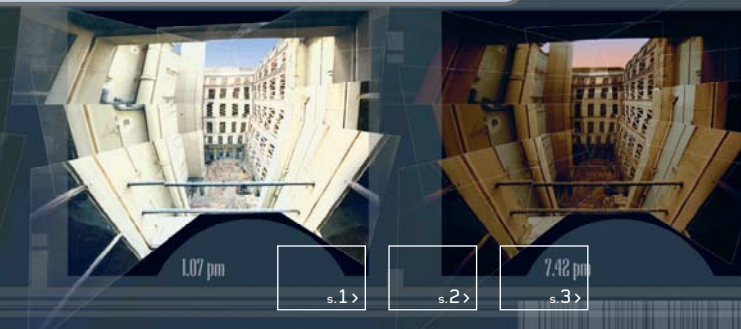




# CREATING PHOTOMONTAGES WITH PHOTOSHOP

## *A Designer's Notebook*



*Demonstrated by leading French artists*

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Reinforced by the young woman's vaguely religious gesture, the light brings an almost sacred connotation to this image. The cracks in the stone wall seem to break up the woman's face, and the picture's timeworn look is reminiscent of Michelangelo's frescoes. This creation seems closer to a piece of painted artwork, in the craftsman-like manual sense of the word, than to so-called digital work, with its connotation of extreme rigor and precision.

# studio 08

ODILE PASCAL

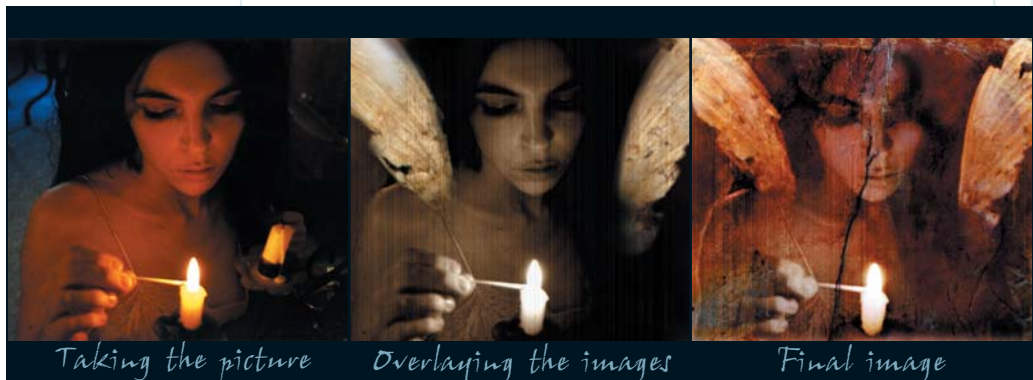
## Hardware used

- Canon EF camera, 50mm lens
- Fuji 400 ISO film
- One candle and one lamp
- Umax Astra 1200S scanner
- Performa 6400 - 200 MHz PowerPC, 140 MB RAM  
2.4 MB hard drive
- 17-inch Pronitron monitor

## Software used

- Photoshop 6.0

## From Woman to Angel



*Taking the picture*

*Overlaying the images*

*Final image*

After studying at the Beaux-Arts in Marseilles and working in filmmaking, I found a compromise between those two worlds, one in which I can put a character on stage, and then model, color, and texturize her using Photoshop. Paintings of women represent a large part of my work. Using costumes and accessories, I enjoy creating often baroque or timeless worlds, blending styles and eras, and drawing my inspiration from mythological and symbolist imagery. The resulting work, which is quite unlike traditional photography, is designed to create a fairy tale-like universe in a pictorial style close to that of the Italian Renaissance.

I decided to avoid traditional representations of angels, with their characters dressed in white, with halos and big wings, set against a background of clouds.

For this piece, ( my idea was to transform the woman into an angel.



