



## Custom Shadows in Photoshop and Photoshop Elements

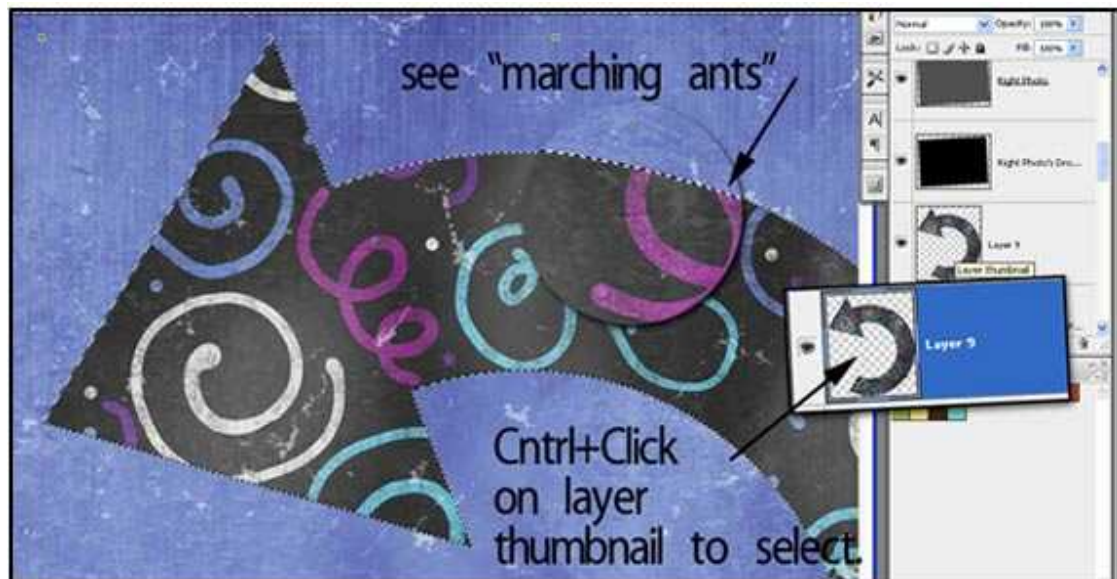
by LaWanna Desjardin

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In this tutorial, I'm going to show you how to apply a custom shadow to any layer on your canvas. Using custom shadows will give you more flexibility to add subtle details that will enhance the realism of the page.

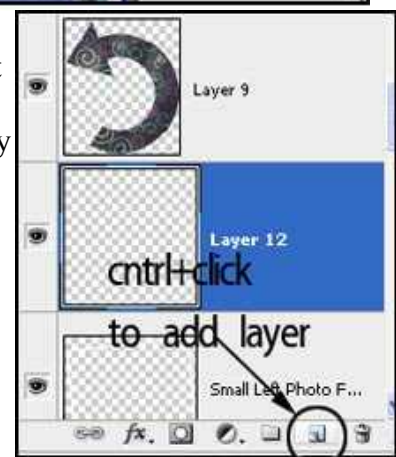
1. First choose the layer to which you want to add a shadow. Holding the cntrl key, click on the layer's thumbnail in the layers palette. This will put marching ants around the layer. You'll need to keep this selection active until the shadow is in place.



