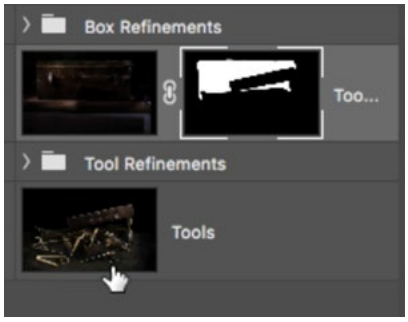
video

50

Color Contrast Adjustments



At left is a light-painted photograph.
Above, you can see the Layers panel, containing two image layers with folders of adjustment layers applied to each.

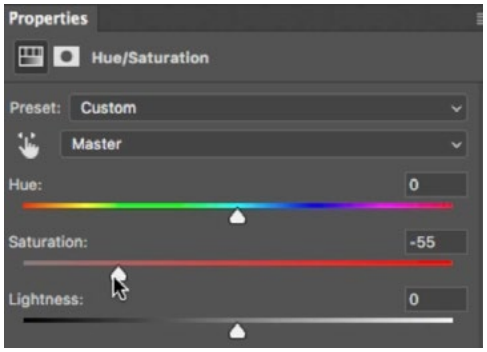
Color Contrast Adjustments

In this lesson, we're going to look at a light-painted image I photographed and some of the refinements I made in order to make the photo shine. In this document, there is a layer for the vintage tools and another layer for the tool box. Each of these layers has a series of adjustment layers applied to it and we're going to look at how these adjustment layers were used to refine the image.

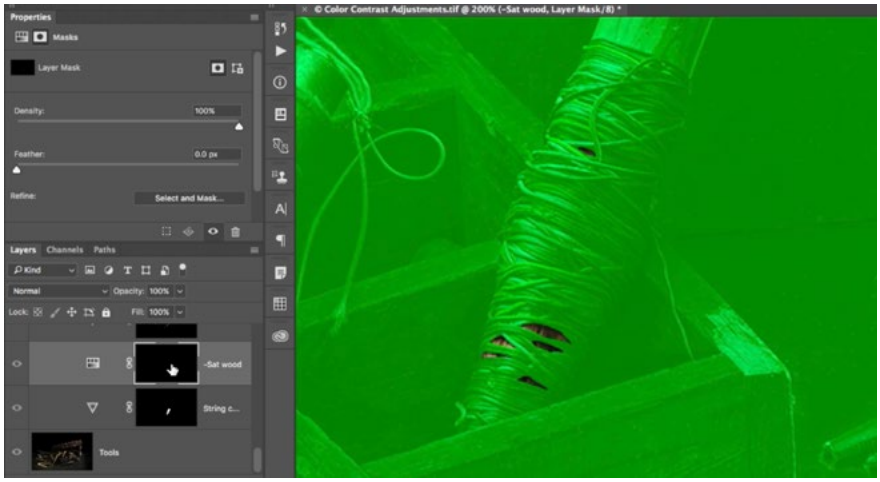
Vibrance layer for string A Vibrance adjustment layer was used to create a contrast between how saturated different areas of the image are. The eye is naturally drawn to things that are colorful, and I wanted to draw the viewers' eyes to the spool of string near the center of the image. To do this, I bumped up the color with the adjustment layer, filled the mask with black to hide the effect and then I painted in the effect only in the area I wanted to make more colorful.

A Vibrance adjustment layer was used to make the spool of string more colorful.

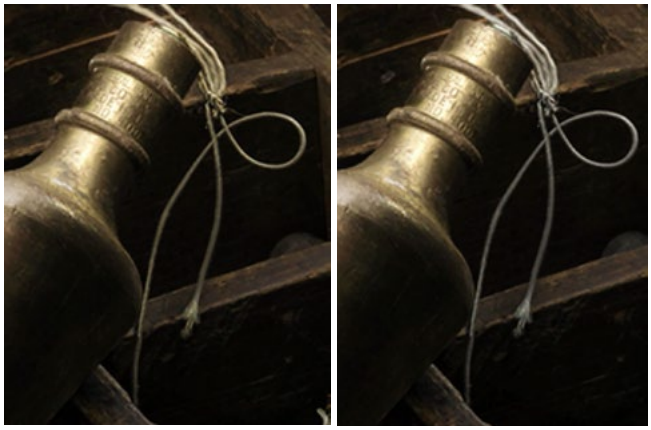
Hue/Saturation for spool The Vibrance adjustment above not only made the string more colorful, but it made the wood of the spool more colorful as well. I wanted to tone that down, and I could have done that by painting on the mask for the Vibrance adjustment layer, but I wanted to have separate control over the area. I created a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer, brought the Saturation slider down, filled the entire mask with black and then carefully painted on the mask with white over the wood parts of the spool.



A Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is used to make the wood parts of the spool less colorful.



Vibrance Adjustment layer for string The next adjustment layer was used to desaturate the string in the center of the image. I did this because the string was yellow in color and the box behind it was yellow as well. By desaturating the string, I created more contrast between the string and the background. This made the string pop out more. A Vibrance adjustment layer was used and we painted on the mask so the adjustment only affected the string.



A Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is used to desaturate the string, making it stand out from the background.

Hue/Saturation layer for metal tool When I looked at the metal thingermajigger* on the right, I could see a hint of a plum color and I wanted to make that color pop out more. I used a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer for this, dragging the Saturation slider to the right and then using the layer mask so the adjustment only affected the desired area.

A Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is used to make the plum color of this tool more colorful.

Hue/Saturation layer for wood chips I wanted to create more separation between the wood chips and the tool they were sitting on, and I accomplished this with a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer. I brought the saturation down and used the mask to apply the desaturation only on the tool and not the chips. This made the wood chips stand out much more.

A Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is used to desaturate the metal, making the wood chips stand out more.

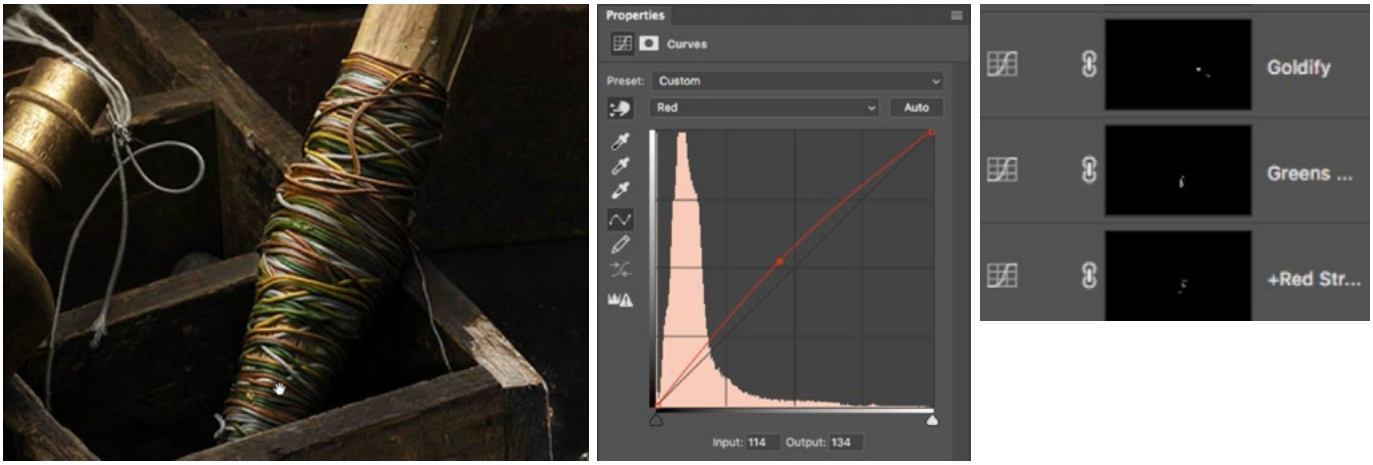
*** I'm sorry for the vague terminology. This girl doesn't know the names of most modern tools, let alone vintage ones! -Karen**

Curves adjustment for pointy tool I also wanted to make the pointy tool (a plum bob?) in the middle stand out a lot more and I did this with a Curves adjustment layer. I slightly increased the contrast and then moved the blue curve down and red curve up in order to make the tool appear more gold. As always, I used the layer mask to ensure the effect was only visible on the tool.

A Curves adjustment layer was used to give this tool a more gold appearance.

