

Selective Color

— *Creative Effects in Postproduction of Underwater Images*

Photo 1 "After."
Coralscape, by John A. Ares. Selective color has been applied in postproduction. (See the original image on the last page of this article.)

Text and photos by John A. Ares

Selective color is a multi-step procedure in postproduction of images, allowing certain colors to be highlighted while removing color in the rest of the image. Underwater photographer John A. Ares gives us a step-by-step look at how one can use this unique effect to transform underwater images into artistic creations.

To do selective color, you must master two techniques: 1) black-and-white (B&W) conversion of color images (there are several methods to do this); and 2) layer masking in Photoshop.

For layer masking in Photoshop, four tools and actions are employed:

- Brush tool
- Setting default foreground and background colors
- Switching between foreground and background colors
- Layer Mask tool

If you are not familiar with these tools and actions, search the internet or YouTube for tutorials.

In processing images, selective color is one arrow in our quiver of tools for creativity in tonality, B&W,

and monochrome, such as sepia and cyanotype.

Simple selective color

1. The first step in constructing a selective color photo is finding

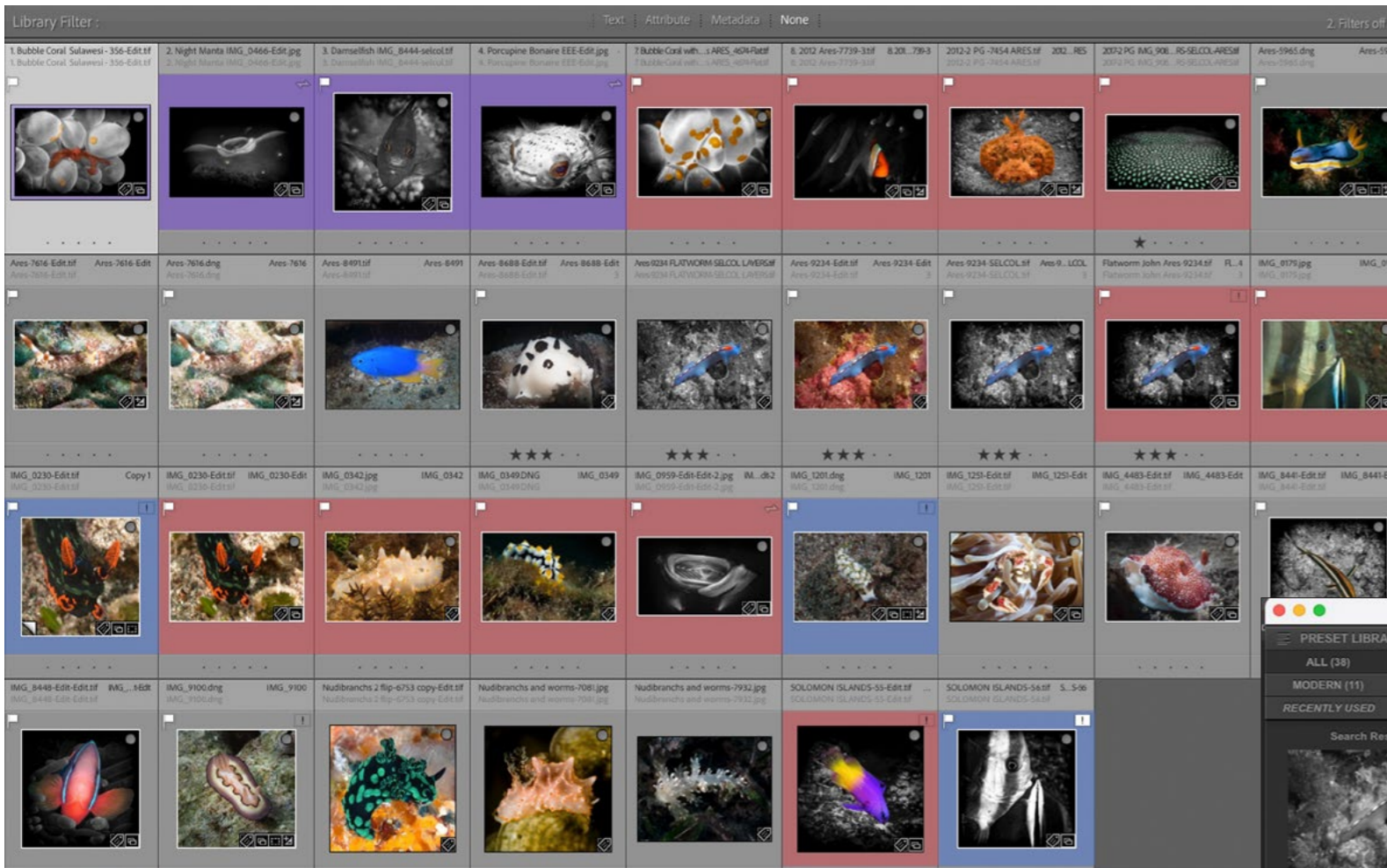
candidate images. Personally, I use the Collections feature of Lightroom to add virtual copies of photos that have dramatic color or colors. Sometimes, the areas of color can be small

