



# MONTIZAMBERT

## Photoshop Impressionism



## Parasol Gossip

by Dave Montizambert

**P**hotography has had an impact on art history. The impressionist period was spawned by early photography. Before photography the only way to have a portrait made of oneself was to have an artist draw or paint your likeness. Creating portraits for people was the bread and butter of many artists. When photography hit the scene many painters feared for their livelihoods, clients were starting to go to photographers to have their "life-like" portraits made. There was no way that the painters could out do the realism of a photograph. In response to this, artists very wisely went in the opposite direction. They started to create paintings that were less rigid and with less realism. Instead of trying to record reality they created an artful interpretation, an impression of reality. These artists were the "Impressionists". This was the start of the Impressionist period. Even to this day, Impressionism has left many photographers feeling inadequate as artists. We do not want to be just recorders of reality, we wanted to be artists too. As a result we have been trying to create images that are more artful, more impressionistic, by manipulating reality with photographic techniques and procedures. Techniques and procedures such as Polaroid transfers and emulsion manipulation, filters, long exposures with camera or subject movement, film grain, cross processing and many other darkroom techniques. But it was not until the dawn of the digital age that photographers were given digital technology that provided us with powerful new digital tools to alter reality into artful impressions. In my opinion we are now entering the "Photoshopist" period, or at least we are in the next few paragraphs where the arty side of Adobe Photoshop is explored.

For the image Parasol Gossip I wanted to capture a whimsical impression of the past rather than an accurate recording of three outlandishly dressed women on a beach. To help convey the feeling of the past the photo needed to mimic the feel of an old, grainy, sepia toned image. The subjects were "immortalized" on medium format 100 ISO B&W Polaroid using a Hasselblad ELM camera fitted with a 150mm Zeiss lens. In Impressionism, less is more. Since Polaroid records less information than film, choosing to go with Polaroid really helped with the soft, ethereal feel of the image. The Polaroid print was scanned on a desktop scanner to make a 2048 by 2048 pixel (12mb) digital RGB file and then digitally enhanced with some selective softening and an artificial film grain effects in Adobe Photoshop. To view the finished version of this image see [1].

Parasol Gossip was shot on a beach in Vancouver B.C. on an overcast day. An incident meter reading of the light striking the subjects from the open sky read f8 at 1/60<sup>th</sup> of a second. The camera was set to f4 at 1/60<sup>th</sup> of a second to over expose the image by 2 stops. After scanning the image, it was opened in Adobe Photoshop. Notice the Polaroid image before retouching called [2]. The image is lacking in detail due to over exposure and Polaroid's low resolving power. However the image is still too sharp for the look I am after. A softening filter could have been used over the lens at the time of exposure to create an overall softening effect to the image. However I'm after a selective softening effect that would allow some areas to appear softer than others and some key areas such as the faces to remain relatively sharp. Any time that I create an image that needs some filter effects I prefer to create the effects after capture in Adobe Photoshop. This allows much more control. With a filter over the lens you are stuck with what you get at the time of capture. Doing the filtration in Adobe Photoshop makes it possible to increase or decrease the effect at any time, or get rid of it all together. To create an overall softening effect in Adobe Photoshop similar to a softening filter over the camera lens, copy the background layer by dragging it down to the turning page icon at the bottom of the layer palette. This automatically copies the background layer and places this copy exactly pixel to pixel over top of the original background layer. Softening is applied to the top layer by selecting the Gaussian Blur filter from the filter menu.

- Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur.

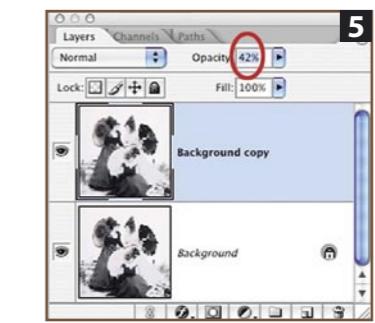
It is always best to judge how heavy you want to apply the filter by viewing the image at 100% zoom.

100% Zoom Viewing quick keystrokes. With Adobe Photoshop use these quick keystrokes to save time when zooming the image to 100%: CMD + OPTION + Zero on a Macintosh or CTRL + ALT + Zero on a PC.

For this 12mb image the radius is set to 6 pixels. See [3]. The Blur filter makes the image appear out of focus on the top layer rather than softened. See [4]. To create the look of a softening filter the opacity is partially reduced on the top layer so the sharp bottom layer partially shows through. This is done by selecting the top layer, clicking on the black arrow head to the immediate right of Opacity 100%, then sliding the pop down Opacity slider to the left. On this image the Opacity of the top layer was set to 42%, see [5]. View [6] to see the effect on the image. This digital softening method is so much more powerful than using camera-softening techniques because it allows you to change your mind at any time and it provides a hundred different amounts of softening rather than a mere handful.



