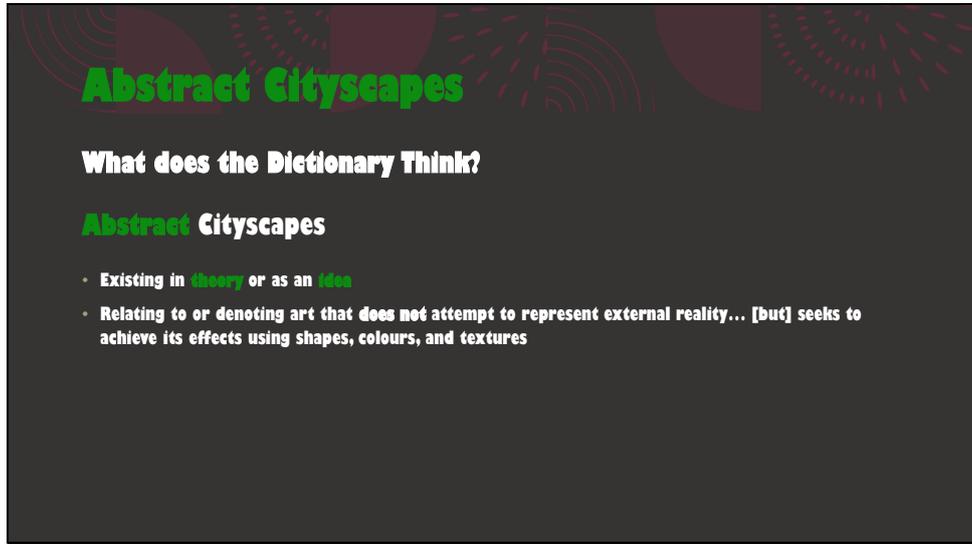


Slide 1



*To investigate Abstract Cityscapes, I wanted to start from first principles: the meaning of the words themselves.*

*I decided to start by looking at both the dictionary definition of the two words, and how they've been used by photographers in the past and into the present.*

The slide features a dark background with decorative red and purple circular patterns at the top. The main title 'Abstract Cityscapes' is in green. Below it, the text 'What does the Dictionary Think?' is in white. The sub-title 'Abstract Cityscapes' is in green. A bulleted list follows, with the first item in green and the second in white.

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What does the Dictionary Think?**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

- Existing in **theory** or as an **idea**
- Relating to or denoting art that **does not attempt to represent external reality... [but] seeks to achieve its effects using shapes, colours, and textures**

*Looking first at “abstract” in the dictionary.*

*The word refers to something existing in theory only: it’s the idea of something, or a summary of it.*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What do Artists & Photographers Think**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946)**

**Music – A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs**

**First intentional set of abstract photographs**



*Born in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, Alfred Stieglitz was instrumental in making photography an accepted art form, and his 1920s “Music” sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs is generally accepted as the first intentional set of abstract photographs; so he seems a suitable first-stop on our journey.*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What do Artists & Photographers Think**

**Music – A sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs, No 2 by Alfred Stieglitz 1922**



*Over the course of ten years this would grow into a series of hundreds of images in a series called Equivalent.*

*This particular one is the second of the series.*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What do Artists & Photographers Think**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Barbara Morgan (1900-1992)**

**“Through abstraction the photographer exercises choices that carry photography beyond record-realism to the expression of his or her personal viewpoint”**

A black and white photograph of Barbara Morgan, a woman with dark hair, wearing a light-colored jacket, holding a large camera with a flash attachment. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera.

*Best known for her dance photography in the 1930s and 40s, Barbara Morgan had trained as an abstract painter in the 1920s, and as we'll see later experimented with some abstract photographic manipulation.*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What do Artists & Photographers Think**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Barbara Morgan (1900-1992)**



*Martha Graham - Letter to the World*

*I found articles online describing her as “the mother” of abstract photography. She talked about abstraction allowing the photographer to go beyond a recorded realism to express their personal viewpoint.*

**Which is one of the things I aim for in my photography.**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What do Artists & Photographers Think**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Barbara Morgan (1900-1992)**

*Artificial Life from the Laboratory*



This is one of her abstract images. Taken in 1967 it is subtitled “The Soul of DNA.”

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What do Artists & Photographers Think**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

