



Mask for work on sky. Mask blocks manipulation of foreground and top of Yucca plant.



Mask for working on foreground and top of Yucca plant. Blocks manipulation of sky.

Note how the unaltered raw image (#1, center pane) begins with the foreground and yucca plant both darker than the sky and quite dull in appearance. In the final image (#6) these tones are completely reversed, making the yucca and foreground much lighter, standing out dramatically against the sky.

A wide variety of techniques and tools are used to control an image. A tool the author uses heavily is the *mask*. A *mask* is a black-and-white-only duplicate of an image that is overlaid on top of the image itself. Other tools are then applied through it.

Masks screen out manipulation to some parts of the image (black areas of the mask) while allowing work on other parts to pass through (white areas).

In the days of film photography, a fine art photographer working in black and white would use color filters over the lens to alter the way black and white film would record the gray tones of specific colors. Of course, he could apply only a single filter at the moment of capture and results were quite impossible to predict with any certainty. Additional negatives were often exposed through different filters, hoping that one might give the sought after result.

Today, the same photographer working digitally will create a mask that addresses a specific range of colors in the captured image so that the resulting gray tone representing that color can be manipulated separately. In this manner it is possible to alter the gray tones of an entire image, one color at a time, correct mistakes and continue to work on the image until exactly the desired result is achieved in every part of the final photograph.

The great American landscape photographer Ansel Adams often likened the captured negative to a musical score, and the printing of that negative to the performance of that score.

Today it remains true that making a fine art photograph is a *performance* of a captured *score*.

"The photograph isn't what was photographed. It's something else. It's a new fact."

*Gary Winogrand*

"..I have looked at far more photographs than I have paintings, because their reality is stronger than reality itself."

*Francis Bacon*

"Like the pen, it is as good as the man who uses it. It can be the extension of mind and heart.."

*John Steinbeck*

"The use of the term art medium is, to say the least, misleading, for it is the artist that creates a work of art not the medium. It is the artist in photography that gives form to content by a distillation of ideas, thought, experience, insight and understanding."

*Edward Steichen*

"The purpose of art is to raise people to a higher level of awareness than they would otherwise attain on their own."

*Brassai*

"..I've been wanting to say this for years. Is cooking an art? Is talking an art? Is even painting an art? It is artfulness that makes art, not the medium itself. Of course photography is an art – when it is in the hands of artists."

*Aaron Scharf*

"..Why do photographers bother with the deception, especially since it so often requires the hardest work of all? The answer is, I think, that the deception is necessary if the goal of art is to be reached.."

*Robert Adams*

Photography can never grow up if it imitates some other medium. It has to walk alone; it has to be itself.

*Berenice Abbott*

"You don't take a photograph, you make it. Photography is more than a medium for factual communication of ideas. It is a creative art."

*Ansel Adams*

DAVID KACHEL  
RED DOOR GALLERY  
702 WEST HOLLAND AVENUE  
ALPINE, TEXAS 79830  
(432-386-5787)

DIRECTOR@REDDOORFINEPHOTOGRAPHS.COM  
WWW.REDDOORFINEPHOTOGRAPHS.COM

# MAKING

A FINE ART

# PHOTOGRAPH



*Sunrise Yucca*

☞ THE PHOTOGRAPH NEVER LIES ☞

This statement may be the biggest lie in the history of art..!

The photograph *ALWAYS* lies and the fine art photograph tells the *most* outrageous lies of all. In fact, if it didn't lie, it couldn't be art.

The camera compresses a three dimensional scene into two dimensions, miniaturizes it, falsifies colors, distorts shapes and perspectives and freezes time, yet somehow produces an image that appears inescapably real and absolutely truthful. So convincing is this preposterous illusion, that a photograph is believed by most everyone to be simply a mechanical record of reality.. a hard fact.

That describes the simple, straightforward record photograph taken every day by millions of people all over the world. The fine art photograph stretches the truth *far* beyond those modest limits. See for yourself.

cont'd..

The greatest asset of the fine art photograph, for artist and viewer, is its illusion of reality. This permits the artist to stretch a photograph to extremes while it remains 100% believable.

To the artist-photographer, the original scene is only crude, raw material to be turned into something completely new and often *unrecognizable*.

The author's popular image, *Sunrise Yucca* is an excellent choice to illustrate this almost magical process. It is used here because its creation was comparatively simple, requiring only a few dozen steps and taking only a day or so to complete.

While only six steps are illustrated here to save space and simplify description, there are actually



Straight black and white conversion of the original color image. Most black and white photographers start, and in many cases, end here. The author uses a different approach, never actually converting the image to black and white in the usual sense. Instead, the colors of the original are exaggerated and used to build a new *monochrome* image.

many steps involved, large and small, in creating just the right balance of tones and contrasts to achieve the desired emotional impact.

The author does not create black and white photographs from digital captures in the manner used by most photographers. In fact, his black and white images aren't really black and white at all. The entire process involves the manipulation of the underlying color image and the photograph is only *converted* to black and white (technically, *monochrome*, since the images are brown instead of black) as a final step, by infusing the entire color image with a single, very exacting brown color.

The original color image always remains beneath.

cont'd.



Original *Sunrise Yucca* photograph, exactly as it came from the camera. No manipulation of any kind was applied.



First step. Increase color saturation and contrast. Common practice among color photographers, many are surprised to know this is also the first step the author takes in making a B&W photograph.



Early stage of the author's process. Note the foreground and plant are now lighter than the sky and the sky is now mostly B&W. Color saturation is largely hidden by the partial B&W conversion process.



Midway through. The sky is now darker, contrast increased and foreground more pronounced. Flowers stand out better against sky.



The upper half of the sky is additionally darkened, more toward the edge so that attention is drawn away from the sky and focused on the center. Ground and flowers are lighter and increased in contrast.



Contrast, overall brightness and tonal balance are controlled to match the planned printing process. Lastly, a transparent brown layer is placed over the entire image, finishing the *conversion* to B&W.