



# Nature in the Abstract

Figure 1: Mourning Cloak  
Wing Abstract



By Barbara Burke

Photography is the vehicle through which I have been able to capture the beauty of nature and share it with others. Since my retirement, I have found that taking close-up images of flowers, leaves, butterflies and other garden critters is one of the most satisfying aspects of photography. Most often the overall properties of color and shape of natural objects are emphasized. However, to me, an equally important, integral part of the beauty in nature is the subject's underlying patterns, textures and shapes. Using my D7500 Nikon® camera with Nikkor 100mm f/2.8 macro lens, I'm able to record the underlying structures, patterns, and textures. The result often makes unique, beautiful, and compelling images.

Recently, I've started transforming some of my close-up images into abstract art using Photoshop layers. I begin by opening an image file in Photoshop Camera Raw, then Photoshop® itself and selecting out the desired portion. I have

found that selections are most effective when the edges are continuous. At this point, the flaws in the image are removed usually using the clone stamp tool. I save the image as a PSD file after each change I make in the image. Next, I make a copy of the selection layer and open it in TOPAZ® Studio 2 and then in "Glow." I use the "Glow" sliders to increase the color richness of the selection and sometimes its sharpness. On returning to Photoshop, I save the PSD file. I make a copy of the "Glow" layer.

Leaving the original file open, I open a new canvas of appropriate size (7"x 5", 10"x10", etc.) and geometric shape (rectangle, square). Using the move tool, I transfer a copy of the "Glow" selection layer to the new canvas and decide on its dimensions (1500px by 1200px for example)—whatever size looks like the best fit for the project in the canvas size chosen. I write the dimensions down as a reference. These are only needed if the original "Glow" selection layer is flipped horizontally or vertically—this is done in the

original, open Photoshop file and then moved back into the new canvas.

Now the creation of abstract art based on nature can begin! To make the image in *Figure 1*, I took the original butterfly wing (which became the top left part of the image), flipped it horizontally to make the top right portion, then took each side of the top portion and flipped it vertically, essentially resulting in a symmetrical, two-way reflection that I found pleasing. (Each of these flips were done on the copy of the original selection in the original file, then brought back into the new canvas and sized to the appropriate dimensions.) The background was chosen to approximate the blue-grey color in the wing itself.

In *Figure 2*, I copied the initial layer (top center) of the selected butterfly wing two times and rotated each to the right; then went back to the copy of the original selection layer in the original file and flipped the initial layer horizontal (top center), brought it back into the new canvas resized it, copied it two times and rotated each to the left, giving the star-shaped image.

*Figure 3* shows a monarch wing that was copied from the original five times and rotated around a central point from right to left, resulting in a floral-like motif.



