

PHOTOSHOP LIQUIFY TOOL “101” FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHER

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There are many uses of the Liquify tool, first issued with Photoshop 6, for the serious and creative photographer, and perhaps more uses for those using Photoshop for graphic arts. Photographs altered with this tool and entered in regular camera club competition may spark some debate. Some applications of this tool change the image to “Abstract” or “Creative” categories. The question then becomes, “What is it. . . a photograph or art?” (and in some cases “art” may be a stretch”).

But. . . even serious photographers need to take a break, once in a while, and just have some fun. The Liquify tool can keep you mesmerized for hours. You can smear, pinch, stretch, twist and create whole new images one would never guess started with a photograph. You can also make very simple and subtle changes that may save an image from the delete file. The last page takes you to a web site with a Liquify tool lesson for the advanced.

This lesson has been prepared using Photoshop CS which does include one new tool, The Turbulence tool, but it was not used in the following samples.

Liquify Tool: Here are the basics:

The Liquify Tool is a tool used to distort the pixels on your screen. . . aptly named *Liquify*, as all the pixels move like soft wet paint, much like finger painting without the mess.

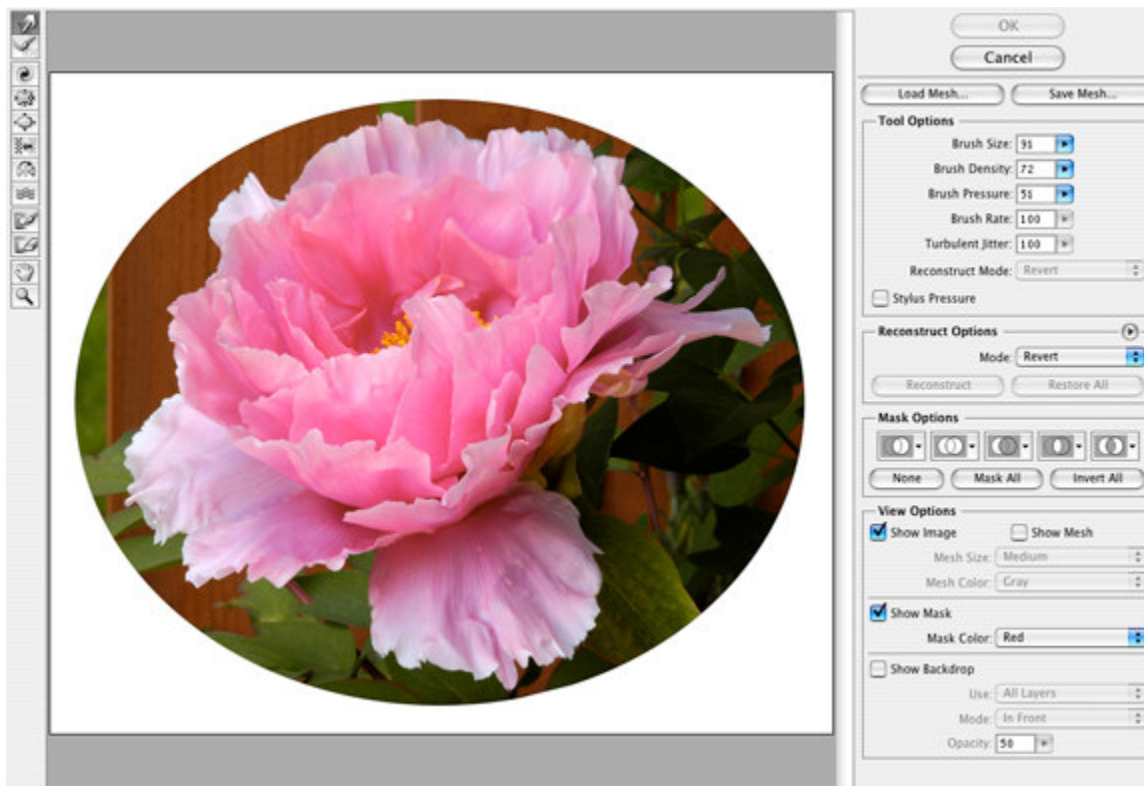
The Mesh: A new copy of your image is created with only the Liquify toolbox and the Liquify dialogue box showing. Photoshop, in its magical way, places a mesh (or a second invisible layer) on top of your photo. The mesh layer looks like a piece of metal screen. You can work with the mesh being visible or invisible. Tools used in the Liquify dialog box twist and distort the mesh or grid into any distortion you can possibly think of, taking your pixels with it. There are several ways to revert your mistakes including a tool that erases the changes in the mesh. Only when you are satisfied with the results do you actually apply the changes to your photo. Like saving selections, you can save and load distortions using the Save Mesh and Load Mesh buttons.

