

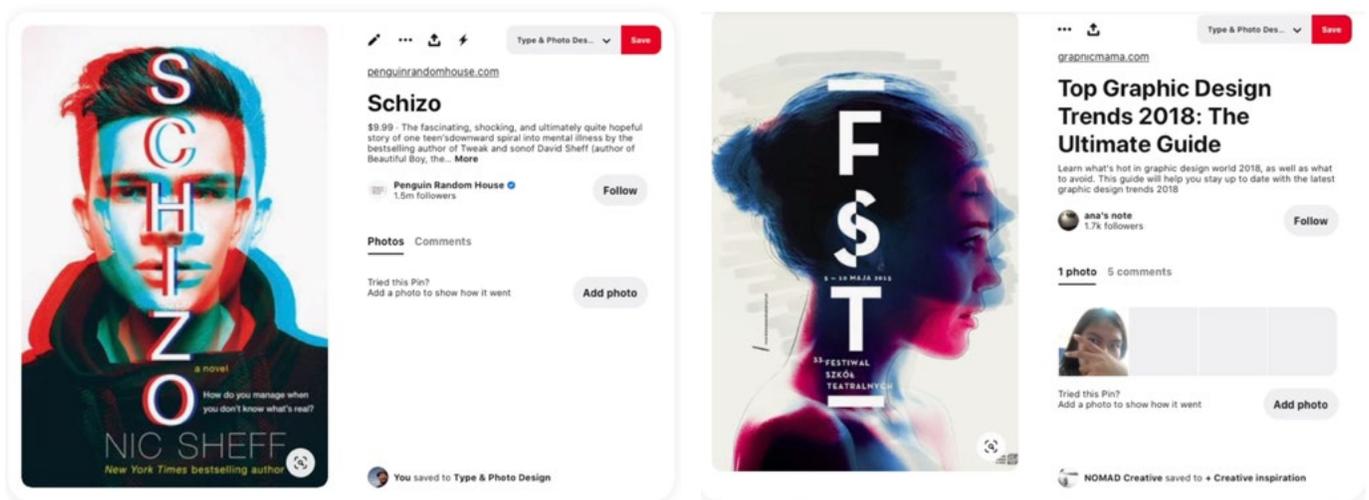


Color Separated Photo Effect

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In this lesson, you're going to learn how to create a photographic effect that I see quite frequently, both online and in print. The effect is created by taking a photograph and making it look as if the colors are selectively out of register. It is a process that involves using channels.

I am first going to show you the manual, step-by-step way of doing it, but know that I am also going to provide you with some actions that will automate much of the work.



These are two examples from Pinterest, of the effect we're going to create.

Convert Channels into Layers (Timestamp 1:45)

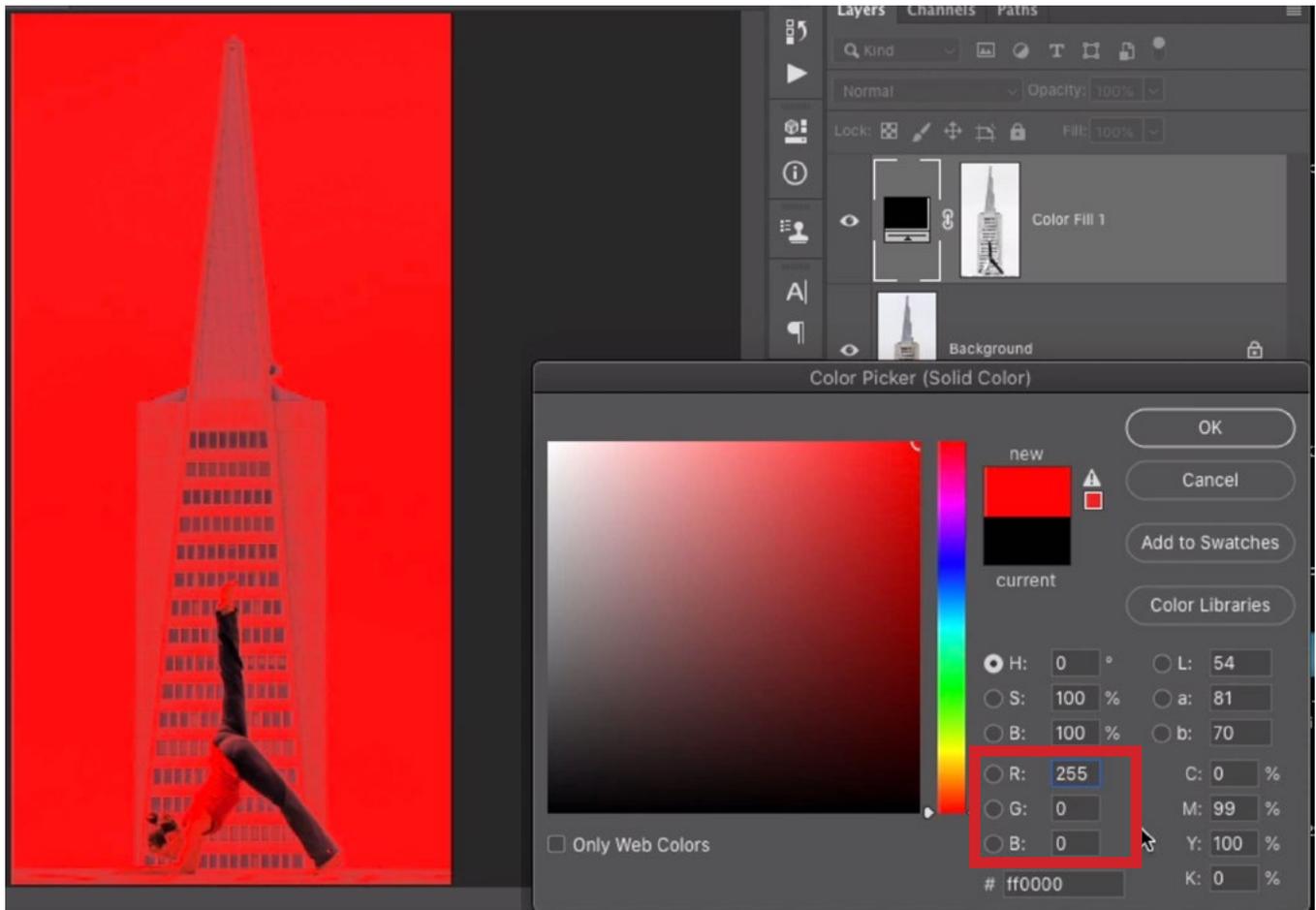
Behind the scenes, a photograph is made out of red, green and blue light. You can see that in Photoshop's Channels Panel, which is grouped with the Layers Panel. (If the panel is not visible on your interface, you can open it by clicking on the Window menu and choosing Channels.) You'll need to take each of the three color channels and convert them into layers so that they will be easier to manipulate in Photoshop.



