



5 TIPS FOR LANDSCAPE SHOOTERS FROM THE GREAT MASTER PAINTERS

Quick Guide
Written by David Veldman



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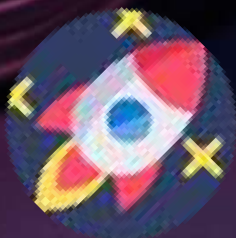
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INTRODUCTION

When I first came up with the concept of this guide, I was a little hesitant to pitch it to our editor. Although it deals with landscape photography – a very popular genre – it also focuses heavily on a different art form that may seem unrelated: painting.

Of course, photography and painting have many differences. While a photographer is, for the most part, dependent on capturing what already exists, a painter may create an entire world from their imagination. Photography is also more technologically reliant, particularly in its digital form. In addition, painting has easily existed for a thousand years longer than photography.

However, both painting and photography are visual mediums, seeking to strike the viewer with a unique vision of the world. This similarity can prove very useful to us; instead of only studying the work of photographers, we can also examine artwork produced by the great painters.

These legendary artists possessed an unrivalled understanding of light and composition.

Much like landscape photographers, landscape painters were obsessed with the beauty they saw around them. This fixation appears to be universal. Landscape paintings over a thousand years old have been found, and they appear in every culture. One of the oldest landscape paintings ever dated comes from China.

The same motivation that drove these artists to document the sublime beauty of the natural world can be found in you and me today, as we search out beautiful scenes to photograph.

Without a doubt, we can learn much from the incredibly talented painters who came before us.

Although their tool was a brush and not a camera, you will find that their lessons are still relevant today. In the remainder of this guide, I am going to share with you five tips we can learn from a few legendary landscape painters.

 **Recommended Reading:** If you'd like to learn more about landscape photography, grab a copy of our best-selling premium guide: [Complete Landscape Photography](#).



Artwork by John Constable

JOHN CONSTABLE – SHOOT CLOSE TO HOME

John Constable was an English painter in the romantic era. His landscapes are renowned for their light, fresh touch. Constable was particularly passionate about landscapes.

Although there was little money to be made in landscape work (an issue many of us can sympathize with today), he only dabbled in portraiture, as he found it rather tedious. His true love was to roam the countryside surrounding his home in Essex, England and capture the beautiful scenes of the natural world with his paints and brushes.

When I considered Constable as an artist, I realized that there were many lessons a modern landscape photographer could learn from his work. For example, he placed a high value on beautiful skies – a sentiment that we should be familiar with.

He also expressed, to the best of his abilities, the reasoning behind his love for landscapes. However, what truly stood out to me was how he managed to create most of his great pieces close to home.

Of course, not all of us live in a naturally beautiful area like Dedham Vale. Many of us live in cities, and at times it may be difficult to access places that we want to photograph. Nor is it wrong to want to travel to another exotic locale for a change of scenery. In fact, Constable himself spent time in China and France. Still, as photographers we should resist the urge to think that we have 'tapped out' our local area.

