



plugs·n·pixels

IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION

New software!

Filter Forge

Vue 6 Infinite

Terragen 2

and much more...



Auto FX Software
VISUAL IMAGING SOLUTIONS

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In this issue we take a look at some slightly retro (circa-2003) but still viable plug-ins from Auto FX, as well as brand new offerings from Filter Forge, e-on software and Planetside Software. Plus other great imaging and web-related goodies.



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•Plugs 'N Pixels will always be free!•

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Background image effects:
[Kubota Artistic Tools](#), [Dreamsuite](#)

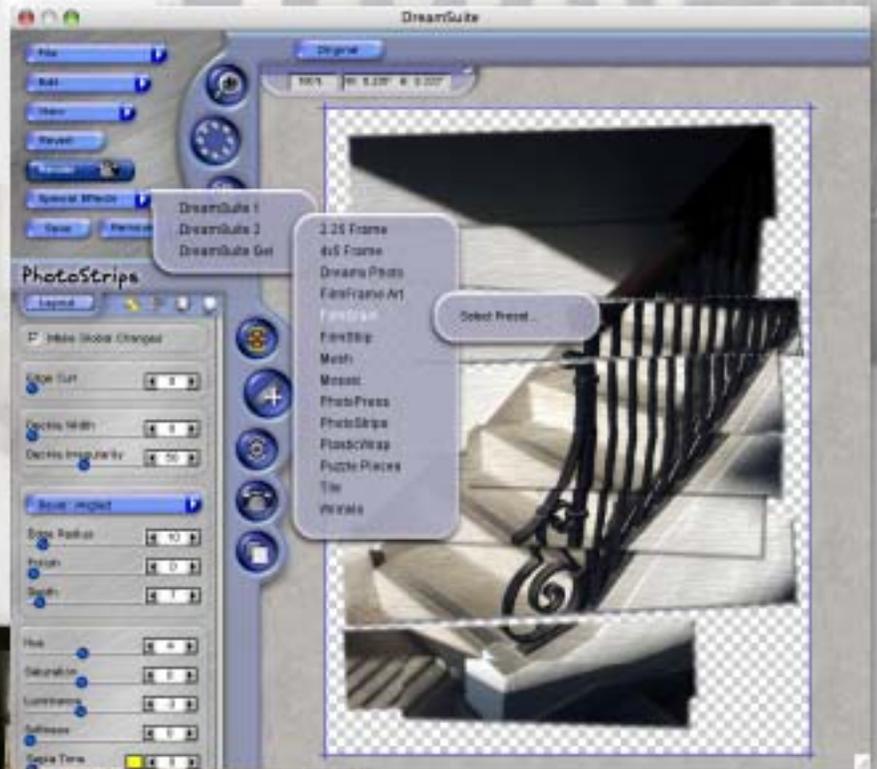
Auto FX Software

VISUAL IMAGING SOLUTIONS

This issue's cover image was created using Auto FX's venerable DreamSuite packages, along with a little help from their PhotoGraphic Edges suite of effects (Acid Edge brush, applied manually). I ran the plug-ins in standalone mode for maximum efficiency, using the latest Mac OS-X (also available for Windows).

DreamSuite Series One includes 18 overall sets of effects while Series Two includes 14. These beautiful effects range from film frames to creases to mosaics to metal to toning to puzzle pieces, and much more! Sure beats trying to create the effects yourself.

Apply the effects to your images using the included presets, or adjust each effect's parameters manually for a more customized and unique result that is both contemporary and eye-catching. The possibilities easily keep up with your imagination.

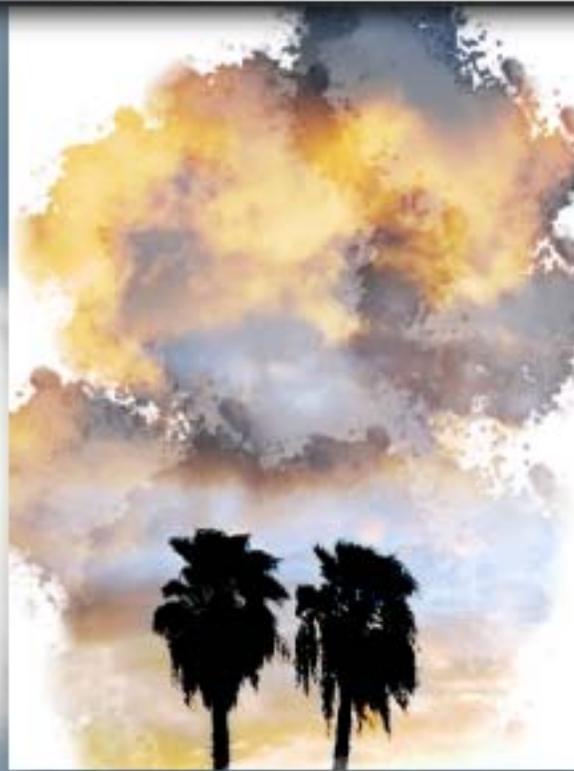


The screenshot above shows the fun and functional 3D interface common to all Auto FX products. The effect shown is from DreamSuite Series Two's Photo Strips option, where your image is sliced into pieces that you can move and resize as desired.

