Getting into the flow

A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO HELP YOU GET STARTED WITH OBSCURA

When it comes to shooting a Lensbaby lens, it seems like everybody focuses on the technical side of the lens (I'll talk more about it later, so hang tight!), and with good reason and intention. In fact, I too put a lot of emphasis on how to shoot Lensbaby lens and share the final images with the world.

Why?

Because it's an essential part of leveling up your shooting skills and creating emotionally impactful images.

However, I've noticed that it's easier to focus on what's wrong and feel disappointed than take as long as it needs, so that you can get good at what you're doing, improve more and more and keep getting more and more insights.

So, let's get into it.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO GET INTO THE CREATIVE FLOW SHOOTING OBSCURA?

First things first, get a positive addiction. Seriously, get obsessed shooting Obscura.

Some people are not as happy with their images as they want them to be. They say, *"It's hard to focus, it's not what I expected, I don't get the same images that I saw other people do."* If that's true, I know lot's of people don't get what they want.

But I also know lots of people do. Because they try again and again until they succeed. Reasons and excuses won't get you where you want to go. Now, you got to take on that mindset and ask yourself, *"**How long do I want to take to get to that point where I start creating magic?**"*

Next, get clear on why you are doing this. Why is it important for you to create extraordinary images? Yes, shooting Lensbaby Obscura is a different workflow than you're used to but it's not necessarily a good or a bad thing.

Don't you have some area in your life, where there is something that you do other people think is hard, but you've done it so often and you like it so much that it's so easy for you. That's how you mastered it. That's where you want to get with Obscura. So, how are you going to get there?

Dig deep down inside yourself and find your reason. You can't truly commit yourself to something if you're not passionate about it. When you start doubting yourself and say, "I've tried, it didn't work, I've failed," come back to your reason and do what it takes to stay in the game.

Finally, commit to doing the work. Do tons and tons of tests. Make it a point to go out and shoot. Do not wait until you have a perfect trip or an ideal client session. Get that muscle memory going. Power through all of those beginner level mistakes. Start really small and work your way up to something bigger. Commit to incremental improvements.

You don't go to a gym for a weekend and stay fit for the rest of your life. You train four times a week, eat healthy and treat yourself as a precious object.

Same approach here! With use and lots of repetition your images will become more impressive as will your level of creativity.

THE HIDDEN TRAPS

Let's talk about some traps you can fall into here because shooting extraordinary comes from actual shooting.

Trap #1 – when you get obsessed with learning

Do you read blogs with tips and watch video tutorials on YouTube over and over and over and over again but you can't really remember the last time you picked up your camera?

Yeah... You're obsessed with learning. So many good articles and tutorials. You say, *"if I watch enough I am going to be nasty good!"*

Nobody ever learned how to drive a car by sitting in the passenger seat and watching other people drive. Don't let your learning lead to knowledge. Let your learning lead to action. Knowledge is your recourse. it's not your power. It's potential power. Extraordinary images come from actual shooting.

Nobody cares what you know and understand. You have to be able to take that understanding and put into practice.

Once you have knowledge you can do things other people can't do. But only if you get yourself into practice. You have to feel the lens with your hands and look through it with your eyes.

You need the repetition of actually doing the thing. There is no video on this planet that can show you what it feels like to actually shoot Obscura.

The muscle memory of setting a lens, going through the settings on your camera, recognizing a potentially interesting scene, and knowing what setting to check. You have to do it physically so many times that eventually you don't have to think about it.

Trap #2 – when you think you got this

If you got to shoot a perfect event on a perfect location shooting Obscura for the first time, you're going to waste everybody's time because you're not going to have the slightest idea of what you are doing.

You're going to make a whole bunch of mistakes on that session that you could be making right now for free shooting camera tests. For a week or so you could have shot five or six tests and learned ten times more in the same time frame.

Allow yourself to grow into bigger projects. Work your way up to them.

Trap #3 – when you have an excuse

"I don't have anyone to shoot." Don't use people, shoot still objects, buildings, street signs, trees, flowers, cars, clouds, the list can go on and on. You don't need anyone to learn the basics.

"I don't live in a beautiful city." You don't need a beautiful backdrop to create beauty. Pay attention to light. Observe how and where the light and shadows fall within the frame.

"I don't have anyone to support me." It's hard to talk to your family, friends, parents about creativity versus talking to people who really understand the space and kind of be a mentor to you. Try to find people that you can be honest with and have those type of conversations about.

