

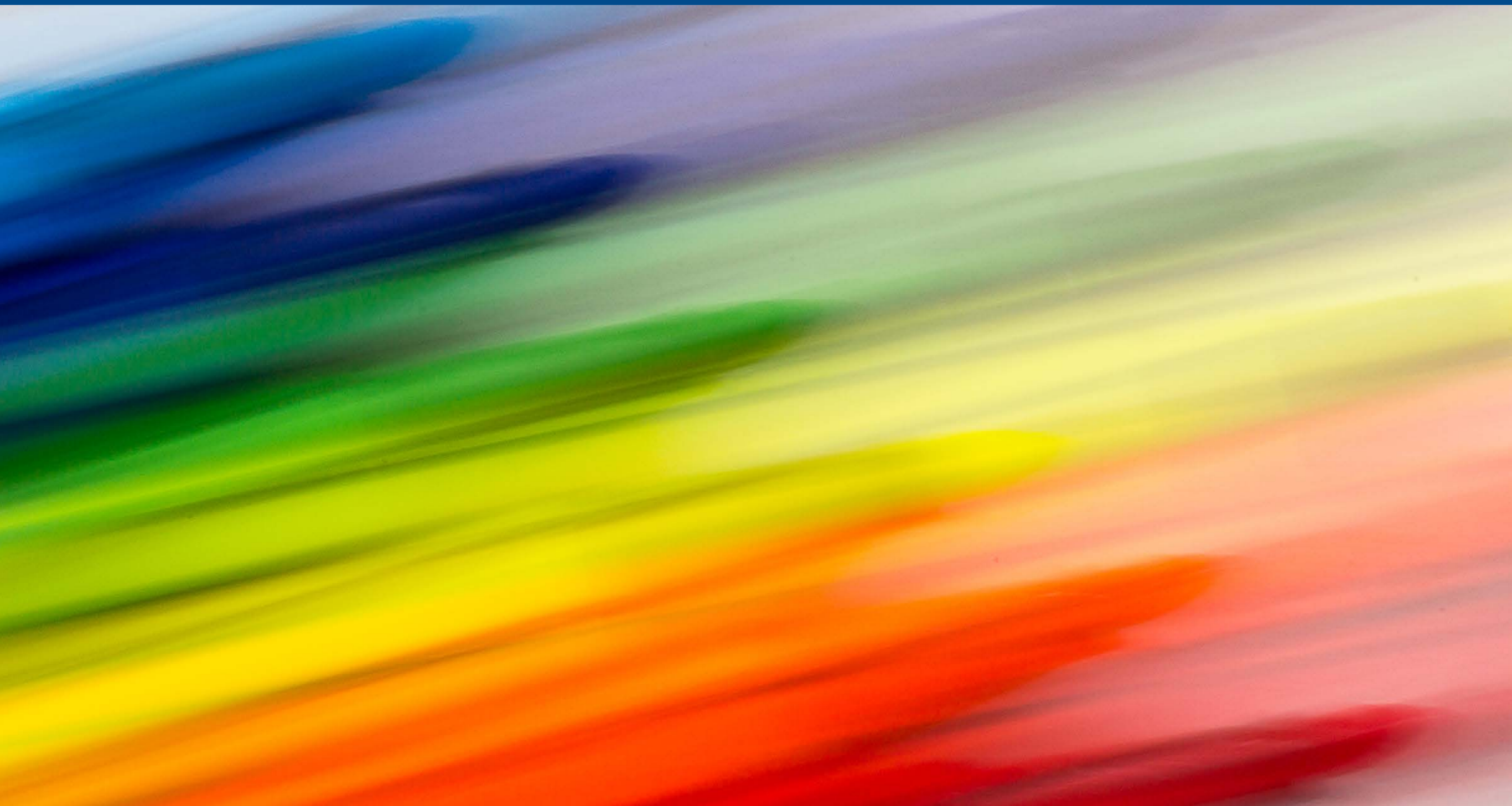


---

# MASTERING INTENTIONAL CAMERA MOVEMENT

---

Quick Guide  
Written by Leanne Cleaveley



If you were to peruse my photographs from the past few years, you would find shots aiming for sharpness in part, if not all, of the image I was shooting. A few months ago, that all changed, as I was introduced to the world of intentional camera movement.

