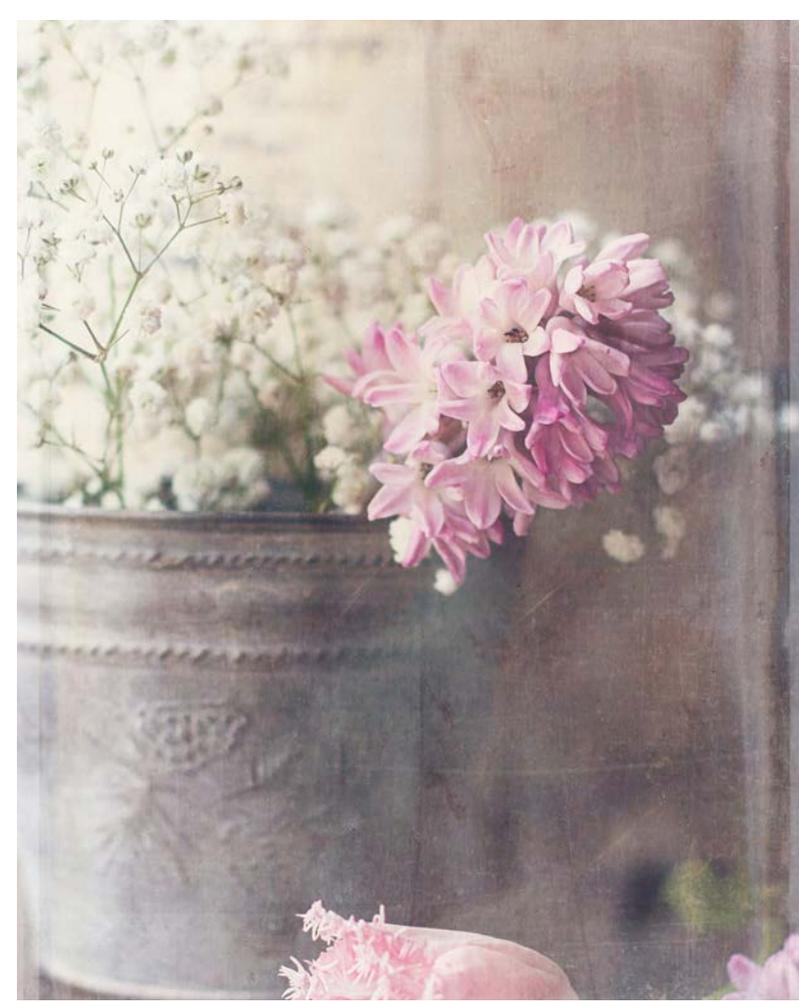


2 LIL' OWLS STUDIO

Working with Textures



In this digital era of photography, there seem to be no bounds to the creativity you can apply to your photographs. We are so lucky to be living in a time where we can fit a camera in our pocket and create art on our computing devices. We no longer have to lug hundreds of pounds of equipment around, like Ansel Adams, trying to get just 1 or 2 good shots for all the effort and then spend weeks in our darkrooms processing those few photos. This alone has opened up photography to the masses when it once was just a profession for the few.

I love creating art, mixed media is my preferred style - mixing textures and elements together to create my art, and working in photoshop is the way I can do this digitally. I began working with and creating textures many years ago. I get so thrilled when I have a beautiful photograph and I start adding textures, changing it and enhancing it in ways I never imagined. This really filled my soul and gave me some direction in my art that was never available before. I spent years trying out every creative pursuit I could find looking for the one that was "my thing". Who was to know that my thing hadn't even been invented yet - and now I couldn't imagine my life without it.

There are many digital styles and philosophies out there when it comes to adding textures and elements to photos. My thing is - start with the very best photo you can and then enhance that with textures. Working on and adding texture to a bad photo doesn't save it - it just makes it a bad photo with a texture on it. Work hard to perfect your photographic craft and then all the work you do to the photo afterward will be so much easier.



What is a texture?

A texture can be a photograph, a scanned image, etc... that you use an overlay on top of your photo.

