

Textures in Photoshop

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What is a Texture?

A texture is an image which does not stand on its own but which you can use to support or unify another image by replacing part of the image or by filling in blank space.

You can download standard textures off the internet but, then, they wouldn't be yours. It is easy enough to collect a library of your own images. For example:

- Clouds
- Book Covers
- Carpet
- Bad Paintwork
- Bad Plaster
- Frosted Glass
- Wood Grain
- Carpet
- Peeling Wallpaper

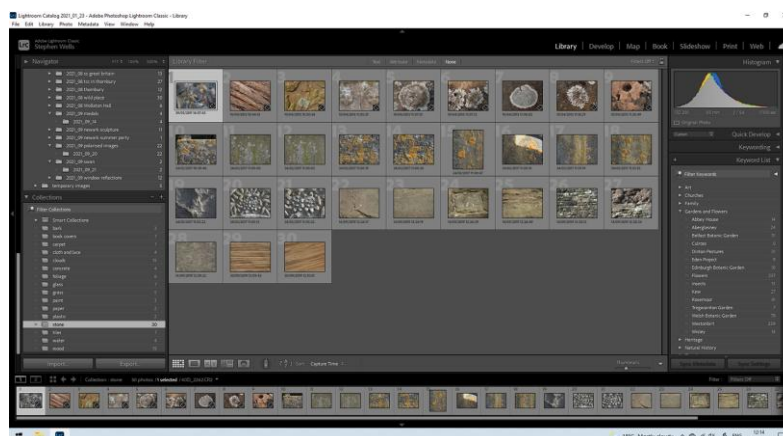
There are sources available throughout your house. Not that I am suggesting that you have bad plasterwork and peeling wallpaper... but if you do, photograph it before you repair it!



This image of the "Sealed Knot" was taken at a display in a modern town square



By replacing the background with some dark clouds from my texture library, I have created the impression of smoke on a battlefield.



Images of "Stone" Textures held as a "Collection" in Lightroom

Cutting Out the Background

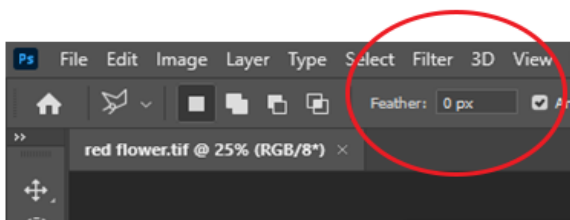
One of the commonest tasks in using textures is replacing a background. This can create problems if the new and old backgrounds are very different in brightness or colour. The problem is that, having made a selection, with a feather to soften the edge, Photoshop includes in the feathered edge some pixels from the original background.

So, if you take a flower on a white background and replace the background with black, some white pixels from the original background will remain.

The solution is to contract the selection by a few pixels so that all pixels in the feather come from the flower and none from the original background. The contraction need to be about 3 pixels – not something which would materially change an image which is probably several thousand pixels across.

So, here is the process:

Set the feather in the ribbon at the top of the screen to zero. As usual, Photoshop allows you to set the feather in several places... we only actually need to set it in one place!



Set the initial feather to zero px.

Now make the selection

In the "Select" Menu choose "Contract".

Choosing "Contract" assumes that the flower is selected. If the background is selected, choose "Expand" from the same menu. Either way, the effect, in this example, is to move the selection boundary towards the centre of the flower.

A popup menu will now appear asking for the size of the contraction. Specify 3 pixels.

Now choose the "Feather" from the same menu. When the popup menu appears, specify a feather of 2 pixels.

This has identified some pixels from round the edge of the subject. Don't forget to delete them. You will now have a clean selection with no artefacts left over from the original background.

