



# plugs·n·pixels

IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION

**MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING:  
Transform blah images into works of art!**



## ISSUE #7

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- Text and images by Mike Bedford except as noted

• Plugs 'N Pixels will always be free! •

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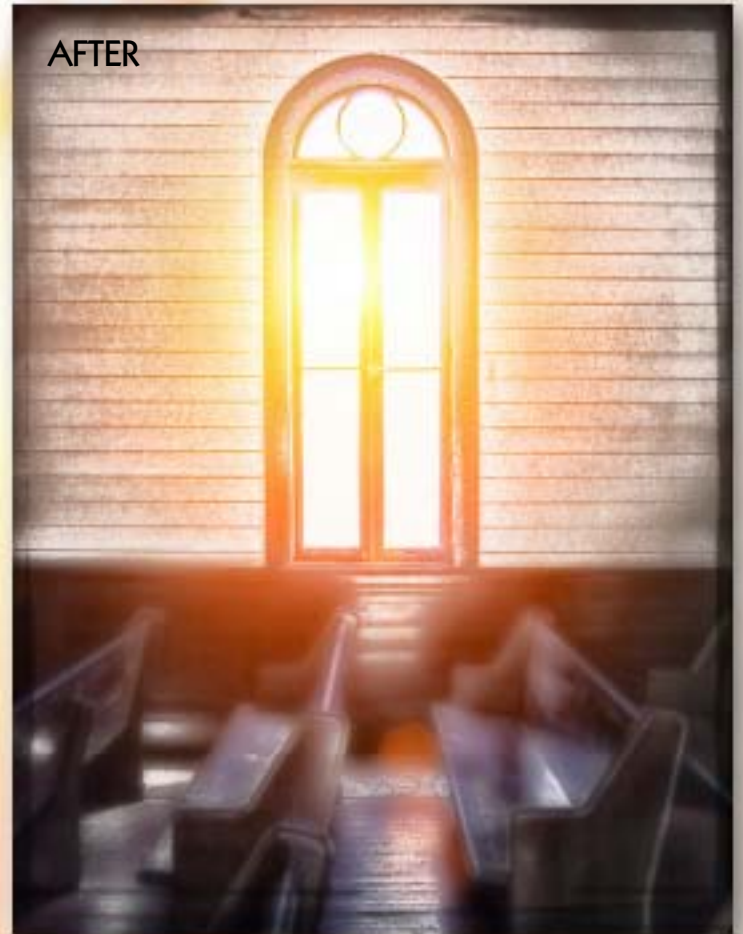
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# making something out of nothing

If we were shooting our images with large format sheet film, we'd be sure every image was shot for a good reason, and that the results were as near perfect as possible. But with digital, there is basically no cost penalty should we desire to shoot everything in sight – except we get stuck with less than stellar results. Let's see how various plug-ins can help rescue these sad images.



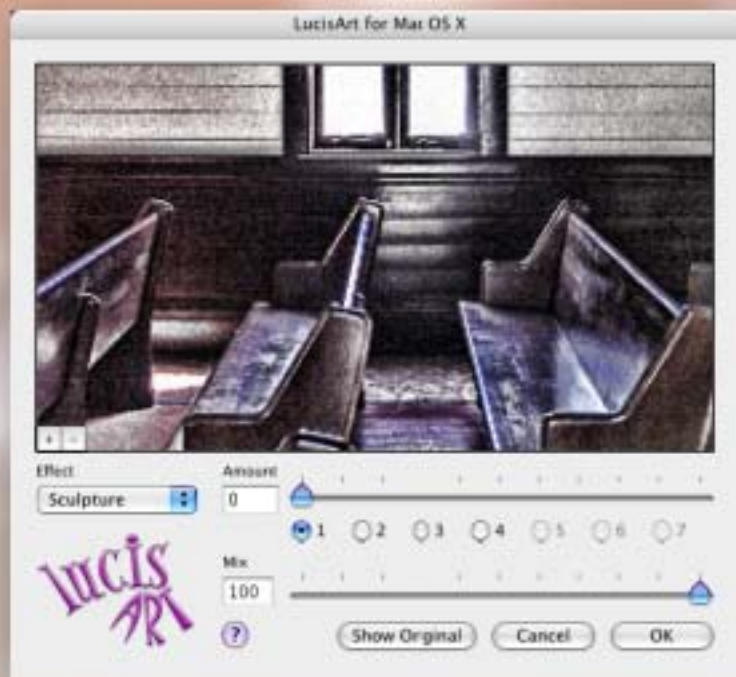
This issue's cover image was shot at Heritage Park in San Diego. The natural light streaming into the interior of the old synagogue caught my eye, and I did my best to capture it as I saw it. Hmm. Needs some work! So, how do we go from the original unretouched image (above, at left) to the much improved finished one (above right)?

I used seven different plug-ins for the task, each one adding its own special touch, beginning with LucisArt.



LUCISART EXPOSURE

My first step in giving this image an overhaul was to apply LucisArt's Exposure filter. Exposure increased overall contrast, reduced the hazy glow besides enhancing detail and sharpness.



LUCISART SCULPTURE

Again in LucisArt, I applied the Sculpture filter (see screenshot at left). Sculpture "pops" any image, smoothing while at the same time revealing hidden detail, resulting in a most unique effect.





Let there be light! Although the sun was actually shining through the translucent window, it was flat and uninteresting. The universal solution for this problem is Knoll Light Factory. It added color and warmth to the image, along with lens flare.



Next up was FocalBlade from The Plugin Site's PhotoWiz collection. I used it to add sharpness to the overall image.