The effect at lower left is from a Tile preset, also found in DreamSuite Series Two. At upper left is a combination of DreamSuite Series One's Focus and Photo Tone options.

On the next page we'll take a look at two other Auto FX plug-ins, PhotoGraphic Edges and Mystical Tint, Tone & Color.

www.plugsandpixels.com/dreamsuite.html



Two more titles from Auto FX's line of plug-in suites include Photo/Graphic Edges and Mystical Tint Tone and Color.

For the cloud and tree image above I used Photographic/Edges' Acid Edge brush, manually selecting different parts of the sky until the effect accumulated to my satisfaction. That was it! The result is quite striking.

For the background image of the clouds and silver lining, I applied Mystical Tint Tone and Color's Soften Details setting, raising the Softness setting from its low default. Again, a quick bit of work with great results.

Frames like the one enclosing this page can be created with the Dimension X presets from Dreamsuite Series One.



Also available from Auto FX are Dreamsuite Gel Series (for translucent graphics), Auto Eye (for correcting images) and Mystical Lighting (for adding lighting effects to your images).

Visit the links below for screenshots, additional examples and more information about Auto FX.

www.plugsandpixels.com/autoeye.html

www.plugsandpixels.com/dreamsuite.html

www.plugsandpixels.com/mysticallighting.html

www.plugsandpixels.com/mttc.html

www.plugsandpixels.com/pge.html

"To develop the best Photoshop plugin on this planet, period."-Filter Forge's goal

An exciting development has recently occurred in the world of Photoshop plug-ins! After three years of full-time development and a period of energetic public beta testing, Filter Forge, Inc. recently released the final version of Filter Forge, its sole product.

A cross-platform application, Filter Forge is positioned as a premier, high-end plug-in for the purpose of enabling users to build their own filters (textures, effects, distortions, backgrounds, frames, etc.).

Users can start by accessing the free online library of user-contributed filters, which can then be tweaked and customized as desired in Filter Forge's node-based visual filter editor. The same editor can also be used to create your own filters from scratch.

These filters support 16- and 32-bit modes in Photoshop, real-world HDRI lighting, bump and normal maps, huge resolutions and seamless tiling.



FILTER FORGE



The screenshot (top) shows some of the Adjustments Components which are dragged into the filter editor workspace as you create your filter.

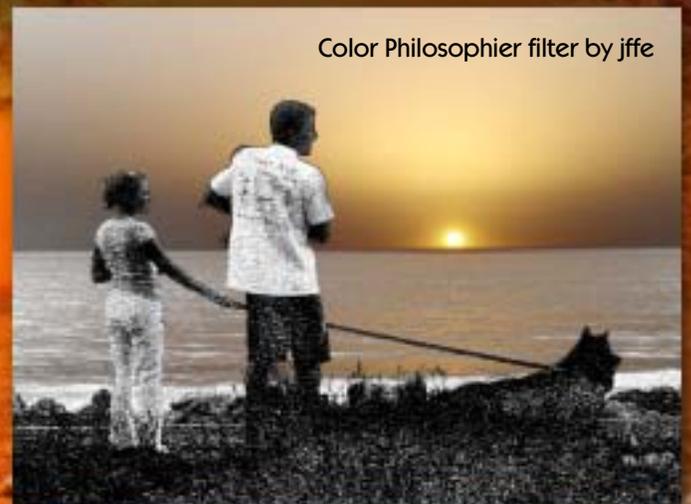
The filter effect applied to the images on this page is called Candle Wax, contributed to the online library by Filter Forge user photoman. The unretouched original image is shown at right.

The wild effects on this page were achieved by using Filter Forge presets without additional manipulation—they're that good! Below is "Burninator" by Richard Bartlett and "100 year old Tugboat" by Bongo51.

www.plugsandpixels.com/filterforge.html



The Filter Editor (above) is the most important feature of the new Filter Forge. The Editor uses a node-based system to free you from having to code your filters.



Vue 6

A New Dawn



When it comes to creating natural 3D environments, there are really only a handful of choices for professionals that stand out. The new Vue 6 Infinite from e-on software is one of them.

With a completely redesigned architecture offering significant memory handling improvement, Vue 6's workflow is the most powerful and efficient to date.

Getting up to speed in Vue 6 is not hard. I am not a seasoned Vue user, but I was able to create the images on these pages shortly after installing and launching it. The presets included under the Atmosphere menu are a good place to start your scene, after which you can add ("Create") a terrain or geometric shape to your scene (such as the weathered pyramid on the next page).

Right click on any object and change its material (surface), adding your choice of covering from the Collections list (Rocks, Landscapes, Ecosystems, Clouds, Special Effects, Plants, etc.).

