

## **Filter with a twist: PixelCreation from TwistingPixels**

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There are many filters for Photoshop, in fact there is a whole industry that is filled with companies that make and sell various plugins for Photoshop. They all offer their own strengths in what they do. The PixelCreation from TwistingPixels is yet another plugin, but as the name implies, with a “twist.” The company makes several other filters but this review is about the product that may fit better in the tools arsenal of photographers who are looking for a little aid to alter the nature. Mind you, these are major alterations to your images and depending on the competition rules, images that have been manipulated with this product may be banned from some, including our very own PSRI. There are categories where this kind of manipulation may be more suited, so understand and follow the rules.

Pixel creation comes with a set of filters that can be selected from a drop-down menu. They all have their appropriate toolbars that allow to tailor the filter through parametric sliders. The number of effects possible either by each filter in the set or in combination is extremely large, so it is very unlikely that two people using the same product will end up with exactly the same results. That is, unless they happen to apply some of the presets with no modifications, more on the presets later. Here are the filters in the PixelCreation:

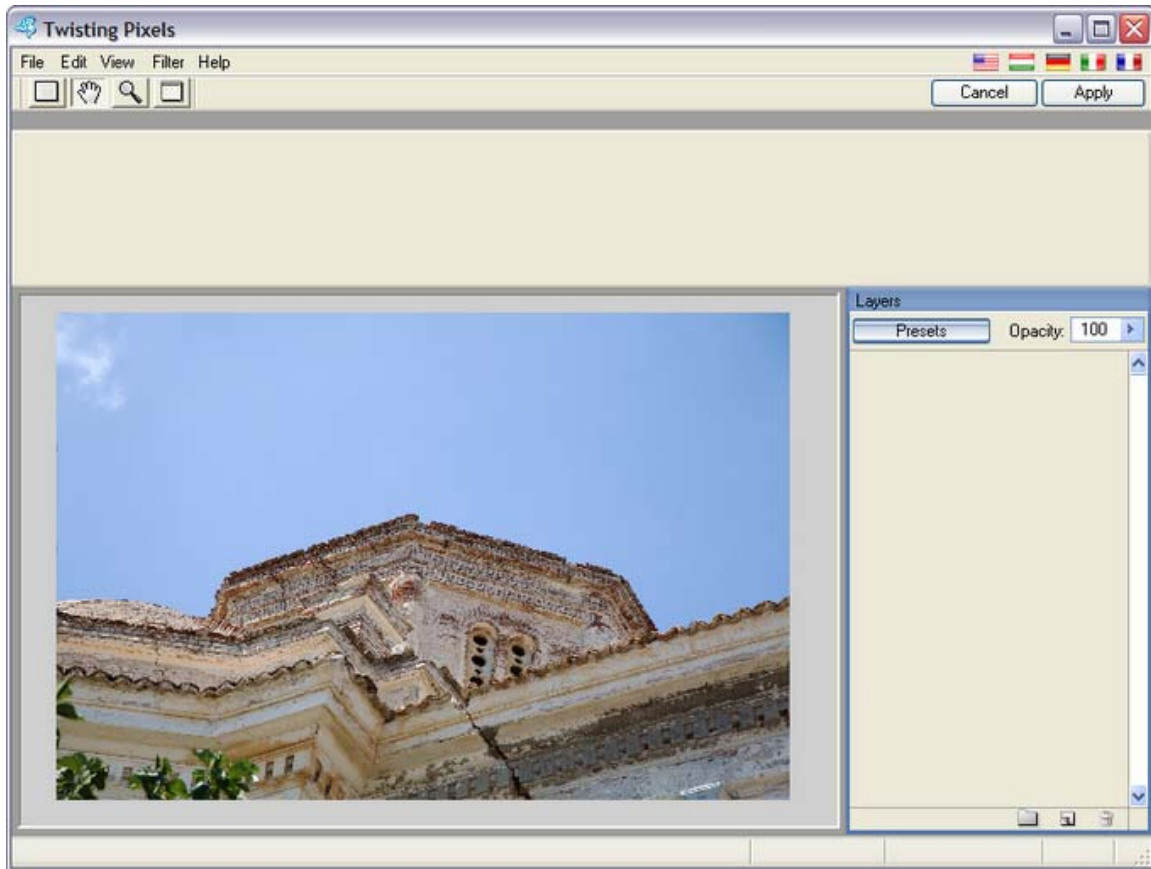
- Altocumulus
- Celestial Shapes
- Constellation
- Cumulus Nimbus
- Milkyway
- Moonglow
- MoonRing
- Starry Night
- Northern Lights
- Aura
- Color Intensity
- Colorize
- Glint
- Luminescent Brush
- Tonal Blur
- Tonal Intensity
- Tonal Sharpness
- Vibrancy