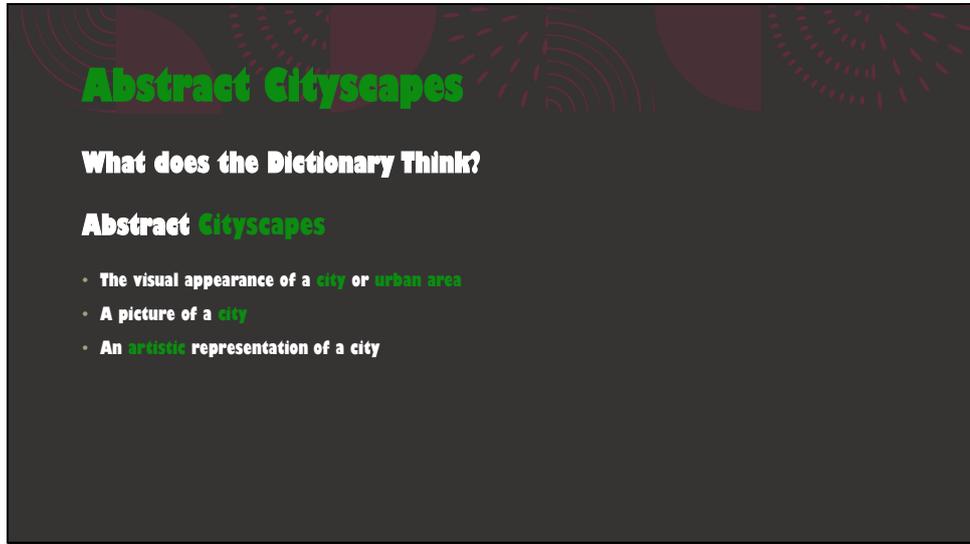
**John Suler**

**“An abstract photograph draws away from that which is realistic or literal”**

Photographic Psychology: Image and Psych (2012)



*John Suler is an American Researcher, writer, photographer, and psychologist who specialises in the psychological impact of modern technology. In his 2012 Photographic Psychology, he describes an abstract photograph as one that draws away from that which is realistic or literal.”*

The slide features a dark background with decorative elements at the top, including concentric circles and semi-circles in shades of red and purple. The main text is in white and green.

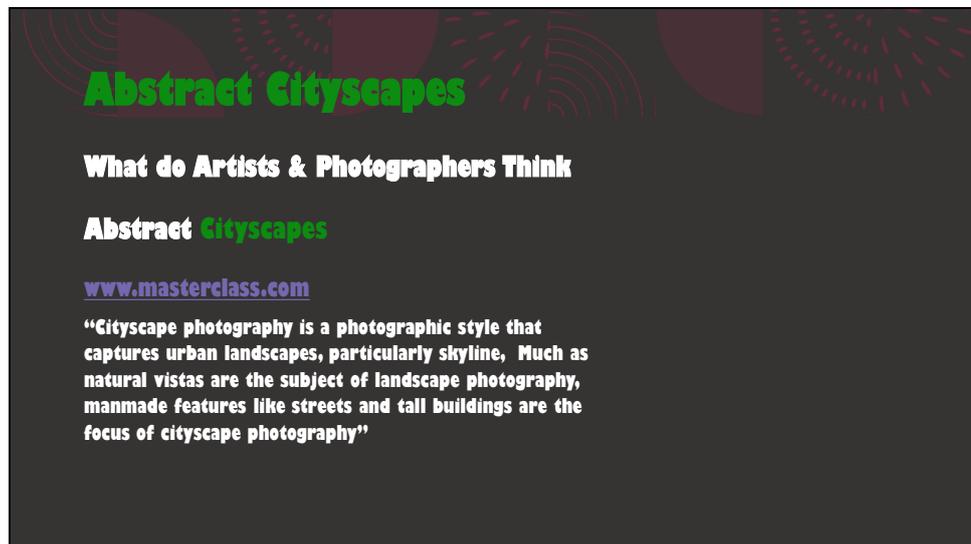
**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What does the Dictionary Think?**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

- The visual appearance of a city or urban area
- A picture of a city
- An artistic representation of a city

*I took a similar approach with the word “Cityscapes”  
The dictionary defines it most generally as the visual appearance of a city or urban area. Or  
more specifically a picture or artistic representation of a city.*



*Masterclass.com provides online tutorials on a wide range of topics from some very well-known speakers (for quite a high subscription!). Their introduction to Cityscape photography describes it as capturing urban landscapes, especially skylines. As landscape photography features natural vistas, street and tall buildings are the focus of cityscape photography.*

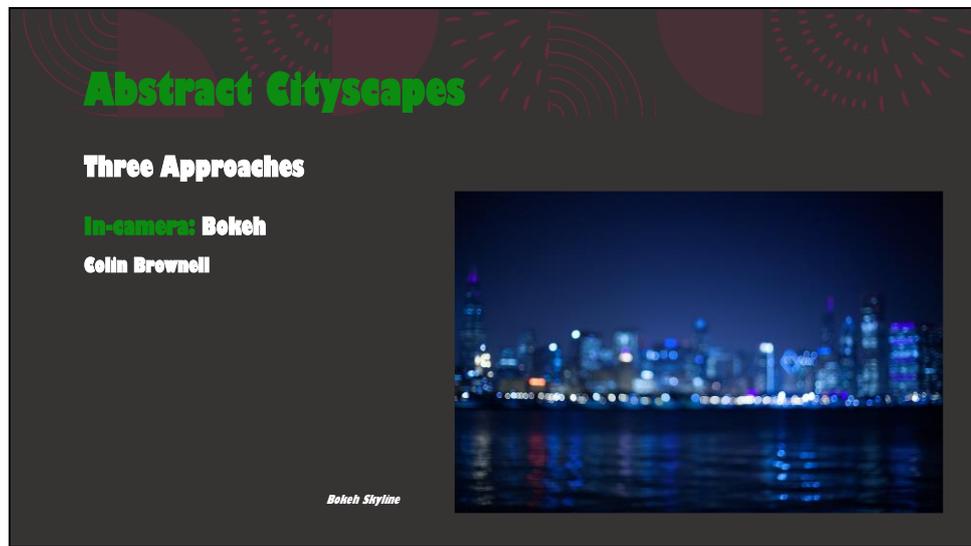
They make nine broad suggestions for shooting cityscapes:

They say that no two cities are alike, so one should **Focus on elements that make the location unique**. You should look for and highlight features specific to the city in which you're shooting.