Close up abstract surfaces make great textures. A few of my favorite surfaces to photograph to use as textures are:

Old plaster walls

Rust

Grunge

Painted surfaces

Cracked paint

Hand-painted papers

Vintage family papers

Vintage music sheets

Old barn wood

and the list goes on and on - essentially anything can be a texture - look around you and experiment.



Where do you begin?

I begin with selecting the absolute best photo out of camera possible. Textures will enhance a good photo; it will not fix a bad photo.

It will turn a good photo into a piece of art. A bad photo will just be a bad photo with a texture on it. You want to start your process out right from the moment you pick up your camera.

Work hard and learn how to use your camera. Figure out what the different modes will do for you and find the one you like to work in best.

I love working in aperture mode for the majority of subjects I shoot. Many prefer full manual. It's your choice. Get the exposure correct. Over or underexposed can sometimes be corrected and sometimes not. You want to use the exposure to enhance your vision.



What photos work best with textures?

Photos with a subject and a simplified background work best. You will not be successful if you are adding texture to an already busy photo.

You need to have some negative space. This would include blank space or great background blur. I shoot on a large aperture (around 2.5-3 on my lens) to produce this result on my photos.

Decide what your main subject is and make that part tack sharp. Then compose the photo making sure that the background will fade into a blur. I call it shooting for the Bokeh (or background blur). I try to make sure the background color is beautiful and adds to my overall vision.

Work the background blur to your advantage. Watch out for the colors and make sure it is enhancing your overall vision. I change angles and take several shots to get the best overall background vs. foreground composition.



How do you choose a texture to use on your photo?

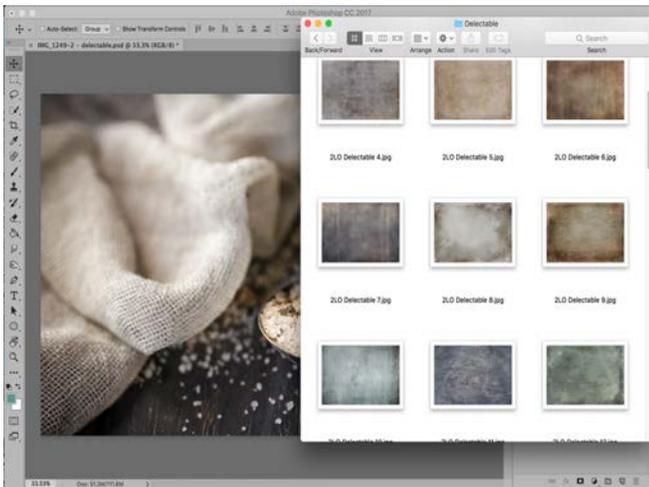
You want to consider scale and color when you are choosing textures.

I used to just haphazardly pick out textures and add them to my photograph. I'd try 20-30 textures on a photo before I got something I liked.

It was a lot of trial and error! I have since discovered that I prefer textures that have a similar color to the background of the photograph with which I am working.

I choose textures now that enhance the original idea I was working toward when I took the photograph. Even though I make some very colorful textures which can be used for a variety of subjects, the majority of the time I still desaturate the color to prevent extra color casting in my image but still allow the texture to show through.

The more you work with textures - the easier and faster it gets to choose ones that do exactly what you imagined.

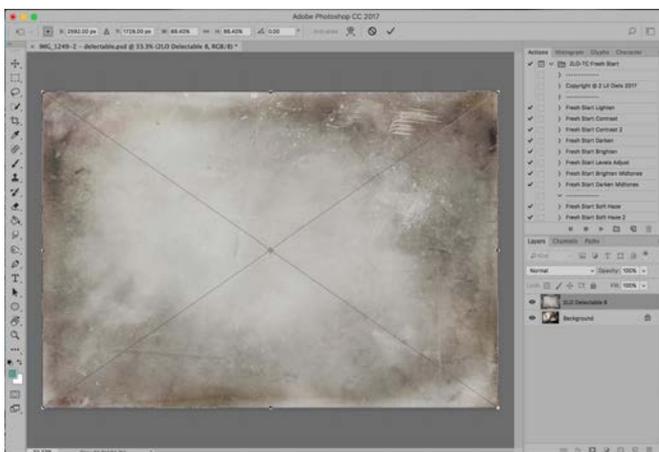


How to place a texture on your photo



How do you add a texture to your photograph? There are a few different methods to do this in Photoshop. One method is to go to the file menu at the top of the workspace and select “place embedded”. This will open a menu box which allows you to navigate to your texture folder and select the texture you want to use.