Figure 2: Turquoise Wing Star

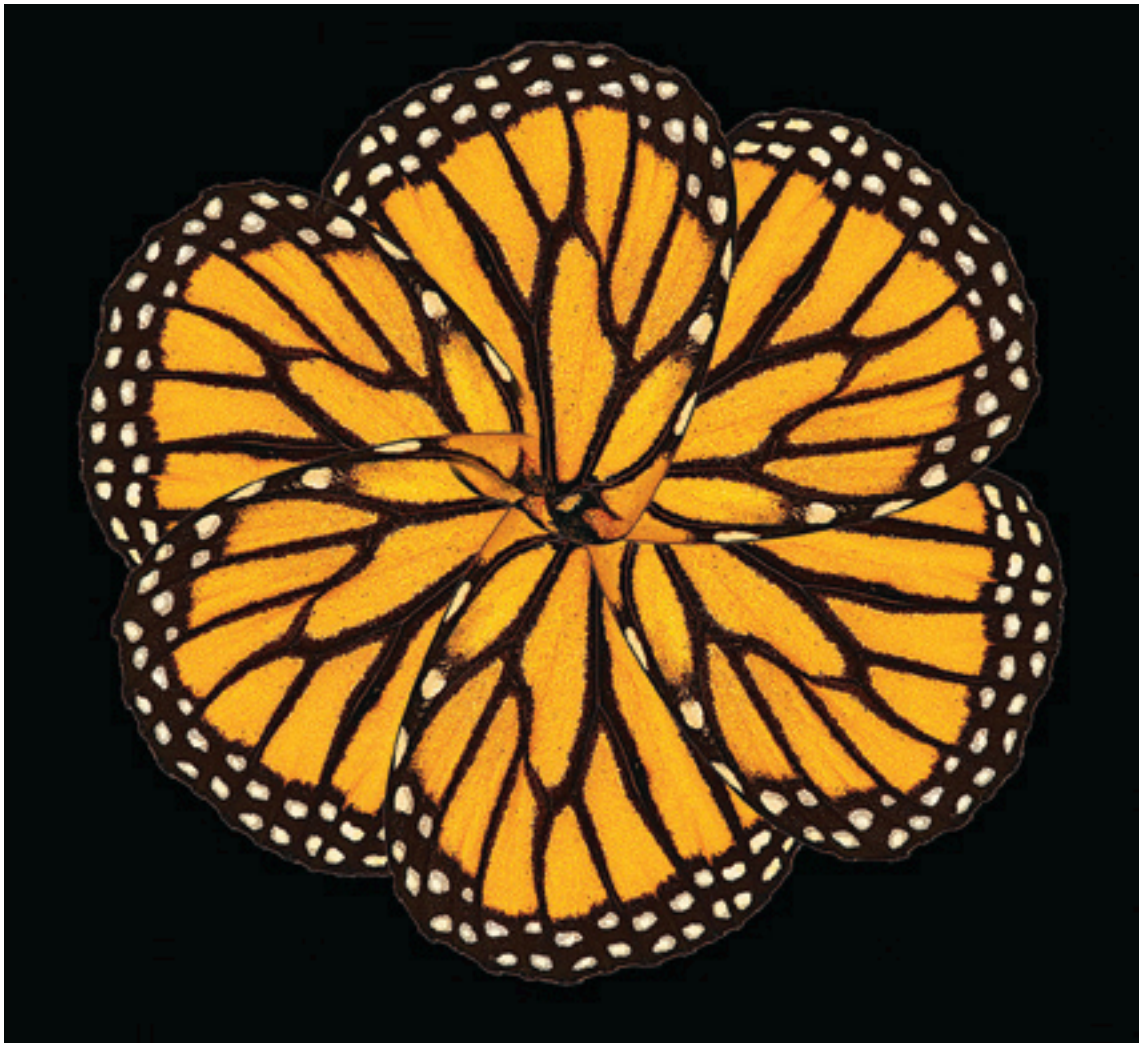


Figure 3: Monarch Wing Floral



Figure 4: Buckeye Butterfly Wing Abstract

Figure 4 was constructed from the underside of a Buckeye butterfly wing, showing its more subtle pattern and texture. The top center wing was copied five times and rotated around a central point from right to left.

The final Figure (5) was composed using a plant leaf that was rotated from right to left. Layers one and two are the top verticals; layers three and four are the horizontals below; the next four layers below are the forty-five degree points; and the final eight layers below are the twenty-three degree points. The result is a circular abstract leaf pattern. The final step was to clone a portion of the leaf base and form a center point of interest.

I hope that photographers will find the examples and tools I've described useful as they develop their own, unique style of abstracting nature. ■

