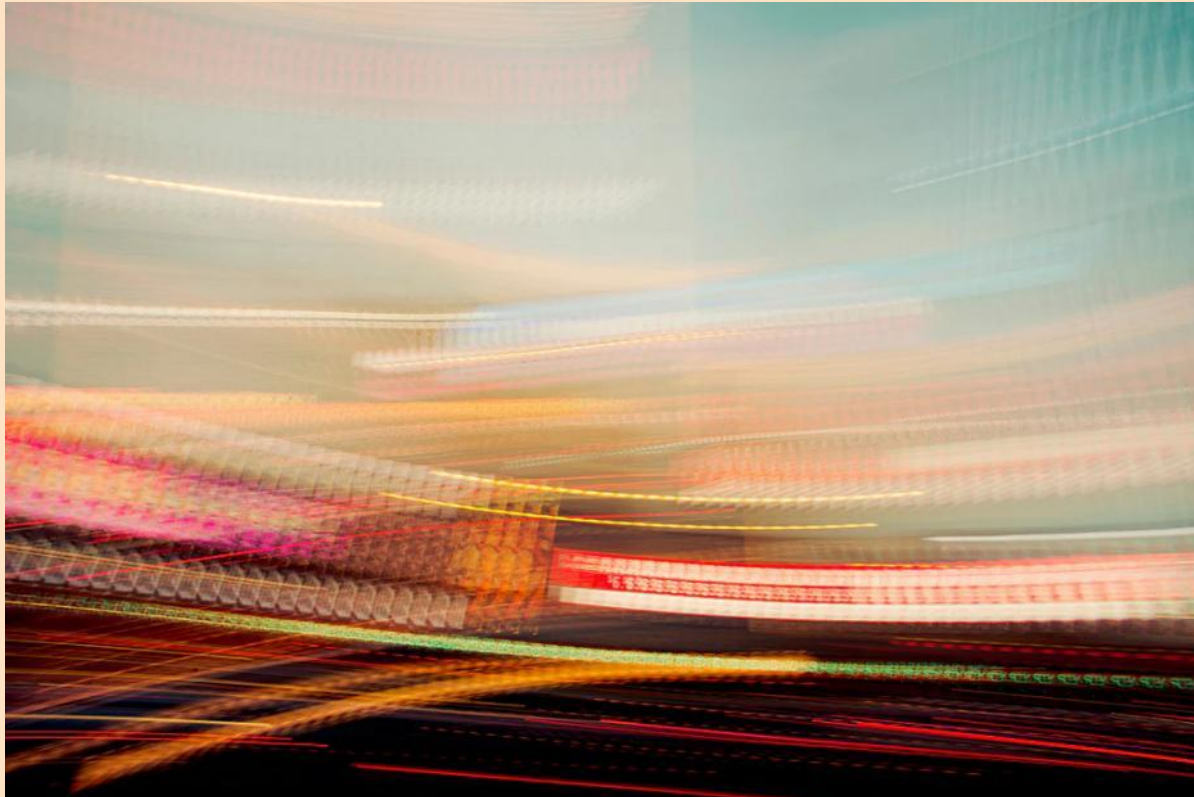


Abstract & Intimate Landscapes 2026



Abstract Landscapes

Abstract Landscapes are less about capturing an accurate record of the scene and more about conveying a mood or feeling.



What does Abstract mean ?

Abstract is from a Latin word meaning "pulled away or detached" and the basic idea is of something detached from physical, or concrete, reality.

It is frequently used of Ideas, meaning that some ideas cannot be applied to real life.

It's also used in Art, to mean an image or object which doesn't pictorially represent reality.



Abstract Photography

In other words, Standard Photography is about capturing what's there (documentation)

Abstract Photography is about interpretation.

Instead of looking for objects (trees, mountains etc), start looking for graphic elements (lines, colours, textures).

Your goal is to simplify the scene until only the essence remains.



So what is an Abstract Landscape ?

In Abstract Photography, an attempt is made to present a vague, or indistinct, image to the audience. The main subject of the photograph is removed from the surroundings, so it's not obvious what the image is at first glance.

