Lifewire

# How to Make a Tilt Shift Effect in GIMP

by **Ian Pullen**

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## 01 of 06 How to Make a Tilt Shift Effect in GIMP

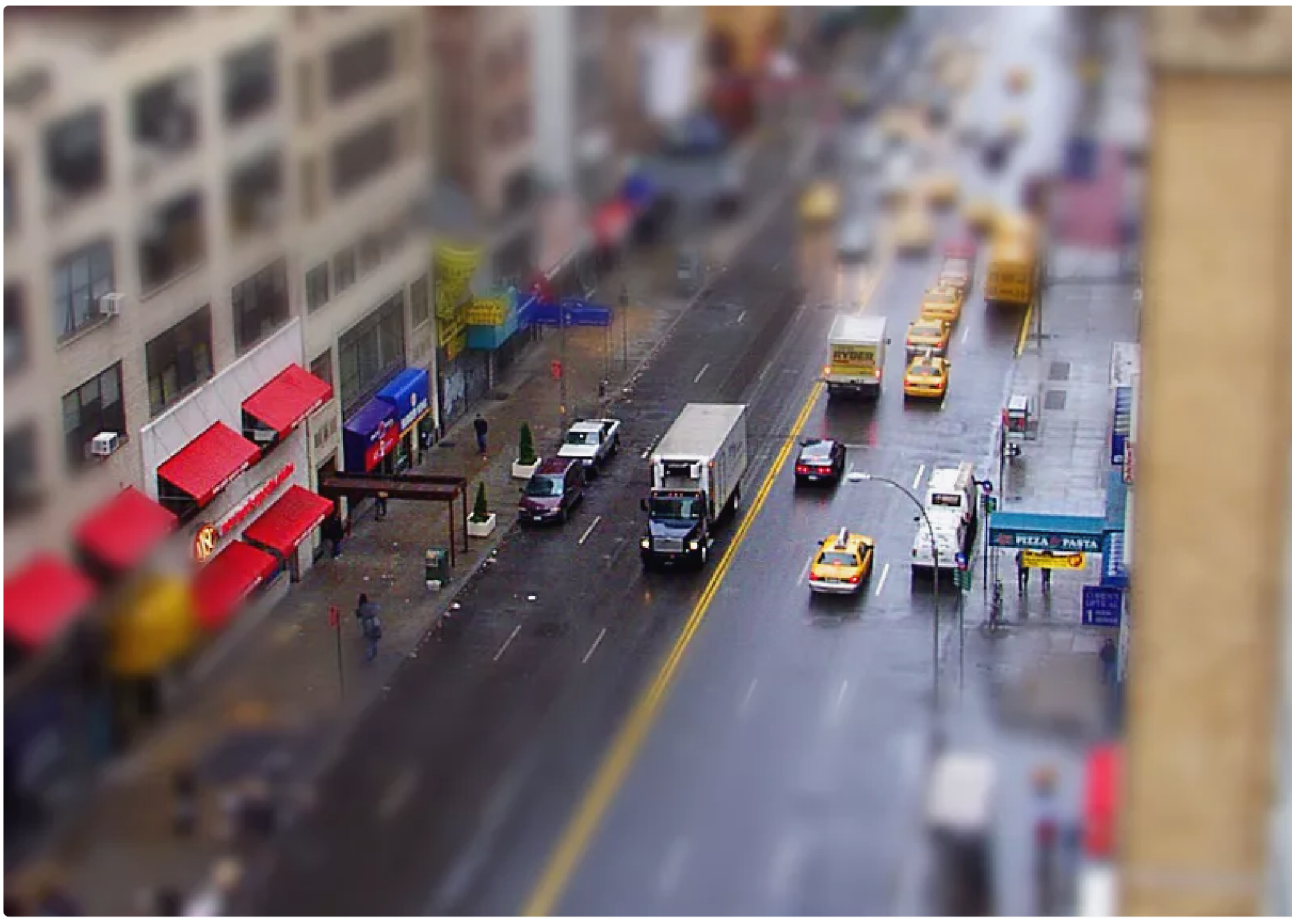


Photo helicopterjeff from Morguefile.com

The tilt shift effect has become very popular in recent years, perhaps largely because many photo filter type apps include such an effect. Even if you haven't heard the name tilt shift, you will almost certainly have seen examples of such photos. Typically they will show scenes, often shot a little from above, that have a shallow band in focus, with the rest of the image blurred. Our brains interpret these images as being photos of toy scenes because we have become conditioned that photos with such focused and blurred areas are in fact photos of toys. However, it is a very easy effect to create in image editors, such as GIMP.

