
MIXED MEDIA: A REASON TO GET PLAYFUL WITH YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

Quick Guide
Written by Kent DuFault



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Photograph by Yan Liu

Creative burnout happens to everyone. If you're feeling a little repetitious with your photo efforts, I invite you to strap on your creativity cap and climb onto the playground of mixed media photography.

Mixed media photography is an art discipline that seeks to unify various art forms. This purpose is achieved by creatively combining artistic insights and crafts towards the final photographic medium.


The image on the left is a very talented use of mixed media. It combines photography with paper cutting and illustration.

Think about the different shapes you could cut into paper or cardboard! What type of background would you place behind your cutout to create artistic meaning or drama in your final photo?

To get started, let's concentrate on four forms of mixed media photography.

Here is what you will learn:

- Projection
- Paper and metal
- Paint
- Print juxtaposition

 **Recommended Reading:** Want to learn how to make your photos stand out from everyone else's? Grab a copy of Photzy's [Effective Storytelling](#) premium guide.

LIGHTING OVERALL

Mixed media is one of those fringe areas of photography where virtually anything goes regarding lighting.

Once you've developed an idea, I suggest using different lighting types, as this may inspire further thinking and depth into your creative process.



Photograph by Isi Parente


PROJECT 1: PROJECTION

In this technique, you project a light source onto your subject. But unlike traditional photography, you place something in front of the light source to create patterns, color, or tone.

GETTING STARTED

Find a few light sources. Here are some suggestions:

- Electronic flash
- Photo lights
- Powerful flashlight
- Household lamps
- Work lights (typically found at big box home repair stores)

 **Key Lesson:** Get resourceful in finding light sources.



Photograph by Seagul

For just a few dollars, you can find an old slide, overhead, or video projector at garage sales and surplus stores. They make an excellent light source for projection mixed media photography!



Photograph by Cocoparisienne

LOCATION


Your location needs to be fairly dark for your projection to show up. A darkened room would be a good starting point. You could also try outside in the evening.

Once you understand how the projected lighting works, you can experiment with raising the surrounding ambient light for a new set of creative options.

WHAT TO PROJECT

This choice is limited only by your creativity. Here are a few ideas to get you started:


- Old photo slides (this one is beneficial if you have an old 35mm slide projector)
- Clear acetate that you have marked up with markers or paint
- A cloth that you've cut holes into
- Old newspapers, with or without holes or tears
- Various types of tissue paper to add color
- Glass or acrylic panel that has been painted, cracked, scratched, or otherwise altered

 **Key Lesson:** Mix and match different light sources with props and other projected objects!



Photograph by Jen Theodore

PROJECT 2: PAPER

 **Key Lesson:** Paper is a highly versatile mixed media prop because you can quickly do so much with it.

In the image on the left, imagine that you lay out some paper, select objects that interest you, and place them onto the paper. Then, lightly spray with a single can or multiple cans of paint. This activity creates a look similar to a 'photogram.'

You could now photograph your paper and already have an exciting mixed media photograph.

You could combine your paper with other elements to expand your mixed media artwork further.



Photograph by Spotsoflight

💎 **Key Lesson:** How about using cut paper, cardboard, and other household items to create a mini-sized realistic set?



Photograph by Jason Leung

Key Lesson: Paper and metal are a favorite combination among mixed media artists.

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One aspect of the paper and metal suggestion I particularly love is that you can find interesting metal objects almost anywhere.

- Vacant lots
- Digging in your backyard
- Hardware stores
- Surplus stores
- Garage sales



Photograph by RhondaK, Native Florida Folk Artist

GETTING STARTED

This exercise is easy to get started. Gather some paper, maybe some paint, and a few metal objects of interest, and put them all together onto a set for a photograph.

You are limited only by your ideas.

💎 **Key Lesson:** Try mixing this project with the projection project!

💎 **Key Lesson:** Paint is an excellent mixed media tool because it can be used in many ways—too many ways to list in a single guide.

Let's generate some inspiration for you.



Photograph (t) by Rune Enstad, and Photograph (bl) by Ben Weber, and Photograph (br) by Alexas Fotos


BODY PAINTING

Body painting is an art all in itself. As a part of your mixed media photography, it doesn't need to be a Da Vinci. Just throwing some paint onto a body is a lot of fun, even your own body.

The bottom-left photo in the image on the left shows a simple mixed media photograph using paint on a body.

The image on the bottom right was more sophisticated in the painting process.

That photographer took the artwork a few steps further by creating the body painting image, converting half of it to black and white in post-processing, then printing the photo, and finally re-photographing it with a paintbrush lying on top.


 **Key Lesson:** That last example illustrates how far you can stretch yourself with the mixed media photography process!



Photograph (l) by Senjuti Kundu and Photograph (r) by Noah Buscher

Tips for body painting:

- Start small.
- You can find body and face paint almost anywhere, from craft stores to Amazon to Etsy.
- Keep your equipment clean – don't use the same tools on different models.
- When first learning, soft paints are easier to work with than hard paints.

 **Key Lesson:** Using body paint as part of your mixed media photography project can be as straightforward or as complex as you wish to make it.



Photograph (l) by Davisuko and Photograph (r) by Nicola Powys

Painting an **alternate reality** is easy and fun. Paint objects to change their reality! You'll find this activity simple, creative, and easy to start.



