

GRC 101 INTRODUCTION TO GRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS

PS COMP LAYER VARIATIONS

Information
Sheet No.

511

Layers in Photoshop let you work with different image elements. Layer Comps in Photoshop CS, on the other hand, let you experiment with different compositions. Sharon Steuer shows how this powerful tool can unleash your creativity.

Layer Comps — new in Adobe Photoshop CS — is a great invention in the digital world. A simple click in the palette to Save New Layer Comp, will let you name and save your current view of layer visibility and editing state as a Layer Comp. You can create as many as you like without substantially expanding the file size and can recall it with an instant click. The process takes sort of savable “Snapshot” — although it only notes your viewing state, never trashes layers, and is saved with your file.

An easy example of its application would be when you are experimenting with having different type layers in your compositions. Instead of having to save different versions of your file for each viewing of your layers, you save one file with the different Layer Comp views. If you want to later send the versions to a client or customer, you can use a premade script to generate separate files or a multi-page PDF from your Layer Comps! The possibilities are endless, and don't have to be as simple as saving this version or that; Layer Comps also save Blending Modes and Opacity settings. When doing this project, you should think about some of the ways in which Layer Comps can help you create variations of an image.

To demonstrate this, lets use some images that are a tribute to Middle Earth, and develop some ideas tor creae your own fantasy landscape. Then look at some of the ways in which the new Layer Comps feature in Photoshop CS can expand your creative workflow and help you generate variations of an image.

Creating a Fantasy Landscape

Inspired by the lush landscapes of Middle Earth, This InformationSheet creates a fantasy landscape of by compositing together three very different landscapes (see Figure 1). The images used are original digital photos, but you can use stock photos, scanned

snapshots, or copyright-free images. Look for images that have different colorcasts, scale and texture. It's the combining of things that are quite different that creates the drama, and elevates a composited photo from ordinary scenery into a fantastic landscape.



Figure 1: *The original images used to create the fantasy landscape, taken with a Olympus C-750 camera.)*

The key to using Layer Masks is to first work lloosely and easily until you develop a composition you like (see Figure 2). Once your basic composition is established, you can take the time needed to clean up and finalize your masks.

When creating your own original project, remember that it's always better to size a photo down (reduce the number of pixels) than up (increase the number of pixels), so use the smallest image to determine the resolution of the final



Figure 2: *The final composited landscape)*

composition, and scale down the other images to fit. You'll need to then move your photo images into one file (use the Move tool to drag and drop one file into another), and scale them smaller if necessary (Image> Transform) to match the dimensions of the target image. With the Move tool, you can also shift the photos within their respective layers so that when combined they're in the correct position. Chances are you'll also want to use Image> Canvas Size to enlarge the canvas work area so you have enough room to maneuver.

Masking the Scenes Together

Arrange the layers in the Layers palette so that your images are in a logical stacking order that helps you visualize how they can be combined. Now you'll create Layer Masks so that your images fit together, or can be "painted into" specific areas.

By default, with a blank layer mask (white), you are painting with black to hide areas of your image. With an opaque layer mask (black), you are painting with white to reveal areas. Grays provide levels of transparency between black (hidden) and white (revealed). If you have an active selection when you click to create a new Layer Mask, with nothing se-

lected, the mask will reveal the area within the selection, and hide the remaining portion of that layer.

If you click to create a blank layer mask, you can use your selection or painting tools to work into your masks (hold Option/ Alt when you create a New Layer Mask to create a black, opaque mask).

Control whether you are working in a layer or its mask by clicking on the appropriate icon for that layer or mask in the Layers palette (see Figure 3). Work loosely and easily with painting, selection, and gradient tools. Remember, there's never only one way to combine images; you may want to experiment with different ways to work with layers and layer masks. If necessary, you can work more meticulously with your masks in the final stages when your composition is complete.

Creating Variations Using Layer Comps

To create variations in light, mood, and composition, you can use Adjustment Layers and Photoshop CS's new Layer Comps feature (see Figure 4).

