish, you're also setting the exposure for the image. You're telling the phone how bright the photo should be, based on what you care about, and not what the algorithm should be guessing.

This is one of the quiet superpowers of smartphone photography - manual control without menus.

And while we're on the subject of exposure, let's talk about brightness.

Phones love bright photos. But food often doesn't.

Slight underexposure will almost always improve a food photograph. This subtle adjustment helps to deepen the colors, calm down the highlights, stop whites from glowing, and brings back the texture to the image.

On iOS, a small downward exposure drag after tapping focus is often all it takes. On Android, similar exposure compensation gestures apply depending on the camera app you're using.

You're not making the image darker. You're capturing a much more honest representation of the scene in front of you.

ORIENTATION IS A CHOICE, NOT A DEFAULT

Most people shoot food in portrait orientation because that's how they hold their phone. That's not a reason. That's a habit.

Think about it for a second. Plates are wide. Tables are wide. So, for that reason, it makes sense that food often looks better when shot in landscape orientation.

The simple act of turning the phone sideways gives the subject more room to breathe. It reduces empty space and aligns better with a seated angle and side light.

The key is not which orientation you choose. It's that you choose at all.

As I always like to say, default shooting leads to default results.

RESTRAINT IS A SKILL

Here's where philosophy creeps in. One photo is usually enough.

If you've paid attention, chosen the light, and committed to the frame, then spraying five versions rarely improves the result. It increases anxiety and pulls you out of the moment.

And sometimes, the most confident move is not taking a photo at all. Afterall, not every meal needs to be documented. Not every plate needs to be saved. When you photograph less, the photos you do take matter more.

That's as true artistically as it is emotionally.

Specialty Times
Top Rivals To Meet In The Potato Bowl
Record Crowds Are "Peeling Out" To Get To Potato Festival
Fish Pirate Caught Up In Crowd
Allegations Of "Fish Stories" For The Nature Of Local Events

WHY THIS MATTERS BEYOND FOOD

Food is just the practice ground. The habits you build at the table will follow you everywhere. You'll start instinctively noticing the direction that light is coming from. You'll create clean frames without thinking. You'll start to move closer instead of zooming. And you'll shoot fewer, but better shots.

Phone photography stops being about features and starts being about awareness. And that's when it gets interesting.

A QUIET INVITATION

As I mentioned earlier, I've recently turned this thinking into a small, printed book called 'Before You Eat', along with a digital edition and an audiobook version for people who prefer listening over reading.

It's not a technical manual or a trend piece. It's a reminder that good photography, especially with phones, starts with attention.

Food just happens to be the perfect place to practice.

If you've been shooting with phones as long as I have, you already know the tools are good enough. The remaining work is human.

Remember: Slow down, notice more, and trust in yourself.

That's where better photos come from. And sometimes, that realization happens right before you eat.

About the Author

Jack Hollingsworth is a passionate photographer with a long and celebrated career, traveling the world to capture stunning images for commercial, advertising, and editorial clients. Since taking his first photo with an iPhone, he's become a strong advocate for iPhone photography.

If this article resonates with you, consider checking out Jack's small project, "Before You Eat." This project is available in multiple formats: a printed book for those who like something tactile, a digital download for easy access, and an audiobook for listening during walks or while traveling. Each format covers the same core ideas but presents them in different ways to suit your preferred learning style.

BETWEEN THE SEA AND THE SHADOWS: A DAY WANDERING THE STREETS OF CÁDIZ

By Brendan Ó Sé

When you think of Spanish cities, which ones spring to mind? I bet it's the usual suspects: Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Bilbao. But did you know that the oldest city in Europe is, in fact, none of these? No, it's Cádiz - a peninsula city on the south-west Atlantic coast of Spain, a short train ride from Seville.

Cádiz is a little treasure. Its cobbled streets and lanes, and their shards of shimmering sunlight, lead you to the seafront, which surrounds this peninsula city with its beautiful beaches and the grand expanse of the Atlantic Ocean.

Spain holds a special place in my heart. When I was much younger, I spent a couple of years living in different parts of the country. One Semana Santa (Easter Week), I spent a few days in Cádiz. Spain creates a carnival of religious festivals. Cádiz is known for its pre-Lent carnival, and when the forty days of Lent are coming to an end, its people return to the streets for the processions and parades - another carnival.

Being back in the city brought those memories flooding back. And now, as I get older and my memory is not as robust as it was when I was younger, I'm determined to commit to capturing the moments I come across with my iPhone.

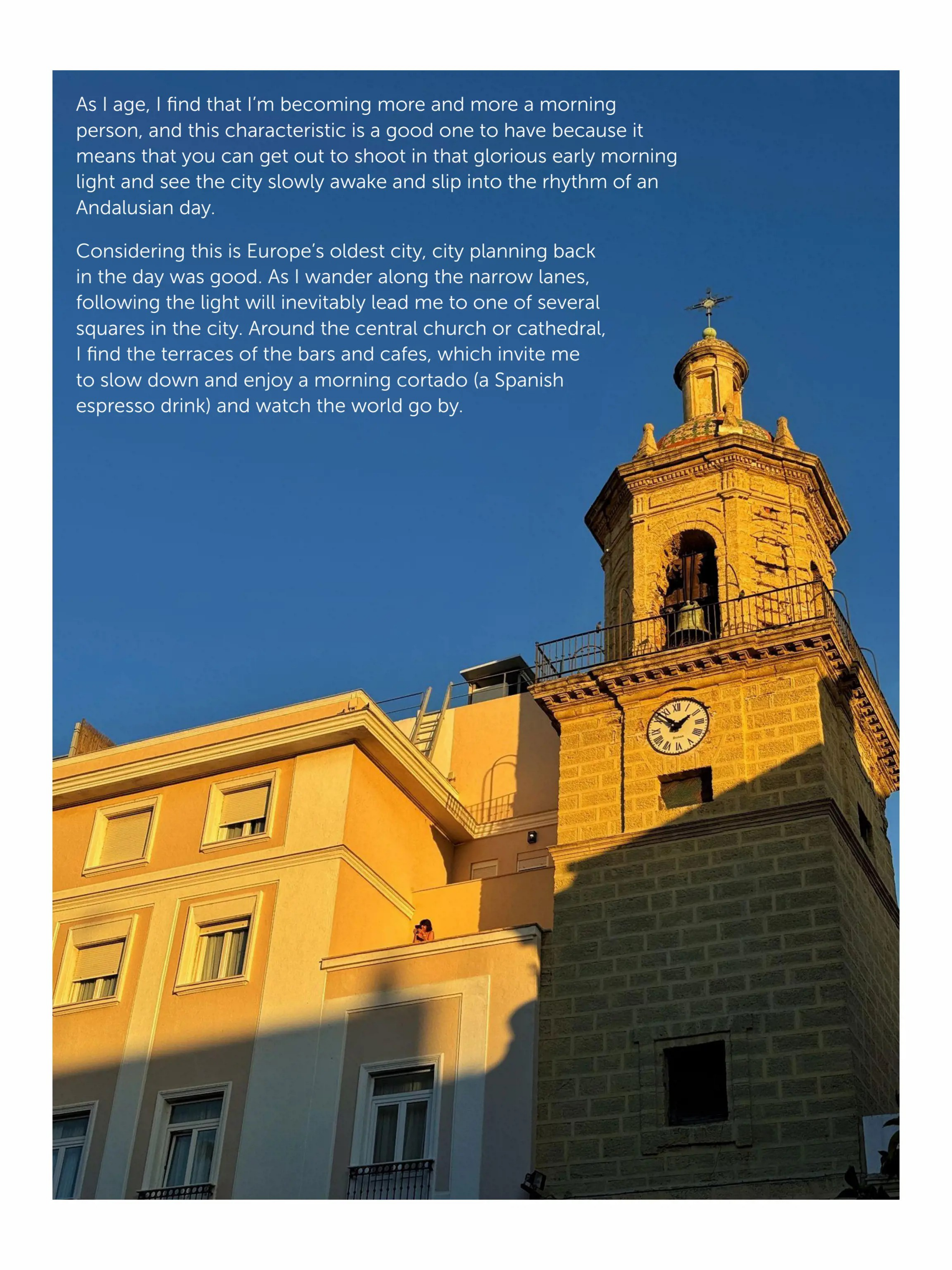
RETURNING WITH MEMORIES AND A CAMERA

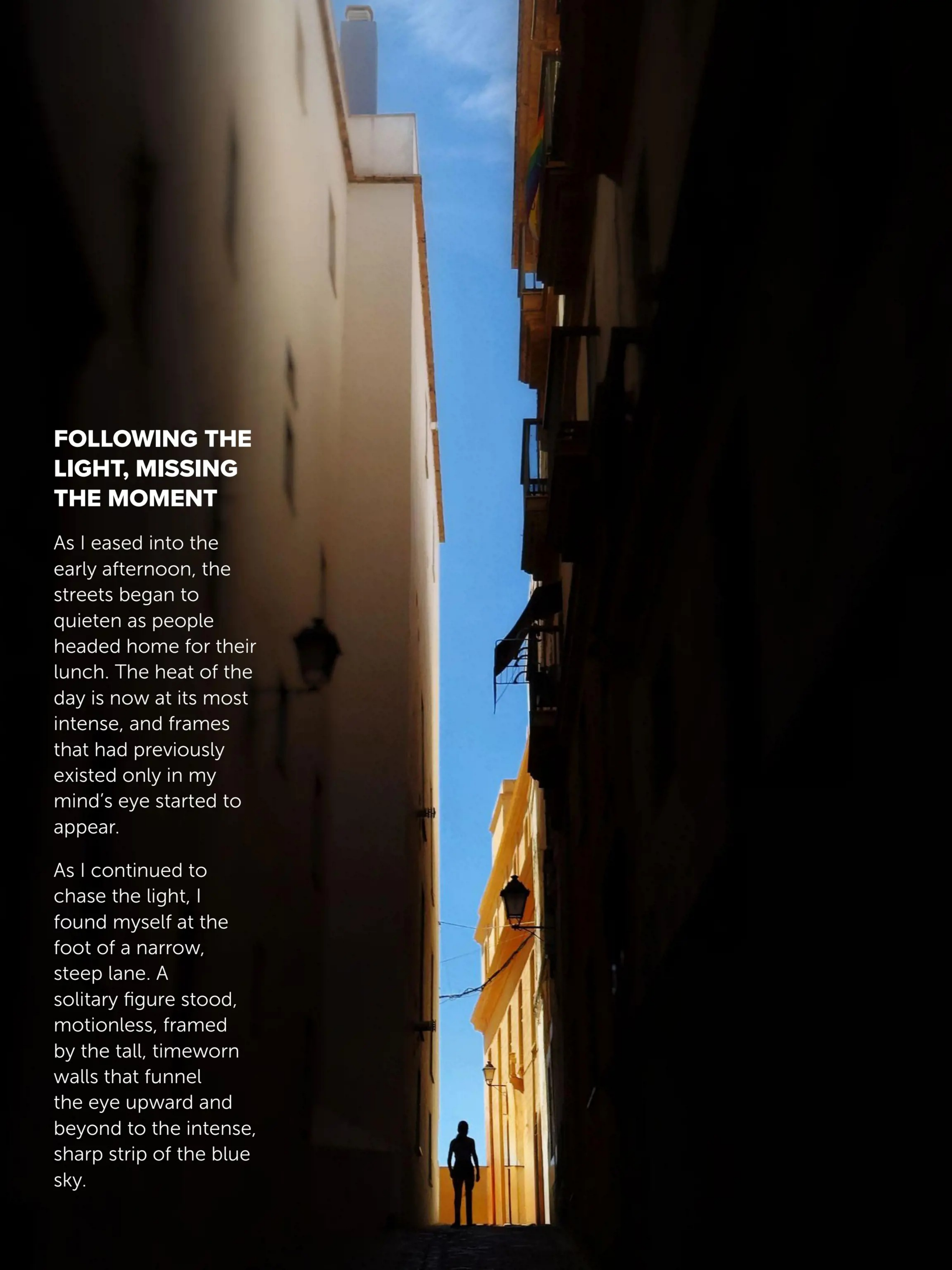
In September last year, as summer was giving way to autumn, I found myself heading back to Cádiz. Although when I travel, I prefer not to research my destination too much beforehand, those memories were stirred, and I was excited about the images I might create.

Cádiz is a fairly compact city, and I was staying in an Airbnb in the old town. Once I got my bearings, using the nearby Cathedral (Catedral de Santa Cruz sobre las Aguas) as a landmark, I discovered that walking in any direction, within five to ten minutes, you'd see the ocean. I was ready to hit the streets to explore, discover and create photos - create memories.

As I age, I find that I'm becoming more and more a morning person, and this characteristic is a good one to have because it means that you can get out to shoot in that glorious early morning light and see the city slowly awake and slip into the rhythm of an Andalusian day.

Considering this is Europe's oldest city, city planning back in the day was good. As I wander along the narrow lanes, following the light will inevitably lead me to one of several squares in the city. Around the central church or cathedral, I find the terraces of the bars and cafes, which invite me to slow down and enjoy a morning cortado (a Spanish espresso drink) and watch the world go by.





FOLLOWING THE LIGHT, MISSING THE MOMENT

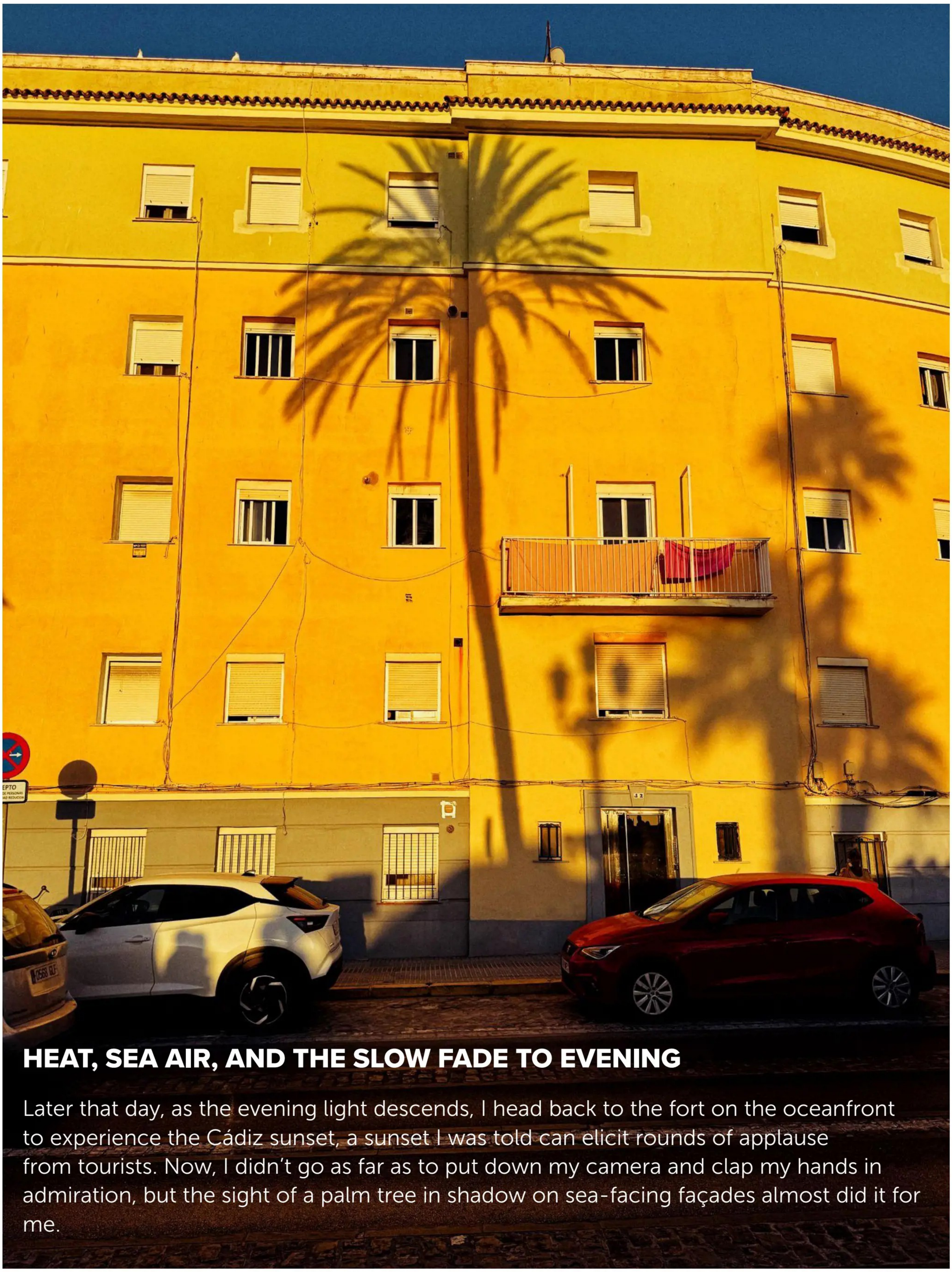
As I eased into the early afternoon, the streets began to quieten as people headed home for their lunch. The heat of the day is now at its most intense, and frames that had previously existed only in my mind's eye started to appear.

As I continued to chase the light, I found myself at the foot of a narrow, steep lane. A solitary figure stood, motionless, framed by the tall, timeworn walls that funnel the eye upward and beyond to the intense, sharp strip of the blue sky.

There's an old saying in street photography: if you see it, it's too late. This is, sadly, so often true. You arrive a second too late on a visually rich scene, like when someone casts a gesture or a look that just brings to life a story, or when elements arrange themselves just perfectly. You see it, but you can't control it. The moment is gone. There were so many scenes like this that I missed while in Cádiz, but with this simple scene of two friends at an ATM, I was fortunate.

As I wandered from the old town, the Castillo de San Sebastián was in sight in the distance, and the Paseo Fernando Quiñones, which brought me there, was alive with young kids either sitting on the walls of the walkway or taking turns to dive into the sea.

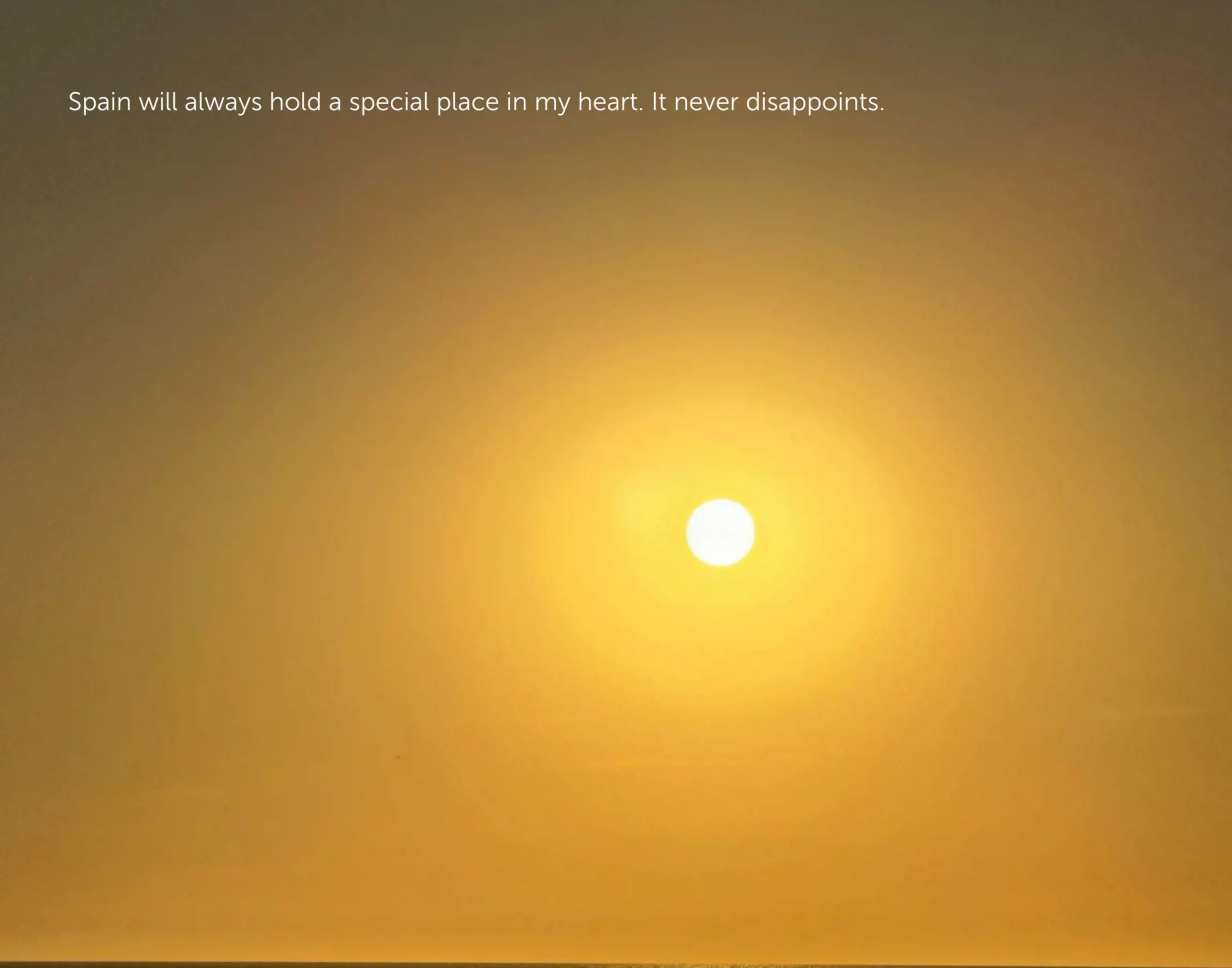
Leaving the expanse of the oceanfront for the warren-like lanes and alleys of the old town, the light now is generous, and frames start to come easily. But the heat is too much, and as the old adage goes, when in Rome, do as the Romans do, comes to mind, and I head back to the Airbnb for a siesta.



HEAT, SEA AIR, AND THE SLOW FADE TO EVENING

Later that day, as the evening light descends, I head back to the fort on the oceanfront to experience the Cádiz sunset, a sunset I was told can elicit rounds of applause from tourists. Now, I didn't go as far as to put down my camera and clap my hands in admiration, but the sight of a palm tree in shadow on sea-facing façades almost did it for me.

Walking to the vantage point to watch the setting sun was something truly magical. The fading daylight and the slowing dance of silhouettes in the shade and light. I could shoot scenes like this forever.



About the Author

Brendan Ó Sé is an award-winning fine art photographer/iPhone photographer from Cork, Ireland. His work was featured in Apple's original Shot on iPhone global campaign in 2015. Brendan combines his teaching background with his love for photography to create dynamic and fun photography workshops which he regularly gives in Irish galleries and further afield throughout Europe and Asia.

Primarily shooting with the iPhone, he tries to see and create in unusual ways and this results in some unique imagery and striking street photography. For Brendan, photography is all about fun.

WHY YOU SHOULD TEST THE LIMITS OF YOUR PHONE

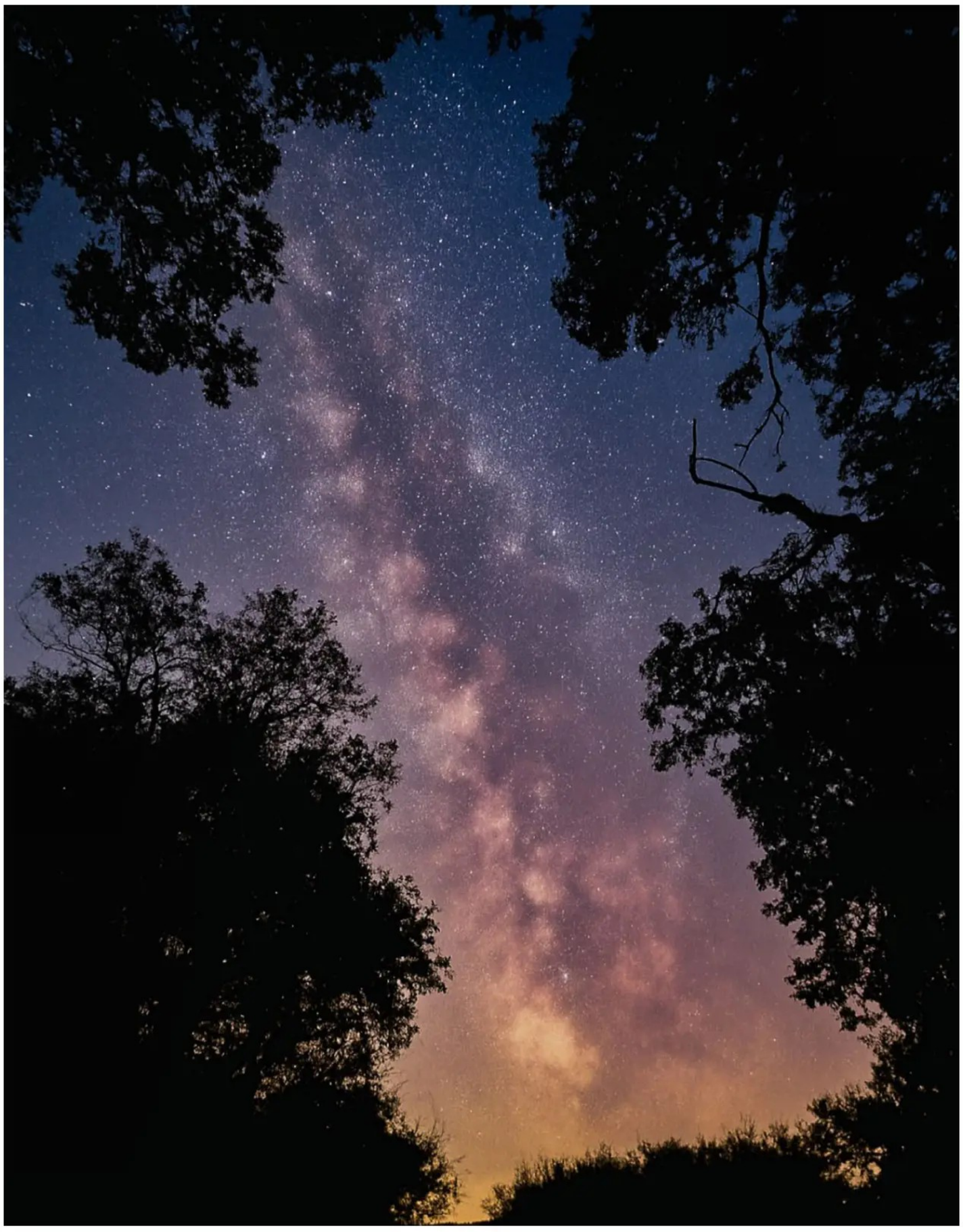
By Mark Myerson

A few years back, I upgraded my iPhone to the latest model. From the first day I started using the phone, I could see a clear improvement in the technical quality of my photography. Every image had sharp details, a generous tonal range, and a pleasing blush of color.

Yet my photography didn't really evolve. I kept churning out the same documentary-style family photos, the same sunny landscapes, and the same nature-inspired vignettes. The only difference was that the images were slightly crisper.

This perpetual staleness continued for some time.

The break came one night, walking home late. The eerie street lighting caught my eye. Still feeling good from the evening's company - and refreshments - I had a flash of inspiration. Time to capture some award-winning (maybe I was a little drunk) spooky street scenes.



