

# The Artist In Me



Artistic Photo Manipulation  
Rich Ernst February 2019

There is an artist in all of us, however, some of us may need to work a little harder to bring it out. In this presentation, I'm going to share some of the software I use to help bring my creative side out.

# Is a Photograph Art?

Want to start a fight? Just ask a group this question. I've encountered people with both positive and negative responses to this question. As photographers, we probably all share the same positive response that a photograph can indeed be art.

# What is 'Fine Art Photography'?

How about an even bigger fight? Ask this question of ten people, and you will probably get ten different answers. Many times that answer will be vague and possibly even incomprehensible. Let's take a little deeper dive into this question.

# Fine Art Photography

Fine Art Photography is photography created in accordance with the **vision of the artist** as a photographer. Using photography as a medium to bring something to life that only lives in the artist's mind. Simply capturing what you see in an artistic way is the art of photography and not creating fine art. The goal is to **express an idea, a message, or an emotion**. Fine art photography stands in contrast to representational photography, such as photojournalism, which provides a documentary visual account of specific subjects and events, literally representing objective reality rather than the subjective intent of the photographer; and commercial photography, the primary focus of which is to advertise products or services.  
(Wikipedia)

If you google 'Fine Art Photography', you will be inundated with links that try to define or describe what it might mean. Wikipedia always has an answer for everything, so here is what they say about it. This boils down to photography that expresses the creative vision of the photographer as they try to convey an idea, a message or an emotion.



# Fine Art Photography

...the term "fine art photography" has no universally agreed meaning or definition: rather, it refers to an imprecise category of photographs, created in accordance with the **creative vision** of the cameraman. The basic idea behind the genre, is that instead of merely capturing a realistic rendition of the subject, the photographer is aiming to produce a **more personal - typically more evocative or atmospheric - impression**. One might simplify this, by saying that fine art photography describes any image taken by a camera where the intention is aesthetic (that is, a photo whose value lies primarily in its beauty) rather than scientific (photos with scientific value), commercial (product photos), or journalistic (photos with news or illustrative value)

Another attempt to define Fine Art Photography, and about the same idea. Again it is the creative vision of the photographer, trying to produce a photograph that is more personal, typically more evocative or atmospheric, more impressionistic than documentary. The photographer needs to invest their emotion, and mood into the photograph in a way that moves the viewer.

# Fine Art Photography

Art implies control of reality, for reality itself possesses no sense of the aesthetic.  
Photography becomes art when certain controls are applied. (Ansel Adams)

A photograph is not an accident - it is a concept. (Ansel Adams)

Some quotes from Ansel Adams expressing thoughts along the same line.

# Fine Art Photography

- It is not about capturing what the camera sees; it is about capturing what the artist sees
- “art” is anything that raises an emotional response in one or more people other than the creator
- done to express the artist's perceptions and emotions and to share them with others
- what is or isn't Art is not only subjective, but also cultural and generational
- In the end, it's all just personal opinion, taste and preference

Some additional thoughts, expressing the difficulty and ambiguity of trying to define Fine Art Photography.

## Fine Art Photography

- Two of the most frustrated trades are dentists and photographers - dentists because they want to be doctors, and photographers because they want to be painters. (Pablo Picasso)
- More than \$250

Mostly tongue in cheek, these comments still have a grain of truth to them. Photographers truly are using the camera for their creative outlet, and if someone views your photograph as something of value and is willing to pay for it to hang on their wall, wouldn't that be fine art?

# My Journey

- I love the visual arts such as drawing and painting but never mastered
- Also love taking photographs
- Photo Manipulation--Combining multiple artistic techniques/media (Photo, Draw, Paint)
- Lots of software options but these work for me
- Start with good composition and interesting subject (even add or remove elements)
- Experiment
- Not all images are good candidates for all techniques
- Pen/Tablet recommended

I have taken classes in fine visual arts such as oil painting, watercolor and pottery, and I have loved it. Unfortunately, not having the time to devote to developing any skill in the craft, I never really matured as that artist inside me. Since my earlier days in the army, I started taking pictures and working in the darkroom, and I loved that too. Enter the digital era, and this changes the whole game. And it only gets better as time moves on. Modern cameras and post processing software open up a whole dimension to the craft of photography.

There are lots of options for both the capture of the image and the image development, and these are the ones that work for me.

There are some things to consider if you go down this road. First, you need to start with a good composition and an interesting subject. The nice thing about digital manipulation, is that you are free to add or remove elements that support and enhance the composition. Since you will be rendering the image in the subsequent steps, the changes do not need to be perfect. This can all be done in a non destructive way, so go ahead and experiment to your heart's content. Realize that you may not end up with the results you were expecting; not all images, for example very fine detailed images, lend themselves to these techniques. If so, move on to another image and try again. Using a digital pen and tablet can even increase the feel of traditional media, and can increase the spontaneity in the image.

# Tools of the trade

Camera--be familiar with the technical aspects: ISO, aperture, shutter speed, focus

Subject, Message

Simplify

Composition--leading lines, rule of thirds, balance, symmetry

Tonality, Color, Contrast

Light--it's all about the light

Post Processing

Don't forget about all the things in your tool bag that you already use. You need to be comfortable with capturing your image. That means that you should be comfortable with your camera and all of its controls. Know how the ISO, aperture and shutter speed affect the image, and how they interact and are used to get the proper exposure. Most photographs are tack sharp, but may benefit from defocused foreground or background. The photographer, as the technician, needs to keep the technical details in mind, so they can effectively express their creative vision. Keep in mind the subject and the story or the message you are trying to convey to the viewer. A lot of times less is better; keep the image simple and do not clutter it up with too much unrelated detail. There are no hard and fast rules to composition, but the more familiar guidelines can help you capture that money shot. Tonality, color and contrast can create mood and drama in your images, enhancing the composition. It's all about the light; whether natural or artificial, this can make or break the photo. There is a reason sunrise and sunset are called the golden hour, as it can impart that special quality to the image. Before and after storms can lead to some very dramatic light, and who doesn't love the drama in these photos. In addition, many of the qualities of composition, tonality, color, contrast, and light can be further controlled in post processing to enhance the viewers experience.

# Programs/Plugins That Manipulate Pixels

## Automated Filters

- Dynamic Auto Painter (DAP, from Mediachance)
- Photo Reactor (from Mediachance)
- Topaz Studio (Supersedes Topaz Plugins)
- Waterlogue

## Manual Drawing/Painting

- Corel Painter
- ArtRage
- TwistedBrush

## Photo Editor

- Lightroom/Photoshop (also On1, Topaz Studio, Corel, Affinity, Luminar)

Combinations of all of these techniques

Countless programs exist to develop your photos and to further manipulate them..This is a list of those I have used and continue to use. These programs span the range from the automatic processes where you make a couple of settings and push a button, to the manual process where you use your image to guide your actual drawing and painting, and to the more traditional digital darkroom tools. Let your imagination run wild and combine them all to achieve your creative vision.

In the following slides, I'll generally be showing a screen capture of the program interface, and then some examples of images created with the software.

# Dynamic Auto Painter (DAP)

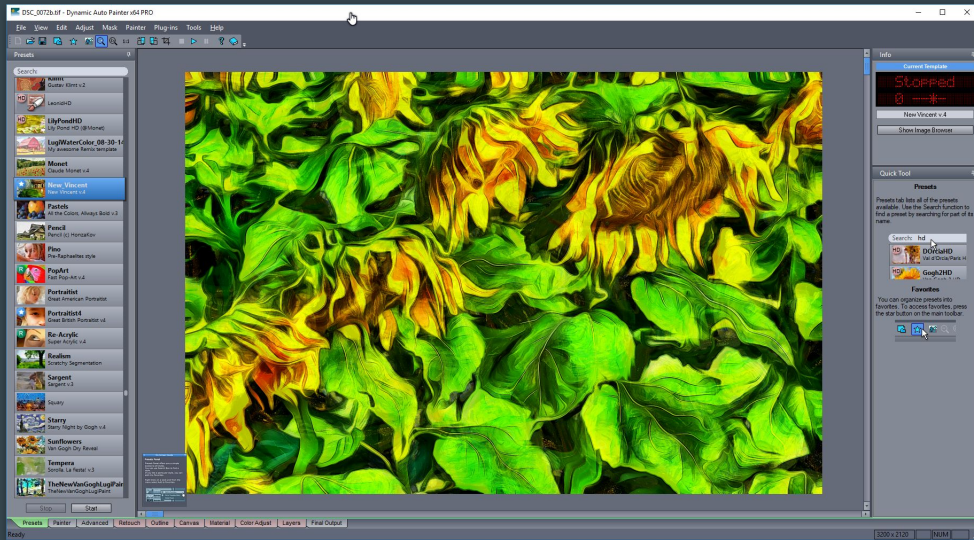
<https://www.mediachance.com/dap/index.html>

- Convert photos with many styles (ie. Monet, Van Gogh)
- Some customization of any style
- Automatically lays down paint strokes

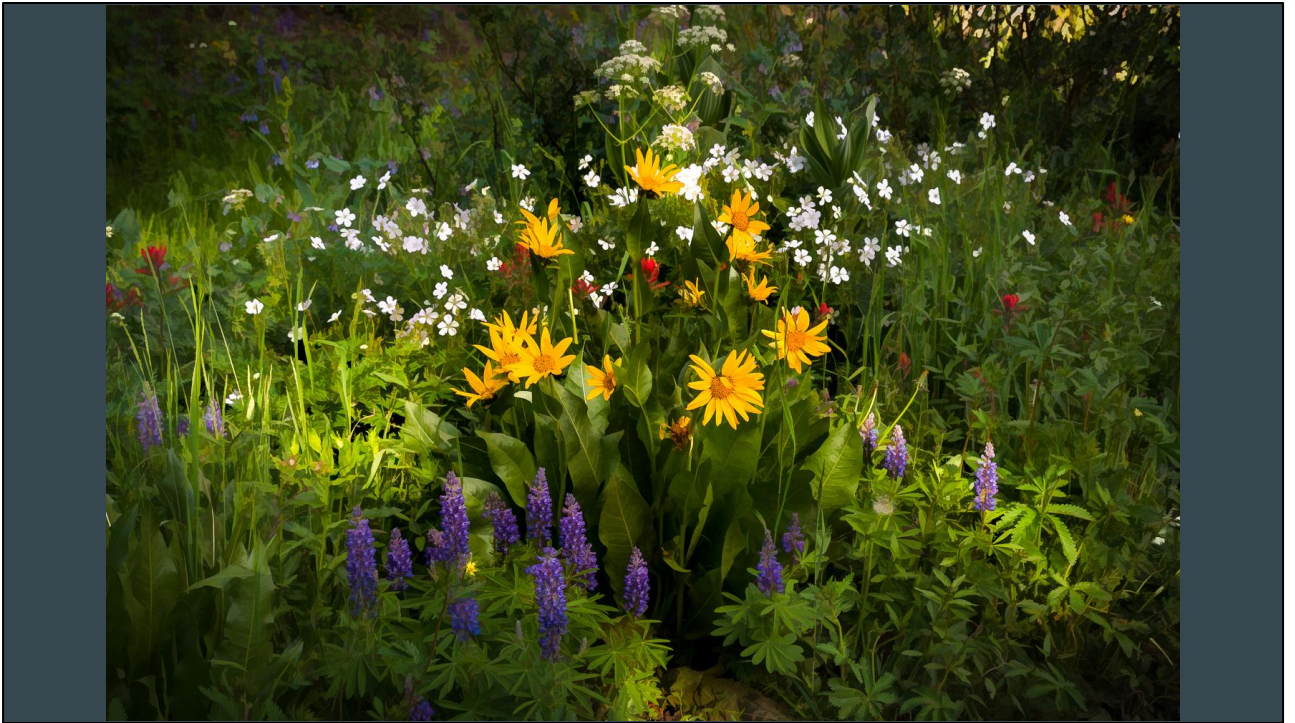
Of all the automated paint programs out there, DAP is probably my favorite. It offers a multitude of styles, all of which can be modified. Unlike most filters, this program analyzes the image and actually lays down strokes of color, similar to what a painter may do. It is quick and easy to experiment with several treatments of an image.



# Dynamic Auto Painter (DAP)



The image is in the central panel of the window, and the preset styles are displayed on the left, and progress and other information is displayed on the right. This is the Van Gogh treatment, complete with the distinctive distortions.