"I'm not creative enough." We all have creativity inside of us and we need to unlock that creativity and let it out.

"I'm not a professional photographer, I'm not good enough... etc." If you want to level up your shooting skills you get to challenge yourself. You need to take that uncomfortable action to learn and do something new. Push yourself outside of your comfort zone. Sitting on the fence doing nothing means zero progress. Better do it wrong so you can learn and grow.

LIGHTING TIPS FOR SHOOTING OBSCURA

I discovered that **the best pinhole images need really bright days with lots of hard shadows**. With this high-intensity light you illuminate your subject or part of your subject and throw everything else into darkness. Dramatic shadows give these types of images a really bold look.

How do you shoot Obscura in bright light?

→ Make sure the sun is shining directly onto your subject, which means the sun is behind you. As a bonus you get deep blue skies and all the vibrant colours surrounding your subject.

→ Try to capture the whole scene instead of attempting a portrait. To best utilize light observe how and where the light and shadows fall within the frame.

→ You might want to use a darker background so the subject looks brighter and looms against the background.

→ Be on the lookout for dappled light or pockets of light. Observe how the light falls on your subject and how it casts shadows. Using this light will result in more dramatic images and help to create layers of depth.
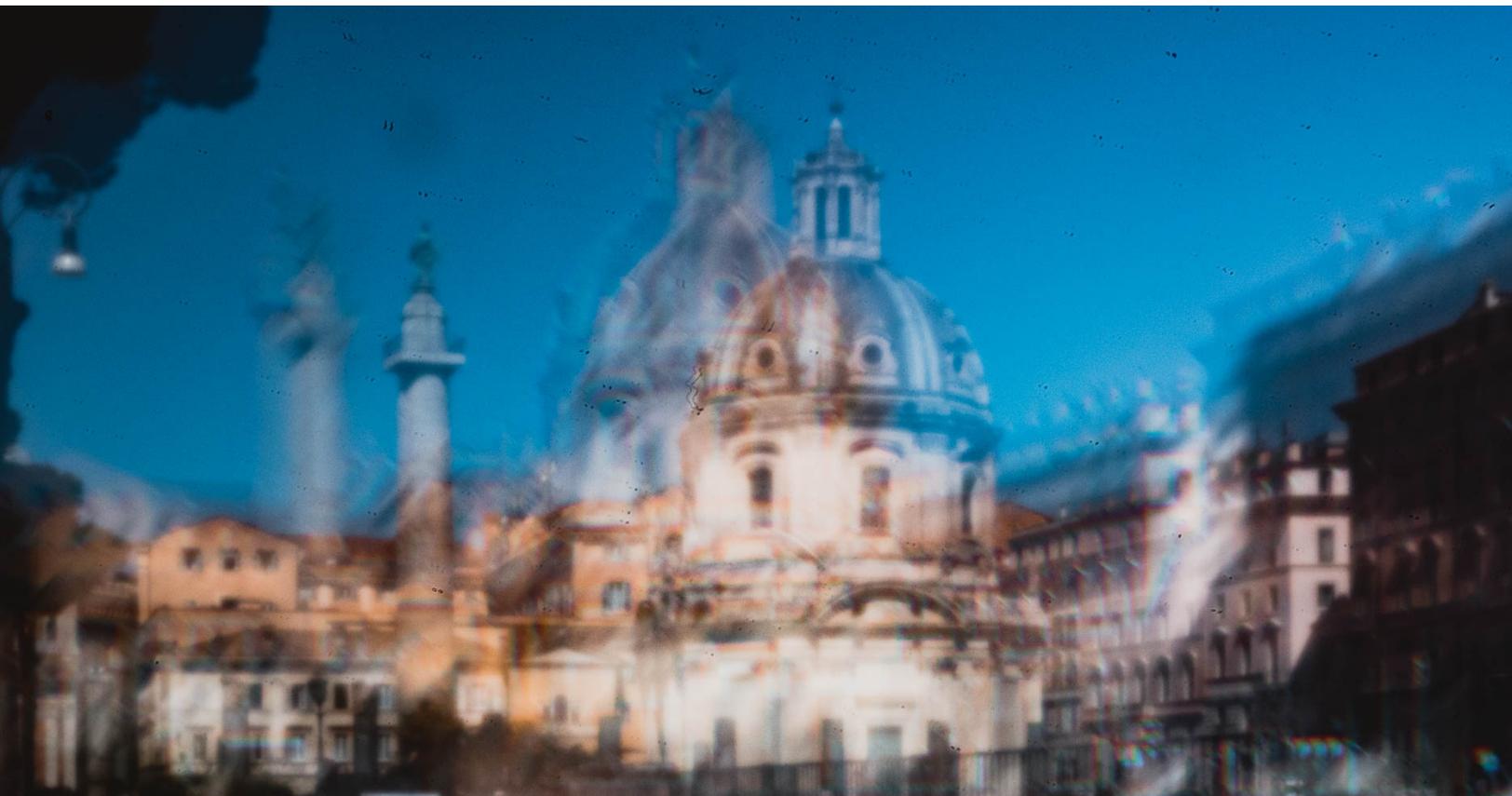
Sometimes though it is not possible or desirable to shoot with the sun shining directly onto your subject. Like, when the sun is bothering your subject's eyes, or you prefer to have the sun behind your subject. Like this you may end up **shooting with a backlight or sidelight.**