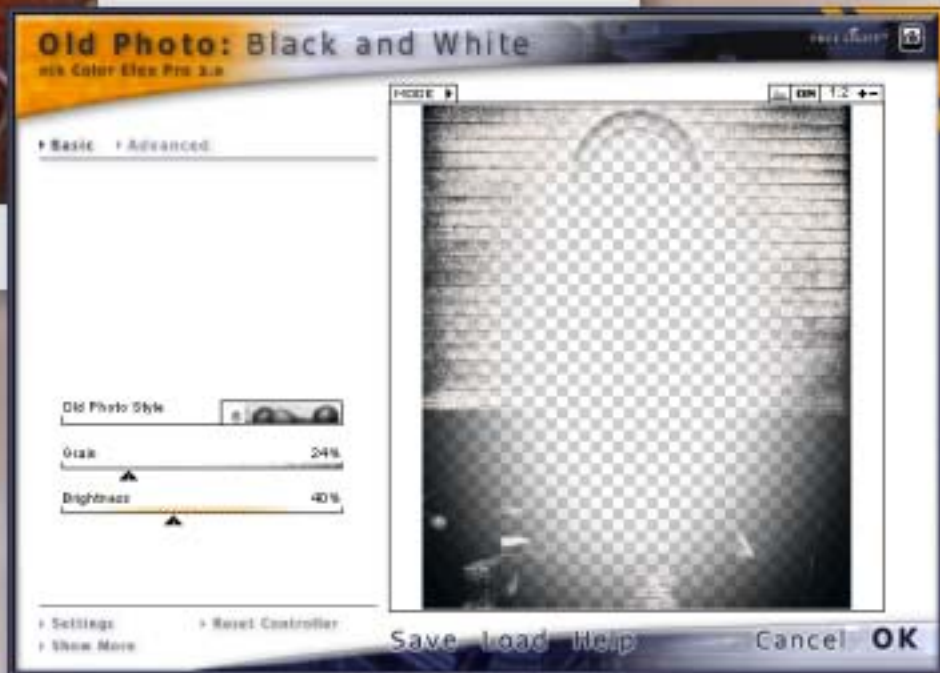
Our image is looking good! So, where to go from here? I decided to go for a dreamy effect around the edges.

Digital Film Tools' 55mm suite includes an option called Vignette, which offers circular or rectangular vignettes, as well as control over horizontal and vertical blur amounts and opacity.

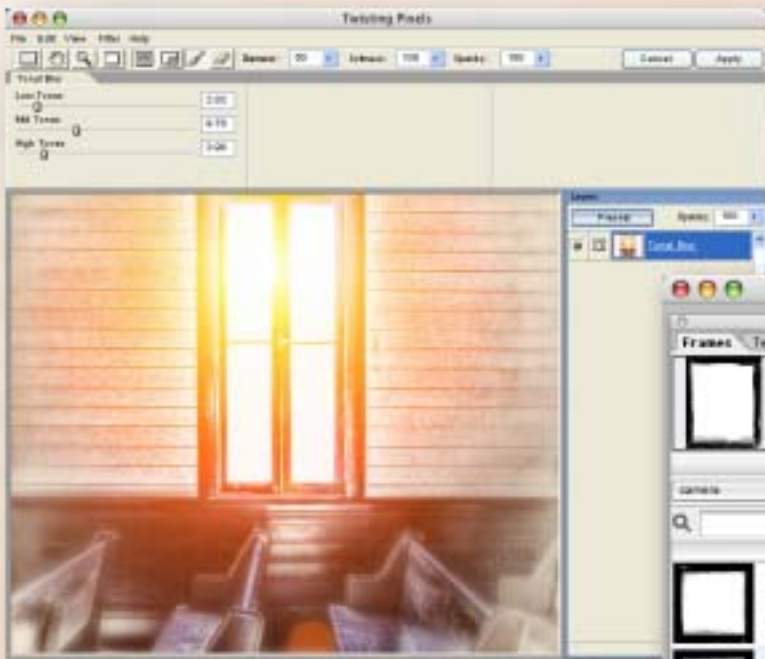
While I was working with the edges, I thought I'd push the contemplative mood mood further by creating an effect that harkened back to older times, when this synagogue was originally built and in use.

I drew a centered elliptical marquee over most of the image, feathered and inverted it, then opened nik Color Efex Pro's Old Photo: Black and White (one of the Stylizing filters).

I ended up choosing Old Photo Style 6 with some grain and brightness added. The result was the exact opposite of the bright and cheery Knoll effect and made an interesting contrast between old and new, color and back & white.







It ain't over 'till it's over, so I next applied TwistingPixels' PixelCreation>Tonal Blur to the overall image. The result is similar to a manual CMYK color channel blurring effect in that you can apply various levels of blur to low, mid or high tones together or independently.

The result of this operation and the TwistingPixels interface is shown at left.