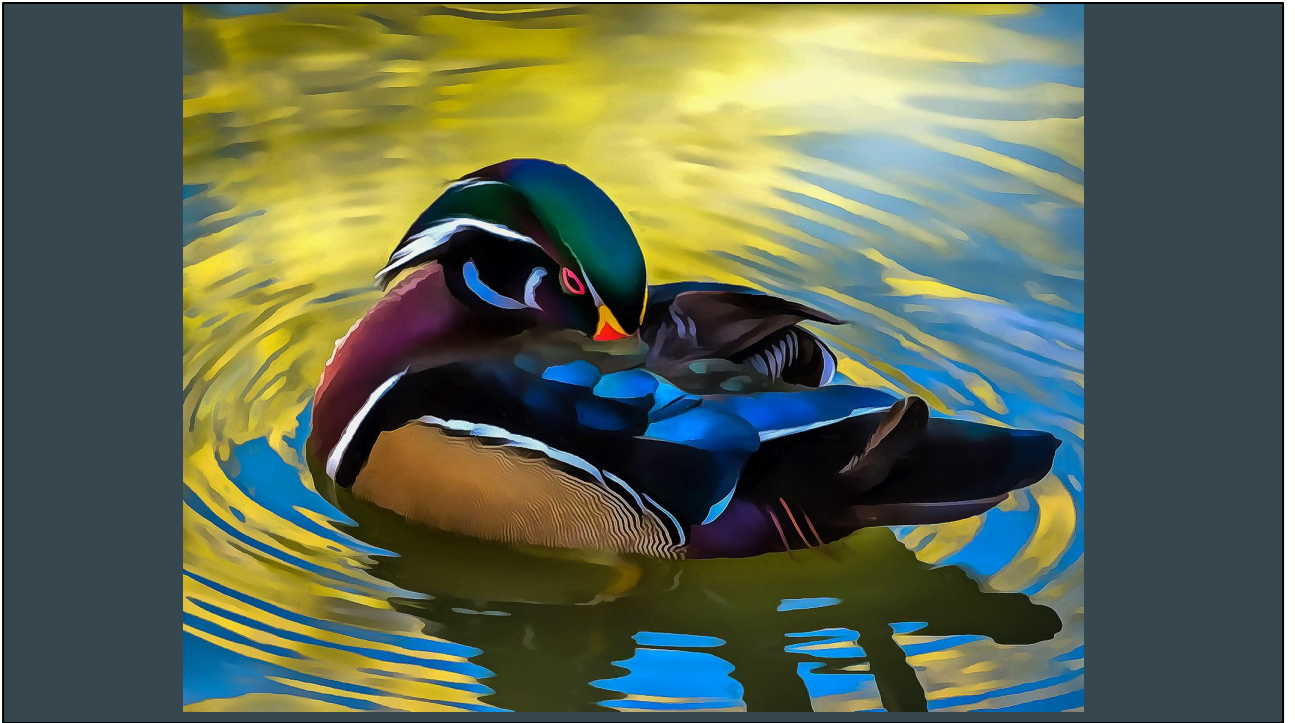


The photo used for this image was very detailed that confused that I feel confuses the eye. Removing the smaller details consolidates the tones and colors into larger blocks. Additional tonal manipulations in Photoshop add more dramatic light. Acrylic style removes small details that can make a shot too busy.

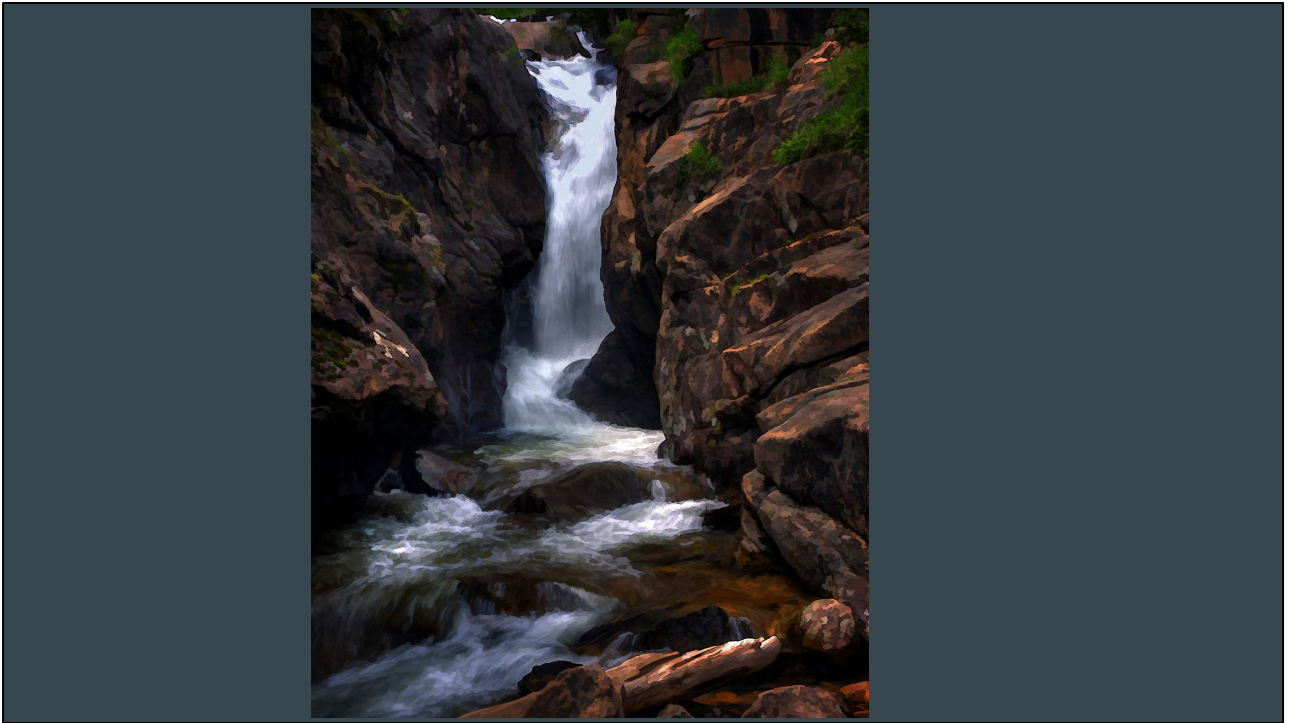


Another acrylic style to smooth things out.





Acrylic results in vibrant colors and fewer small details.



An oil style that was finished in Photoshop to add lighting into the pools.

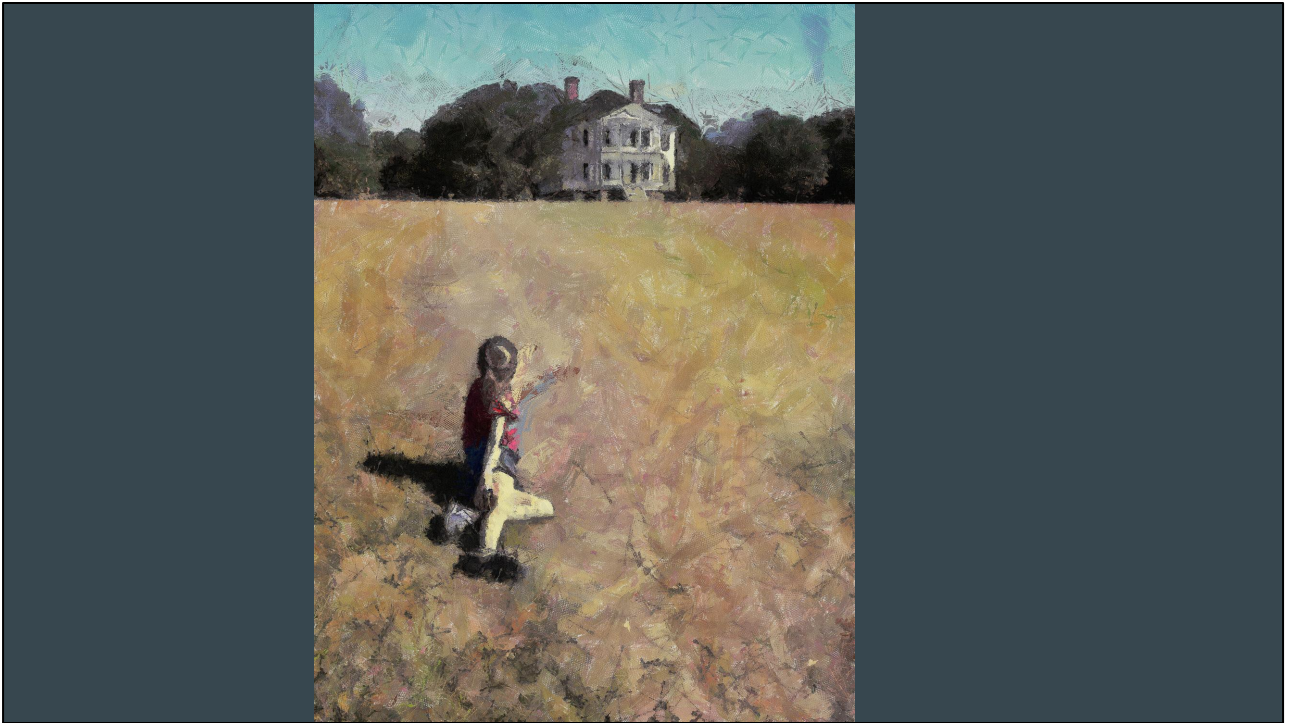


Removing smallest detail results in larger blocks of color and tone.



Removing small details results in a more graphic style.



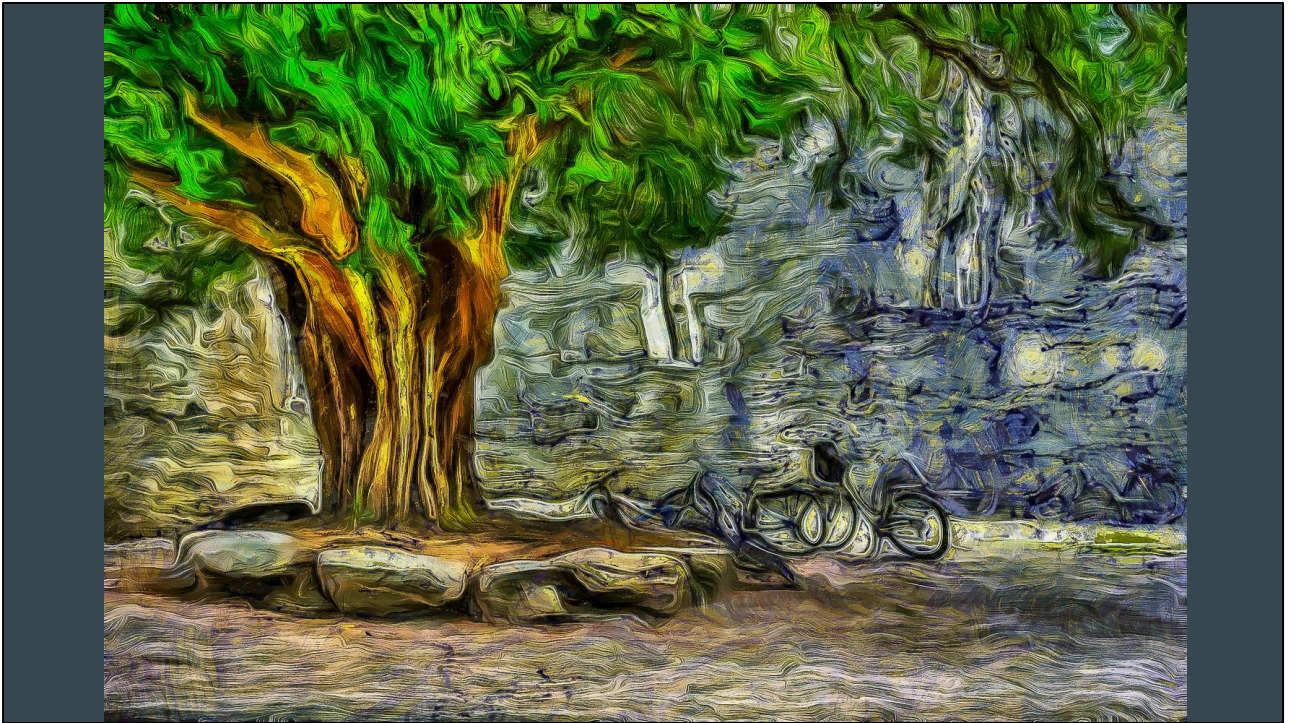


My take on 'Christina's World' by Andrew Wyeth.