or large. This is a completely subjective decision. The idea behind using Collections is to have a range of choices for your first attempt. (See Screenshot 1 on the next page.)



Photo 2 (right). For this tutorial, I chose this photo of a flatworm, taken in Dumaguete, Philippines.

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Screenshot 1 (above). Using the Collection feature in Lightroom, I select a candidate image for selective color; Screenshot 2 (right). I use Nik Silver Efex—an advanced creative black-and-white photo-editing software developed by photographers—to convert a color image into black and white, as it has a useful slider called “Structure,” which increases mid-tone contrast.

2. Make a copy of the image you want to modify. In this case, I use an image of a flatworm from Dumaguete in the Philippines. (See Photo 2.)

3. The next step is to do a B&W conversion that creates a top layer over the original color layer, which is the base layer. Any photo-editing software that supports layers can be used. I have seen a plug-in from one that adds layers and layer masking to Lightroom, but I have not tried it yet.

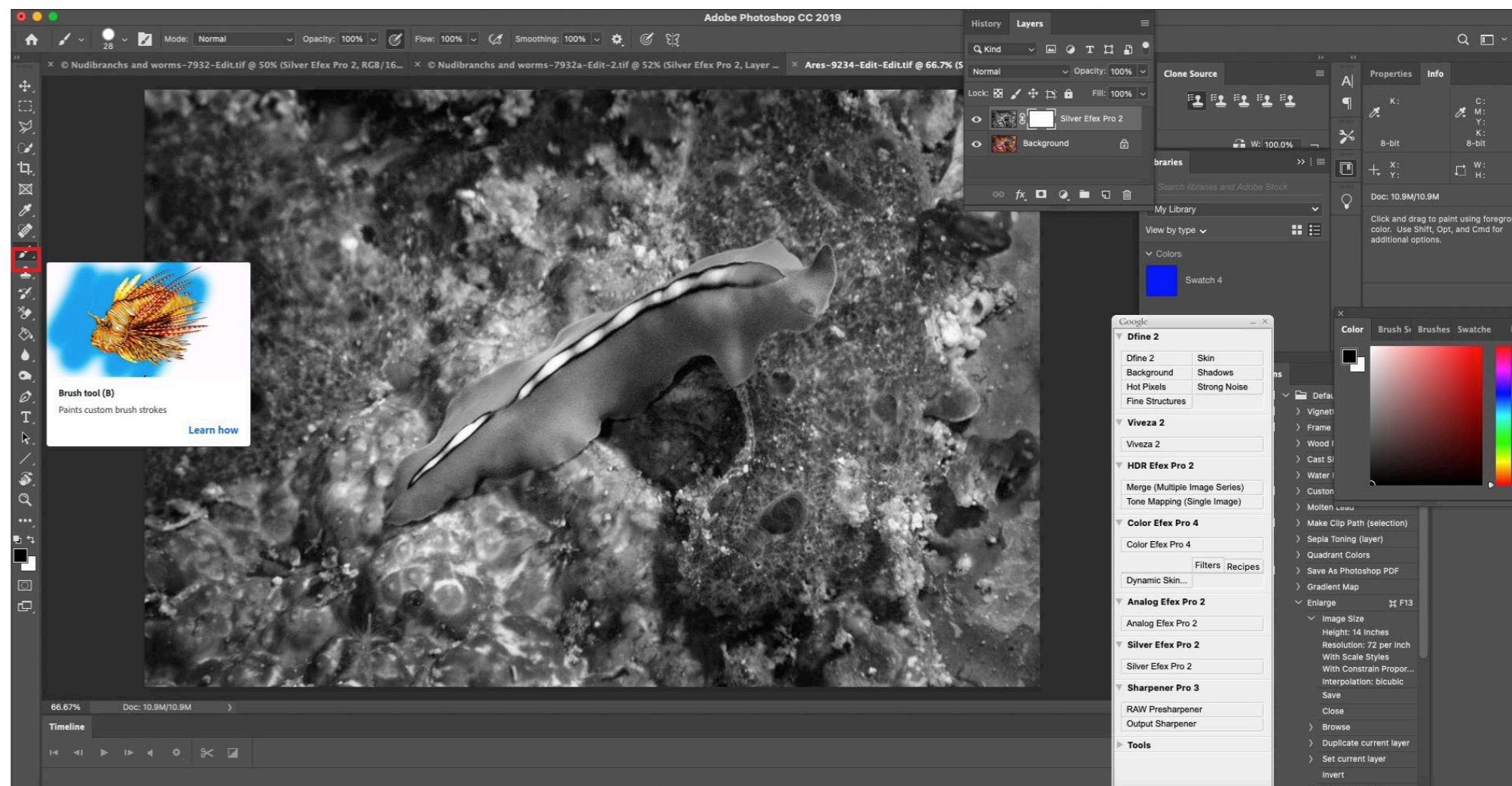
Indeed, B&W conversion is a significant topic for discussion on its own, given all the methods available.

