

Photo Swirls

Creating photo swirls involves taking multiple exposures of the same subject while rotating the camera . They are quite easy to do and result in some very interesting, and oftentimes unanticipated, images. Here are a few tips on how to create impressionistic photo swirls.

Subject: Photographing any subject can lead to interesting photo swirls. However, you must have good colour separation in your subject matter (or good tonal contrast if you are shooting in black and white). Some photographers prefer to photograph a bed of colourful flowers. You can photograph anything, from flowers to trees to piles of coloured stones. For this demonstration, I chose a box of Smarties; they are brightly coloured and provide great colour separation, especially when placed on a white background.

Equipment: You will need a zoom lens that has a tripod collar (this is the collar surrounding the camera lens that you can slightly loosen and rotate). I prefer a 70-200 mm lens, but any zoom lens will suffice provided you are able to rotate the entire camera assembly. A solid tripod is also necessary. You can try shooting multiple exposures freehand, but it is a little bit more involved. If you have a camera that can take multiple exposures (some Canon and Nikon cameras have this capacity) you will be able to shoot multiple images in camera. However, not to worry. You can still make multiple images of a subject using a special Photoshop script (more on this later).

Procedure: You want to aim for 6-10 images that are all well-exposed and in focus. To start, set your camera to autofocus and select the middle focal point. Focus this point on one item in your field of view. For example, if you are photographing a bed of flowers, focus on one flower. For this demonstration, I focused on one red Smartie in the centre of my frame.

Take your first photo with your camera in either the vertical or horizontal position (see Fig 1).



Figure 1: First Image

For your next shot, rotate the camera slightly (remember to have the tripod collar *slightly* loose so that you can rotate the camera without slippage). Increase the zoom slightly. Re-focus on the same point in your frame (flower or Smartie) and take your second shot. Continue to do this until your camera is either in the horizontal or vertical position, depending upon where you started. (see Fig 2).



Figure2: Last Image

Keep in mind that you want to take 6-10 individual images in an *incremental* manner; this is not continual camera motion like a camera sweep or blur. So the routine is: 1-focus on one subject 2-take the first shot 3-rotate slightly 4-increase zoom slightly 5-focus on same subject 6-take the second shot 7-continue till you get 6-10 images.

Post Processing in Photoshop: If you have a camera that can take multiple exposures you can now sit back and view your image on your camera's LCD. However, if you do not own one of these higher-end cameras you can still make multiple images of a subject using a Photoshop script that automatically stacks your photographs into layers and combines them at different opacities. Garry Black, a professional photographer based in Ottawa, has kindly provided an instructional sheet on downloading and using this blending opacity script ([instructions](#)). Here is the free download of the script ([script](#)). Once you have loaded your photos, the script will automatically blend your photos into one layer. (For some interesting and informative information on photography, I recommend that you visit Garry's website at www.garryblack.com).

Once you have created your multiple image, you can then do further processing, such as exposure and levels adjustment, as well as cropping and rotating. I prefer to crop my images so that the centre of the swirl is not in the middle of the photo, but this is a personal choice. Experiment to see what works for you (See Fig 3).



If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

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