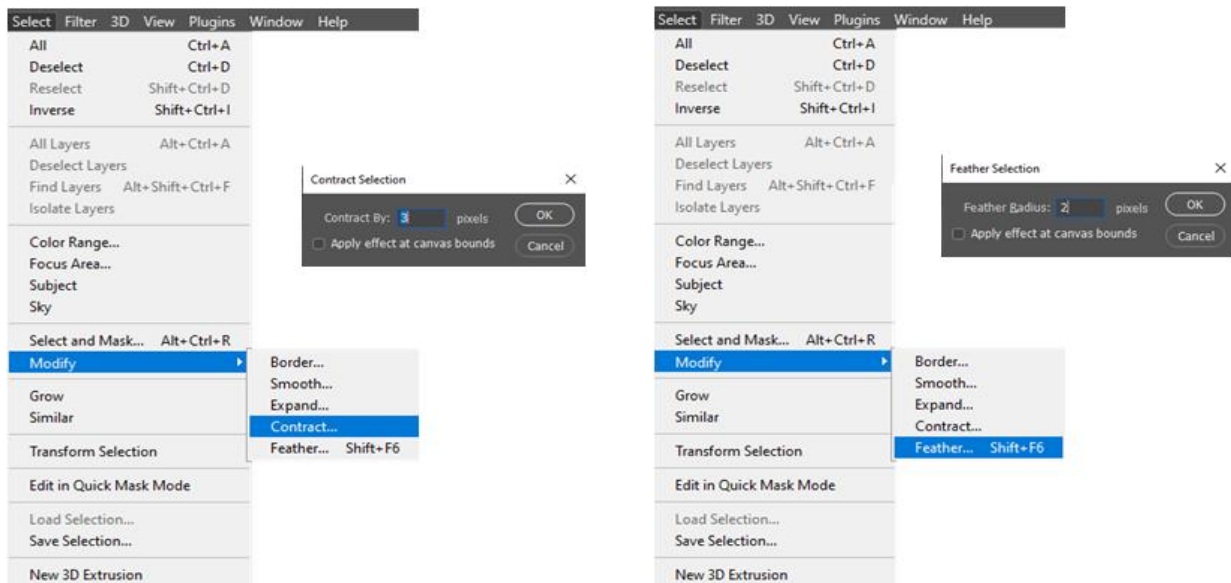


A flower on a white background



The background has been replaced with black but a white border remains from the original background.

NOTE: a very large feather (25px) has been used to make the effect obvious. Normally about 2px would be used!



Use the “Select” menu to, set the amount by which to contract the selection to 3p. Then use the same menu to set the feather to 2px.

What Can You do with a Texture?

The texture layer can go above or below the subject. If it is below, it will form a background. The texture layer can then be combined with other colour layers and blending. A texture layer above the subject layer will appear as a foreground. Masking will be needed to reveal the subject. More blending could be used together with the Opacity slider to allow a layer to show through another layer.

Ultimately there are just three adjustments which in combination can achieve interesting effects:

- Blending modes
- Opacity
- Masking

To demonstrate how this works, it is best to work through a couple of examples.

Example: Magnolia



In this photograph of a magnolia against an overcast sky, the background has been replaced with an image of a piece of cardboard and the branches to look as if they are painted in with black ink.

The flowers and branches are treated differently so two masks are required.