TIP: In Photoshop, you can simply duplicate the layer. The layer on top should be the one converted to B&W. I use Nik Silver Efex because it has a slider called “Structure” that increases mid-tone contrast. There have been several versions of the Nik Collection, which are now available for purchase from DXO at: nikcollection.dxo.com. (See Screenshot 2.)

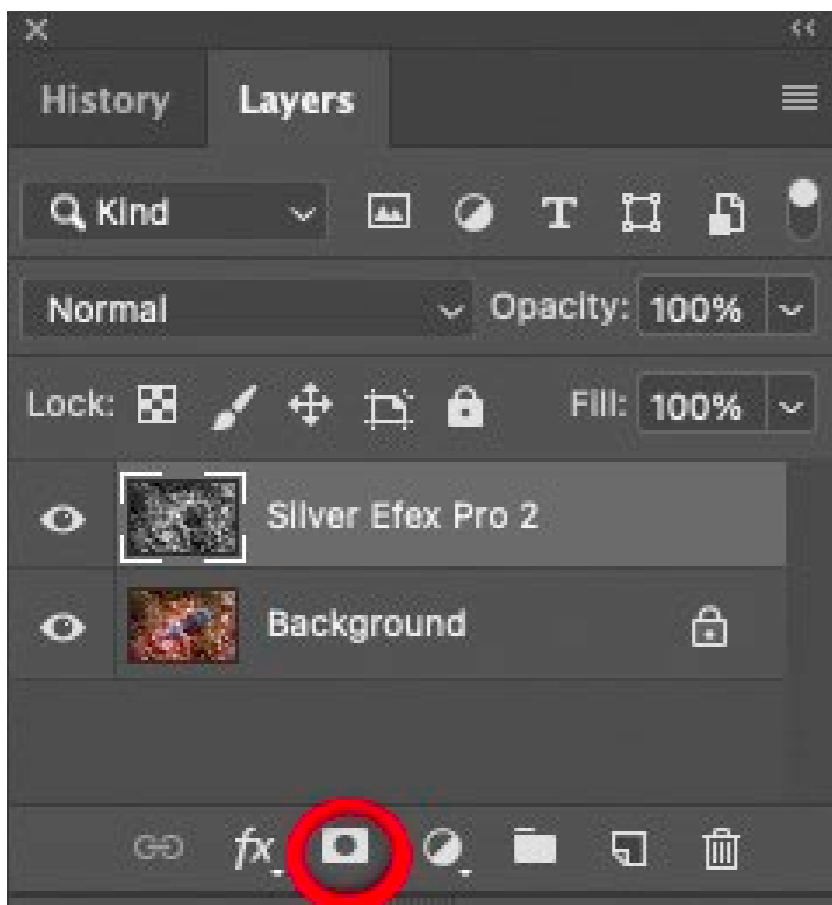


Screenshot 3. To select the default foreground and background, click the icon in the red circle shown above.

