Playing with Photoshop
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Simple cut and paste composite

I am interested in exploring ways to make my photos look more interesting. I've only now starting to get into compositing with blend modes and textures, and there are LOTS of tutorials on that. Tonight I'll talk about some of the interesting things one can do with PS well short of that.

My first venture was a very simple composite of photos taken during monsoon from the top of Mt Lemmon. Two pictures from Mt Lemmon during Monsoon were okay but not particularly interesting.   I wanted to capture the mood of the clouds, the burned forest. The raven portrayed my sense of wondering what would happen in the future.


I selected the raven which was against a background of more trees. Then I pasted it onto a so-so landscape. At the time, I didn't know much about burning and dodging, so I wound up using four exposure layers with very different masks to adjust the brightness of the sky, the bird, and the trees. It's still one of my favorite photos.

Simple effects with color balance, transform

Sometimes I just played around to see what simple PS commands would do. For this, I started with a water lily and extracted it from the background. The strong contrast of the flower against the greenish water and the sharp lines made that pretty simple. I selected the flower using the quick selection tool. Then I copied and pasted it on a black background. I made two more copies, so I had three layers.   By duplicating the layers, they lined up automatically. I used the Transform tool to make them different sizes. After stacking the layers with the largest on the bottom, I went to each layer and did a different color balance adjustment. I can go back and change the colors and saturation of the layers whenever.
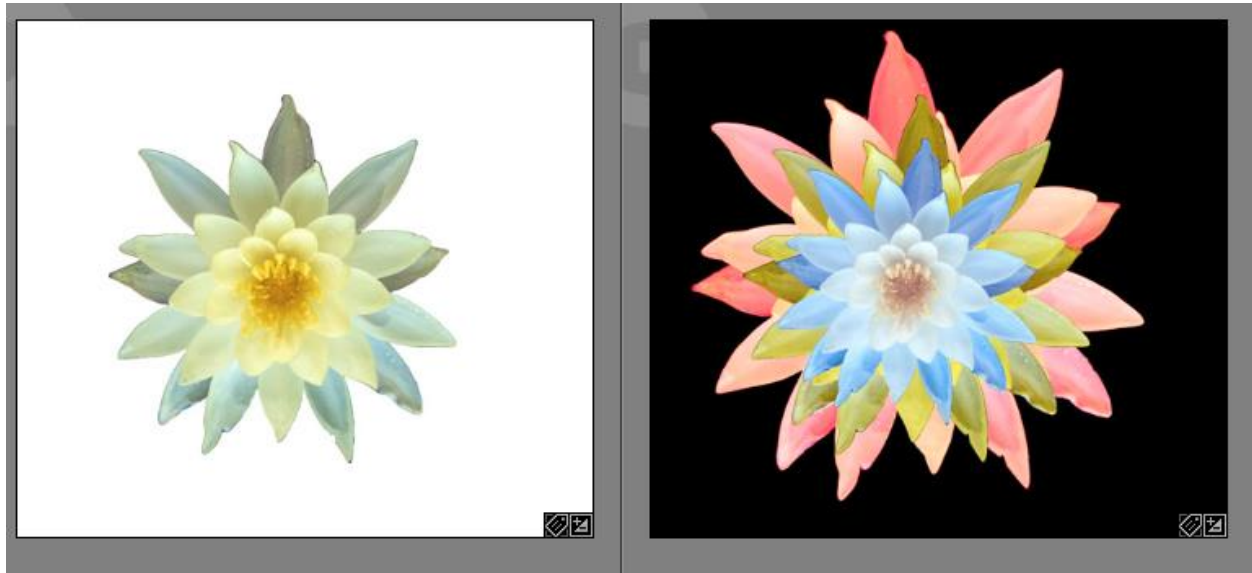
Black and white silhouettes

To isolate image:
        Copy layer
        Find edges Filter>Stylize>Find Edges
        Convert to B&W – adjustment layer, I used blue filter high contrast preset
        Stamp image to get a single layer
        Invert adjustment layer to get white on black.
        Use curves to make it more black and white, less gray.
You can do any cleanup you want – paint over white areas with black Put a clear layer, do the painting on that.

