



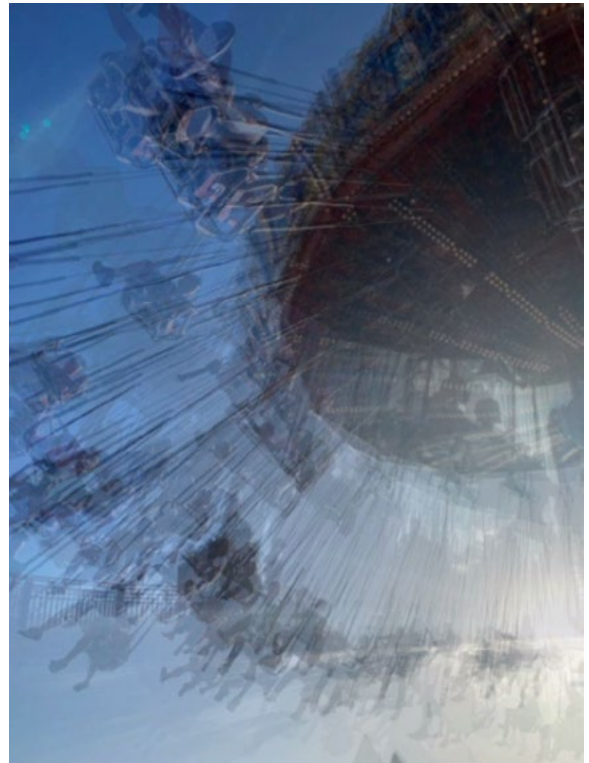
Creative Multi-Exposures

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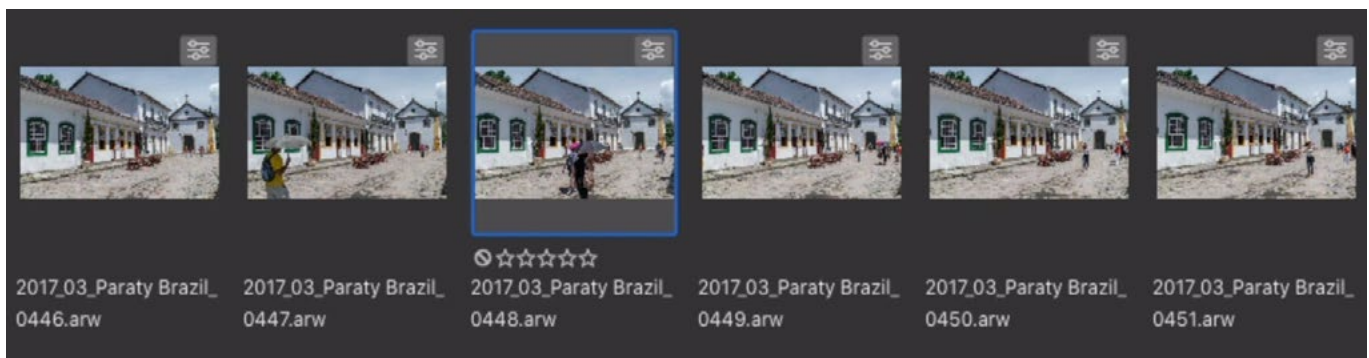
In this lesson, we're going to learn a creative technique for capturing multiples and then combining them together into a really interesting and artistic image.

Shooting the Images

When photographing a scene for this purpose, you will need to capture multiple exposures of the scene. While you should stand in the same location while capturing the images, you don't want to be on a tripod. You'll need to capture the images hand-held because you actually want the slight variation in alignment from frame to frame. If all of the images aligned perfectly, the technique would not work.



This effect was created by combining several exposures and then combining them creatively in Photoshop.



This is a screen shot from Bridge. You can see that several images were shot of the same scene. The camera moved slightly between frames and various elements changed in the scene from frame to frame.