The viewer may first recognise the light in the image, or perhaps a pattern, rather than seeing it as a landscape.

For an Abstract Landscape photograph, we can either restrict the field of view so that we only see part of the whole scene, or make the whole scene indistinct by altering the focus/introducing blur.



Abstract Landscape Photography

Abstract Landscape Photography is not constrained by the traditional rules of composition. This allows the photographer to explore their creativity and imagination and to create one-of-a-kind images.

Abstract landscape photography seeks to capture a non-obvious view of the natural world, seen only by the photographer.

However, be aware that there is no single, common definition of what is an Abstract Landscape image.

As with Art, it depends on the artist's and viewer's interpretations.



Example – the image is deliberately blurred



This is achieved by moving the camera whilst taking the shot (Intentional Camera Movement ICM) ...



Or by manually setting the focus to the wrong distance, to blur out the subject. Note the Bokeh in the background !

Example – there is no horizon visible



In this example, the sun is only present through light and shadows on the rolling fields.

In the lower image, the sky is only present as a reflection in the pools on the beach.



Note the deliberate choice of colours which compliment each other :

Yellow/green and blue in the top image

Orange and blue in the lower image.

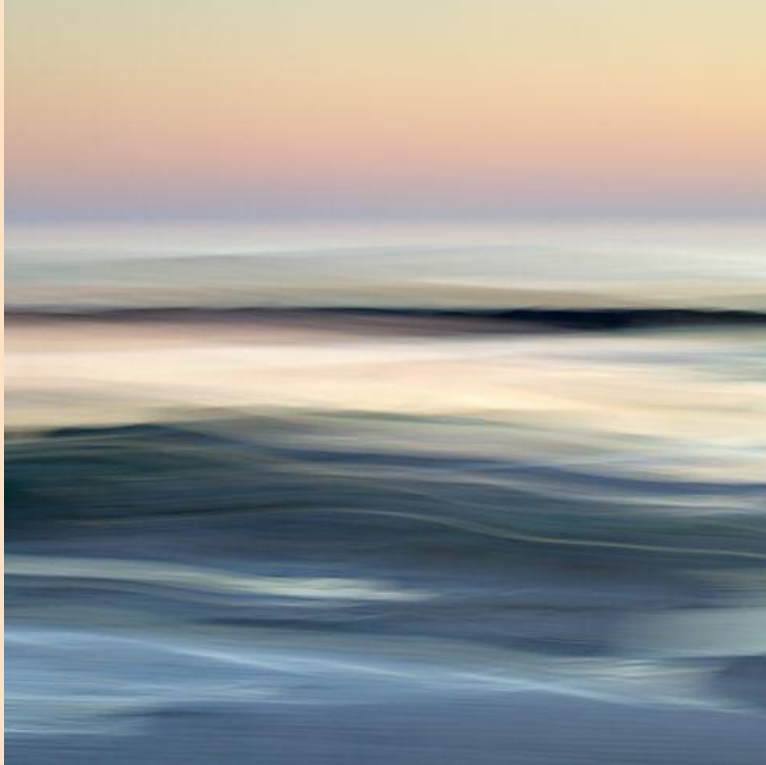
Example – deliberately wrong exposure



Under-exposing the sky to make it indistinct, or deliberately over-exposing the sky to achieve the same result.



Examples – abstract seascape / reflection



Water makes a great subject for abstract photography. Use a slow-shutter speed (long-exposure), to smooth waves and clouds.

In the 2nd image, only the reflection has been included in the image. The ripples make it harder to interpret what is shown.



Examples – indistinct subject



Using fog/mist to hide details within the landscape. In the image above, also using B&W makes the sky disappear into the grey mist.