They recommend shooting during the golden and blue hours – either shortly before or after sunset because these times provide soft light that brings out the details of a subject.

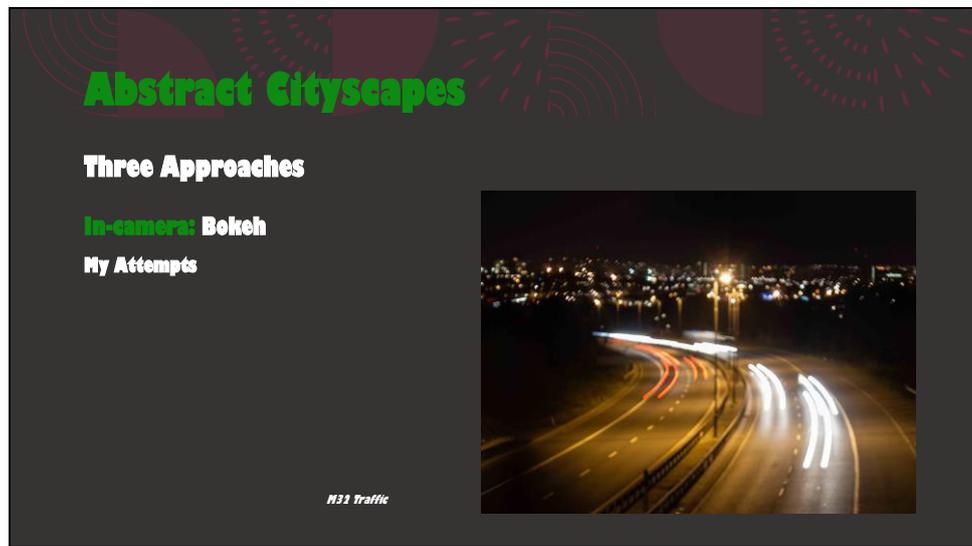
Use ND or polarizing filters if shooting during the day.

Keep ISO as low as possible to avoid visual noise.



Use long focal lengths to create depth of field. Such as this one from flickr user Colin Brownell.

They suggest finding ways to incorporate nature in your images. “When cityscape photographers seek to capture the essence of a city from the perspective of its inhabitants, they include bursts of nature.”



Through the wonders of Lightroom, I found an old shot of mine that combines two of these techniques to consider one of the main routes into Bristol.

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What do Artists & Photographers Think**

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**James Maher**

**“From the tallest building and wide expanses to the tiniest details of city life, there is so possibility for what you can create with cityscape photography”**



*New York Fine Art photographer James Maher, who’s site is linked to on the slide, talks about Lenses and settings – manual or aperture priority*

*Night Photography – use a tripod or candid @ ISO3200*

**Long exposure** – “can allow you to create some very creative cityscape photographs. You can do this with cars and water, but I particularly love to use it with crowds of people.”

*He makes the usual suggestions about Composition, especially regarding moving the viewer’s eyes through a scene.*

*He has a preference for wide-angle lenses and recommends embracing people in cityscape images to add a sense of scale.*

*Most importantly, he says to WALK: “get a good pair of walking shoes, travel light, and get excited to walk!”*



*Another New York photographer, Joe Taylor is much more pro-tripod than Maher, but similarly talks about the use of framing techniques and using People and reflections in images.*

*He also suggests scouting for locations that give unobstructed views or a skyline; suggesting that viewing platforms or rooftop bars can often give these sorts of opportunities.*

*Finally, he talks about avoiding, or using, converging lines. They can add to a tall building's sense of scale or detract from others if they appear to lean away from the viewer.*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**What do Artists & Photographers Think**

**Abstract Cityscapes**



**Wobbly Bridge by ME!**

The image is a presentation slide with a dark background. At the top, the title 'Abstract Cityscapes' is written in a bold, green, sans-serif font. Below it, the subtitle 'What do Artists & Photographers Think' is in a white, bold, sans-serif font. Underneath the subtitle, the text 'Abstract Cityscapes' is repeated in the same green font. On the right side, there is a photograph of the Millennium Bridge in London at night. The bridge's distinctive white, lattice-like structure is illuminated, and its reflection is visible in the water below. In the background, St. Paul's Cathedral is brightly lit, with its large dome and spire clearly visible against the dark night sky. The overall scene is a cityscape at night, with lights from buildings and the bridge reflecting on the water.

*This is one of my attempts: Norman Foster's Millennium Bridge leading to St. Paul's Cathedral.*

The slide features a dark background with decorative elements at the top, including concentric circles and semi-circles in shades of red and purple. The main text is in white and green.