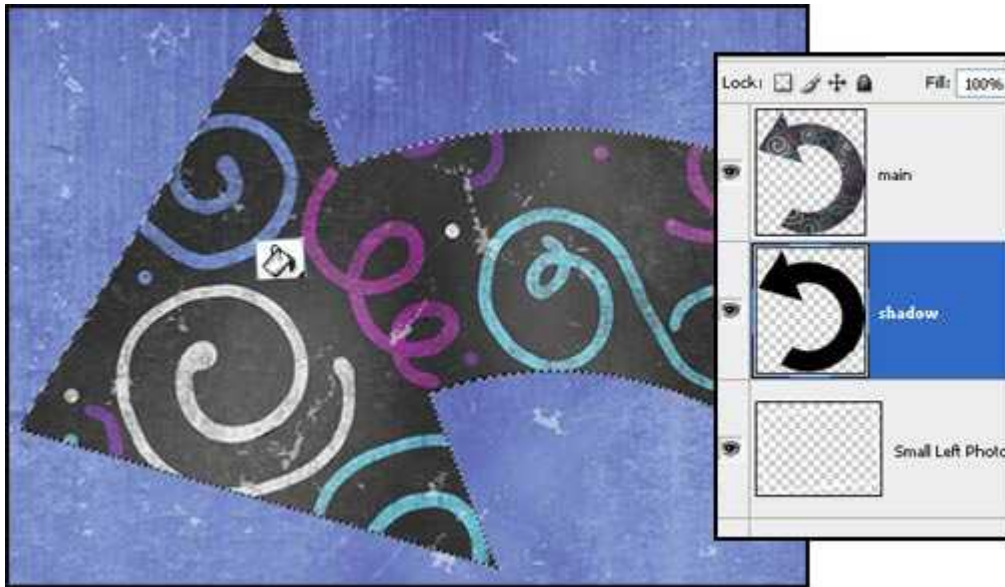
2. Next you will need to add a new layer for the shadow. Putting it on a new layer will allow you to manipulate it separately. To do this, choose the main layer in the palette. Now hold the cntrl key down while clicking on the new layer icon in the layers palette.

You can also create a new layer by selecting layer>new>layer. Click okay in the next dialog box.

This will put the shadow layer below the main layer.



3. Now you will fill the selection you've made on the new layer. Choose the paint bucket tool from the tool box. You will also need to choose a color for your shadow. I usually use black or dark gray, but feel free to experiment. With the new, blank layer active, click in the selection with the paint bucket tool.



4. Now that you've added the shadow, you can press `ctrl+D`, to remove the selection and the marching ants. You will not be able to see the shadow on the canvas, but it will be visible in the layers palette.
5. Now you will add a bit of blur to the shadow using the Gaussian blur filter. Choose the shadow layer in the layers palette. Choose `filter>blur>Gaussian Blur` from the tool bar. Select the level of blur in the dialog box by adjust the radius. You can see the effects of the shadow on the canvas as you adjust. When you are satisfied click OK.