Clearly, the default camera settings weren't going to cut it. Too dark. So, I switched to Night Mode - a feature I hadn't really tried before. "It probably won't work...," I thought. No phone I'd used before could handle this kind of low light.

The results blew my mind. The iPhone captured the street lighting perfectly and added a sky full of stars as a spectacular garnish. Since that day, nighttime photography has become a favorite pastime.

The moral of the story? Testing the limits of your device, and even pushing past them, is one of the best ways to discover new creative avenues.

Photo by @sabphotos69

THE BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF FAMILIARITY

Every great cellist knows their instrument intimately. They know exactly where each finger must rest to produce a perfect note, and how to manipulate the bow to produce any tone. If challenged, they could reproduce an entire concerto blindfolded.

As photographers, we should all develop the same level of affinity with our cameras. Do Don McCullin and Annie Leibovitz use any deliberate thought in making exposure adjustments? Clearly not. Taking a picture is an automatic function; their conscious mind focuses solely on the creative process.

After a few years with the same phone, many of us eventually reach this level of familiarity. Or we think we do. In reality, we tend to become experts only in the techniques we use every day. Street photographers can shoot from the hip. Macro photographers know how to select focus precisely. Portrait photographers learn how to control simulated depth of field.

What we don't usually do is venture outside these boundaries. Look at the example I recounted earlier. It took a chance event - a creative whim - for me to learn how to use my phone to its fullest potential. In so doing, I extended my own boundaries as a photographer. It's an experience I highly recommend.

Photo by @ilemusi

WHAT CAN IT DO?

Rather than waiting for chance to intervene, you can take an active role in exploring the limits of your device and yourself as a photographer.

Here's a starting point. Have you tried every mode on your device? A couple of test shots doesn't count. I'm talking about serious time spent capturing real-world scenes. If you're missing this type of experience with any mode, try to fill the gap. This is your foundation.

The next floor up is experimentation. You need to adopt the mindset of a scientist. What can this device do?

Can I nuzzle the lens up to a vibrant inflorescence while maintaining sharp focus? Can the sensor balance dazzling reflections of the summer sun on the deep blue surface of the sea? How far can you stand from your subject and still access the background blur of portrait mode?

Photo by @the.chronicles.of.sandra

Gather data and study the resulting images carefully. You may learn how to produce more compelling images within your normal range. However, there's even more value in the images that don't fit your usual mold. These are flecks of gold, glinting in your photo stream.

When you see something different, open the image and take a look at the metadata. What did you do differently to produce this result?

At once, you've opened a door. These are permanent new additions to your creative Rolodex, which you can deploy on demand. Similar organic discoveries await any photographer who properly samples the capabilities of their device.

PHOTOGRAPHIC STRESS TESTING

While the scientific method has merit, so does child-like play. Much like a rampaging toddler, you might need to break a few things to accelerate your creative development.

Rather than simply identifying things your phone can do, find out what it can't do. This is a much more efficient way of locating the outer limits of your device.

Pano mode exemplifies what I'm talking about. This tool encourages users to capture simple horizontal vistas. The on-screen instructions tell you to move slowly and keep your device level.

You don't have to play by these rules, though. What happens when you guide your phone along an irregular path?

Photo by @jawdoc2

Some phones will freak out. Others try to make sense of everything they've seen, compiling a composite image that warps time and space. What will your phone do? And what results can you achieve by breaking the rules? There's only one way to find out.

The same can be said for low-light performance, fast-moving subjects, flash photography, extreme macro, and countless other domains.

In each instance, the key is to avoid tiptoeing around the assumed limits of your device. No one gets hurt if your camera doesn't focus properly or spits out an ugly mess.

Conversely, your progression as a photographer could be restrained by failing to test the limits. Sometimes, breakages are necessary.

MAPPING YOUR CREATIVE UNIVERSE

As a mobiographer, your phone is your creative universe. You have a constellation of camera settings to work with, and an entire solar system of editing apps.

Most of us stick to our home planet. It's where we feel comfortable and secure. But if you're willing to explore the full extent of your domain, there's a whole sky full of creative opportunities to visit.

Photo by @nils_spiegler

MARTIN PARR: A VISUAL TRIBUTE TO A PHOTOGRAPHY MASTER

Video Placeholder

Internet Connection Required

In December 2025, the world of photography suffered a profound loss with the passing of the great British documentary photographer, Martin Parr (1952-2025).

This short film is a visual tribute to Martin and his work as we pay our respects to the master whose uniquely witty, sharp, and anthropological eye transformed the mundane into the magnificent, defining the look of modern documentary photography.

While not smartphone-centric, this short video is an excellent source of inspiration, as Martin's work forces us to look more closely at ourselves, revealing the humor and awkwardness in our everyday rituals of consumption and leisure. There is a lot to be learnt from his approach to the photos he captured.

SLOW DOWN AND LOOK CLOSER: INSIDE CHARNE ODENDAAL'S WORLD OF MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY

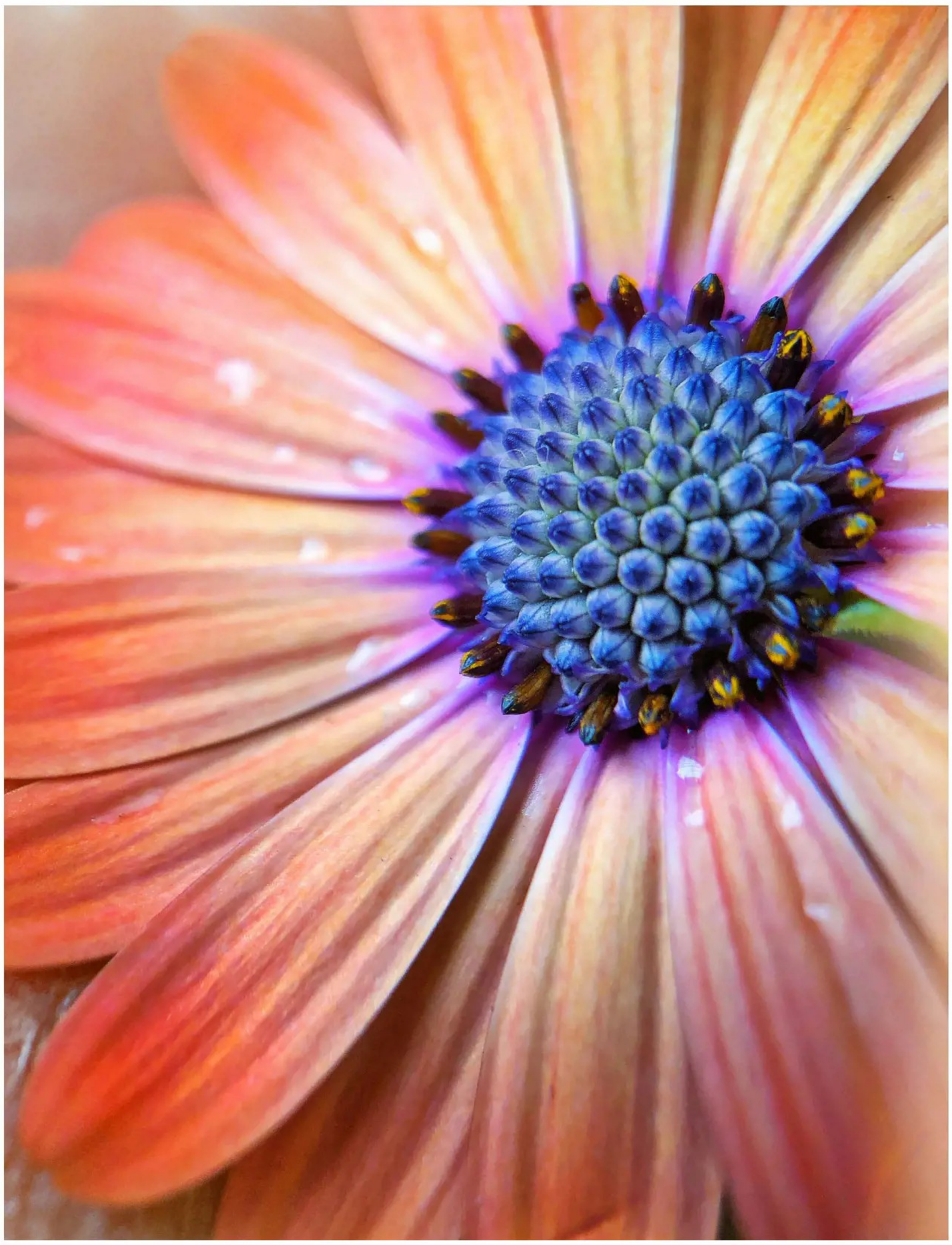
By Andy Butler

Charné.lo

Charne Odendaal is a smartphone photographer based in Pretoria, South Africa, where she balances life as a preschool principal with a deep love for photography, which is rooted firmly in the nature that is around her.

Charne has always turned to her iPhone as her camera, with flowers sitting at the center of the images that she takes, not just for their beauty, but for the tiny details they reveal when you move in close. Petals, stamens, droplets of water, and the occasional bee or butterfly become the focus, inviting the viewer to slow down and really look. Charne's work conveys a sense of patience and wonder, and also her love of nature which comes through in every frame.

In this interview, we talk about her journey into macro photography, the tools she uses and the process she follows, as well as how teaching, creativity, and observation all come together in her approach to making images.



COULD YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY AND HOW YOU DISCOVERED SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY?

Photography has always piqued my interest, but I never really pursued it wholeheartedly. Then in 2017, I got my iPhone 8 Plus. I was impressed by the clarity and quality of the camera, and particularly enjoyed the portrait mode feature which creates a blurred background while keeping the subject sharp. This allowed me to produce more "professional" looking shots, and it made me realize that I didn't need to buy expensive gear to explore photography.

I started taking more photographs in my day-to-day life and while travelling, seeking out interesting subjects. Being a nature lover, I instinctively gravitated towards photographing flowers, insects, and the natural world around me. Exploring different perspectives and using the various editing tools available allowed for a very satisfying creative outlet.

In 2018, seeing my passion for photography, my husband gifted me an Olloclip macro lens, which took my photography to a whole new level.

YOU MENTIONED THAT THE OLLOCLIP MACRO LENS WAS A TURNING POINT FOR YOU. WHAT WAS IT ABOUT MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY THAT HOOKED YOU? AND HOW DID IT CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE THE WORLD AROUND YOU?

Absolutely! This marked a pivotal shift in my photographic journey. The moment I looked through that macro lens was the moment I fell in love with macro photography. It was like I was visiting a whole new universe, exploring hidden details and textures. I found myself diving between petals and into the heart of a flower, getting close up to bees and insects to observe their unique mannerisms and details. I was able to capture the beauty and light of raindrops, and wander through a dandelion clock. It was like I was having a secret love affair with nature.

It instilled a sense of wonder and passion in me, making me see the world in a whole new light. It made me realize that we miss so much of the magic around us, that we understand so little and that nature has so many secrets to discover. I was captivated! I'm still captivated! Everyday things are not everyday things anymore. I want to look closer, find those tiny hidden treasures I've been overlooking all this time. Macro photography has taught me to slow down, look closer, appreciate more, and has set me on a never-ending journey of discovery.

MORE MAGAZINES: XSAVA.XYZ

FLOWERS ARE AT THE HEART OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY. THEIR COLORS, SHAPES AND TEXTURES COME THROUGH SO BEAUTIFULLY IN YOUR WORK. WHAT DRAWS YOU TO THEM AS A SUBJECT? AND WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING WHICH FLOWER TO PHOTOGRAPH?

Flowers are such magical and enchanting subjects. What draws me to them, besides their beauty, is that they offer so many aspects and details to explore and photograph as a macro photographer, far beyond what a casual onlooker may see.

The variety of colors on their petals, the unique details of their stamens, the shapes of their leaves and the abundance of textures seem endless to me. From the buds to the seeds to the tiny hairs on a stem, they offer an extraordinary magical macro world to discover.

Another great benefit of photographing flowers is that they attract insects. So, while photographing flowers, I've been given opportunities to get shots of bees, butterflies, ladybugs, spiders, aphids, and several other insects that one may not likely see with the naked eye.

Equally, each changing season brings opportunities to capture a new variety of bloom.

Even after they've bloomed, flowers continue to offer wonderful photographic opportunities. There's a change in texture and detail, colors start to shift, and shapes and structures can make for very striking and interesting compositions.

For me, there are several things that I look for when choosing a flower to photograph. Colors and details are on the top of my list. Bright striking colors on the petals are a big attraction and can create opportunities to add details if you're looking to become more creative. I've often used colorful petals as a backdrop to showcase a droplet, stamen or dandelion seed.

The stamens of many flowers, but especially Anemones and African Daisies, always intrigue me with their intense details.

Flowers with open faces allow light in and enable you to get the lens really close to capture the details. I sometimes like to push the lens through the petals of the flower to capture the details of the stamens, creating a more intimate atmosphere for the shot.

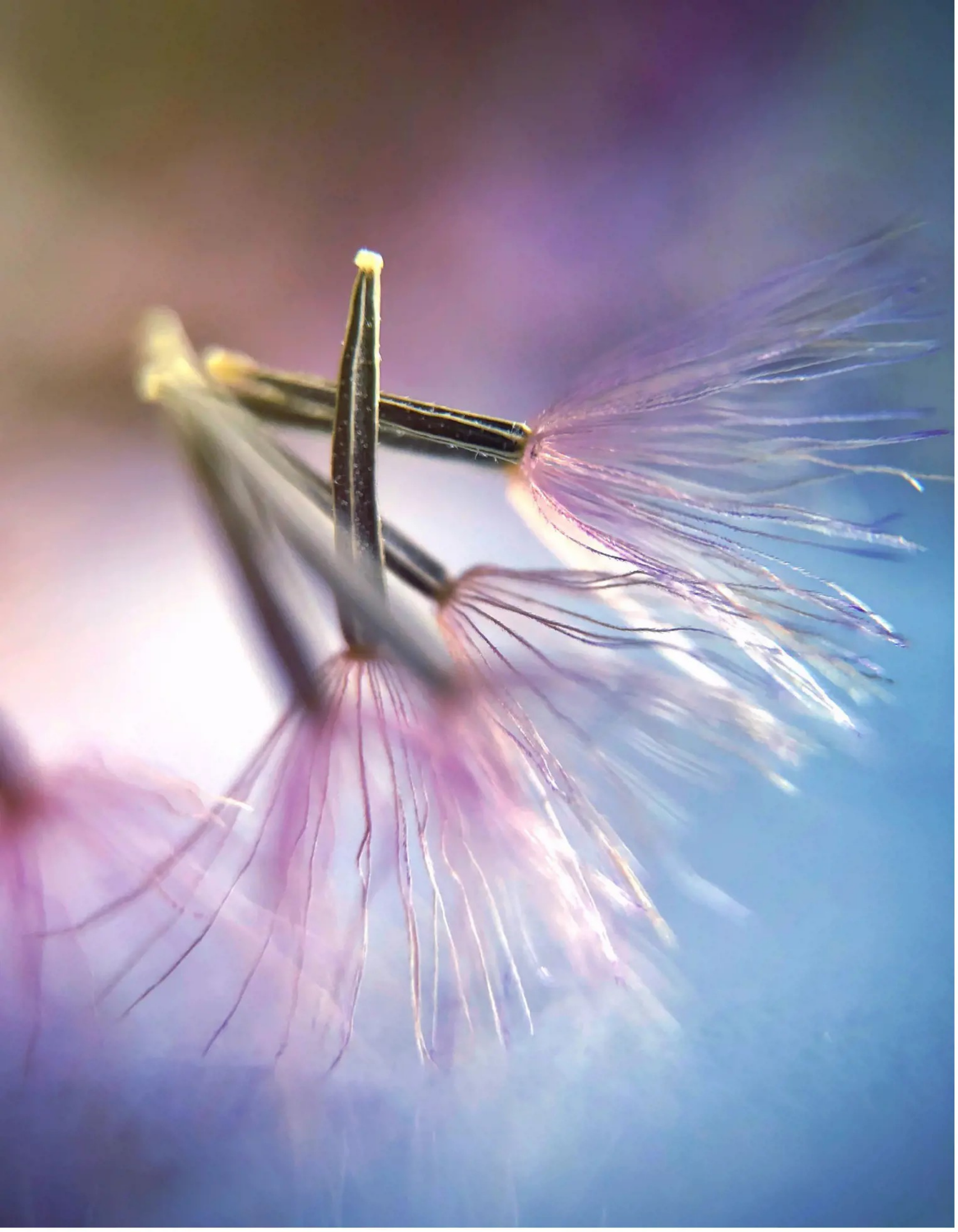
Having said all of that, I've come to find many surprising discoveries even in the seemingly dull and uninteresting of florals. I've learnt that everything has beauty, so I explore everything and enjoy the unexpected discoveries.

MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY OFTEN INVOLVES PATIENCE AND PRECISION. EVEN THE SLIGHTEST BREEZE CAN RUIN A SHOT. WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WHEN SHOOTING CLOSE-UP? AND HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THEM?

You're spot on! A fun way of describing being a macro photographer involves having the precision of a ninja and the focus of a sniper. But seriously, these are crucial skills to practice in order to achieve the best results. The slightest movement can affect the sharpness and focus of the shot. You need to have a steady hand and keep the camera as still as possible. Most of my shots are handheld, so slowing down and focusing on my breath help me to keep steady.

When photographing insects, you need an abundance of patience as they're continuously on the move and can be unpredictable. A good trick is to use burst mode when shooting. This allows you to capture a series of shots and then choose the best ones.

Sometimes, when the weather conditions aren't good, I like to shoot indoors. I'll use cut or picked flowers in a space that provides lots of natural light. I like to get creative with different backgrounds to add color, contrast, or bokeh to the shot. I always spend time exploring different angles when shooting. Just tilting or moving the lens slightly can capture a whole new perspective of the flower.



LIGHT CAN MAKE OR BREAK A MACRO IMAGE. HOW IMPORTANT IS LIGHT TO YOU WHEN YOU'RE SHOOTING? AND WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR TO CAPTURE THAT PERFECT GLOW OR DETAIL?

Light is a very important factor to consider. The golden hours are best to photograph in as they provide soft natural light. So early morning and evening are the perfect times to shoot.

Midday sun can be too harsh, causing shadows and glare. Using a diffuser can often soften harsh light and even out the brightness.

I like to play around with different angles. Even slightly moving the lens can bring in or reduce the amount of light you need. Exploring angles is a great way to find that perfect light for the best result.

Another option is to use a mini studio light box for indoor macro photography. I've purchased one but rarely use it as I prefer using soft natural light in my photography.

Using backlight on flowers with thin petals or leaves works well. It can highlight their colors or intricate details, and can produce a magical illuminating effect.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE TIME OF DAY OR SEASON TO SHOOT YOUR FLOWER PHOTOS?

Spring and summer are without a doubt my favorite seasons to shoot flowers. It's when the macro world truly comes alive for me. Spring brings out new blooms, which attract insects. Fresh rains bring opportunities to capture droplets. And all the colors just seem to pop during this time.

Summer allows for more favorable weather conditions. So I'm always outdoors or on nature trails where the opportunities for macro photography are everywhere.

The crisp early mornings are great to photograph in, as well as the warmer glow just before sunset.

However, autumn and winter also bring wonderful macro opportunities. The crispy, crunchy textures, the colors of leaves, or magical details you can find in seeds make for some interesting images.

YOU'VE USED BOTH OLLOCLIP AND MOMENT MACRO LENSES. HOW DO THEY COMPARE? AND DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVORITE GEAR OR TECHNIQUES YOU'D RECOMMEND TO SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO START EXPLORING MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY ON A SMARTPHONE?

The Olloclip macro lens was the first macro lens I explored with. Unfortunately, these lenses are no longer being manufactured.

I purchased the Olloclip phone cover for my iPhone 8 Plus which makes it very easy to clip on the lens. The kit came with two diffuser caps and various lenses including a super wide, fisheye and macro 15x, macro 14x and x7, and a macro 21x, allowing for different levels of magnification which is great. The lenses stack up in pairs, so it's really easy to quickly attach or detach them to swap between different focal lengths. The corners tend to blur a little, but this isn't something that really effects my macro photography.

A few years back I purchased the Moment macro lens 25mm M-Series which I really enjoy. The quality and sharpness of the images it produces are quite impressive.

For someone who wants to start exploring macro photography on their smartphone, I'd recommend starting with a high quality but affordable lens. It's important to research and read reviews on the product before buying to be sure of what you're getting and to avoid disappointment.

Something to consider is the magnification of the lens which will affect how you want to shoot. A higher magnification, for example the Olloclip 21x /15x /14x lenses, calls for you to get up really close with the subject, making it harder to focus. A magnification such as that of the 25mm Moment lens allows you to capture more of the background in your shots.

Another thing to consider is stability. Personally, I find that a case-mount provides more stability than a clip-on, however clip-ons are generally more affordable and universal. If you go for the case-mount, you may need to purchase a new one should you upgrade or change your phone.

Patience and practice are important when starting, but most importantly enjoy yourself!

Get creative, experiment, and appreciate the new discoveries! It’s a beautiful world to explore!

WHICH APPS DO YOU USE TO SHOOT AND EDIT YOUR PHOTOS? DO YOU FOLLOW A SPECIFIC WORKFLOW OR EDITING PROCESS TO BRING OUT THOSE VIBRANT COLORS AND FINE DETAILS?

I don't use any apps to shoot. I shoot straight from my camera.

I like to take a lot of photographs of my subjects, exploring every aspect and angle, using light, playing with color, and experimenting with bokeh and background.

I then go through my camera roll to choose the best shots and place them into categorical albums. Once I've picked the image I want to work on, I use the Snapseed app to bring out the best details, adding vibrancy or ambience and any other edits I feel I want to make.

My edits are very much based on my mood and on the image. Sometimes I love to add my artistic touch or a certain feel to an image. Other times I like to keep as true to the capture as possible.

Snapseed offers a brush tool that allows me to change the temperature and saturation to highlight specific details of my image. And the healing tool is very useful in getting rid of any distracting or unwanted imperfections.

My next go-to app is Afterlight. It has great editing tools as well as a variety of color overlays, gradients, and light filters.

Lastly, I use PicMonkey to add my watermark on the final image before posting.

DO YOU EVER EXPERIMENT BEYOND FLOWERS? AND IF SO, WHAT OTHER SUBJECTS CATCH YOUR EYE?

I'm always experimenting! I love experimenting!

Things that catch my eye are water droplets, feathers, mushrooms, seeds, and insects. I'm always thrilled when I come across tiny jumping spiders hidden within the petals of a flower. I also like to play around with flowers and everyday objects to create still life images. I've used tiny flowers between the tips of coloring pencils, flowers at the end of forks or paper clips, and clover in tiny eggshells. Getting creative and experimenting is a big part of my photographic journey.

BEING A TEACHER AND RUNNING ART & CRAFT CLASSES, CREATIVITY SEEMS TO FLOW NATURALLY IN YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE. DO YOU FIND THAT YOUR WORK WITH CHILDREN INFLUENCES YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY IN ANY WAY, PERHAPS IN HOW YOU SEE COLOR, DETAIL, OR PLAYFULNESS IN NATURE?

This is a great question that I've never really thought about. And yes, I guess being an art teacher does influence my photography to some extent. I'm drawn to bright colors and love to get creative with my photography. I've often used colorful abstract art pieces as backgrounds for my flower photography. And I've also experimented with flowers and craft supplies like beads and glitter.

In turn, my photography also influences my teaching. Being a nature lover, I'm always mindful of offering a lot of nature-based play activities for the children. We're always outdoors discovering and observing through play. I've used my macro photography to bring the children's attention to the tiny details of nature, sharing close-ups of my captures during a science or biology lesson. And I often provide them with magnifying glasses to search for hidden treasures in our sensory garden. Sharing my love of nature has become part of my teaching.

HOW DO YOU FIND BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR TEACHING AND PHOTOGRAPHY? DO YOU SEE PHOTOGRAPHY AS A CREATIVE OUTLET, A FORM OF MINDFULNESS, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

My macro photography is a passionate hobby for me. A time where I can slow down, become creative, or just be an observer of natural beauty. It brings me a sense of peace and fulfilment. It's a wonderful creative outlet that I don't think I could do without. I share my photographs to showcase the beauty of nature that's around us, to awaken others to be mindful of the tiny hidden magic that's there, and to encourage people to slow down and take a closer look.

FOLLOW CHARNE ODENDAAL

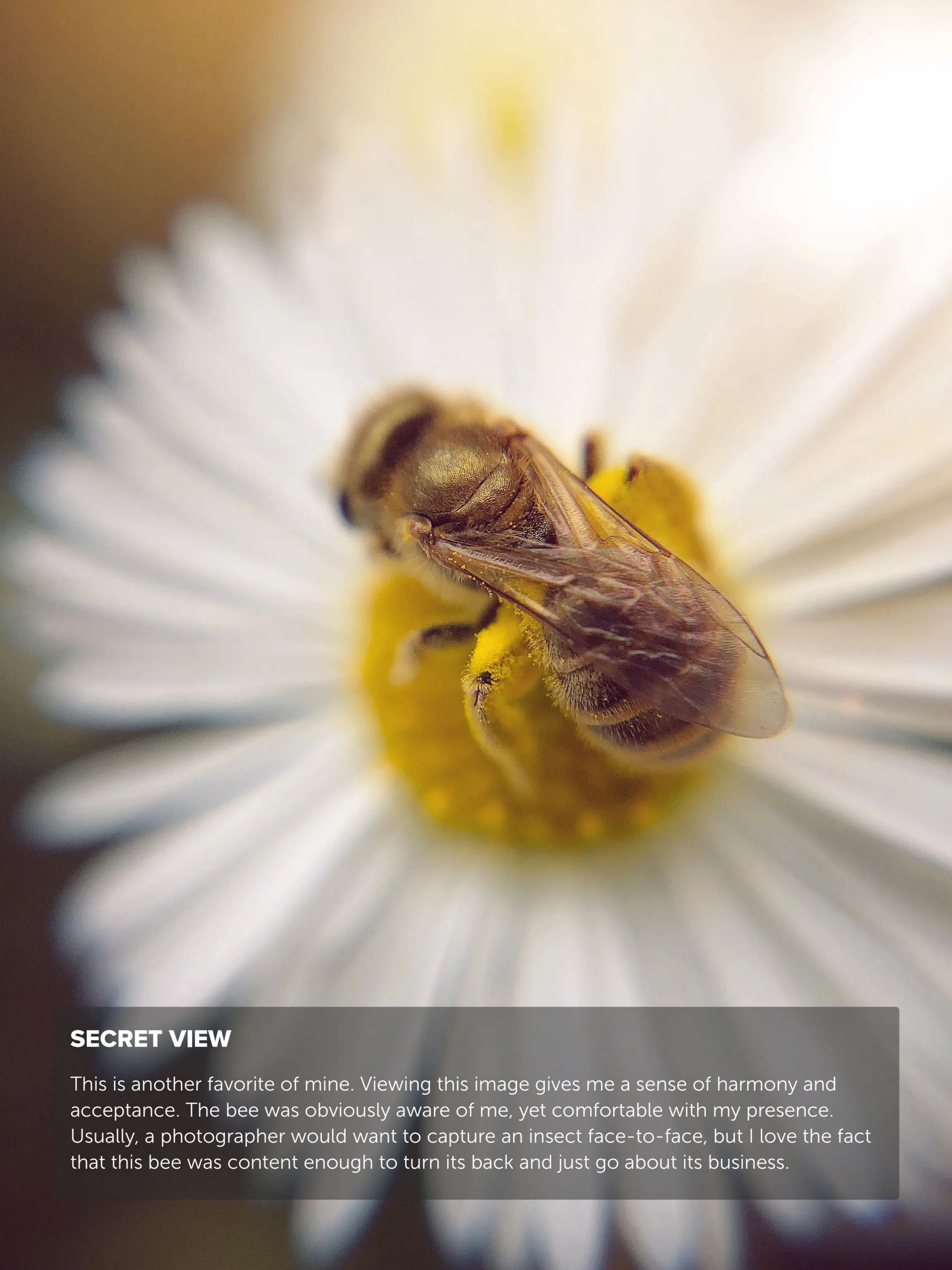
Instagram: @charne.lo

THE STORY BEHIND MY FAVORITE PHOTOS...