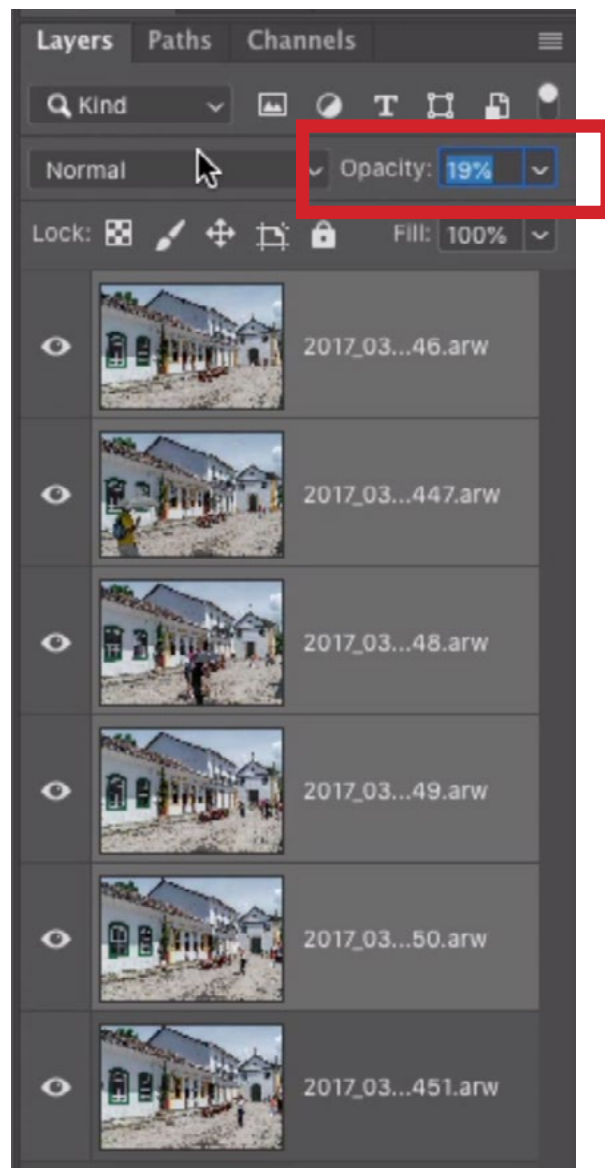
Load Files into Photoshop

Before moving the images into Photoshop, know that you probably want to be working in 8-bit mode and not 16-bit mode. The file sizes are much larger in 16-bit mode and stacking several images in one Photoshop document will make the resulting file unnecessarily huge.

Select all of the images in Bridge, click on the Tools menu and choose Photoshop > Load Files into Photoshop Layers. If you were instead using Lightroom, you could click on the Photo menu and choose Edit In > Open as Layers in Photoshop. Photoshop will open and each image will be loaded as a separate layer in a single document.

Opacity Method

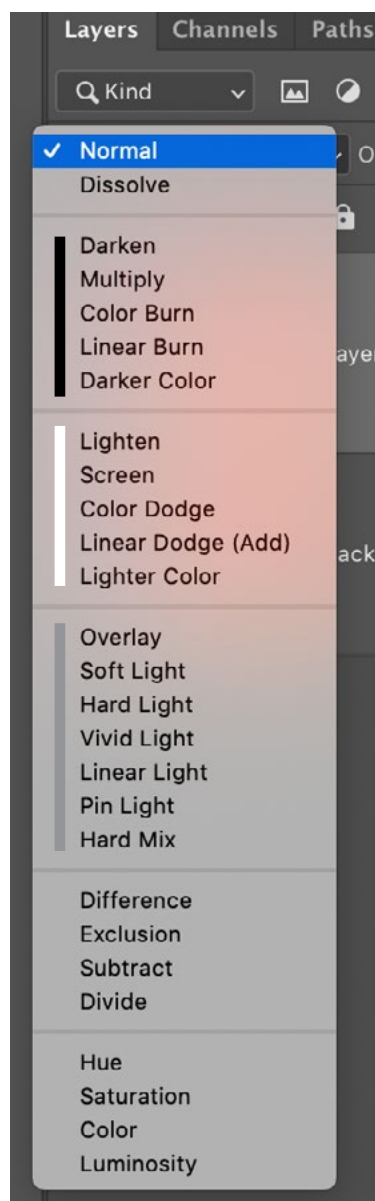
In the Layers panel, select all except the bottom layer. You can do this by clicking on the top layer, holding the Shift key and then clicking on the second layer from the bottom. With all of these layers selected, you can lower the opacity of all of them at the same time. The Opacity menu is at the top of the Layers panel, but you don't actually need to use the setting as a menu. You can use it as a slider instead, by clicking on the word "Opacity" and dragging left. Lower the opacity until you start to see an equal influence of all the images and you start to get a creative look. In the video example, I lowered the opacity to 19%.



