

Traditional Techniques Go Digital

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Photoshop® applications for creating interesting and affordable alternatives to classic looks.



Figure 1: Click anywhere in your screen to activate the "Type" menu.



Figure 2: When creating effects for type, think large. You can always reduce the size of the type later.

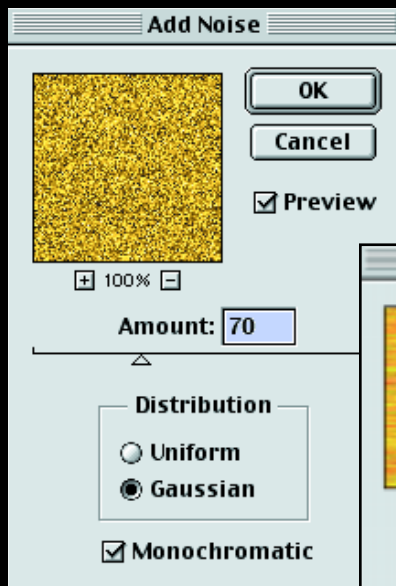


Figure 3: The noise generates dots that we will blur and distort to create the mottled texture typical in gold leaf.

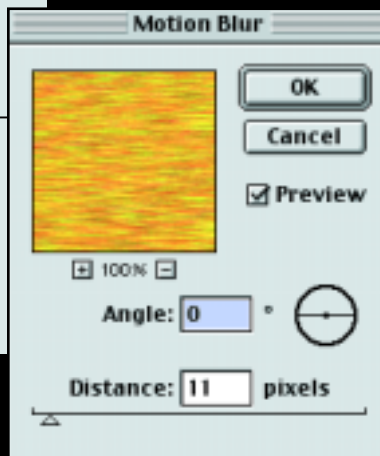


Figure 4: I used a distance of 11 pixels. However, this number is relative to the size of your document, so your distance setting may be different from mine.

About the authors: Mary E. McGivern is a multimedia artist and instructor at Red Rocks Community College Multimedia Center. She was a sign painter for many years before being kidnapped by Photoshop. Lou Kingman is a Photoshop expert and was the original instructor at the nationally acclaimed Red Rocks Community College Multimedia Center. He is partner with Mary in their web design business, Bytestyle.

FOR TEN YEARS, I was a sign painter. With my quill and a can of 1 Shot® I was ready to take on any sign job.

Boy, have times changed. Because the toxic materials were causing problems with my health, I closed my sign shop and decided to return to school to try another career. By some quirk of fate I ended up in a Photoshop class and life has never been the same.

Now I think in pixels and dream about Postscript 3 compatibility. Instead of creating signs for local businesses, my partner, Lou Kingman and I create artwork and signage for the web and computer-based training programs.

However, the principles are the same as when I constructed the signs from sign board and wood.

Designing signs digitally can open a new world for sign professionals. Consider these advantages:

- Sign painters can easily blend two photographs together
- Create custom type effects
- Match a client's promotion materials
- Recreate a client's logo or artwork for multiple applications
- Perform tedious tasks in much less time

Photoshop is a digital imaging powerhouse that can create just about any effect that you can dream up. Push some pixels around to create the look of carved wood, chrome, gold leaf, crystal, etched glass and more — at a fraction of the traditional construction cost. Then, bring the digital file into a sign-printing program and print your artwork from there.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Gold leaf was always one of my favorite sign techniques. The cost, however, prevents many small businesses from selecting it. Real gold leaf is quite expensive and the construction process can be time-intensive.

I often offered lettering with a gold paint but the effect is nowhere near as rich as gold leaf. While no digital effect can replace actual gold leaf, we can create a gold leaf effect in Photoshop that is quite lovely at a fraction of the cost of real gold.

The result, printed on pressure-sensitive vinyl and applied to various surfaces such as windows, vehicles or interior signs, is a less expensive alternative for cost-conscious customers. Since gold leaf is shiny, this effect is most effective when printed to glossy materials.

Here is how to create the effect in Photoshop...

Create a new document in Photoshop.

We will create this effect with type for this example but you can use any logo or graphic image as well.

Select the *Type* tool (T)(see **Figure 1**).

Click anywhere in your screen to activate the *Type* menu. Choose a bold font that will show off your gold leaf effect.

Type *GOLD* (or anything else you choose). I chose a font size of 100 so that I could really see the effect. When creating effects for type, think large. You can always reduce the size of the type later (see **Figure 2**).

LOOKS LIKE GOLD

Remember that all digital artwork is an illusion. It is up to you as the artist to create the *reality*.

Start by filling a new layer with a bright, gold color.

Add *Noise* (*Filter, Noise, Add noise*). The noise generates dots that we will blur and distort to create the mottled texture typical in gold leaf.

Make the noise monochromatic in the *Noise* dialog box (see **Figure 3**).

Add the *Motion Blur* filter (*Filter, Blur, Motion Blur*).

You want the streaks to be short. I used a distance of 11 pixels. However, this number is relative to the size of your document, so your distance setting may be different from mine (see **Figure 4**).

You may need to adjust the colors at this point. I wanted my gold leaf to have that bright shiny look to it so I used the *Levels* dialog box (*Image, Adjust, Levels*) to brighten the color and contrast (see **Figure 5**).

