Photomontage in Fireworks

http://www.projectseven.com/tutorials/images/p_montage/index.htm

by Linda Rathgeber
What you'll learn:

There is a handful of photo editing techniques that PVII makes clever use of, and about which many of our forum visitors have asked questions. These techniques are:

- Retouching
- Masking
- Fading
- Blending

Rather than approach each technique in a separate tutorial, I thought it might be fun to include them in an introductory tutorial on Photomontage. When you've finished this tutorial you should be comfortable with simple digital photo retouching techniques like patching, smudging, and color correction. You'll also learn to make marquee selections, use the Rubber Stamp tool, and create quick masks and brushed masks. First, some background.
Photomontage

"The juxtaposition of two primary stimuli leads to a powerful secondary response" __Sergei M. Eisenstein.

A photomontage is a single pictorial composition made by superimposing two or more picture elements. In real world examples, source material can include cutouts from magazines, newspapers, and other ingredients that enhance and extend the meaning of the original image. Photomontage as screen art is mainly focused on photographic images.

The beginnings

Although photos have been manipulated since Victorian times, Photomontage wasn't fully developed as an art form until just after W.W.I. At the center of this new art movement was a group of artists in Berlin that called themselves Dada. Dada artists were looking for a means of saying more about reality than figurative painting could express. They used photographs and other types of images to produce works that were visceral, erotic, playful, emotive, intuitive, and often mystical. Photomontage was a new way of making the invisible visible.

Dada, and its child art form, Surrealism, have experienced revivals in the '60s and '80s. Photomontage is enjoying a revival in the form of images for the Internet.

Note: Dada means things in several languages. It's French for "hobbyhorse" and Slavic for "yes yes."

Before we move on to building the Dreamcatcher image you'll need to download a zip file containg the images. Unzip the file to the Studio VII folder on your hard drive. A subfolder named Dreamcatcher is created, containing the three images needed for the tutorial.

The beach and dome images are courtesy the good folks at the Inertia Stock Exchange. Inertia is an excellent source of royalty free and copyright free images.

Overview

   * Preparing the destination image
   * Importing a dome
   * Creating a vector patch
   * Window demolition
   * Snowgirl
   * Putting it all together
   * Last words

Preparing the destination image

The background or base image of a Photomontage is called the destination image. It is the image that all other parts of the Photomontage are added to. The destination image for our artwork is labeled Karl's_beach.tif.

- Load Fireworks MX and open the destination image, Karl's_beach.tif
- Choose File > Open. The Open dialog box pops up
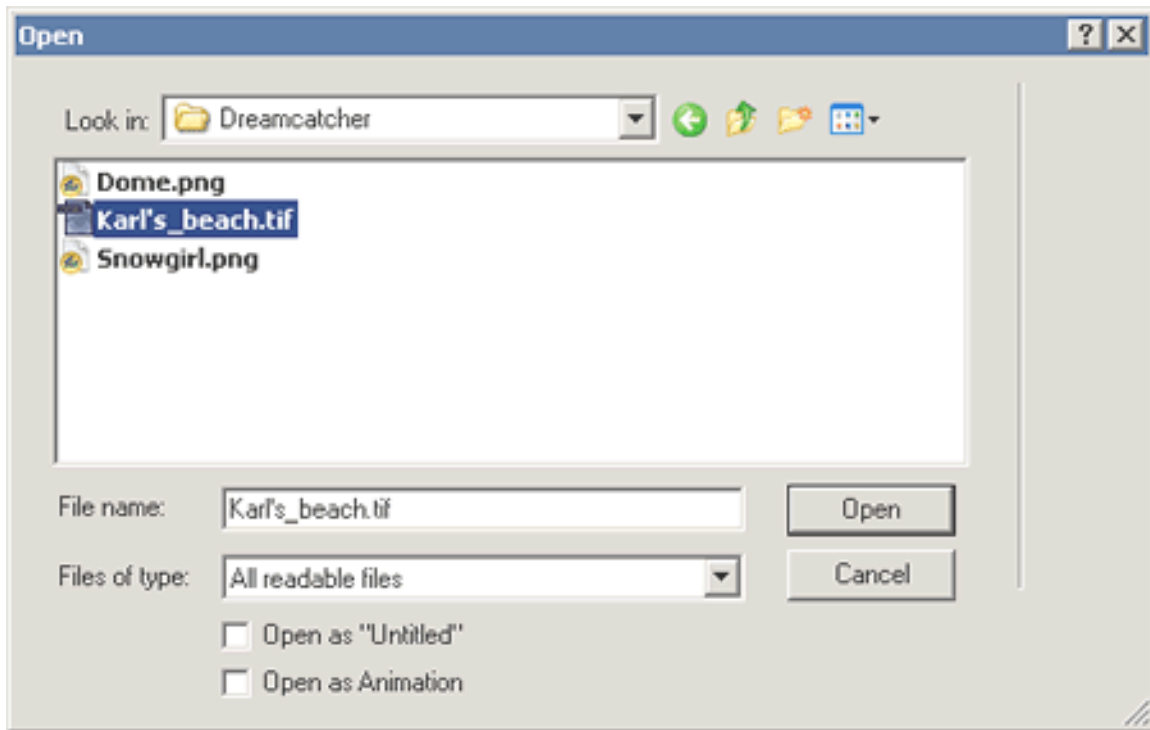
- Browse to the Dreamcatcher folder and find the Karl's_beach.tif
- Click on the file to select it
- Click on the Open button to open the image in Fireworks