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Looking back at the final image, [1], notice that the image does not have an overall softening effect, the softening is distributed unevenly. Selective softness or sharpness, depending on how you look at it, is yet another tool to draw the eye to key points in the image as well as adding depth. For this selective softening effect, I usually do not lower the blurred top layer opacity setting below 100%. To see select parts of the sharp bottom layer through the top blurred layer, a layer mask is used to hide (make transparent) areas of the blurred layer. With this in mind the previous blurred layer was thrown out because it has too little Gaussian Blur applied to it at 100% layer opacity for the effect I am after. It is replaced with a new background copy layer that was blurred with a Radius of 12 pixels, see [7] and [8]. To selectively reveal parts of the sharp bottom layer it would make sense to erase portions of the top blurred layer with the eraser tool. This will do the job, however it will limit your options later on. A more powerful solution, rather than deleting areas of the top blurred layer, is to hide these parts by gradually painting black onto a white Reveal All Layer Mask. This method allows you paint back what has been painted away at

anytime, even after the image has been saved and reopened. To try this technique start by clicking on the top blurred layer to select it. From the Layer Menu select Layer Mask and then Reveal All.

- Layer > Layer Mask > Reveal All
- Select the Brush tool and then select Airbrush attribute from the tool options bar next to Flow. Set Flow to 10% or less, then near the bottom of the tool bar select black as the Foreground Color. Drag the brush over the areas of the image that you wish to appear sharper. Where ever you paint with the brush tool begins to hide the top softened layer allowing the sharp bottom layer to show through. If you change the Foreground Color from black to white and repaint over these same areas, these previously hidden areas will again be revealed. To see the layer mask painting effect complete see [9] on. Compare this version with the unpainted version, [8].

In my mind the advantages of softening an image digitally either globally or selectively makes traditional methods obsolete. I also think that using a layer mask to selectively hide areas of the top soft layer so that parts of the bottom sharp layer show through is superior to selectively erasing the top layer with the eraser tool. This is because a layer mask allows us to change our minds about where the layer mask hides the top layer and by how much. It also allows us to re-edit the effect at anytime thereafter.

Parasol Gossip was captured on B&W Polaroid so it is a B&W image. However, the scanner scans the image in RGB color space making it a monochrome color image. Since the image is already in RGB color space it is a very simple matter to colorize it so that it looks like a Sepia Tone. The brown tone Sepia effect we see on [11] on is created with a Hue and Saturation Adjustment Layer in Adobe Photoshop. Click on the Create New Fill or Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers Palette – the half black half white circle. Select Hue/Saturation from the pop up menu (the New Adjustment Layers' menu is accessed in pre-6.0 Adobe Photoshop by clicking on the arrow head located near the top right corner of the Layers Palette). In the resulting dialogue box click inside the Colorize box on the bottom right side of the Hue/Saturation dialogue box to select Colorize.

Make sure the Preview is selected also. Now drag the Hue slider to the left until the image is Colorized with brown. If the Colorizing is too saturated, slide the Saturation slider to the left. See [10] on to see my settings. If sepia is not your cup of tea, try other Hue and Saturation settings. Blue toning can be easily mimicked using the Hue and Saturation controls too.

The finishing touch added to Parasol Gossip is film grain. As discussed earlier, digital captures from digital cameras have no film grain. This is an advantage for most image creation however if you purposely want a grainy looking image you need to mimic film grain with a Noise filter. To add Noise to the image in Adobe Photoshop, first select the layer you want to add the effect to then select Filter > Noise > Add Noise. Zoom in to 100% then drag the Amount slider until the desired amount of grain effect is achieved. Depending on your tastes select either Uniform or Gaussian for Distribution and select Monochrome. If you leave Monochrome unselected the noise pixels will be coloured red, green, or blue. To my eye this looks fake.

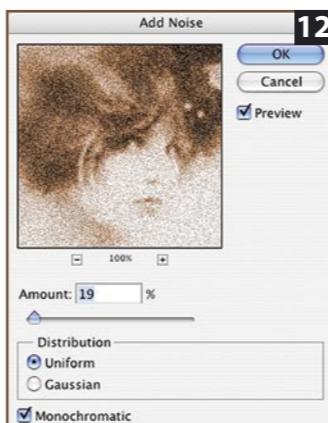
The Amount slider controls the intensity of the individual noise pixels, that is to say, how bright or dark the contrasting noise pixels are. To print a photograph on paper with a printing press the image must first be broken down into dots. This transformation from continuous tone to a dot pattern is called applying a line screen. A 150-line screen will break