Photograph by Christian Gertenbach

PROJECT 4: PRINT JUXTAPOSITION

This mixed-media photo technique of print juxtaposition is one of my absolute favorites.


HOW TO DO IT

- Create an original photograph. You can create a photo with a mixed media idea in mind or simply select an existing image from your collection.
- Print the photo to an appropriate size that will work for your project. In the image on the left, an approximate 5 x 6-inch print worked fine.
- Now photograph your existing copy after juxtaposing it against new elements that tell a story!



Photograph by Crawford Jolly

The print juxtaposition in the image on the left started with a black and white photo that was printed, defaced, and placed over a hand-painted surface.

 **Key Lesson:** Are you beginning to see how you can combine all the different mixed media photography techniques discussed here into something new, fresh, and ultimately yours alone?

That is the beauty of mixed media photography. No one can exactly repeat your process. Each photograph that you make will be yours and yours alone.



Photograph by Jenny Hill

In the image on the left, the original was printed larger and juxtaposed against a similar background and diverse subject.



Photograph by Talles Alves

◆ Key Lesson:

- Take a photograph, print it, and frame it.
- Place your framed photograph in a scene and photograph it again.
- Now, using a layering editing program, such as Photoshop, place multiple copies of your framed photograph into the re-photographed scene.
- Use this technique to create a semi-abstract image or to convey a message.

📖 **Recommended Reading:** Want to learn how to make your photos stand out from everyone else's? Grab a copy of Photzy's Effective Storytelling premium guide.



Photograph by Crawford Jolly



Photograph by Tony Ross

CONCLUSION

Mixed media photography combines traditional photographic techniques with other forms of artistic expression. There are no rules here.

Your mixed media art can be realistic, semi-abstract, or completely abstract. It can convey a message or simply be a visual treat. You are limited only by your imagination.



Photograph by Ben Weber

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) What can mixed media photography help you overcome?
- 2) What four forms of mixed media photography were discussed in the guide?
- 3) True or False: You can get away with any type of lighting in mixed media photography.
- 4) Name two places where you could find some interesting light sources.
- 5) Why is a dark location necessary when using projected light?
- 6) Why is paper such a versatile mixed media photography prop?
- 7) How do you create a mini set with paper?
- 8) Paper and _____ are a favorite combination among mixed media artists.
- 9) Name two locations where you might find exciting metal objects.
- 10) Why is paint an excellent mixed media tool?
- 11) Name the steps for creating a mixed media photo juxtaposition.



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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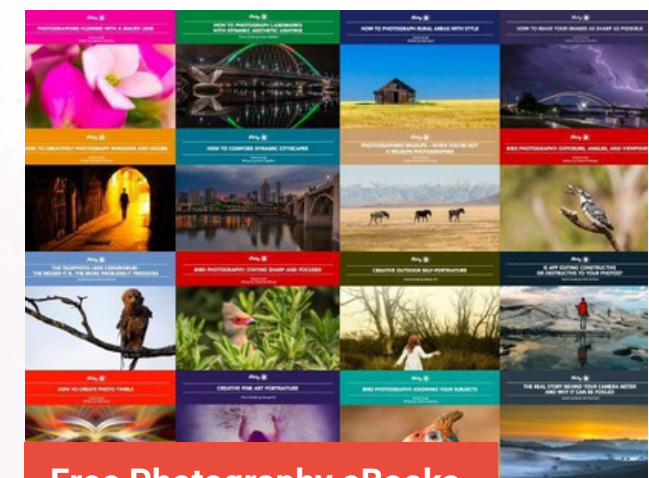
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



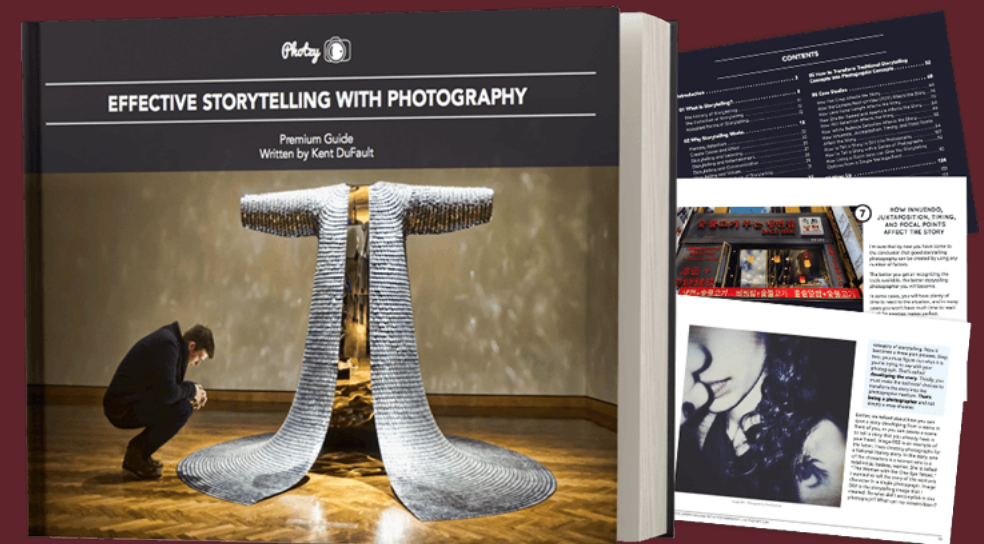
Kent DuFault is a professional photographer and author.

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