Place the wings



Tone down background

Soft lighting

Integrate the textures

Eliminate these elements

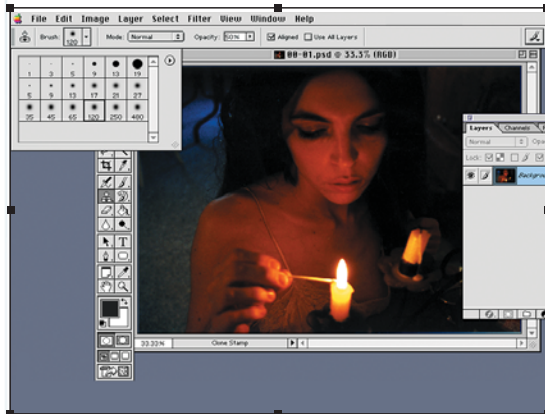
# Stage 1

## Setting up the photo

I chose a very minimal setup, using a woman named Marina as my model. Taking the full-face photograph in very dim light gave a feeling of intimacy. My goal was to render the moment like a little play; a portrait that would sum up my character's history.

The biggest part of the job would be **integrating** the two exterior textures.

The lighting consisted of a candle and a 50-watt lamp outside the field of view, and was enough to bring out the main features of Marina's face. The objects that could be seen behind her and the arrangement of the visible space weren't important. The photograph would just be the starting point from which I would create another image, so there was no point in dwelling on the details at this stage.



When you start with a photographic setup, the tone of the image is established from the very beginning, even though many stages of transformation lie ahead. The choice of soft lighting here, for example, already set the mood—a somewhat intimate one. ■

The orange tones of the candle flame clash with the blues of the background. Later, in Stage 4, I will suppress the dominant cold colors and spread warm yellow-orange tones over the whole picture.



The most important thing is to have a clear idea in advance of what you want to accomplish with this iconographic foundation. I often take pictures of interesting objects or textures with a view to using them in my future work. These elements guide me when I put a mini-photographic setup together. This requires more work using the software to manipulate the picture, but it also gives me great creative freedom.



Exterior texture

# Stage 2

The glow from the candle accentuates

Throughout the work in Photoshop, the light source is our guideline. The glow from the candle accentuates the quality of softness and purity in the subject's face, as seen in the Marina layer.

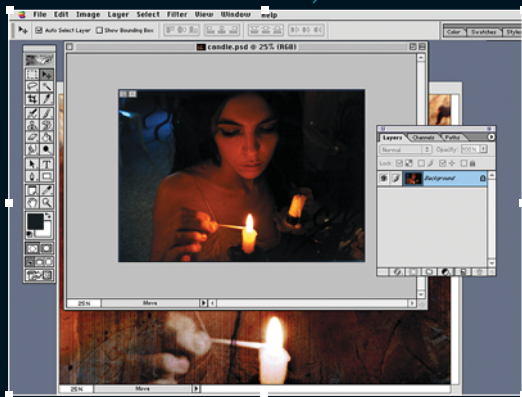
## Initial retouching in Photoshop

I started by eliminating whatever was superfluous in the picture—the chair legs, for example—using the Clone Stamp. I first set the tool at strong opacity for most efficiency, then reduced it to 50% so as not to use a piece of the background or color twice in a row.

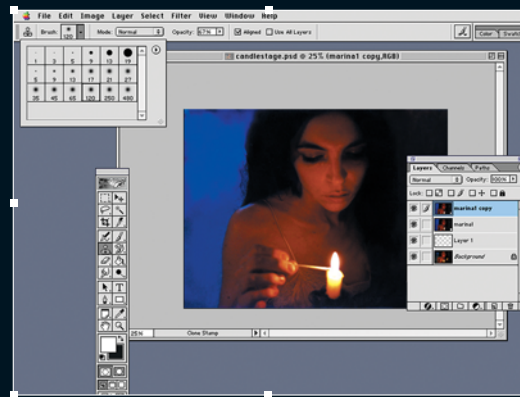
The lower-left part of the photo looked grainy, because of the carpet that was there. I softened it, using the Eyedropper to sample the carpet's original color, then very lightly covering the area with the Airbrush set to low opacity and a diameter of 60 at first, then 120.