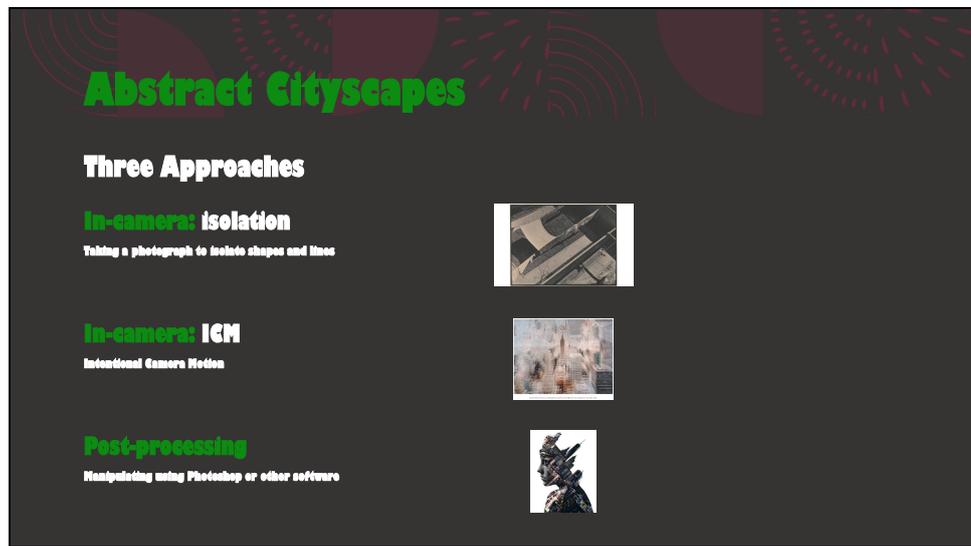
**Abstract Cityscapes**

**So what do we think?**

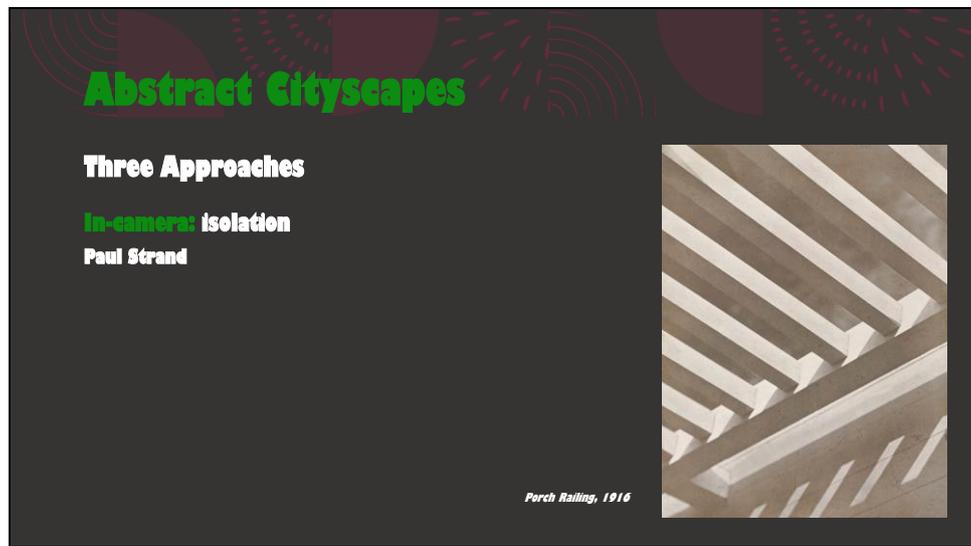
**Abstract Cityscapes**

- A non-literal, **artistic** representation of the **spirit** of a city
- Depicting an **urban environment** using **shapes**, **colours**, and **textures**

*With a grounding of the two separate words, we can now combine them, to get a working definition of “Abstract Cityscapes as a non-literal, artistic representation of a city or its spirit, which uses shapes, colours, and textures to depict the soul of an urban environment.”*



*I found three main approaches to achieving these aims (some of which have been hinted at already), two in-camera, and techniques around post-processing:  
Isolation depends on the choice of what one photographs to isolate shapes, lines, and patterns;  
ICM is variously in camera movement or intentional camera motion and moves the camera while the shutter is closed to introduce deliberate blur to the shot;  
A myriad of post-processing techniques use Photoshop or other software, or indeed dark room methods, to convey the artist's message.*



*Starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Paul Strand was, amongst other things, founder of the Photography League which “advocates using their art to promote social and political issues.” This would lead to him being investigated by Joe MCarthy for so-called unAmerican activities and his eventual exile to France.*

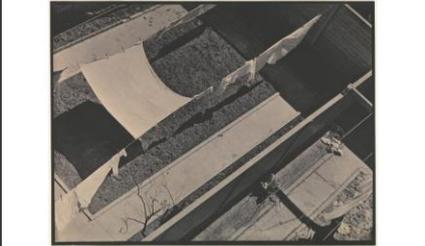
*Rather than relying on recognisable imagery such as tipped over tables or a café’s porch, Strand here uses the relationships that these elements, or more importantly their shadows, form within the frame.*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Three Approaches**