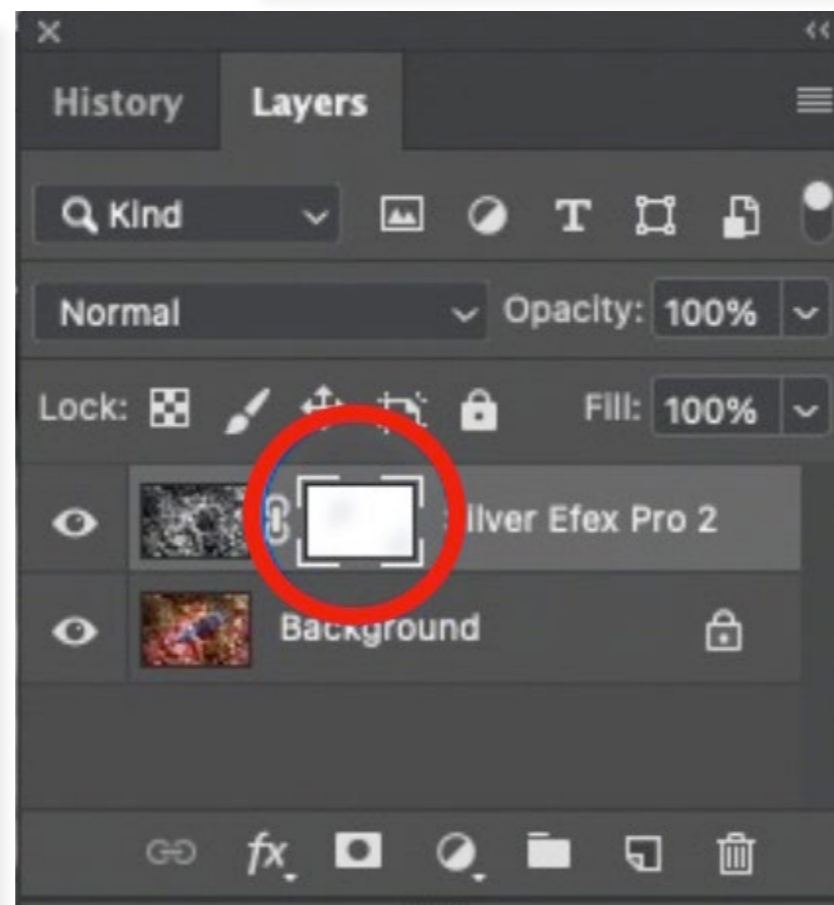
Screenshot 6. The Brush tool (framed in red) is located in the toolbar on the left side of the Photoshop workspace.



4. Select the default foreground and background color by clicking the icon in the red circle shown. (See Screenshot 3.) Black is the foreground color.
5. The next step is to apply a layer mask to the top layer. Be sure the top layer is selected.
6. Go to the Layers panel and click on the icon (circled in red) at the bottom of the panel. (See Screenshot 4.) You will see a white rectangle appear to the right of the top layer. (See Screenshot 5.)



