



plugs·n·pixels

IMAGE CREATION, MANIPULATION & EDUCATION

Tutorial: Texturizing images
PostworkShop Pro
AKVIS, Topaz, PhotoWiz
HDR from Unified Color
PD Pro Digital Painter 5
Kubota Pow Wow!/Viva
Cloudscapes for Vue 9
Plus more!

Cosmic Pack 2
from Digital Heavens

plugs·n·pixels

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Since the last issue of the Plugs 'N Pixels ezine there have been many developments in the field of digital-imaging software. Existing products keep getting better and better while new ones are coming out all the time (for both desktop and mobile)! There's a lot of development genius behind all of these.

Take for example Digital Heavens' Cosmic Pack 2 (see cover and this page's background art). Who would have thought that you could create highly photorealistic astronomical objects using easily editable parameters from only source textures and Photoshop actions? Meanwhile, back on Earth, Cloudscapes for e-on's Vue helps you add highly authentic, adjustable clouds to your scenes.

In the digital art arena, Xycod is now developing version 2 of the incredible PostworkShop Pro, a layers-based standalone application (and plug-in) that makes adding hundreds of art effects to your images extremely easy. And PD Pro Digital Painter helps bring out the traditional artist (or animator!) in you.

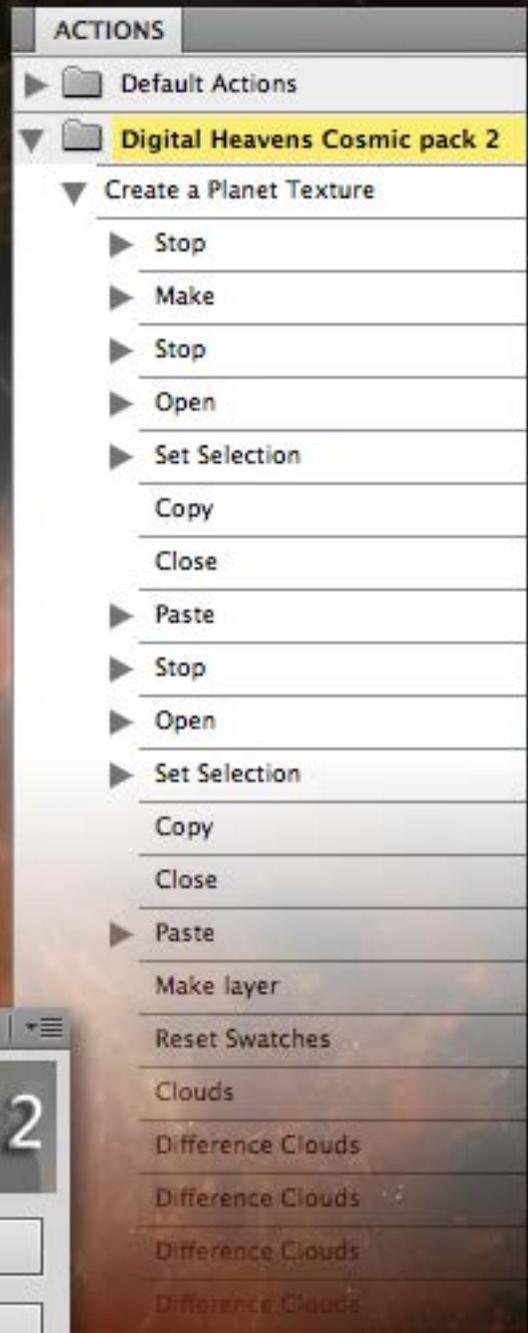
AKVIS is always updating its line of products while PhotoWiz continues to refine theirs. Kubota has introduced new actions for the wedding and portrait industry and (of course!) Topaz continues to shake up the industry with one incredible and affordable plug-in after the other.

DIGITAL HEAVENS | Where imagination comes alive

Exploring the universe from your desk requires only a copy of Photoshop and the Digital Heavens Cosmic Pack 2. Create everything from inhabited planets to gas giants to moons and nebulae.

There are a lot of clever digital imaging products out there but this is one that really impressed me. Using only the included textures and actions, Cosmic Pack 2 can create very believable celestial objects while you watch! Far from being generically generated, the user is able to interact with the actions at every step, editing parameters as desired until the final result is exactly what is expected and desired.

This flexibility is maintained in the final objects, which are created separately so you can collage them together into new and different scenes at will.



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Using these actions is already easy enough (free training videos are available online), plus Cosmic Pack 2 includes a custom panel for Photoshop CS4 and 5. Simply choose the type of object you wish to create, click and follow the guided steps!



Shown above is a sample selection of the automation the Cosmic Pack steps through to work its magic (in this case, creating a planet texture).