A cubist kind of treatment.



And a nod to Van Gogh.

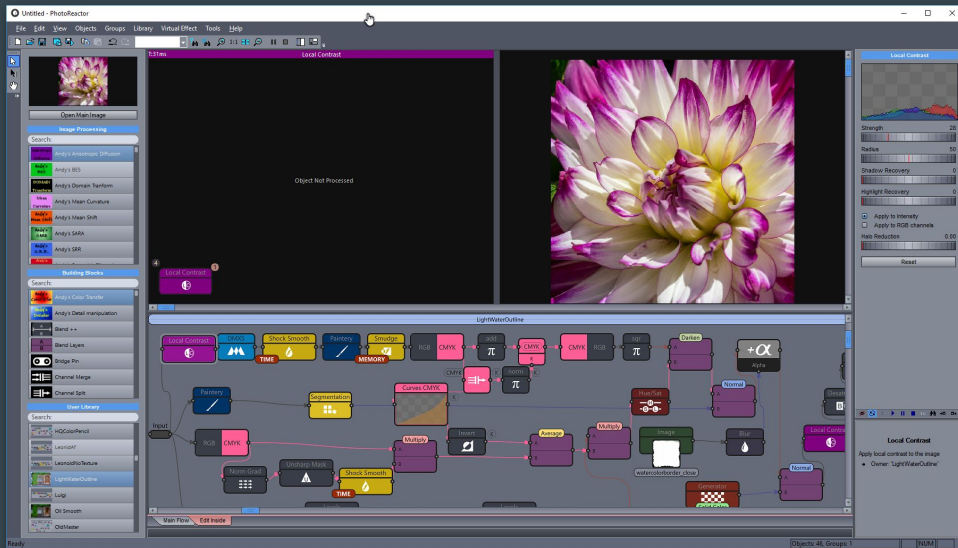
# Photo Reactor

<https://mediachance.com/reactor/index.html>

- Flow diagram photo processing
- Can be used for photo edits
- Many DAP styles based on Photo Reactor

This is a totally different animal. The big difference is that you create a flow of actions you want to perform on an image, and they are many and complex, and then package them up into a style or preset. This program includes the common tonality, contrast, color and sharpening that are common in most digital darkroom software, and in fact can be a standalone photo editor. In addition, there are many more complex adjustments such as splitting channels, adjusting, then merging back together. A lot of the styles from this program are built into DAP, another program from Mediachance.

# Photo Reactor



The bottom center panel shows a very complex flow of actions that are applied to an image to achieve a particular style. Each of those actions have adjustable settings that can be modified to further change the style. This is very similar to programming for the digital darkroom. Along the left are the building blocks in the flow as well as some already programmed flows, or presets. Programming a flow is as simple as grabbing a basic action or adjustment and dropping it in place onto the flow line. Each of the building blocks can have none to many adjustment sliders; these are displayed on the right when the block is selected.





Hard black edges highlight the color. Use of selective color to showcase the leaves.



Stylized to evoke the feeling of a fall walk through the aspens.





Dark edges and muted colors are similar to pen and ink with color wash.

# Topaz Studio

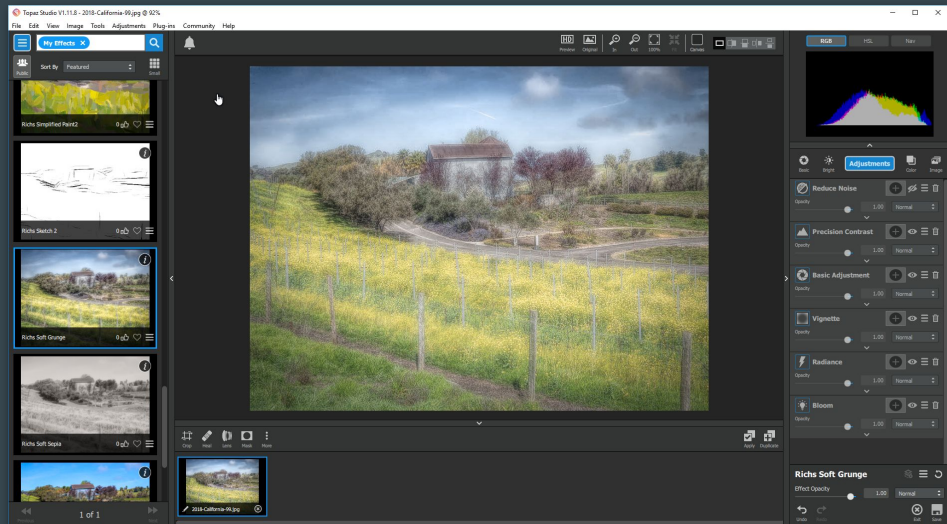
<https://topazlabs.com/>

- Photo effect filters (simplify and impression painter)
- Photo editor

Topaz studio is the replacement to all of the topaz plugins. The plugins still work, but will no longer be updated, as all of the development will be on Studio; most if not all of the functionality of the plugins is or will be in Studio. Topaz Studio in its own right is a photo editor. It supports all of the common adjustments of a digital darkroom as well as layers and masks. One thing that sets it apart are the simplify and impression adjustments. These two processes have long been a staple in the plugins for which Topaz is known.



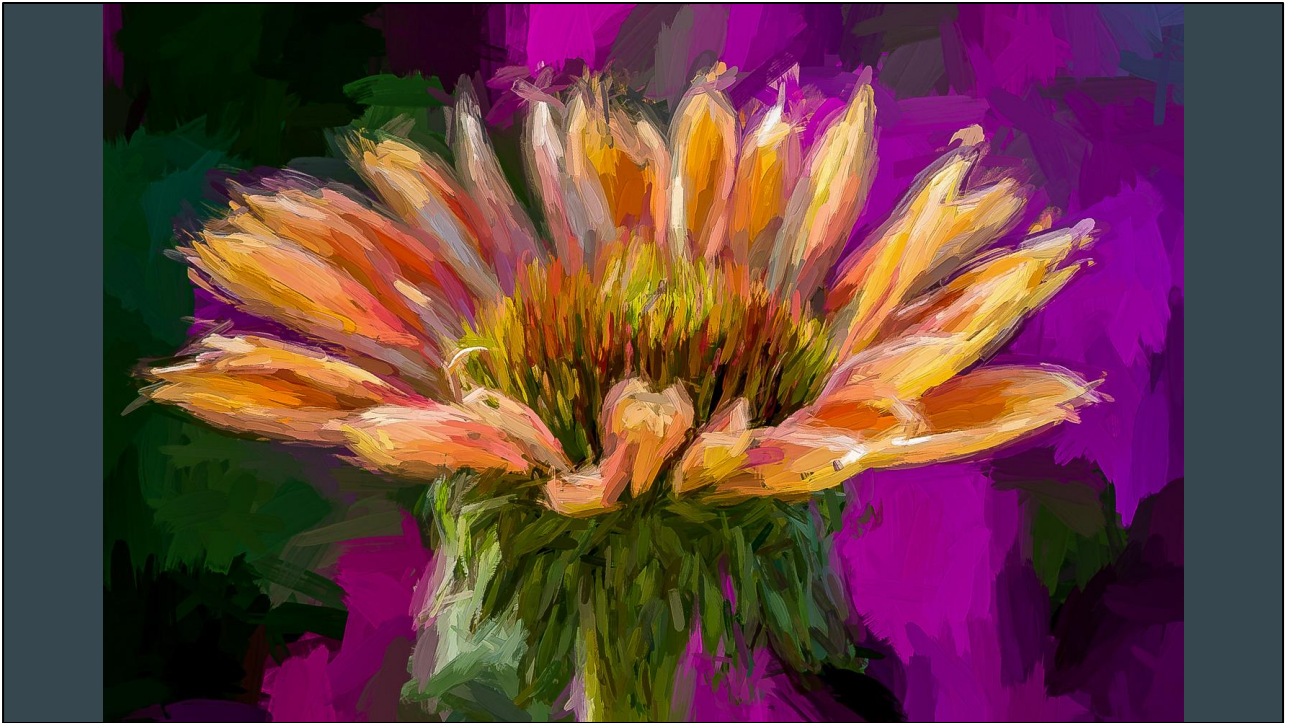
# Topaz Studio



Typical of most editors, the image being processed is in the center panel and a filmstrip below. The left panel contains the presets with a thumbnail of each. The adjustments being applied and the order they are applied in are shown on the left. Each adjustment has an expandable subpanel with actual setting sliders.

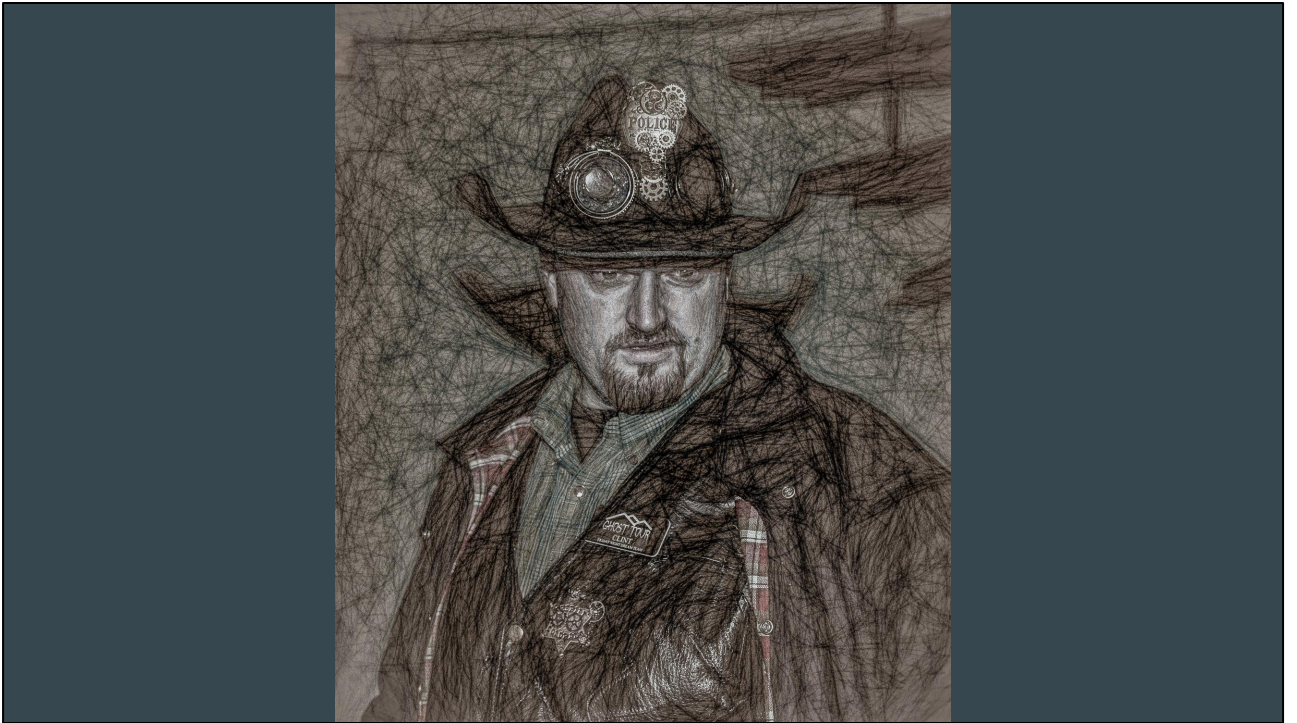


Removing detail and adding a canvas texture is similar to a classic oil.