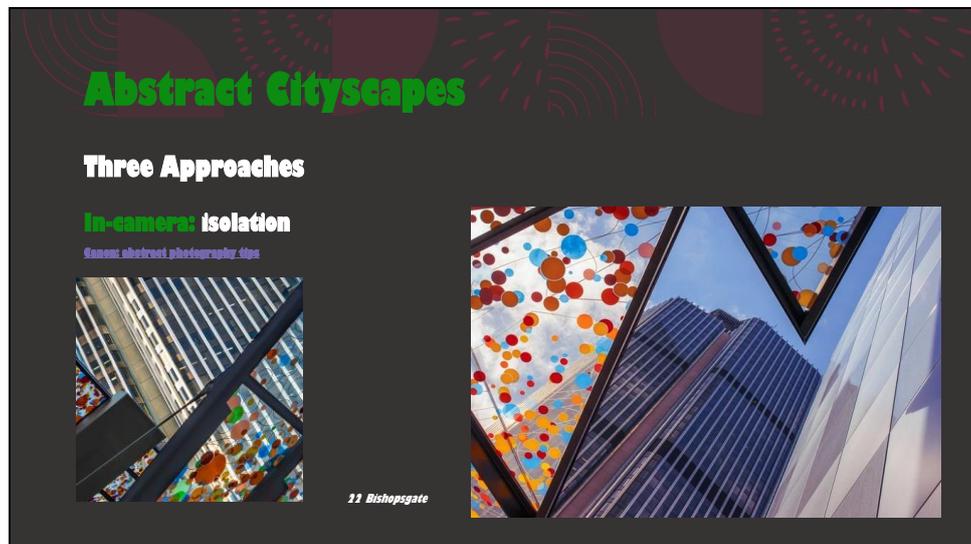
**In-camera: isolation**

**Paul Strand**



*Geometric Backyards, 1917*

*He tried to explore photography without resorting to “tricks of process of manipulation,” to think about 2D productions that followed from a 4-Dimensional existence to achieve a “fundamental objective of both photography and art: of showing the viewer more by showing less.”*



*I found a very useful page of abstract photography tips on the Canon website, which is linked to in the slide. They recommend several techniques:*

*Capture camera blur (which we'll come to later);*

*On the technical side, exposing for highlights;*

*They consider as separate topics two things that I'll join as one: Shooting double exposures and overlaying multiple frames. I suppose me treating these as one thing betrays my digital bias!*

**Pick out details.** *This slide on the right is the image they use to represent picking out details. Coincidentally, I'd visited this same building in November, so the image on the left is my attempt at it;*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Three Approaches**

**In-camera: Isolation**  
[www.canon.co.uk](http://www.canon.co.uk)  
Canon: abstract photography tips



*Play with Shadow.*

*Finally, they suggest Playing with Shadow. This is obviously an extremely high-contrast effort; I can't help wondering if the artist who took this had Paul Strand's Porch Railing, which we saw earlier, in mind when they took this?*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

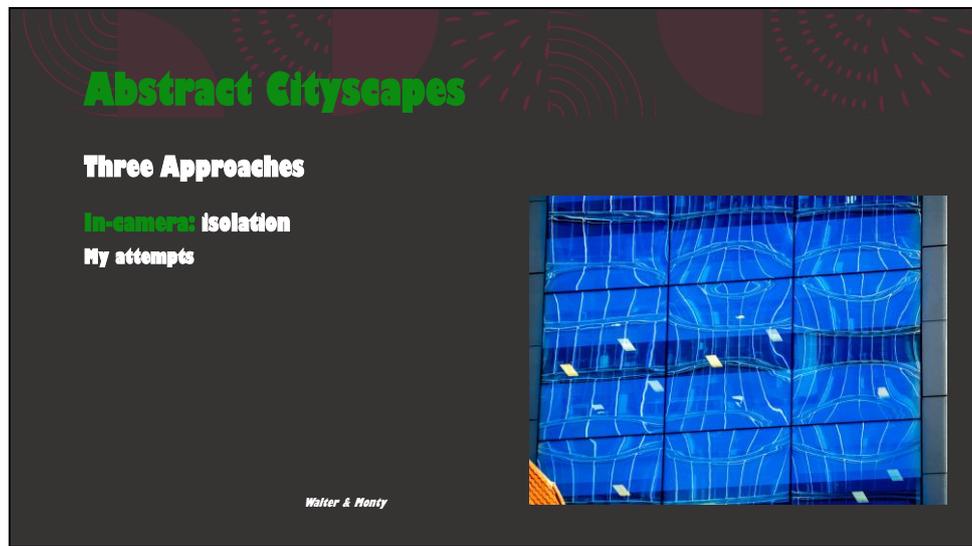
**Three Approaches**

**In-camera: isolation**  
**Simon Caplan**



*Out of the Blue, 2015*

*You may recall the guest Speaker Simon Caplan that we had in before Christmas (October, I think). He uses this “isolationist” approach to abstract cityscapes, including this image “Out of the Blue”*



*Not long after Simon's visit I was in London, so his talk was very much on my mind, including this shot taken near the Swiss Re Insurance building, the Gherkin.*



*Another of my efforts from that day, in fact taken from within about 50 yards on the previous one*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Three Approaches**

**In-camera: ICM**

**Ted Croner**

“...I try to communicate the emotions that I am feeling in that moment”

*Central Park South*



*Moving on, we turn to ICM, variously In- or Intentional Camera Movement or Motion. At its most basic this is a long exposure technique. Movement is introduced in either the “target” or the camera itself while the shutter is open to produce the desired effect. Camera movement can be achieved either by moving the camera to give linear blur or “zooming” it, which produces a circular effect. An historical example of this is shown here: Central Park South by American Ted Croner in 1947/48. His obituary described it as reducing [the Manhattan skyline] “to abstract slashes of white light among black tall buildings against a gun-metal gray sky.”*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Three Approaches**

**In-camera: ICM**  
**Carmino Chiriaco**

“...I try to communicate the emotions that I am feeling in that moment”



*Empire State of Mind*

Empire State of Mind is a photograph by Carmino Chiriaco which was uploaded on July 10th, 2010.