Continued >

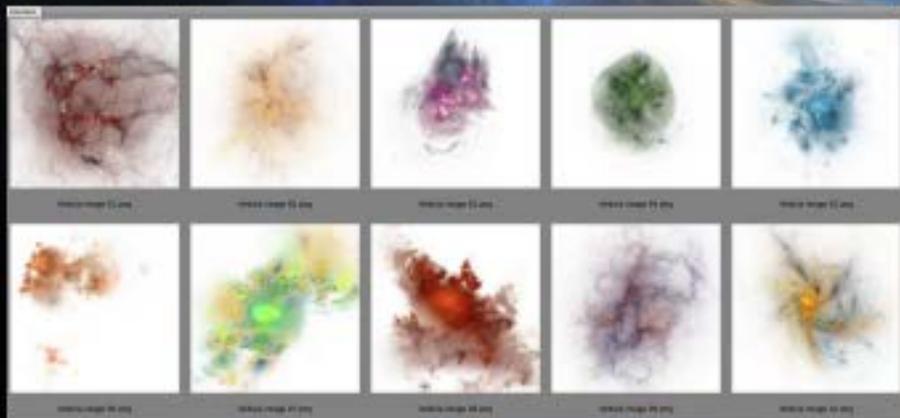
After you work your way through the actions and their prompts, your finished object will be presented as a layer set (as shown at right). This layer set can be dragged directly onto one of the many included space backgrounds, or you can provide your own interstellar backdrops.



The screenshots below demonstrate the various textures and masks that go into making up one of the Cosmic Pack planets. No need to make all this stuff manually!

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www.plugsandpixels.com/cosmicpack.html



If you just can't get enough of this space artistry, the Cosmic Pack 2 Deluxe edition includes an additional two volumes of Pro Textures plus two stock images, at an additional savings over these items purchased separately.



texturing your images

Background by onOne PhotoFrame

Chances are you have quite a few decent images in your personal stock photo collection that you can pull out and use for whatever project comes your way. Even those that aren't very interesting on their own hold a lot of potential, given the right treatment.

In this feature we'll look at the following plug-ins, actions and textures that will help you achieve this popular "grunge" effect:

- Filter Forge •
- Kubota Bor-Tex •
- Mister Retro Machine Wash •
- Digital Heavens Grunge Textures •



This just in:
The folks at [JixiPix Software](#) offer a very inexpensive line of Mac, iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch apps for adding grunge, vintage and other artistic effects to your images, such as the fantastic Grungetastic.

filter forge



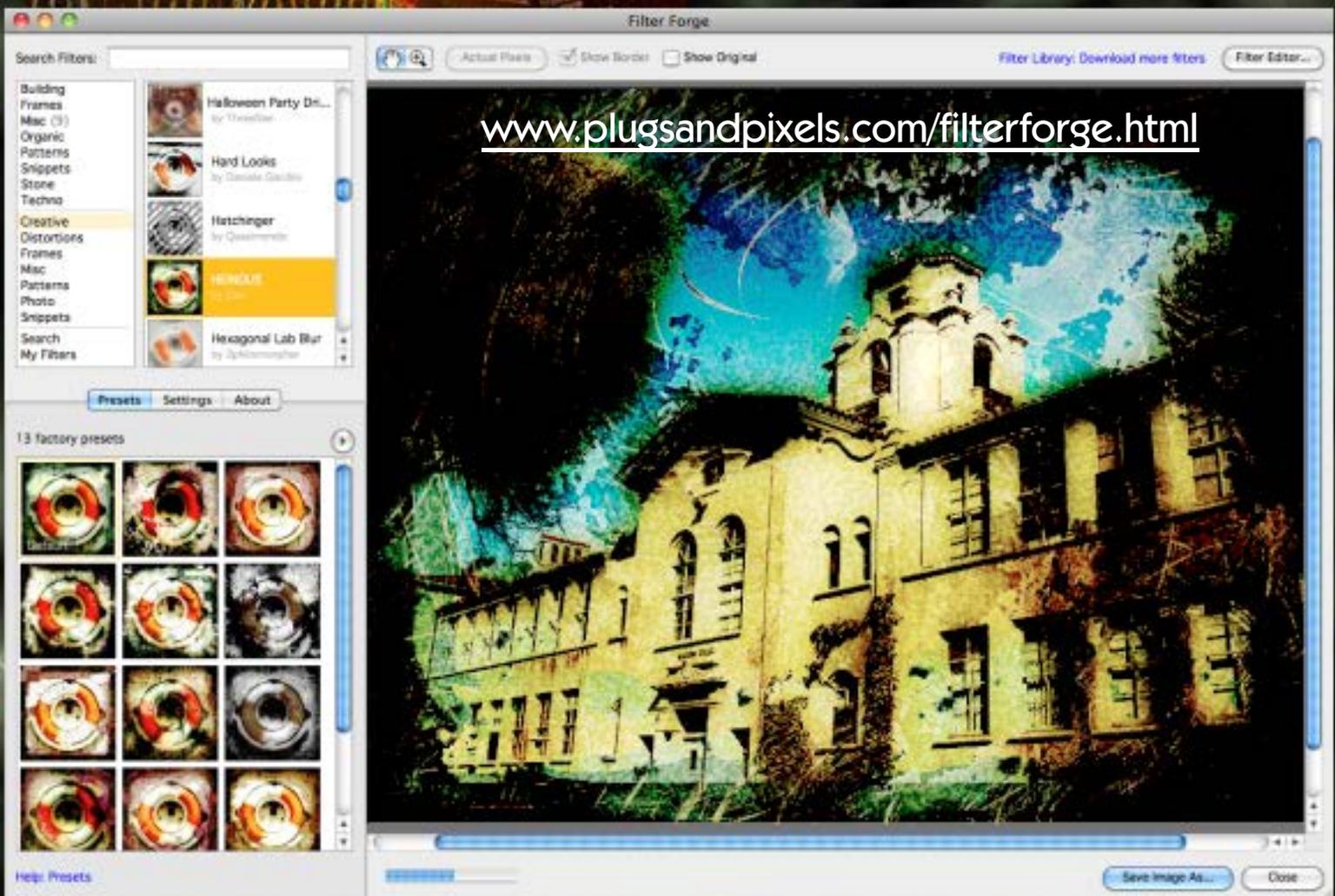
If you've heard of Filter Forge you may be considering it mainly as a photorealistic seamless texture-creating application and plug-in. That's a large part of its capability, but it does so much more.