This is what the image should look like (though much larger, of course).

Because we want the flat looking part of the image on the right side we'll need to transform it. To make the transformation:

- Click on the Flip Horizontal button on the main toolbar (Windows only) or choose Modify > Transform > Flip Horizontal

You may do a Photomontage with dozens of image objects someday. Let's lay the groundwork for good working habits by creating and naming layers for the image objects. To begin:

- Open the Layers panel by clicking on its tab.
- Double click on the Background title bar to open the Layer Name dialog box.
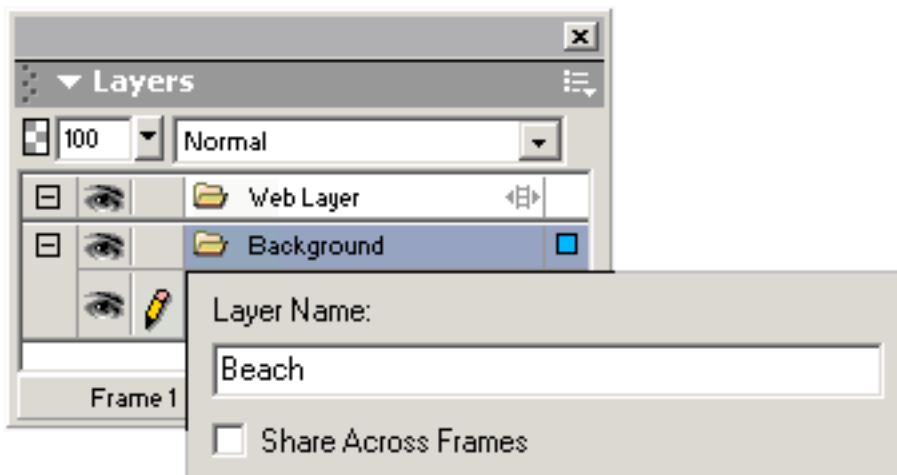
- Type in the word "Beach"
- Press enter to accept the changes and close the Layer Name dialog box

Inside the Dome

Before we import the dome image, let's prepare a layer for it.

–Click on the expander icon (the wavy line) at the top right of the Layers panel and choose "New Layer..." to open the New Layer dialog box.
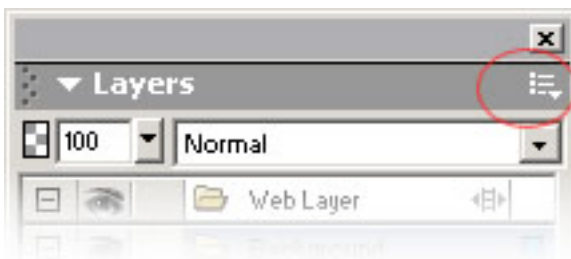

–Type the word Dome and press Enter

Now let's import the Dome image. Click on the title bar of the Dome layer to make the layer active and...

–Choose File > Import to open the Import dialog box
–Browse to the Dreamcatcher folder
–Click on the Dome.png file
–Click on Open to copy the image to the clipboard and close the Import dialog box

The cursor changes to an insertion pointer to let you know that your image is ready to paste.