→ Be aware when shooting with backlight or sidelight, both lighting conditions cast strong shadows on your subject's face. You can try your subject to face a reflective surface (a concrete floor or a white fence), it will help to throw a little light onto the face of your subject if you want to show facial expressions.

→ Play with shadows and create an intense mood by projecting the shadow onto a lighter background. It brings an air of mystery to your subject and creates outstanding outlines.

→ Try dark silhouettes in urban environments. Such shots tend to create a feeling of tension. In order to do this you will need to backlight your subject. This will give an emphasis to the subject's features and a slight idea of the location. The very same scene can look absolutely different when using different exposures.

If you are **shooting Obscura by the window**, it is preferably to shoot earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon when the light is not too harsh or too soft because harsh light can create unwanted highlights and too soft light can take away the dramatic mood leading to soft images. Depending on how your subject is lit you can add reflectors to fill any unwanted shadows on the opposite side of your subject.

Here are 3 simple and easy steps to help you shoot by the window:

Step 1: Place your subject as close to the light source (a window) as possible. You may want to close curtains to modify the light creating a pocket of light. Pay attention to the intensity of light. The brighter the light the more dramatic shadows you get.

Step 2: Expose for the lightest part of your subject, for example their faces, embracing the shadows within the rest of the frame. The dramatic shadows help create a mysterious effect.

Step 3: Take a test shot and check the brightness of your image. If it's too bright, drop the ISO. If it's too dark, increase the exposure time, play with your shutter speed.

CAMERA SETTINGS TIPS

Obscura is a really dark lens and it has really tiny aperture settings. You'll be closing your aperture down all the way to a f/161. **Most of the time you'll be shooting at a really high ISO**, especially when in open shade or on a cloudy overcast day.

→ It's quite important to have a camera body that enables you to take good quality images at a very high ISO.

→ For your Obscura images to look good and the way you want them to look, you might want to shoot in manual mode so you can take control over your camera.

Here are some settings that you can start with:

→ **Aperture:** you get three aperture modes to choose from – f/32, f/64 or f/161. Obscura comes with three optics, each of them has a fixed aperture.

→ **Shutter speed:** If you're shooting a video at 24 fps, your ideal shutter speed would be 1/50th of a second; 50fps – 1/100th of a second. Always double your frame rate as a shutter speed because you want to mimic motion the same way the human eye sees in real life.

If you're shooting still images have a shutter speed greater than (1/focal length) taking into account the crop factor so you can avoid too much blur when shooting handheld. So, for example if you are shooting with Obscura 50mm on a full-frame camera body, set your aperture to 1/60th of a second or 1/80th of a second. Adjust shutter speed as necessary for the desired effect.

→ **ISO:** Adjust your ISO depending on the intensity of light.

→ **Metering mode:** Spot metering works great when shooting Obscura because we are focused on just having our subject lit and other areas dark, so you get the exposure calculated right on your subject.

GETTING INTO THE FLOW 30-DAY CHALLENGE

→ **Step 1: Watch a training, watch it twice**
Watch a training or learn something new about shooting Obscura.

→ **Step 2: Pick up your camera and take lots of images**
Pick up Obscura and go take 100s of images practicing what you've learned. Mess with your settings, watch how each of them affect your exposure.

→ **Step 3: Import images into editing app, review them**
Upload images to your editing application, review them. Take notes of any mistakes. There will be quite a few.

→ **Step 4: Watch a training, shoot another set, learn from mistakes**
Watch another training or read an article. Shoot another set of images. Learn from the mistakes you made in the last session.