The Filter Forge Filter Library is a free online repository of over 8000 effects (!!) created by both the developers themselves and end users who contribute their own uniquely programmed sets. In this collection you will find both standard image editing and wildly interpretive filter options.

Since the focus of this feature is on grunging up our images, let's take a look at how a particular Filter Forge filter does just that. (By the way, Filter Forge is also perfect for creating actual overlay textures, such as the one on the background of this page. These will also add a grunge effect via image blending modes back in Photoshop).

In the screenshot below I have selected the Creative category from the installed filters list. After experimenting with different ones I settled upon the "HEINOUS" filter created by user Carl (the description says, "When a little grunge isn't enough, escalate to Heinous"). This filter alone has 13 factory presets to experiment with, after which you can dig further into the Settings and adjust various parameters of the filter to your liking.

Each filter reacts differently depending on the source image, so keep looking until you hit upon the perfect combination.



Kubota bor·tex

Top 10 wedding photographer Kevin Kubota's company offers professional photographers (and anyone else who would like them!) many sets of actions and presets created mainly for adding beautifying effects to wedding and portrait photos.

But they haven't neglected to address the needs of creative photographers with grungy inclinations! Kubota more recently introduced Borders and Textures (also known as "Bor-Tex", available individually or as a combo pack). Bor-Tex includes the actions sets Texture Tools (100 Earth and Industrial textures) and Sloppy Borders (125 traditional darkroom-style edges).

Accessed through a version of the clever DASHBOARD made just for Bor-Tex (shown at right), you can browse previews of these textures and borders and choose the best ones to apply to your images. With the new DASHBOARD, you can also rotate and re-size your texture, adjust saturation, hue, opacity and more.

The example artwork below shows both textures and borders applied to the same image. The background texture was applied to a blank white image area, so Bor-Tex is also a texture-creation tool!

(See page 17 for information about more Kubota actions.)

www.plugsandpixels.com/kubotaactions.html



Kubota Image Tools™

DASHBOARD
BORDERS AND TEXTURES

Industrial Tex...



- Aluminium - Texture
- Aunt Dot - Texture
- Barium - Texture
- Berzerk - Texture
- Bubblize - Texture
- Bubs - Texture
- Burner - Texture
- Buzz - Texture
- Chromium - Texture
- Cobalt - Texture
- Copper - Texture
- Dubnium - Texture
- Fingernails - Texture
- Flourine - Texture
- Genesis - Texture
- Gold - Texture
- Helium - Texture
- Holmium - Texture
- Hydrogen - Texture
- Kapchorwa - Texture**
- Lead - Texture
- Licorice Buzz - Texture
- Lithium - Texture