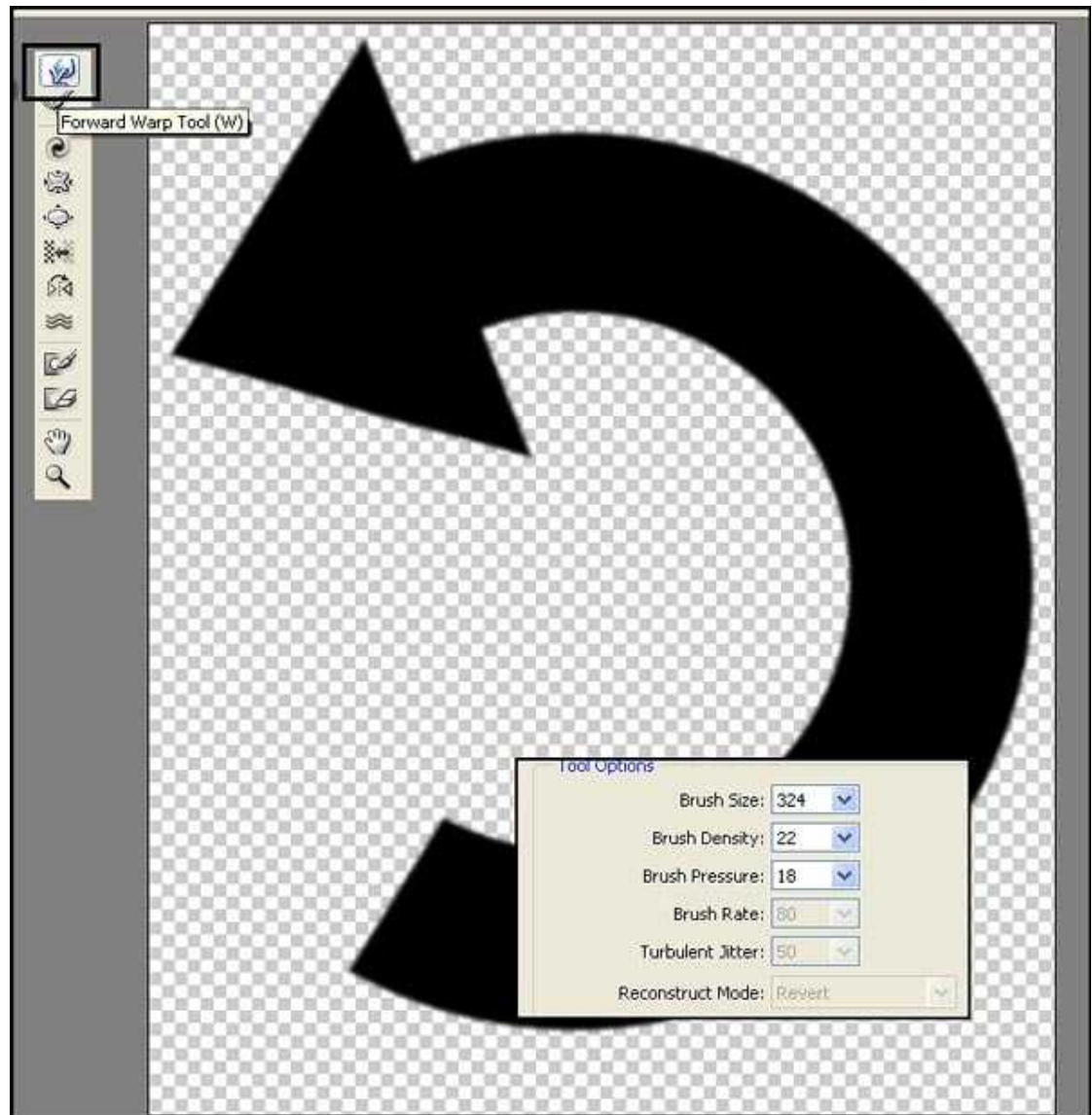
- Now that you've added the shadow you may need to adjust it's position and transparency. Click the move tool in the toolbox. Use the arrow keys on the keyboard to shift the shadow slightly down and to the right. Now use the opacity slider in the layers palette to change the