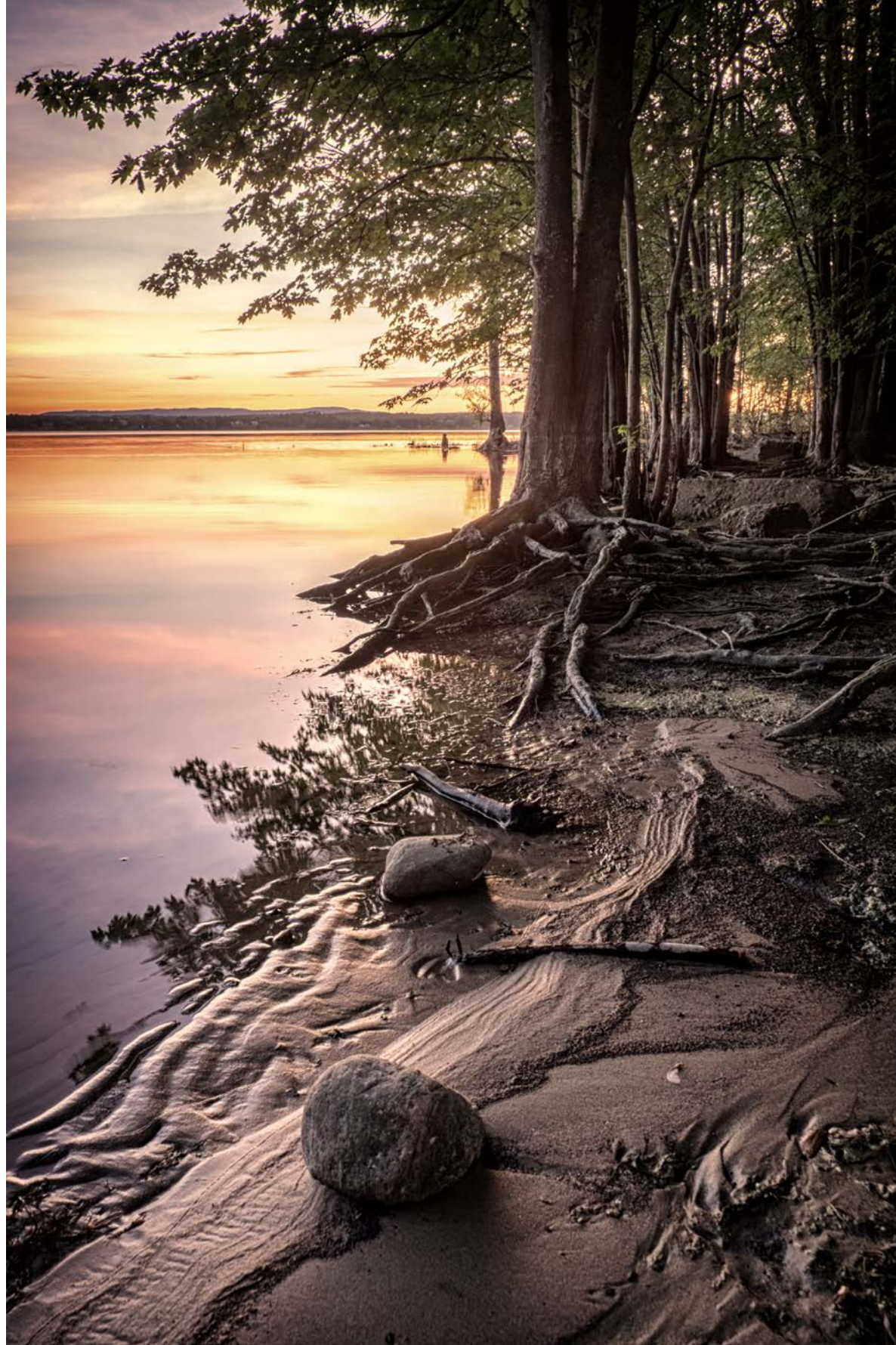


Photo by David Veldman

When we go online, we are often bombarded with incredible images of far-off, stunning vistas, which we would love to capture. It is all too easy to become jealous, or frustrated, or feel cooped up in one locale.

I am not suggesting that we should never travel, or only shoot one type of landscape, but we should also never forget that our own surroundings have their own beauty.

More importantly, if we can teach ourselves to shoot well in our own area, we stand a better chance of capturing something meaningful when we travel.

Constable summed it up best in his famous quote: "I should paint my own places best."