To blur the duplication, I set

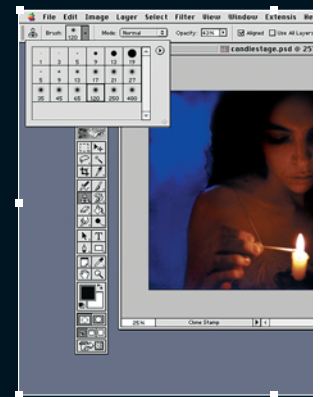
(the opacity to 33%,  
which made the blend seem more "natural."



*Eliminating the superfluous*



*Blending*



*I then decided to extend the brightest part of the blue background across the darkest, upper-left area, using a high Clone Stamp opacity (86%).*

After smoothing the right side of the picture (which was still very dark), I used the Clone Stamp tool to eliminate the unlit candle, since it wasn't needed. I also lightened this area before I could add the butterfly wings to it, which resulted in a more visually interesting surface texture.

I duplicated the more nuanced left part of the background with the Clone Stamp, varying its opacity so as not to repeat any texture or color.

ates (the quality of softness and purity  
in the subject's face.

Now that the image was cleaner, I removed the excess red in the model's face and rebalanced the red and cyan to +18% using the Selective Color option.

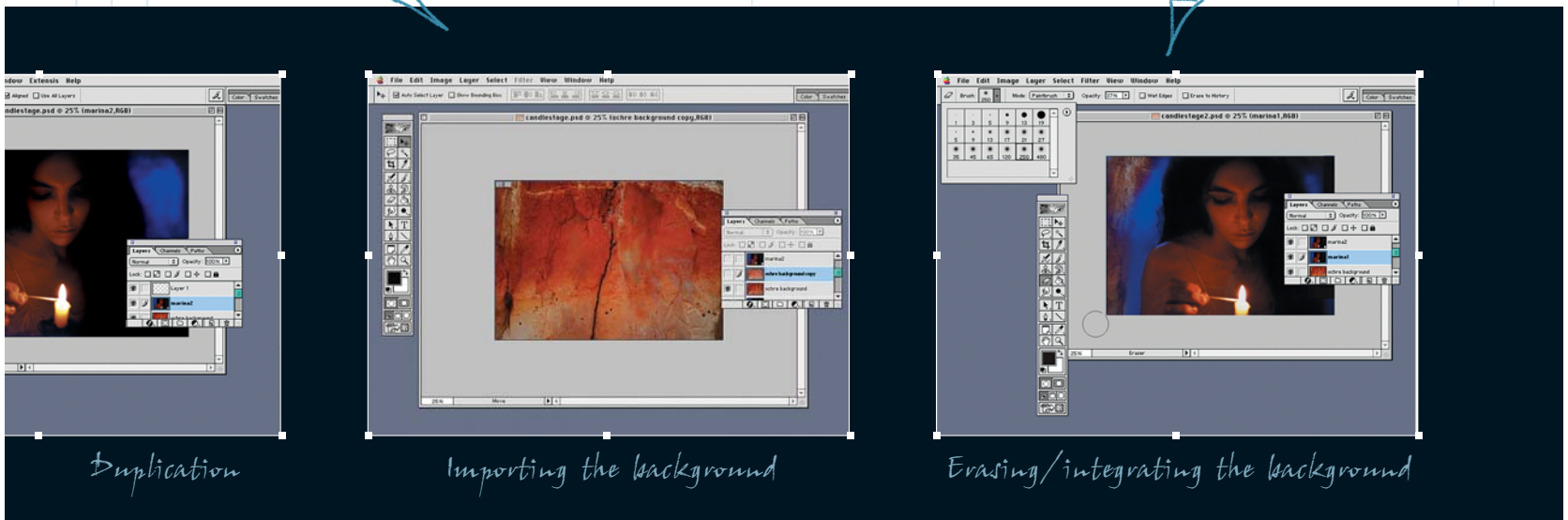
### Adding a background

An expanse of ochre quarry wall that I had photographed earlier would serve as the background canvas, providing the setting that had been missing from the original photograph of Marina.