FAR LEFT: In the Channels Panel, you can see that the image is made up of red, green and blue light.

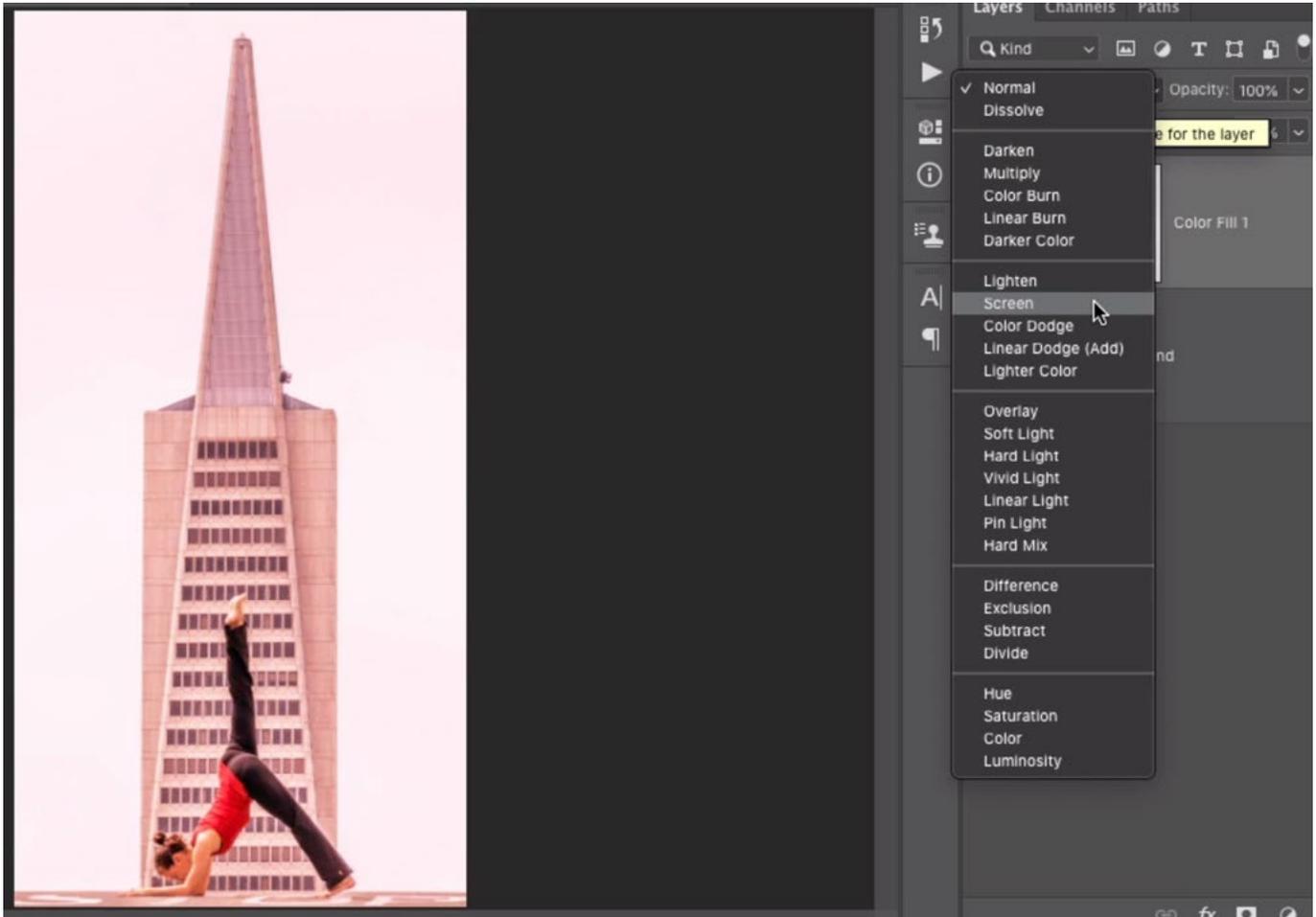
DIRECTLY LEFT: A selection was made of the red channel by holding down the Command key and clicking on the channel thumbnail.

- 1. Create selection of the channel** With the Channels Panel open, hold down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and click on the thumbnail for the Red channel. The “marching ants” selection will appear on the image. This selection is based on the brightness of the channel, where white areas are selected and black areas are not.
- 2. Create layer based on the selected channel** Now you’ll need to create a layer that is filled with red, based on the selection. Click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel (It looks like a circle that is half black/half white.) and choose Solid Color from the pop-up menu. The Color Picker will appear. The color needs to be pure red, so enter 255 into the Red field, leaving the Green and Blue fields set to 0 (zero). Click OK to close dialog.



A solid color layer is being created for the red channel. In the Color Picker, we entered 255 into the red field and 0 into the green and blue fields.

- 3. Change blending mode of color layer** This layer needs to act like light in order for the effect to work. Click on the Blending Mode menu at the top of the Layers Panel and choose Screen. The Screen blending mode causes the layer to act like light.
- 4. Temporarily hide red layer** Before repeating the process for the green and blue channels, turn off the visibility for the color layer that was just created and make sure the original image layer is active again.



The blending mode of the red layer is being set to Screen.

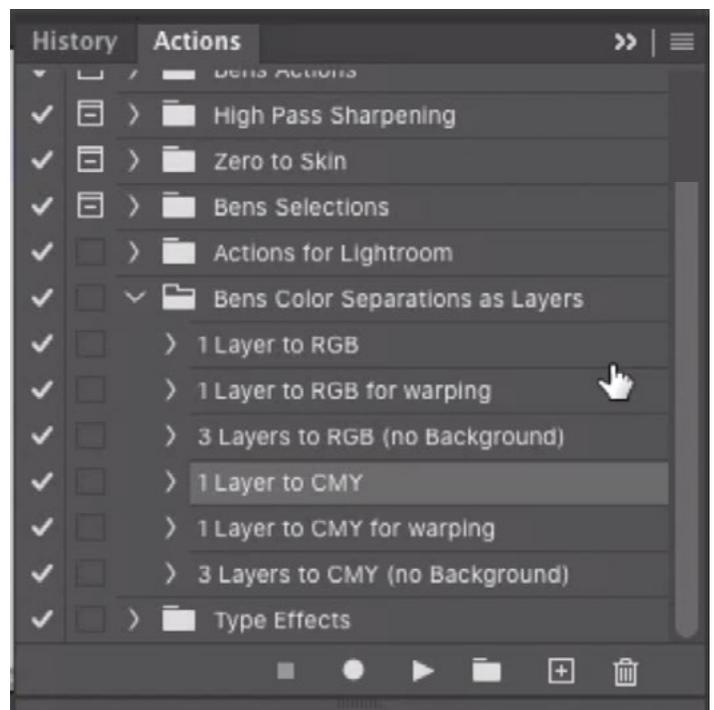
5. **Repeat process for the Green channel** Repeat steps 1 through 4 using the green channel. When creating the solid color layer, enter 255 into the Green field, leaving the Red and Blue fields set to 0.
6. **Repeat process for the Blue channel** Repeat steps 1 through 4 using the Blue channel. When creating the solid color layer, enter 255 into the Blue field, leaving the Red and Green fields set to 0.

Create Underlying Layer Filled with Black (5:45)

1. Click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel and choose Solid Color. When the Color Picker appears, set each of the R, G and B fields to 0 (zero) and then click OK.
2. Drag this new black layer so that it's positioned beneath the red, green and blue layers in the Layers Panel.
3. Take the layer mask that's attached to the black solid color layer and drag it to the Trash icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel. (This step is optional, but I feel it's good practice to discard any masks that are not doing anything.)

Downloading and Loading the Photoshop Action (6:35)

With this lesson, I have included an action that completes all of the above steps. You can download it from the course page on the Masters Academy site. The file will be compressed in a zip format. After you have downloaded the file, you will need to double-click on it to expand its contents. To install the action, double-click on the expanded .atn file. Photoshop should come to the forefront on your computer, indicating the action has been installed. (Note that there will be no indicative message that pops up.) If you expand the Actions Panel, you should see the newly-installed actions at the bottom of the action list. They are in a folder, titled “Bens Color Separations as Layers.”



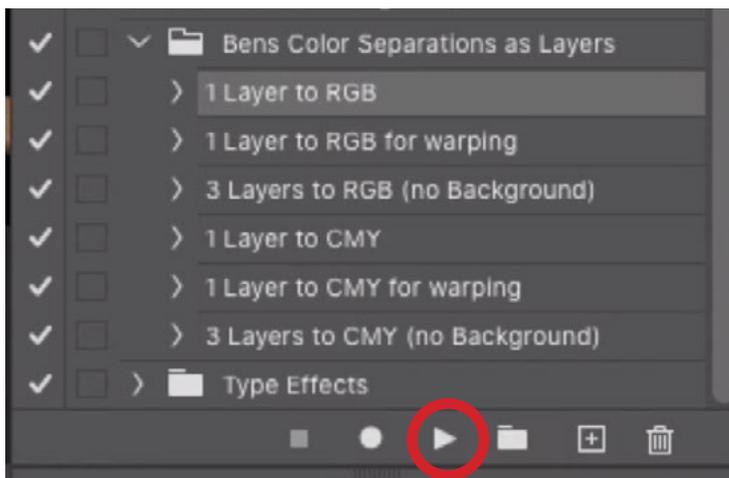
The downloaded actions folder will appear in the Actions Panel after being installed.

If, for some reason, the actions are not installed, you can manually install them by clicking on the little menu in the top right corner of the Actions Panel and choosing “Load Actions.” You’ll be prompted to navigate to the location of the actions file on your hard drive. Make sure you choose the file ending in .atn and not the zipped file.

Running the Action (9:04)

Expand the “Bens Color Separations as Layers” folder (in the Actions Panel) and you will see that it includes several actions. The first action, titled “1 Layer to RGB,” will produce the same end result as steps that were detailed above.

To run an action, click on the name of the action to make it active. Then click on the little Play button at the bottom of the Actions Panel.

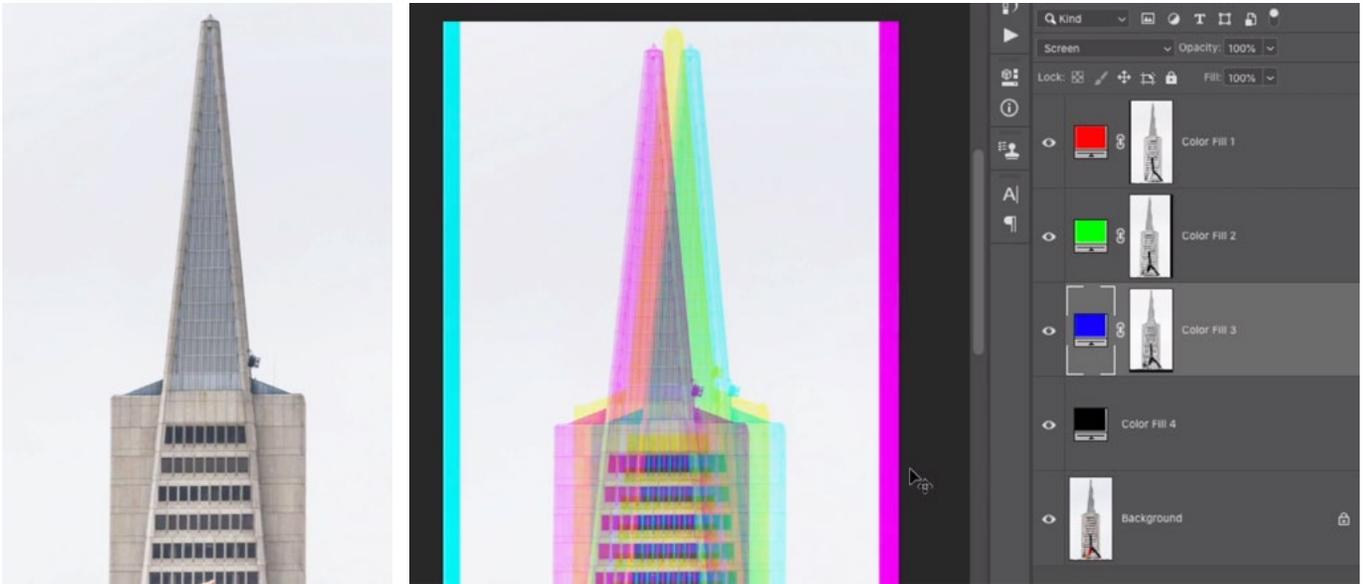


To run an action, click on the action to make it active and then click the Play button (circled).