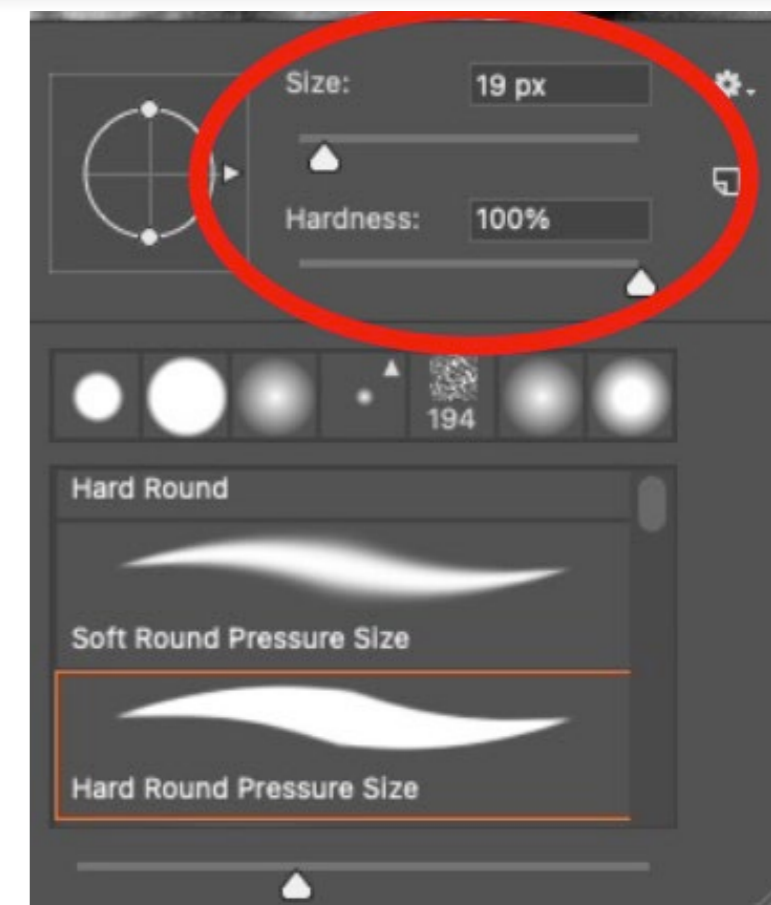
Screenshot 4. Click on the circled icon to go to the Layers panel.



Screenshot 5. A white rectangle appears in the top layer.

7. Then, activate the Brush tool to paint ON THE PHOTO where you want the color to appear. This will allow the color to bleed through the top layer, exposing the base layer color underneath. The Brush tool is in the toolbar on the left side of the Photoshop workspace. (See Screenshot 6.)

8. Go to the Brush tool, right-click on it, select a brush width and hardness (preferably 100% hardness to start), and select a brush size of perhaps 20 to 100, depending on the area you need to mask. Do not be afraid to experiment if you made a copy of your file. You can use a wide area at first and then use a smaller area when you get close to the edges of where you want the color to stop. (See Screenshot 7.)