After putting the Marina layer over the Background copy, I erased the layer all around the young woman, to bring out the texture's bright colors again.

Using the Eraser, I went back and forth between opacities ranging from 10 to 90%, and also varied the tool's shape (diameter from 40 to 120).

I repeated these steps until I got the desired effect. It was a long and boring job, but fortunately, I could use Edit→Undo to undo attempts that didn't pan out. ■



Duplication

Importing the background

Erasing/integrating the background

The choice of background is (critical, so its integration must  
be done very carefully.

Having imported the ochre texture, I placed this new layer, Ochre background, below the Marina layer. To add more nuances to the background, I copied the ochre background layer as Background copy and transformed it by lightening it, so the outline of Marina's face would later stand out against the background. This would give the picture more readability at a time when the face was overlaid with a filter on the Background copy layer beneath it.

When you use the Clone Stamp to modify an area, you must take into account the way the light source casts shadows. To create a shadow, make an artificial gradient by varying the tool's opacity while you're stamping.

# Stage 3

*It was now time to merge the different elements.*

## Placing the wings

I chose to use some slightly velvety butterfly wings, because of their almost “vegetable” look. Once imported into Photoshop above the other layers, I had to adjust their size to fit the character. Before each wing was placed on Marina’s shoulder, it had to be rotated vertically and scaled up, outlined with a 10-pixel feather, and cleaned up with the Eraser.

To simplify the job, and also to make it possible to make changes later, it’s a good idea to copy the layers and put each wing on a separate layer.

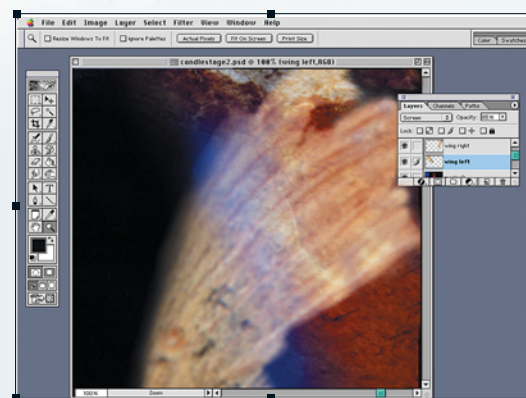
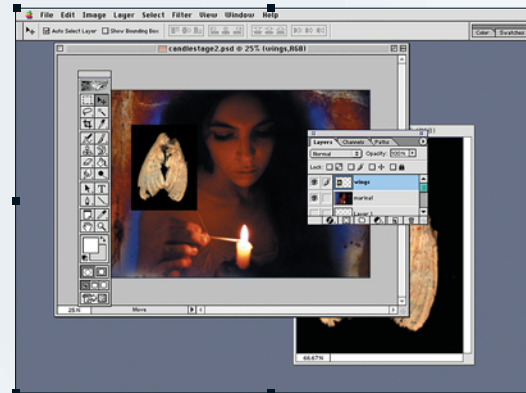
**Adding the butterfly wings** (to the character) *gave the scene its dreamlike aspect.*

The wings were now in place, but they still needed some retouching, because the picture at this point just looked like a plain collage. Using the Eraser set to very low opacity, I softened the ends of the wings and harmonized their integration with the background.

I also changed the shape of the left wing using the Transform→Distort command, by stretching the wing to make it wider and bolder, reinforcing the effect of the light cast by the candle.

I then applied the Screen filter to each wing, reducing the opacity to 85% for one and 75% for the other. This was to avoid the kind of symmetry that always suggests “modernity.” ■