To combine the agave and the hawk:
        Create a new file with a black background.
        Paste the agave on black over the background layer. No selection needed.
        On the hawk image, use quick selection to select the background – it's all black.
        Invert the selection (to select the hawk, not the background) and copy and paste the hawk onto the new file.
        Use transform tool to adjust size, angle, position on both layers.
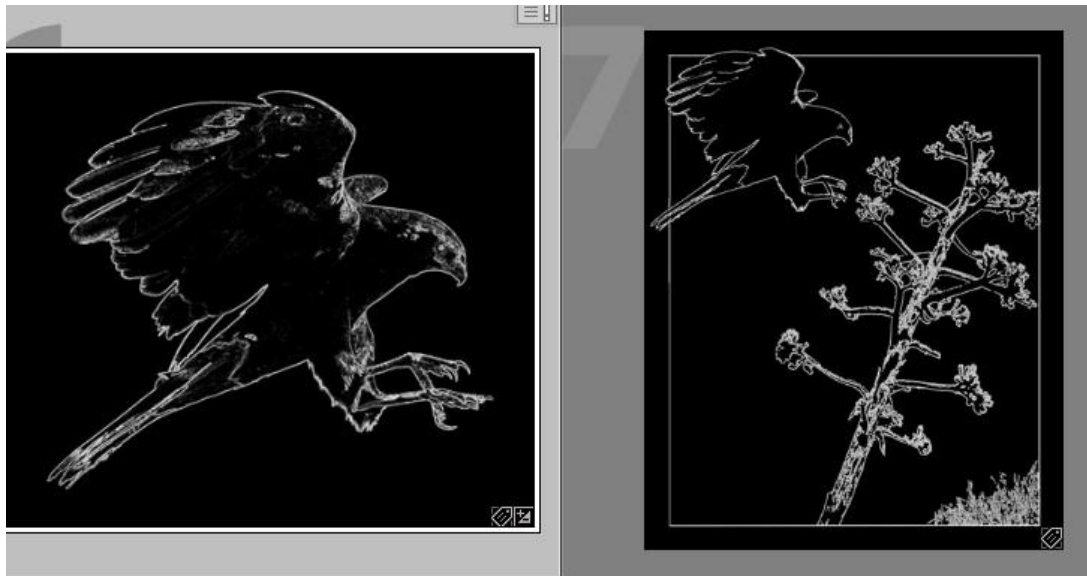
Sketch Tool

1. Open file.
2. Make a duplicate layer – Ctrl J
3. Make the duplicate layer B&W. Go to Image menu > Adjustments > Hue/Saturation, set saturation to 0. If you use an adjustment layer, you'll have to merge it with the image – the next steps won't work with an adjustment layer.
4. Duplicate the B&W image (Ctrl-J)
5. Invert the B&W image.   Image> Adjustments > Invert. You have a negative. Again, use Image> Adjustments, not an adjustment layer.
6. You now have 3 layers:
   Original
   B&W
   Duplicate B&W, inverted. (active)