Screenshot 7. Slider for adjusting the size of the Brush tool

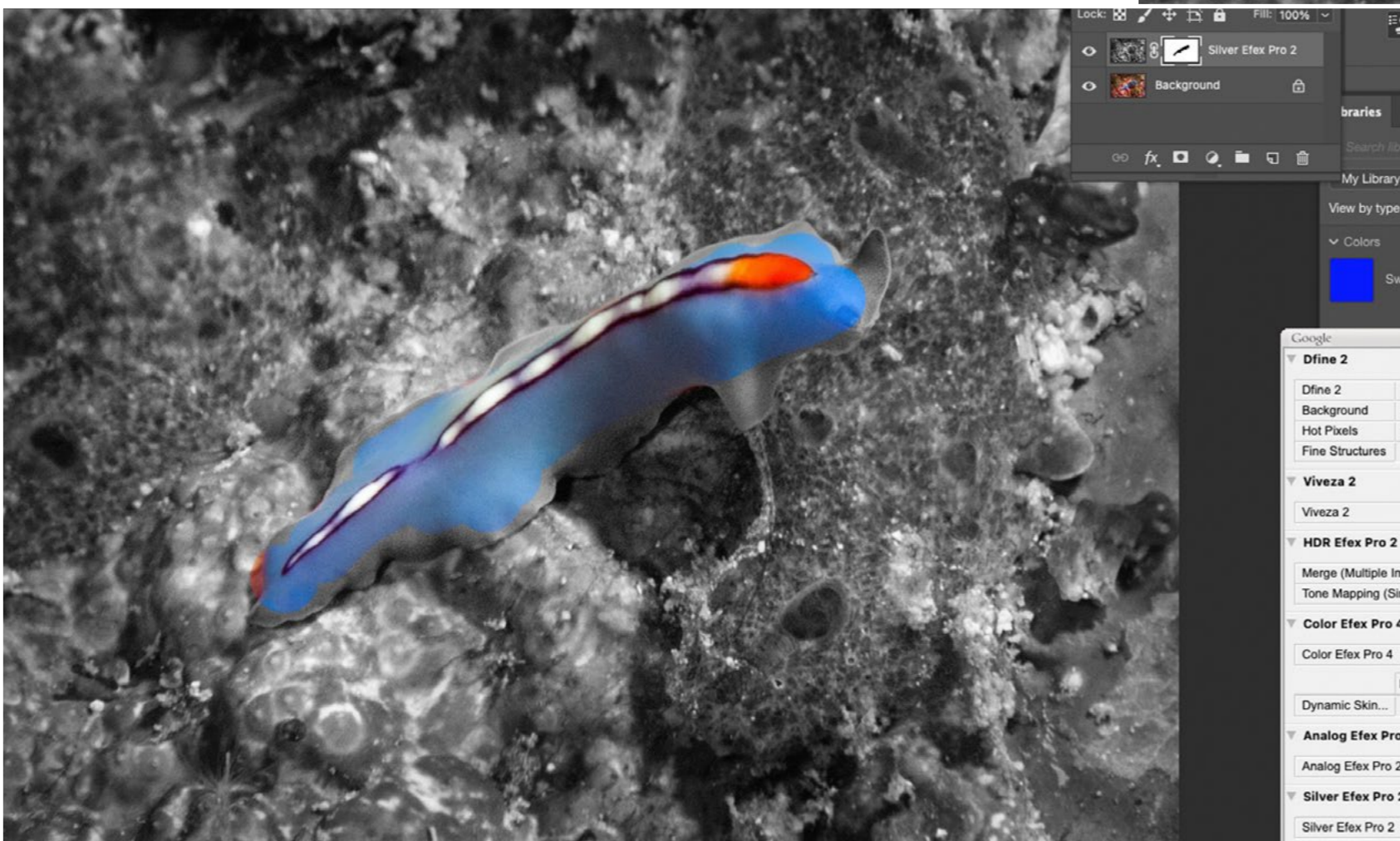


Screenshot 10 shows the finished image with selective color applied.

“When we remove some of the true color from an image, we remove some of the reality. When we remove some of the reality, our images can, but not always, look more creative and artistic.”

— Rick Sammon, author and award-winning photographer, named Canon Explorer of Light

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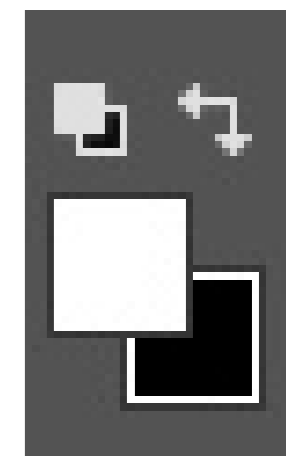


9. Paint over the area you want to highlight. Do not worry if you go over the border of your “color boundary.” You have been uncovering the color at this point, using “black” as the foreground color to reveal color in the base layer. (See Screenshot 8.)
10. If you need to fix the border because you exposed too much color into the B&W area, hit the X key to switch to the background color (white) and paint over the “mistake” to restore the B&W to the masking area of the top layer. (See Screenshot 9.)

11. Hit the X key again to continue masking until you are done. (See Screenshot 10.)
12. Save your work in a TIFF format to preserve the layers if you want to make future adjustments. Layers are not supported in JPG files.

Complex selective color

Aside from dramatic color, you can take a more subtle approach. You can look for areas that may have a hint of glow. You can also look for photos that are predominantly B&W, but the subject has a good amount of tint.



Screenshot 9. If you have exposed too much color, hit the X key to switch the background color to white, or click on the icon shown in the top left corner of this screenshot.

Screenshot 8 shows how the image appears as one “paints” over the area to be highlighted, uncovering the color by using “black” as the foreground color in the layer mask, to reveal the color in the base layer underneath.



photo & video

Photo 4 "Before" (right) shows the original image of an unusual nudibranch photographed in the seagrass off North Sulawesi, Indonesia, wherein the background does not contribute much to the overall composition.



Photo 5 "After" (right) shows the nudibranch image after selective color has been applied, allowing the subject to stand out in its subtlety.