I like to imagine the first time a photographer stumbled across the style of photography that is now referred to as 'intentional camera movement' (ICM). I think it may have gone something like this:

*Fran carefully adjusted her camera settings for the beautiful scene in front of her – autumn at the lake. She was using her tripod to ensure a crystal-clear focus throughout her image. But Fran forgot to tighten the tripod head and just as she released the shutter the tripod head drooped.*

*Assuming the photo to be ruined, Fran quickly hit the review button to delete it. But what she saw before her eyes was a painterly picture – a breathtaking abstract – of the lake scene. Instead of garbage, she saw potential! It was, in short, a masterpiece!*

Okay, maybe it didn't quite go that way. But how many of us have snapped a photo before adjusting our shutter speed, or moved to scratch an itch as we hit the shutter button, only to find that what we snapped was kind of interesting?


Let's take that one step further. Say you *purposefully* sweep the camera, ground to sky, while shooting a forest scene. Now you have moved into the realm of "intentional" camera movement.

This is very far from the "what you see is what you get" approach of photography. What you get will be an intentionally blurred, abstract of the image before you.

But the results can be amazing and often convey things that the "still" photo would not have been able to.

Curious? If so, read on and I will share the following:

- Techniques for taking ICM photographs
- The best camera settings to use when shooting ICM
- Useful tips on the time of day and settings that work well for ICM shots
- Things to look for to help you achieve a great ICM photograph

 **Recommended Reading:** If you'd like to create stunning portraits with gorgeous blurry backgrounds, check out Photzy's [Beautiful Background Blur premium guide](#).



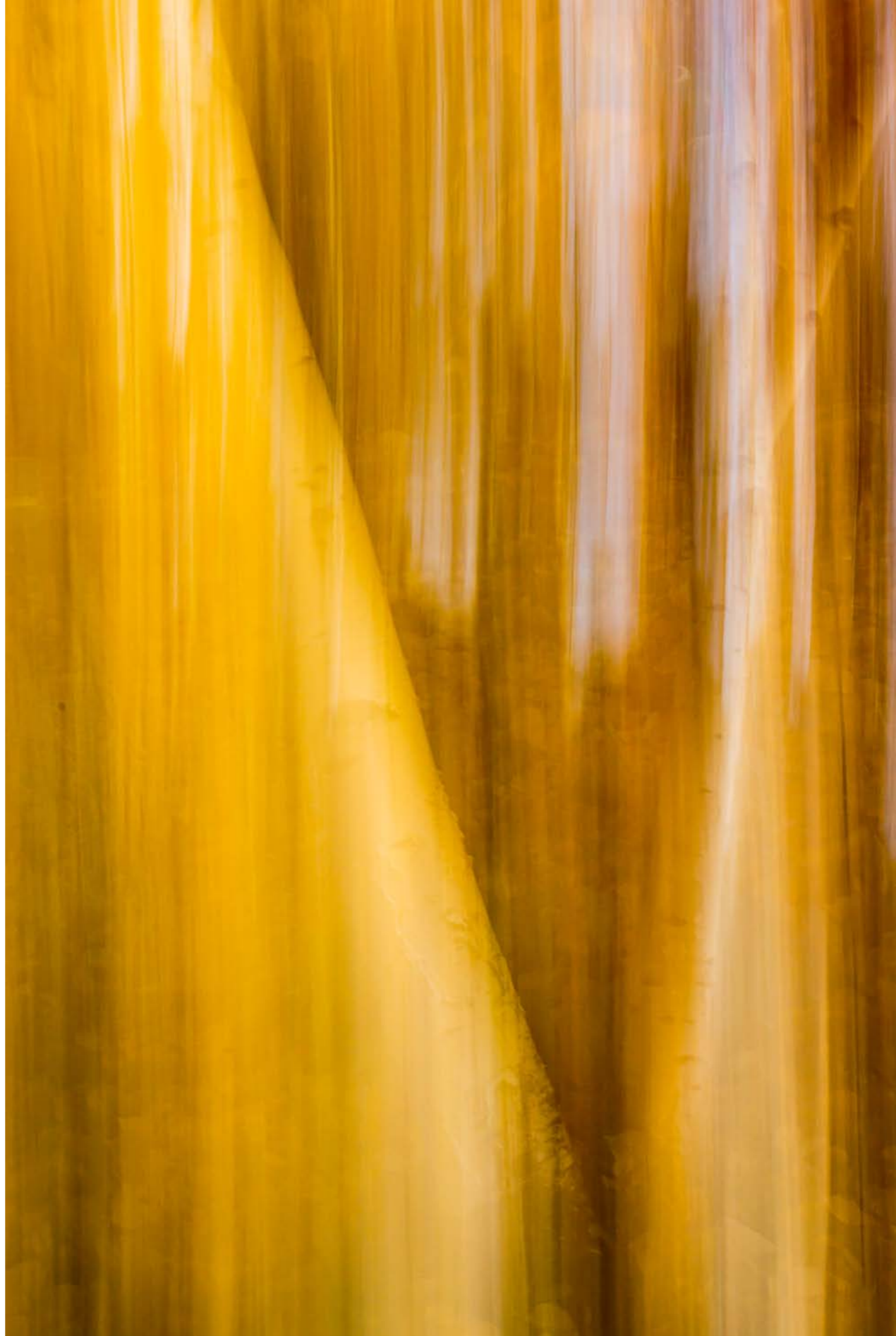
Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

## BACKGROUND

Intentional camera movement, as a technique, has been around for years. Many of us have used 'panning' to convey the message of speed in a photo. You intentionally move the camera with the subject (a car or a runner, for example). The subject is relatively focused, but the background becomes a streaky blur, adding to the sense of speed or movement.

What's new is that more and more photographers are using this technique not for 'panning' but to achieve other results. In most of these photos, you will not find a focused, clear subject, but the whole photo will be blurry, and that is on purpose.

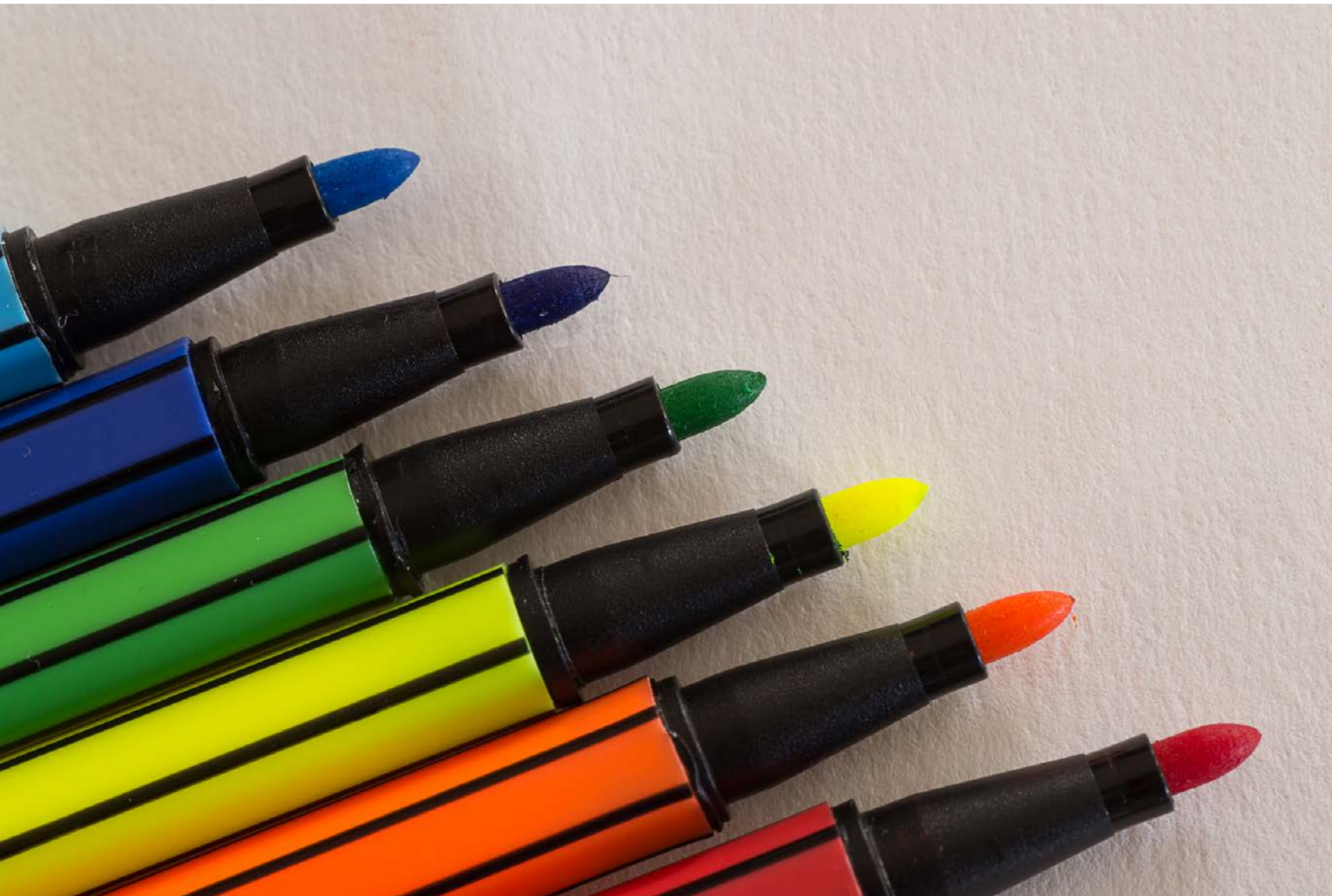
Many of you are probably thinking, "Why would I want to make my whole photo blurry, on purpose?" But until you have seen the results it is hard to explain. So, look at these examples of photographs taken using this technique:



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley



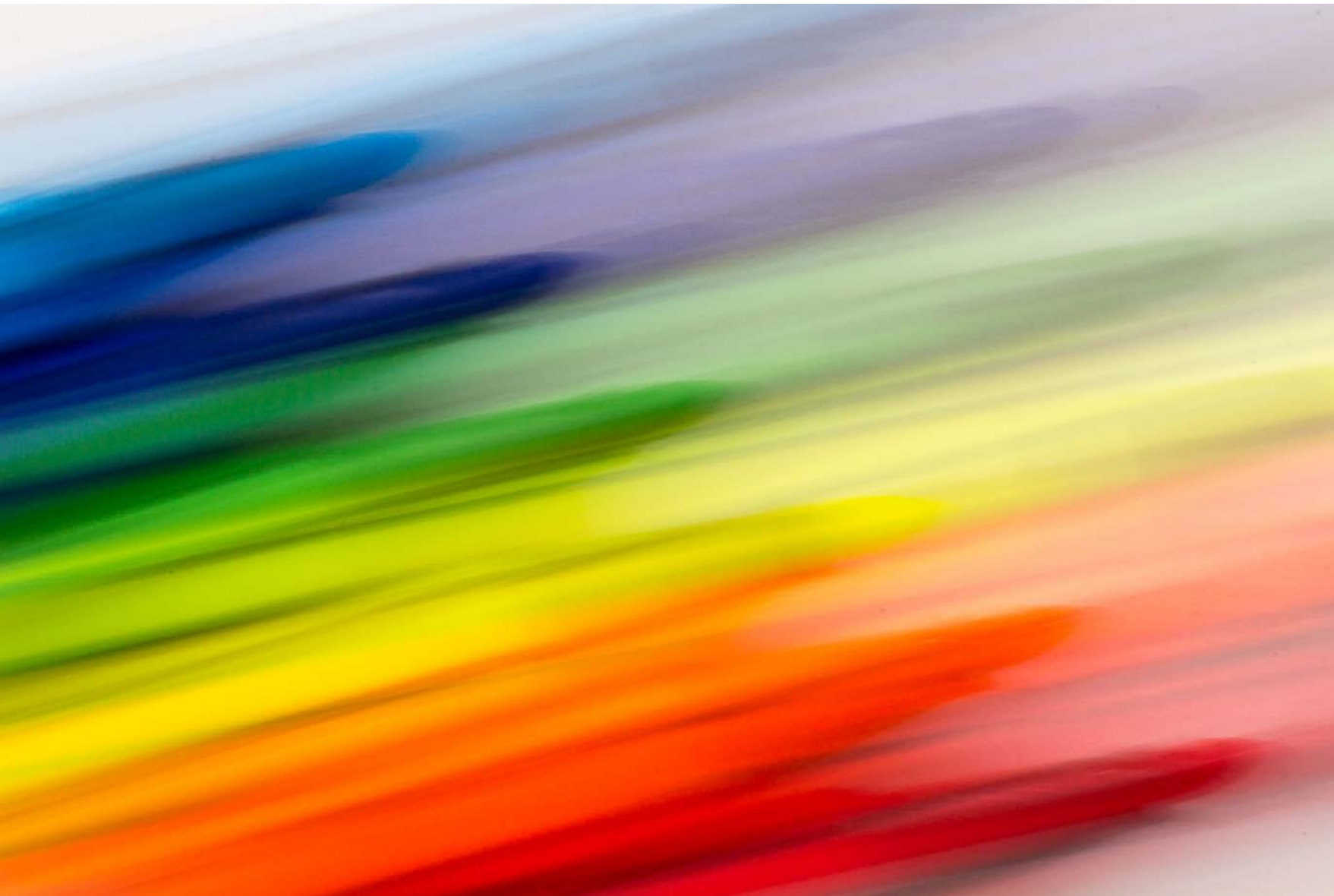
Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