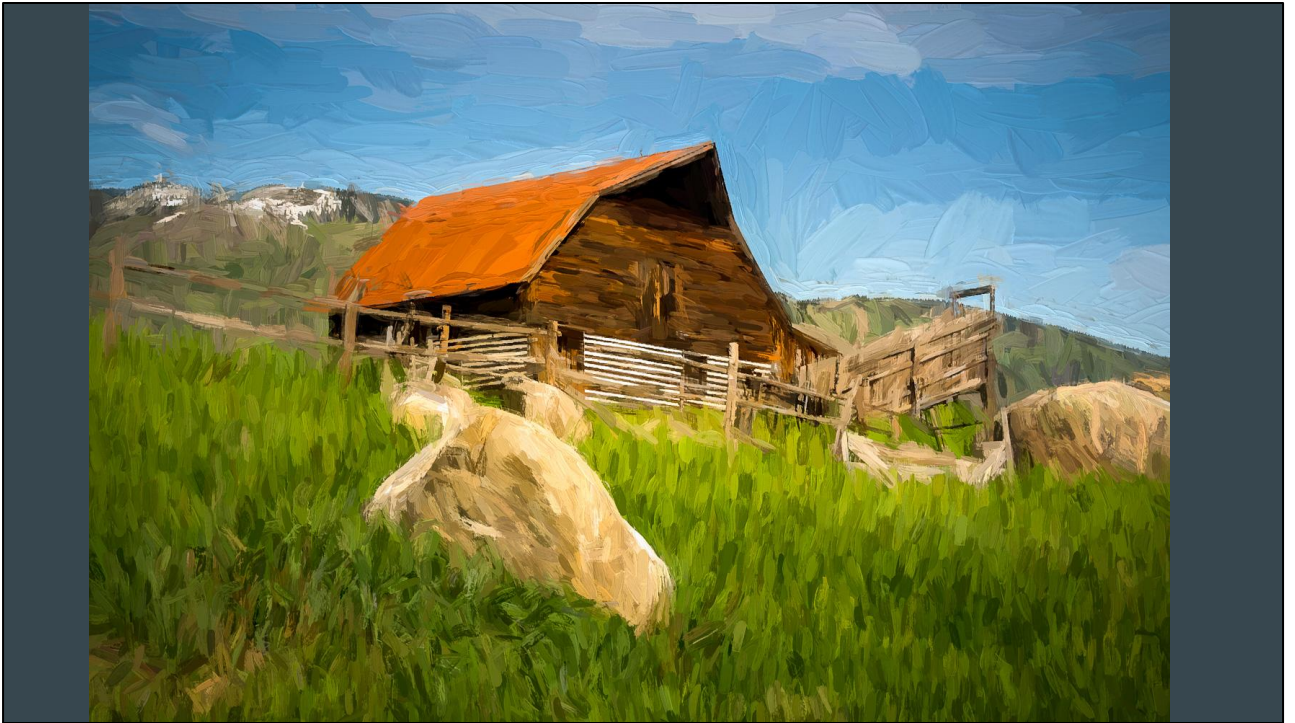


Bold strokes add an impressionistic touch.





How about a line drawing style?



The barn in Steamboat with the ski area behind done in a bold, broad stroke oil style.



Another in an oil style. This style typically works well on old barns and other wooden structures.





The strokes are very visible in this oil style, while the trunks and leaves in the background are just suggested.



Of course, a B&W high contrast leads to a very stark graphic style.



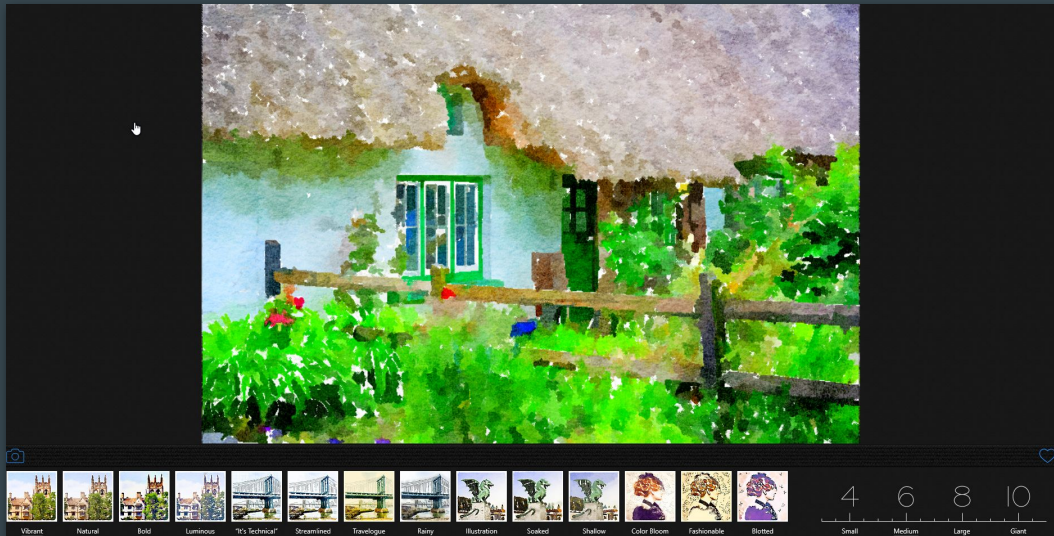
# Waterlogue

<http://www.tinrocket.com/apps/waterlogue/>

- Watercolor filter
- Minimum number of fixed styles
- Realistic effect

If I am after a watercolor effect, then Waterlogue is my goto app. This is probably the most realistic watercolor of any I have tried; most just blur the picture while this one will apply areas of color, similar to a real watercolor. I will typically bring this into Photoshop to finish it off since it does leave some annoying white space in the image. While there are very few options available, it does create a nice image.-

# Waterlogue



Not much to the interface, and not much customization available in this program. Your only choices are one of the 14 styles, a size, and a lighter/darker choice.



I think that Waterlogue is one of the best watercolor effects available. One distraction I find in these conversions are the myriad white specs; I usually finish off in Photoshop to blend them out.

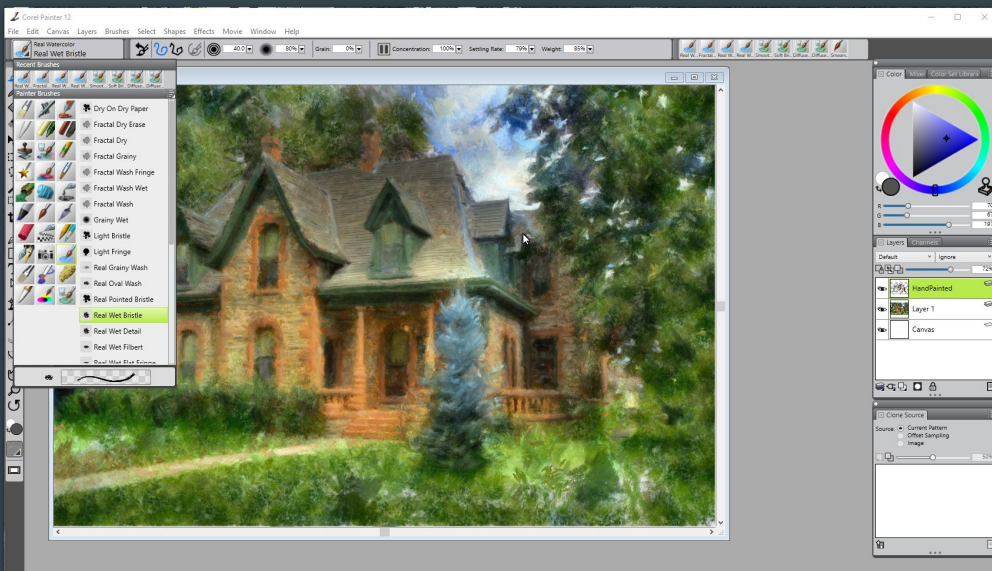
# Corel Painter

[https://www.painterartist.com/en/product/painter/?hptrack=en2bb2&\\_ga=2.123978760.340725877.1534737108-2002917168.1534737108](https://www.painterartist.com/en/product/painter/?hptrack=en2bb2&_ga=2.123978760.340725877.1534737108-2002917168.1534737108)

- Draw/Paint
- Clone Paint

This was one of the first digital artist programs available. It has tons of natural media brushes available, and it can be used for drawing and painting from scratch. It also has a tracing paper and cloning mode where a photo can be placed under the tracing layer as a guide for drawing, and it can also be used to pick up color from the underlying image and apply as a brush stroke. This is a complex program with a steep learning curve. In addition, it is a very expensive program. It is a very competent program, but I prefer the simplicity of ArtRage.

# Corel Painter

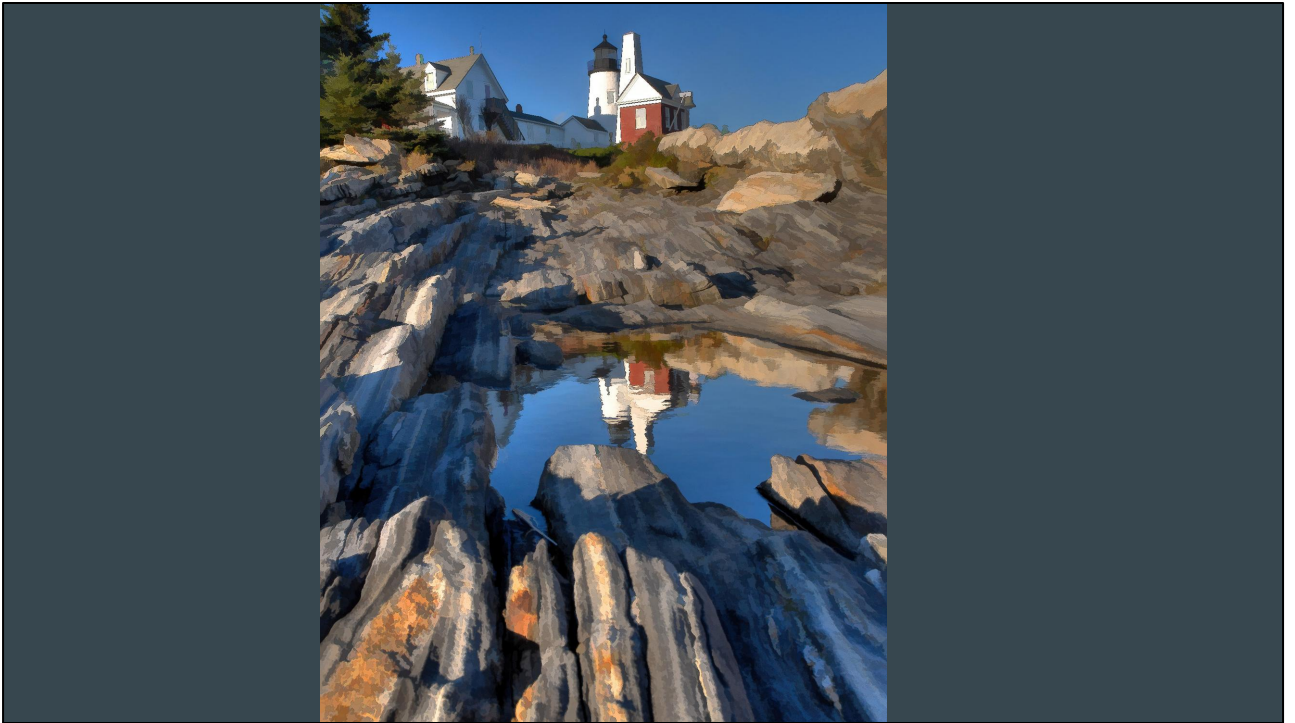


The interface is straightforward and familiar to navigate, with typical menus and toolbars. Tear-off palettes give you access to brushes, color picker and layers.





This was my first attempt at digitally hand painting. Obviously, a pen and tablet really help.



Simplified and digital hand painting results in very clean lines.



This view has changed so drastically in the past few years, and it makes me sad. The oil and gas wells, along with the wind farm would require lots of work to remove and get a clean horizon.



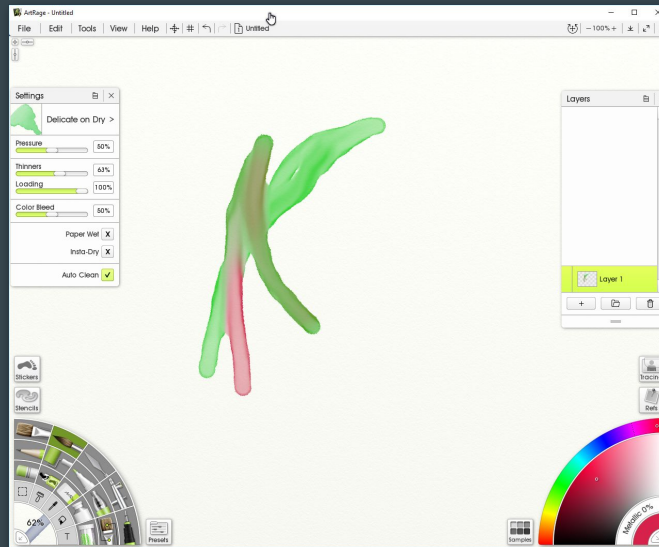
# ArtRage

<https://www.artrage.com/>

- Draw/Paint
- Tracing/Cloning

ArtRage is another drawing and painting program that offers tracing and cloning from an image below. It is similar to Corel Painter, but is much simpler and much cheaper. For freehand drawing and painting, this is my current choice.