HOLDING HANDS

This is my one of my favorite photos. I found this pair in a bush of African Daisies in my garden. I liken them to a couple holding hands. It makes me consider how everything is connected, how every action has an effect on the next, and to be mindful of how we can make beautiful and meaningful connections every day.

I enjoyed playing around with the edit of this photo. I feel that the colors of the light match beautifully with the colors of the flowers, giving it a magical, dreamy feel.



SECRET VIEW

This is another favorite of mine. Viewing this image gives me a sense of harmony and acceptance. The bee was obviously aware of me, yet comfortable with my presence. Usually, a photographer would want to capture an insect face-to-face, but I love the fact that this bee was content enough to turn its back and just go about its business.

STAND AS YOU ARE

This is the third photo I chose as one of my favorites. I love the crisp fresh green tones coupled with the darker shadows. The blurred background creates a beautiful depth of field making this individual clover stand out, highlighting its wonderful details.

I hope that my images not only inspire others to become more mindful of the natural world, but also allow nature itself to awaken a sense of emotion and connection with them.

CAPTURE STUNNING TIMELAPSE IN 4K PRO-RES ON IPHONE

Video Placeholder

Internet Connection Required

In this video, Mark McGee explores the new Reelapse 2.0 app for the iPhone 17 Pro, and shows us how it is transforming mobile timelapse photography. Mark explains how its features can take your timelapses far beyond the iPhone's default capabilities. Mark also shows how Reelapse simplifies what once required bulky gear—while still matching the quality of pro-level cameras.

AN URBAN ROMANCE GRUNGE TUTORIAL WITH PROCREATE

By Nicki Fitz-Gerald

Not every photo in your camera roll will be a standout image. Many will be quite uninspiring. But even so, some will work well as a starting point for something more creative. In the winter months, when it's cold outside, photographic activity can often slow down. Using this time to revisit these older photos can open up new directions. February, with its hints of romance, in particular, feels like a good time to take those overlooked images and see where they might lead.

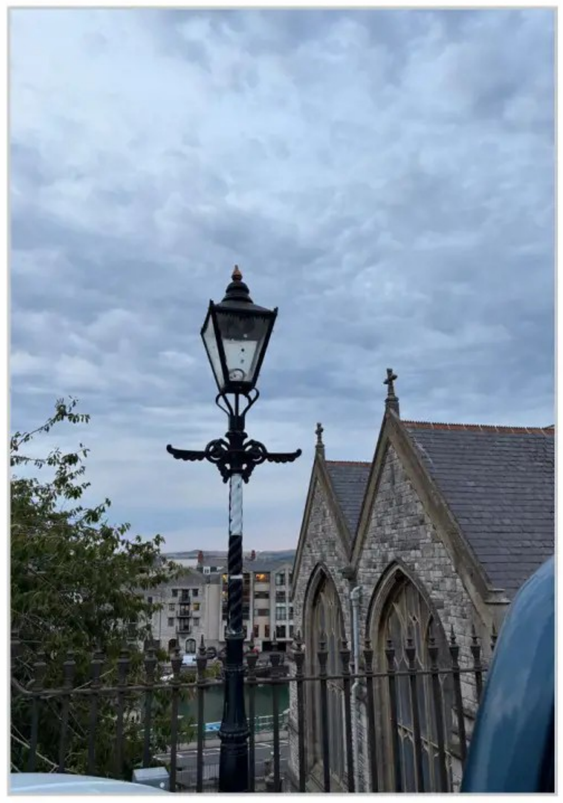
In this tutorial, I'll show you how to use Procreate to transform a simple photograph into a painterly urban scene with a romantic edge. A well-composed base image with strong leading lines will provide the foundation for this creation. From there, we'll see how we can introduce some subtle elements, such as a couple walking close together, a lamppost, perhaps a few symbolic textures, to suggest intimacy and mood rather than spell it out.

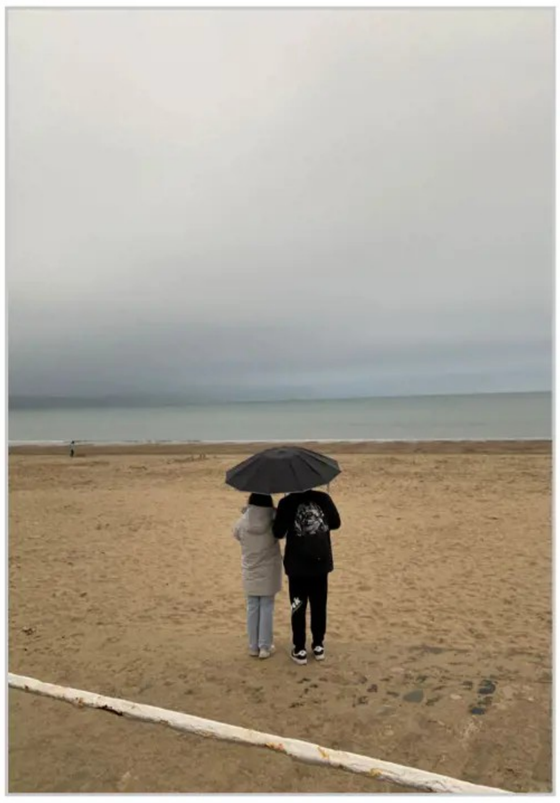
I love starting with a photo and seeing where it takes me. When you begin with a single photograph, the composition is already there. By softening detail, limiting the color palette, and layering texture, you can push the image beyond realism and into something more expressive. For me, it's about reshaping reality, slowing down, and letting the image evolve somewhere new.

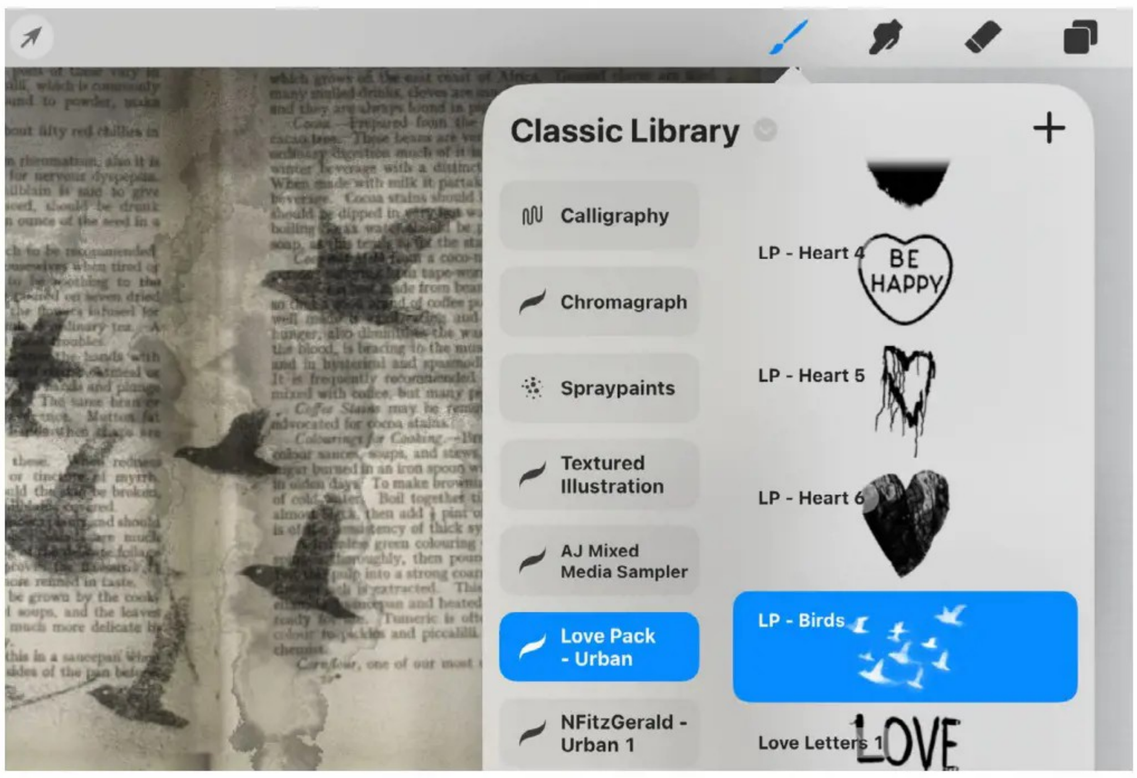
WHAT YOU'LL NEED

You'll need a few photos to start, and to help guide you, I've listed a few ideas below. You'll also need a compositing app that lets you create layers so you can put it all together. Apps like Procreate or Photoshop are perfect for this. You can use the phone versions of these apps, though I prefer to use the bigger screen of my iPad Pro.

SUGGESTED PHOTOS







Background Scene: Photos that have a path leading off to the distance work well.

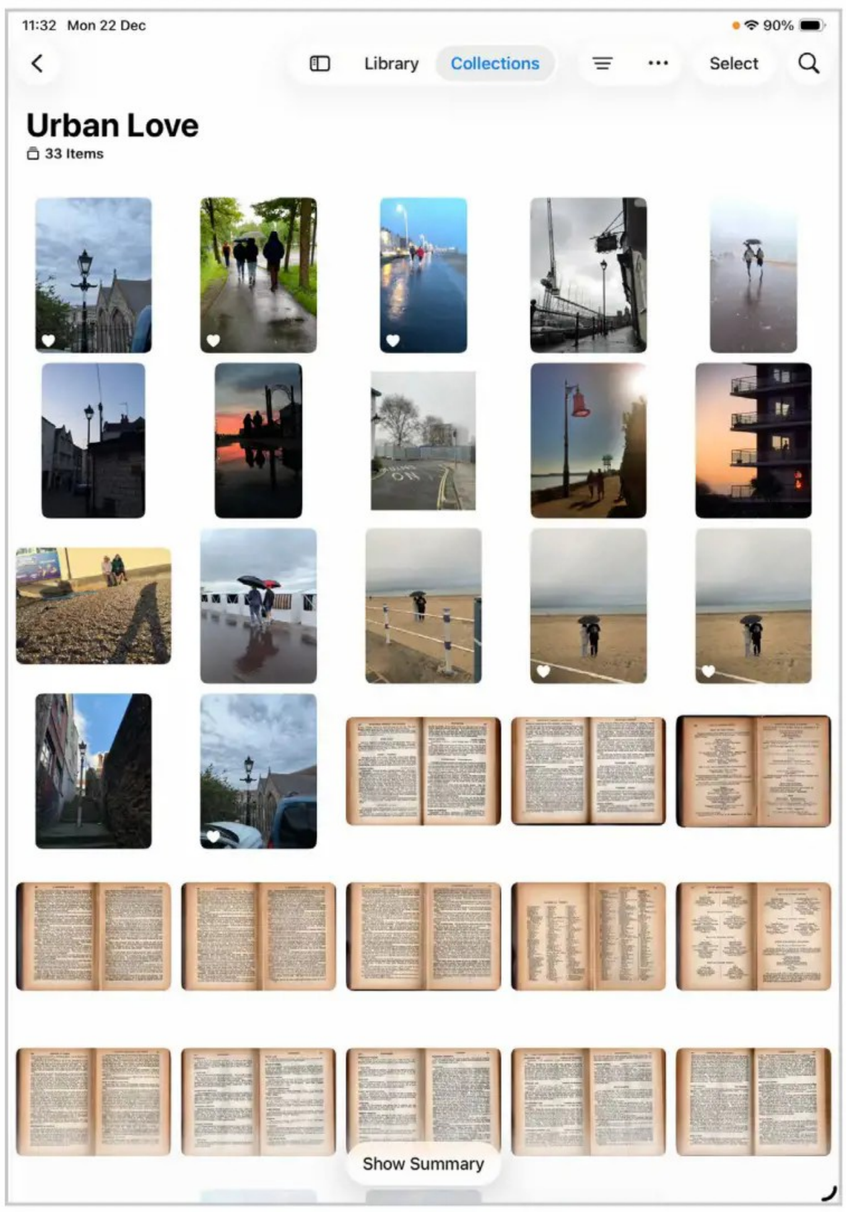
Framing Elements: These are elements that sit on either side of your main subject, like buildings, trees, or lampposts.

Main Subject: You'll need a couple of figures for your main subject.

Textures: I like to introduce textures into the scene, like old book pages or handwritten letters.

Textures, Elements, and Pattern using Stamp brushes: Another way to add more texture and elements to your image is to use Stamp brushes. These are custom brushes that can be made from anything that can be photographed. I've made stamp brushes from graffiti, flower illustrations, postal marks... the list is endless.

In the final image, I introduced a flock of birds using a brush stamp from my Urban Love Pack of Procreate brushes. You can download these yourself by clicking here.

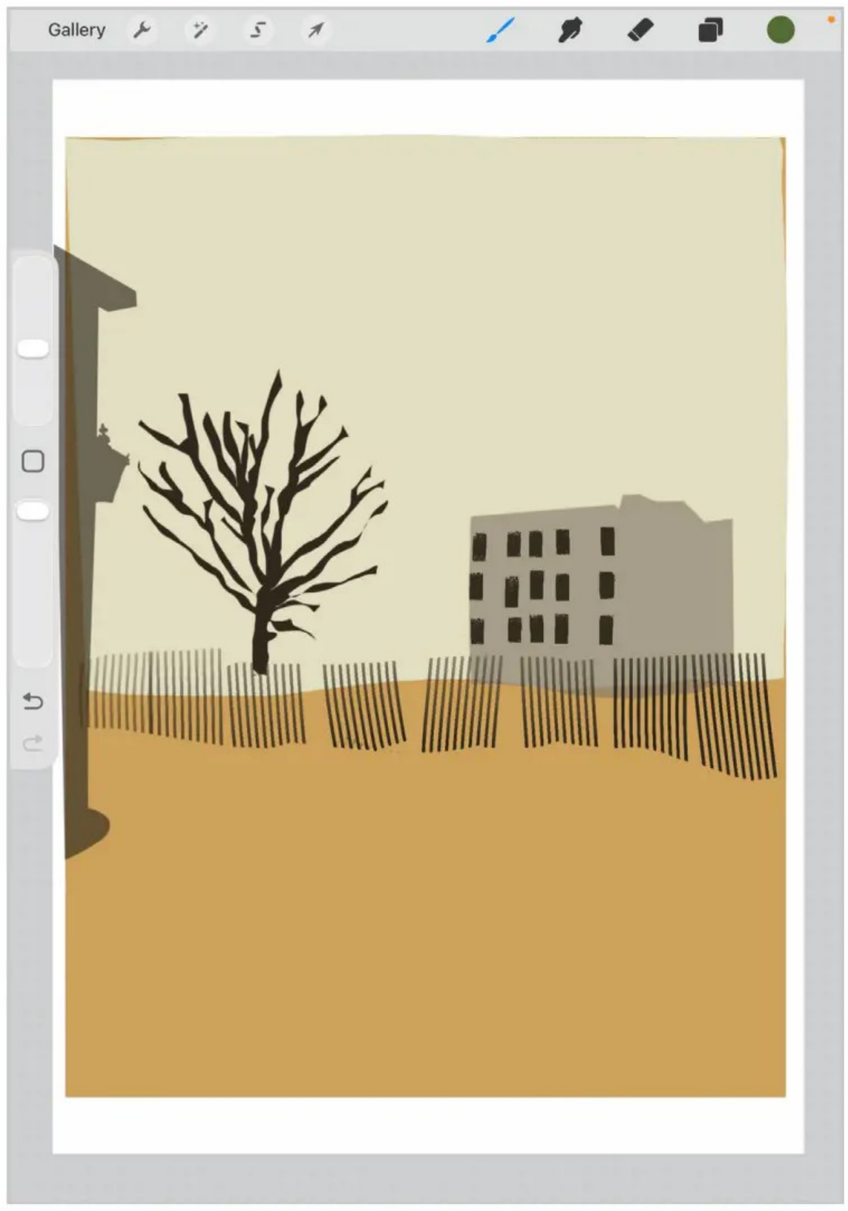


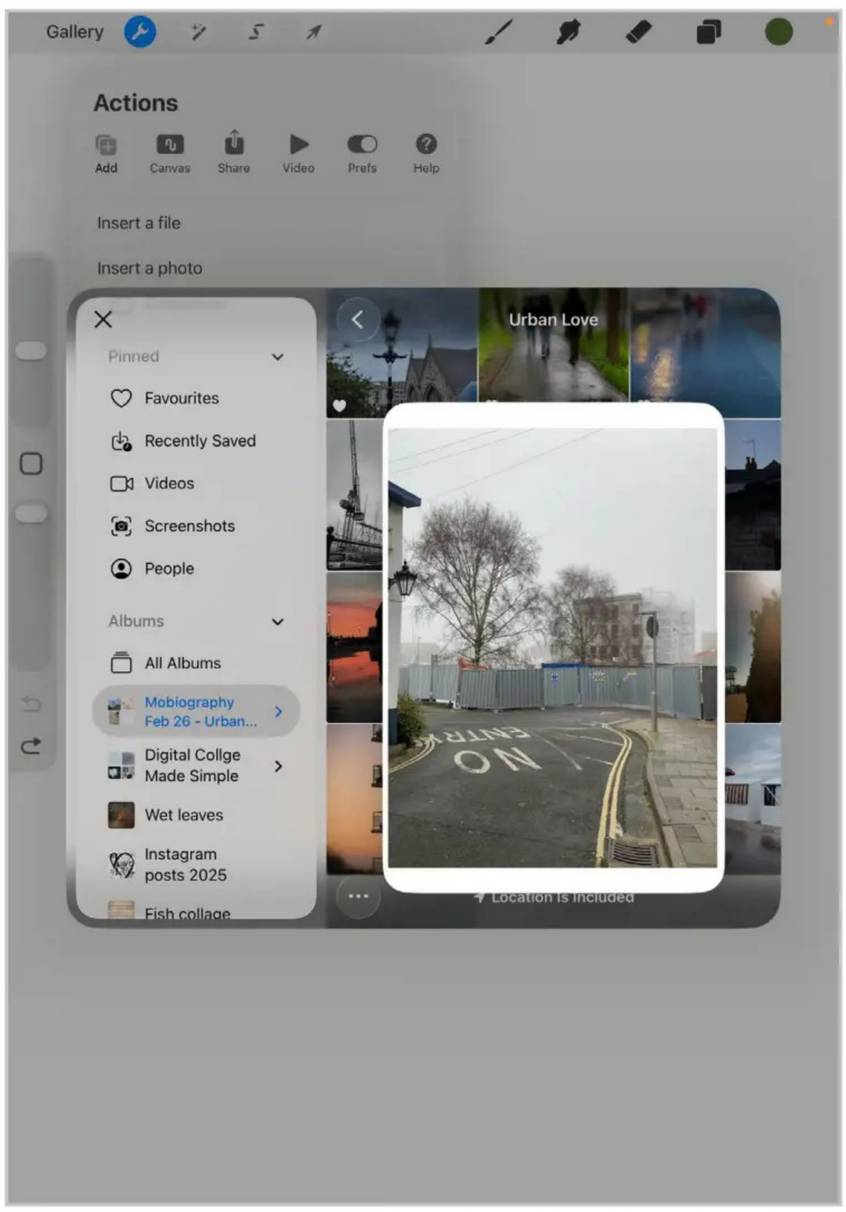
STEP 1 - COLLECT PHOTOS

Gather some photos together that could be used for the final image. Place them in a photo album on your device, and give the album a title.

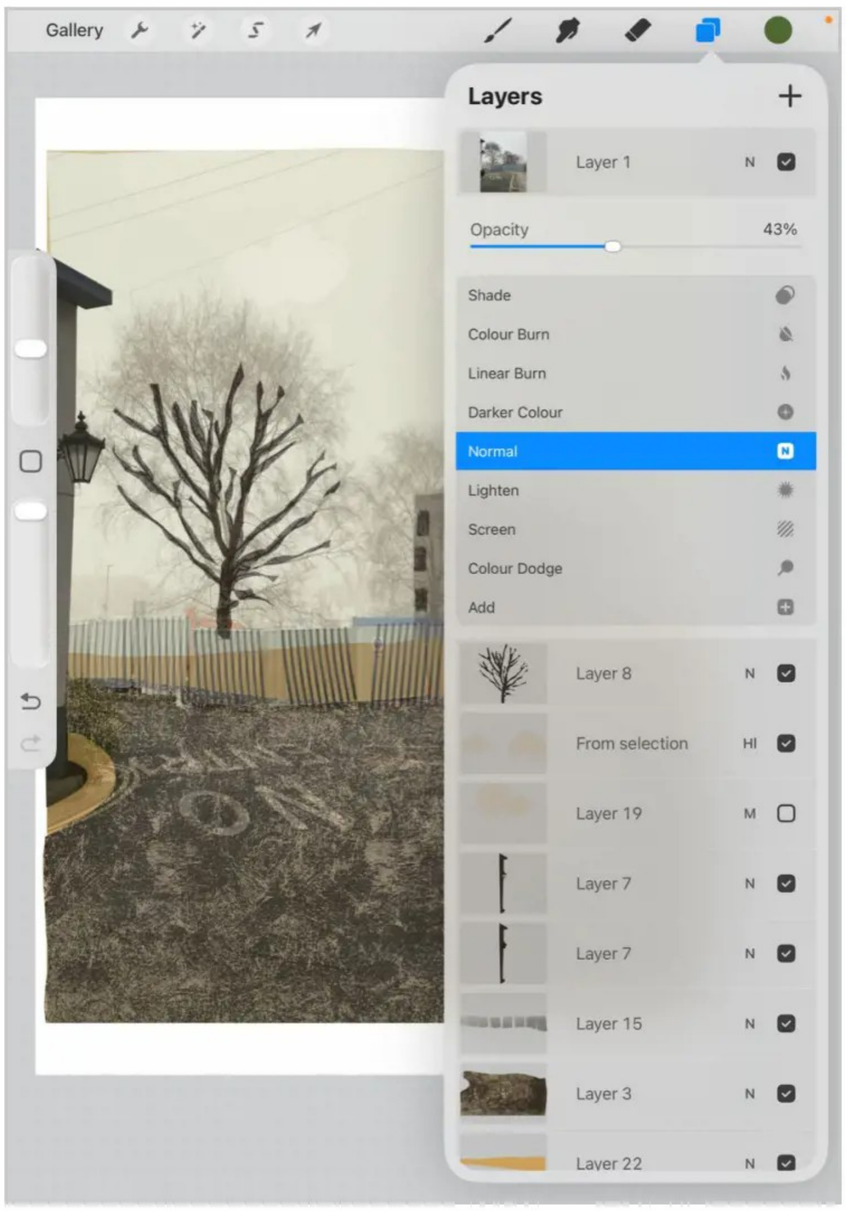
STEP 2 - BLOCK OUT THE MAIN AREAS OF THE SCENE

First, we'll use our ordinary scene photo to create a background made up of different colored flat shapes, like in the image on the right.



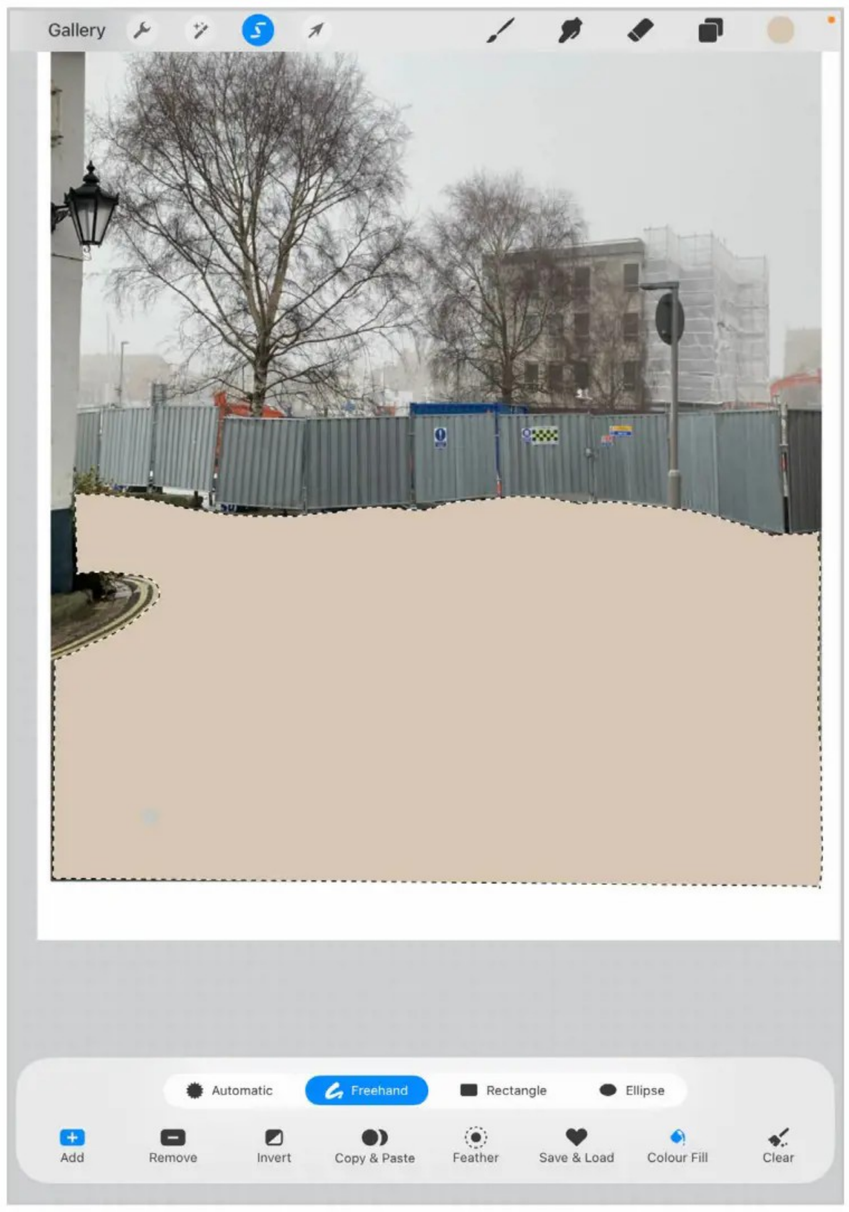


First, open Procreate and import the original scene photo. To import a photo, tap the Wrench icon and select your photo. Simplify the scene by creating flat shapes for each of the main parts of the image, like the background, foreground, fence, tree, buildings, etc.