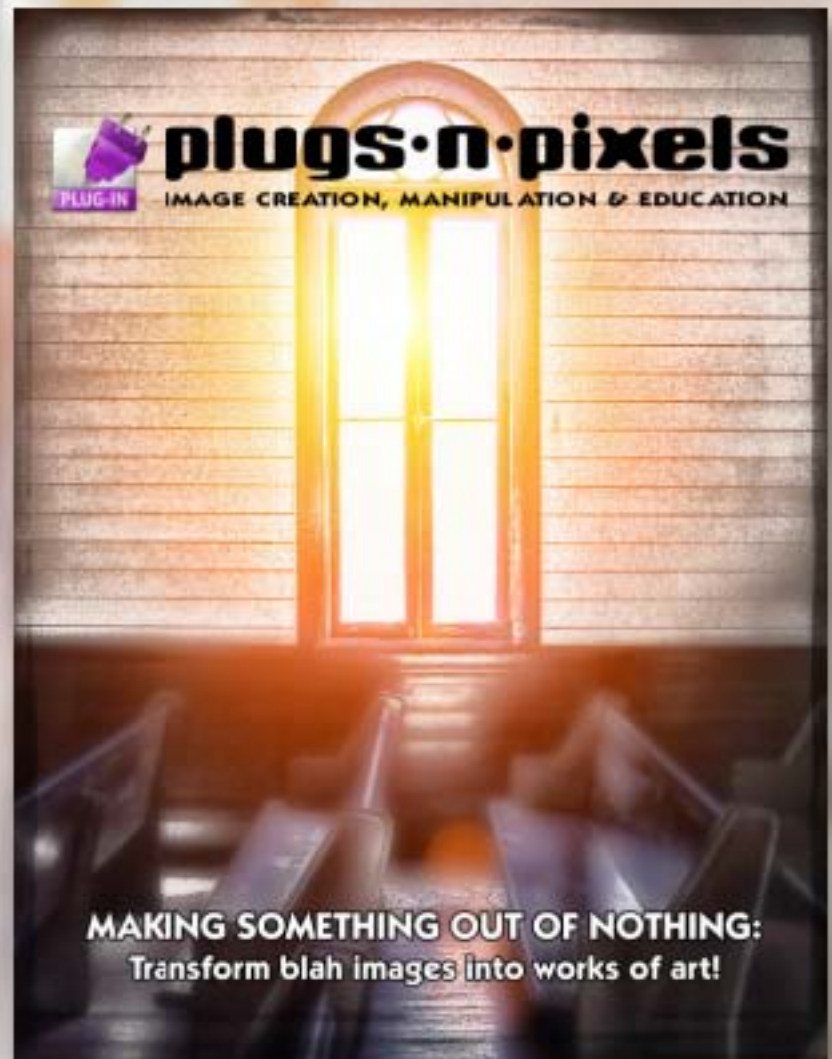


Even I know when it's time to stop, and onOne's PhotoFrame 3 was the last effect to be applied. An image with clean edges just doesn't seem finished...

I chose one of the Volume 1 Camera frame effects to provide a further touch of nostalgia to the image. PhotoFrame lets you apply the frame to a new layer, which I did here so I could not only control the opacity, but invert it from white to black. The isolated inverted frame layer is shown above.

And there you have it! What started out as a bland image reached its full potential through the creative use of multiple plug-ins.

For our next trick we'll take another (I call it "ugly") image in need of assistance and, using only plug-ins from Alien Skin Software, transform it into something entirely new (and less ugly!). •





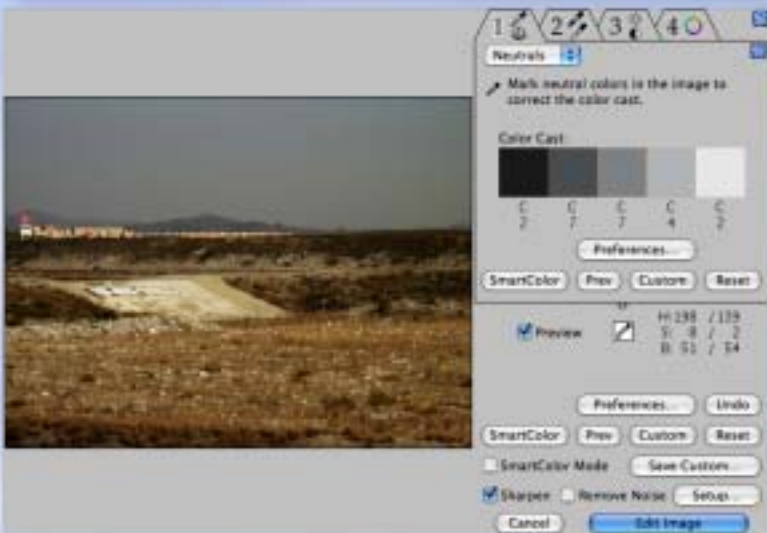
When it comes to making something out of nothing, the venerable Alien Skin plug-ins should be among your first choices. I used several of their packages to turn this taken-from-the-freeway grab shot of a Miller brewing plant and flood control basin (why exactly did I shoot this?) into a winter wonderland scenic, complete with stone patio and ice skating pond. No tedious drawing with brushes was necessary! That's why we love plug-ins so much – they do most of the work for you.