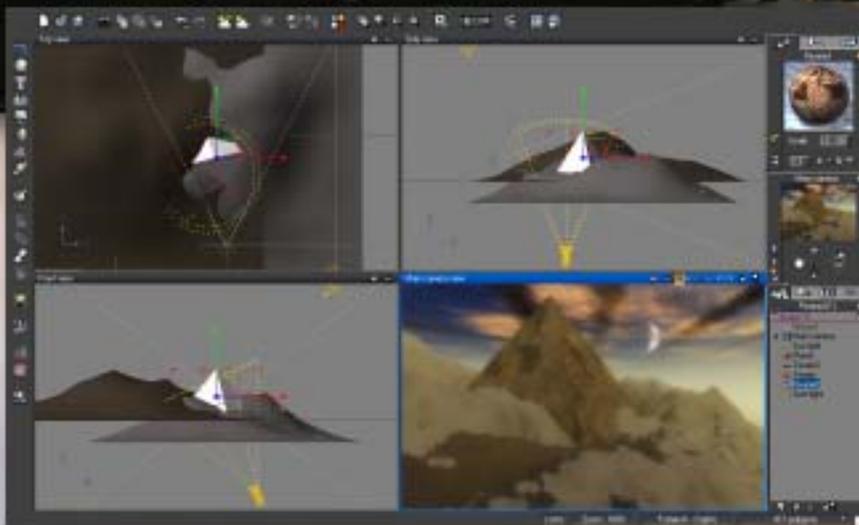
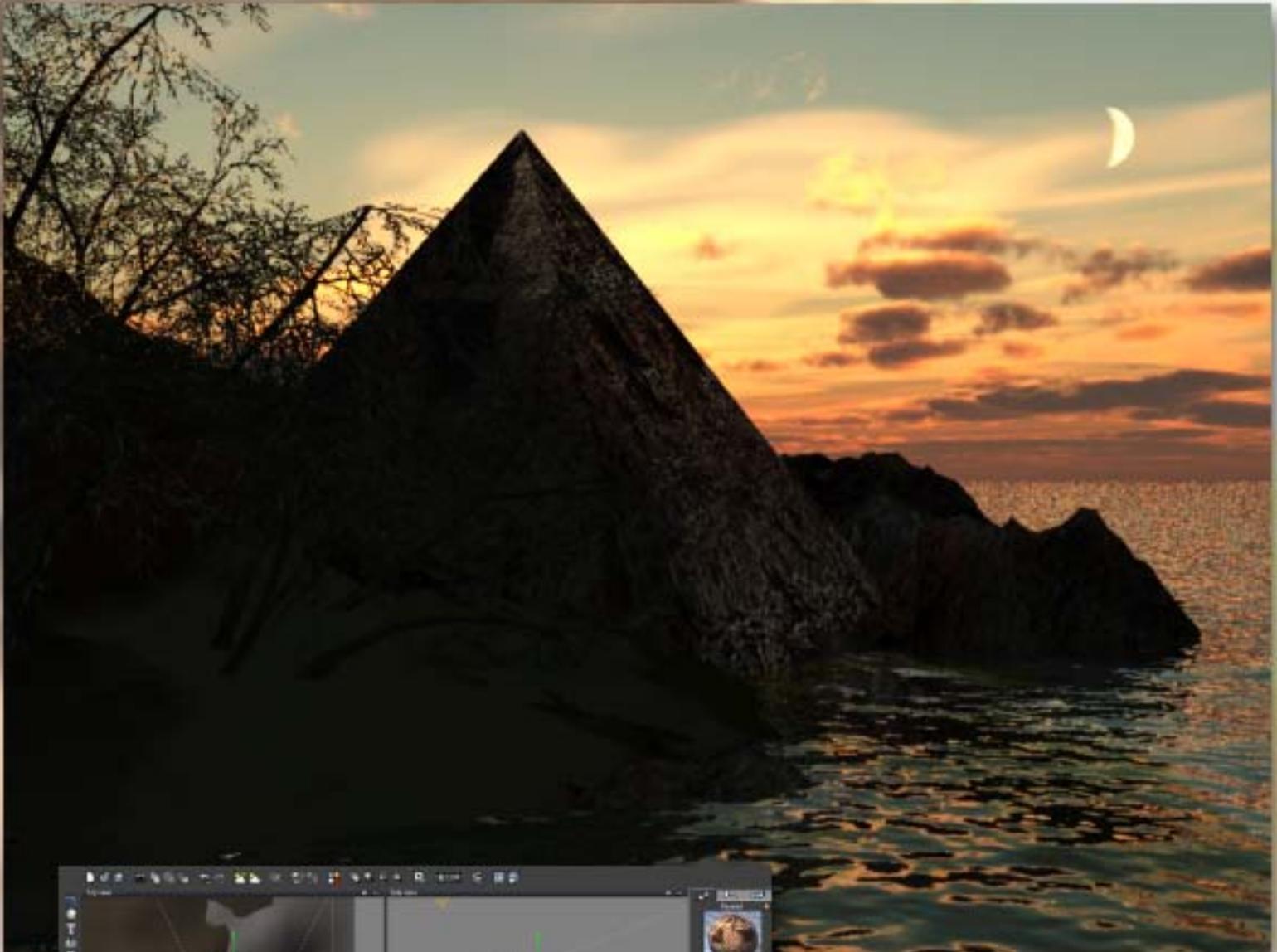
Rendering is surprisingly fast, even on a laptop (up to 130% faster). These scenes, originally 1600x1200 before downsizing for this layout, took only several minutes each to complete.





