



The Silent & the Playful: Light

Aras Karimi

My fascination with light started early in my life. When I was about five years old, I was sitting in a room by a window with shuttered heavy curtains, leaving only a small distance in between them, where a miracle was happening: I could see the movement of dust in the air. I was mesmerized, not just by seeing the dust, but feeling something powerful and beautiful for the first time: light.

I left the room, not knowing that for years to come light would keep stealing my attention. And from the light

circles on the bazaar's floor, reflection of colored windows in daytime and the last moments of a fiery sunset in a Persian Gulf port where I used to live, I could see light declaring its inimitable splendor over and over.

That childhood fascination has paved its way to be the central theme of my work as an abstract photographer. But unlike the usual process in photography where light is the modest messenger of a story, in my work light itself become the



storyteller and objects become the messengers letting light expand its playful presence on them. Light is truly the “subject” of my works. It comes from my urge to share the way I see and experience the world around me, a world full of light moving, turning, twisting and dancing on different surfaces and spaces with everything else in view as a background.

The process I use in taking photographs wasn't developed overnight. My earlier efforts to capture light through photography were total failures. Although I was trying to record light, the results were pictures of still objects such as chair, table or curtain; I needed the objects to capture the reflections, to use them as the medium. But somehow those “preset subjects” could easily become the center of attention of my pictures, and light would become merely a tool to depict them.

The cause of my dilemma is simple: light does not create a distinct mental portrait. Potentially and historically, light has always been the modest medium for portraits of other people or things. And those portraits and their stories effortlessly become

the dominant subjects of the photographs. None of the viewers of my earlier photos had an “image” of light as my actual subject in their mind or anything of that nature to compare my work to, or to feel the importance of light, regardless of the object in the picture. No matter how I would play with the contrast, color, brightness or sharpness during photography, the results failed to communicate the essence of what I wanted to reveal. Therefore, my effort of giving subjectivity to light seemed impossible.

This struggle went on until little by little I discovered that if I take pictures with longer shutter speeds and move the camera, shapes of objects start to break and the border between them fades. They are still there, letting the light reflect on them and announce its playful existence, but the deformed objects cannot dominate the attention of the photo anymore. I constantly try to diminish the objects in my photos, abating their structural presence to magnify the qualities of light that is shaded on them. This opens the opportunity to see new things, feel new things, an abstract ethereal world free from

structure, arrangement and definitions, filled with brightening pleasure and liberating movements.

Recording light is like a chase for the untouchable; patience and persistence become inevitable. I take scores of shots to choose one that satisfies me with its revelation of light, the unearthly mood, and the aesthetic composition I want to create. And after years of doing photography I can now imagine the results better; I can better predict how the photos will turn out with different camera movements in my hand. My process has grown from absolute experiments to a now more controlled technique.

I work only in digital format. I started working with film, but I switched to digital photography about seven years ago. It's more convenient and cost-effective. I can see the results faster. I move the camera while taking the picture, and with digital camera that has preview, it is easier for me to capture better composition.

This collection is dedicated to the reflection of natural light on different surfaces such as glass and plastic. None of the pictures is taken from dust, smoke, or moving objects. The feeling of movement in the photos comes from two sources: the movement of light itself, and the turn and swing of the camera in my hand with a long shutter speed. Natural light always offers surprising twists and turns, as well as the gradual matchless changes due to the change of sunlight. I don't use filters. Colors result from the natural light reflection on objects, or light decomposition when passed through glass.

In post-production, I use only two Photoshop tools: burn and crop. I use burning for higher contrast and to darken some elements in my photos to give attention to other elements. Once in a while I use the cropping tool to change the composition.

Like my other collections on light, the photographs of this collection are purposefully untitled. I like to give viewers a chance to experience their own emotions while they are interacting with an expression of mine. And it seems unnatural to me to apply a rational meaning to something that is the opposite of a product of intellect. Ideally I would like my audience to see the photographs in large print format. I produce 20" x 30" inkjet prints on Hahnemuhle Fine Art Pearl Paper (285 msg).



All of my works are reflections of my vision and emotion at the moment the shot is taken. They are an invitation to re-experience light, an invitation to a world where one can touch the mercurial presence of light, far larger than what we tend to see in daily life.

Born in 1983 in Iran, Aras Karimi began photographing at the age of 16. He is an emerging artist based in Los Angeles with several awards on his resume, including 10 honorable mentions in the International Photography Awards in the past three years. He studies fine art at Santa Monica College, CA. His work will be presented by the New Art Center, New York City Nov 8 -29, 2011. His website is www.ArasKarimi.com.

To ask a question or comment on this article, visit our online Forum: www.phototechforum.com

Product Resources

Camera: Canon EOS 10D; Lense: Canon 16-35mm f2.8 II; Software: Photoshop and Lightroom 3