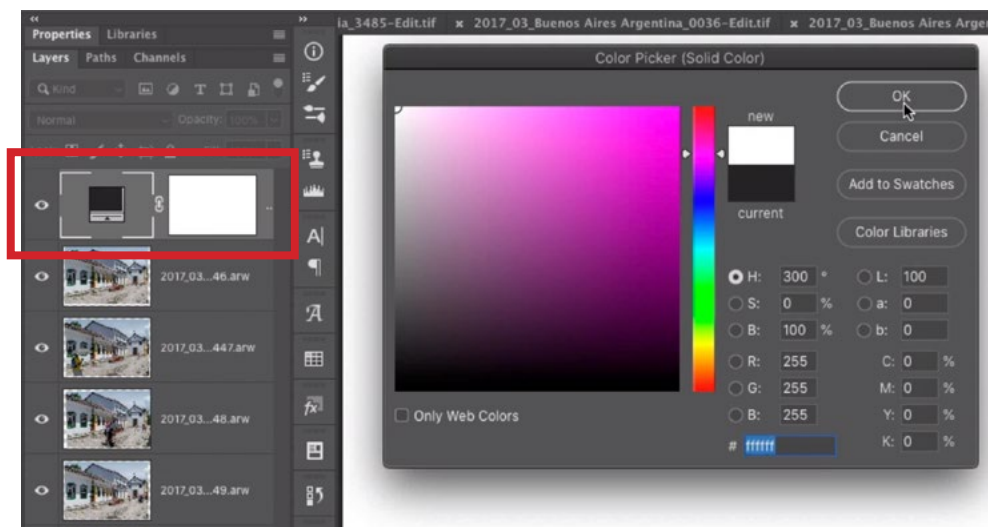
All layers except for the bottom layer have been selected and we are lowering the Opacity setting.

Blending Mode Method

You can also achieve variations on the effect by using different blending modes. When you change the blending mode of a layer, it changes the way it interacts with the layer beneath it.



When creating this effect using blending modes, you will select all of the layers and then use the Blending Mode menu at the top of the Layers Panel to specify a mode. After changing the blending mode of all layers, you will see some transparency in the resulting image. That will be visible as the underlying checkerboard background. To prevent this, you will need to place a solid color layer at the bottom of the layer stack. Click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel and choose “Solid Color” from the pop-up menu. The Color Picker will appear and you can use it to choose a color and then click OK. The color layer will appear in the Layers Panel and you’ll want to drag it to the bottom of the layer stack.



LEFT: The Blending Mode menu is expanded and you can see the three different categories you can use for creating this effect. **RIGHT:** A Solid Color layer was created and we are using the Color Picker to set the layer to White.

The color of this Solid Color layer will depend on which type of blending mode you use. When the Blending Mode menu is expanded, you will see some horizontal lines that divide the modes into categories. The modes in the category beginning with the Darken mode will all darken the layers. When using one of these modes, you'll want that solid color base layer to be white.

The modes in the category beginning with Lighten will all lighten the layers. When using one of these modes, you'll want the solid color base layer to be black. The modes in the category beginning with Overlay will both lighten and darken the layers. When using one of these modes, you'll want the solid color base layer to be 50% gray.

Multiply Mode Let's try one of the blending modes in the darkening category. Select all of the layers in the Layers Panel. Then, use the Blending Mode menu at the top of the Layers Panel to set the blending mode to Multiply. With this blending mode, each of the layers will act as if it's being printed with ink onto the image beneath it. This will initially make the image look very dark. The next step will be to lower the opacity of the layers so that the image no longer looks dark.



The blending mode of all the layers has been changed to Multiply.

Remember, there will need to be a solid color layer at the bottom of the layer stack in order to prevent transparency. Because this is a darkening mode, you will place a solid white layer at the bottom of the layer stack. Now you will no longer see the checkerboard transparency and you can fine-tune the opacity if desired.

Screen Mode Now let's look at one of the lightening modes. Select all of the layers and lower the opacity as we did in the previous examples. Then set the Blending Mode menu to Screen. The Screen blending mode will cause the layers to act like light. The only thing it can do it brighten things. When we used the Multiply mode, we placed a solid white layer at the bottom of the layer stack. When we use Screen mode, we will need to place a solid black layer at the bottom of the layer stack. Click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel and choose "Solid Color" from the pop-up menu. The Color Picker will appear and you can use it to choose solid black and then click OK. Then drag this layer to the bottom of the layer stack.