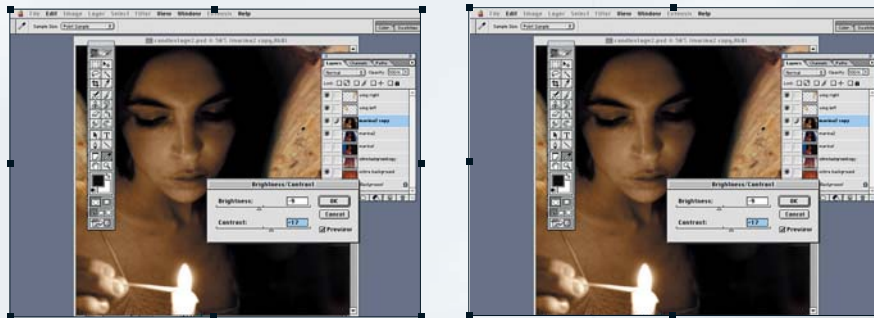
*The elements were now ready, but I still had to bring them together.*



# Stage 4

## Choosing and applying colors

*I repeated the operation for the wings, with a little more yellow.*



At this point, I felt that the face lacked contrast, so I used the Brightness/Contrast window to remedy this, increasing contrast by +17 and cutting brightness by -9.

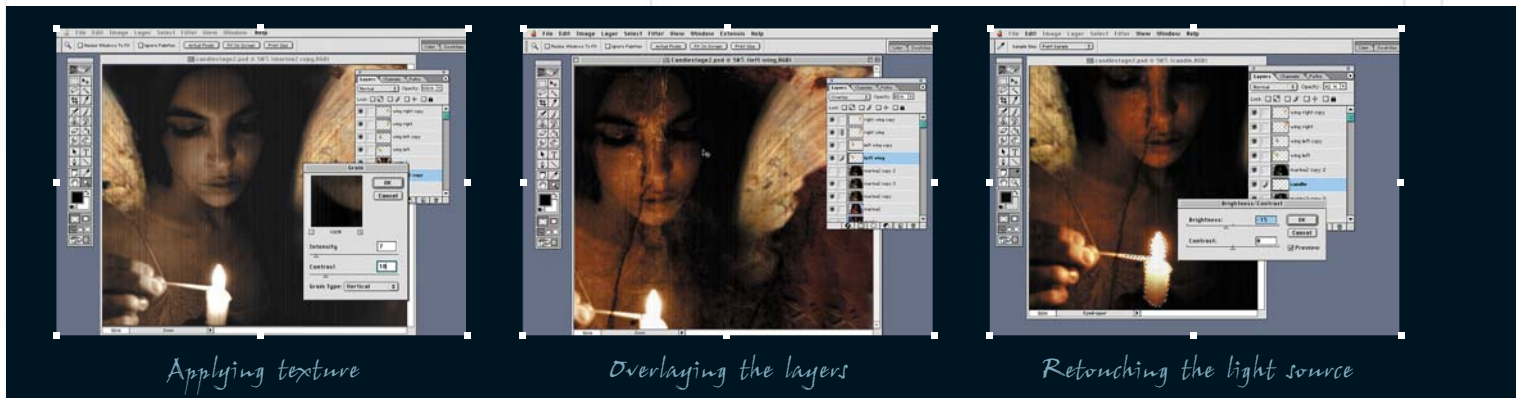
### The effect of filters and layer stacking

To give the picture a timeworn look, almost shabby in places, I copied the Marina layer several

times and applied the Texture filter with vertical Grain, varying the intensity and contrast.

Because the wings were isolated on separate layers, I had to give each of them the same treatment before erasing part of the Grain texture with the Eraser so the layers would retain their original clarity before being transformed.

To unify the different layer elements, I modified the color on the young woman and the bright blue background. First I copied, then desaturated and recolored the Marina layer, choosing 30% red and 20% yellow in the Color Balance menu. I then set the different percentages for the shadows, midtones, and highlights.



I now combined the many stacked-up layers while applying an Overlay blending filter with lowered opacity until I got the right balance of position, color, contrast, and brightness.

The same Overlay filter was applied to the copy of the Background layer. This mix allowed the background to be seen, and brought out some graininess on the model's skin and

wings. The result was harmonious, but one more detail remained to be adjusted. The various operations had lightened the candle flame to the point where it was too bright. To cool this hot spot, I outlined the flame, copied it onto a separate layer, darkened it by lowering its brightness, and placed it above the other layers. ■