Shooting in the dark

WITH TOM BLACHFORD

NGV

Tom Blachford *Doric Dichotomy* 2019

About Tom

Tom Blachford is a Melbourne-based photographer, who travels the world to photograph architecture at an unusual time of day – midnight. His photography is influenced by the dystopian landscapes and neon lights depicted in 1980s Sci-Fi cinema. Tom emphasises the light on a building so that it appears as if it's emerging from the darkness. He also edits the images to create an eerie or surreal scene. For instance, he may add neon lights to office blocks or remove the wheels of a taxi to make it look like it's hovering.

Photography is difficult without natural light. If there is too much artificial light from streetlamps, for example, the photograph can look overexposed or 'washed out'. Tom has perfected his skills in shooting at night through experience and hours of practice. He experimented by adjusting the exposure on his camera to let more or less light in. Finally, he found that the best source of light for the desired effect was to photograph during a full moon.

Fun fact

You don't always need to shoot at night to capture a scene at midnight. The film industry uses a technique called 'day for night' which means scenes are shot during the day but edited to look like they were captured at night.

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With a smartphone, use this guide to transform a daytime image into a night-time scene.

Subject

This activity works best on a sunny day when there is a high contrast between light and shadow, or you can stage a high contrast environment using artificial light from a desk lamp.

- Find a scene or subject that interests you. Look for areas with strong light and shadow. A scene with reflective objects such as dark shiny surfaces, water or dark leaves could also work well. You could try photographing a building, something from nature or some favourite objects.

Composition

- Experiment with composition and different points of view. Try shooting while lying down or from above.
- The Rule of Thirds can guide composing an eye-catching image. Visualise a grid over your image, made up of two vertical and two horizontal lines. To avoid placing the subject in the centre, experiment by positioning your subject within different thirds of your frame.
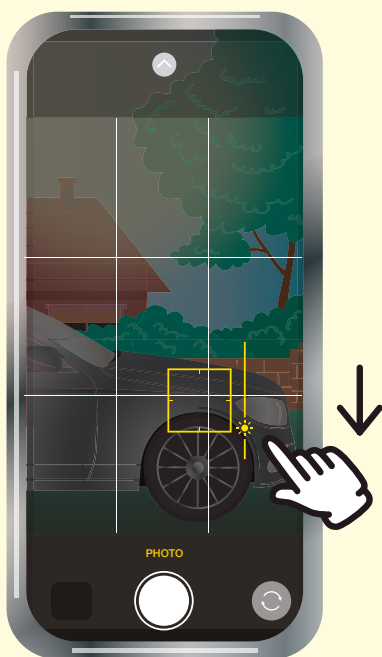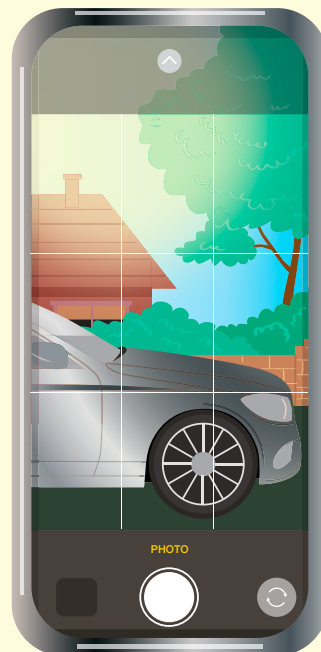
Shooting

- On your smartphone, open your camera application. If you have multiple lenses on your phone, use your standard or telephoto camera lens – avoid using your wide-angle lens as this diminishes the quality of the image.
- Darken your scene so you only capture the brightest parts by tapping on the screen and swiping down to decrease the exposure. Take as many photos as you like, adjusting your compositions, scene or subject matter based on what you like.

Editing

- Open your favourite photograph in your smartphone editing app and begin by adjusting the settings to your preferences. You can do this by touching the icons, such as BRILLIANCE and HIGHLIGHTS, and dragging the bar left to increase, or right to decrease.
- Add drama to your photograph by increasing the CONTRAST. This will make the colours in your image more intense. Now adjust the SATURATION to manipulate the colours to your liking.
- Decrease the WARMTH to add blue to your photograph. This will give your photograph a moonlit effect.
- You're finished. **Now practise, repeat and experiment!**

For more inspiration, search 'photography' at ngv.melbourne/ collection

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