The abstract, painterly look that can be achieved using ICM is quite exciting, and there are many ways to use it to create amazing images.

ICM photos can turn an image like this...




Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

...Into something like this!

Intentional camera movement allows for another level of creativity when taking photographs. Let's look at how it is done.

## CAMERA SETTINGS AND SETUP


The thing I love about taking photographs using intentional camera movement is that you don't need any special equipment. With any camera that allows you to shoot with a slower shutter speed, you can shoot ICM.

 **Key Lesson:** The only things you need to take a photo using ICM are you and your camera.

There are some pieces of equipment that can help you stretch your ICM shots. But let's look at the basic set-up for ICM, without anything other than your camera.

First off, you want to adjust your shutter speed. I often use a 2-3 second exposure but you can do longer or shorter and get some great effects.

Now, just setting for a longer exposure alone will usually give you an overexposed shot. You also need to adjust your ISO and aperture to account for the slower shutter speed. I lower my ISO to 100 and adjust my f-stop to a smaller aperture (in a bright room, that might be f22 or greater), allowing less light to hit my sensor.


 **Key Lesson:** We typically reserve ISO 100 for well-lit scenes which don't have moving subjects because it lowers the image sensor's sensitivity to light. You are going to allow plenty of light in during an ICM shot, however, because you are leaving the shutter open longer. The lower ISO helps compensate for that.

I mentioned above that there are some other pieces of equipment, other than your camera, that can be helpful. Some photographers will use a neutral density (ND) filter to bring the exposure down a couple of stops. This will allow you to leave the shutter open longer or shoot in brighter conditions. Personally, I have always found adjusting the aperture to be sufficient for most of my shots, but for longer shutter speeds and bright sunny days using an ND filter would be helpful.

The other piece of equipment that can be useful is a tripod. Depending on the technique you are using, a tripod can help prevent unintentional blur so that you only get the blur that you intend to. It can also help make your movements smooth rather than shaky.



Admittedly, most of my ICM images are handheld. I did use the tripod for some of my “close up” ICM images, as small, unintentional shakes were more glaring in these shots. You will have to find what works for you and consider the time of day and whether you have had enough coffee to prevent “jittery” movements.

 **Recommended Reading:** If you'd like to create stunning portraits with gorgeous blurry backgrounds, check out Photzy's [Beautiful Background Blur premium guide](#).



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley


*This was the result of this first experiment. My daughter was going for a 'spooky corn maze' shot and although this didn't quite come across as spooky, it was interesting.*

## THE HOW-TO

There are many ways to create photographs using intentional camera movement. One of my first attempts involved twisting the zoom ring while the shutter was open. I had my hand ready and twisted as I pressed the shutter down.

Alternatively, you can 'sweep' the camera horizontally, vertically, and diagonally to capture a creative ICM shot. One tip I have found quite useful is to begin moving the camera and depressing the shutter button while you move. This allows for a smooth sweep without interruption or "jerkiness."

Turning the whole camera around, in a circular motion, can make for an interesting ICM image as well. Some tripods allow for the camera to be mounted between the legs – a great way to set up your camera for this kind of shot if you are shooting something small. Again, you want to be purposeful about your movements so that they appear intentional.

 **Key Lesson:** To get a smooth motion when shooting ICM, start moving the camera through your scene and then press the shutter release during the movement.

