

plugs·n·pixels

IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION

Artsify your photos!
Without touching a brush...

plugs·n·pixels

ISSUE #25

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Cover art created with [Topaz Impression](#) from an iPad 2 image capture
This page's art created with [Topaz Impression](#)
Texture backgrounds from various [Flypaper Textures](#) collections
Page layout and PDF export: Photoshop, [iStudio Publisher](#) and Acrobat Pro

I am a photographer, not an artist... I want a one-click path to natural media!

I have an eye for composition and color and really appreciate the look and feel of traditional paint and other artistic textures. But I don't have art training or the patience to create a piece of art stroke by stroke, even on the computer (despite the easy availability of many digital natural media emulation tools at my disposal). Surely there are many others like me who wish to quickly apply the beauty of natural media to their photos without a lot of fuss. That's what this issue is all about!

Let's take a look at several plug-ins and apps that help you do just this very thing, most of them requiring literally only one click!





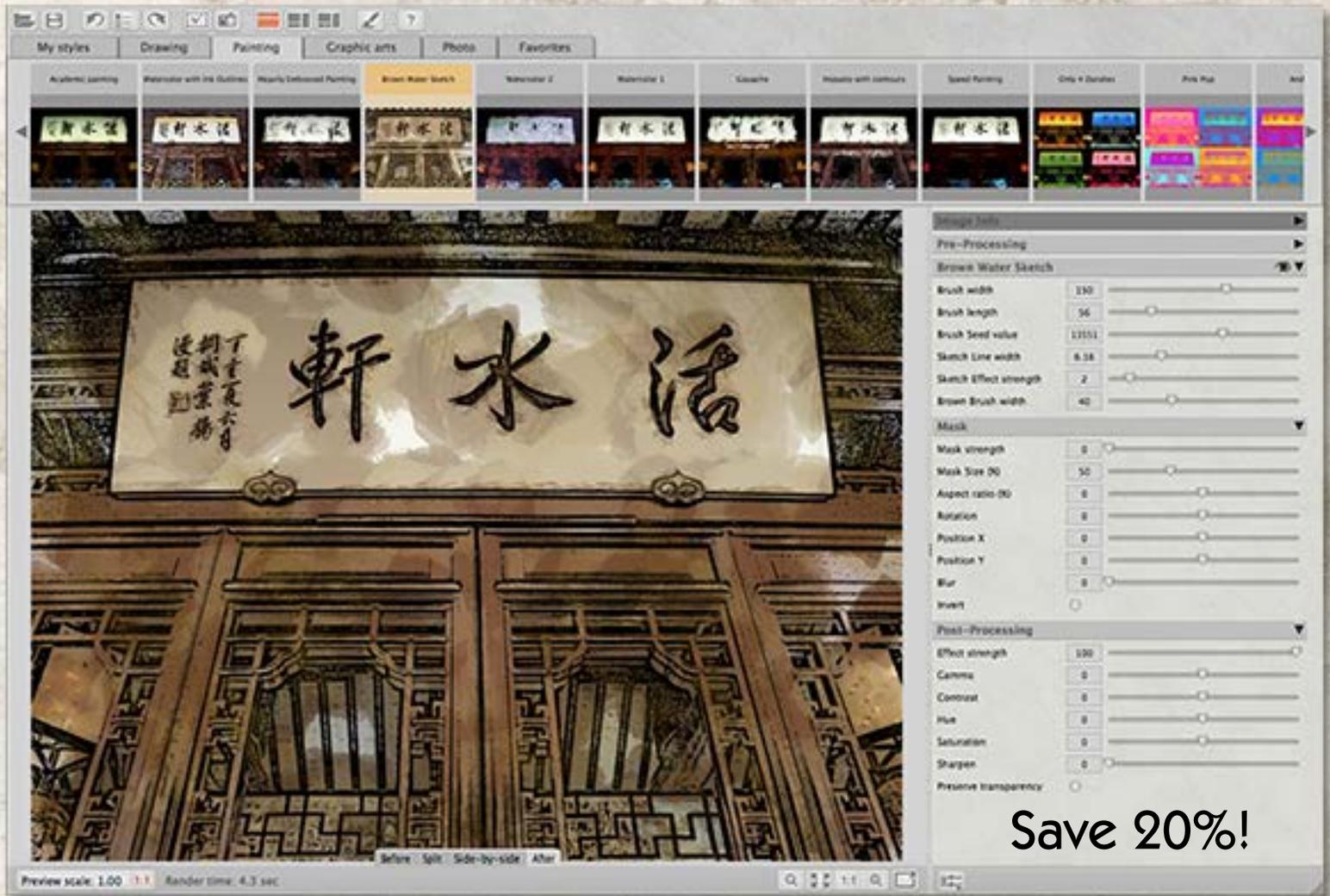
Topaz Impression is one of the newer digital artistic apps on the block, and as a result takes advantage of the latest in image processing technology. Impression offers several genres of presets to get you started (such as Ancient, Impressionistic, Modern, Painting, Pencil, Pictorial and Charcoal/Pastel).

No matter which preset you choose, Impression mimics the actual art styles of famous artists and common styles and paints one stroke at a time (though it does this 10,000 times a second!). You can literally click a preset and watch your image take on the style of Cezanne, Degas, Hopper, Monet, O'Keeffe, Rembrandt, Renoir, Seurat, Turner or Van Gogh.

And that's only the beginning. Every preset can be edited and customized in great detail, from the type of brush used and specific stroke settings, color adjustments, lighting control and background texture.

You can download a free 30-day trial of Impression or save 15% off the purchase price and see for yourself not only how easy it is to create digital artwork but how realistic the results are. You will definitely be Impressed!





Xycod's PostworkShop Pro 3 is a very powerful digital art studio, boasting 300 styles and over 100 presets (plus you can build and save your own). Categories cover a full range of drawing, graphic arts, oil painting, watercolor, pencil sketch, acrylic painting and photo effects, and all can be applied in a single click.

PostworkShop offers adjustable parameters from the time you load your image (pre-processing adjustments such as tone and orientation), masking (strength, position, blur, etc.) and post-processing (effect strength and tonal adjustments). See sliders in screenshot above.

If you want to operate at a more advanced level, PostworkShop includes a node-based filter graph editor for chaining together effects in unique ways. Stack images using a layers palette and edit how they interact. Manually tweak the results with a full choice of brushes and export your work in any of several image formats.

A 20% discount is available, so take advantage of it.



