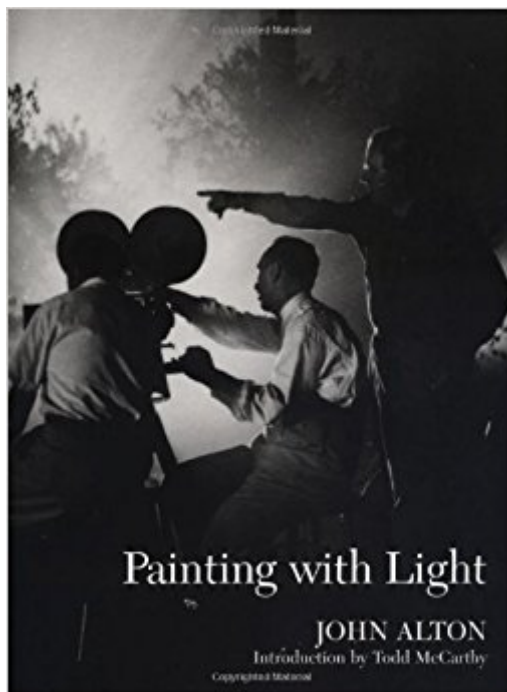


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# Painting With Light



## Synopsis

Few cinematographers have had as decisive an impact on the cinematic medium as John Alton. Best known for his highly stylized film noir classics *T-Men*, *He Walked by Night*, and *The Big Combo*, Alton earned a reputation during the 1940s and 1950s as one of Hollywood's consummate craftsmen through his visual signature of crisp shadows and sculpted beams of light. No less renowned for his virtuoso color cinematography and deft appropriation of widescreen and Technicolor, he earned an Academy Award in 1951 for his work on the musical *An American in Paris*. First published in 1949, and long out of print since then, *Painting With Light* remains one of the few truly canonical statements on the art of motion picture photography, an unrivalled historical document on the workings of the postwar, American cinema. In simple, non-technical language, Alton explains the job of the cinematographer and explores how lighting, camera techniques, and choice of locations determine the visual mood of film. Todd McCarthy's introduction, written especially for this edition, provides an overview of Alton's biography and career and explores the influence of his work on contemporary cinematography.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Painting With Light* was the first book on cinematography written by a major Hollywood cameraman. Published in 1949 and now put back into print, it is one of the best and most unusual books in the field. Written with good humor and full of helpful diagrams and photographs, it is certainly the most entertaining. Its technological discussions are dated, but *Painting With Light* remains relevant

because its primary focus is on light itself and the many complex ways the camera crew can manipulate it. This new edition contains a biographical introduction by Todd McCarthy, who describes how the man who shot the strikingly colorful ballet sequence in *An American in Paris* also helped define the stark, haunting style of the film noir.

"Provides fascinating insights into the mechanisms of the studio system." (Ian Gilchrist Reel Ink 2013-06-03) --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

As a former professional stills photographer I can relate to many, if not all of the lighting discussions in this book. After all, in a way light is light. Nothing much has changed there. What has changed enormously is the move to a more natural 'lighting', i.e. away from the very theatrical lighting often displayed as examples in this book. There is a lot of great, detailed explanation on how to light in various situations but the result is something that looks pretty dated nowadays. It is an essential book for a grounding in basic lighting, in an era, but...I don't see things lit the same way...today. And with respect to my American friends, some things are explained in a long-winded way that I got in the first couple of paragraphs. We don't need endless variations of what was just said. A lot of people have defended the book, almost religiously, as if somehow it could not possibly be less-than-perfect. Well, it probably was for the time. Just not now. It is an essential library addition, but as a go-to book...I'm not so sure.

This is the classic by John Alton. You will learn those essential theories on lighting which answer all or at least many of your questions. I've read so many books on this subject, and this is the first that really explained how to light to make it 'look like a movie.' I encourage you to purchase this. You will learn some essential theory you need to be a pro, or to understand cinematography. Even though this was written years ago, the techniques are still used today. You can see a great example of this style in Spielberg's *Lincoln*, and in just about every other movie made today. An essential book for the cineaste, and a good read.

I've not made it all the way through this book, however, what I have read has been great. As an independent filmmaker, it seems that the term "independent film" means "crap." I don't want to make movies to express myself in some abstract way that people associate independent with. I want to make films that are entertaining and fun to watch. I enjoy watching movies and I want to deliver the same feeling to other people. This book has helped increase the production quality of our work to

help get rid of some of the "independent" look.

The book was recommended by a neighbour and friend, Nico Dufort, who worked on 'Happy Feet Two', and who had duties which spanned technical and creative work on the movie. The book's author, John Alton, insisted that still photographers and cinematographers are primarily creatives. He also gives many examples of working quickly and innovatively, whilst honouring the beauty of the actors and scenes, indoors and outdoors. Mr Alton achieved an enviable list of film noir credits in particular but his range extended to various genres and to colour as well as black and white: He asserted that black and white were colours despite the orthodox classification. Mr Alton also understood the need for openness to other artistic experiences. His life spanned several continents and very different cultures and is interesting in its own right. Perhaps the greatest strength of 'Painting with Light' is the clarity and generosity of technical knowledge freely explained with diagrams and methodologies set out for different types of scenes and lighting conditions.

John Alton knew lighting, and has a great grasp on teaching it. His book, although old, still has momentum in the basics of lighting and even a few cheap ways to make effects in photography that are applicable to this day. Even if you know all the info in this book its a great historic read to see how the masters hashed it out in the adolescence of film. He shows you the complete A-Z of motion photography from set building, character, and the powerful effect of light when used correctly.

This book came highly recommended to me by Shane Hurlbut ASC. It contains fundamental cinematography techniques, advanced techniques, and a wealth of information regarding just that - painting with light. None of the info here has changed... there may be more controlable light sources these days, but light remains the same as does it's application. I recommend this to anyone, novice to expert, that has a passion for cinematography and wants to keep their sword ever-sharpened... great read!

Thank you, Martin Scorsese, for recommending this book. Alton's work is so remarkable, it's a pity he wasn't able to successfully work within the system to create more films. He did receive an Academy Award for his cinematography on "An American in Paris," but was largely shunned by the industry. Just watch the film noir classic, "The Big Combo," and you'll see what I'm talking about.

Everything OK. Thanks.

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