*Bringing us straight up to the modern day, we find Roman photographer Carmino Chiriaco who here found himself gravitating towards the “friction, distortion, and movement” of New York City.*

*ICM images are usually made in one of three ways:*

*The camera is held steady to get a “fixed” starting point before starting the movement;*

*The movement is continuous while the shutter’s open; or*

*The movement is at the start of the exposure, before coming to rest to create a solid “base.”*

*Chiriaco has taken a different approach here, in that he appears to have “paused and zoomed” many times, stepping into the frame and giving a dynamic, 3D look.*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Three Approaches**

**In-camera: IGM**  
**Carmine Chiriacò**

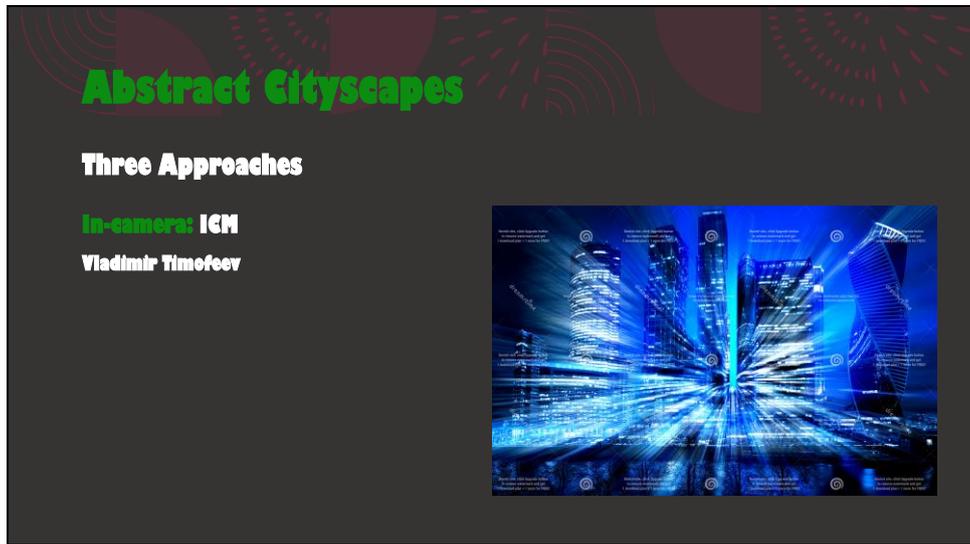
**"...I try to communicate the emotions that I am feeling in that moment"**

*Woman with Parasol*

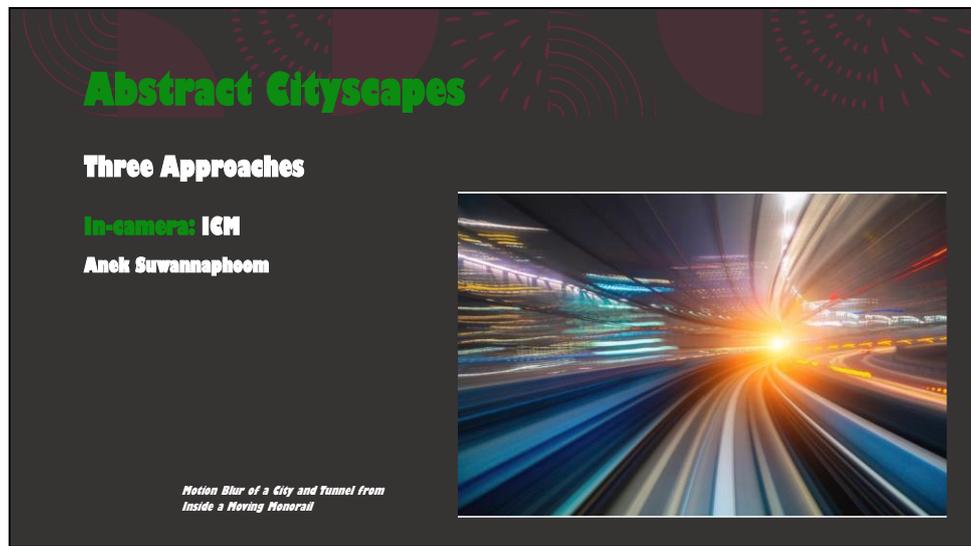


Woman with Parasol is a photograph by Carmine Chiriacò which was captured on July 19th, 2012.