The tilt shift effect is named after specialist tilt shift lenses that are designed to allow their users to move the front element of the lens independently of the rest of the lens. Architectural photographers can use these lenses to reduce the visual effect of vertical lines of buildings converging as they get higher. However, because these lenses only focus sharply on a narrow band of the scene, they have also been used to create pictures that look like photos of toy scenes.

## 02 of 06 Choose a Suitable Photo for a Tilt Shift Effect




Photo © helicopterjeff from Morguefile.com

First you'll need a photo that you can work on and as mentioned earlier, a photo of a scene that has been taken from an angle looking downwards usually works best. If, like me, you've not got a suitable photo, then you can look online at some of the free stock image sites. We downloaded a photo by helicopterjeff from Morguefile.com and you may also find something suitable on stock.xchng.

Once you've selected a photo, in GIMP go to **File** > **Open** and navigate to the file before clicking the **Open** button.

## 03 of 06 Adjust the Color of the Photo

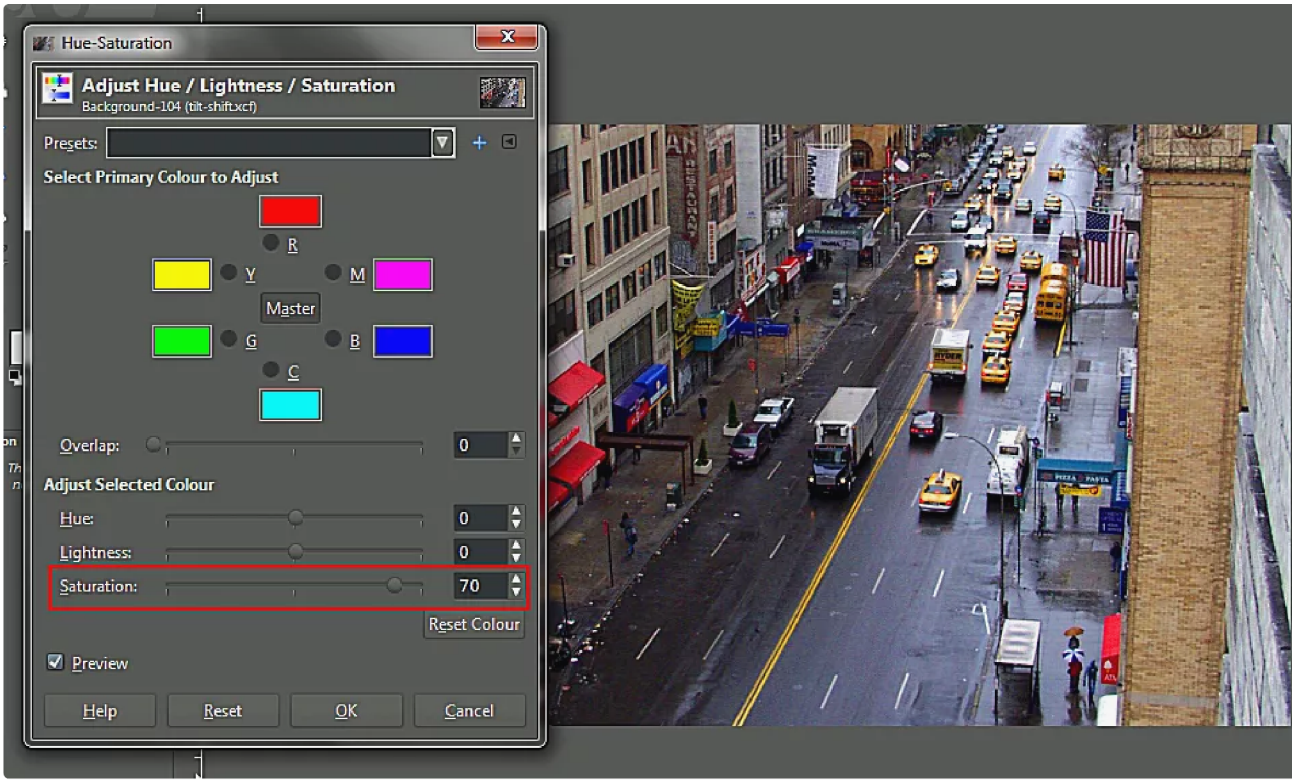



Photo © helicopterjeff from Morguefile.com, Screen Shot © Ian Pullen

Because we're trying to create an effect that looks like a toy scene, rather than a photo of the real world, we can make the colors brighter and less natural to add to the overall effect.