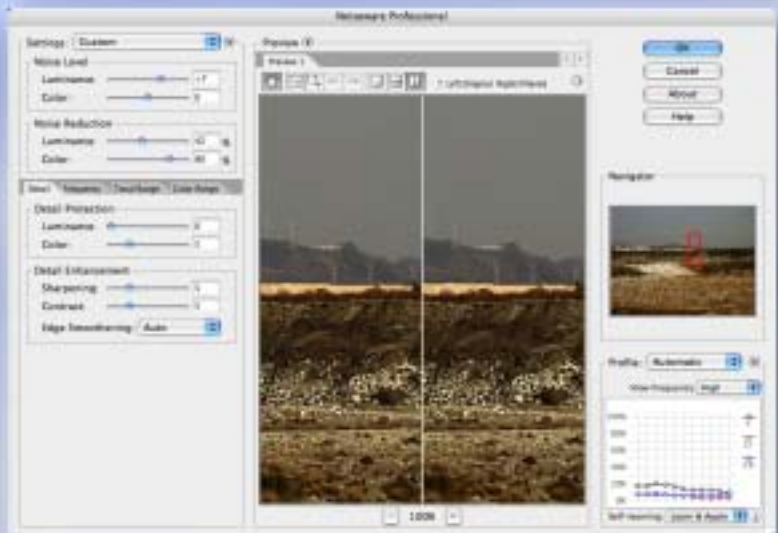
BEFORE



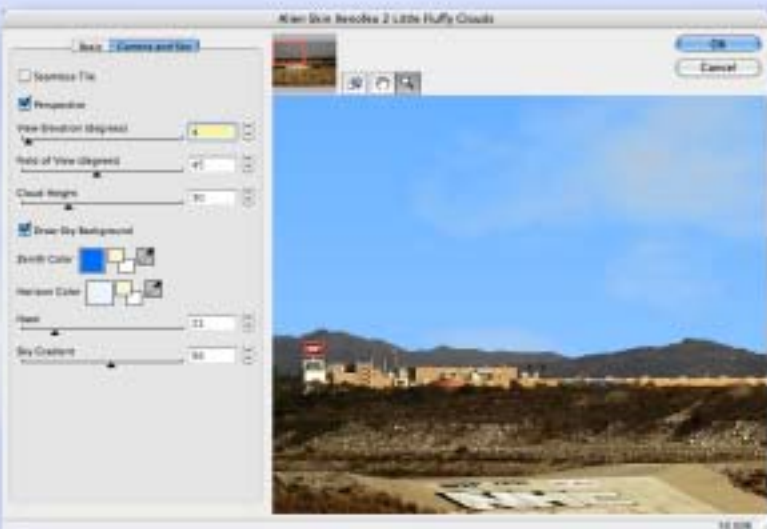
AFTER



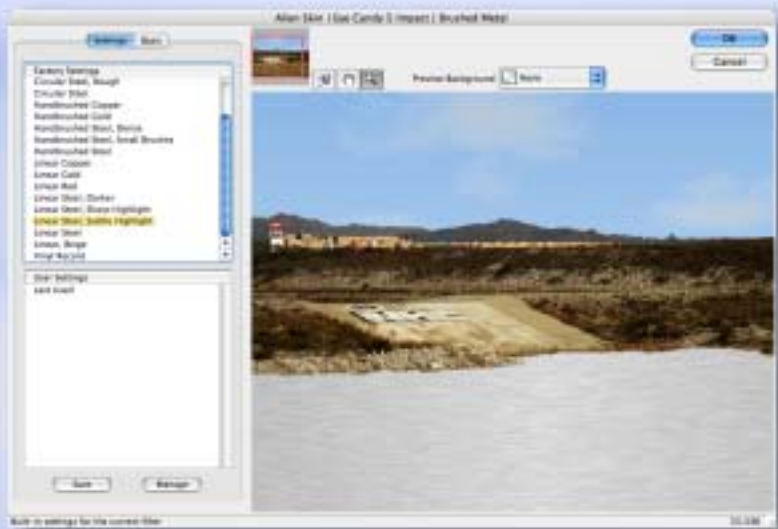
Before I begin working on any image, I like to color correct and tonally adjust it. My favorite method is [PictoColor iCorrect EditLab 5](#).



Next, due to the lack of large subject features, I reduced the noise in this image by using [Noiseware](#) from Imagenomic.

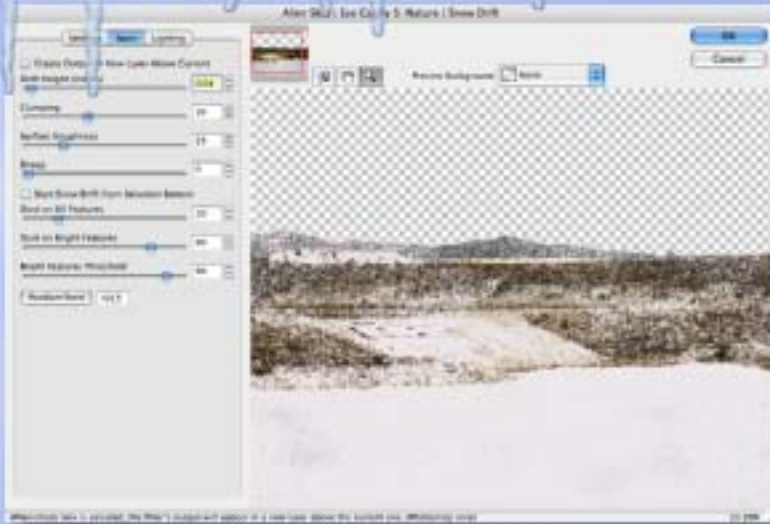


The ugly gray smoggy sky had to go! I selected and replaced it with a blue sky and clouds using [Xenofex 2](#)>Little Fluffy Clouds.

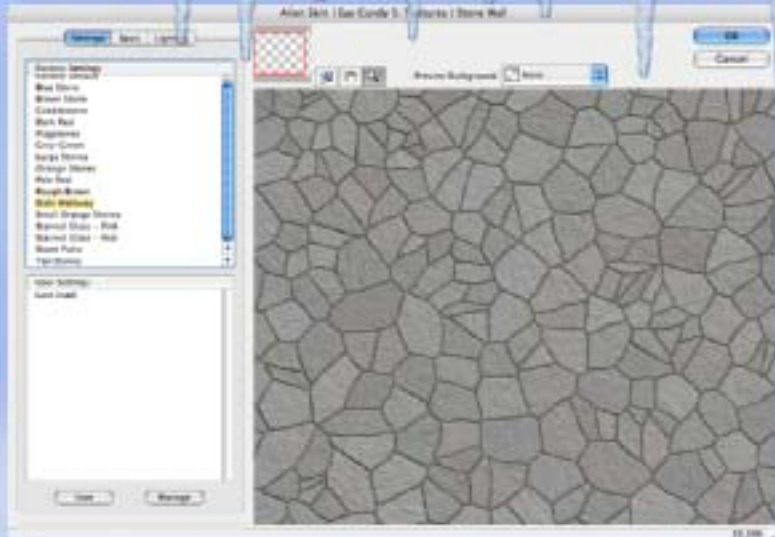


The flood basin makes a great pond. I selected it manually and filled it with [Eye Candy 5: Impact](#)>Brushed Metal. Not bad on its own.

