



PHOTOMONTAGE

By Sally Mason FPSNZ

Photomontage is the art of blending together a series of photographs to create a visual story, of a place, a family or an occasion. This is an ideal way to use those hundreds of travel images and create either a montage album or a piece of artwork for your wall.

The ingredients:

An active and creative imagination, a sense of adventure and a sense of humour and the ability to change direction many times before your masterpiece is finished.

Photographs – ideally taken specifically for a project. This involves learning a completely different way of seeing things and is often the hardest barrier to cross for a "photographer" who is used to composing each individual image to stand on its own merits, as a completed whole.

Photographs that you have already can be used; it is less easy for a beginner and special attention must be paid to the evenness lighting throughout the images so all can be blended successfully..... but, there is always an answer.

Photomontage makes you step sideways and see things that are parts of a whole; how the photograph was taken dictates how it can be used.

Photomontage is like creating an interlocking jigsaw puzzle. However, in the case of a jigsaw you have the finished picture to aim for and recreate. With a photomontage, you are letting things happen in front of you, creating the finished product as you go along. All is not revealed until the end-point and your mind has to be free enough to go in any direction, at any time.

It is an art form that can only be understood and learned by doing, because only by going through the process do you understand what you are doing, and why. Once the principles are learned, the art form can be taken in any direction. These classes are a practical "hands on" way of learning. using prints and scissors, and therefore open to anyone. Those who have computer skills will benefit from the practical aspects of this form of learning and can then continue to create montages using their computers.

There are several layers of thinking involved:

- (a) What you are trying to show - what story you are trying to tell.
 - (b) The composition of the overall picture. This must include an understanding of balance, proportion, 3D effect, colour balance etc so that the finished product is one completely balanced work rather than just a collection of photographs.
 - (c) The construction elements, and the techniques and visual tricks that you can use to create the effect you want, whether it be careful blending or abstract.
 - (d) Lighting is important, and the most successful works will result from using photos that were taken within the space of an hour or so, on a bright overcast day. This means that the light will be even throughout all the photos, with no harsh, dark shadows.
- If a collection of photos, taken over a period of time are put together, there is difficulty in blending them together successfully.

Photomontage is an individual art form. Each person sees, and creates things in his or her own way.

As part of my workshops, ideally each group of students will shoot images at the same place, then use these photos to learn how to montage. Each will produce an amazingly different result. As we work with prints, shooting with either film or digital is OK.

In working and learning together as a group, we extend each other's perception of how to approach things, and learn the most valuable lesson of letting you think sideways.

Workshops can be run over a weekend or for 4 -5 days. Both are very focused and a fun learning experience. Photomontage is after all, learning by doing.

Abstract photomontage:

This is an advanced way of thinking, playing with images in an abstract unpredictable way, often with very irreverent, hilarious results. There are many ways of using prints, and the only limiting factor is your imagination. In a 4-5 day workshop, blended and abstract photomontage techniques are explored, with projects done in both forms.

An audiovisual "Beyond the Frame" is available from the PSNZ library and shows examples of montage work.

Sally is available to Clubs for workshops at \$500 per day plus travel costs. Please contact her for more information on setting up your own workshop, and is happy to send examples of recent works to those interested.

Sally Mason FPSNZ
128 Rarangi Beach Road
RD 3
Blenheim.
Ph. 03 570 5157
photosally@gmail.com
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