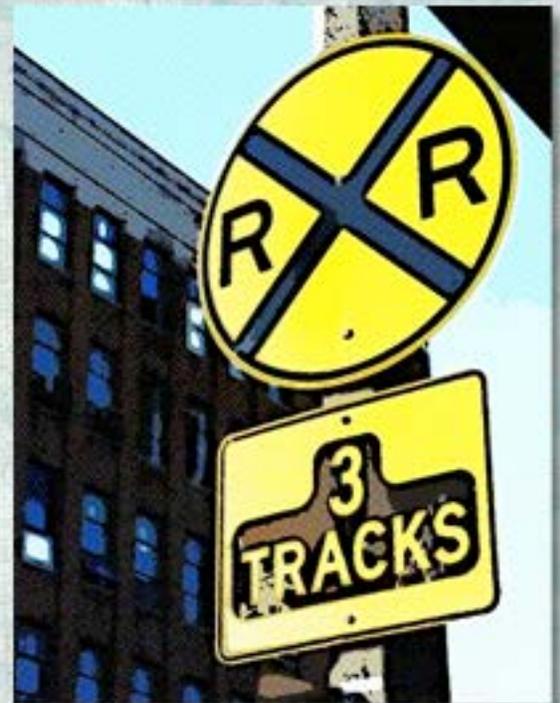


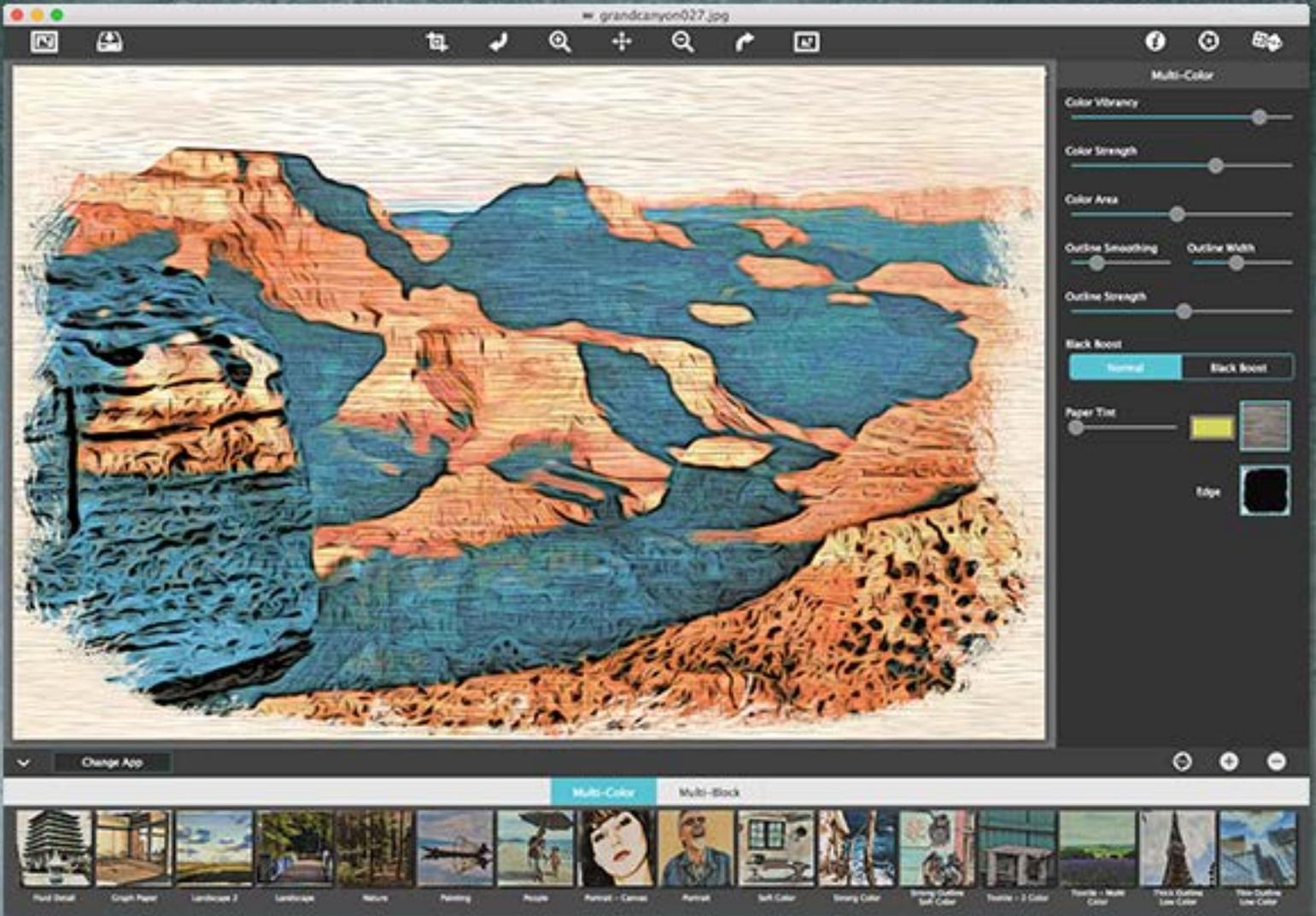
Alien Skin has long been known for their very unique "Eye Candy" type of effects, and for some users this was their first exposure to the world of plug-ins. More recently, Alien Skin has been offering more "practical" software titles (such as film emulation and image enlargement technology), and you might say Snap Art fits that description.

As with the other art applications we are reviewing, Snap Art presents you with various presets covering diverse types of traditional art such as color pencil, comics, crayon, impasto, oil paint, pastel, pen & ink, pencil sketch, pointillism and watercolor. In addition, the Stylize category is based around lines (or the lack of them) and some wild results can be created there.

Each preset category contains several 1-click presets with labeled thumbnails to get you started (see screenshot above). Each result is fully editable using sliders that affect the width of the pencil or brush, level of realism and coverage, control over masked areas, tonal and color saturation adjustments and also canvas-related settings with presets covering such items as canvas type (various papers and other materials), lighting and vignette.

Snap Art is available at a 10% discount ([see here for info](#)).

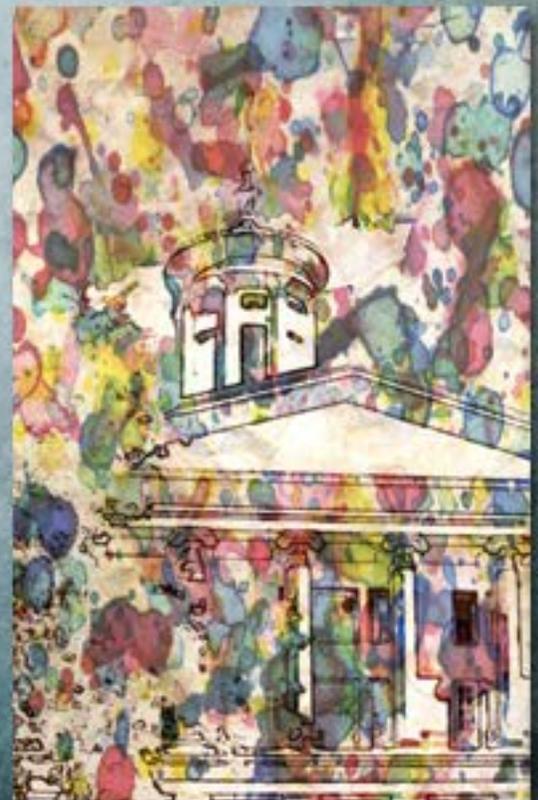




With a name like "JixiPix" you know this pack of 18 photo, artistic and creative applications (and also plug-ins for Photoshop, Elements and Lightroom) are going to be fun. And they are!