Pull the white slider bar to the left to brighten your lightest colors and pull your black bar slider to the right to darken the darkest colors. The middle slider adjusts the midtones of your image. If you want your color to be generally lighter, drag the slider bar to the left. Drag it to the right if you want it generally darker in color.

Another way to adjust the colors is to use *Variations* (*Image, Adjust, Variations*). This intuitive menu can help you change the general tones of the image (mid-tones) and the highlight and shadow areas of the image.

You can also lighten and darken the image. The *Variations* dialog box works on a subtractive color model. In other words, if my image has too much red in it, I would add cyan to it to subtract the red that is on the opposite side of the color wheel. You can add and subtract to your image until you arrive at the desired effect (see **Figure 6**).

FEELS LIKE GOLD

Next, add texture.

Select *Filter, Distort, Ocean Ripple*. The *Ocean Ripple* filter is only one of several distort filters that are standard in

Photoshop. It creates a merle pattern that, in this case, emulates the reflections in gold leaf.

Drag the slider bars to the left until you have a convincing effect. I used a ripple size of 11 and a magnitude size of 13 (see **Figure 7**). All images are different, so do not be afraid to experiment with these settings.

We have to mask out the gold leaf pattern with the type. To do this we will use a clipping group. "A clipping group is a group of layers, the bottom layer of which acts as a mask. The bottom layer

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clips all the associated layers so only the parts that fall within the shape of its own transparency mask can contribute to the image" (Dayton, Davis 1999).

Show your *Layers* palette (*Windows, Show Layers*). Make sure that the type layer is underneath the gold leaf texture layer (see **Figure 8**).

Hold down your option key (*alt Windows*) and click the border of the two layers in the *Layers* palette. Photoshop uses the transparent areas in your layer to create a mask.

CREATE AN OUTLINE

Traditionally, we painted an outline around gold leaf to protect and secure the edges. It also enhances the shine of the leafing.

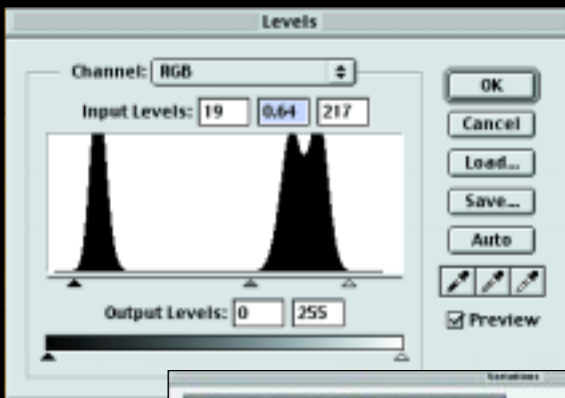


Figure 5: Use the "Levels" dialog box to brighten the color and contrast.

Figure 6: The "Variations" menu can help you change the general tones of the image and the high-light and shadow areas.



Figure 7: The "Ocean Ripple" filter is one of the standard distort filters in Photoshop.

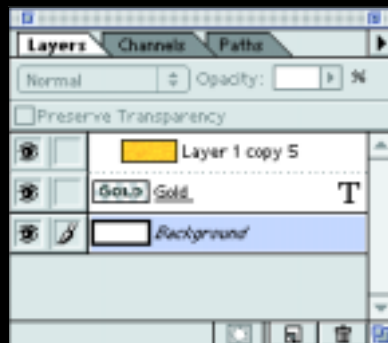


Figure 8: In the "Layers" palette, the "Type" layer should be underneath the "Texture" layer. Photoshop uses the transparent areas in your layer to create a mask.



Figure 9: Choose an appropriate pixel width that doesn't choke out the type.

To complete the Photoshop illusion, create an outline around the digital gold leaf.

Select the topmost layer in your Layers palette (see **Figure 8**).

Click on the *New Layer* icon in the Layers palette to create a new layer.

⌘-click (Macintosh) or ctrl-click (Windows) your Type layer to make it an active selection. You should see the marching ants (small, moving dots) around your type. Your new layer should still be highlighted.

Make black your foreground color (or type *D* to activate your default color settings).

Let's outline the gold leaf.

Choose *Edit, Stroke*. Choose an appropriate pixel width. I chose 5 pixels. You can always try a pixel width and if you don't like it, undo (⌘-z Macintosh; Ctrl-z Windows). Select *outside stroke* because we do not want the type to be choked out by the outline (see **Figure 9**).

Gold leaf looks great on top of a dark color. I chose a dark blue. If you are creating the gold leaf for a window or as a vehicle sign, the last step is not necessary. In fact, you may want to delete the background so that the gold leaf is sitting on transparency.

Select your *Background* layer and fill it with a dark color.

You have completed your gold leaf effect.

Digital imaging will never replace all traditional sign techniques. However, it can add to the sign painter's offerings. If we can imitate expensive sign options digitally, maybe sign businesses can keep the customers that cannot afford the higher-priced items. SB



Gold leaf is beautiful but expensive. Affordable illusions, rendered through Photoshop are an alternative that may serve a client's needs.