The key is, whenever you discover a version of your image that you like, create a Layer Comp for that current state of your layers palette. Here's how:

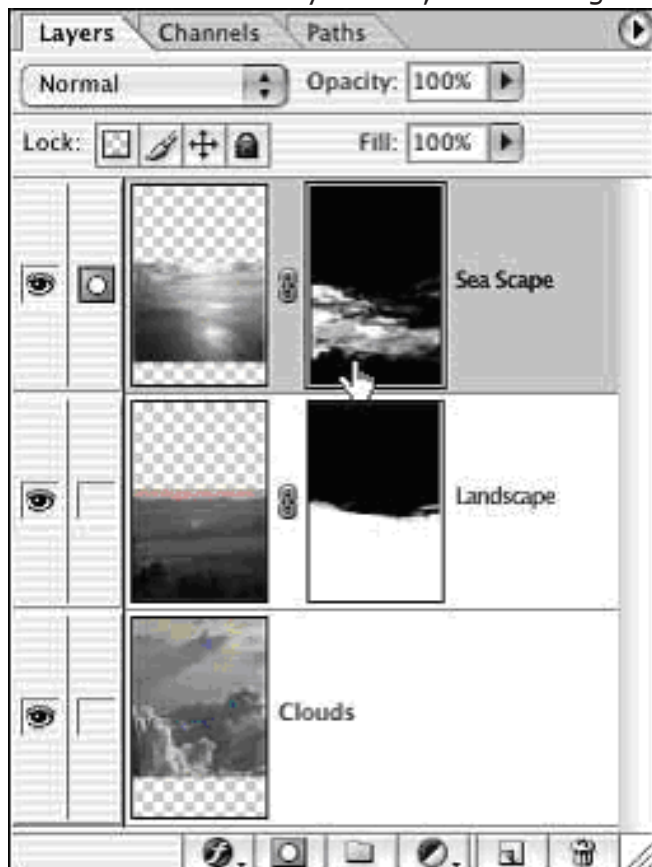


Figure 3: Work into the different Layer Masks to create the fantasy landscape.

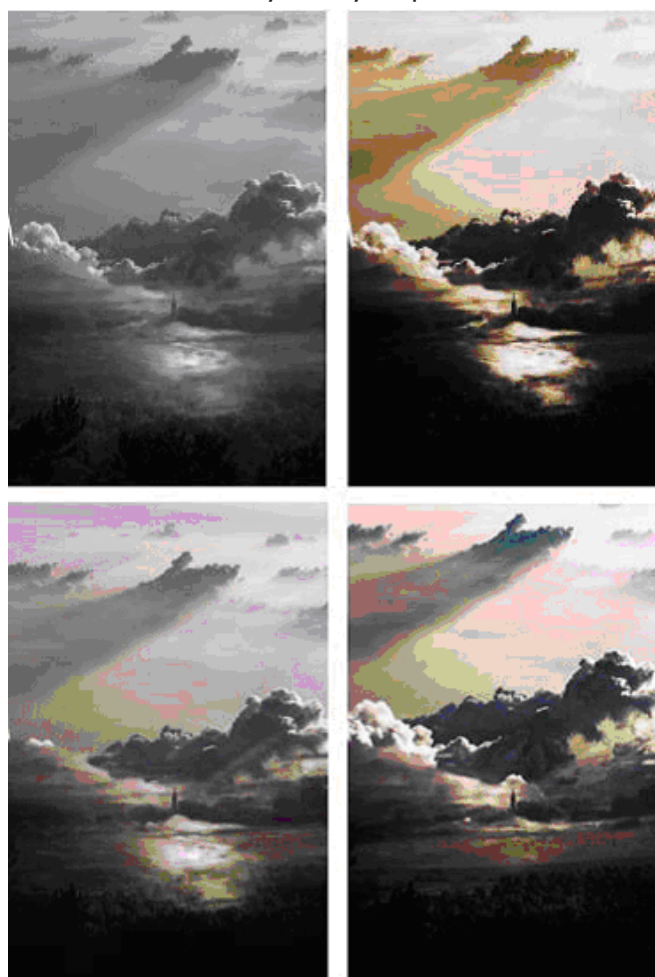


Figure 4: Variations on a scene saved as Layer Comps.

When you first launch Photoshop CS, the Layer Comps palette will be in the well in the right side of your Options bar (see Figure 5). You can click on the Layer Comp tab to open the palette temporarily, or you can drag the tab out onto your work area to keep the palette open.

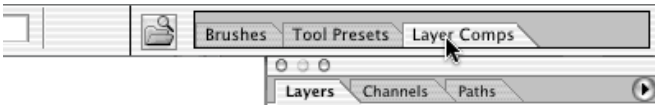


Figure 5: Layer Comps are first found in the well in the Options Bar; click it to open the palette temporarily, or drag it to your workspace to keep the palette open.)