In order to trace the shapes, you'll need to put the original scene photo at the top of the layer stack, then lower the opacity to around 43%. To adjust the opacity of a layer, tap the little "N" in the layer thumbnail and adjust the Opacity slider at the top of the drop-down menu. This menu also contains blend modes, which I'll use later in the tutorial.

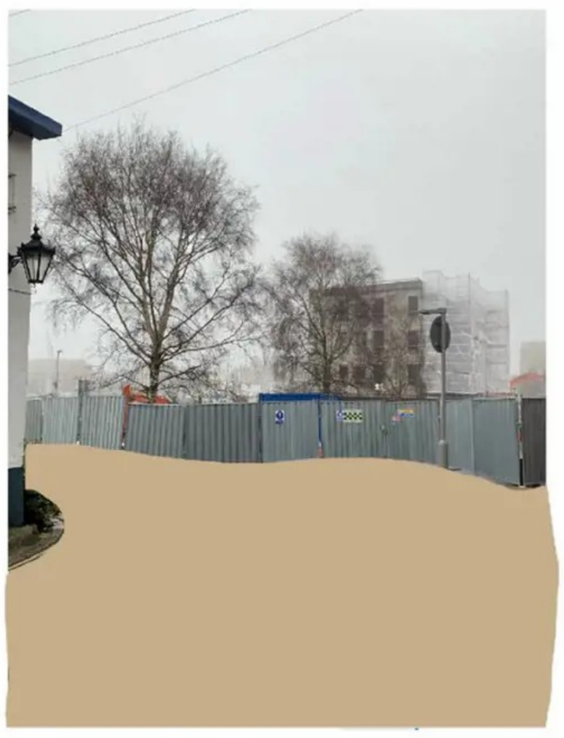
Next, we'll draw the shapes on separate layers below the original scene photo.



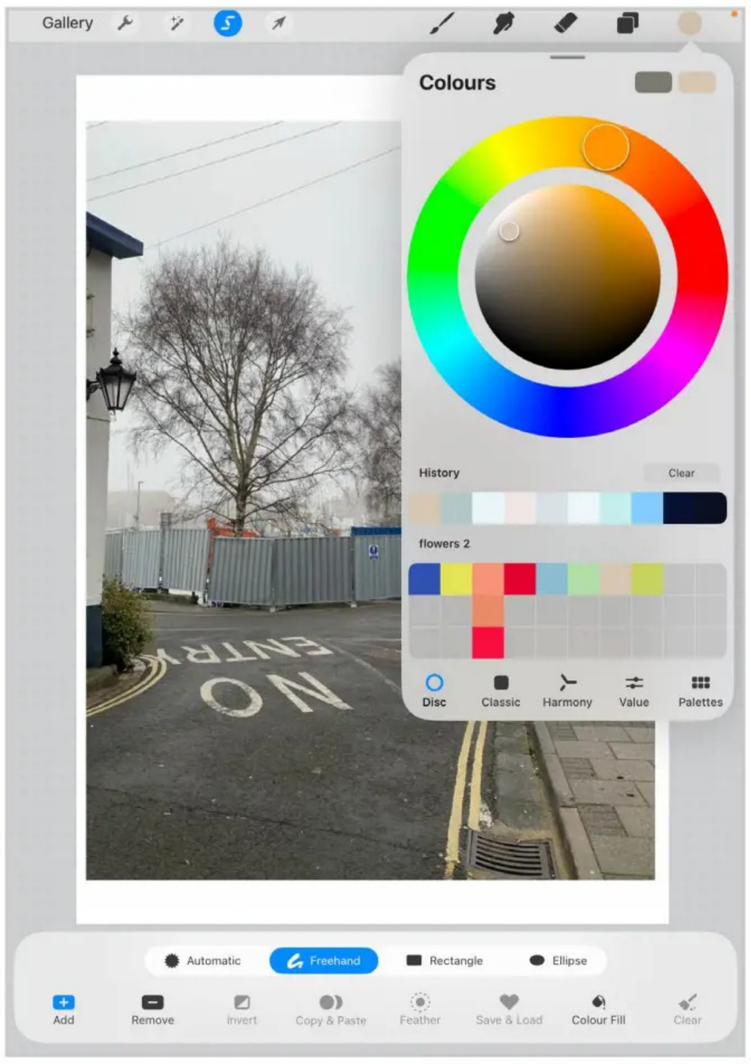
For each flat colored shape, I created a new layer. I drew each of the shapes using the Freehand Selection tool (tap the S icon, then Freehand from the lower menu).

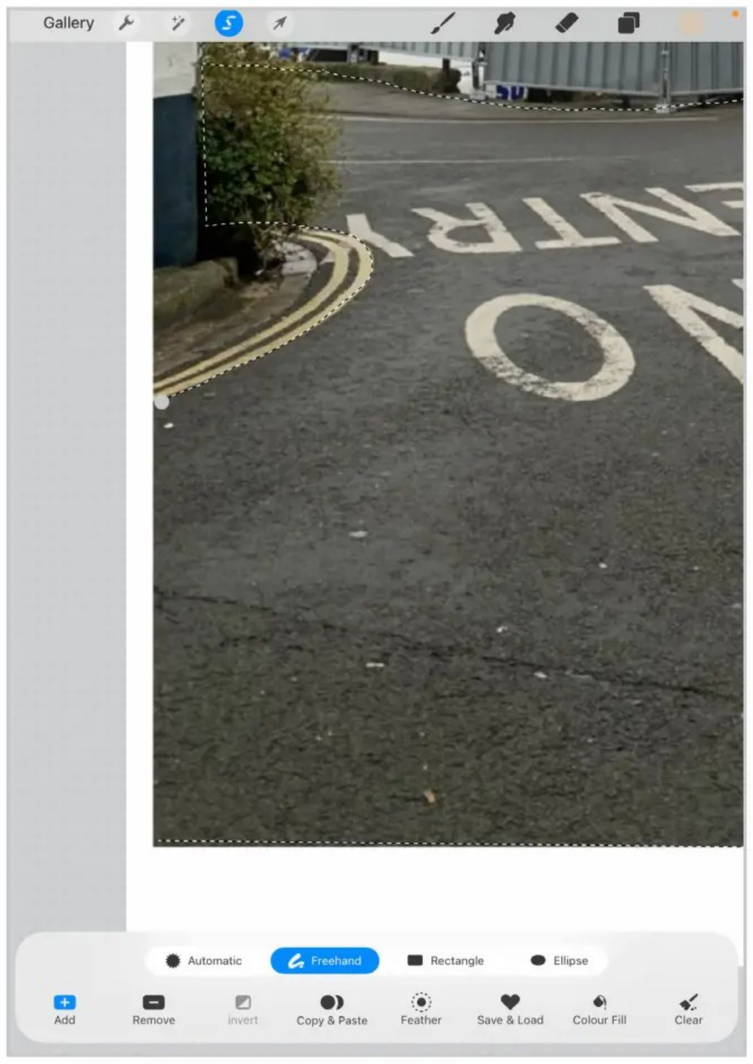
I also turned Color Fill on (bottom right paint bucket icon) to automatically fill my shape with the active color once I'd finished drawing it.

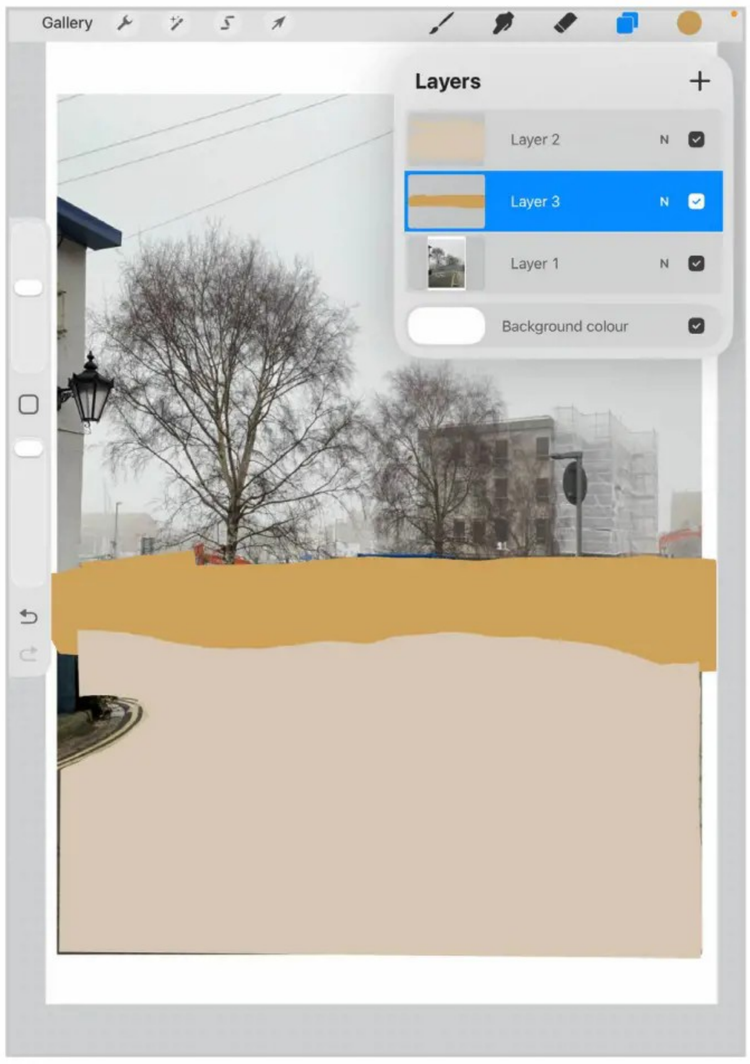
Remember to tap the grey dot at the end of drawing your shape to complete it.



Don't worry too much about the colors for now, we can always change them later. Just make sure they are different from each other so you can tell the shapes apart. I chose muted warm colors.

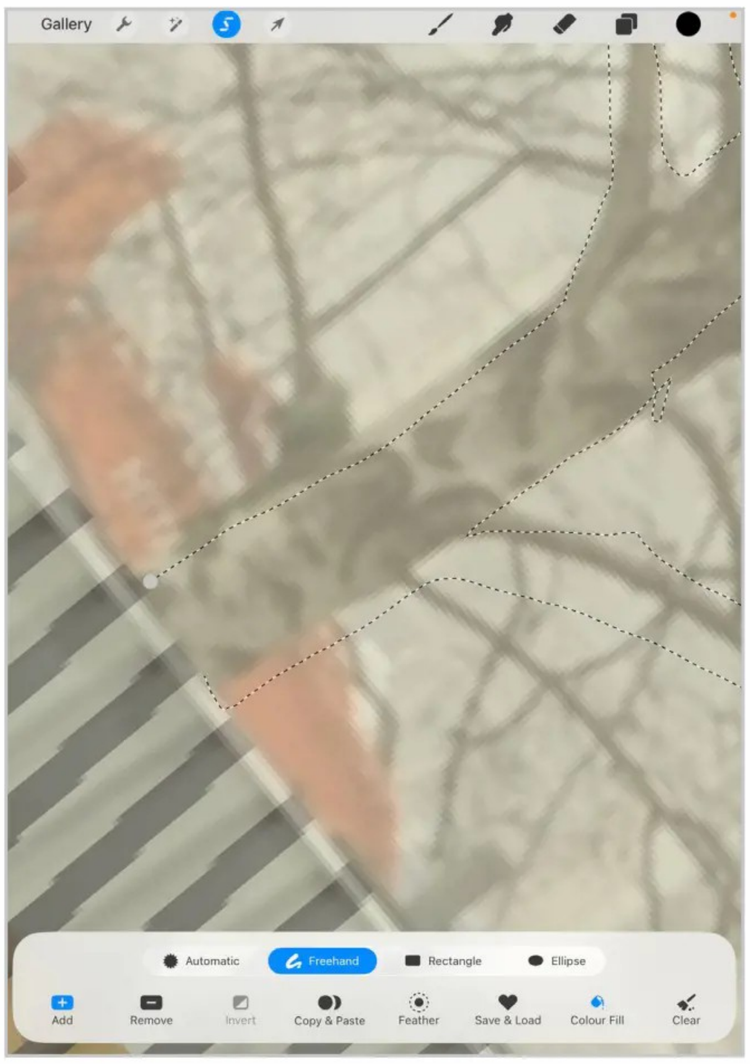


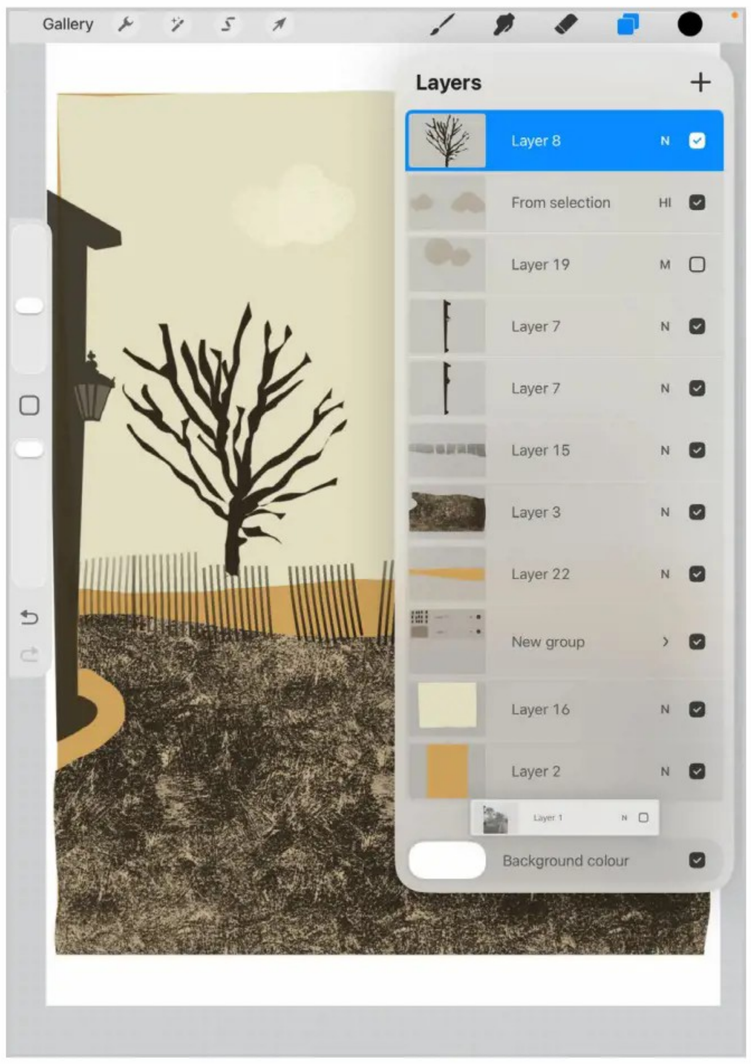




You don't need to be perfect!

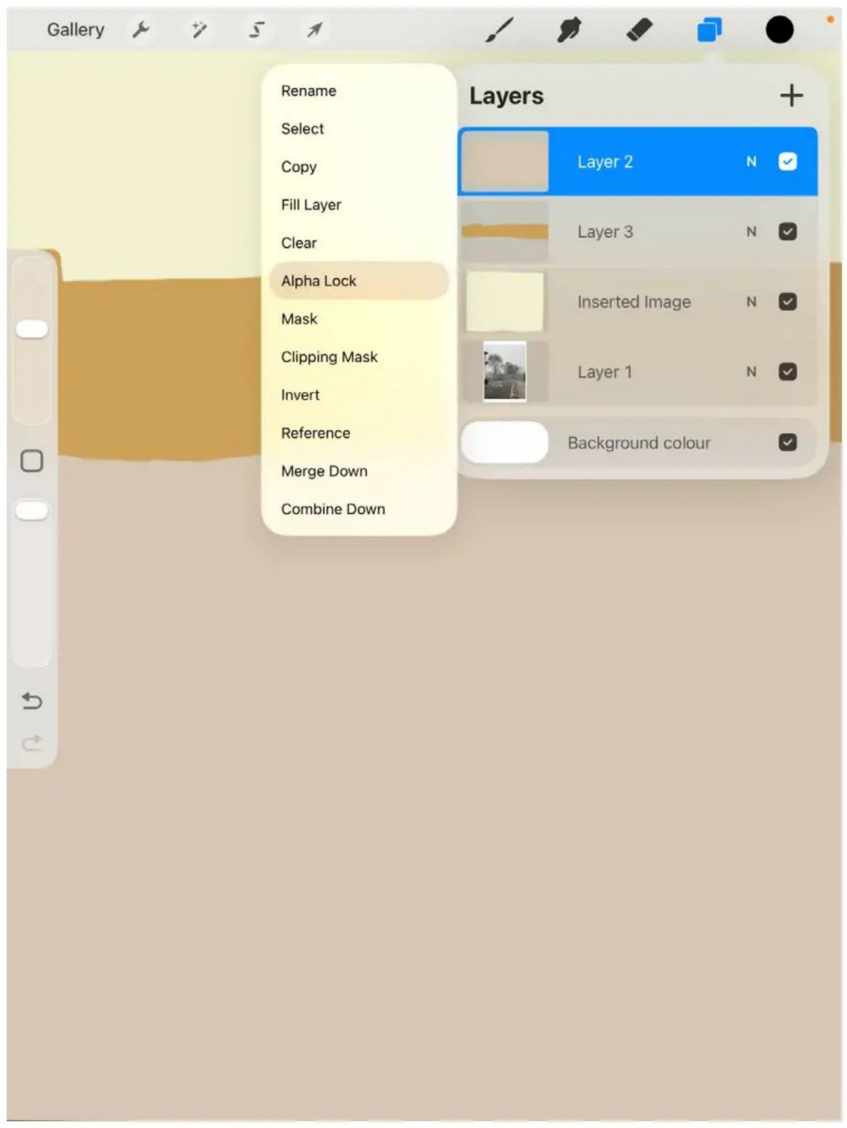
When I drew the tree shape, I roughly drew around some of the main branches to create a kind of hand cut paper style look to my shapes.





TIP: Remember to tap the grey dot to close the selection. You can also tap the Add button (bottom left) and turn on Color Fill (bottom right).

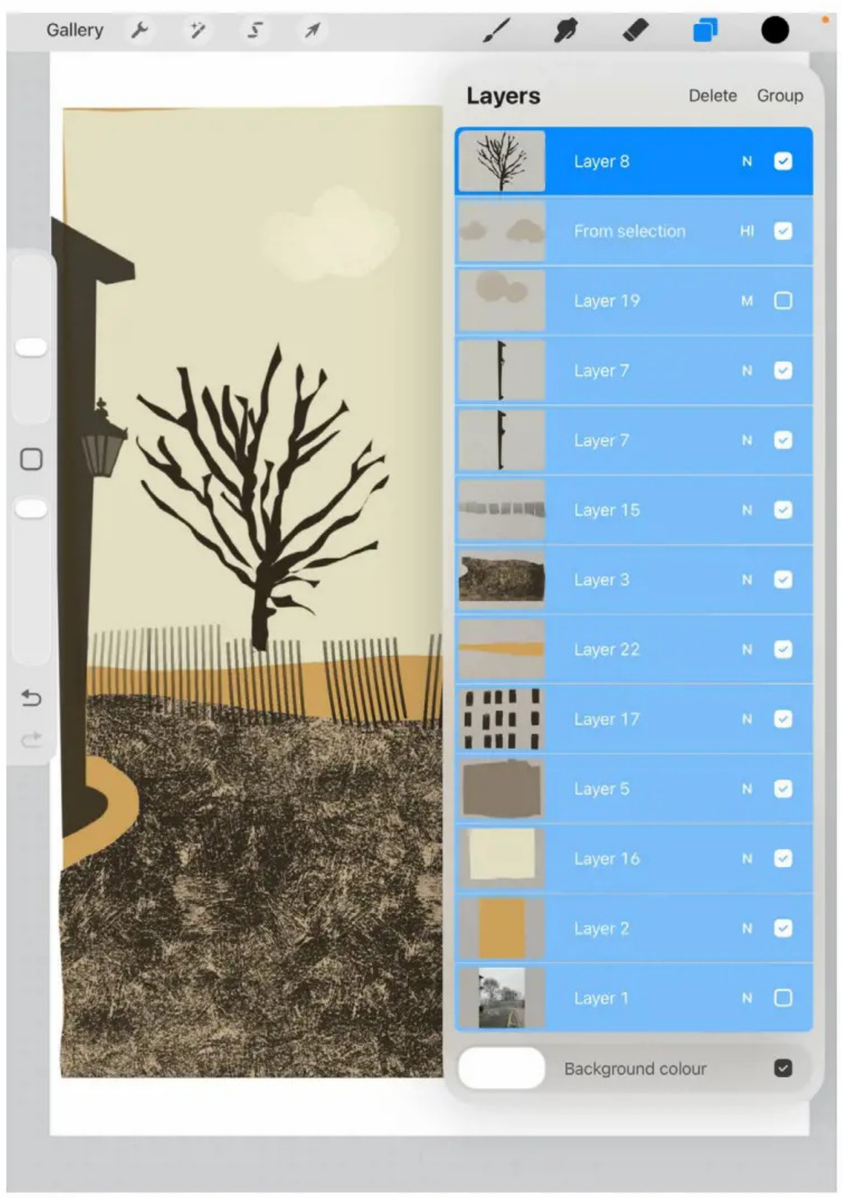
STEP 3 - ADD TEXTURE TO THE SHAPE AREAS

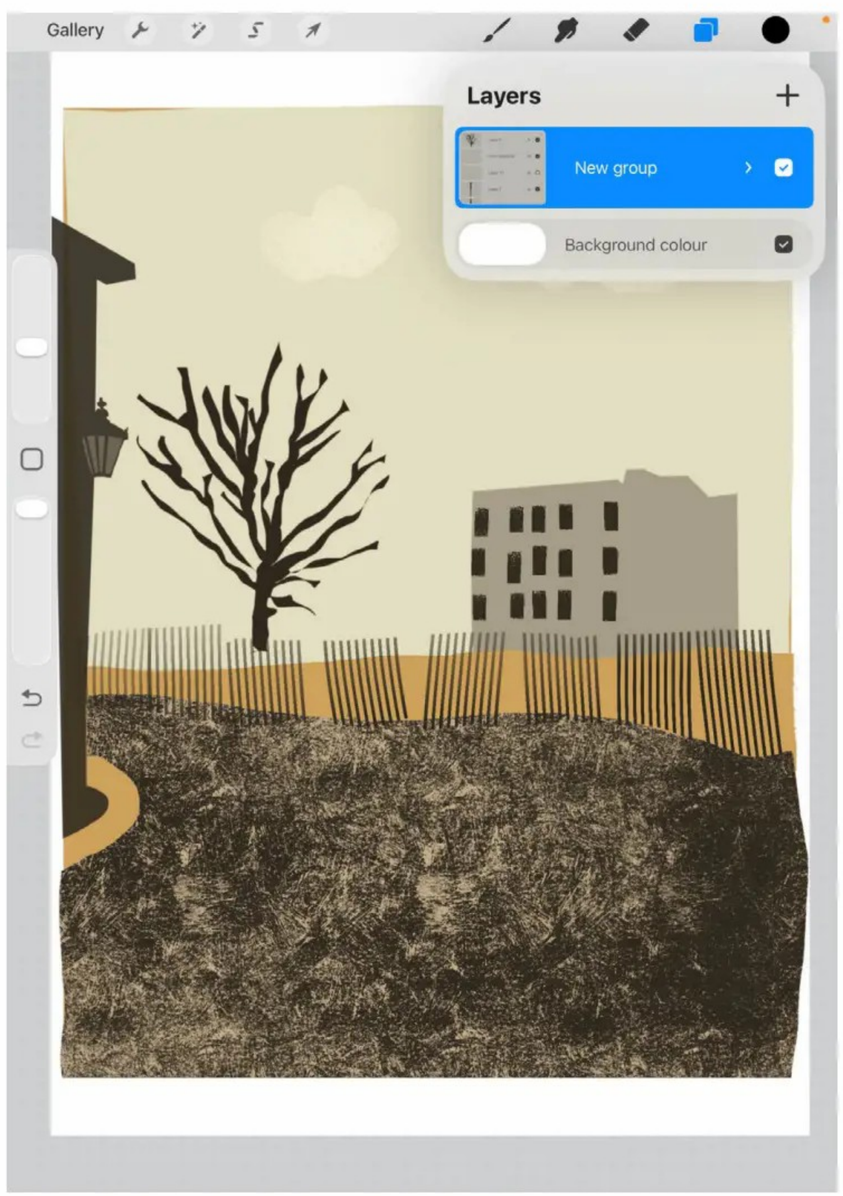


I also used Procreate brushes to reinterpret the elements in the composition. There are some fabulous new brushes in the Procreate brush library designed by Kyle T. Webster.

For example, I used the Eddystone brush from the Basics set to suggest the fence running across the image, and a textured brush for the foreground. There are some gorgeous brushes in the Grunge brush category like Saltmallow and Motorsport. I encourage you to experiment and play!

To paint inside the shape, use the Alpha Lock feature. To do this, tap the shape layer thumbnail, then tap Alpha Lock from the pop-out menu. When you paint, the texture will only appear within the confines of the shape. To release the Alpha Lock, simply repeat the process you used to turn it on.





Once I've painted a few layers, it's good practice to group them all to keep things tidy.

To start, select the top layer. Then, tap and slide every layer you want to include in the group to the right. Once they're selected (highlighted in blue), tap Group to create the Group.

Duplicate the group by tapping and sliding the New Group thumbnail to the right, then hide the bottom group by tapping the checkbox. This gives me a backup group if I need it.

Next, flatten the top group by tapping New Group and tapping Flatten from the pop-out menu.

STEP 4 - FLIP THE SCENE FOR BETTER COMPOSITION

I decided to flip the whole image horizontally as I thought it would make a better composition.

Now we have a flattened layer, we can easily flip it using the Move tool (arrow icon).