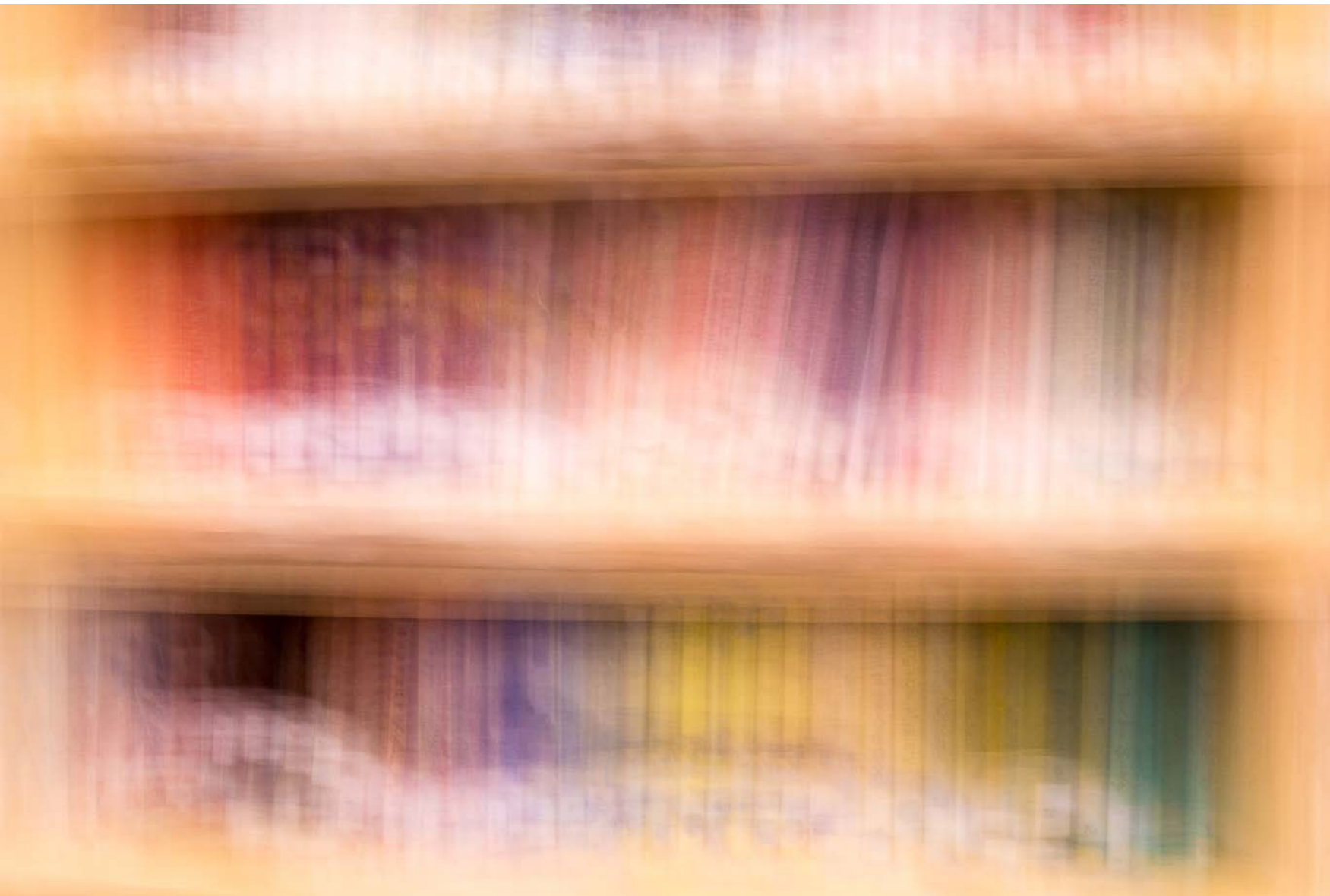


Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

Lifting the camera up or down while you sweep the camera across a scene as you shoot can make for some interesting results. In the image on the left, I used this approach and found that the fluorescent lights in my photo appeared to be flying.

**⚠ Key Note:** The speed of your movement can affect the outcome. Experiment with sweeping the camera through the scene quickly and slowly. You will get very different results.

Another approach is to make small shaky movements with the camera. I have had less success with this approach and my photos often look like accidental camera shake as opposed to intentional movement.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

*This is a “shaky” image of colorful books on a library bookshelf.  
You are the judge: is it ICM or just camera shake?*

Using a rail is another option for photographers who have such equipment. Your camera can be mounted on a dolly with wheels so that it glides smoothly across a flat surface or a track. This would be very useful for a steady horizontal movement of the camera.