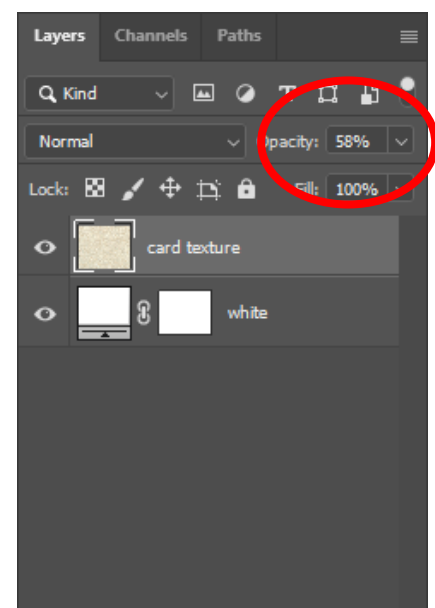


Separate masks for flowers and branches

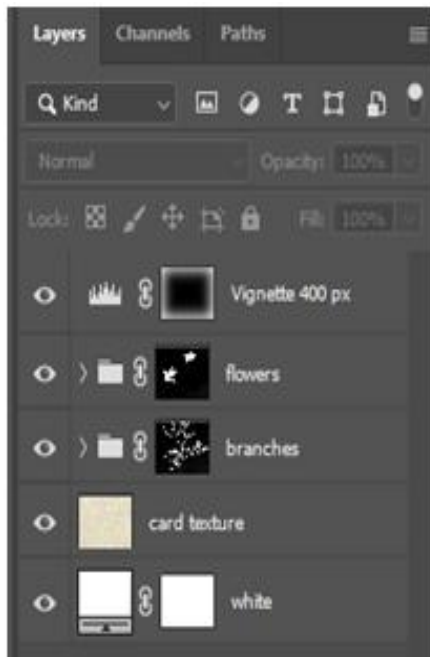
The texture layer is rather dark, It needs lightening.

A white layer provides a base colour with which to mix the tones of the texture. Use the opacity slider to do the mixing.

In this case, by reducing the opacity of the texture layer, the white has shown through. The tones of the texture layer have been lightened.



Mixing the background with white



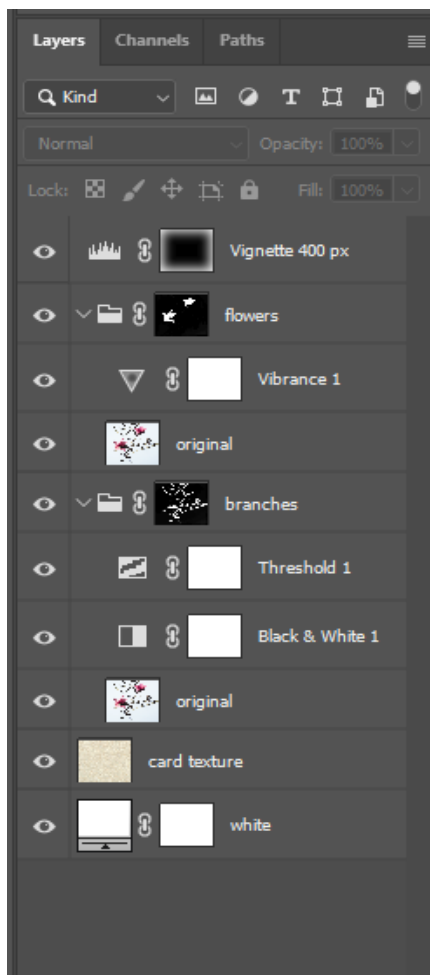
Use separate layer groups for the different parts of the image. This helps to separate the changes made to each part of the image.

The default blending mode for a layer group is “Pass Through”. This would mean that any adjustment layer in a group would also affect the layers and groups below. So, set the blending mode to “Normal” to keep the groups separate.

The mask on a layer group affects all the layers within the group. So you only need to provide it once.

So, here, the texture is at the bottom. Above it are layer groups which affect the flowers and branches separately.

A vignette, at the top of the stack, to darken the corners.



Within each layer group there is a copy of the original image. This is a consequence of setting the layer group blending modes to “Normal”.

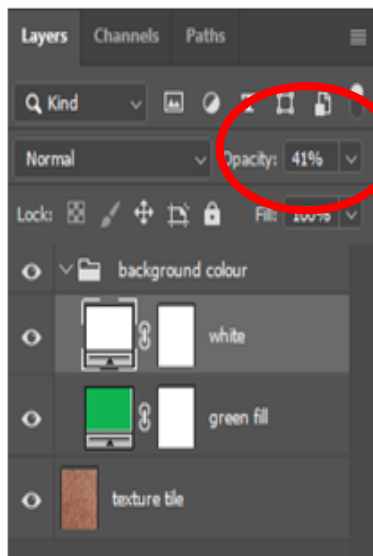
For the flowers group I have added a little vibrance to make the colours more intense.

