

The background is a solid blue color. In the upper right, there is a large, stylized spiral graphic. In the lower left, there is a stylized, abstract figure that resembles a dancer or a person in motion, rendered in a darker shade of blue. The figure has a long, thin leg and a more complex, multi-limbed upper body.

Tips and Tricks

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Keeping an Eye on Digital

Art Tech Speaker Helene DeLillo Brings Her Retouching Expertise to Imaging USA

This year's PPA Imaging USA Conference & Expo will feature a new speaker, Dr. Helene DeLillo, whose expertise in digital retouching is widely known throughout the imaging industry. Sponsored by the Art Tech specialty group, DeLillo is president of Dancing Icon Inc., a New York-based company whose clientele includes many high-profile names in the fashion and entertainment industries.

DeLillo's program is scheduled for Sunday, July 30, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. "The Art of Digital Retouching" will cover the essentials of digital retouching for professional photographers and digital artists, with techniques for using Adobe Photoshop's Airbrush and Cloning tools, color corrections, layering techniques, lighting effects and more. DeLillo has previously taught at the Rochester Institute of Technology, The International Center of Photography, Parson's School of Design, and The School of Visual Arts in New York.

Known as Dr. Helene by her loyal following, DeLillo gives Professional Photographer readers a sneak peek at her upcoming program.



Before

By Helene DeLillo

As a digital retouching artist, it is my job to take a professionally created image and use my retouching skills to enhance the subject's best attributes and to mask the less desirable ones. I use a step-by-step

process to accomplish these goals.

The first step is to evaluate the image. I have to determine what the photograph is trying to sell. Is it the moment in time? Is it the model's expression? Is it the clothes she's wearing?

In this photograph, the model is the most important part of the image. I want to make her look her best, just as a portrait photographer would

want to do in a professional portrait. The model has several items that need to be addressed: skin blemishes, thin eyelashes, shadows under the eyes, loose hairs, and pale lips.

Next let's talk about technique. I prefer to use a Wacom graphics tablet with the Adobe Photoshop Airbrush tool. If you've ever tried retouching an image with a mouse, you've probably found that it's like trying to paint the Mona Lisa with a hockey puck. The graphics tablet is essential to producing natural brush strokes. In fact, I've developed my own Airbrush stroke that looks, feels, and works just like a traditional (non-digital) Iwata airbrush.

Before you start working on the image, open it in Photoshop and duplicate the background layer (Layer>Duplicate Layer). Name the new layer "working retouch." This will ensure that you always have the original to go back to in case you over retouch (Figure 1).

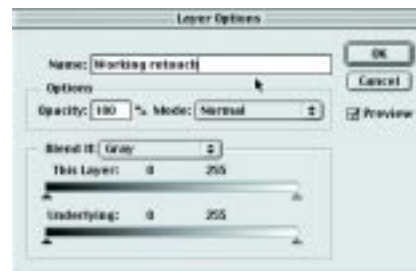


Figure 1

Once you have the file open, start by lightening the area under the eyes. Double click on the Airbrush tool to bring up the Airbrush dialog box (Figure 2) and

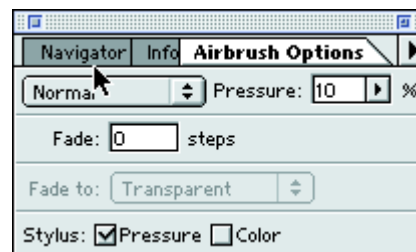


Figure 2



After

change your settings to read Normal for the Blending mode and 10% for Pressure. Hold down the option key (opt key/Macintosh, alt key/Windows) to sample the lighter area under the eyes. This will change the default color in the menu bar to the color you'll be using to airbrush the shadows. Choose an appropriate size brush and lightly go over the shadows until they begin to lighten. Be careful not to over retouch.

This technique works very well on certain images, however there are many ways to control your Airbrush color. For example, you can go back into the Airbrush dialog box and change the Blending mode to Lighten (Figure 3). When you're in this mode, you can sample a dark color in the image and the Airbrush tool will automatically create a lightened version of it. The Blending modes give you all kinds of options for

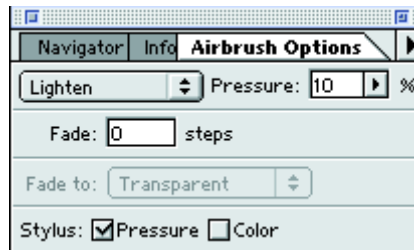


Figure 3

applying color to the image. Experiment with these options and discover what they can do for you.

Next, go to the Layer menu and select Adjustment Layer (Layer>New>Adjustment Layer). A dialog box will pop up. Type in the name "Sharpen Eyes" after the word Levels. Leave the Opacity and Mode at 100% and Normal respectively. Click OK.

Another dialog box will pop up with a histogram (tonal range) of the image, giving you the highlight, mid-tone, and shadow information. You will

see three triangles under the histogram. The black triangle adjusts the shadows, the gray adjusts the mid-tones, and the white adjusts the highlights. Move the black and gray triangles to the right to darken the entire image until the eyes stand out. Click OK.

Now we want to use the adjustment layer as a layer mask and airbrush in contrast where we need it, to give the appearance of sharpening the eyes. Make sure your adjustment layer—Sharpen Eyes—is still active (The brush icon will be on the left of the layer name in the Layers palette.) Hit D on your keyboard to go to the default colors. The foreground should be black and background white. Select all (cmd-A/Macintosh, ctrl-A/Windows) and hit the delete key to deselect the entire layer effect. The layer is still in the Layers palette, you have

just masked out the effect. Now select the Airbrush tool and zoom into the eye. Double click on the Airbrush tool and set the Pressure to 12%. Brush along the edge of the eye; you'll notice that the area you are brushing gets darker.

You can vary the Pressure of your brush by hitting different numbers on the keypad. For example, the number 1 equals 10%, 2 equals 20%, etc. After you brush in the effect, you can erase color as necessary with the Eraser tool. You can also airbrush in some shadow color to darken the eyebrows.

Now go to the Layer menu and select a new adjustment layer. Go to the second mode in the first dialog box and select Color Balance for Layer Type. Label the layer "Lip Color." Adjust the color balance until the lips turn a red. Select all and hit the backspace key to delete

the entire layer effect. Use the same brushing techniques as before until the lips are colored the way you like them (Figure 4). The nice thing about adjustment layers is that you can always undo them if for some



Figure 4

reason the client comes back and wants to make the lips a different color. You just double click on the layer and change it.

To finish the image, I used the Cloning and Airbrush tools on the "working retouch" layer to straighten the hairlines, fill in the missing hair, and remove blemishes. Finally, I used the Airbrush tool with a soft edge and light black/brown color sampled from the eyelash area to paint in more eyelashes. Most photographers use the Rubber Stamp for this kind of retouching, but if you use this tool incorrectly, it makes the image look flat. Rubber Stamp Tip: Sample frequently and vary the opacity. The area you are cloning will look more natural.

Have fun with your images. Digital retouching tools keep getting more powerful and easier to use. Feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions helene@dancingicon.com. ■