Creative Point of View

Photoshop from the creative to the practical

■ BY KATRIN EISMANN

Don't Take Anything for Granted

How many times have you heard, "Get the image right before taking the picture" or "Photoshop isn't an excuse for poor photography"? These assumptions aren't feasible for people with disabilities and Photoshop is the perfect tool for people with a wide variety of abilities.

For the past three years, I've had the pleasure of exchanging emails with an enthusiastic and honest woman named Sophie Ouellet. Sophie has taught me that people learn in a variety of ways and that my assumptions, which are based on my own experience, aren't always relevant. In Sophie's own words, "I was born with cerebral palsy, a neurological condition that severely affects my dexterity and causes tremors. For me, routine tasks, such as sewing, cooking, or holding a glass filled with water, is nearly impossible."

A few years ago, Sophie thought that enhancing an image with Photoshop was akin to cheating, but then she wrote to me, "I think it's good to detach oneself from the memories attached to a picture and take another look. In the past, there were pictures that I would discard because I thought they showed nothing. Now I think these 'nothings' are what I should work with to look beyond the context in which a picture was taken."

Sophie always appreciated that I responded to her emails, but little did she know that she was teaching me to appreciate honesty and to consider how people can express, explore, and discover the world through photography and the creative arts.
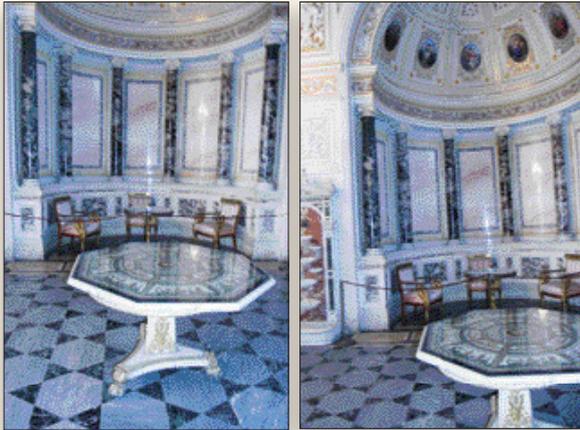
SOPHIE OUELLET

Sophie Ouellet (www.sophieouellet.com) has a Bachelor's degree in Translation and a Master's in Multimedia Communication and she speaks French and Spanish fluently. She has extensive knowledge in assistive technology, which is designed to improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Sophie enjoys meeting with professionals and students to discuss this science and her experience as a digital artist and a woman with cerebral palsy.

Endless possibilities

As Sophie explains: "Right from the start, I was enchanted with the customization possibilities in Photoshop. Something as basic as the Zoom tool gave me the ability to achieve a level of precision that my body had never reached before. Very early on, I knew the keyboard shortcuts for most of the tools. I felt extremely empowered whenever a new customization feature was added and pleasantly surprised when the possibility to create my own keyboard shortcuts was introduced. I can now assign shortcuts that are more meaningful to me and thus more easily remembered. Each time I would use the Undo command, it felt as if my disability became a little less invasive."

Over the years, I admired Sophie's tenacity and her insistence on my being honest with her. I encouraged her to delve into digital photography, as I sincerely wanted to see how Sophie saw things. Sophie writes: "A few failed attempts had convinced me that photography wasn't for me, because a little something was always missing. Details, such as the tops of buildings, trees, and even my subjects' heads were cut off or completely missing. Less than a year ago, I decided not to let this flaw get in the way. By using multiple layers and a great deal of cloning, I was able to overcome my tremors and lack of precision when taking the initial photograph. Because of my fear of visually 'amputating' my subjects and, without altering my point of view, I take as many shots of the same scene as I can. Many times, however, there simply isn't a single exposure with the whole subject. In that case, Photomerge or layer stacking and Auto-Blend layers (new in the Photoshop CS3 Public Beta) comes to the rescue, allowing me to restore my visually

When Sophie takes photos, she contracts her arms tightly to steady the camera.

DAVID OUELLET

SHOPIE OUELLET

*Photographing the same subject multiple times
allows Sophie to recompose the image using Photoshop.*

"I'm a beginner photographer with a serious physical disability," she says. "Thanks to Photoshop and my desire to constantly learn and explore its innovation, I focus on the wide range of possibilities and have realistic yet high hopes for my future as a successful digital artist." ■
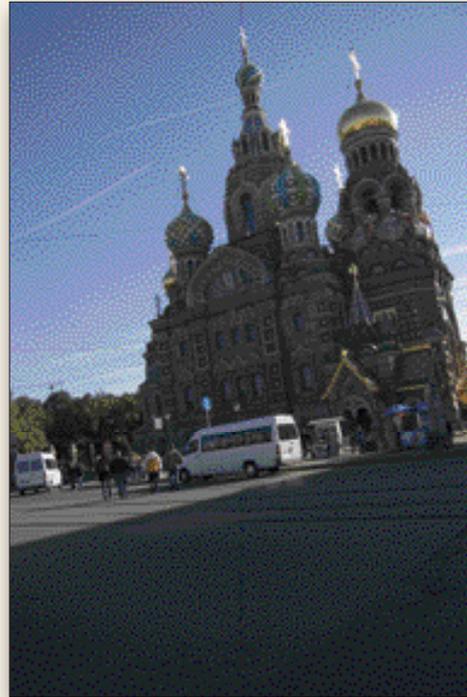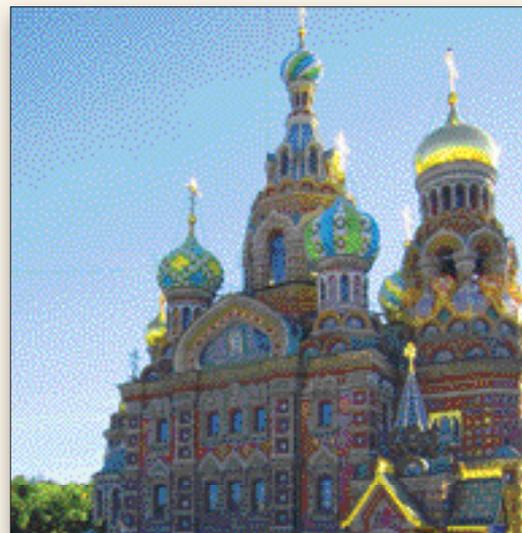

SHOPIE OUELLET

Original

dismembered subjects by combining pictures shot from an almost identical angle."

"When I move close to a subject, it's very difficult to make my subject fit the viewfinder," Sophie explains. "To solve my problem, I leave a lot of negative space around the subjects I shoot and then use the Crop tool to refine the final composition."

Creative control

Sophie finds that Photoshop provides her with ways to control her creativity. She says: "At first, part of me felt as if I was cheating, leading people to think of me as a better photographer than I actually am. Now I'm learning that expressing myself and creating pictures that share my zest for life is what really matters. With all its features, Photoshop gives me a sense of control that I cannot otherwise have. I think it's that sensation that pushes me to want to continually experiment with new techniques. Photoshop allows my soul to do most of the work; my hands merely become one more tool."

SHOPIE OUELLET

Cropped and enhanced

Katrin Eismann is the author of Photoshop Restoration & Retouching *and* Photoshop Masking & Compositing. *In 2005, she was inducted into the Photoshop Hall of Fame and in 2006, she was named Chair of the MPS in Digital Photography department at the School of Visual Arts in NYC (www.sva.edu/digitalphoto).*