transparency of the shadow. In the example below, I've adjust the opacity to 72%.



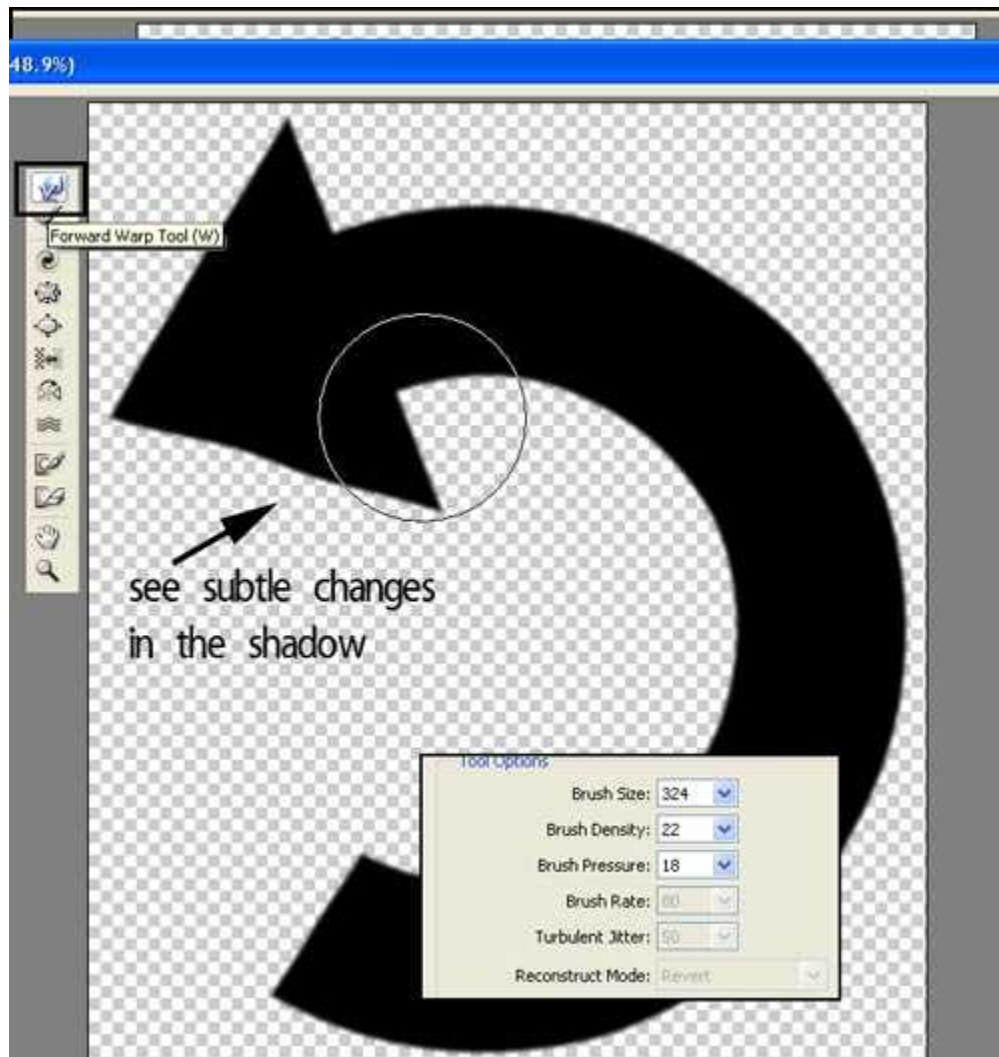
- Now is the fun part! Manipulating the shadow to add realism. Choose the shadow layer in the palette. Choose the select tool in the tool box. Draw a square selection around the shadow layer.