→ **Step 5: Do it for 30 days on repeat**
Get curious to explore and experiment. Enjoy the process!
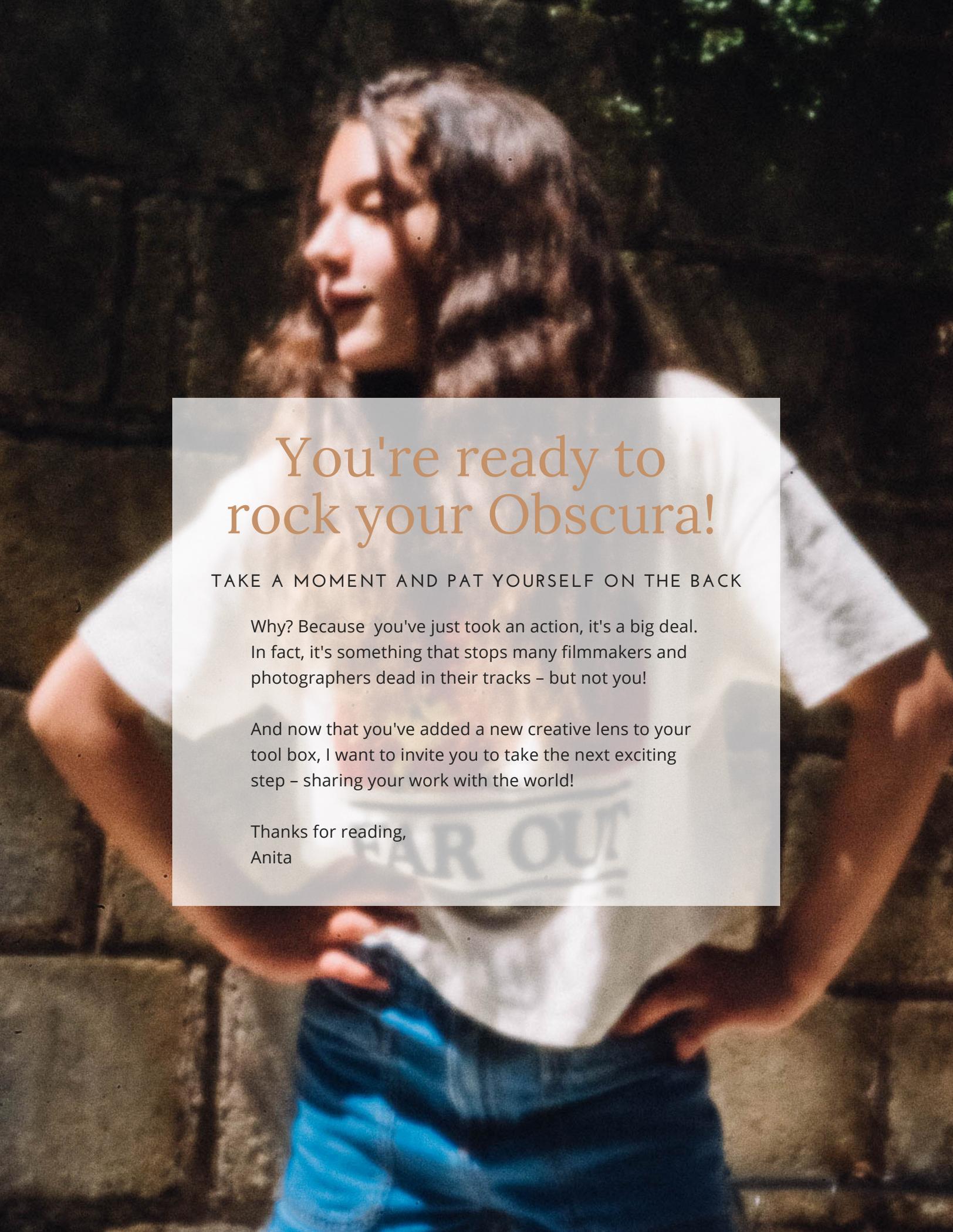
You're ready to rock your Obscura!

TAKE A MOMENT AND PAT YOURSELF ON THE BACK

Why? Because you've just took an action, it's a big deal.
In fact, it's something that stops many filmmakers and
photographers dead in their tracks – but not you!

And now that you've added a new creative lens to your
tool box, I want to invite you to take the next exciting
step – sharing your work with the world!

Thanks for reading,
Anita