There are many effects I have not seen anywhere else, or at least not done this well, and it's really easy to get great results quickly. The screenshot above shows the Moku Hanga app and the example at right is from Artista - Haiku. Remember, these are 1-click effects, yet they are as customizable as you need.

Switching from one of the included apps to another is easy, as they're all built into a single interface. Just select "Change App" and pick another from the list. Besides those listed earlier, choose from among Aquarella, Artista - Oil, Artista - Sketch, Artoon, Chalkspiration, Dramatic Black and White, Grugetastic, Kyoobik Photo, NIR Color, Pop Dot Comics, Portrait Paint, Rainy Daze, Romantic Photo, Simply HDR, Snow Daze and Vintage Scene. Surely you'll find one that's perfect for your image.





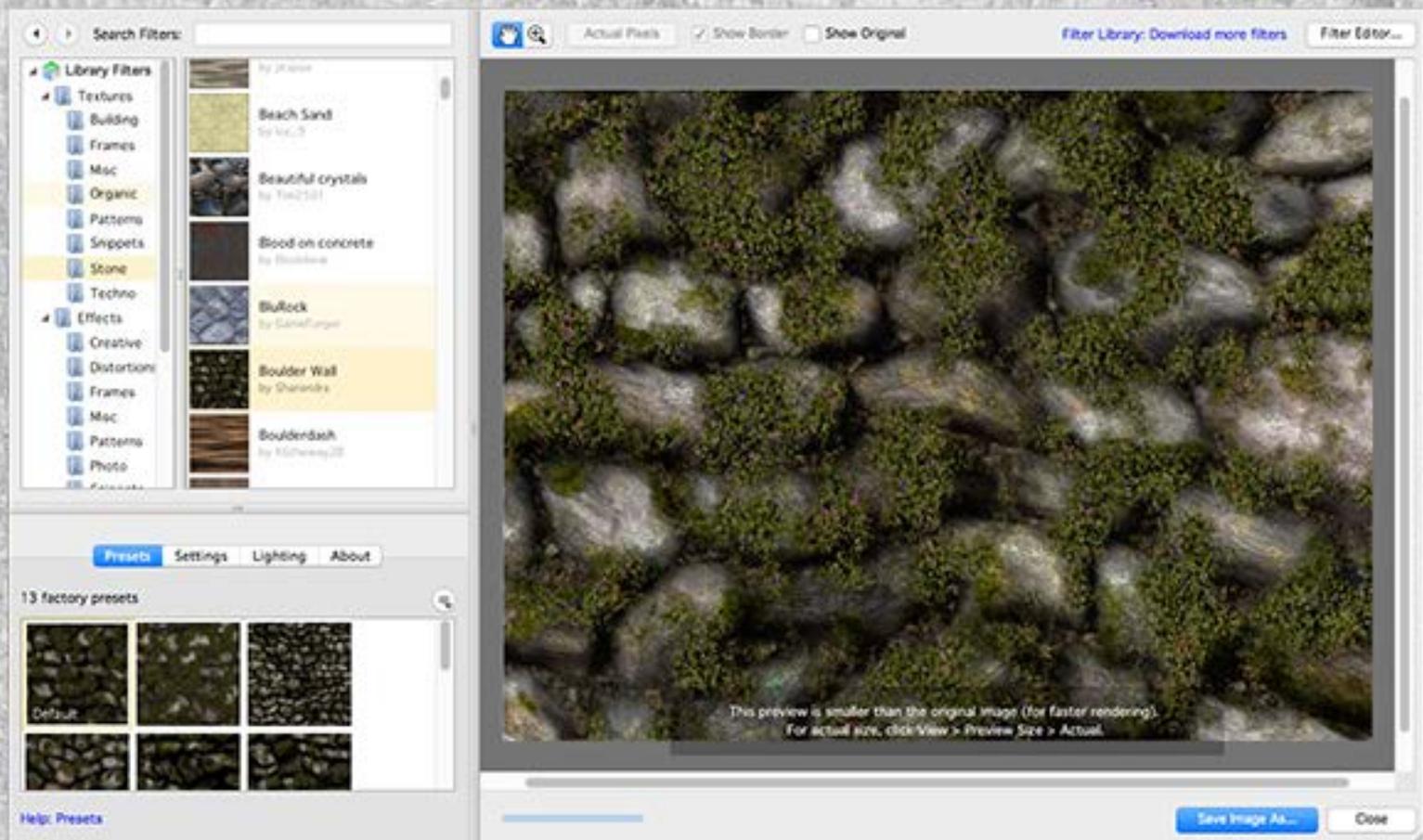
AKVIS offers a large line of Photoshop plug-ins and a few of them are focused specifically on various types of art emulation (Charcoal, Draw, OilPaint, Pastel and Sketch), but their ArtWork plug-in combines several of these painting and drawing art styles under one roof.

Once your image is loaded, you can begin experimenting with applying oil, watercolor, gouache, comics, pen & ink, linocut and pastel presets as separate effects or even in combination with each other.

As we've come to expect, each style offers full control over every aspect of the stroke thickness, length and intensity, radius and intensity of effects and simplicity and saturation. In the screenshot above the image is being treated with the Gouache style.

Since AKVIS offers so many plug-ins covering a wide range of image enhancement approaches, your best bet is to purchase one of the bundles and save 30-60% as opposed to 10%.





Filter Forge is not necessarily known as an art application, but since there are over 11,000 textures and effects available for it (not to mention that you can also create your own), you will definitely find some natural media capability there.

For instance, see the mountain photo at right. Looks like art, doesn't it? I rest my case. Since Filter Forge operates on the preset filter principle (see screenshot above for examples of categories and specific filters), applying these effects is 1-click easy and refining them not much harder.

I spend most of my working time in Filter Forge under the Effects > Creative category, where you will find such art-worthy filters as Abstraction Painter Pop Art, Aged Paintbrush 1, Anaglyph Art, Angry Painter, Another Watercolor Painting, Art Zone, Artification, Artistic License, Artomatic, Artsy Illustration (you get the idea, and that was only some of the A's!).

