

Camera in action

My first year with ICM photography

My abstract photography started with a photography workshop about looking differently. At the time, I had already been shooting for years. I wanted to learn something new. During the workshop, the teacher let me use her neutral density filter, so I could experiment with slower shutter speed and intentionally moving the camera.

Up to that point, all my attempts to use slower shutter speed had ended in overexposed pictures. Before the workshop I never wanted to use a filter, because it felt 'fake'. But, the teacher assured me, a neutral density filter only blocks light. This is to avoid the overexposure that I previously experienced. So I tried.

The experiment was a marvelous experience, especially because I couldn't control the result (this was also due to lack of experience). It felt awkward and exciting at the same time. What I saw in real life looked in no way like the pictures I took. Here's an example:



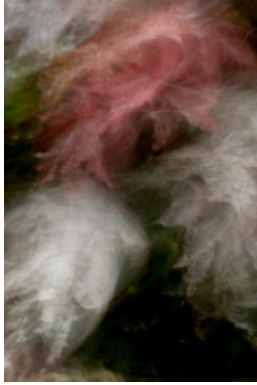
After the workshop I immediately bought my own neutral density filter. The experimentation could begin. I bought [this filter](#). You can turn the filter, making its effect darker or lighter. Intentionally moving the camera while taking a picture is called ICM, or 'Intentional Camera Movement'. The camera registers the movement and the length of the shutter speed.

With ICM you move the camera on purpose while making a picture. Recently, someone who walked past me commented: "are you taking an action photo of a still life?" Well, yes...

For the enthusiasts: I have a Nikon D700 with a Nikkor 50 mm lens. Aside from this, I will give little to no technical details about camera settings or the length of the shutter speed. After all, many others have already written elaborate things about it (see the internet). Instead, I will tell you what I've learned:

Practice, practice, practice

If I had known how much time I would spend on it, I might have decided to stay away from ICM. But in the end, I liked it so much that I wanted to go outside every day. Sometimes an hour, but usually two hours or longer. I took hundreds of photos, just to throw most of them away immediately. Slowly, I began to discover what worked for me and what I liked.



Autumn leaves; still a favorite.



One of the first photos I was satisfied with: a dune lake.

Be curious and play

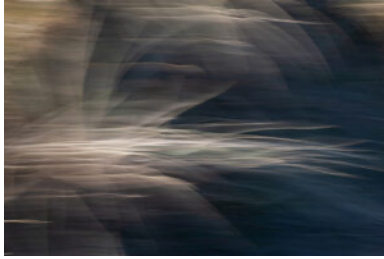
When you move the camera, you don't know how the result will look. As I gained more experience, I was able to have some influence, but there remained an great uncertainty. It's really just playing and being curious. I especially learned to avoid what I didn't like, such as the effect of small gaps in thick tree canopy (see photo below). The light that shone through it often did not give good results, I thought. In any case, light is always important in photography, but too much direct light is not always desirable (with ICM).



I made a lot of photos like this in the beginning, but I just didn't think they fit me.

Look differently

When you move your camera on purpose, different things become interesting than when you hold the camera still. You discover that when you're back home behind your computer (and the photos you see are very disappointing :-)). Patterns (lines especially), colors and contrasts are even more important with this technique because a photo becomes 'flat' faster. Small details become hardly noticeable, unless you photograph them from very close. In the end, you learn most from your failed pictures, so don't despair... (and I assure you, I sometimes did...)



Marram grass against a dark background.

ICM is only the name of the technique

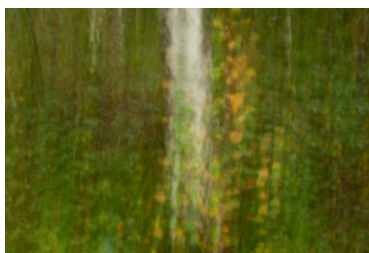
ICM is a word that only tells something about the technology. So you can shoot in all kinds of styles; impressionistic, abstract-modern, magical, sleek, futuristic. These styles depend on how fast you move, the length of the shutter speed, your subject and the light. At first, I found it frustrating. I took nice pictures, but the style went in many different directions. Now I have learned to let it go. And, I must admit, I have more control than in the beginning.



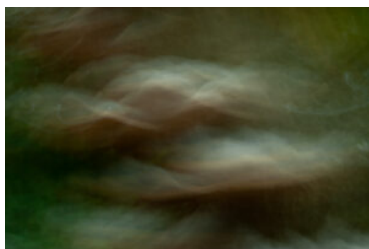
Kind of Hockney-esque, or as an illustration.



