

Pixel Composites:

Using the Computer Darkroom to Make New Slides from Old



Figure 1



Figure 2

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With over 15,000 color slides in my files and more than 100 CDs filled with images, I want to describe how to make pixel composites in the computer darkroom. Having “gone digital,” I have an additional 5000 pictures on file, all of which are on contact sheets as thumbnail-sized images. I begin my project of creating new slides from old images by going through my image thumbnails, which are in three-ring binders, and visualizing which photos might work well together to make a “Pixel Composite.” I usually make a pencil sketch to see how the final image might look.

Let’s start with the two photos shown in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 is a shot of a Yellow Bearded Dragon which was taken in my front yard. Figure 2 is an image of a Tiger Swallowtail butterfly also shot in my front yard. I visualized the butterfly flying towards the dragon. The original photos were taken with my Canon 10D. I usually show my work as both prints and slides. My purpose

for this composite was to have a new slide made from my file at a service bureau. To end up with a 35 mm slide, the image needs to be produced with the correct size and ratio. The dimension of a 35 mm slide is 36 x 24 mm. This is a ratio of 3:2. I like to work with Photoshop because it is probably one of the best Imaging Software packages available. It has every tool and filter that you will need.

The Lasso Tool was used to draw a rough selection around the dragon. The original dragon layer was duplicated. The Select>Color tool was used to select the green around the dragon. Next, the green portion around the dragon was deleted. To finalize the selection, the Eraser Tool was used, and the dragon was placed on a separate layer.

Figure 3 shows the background that I will be using for my composite. It is cropped to a 3:2 ratio. I used a motion blur on this background with a setting of 325 and an angle of -14.

Figure 3



When doing a Pixel Composite, the component files that make up the composite should be roughly the same size. This was no problem for me because all the images used in this composite were shot with my 6.3 Megapixel Canon 10D Digital Camera.

The butterfly was selected using the Pen Tool. This is one of the most accurate methods of making a selection in Photoshop. The process of outlining the butterfly with the Pen Tool was very time-consuming because of all the tiny legs and antennae.

The dragon and butterfly were dragged into the background layer. The Free Transform Tool was used to scale them to the appropriate size and move them into the final position. In order to have a new slide made at the Service Bureau, the file was flattened and saved as a TIFF format. The file size was approximately 16 MB, which is more than adequate for making a new slide from a film writer. Figure 4 shows the finished image.

Another Example

For our next Pixel Composite, we will be using Figures 5 and 6. Figure 5 is a photograph of the 13th Hole at the Masters Golf Course in Augusta, Georgia. Figure 6 is a photo of the famous golfing legend Arnold Palmer taken at the Tampa Classic in 2000. Both images were shot on slide film with the Canon EOS1N and were taken more than five years apart. In order to make the Pixel Composite for the two images fit together, the two slides were scanned at the same resolution of 2000 dpi. The Extract Tool in Photoshop 7.0 was used to select Palmer. The selection was finalized using the History Brush and Eraser Tool.

After the selection was completed, Palmer was placed on a separate layer. Palmer

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Figure 5

was dragged into the image of the 13th Hole and placed above the original layer. Free-Transform>Scale was used on the Palmer layer to provide the composition that I wanted. After scaling Palmer, he was moved into position.

We then use the Layer Mask Technique to blend the two images together. A Layer Mask is added to the Palmer Layer. We will use the Gradient Tool with the foreground color set to black and the background color set to white and opacity set to 75 percent. To get the effect that I wanted, I moved the Gradient Tool from bottom to top on the Arnold Palmer layer. Layer Mask has the effect that if we paint with black we reveal some of the layer that is beneath the layer we are painting on. Therefore, more of the 13th hole layer is showing at the bottom of the Arnold Palmer layer. I experiment with different Gradient opacities until I am satisfied with the way the two images blend together. I do the final touch-up using the Brush Tool, at 50% opacity, working on the layer mask on the Palmer layer. See Figure 7 for the finished image.

Figure 7

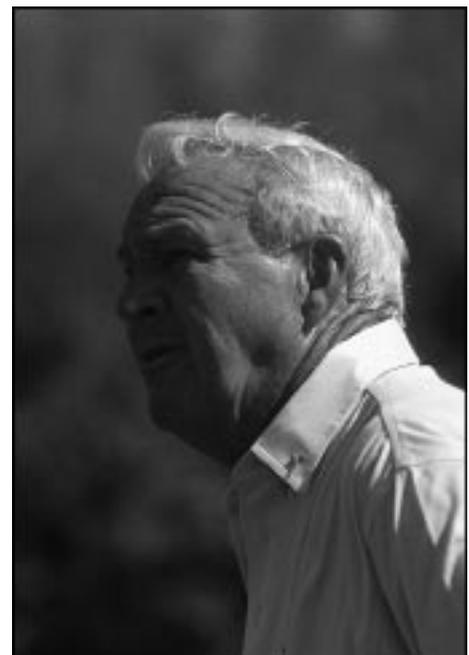


Figure 6

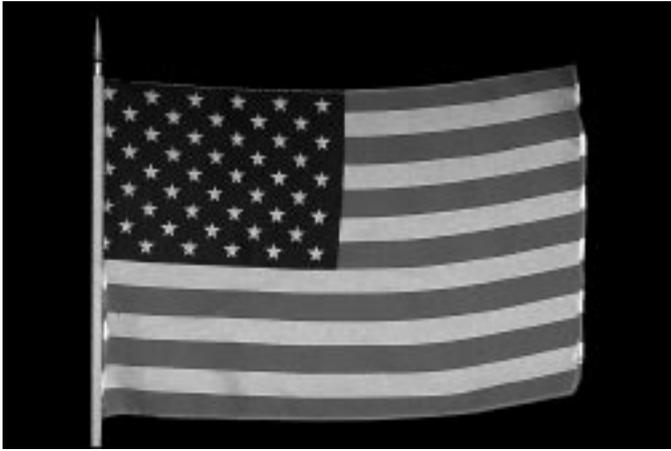


Figure 8

One Last Example

In this composite, we will use the two images shown in Figures 8 and 9. I have a small American flag that I put in my front yard. The flag is less than 12 inches wide. It was photographed on black velvet cloth. This makes it easy to separate from the background.