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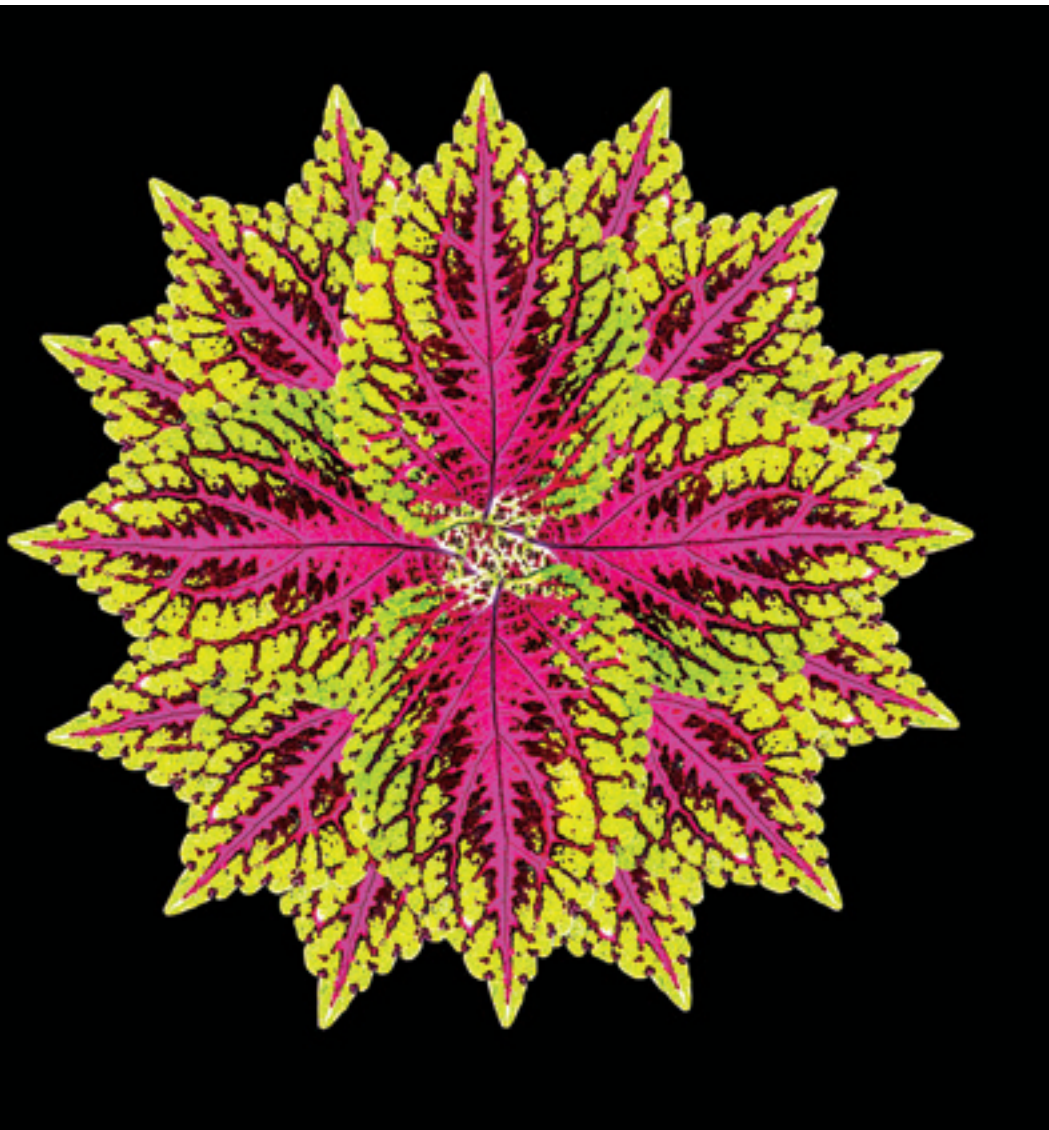


Figure 5: Caladium Crimson Leaf Floral

**Barbara Burke** is heavily involved in the Southern California Photography scene. She is currently a member of the Coachella Valley Desert Camera Club (CVDCC). She was previously a member of the ACES (Anaheim Camera Enthusiasts) photo club, where she was treasurer for three years and secretary for two years. She is also a member of the Southern California Council of Camera Clubs (S4C), board and chair of the Monochrome Division. In 2020, she earned the S4C Associate Honor (AS4C) award.

Barbara is primarily interested in macro photography. She enjoys studying and recording the array of colors and structural patterns of flowers and other natural objects. Her goal is to find camera views that best show the unique qualities of color, structure and composition of each individual object photographed. She enjoys experimenting with different methods that showcase natural flowers and other objects in rather unusual ways. She uses a Nikon D7500 camera with a 105 mm macro f/2.8 Nikkor lens for much of her work.