

noll Lens Flare Pro

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Pros: Truly realistic lens flares, suns, explosions.

Cons: Slow preview window updating, effects sometimes too perfect.

Categories: Plug-ins, XTensions & Xtras

Developer: Puffin Designs <www.puffindesigns.com>

D continues to encroach onto the once strictly 2D world of Photoshop, as indicated by the ever-increasing number of plug-ins being released for it and other Adobe applications with a similar plug-ins structure such as Premiere and After Effects. The payoff is that it is becoming ever less necessary for computer graphics artists to touch a dedicated 3D program, a blessing given the steep learning curve too many of them still impose before you get a decent result.

Photoshop already has its own built-in lens flare filter, useful for simple effects reminiscent of the old Nikon 50-300mm zooms, 35mm and 105mm prime lenses that I used to use in my youth before trading them in for the excellence of the Leica rangefinder camera and its superb optics. The quality of lenses, even the moulded plastic ones in low-end cameras, has become so good now that the old ploy of dropping a quick'n'dirty Photoshop lens flare onto a faked up computer graphic no longer has any point. Doing so makes the image less photorealistic if anything.

o you must be more judicious in how you use such effects, reserving them for when they will have real emotional and visual impact rather than gimmick charm. Apply subtlety, and do it with a tool that allows you fine control over the lens effects. That is where Knoll Lens Flare Pro comes in, a lens flare generator plug-in that is light years beyond Photoshop's own.

Unsurprisingly, this plug-in is made by the very same people who created Photoshop in the first place, the Knoll brothers, and it possesses the same innovative thinking, and excellence. Knoll Lens Flare Pro comes with 39 presets, and you can sculpt your own unique effects to suit. I applied the plug-in to my header illustration by selecting a sunset flare preset and then applied a number of distortions upon it, ending up with a completely synthetic image that, had I taken the time to add a reflection behind the type, would have uncannily resembled the setting sun reflected off a mirror glass window decorated with 3D plastic lettering.

As it is the image is close to being true to life, and Knoll Lens Flare Pro added just the right touch of reality. If photorealism is your goal, or you are manipulating photographically generated originals, then Knoll Lens Flare Pro is a worthy addition to your image editing toolbox. I have no complaints about its features, other than that it could do with a bigger preview window and faster redraw performance. Other than that, it is terrific!

Illustration made in Photoshop 5.02 using the Rayfect 4 Seasons, Vertigo HotText 1.5 and Knoll Lens Flare Pro plug-ins.

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