7. In the Filter menu, Other> Minimum. Try a setting between 4 and 8.
8. Change the top layer blend mode from Normal to Color Dodge.
9. If you want a B&W sketch image, you can hide or delete the original color layer.
10. If you want a color sketch image, you can hide or delete the B&W layer.
11. Adjust the top layer opacity to give as much or little effect as you want.
12. Now you can use other adjustment layers to change the contrast, color balance, saturation, etc.
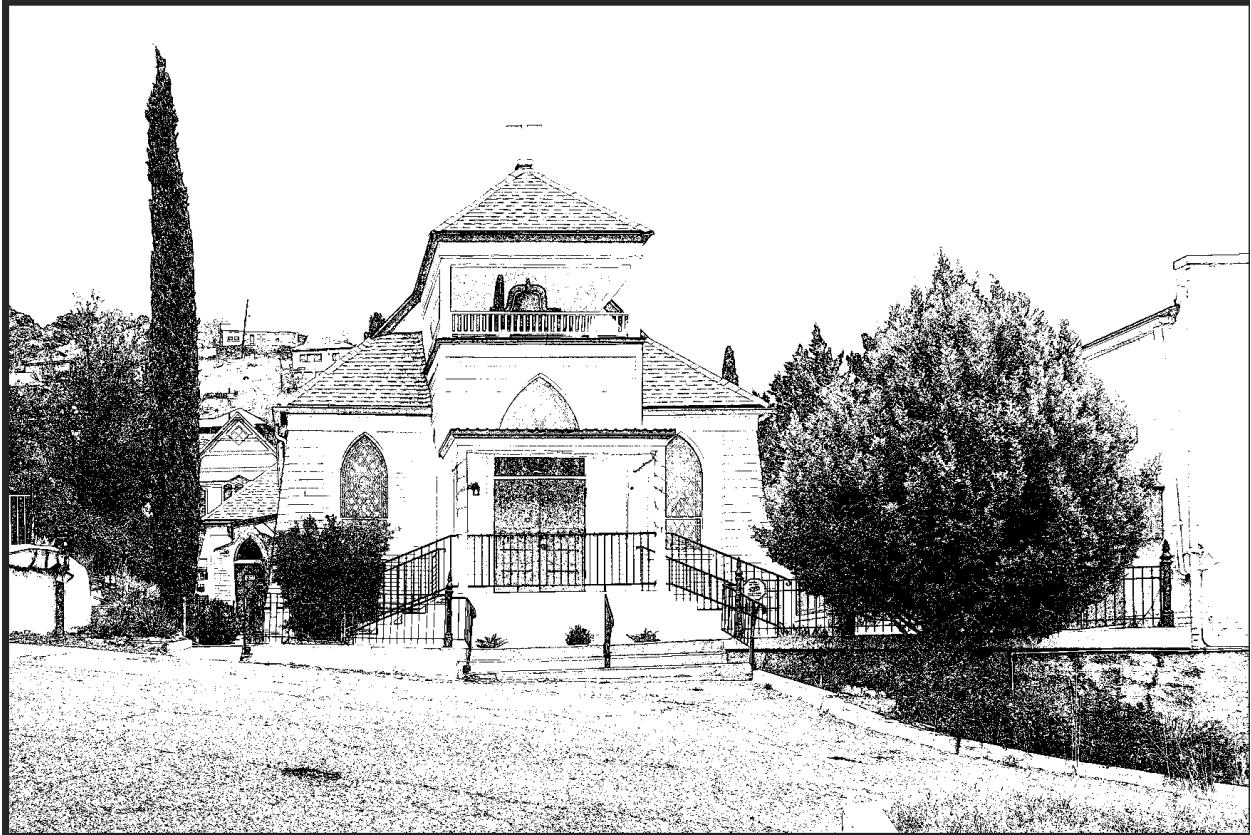

13.

B&W sketch
Follow the same steps as above, but don't hide the B&W layer. You can use curves, contrast, etc. to get the range of grays to your satisfaction.

Using Blend Modes–
Stamp the layer,
Copy the stamped layer
Try different blend modes and opacities. This is Hard Mix, 100%.