# ArtRage



The UI is very simple and intuitive, with tool palettes along the edges. They conveniently hide as the brush approaches them. The natural media brushes offer realistic results and are easily configured to different density and blending effects. My choice now for a fun and natural painting experience.

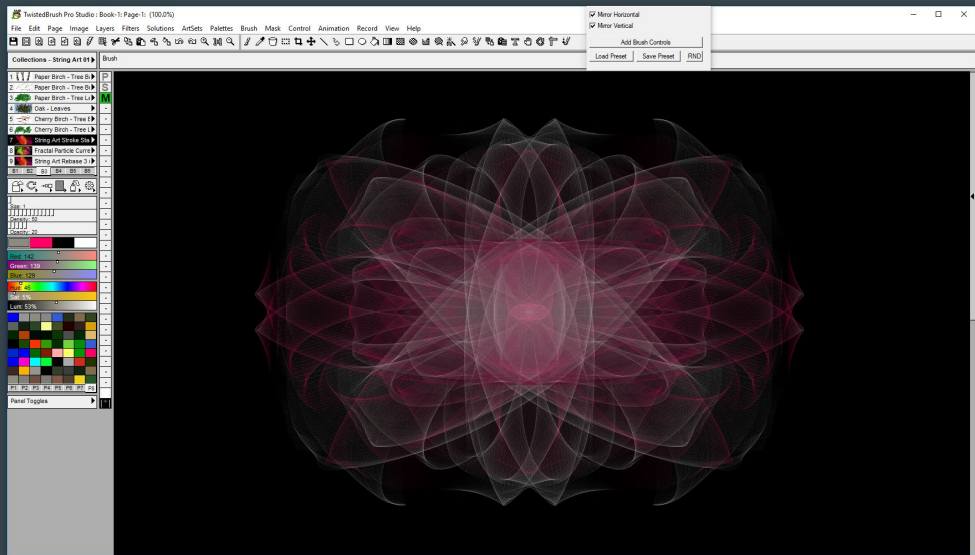
# TwistedBrush Pro Studio

[http://www.pixarra.com/pro\\_studio.html](http://www.pixarra.com/pro_studio.html)

- Photo Editing
- Filters
- Compatible with many Adobe Plugins
- Draw/Paint

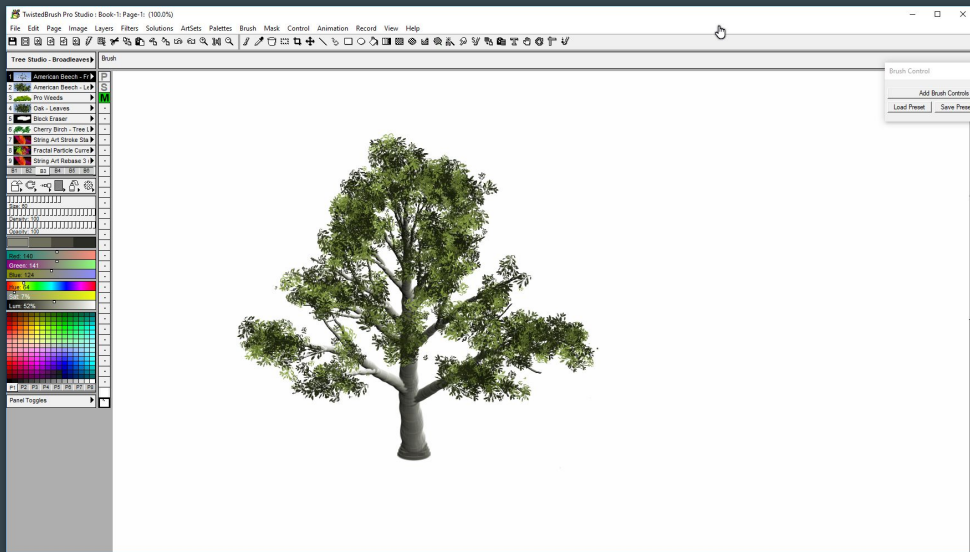
Twisted Brush has been around for a while, and the UI is dated and can get in the way, but it is still a nice program for digital painting. It has many functions for photo editing, and lots of filters and even can accept most Photoshop plugins. Its main strength is the brush engine that has been developed. Not many other programs can perform the tricks that this program can. You can spend hours just playing around with it.

# TwistedBrush Pro Studio



As I indicated, the UI looks a little different and dated, not quite following all UI conventions. Again, the image takes up the central panel of the window, with the brush and settings on the left. Nonetheless, it has some fascinating capabilities. This one is the string brush; it can be mirrored vertically, horizontally, or both. Choosing various color backgrounds and brushes can result in very different, abstract patterns.

# TwistedBrush Pro Studio



Another novel set of brushes are the tree building brushes. There is a brush to create the main trunk, another to add branches, and another to paint on the leaves. Several tree forms are available. These trees can be saved as image files and imported to be used as elements in other creative landscape images. This may be more fun than practical.



Digitally hand painted with Photoshop enhancements.

# Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop

<https://www.adobe.com/#>

- Love/Hate relationship, but the gold standard for photo processing
- My workflow is Lightroom 80%, Photoshop 20%
- Photoshop layers, masking and blend modes to control light and color
- Layers and adjustment layers offer non-destructive editing
- Can be used to process special effects
  - B&W and Sepia
  - Orton effect
  - Grunge effect

And then there is Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop. Don't overlook these programs to add some real dynamic interest to your photos. Some people swear by it, while others swear at it, but however you feel about Adobe, it is the gold standard of photo editing. I guess at times, I fall into both categories. My typical workflow is to do most of my basic processing in Lightroom, and probably I spend 80% of my time there. However, there are some things that just can't be done in Lightroom, or that can be done more easily and effectively in Photoshop. From Lightroom, I will hop over into Photoshop; the real power in the digital darkroom is in the layers, masking and blend modes available in Photoshop. From there, I can create a new layer and spawn Topaz Studio to adjust that layer. This layer along with other adjustment layers provide a non destructive processing that can be easily changed. Masks, particularly luminosity masks allow you to accurately target very specific areas of the image for adjustment. Lots of different effects can be added to your images using Photoshop; this ranges from the traditional B&W, Sepia and Duo Tone to the more current Grunge effect. I would guess that most professional photographers use Photoshop to get those magazine quality photos. So, don't be afraid of Photoshop, and dive in to take your photos from Ho-Hum to WOW.





Sepia toned and soft Orton effect. The image is a natural for B&W conversion since it started out as basically monotone, and the soft glow enhances the moodiness of the image.



Using HDR results in a wide tonal range, allowing you to make some extreme tonal adjustments. HDR with B&W and tonal adjust.



High key, high contrast B&W. With the snow and the white flower, this treatment is a natural for high key.



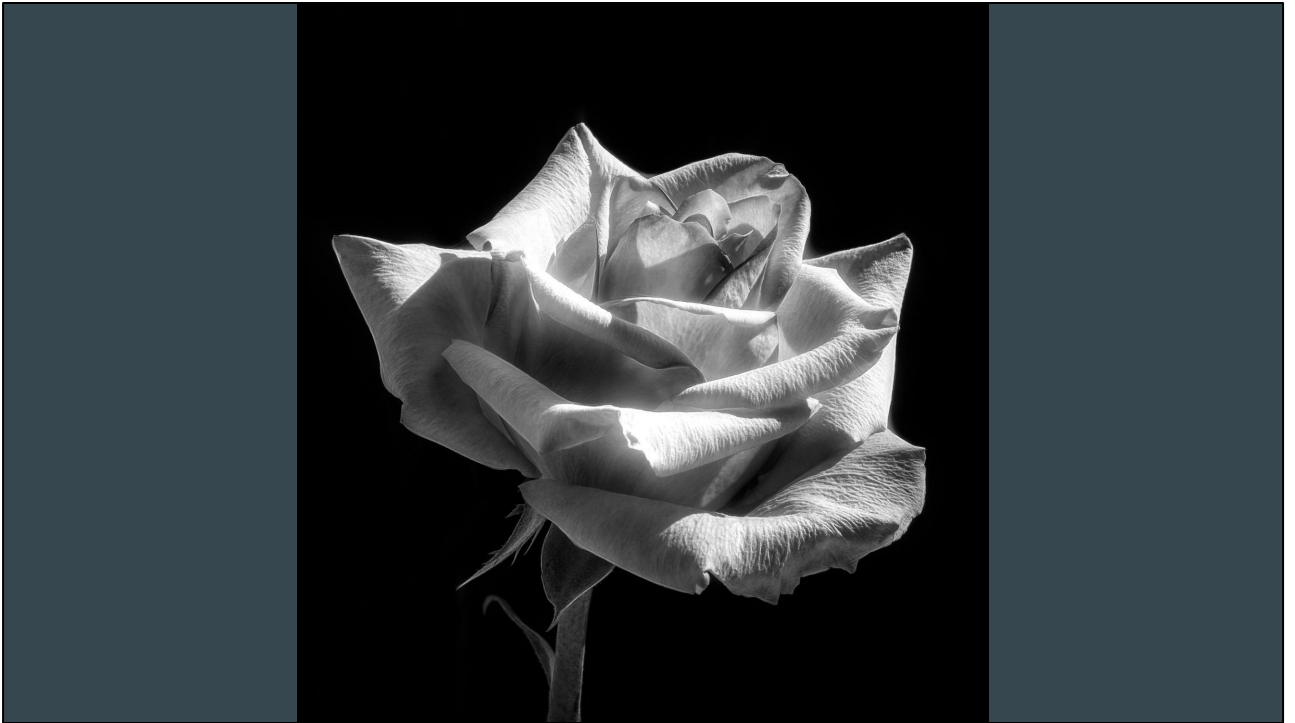
HDR, high contrast, low key B&W creates a totally different mood.



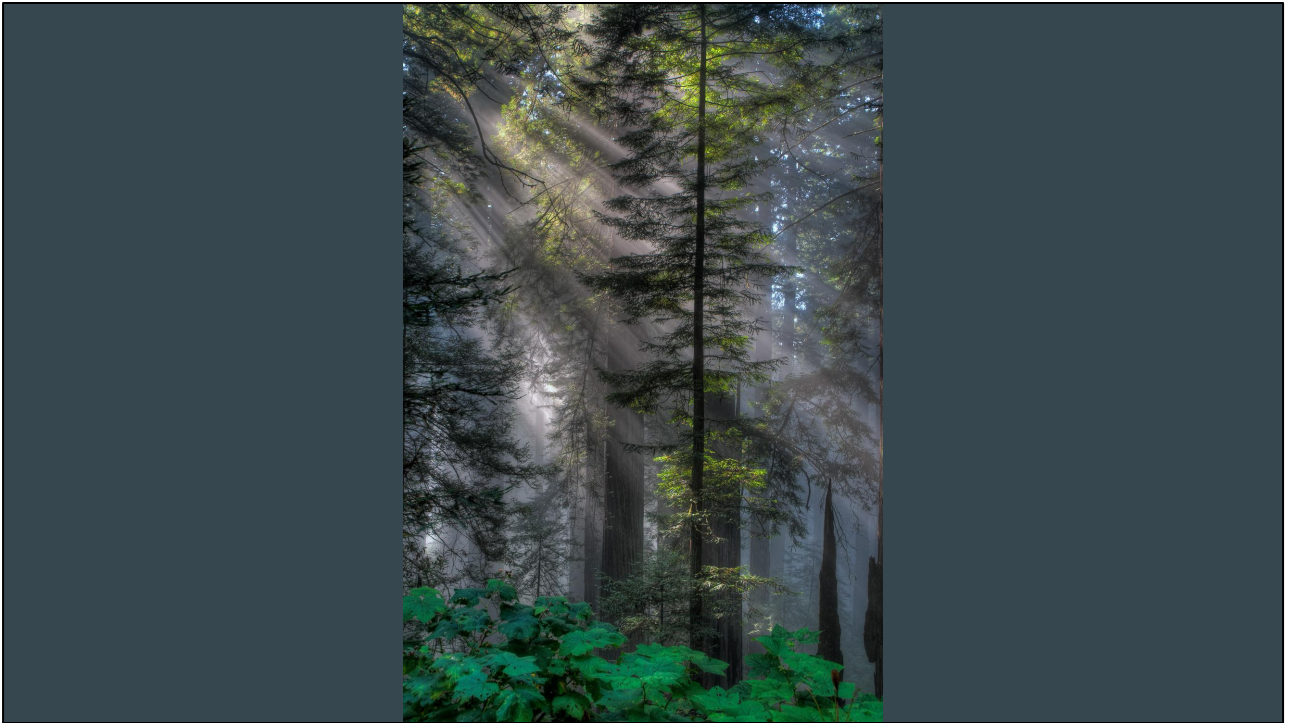


Lots of tonal adjustments on top of B&W conversion with a soft glow creates this moody picture.