To make a Layer Comp for this starting view of your image, click the New Layer Comp icon (see Figure 6) and name the layer "Start." Also make sure that you enable all options (for this project) and click OK (see Figure 7).

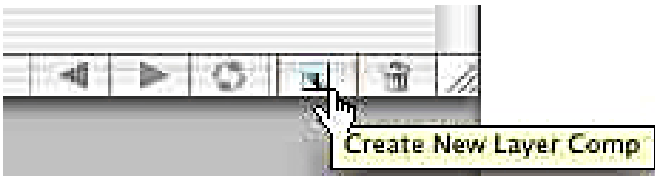


Figure 6: Click the New Layer Comp icon to

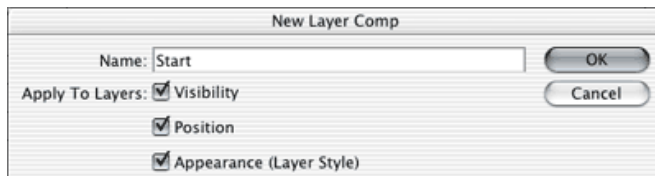


Figure 7: Name your layer and enable all options for your Layer Comp.)

Adding Adjustment Layers

To begin the variations process, create a new Adjustment Layer by choosing one from the pop-up list from the Layers palette (see Figure 8).

Experiment with the settings until you find something that you like (if you don't like that Adjustment Layer, then Undo and try another). As soon as you find something that works, make a new Layer Comp (remember to name it meaningfully as you go!).



Figure 8: Create a New Adjustment Layer by choosing it from the Layers palette pop-up menu.

Continue to experiment: Add a new Adjustment Layer, save this if you like as a Layer Comp, and

continue. As you work, you can keep the previous Adjustment Layer visible or hide it. You can duplicate an Adjustment Layer (drag it over the New Layer icon) and then double-click the duplicate to adjust the settings. Once you have three or four Adjustment Layers created, play with changing the blending mode and opacity of the various Adjustment Layers, as well as turning the visibility on and off for different layers. As you work, whenever you find something you like, save it as a new Layer Comp.

In addition to noting which layers are visible or hidden, the blending modes and opacity settings for each layer, Layer Comps will also keep track of whether a Layer Mask is enabled. Adjustment Layers can have Layer Masks attached to them, which allows you to apply the Adjustment Layer to only a portion of your image. As with any Layer Mask, you can work with the mask by activating its icon, and then use your painting, gradient, and selection tools on the mask. To disable a Layer Mask, Shift-Click on the mask icon in the Layers palette (see Figure 9). Shift-Click again to re-enable the Layer Mask.

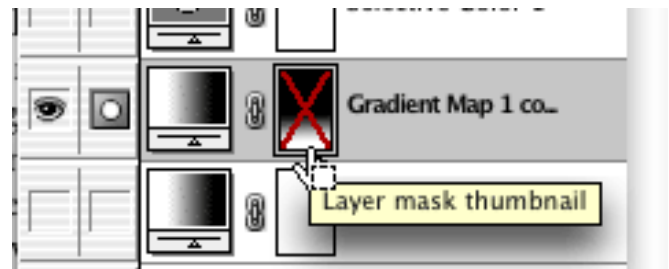


Figure 9: Shift-Click on a Layer Mask icon in the Layers palette to disable/enable It.

One of the most exciting aspects of a Layer Comp is that you can record the position of your image within its layer! So, with this fantasy landscape, you could move the clouds image within its layer (with the Move tool) and record the shifted clouds as a new Layer Comp.



Figure 10: Layer Comps showing before (L) and after shifting (R) the position of the clouds within the layer.

The Layer Comps feature has many commercial applications as well as purely creative ones. For instance, use this aspect of Layer Comps to experiment and document different typographic layouts within a book cover design — and all without increasing your file size!

If you do start shifting images within their layers, be aware that you may need to duplicate image layers to support your variations. For instance, at one point when the position of the clouds changed within a layer, it was necessary to duplicate the layer containing the Layer Masks that interact with the clouds (see Figure 11). When the clouds are in one position the corresponding landscape and Layer Mask would be visible; when the clouds are in another position, you may wish to use the duplicate landscape so that you can rework that Layer Mask.

