

COMPOSITE using MASKS – This tutorial assumes you know Photoshop basics. If you have never created a composite, please refer to my “EZ-Composite” tutorial for basic steps.

1. Open Photoshop and then open the images you plan to include in your composite. Make all color and tonal corrections needed. Decide which image you'd like to use as your background.

For this tutorial, I'm using five images. The background will be an image of an old man sitting at his brother's grave during Day of the Dead. The other 4 images are scenes from that evening.



Fig 1 (fourth image not shown)

2. Click on the image that you want to use for your background. Resize this image to the final size and resolution you plan to print.

RESIZE SHORCUT: Right/Click (Control/Click-Mac) on the title bar of your image. Choose “image size” and then resize it accordingly. Also set the correct resolution for printing.

NOTE: There is no need to resize your other images at this time. You also don't need to worry about the resolution. When you drag them into the background image, Photoshop will automatically match the resolution for you.

3. Using the “Move” tool, Click/Hold and Drag each image onto the main image. (To move an image, click INSIDE your image; not on the title bar). Position and resize these images to your liking (see TIP below).

Naming each layer will help identify your layers at a glance. This can be very helpful when compositing multiple images. In Photoshop 7 & CS, double click a layer to rename.

When done, your Layers palette will look similar to Fig 3 below. Fig 2 shows how my images are almost completely covering the background image.

TIP: If your images are larger than your background when dragged in, use “Free Transform” to resize by pressing Control/Command and “T”. Then press Control/Command 0 (zero) to see the bounding box. Drag the “handles” to resize as necessary.



Fig 2

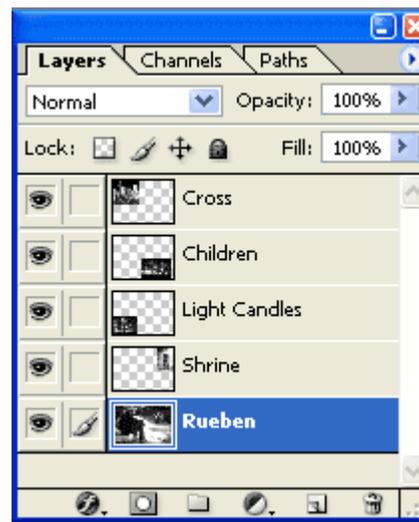


Fig 3

4. Now, click on the image layer that you'd like to work on first. I find it helpful to turn the other layers off but that is a matter of personal preference. Then click the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers Palette. This will add a white mask to that layer. (See Fig 4 on next page)

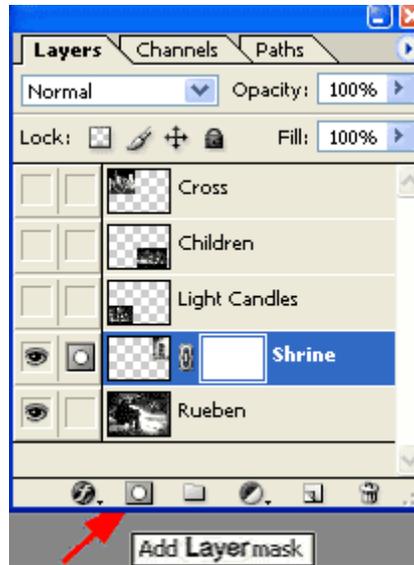


Fig 4

5. Before you proceed, make sure the Mask is active! You know you are working on the mask when there is a little mask icon to the left of the image layer and you'll also see a line around the mask. (see Fig 5 below)

(I mention this because you might have closed your image to work on later and then forget).

MASK BASICS: A White mask allows a layer to SHOW; A Black mask HIDES what is on the layer.

I like to think of masks as an ON/OFF switch. White turns a layer on. Black turns a layer off. Simply put; if you want part of your image to be hidden, you will need to cover that area of the Mask with Black. The first added image shows entirely because a White Mask allows all to show.

6. The colors on your Tools Palette should be black and white. If they are not, press "D" on the keyboard to set them. Make sure Black is the foreground color (on top). Choose a soft brush and then "paint" with black around the edges of the added image. If you want an even more gradual transition, just lower the opacity of your brush (options bar at top). If you make a mistake, just switch to white (press X on your keyboard to switch colors). Paint over the area again to bring the image back. Go back and forth between black and white until you are happy with the blending. (Fig 6)



Fig 5

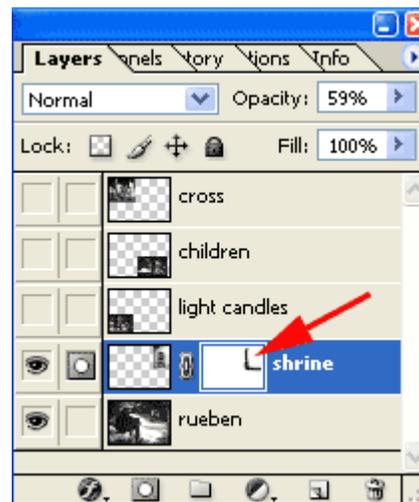


Fig 6

TIP: When you are finished "masking", experiment with reducing the opacity of this layer to blend it even more.

