

Book introduction

for

"Gathering Light" by Doug & Eileen Leunig



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The images in this book are not photographs.

Photographs capture reality. These images capture imaginings.

We took exposures using a digital camera and flashlights. But no single frame represents what the scene looks like. Each image is a gathering of light and time. Each image tells what the place feels like.

Gathering Light is a collection of surprises. Even its inspiration came to us unexpectedly—on a morning dog walk. As we passed by a neighbor working in his yard, he asked “Have you guys seen any of the light graffiti on the Internet?”

“No,” we replied, curious.

“Kids point lights at the camera and write words or make pictures. There’s some pretty wild stuff out there,” he told us. It brought to our minds the photo of Pablo Picasso in his shorts drawing in the air with a flashlight.

We walked on and with each step that simple conversation sparked an idea that grew: “What if we pointed the light away from the camera?”

That night, we set out to try our idea. With strobe in hand, we went off to the woods with our camera. The test only lasted a few minutes—as long as the old batteries in the strobe lasted—but we had our answer. We could turn the common into the uncommon.

Now at night you will frequently find us setting up our camera and light-painting. We focus the flashlight on what catches our eye—the curve of a tree limb, the repeating lines of a tropical fern, the swaying of cattails in a light breeze. We cast shadows to express the significance of objects and share the mystery and wonderment of each place. We spend hours at a site and take hundreds of exposures. We slow down long enough to hear and feel the tiny details that make each place fascinating and magic.

During the day, we sit down at our computers with these digital palettes. We gather the light from hundreds of exposures to create our expression of the place and our experience. The result is theatrical-style art that more closely relates to movies than reality.

As we have worked on this collection, we have come to expect the unexpected. While capturing “Banner Marsh,” hundreds of migrating birds came to rest for the night in the tall grasses. Simultaneously, as if on some unseen cue, all the birds would stop cackling and settle into a reverent silence. In “Above El Mirador,” vultures surprisingly came to rest on a dead tree. And the unpredictable didn’t just occur in nature, as you can see in the train that came through while shooting “Metropolis.” All of these surprises climaxed with the explosion of the Arenal Volcano while we were light-painting in Costa Rica.

As you turn the pages of Gathering Light, you’ll find surprises, too. Look closely at the details and you may find shadows of ourselves and discover lighting artifacts. We hope you spend time letting your imagination play in our parks and gardens and urbanscapes, and capture imaginings of your own.

Doug and Eileen Leunig

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See ["Gathering Light" by Doug and Eileen Leunig on Blurb.com](#)