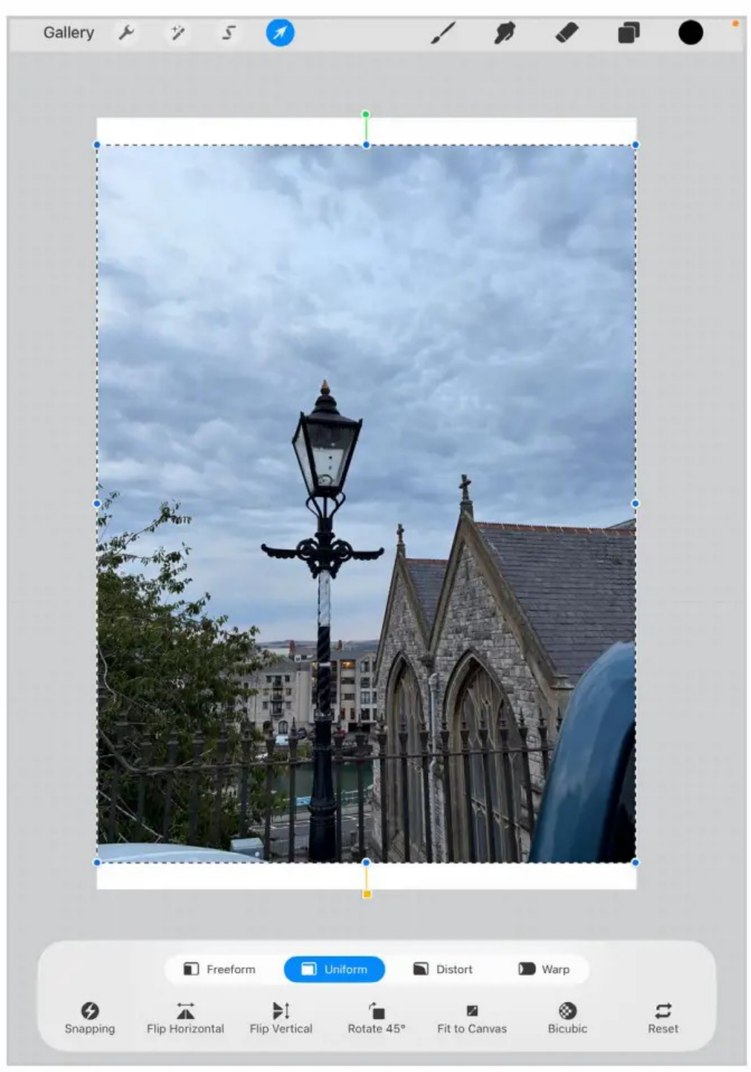
Tap the arrow icon, and tap Flip Horizontal from the bottom menu.

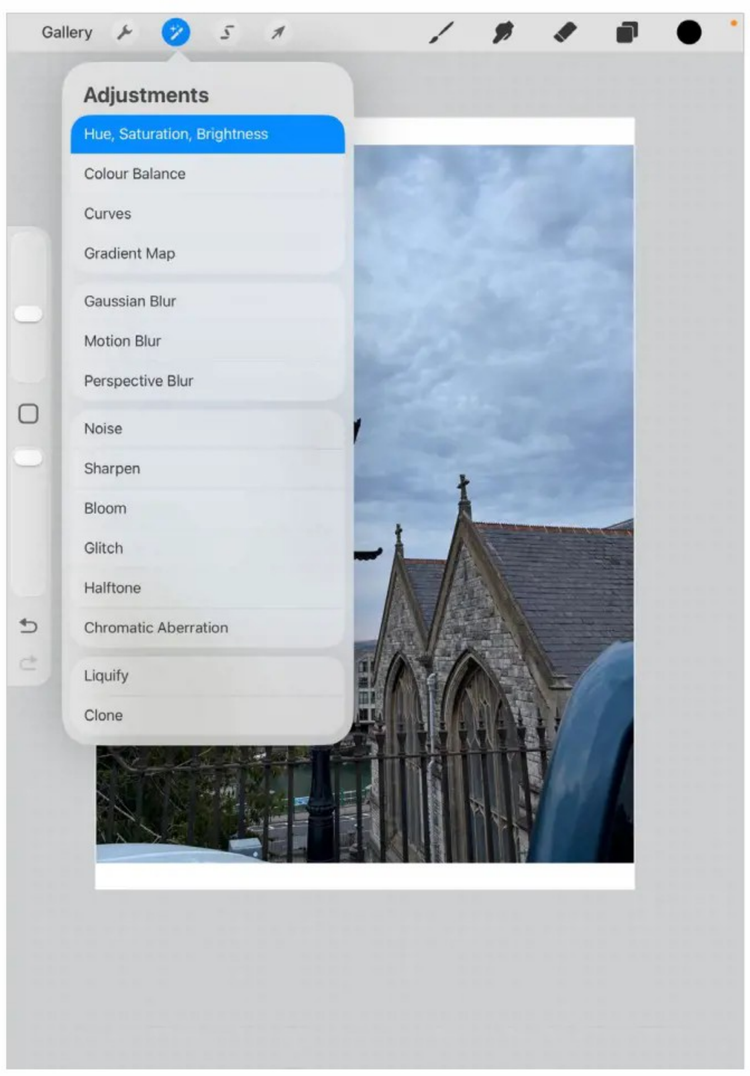
Now we can finish our story by adding the key elements like the figures and the lamppost before adding some painterly touches to enhance the dark, romantic mood.

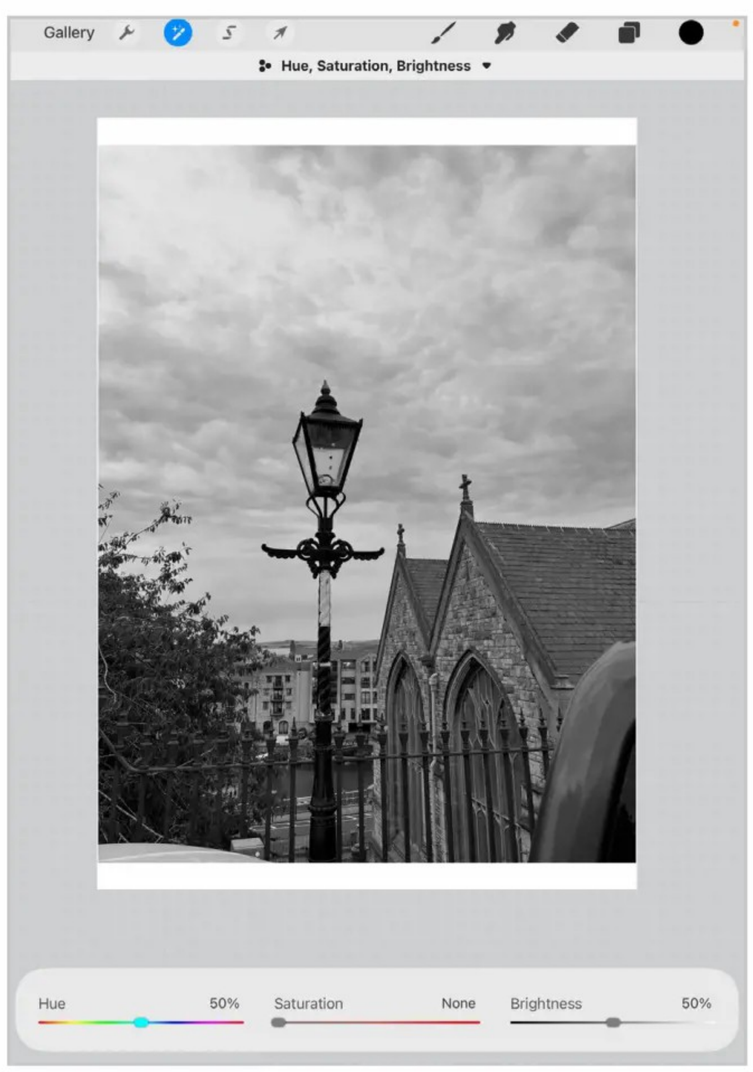
STEP 5 - ADD MORE ELEMENTS

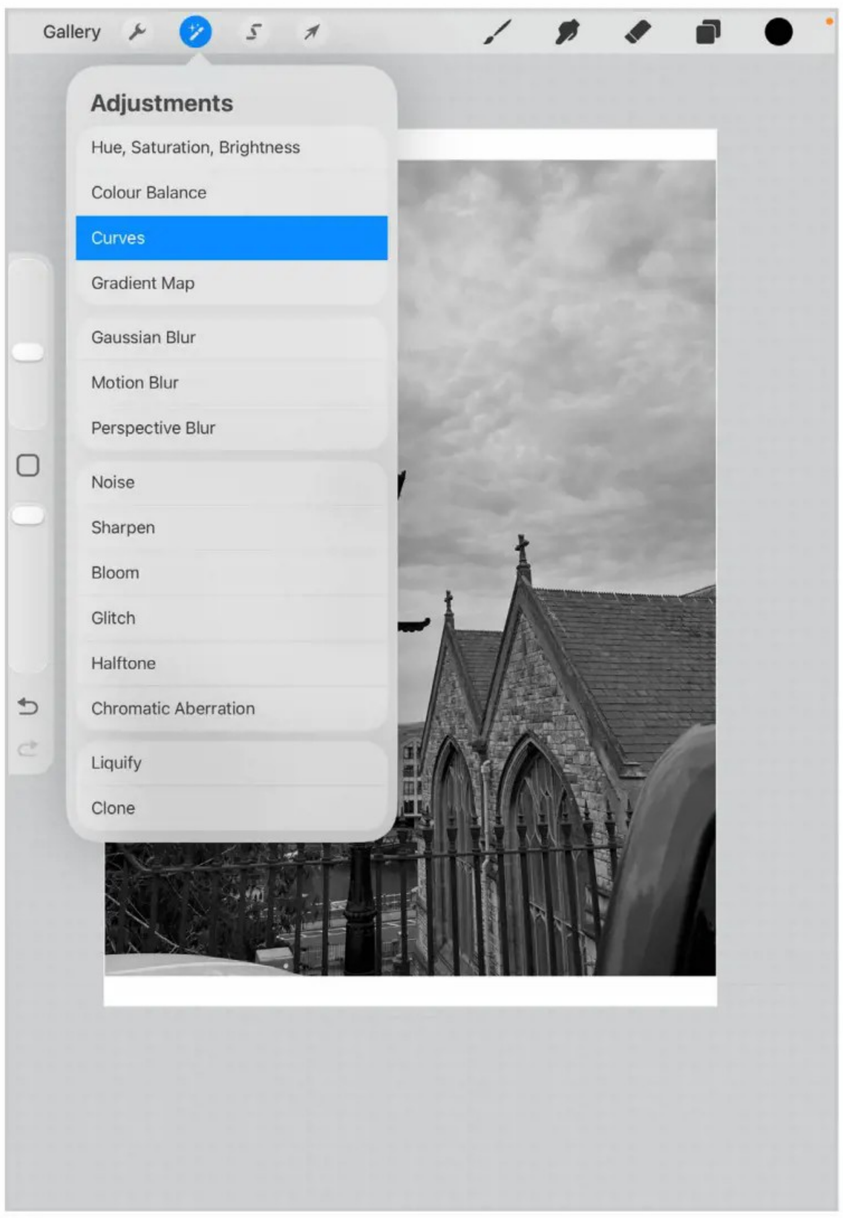
In this next step, I used the Automatic Selection tool to cut out the lamppost and the figures.

I started by importing the Lamppost photo and changing it to black-and-white using the Hue, Saturation, Brightness feature under Adjustments (magic wand icon).









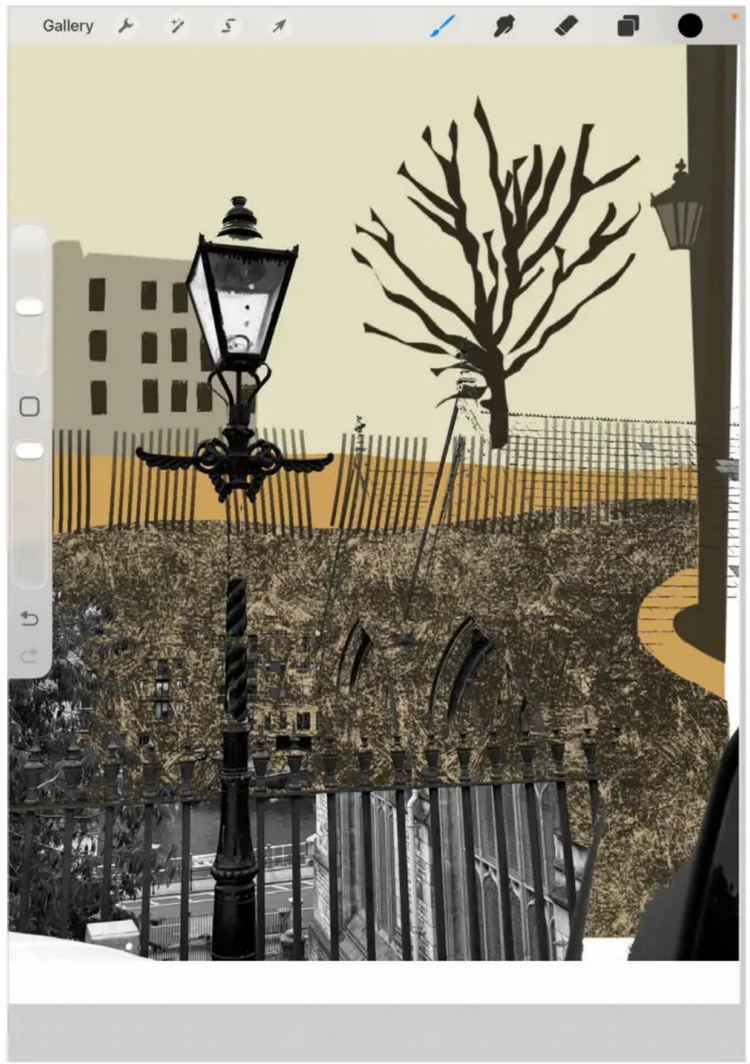
Also, under Adjustments, I used Curves to increase the contrast.

To remove the background from the lamppost, follow these steps:

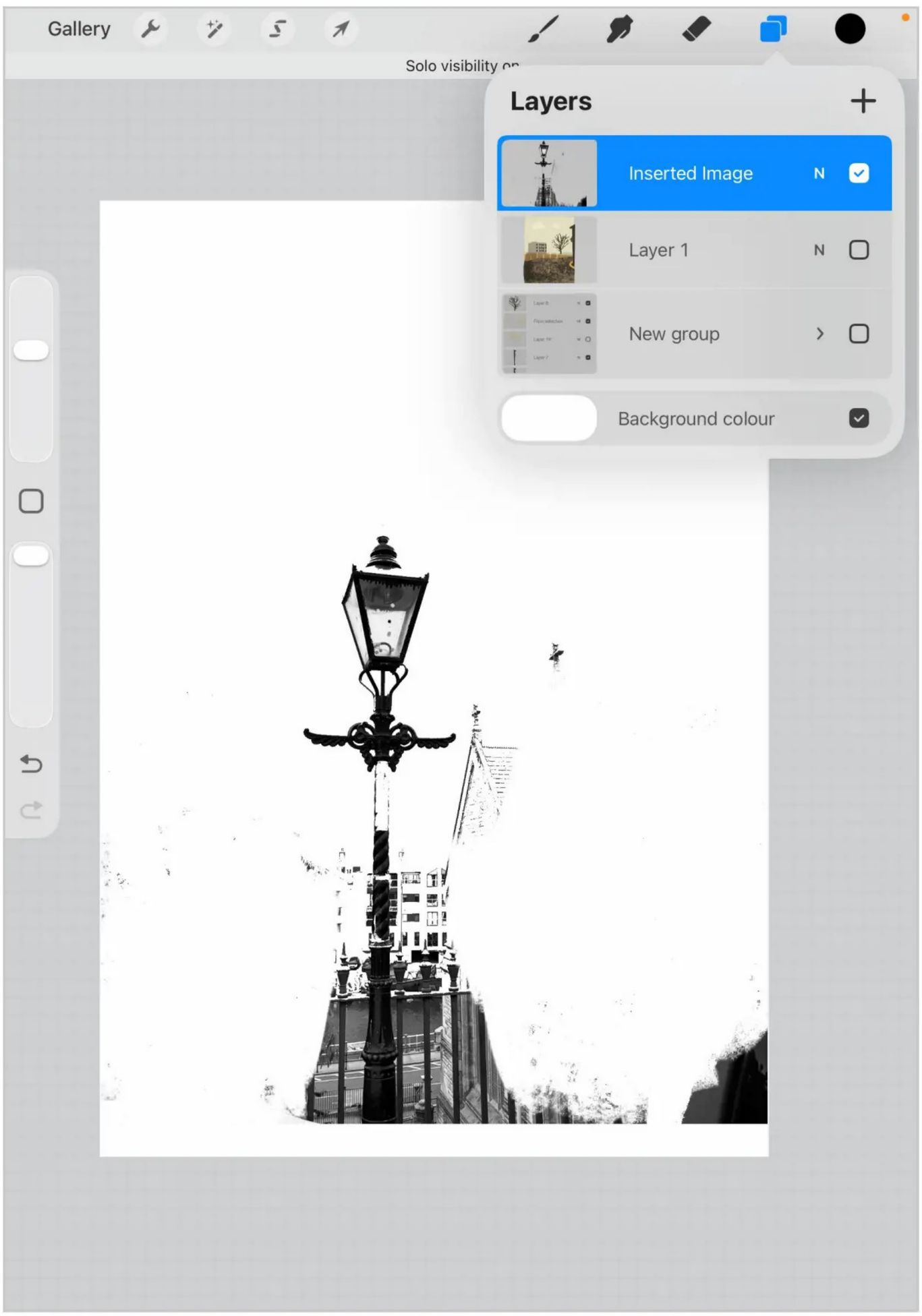
Start by tapping the Selection tool, and choose Automatic.

Next, tap on a light grey area of the sky and slowly slide your finger or Apple Pencil to the right until you've selected as much of the sky as possible, so the sky goes dark. The dark areas show the selected areas. Notice the little blue Selection Threshold line moving across the top of the screen as you slide to the right.

Continue tapping the white areas inside the lamppost to remove them.



Three-finger swipe downwards on the screen to reveal the Copy & Paste menu, then choose Cut to remove the sky and other parts of the image that the selection might have included.

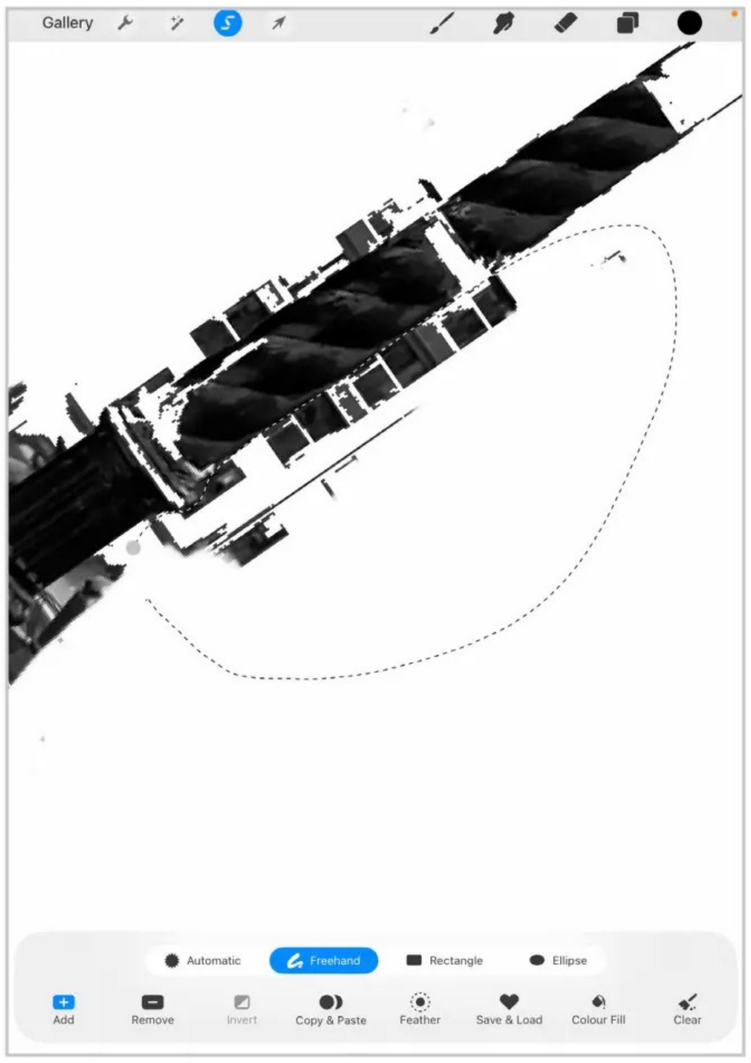


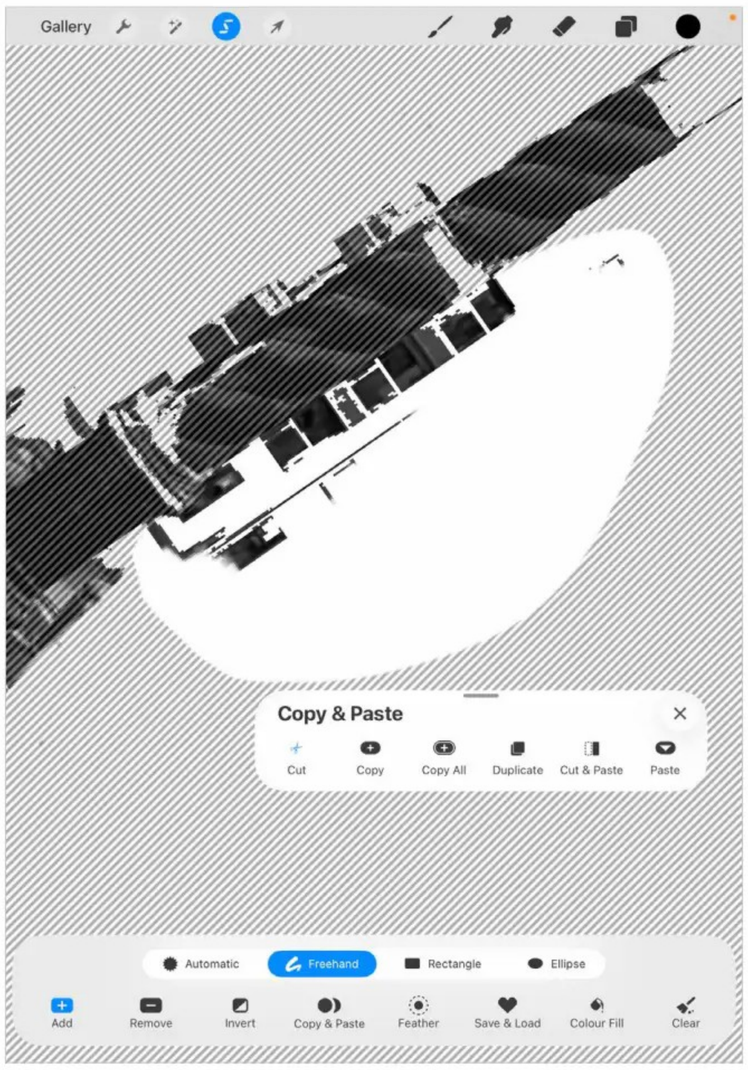
Now we can see the background, which all looks a bit busy. We still need to erase the remaining parts of the photo around the lamppost. It's easier to do this if we isolate the layer and hide all the other layers.

To do this, simply tap and hold for a moment on the little square in the layer thumbnail of the layer you want to work on (in our case, the lamppost layer). All the other layers should disappear, allowing you to easily work without distraction on the lamppost layer.

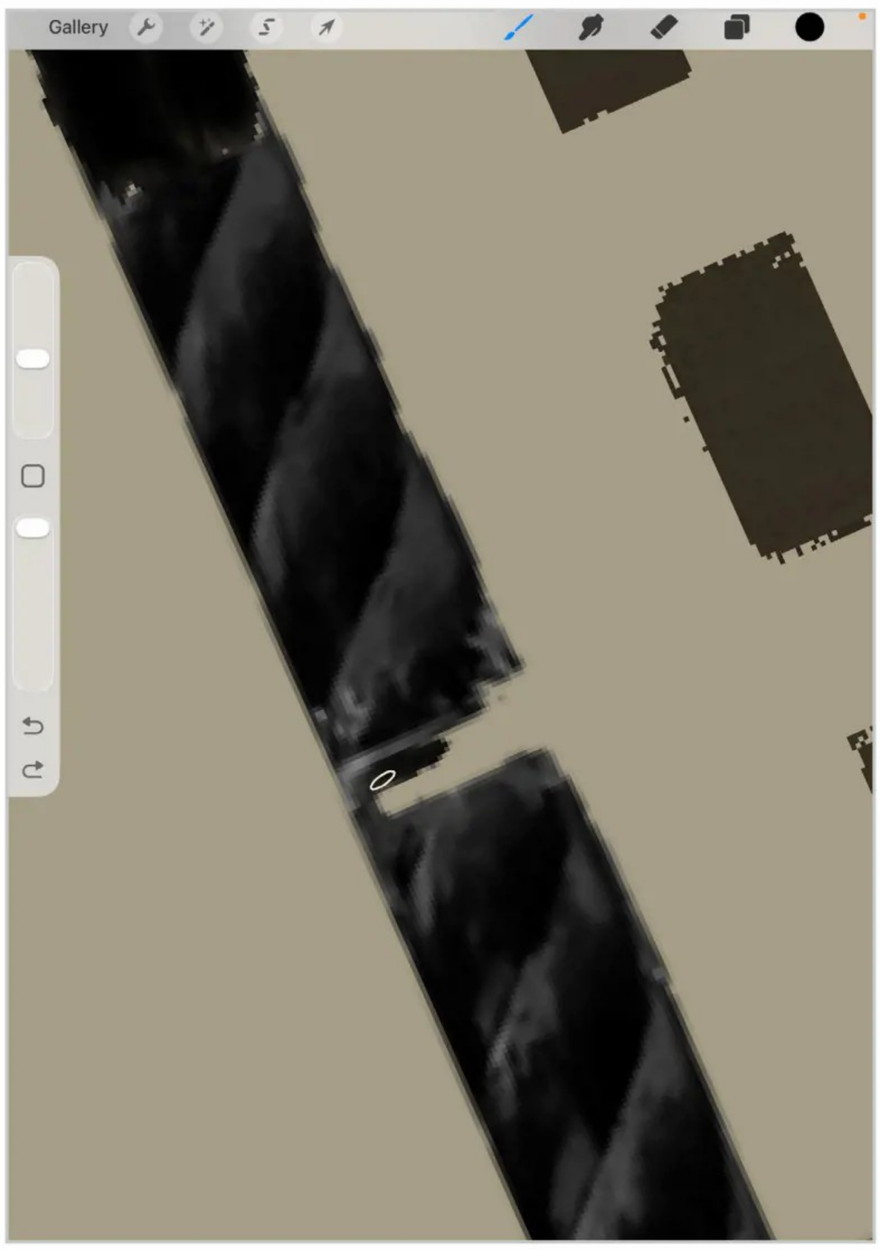
I used both the eraser and the freehand selection tool to clean up around the lamppost. I also used the eraser with a large brush for the big areas furthest from the lamppost.

