

How?

IT'S A WRAP!

By Susi Lawson

Project Summary: A fun painting project experimenting with a different background idea using a common household item—gift wrap.

Main Components

Original Source Files: Before-and-after images of "It's a Wrap" wrapping paper image

Other files: 20 Step-by-Step Screen grabs

Requires: Photoshop CS4 or Photoshop 7 or higher

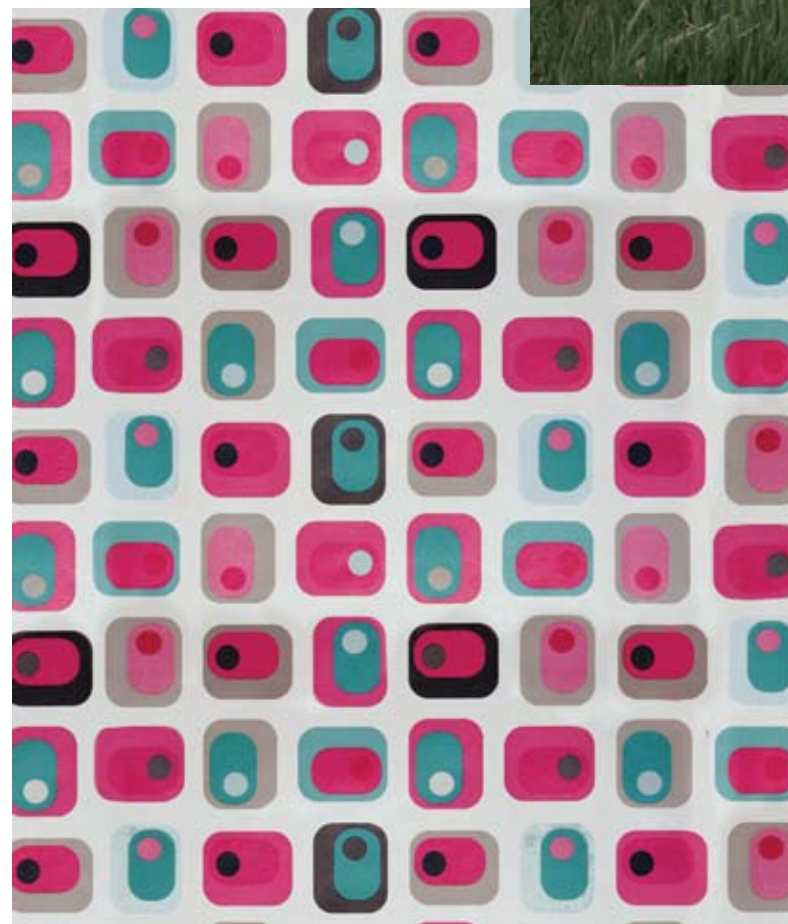
Project time: Approximately one hour, depending upon experience level

Difficulty: Intermediate to advanced

Image: "It's a Wrap!" by Susi Lawson

Model: Cassa Marie Smith

Camera & Lens Used: Canon EOS 5D, Canon 24–105mm f/4



In the never-ending quest for a portrait that has an element of surprise or a different artistic flavor, it dawned upon me at a child's birthday party that the gift wrap could possibly make a great backdrop. There are a multitude of colors and designs to choose from, and most importantly they are easily accessible and very affordable. They could be used during the shoot or after the shoot in editing. All you need is an engaging shot of a child or adult and some wrapping paper that complements the model's attire.

Here are the steps you need to wrap up your portrait:

Step 1: Shoot the Background

First, shoot the background wrapping paper. I found mine in the basement. Since I knew I would be adding this to my subject after the shoot, I was not too worried about the lighting. However, I did use a diffuser to eliminate any shadows and I had to be careful about sheen from the overhead light. You can either tape your paper to the wall or lay it on the floor. I chose to put mine on the floor and shoot from a stepladder, which worked quite well. I then brought it into Photoshop and corrected any sheen issues by cloning the pattern over these areas.

Step 2: Portrait Mode

This portrait will be in Portrait mode, so if your original portrait is in Landscape mode then grab the crop tool and crop your image as shown. The subject should still have enough resolution left after cropping to retain quality, but it is not essential as we will be painting over the subject entirely.



Step 3: Arrange Portrait and Wrapping Paper

Now drag the original portrait to the Layer icon to duplicate the layer and then arrange the portrait and the wrapping paper images side by side with the paper on the right. Drag the frames to separate and arrange them as shown in the image. Now trace around the subject using the Lasso tool cutting off the grass area.



Step 4: Move the Subject

Once you have traced all the way around with the Lasso and completed your selection, you need to make this selection a layer, so hit Ctrl/Cmd + C and then Ctrl/Cmd + V on your keyboard, then select the Move tool and drag the subject on to the wrapping paper to your right.



Step 5: Clean up Old Background

Now let's zoom in close and grab your Eraser tool. Using the #100 soft round brush at 100% opacity, clean up all the excess old background still clinging to the edges of the subject. Clean until it is nice and tidy.

Step 6: Adjust Brightness

Go to Image > Adjustments > Levels and adjust the sliders to the left until the subject has a harmonious tone and brightness, which goes well with the background.



