

On the FileSilo

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Essentials

Works with



What you'll learn

How to blend photos with layer masks and blending modes

Time taken
1 hour

Expert

Andre Villanueva



"Blending images is one of my passions, whether it's thematically linked photos or wild juxtapositions. I remember learning how to use layer masks and dreaming of the possibilities for imagery, especially when allying with blend modes. I discovered Photoshop when studying web design. I'm now art director for a tech company, soothing my inner instructor by sharing techniques with readers."

Create a double exposure



Mix photos and textures using layer masks and blend modes to create a nature-themed, double-exposure portrait

Layer masks are one of the cornerstones of creative Photoshop imaging. Without them, we'd be hard-pressed to blend imagery with any degree of subtlety or elegance. A mask attaches to a layer and enables you to add black to it to hide parts of the layer. You can then paint back with white to reveal. When using a soft-edged brush or smooth gradients, you can fade the edges of boxy photos to make seamless transitions. When you add in the power of blend modes, which alter the rules whereby a layer blends with the image below, you have the ability to make just about any type of merge.

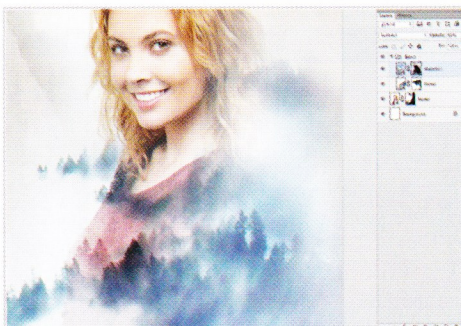
Here we're inspired by the double-exposure imagery that's so popular these days. Marrying two (or more) images via masks and blend modes can be just what your next project needs. Use compatible images or even unlikely pairings to form presentations. In the tutorial, we'll mix a model with wildlife and forest imagery to create a nature-themed portrait. Textures and various adjustments will be recruited to make sure everything meshes just right.

After completing the tutorial, try using your own choice of images and be sure to upload your creations to your free [Photoshop Creative gallery](#).



Blend the forest

01 Open 'Start.psd' from the FileSilo. Go to File>Place (Place Embedded in CC) and grab 'Forest.jpg'. Situate it at the bottom and confirm. Set blend mode to Hard Light. Click the Add Layer Mask button in the Layers palette. Select the Brush tool. Paint black with a Soft Round brush at 60-80% Opacity to blend.



Add a waterfall

02 Next, place 'Waterfall1.jpg' and confirm. Set the blend mode to Subtract (try Exclusion if you don't have that mode). Drop Opacity to 50%. Add a layer mask, as in the first step, then paint black at 40-60% Opacity to reduce on the model.

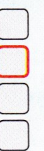


Mountain and trees

03 Place 'Mountain.jpg' in the upper-right section. Option/Alt+click the Add Layer Mask button. Press Cmd/Ctrl+J to duplicate, move down a bit with the Move tool, and set the blend mode to Darken. Paint white in both masks at 40% Opacity to add trees. Paint black to remove excess.



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Tutorial Create a double exposure

Expert tip



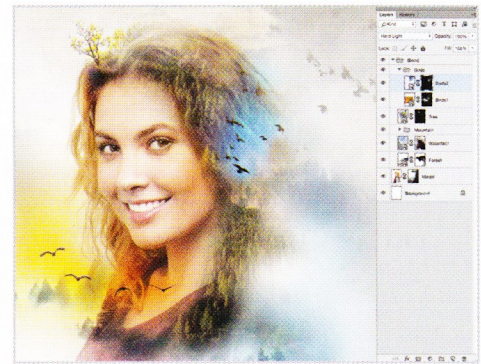
Mastering composition

In creative writing, it's often a good idea to write your first draft freely. Just write; let your words come out without excessive censure, then edit and fine-tune later. Exactly the same can apply to creative imagery. Just start blending and layering, letting intuition guide you. Your main goal is to get the base composition as you want it. You can refine adjustments, masking and positioning afterwards. The more you do it, the easier this process can become.



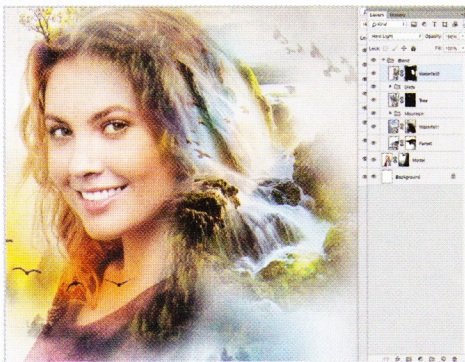
Place a tree

04 Place 'Tree.jpg', set the blend mode to Pin Light, position to get a part of the tree on top of the model's head, then confirm. Rotate with Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T) if needed. Option/Alt+click the Add Layer Mask button. Paint back with white at 60% Opacity to add.