The first step is to go to **Colors** > **Brightness-Contrast** and tweak both sliders. The amount that you adjust these will be dependent on the photo that you're using, but we increased both the Brightness and Contrast by 30.

Next, go to **Colors** > **Hue-Saturation** and move the Saturation slider to the right. We increased this slider by 70 which would normally be excessively high but suits our needs in this case.

## 04 of 06 Duplicate and Blur the Photo

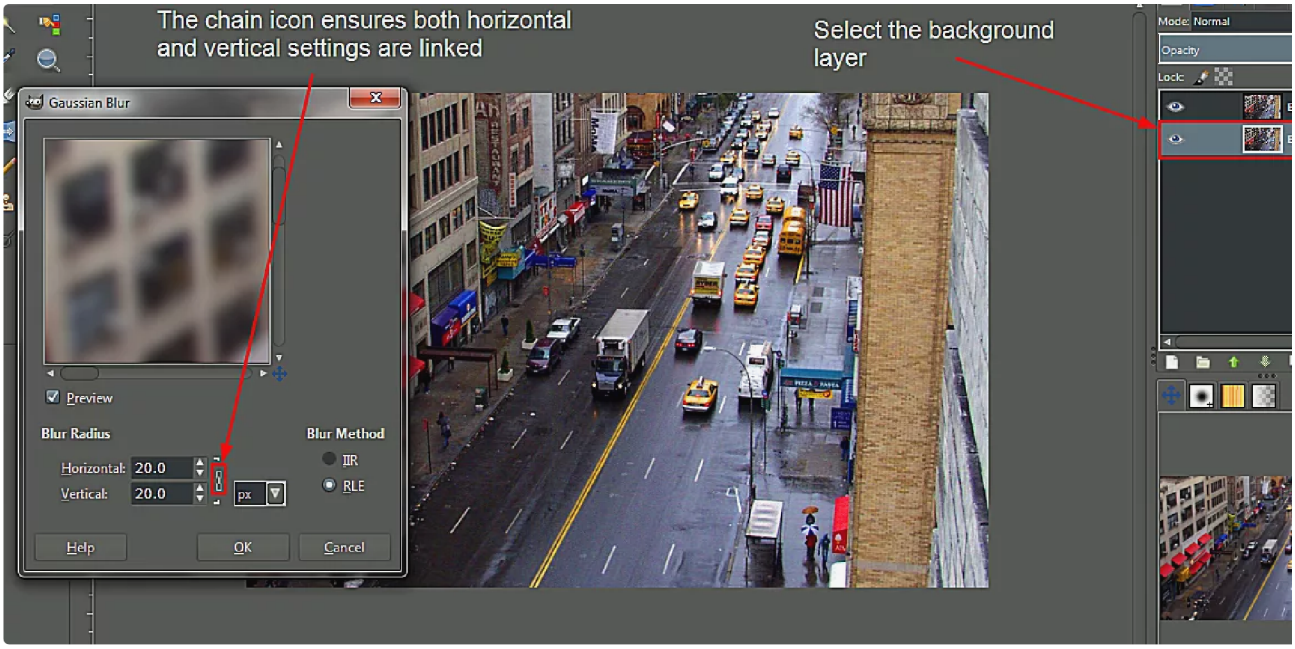



Photo © helicopterjeff from Morguefile.com, Screen Shot © Ian Pullen

This is a simple step where we'll duplicate the background layer and then add blur to the background.

You can either click the Duplicate layer button in the bottom bar of the layers palette or go to **Layer** > **Duplicate Layer**. Now, in the Layers palette (go to **Windows** > **Dockable Dialogs** > **Layers** if it's not open), click on the lower background layer to select it. Next, go to **Filters** > **Blur** > **Gaussian Blur** to open the Gaussian Blur dialog. Check that the chain icon is unbroken so that changes you make affect both input fields – click the chain to close it if necessary. Now increase the Horizontal and Vertical settings to about 20 and click **OK**.