Advanced users will appreciate the new features of Vue 6 such as layering of materials (each layer with its own attributes, as in Photoshop); an animation graph with advanced features; painting over surfaces using pressure-sensitive tablets when creating ecosystems; local wind generation; a spectral atmosphere engine; importing of fully animated Poser scenes; expansion modules covering plants, lighting, asset management and network rendering—and so much more!

www.plugsandpixels.com/vue.html



If you are familiar with other 3D products (Max, LightWave, Cinema4D, XSI or Maya), you can emulate their keystrokes and interface attributes right in Vue. The default Vue GUI is shown at left, with the seaside pyramid scene (above) in progress.

VUE 6 INFINITE

asileFX

INSTRUCTED BY: NICHOLAS PELLEGRINO

Here's the perfect set of training materials for getting up to speed with e-on software's new Vue 6 series. asileFX's expert instructor Nicholas Pellegrino's videos take you from getting started with Vue to what's new in the latest version. He then moves on to the advanced subjects of custom plant creation and spectral atmospheres (shown here). You can either download the lessons and get started immediately, or order the CD versions (or do both!).



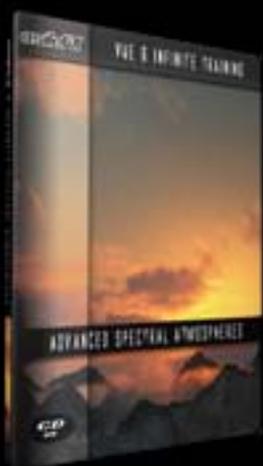
SETTING UP THE SKY - CHAPTER 1

CLOUD CREATION - CHAPTER 2

GOD RAYS - CHAPTER 3

CREATING THE COVER SCENE - CHAPTER 4

RENDER OPTIMIZATION AND ANIMATION - CHAPTER 5



Advanced Spectral
Atmospheres



What's New
In Vue 6



Advanced Plant
Creation



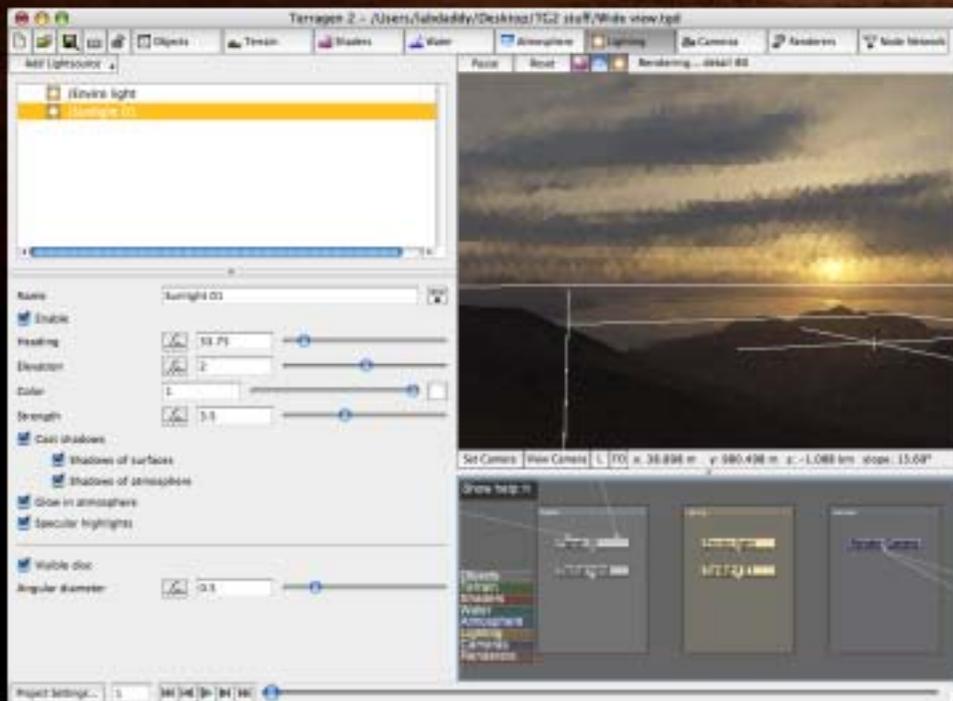
Getting Started
With Vue 6

asileFX also offers training in Lightwave 3D, Softimage | XSI, 3D Studio MAX, ZBrush and Adobe Photoshop, along with royalty-free texture collections, Lightwave and Vue preset collections. Object libraries, stock images and stock HD footage are coming soon.

terragen² photorealistic scenery rendering software

Terragen 0.9 has been very popular with landscape artists for years now. When it became known that a whole new advanced version was in the works, longtime users couldn't wait to get ahold of it! Alpha testers unwittingly teased the Terragen faithful with stunning images that still only hinted at the incredible advances to come.

Finally, many months later, the Terragen 2 Technology Preview is available for download. It takes Planetside's signature offering to a whole new level. And it's not even finished yet! Many more features will exist in the final Terragen 2 release, and rendering will be further optimized.



