

Beyond the Print

by Lesley Riley

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp and quilt artist Lesley Riley

It all began with a challenge. On October 1, 2017, one of my former coaching clients, an award-winning photographer who posts regularly on Instagram, stated that she was beginning a 31-day #painterlymobileart challenge. She was just challenging herself but I jumped on board. I was already on Instagram every day, I was photographing my eco-dyeing and wet-cyan prints, playing with a new-to-me photo app, Diana, and easily had the few minutes a day it would take, so I said, “Why not?”

I was hooked. 31 days became 31 weeks with no end in sight. Manipulating my photos on my iPhone using just a few key photo apps has opened me to a whole new vision and approach to my art. It is—and continues to be—one of the most rewarding things I have done as an artist. I now see pattern, line, light, color, layering, and possibilities in a whole new and exciting way. I’ve only scratched the surface of what is possible as new ideas and ways to further my art continue to explode.

CREATE A PHOTO STASH

You need a fabric stash to make quilts, a paper and ephemera stash for collage, and a paint stash for any and all painting. So, obviously, you need a digital photo stash to create layered digital collage.

Start by looking at your art and the world with an eye for pattern, color, shape, and composition. My work is created primarily with digital photos of my eco-dyeing and wet-cyan prints. I often combine them with images of painted or decaying surfaces, patterns, and details of my own artwork, both past and present. I liberally take a ‘what if’ approach when it comes to combining two photographs to create the final images you see.

You can risk further with this medium because there is no waste of materials or wrong strokes or stitches. Other than your phone, it doesn’t cost a penny to explore your creativity in this medium. You can easily trash something that is not working out and start over. The hidden bonus is you can also duplicate

an image you are happy with and use it again in further explorations.

If you already have a stash of photos on your phone, you can start weeding through them for ones that have good design, aren’t too busy, and—most importantly—photos that inspire you. For my technique, photos that have white areas in them work best. When you are layering photos, a white area in the top photo allows the color in the bottom area to clearly show through. That is why wet-cyan prints are perfect for my process!

PHOTO EDITING

The second step after taking a well-composed photo is to use the built-in photo editing apps on your phone to adjust the color, contrast, and brightness of your image, and to possibly crop it to highlight a desired focal point or detail. I try to photograph in indirect daylight but perfect lighting conditions are not always possible. In most instances, you can turn a washed out image into a beauty with just a few finger swipes.

Digital photo-editing apps can become a giant rabbit hole. You could probably spend what's left of your lifetime trying out and experimenting with them all, as new ones appear every day. But here's the thing ... it's not about the app. It all starts with a well-adjusted photo and an artistic eye.

After my initial editing with the built-in digital phone tools, I choose to limit myself to just two apps. I'd rather spend my time perfecting my eye and furthering my artistic vision using two apps I'm familiar and comfortable with than always searching for new gimmicks or tools. "If one is master of one thing and understands one thing well, one has at the same time, insight into, and understanding of many things," said Vincent Van Gogh.

IMAGE BLENDER

My go-to app is Image Blender, available for all phone types. I find the interface easy and the use logical. There are advanced functions if I want them, but most of my work is created with the built-in blending modes. The more I use it, the more I can predict which two images will play well together. Sometimes I will choose something I don't think will work, just because I have often been surprised by the outcome. No need to second guess yourself in this art form. Risk it all!

The best way to learn how to use Image Blender is the same way I learned—play with it! Just like children learn from play, adults can, too. And as I have already mentioned, there is no penalty for playing. There are tutorials on YouTube and step-by-steps online instructions if you like to have a map to

follow or to get clear on which button, dot, or arrow does what.

My best word of advice—if you think you like a combination, save it. I might save three or four and then evaluate later and delete anything that no longer thrills.

SNAPSEED

Snapseed is a more powerful editing app than the one built into your phone. There are more adjustment options and special effects. It's another digital playground, but again, I just go there when I need specific finishing details for the image I've created in Image Blender. The functions I use on Snapseed include:

- Rotate—to flip or mirror-image a photo
- Details—to increase the definition of the image
- Tune Image>Ambiance—to create a warmer, deeper look
- Curves—one of the most versatile and easy editing functions. Lighten a dark scene, boost contrast and color, or make a variety of color shifts.
- Heal Image—to erase/blend an annoying bit of the image

All of my editing and adjustments are guided by the look I am trying to achieve, one that speaks to my style, aligns with my vision, and pleases my artistic eye. It's fun to get caught-up in all the possibilities presented by photo apps and editing, but to create a body of work or express yourself in a recognizable style, remember to edit your own tendencies while editing the photo. And have fun!

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