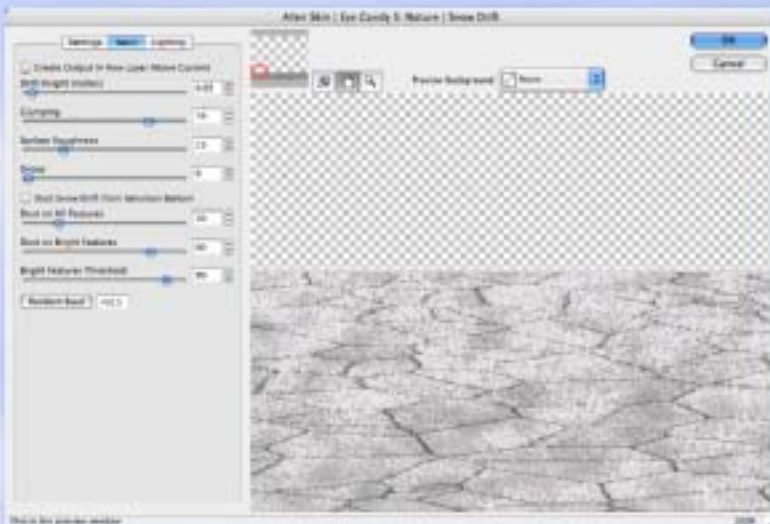




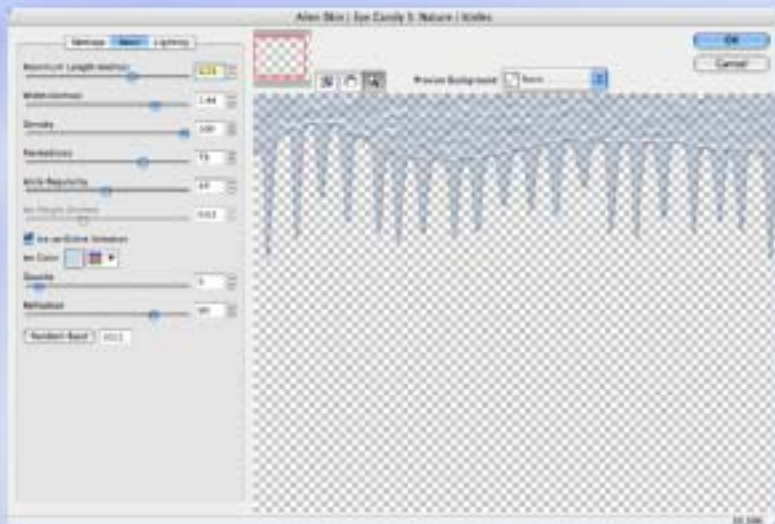
Next, I used Eye Candy 5: Nature>Snow Drift to change the barren summer into winter. I started with a preset and made various adjustments until I got the best results.



Eye Candy 5: Textures>Stone Wall gave me the makings of a realistic-looking stone patio (Slate Walkway preset).



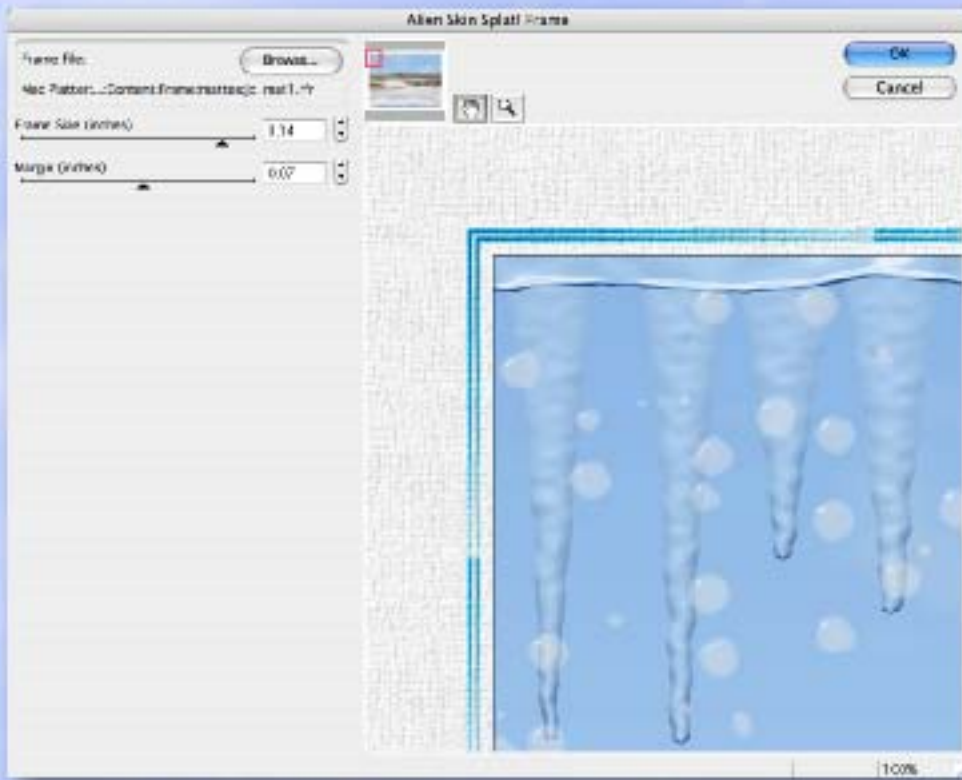
I scaled the stone patio layer directly downward and applied Eye Candy 5: Nature>Snow Drift.



It started getting cold about now so I went inside and watched the Eye Candy 5: Nature>Icicles forming.







Once it gets cold it starts snowing! I used Eye Candy 5: Nature>Water Drops to add white water spots to the image. The illusion of motion was added manually in Photoshop using Filter>Blur>Motion blur.

I added some distortion to the patio to change the angle of view. I had earlier erased through the layer with Snow Drift on it to reveal the Brushed Metal ice, which almost worked. As a result, I had a lucky accident when I changed the layer order and got the nice snow-on-the-patio effect shown below.

Finally, the complementary-colored matte frame (a custom frame option downloaded from the internet) was added using Alien Skin's Splat!>Frame. The result is a far cry from the original wasteland photo I began with.





Composing a good photograph is not easy. Teaching others how to create interesting compositions is even harder. Composing a photograph does not necessarily mean placing the most important subject in the center of the image. De-centering the subject can result in more interesting compositions. Both the edges and the corners of the image can and should be used. They are not just “there” because there is no way to do away with them. They are there because

One of the mistakes that many people make when composing a photograph is to follow one of the tips that Kodak offers on the countless “How to take better photographs” brochures it distributed a few years ago. This tip, addressing composition, recommends that you place the subject in the center of the frame and that you are careful not to accidentally cut off part of this subject.

Since this tip essentially addresses photographing people, it says to place the subject in the middle of the frame, have the person look straight at you, and press the shutter. This is certainly the perfect recipe to create one of the most soporific photographs you will ever take.

Let’s look at one photographer’s take on composition: Edward Weston. When asked for his definition of composition Weston answered that “Composition is the strongest way of seeing.” Weston’s definition contains two very important words about composition: seeing and strong.

We know that photography is largely about seeing. We now are learning that composition is about strength: visual strength. If composition is the strongest way of seeing and seeing is the strongest way of photographing, then composition is the strongest way of photographing. If this sounds like Aristotelian logic that’s because it is. Is it accurate? Let’s see.

There is more than one way to compose a scene. Paying this much attention to composition implies that there is more than one way to compose a scene. Indeed, to the experienced and trained eye, the same scene can be seen and composed in a number of ways. This fact was to me a

revelation when I first discovered it.

For years I had been struggling with trying to re-create photographs taken by other photographers. These photographs amazed me and I literally sought to stand in the footprints of those who created them. The problem is that when I stood in the locations where those great images had been created I could see only one composition: the one that another photographer had created. I could not see or compose for myself. I was a slave to the way other photographers saw the world.