Another way to add a texture is to open your photo in photoshop, open the folder where you have your texture stored, and use the move tool to drag the texture onto your photo in photoshop. You are now ready to work with the photo and you can close the texture file. You will need to resize the texture to cover the photo.



Once the texture is on top of your photo you will need to resize it to the correct size using the command (control on pc) key and the letter “t”. This will give you some control handles on the texture with which to resize it. When you have the texture placed, simply hit your enter key to lock it down. Now we are ready to do some experimenting! Time to start blending the texture with the photo.



Working in Blend Modes

Experimenting with layers and blending modes is the secret to making great photographic art with textures. Once you add a texture file to your photograph, you have added a “layer” to your file.

Blending modes are really cool! After you change the blending mode of the layer to one of the transparent modes, you have now incorporated the texture into your photograph.

How does a blending mode work? When you add a texture to a file, the blending mode transforms the way you see the original base file. It changes how the top layer interacts with the base files’ tones, lights and darks, and color. It “blends” the layers and does it in different ways depending on which mode you select. There are light and dark modes, overlay modes, color modes etc...

Once you select the transparency mode you like, you can then change the opacity of that layer to determine how heavy you want your texture to appear. There are at least 25 blending modes in Photoshop, but some of my favorite are: Softlight, Overlay, Screen, Hardlight and Multiply. I often experiment with other modes to push the limits. You’d be amazed at how many happy accidents you get from experimenting!



Normal mode:

This is how your photo looks once you have placed the texture. I am going to leave the left side with just the photo for now so we can see how the different blend modes change the photo.



Softlight mode:

This is the texture on 100% Softlight. This is by far my favorite mode to work in with most textures. This mode is wonderful because it is soft, subtle, and easy to build on. I have the texture on just 1/2 of the photo so you can see the before/after. I like to keep it subtle - my goal is to enhance the photo not compete with it.



Overlay mode:

This is the texture on 75% Overlay. Overlay is a stronger mode than Softlight and will produce more dramatic looks. I rarely use this mode at 100% because it is often too harsh. This is the texture on 100% Softlight. This is by far my favorite mode to work in with most textures. This mode is wonderful because it is soft, subtle, and easy to build on. I have the texture on just 1/2 of the photo so you can see the before/after. I like to keep it subtle - my goal is to enhance the photo not compete with it.



Screen mode:

This is the texture on 30% Screen mode. This is a great mode for making things lighter and brighter and adding some beautiful hazing. I do not normally use this on 100% because it is a very strong mode. I often prefer it at 50% or less to best compliment my photo. I have the texture on just 1/2 of the photo so you can see the before/after.



Multiply mode:

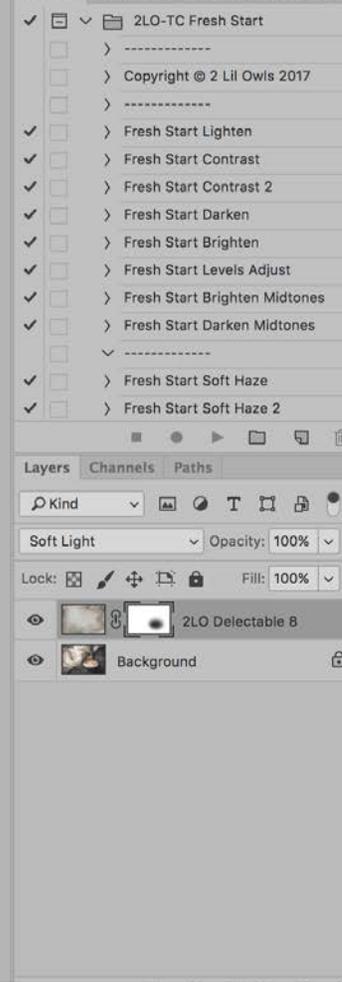
Multiply is a great darkening mode used to add some drama to your work. The texture is applied at 30% Multiply on this photo. I rarely use this mode at 100% because it is simply too dark for most things, but used in moderation it can add some great depth. I have the texture on just 1/2 of the photo so you can see the before/after.