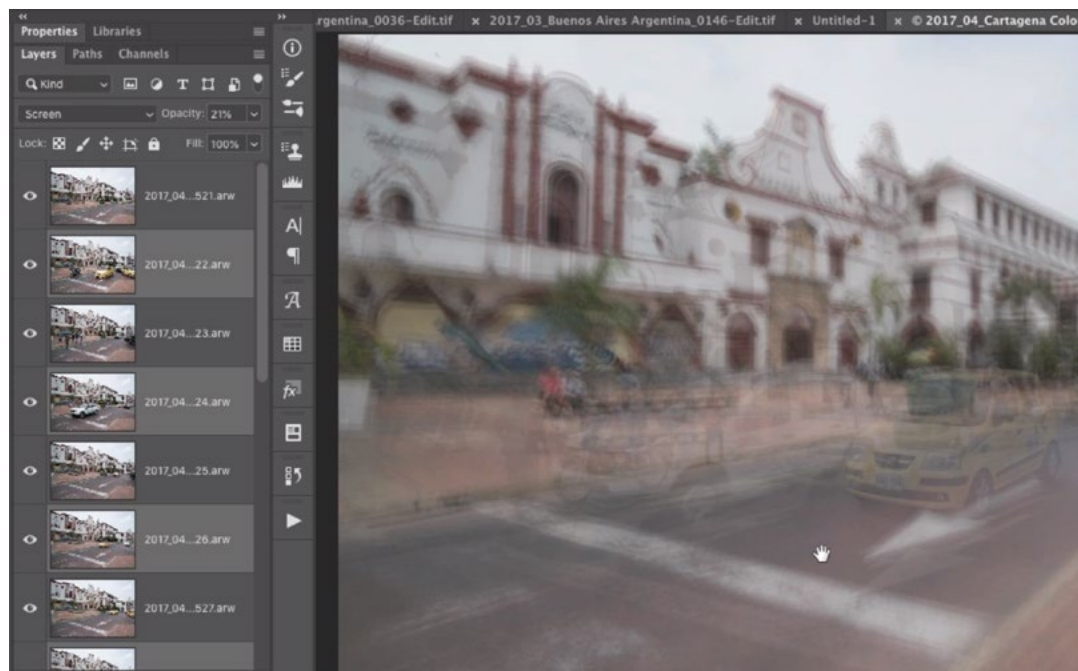


The blending mode has been set to Screen for all of the layers and a solid black base layer has been placed at the bottom of the layer stack.

If you already have an existing solid color layer at the bottom of the layer stack, simply double-click on the layer thumbnail to call up the Color Picker again. Now you can go in and fine-tune the opacity. With Screen mode, raising the opacity will make the layers lighter (because Screen mode acts like light) and lowering the opacity will make the layers darker. With the darken modes, raising the opacity will make the image darker and lowering opacity will make the image lighter.

Mix Blending Modes

When creating this effect, I find that it can be useful to combine blending modes for a more interesting look. One way of doing this would be to select every other layer and then change the blending mode of these layers. You can select multiple layers by clicking on the first one, holding down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and then clicking on the others. Then select all of the other layers and setting the blending mode to something different. I have found that it can be interesting to set half of the layers to Multiply mode and the other half to Screen mode, which is the opposite of Multiply. If half of the layers are set to a lightening mode and the other half are set to a darkening mode, then the solid color base layer should be 50% gray.

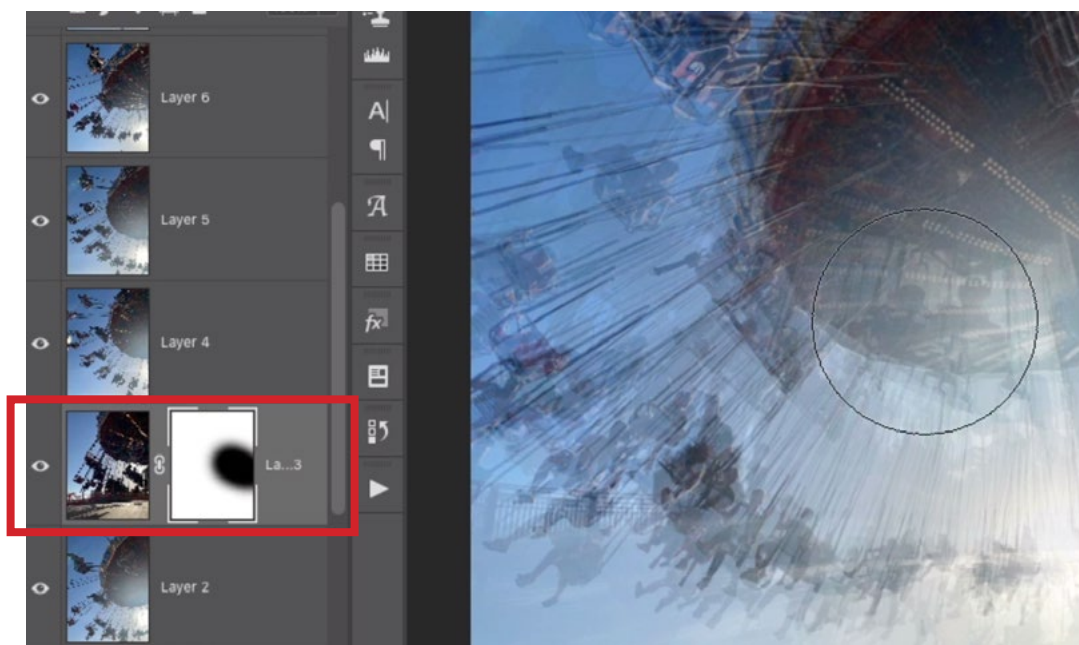


In this document, you can see that every other layer was set to the Screen blending mode. We'll set the remainder of the layers to the Multiply mode.

Blending Mode Menu Tip: With this technique, you will be cycling through blending modes in order to see what the various modes look like on your image. There is a keyboard shortcut to quickly do this. Make sure that the Move Tool is active, hold down the Shift key and then tap the + (plus) key to cycle through the modes.