The screenshot above and the image at right show off another of Filter Forge's strength – realistic textures.

Check in regularly as Filter Forge is often on sale.

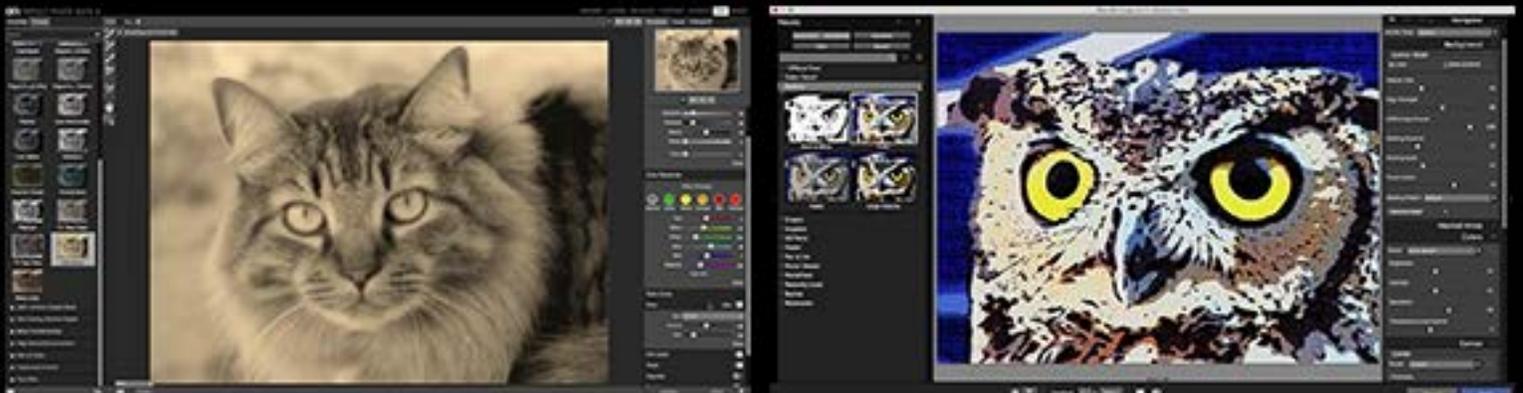
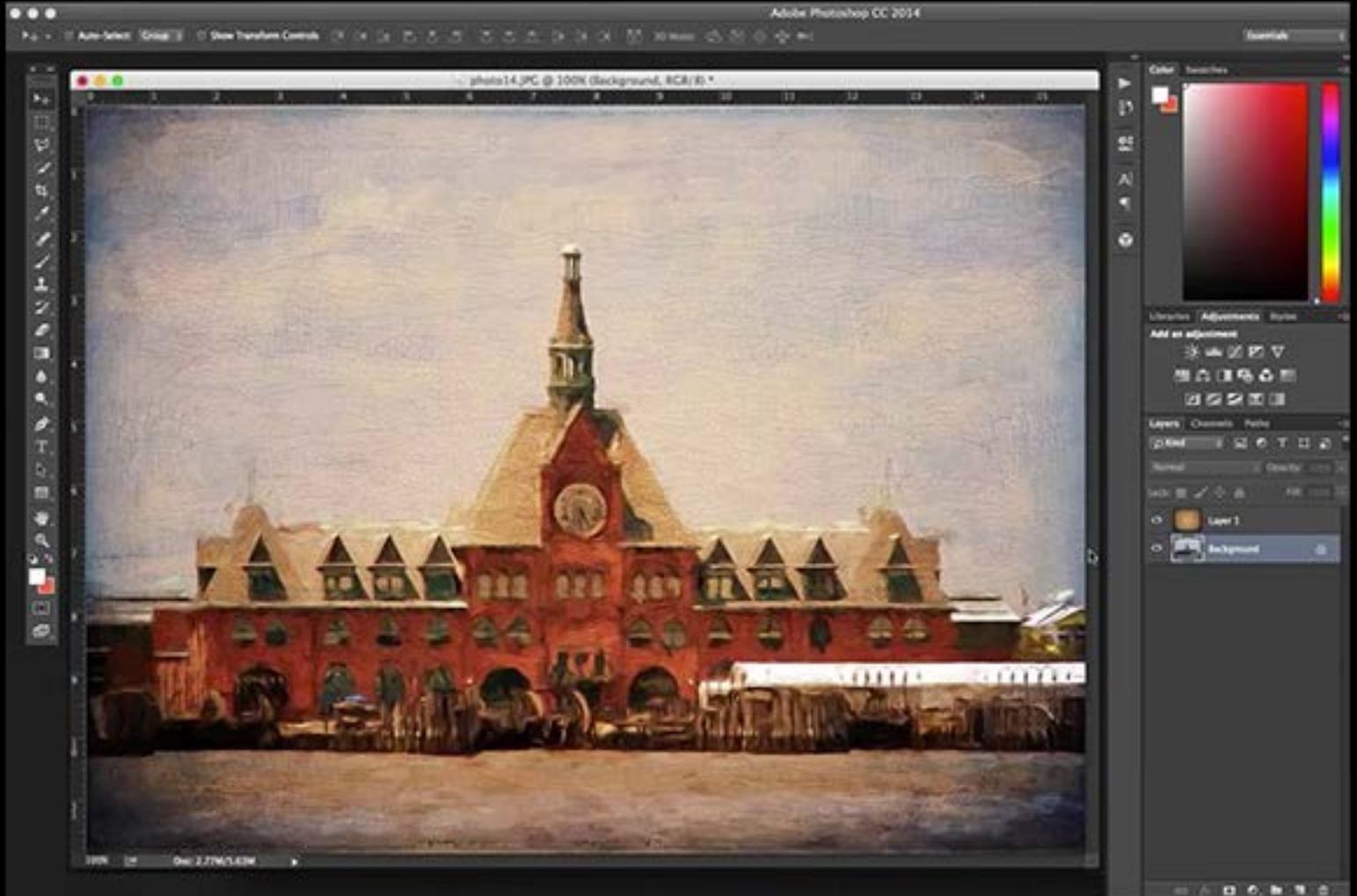


RetouchPRO

You've seen training videos online but have you ever participated in a FREE and freewheeling, exciting, unscripted LIVE seminar? Every week, RetouchPRO LIVE invites a guest artist who takes you through a Photoshop or retouching-related topic while you watch and submit questions. Each session is unscripted and extemporaneous and goes anywhere the audience wants it to go.

Plugs 'N Pixels was invited to participate and to date we've done two shows, one on creating digital artwork and one on grunge effects. These shows have been archived for free access on YouTube.