Hardlight mode:

This is the texture used at 50% opacity in the Hardlight mode. This is a very strong mode and is one that works best in moderation. I have the texture on just 1/2 of the photo so you can see the before/after.

I have shown you just a few of my favorite modes I use in Photoshop. These examples are a great way to see how the modes will work with your textures and the effects they will apply. There are a ton of other modes in photoshop for you to try out. Don't be afraid to experiment with some new modes when you are working with your textures.



Using a layer mask

Removing the texture from parts of your photo:

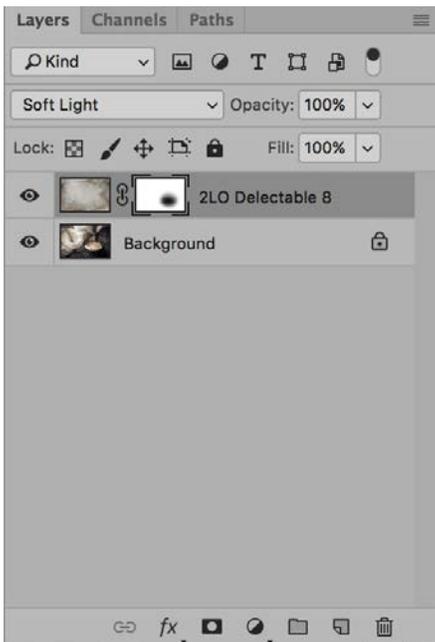
Have you ever applied a texture to a photograph and then wished that the texture wasn't on the main subject, like a face or important feature? We are going to use a layer mask to fix this!

