



Balloon Basket Composite



In this lesson, we'll combine the images on the left and at center to create the composite shown at right.

Balloon Basket Composite

In this lesson, we're going to create a simple photo composite. During the shoot, it was ~~very difficult~~ impossible to get the baby and the balloons in the appropriate positions at one time. Because of that, we took one photograph where the baby was in the basket without the balloons attached and another shot of the basket with the balloons in the ideal position (minus the baby). We will now learn how to combine the two images.

In Adobe Bridge, I will select the two images that will make up the composite and then I'll go to the Tools menu and choose Photoshop > Load Files into Photoshop Layers. (If you're using Lightroom, you will go to the Photo menu and choose Edit In > Load Files as Photoshop Layers.) Photoshop will open and both of the images will be loaded as separate layers in a single document.

I will work on this composite with the image including the baby as the underlying layer. I will then composite the balloons in on top of that. Looking at the two layers, however, I can tell that the handles on the basket may present a problem. In the image with the baby, the handles are down, and in the image with the bal-

loons, the handles are up. We're going to need to use the "up handles" but in order for the "down handles" to no longer be visible, we'll need to retouch them out.

I will turn off the visibility of the balloons layer for now and then add a new, empty layer above the baby layer. We'll do our retouching on this empty layer. I will activate the Clone Stamp Tool and make sure the Sample setting in the Options Bar is set to Current & Below. This will allow us to apply the retouching on an empty layer. In order to remove the handle, I'm first going to break it apart into isolated areas that need to be fixed. The Clone Stamp Tool works well for this part.

I'll use the Clone Stamp Tool to copy (Option+click on Mac/Alt+click on Win to copy) from an area in the surroundings to create a gap between the ring I'm trying to get rid of and the basket itself. Then I'll switch to the Spot Healing Brush and paint over the isolated area of the ring. This did a good job of getting rid of the ring. Because the remaining part of the ring bumps up against the grassy area, the Spot Healing Brush will likely not do a great job here.



Far left: The Clone Stamp Tool is being used to create a gap between the ring and the basket. Directly left: The Healing Brush is being used to remove the isolated part of the ring.

Note about the Auto-Select feature: In recent versions of Photoshop, Adobe has changed the default setting for the Auto-Select feature so that it is automatically on. This means that, when you're using the Move Tool, Photoshop will automatically activate the layer under your cursor when you click and drag. I find this to be irritating, so I will turn the feature off from the get-go. To turn the feature off, activate the Move Tool and then turn off the "Auto-Select" check box in the Options Bar above the image window.

I want to isolate the remaining part of ring so that it's surrounded by basket material and I will do that with the Clone Stamp Tool, copying from the edge of the basket lower down in the frame and then painting over the area where the edge of the basket is obstructed by the handle. With part of the ring isolated within the basket, I'll try to use the Spot Healing Brush to quickly remove it. When this doesn't work, I'll then move to the Healing Brush. The Healing Brush always tries to match the brightness of the surroundings. Unlike with the Spot Healing Brush, we need to tell the Healing Brush where to sample from. We'll do that by holding down the Option key (Alt on Win) and clicking on the area we'd like to sample from. I'll sample from a nearby area that matches what the target area should ideally look like. Then I'll use the Healing Brush to paint over the remainder of the ring. The ring has now been removed from this layer and I will follow the same steps to remove the ring on the other side of the basket.



The Clone Stamp Tool is being used to create a gap between the ring and the grass.



The Healing Brush is being used to remove the isolated part of the ring.

Now, I'll go about incorporating the balloon layer. I'll turn the visibility of the balloon layer off and on a few times to see how the layers line up. It turns out that the basket is more level on the layer with the balloons, and I'll want to rotate this a bit so that it's even with the basket on the baby layer. To do that, I'll activate the top layer and change the blending mode to Difference. This will give us an odd view of the image that will help us see where the two layers are different. Using this view, I will use the Move Tool and the free-transform command to move and rotate the balloon layer so that the basket lines up with the basket in the baby layer. When things are lined up, I will switch the blending mode of the balloon layer back to normal.



The blending mode of the top layer is set to Difference in order to give us a better view of how the active layer is lining up with the underlying layer.

At this point, I can start to think about masking the balloon layer in order to make the baby visible. The balloon layer is completely obstructing the baby layer so I will temporarily lower the opacity of the balloon layer in order to see what's underneath. This will help me to paint in the most appropriate areas on the mask. Now I will add a layer mask to the balloon layer. When you add a layer mask (by clicking on the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel), it will be completely white by default. This means that the entirety of the layer will be visible. I want to create a mask that is filled with black, so I will hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and click on the layer mask icon. With a black layer mask, the entire



Left: The opacity of the top layer is lowered so we can see what's underneath. Right: A black layer mask is added to the top layer containing the balloons.

layer will be hidden and we will have to paint with white in the areas we want to be visible. I'll use a soft-edged brush and paint with white over the areas where the basket handles and balloon strings are. I'll then continue to paint over the balloons themselves, making them visible in the image.