Move the Color Layers out of Alignment (9:38)

Now that the three color channels are on different layers, you can get creative with them. Here are some of the things you can do:

You can move the layers so that the colors are out of register, or no longer aligned. To do this, click on one of the color layers to make it active and then use the Move Tool to click and drag on the layer, repositioning it. Do the same thing for the other color layers.



LEFT: All three color layers are in alignment. RIGHT: The Move Tool was used to reposition the three color layers, moving them out of alignment.

We moved the layers in the video example and you can see that we ended up with vibrant colors on the image edges. This will happen any time you have an almost-white background in your image. If that's the case, you can prevent it by using a different action. Use the action titled "1 Layer to CMY," which stands for Cyan, Magenta and Yellow. The results will look the same but you won't get the vivid colors around the edges.

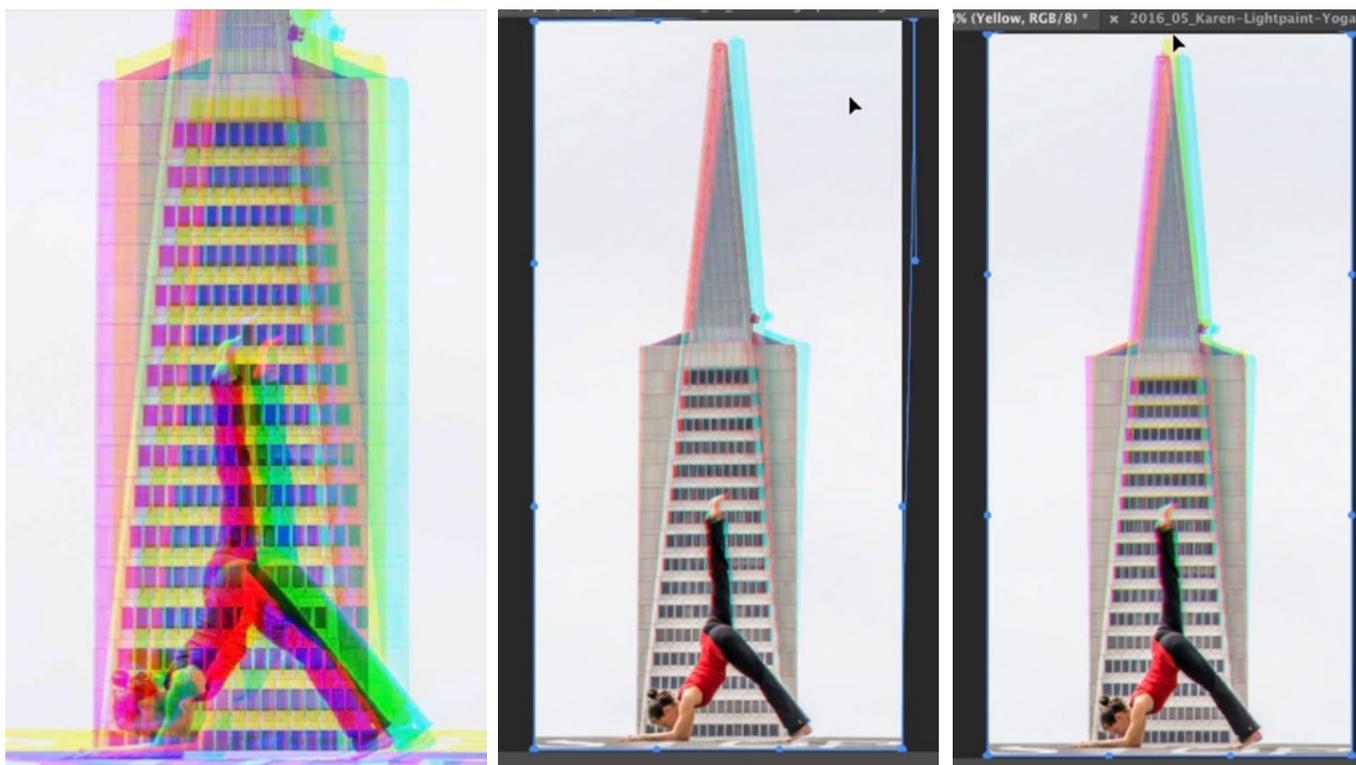
TIP: Use the "1 Layer to RGB" action when your image has a dark background and use the "1 Layer to CMY" action when your image has a light background.

Warp the Color Layers (11:45)

The technique above allowed us to move each of the three color channels independently of one another. There is another technique where we don't move the entirety of a layer. Instead, the Warp command can be used to move some parts of a layer more than others.

Activate one of the color layers, click on the Edit menu and choose Transform > Warp. You will see that transform handles appear around the layer. You can now click and drag within the image and the part of the image where you click is the part that will move when you drag. The rest of the image will stay in place. Tap the Return/Enter key to lock in the transformation. Now you can repeat the process with the other color layers, warping them independently of one another.

In the video example, we wanted the subject (near the bottom of the image) to stay in place while we shifted the colors in the background of the image. We warped the color layers by clicking within the image, near the top, and shifting the colors. Because the subject is at the bottom of the image, the colors are not shifted in that area.



LEFT: The three color layers were moved using the Move Tool. **CENTER:** Instead of using the Move Tool, the Warp command is being used to move the top right part of the blue layer. **RIGHT:** The Warp command was used to move the top area of all three color layers. The bottoms of the layers remained in place.

Puppet-warp the Color Layers (13:23)

The Puppet Warp command provides another way of moving the color layers independently of one another. If you are going to use this feature, however, you will need to prepare in advance.

In the actions folder I provided, there are two actions that are designed to produce results that can be used with the Puppet Warp feature.

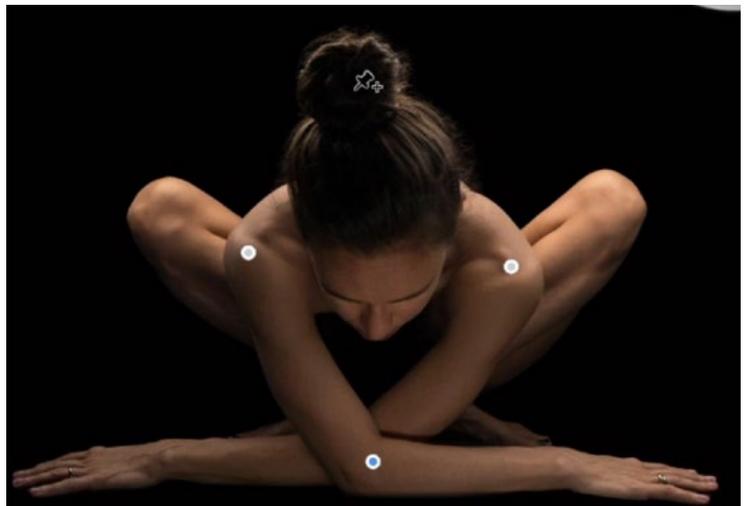
The actions are:

- “1 Layer to RGB for warping”
- “1 Layer to CMY for warping”

If you run one of the actions we used previously and then try to use the Puppet Warp command, you will see that there will be an issue. If you plan to use this feature, you will need to separate the color channels by using one of these “for warping” actions. These actions will create color layers that do not have layer masks attached to them.

