LET'S PRACTICE

Filters and Plugins—Part One

I'm planning a series on filters and plugins for Photoshop. Any ideas for future topics are welcome. Soon to come will be Polar Coordinates, Render-Clouds, and High Pass. Other ideas have been: Liquify, Artistic filters (that will be a whole issue in itself), custom filters and using a "double stroke".

Pixel Bender

To start off, a question was raised about Pixel Bender. This is a free download from Adobe®: http://labs.adobe.com/technologies/pixelbenderplugin/. While I can't explain exactly how it works, I will show you various effects that can be created using this plugin filter.

Definition of Plugin:
In computing, a **plug-in** (or plugin) is a set of software components that adds specific abilities to a larger software application. If supported, plug-ins enable customizing the functionality of an application. For example, plug-ins are commonly used in web browsers to play video, scan for viruses, and display new file types. Well-known plug-ins examples include Adobe Flash Player, QuickTime, and Microsoft Silverlight.

Pixel Bender works a lot like the Filter Gallery in Photoshop. You have a group of choices shown in the examples on the following pages. After you install a plugin, you will find it listed in the Filters menu toward the bottom. Another example of a plugin is Topaz Labs and their bundle of programs. There are numerous plugins available and some of them are free.

Pixel Bender is available for Photoshop CS5 and CS4. So here we go taking a look at some of the weird effects you can achieve using Pixel Bender.

The selections in Pixel Bender (and there are a few I won't show because, frankly, I couldn't figure out how—or what I would do with them):
Circle Splash—Convergence—Fisheye—Hole—Kaleidoscope—Oil Paint—Pixelate—RippleBlocks—Smudge—Spherize—SpinRadialBlur—Tube View—Twirl.

Some of these effects can also be duplicated in Photoshop filters.

Have fun—and Let's Practice.
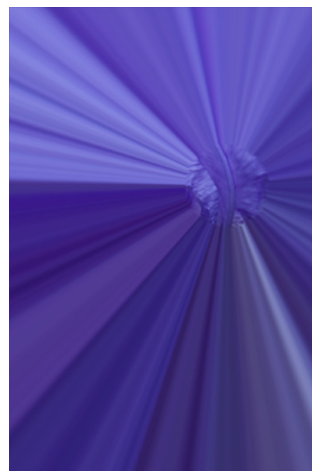Marti

Pixel Bender from Adobe®

Here is the base image I'm starting with. All the subsequent images are variations using Pixel Bender.
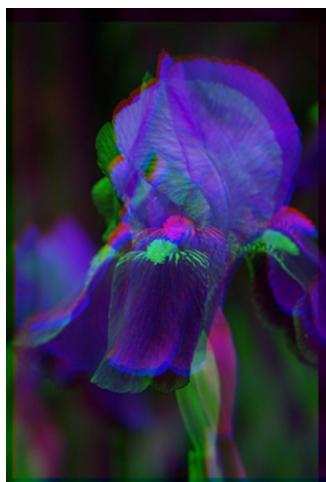

The first selection you have when you enter the Pixel Bender Gallery is the "Circle Splash". This creates a circle around a part of the image. You can maneuver the sliders so that the circle is anywhere on the image...up, down, centered, right, left, ...anywhere you wish.

The size of the circle also has a slider so you can increase or decrease the side of the circle. What is inside the circle will remain relatively undistorted.

Here is a relatively small radius circle and quite a different look to the image.
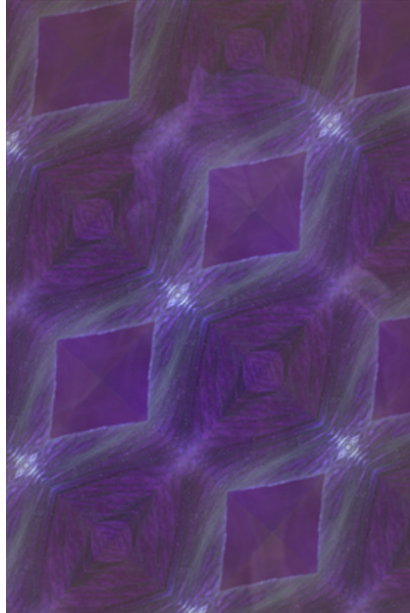
From Circle Splash the next is "Convergence". This does separation of the blue-red-green colors. To be honest, I don't know why this is used—but some people like it.

This one is called "Hole". It puts a hole wherever you place the circle. In this case, I used a headshot of myself on a layer underneath the Hole layer to create this image.