You won't be able to see the blur effect unless you click the eye icon beside the Background copy layer in the Layers palette to hide it. You need to click in the blank space where the eye icon was to make the layer visible again.

## 05 of 06 Add a Mask to the Upper Layer

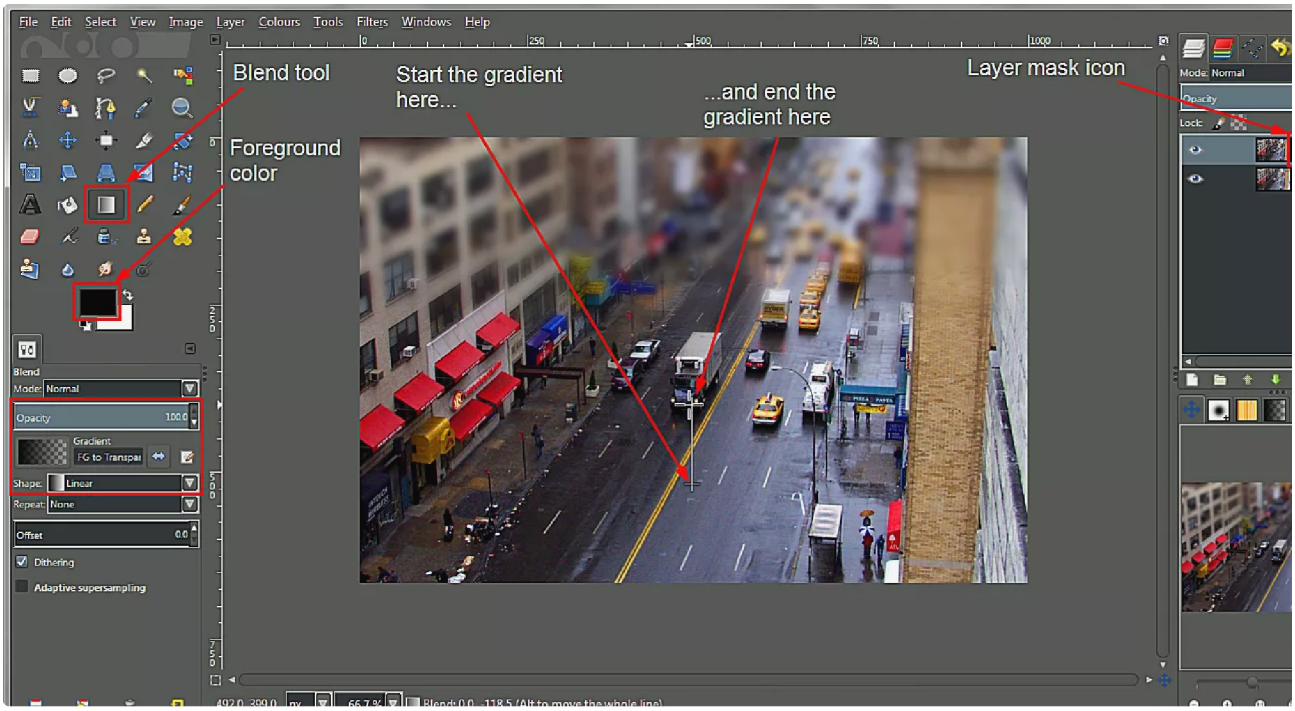



Photo © helicopterjeff from Morguefile.com, Screen Shot © Ian Pullen

In this step, we can add a mask to the upper layer that will allow some of the background to show through which will give us the tilt shift effect.

Right click on the Background copy layer in the Layers palette and select Add Layer Mask from the context menu that opens up. In the Add Layer Mask dialog, select the White (full opacity) radio button and click the Add button. You'll now see a plain white mask icon in the Layers palette. Click on the icon to ensure that it's selected and then go to the Tools palette and click on the Blend tool to make it active.

The Blend tool options will now be visible below the tools palette and in there, ensure that the Opacity slider is set to 100, the Gradient is FG to Transparent and the Shape is Linear. If the foreground color at the bottom of the Tools palette isn't set to black, press the **D key** on the keyboard to set the colors to the default of black and white.