Mt. Rushmore was photographed on one of my trips to South Dakota several years ago. Both of these images were slides that were scanned with a Nikon LS1000 slide scanner.

The sky in the Mt. Rushmore photo was a solid blue. This made it easy to select using the Magic Wand Tool in Photoshop. The sky was deleted. We now had Mt. Rushmore, without the sky, on its own layer.

Mt. Rushmore was brought into the flag image and placed on a separate layer. The black portion of the flag image was selected using the Magic Wand tool. This selection was inverted to get the flag outline. The

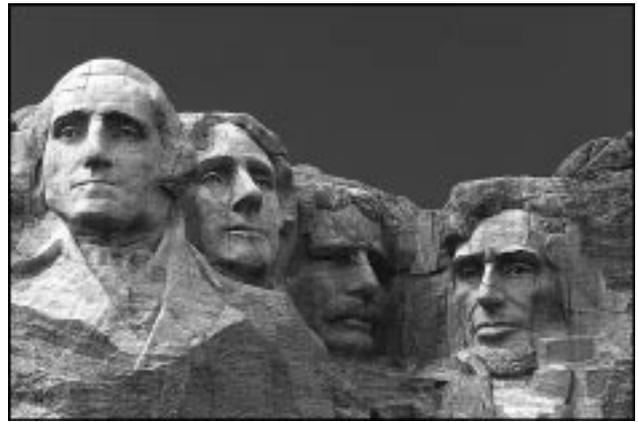


Figure 9

flag selection was then used to cut out the portion of the Mt. Rushmore layer so that the two images were exactly the same size. The Gradient Tool was used to blend the two images together. The Photoshop Emboss Filter was applied to the Mt. Rushmore layer. At this point, I save the layered file as a Photoshop PSD format. This enables me to do further editing if necessary. To complete the image, the file is flattened and saved as a TIFF format to send to a Service Bureau to have a new slide made. The final image is shown in Figure 10.

I hope this article has given you ideas and some inspiration on how to make Pixel Composites in your computer darkroom. Pick out images that will work well together. Get them into your computer and have fun with our wonderful hobby in this great field of Electronic Imaging. 📷

<http://www.photographybuynick.com>
<http://home.tampabay.rr.com/nickpage>

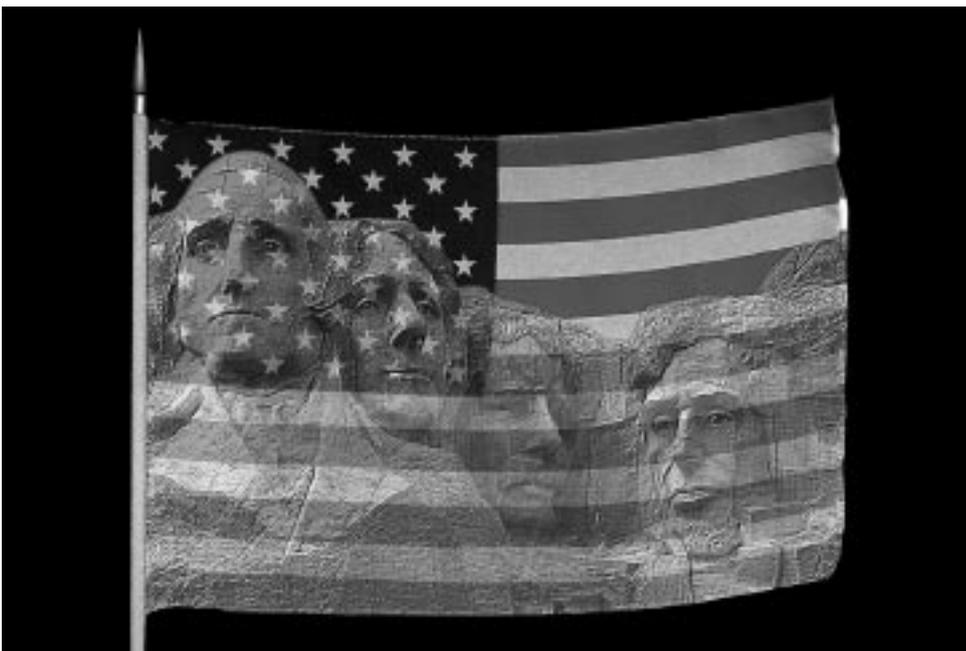
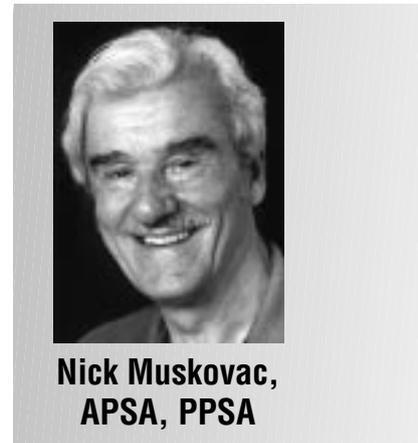


Figure 10