I personally subscribe to the economy approach to photography and do not possess a rail system in my meagre budget. But I have found a moving car can achieve a similar result!

So long as the road isn't too bumpy, taking ICMs from the passenger seat of a moving car can be a fun way to pass the time and get some very interesting shots. Please note, I said “passenger seat” as I don't want any of you to get into an accident taking photos while driving!



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

*This is an example of a shot of city lights taken from a moving car.*

I have recently been playing with ICM shots where I keep the camera still for a portion of the time that the shutter is open. You can get some photographs that are reminiscent of double exposures. These allow for some creative and interesting photographs.



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

*This is an example of what keeping the camera still for a portion of the shot can achieve. When taking this photo, I depressed the shutter, kept the camera relatively still for one second, and then swept the camera horizontally to the right to make it look like the girl and the books are getting swept away.*



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

*In this image I swept the camera horizontally, briefly pausing three times. The effect is a triple exposure of the young girl reading and an interesting layered image of the books on the top shelf.*

### **Types of movement that work for ICM shots are as follows:**

- A twist of the zoom ring
- Turning the whole camera in a circular motion
- A horizontal, vertical, or diagonal sweep or swoop
- Small shaky movements (jiggling the camera)
- Movement (usually horizontal) on a rail
- Movements that include short pauses while you sweep the camera



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Like all photographs, you want to look for an interesting scene to create your image. Tonal contrasts are important, as are contrasts in texture and color. Strong lines are helpful too. I have found shooting ICM to be a great way to train my photographer's eye to look for these things!

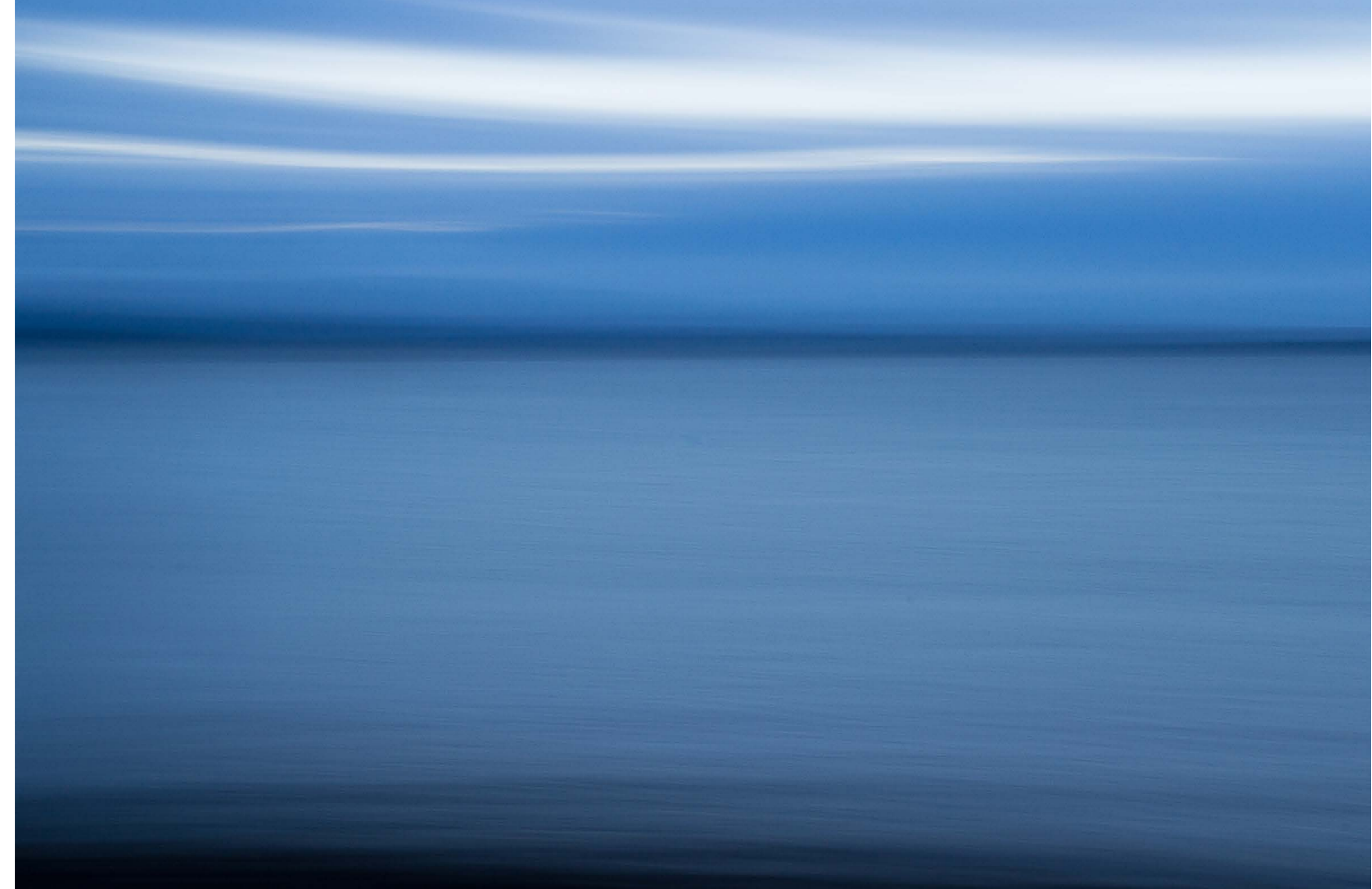
**⚠ Key Note:** Contrasts in tone, color, and texture can make for interesting ICM shots.