Help Settings Undo Paint Apply
Edit Update



mister retro machine wash

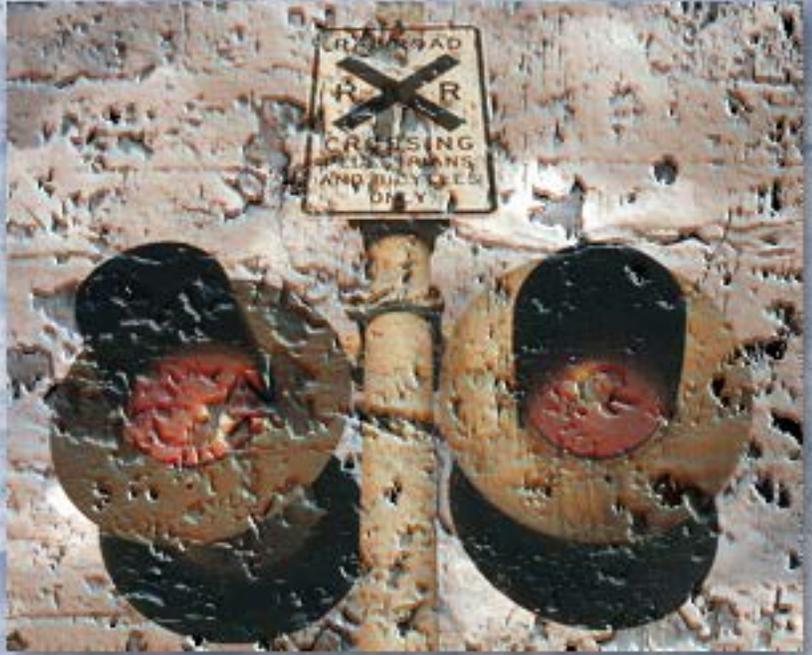
Mister Retro's latest version of the Machine Wash Deluxe plug-in (based around a laundromat motif) is a collection over over 240 texture effects. A number of effects are built into the basic plug-in; four sets of additional textures can be purchased and installed separately.

The interface is shown below, with the Wash options visible. You start with the Basic tab, where you can navigate through installed texture presets and save your own customized user settings.

In the Wash section you adjust the scale, intensity and orientation of each Wash Effect, modify the amount of coverage, etc.

Under Surface you create realistic depth with dimensional textured effects and adjust lighting and tone effects.

Finally, under Background, there is a Background surface creator where you can properly scale the background to the image you're working with.



Machine Wash Deluxe (64Bit)

MACHINE WASH DELUXE GUIDE HELP INFO 

Basic **Wash** Surface Background

Use Wash

Abusive Choose 

Wash Scale 0

Wash Intensity 100

Coverage 100

Coverage Scale 100

Edge Distance 0

Edge Softness 0

Orientation

Flip Horizontal

Flip Vertical

Invert

Random

123

Random

Wash Area

Inside

Outside

User settings

www.plugsandpixels.com/machinewash.html

Save Delete

Composite | Wash One | Wash Two | Original

Generate Wash Effects in Mask Layer

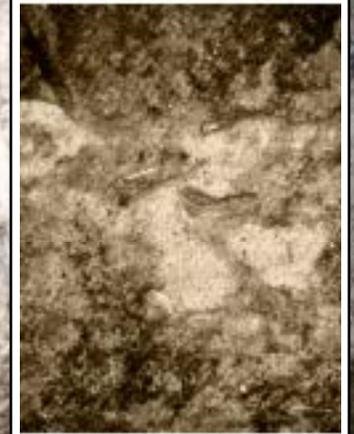
Cancel  100%  OK

digital heavens grunge textures vol. 1 and 2

If you're ready to start adding grunge textures to your images using only your image editor but don't have access to decent high-resolution source photos, Digital Heavens (see cover story for their Cosmic Pack) also offers two sets of royalty-free Grunge Texture Packs. These 2592 x 3888 JPEG-format files are added as layers above your source image and combined with your original using Blending Modes.

In my example at lower right, I started with a straightforward photo of snow covered southern California mountains. I picked two of the Digital Heavens grunge textures and experimented with different blending modes and degrees of opacity. The result, as seen in the background, is a very interesting artistic representation of the original scene, while still maintaining subject recognizability.

These Grunge Texture packs are available via download and are just under 60 megs each.



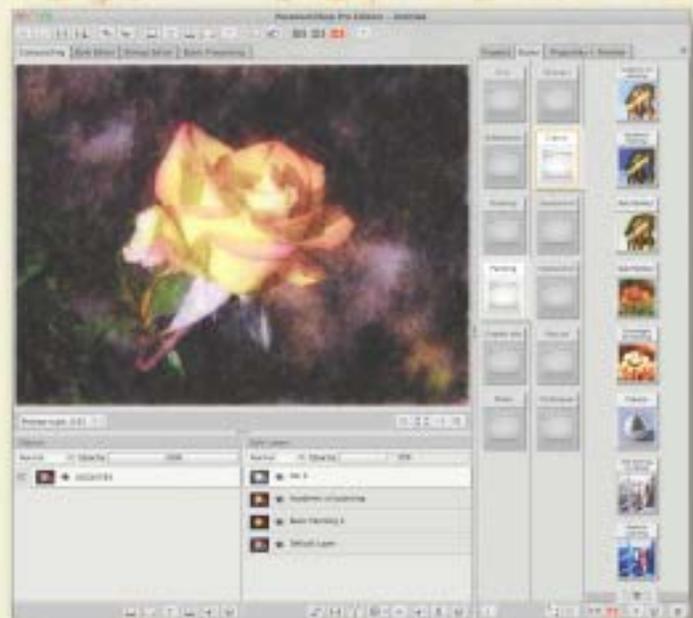
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[Click here](#) and use coupon code **“plugs2011”**



Photoshop users tend to be creative people (most often photographers), but sometimes this creative streak does not include the talent for painting! That's why developers bring us software such as PostworkShop Pro (PWSP for short), which enables you to quickly apply literally hundreds of realistic art effects to your images in a layered Photoshop-like environment for maximum flexibility.