PixelCreation may be installed as a plugin or a free-standing application. In fact even when it runs as a plugin, it has the appearance of a full application once launched. The interface is very clean, filters selectable from a menu, and the image display is fully resizable.

As I said, the product comes with a large number of effects with many parameters. So, this review will not cover all, but give the reader a sense of the interface, the usability, and the results from a few selected filters. PixelCreation is available from TwistingPixels for \$99.95 (PSRI Members receive 20% discount, see the PSRI News distributed to our membership weekly.)

### ***The interface***

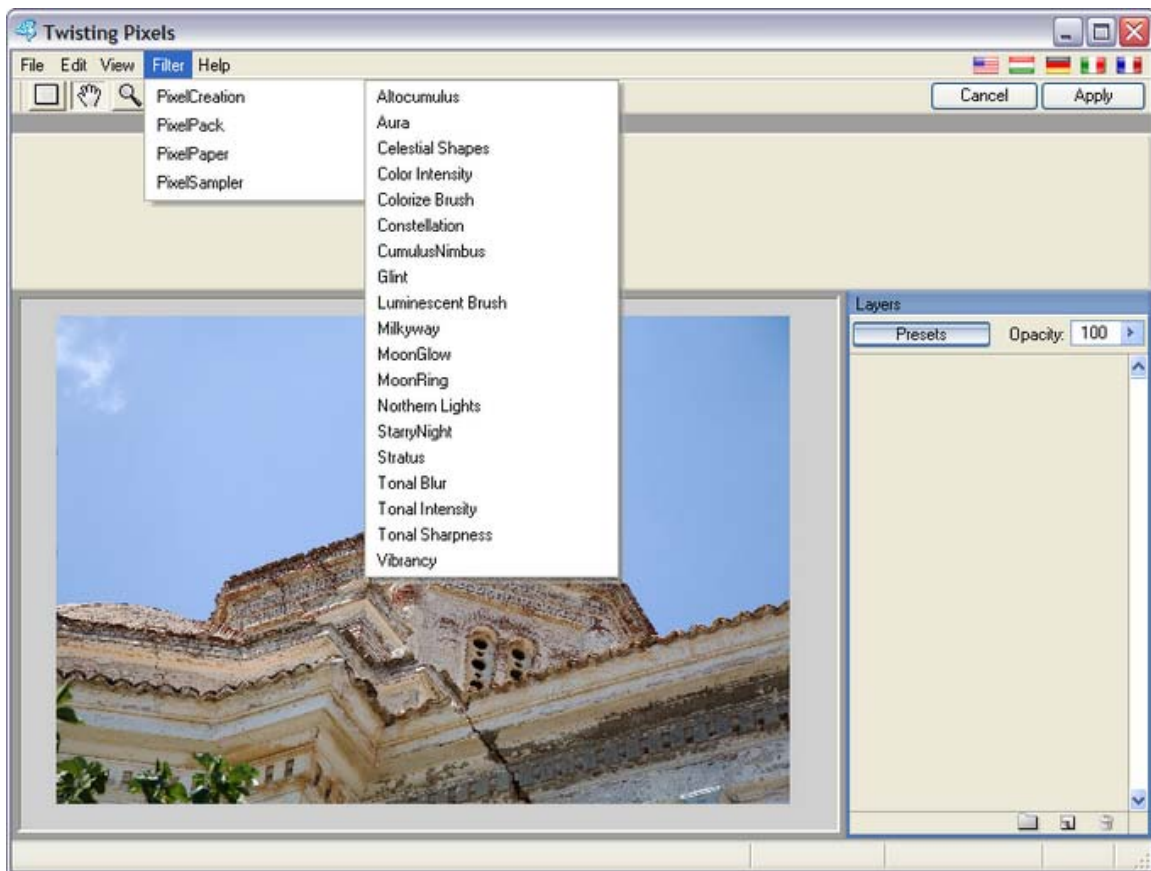
When invoked from the “Filters” menu of Photoshop (I installed it on Photoshop CS3 but it works with the earlier models too) PixelCreation presents a clean interface with your image displayed as large as your display monitor allows. You can zoom in and out for more details or to see the overall effect. It has a typical menu and a toolbar at the top and on the right hand side is a panel that contains a stack of effects you may apply to a single image. They are similar to Photoshop layers and can be rearranged to alter the effect, turned on or off, or entirely deleted. Of course you can also change the opacity of each filter layer to control the intensity of the layers.