I also look for low light situations that allow for me to leave the shutter open for a longer amount of time. Shooting at dusk or in the early morning is quite helpful. A dark overcast day can be a great time to explore ICM.





Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

*This image and the one on the previous page are examples of evening ICM shots. The first was taken off my deck, during a golden sunset. The second was by the ocean, in the blue hour.*



Photograph by Leanne Cleaveley

*While holding a camera while you swing isn't the easiest, it made for a fun and interesting shot.*

Depending on which technique you use to shoot ICM, you may want to look for strong horizontal lines or strong verticals as these can enhance your shot. For example, when shooting ICM photographs of trees, you get a more pleasing, interesting shot if you sweep the camera vertically.

**⚠ Key Note:** Sweeping the camera in the same direction as the dominant lines in your photo can create a stunning effect.

Whatever you find yourself shooting, don't be afraid to play around with different movement techniques, shutter speeds, and approaches to find the best result. You may find yourself deleting many images. Sometimes the result can be pleasantly surprising.

Can you think of any other ways you can move with your camera and achieve some creative, interesting shots?

**👤 Recommended Reading:** If you'd like to create stunning portraits with gorgeous blurry backgrounds, check out Photzy's [Beautiful Background Blur premium guide](#).

## Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) Intentional camera movement has been around for years, in the form of a photography technique known as \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) The two things you need to create ICM images are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3) Which of these things is important to do when setting up your camera to take ICM photos?
- 4) Set your ISO to 100, your f-stop to a wider aperture, and adjust to a slower shutter speed.
- 5) Set your ISO to 100, your f-stop to a smaller aperture, and adjust to a slower shutter speed.
- 6) True or False: Twisting the focus ring is one way to achieve an ICM photograph.
- 7) Two optional but helpful pieces of equipment for taking ICM shots are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8) A way to achieve interesting photos reminiscent of a double exposure is by keeping the camera \_\_\_\_\_ for some of the shot.
- 9) Which one? A good way to avoid jerky, unintentional blur is by depressing the shutter button **before** or **after** you start moving the camera?
- 10) Name three things/places you would like to use ICM photography and what kind of camera movement (horizontal, vertical, shake, zoom-ring twist, etc.) that you will use for each.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Leanne Cleaveley is a hobby photographer, part-time elementary school teacher, and full-time mother and wife. She loves reading, gardening, crafting, and music – and contemplates ways to find more time in the day to pursue her hobbies. Her photographs can be found on [Flickr](#).

Congratulations! You've completed this Photzy guide!

If you've found this creative photography tutorial helpful, check out this premium guide on how to create gorgeous, creamy, blurry backgrounds: [Beautiful Background Blur](#).



---

**IF YOU'D LIKE TO CONTINUE  
LEARNING AND IMPROVING  
YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY PLEASE  
VISIT [PHOTZY.COM](#)**

---