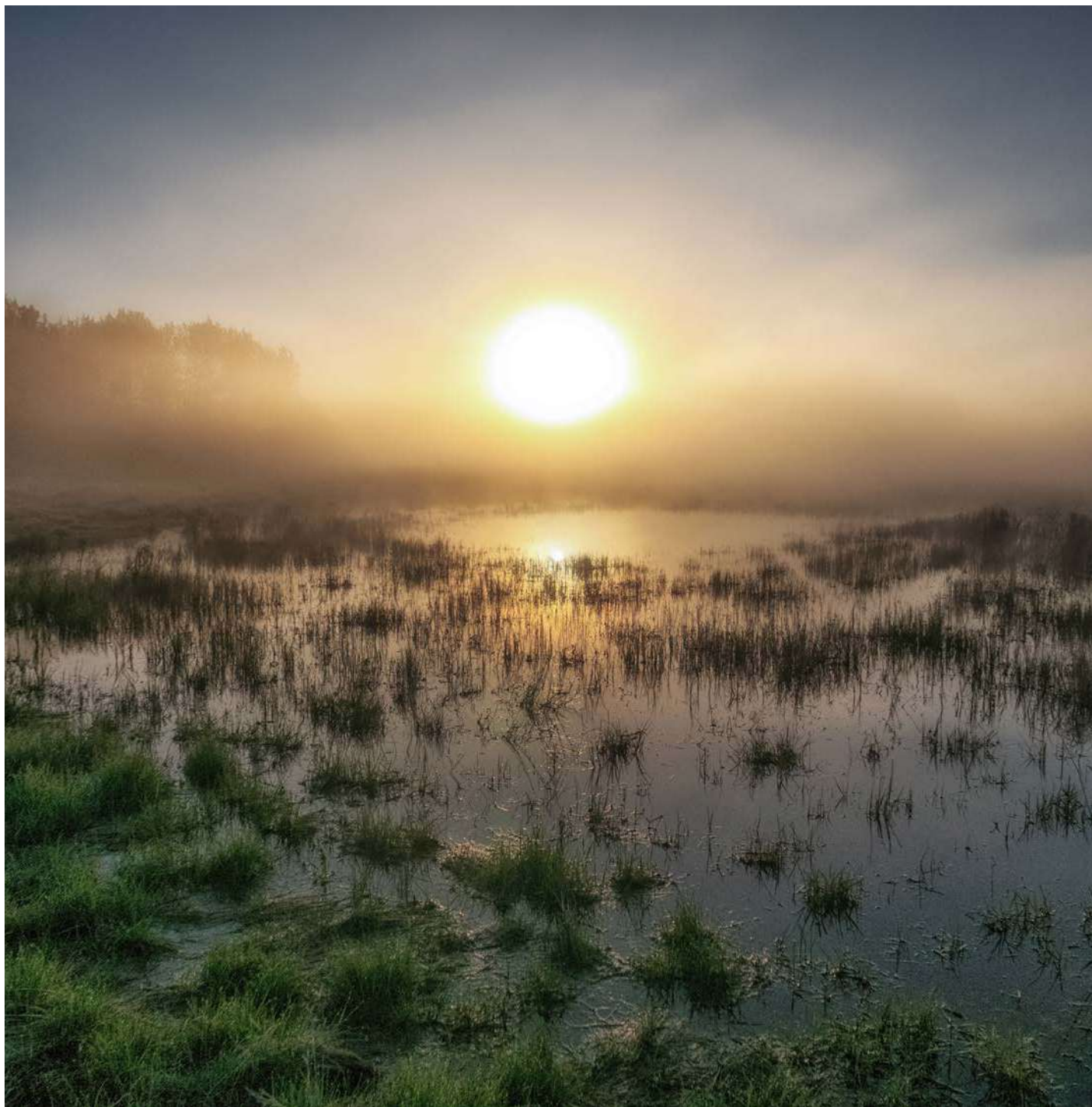



Photo by David Veldman

TURNER – LIGHT MATTERS

It would seem to go without saying that light matters. I have mentioned the importance of light before, and Photzy has two premium guides that are specifically directed at understanding light.

