

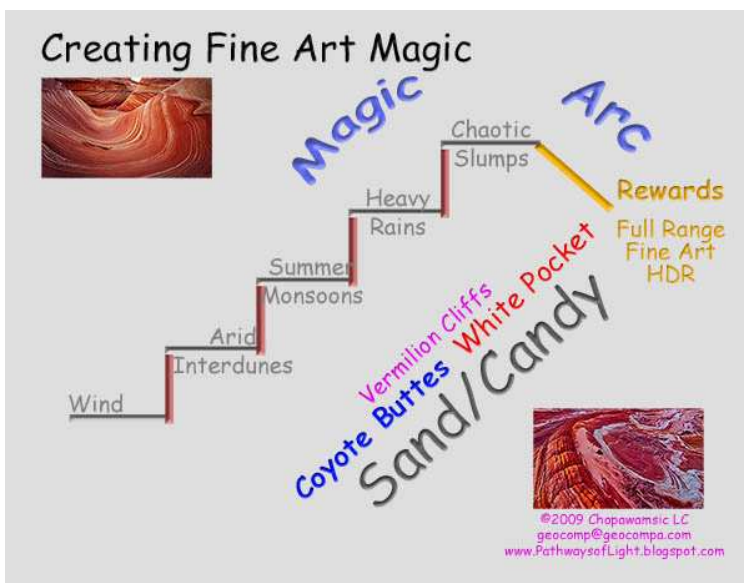
Why Workflows?

Create Fine Art Magic may be a neat turn of phrase similar to *Digital Darkroom*. But, mastery of several complex digital components is necessary to exhibit artistic creativity and produce that 'flawless' fine art image.

For example... a client asked you to do a thorough analysis of an awesome landscape site which is hard to get to, requires camping several nights, you need a satellite phone in case of emergency, you shoot before dawn, you shoot after dusk, and you need to maximize digital efficiency as you capture many incredibly exciting raw images! Because you shoot at dawn and dusk, you need to capture Full Range HDR raw files, then, later, diligently process them into fine art.

We touch briefly on several complicated technical and logistical aspects of digital photography which bring such an exciting venture to culmination as an award winning image in several venues.

Workflows:



1. Capturing nature images in the wilds.
2. Immediately backing up raw images (LR3).
3. Evaluating images - are re-shoots required (LR3).
4. Preparing images (PP, LR3 & CS4).
5. Preparing images for marketing, competitions, and galleries (LR3 & CS4).

Capturing Nature Images in the Wilds

Without being a gear head, a good camera, many large-space high-speed CF cards, and a stable tripod form the basis for your rapidly growing digital world. You get back from a day's shoot, back up, make early picks, and do a visual evaluation of whether or not you need to reshoot.

What does it take to pull off such a digital coup?

A semi-professional camera with high ISO range, a stable tripod, a manageable panoramic head, a remote; these components are a must. An eye for composition, a

desire to be in wild country at dawn and dusk, often camping out, and a seemingly endless patience to learn tricky software; these creative talents must be there as well. Finally, the shooter's ability to experiment with some of the best software digital photography has to offer; for, it's here the brush of an artist subtly tints the image to the point that a woman, on first viewing, provides the accolade of a quickly drawn breath, or more dramatically, a gasp...

Immediately Backing up Raw Images (LR3)

As you spared no expense to get these images, you'll want to insert copyright, keyword, and other relevant data as you bring images in, storing them on two different backup devices using Lightroom. With backup, you then format CF cards in camera for the next day's shoot.

Evaluating Images If Re-Shoots Required (LR3)

With Picks, Unflag, and Reject keys, you swiftly and accurately scan for best of the best, placing them in Collections. For me, Keepers are those images which will be further prepared for competition or publication. I also use this category for client requests.

Preparing Images (PP, LR3, & CS4)

Raw images capture light to the best ability of each camera. Initially, raw images look dull compared to a JPEG. They also lack sharpness.

LR3 lets you perform primary tone mapping with its amazingly intuitive Develop Module. You want to spend a lot of energy learning how to apply clipping limits, curves, sharpening, etc.

Although you can get pretty good tone mapping from Lightroom, preparing a creative fine art image is a different story. The fine art of masking becomes a dominant player with cloning, noise removal, retiring chromatic aberration, etc.

This class of preparation is where plug-ins may shine.

For our Full Range HDR, perhaps 20 images will be captured, processed through Photomatix, Lightroom 3, and Photoshop CS4 for that final image. It's a rather delicate balance knowing how much and what kind of digital darkroom to apply from each software.

I only let Photomatix create a 32-bit HDR file. Careful evaluation of Photomatix Pro (PP) indicates aesthetic limitations on its HDR process in.

I initially do global tone mapping in Lightroom. Finally, CS4 adds those subtle contrasts to make the finest art connoisseurs eagerly reach for their wallets...

Preparing Images for Competitions and Galleries (LR3 & CS4)

Fine art can be judged Worthy of Merit in local, regional, state, national, and international competitions. Patient learning provides digital photographers growing ability to know what tool to apply when, discernment to know when and how to crop a complex image, and perception to know where and when to sharpen an image just so.

A key word in competition language, "*Tack Sharp...!*"

Judges also react sharply against HDR images which are "*Over the Top...!*" While perhaps not as vocal, losing points over garish HDR productions which don't reflect realistic light conditions is something you may sense in the room, though not audibly hear.

LR3 and CS4 are premier digital darkroom programs. Their width, breadth, and depth create an initially steep learning curve. As premier software, while they're expensive, their absolutely classic products set the fine art standard.

Each time I try a new path in either program, I write a tutorial clearly disclosing individual steps in such paths. Starting with CS2, then LR2, these tutorials are available through LR3 and CS4 on CD.

Beyond that, I usually provide a tip/trick as an individual blog entry at *Pathways of Light* when the topic is appropriate.

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