Examples – patterns and texture



Examples – water



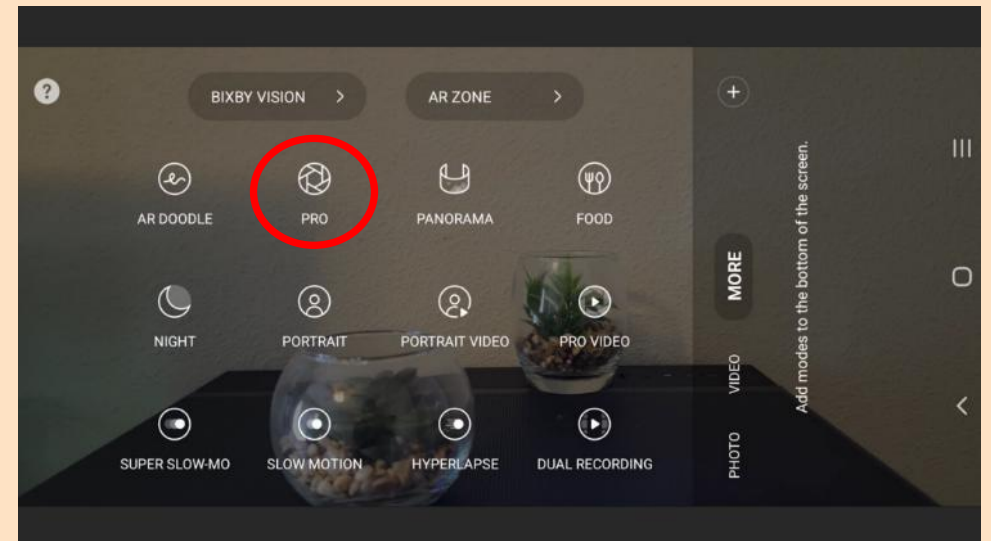
As well as shooting waves, water droplets can hide the subject and form interesting patterns in their own right.

Abstract Landscapes – what gear do I need ?

Good news: You do not need expensive, high-resolution gear for this technique !

In fact, "imperfections" like blur, wrong exposure, ISO graininess and lens distortion are part of the look !

Any camera with manual control – even a smartphone with a pro-mode app – is suitable.



Abstract Landscapes – how do I take them ?

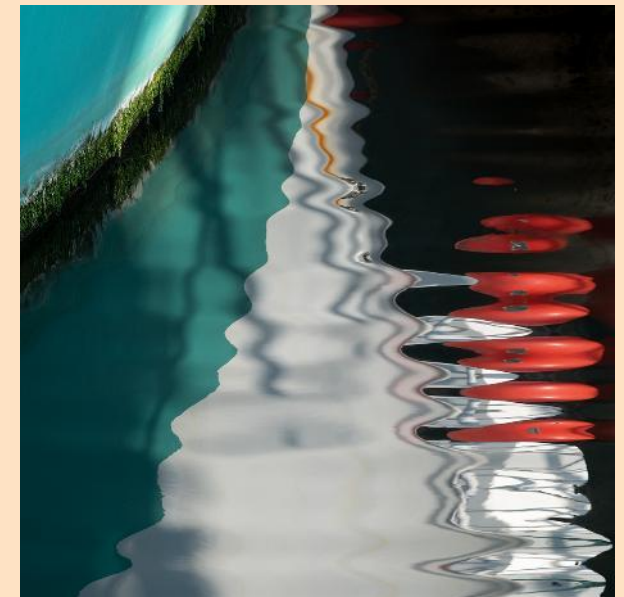
More good news: We have already covered most of the techniques !

Remember we either want to hide the landscape

- Using blur
- The wrong focus
- A wrong exposure
- Environmental effects (fog/mist etc)

Or to restrict the view to hide clues

- Hide the horizon
- Shoot in mono to remove colour clues
- Zoom in very close (Macro)



Blur by Intentional Camera Movement (ICM)

Turn your camera sensor into a canvas and your movement into a brushstroke !

Settings: Shutter Priority mode, a shutter speed between 1/4s and 2 seconds, the lowest ISO setting (100).

Move the camera fluidly during the exposure.

Match the landscape's natural lines (pan horizontally for horizons, vertically for trees).

Start moving before you click the shutter, and don't stop until after it closes.