I'm sure you can think of images you have where this could be used to create interesting composites.

Pixel Bender from Adobe®

Another choice is Kaleidoscope. This filter can be used for making interesting patterns for backgrounds.

These next two images were done with the "Oil Paint" selection.

The one on the left is the more realistic version while the one on the right is a "grainy" version.
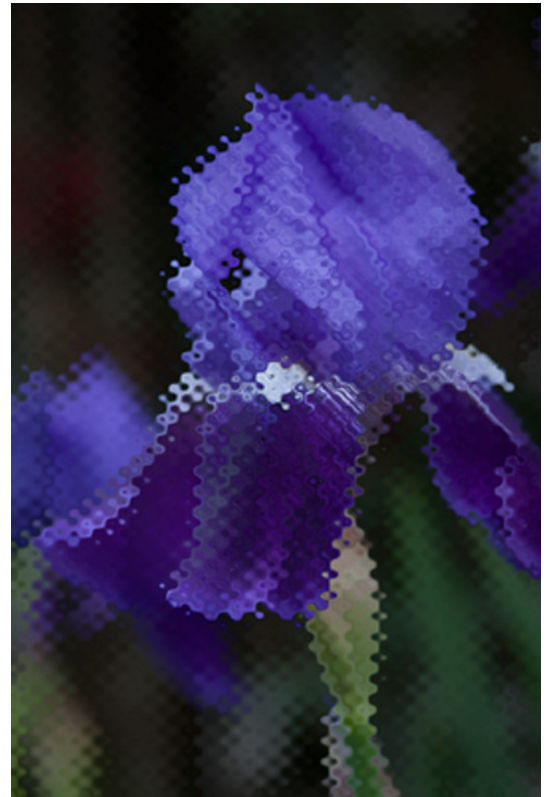
Pixel Bender from Adobe®—cont'd

RippleBlocks is the next of the choices. In all of these filters there are sliders and ways of adjusting to many different views. This is only one of them. This sort of looks like you are looking through a rippled window or piece of glass.

"Smudge" is another one that sort of reminds me of looking through distorted glass.

"SpinRadialBlur" could also be used for a pattern or background. It can be used to show motion...okay, so this was shot on a very windy day? ☺

Again, there are many adjustments that can be made to the speed, spin etc.
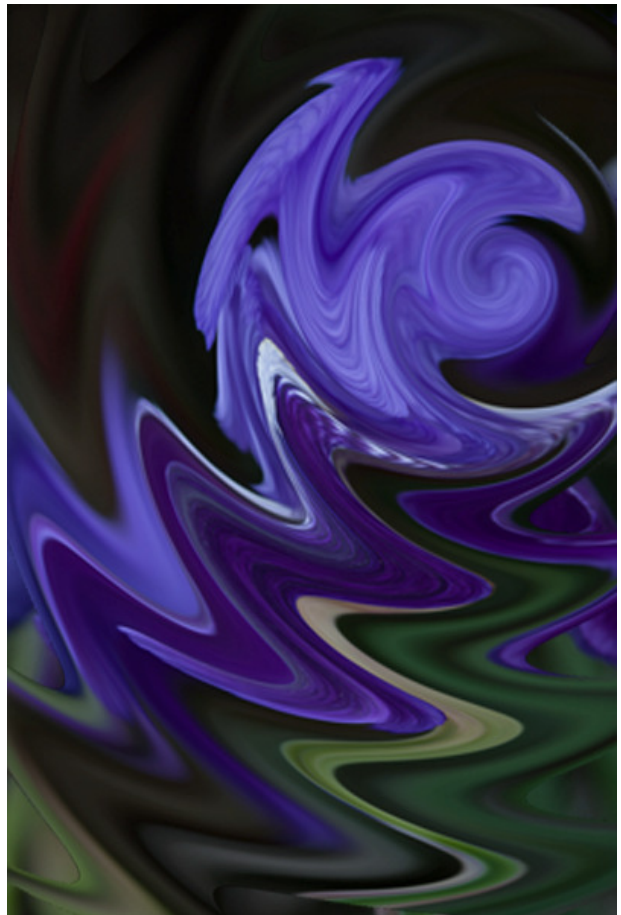
Pixel Bender from Adobe®—cont'd

Finally, "Twirl"
This creates a similar effect to the Wave filter (under Distort) in Photoshop. You can get little ripples such as the image on the left…..

Or you can get more abstract patterns such as below.

While my original may not be competition worthy, some of these Pixel Bender effects might make them interesting in a creative section of a contest.

So download Pixel Bender and have some fun with your images.