I used the Freehand Selection tool to draw around trickier areas that required more precision closer to the edge of the lamppost. To do this, use the Freehand Selection tool to draw around the area you want to remove, close the selection, and three-finger swipe on the screen, then choose Cut from the pop-out menu. Repeat this until you've removed the excess parts of the photo and just have the lamppost remaining, then move it into position using the Move tool (arrow icon)

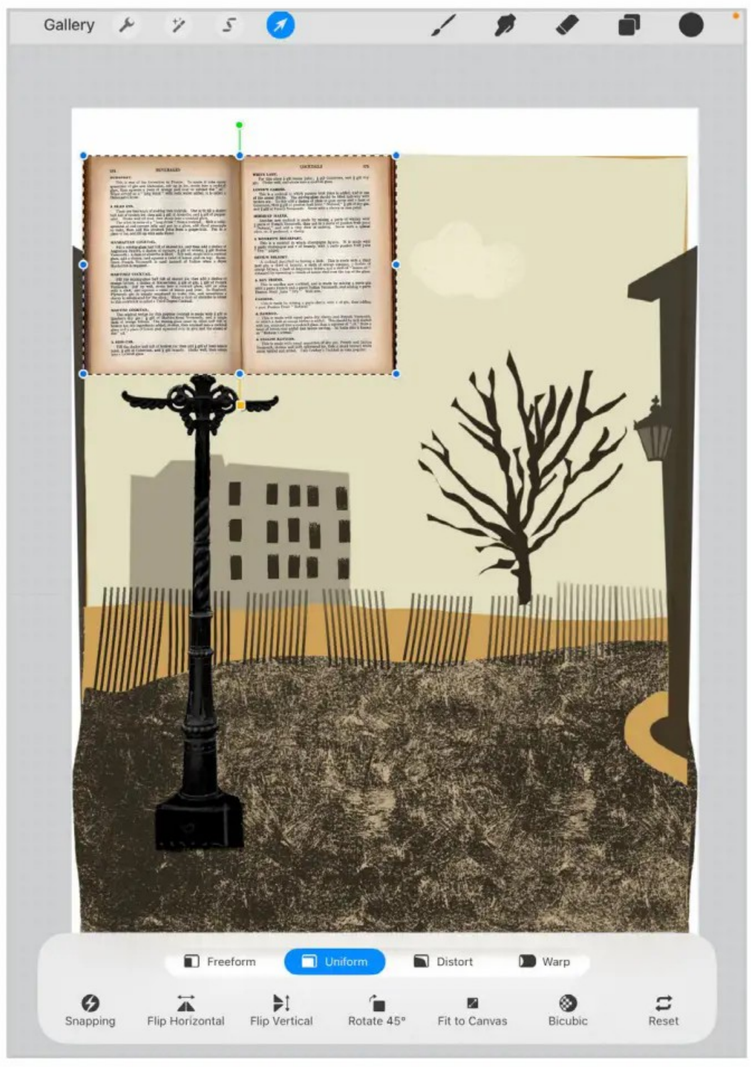


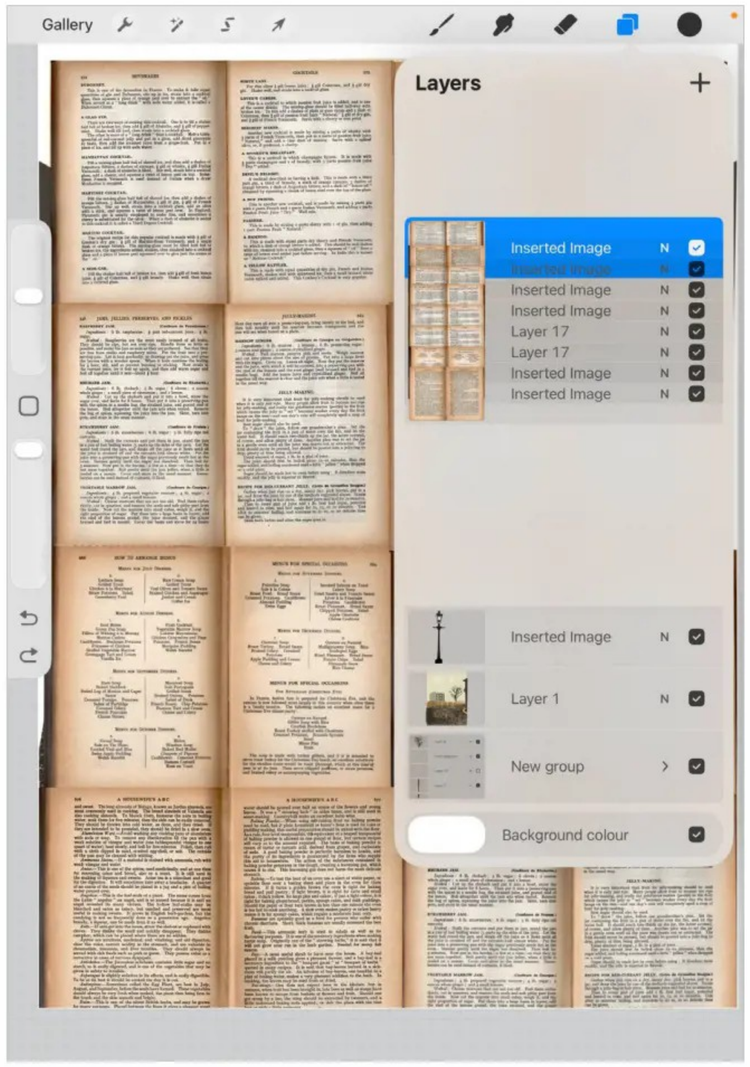


I also painted in a few gaps in the lamppost using the Shearwater brush from the Inks brush set, and applied a base with the Nikko Rull brush in the Painting set.



STEP 6 - ENHANCE MOOD BY ADDING MORE TEXTURE AND PAINTERLY TOUCHES

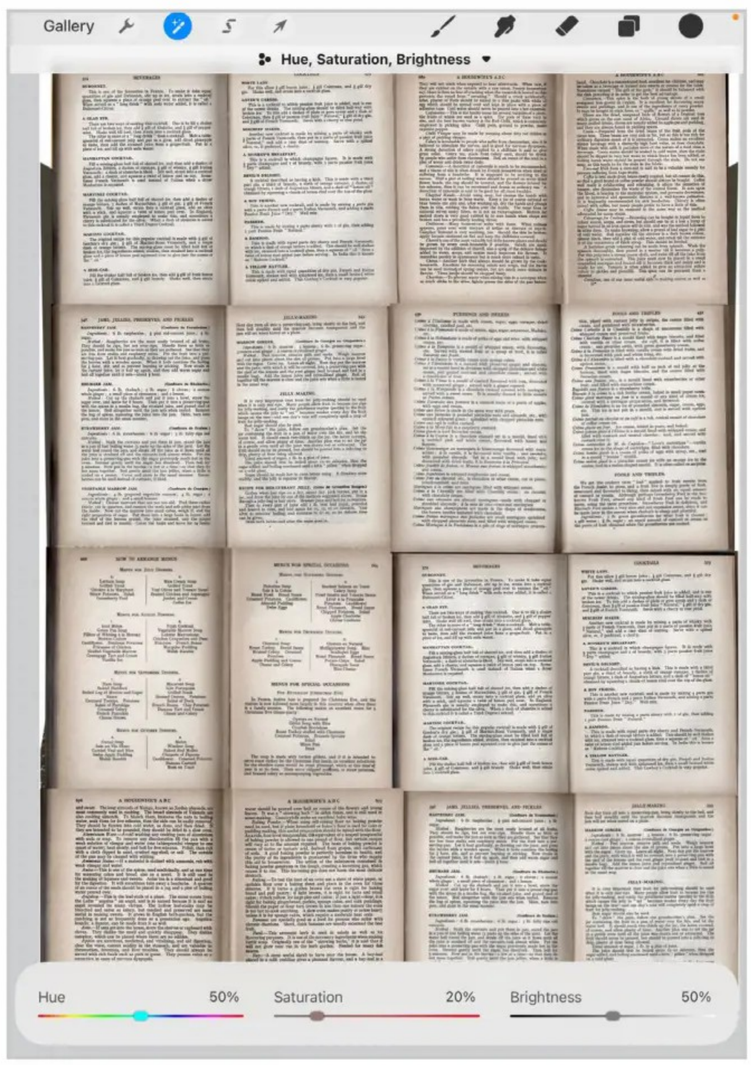


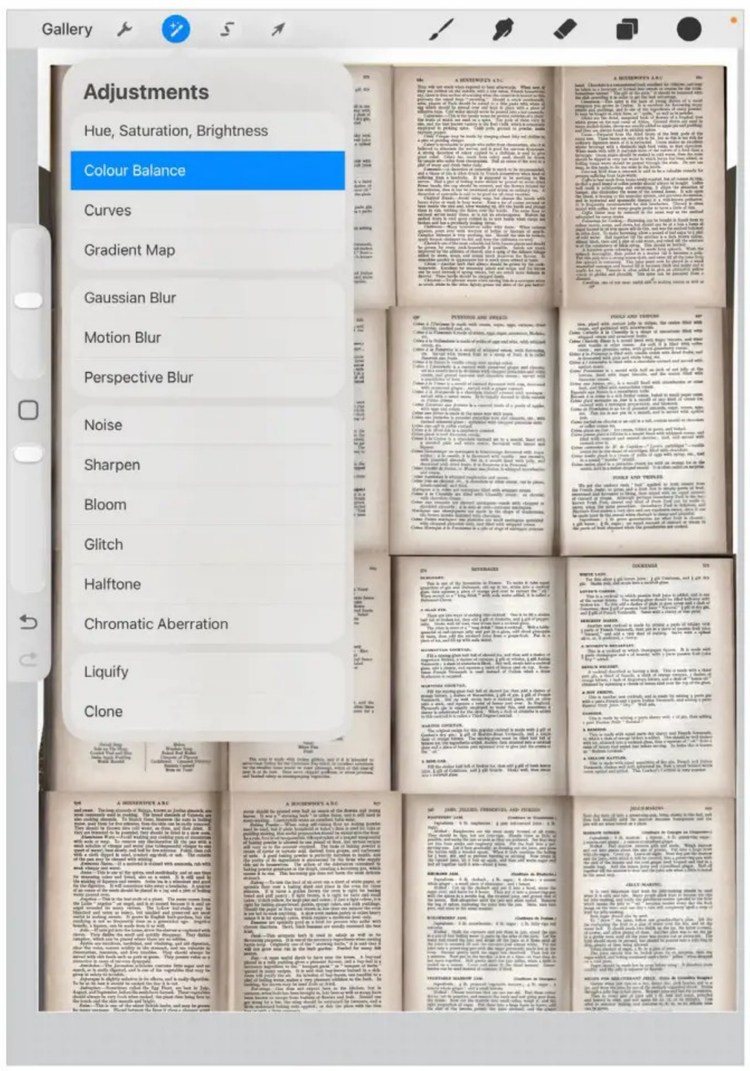


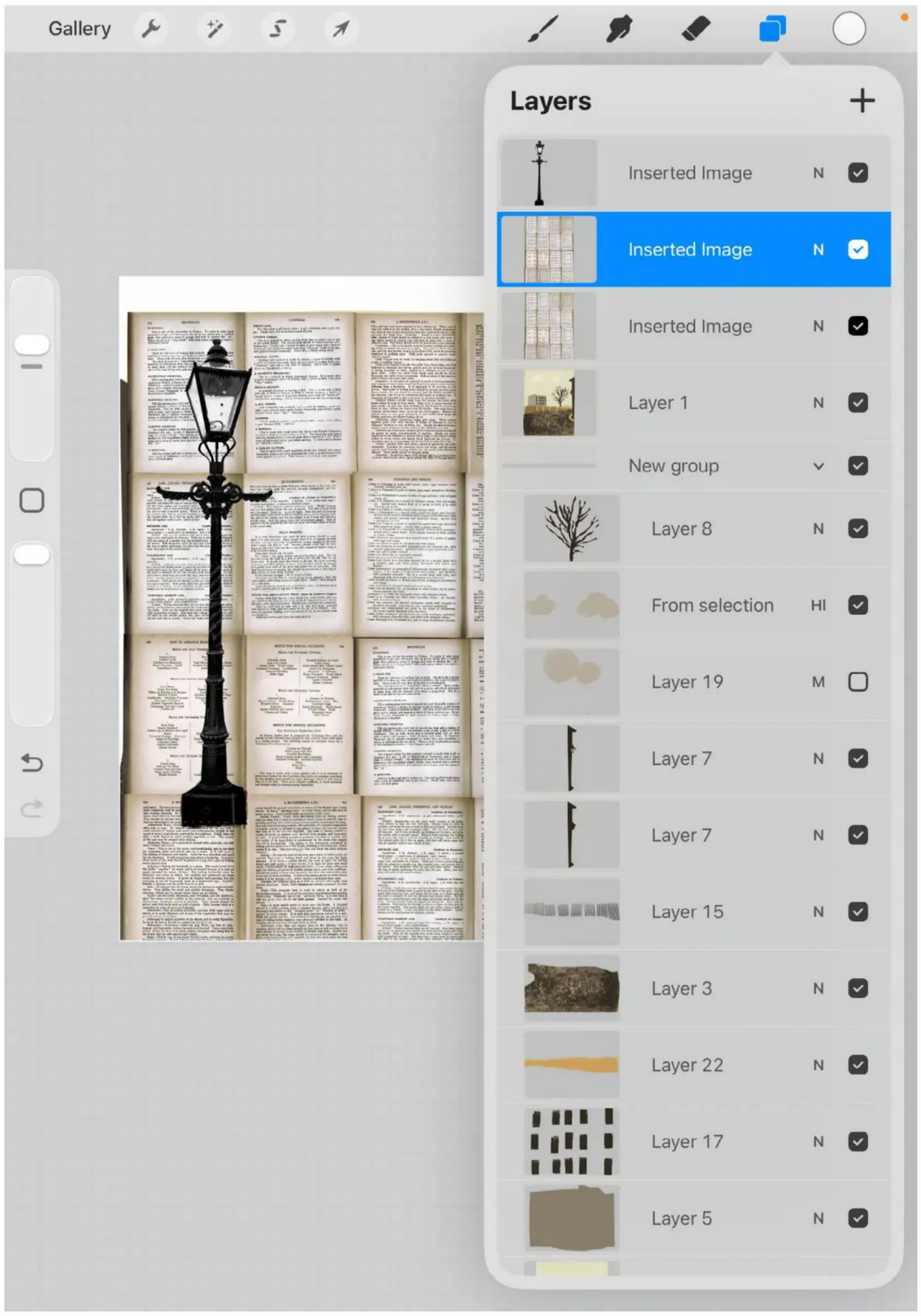
Next, I add a background texture of “old books” and paint to the image, which help to add a sense of romance and poetry.

To add the book texture, I scanned a few pages from an old cookery book, then imported them into Procreate and spread them across the canvas. I then merged them into a single layer by pinching them together.

I made some color adjustments, taking the saturation down a bit, and chose Color Balance to increase the yellow a little.



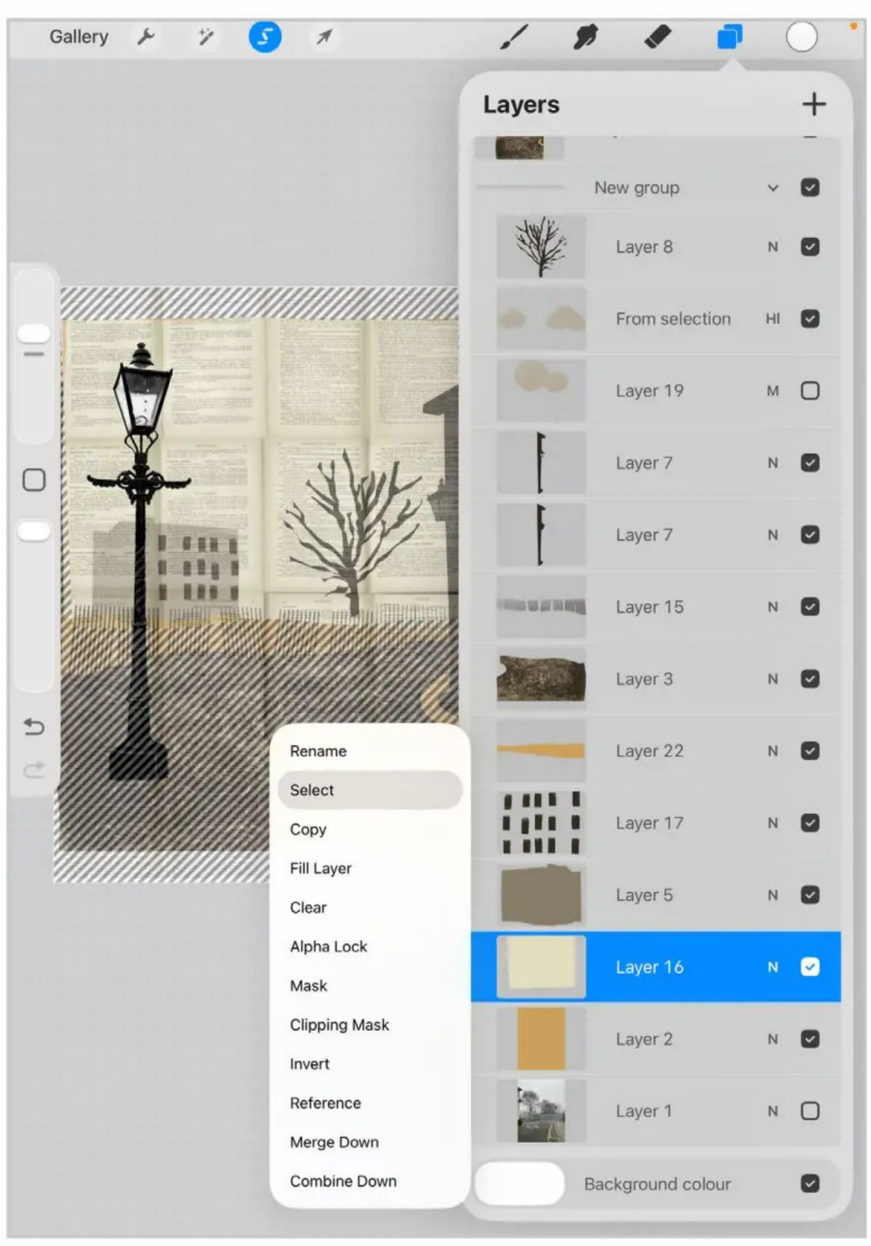


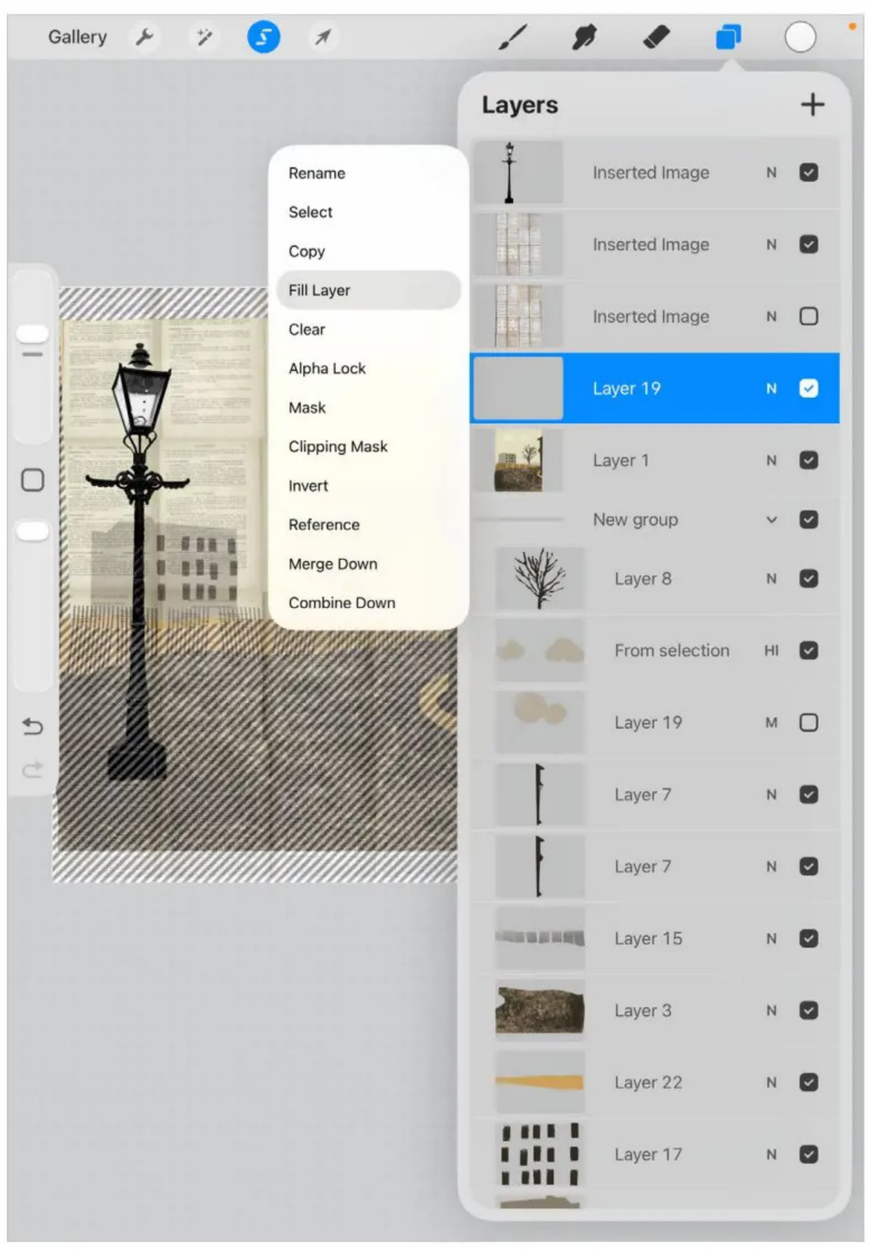


I duplicated the book layer (so I had a backup) and hid it by unchecking the checkbox in the layer thumbnail.

I placed the book pages layer below the lamppost layer, so it sat in the background, and changed the Blend Mode to Multiply so that the book layer blended with the background a little bit.

The problem with doing this is that I didn't like the yellow/cream background showing through.

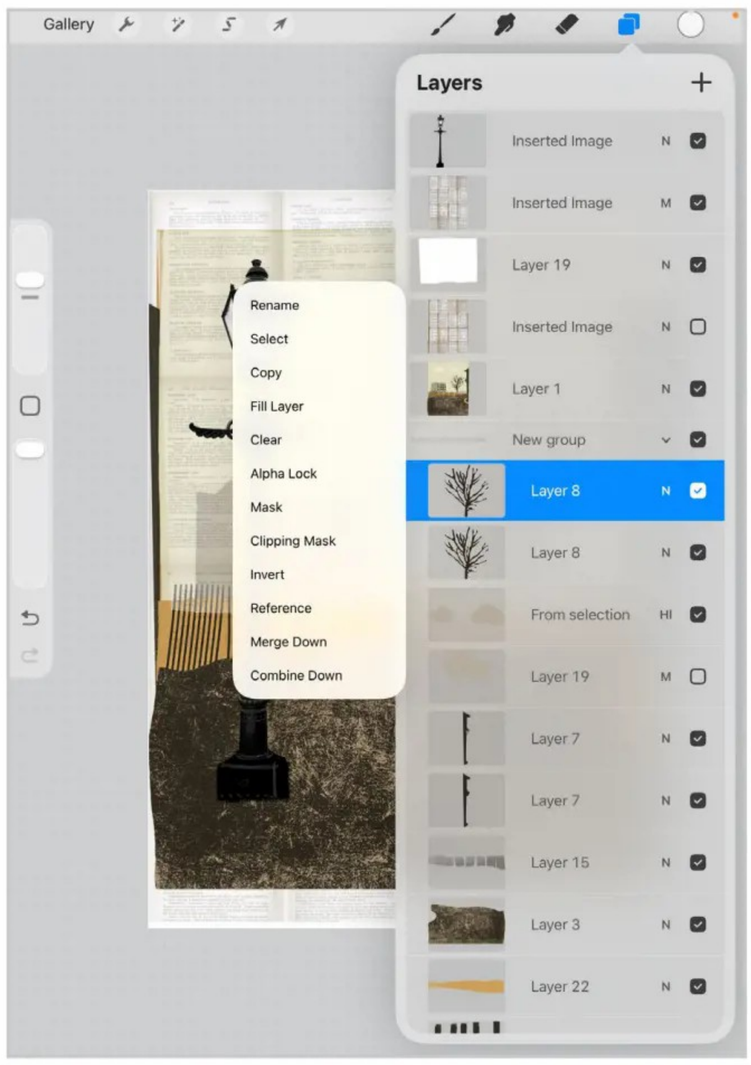


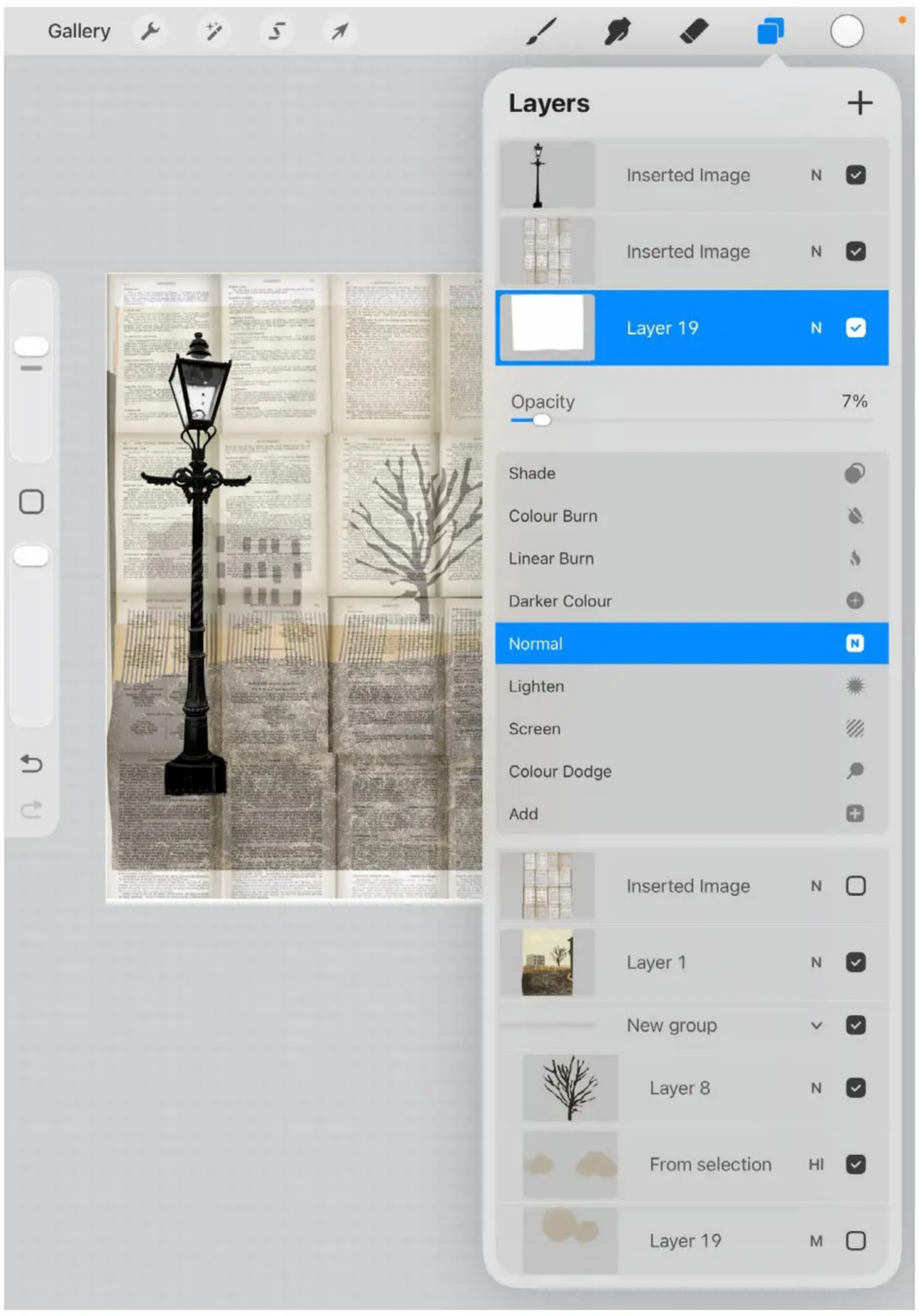


To fix this, I duplicated the yellow/cream background by tapping the layer, tapping Select from the pop-out menu, then creating a new layer (with the selection still active) and filled it with white. To fill with white, tap the empty layer and choose Fill Layer.