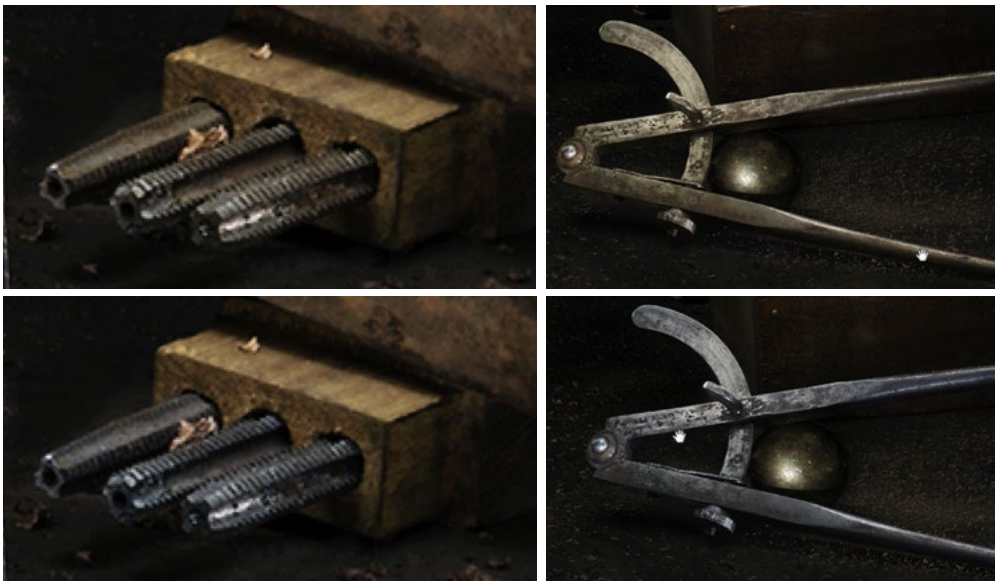
Curves adjustments for colored string Now, I wanted to make the individual colors in the spool of string stand out more. To do this, I used a Curves adjustment layer, working on each color individually.

With the hand tool active, I held down Shift+Command (Shift+Control on Win) and then used the eyedropper to click on one of the red strings. This put a point on each of the color curves (red, green and blue). You can use the menu above the Curves chart in the Properties panel to switch between each of the color curves. I then experimented by moving each of these points up and down to see which adjustment made the image more red. Moving the point on the red curve did a lot of the job. Finally, I inverted the layer mask so that it became filled with black and then painted on the mask (with white) only over the areas where the red string is. I then followed the same steps for the other colors of string.



Curves adjustment layers were used to bring out the individual colors in the spool of string. The Curve chart shows the point on the red curve being bumped up to make the image more red. The layer mask was then used to isolate this adjustment to just the red strings.

Curves adjustments to create color contrast There are a handful of instances where two adjacent items share a similar color cast. By shifting the color of one of the items, I created a greater separation and contrast between them. I used Curves adjustment layers, applying the same technique as with the colored string, to shift the color of an item in order to make it separate better from the item next to it. (See screen shots below)

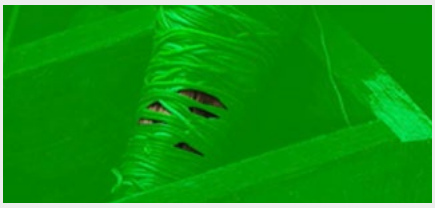


At left, you can see how a simple color shift creates contrast between two items, making them separate from each other. In the top images, the items share a similar color. In the bottom images, one of the items was adjusted so that the items contrasted better with one another.

To sum things up, you can create more visual interest in your images by using color shifts in order to make different items stand out from one another. In the example image here, I used a series of Vibrance, Hue/Saturation and Curves adjustment layers to achieve this color contrast.

The final image was fine-tuned using a series of adjustment layers to create color contrast between the different items in the scene.

Layer Mask Tip: When you're working on a layer mask, you can hit the backslash key (\ ) to see an overlay of the mask on your image. This can be useful to help you see what parts of the mask have been painted on. The areas that have the overlay are masked. The effect is hidden in those areas. The areas that don't have the overlay are not masked. The effect will be visible in those areas.



The overlay shows what parts of the layer are masked. It may be a different color in your interface, depending on your preferences.