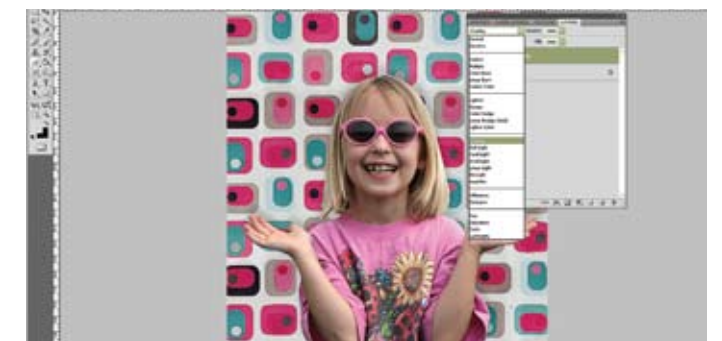
Step 7: Add Soft Shadow Effect

Click on the fx symbol at the bottom of the Layers palette, which will bring up the Layer Styles box. Enter the dynamics you see in the sample, which will give a subtle soft shadow effect.



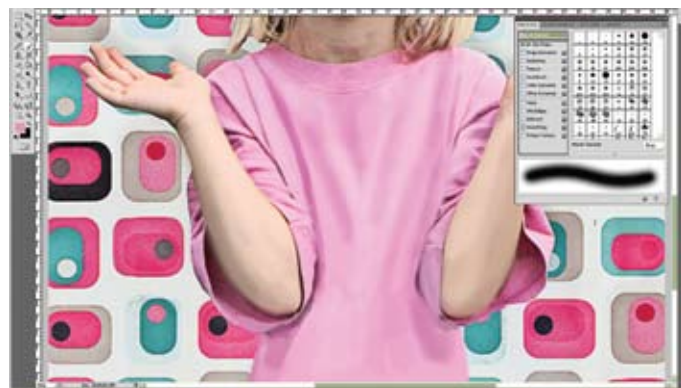
Step 8: Flatten Layers

Now let's add some definition to the image. First, flatten the layers and then create a duplicate. Then go to Filters > Other > High Pass and adjust the slider to look like a gray outline.



Step 9: Add Punch and Detail

Now choose the top layer and go to the Layer Blend modes drop down menu and choose Overlay, which will add some punch and detail to the overall portrait. Once again, let's flatten and make another layer. This is a good time to go back to levels again if further brightening is needed to the whole image.



Step 10: Utilize the Paint Brush Tool

Now put on your artist hat and grab the Paint Brush tool. Choose the #100 soft round at 100% opacity. Extend the T-shirt to the bottom of the canvas and paint over the flowers on the shirt and the stray grass blades. It is very important to sample the actual color from the image using either the Eye Dropper or the Alt-key. After the distracting elements are painted over, reduce the brush opacity to 30% to paint in the shadows and lighter areas.



Step 11: Airbrush Over the Subject

Now, sticking with the graphic style of the background, let's continue airbrushing over the subject using the same soft round brush. This requires some practice to get the right look, so we will need to vary the opacity and the brush size using your good judgment as you go. I find it is much more effective to use a lower opacity and several "coats" of paint in a glazing technique rather than to apply a thick opaque amount at one time. But do what works for you and the style you prefer. You may also choose to create separate layers for the skin, T-shirt, etc., in case you want to undo and start over in one area.

Step 12: Switch to the Smudge Brush

In rough grainy areas (usually the darker shadows) switch to the smudge brush using one of the spatter brushes such as #24 at a low opacity and smooth over these areas before airbrushing. Be very careful when painting or smudging to follow the contour of the face, hair and lips so as not to distort the natural shapes.

Step 13: Sample Natural Color

A great way to add blush to a painted face is to sample the natural color of the lips. Just use the Color Picker and use a very low opacity to add color to the cheeks and tip of the nose for a youthful healthy look.



Step 14: Paint in the Hair Color

When painting the hair, start with the dark shadows and then paint a beige undercoat for blonde hair, not yellow. Don't worry that it looks like a wig at this point. Just brush in the direction that the hair grows. This will be the support color for the lighter, more detailed work in the next step. We are still using the #100 brush at around 40% opacity.



Step 15: Make the Hair Come Alive

Now you see the hair coming alive. To achieve this look just bring up the color box and choose a much lighter beige and reduce your brush tip to the size of a hair strand and paint in individual hairs letting them fly about outside the edge of the hair and into the face. Compare the left to the right in the image to see the improvement.



Step 16: Brush in Highlights

Now let's choose the Dodge tool (same brush at 40% opacity) and brush highlights onto the cheeks, forehead, tip of nose, tops of shoulders and forearms where the light would naturally fall. This will add more dimensions to the subject and keep it from appearing too flat.

Step 17: Add Glare

The glasses need a little more life to them, so let's add a glare to suggest more light. This is quite simple to achieve. Just choose white for the color and paint stripes diagonally across each lens as shown. I also added a very light layer of white to the whole area of the lens. Same soft brush, low opacity.



Step 18: Deepen the Existing Shadows

The image looks a little too light overall, so now we are going to take advantage of the Burn tool and use it at 50% with a soft

brush to deepen the existing shadows. Here you see where I have darkened them beneath the chin, the dark areas of the hair, the smile line, etc. Use this technique when needed.

Step 19: Add More Shadows

I thought the subject needed to stand out more from the background and even though I added a shadow in the beginning, I see that it needs more. To fix this I chose the color black at 18% opacity, created a new layer and airbrushed the shadow behind the subject making it a little darker closer to her body. If there is any overflow, just select the shadow layer and use the Eraser to remove. CC

Step 20: Add Final Touches

To put a wrap on this fun portrait, go to Image > Adjustments > Brightness Contrast and adjust the sliders to achieve a little more punch and vibrancy.

Susi Lawson is a digital artist and writer who shares her Photoshop lessons via her website at <http://susilawsonphotography.biz>. Check for her available instructional DVDs—new ones to come this month!



ALL PHOTOS COPYRIGHT © SUSI LAWSON