If you're interested in doing your own show, visit the first URL below for more information.



www.retouchpro.com/rplive (new live show announcements)

www.youtube.com/retouchpro (recorded past shows)

For many years I created and maintained the Plugs 'N Pixels website using Adobe GoLive, which I began using in its original incarnation as GoLive CyberStudio back in the late '90s. The last version of GoLive was discontinued in 2008, though I managed to limp along with it through each new version of OS X up through El Capitan (under which GoLive 9 by some technical miracle continues to run).

But the writing has been on the wall for a long time and I had been missing out on all the latest web development functionality, and I knew I finally had to get my web design environment up to date. Replacing the friendly design environment of GoLive was no easy task, but I recently discovered Sparkle for Mac.

It combines the simplicity of WYSIWYG design with modern web features, and keeps the code where a creative designer wants it (ie, hidden!). (con't.)



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SAVE 15% off any TOPAZ plug-in or the entire Collection!

[Click here](#) and use coupon code "plugsnpixels"



Discount codes & coupons

Never pay full price for software! Plug-ins and other Photoshop-related resources are ALWAYS on sale at Plugs 'N Pixels!

Reviews

Trying to decide which plug-in, application or other resource to purchase? It can get confusing! See what we think...

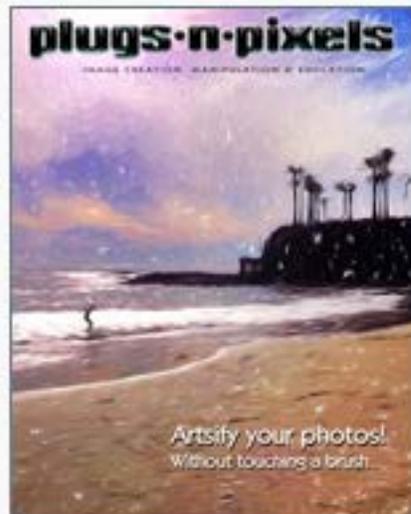
Tutorials

So you've got some new plug-ins and apps on hand. How do you use them? Sometimes it's not easy getting started, but with our simple tutorials, you'll be correcting and creating in no time.