Adjust Individual Layers

After blending all of the layers, it can be useful to toggle the visibility of each layer, one by one, to see how they are affecting the image. If you find a layer that is hurting the end result, you can either delete it completely, or hide the element that's causing the issue. If there is just one element in a layer that doesn't look so great, add a layer mask by clicking the layer mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Then, use a soft brush to paint with black over the element you want to hide. Adding black to a mask will hide parts of the layer, so it will remove the undesirable element.

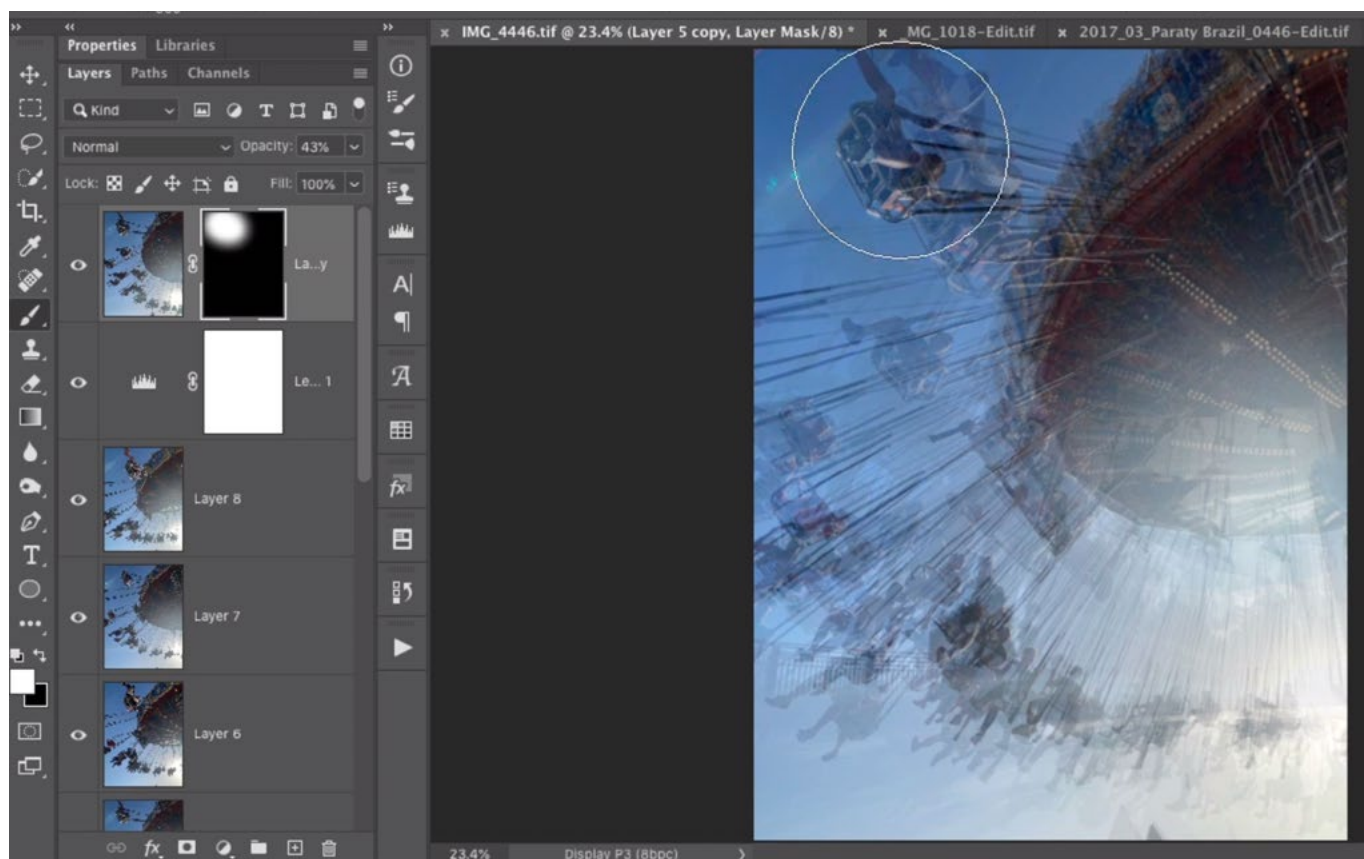


There was an elements in the highlighted layer that I found to be distracting, so I added a layer mask and am painting with black on the mask. This is hiding the layer element in just the area where I paint.

If you find a layer that you would like to be more prominent, you can experiment with its blending mode to find a mode that makes it stand out more. You can also increase the opacity of just that layer.

There may be a layer that contains certain elements that you'd like to be more prominent. If this is the case, start by duplicating the layer. You can do this by using the keyboard shortcut Command+J (Ctrl+J on Win). Then drag that duplicate to the top of the layer stack. Set the blending mode of this layer to Normal so that you're not using any blending mode, but keep the opacity at a lower setting (less than 50%).