When you launch PWSP you are greeted with a Quick Start Guide to get you going. Basically, you will have already prepared an image or images for use in PWSP, perhaps adjusting exposure and color for a good start. Once loaded, your image is ready for the application of Styles. PWSP includes over 400 ready-made art styles (effects), organized in main categories such as Drawing, Painting, Graphic Arts and Photo. Each main category has subsets (in the case of Drawing, there are Chalk, Charcoal, Ink, Marker, Pastel, Pen and Pencil categories, each of which have even further options). Marker, for example, includes Black Marker, Color Marker, Felt Pen, Marker Sketch, Saturated Marker and other presets). >



As if that wasn't enough, once you apply a style (I like to Shift>double-click to add a styled version of the base image on a layer above the original), you can enter the dialog under the Properties + Preview tab and make custom adjustments based on the preset you have chosen. These adjustments range from common color and brightness tweaks to more complex line and brush width and length settings. The more technical-minded user can enter the Style Editor and use a node-based filter graph editor to make minute adjustments to the structure of any Style.

But this is really only the beginning! Because it supports Style Layers, PWSP becomes almost like a version of Photoshop just for effects. Your original image is the background layer (here called Default Layer); any effects you add as described above stack on top of it one by one. These new layers can be swapped around in the stacking order, reduced in opacity and caused to interact with each other in multiple ways using blending modes.

The Objects area of the interface allows you to add even more images to the mix! Add more Styles to additional images, then blend these images with the other ones using blending modes.

I like to start experimenting with one of the Painting Styles, building a base set of effects with a traditional artistic look. Then I begin adding Styles from the Drawing set to create lines and other pen- and marker-like edges in the image. Sometimes I don't get past a single Style because it already looks so good!

Due to the sheer number of Styles presets, you are certain to find the perfect final artistic effect for each of your images. By the way, you can mix multiple styles and save the new result as you own new Style as well as download additional free styles, textures, papers, brushes, etc. from the developer's website. You will find PostworkShop Pro (also available in more limited Artist and Basic editions) an incredibly easy and effective way to make any image even more exciting and attractive. The results are certainly capable of being sold as framed art. •





artwork



For those of us who love taking photos and appreciate art and wish to combine the two genres, AKVIS has created Artwork, now in version 5. By simply importing your image into Artwork, you can easily turn it into an art piece in one of five different styles (Oil, Watercolor, Comics, Pen & Ink and Linocut). You don't need to have actual experience with any of these techniques in real life! AKVIS Artwork does the work for you.

The background photo on this page was created with the Oil preset, while the screenshot at left shows the result of the Pen & Ink preset.

Artwork is offered individually or as part of the AKVIS Alchemy: All-In-One suite (at a discount).

www.plugsandpixels.com/akvisartwork.html





InFocus

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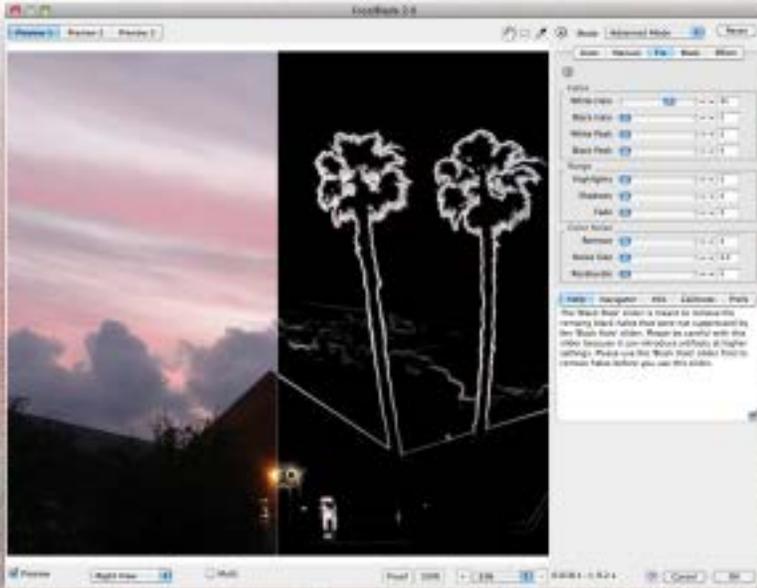
www.plugsandpixels.com/infocus.html



One of the recent additions to the Topaz family of plug-ins is Topaz InFocus. InFocus addresses the common need to enhance sharpness in either scanned or digital images. Causes of image softness may have to do with poor focusing in the camera when the shot was taken or poor optics even if the camera was focused.

