

# Creative use of layers and layer masks

Bob Breach

# FORMAT FOR THIS EVENING

- Short presentation covering principles of :
  - Layers and layer masks
  - Use of PS filters
  - Blending modes
- Examples of the above in a creative way
- *Experimenting with your own images*
- *Plenty of time for discussion and problem solving*

## A note on software

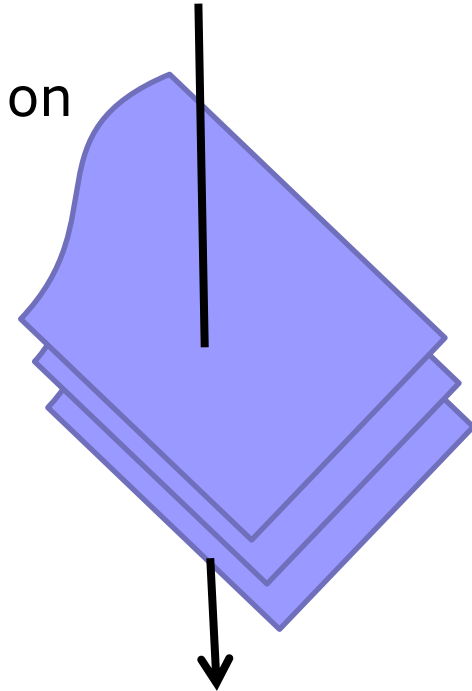
- *These days there are many different photo editing software options. For most post processing these can be as good as, if not better than, Photoshop (PS)*
- *However for creative use of layers and layer masks PS can be very powerful*
- *Tonight's talk will be based largely on Photoshop (either CS or elements) although the tools and layout may vary somewhat between each and the version you are using*
- *Some other software may have similar functions (Corel paint?)but will not be covered tonight*



**Layers and layer  
masks in PS  
The basics**

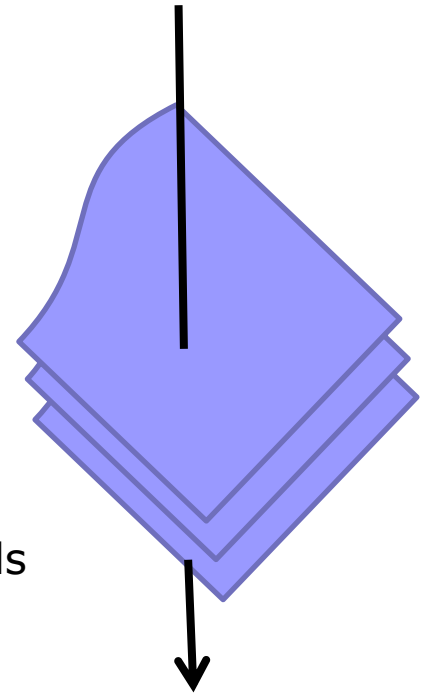
# HOW DO PS LAYERS WORK

- Imagine a series of clear acetate sheets (layers) stacked on top of each other
- As you look down through the stack the images on each layer “combine” to form the overall image
- Each layer can be:
  - The background layer (the starting image)
  - Copies of the background layer – possibly with cloning
  - Layer with a filter effect applied e.g. blur
  - Adjustment layer(s) (e.g., saturation, hue, levels, etc.)
  - A solid coloured layer
  - An effect layer based on another image
  - Another image
- At the end the layers can be merged (flattened) together to form a final image



# WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH LAYERS?

- Each layer can be:
  - Switched on or off
  - Faded by reducing opacity
  - Copied or deleted
  - Have the order changed
  - Worked on by selecting
  - Used for complex cloning
  - Blended in various ways
- For each layer a “mask” can be applied\*
  - This allows all or only a part of the layer to be seen
  - Changed by using brush tool: white reveals, black conceals
- Layers can be linked – this allows an adjustment layer to only affect linked layers



\* Make sure that the mask is highlighted when modifying the mask

# WHAT DO BLEND MODES DO

- The blending mode controls how the pixels in the different layers interact with each other
- Normal default – no interaction between layers (top layer dominates)
- There are then five other groups within which each mode broadly has the same effect
- However, the maths behind this is complex and the effects are often unpredictable to the average user
- Often best to experiment and see what happens

# PS BLENDING MODES

Commonly  
used modes



Normal
Dissolve
Darken
Multiply
Color Burn
Linear Burn
Lighten
Screen
Color Dodge
Linear Dodge
Overlay
Soft Light
Hard Light
Vivid Light
Linear Light
Pin Light
Hard Mix
Difference
Exclusion
Hue
Saturation
Color
Luminosity