–Move the insertion pointer to the top left corner of the canvas and click once.
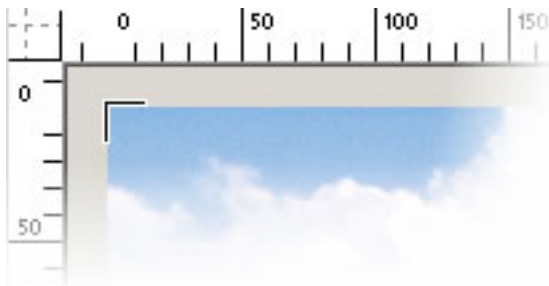
The Dome.png file is now sitting on the top left of the background image.

There's one small patch to make in the dome image before we start doing more interesting things to it. If you guessed it was to cover up the small dark square at the bottom, you're right. Make the background layer invisible by clicking on the eye icon of the Beach layer.
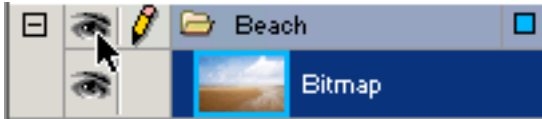
Creating a vector patch

We'll need to create a tiny gradient filled rectangle to patch the door opening, then convert the vector rectangle to a bitmap and fuse it to the image. Let's make it easy to see what we are doing by enlarging the image.

- Click on the Zoom tool (the magnifying tool icon in the Tools panel)
- Click 3 or 4 times with the Zoom tool on the small dark square at the bottom of the dome image.
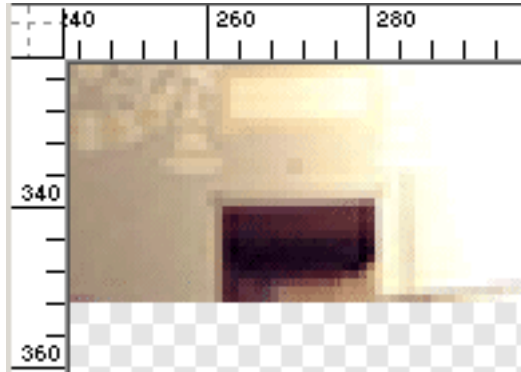

This close in we can see that the dark spot is the top of a door trimmed with molding. This will be a snap to patch. Click on the vector Rectangle tool to select it.

- Draw a rectangle over the door opening and set its fill type to Linear in the Property inspector.
- Click inside the color box in the Property inspector (or in the color box in the Tools panel) to open the gradient editor

- Click on the left color chip in the gradient editor to open the swatches pop–up
- Use the swatches pop–up color picker to select a pixel in the bitmap just left of the vector rectangle
- Click on the right color chip in the gradient editor to open the swatches pop–up.
- Use the color picker to select a pixel in the bitmap just right of the vector rectangle

- Click on the pointer tool to bring up the gradient adjustment bar
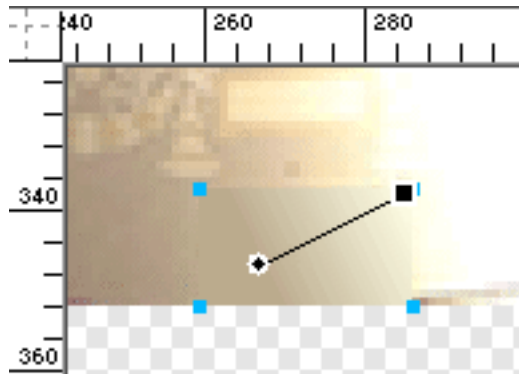
- Move and rotate the gradient to get the best match for the bitmap

Don't worry if it's not a perfect match. We'll fix that in the next steps.

- Shift + select both the dome bitmap and the gradient rectangle

Note that Shift + select is Fireworks shorthand for Press the shift key and click on the image objects as instructed. You can Shift + select the image objects on the canvas or in the Layers panel.

- Choose Modify > Flatten Selection
- Click and hold on the on the Blur tool to find the Smudge tool
- Select the smudge tool and use it to smudge the pixels of the surrounding bitmap into the gradient patch

Small wiggly or rocking strokes work best. When you've done what you can with the Smudge tool, select the Blur tool and go over the area to blend in any wayward smudges. When you are satisfied with your result, reduce the image view to 100% and take a look at the Dome windows. We'll be removing those so the background layer can show through. First, save your work!