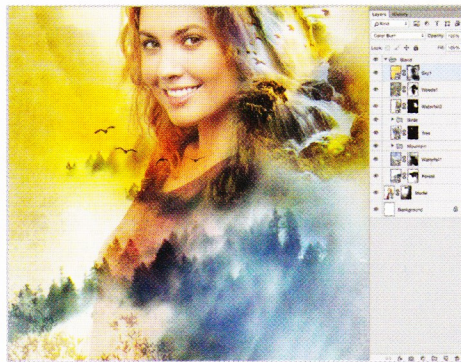
Introduce some birds

05 Place 'Birds1.jpg', set to Hard Light, and position in the left central area and confirm. Place 'Birds 2.jpg', set to Hard Light, position to the right of the model and confirm. For each, select the layer and Option/Alt+click the Add Layer Mask button. Paint white at 40-60% Opacity to add.



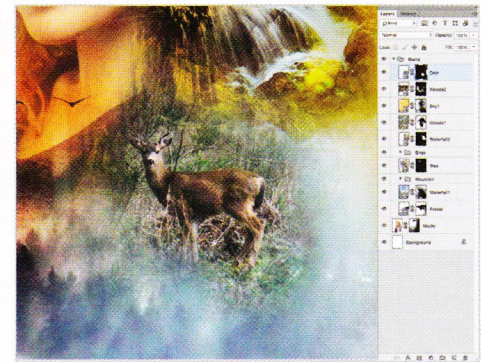
Merge the waterfall

06 Place 'Waterfall2.jpg', set to Hard Light, and position on the right side of the model's head before confirming. Add another Hide All layer mask (Option/Alt+click the Add Layer Mask button). Paint white at 60-80% Opacity to add.



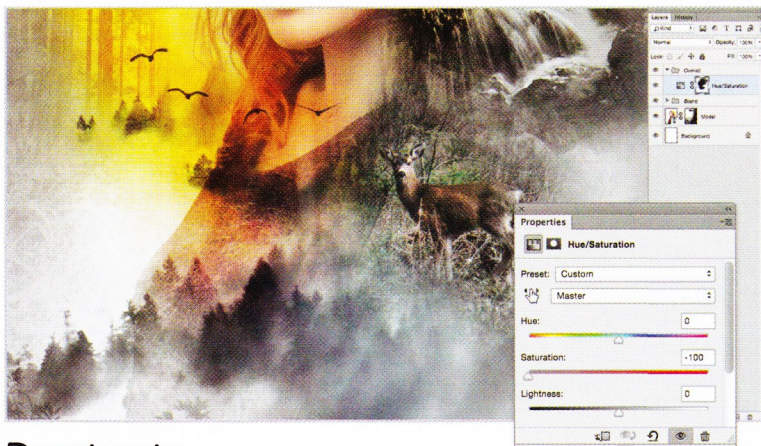
Add some texture

07 Place 'Woods1.jpg' and confirm. Drop Opacity to 10%. Place 'Sky1.jpg' and confirm. Set both layers to the Color Burn blend mode and add layer masks to them. Paint black at 60-80% Opacity to reduce the effect.



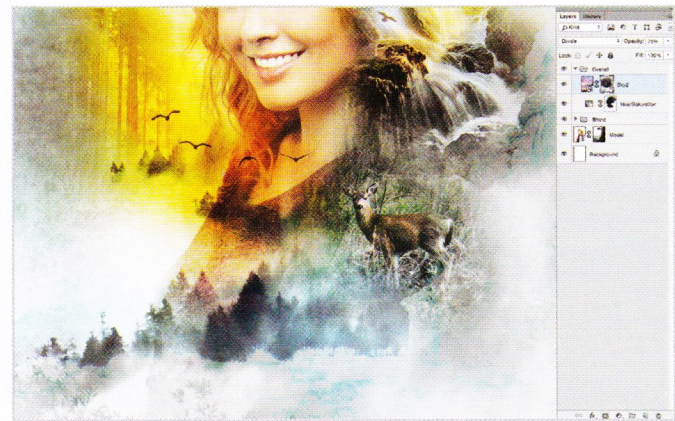
Insert woods and deer

08 Place 'Woods2.jpg', set to Overlay, position to the left of the centre and confirm. Place 'Deer.jpg'. Position on the model's body and confirm. Add a Hide All layer mask to both layers. Paint white at 60-80% Opacity to add back.



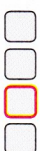
Desaturate

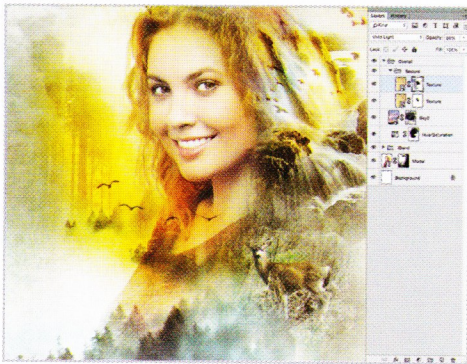
09 Click the 'Create new fill or adjustment layer' button located in the Layers palette and choose Hue/Saturation. Slide Saturation all the way left to -100. Paint black at 60-80% Opacity to reduce, bringing back some colour.



Use the Divide mode

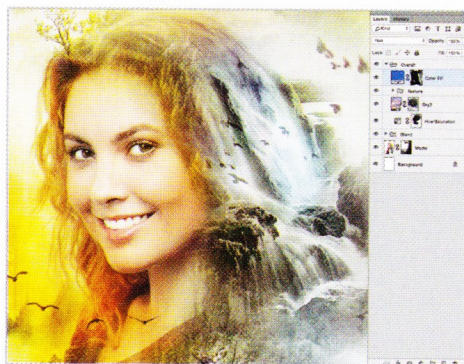
10 Place 'Sky2.jpg' and confirm. Set the blend mode to Divide (try Linear Dodge if you don't have that mode). Drop Opacity to 70%. Add a layer mask, then paint black at 40-80% to reduce.





Use texture

11 Place 'Texture.jpg' and confirm. Set the blend mode to Hard Light and drop Opacity to 20%. Add a layer mask. Press Cmd/Ctrl+j to duplicate. Set the duplicate's blend mode to Vivid Light. Paint black at 30-60% on each mask to reduce.



Add a cool colour

12 Click the 'Create new fill or adjustment layer' button in the Layers palette, and choose Solid Color. Pick #126fcd. Set the blend mode to Hue. Click the mask and press Cmd/Ctrl+i. Paint white at 30-60% to add a bit of coolness to the right side.



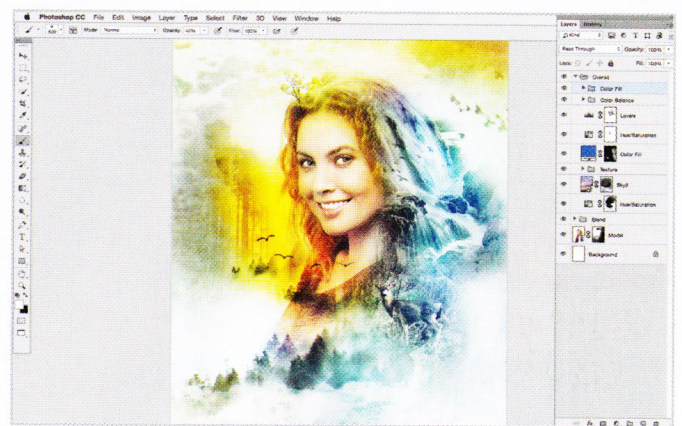
Increase saturation

13 Click the 'Create new fill or adjustment layer' button in the Layers palette and choose Hue/Saturation. Increase Saturation to +10. Next, add a Levels adjustment layer. Set the blend mode to Soft Light and drop Opacity to 75%. Paint black in each mask at 20-40% to reduce.



Adjust Color Balance

14 Photoshop only: Click the 'Create new fill or adjustment layer' button in the Layers palette and choose Color Balance. Set Midtones to (from top to bottom): 0, +24, +100. Duplicate with Cmd/Ctrl+J. Adjust the duplicate to: 0, +100, 0. Paint black at 40-60% in each mask to reduce.



Add more colour

15 Add a Color Fill layer (#c1c720) and set the blend mode to Color Burn. Add two others (#16adf0 – Color Dodge, #9baf0 – Color Burn). Drop the third Color Fill to 10% Opacity. For the first two, click on each mask and Invert (Cmd/Ctrl+I). Paint white at 20-50% to add.

What can go wrong

Blending correctly

When creating a double exposure (or if you're simply blending multiple images together), you need to be able to really scrutinise your work. Zoom in and out and sweat the details. If you see any chinks in the armour of your illusion, it's crucial to shore them up.

Layer masks factor heavily when blending images. Using the right brush to paint on a layer mask is key. A Soft Round brush at a fairly large size can be great for getting a good amount of transitional fading. Adjust the size and/or hardness for detail work, and be ready to swap the Foreground colour between black and white to hide and reveal respectively. Inspect all edges to ensure they're properly faded.