Now choose Filter>Liquefy. (Depending on the version of Photoshop or Elements you use, this may be under the distort filter.) You will see a new dialog box appear that will give you several options. (I'm not going to go over all these now. I'll have to save that for another tutorial.) Choose the topmost choose in the liquefy toolbox. This is the forward warp tool.

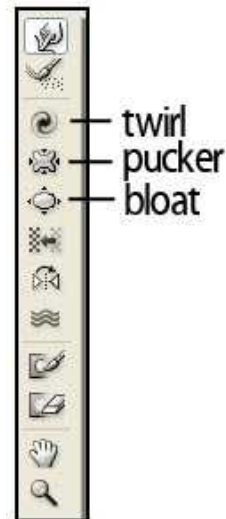
(For the screen shot, I've manually moved the tool bar and options box to reduce the size and readability of the tutorial.)



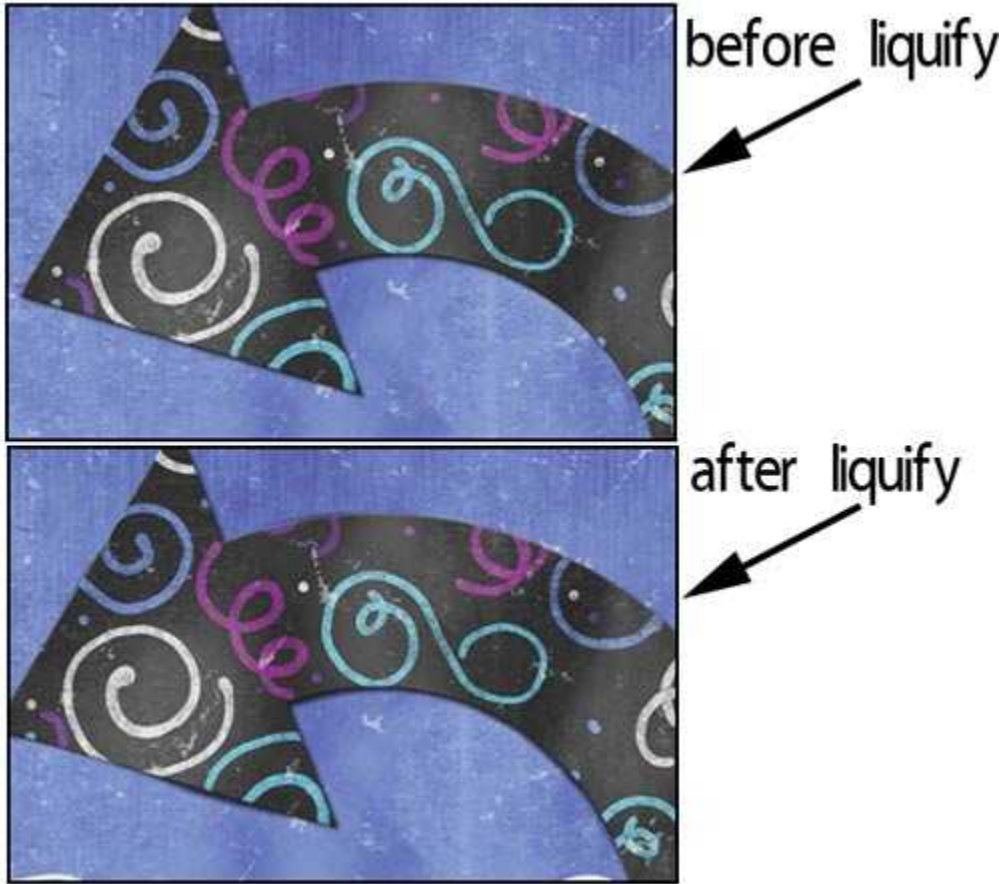
8. Now you'll use the warp brush to shift parts of the shadow. You will need to adjust the brush size for the size of the shadow. I'm using a large size brush for this shadow, but you may need a smaller one for smaller shadows. You will also need to adjust brush density and brush pressure for you own needs. A higher brush density will affect a larger portion of the brushed pixels. The higher the brush pressure, the less subtle the effect will be.
9. Use the forward warp tool, click and drag with the brush along the edges of the shadow. You will see subtle shifts in the shadow as you move.



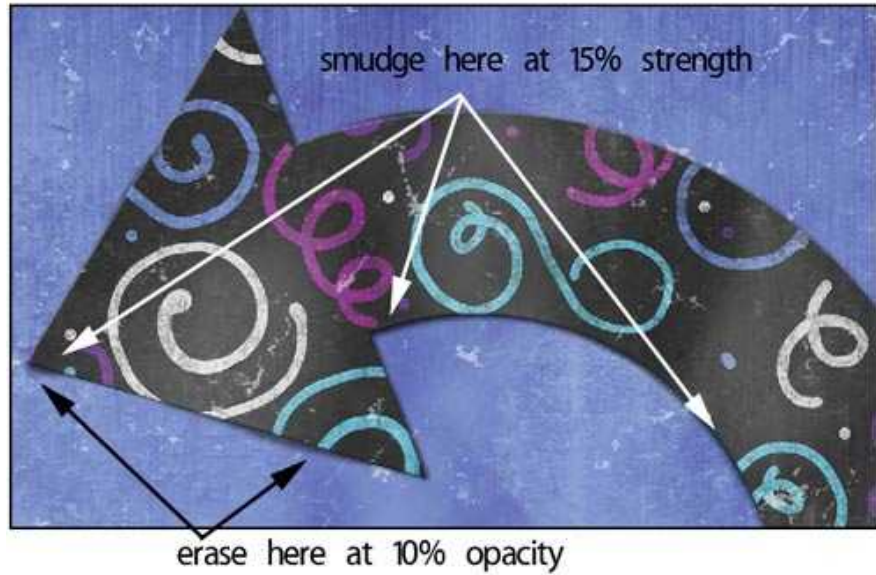
10. You may also want to experiment with the other liquify tools. I like the twirl, bloat and pucker tools. When you are satisfied with the results choose OK.



11. The results of the liquify filter can be very subtle depending on how they are used. Here is a before and after shot of the same shadow.



12. You can also use other tools to manipulate the shadow. Try using a large, soft eraser brush on a very low opacity to reduce the opacity of certain parts of the shadow while leaving other parts intact. Or use the smudge brush at a low strength to further warp the shadow. You can see what I've done below.



Playing with shadows can be lots of fun and offer lots of ways to create realism on your pages. Granted, it can be time consuming, it also gives a really touchable look to your digital layouts!