- Repeat step 6 until all your images have been blended together. Your Layers Palette will look similar to the one below. (fig 7)

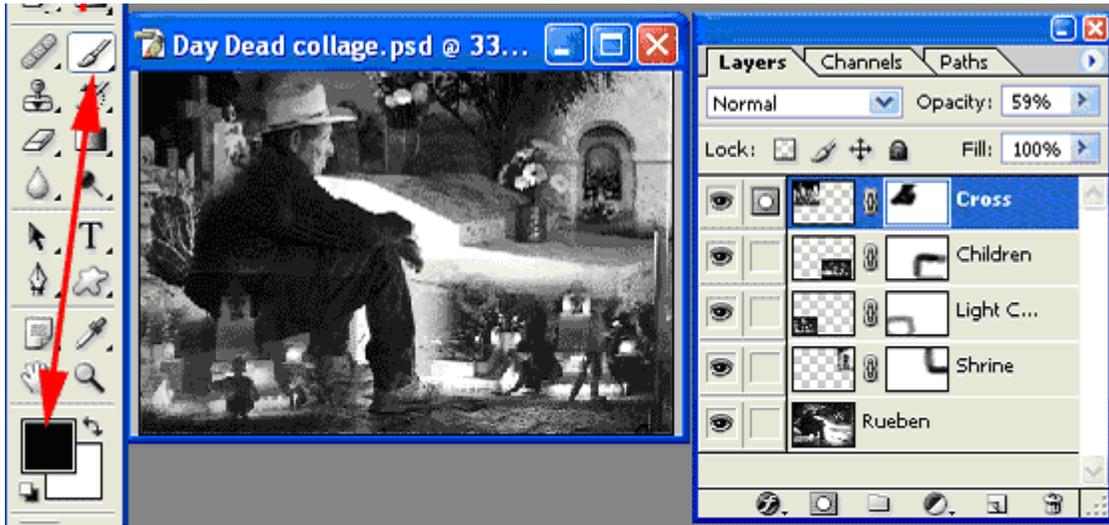
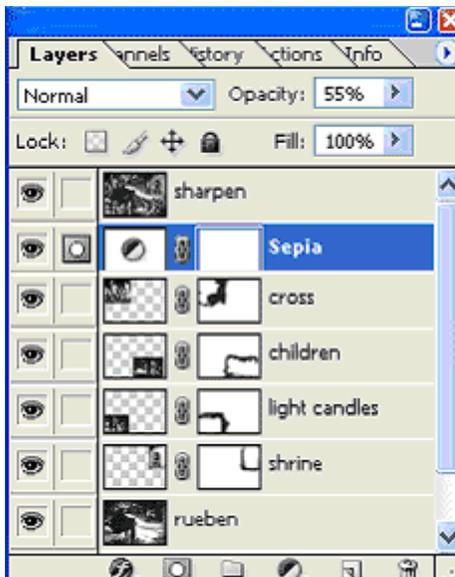


Fig 7

- Once all images are blended, more color and tonal corrections might be necessary. For my image, I converted all my images to black and white before I started but I later decided that it would look even better with a Sepia toned look. I created a Hue & Saturation Layer and named it "Sepia".

Refer to the screenshot of my final Layers Palette (below left). Note that I also created a "Sharpen" layer on the top. This is a MERGED layer as I do not like to sharpen my original images. Merged layers are also useful for any filters you might want to add. If you don't like the effect, you can just delete this merged layer.

To create a merged layer: Click the "add new layer" icon at the bottom of the Layers Palette. (just left of the trash can) Drag this new layer to the very top of the Layers Palette (if it is not already there). Hold the ALT/OPTION key and click on the little arrow to the right of the Layers Palette (just above Opacity Slider). Choose "merged visible". All your layers will combine into this new layer. If you end up with only one layer, then you did not hold ALT/OPTION when you "merged visible"!



FINAL NOTE: Once you grasp the concept of Masks, you'll have ultimate control over your images. For instance, every Adjustment Layer comes with a Mask! Use this Mask to fine tune whatever adjustment was made by turning it off/on in any area of the image. SAVE these masked layers with your image file. They are like having permanent History attached to your file!