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Coralscape. This photo (on the first page of this article) took days to render as selective color. By processing this image with selective color, the coral is turned into B&W, removing color that is not needed and adding an artistic look to the green polyps, so that they appear to "glow" next to the B&W background. However, producing this image tried my patience, owing to the sheer number of polyps. But the technique is the same as for simple selective color images, and I was happy with the result. It helps to do the editing a little at a time and take frequent breaks. (See Photo 3 "Before" on this page, and Photo 1 "After" on the first page of this article.)

Nudibranch. My image of an unusual nudibranch was taken in the sea grass off North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The background color

did not contribute to the overall composition. The tonal range of the nudibranch was almost B&W but not quite. The image benefitted from a darkening of the background and a masking of the nudibranch, allowing it to stand out in its subtlety. Again, the techniques used were the same as the ones described at the beginning of this article. (See Photo 4 "Before," and Photo 5 "After.")

Afterthoughts

If you have an image that you think could be optimized with the use of creative effects, try your hand at selective color and give it a spin. You may find the results surprisingly sublime! ■

A former senior management consultant for Fortune 100 companies, studio commercial photographer and trained biologist and

marine food toxicologist, John A. Ares is an assignment and stock photographer and image consultant based on Staten Island in New York City, specializing in portraits, nature, travel, underwater, food/restaurant and fine art photography. An avid diver, he has been a PADI instructor and instructor trainer, teaching underwater photography courses and traveling to many exotic dive destinations around the world. A member of the New York Underwater Photographic Society (NYUPS) and American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP), he has served as an associate editor and photographer for Seafood America magazine and his work has won competitions of American Photographer magazine. He also conducts training seminars and has been a presenter at Beneath The Sea and NYUPS. For more information, visit: JohnAres.com



Photo 3 "Before" (above) shows the original image of Coralscape. See the final image with selective color applied in Photo 1 "After," on the first page of this article.



Canon EOS R5 C camera

Canon has announced the EOS R5 C, a hybrid camera with pro features from Canon's Cinema EOS line. The EOS R5 C works with Cinema RAW Light in three quality settings: HQ (high quality), RAW ST (standard quality) and RAW LT (light recording). All three modes are 12-bit. Furthermore, the R5 C can also record 8K video in MP4 format. The camera comes with a 45MP full-frame sensor and combines electronic image stabilisation with lens-based stabilisation. The Canon EOS R5 C is expected to ship in March 2022. usa.canon.com



Ikelite strobes

Ikelite has announced new versions of their popular DS strobe series, which are ready to order and ship in February 2022. The DS230 offers 213Ws of power and has an integrated 2500-lumen video light. The DS162 has 160W of power and includes a video light, while the DS160 II has the same strobe output (160W) but comes without a video light. The new DS51 II strobe has 50W of output. All the new strobes feature improved recycling times (0.1 to 1.2 seconds, depending on power setting) and redesigned controls. Triggering is either via the Ikelite ICS-5 electrical plug (standard) or an optional fibre optic converter. ikelite.com



Marelux housings

Marelux, a new housing manufacturer from California, USA, is producing a series of aluminum housings and accessories especially for mirrorless cameras, including Canon EOS R5/R6, Nikon Z 6II/7II, Sony Alpha 7mk3/mk4, Sony Alpha 1, along with Sony FX3 and Arri ALEXA Mini LF video cameras. Aside from their housings, Marelux offers dome ports, macro ports, zoom and focus gears, as well as additional accessories like optical triggers, vacuum sensors and optical snoots. The housings are made of anodised aluminium, are depth-rated to 100m, feature a solid dual-locking system, and include an optical-electronic flash trigger device as standard. The housings are available in various different colours. marelux.co



Nauticam NA-A7IV housing

Nauticam is now shipping their NA-A7IV housing for the popular Sony A7 IV camera. The housing has a dedicated lever for switching between video, still and VFR mode. It offers the option of HDMI 2.0 output and uses Nauticam's well-known N100 port system. Strobe triggering is via fibre optics with an optional flash trigger. Technical specs: 340mm wide, 170mm high, 125mm deep; Topside weight: 2.7kg; Underwater weight: 0.3kg, including camera and battery; Depth rated to 100m. nauticam.com