After running one of these “for warping” actions, activate one of the color layers, click on the Edit menu and choose Puppet Warp. By default, a mesh will appear over the image. If you don’t care to view this mesh, turn off the “Show Mesh” check box in the Options Bar (above the main image window).

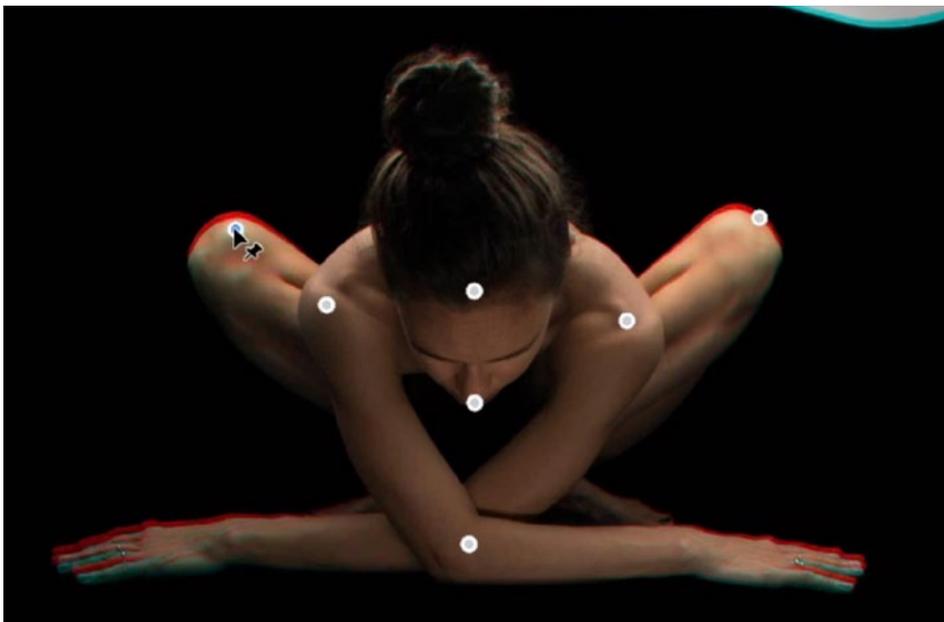
Now choose which parts of the image you would like to look normal. These are the parts where the colors will stay in alignment. You are going to place pins on those areas that you don’t want to change and those pins will lock the positions of those areas. That way, you can warp other areas of the layer and the pinned areas will stay in place.



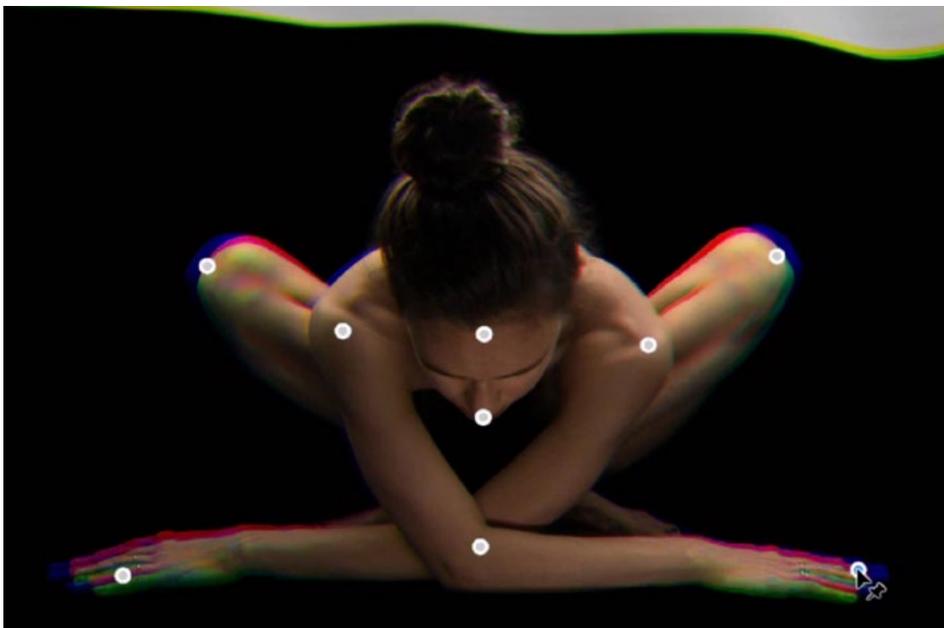
The Puppet Warp command is being used to place pins on the areas we want to remain in place.

Click on the areas you want to stay in place. You will see little pins appear on those areas. Then, click and drag on an area you want to reposition. This will place a pin and then move it, repositioning the layer. You will see the color shift positions, depending on which color layer was active. When you're satisfied with the color you were working on, tap the Return/Enter key to lock in the transformation and remove the Puppet Warp pins.

Now you can repeat the process with the other color layers.



With the red layer active, we clicked to place a pin and then dragged that pin to move the targeted area.



All three of the color layers were manipulated in different ways while the central part of the layers stayed in place.

Create the Effect with Multiple Images (20:30)

There is another way of creating this effect and that is by using three images. There are two actions included in the provided actions folder that will allow you to do this.