InFocus is able to restore clarity with subtlety, unlike the often-misused unsharp mask which leaves unwanted edge aberrations. Rather than simply enhancing the edges of your subject with a boost in contrast, InFocus employs image deconvolution technology to mathematically reverse image blur, thus increasing the actual sharpness.

InFocus is available separately or as part of the [Topaz Bundle](#) at an overall discount.

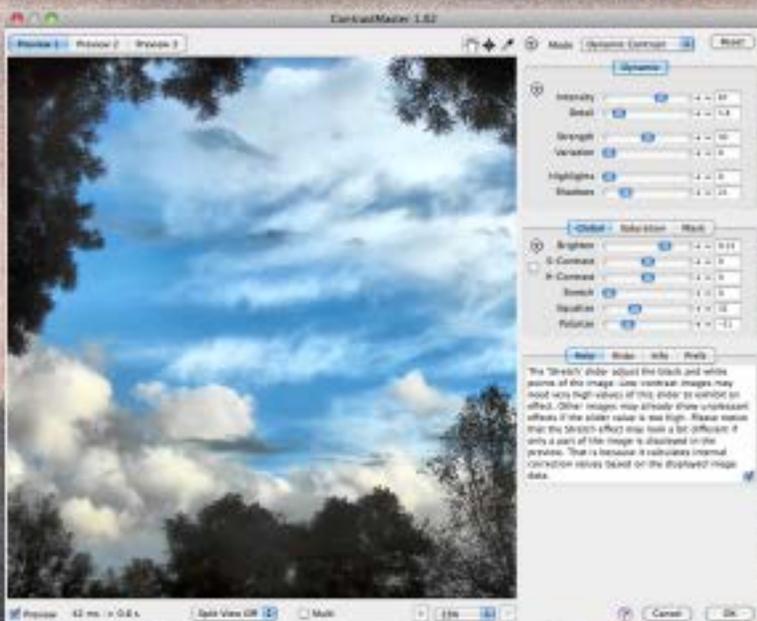


The Plugin Site's PhotoWiz line of plug-ins covers a wide range of image enhancement and correction tasks, from color correction to B&W conversion to virtual lighting.

On this page we take a look at two of their recent upgrades, FocalBlade 2 and ContrastMaster.

First, FocalBlade (screenshot at left) effectively sharpens your images for display and print without unwanted side-effects. Conversely, you can also add blur, soft focus and glow effects.

One of the most exciting things about FocalBlade is the level of control it gives over the sharpening process. You can independently control sharpening effects for both edges and surfaces, as opposed to applying a level of consistent sharpness throughout the entire image. FocalBlade also keeps unwanted haloning artifacts under control.



ContrastMaster (screenshot at left) is an effective tool for performing dramatic contrast enhancement, such as when you're going for the HDR look, improving contrast in small image details without blowing out highlights.

Utilizing five algorithms, ContrastMaster allows you to produce a wide variety of effects and looks, including photorealistic paintings.

Both FocalBlade and ContrastMaster are available as standalone apps as well as plug-ins.

PhotoWiz plug-ins offer you a full compliment of adjustment controls for fine-tuning every parameter you can imagine. To avoid overwhelming the new user, the plug-ins offer Novice and Expert modes as well as presets and Automatic/Manual modes.



Unified Color provides a state-of-the-art toolset for processing HDR images. Their products are based on human visual perception, offering unprecedented control over the HDR process.



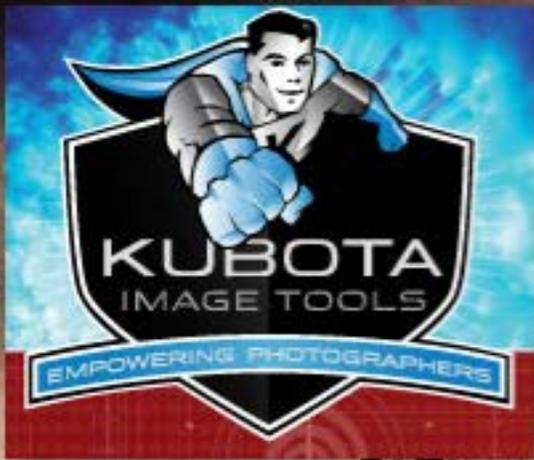
PD Pro digital painter

Project Dogwaffle, or as it is also known, PD Pro Digital Painter, is an incredibly clever paint and animation application (Windows only). Created by a professional animator and artist, PD Pro can handle everything from simple sketching to fully fleshed out paintings to animation upon animation (ie, adding your own animations to existing video!).

