

ADOBE PHOTOSHOP CS

# Digital Light Painting

**Dave Montizambert.** Adapted from [www.software-cinema.com](http://www.software-cinema.com)'s CD tutorial Digital Light Painting by Dave Montizambert. Dave Montizambert, a successful working commercial advertising photographer, is an international photo/digital educator and author. [www.montizambert.com](http://www.montizambert.com)

Digital light painting is a powerful Adobe® Photoshop® CS technique that can be used to turn lifeless images into works of art. In fact it is the digital equivalent of a photographic lighting technique called painting with light. Painting with light needs to be executed in relative darkness so that a small handheld light source can be used to paint light energy over a subject during a long exposure. This painterly lighting effect works well on subjects that are stationary but falls short on animated subjects such as people. Light painting people usually renders static looking results. Digital light painting has major advantages over painting with light. It is not a “blind one way” process—the painting effect is visible as you create it, you can modify it at any time, and you do not have to work in darkness. This technique works best with flat lighting so frontal lighting is most favorable—all highlight and shadow will be created in Photoshop.



## 1. Darken the image.

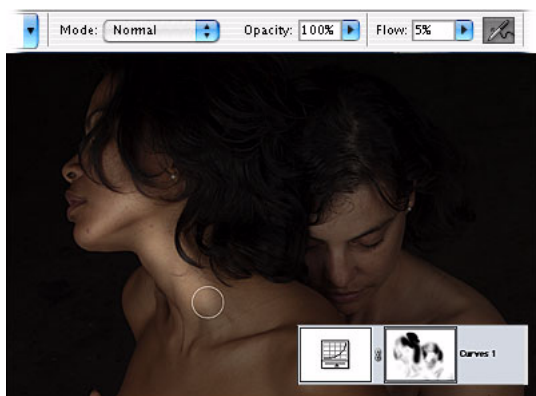
Open a correctly exposed version of the image, and then choose Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Curves. To darken and flatten the contrast of the image, two points of the composite curve are altered; the highlight value 255, which is at the extreme top end of the curve, is dragged down to 107. Value 64 (the 25% point near the bottom of the curve called the 1/4 tone), is pulled down to value 14. These figures will differ from image to image.



## 2. Paint the layer mask.

Click on the Curves Layer mask in the Layers palette. Choose black as the foreground color then paint with a low flow setting over the image with the airbrush attribute selected on the paint-brush to create a gradual build up of black on select areas. These black areas hide the affect of the darkening Curve allowing the normal

exposure background image layer to show through. To keep the brushed in lighting really soft edged, I use 5% or less flow pressure for the airbrush for a gradual build-up. This digital light painting technique looks like you are painting light right onto the subject!



### 3. Additional effects.

Notice how the digital painting gives the image a haunting ethereal look. To push it even further in this direction I usually add the following:

Softening: Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur > Radius—  
I used 7 pixels on this 2587x1896 pixel image.

The grain effect: Filter > Noise > Add Noise > Amount  
21 > Distribution: Gaussian > Monochromatic.

The bluish red color shift effect: Create a New  
Adjustment Layer by Layer > New Adjustment Layer >  
Curves. In the Curves dialog box select the red channel.  
Drag 194 to 208, 128 to 160 and 64 to 88. Select the blue  
channel then drag 125 to 153.



### 4. Conclusion.

Digital light painting is a piece of photographic history in the making, for it transforms Photoshop from a post production tool into a lighting tool—we capture images of our subjects digitally then open them into Photoshop immediately to start light painting while the subject is present and the set is still setup. This avoids compromise since we can tweak the set, subject, or lighting and recapture the image if necessary.

Light painting people in Photoshop is a perfect example of improving on a traditional technique digitally. It provides complete freedom to capture moving breathing subjects with all their moods and expressions and still create the painterly painting with light effect. It is hard to imagine painting with light now that I can create a superior product with a lot less blood and sweat and turn it out faster.