I chose to use a photograph that showed mostly clear sky except for a tiny sliver of a cloud on the top left corner. This, I thought would give me a chance to experiment with the different effects possible with PixelCreation. The wide band under the menu and the toolbar is reserved for the controls for each different effect. It is possible to start with a selection in the original image which would apply the effect in to that area only, but I started with no masking at all. As you will see, this may or may not be necessary depending on the effect you seek.

### ***The filter set***

By following the menu “Filter/PixelCreation” you can see all the filters and effect at your disposal. Any one of them can be used alone, with its parameters only or can be combined with others for different results. Each application of a filter will create a layer inside the panel on the right and by selecting a particular layer its parameters can be changed at any time until the “Apply” button is clicked on the top right. See the figure below to get an idea about the interface. It appears as a small window but when in use, it covers the entire width of my 24” screen showing me the image at a respectable size for better judging the effect. I should warn you about one thing on the outset: it is very easy to go overboard with this product and make your results looking tacky. You will see this in my examples probably as I am trying to demonstrate what the product can do, rather than what I can do with this product. So, don’t be mesmerized by the results and let them become your image. Remember, this is an “image enhancement” product, not an “image replacement” one. Your photography should benefit from it rather than play second fiddle to it.

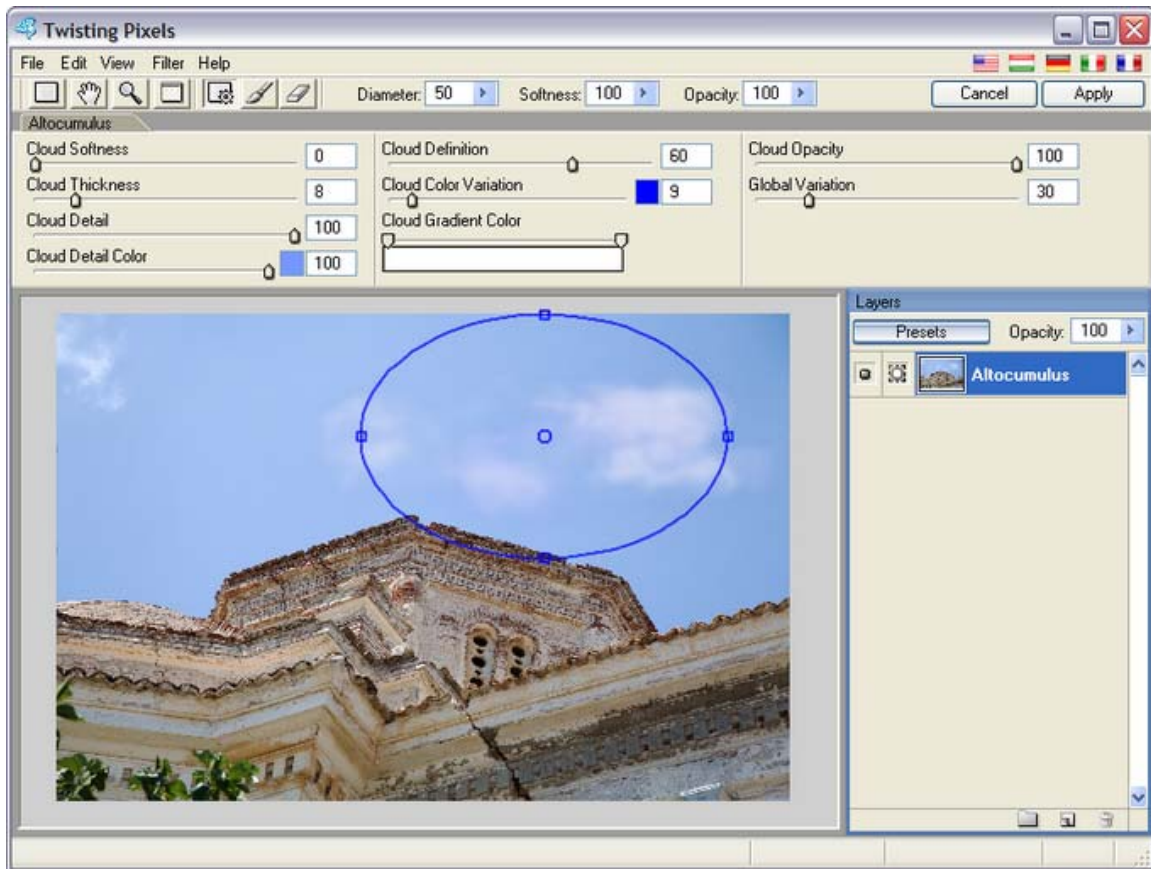


### ***Ease of use***

PixelCreation is very easy to use but probably quite difficult to master to make the effects believable. I chose a simple image to begin with to see where I will end up. As you will see, you can go as far as you like with it, the trick is to know when to stop. Here is my original image:



First I wanted to apply some simple clouds to make the sky a bit more interesting. This is done simply by selecting from the menu “Altocumulus” as shown below. This will produce the toolbar that goes with this effect. As you see, the parameters are many and their range of control is rather large.



The blue ellipse you see controls the size of the cluster and the clouds in it will spill outside according to its internal algorithm. Compared to the real cloud in the top left corner, the new introductions look quite convincing. I played with all the parameters quite a while before settling on this small set of clouds for my first “created pixels.”