Luminosity Blending – increases contrast nicely.

On the image you want to have more contrast, create a black and white layer. Change the Blend Mode of the B&W later to Luminosity. You can adjust the opacity, or make other adjustments.

Simplifying an image

1. Clean up the image. Use healing brush, clone stamp, paintbrush, etc. to remove all the specs you don't want in the final image.
2. Use Curves, burning to increase contrast.
3. Clone out the ducks in the background and other distractions
4. Stamp the layers, and clean up more if necessary
5. Use Curves to darken the background
6. B&W
7. Stamp layer- need a pixel layer for filters
8. Stylize> Find Edges
9. Use curves to sharpen B&W
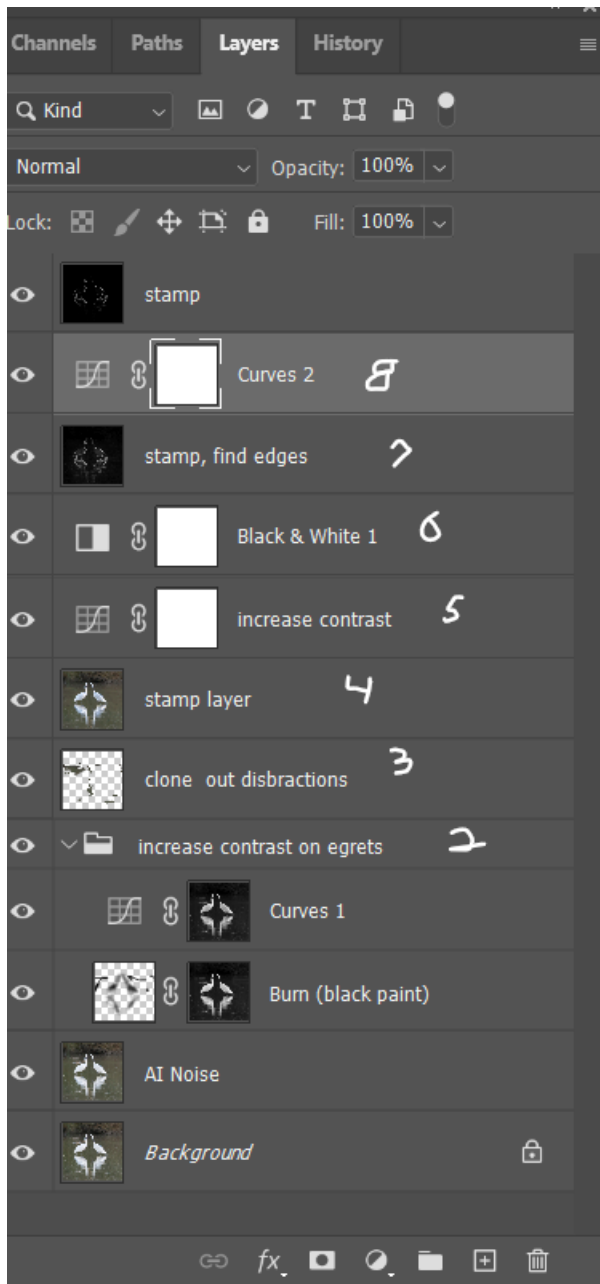
Using a texture and blend mode