One day I managed to free myself from this enslavement. That day I started to see the world for myself. I realized that there wasn’t only one possible image in a given location but a multitude of possible images. My mind had, somehow, opened up. That day my goal changed completely as I sought to capture on film not the images I had seen before but the images I could now see in my mind’s eye. I was composing my own images.

But a new problem surfaced – I could capture only a few of the many images which now presented themselves to me. I had to make a choice because I had a limited amount of time to work while the light was at its best. What I was looking for was “the strongest way of seeing”. I started walking around the scene I wanted to photograph, looking for the composition which stood above all the others, the one which would enable me to represent the scene in front of me in the strongest manner.

(con’t.)

## Aesthetics and photography: Composing a photograph



# Beautiful-Landscape

*Bear Art's Photography*

By Alain Briot, special guest author

All text and photographs Copyright © Alain Briot



## Rules of Composition

I know this essay will not be considered complete unless I go over some of the rules of composition. Here are some of the most important ones:

### 1. Rule of thirds

This rule calls for you to divide your image in three equal parts and compose your image in thirds. This applies to both vertical and horizontal directions and vertical and horizontal compositions. The dominant subject matter in the photograph is placed one third up or down the image or one third from the left or right side of the image.

### 2. The Golden Rule

The Golden Rule came to prominence during the Renaissance when it was rediscovered by the Masters. It was, however, introduced in ancient Greece. The Golden Rule states that the most important area of an image is located near the bottom right corner of the image, roughly one fourth of the image height up and one fourth of the image width to the left.

Theoretically we "read" images the same way we read a written text: from left to right and from top to bottom. Since our reading ends at the bottom right corner of the page this is the area where we hold our attention for the longest time as we either stop or pause before turning to the next page (or the next photograph). In line with this theory, Japanese and Chinese readers look at images very differently.

### 3. Leading lines

Lines leading the eye into the composition, and thus into the image, are another classical way to compose a photograph. The typical example is a road, or a pair of railroad tracks, leading the eye towards the horizon.

In landscape photography we do not have roads or railroad tracks unless we decide to include man-made elements. Fortunately we have other elements which can work just as effectively. One of them is rivers, which draw our eye deep into an image. The sweeping shape of the river adds a nice movement and helps make the image even more interesting.

### 4. Perspective.

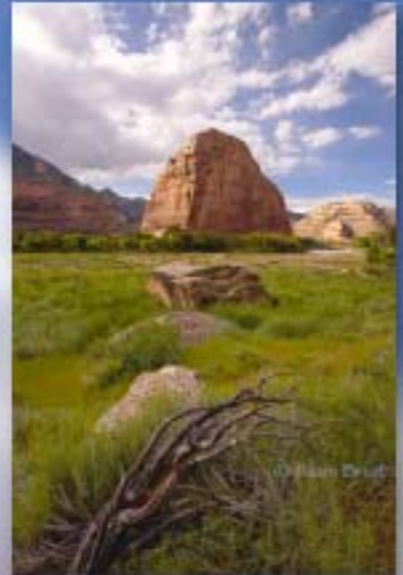
Perspective is a strong compositional tool. As a river moves into the distance, its width is progressively reduced. This reduction is caused by perspective which dictates that the size of objects is proportionally reduced as these objects become increasingly distant from the viewer. Perspective is one of the most effective ways of adding depth and distance to an image

### 5. Framing the photograph

The main view, typically the background, is framed by another element of the scene, typically a foreground element. Without framing any landscape image would be far less interesting and dramatic.

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Alain recently released his Printing Mastery Workshop on DVD, a year in the making! This is one of his complete advanced seminars on disc, covering the creation of masterpiece images from beginning to end. (See the URL below for more info.) Also available is his new Marketing Mastery DVD with advice for marketing your images.



[www.plugsandpixels.com/blprintmastery.html](http://www.plugsandpixels.com/blprintmastery.html)



