LET'S PRACTICE

July Will Be Composite Month

Our special topic in July will be composites—creating an image using elements from more than one image (preferably your own).

There will be several Photoshop tools and techniques to use in creating your composites—Layers, masks, selections etc. This issue will address a couple of these.

Bob has asked about replacing or enhancing a drab sky. He also asked about how to make a "ghostly" figure. Some of the techniques I'll use to demonstrate can also be used while creating your composites.

This issue will cover selections and masking and maybe more if I get the time.

Have fun—and Let's Practice.
Marti

Choosing Your Images for Composites

When planning your composite, look over your images and get ideas on what you can create with them. Have a couple of ideas in mind while looking at your images. That way, if things don't work out quite right with one idea, there will be another to fall back on without a lot of thought.

Look for objects with clean lines—objects that contrast well with their background.   This will make your selection process easier.

Be aware of sizing. If you choose a macro of a flower to add to a scenic, it's going to be way out of proportion. Of course there is always Transform to fix that.

Think about your colors and what will be pleasing to the eye. Or perhaps, you want it bold with clashing colors. Either way, it pays to think about your overall objective with the image.

Sky Replacement and Selections

There are many ways to make selections. If you have an image with good contrasts between background and subject, you might go with Quick Selection tool or Magic Wand. You can also use Lasso and even the Pen tool.

In the following demo, I used Quick Mask and followed it with the magic wand tool to get at the smaller areas.

Bob had asked about replacing the sky in this image:

For the selection, I clicked on Quick Mask and masked out the bird, the nest and the branches. Once I had made my selections, I hit Q and it turned the selection to marching ants. While in the marching ants mode, I used the Magic Wand tool to refine the areas around the branches. Use the "Add to Selection" button to add the little pieces between the branches to the selection.

I Inversed the selection so that instead of the background, the selection was of the bird and the nest.

Next, I wanted to pick out a sky. I could have chosen a sky image out of my collection but in this case, I decided to make a sky.

I turned off the layered selection.

I chose the background layer to be active and then made a New Layer and then chose a color that I thought would make a decent looking sky color.

Next, I went to Filter then Render, then Clouds. This gave me a patterned background that looks sort of like a sky would look.

After getting the right looking sky, I made the selection layer active again and this was the result:

I did a little sharpening and some Levels and Saturation work on the nest area.

These same techniques can be used while creating your composites.

Magic Wand Tool

The Magic Wand tool can be quite helpful in making selections when there is a definite distinction between the background and the subject. NOTE: Magic Wand cannot be used with a bitmap image or on 32 bits-per-channel images.

Magic Wand has four options:
    New Selection (for making a new selections
    Add to Selection (for adding new portions to an existing selection)
    Subtract from Selection (for removing portions of an existing selection)
    Intersect with Selection

Tolerance—Determines the color range of selected pixels. Enter a value in pixels, ranging from 0 to 255. A low value selects the few colors very similar to the pixel you click. A higher value selects a broader range of colors.

Anti-aliased—Creates a smoother-edged selection

Contiguous—Selects only adjacent areas using the same colors. Otherwise, all pixels in the entire image using the same colors are selected.

Sample All Layers—Selects colors using data from all the visible layers. Otherwise, the Magic Wand tools selects colors from the active layer only.

Move Tool

Most likely, you will be using the Move Tool during your creation of the composite. Once you have made your selection and want to move it to another image, you will do that with the Move Tool.

Have both images open.
Click on the Move Tool.
Drag the selection over to the other image holding the left mouse button. When you get to the other image, release the mouse and drop the selection into the main image. This will create another layer.

Each of your composite pieces should be on a separate layer. This way you can turn them on and off as desired.

Making a "Ghostly" Figure

For a "ghostly" figure, make your selection, drag it into your original image. Again, it will be on its own layer.

Lower the opacity on the layer as desired.

Can you find the face in the trees?