The actions are:

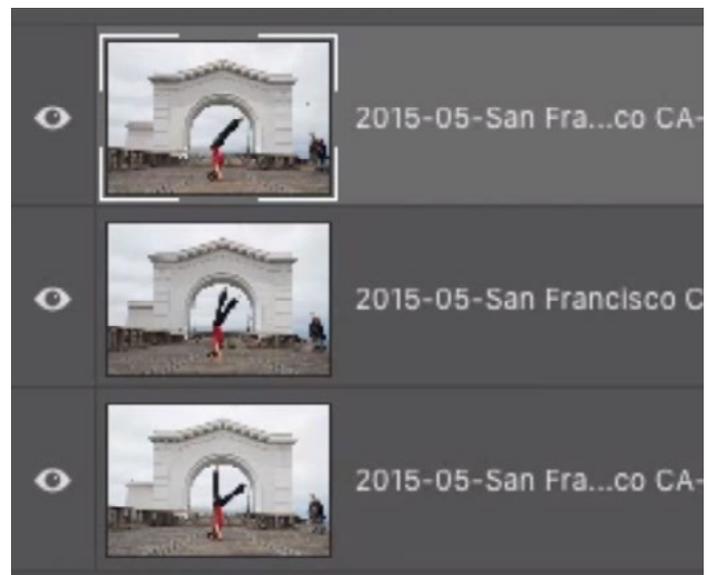
- “3 Layers to RGB (no Background)”
- “3 Layers to CMY (no Background)”

When we created the effect using one image, each of the three color channels were turned into individual layers. When using three images, we take the red channel from the first image, the green channel from the second image and the blue channel from the third image. That’s what these actions do. Note that you can not have a locked background layer when running these actions.

In the video example, we have three images where the background is the same but the subject is in different positions. That’s going to create an interesting effect when we separate the colors.

You will need to start by placing the three images in a single Photoshop document. Select the layers in Bridge, click on the Tools menu and choose Photoshop > Load Files into Photoshop Layers. Photoshop will come to the forefront and all three images will be stacked as separate layers in a single document.

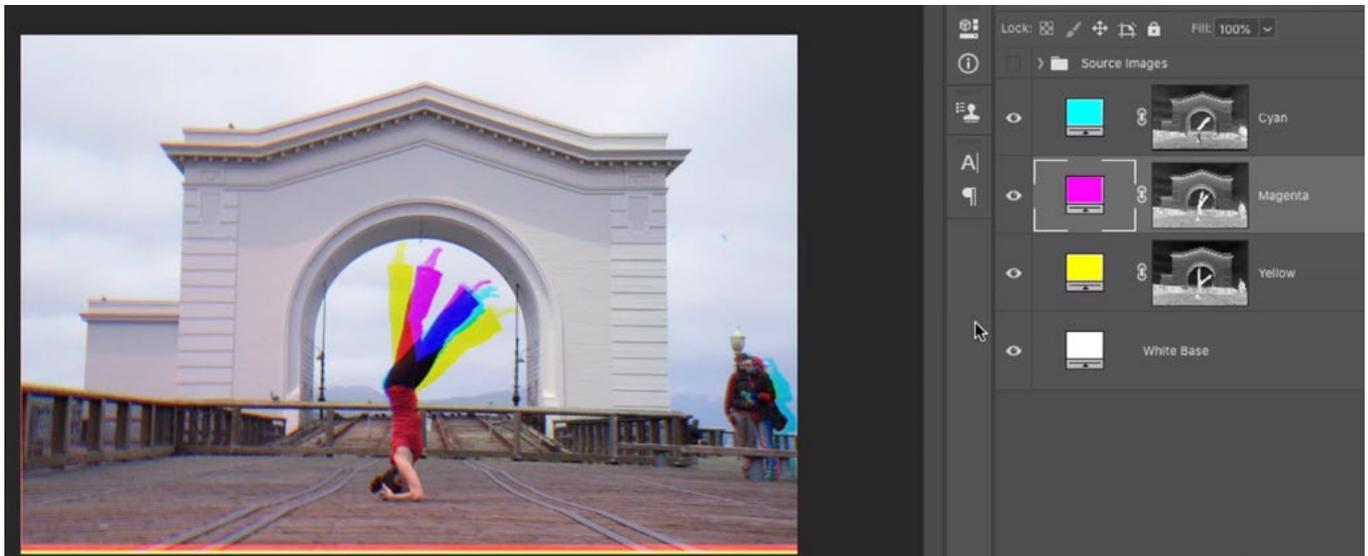
NOTE: If you are using Lightroom, you would select the images, click on the Photo menu and choose Edit In > Open as Layers in Photoshop...”



Three images were loaded as separate layers in a single document.

If the image has a light background, you will use the “3 Layers to CMY” action. If the image has a dark background, you will use the “3 Layers to RGB” action. Click on the name of the action to make it active and then click the Play button.

You’ll end up with three layers, where each image uses a different color channel. Anything that was in motion in the scene is going to take on a different color because it’s out of alignment.



Each of the three images has a different color channel applied. The image looks normal in the areas that are aligned.

Applying the Effect to Text (25:35)

This color separation effect can also be applied to text. In order for this to work, you will need to flatten the image so that the text is not still a layer that can be edited. Use one of the actions that starts with “1 Layer...” based on whether your image has a dark or light background.

Use Filters to apply effects After creating the layers, you can use filters to create some unique effects. You will need to apply the filter to the layer mask, so make sure that the mask is active, and not the layer itself. You can tell that the mask is active because it will have little white brackets around its thumbnail. If the layer is instead active, simply click on the mask thumbnail to make it active.

Motion Blur With this filter, it is only through this motion blur that the text layer will be out of alignment. You can apply the Motion Blur filter to each of the three layer masks, changing the Angle and/or Distance setting for each one.



The Motion Blur Filter is being applied to the layer masks for each of the three color layers.

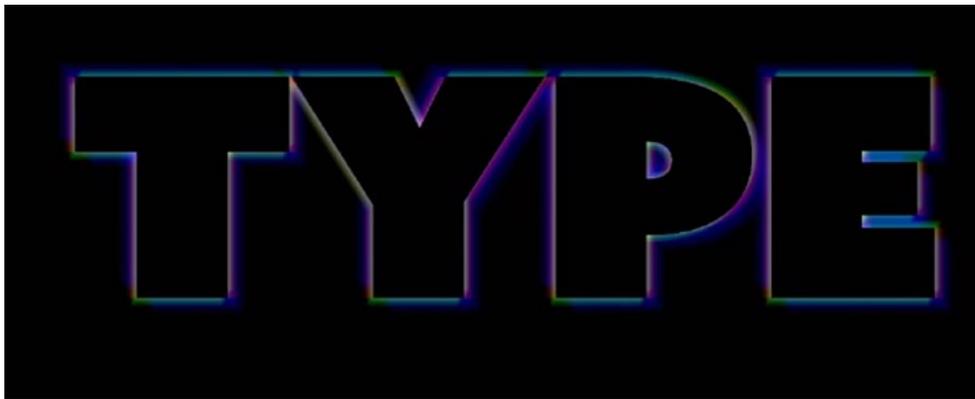
You can even take this a step further by using blending modes. Drag the original image (the bottom layer) to the top of the layer stack. You may need to unlock the layer in order to do this. When it's at the top, it's going to completely obscure the view of what's underneath. The trick is to change the blending mode to change the way the layer interacts with the layers beneath it. You can either manually use the blending mode menu at the top of the Layers Panel, or you can use a keyboard shortcut to cycle through the layers. The Move Tool must be active in order for this shortcut to work. Hold down the Shift key and then use the plus and minus keys (+ -) to cycle through the different blending modes. The different modes will create different types of effects.