- Choose File > Save as
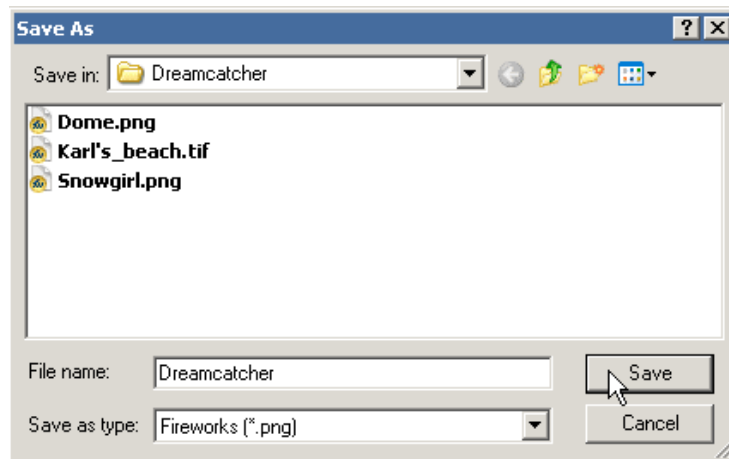
- Browse to the Dreamcatcher folder on your hard drive
- Enter the word Dreamcatcher in the File name box
- Click on Save

Window demolition

Haven't you always thought it would be fun to do a building renovation? Here's your chance to do it in a way that won't make you hot and sweaty. If your Dreamcatcher file isn't still open, open it now and hide the background layer. Pick the window you want to demolish first, and then click on it with the Zoom tool a couple of times.

- Click and hold on the Lasso tool to pop out the Polygon Lasso tool

The Polygon Lasso tool looks a little like an upside-down wire coat hanger with a broken hook. The tip of the broken hook is where the Lasso spins from, like silk from a spider.

- Select the Polygon Lasso tool and click in the bottom left corner of your window with its broken hook
- Release the mouse button and move the Polygon Lasso tool to the top left of the window (you'll see a bright blue line spin out behind you as you move)
- Click just where the window's curved top begins, and then release the mouse button
- Move forward a few pixels along the curve, then click
- Release the mouse button and move forward along the curve again
- Click and release

This clicking-releasing-moving forward with the Polygon Lasso tool is called stitching or marking a marquee.

- Continue marquee marking around the window opening until you return to your starting point (when you reach the starting point, a tiny cursor cue in the form of a square displays next to the Lasso hook)
- Click to close the path

The marquee will begin crawling the blue path like a line of marching ants.

- Choose Edit > Cut to delete the area inside the marquee

It doesn't need to be perfect. The few stray pixels that remain in the window openings will disappear later when we reduce the size of the finished Dreamcatcher image. Using the technique above, remove all the windows in the dome.

- Return the image magnification to 100%
- Unhide the Background by clicking where the eye should be in the title bar of the background layer

Sit back and admire the view.

- Crop the bottom of the composition even with the bottom of the Dome image
- Save your work again.

Snowgirl

Open your Dreamcatcher.png file if it isn't still open. Hide both the Background and Dome layers. Create a new layer and name it Snowgirl. Click on the title bar of your new layer to activate it. Import the Snowgirl.png onto the new layer.

The first thing you'll notice is that the image is way too large. It's that way on purpose to make it easier to take care of the second thing you might have noticed. Her awful lipstick color. Zoom in on the young woman's mouth to 200%. We'll start retouching the image by using the Rubber Stamp tool to get rid of the snow blobs on her lips.

There is a lot of confusion about what the Rubber Stamp tool does and how it works. The Rubber Stamp tool clones the pixels in one area of a bitmap so you can stamp them onto another part of the bitmap. This feature is especially useful when you want to fix a scratched photograph, and remove dust or other flaws.

- Select the Rubber Stamp tool and set the size for 6 pixels, the edge to 1, and check Source aligned
- Source aligned means the pixels are copied from the area we designate as the source.
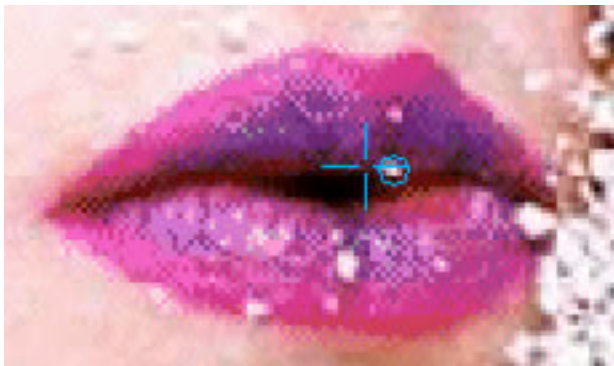
- Click just to the left of the lower, light colored blob on Snowgirl's upper lip

The cursor changes to a crosshair that shows you the location of the copied pixels. As soon as you move your mouse, a 6 pixel circle appears next to the crosshair. This circle is what you use to target the area where you want to deposit the pixels you copied.