Moving, but still very realistic.



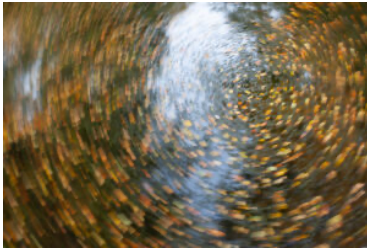
Tree with vegetation, impressionistic effect.



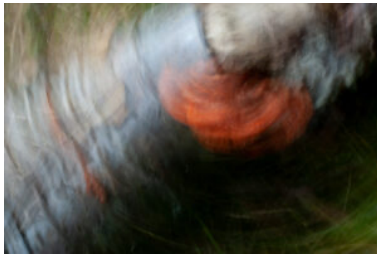
Mushrooms, magical, mysterious atmosphere.

Movement in so many ways

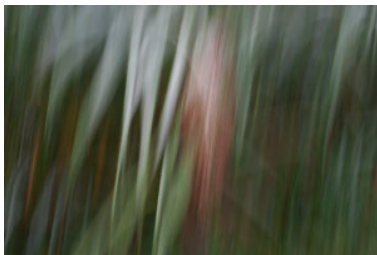
You can move the camera horizontally, vertically, front to back (closer and further away), rotate or maybe even create a shape.



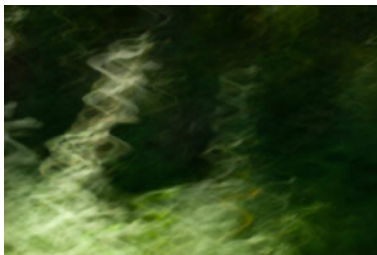
Spinning, autumn leaves in the water.



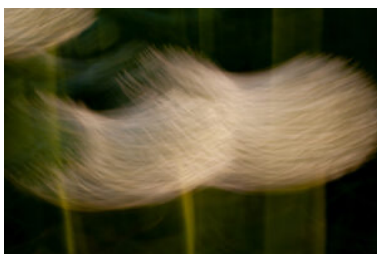
Little twist, mushroom on a birch.



Up, grass in the dunes.



"Circle" of grass (quickly from left to right and back).



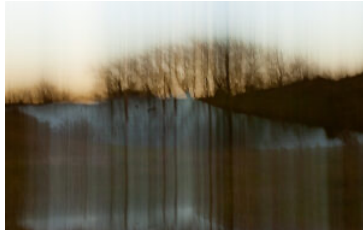
Swipe

Go with the flow or against it

You can use your camera to follow the lines you see, but you can also move against them. The latter creates completely different effects and atmospheres.



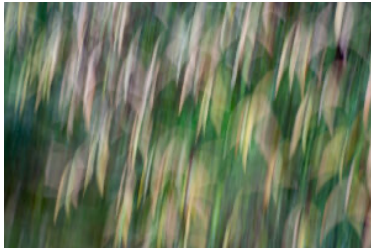
Move from left to right on the beach.



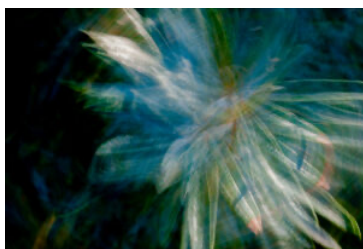
Moving from top to bottom, although the horizon runs from left to right.

Playing with shutter speed and movement

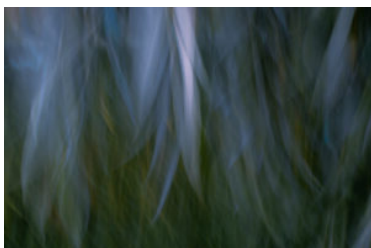
(Relatively) slower shutter speed produces more blurry photos than shorter ones. You can make your moves faster or slower, and make the movement longer or shorter and move faster or slower. All these things (and also the subject itself) have an effect on the result. Just try it. The more you practice, the more you'll get a feeling for it.



Short moves, firethorn.



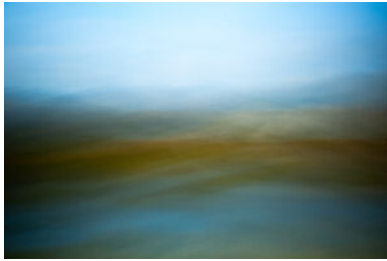
Faster shutter speed (with turning), firethorn.