With the Blend tool now set correctly, you need to draw a gradient on the top and bottom of the mask which allows the background to show through while leaving a band of the upper image visible. Holding the **Ctrl key** on your keyboard to constrain the angle of the Blend tool to 15-degree steps, click on the photo about a quarter way down from the top and hold the left key down while you drag down the photo to a little above the halfway point and release the left button. You will need to add another similar gradient to the bottom of the image also, this time going upwards.

You should now have a reasonable tilt shift effect, however, you may need to clean up the image a little if you have items in the foreground or background that are also in sharp focus.

## 06 of 06 Manually Blur Areas

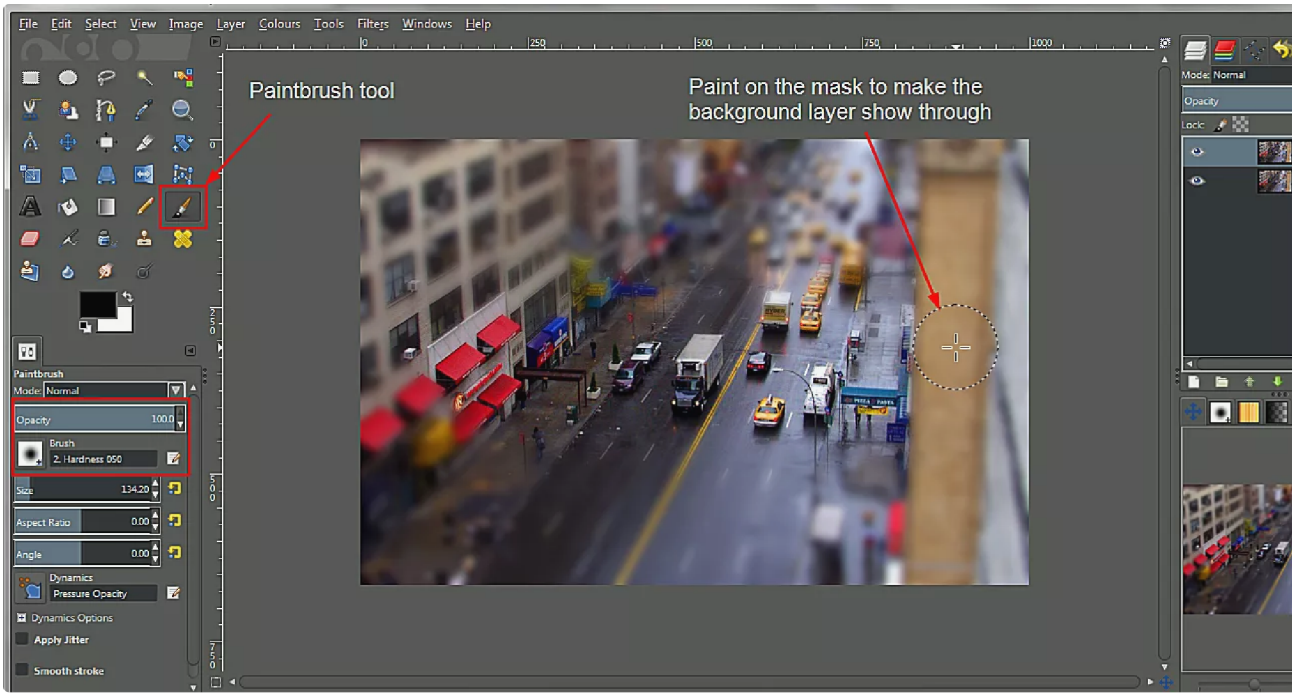



Photo © helicopterjeff from Morguefile.com, Screen Shot © Ian Pullen

The last step is to manually blur areas that are still in focus but shouldn't be. In this photo, the wall on the right-hand side of the image is very much in the foreground, so this should really be blurred.

Click on the **Paintbrush tool** in the Tools palette and in the Tool Options palette, ensure that Mode is set to **Normal**, select a soft brush (we chose 2. Hardness 050) and set the size as appropriate for the area that you're going to be working on. Also, check that the foreground color is set to black.

Now click on the **Layer Mask** icon to ensure that it is still active and just paint over the area that you want to be blurred. As you paint on the mask, the upper layer will be hidden revealing the blurred layer below.

That's the final step in creating your own tilt shift effect photo that looks like a miniature scene