 **Recommended Reading:** If you're interested in those two guides, you may check them out here:

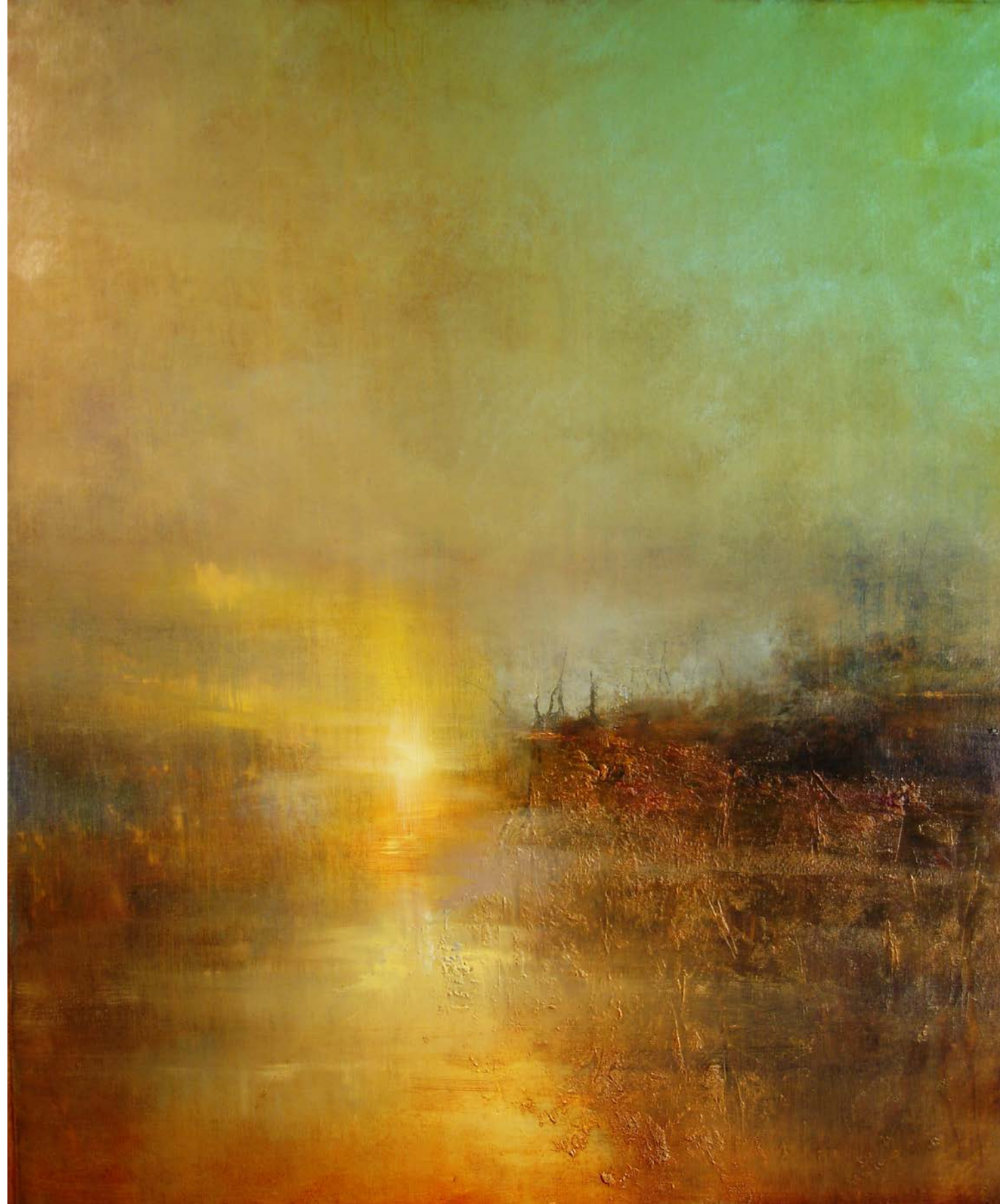
- [Understanding Light Book One](#)
- [Understanding Light Book Two](#)

Photography is nothing without light, and yet, landscape photographers are often the most careless with their use of it.

I believe that there are three primary elements a photographer must consider before they shoot: **subject, light, and composition.**

The subject for a landscape photographer is the scene they choose to capture, and many of us spend much of our time searching for the perfect vista.