Version 5 offers much in the way of new improvements, including a redesigned and streamlined interface (see screenshot below), more efficient workflow, improved algorithms for gradients, image scaling and lightning tool, improvements to the media and batch conversion browsers, updates to the animation features and much more.

The background image was created entirely with preset brushes. Fun and different!





Two of the more recent Kubota action sets are Viva La Vintage and Pow Wow!, available separately or as a combo pack powered by the Kubota DASHBOARD (shown on page 7). VIVA LA VINTAGE contains 25 time-warping enhancements while POW WOW! contains 26 popping-fresh enhancements, all with cool Kubota names such as "Hot Flashes" and "FunkTāFi" to make your experience even more fun.

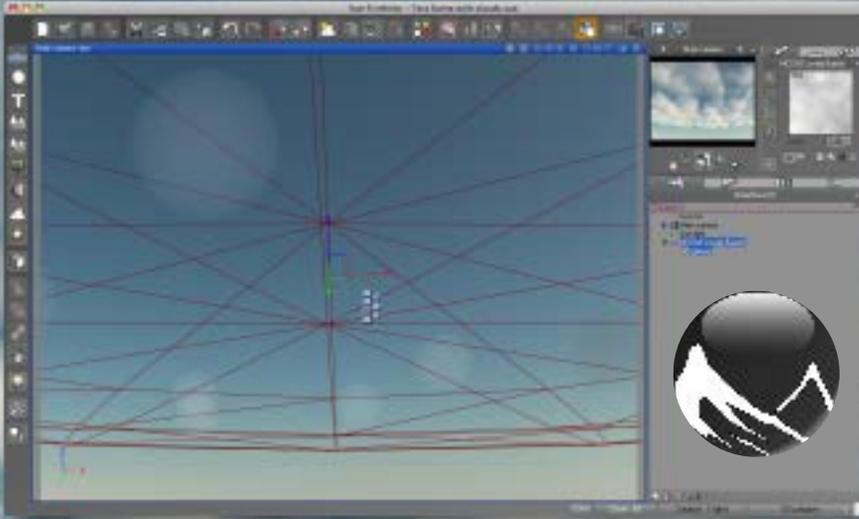
Click on the URL below for more info on these and other Kubota actions.

viva la vintage

POW WOW!



CloudScapes For Vue



by Dick Scherzinger
www.plugsandpixels.com/cloudscapes.html

Making believable clouds in any 3D terrain application is no easy feat, but with the Cloudscapes For Vue sets created by Dick Scherzinger, even those new to Vue can have professional looking skies in very little time.

The latest sets offered are Metaclouds Vol. 1 and WhiteMagic.

The Metaclouds Vol. 1 collection contains 16 unique Metacloud objects for use in Vue 7 or higher. Metaclouds are essentially an alternative way of creating 3D clouds in Vue. The collection of single clouds and cloud areas are loaded into Vue as with any other object and can easily be positioned and scaled, as shown in the screenshot at left. Regular 3D cloud layers are not this easy to handle.

White Magic is a collection of cloud layers that are beautiful, easy to handle and render extremely fast. The collection consists of 16 cloud layers, generating high altitude clouds. Also included are two PDFs with instructions for usage. White Magic is for Vue 8 or higher.

The price point for each of the CloudScapes sets is quite low and well worth it for the time and effort you will save creating your scenics.

Vue
Infinite

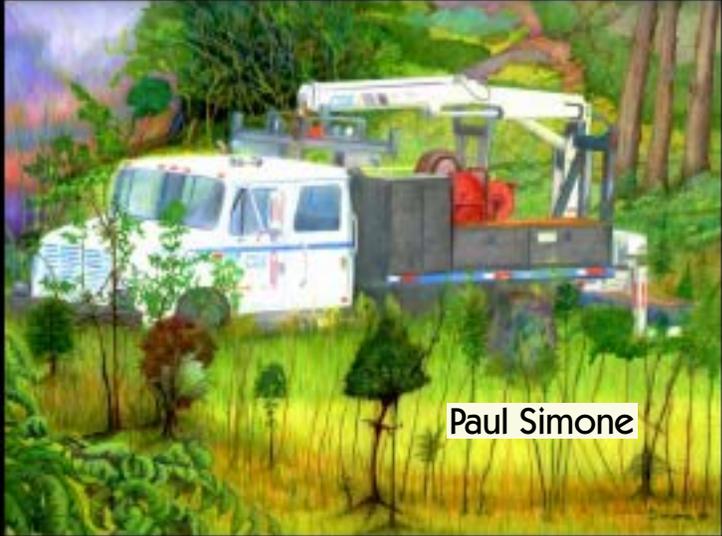
featured artists

Our Featured Artists for this issue include a full-time retoucher and artists engaged in post-processing. Florin Safner handles retouching jobs from high end to low, working online out of his home in Venezuela. Phil (online user name "philinnz") uses Topaz Adjust, Simplify and DeNoise in his work. Paul Simone of Fayetteville also uses Topaz plug-ins for his railroad-related imagery.