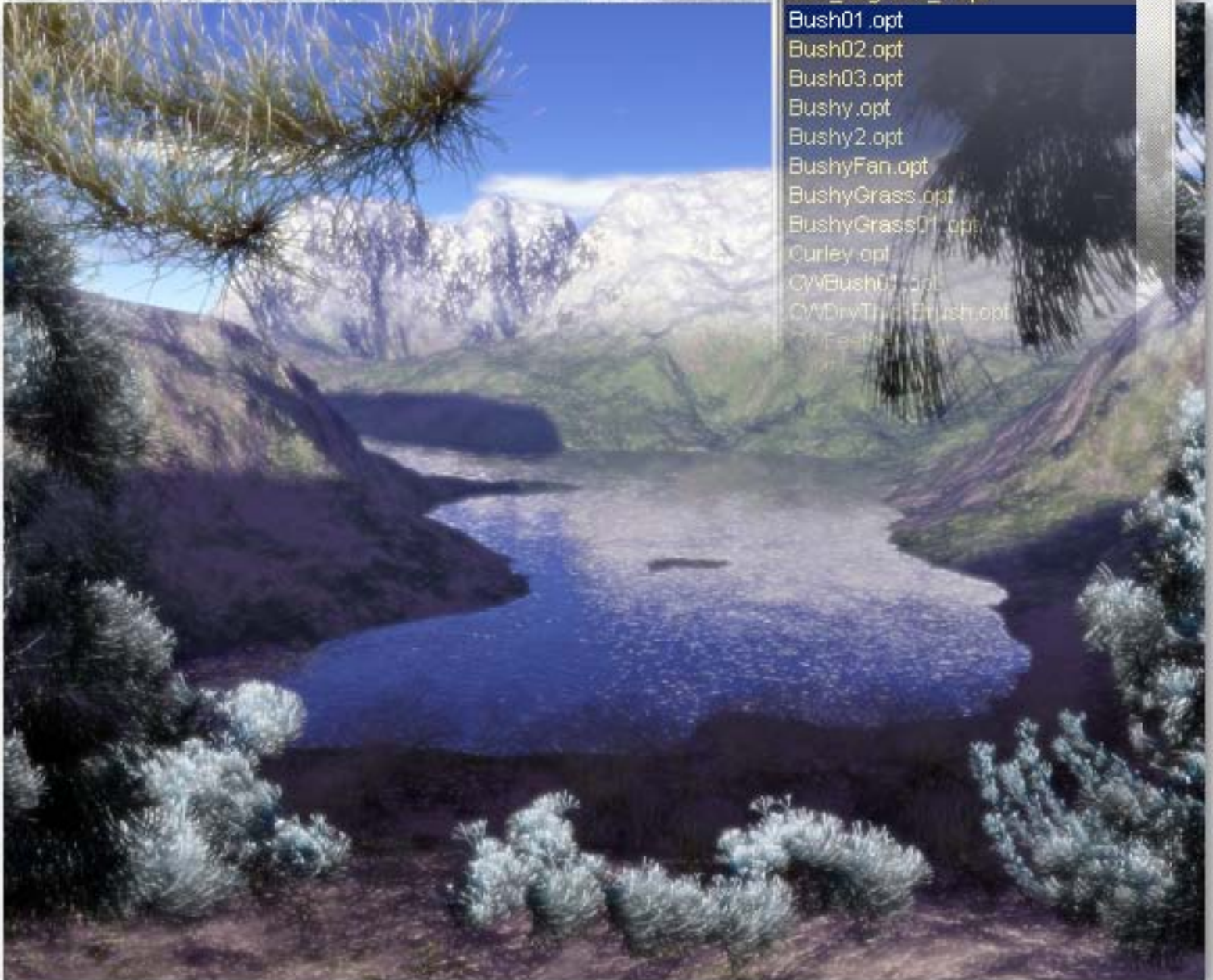
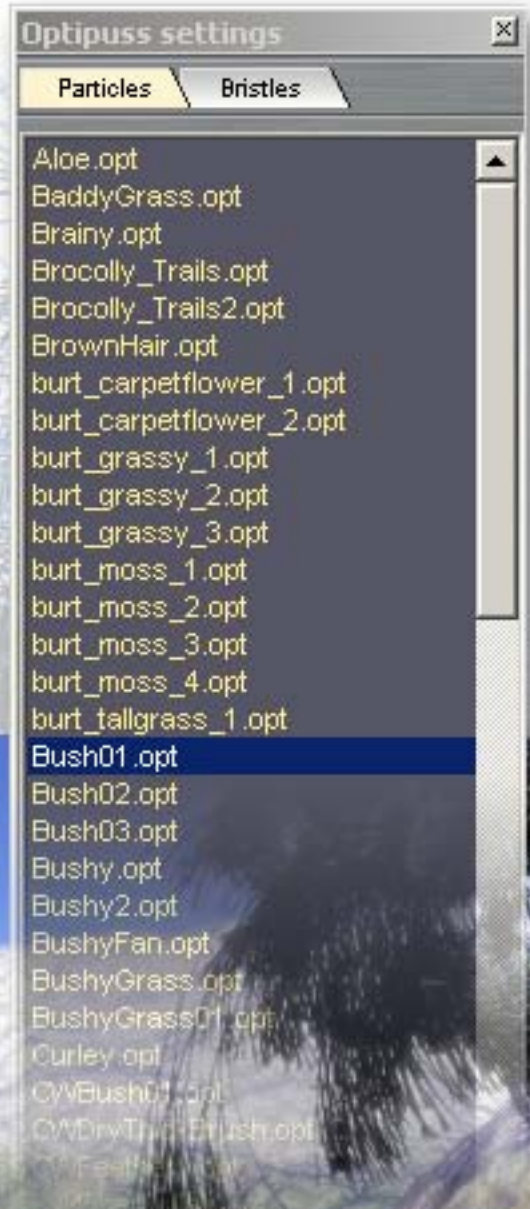
# PD Pro Digital Painter 4.0



One of the most unique drawing apps available has just been updated to version 4! PD Pro Digital Painter boasts a redesign of the user interface for easier accessibility to the many features and settings.

Speed and performance have also been increased to take advantage of current CPU technology. Pigment profiles and newly integrated color harmony tools make working with colors much simpler.

And let's not forget the unmatched particle optipustics and bristle brushes (right)!





To create the examples shown on the previous page and below, I first created a barren winter scene in Terragen (right), composing it while keeping in mind that I would be adding the vegetation later.

Next, I downloaded all of the free particle brushes from The Best 3D's freebies page, installed them alongside the defaults and explored each of them until I found wintery-looking ones. I ended up using Bush, LimpopoBush, Pine Branches, ThinBranch and WinterBranches. Minutes later, I had my completed fantasy winter scene!



I next explored PD Pro's Filter menu to see what kinds of effects could be added to the finished image. For the large version on the previous page I used Photographic filters>Light Diffusion. The image at left is treated with the Blur>Mystic vision option. The image below shows the results of Photographic filters>Day for night, while the background image on this page is the original Terragen image with PD Pro's Artistic>Brush strokes applied.

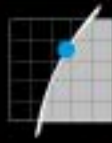
Keep in mind that PD Pro Digital Painter's particle optipustics and bristle brushes are only a small part of what it can do! You can paint artwork in a traditional style with all the convenience of the computer, create animated illustrations and apply special effects to CG animations, etc.

Two other simplified versions of PD Pro are available: PD Particles (featuring optipustics) and PD Artist (with emphasis on painting). No matter which you choose, the prices are quite reasonable. And all create something from nothing!•





# kubota actions



**kubota**  
IMAGETOOLS

empowering  
photographers



## KUBOTA ACTIONS IN ACTION:

- Digital Fill flash
- midbright
- Angel Glow
- Modern Antique 1  
with glow
- StarBurst vignette




MORE KUBOTA ACTIONS:

- Kubota light GlowSoft vibrant
- Kubota darker GlowSoft
- backlight compensation 2x
- sunglow 2
- Edge Burner
- Edge Blur More
- Sloppy Borders



[www.plugsandpixels.com/kubotaactions.html](http://www.plugsandpixels.com/kubotaactions.html)





Creating something from nothing indeed! All the imagery you see on this page was created in Photoshop using TwistingPixels' various plug-ins – and nothing else!

For the inset tan paper image I began with a blank white document and experimented with different TwistingPixels effects (such as PixelPack Texturizer/Stain and PixelPaper Acid).

I brought this image into another blank document which was treated with PixelCreation Altocumulus, Celestial Shapes, Glint, MoonGlow and MoonRing, PixelPack Label Maker and Texturizer and PixelPaper Crunch and Fold.