Once on location, we immediately begin to think about composition, walking around the area searching for the best vantage point. We consider compositional elements like foreground interest, the rule of thirds, and visual balance.



Artwork by JWM Turner

Sadly, in many cases we may not consider the 'light' until the last moment.

When it comes to dealing with light, there are a few key considerations.

First is **when** we shoot. The time of day, and even the time of year, plays a large part in the nature of the available light.

Secondly, we can choose **where** the light falls. Obviously, we cannot move the sun, but as we change our position relative to the sun it affects whether the light is from the side, behind, or even dead ahead.

Joseph Turner, a truly legendary figure in the history of landscape paintings, is well known for his use of light in his paintings. In fact, he was called 'the painter of light' for good reason.

Turner worked with both oil and watercolor paints. His paintings are still enjoyed around the world, and they grace many prestigious collections.

As you can see, he possessed a wonderful sense for atmospheric light.

In many of his paintings, the details are secondary to the play of light and shadow.

For Turner, light was a spiritual motif that represented life and divinity. In fact, some art historians divide his body of work into periods, as his treatment of light continuously evolved.

Turner's paintings are an excellent source of inspiration for the landscape photographer. His depiction of light should encourage us to place greater importance on it during our creative process.



Artwork by Caspar David Friedrich

CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH - INVOKING MOOD

What makes a landscape picture 'great'? Is it merely a beautiful scene? Is it perfect light? Or is it a combination of the three elements that I mentioned above?

While masterfully combining **subject, light, and composition** will create a good landscape image, creating a **great one** may require a little bit more. **It may require 'mood.'**

Of course, this is no easy task. It is relatively easy to take a pleasant landscape shot, but it is considerably more difficult to create an image that invokes a mood that can inspire an emotional response from the viewer.

Caspar David Friedrich was a German romantic painter.

History has had a rocky relationship with his work, as the artistic community at times embraced it, and then spurned it.

However, to this day his images resonate very strongly with many viewers.

One of the common accusations that landscape painters (and photographers) face is that their work has little emotional impact.

Some art establishments (of the past) considered landscapes to be a “low-tier” art, and today some photographers still feel the same way.

“There’s no people in the shot, or a sense of ‘feeling’ in it, it’s just a picture of something pretty.”

You may hear some photographers say this from time to time.

“Art is intended to invoke a response, or provoke thought by the viewer,” they will argue.

While this may be true, Caspar David Friedrich proved that it was possible to do so with a landscape, and he did this by crafting a mood in his paintings.

“The artist should paint not only what he sees before him, but also what he sees within him.”

– Caspar David Friedrich

Friedrich didn’t just paint scenes of nature; he frequently placed human figures within his landscapes, portraying them from behind as they contemplated the power and the beauty of nature. This was his way of encouraging the viewer to understand the value of appreciating the natural world.

Furthermore, by a careful usage of shadow and space, he created an inimitable atmosphere within his works.

As we shoot landscapes, it’s important to keep this goal in mind. Although pretty scenes have a value of their own, creating a mood should be one of our goals.



Photo by David Veldman



Artwork by Claude Monet

MONET – DO IT AGAIN

Monet is remembered as one of the greatest impressionist painters to have lived.

A resident of France, Monet was not purely a landscape painter. In fact, some of his most famous paintings are arguably portraits. However, as he grew older, Monet focused more and more on landscape scenes.

Have you ever taken a picture, and over time realized that you could have shot it better?

While most of us have experienced that realization, we tend to simply shrug our shoulders and move on.

Not Monet. By the time he died in 1926, Monet had created over 250 paintings of lilies. Most of these paintings still exist today, and are in circulation around the globe.

