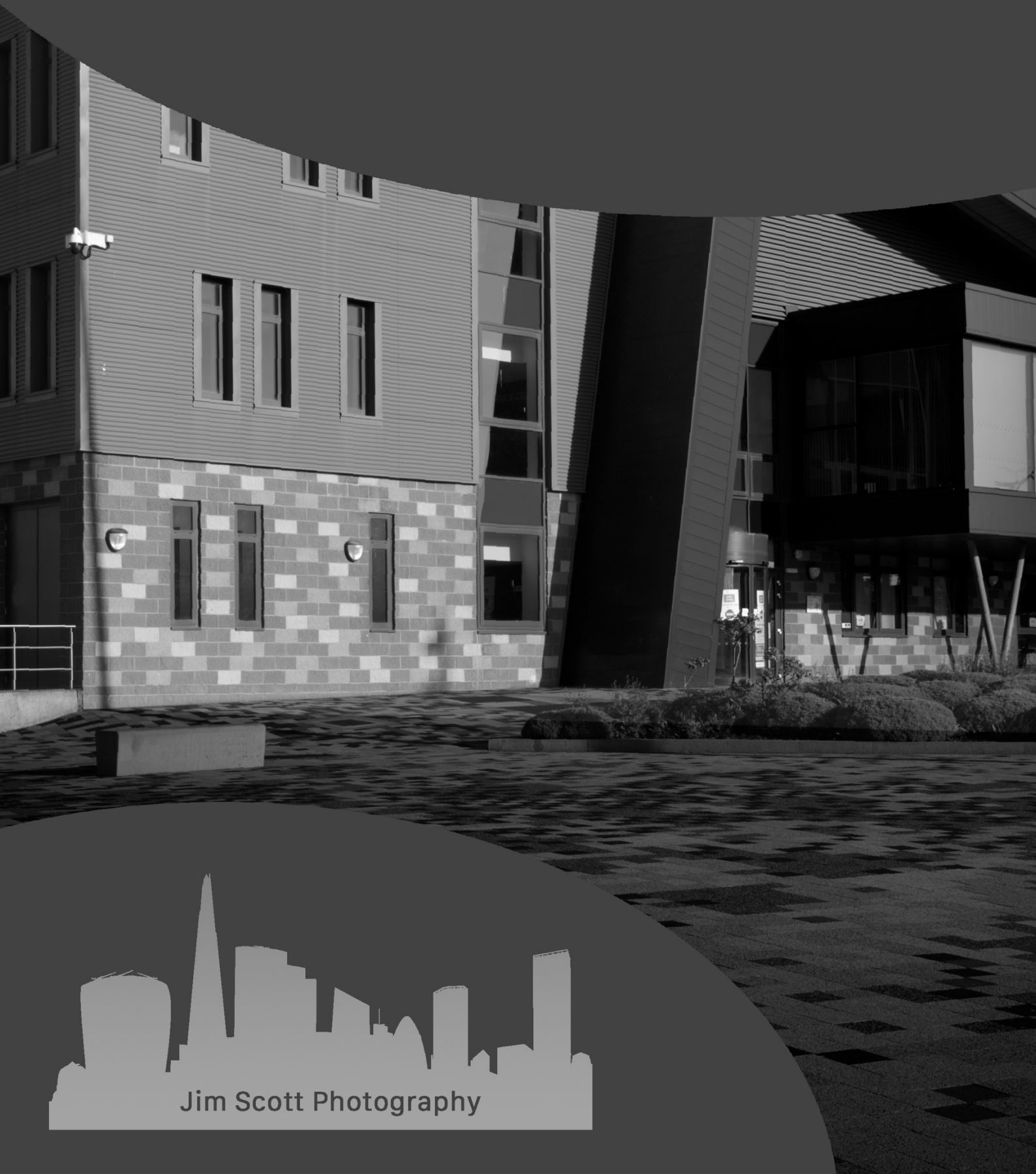


# Manually Aligning and Blending Layers

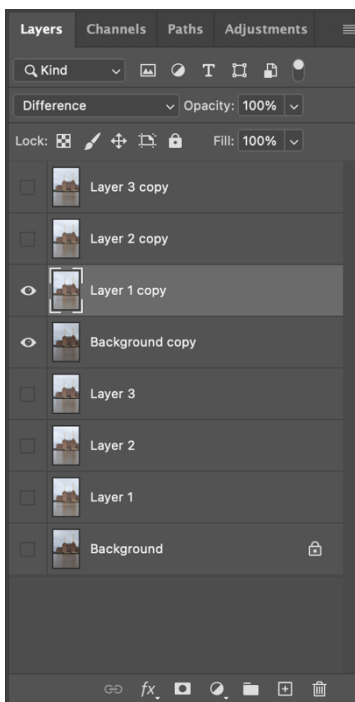


Jim Scott Photography

## Manually Aligning and Blending Layers

There are occasions where instead of taking a single extremely long exposure image, it may be preferable to take a series of long exposure images but of a shorter duration and thereafter combine these images in Photoshop. This guide will discuss how to ensure all images are aligned and then how to blend these into a single image which then can be processed thereafter. It should be noted this blending technique is for the merging of images of a similar exposure value as opposed to blending layers that have been taken as part of a bracketed series of images.

Open all the images in Photoshop that are to be merged together and then click on the second image tab to select this image. Hold the Shift key (Mac or PC) and click and hold the left mouse button on the on the layer thumbnail and drag up to the first image tab (should now be highlighted) then move the mouse over the middle of the first image and then release the mouse and Shift key. Repeat for all the other images by dragging and dropping on the first image as previously described. When complete close all other images to leave just the first image open.



Select all the layers and then right click over them and from the pop up menu select 'Duplicate Layers' or use Cmd+J as a keyboard shortcut. When the layers have been duplicated, deactivate the original layers by toggling the radio button beside each layer to the off position.

To align all the layers, switch off all copied layers except the background copy layer and layer above it and then change the blend mode to 'Difference'. At this point the image will change to have a film negative type appearance. If the two layers are not perfectly aligned this will be indicated by a distinctive white halo. To manually align the layers, select the Move tool from the tools panel (or V for keyboard shortcut) and then use the navigation keys (up, down, left, right arrow keys) to nudge the image to remove the halo.

When aligned, deactivate the layer and reactivate the next layer above to align with the background copy layer by changing the blend mode to 'Difference' and using the Move tool as previously described. Repeat until all layers are aligned and then when complete, change the blend mode back to 'Normal' and reactivate all copied layers.

Activate and select all the copied layers and then go to **FILTERS>CONVERT FOR SMART FILTERS** to create a new combined layer. When the rendering is complete, stand on the top layer and go to **LAYER>SMART OBJECTS>STACK MODE>MEAN**. This process averages out the layers to create an image representing the total exposure time of all the images used in the blend.

Examine the top layer and if any artefacts are present, then review all the copied layers to identify a layer where the artefact is not present and move this layer to the top of the stack so it sits above the stacked layer. Hold the **Alt** key and click on the 'Add a Mask' button to create a black mask. Using a White brush at 100% opacity paint over the area of the artefact to remove it. Remove any other artefacts by moving the clean layer to the top of the stack and applying a black mask and white brush using the same method as before.

If the brushing in has created a visible difference in the exposure between the layers, add a Levels Adjustment layer and clip this layer to the underlying layer (right click on the adjustment layer and select Create Clipping Mask) and then adjust the White or Black point to blend in the exposure difference between the layers. When all adjustments are complete, create a new clean working layer by Shift+Command+Option+E (Mac) or Shift+Ctrl+Alt+E (Windows) and then edit as required.