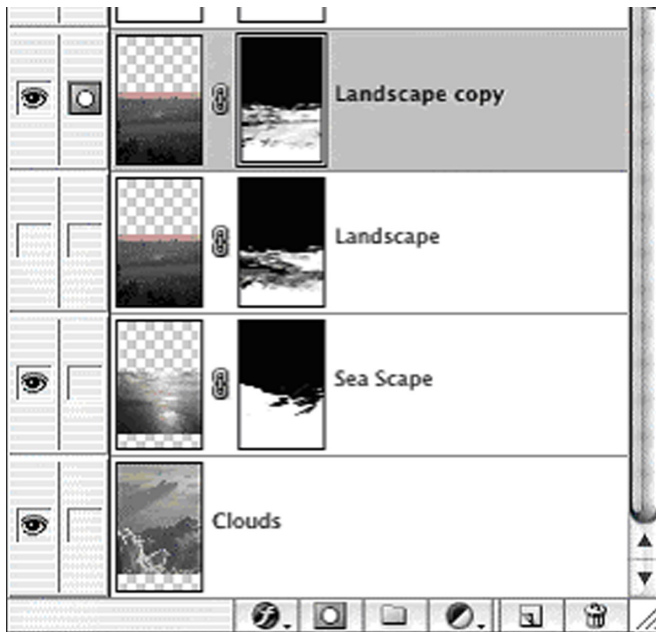


Figure 11: After moving the position of the Clouds layer, I had to duplicate the top Landscape layer so that I could rework the Layer Mask for the new cloud position.

You can continue to add layers to your file without confusing Layer Comps — the new layers will simply be hidden (see Figure 12A).

There are a zillion other things that you can do with Layer Comps, but here’s one last feature that gives you a hint to the power:

With Photoshop CS, you can use File> Scripts to transform Layer Comps (all or selected) as separate files or a multi-page Acrobat documents (see Figure 13).

In the next page is a TIFF of The final Photoshop file, including its variations (Figure 14):

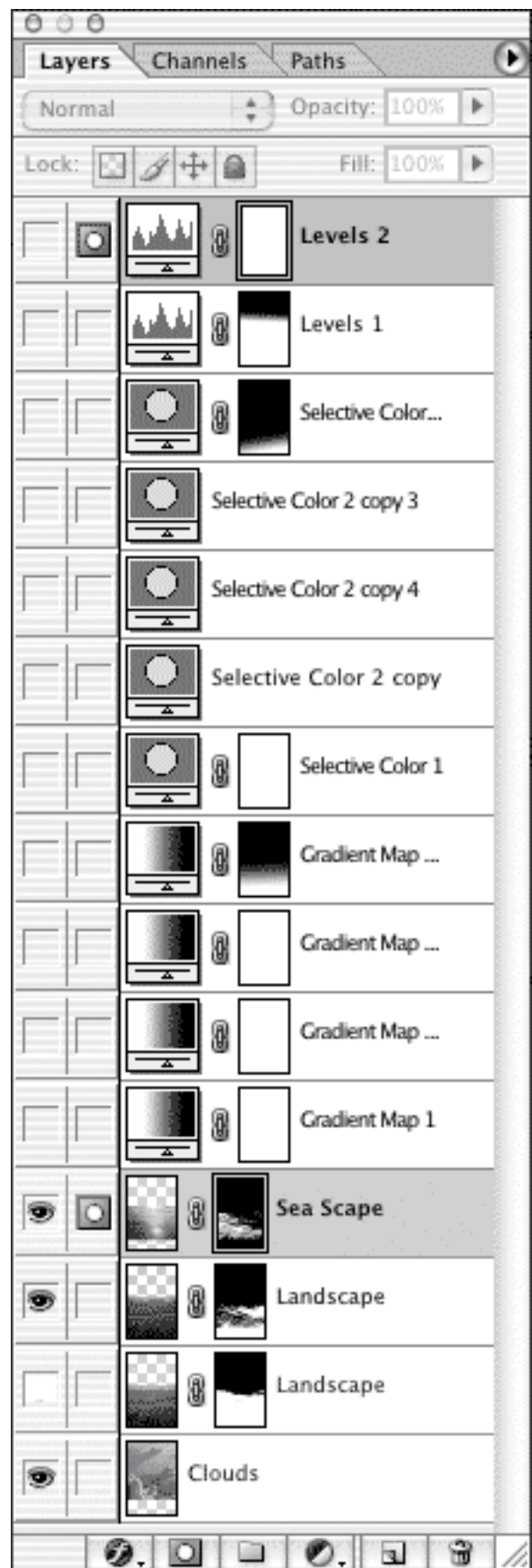


Figure 12A: The final layers.