Additional Resources



Free ezine

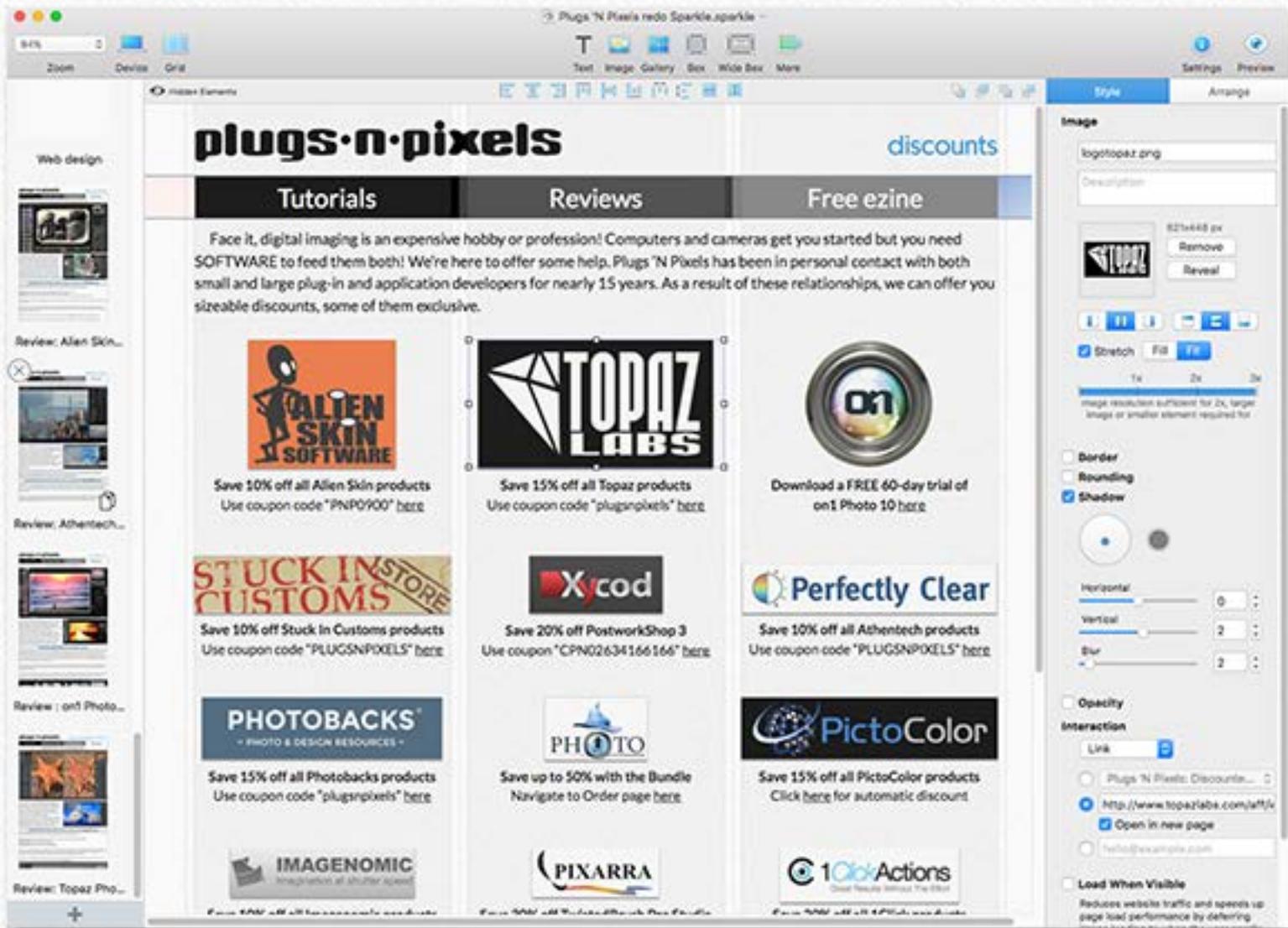


Subscribe to the FREE PDF ezine

Send email to Plugs 'N Pixels

Website created with Sparkle for Mac.  Check it out at www.sparkle.cx

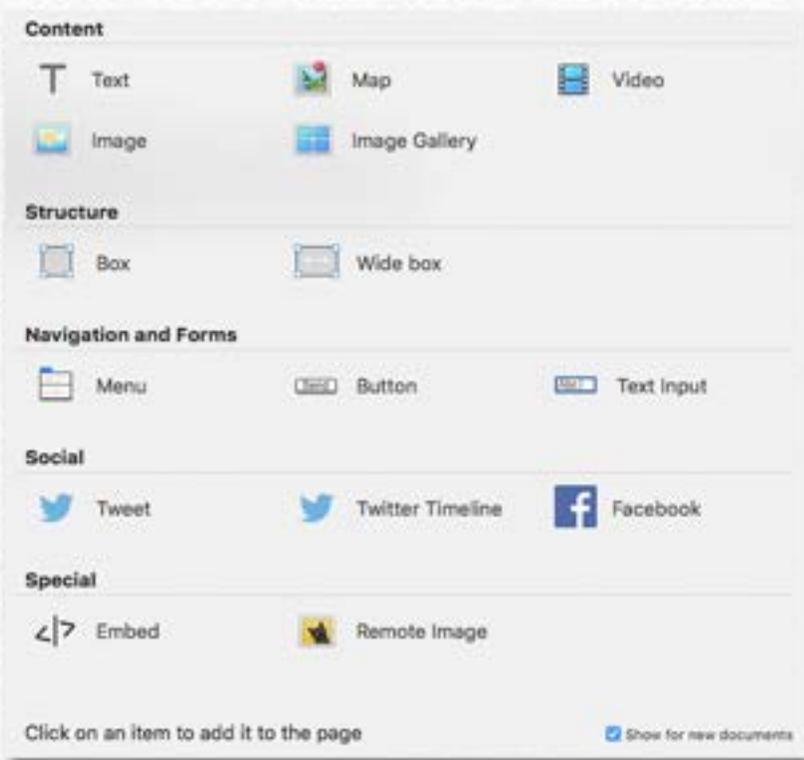
Here's what it looks like when you're working in Sparkle. At left are the pages you have created for your site, at center is where you place your text, images and other elements exactly where you want them, and at right are the attributes of any selected object. You can adjust the grid, zoom in and out and preview your layout on various devices (desktop, tablets and phones).



At right you can see the various elements that can be added to any page. Click on any choice and that element appears on the page, ready for editing.

My website's layout is intentionally very clean and conservative, though Sparkle is capable of creating very slick, cutting edge designs where images glide over each other like glass sheets while swapping out and translucent text boxes overlay images (see an example of a free editable design template below).

The thing to remember is how easy this is. (con't.)



With Sparkle's help, I completely revamped my original Dark-themed GoLive website design (right) into something much brighter, modern and more functional. Most of the new content was created from scratch, beginning with higher-resolution images (which Sparkle reconfigured as necessary for display on multiple devices). This alone saved a lot of work, not having to precisely size and export each separate GIF and JPEG as before.

Some existing text and other content needed to be migrated over for the moment, until those pages can be re-created anew. Maybe this is an opportunity to clean house and drop the old content!

The redesign also enabled me to add or expand features that were missing or not as prominent on the original site, such as Reviews and Tutorials (an example of a new review is shown at lower right).



As Sparkle grows in capability with upcoming versions, my site can grow along with it. Be sure to visit Plugs 'N Pixels (URL below) to watch the site grow and to take advantage of what it has to offer. Also visit the Sparkle website (URL above) if you're in need of relief from over-complicated web design solutions. •



New World Digital Art specializes in providing Terragen-specific content and tutorials for both home and professional users. Their online store provides a marketplace where users can share presets, tools and techniques.

NWDA recently sponsored the "Iceland" challenge. Here are the incredible top four results.



Theme Challenge

NEW WORLD DIGITAL ART PRESENTS

"ICELAND"

SECOND PLACE WINNER: Brendan Gully



PLANETSIDE SOFTWARE'S TERRAGEN 3

FIRST PLACE WINNER: Jeff Boser



THIRD PLACE WINNER: Arthur Bayard



HONORABLE MENTION: Michael Turnbull



My name is Brendan and I am an Engineer and amateur 3D artist living in Wellington, New Zealand. I have never visited Iceland before, so most of my inspiration for this image came from photos and videos posted on the NWDA Pinterest reel, forum members as well as my own research.

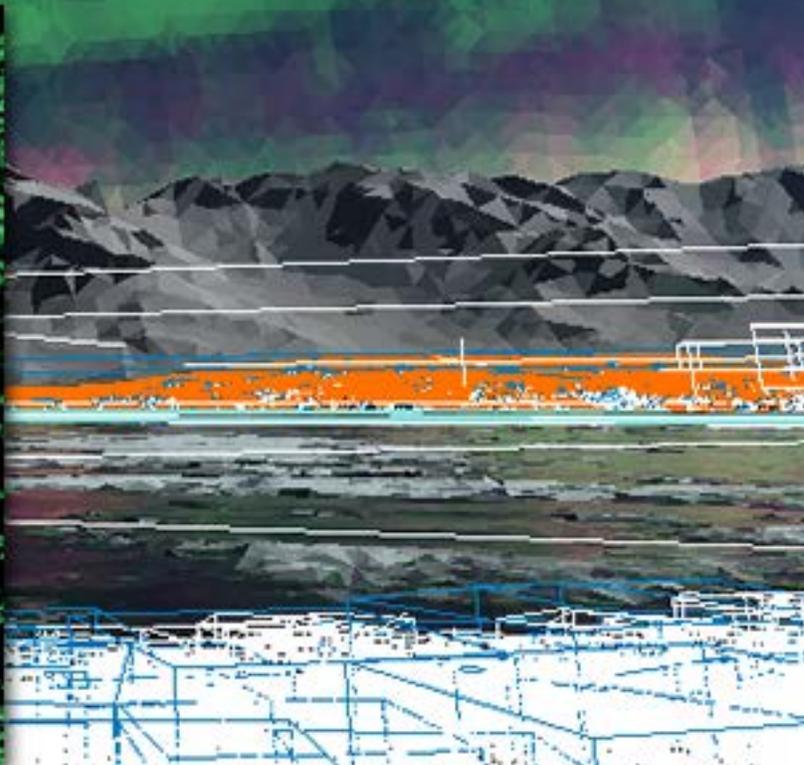
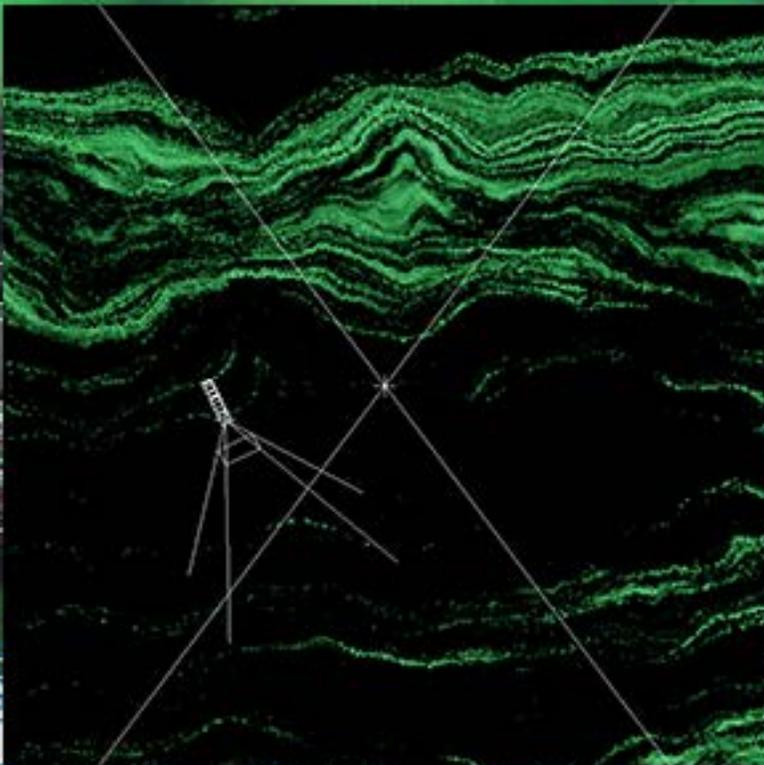
With this image I began by building a terrain and finding a point of view that would allow me to compose my elements into. I recycled an old terrain setup from a previous render, but adjusted some of the strata properties to fit more with what I was seeing in photographs of Iceland (narrower and near horizontal strata). This allowed me to focus on finding an interesting point of view and perfecting the other elements of the scene. The original terrain was a DEM model of Queenstown, New Zealand, which I dragged through World Machine to add a bit of fine detailing.