New to the Technology Preview is a graphical node/graph editor which is used for creating networks of shaders and scene elements (seen at the lower right of the screenshot). Between you and me, it's possible to create stunning imagery without going near it! But those of you who are comfortable in such an environment will be able to unlock the full power of the TG2 rendering engine.

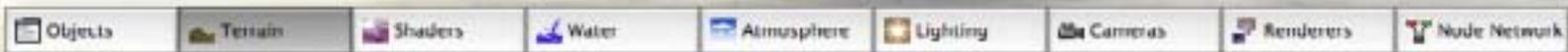
It's not a huge feat to get started with Terragen 2, despite its advanced capabilities. I created the main images on these pages not long after reading through the helpful tutorial document found on Planetside's website.

Basically, you click on the Terrain button, add a terrain, switch to the Shaders tab and add a set of colors. Next, add a layer, color it, then set the altitude constraints, followed by slope constraints.

Do a test render before adding sunlight by switching to Lighting mode and atmosphere in its own mode. Add a cloud layer, and adjust the parameters (in time you'll learn what settings produce which results in each of the modes).

When the preview looks like you want it to, perform the final render (registered users can produce larger and better quality renders than those using the free version).

And that is how it's done in Terragen 2!



www.plugsandpixels.com/terrigen.html





Gertrudis graphics

NEW 3.2
version



Original

Turning your favorite photos into artwork is a popular endeavor. Images take on a magical quality when transformed into the realm of traditional art. But the problems begin when your art skills fall short of your lofty creative aspirations!

A number of applications are dedicated to this purpose, but most of them require your manual intervention to choose colors, apply the brush strokes, and so on.

I personally don't have the art skills (or patience) to work stroke by stroke, so an application like Gertrudis Pro 3 (for Windows) is perfect for me! I can concentrate on my photography (which I can do) and let Gertrudis perform the tricky conversion to artwork (which I can't pull off), automatically.

Take this example of the cat. Nice photo, but who's going to paint it by hand, on the computer? Especially all that hair and grass?!

So I simply opened the image in Gertrudis, made my choice of art styles (in this case, Water Color), and chose to apply it to the entire image automatically. After reapplying the process several times by pressing Control-F (this was as close as I came to expending any real effort on this artwork!), I got the excellent result you see here.

It all takes place so quickly, you can move on to the next images in rapid succession.

When it comes to artistic software, there is a bit of a middle ground for people like me who may want to pretend they can paint. Gertrudis allows you to apply the preset paint effect manually, while still helping you out.

Using the Auto-sketch tool mode, you paint over a white area the size of your source image, and samples of the image are applied at the cursor location in the chosen art style (Oil, Crayon, Pastel, Van Gogh, Water Color and Vincent—all offering editable parameters). This is how I created the voodoo skulls image below (the mountain artwork in the background were created in the same manner as the cat; that is, effortlessly, this time using the Van Gogh setting).

The stroke width is adjustable, as is the particular pattern laid down by the brush, color variation (HSL) and even 3D brush settings such as bumpiness, softness and intensity of light (new to this version; see the dialog screenshot below).

Version 3 also offers support for Wacom tablets, choice of workspace background color, full-screen painting and an improved painting algorithm. Your artwork can be exported at any resolution in any of three common image formats (JPEG, BMP or TIFF) for printing or sharing electronically.

As if all this weren't enough, Gertrudis is also available as a plug-in for Photoshop or PD Pro Digital Painter (aka Dogwaffle).

So forget the art lessons and get started making realistic artwork NOW!

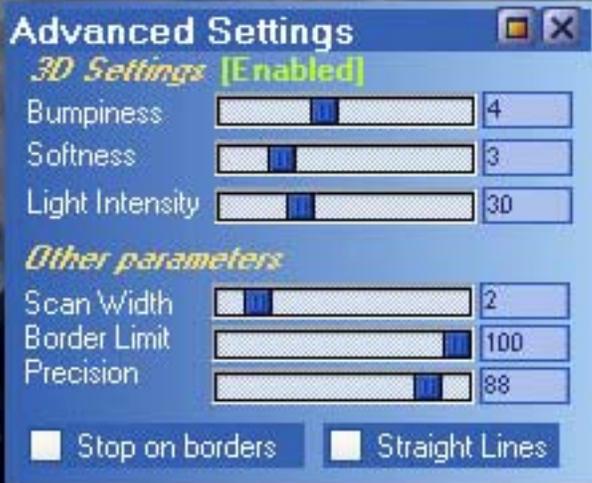


Original

Take a photo,
make a painting!
No art skills
required.



Original





Kekus

DIGITAL

Image stitching for the Mac

Panoramic image stitching is increasing in popularity as photographers work to squeeze even more out of their camera's limited field of view and resolution. While prosumer digital cameras are available with long zoom reaches, they tend to fall short on the front end, often only approximating about a 35mm (equivalent) wide angle lens' coverage.

Kekus Digital offers an incredibly easy to use stitching application called Calico (see its straightforward interface at right). Simply drag your contiguously numbered horizontal, vertical or block-arranged images into the well, and a couple of clicks later, you have a finished panorama!