Since I had the foresight to apply this on a copy of my background image in Photoshop, I created a new copy of the background layer and darkened it to simulate early evening to night time. I wanted to see if I could add a nice moon behind some clouds and stars to this image. This would require three layers of effects applied in PixelCreation. Take a look at the result.



The stars and the moon are behind the clouds and each layer can be adjusted very easily in many different ways. I thought I would try something totally unrealistic next, northern lights over the church. I applied the filter after cooling the light on the church. It was very simple to apply the northern lights by simply drawing a path for the curtain of lights.



One of the features of PixelCreation is the ability to apply presets to your image. This time, I applied the same darkening correction and cooled the light a little more, then selected the sky with the quick selection tool in Photoshop CS3. This would apply the filter only to the selection as I wanted to do something wild and crazy. Being a beginner in using this product, I relied this time on the presets that came with PixelCreation. This included a moon glow, haze around the moon, clouds in front and to top it all a gorgeous aurora. I told you, you could easily go overboard, especially with the presets. Take a look at this result with some minor tweaking of the size of the moon (it was larger), and adjusting the opacity of each layer before applying it.



Now, you may or may not like the result. I am simply trying to show how easy it is to apply this kind of effects to your images. The other tonal effect set will do rather useful things as adding some vibrancy to your images without over saturating the colors, dodge and lighten certain areas or the entire image and so on.

This filter is certainly not for the purists. But the “creative” types will spend hours experimenting with different effect and their combinations. Its use is rather simple and straight forward and the results are interesting and with care they can be quite stunning.

It is available from TwistingPixels. Their Web site can be found at:  
<http://www.twistingpixels.com/>

You can download a trial copy to see the results first hand, just be prepared to spend a long time experimenting with all the effects and parameters. If you want to take advantage of the special discount given to PSRI members, check the PSRI News that is distributed to our members every week. There will be a code that you will enter to receive a 20% discount on PixelCreation. There will be one copy of it raffled off at one of our meetings as well.

Good luck.