I am a bit of a nature geek and have a mild obsession with the Aurora, so it was a natural urge to recreate it in Terragen. This contest was the perfect opportunity to try it, and I am very pleased with the results. I started by creating a standard cloud layer and adjusting its height and depth to a point that seemed realistic. I played with the perlin density function by stretching it along one horizontal axis and giving it a good blast of lead in warp. This gave me a good base to work with, and it was trial and error adjusting the seed value until I found some shapes I liked. [con't.]

Brendan Gully describes the making of his winning entry

www.nwdastore.com/theme-challenge/

jokulsarlon aurora by brendan gully, nz

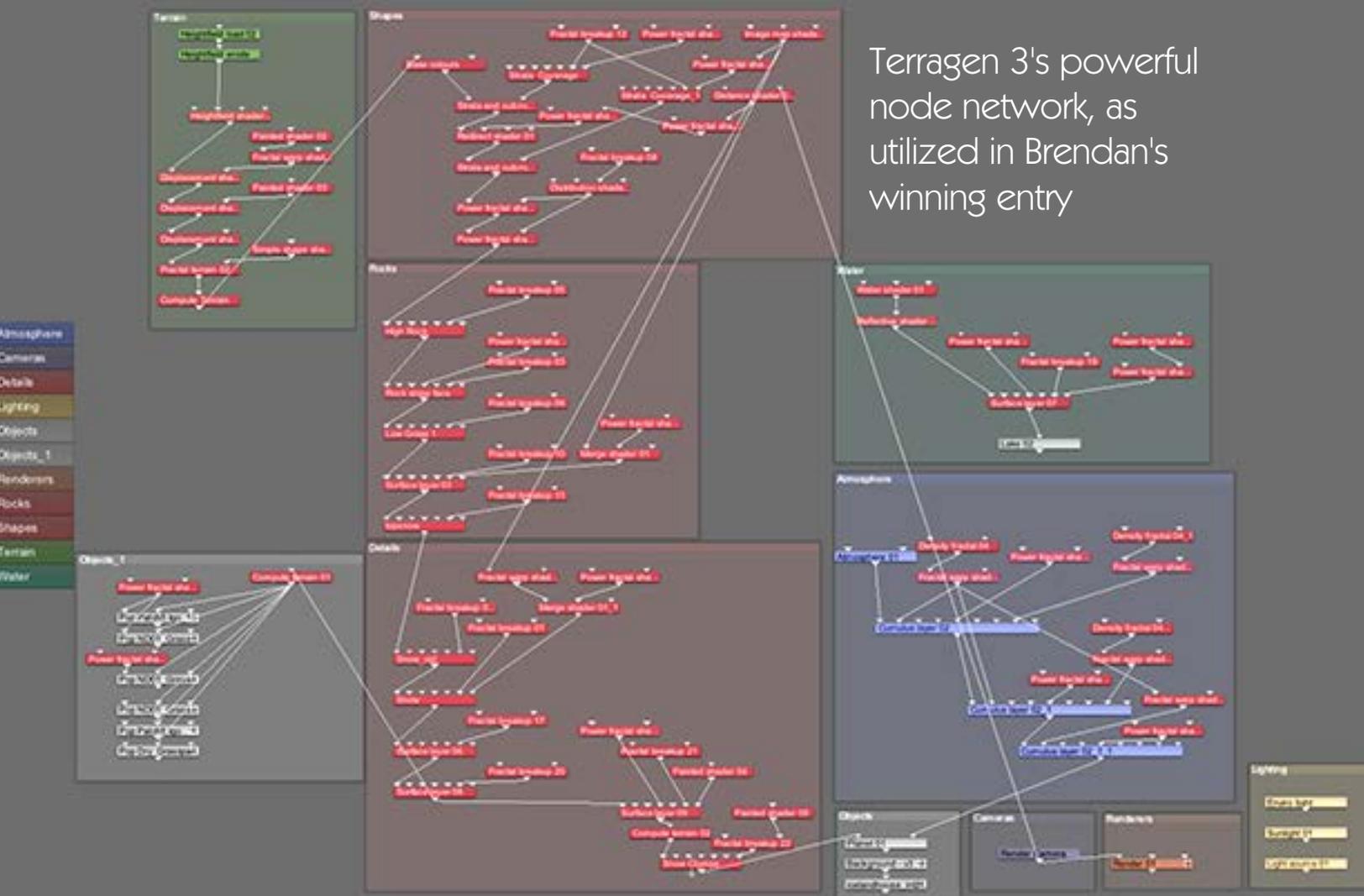


It was a tricky balancing act adjusting colors, density, edge softness, lighting, base properties and height, but I eventually settled on a combination I was happy with. I experimented using a Fractal Warp Shader on the perlin input, which was able to give me nice ripples along the edges and created the sharp contrasting pillars which you tend to see on shorter exposure aurora photographs. I duplicated this base cloud layer twice and adjusted the height, depth and color, to create the highlights along the base and the pink tops.

Next I went about building the two land-forms in the mid and foreground using a Painted Shader fed into a Displacement Shader, applied to the original terrain. One of the reference images I was working from had some nice grass in the foreground and it helped balance the image. This image also captured a tourist building, which I recreated in SolidWorks (remember, I am an amateur and being an engineer, that is what I am familiar with). I felt these elements added to the Icelandic theme, although there were probably more interesting and artistic objects I could have gone with.