The problem with the white layer is that it now covers the details in the image, like the tree, building, and parts of the fence, and makes them a bit faint. So I dealt with the tree issue first.

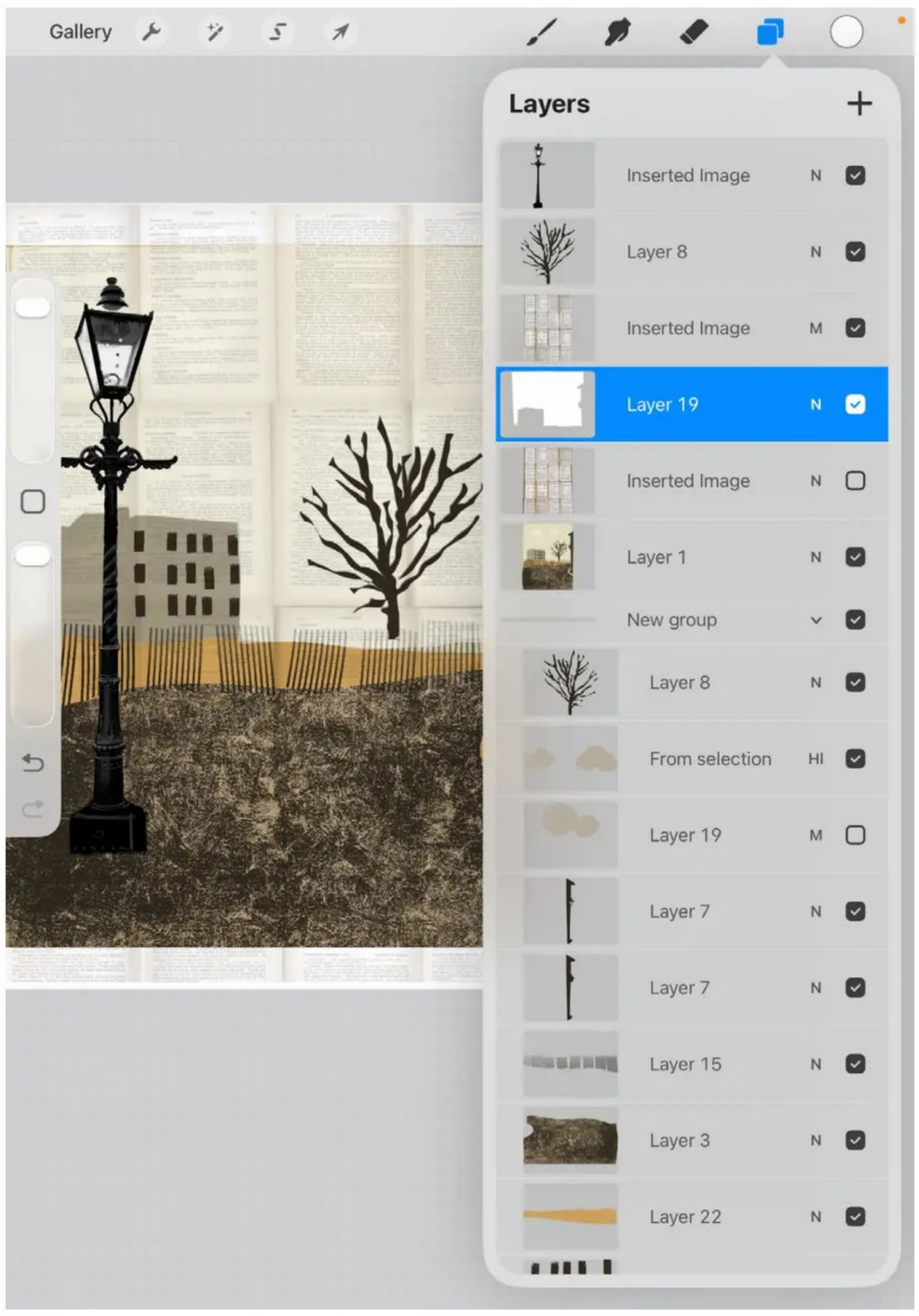
I went back to the multi-layered group at the bottom of the layer stack, duplicated the original tree layer, and moved it up the layer stack until it was above the book pages layer. I used the move tool to place directly on top of the faint tree.





For the other areas, I simply cut out the shapes of the white layer that needed to be revealed, like the buildings and the fence, to reveal the shapes behind them. I temporarily lowered the opacity of the white layer so I could see the shapes underneath.

To cut out the shapes, I used the Freehand Selection tool. Make sure Color Fill is turned off. If you accidentally turn it on (as I have here in the image - the icon is highlighted in blue), simply turn it off as soon as you spot it so your selection won't be filled with color.



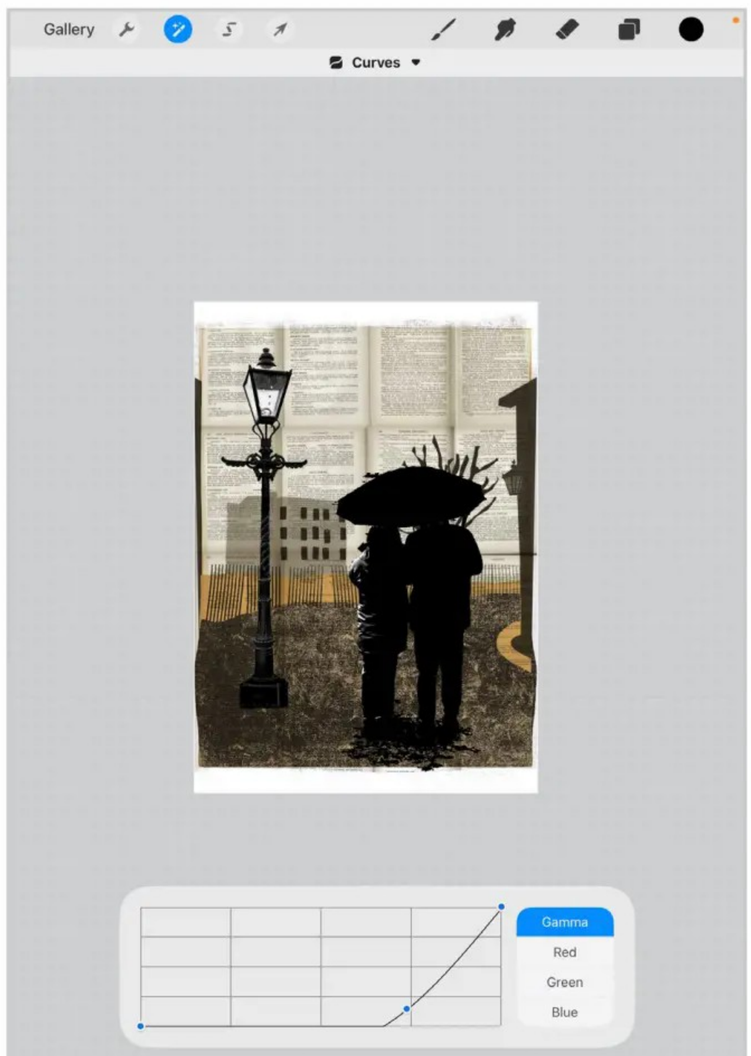
Here you can see the white shape with the cut-out bits.

I also roughly erased the top and bottom of the piece with the Nikko Rull brush (Painting brush set) on the sharp top and bottom edges of the book and background layers to simulate an art print.

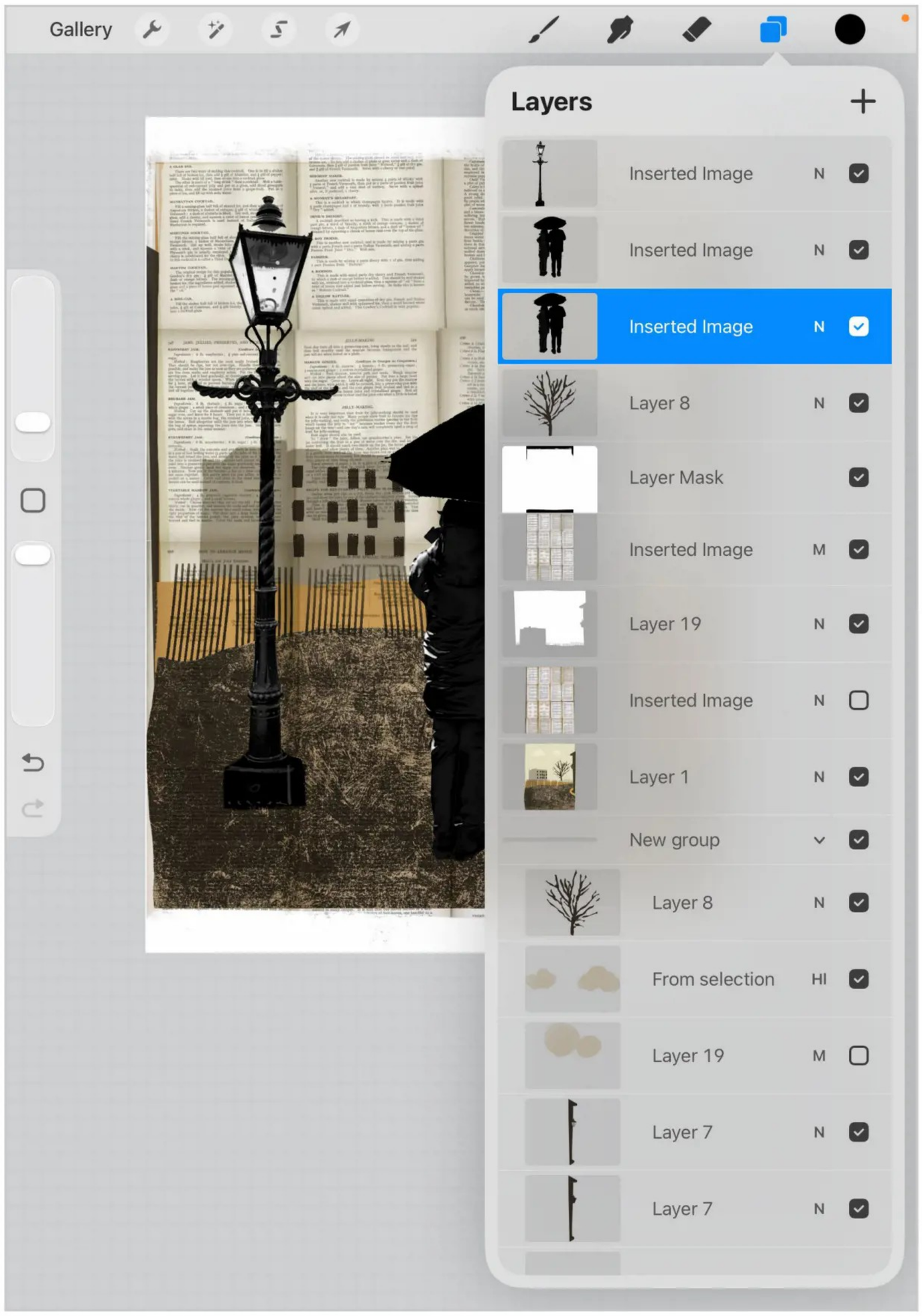
STEP 7 - ADD FIGURES

Next, I added the figures by cutting them out in exactly the same way as I cut out the lamp post in Step 5. I then converted the image to black-and-white, added contrast with Curves, and used the Automatic Selection tool to cut out the figures.

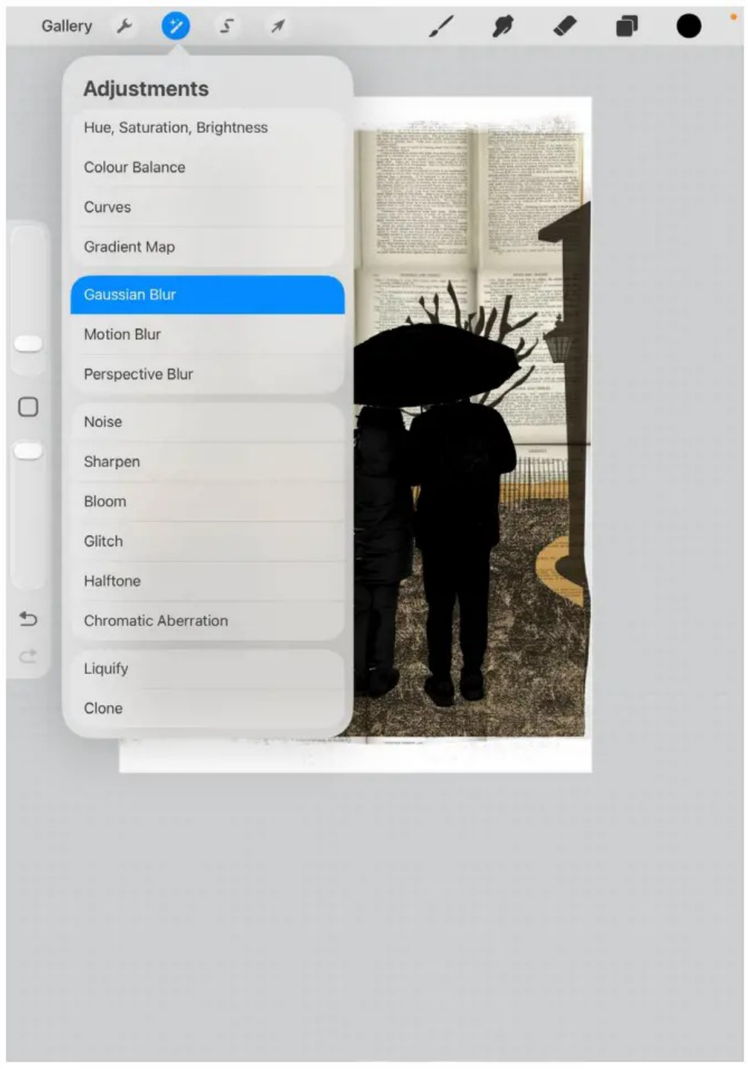
I also painted black over some of the light areas, like the shoes and white parts of the trousers and jacket, using the Wet Acrylic brush from the Painting set to create a silhouette look.



I also applied Curves again to darken the figures, and the Eraser to rub out the straggling bits the Automatic Selection tool hadn't removed, and to go around some of the edges to soften them.



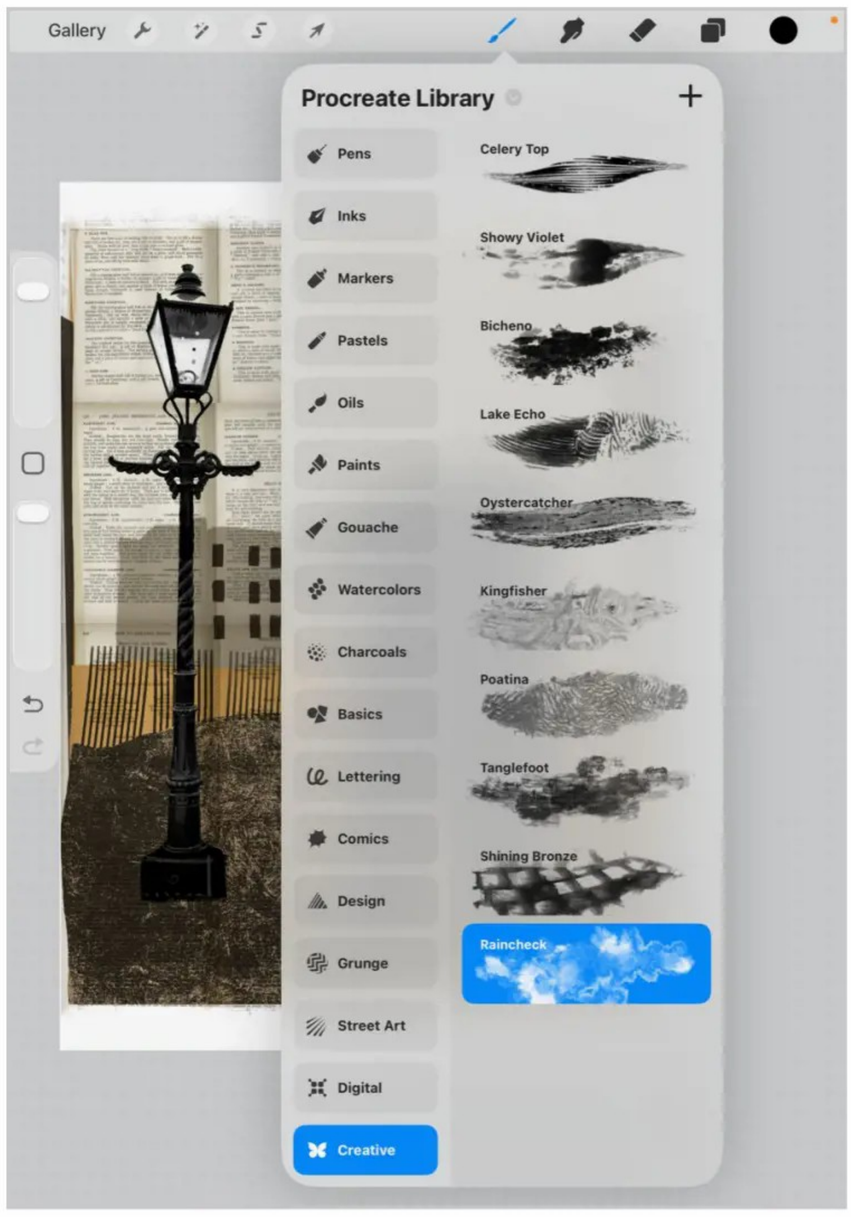
Another trick I use to soften the figures is to add a slight blur. To do this, duplicate the figure layer. With the bottom figure layer selected, tap the Adjustments icon and select Gaussian Blur.

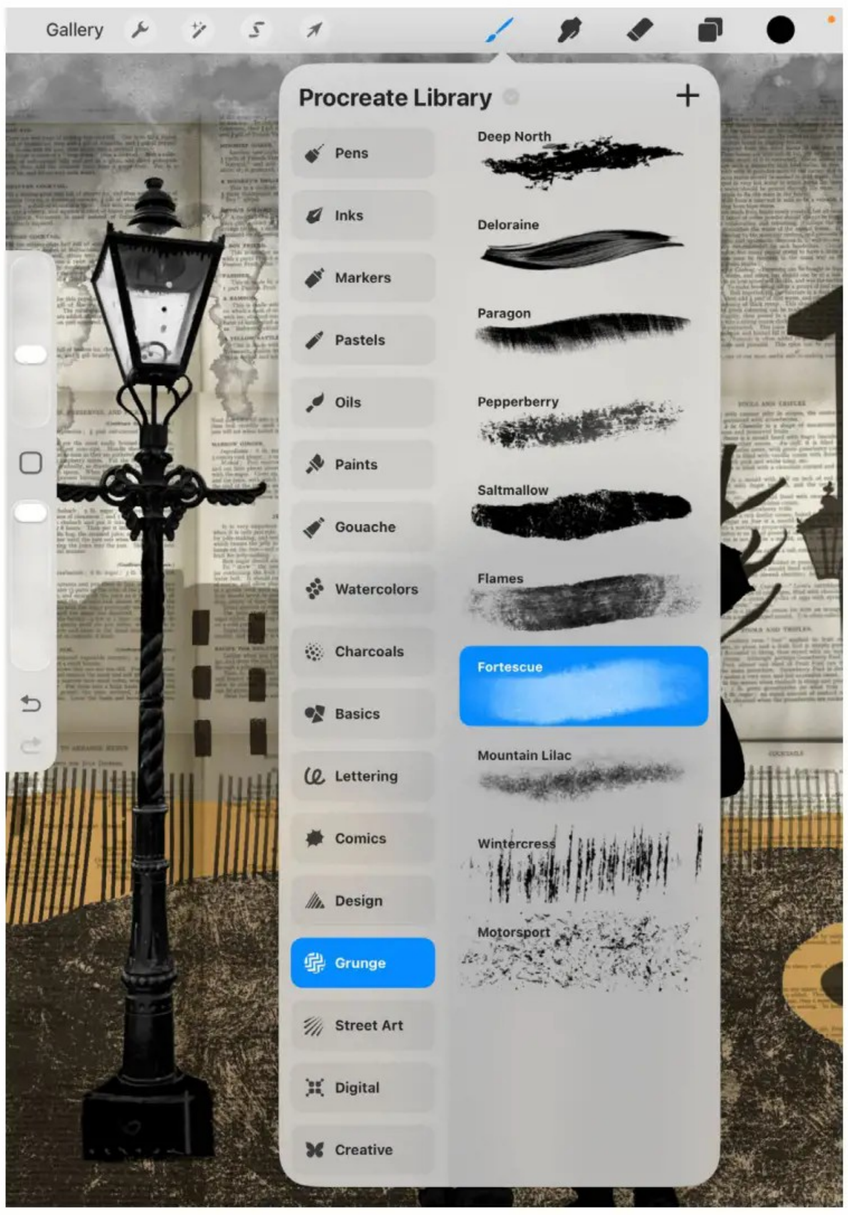


Tap and drag your finger or Apple Pencil to the right slightly on the screen to about 3% (notice the thin blue line move at the top of the canvas as you drag across the screen). Release your finger/pencil when you have a nice, soft blur around your figures.

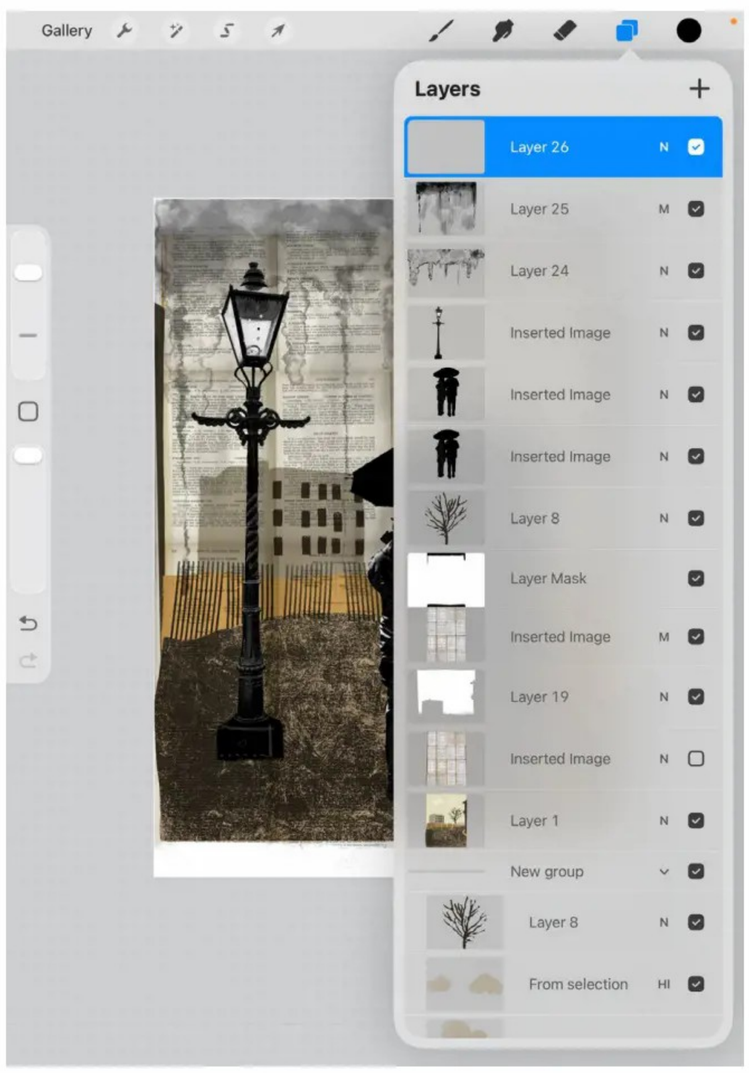
STEP 8 - FINISHING TOUCHES

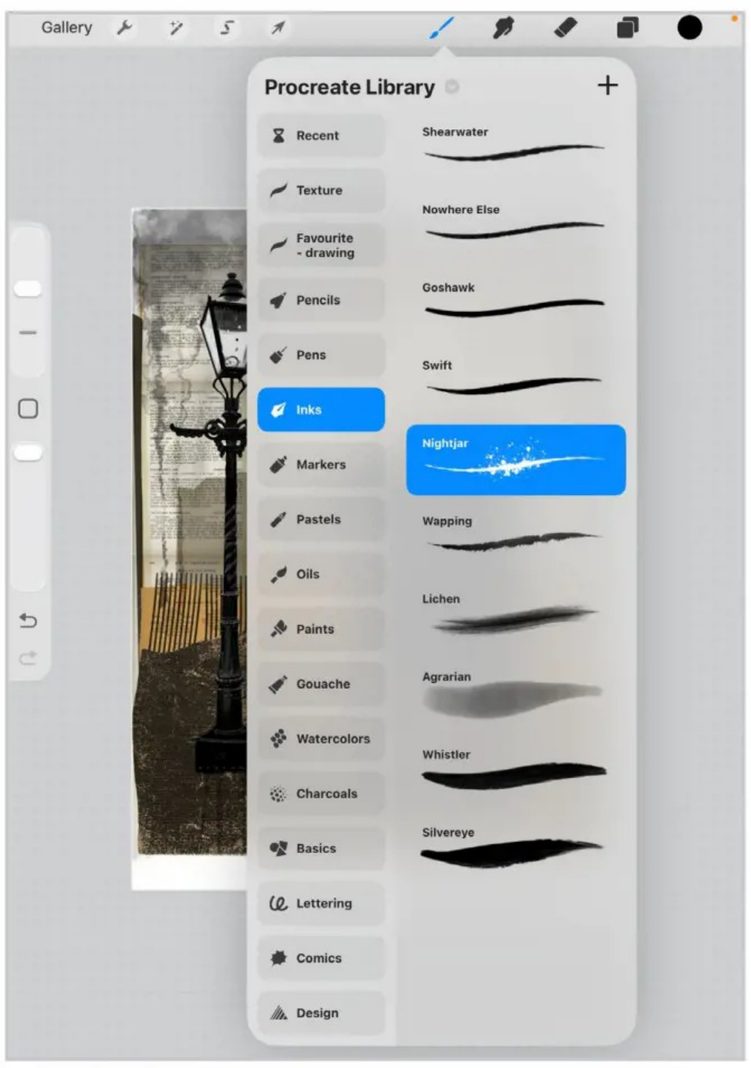
Finally, to enhance the mood, I added some painterly touches using the Raincheck brush from the Creative set and the Fortescue brush from the Grunge set. Both these brushes are from the wonderful new brush library now included with the recent Procreate update.