Lilies were not the only subject matter to receive a thorough treatment by this

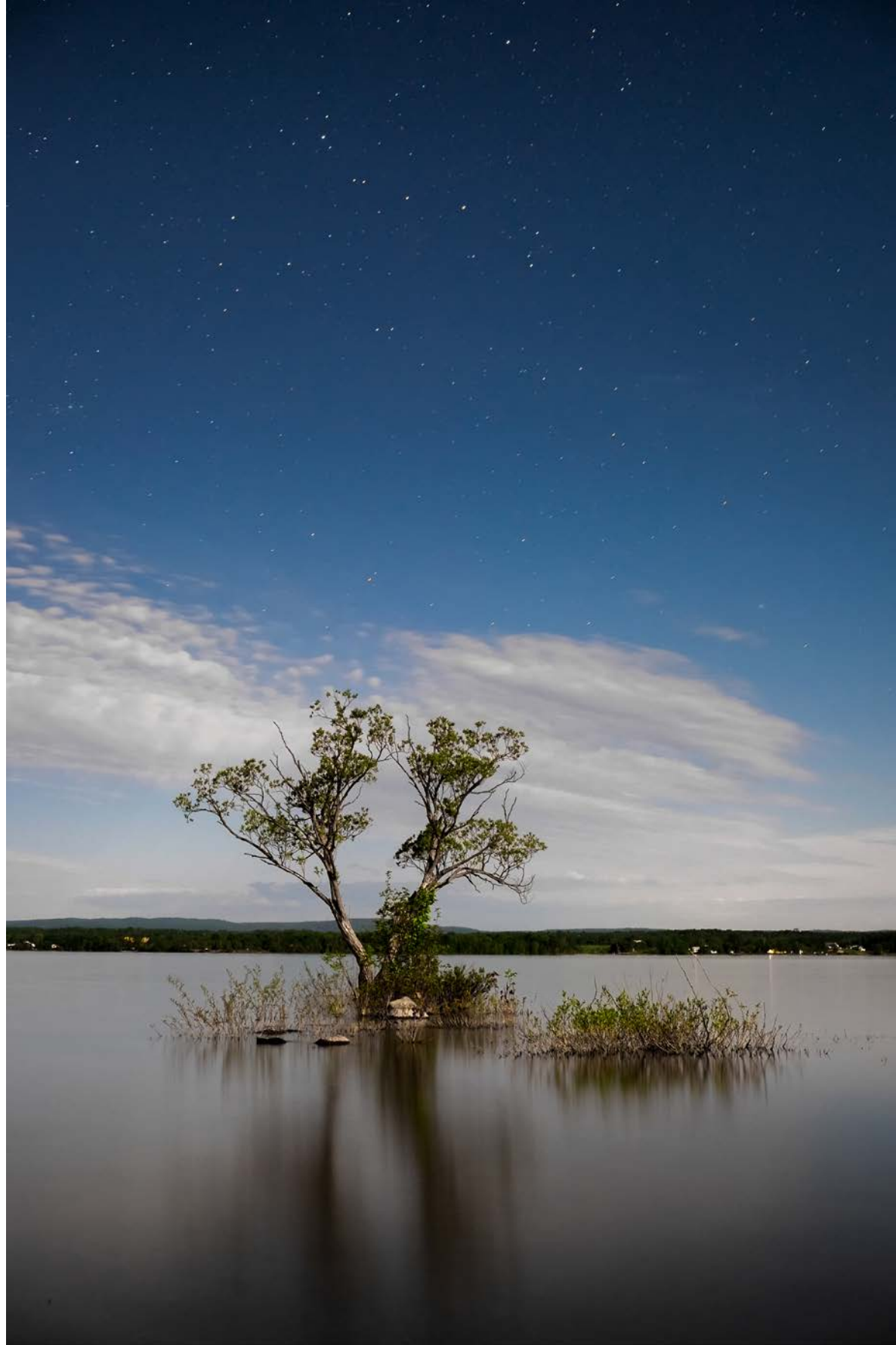


Photo by David Veldman

artist; he frequently revisited subjects in an attempt to perfectly capture them.

While we may not need to go to such great lengths as Monet, we should be inspired by his example.

The photograph on the left was taken not far from my home.

This tree, located at the beach in my town, is normally accessible by land. When water levels are low enough (which is most of the year), you can walk out to the little spit of land it sits upon. However, once or twice a year, the river rises and the tree is marooned.