High contrast B&W with the background darkened makes the rose stand out.



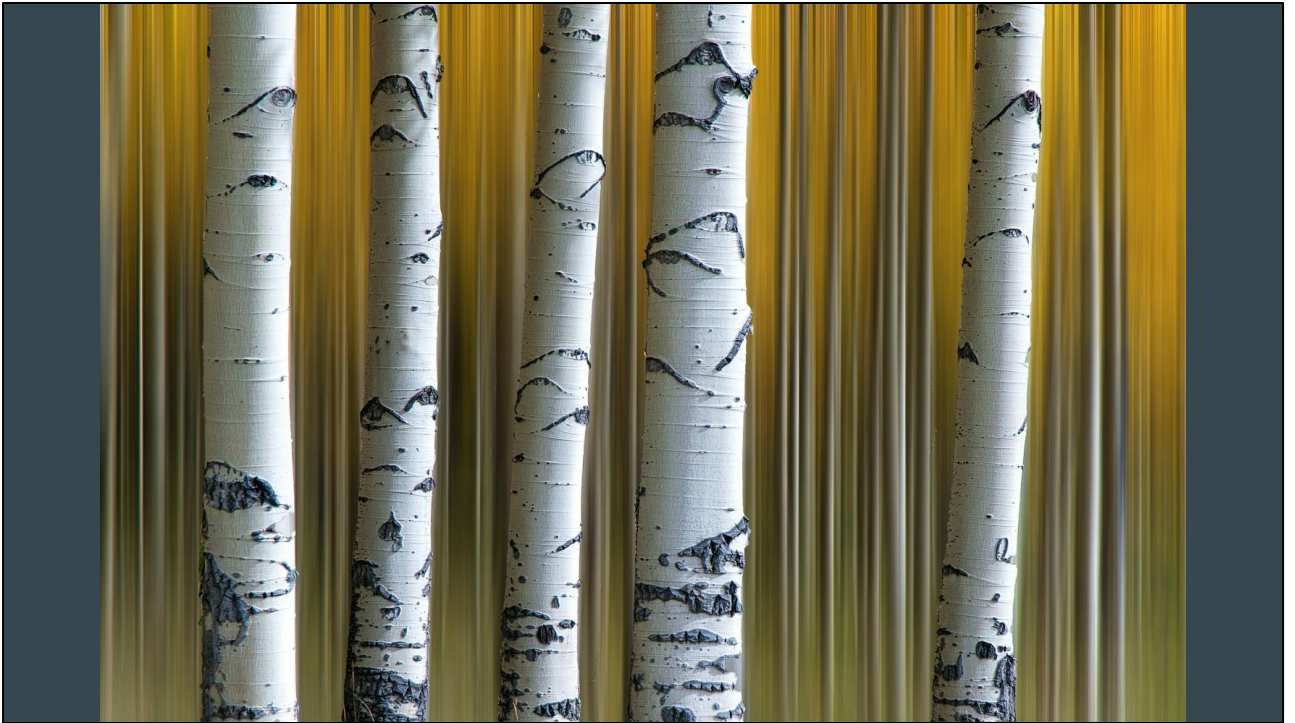
One of my favorite tools for high dynamic range photos is exposure blending; without HDR, the foreground would have very little detail. HDR and tonal adjustments.



Exaggerate detail, contrast and sharpening; the contrast of the water with the rider adds a dynamic look.



Compositing an image like this requires a workflow with layers and masking. There are probably 30 shots to make this composite.

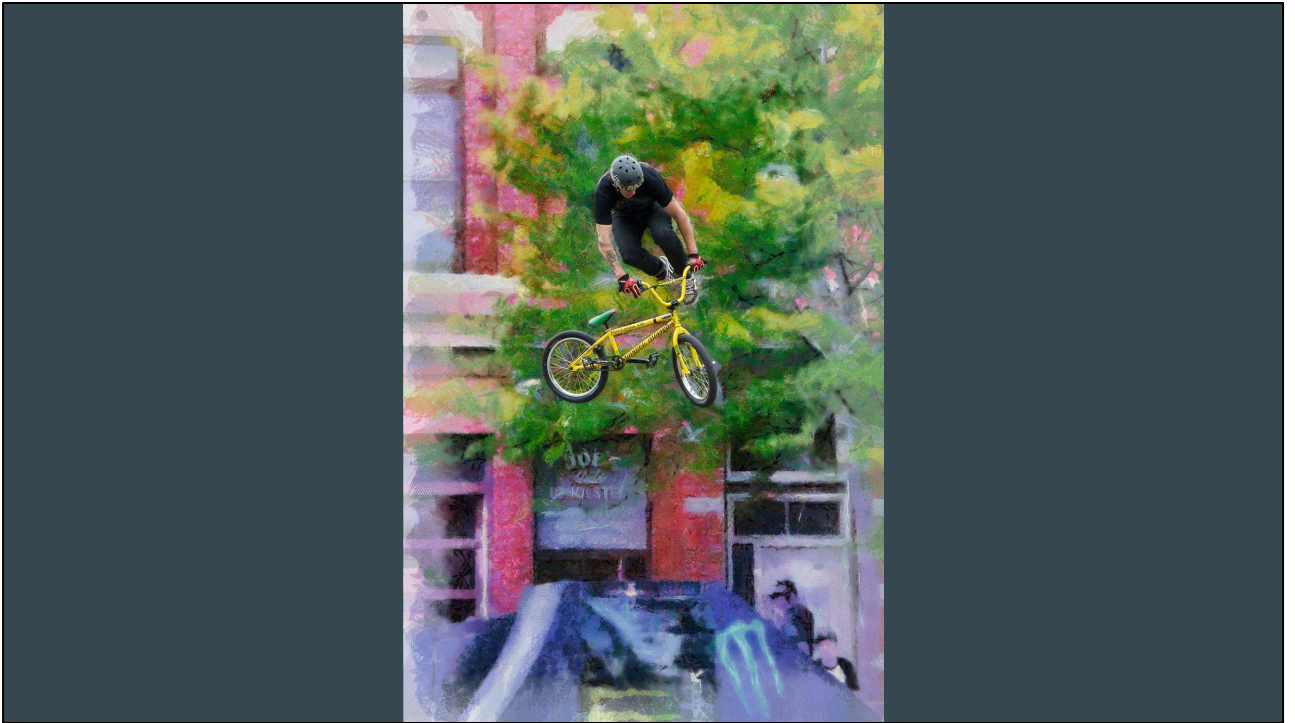


Masking, another feature of Photoshop allows you to isolate the subject. Vertical motion blur with tree trunks masked from effect.





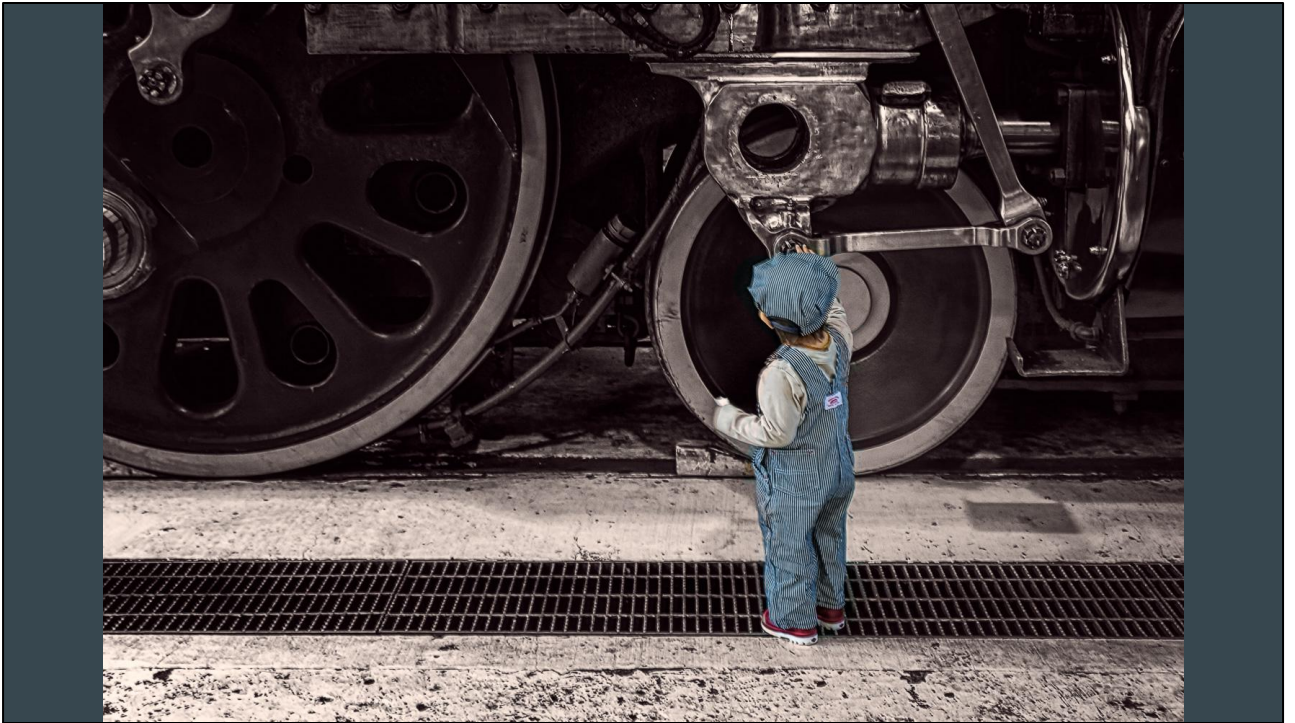
With the bluebird sky in the original shot, it just lacked something, so replacing the sky gave me that something. Again, layers and masking are needed to pull that off



In the original photo, the rider was lost in the details of the tree. DAP painting with rider masked out from effect makes the rider stand out from the background..



Similar to the previous, Topaz grunge with rider masked out from effect.



Sepia conversion with child masked out for selective color effect.





In these last two images, which I consider more 'artsy', I will explain the workflow and how I create my artistic interpretation of the photo. The first will be the workflow for a stylized painted image.

- 1) I use Lightroom extensively, and usually start with it. I will make the basic tonal and color adjustments in Lightroom.
- 2) I will then send the image to Photoshop for the heavy duty work. First up would be to remove distractions and dust spots; Photoshop does this much better than lightroom.
- 3) Next duplicate the layer and send it to Topaz Studio for the artistic alterations, here a painted style; the changes come back to Photoshop as a layer. Adjust the opacity to use more/less of the stylized image.
- 4) Use dodge/Burn layers to adjust lighting.
- 5) Add a texture layer and modify blend mode and opacity for desired effect.
- 6) Make any other adjustments using adjustment layers.