The original image layer was moved to the top of the layer stack and the blending mode was set to Darken. This limits the color effect to the inside of the bright type.



The blending mode of the top, original image layer was set to Lighten.



The blending mode of the top, original image layer was set to Subtract.

Warping text You can also apply the Warp command to the three different colored text layers. With the first color layer active, click on the Edit menu and choose Transform > Warp. Then, click and drag within the layer to warp different areas. Click the Return/Enter key to lock in the transformation. Then, do the same thing with the other two color layers.



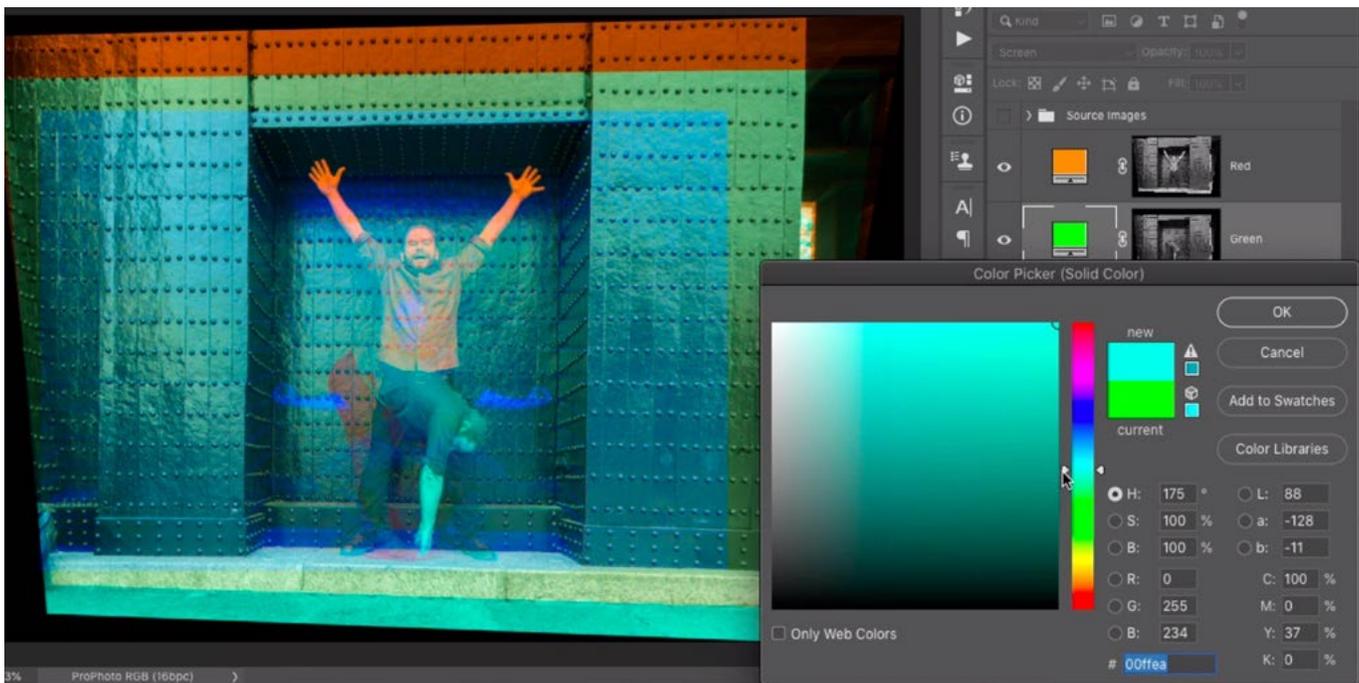
The three individual color layers were warped independently of one another.

Change the Colors of the Layers (32:58)

If you used one of the techniques or actions that creates three solid color layers, you can easily change the colors. You're not limited to using red, green and blue (or cyan, magenta and yellow).

To change the color of one of the layers, double-click on the color swatch for the Solid Color Layer in the Layers Panel. The Color Picker will appear and you can use it to change the color.

If you do change the colors, know that the unchanged parts of the image (the areas that were in alignment) will no longer look like a normal photograph. For this reason, I find that changing the colors can be most effective when working on a white background.



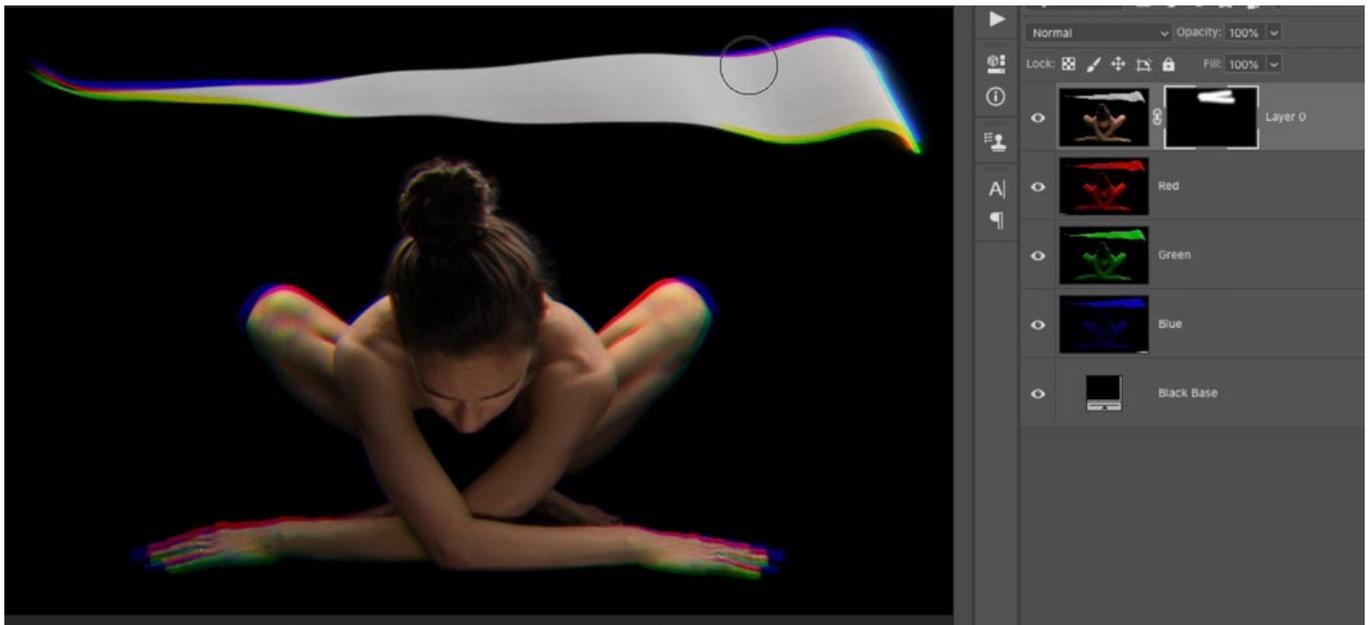
We double-clicked on the color swatch for the Solid Color layer. This called up the Color Picker and we're using it to change the layer's color.