I have photographed this scene three times. The first time was a few summers ago, but I disliked the result. The second attempt was last fall, when I tried to capture some interesting clouds along with the tree. Just recently, at 2 a.m. with a full moon behind me, I finally created an image that I was happy with.

It is always quite possible to have an 'off day,' or simply fall prey to poor conditions. Don't hesitate to revisit a subject so that you can achieve the best possible image.



Artwork by Alexei Savrasov

ALEXEI SAVRASOV – SHOOT ALL SEASONS

Alexei Savrasov is the least celebrated of the painters that I've mentioned so far.

Alexei was a Russian painter in the 1800s, and his life was not an easy one. He never achieved the level of fame that Constable or Turner did, and he ultimately died an impoverished alcoholic. Nevertheless, his work is popular today thanks to his unique style.

Savrasov also left behind a lesson that landscape photographers should heed: capture your landscape images in all seasons and at all times of day.

We all have a favorite season. My favorite season is undoubtedly fall when the plain green of the forest gives way to autumn's spectacular, fiery colors. Some, however, prefer the warmth of summer, or the vibrant new growth of spring.

It's all too easy to create a 'shooting season' in our minds, which can result in a failure to appreciate the subtleties of an ever-changing landscape.

In addition, many of us prefer to shoot at a particular time of day (often the Golden Hour), which can result in our images becoming dull or overtly similar.

Savrasov did not fall into this trap. Rather, his works show an appreciation for the shifting moods of Mother Nature. Many of his paintings portray winter scenes, or are set at night.

Don't be tempted to put aside your shooting because the conditions are less than ideal.

At times, the light may not cooperate, or the weather might be downright foul. Despite this, it is possible to capture great images under all conditions, and we should never risk missing that perfect chance.



Photo by David Veldman

MORE TO LEARN

I hope you've found these tips useful. I can personally attest to the fact that considering the work of the master painters has improved my photography, and I'm confident that their talents can assist you as well.

Remember, the cinematographer, photographer, and painter all seek to convey a visual message. The only difference is the tools that they choose to use.

Don't limit yourself to only studying great photographs. Take a trip to your local art gallery and see what you can learn from these old masters.

 **Recommended Reading:** If you'd like to learn more about landscape photography, grab a copy of our best-selling premium guide: [Complete Landscape Photography](#).

Self Check Quiz

1. True or False: John Constable placed a high value on beautiful skies as is evident in his landscape work.
2. Where was one of the oldest landscape paintings found?
3. What did Caspar David Friedrich place in his paintings to create a feeling of awe and mystery?
4. What subject did Monet paint over 200 times?
5. What element is Turner most famous for mastering the use of?
6. What lesson can we learn from the style of Savrasov's paintings?

Shooting Assignment:

After reading this tutorial and checking your comprehension with the quiz, it's time to take the next step and put your freshly acquired knowledge into practice.

This assignment consists of two parts.

1. Visit a local or regional art gallery and try to find some landscape paintings. Don't worry if it's just a small gallery – you may not necessarily have access to paintings by Turner or Monet. However, even small galleries typically have at least a few landscape paintings in them. Select a favorite painting and study it. Consider the elements that the artist chose to use, such as light, shadow, and composition. Try to appreciate the 'mood' that the painter created. Take notes, as you may need them for the second part.
2. Armed with your recent research, and hopefully a few notes, attempt to recreate a similar shot using your camera. Imitation may seem like a cheap trick, but it can prove very useful as a form of training. In fact, many famous artists of history faithfully copied the works of other masters that came before them. You may find that replicating a similar image is harder than you expect! After you have captured it, consider your image against the original. Did you manage to create a similar mood? Can you see the particular style that you brought to the piece?



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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About the Author



David Veldman wants to be a better photographer, and he hopes you will join him on the journey of learning. Best of all, he's doing it on a budget! When not taking pictures, David and his wife are hiking, snowshoeing, or discovering new culinary delights.

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