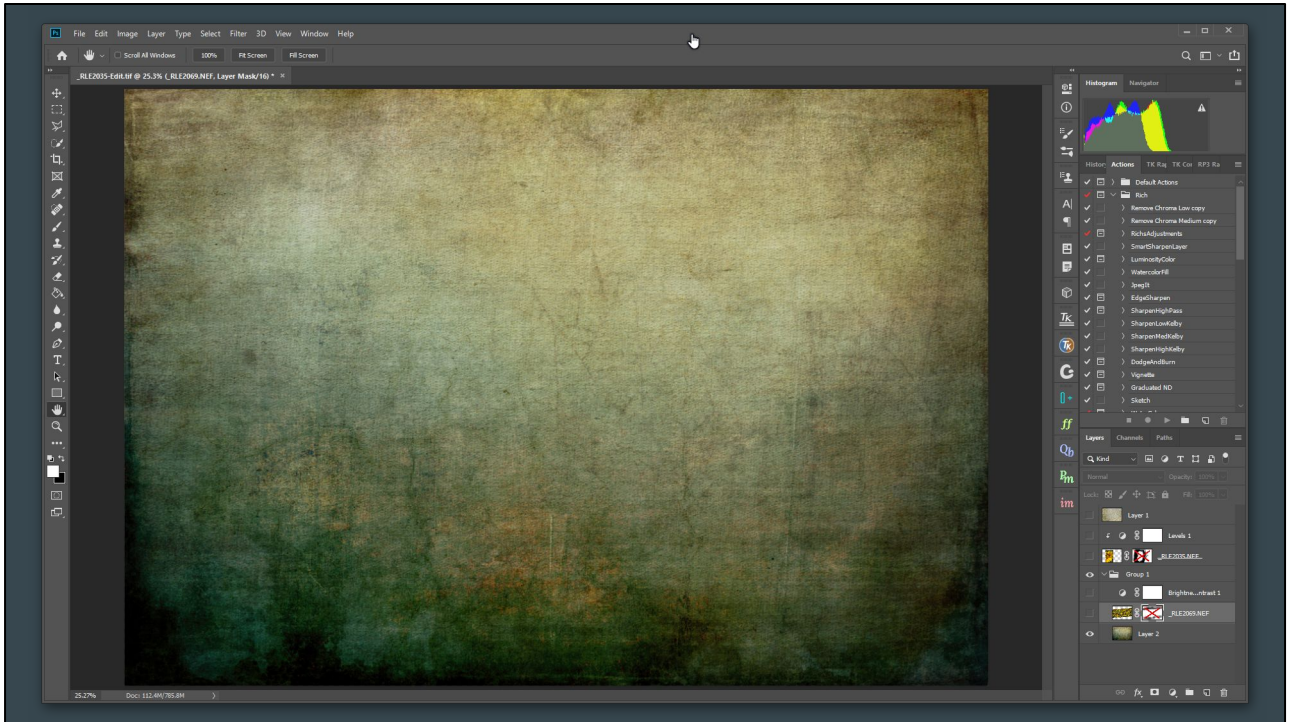


For a final image, I thought I would combine multiple techniques to create something that does not exist in nature, but does in my mind. Two Photos and two textures, some masking, adjustments and blend modes for this picture in a picture.

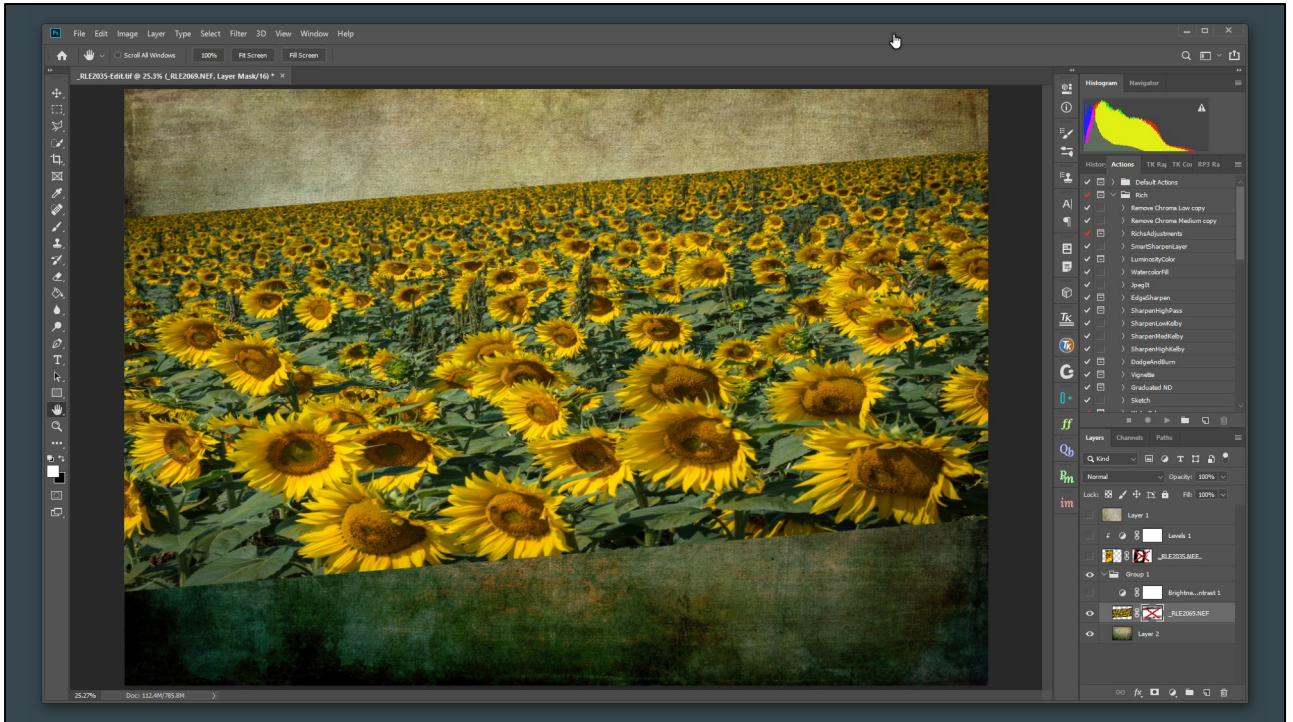
- 1) Basic adjustments in Lightroom on both photos and into Photoshop.
- 2) In Photoshop, I added a background texture layer.
- 3) I then added the field of flowers layer, warped, masked and blended the field of flowers into the background layer. There was a distinct edge on this new layer, so I added a white layer mask (black conceals and white reveals); using a large, feathered brush, I brushed black on the mask along the edges of the field of flowers to eliminate the harsh edge and blend into background.
- 4) Then I added the large sunflower as a layer with masking to blend, similar to previous step. I added layer mask to remove the hard edge and blend into the image.
- 5) Finally, I added a texture to unify the tones and colors in all the images. The tones of the flower were so much brighter, so I needed to adjust tonality and blend in a warm texture to unify.
- 6) Bottom line is that if you can imagine it, you can create it.

# Creating the Image

The following slides will show how the image is built, and what it looks like at each step. Of course there was a lot of trial and error for each of the steps, and you will see the entire layer stack, so I will turn each layer on in order, to give you an idea of how I approach my image.

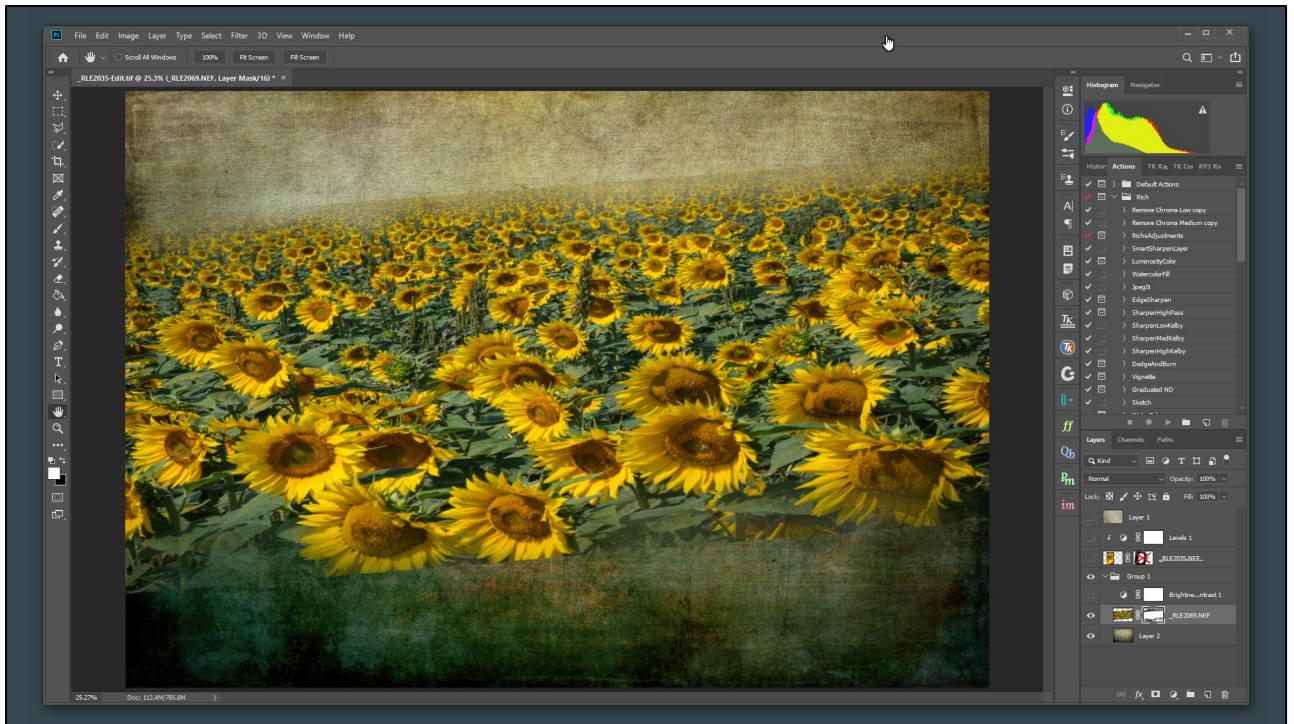


The base layer is a grungy texture that has the same basic color range that I would like in the final image.



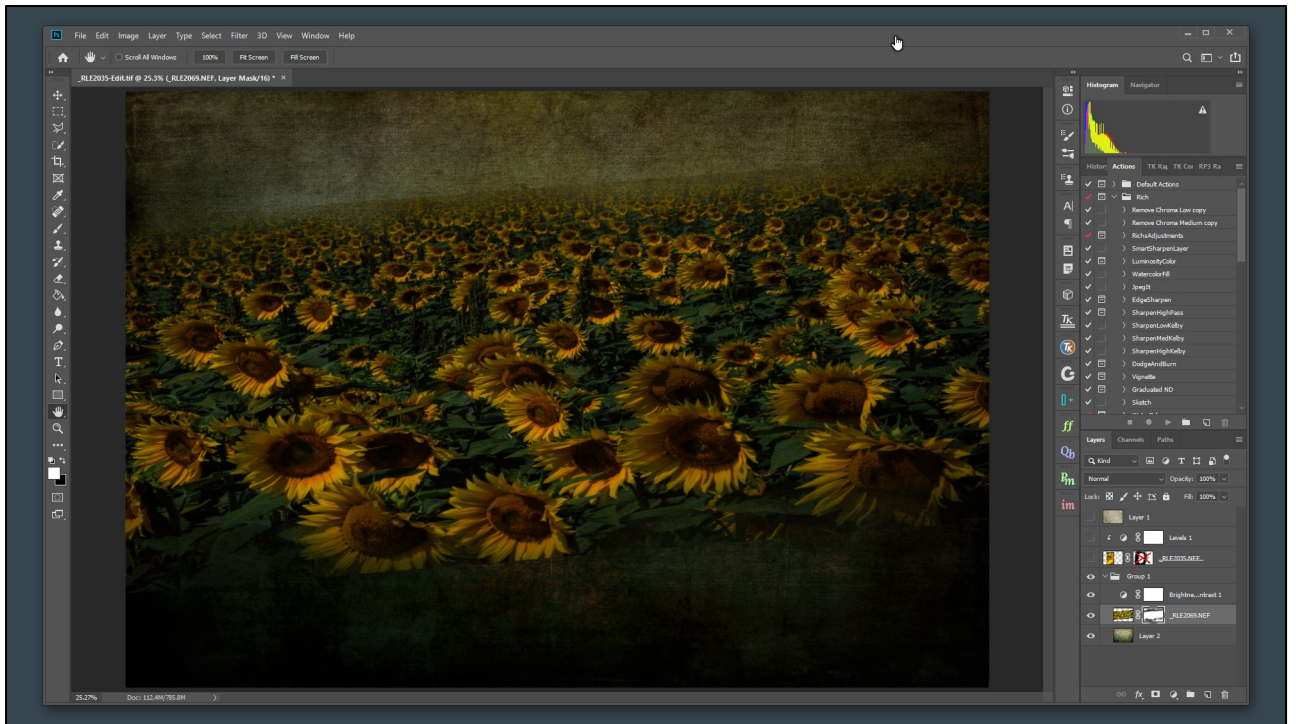
Add the photo that will be in the background.