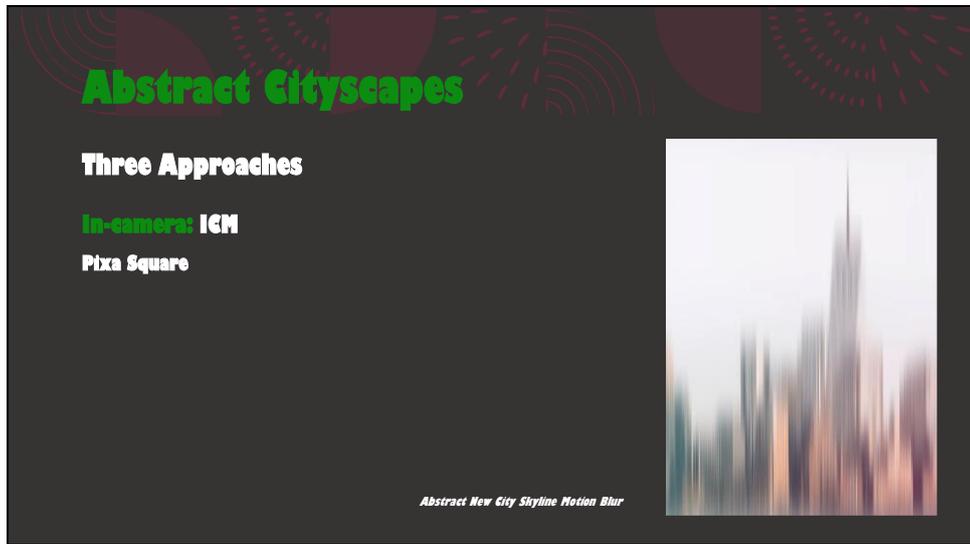
*Or this Woman with a Parasol where he tries to communicate the emotions he was feeling when he took it, which I consider to be the target of most photography that seeks to go beyond a record shot. This image particularly puts me in mind of an architect's sketch as they're considering the semi-public space associated with their latest project.*



*This image by Vladimir Timofeev, is a more conventional example of ICM: he's turned the barrel of his lens while the shutter was closed to achieve the starburst effect in this image.*



*Whereas Anek Suwannaphoom was obviously stationary on this moving monorail to convey the feeling of the city whizzing by as they passed out of a tunnel back into view of the city. I can almost imagine this being a still from a sci-fi movie: in fact it has quite a strong “Tron” vibe for me.*



*At the most extreme end of ICM would be this rendering of the New York skyline by Pixa Square, which leaves the skyline virtually unrecognition to all but those most familiar with it.*

**Abstract Cityscapes**

**Three Approaches**

**Photoshop**  
**Barbara Morgan**



*Fossil in Formation (1965)*

*Finally, we come to Photoshop, or more accurately, post-capture manipulation; it's always worth remembering that images were "photoshopped" before photoshop was invented! As in this 1965 image by Barbara Morgan (who we mentioned earlier).  
"the camera always lies."*



I personally find this other image of Morgan's more interesting. Entitled "City Sound," and knowing about her dance background, I find it a strong, evocative image.



I adore this abstract that I found on a stock photography site: it overlays multiple versions of the same image at different scales.

## Abstract Cityscapes

### Three Approaches

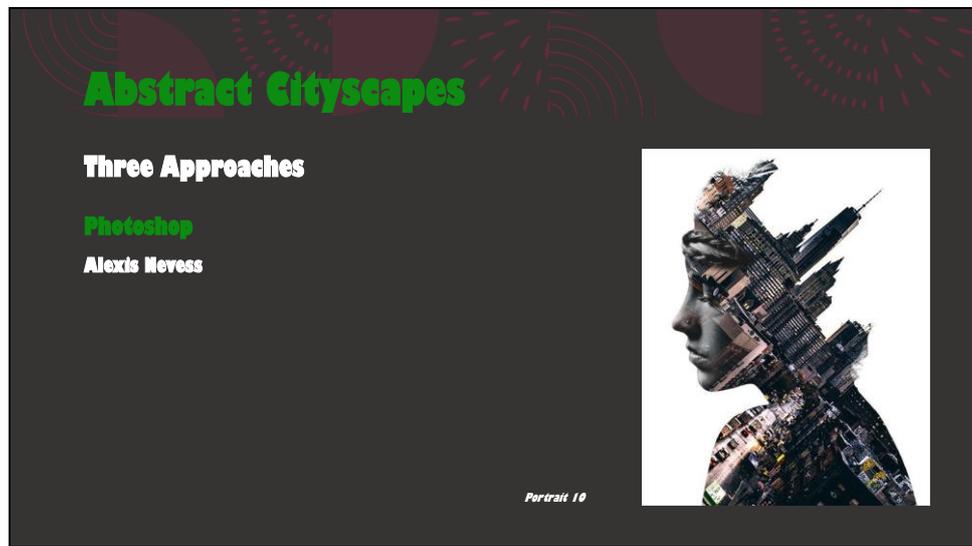
Photoshop  
[Jasper James](#)

"I know I liked the feeling of looking of the window of that city. But if I just took a photo of the city, it wouldn't be that interesting"