- Move the circle cursor over the blob and click. Voila! The blob is gone
- Move the cursor to the right of the remaining blob on the upper lip
- Press Alt and click (Option-click on Macintosh) to choose the new source
- Center the circle over the blob and click
- Remove the blobs from the lower lip

You might want to do the largest blob in two or three steps. Take your time with this. If you make a mistake, simply undo your steps.

Now that we've finished deblobbing the model's lips, let's change that ghastly lip color.

- Select the Polygon Lasso tool and stitch a marquee around the edge of the lips
- Choose Filters > Adjust Color > Levels from the main toolbar
- Select the middle of the three eyedroppers on the right side of the Levels dialog box

The middle dropper enables you to set the midlevel color of the selection.

- Click the eyedropper in the light pink color on the Snowgirl's left eyelid (your left – her right)

That got rid of the blue color in the middle of her lips and brightened the color. Next we'll change the color to a more natural looking rose.

- Choose Filters > Adjust Color > Hue/Saturation from the main toolbar
- Reduce saturation and lighten
- Move the Hue slider back and forth until the hue changes to an acceptable one

The settings I used were 19 for Hue, –32 for Saturation, and 21 for lightness. Use those as a starting point if you like. They'll probably need adjusting because the midlevel color of the lips from the previous step will be slightly different in your image.

If you are feeling confident in your newly earned Rubber Stamp skills, stretch them a bit farther by removing the snow blobs along the ridge of the Snowgirl's nose.

Another refinement we'll make to the image is to lighten the area under the Snowgirl's eye. We'll use the Dodge tool for this.

- Click and hold on the Blur tool to find the Dodge tool and select it (he Dodge tool is the one that looks like a cardboard looking glass)

Enter the following settings for the Dodge tool in the Property inspector:

- Brush size – 32
- Edge – 100
- Shape – round
- Range – midtones (leaves the neighboring highlight and shadow pixels alone)
- Exposure – 25

Rather than dragging the Dodge tool as the Fireworks help files suggest, lighten the area with a series of quick mouse clicks. This technique gives you much more control over the results. As you become more confident with the Dodge tool you'll be able to adjust the settings and try other kinds of strokes.

The last adjustment we need to perform on the Snowgirl image before blending the three images together is to reduce its size. If the image isn't selected, click on it and:

- Choose Modify > Transform > Numeric Transform
- Choose Scale 50%. Leave both Scale Attributes and Constrain Proportions checked
- Unhide the Background and Dome layers
- Move the Snowgirl's head to the middle of the dome, then hide the Snowgirl image.

Putting it all together

Though you might not think so, this will be the easiest section of the Photomontage tutorial. That's because we can use quick masks instead of hand drawn ones. If you haven't tried masking before, you'll be surprised by how simple it can be.

- Click on the Dome image to select it
- Choose Commands > Creative > Fade Image. Pick the Left to right linear fade (row 1, choice2)

- Click on the black + white mask thumbnail in the Dome layer of the Layers panel to bring up the adjustment bar for the mask gradient
- Move the round handle of the gradient adjustment bar right, to a few pixels past the middle of the canvas
- Move the square handle of the gradient adjustment bar in toward the dome image until the rightmost quarter of the dome image fades into the background image

- Unhide the Snowgirl layer

Before applying the quick mask to the Snowgirl image we'll soften the edges a little with a brushed (layer) mask.