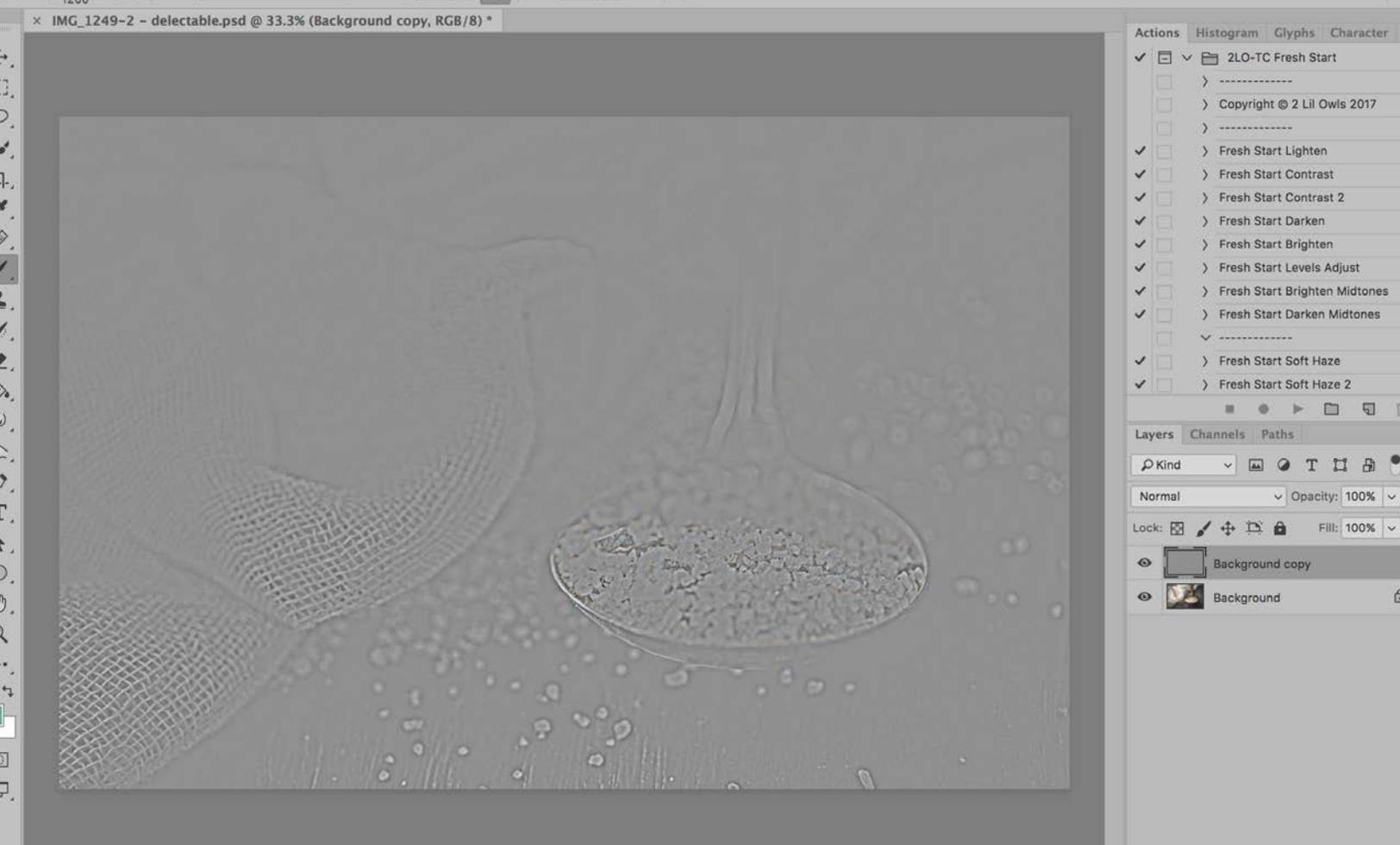
To add a mask - you will select the texture layer and then go to the bottom of the layer palette and click the mask box.



Then you will select a round soft brush, go to the color picker box and select the color black, go up to the opacity box at the top of the screen and pull the opacity of your brush down to about 40% - then you are ready to start masking.

You will select the mask box on your layer and then brush on the areas you want to remove some of the texture from. I work on a lower opacity so I can remove the texture in stages. I don't usually want to remove it all - I want it to blend from where I removed it to where I left it.





I usually want to sharpen my photo before adding the texture. This ensures that my subject is sharp at the start and I am not sharpening both the photo and the texture together later. I do this because to sharpen the texture layer usually makes it too strong and alters the effects I was going for. Definitely, try both ways to see what you like best yourself. It is all about experimenting.

Sharpening your photo

When I sharpen the photo in Photoshop I use the high pass filter instead of the unsharp mask. I like this method best because it defines all the edges of your subject without oversharpening and adding grain into the fill areas. (I usually start my workflow in Lightroom and I do an initial sharpening in that program before coming into photoshop to add textures - so this is a 2nd sharpen of the photo concentrating on crisping up the edges)

How I do this and the settings I use: Duplicate your background layer and while that duplicate copy is still highlighted, go up to the Filter menu and select: Other > Highpass filter. Set the filter radius to 12 pixels. Next, change the blending mode of this layer to Softlight or Overlay. Overlay is stronger than Softlight, so test out each option to see what works best for your image. If the sharpening is too much - simply lower the opacity of that layer until it is just right for your photo.



Digital photography tools and workshops

— 2 Lil' Owls Studio —

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Hello and welcome!

I'm so glad you stopped by. At 2 Lil' Owls Studio, I strive to provide you with the most creative digital tools and workshops to help you take your photographic journey further. I love to help people in their artistic efforts, creating a positive and encouraging environment for you to thrive in.

With our collection of Lightroom Presets, Fine Art Textures, and Creative Photography Workshops – it is easy to elevate your work to new levels.

Wishing you all a very creative day!

~Denise Love

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