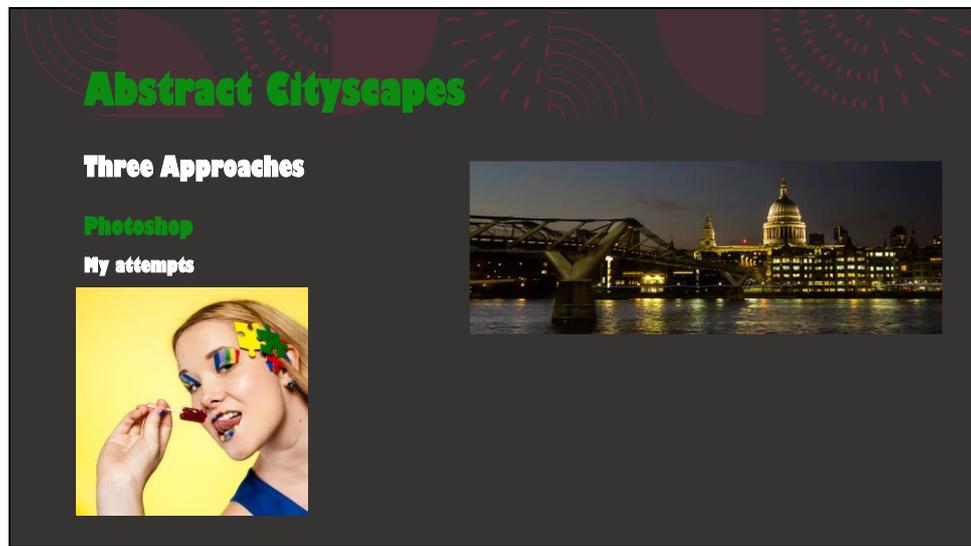
*City Silhouettes*

The image shows a person's silhouette in profile, facing right. The interior of the silhouette is filled with a detailed, high-angle photograph of a cityscape, likely Tokyo, showing numerous skyscrapers and buildings. The background of the entire slide is dark with faint, red, concentric circular patterns.

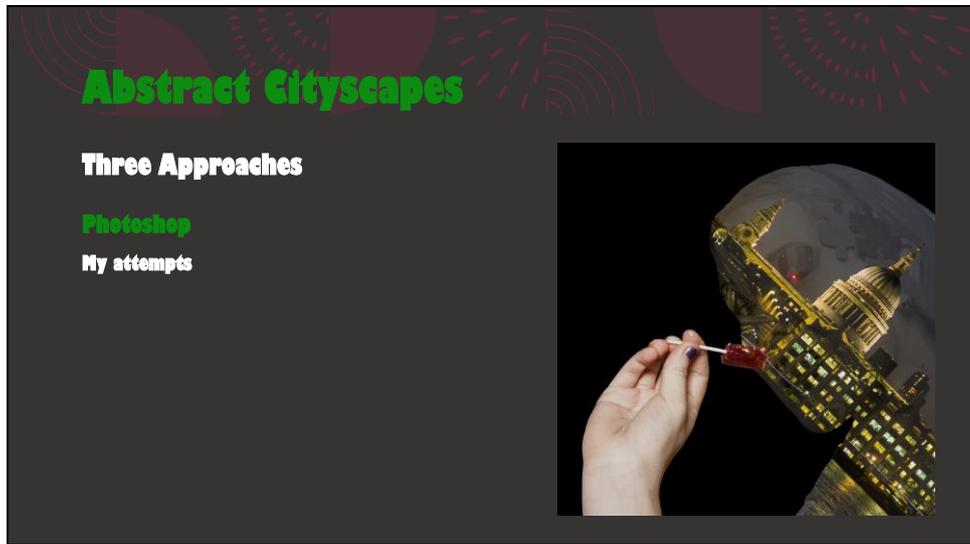
*Jasper James was inspired on a 2006 trip to Tokyo to use this overlaying technique to handle the "awe-inspiring... scale of the city." He felt that combining a portrait with a cityscape would be more interesting than presenting either one separately.*



*A similar but more heavily manipulated version of abstract cityscape is here demonstrated by 18yo French digital artist Alexis Neveas. He says it takes him 3-4 hrs to produce stunning images like these. Clearly, he doesn't take so long on naming them!*



*I decided to try my hand at one of these more heavily manipulated images. My starting point was these two: obviously a model-portrait, and another take on the Wobbly Bridge leading to St. Paul's. The plain background was a large motivator in selecting the model shoot, and I hoped that the cityscape would have a good mix of horizontal and vertical components.*



*The result is clearly a first attempt, but I think a reasonable one.*

*I think more success would be had if the portrait and the skyline were taken with this technique in mind (although I do like how a light so closely aligned with the model's eye).*



This project has ended up clearing up some of the directions my photography has been taking up until now, so hopefully with that knowledge and clarity it can help me move forward more deliberately and consciously.

I have always wanted my photography to be about interpreting and perhaps explaining the world around me, rather than purely recording it (there is of course nothing wrong if an individual chooses the opposite approach though and a “record shot” can often be the first step towards an “interpretive” one); about expressing and exploring emotions and meaning. I think some of the abstract photos certainly provide inspiration for me to try moving forward, and possibly future areas for me to research.

In contrast, the photoshop techniques, though some of them I’d seen and admired before, are a completely different direction to one I’ve travelled before, but suggest a path I should certainly investigate in more detail.