We are painting on the mask with a soft, white brush to reveal the areas of the layer containing the balloons and the balloon strings.

I did my masking pretty quickly, so I'm now going to zoom in and clean up the more detailed areas like the baby's arm. Because her arm has a crisp edge, I'm going to use a more crisp-edged brush to paint with white, revealing the part



Here, we're cleaning up the layer mask with a smaller brush.

of her arm that is close to the basket handle. In situations like this, it can be useful to again lower the opacity of the layer while working on the mask. This will help you see what's underneath so that you know where to paint. I will do the same thing where the edge of her head comes in contact with the balloon strings, using a small brush in order to work precisely. If I make a mistake and end up painting with white in an area that should be hidden, I'll switch my foreground

color to black and paint over the area with black, hiding the layer in that area. (Note: You can swap your foreground/background colors by hitting the X key or by clicking the double-arrow icon above the foreground/background swatches in the Tool Bar.)



A larger brush is being used to paint on the mask, softening up the transition between the two layers.

Now, as I evaluate the image I can see that there is still a visible edge in the green background surrounding the balloon string. I will need to clean this up to make it unnoticeable. To do this, I'll use a much larger, soft-edged brush to paint with white over the transition, smoothing it out until I think it looks unnoticeable.

Now that we've composited the two images together, I'm going to fine-tune the image a bit. I'd like to add a light softness as well as a slightly desaturated effect to the photo. Before I start adding effects, however, I'd like to get a copy of the image where the entire composite is contained on one layer. To do this, I'll use the keyboard shortcut Shift+Option+Command+E (Shift+Alt+Ctrl+E on Win). This will create a new layer that contains an equivalent of all the other layers flattened into one. (All of the underlying layers will remain unchanged though.)

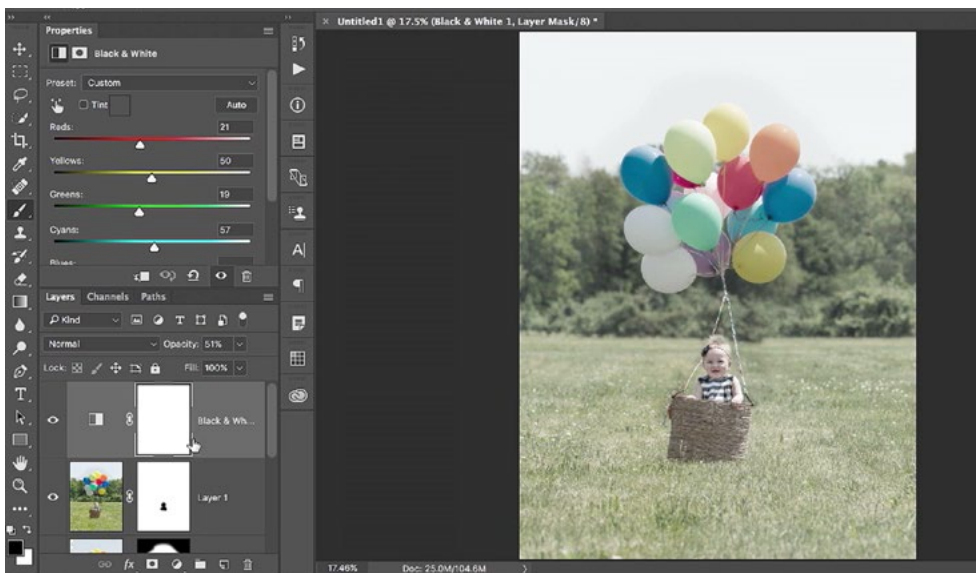
With this new composite layer active, I'll add a blur by going to the main menu and choosing Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. I'll move the Radius slider up just enough so that we can no longer see the details in the image. Then I'll click OK. Because I want a light, soft feeling to the image, I will change the blending mode of this layer to Screen. The effect is a little too much, so I will lower the opacity of this layer until I think it looks subtle enough.

I'm happy with the softening effect, but I'd rather it not be applied on the baby's face. I will add a layer mask to this layer by clicking on the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Then, I'll use a soft-edged brush to paint with black (therefore hiding the effect) over her face.



A Gaussian Blur effect is applied on the composite layer and then we added a layer mask and painted with black over the face in order to hide the effect in that area.

Finally, I'd like to desaturate the image a bit, making it slightly less colorful. I could create either a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer or a Vibrance adjustment layer and then move the Saturation slider down a bit. That's one way of doing it, but I'd like to cover an alternative method. Instead, I'll create a Black & White adjustment layer. In the Properties panel for the Black and White adjustment layer, I'll turn on the Auto checkbox, which will move the individual color sliders to the settings that Photoshop thinks will best benefit the image. This will create more variation between the different colors, giving us a better-looking end result. Lastly, I'll lower the opacity of this Black and White adjustment layer until the image has the desired amount of color.



A Black and White adjustment layer was created, we turned on the Auto Setting and then lowered the opacity of the adjustment layer until the desired amount of saturation was present in the image.

Photo Shoot Outtakes:

