

Improve Your Photoshop Composites

5 Tips You Can Use To Improve Your Art Today!



Creating a great composite can be one of the most rewarding experiences when working with Photoshop. Being able to combine images to create new worlds for models who are often photographed in the studio, is a powerful skill. After watching dozens of tutorials featuring composites, I have chosen five examples of the kind of techniques used by top image manipulators.

I hope you find some of these useful for your own composites!

Shift Art

#1. From Tutorial: Last Resort by Bounty Pundir.



Bunty's art always includes a background or environment created entirely from scratch using only stock photos. In this example, Bunty will combine these two images into a cohesive landscape:

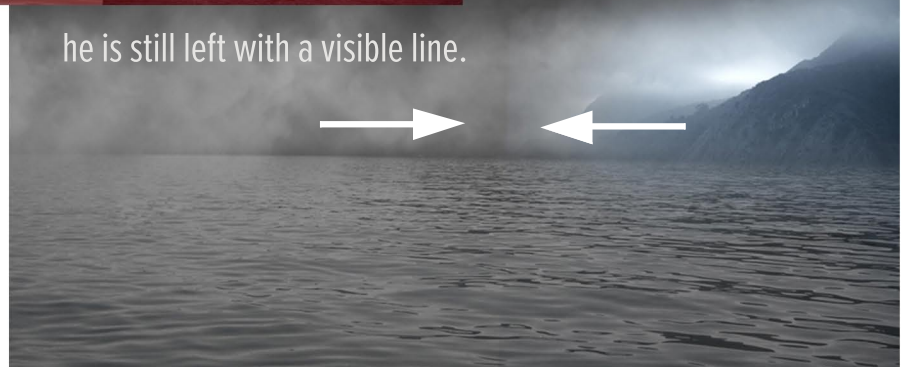


Shift Art

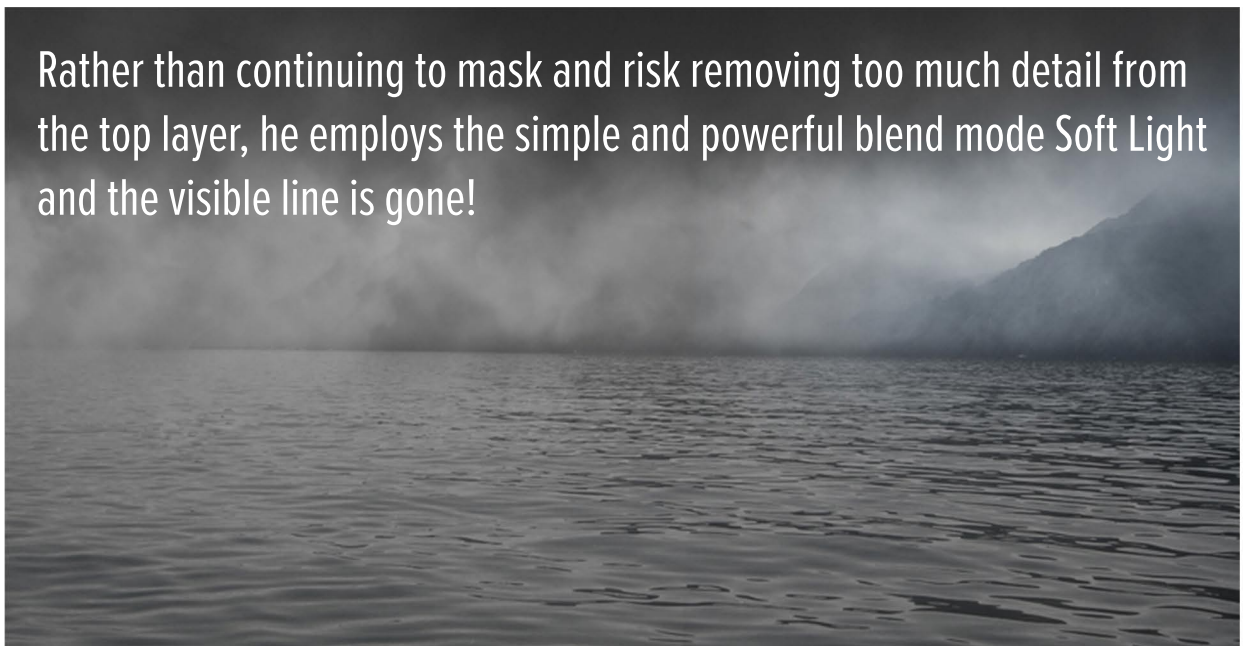
In this example we'll see how powerful blend modes can be when creating a background like this.



he is still left with a visible line.



Rather than continuing to mask and risk removing too much detail from the top layer, he employs the simple and powerful blend mode Soft Light and the visible line is gone!



Shift Art

#2. From Tutorial: Halo by Jason Hahn.

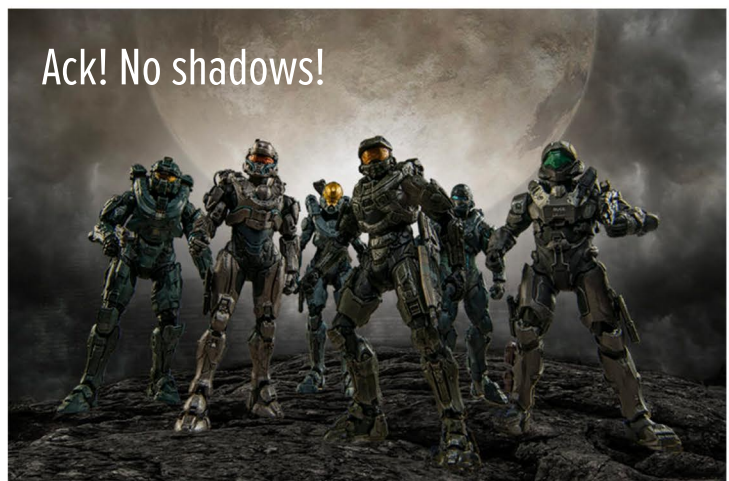


Details count when creating shadows! In this example, we see how Jason adds shadows in multiple layers to build a believable effect.

Midway through composite tutorial, he has reached this stage of the image with the moon behind the soldiers as a light source.

The figures need shadows to make this lighting realistic.

Jason starts by duplicating the layer with the Halo soldiers, then lowers the exposure until black and moves the layer below the figures.



Shift Art

Then he uses the transform tool (distort) to flip the shadow and move it into position. The final effect was achieved by masking/erasing bits of the unwanted areas of the shadow, and finally doing a gaussian blur as needed.

To make the effect even more believable, Jason adds additional shadows on their feet. First he clips a new blank layer to the soldier layer and then paints on their feet using a soft round brush set at a low opacity (20% here). The result is subtle, but makes a huge difference in the overall effect.



Pro tip:

You may notice another difference between these two screenshots; enhanced highlights!

In this version Jason also clipped a layer to the soldier layer and painted with a soft

white brush to add a bit of wrap-around lighting. This not only plays into the back lighting, but also makes the figures stand out better against the background.

Shift Art

#3. Based on Wonder Woman by Bernard Taylor.



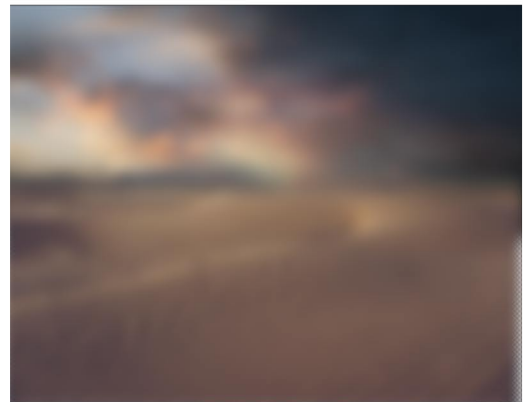
While creating his composite called Wonder Woman, Bernard is faced with the problem of mis-matched subject and background. This is a common problem that must be solved in almost all composites where the subject and background were not photographed under the same lighting conditions.



Shift Art

Notice that the subject is significantly darker than the background, and the overall tonality is off. It is fairly obvious that Wonder Woman has been pasted in!

To deal with this, Bernard takes his background and duplicates it to a new layer. He then applies a heavy gaussian blur to remove any details, while retaining all the color tones. This new layer looks like this:



Now he drags this blurred layer on top of the model and clips it to her layer. By setting this layer to Soft Light and adjusting the opacity (58% in this example), Bernard not only lightens up the model, but also brings in colors that are more in line with the desert environment he has created for his vision of Wonder Woman.



Notice the warmer skin tones...

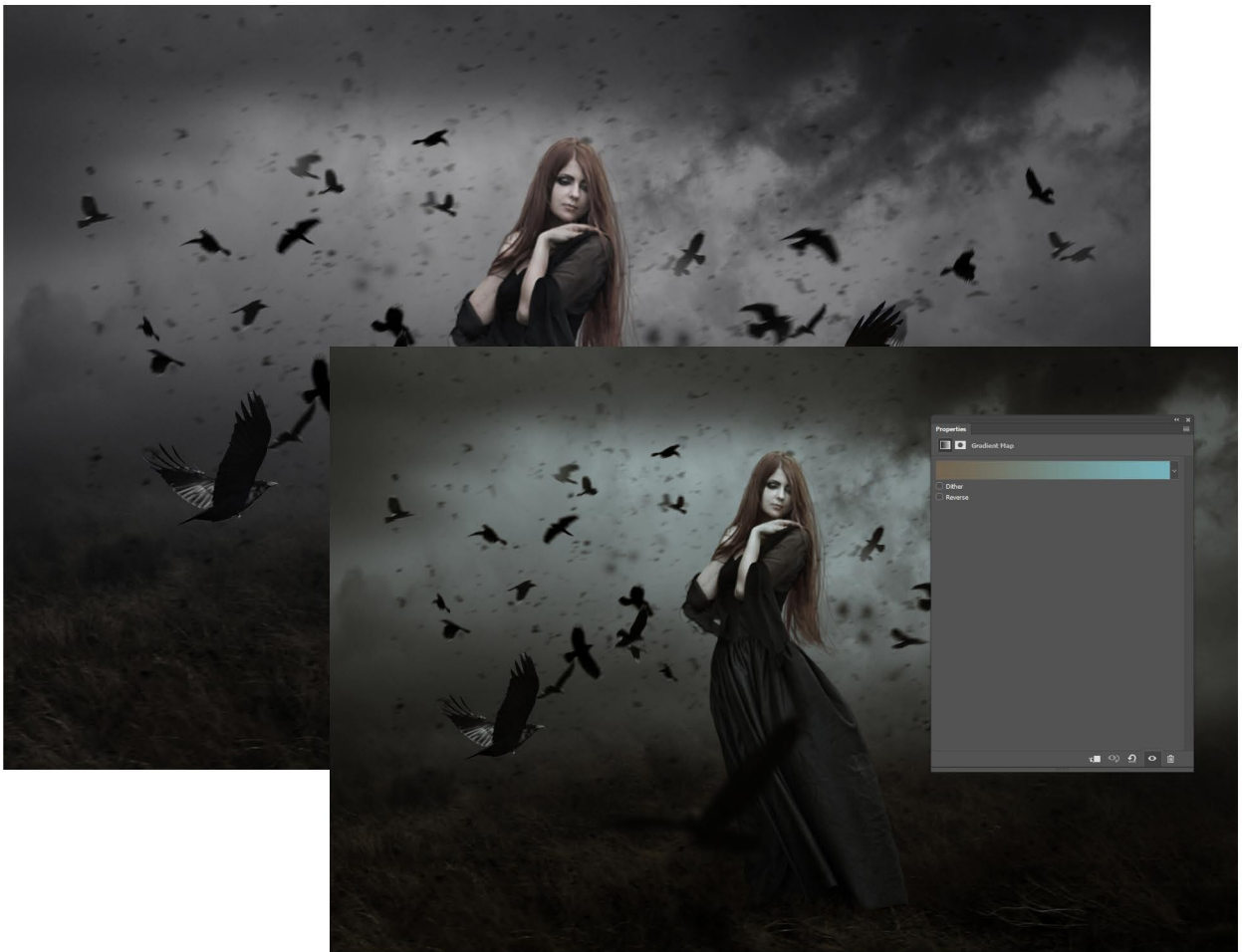
as well as the color difference in her clothing, helmet and gear.



Shift Art

#4 a. Based on Dark by Jenny Le.

Towards the end of her creation process, Jenny puts some finishing touches to her piece, to achieve the tones and colors she wants in her final version. Here she has all her elements in place, and the brightness, contrast and colors are all pretty well matched. However there is a flatness to the image.



To remedy this, she employs the powerful Gradient Map option! By placing a new layer with a Gradient Map, set to Soft Light, she significantly alters the mood of the image. Notice that her Gradient Map spans from a warm tone to a cool tone. This brings warmth to the darker areas of the image, like the model's hair, and a coolness to the lighter areas, like the light source in the background. This brings a nice pop to the colors.

Shift Art

#4 b. Based on Dark by Jenny Le.

After a few more color balance adjustments, Jenny is left with this outcome. It could very well be complete at this point, but Jenny wants to bring a bit more overall warmth to the image.



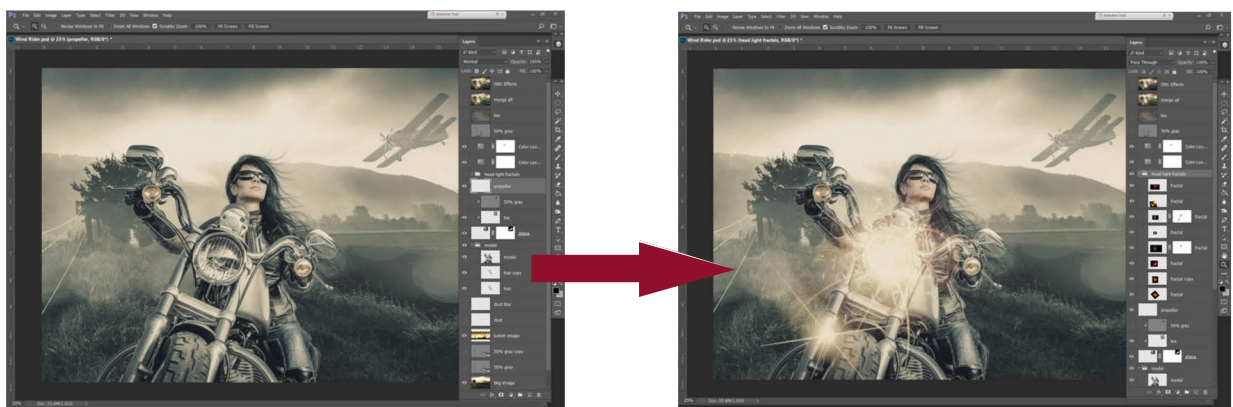
To produce her final outcome, she uses a simple Photo Filter adjustment, set to a nice warm orange. This leaves her with her final piece as seen above.

Shift Art

#5. Based on Wind Rider by Gail Edwards.



As our last example, let's see how a super easy lighting trick can really amp up your work. This method is one of Gail's go-to techniques and you'll see why here.



To bring some great lights to her motorcycle, Gail uses some fractal images set to Screen mode! This is such a simple but effective way to bring in some textured and dynamic fantasy lighting.

Shift Art

I hope you picked up some new ideas and techniques from these examples. All the examples shown in this guide are from tutorials on Shift Art. To access the full video tutorials sampled in this guide, sign up at ShiftArt.com.

At Shift Art you'll be joining thousands of fellow artists on a quest to drastically improve their art. By learning from accomplished artists, this goal is within your reach.

If you want to dive deeper into the world of making composites, I'd recommend you take a look at our Composite Tutorial Bundle. This bundle includes eight tutorials by pro artists, covering a ton of techniques used when creating composites of various styles. There is a LOT to learn, and with this bundle you will be well on your way to making great composites!

Happy Photoshopping!

Andrei Tallent

Shift Art Founder & Photoshop Enthusiast