Intentional Camera Movement ..but !

Be careful not to confuse intentional movement with camera shake, or an image which is just out of focus.

If you are going to try intentional movement, make sure the effect is strong enough so that the viewer is not left in any doubt !



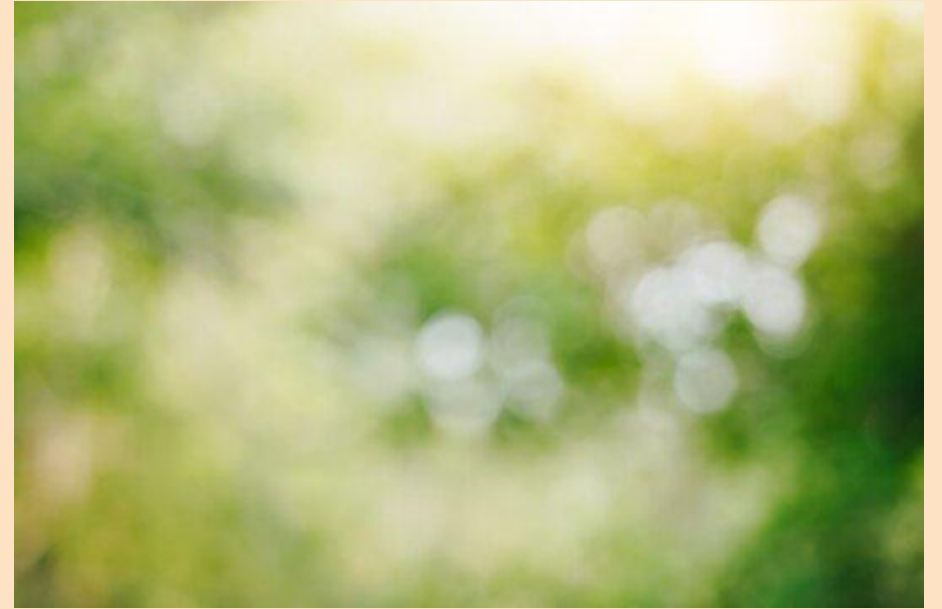
Blur by wrong focus

Normally you want your images to be sharp, but a complete blur can also be beautiful !

Settings: Switch your lens to Manual Focus (MF). Twist the focus ring until the scene dissolves. If you can't do this, trying focussing on a close subject, lock the focus and then move the camera to your subject and take the shot, or use the "Blur" feature on your phone !

Use a wide aperture ($f/2.8$ or $f/4$) to get the shallowest depth of field (more blur).

Look for high-contrast light sources, like a sunset filtering through trees, to create glowing colour blobs (Bokeh).



Blur by wrong exposure

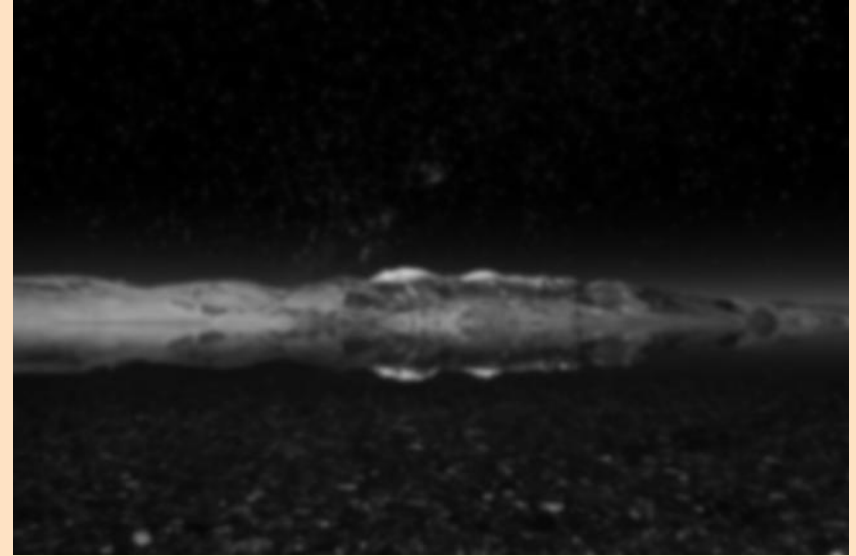
Normally you want your images to be correctly exposed, but this can also be used to create an abstract image.