For the branches I want the effect of black ink. To do this, I have used a black and white adjustment layer to convert the layer to monochrome. At this stage, the layer is in a grey scale. The Threshold layer converts this to just black and white with no greys.

Example: Honeysuckle

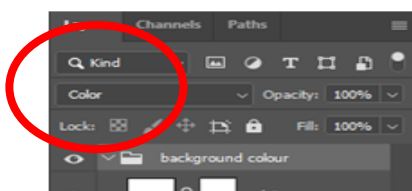


Here, the background has been replaced with texture taken from a floor tile. The colour of the background has been created in Photoshop.

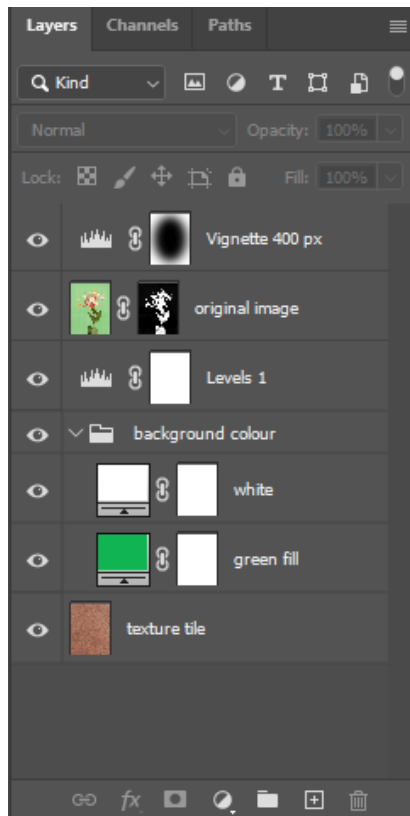


The texture is taken from a floor tile which was originally terracotta. Two colour layers (white and green) have been blended to create the final colour for the background

As with the previous example, the opacity sliders for the colour layers have been used to create the mix.



In order to replace completely the colour of the floor tile, the colour layers have been placed in a layer group. The blending mode for the layer group has been set to "Color". This means that the colour is taken from the layer group. The texture layer itself only provides the luminosity: the lights and darks.



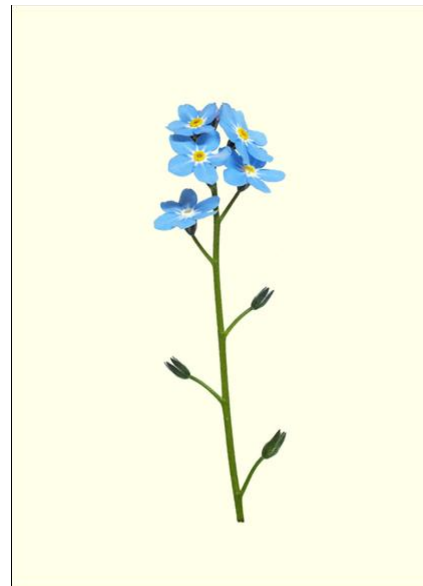
This is how the layer stack looks with the original image included and masked to remove the background.

I have added a vignette to complete the effect.

A Few More Examples



Oak Leaves on a background created from the inside cover of an old book



This Forget-Me-Not originally had a white background



*A Yellow Flower laid onto a Cactus
(and a canvas texture in the background)*



*This Magnolia is placed on a
background which started out as a
place mat made from strips of
bamboo. The drop-shadow effect is
created in Photoshop.*

Meanwhile... there is nothing new. Going back to the Seventeenth Century, Rembrandt was using textured backgrounds.



*Self Portrait (1660)
Rembrandt van Rijn*