

Technique – 10/12/2022

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Taken 10/10/2022 somewhere in Odessa, TX

What you are seeing is the finally results of the process I applied to an image I found in Odessa, TX. As scenes go it has the elements of composition that make it interesting enough to appreciate but I will be breaking down the how the original was transformed into this. The original was exposed properly, just barely blown out, and looked good as is but when the bracketed exposure I took was mixed in I got a corrected version with some contrast; however, tweak the color via some layers and the result is more pleasing.

Even with a good starting image extra exposures and some post processing magic can make a big difference. As I note my process and show you some of the steps it is worth pointing out that each image will be unique and what worked here may not completely fit into the processing of the next image I do, so concepts carry over but actual repeatable steps do not.

The original image



For comparison here is the original and a histogram of its exposure when it was taken. At first glance there is nothing wrong with it and it works as is but there is room for improvements.

In order to have room for improvement I used a tripod and bracketed the exposure you see here by plus or minus two stops as well. With the minimum of three images I had the extra information I needed. As a single image you have only the information captured so artifacts will become more apparent quicker. The other option is to shoot it as a raw file and gain some latitude that way. I chose to bracket my exposures.

My processing I did in GIMP 2.10 will be covered later but depending on how you look at it that initial image or set taken isn't the final image but the

starting point. I collect the information I need at the moment I see it because it is fleeting and lost forever; however, the files and time to try and recreate something I saw isn't.

Application of the multiple exposures

The next stage of the transformation is subtle but I see it as an increase of contrast overall and perhaps more detail in the sky but that part is bright either way. The histogram does show you where the change occurred though.

The histogram as a tool shows the statistics of how many pixels fall into absolute black (0), absolute white (255), and the levels in between. These examples are based on luminance as reported in GIMP. I find this tool useful in field because my LCD on the camera isn't calibrated so results can be inaccurately displayed, in post my monitor is just as unpredictable so the numbers do help me out.

I mentioned the bracketed set but the three images capture essentially the same scene because the tripod keeps the camera in the same position, in theory, so the sky blown out in one image has full detail in another as an example. My shadows, midtones, and highlights have been recorded in detail and I can then combine and modify them as needed. Really didn't have to do much on this image but I used them to pull in some detail on the sky and create a little more contrast anyway.

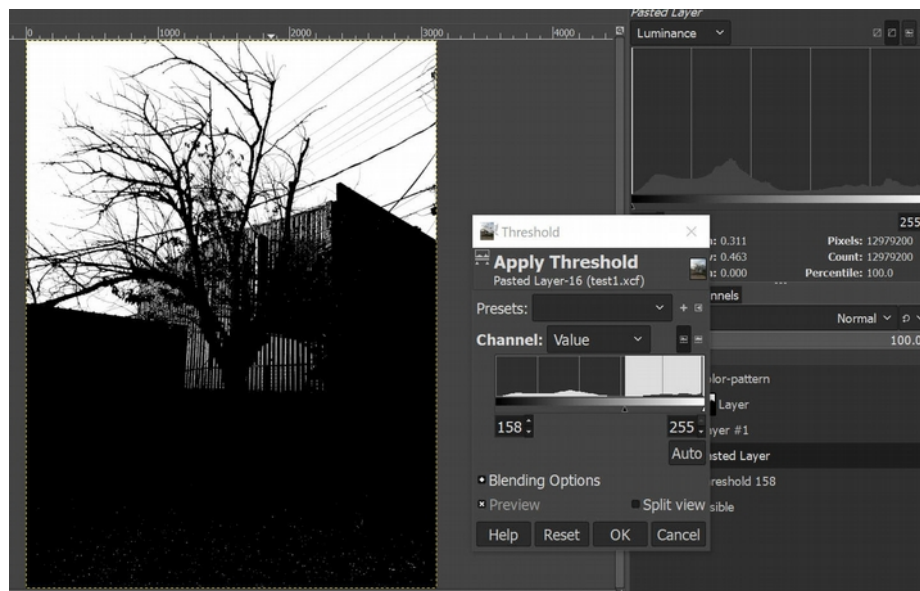


The source of inspiration

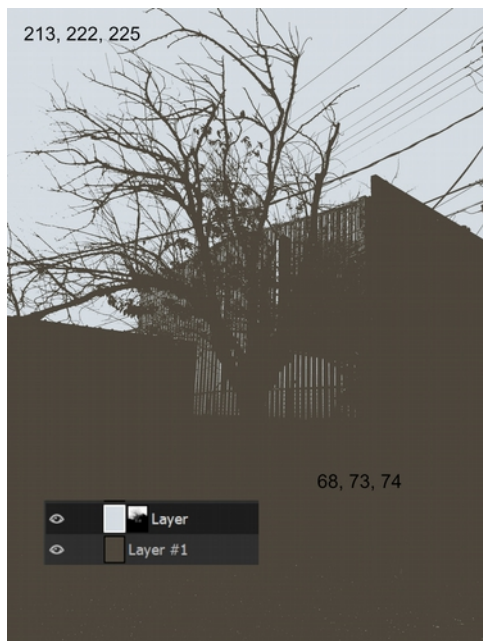
From playing and learning on other images I found I could use a solid color layer based on the value of a selected area or median values of the image itself and then use it as is or invert it for a different effect. Color is a key aspect of how we interpret an image along with the tonal values underneath, both may work together to direct the eye or conflict and have unique subjects highlighted. The image in this case is still color so color is more important here, alter the color and rework the impact an image has. A change applied across everything wasn't my goal here but create contrast in the color in the lower and higher areas.

It is here I would like to tell you about the inspiration from painting and drawing that I

really don't understand but the effort in trying pays off even if I never paint. The two tone statement is essentially laying out the dark and light areas to build up on initially for the next steps. I can at least emulate this in GIMP by doing a threshold on my image.



The dark and light area in this case is between the low point in the histogram (158) and the threshold at 158 yields the black and white pattern shown. Hopefully you begin to see the process of where I went from as it would be software specific as well but I used this pattern to isolate out the area of the image and via the histogram see the median values of the red, green, and blue channels for a RGB color to use. Invert the pattern and repeat to get the other RGB color.



I ended up using 213, 222, 225 as the color where white goes and 66, 73, 74 where black is for this dual colored layer in the final process. Like any tool use brute force and results are not pretty and I tried some ideas that were not pretty at all but I found the method needed in the end. Some of the fun comes in playing and seeing what will happen, sometimes a technique is found to use later.

The final result revisited



layer 05 copy visible blend mode = normal at 100%

layer 04 color pattern blend mode = color erase at 33%

(step 1 - create layer 5 as shown, step 2 – invert the layer and change blend mode to soft light at 100%)

layer 03 overexposed [mask = overexposed inverted] blend mode = multiply at 85%

(pulls the darker values closer to black)

layer 02 underexposed [mask = underexposed] blend mode = darken only at 11%

(helped restore clouds)

layer 01 neutral image blend mode = normal at 100%

The above will likely not make any sense but is my recipe of layers, masks, blend modes, and opacities that I record to recreate the JPGs I save; however, it shows the mix of the bracketed set and color pattern created to form the final result. Tweaking the color via layer 4 and 5 left the histogram more or less the same but the improvements made are very visible. GIMP is the tool for post processing I have learned but I encourage you to learn your tools of choice and push them to produce your own images like this.