If you're interested in having your post-processing or retouching work featured, please email us.



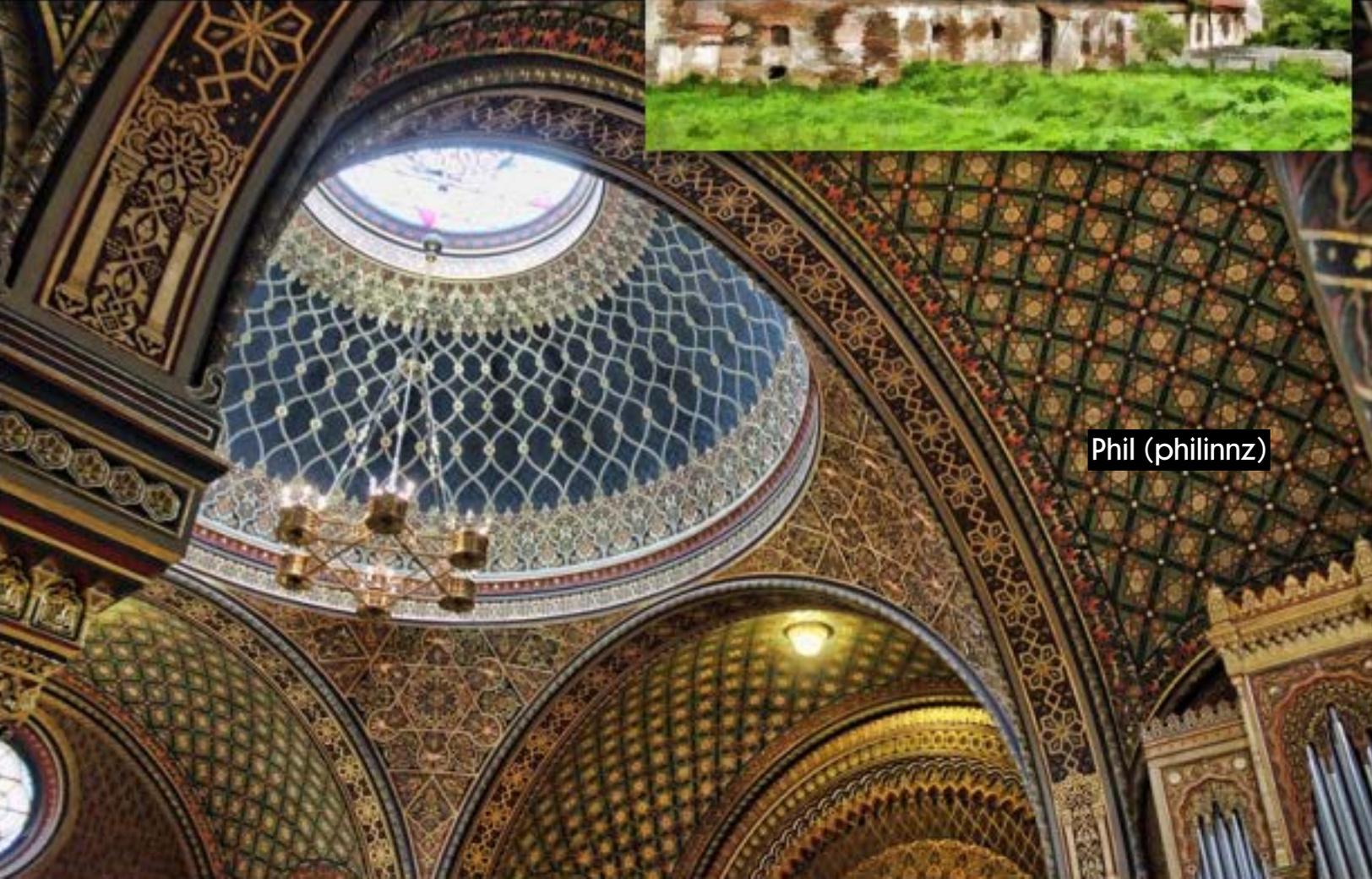
Florin Safner



Paul Simone



Phil (philinnz)



Phil (philinnz)

closing artwork

Sid Vasandani

Photography & Retouching

This issue's Closing Artwork features Sid Vasandani, an award winning photographer from India who is currently based in Guadalajara, Mexico. Primarily an advertising, fashion and beauty photographer (as well as high-end retoucher), he is well versed with other fields of photography including architecture, weddings, fine art and lifestyle.

In addition, Sid has created a set of 150 Pro Photoshop Actions intended for use in portrait and beauty retouching, HDR and tone-mapping, for creating painting and sketching effects, light and lens effects, luminosity, contrast and saturation masking, and color, tone and B&W adjustments.