Darken Modes

Lighten Modes

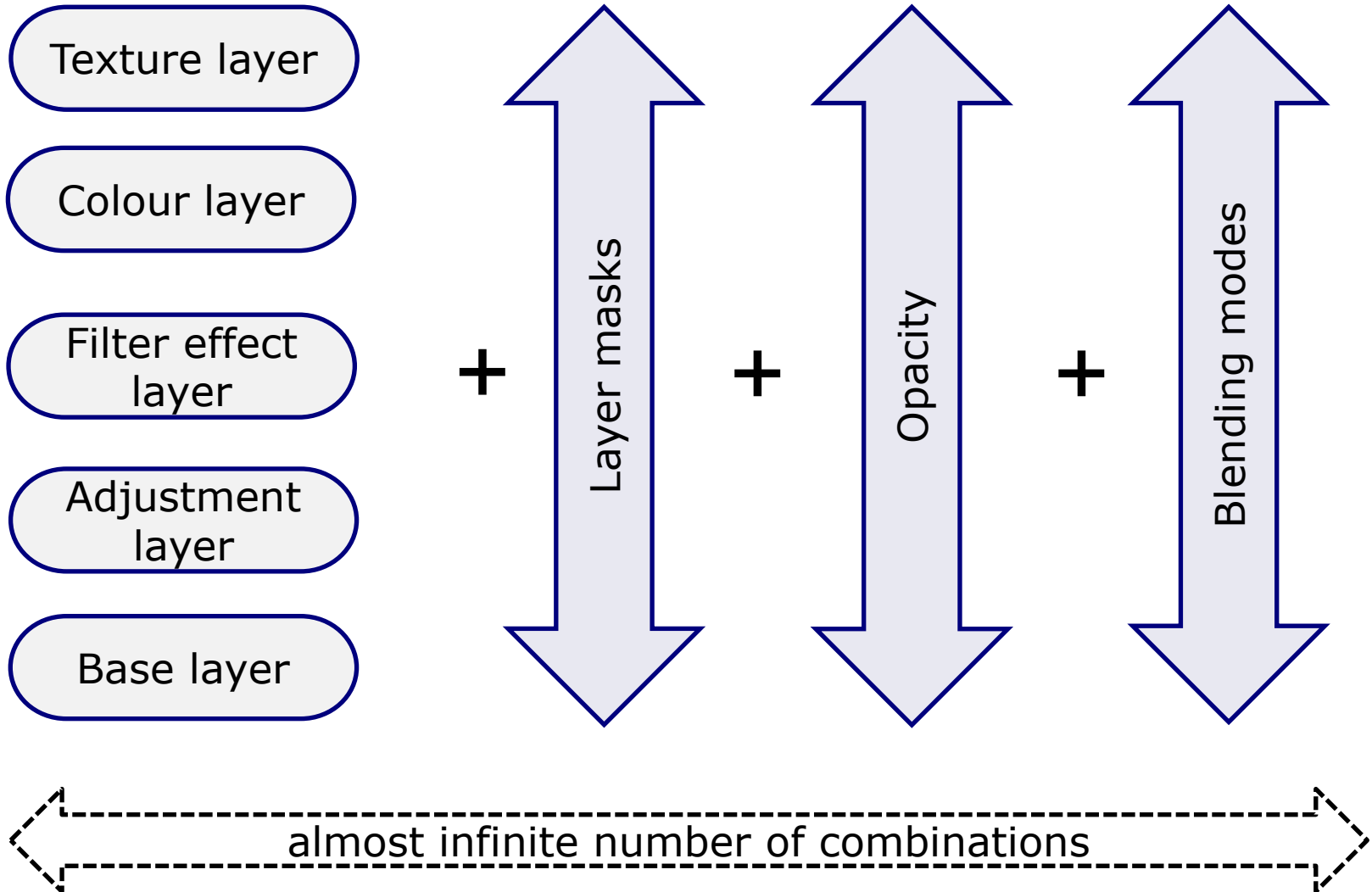
Contrast Modes

Comparative Modes

Composite Modes  
(Hue, Saturation, Luminosity)