Edit the original image until you're happy with it.
Bring in a texture from another photo. (You can use bricks, grass, fabric, etc. to make a texture
Generally you'll need to blur the photo a lot to make it suitable for a texture.)
Change the texture layer to a blend mode. This one was with vivid light. You can try all the modes to see
which you like best. Also play with the opacity. I used around 50% here. By using a suitable blend mode,
you won't need to mask or erase parts of the texture layer.
Use any adjustment layers / tools to make the photo suit your taste.

Multiple image compositing

I visited the Monarch Preserve in Mexico. There were butterflies everywhere! Covering the trees, filling the sky, feeding on plants. I came back with many photos but no single photo began to convey the experience. So I selected six different images and began to put them together.

1. First was a background picture, trees and sky with butterflies.
2. I cleaned up the sky, then stamped the image.
3. Apply any corrections to this layer that you like. I used a curves layer. Then I stamped again, because I was going to start adding more things.
4. I had selected buterflies in different positions from various photos. I pasted these in – that automatically puts each one on a separate layer.
5. Then I selected one layer at a time and used the transform tool to size, rotate, position each butterfly.
6. After that you can do any more adjustments you care to.
7. If you use a painterly effect lightly, it can make the picture look more internally consistent. I use Topaz Studio 2 sometimes.
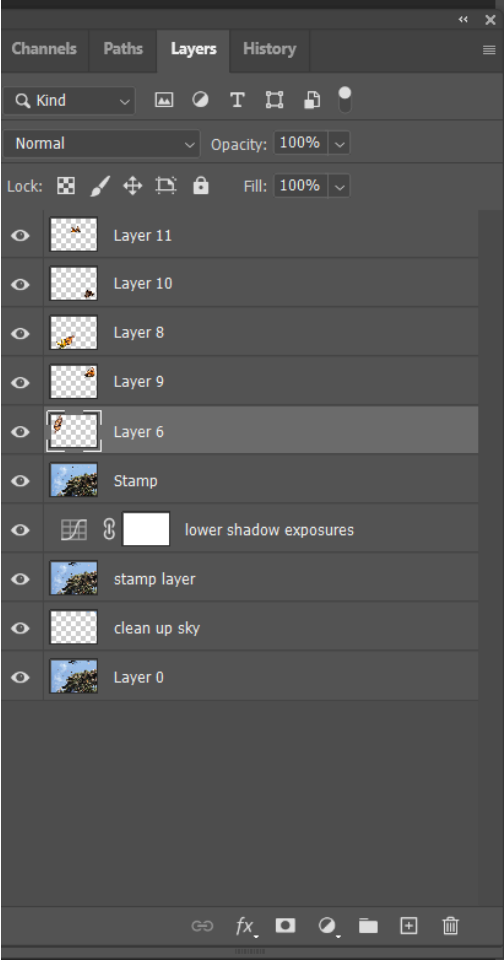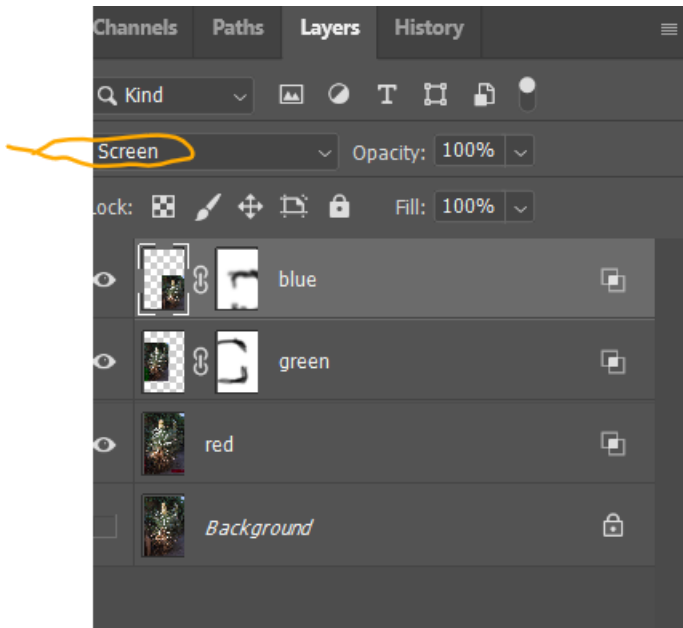
Color Separation – method developed by Warren Van Nest. These are his images.
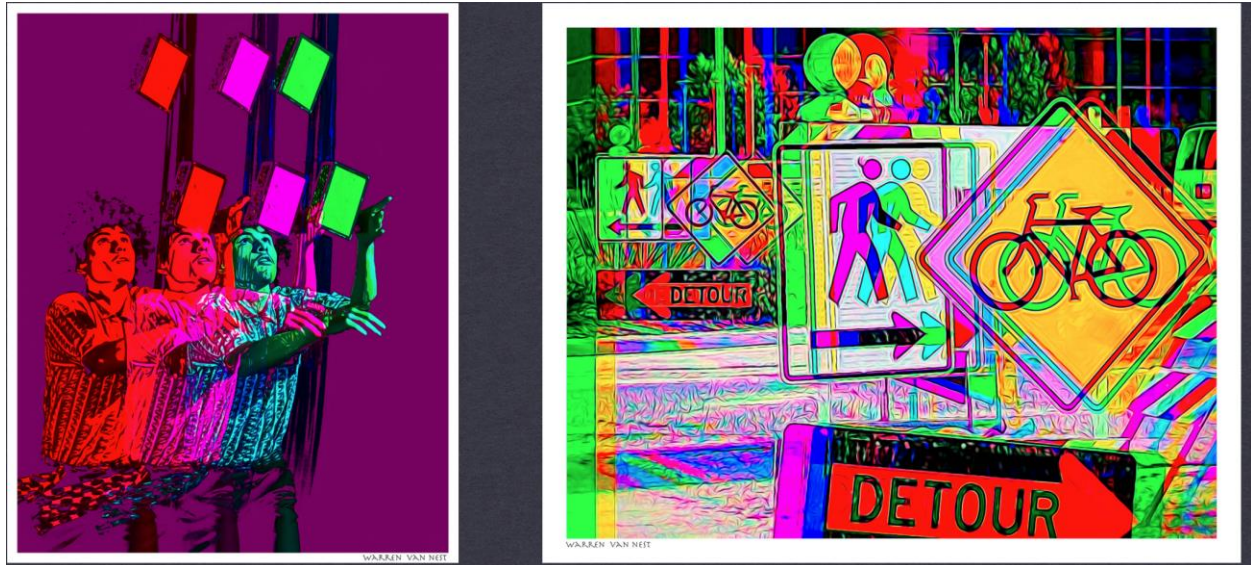
Process:
1. Open the file.
2. Create 3 duplicate layers.
3. Change their names to red, green, blue. (Optional – just for ease of use.)
   For each layer, right click to get the layer style menu. Select Blending Options at the top.
4. Change blend mode to Screen
5. For each layer, uncheck two of the channels.

6. Hide the original layer. You will still see the original image because all three channels are aligned. Pick a layer, bring up the Transform tool (Ctrl-T), and move or resize that channel's image.

7. You can use any adjustment tools on this image, just like any other.