Add a layer mask by clicking on the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. You'll want to start with a black mask, which hides the entire layer. You can switch the mask from being completely white to being completely black by clicking on the Image menu and choosing Adjustments > Invert. Next, use a soft brush to paint with white over the element you would like to make more prominent.



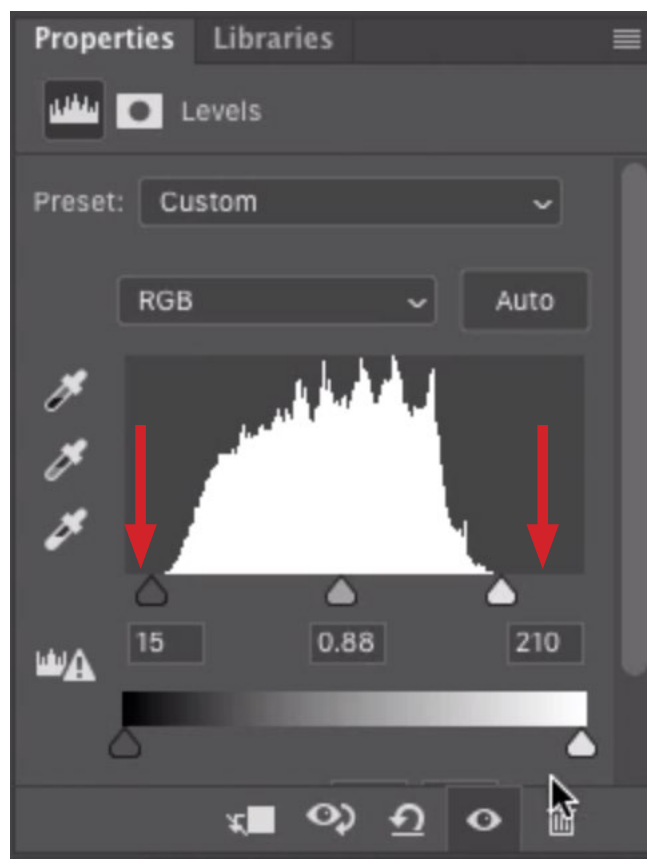
In this document, I wanted to make the top swing more prominent. I duplicated the layer and moved the duplicate to the top of the layer stack. I hid the entire layer with a black mask and am painting with white on the mask here. This is revealing the layer in just the area where I paint.

Levels Adjustment to Refine Brightness

You can refine the brightness of the image after all of the blending modes have been applied. One way of doing this would be with a Levels adjustment. Click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose “Levels” from the pop-up menu. The new adjustment layer will appear in the layers panel and you’ll want to make sure that it appears at the top of the layer stack.

With this adjustment layer active, the Levels settings will be visible in the Properties Panel and you’ll see the bar chart, which shows what brightness levels can be found in your picture (and which are missing). If there is a gap on the far left side of the histogram, it means that there are no black tones in the image. If this is the case, you can add a black point by dragging the black slider to the right until it meets the bars in the chart.

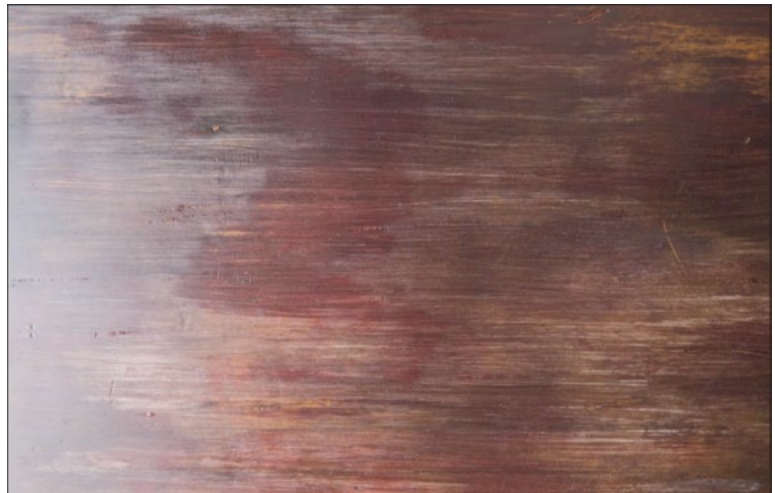
If there is a gap on the far right side of the chart, it means there are no whites in the image. Again, you can introduce some whites by dragging the white slider to the left until it meets the bars. Adjust the middle, gray slider to fine tune the overall brightness of the image.



There were gaps on the left and right sides of this histogram (see arrows). This means there were no blacks or whites in the image. The black and white sliders were moved in to meet the bars on the chart. This forces the darkest areas to black and the brightest areas to white.