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the image down into 150 dots per inch. When supplying digital images for printing on a printing press, set the resolution (the pixels per inch or ppi) of your files to 1.5 to 2 times the line screen ruling. 150-line screen requires an image resolution of 225 to 300 ppi (1.5 or 2 x 150) at the final dimensions of the image. In Adobe Photoshop the controls for this are under the Image menu under Image Size. Applying a line screen to an image tends to hide noise and film grain. A low line screen ruling hides noise and film grain more than a high line screen. Usually this is a bonus since in most cases noise and film grain are unwanted. However in the case of Parasol Gossip we want Noise in the image to make it look grainy. If the digital file is output as a photographic print, the grain effect should show up quite nicely. However, for the effect to be visible in this magazine which is printed on a printing press with a line screen of 150 applied to the images, I need to use a higher Amount setting or apply Unsharp Mask to the image after the Noise is applied. In other words since the Noise will be somewhat hidden after printing, I need to over emphasize it. [12] on shows my settings and [13] shows the results. The only problem with adding noise to the whole image evenly as I did in [13] is that there is too much noise showing up in brighter tones to look truly like film grain. To maintain heavier noise in the dark areas with less in the light areas of the image, I have another approach. The Noise that was applied to [13] is undone (Command/Control Z). A Curves New Adjustment Layer is generated by selecting Curves from the New Adjustment Layer menu. The composite RGB Curve was dragged downward darkening the image. See this Curve in [14]. Notice the white square thumbnail in the Curves layer in the Layer Palette in [15]. This is a Reveal All Layer Mask. The next step is to fill this Curves Layer Mask with black to convert it to a Hide All Layer Mask. Black is chosen as the Foreground Color near the bottom of the tool bar and then: Edit > Fill > Foreground Color. Or simply use the Fill with Foreground Color quick keystroke: Command/Control Delete (to fill with Background Color use Option/Alt Delete).

Notice that the Curves Layer Mask thumbnail in the Layers Palette is now black in [16]. Now the effect of the darkening Curve layer is hidden. Noise is added to the Hide All Layer Mask: Filter > Noise > Add Noise > Amount 400% > Uniform > Monochrome (see [17]). The noise added to the black mask is made up of contrasting white pixels. Wherever a white pixel shows up on the black mask, that small portion of the image will be

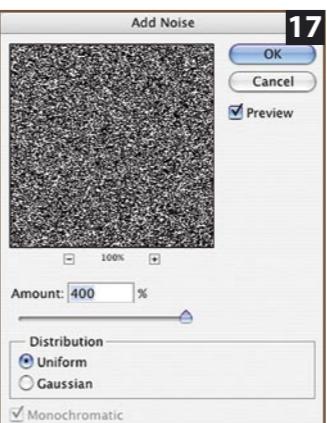


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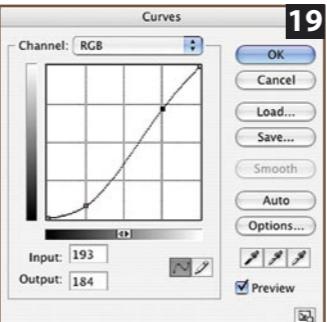
darkened by the darkening curve. Visually this results in dark bits of grain (noise) on the image, which will also darken the image. If these dark grains make the image too dark, use another Curves Layer to correct the brightness. Applying the Add Noise Filter to a Curves Layer Mask rather than to an image layer provides separate control over how visible the noise is in different tonal areas. In Parasol Gossip the RGB composite curve was dragged downwards increasing the noise's visibility throughout the image. Since the curve was pulled down at the 1/4 tone point (the darker end of the curve), the noise in the dark areas of the image was emphasized more than in the lighter areas of the image. See this curve's affect on the image in [18]. As mentioned earlier, simulated film grain looks more realistic if the noise is heavier in the dark tones and less in the light tones. With this in mind I dragged the 3/4 tone point (brighter end of the curve) up a little to lessen the noise in the light toned faces. See this curve in [19] and its affect on the image in [1] on. For a side-by-side close-up comparison of three different applications of noise to the image see [20]. The image on the left has noise applied to the image layer (close-up of [13] which uses the [14] curve). The center image has noise applied to a Hide All Layer Mask of the curve adjustment layer (close-up of [18] which uses the [19] curve), and the image on the right is similar to the center image except that the 3/4 tone portion of the curve was pulled up to reduce the grain effect in the highlight end of the image (close-up of [1]).



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*Digital not only gives us many new tools and abilities for creating fine art images it also provides us with easier solutions that offer much more control than traditional photographic techniques. And as we have just seen with Parasol Gossip, we photographers can be artists too!*

## DAVE MONTIZAMBERT ON CD & PAPER

Photoshop Impressionism is an excerpt from Dave Montizambert's new book – Professional Digital Photography: Techniques for lighting, Shooting and Image Editing – published by Amherst Media Buffalo NY. For more Photoshop tutorials by Dave check out <http://www.software-cinema.com>

Dave lectures internationally on lighting, metering/zoning, and digital photography. He also writes magazine articles on these topics in North America and in Europe and has co-directed, co-produced, three humorous educational photography videos on metering, zoning, and lighting as well as written a how to book on lighting for photography also published by Amherst Media. Dave's knowledge was gained primarily from training with Dean Collins at Finelight in California and from training at SINAR in Switzerland.

Dave Montizambert owns and operates Montizambert Photography Inc. located in downtown Vancouver. For the past twenty-three years Montizambert Photography Inc. has created photographic images to aid various organizations and companies with their communication needs. They have created images for clients such as: McDonalds Foods, Motorola, Atlanta Scientific/Nexus Engineering, Toyo Tires, Tri-Star Pictures, Warner Brothers, Constantine Films of Germany, Chevron Canada, Cuervo Tequila, the C.B.C., J&B Scotch, Hong Kong Bank, Chimera Softboxes, Tsing Tao Brewery of China, No Fear Sports Gear, Kodak, and Canada Post.

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