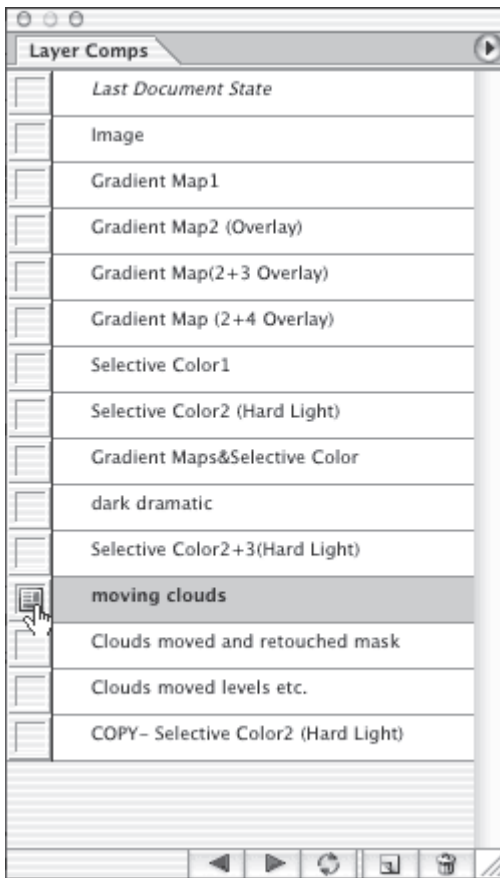


Figure 12B: The final layers (previous page) and the Layer Comps (above).

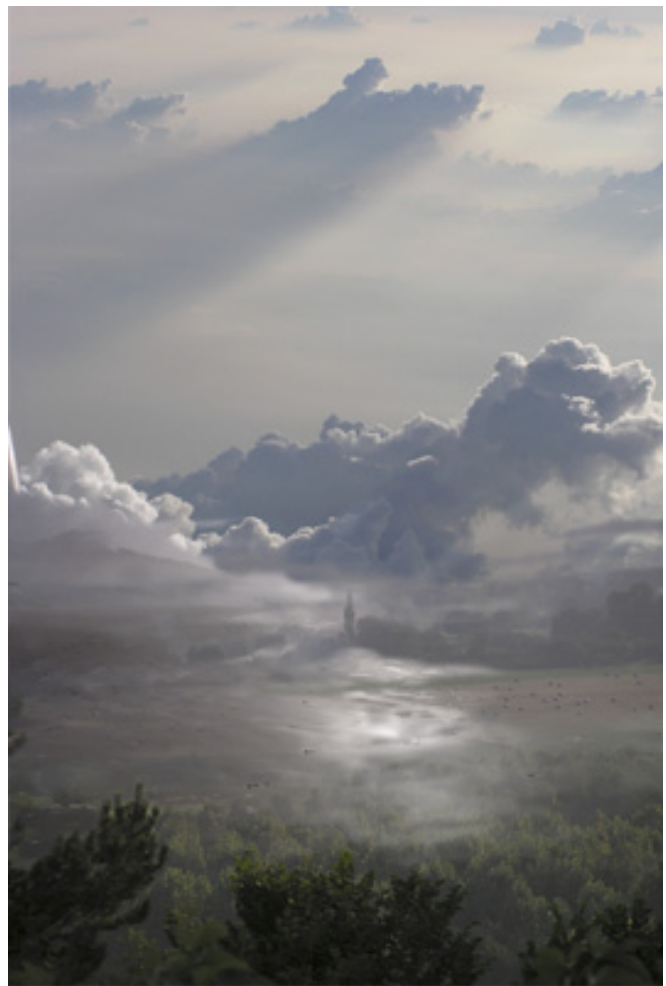


Figure 14: The final Photoshop file as created using the variations.

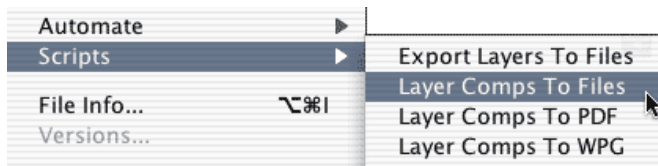


Figure 13: To save out separate files or a multi-page PDF from your Layer Comps, choose File> Scripts, and then specify your options