Frame your composition, then use exposure compensation to add too much, or too little exposure.

On phones, click on the subject and then use the brightness slider.

Or, manually change the shutter-speed to get the same effect. This works in cameras and in phones “Pro” mode.

You can also combine this effect with blur !



Blur using Glass/Steamy Windows

Take a photo through glass, particularly if it is steamed up, or is frosted/opaque.

In the far-right image, raindrops have obscured the forest.

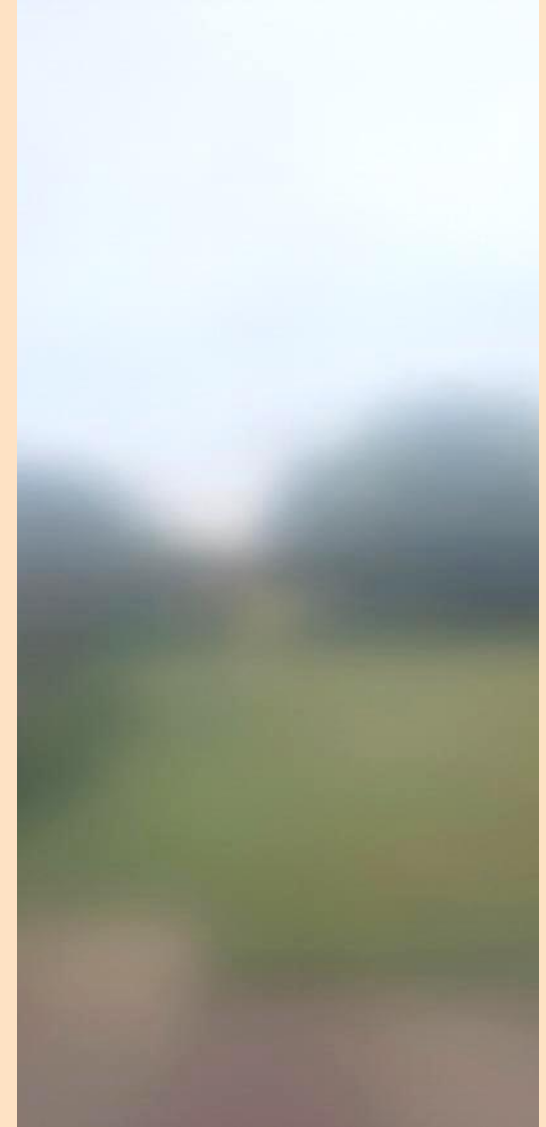


Blur using opaque film

Whilst you can purchase special filters for your cameras, a cheap way of achieving blur is to use an old bag or plastic film.

In this case, I've used an old A4 plastic wallet with my smartphone.

Just hold the wallet in front of the lens – if a friend can hold the film, it will help !



Blur using environmental factors

There may not be much fog or mist around at this time of year, but you can use them in the Autumn/Winter.

Alternatively, taking shots at night/ low-light can help obscure details in the image.



Blur using Multiple Exposures

Another technique is to combine 2 or more images in camera.

Settings: Turn on "Multiple Exposure" mode in your camera settings (usually under the shooting menu).

Take Shot 1: A clean, simple silhouette with strong shapes.

Take Shot 2: A frame filled with texture, like water ripples, tree bark, or autumn leaves.

Let the camera blend them using the "Average" or "Bright" overlay settings.

It also works for city scenes !

NB – not every camera can do this, but you may be able to combine images in your photo editor.



Intimate Abstract Landscape

If anyone has done a photo walk with Gill Moon, you'll know that "Intimate Landscapes" are close up shots without the horizon (or sky) visible.

However, in Intimate Landscapes the subjects are usually in focus and recognisable.

For me, this is the difference between Abstract and Intimate Landscapes.