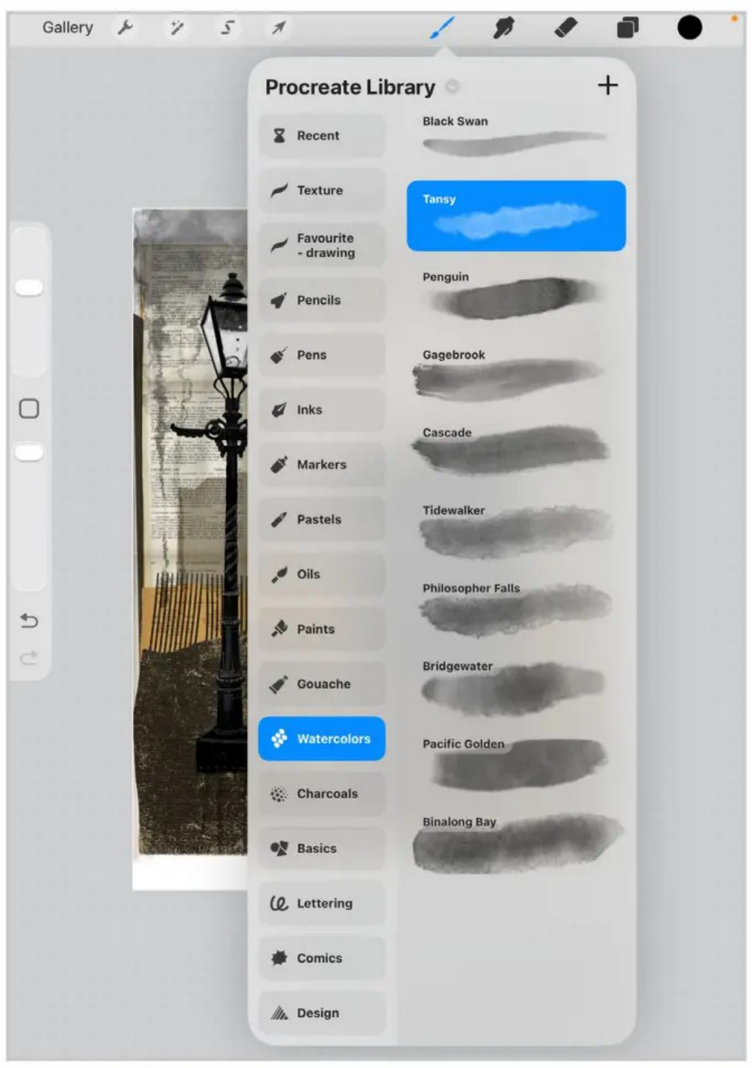


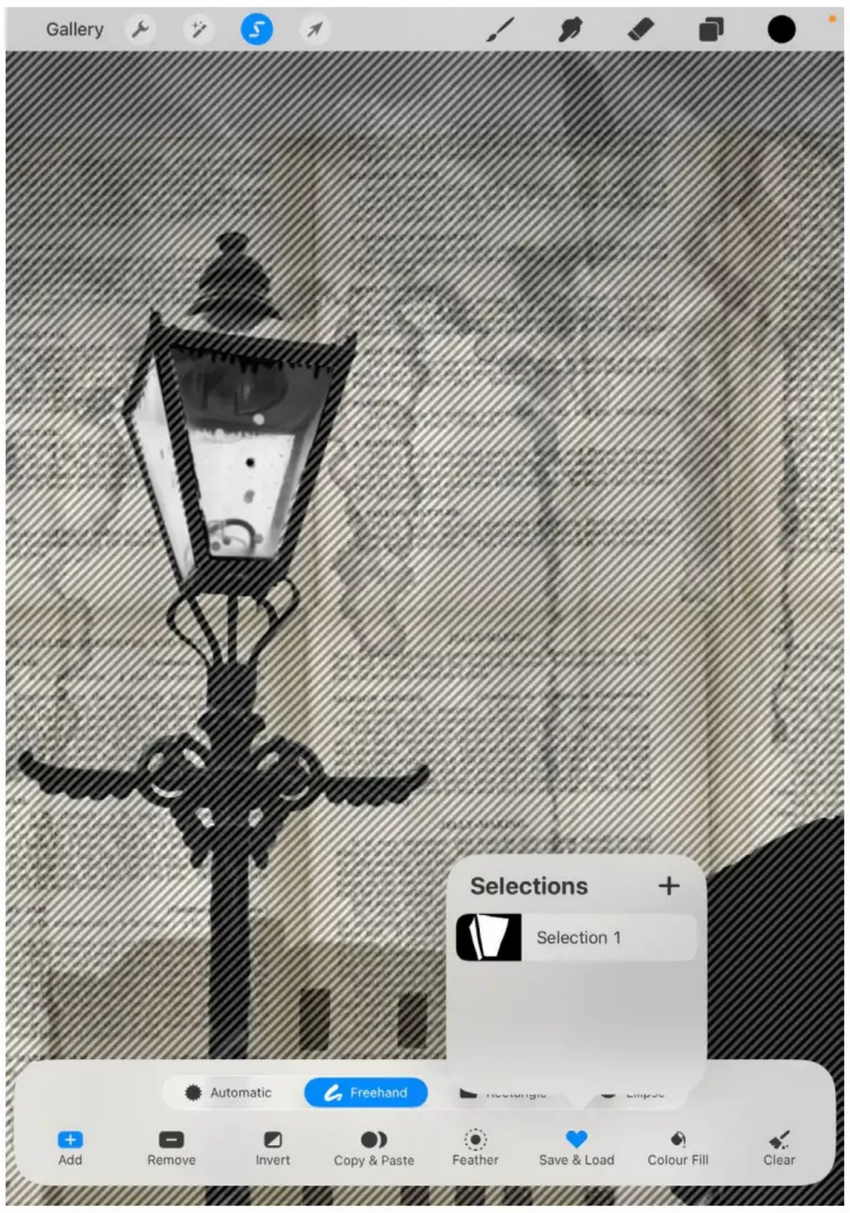


I added the brush marks on separate layers to give me some flexibility, for example, if I wanted to change the blend mode or lower the opacity on any of these layers. I changed the top painterly layer to a Multiply blend mode.



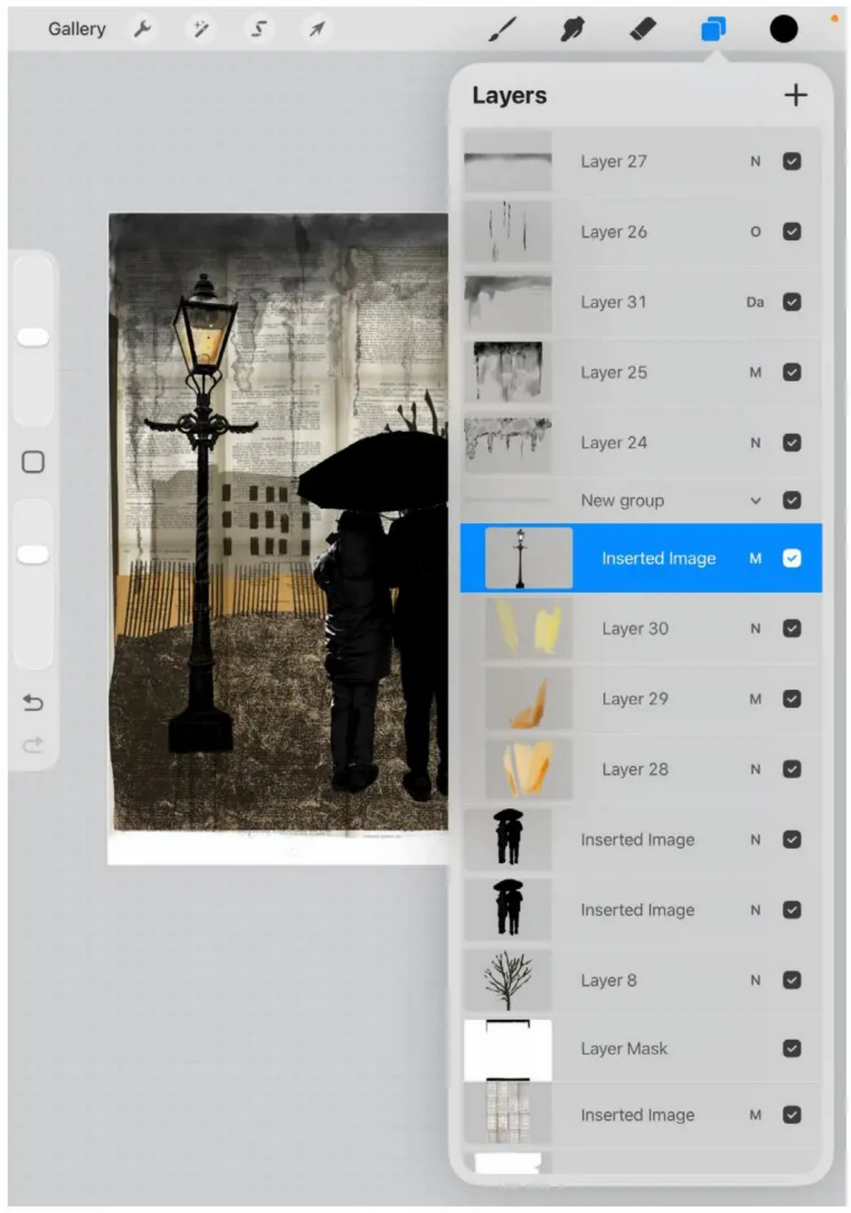




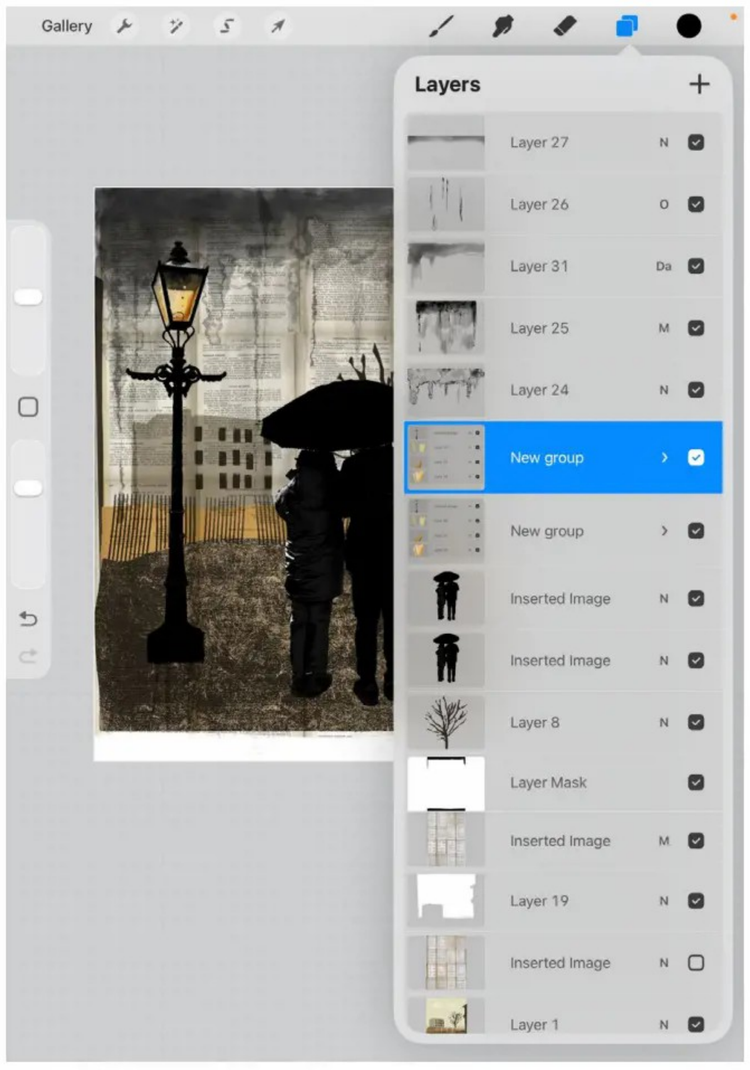


I also added some bright, warm, yellow painterly touches to the inside of the lights. To keep the brush marks within the lamp area, on a new layer, I made a selection using the Freehand Selection tool using the inner frame of the lamp glass, then painted inside the selection.

I saved the selection in case I wanted to come back and retouch the paintwork inside the lamp. To save a selection, tap the heart icon (Save & Load). You can return to this selection any time by tapping it.



I built up the yellow paint over three layers, as I like to play with the blend modes. You can see here that I set one of the layers to Multiply.



I grouped the lamp post layer with the color layers, and duplicated the group to give me a second lamp post and placed it in the distance. This helped to frame the couple between the two lamps, strengthening the composition.

I also added a few more drips here and there, along with some shadows behind the figures' feet.

For a final twist to the story, and to add a bit of mystery, I added a single figure in the distance.

I also used a stamp from my Urban Love Pack - the flock of birds - to add a bit of drama.

THAT'S IT!

Photographs are a great starting point for creating images from your imagination by compositing photo elements into collages in Procreate.

If you enjoyed this tutorial and would like to explore digital collage making further, you might like my new course, Digital Collage Made Simple, using Procreate. It's a brand-new course for beginners that takes you step by step through everything you need to get up and running in Digital Collage making with Procreate. Click here to find out more.

If you'd like to use brushes from my Urban Love Pack, you can download them here.

About the Author

Nicki Fitz-Gerald is an artist, experimental mobile photographer, author and teacher who uses her iPhone and iPad to blend traditional and digital image-making methods together to create rich and textured works both figurative and abstract. She is author of two books published by Rocky Nook: "Digital Collage with Procreate" and "The Art of iPhoneography" (co-authored with Bob Weil).

Nicki is just about to launch her 10th online course "Digital Collage Made Simple", a course for Digital Collage beginners. You can find out more about this course on the Courses section of her website: www.nickifitzgerald.com

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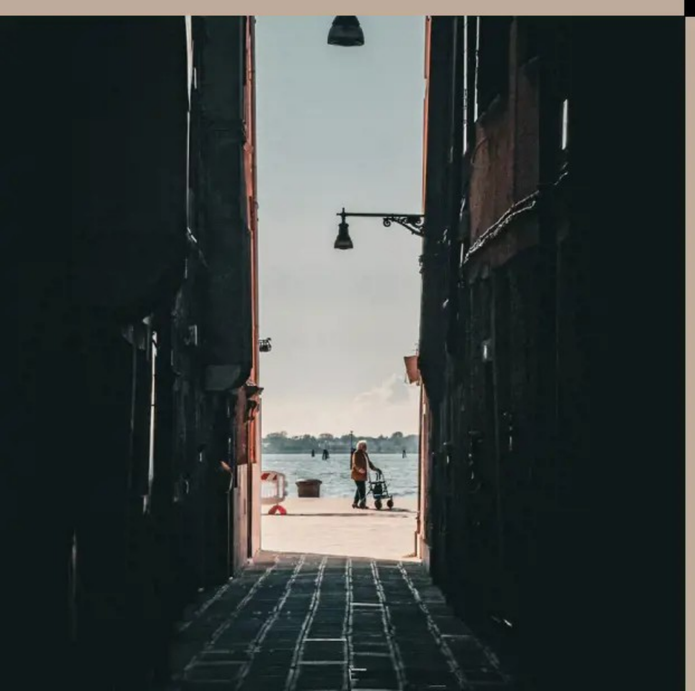
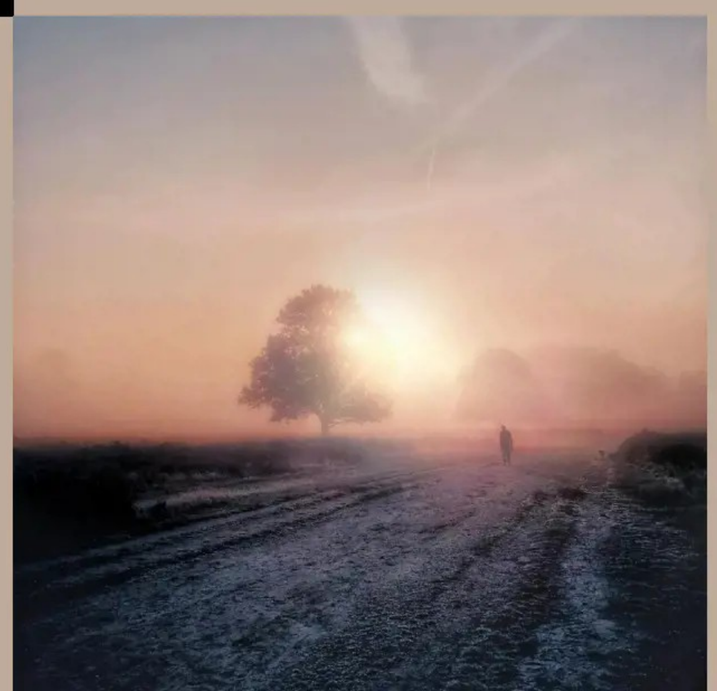
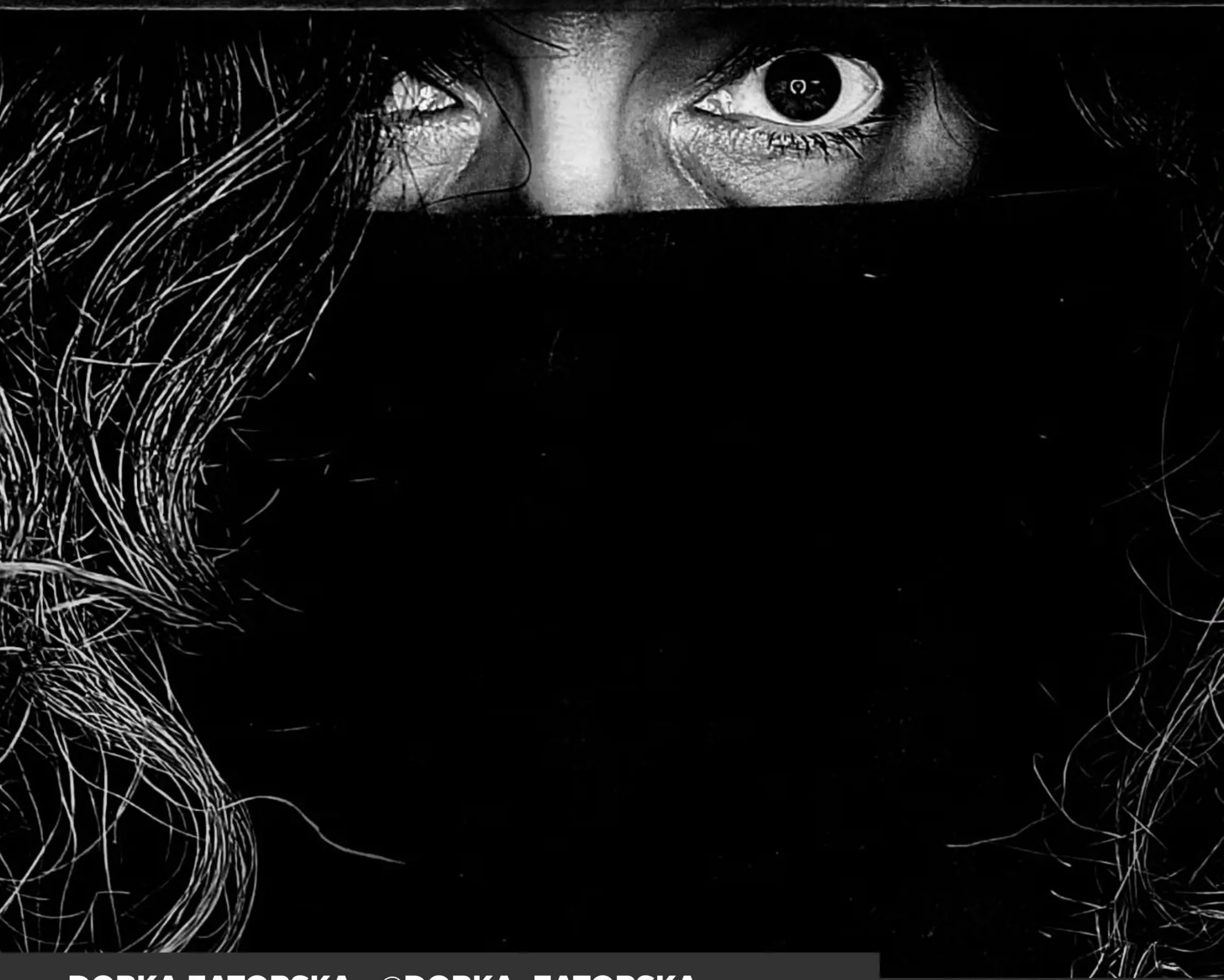




NICK KOCIŃSKI - @KOCIŃSKI

Nick Kocinski is a London-based iPhone photographer who captures everyday moments in both urban street settings as well as in quieter landscapes. This approach allows him to find interest viewpoints in ordinary surroundings and passing moments. His black and white images are defined by strong contrast and deep shadows, giving the work a darker, more moody feel. In his color work, his approach shifts, with a richer and more vibrant color palette. Across both styles, Nick pays close attention to composition and the use of reflections to help guide the eye and give his images a sense of depth and intention.



DORKA ZATORSKA - @DORKA_ZATORSKA

Dorka Zatorska is a Polish photographer whose images capture everyday moments with sensitivity and intention. Her expressive use of light and composition, combined with a keen eye for detail, gives her work a quiet, subtle beauty. Working primarily with her smartphone, Dorka often creates minimalist images — some in high-contrast black-and-white, others vibrant in colour, abstract, or conceptual. If you haven't already, be sure to check out Dorka's work.

GUILLAUME SOULARD - @GUIMSPHOTOGRAPHIE

Guillaume Soulard is a photographer who shares a striking collection of black and white images captured using his iPhone, Lumix GX80, and a DJI Mini 2. Rich blacks, clean white lines, and silky smooth grey tones are all hallmarks of Guillaume's work. His images capture different facets of modern architecture, often placing lone figures within ornate interiors. Guillaume is an expert in composition, and makes full use of patterns, leading lines, and curves to help draw the viewer's eye into each scene. Be sure to check out Guillaume's work on Instagram!

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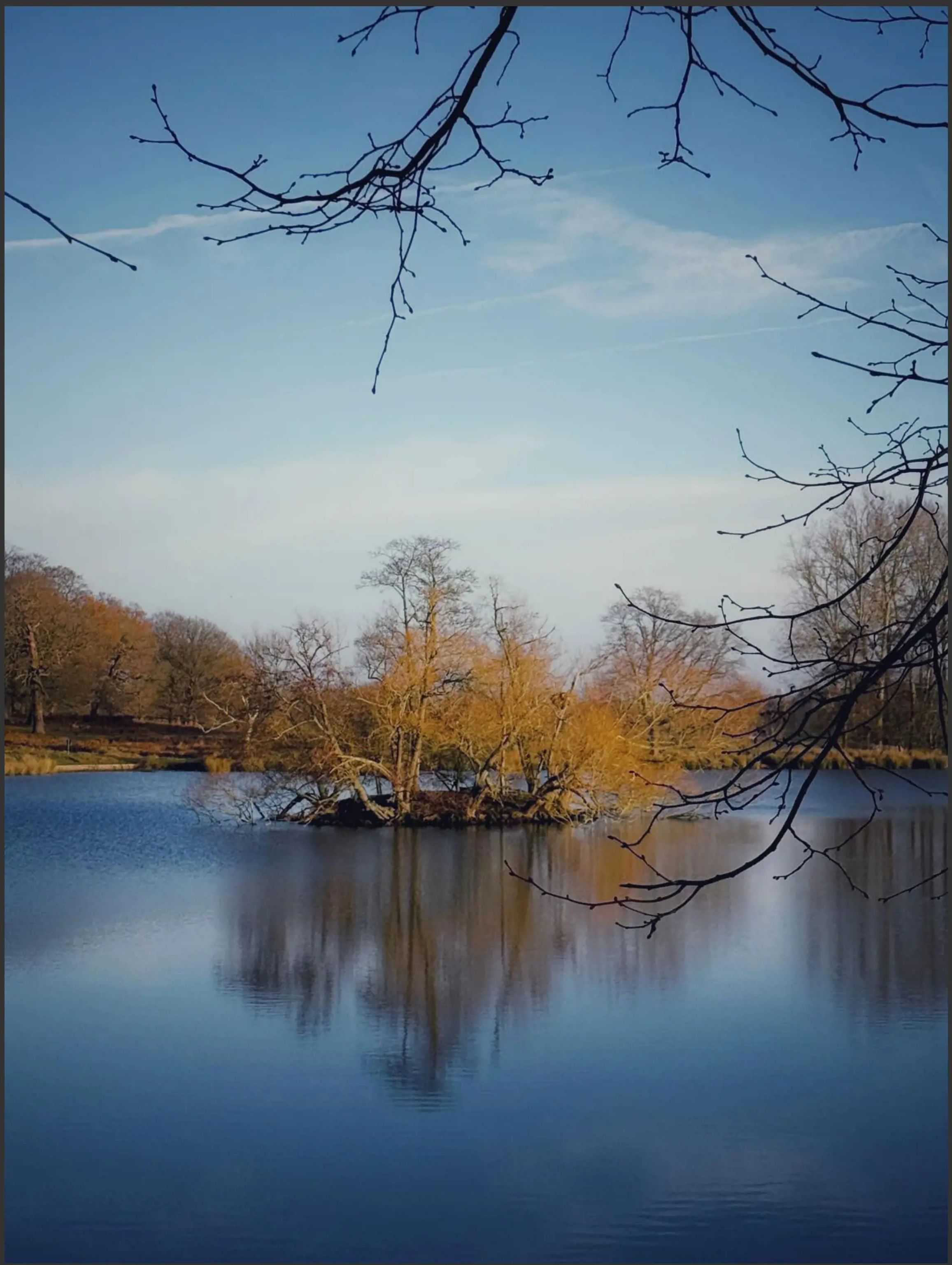
SANDY PREECE - @THE.CHRONICLES.OF.SANDRA

Sandy Preece is a London-based mobile landscape photographer who shares a beautiful collection of landscape images on her Instagram account. As you would expect, cool dawn tones are a recurring feature of her work, alongside misty lakeside scenes, sunrises, and muted color palettes. During the summer months, vibrant colors take over through brightly colored flowers and wildlife. If you're a fan of landscape photography, be sure to follow Sandy and get inspired.



BEE MAILEY - @BEE.MAILEY

Bee Mailey is a smartphone photographer from New Zealand with a distinctive visual style. Her images have an Instamatic-like look and feel, and her Instagram feed is presented in a clean, formal way thanks to the use of a consistent white border across all her images. Bee's subject matter centers on the everyday details around her, from flowers and tree branches to ornate objects and telegraph poles. At times, she also uses intentional camera movement to create soft, abstract images. If you're looking for inspiration from a photographer who approaches familiar subjects in a different way, Bee Mailey's work is well worth following.

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