Very cool! You can keep going forever with all the filters and settings at hand.

[www.plugsandpixels.com/pixelcreation.html](http://www.plugsandpixels.com/pixelcreation.html)

Twisting Pixels



Richard Rosenman and Martin Vicanek's Depth Of Field Generator Pro is one of the best available methods of adding highly controllable realistic bokeh focus effects to your images. This is far more than simple gaussian blurring or soft edge vignetting.

DOF Generator Pro offers support for batch processing and animation, as well as various adjustable aperture shapes and sizes, along with depth maps and related editing tools.



[www.plugsandpixels.com  
dofgenerator.html](http://www.plugsandpixels.com/dofgenerator.html)

**Depth Of Field Generator PRO**

**Richard Rosenman**



## Professional Adobe Photoshop Tools: Photo Edges, Frames, Brushes, & Backgrounds

[graphicauthority.com](http://graphicauthority.com)

Graphic Authority is your source for hundreds of ready-made professional-quality custom edges, brushes, frames, stock photos, layered images and training videos. The idea is to use these materials to composite stunning-looking images in minutes, without having to create your own source effects.

The examples on this page show how these materials can be used. The background is part of the Antique Paper collection. The sunset photo is from the Sunscape collection, and when combined with an appropriate pre-made layered effects file (simply drag the image into position among the layers), the result is worthy of display or sale.







When you have nothing and you need something great, Alien Skin's Eye Candy 5: Textures is the perfect solution. All of the images on this page were generated in EC5 using a few of the 200 supplied presets. No additional photos or textures were needed.

Included in this package are realistic animal fur, brick wall, diamond plate, marble, reptile skin, stone wall, swirl, texture noise, weave and wood textures. See page 7 for Stone Wall in action.



[www.plugsandpixels.com/eyecandytextures.html](http://www.plugsandpixels.com/eyecandytextures.html)





# topaz adjust

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Reveal hidden  
details in the  
shadows while  
bringing highlights  
under control

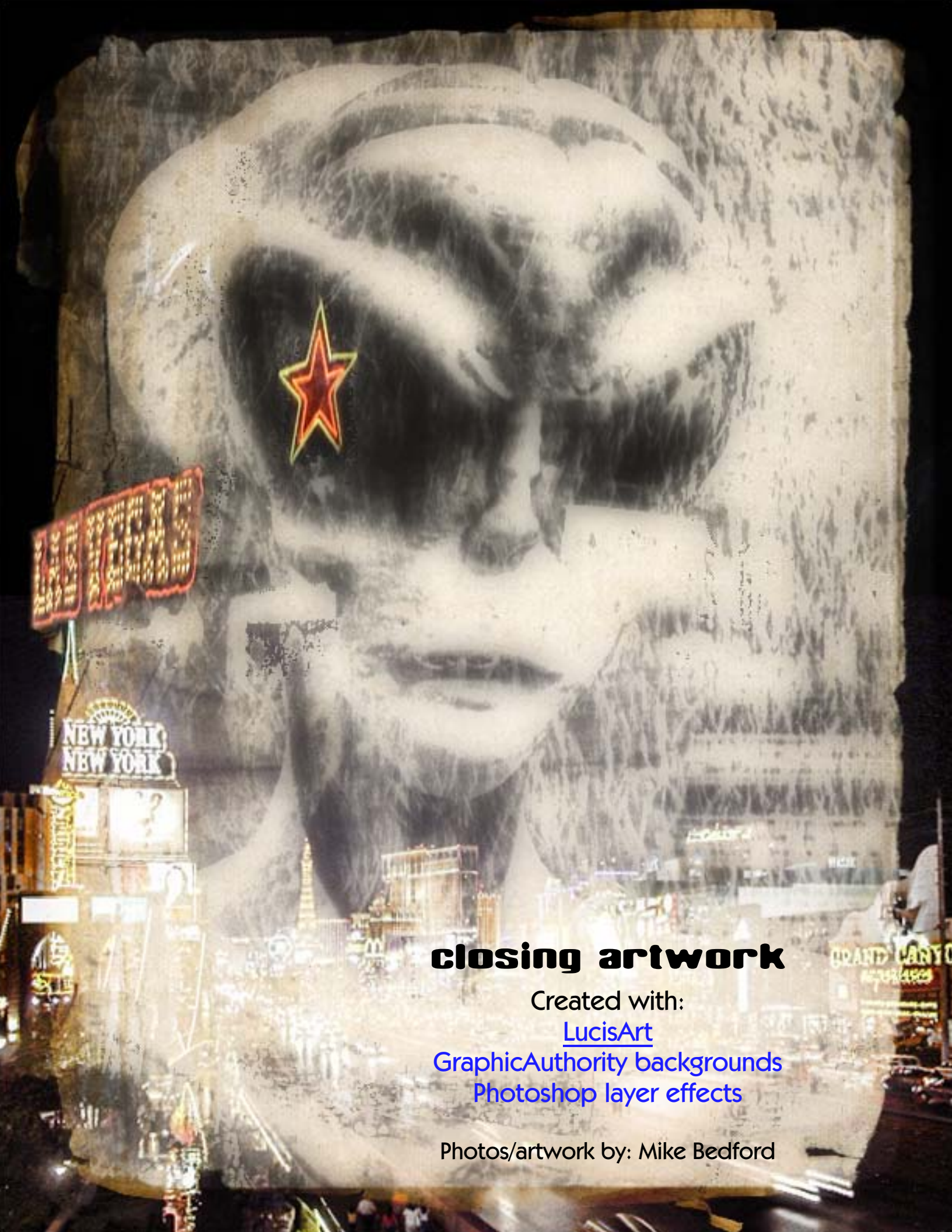
Original



## **ADJUST DOES MORE THAN HDR!**

While the results of this example are impressive enough, Topaz Adjust does much more than revealing highlight and shadow detail in extremely contrasty images. Starting with any of the 18 presets, you can do anything from simple exposure adjustment to controlling detail, color and noise, achieving corrective and artistic effects once reserved for plug-ins costing several times more.





## **closing artwork**

Created with:

[LucisArt](#)

[GraphicAuthority backgrounds](#)

[Photoshop layer effects](#)

Photos/artwork by: Mike Bedford