Seams are flawless, even with a handheld "quickie" series of shots, as with my set of examples shown here.



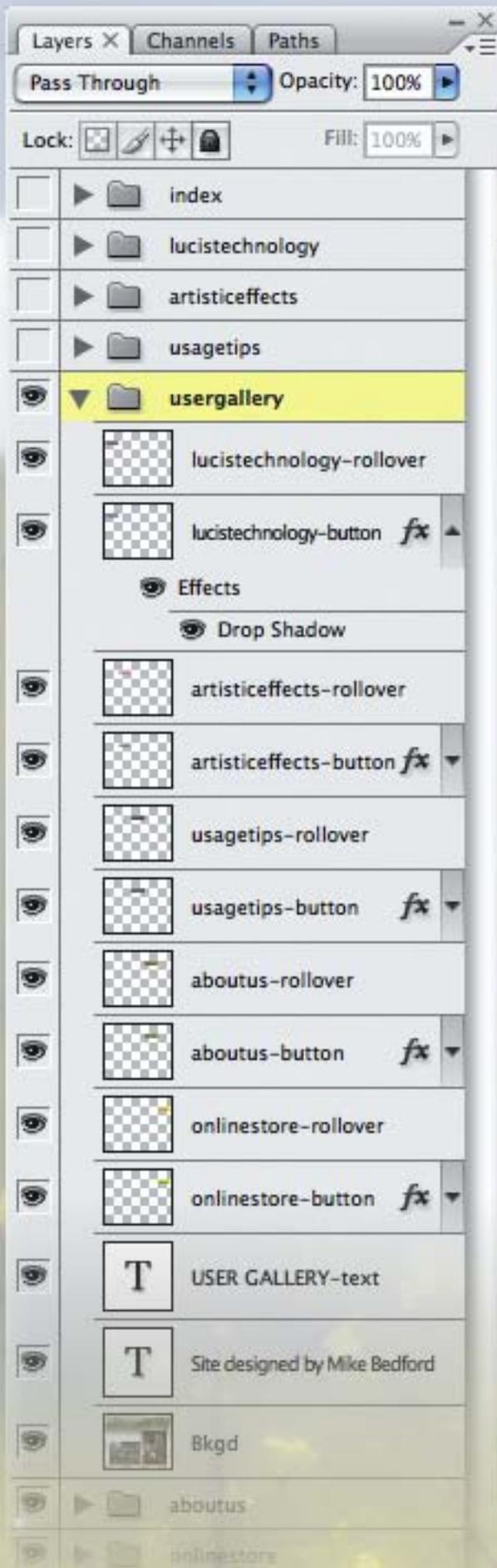
Dana Point Harbor (California)

The original series of four handheld images



When compared to other affordable image stitching applications, Calico produces much better and more accurate results. There is no repetition of objects in the scene, and tonality (exposure level) is consistent throughout.

For more advanced users who prefer greater manual control over each individual image in the series, Kekus also offers solutions such as PTMac, PTBatch, LensFix & PanoTools plug-ins, XBlend and fovCalculator.



sitegrinder2

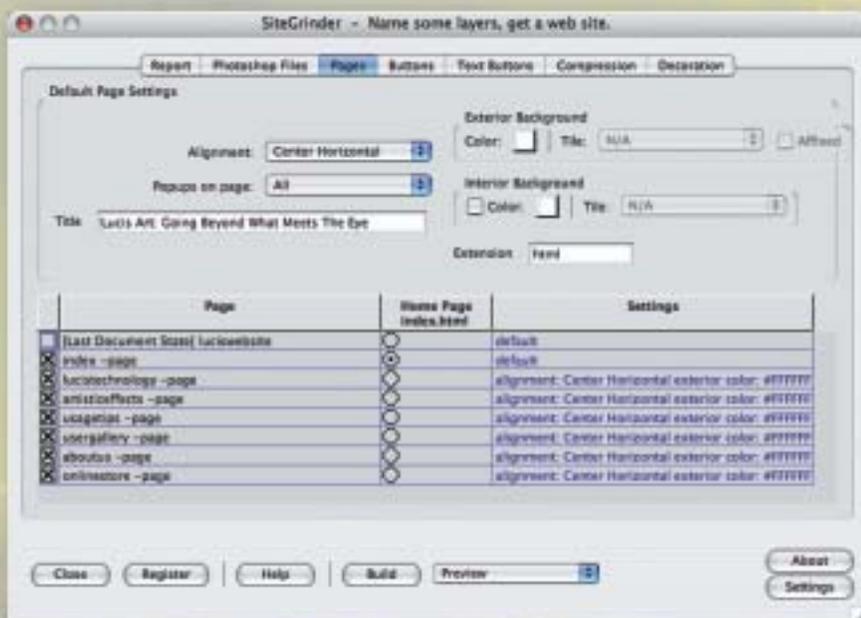
www.plugsandpixels.com/sitegrinder.html



Most creative folks who want a website don't want to have to learn a web development application—especially the coding part. Chances are good they already know Photoshop quite well, so it would be perfect if it could do the job. And it can!