Adding Texture

You can also add some texture as an extra artistic effect. This will be applied as a separate texture layer that will be placed at the top of the layer stack. You can use any kind of texture image you'd like here. When I'm out shooting, I will often times photograph textured walls or other surfaces so that I can use them for this purpose. In the video example, we have an image of a very weathered wall.



This is an example of a photograph I might use to add texture to an image.

Place this texture image at the top of the layer stack and then cycle through the blending modes to see which looks best. Remember, you will likely be lowering the opacity of this layer to make the effect more subtle. After choosing the blending most, adjust the Opacity slider to your taste. You can always add more than one texture layer for added effect.



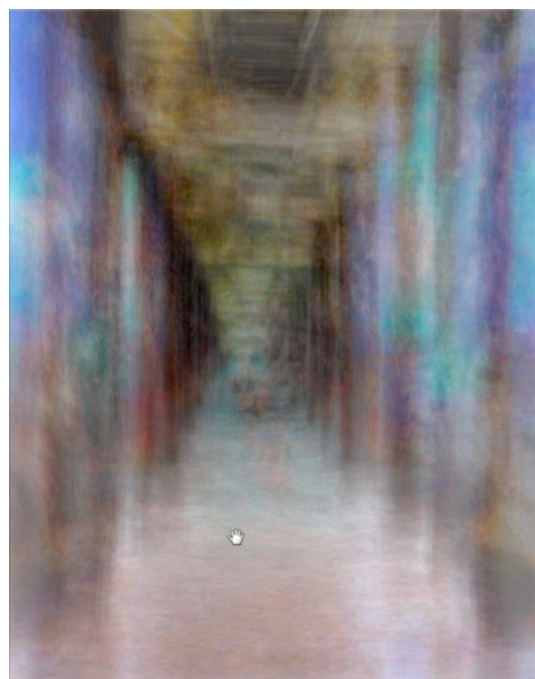
The texture image was placed at the top of the layer stack and set to the Multiply blending mode. The opacity was lowered, making the effect more subtle.

If the texture layer ends up making a particular area in the image look too busy, you can always add a layer mask and use a soft brush to paint over the area with black. This will hide the texture effect in just the area where you paint.

Using a LOT of Image Layers

The more image layers you use, the more complicated the result will be, but this can be a good thing! When I use a whole lot of images to create this effect, it tends to look very interesting and painterly. Note that the more layers you use, the lower the Opacity setting will need to be in order for the image to not look overly dark.

It's also important to know that if your document contains loads of layers (there are dozens in the video example), you may run into the file size limitations of many file formats. The Photoshop file format allows for a maximum of 2 GB. The TIFF format allows for a maximum size of 4 GB. If you exceed this size, then you will need to set the Format menu (in the Save As dialog) to Large Document Format. This file will end in .psb, for "Photoshop Big File." The problem with this format is that not many programs can open them, and they can't appear in Lightroom.

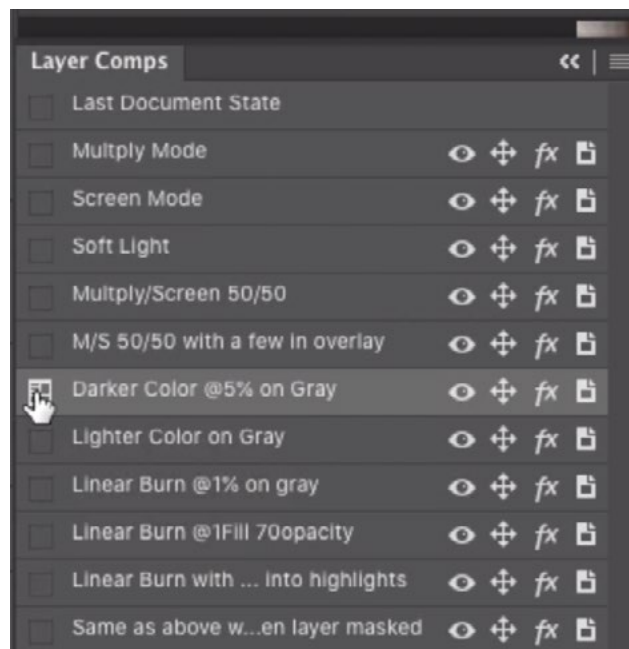


Here, you can see just a handful of the layers that went into creating the image above. The final document contains dozens of layers.