Selectively Apply Original Image (34:27)

It can be useful to keep the original image that was used to create the separated color effect because you can use it to adjust the effect. To do this, drag the original (bottom) image layer to the top of the layer stack. Then add a layer mask that is completely black. You can create a black layer mask by holding down Option key (Alt on Win) and clicking the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel. When a mask is completely black, it means that it is completely hiding the layer it's attached to.

Now, you can activate the Brush Tool and use a soft-edged brush to paint with white on the layer mask. By painting with white, you are revealing areas of the layer. By bringing back parts of this original image, you will be selectively hiding the color effect.

You can also experiment with the opacity and blending mode of this top-most original image layer.



The original image layer was placed at the top of the Layers Panel and a black mask was added, hiding the layer. Here, we are painting with white on the mask in order to selectively reveal parts of the layer.

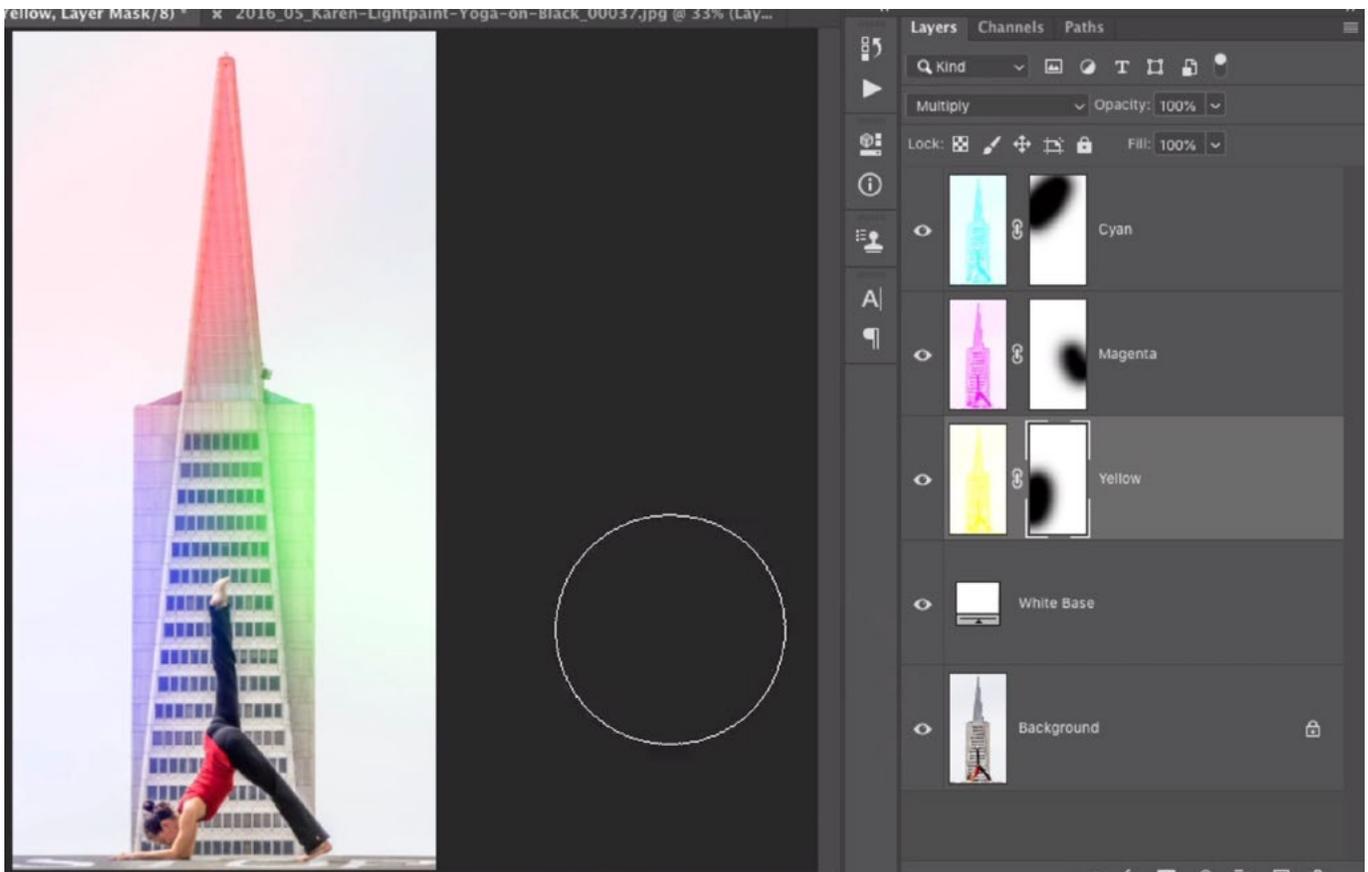
Use Layer Masks to Hide Parts of the Color Layers (37:31)

This technique can be used on the color layers that result from using one of the “for warping” actions. These actions create three individual color layers that do not use layer masks.

Run one of these “for warping” actions and then add layer masks to each of the resulting layers. Add a layer mask to an active layer by clicking the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel. The mask will be white by default, which means that the entire layer is visible.

Then, activate the Brush Tool and paint with black on one of the Layer Masks. This will prevent the color from applying in the area where you paint.

Wherever you allow all three of the color layers to apply, the image will look normal. It’s the areas where you paint with black that the color will be shifted.



The “for warping” action was used, which resulted in three color layers. A mask was added to each layer and we painted with black on the masks in different locations for each layer.