The folks at Media Lab offer a revolutionary plug-in that creates a fully working website from a set of Layer Comps, and assigns functionality according to layer name. Brilliant!

For my example website (index page shown above), I was free to lay out the design in Photoshop without worrying about image overlap or text placement. Explore an online version of my site at www.plugsandpixels.com/sitegrinder/index.html



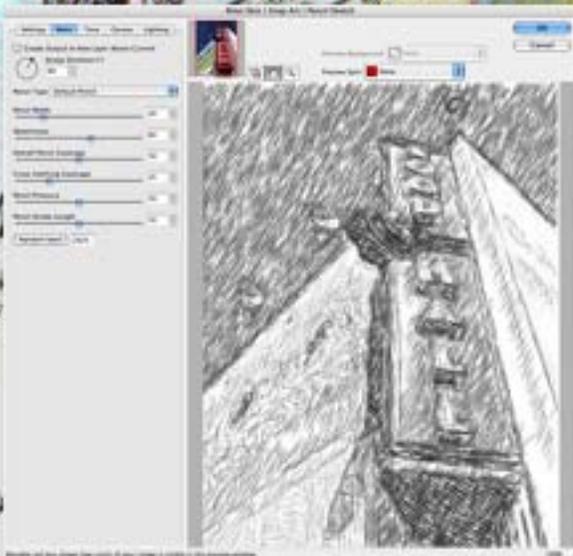
If you're already familiar with the concept of Photoshop Layers, it's only a small step up to learn about Layer Comps (shown above).



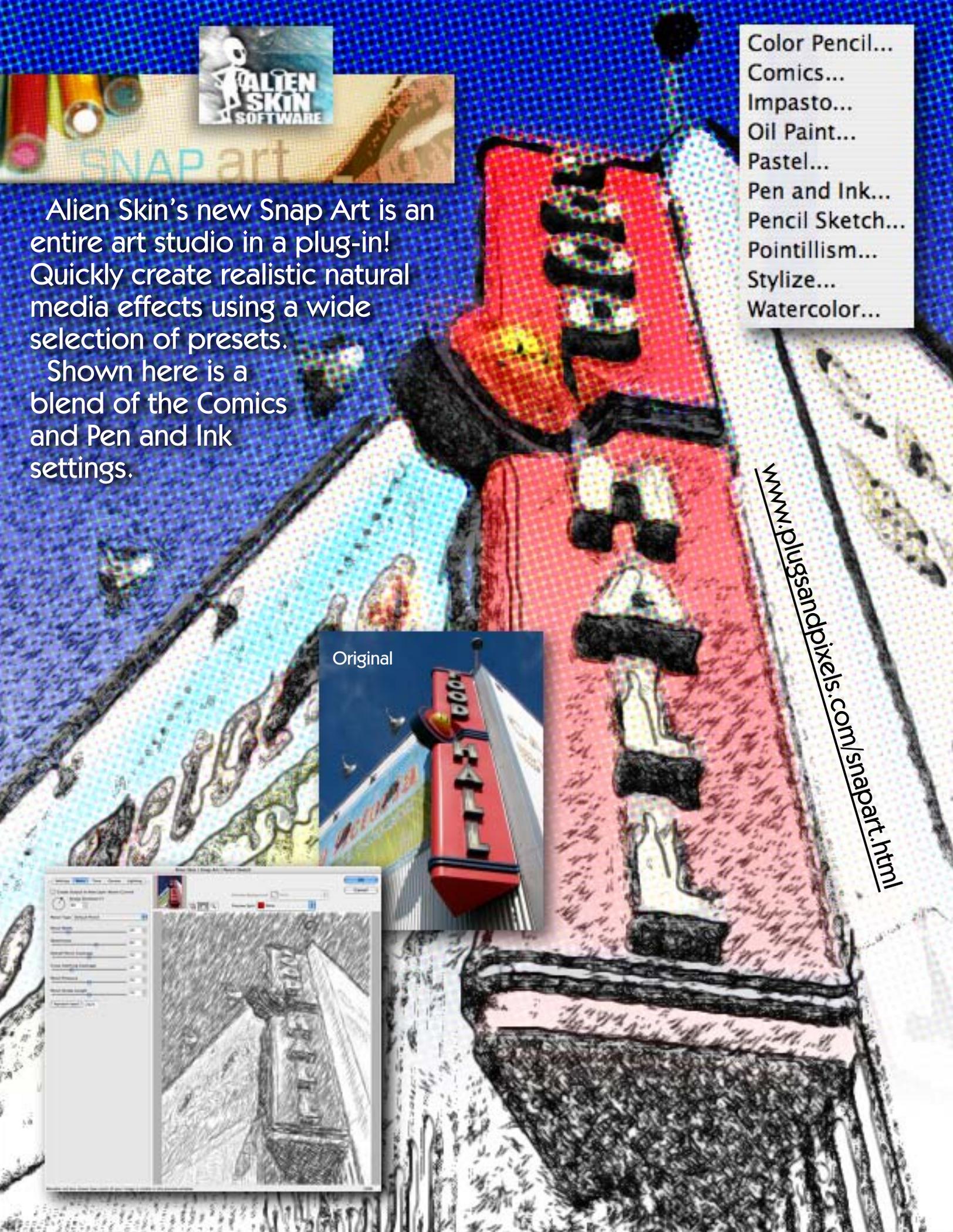
- Color Pencil...
- Comics...
- Impasto...
- Oil Paint...
- Pastel...
- Pen and Ink...
- Pencil Sketch...
- Pointillism...
- Stylize...
- Watercolor...