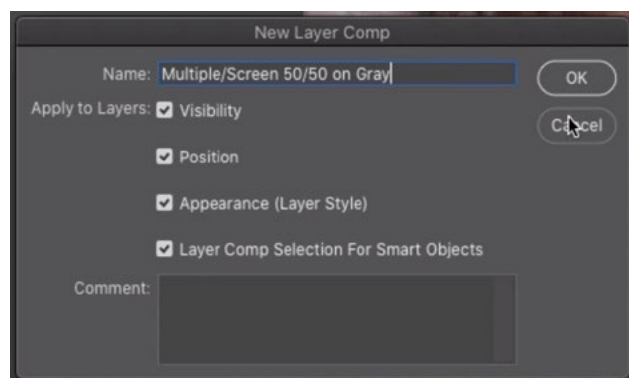
There is a trick for saving a file in the TIFF format without running into its file size limit. Choose the TIFF format, click the Save button and the “TIFF Options” dialog will appear. In this dialog, set the Image Compression setting to JPEG. Then, set the Layer Compression setting to ZIP. This will lower the file size quite a bit.

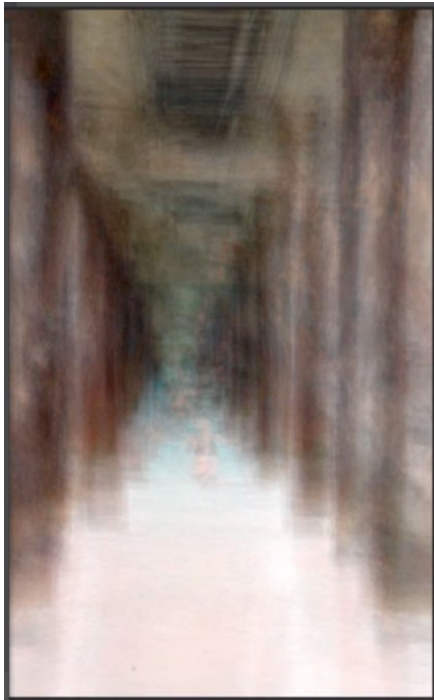
Create Several Versions Using Layer Comps

You can create several versions of these artistic image right within one Photoshop file using layer comps. When you create a layer comp, Photoshop remembers what layers are visible, where they are positioned and what their layer styles are. Create the first version of the image that you want to save. Then open the Layer Comps Panel by clicking on the Window menu and choosing Layer Comps. Click on the New icon [+] at the bottom of the panel and a dialog box will appear. Here, you’ll be prompted to give the new layer comp a name and it’s a good idea to use a descriptive name so that you will know what it is later. For example, if I set every other layer to Multiply mode and the rest of the layers to Screen mode, I will name the layer comp “Multiply Screen 50/50 on Gray.” (The Gray is the color of the solid base layer.) Turn on the check boxes for Visibility, Position and Appearance. (It won’t matter whether or not the fourth check box is turned on.) Then click OK. The new layer comp will be added to the panel.

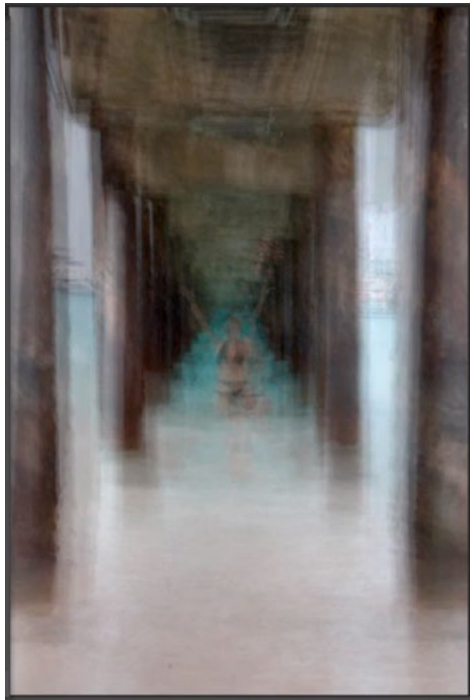


In this Layer Comps panel, you can see that I have created several different versions of the image. Each comp has a descriptive name.





Darker Color @5% on Gray



Multiply/Screen 50/50



Soft Light



Screen Mode

Now you can change the document to create another version of the image. Maybe you want to change the layers to all use the same blending mode, or maybe you want to hide the visibility of some layers, etc. After making these changes, follow the same procedure for creating another layer comp. Do this for as many versions as you'd like. Then, you can click through the various layer comps in order to switch between them. When you click on a comp, the document will change to reflect all the layer settings for that version of the image.

At left, you can see a few versions I created of one image. The Layer Comp names are shown below.

Extra Shooting Tips

Here are a few additional things to try when you are out shooting images for the purpose of creating this effect:

- A large, prominent and simple subject tends to produce very nice results.
- Center the subject and take a shot. Then walk half a foot to the left, swing the camera to keep the subject in the middle and take another shot. Repeat this process many times. This will keep the subject in a consistent position but the background will be in very different positions. The result can be very interesting.
- Consider experimenting with zooming the lens slightly between shots.
- Consider varying the angle of your camera very subtly between shots.