One personal observation before you start. My first experience with the Liquify tool was on my older Macintosh G-3 with less memory and speed than my current computer. I waited what seemed to be endless amounts of time for the changes to apply. Many times I made so many changes my computer completely froze and everything was lost. I found that applying the changes in small increments worked best in that situation.

To get started:

- First, start with a COPY of an 8 bit image. If would you like to turn a portrait into a cartoon, start with a face. Flowers make interesting abstracts. However, images can be just slightly manipulated or improved without a distorted look.

- Choose Liquify (shift com/con X) or from the menu, *Filter, Liquify*. You will now see your photo in the middle, a toolbox on the left and options for using those tools on the right. If you wish to see and work the mesh visible, check the Mesh check box in the View Options area.
- If you have areas of your photo you want untouched, you can “freeze” those areas before you begin by dragging the Freeze tool over those areas before you begin. The Thaw tool does the reverse. On this example, I did not use the freeze tool.



• The Warp Tool: All the adjustments in these examples (except the green chair) were made with this tool (a great tool for beginners). This photo might be used on a card, but had an objectionable fence in the background and a “hole” on the right side under the pedals. The Warp tool, which looks like a hand and finger, will be used to make a very simple distortion of the background and also to pull the lower right side of the flower down to cover the empty space.

Tool Options:

Brush Size controls the size of the brush cursor from 1 to 600 pixels. For this photo, I started with a brush size of 160.

Brush Pressure controls the speed of the changes to the photo, with the strongest part being in the center of the circle. Imagine finger painting, and begin pushing and swirling parts you wish to

maneuver. Change the brush size and experiment with the brush pressure. Using a larger brush size, I placed the circle on the right side and pulled the pedals down. With a smaller brush, I pushed the edges of the oval (for the Polaroid transfer look). *If you have a Wacom Tablet attached, you will have a check box to turn pressure sensitivity on and off.*

When (not if) you make a mistake, the second tool is the reconstruct tool (or the eraser). Move this tool over the area you wish to revert and your original photo is restored only in the places you cover with the reconstruct tool. If you wish to restore the entire photo, hold down Alt or Option key and hit the “Revert” button, (advanced users will find several revert options using the “Reconstruct Options”) When you are pleased with the result, click the OK button. *A safer way to work is to hit the OK button each time you are satisfied with an area, save your work, then return to the Liquify tool and continue making adjustments.*



Finished Peony

Here is another example making changes in the shape this rose and its leaves. Because the background is plain, the rose could be maneuvered in any direction. The original rose is rather round in shape and the leaves touch the left side. The leaf on the right dominates the space and takes my eye out of the picture. (However my correction of this leaf is very unsatisfactory and ready for total removal or reconstruction, but left in to show you the bad with the good.)



Original



Altered

In the next photos the gray Koi in the middle is somewhat in focus, the rest were blurred. I cropped the photo and manipulated the out of focus fish into various shapes.



Original



Still a photograph?

Remember watching a kaleidoscope make beautiful designs when you were a child? Now you can do almost the same thing on your screen. When you want to be mesmerized, pick any photo you have and apply the *Twirl Clockwise* tool. Just hold it down in one place and watch the pixels be transformed into circles. . . it is fascinating! I will toss this in the trash, but I had several minutes of enjoyment watching these circles being created.



Original



Twirl Clockwise tool

Other tools are:

- Turbulence Tool (only in CS): Looking for ripples on water? This is your tool and a very powerful one. It also can be used for smoke and cloud effects. The Turbulence Jitter option controls the speed. The movements are somewhat softer than the Warp tool as it scrambles the pixels.

- Pucker Tool: Moves pixels toward the center of the brush area as you hold down the mouse button or drag.

- Bloat Tool: Moves pixels away from the center of the brush area as you hold down the mouse button or drag.

- Push Left Tool (or Shift Pixels Tool): Moves pixels to the left when you drag the tool straight up (pixels move to the right if you drag down). You can also drag clockwise around an object to increase its size, or drag counter-clockwise to decrease its size. To push pixels right when you drag straight up (or to move pixels left when you drag down), hold down the Alt/Opt key as you drag.

- Mirror Tool: This tool may be called the Reflection tool in older versions. It copies pixels from an area of the image perpendicular to the direction of the stroke and mirrors them in the brush area. Left to right stroke picks up pixels from below the brush and right to left picks up pixels from above the brush. Option/Alt key is used for parallel mirroring. If you are trying to mirror a large area, overlap straight strokes in the same direction (use the shift key to keep your lines straight) This one will take some practice.

Ken Hales sent this tip. Russell Brown has created a great lesson (advanced in my opinion) using the Liquify tool. The website address is: <http://russellbrown.com/body.html>.

In conclusion: This tool is as endless as your imagination and as Adobe's Julieanne Kost said, "it can be used for good or evil." I hope this gets you started, the rest is up to you!