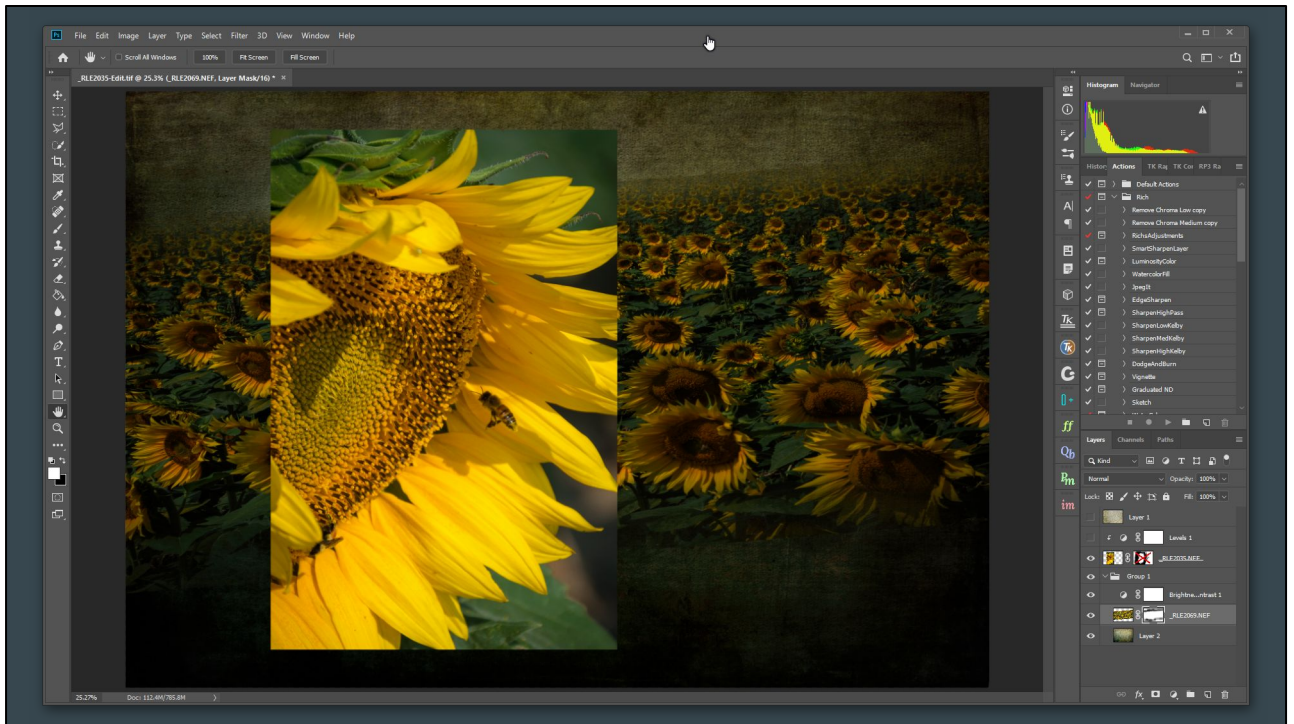


Using a big soft black brush, paint on the white layer mask to soften the edge of the photo to better blend into base layer.

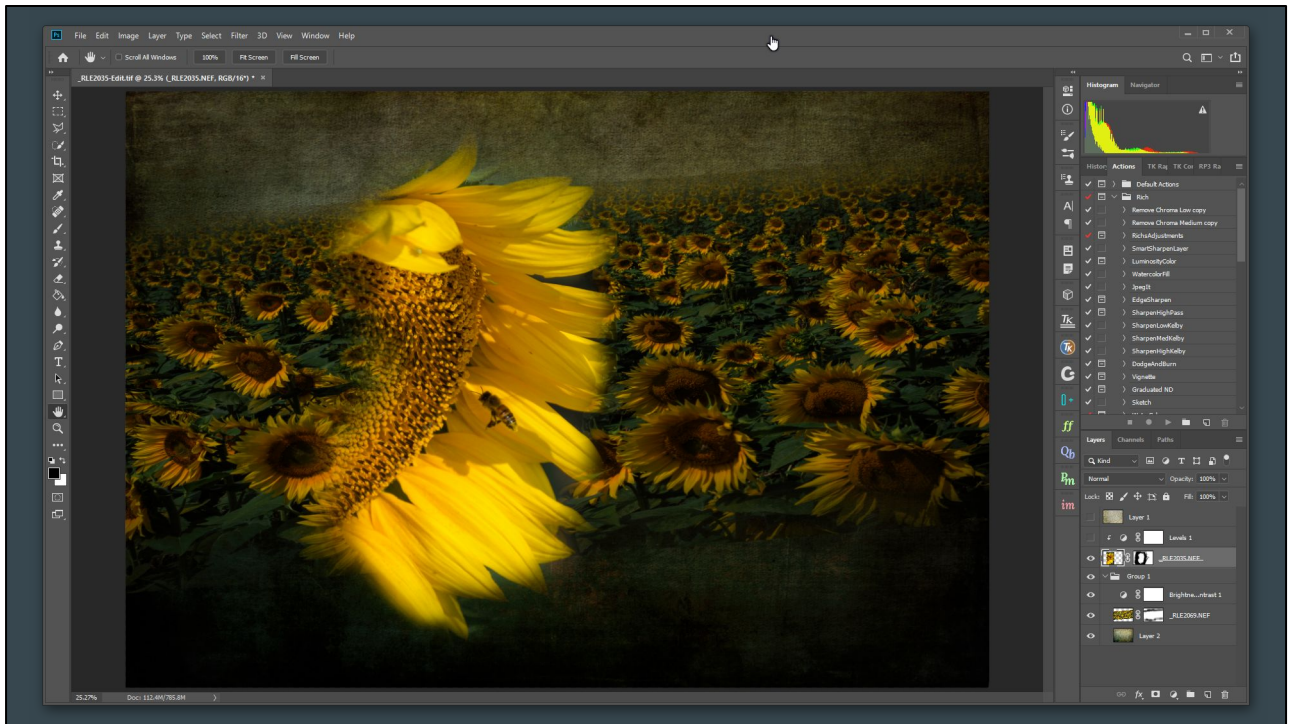




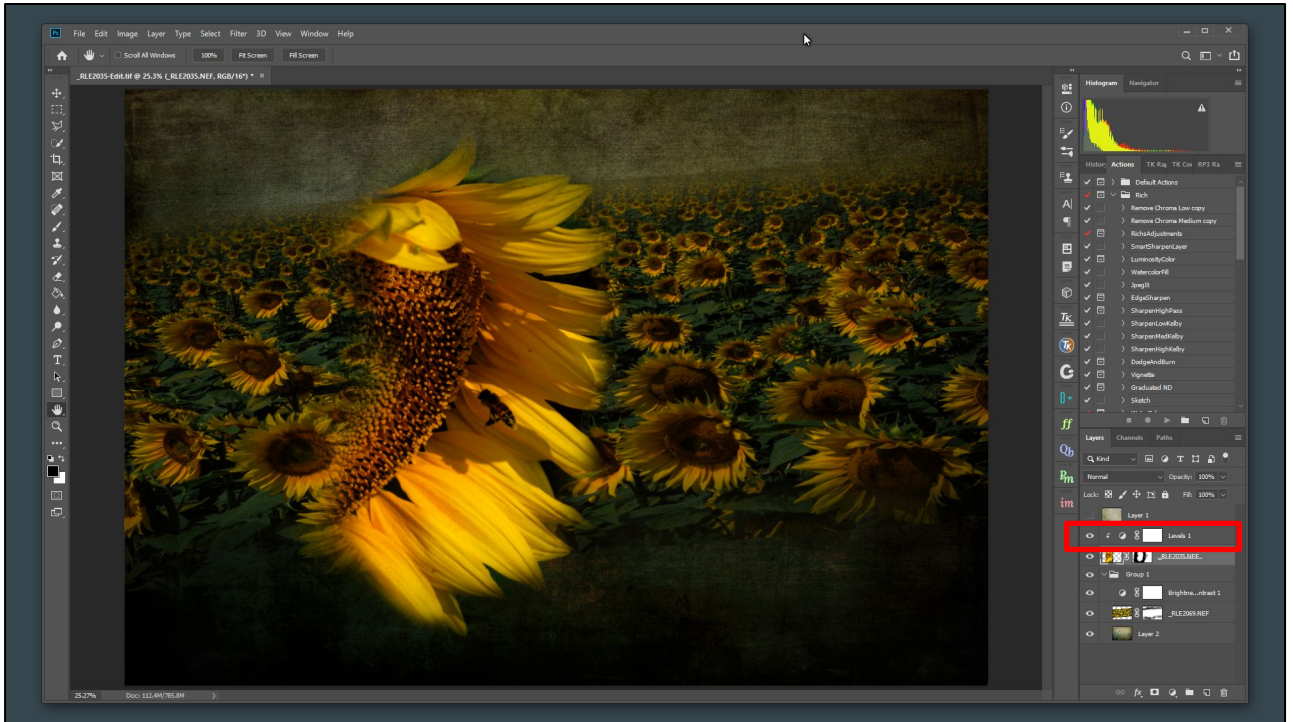
That was a little too bright, so darken with adjustment layer.



Add the second photo, the main focus.

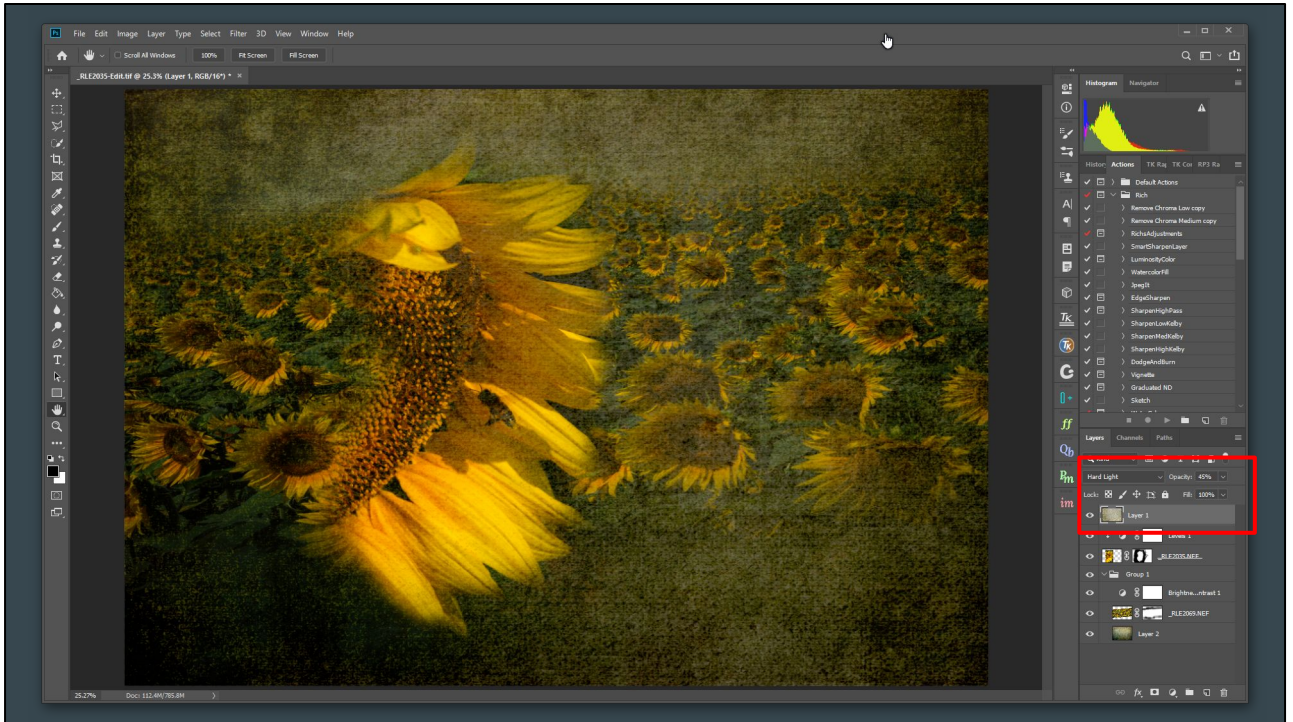


Again, use a big soft brush on the layer mask to blend away the hard edge.



The tone was a little too bright for the whole image, so use adjustment layer to darken. Notice that the adjustment is 'clipped' to previous layer so the adjustment only affects the main flower.





Finish up by adding an additional texture to unify the whole image. Notice the blend mode and opacity; adjust these on any layer to get the exact look that you want to express your creative vision.





The final result, in maybe 20 minutes.



I asked my daughter what she thought of the previous image. She thought it reminded her of the CO flag and wondered what it might look like to use flowers to create such an image. Leaving no challenge unmet, I put these flowers together.