# LAYER COMBINATIONS



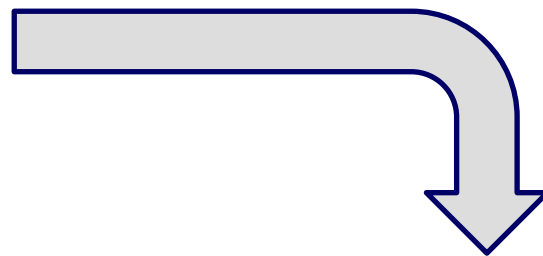
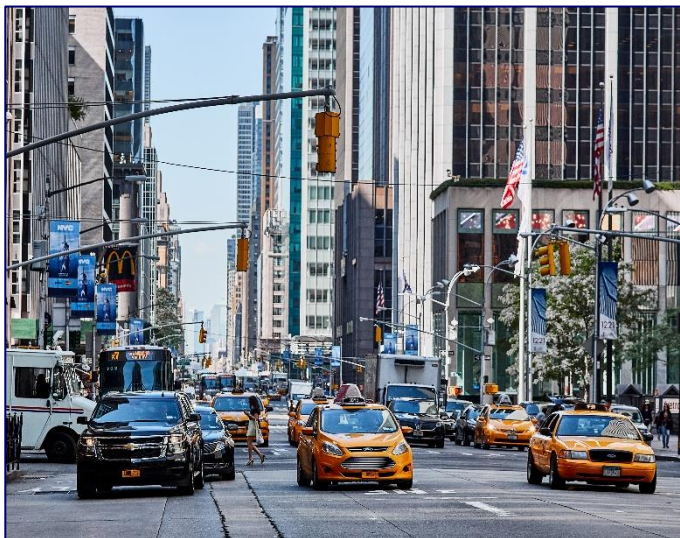
# LAYER TIPS

- Easiest to move around image and expand/contract using “navigator” tab
- Carry out any adjustment
  - On new layer not on “background”
  - For multiple adjustments or complex cloning use separate layers
  - In both cases easier to go back one stage if mistake rather than losing all corrections
- Can save work in progress on image (including layers) but only as large PSD (or TIFF) file
- Only when happy with final image should you “flatten” image and save for final output as TIFF or JPEG file



**Some examples  
- Filters**

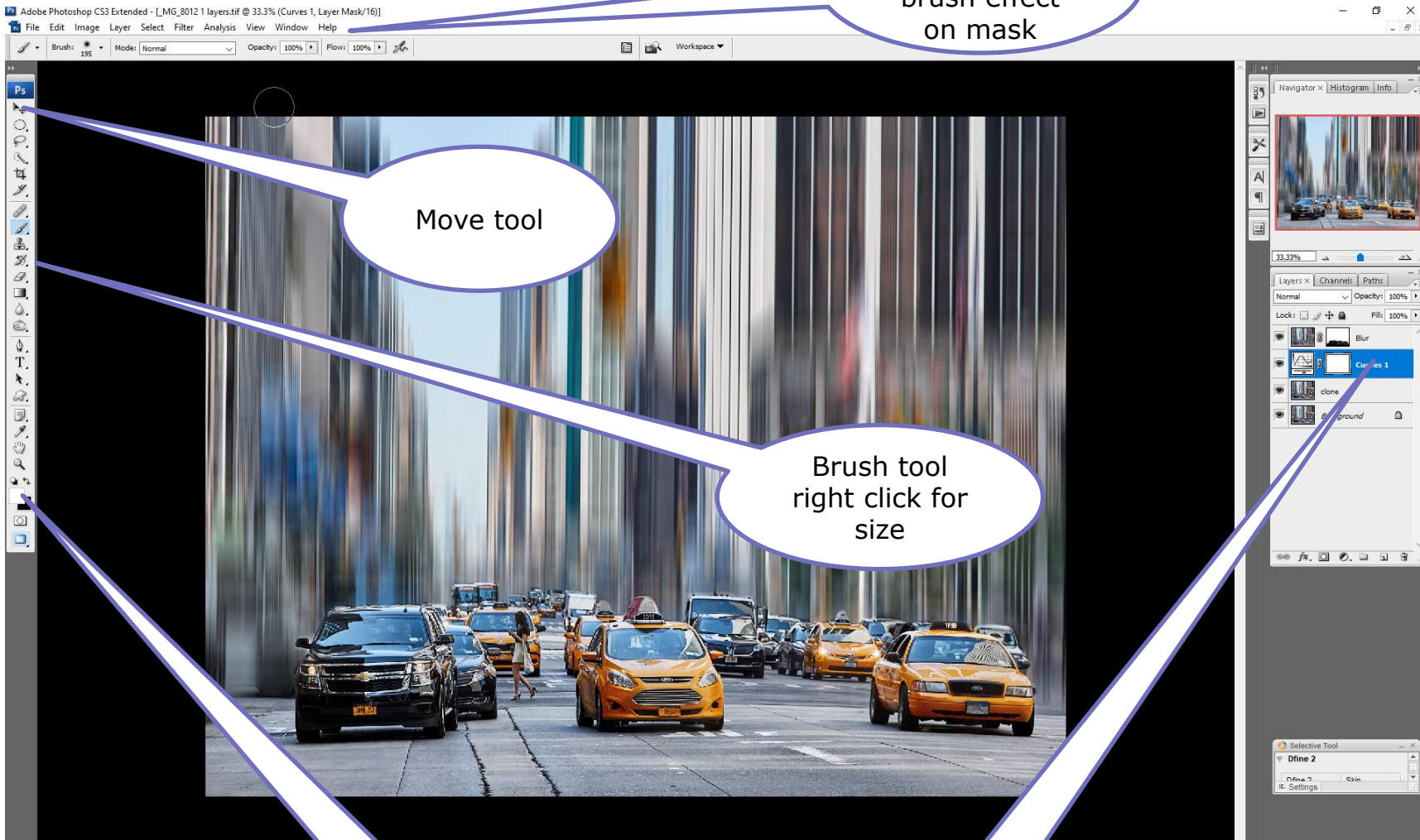
# New York



# LAYER CONTROLS

The image shows a screenshot of the Photoshop Layers panel with several callouts explaining different controls:

- Click to switch layer visibility:** Points to the eye icon next to the 'Curves 1' layer.
- Adjustment layer:** Points to the 'Curves 1' layer, which is highlighted in blue.
- Background layer:** Points to the 'Background' layer at the bottom of the stack.
- Add mask:** Points to the 'Add Layer Mask' icon (a square with a diagonal slash) in the bottom toolbar.
- Opacity:** Points to the 'Opacity: 100%' control in the top right of the Layers panel.
- Layer mask: "paint" to define area of mask which applies to adjustment layer:** Points to the white square mask icon next to the 'Curves 1' layer.
- Duplicate layer: drag and drop:** Points to the 'Duplicate Layer' icon (two overlapping squares) in the bottom toolbar.
- Delete layer: drag and drop:** Points to the 'Delete Layer' icon (a trash can) in the bottom toolbar.
- Adjustments:** Points to the 'Adjustments' icon (a square with a diagonal slash) in the bottom toolbar.




Opacity and flow affects brush effect on mask

Move tool

Brush tool right click for size

Black/white switch

Make sure mask is live when brushing




**Some examples  
- Colour layers**

# Wolf pair







**Some examples  
- Texture layers**

# Cambodian dancers





# **Making “pastel” images**

# MAKING SOFT PASTEL IMAGES

- This type of image has been particularly developed by Irene Froy in the UK
- And some of our members!
- Typified by soft pastel images covering a range of people, landscape and other subjects

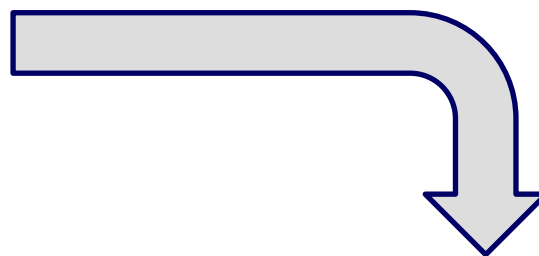


# BASIC APPROACH IN PS

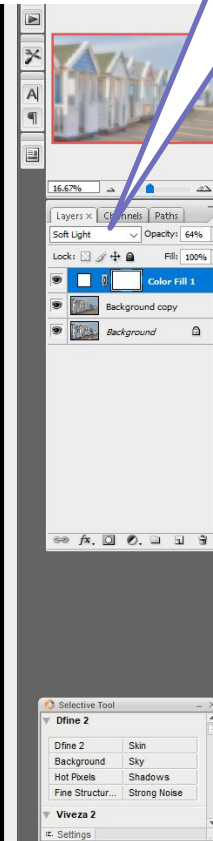
- Duplicate the background layer
- Apply 'Gaussian Blur' to copy layer
- Reduce opacity, or use 'Multiply' blend mode and adjustment layer to lighten overall tones
- Create top empty layer and fill with white. Use 'Soft Light' blend mode. Adjust opacity to suit.



# MAKING PASTEL IMAGES



# BLENDING MODES



Drop down  
box for  
blending  
mode



# **Composite images**



# COMPOSITE IMAGES

- Many images in national/international competitions are composites
- Can be used as a creative tool
- Can use composite images to:
  - Put people in better backgrounds
  - Improve high dynamic range by blending two different exposures of same image
  - Put in a “better” sky to enhance image
  - Or whatever your creative imagination thinks of



But check competition rules to see if this is allowed e.g. not for nature

# COMPOSITE IMAGES

- Open two (or more) source images - minimise each for easier viewing
- Make rough selection of element to be copied
- Copy and paste, or drag and drop, the selection into background layer
- Place roughly in right place and resize to suit (edit>transform>scale and hold shift key to keep proportions constant)
- Can move new layer around using move tool
- Create layer mask
  - Click on mask and choose brush (adjust size/softness as necessary)
  - Use black/white brush to isolate figure by painting around edge
  - Use opacity/flow to soften edges or difficult areas like hair
- Inspect closely at high magnification. Adjust mask further if necessary. Can also add shadows

Note - ensure direction of light is similar to background image.  
Check shadows if bright



**Now it's your turn !!**