Intimate Landscape becoming Abstract....



As we remove details in the image, it becomes more abstract.



Hide using Black & White

Changing the image to B&W emphasises the tones and textures, whilst removing all colour clues.

Look for areas with a mix of light and shadow.

These can reveal texture, or help to hide areas to add mystery to the image.



Hide using different angle – top down

Shooting from above will present the viewer with an image from an angle they don't normally see.



Zoom or crop your image to remove clues about the scene. Is it a view from a balloon, or a close up of your garden ?



Zoom in further – Macro Abstract Landscape

Macro Abstracts remove the viewer's sense of scale.

Settings: Use a telephoto or macro lens to isolate a tiny detail.

Exclude the sky and the horizon line entirely.

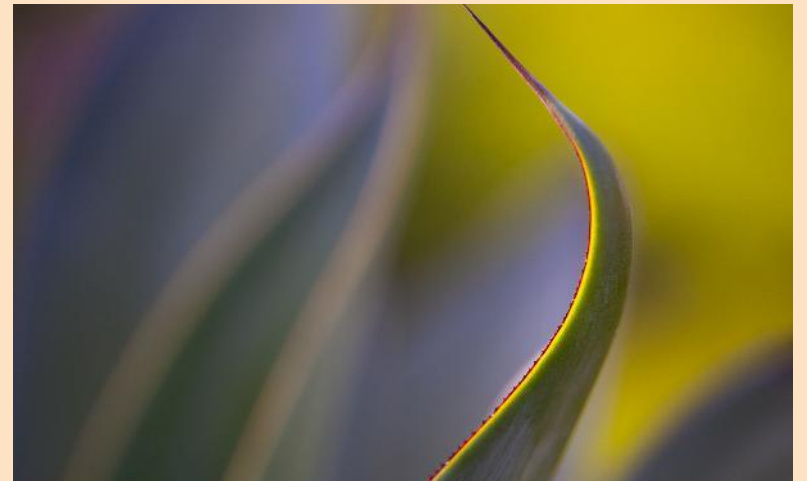
Look for natural patterns, repetition, and geometry. Force the viewer to wonder if they are looking at a satellite image or a microscopic slide.



Abstract Landscape vs Close-up/Macro

Close up / Macro photography normally refers to a tightly cropped shot that shows a subject (or object) up close and with significantly more detail than the human eye usually perceives.

For me, the difference between an Abstract and a Close-up, is with an Abstract, you can't always tell what you are looking at !



Locations

Whilst you can take blurry, indistinct images of any scene, the best locations offer a mix of wider views and close up subjects.

Beaches offer the wide, sea view, plus sand (movement & patterns), rock pools, unusual rock formations etc

Heath areas also offer wide views, with gorse and heather and isolated trees.

Wooded areas also offer wide views, plus textured wood, leaves and rocky areas.

Locally, try Covehithe or Sizewell Beach, Dunwich or Westleton Heath, Rendlesham Forest or Staverton Thicks.



Post Processing Tricks

Abstract Editing isn't about fixing mistakes; instead it's about pushing creative boundaries.

Trick 1: Aggressive cropping. Cut out 80% of the image to isolate the best abstract shape.

Trick 2: Extreme White Balance. Slide it all the way to blue or amber to create surreal, non-literal moods.

Trick 3: High contrast or Black & White to emphasize shapes over reality.



Don't give up !

Abstract photography is a numbers game.
You cannot predict exactly how blur or
movement will look.



Give yourself permission to take 100
bad photos to find that one brilliant
accident !



Videos

- Creative Abstracts on iPhone (17 mins)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzwwhsLsyBU>
- Abstract Photo Ideas (10 mins)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-nnDzB5lYE>

Conclusion

Abstract Landscapes offer the Photographer a chance to take a unique, or different view of a scene.

There are different techniques you can use to get your abstract image, but remember you are trying to remove/hide clues which tell the viewer what they are looking at.

Remember, there is no single common definition of what is an “Abstract Landscape”.

So why not have a go ?!!