Alien Skin's new Snap Art is an entire art studio in a plug-in! Quickly create realistic natural media effects using a wide selection of presets.

Shown here is a blend of the Comics and Pen and Ink settings.

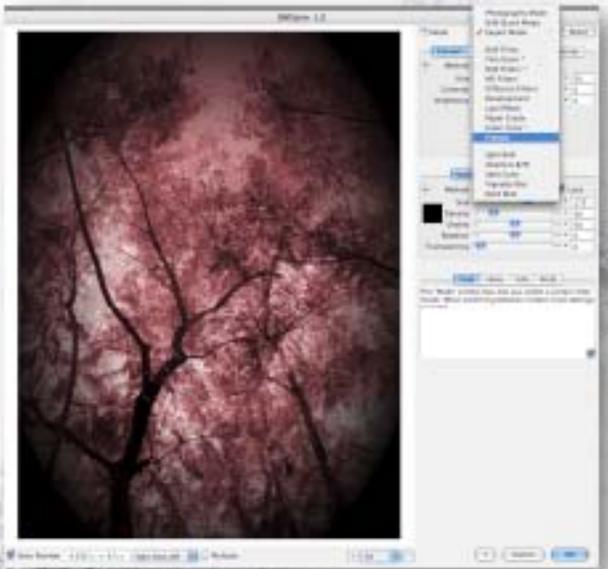


www.plusandpixels.com/snapart.html



B/W STYLER

www.plugsandpixels.com/bwstyler.html

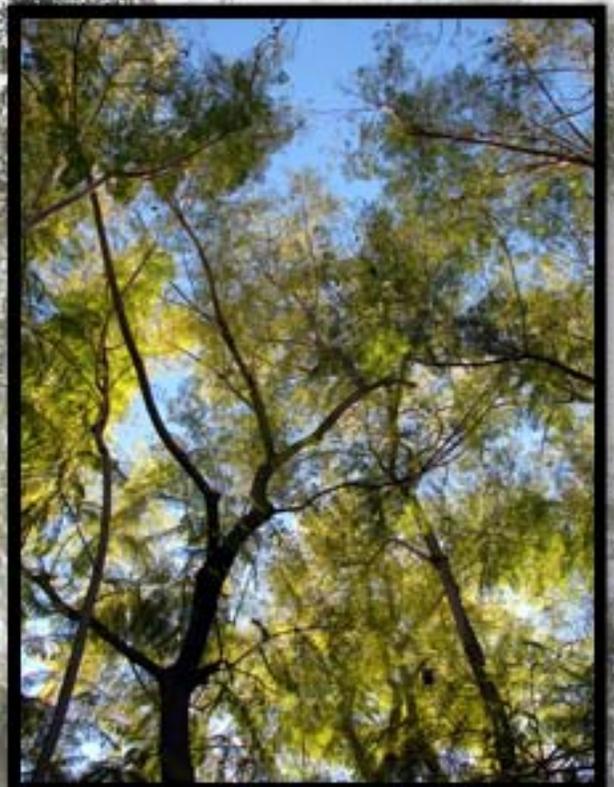


We can easily shoot all the color images we want, but the allure of monochrome still beckons the creative photographer. One excellent option for performing these conversions is B/W Styler from PhotoWiz.

Far from being a simple conversion utility, B/W Styler handles not only the emulation of traditional film, but goes on to simulate lens filters, film developing lab effects and different types of photo papers! Soft-focus and glow effects top off the list.

The screenshot above shows B/W Styler's interface, with both a Color Tone and Frames effect applied. The background image takes advantage of the Diffusion Filters and use of layers to blend the treated version back into the original.

B/W Styler is aimed at all levels of user capability, with a choice of three different working modes to match your skill set.



• Photoshop Solutions for Designers



A great new Photoshop-related resource has recently opened to English-speaking markets worldwide. Previously available in French, German and Polish, .psd magazine is now available via subscription and in Barnes & Noble Bookseller stores.

.psd is a 75-page, 4-color, glossy A4 publication full of Photoshop tutorials, news, tips, reviews, interviews and artist profiles. Also included with each issue are two CDs filled with freebies (demo software, brushes, shapes), source files, tutorial movies and royalty free images.

Be sure to check out .psd magazine in your quest for inspiration!

.psd PHOTOSHOP

Photoshop Solutions for Designers

www.plugsandpixels.com/psdmag.html



topaz adjust

SAVE \$70!

When you
purchase the
Topaz suite

www.plugsandpixels.com/adjust.html

Instant HDR with
a single frame!



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 frames

Photo/artwork by: Mike Bedford