- Click on the Snowgirl image to select it

- Click on the Add Mask button on the button bar at the bottom of the Layers panel
- Select the Brush tool in the Bitmap section of the Tools panel

In the Property inspector:

- Choose Mask to Grayscale
- Check the Preserve Transparency box on the Property inspector
- Carefully remove the hard edges of the Snowgirl photo

It's not necessary to do more than round the image slightly. Once you've rounded the image, click on the Snowgirl layer in the Layers panel and choose Modify > Flatten Selection. To create the final fade of the Snowgirl image we'll go back to using quick masks. With the image still selected:

- Choose Commands > Creative > Fade image
- Add the radial quick mask. The radial mask is the one at the bottom left of the dialog box
- Click on the Mask thumbnail in the Snowgirl layer in the Layers panel
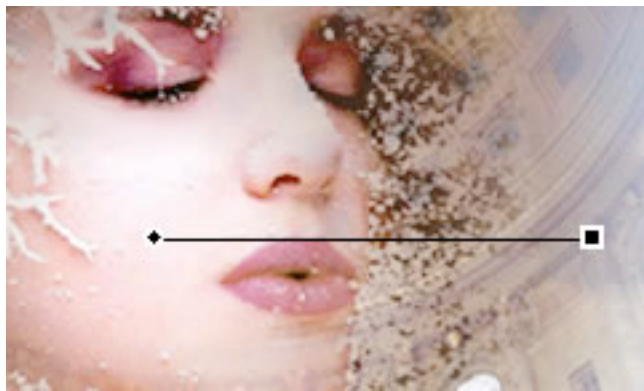
- Move the round handle of the gradient adjustment bar to an imaginary point just below the apple of the Snowgirl's cheek
- Adjust the square handle of the gradient adjustment bar until you are satisfied with the way the edges of the image blend into the dome image.

As a final refinement, move the Snowgirl image so the hinge of her jaw, just in front of the ear, lines up with the ring formed by the cornice above the windows. The line of the jaw and the sweep of the ring together are vaguely reminiscent of the well-known bust of the ancient Egyptian queen, Nefertiti.

Some last words

To make the image a reasonable size to display in the opening page of this tutorial, I reduced its size by close to half. If you'd like to do that too...

- Choose Select > Select All, or Shift + select all three layers in the Layers panel
- Choose Modify > Flatten selection
- Next, choose Modify > Transform > Numeric Transform. Scale to 60%
- Choose Modify > Canvas > Trim Canvas

I find that a modest amount of sharpening brightens the image.

- Click on the Add Effect button [+] on the Property inspector
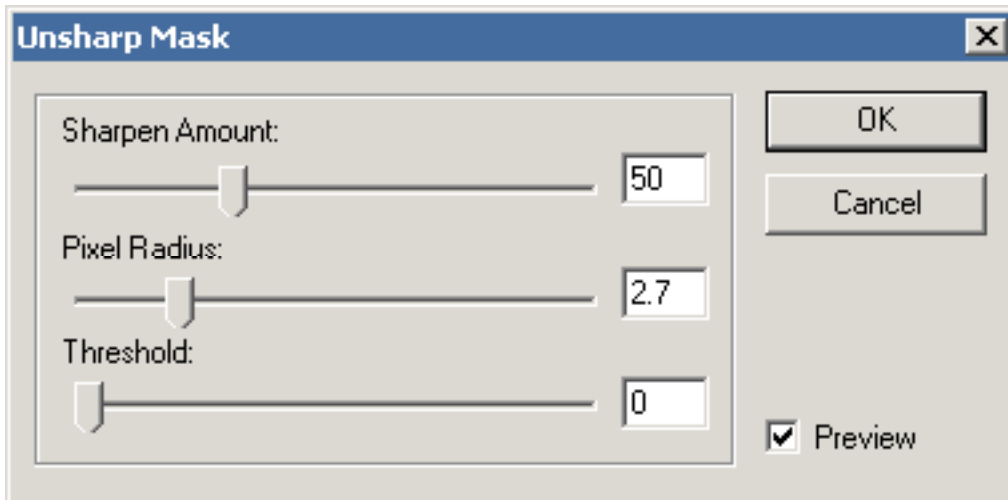
- Choose Sharpen > Unsharp Mask. Use the following settings:
    - o Sharpen amount 50
    - o Pixel Radius 2.7 to 3.00
    - o Threshold 0.

The font I used in the image is Amazone BT at 28 points. To optimize the image
- Choose File > Export Preview. The export settings I used are:
  - o JPEG
  - o Quality – 80
  - o Smoothing – none
  - o Sharpen Color Edges – checked

The file size rounds out to 30K. It will reduce more if you use a smoothing setting of 1 and uncheck Sharpen Color Edges.

Dreamcatcher

I hope you had fun creating the image, and that doing so has inspired you to learn more about digital Photo and manipulation technique. May your experiments with Photomontage bring you many years of pleasure.