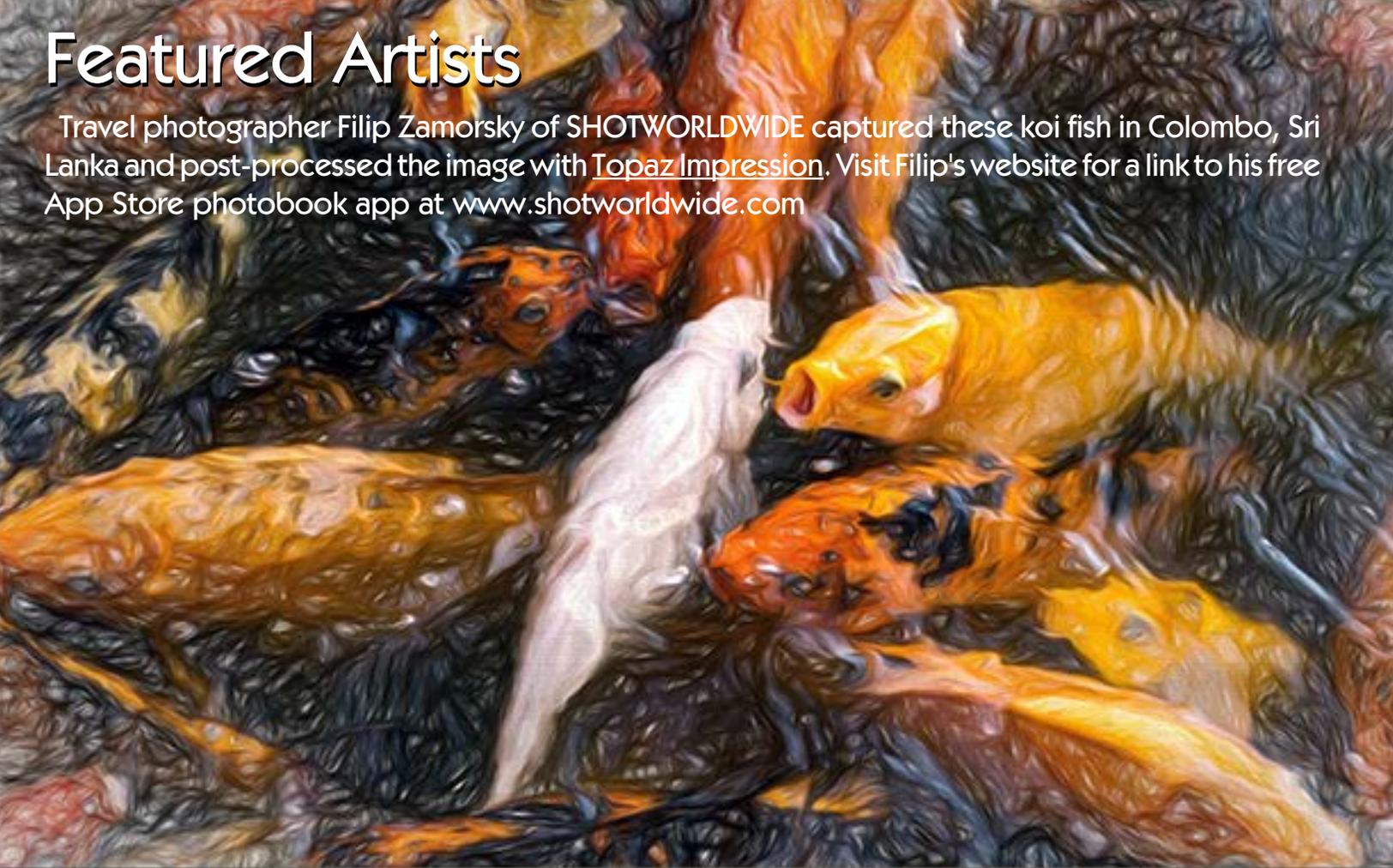
After finishing the terrain and objects I began work on the water. It was a good thing I started this last, as the render time increases caused by the reflections were horrendous. The final render took over 75 hours to complete on a new i7-4790k system, but this was mainly due to the use of 32 samples for the soft water reflections. I really wanted the soft matte reflections you see in Aurora photographs, but I used this feature naively. The problem with this feature is that obvious mismatches occur at the edge of the render chunks, and this got worse as I increased the reflection softness. Instead of reducing the softness I just increased the render samples, which didn't actually fix the problem at all but just made my headache worse. If I had more time I would have liked to experiment using a cloud layer to achieve a blurred reflection, as suggested by Dune in my WIP thread on the [Planetside forums](#).

The Icebergs were achieved by placing a Surface Shader between the Reflective Shader and the Lake objects input node. This had the inherent but desirable effect of adding reflections onto the ice. Many hours, tweaks and iterations later, I came up with what you see here. Many thanks to the contest organizers, sponsors and Plugs 'N Pixels for the chance to have my work featured. Another big thanks to the other participants and everyone else who commented and suggested ideas on the forums – I couldn't have finished my image to this standard without you. •



Featured Artists

Travel photographer Filip Zamorsky of SHOTWORLDWIDE captured these koi fish in Colombo, Sri Lanka and post-processed the image with Topaz Impression. Visit Filip's website for a link to his free App Store photobook app at www.shotworldwide.com



Right: Machine Falls in Short Springs Natural Area, Tullahoma, TN, photographed by landscape and astrophotography hobbyist **Arthur Gonzales** and post-processed with Topaz Simplify. www.arthurgonzalesphotography.com



Left: Central Texas sunrise photographed using iPhone 5s by nature photographer and digital artist **Brian Shepard**, post-processed in painterly style with Topaz Impression.

<http://ImagesByShepard.com>

Featured Artist: Marilyn Flanders

New Hampshire photographer Marilyn Flanders used Alien Skin Exposure to add film, color and bokeh effects to her images shown here, taken both in New England and in the Caribbean island nation of Dominica. Beginning with the various Exposure presets, she made custom manual adjustments to suit each particular image.

"Sometimes a standard image is good as is. However, sometimes the application of the photo may require a different look. I prefer to take the component of a photo I like the best and will often use a vignette to help subtly begin the process of drawing the viewer's eye where I'd like it to go. The subject matter should allow for a continual movement. Further enhancements such as an addition or subtraction of saturation, highlight colors, or softening edges leads to my overall goal of creating space for someone to see what I am seeing."



See more of Marilyn's work at:
<http://fineartamerica.com/profiles/marilyn-flanders>

closing artwork

Effects by:
Mike Bedford



Fun effects made with:
[Alien Skin Eye Candy](#)