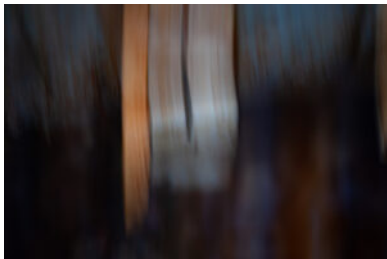
Slower shutter speed and just one long movement, willow.

Also with a macro lens

When I purchased a macro lens (AF-S NIKKOR 60 MM 1:2.8 G) after more than a year of using ICM, I noticed that I could also achieve interesting results when I move closer.



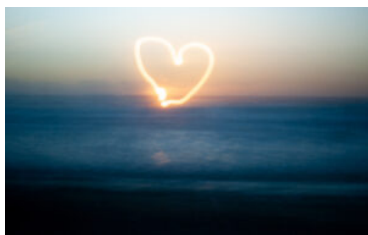
Dune lake (landscape, further away).



Silver birch bark (on the ground, close by).

Playing with light sources

When you photograph a luminous object, this can sometimes give a disturbing effect. But you can also use this for your own purpose.



Draw a heart with the sun ☺



Arch of light.

Sharp or less sharp

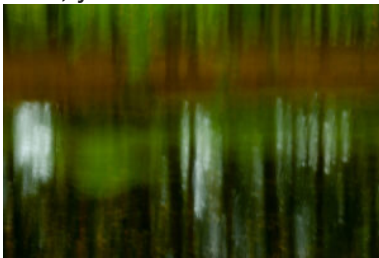
Photos with ICM are a lot blurrier than 'normal' photos and sometimes I even find them too vague. When I learned to use multi-exposure (mixing two images together, you can also do that in the camera) I was able to combine sharpness with blurriness in one photo. By the way, when I start taking a photo, I focus first, even if I start moving afterwards. The photos are much better that way.



Blowing.

Without neutral density filter

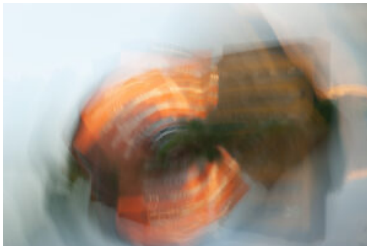
When I forgot the neutral density filter once, it turned out that I could also do without it. You will need the filter when there is a lot of light, but with a lot of clouds, in winter or under the trees, you can do without it.



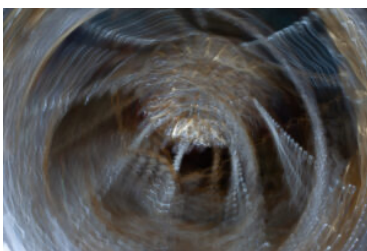
Forest in Holland (Bergen), trees reflected.

You can use ICM always and everywhere

I mainly shoot in nature, but ICM is also very suitable for people or buildings.



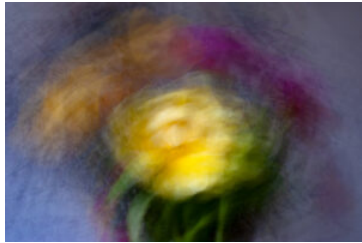
A striking building.



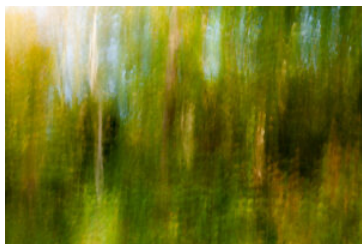
Chandelier in a castle.

Don't immediately throw away everything that seems to have failed

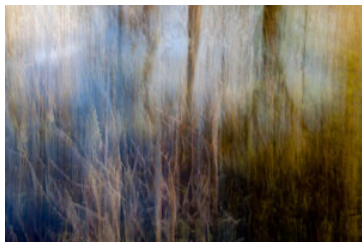
Photos that seemed unsuccessful at first, I eventually learned to like. That's why I save as much as possible in the beginning. Only after half a year or so I can really select well.



Flowers in a vase.



Forest in summer.



A muddy puddle with reflection of trees.

These are the findings that came to my mind. I may add more to this story in the near future. I hope you found it inspiring.

Lisette Geel