

# Project: Making Baubles

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## Baubles?

Around Christmas there are always Christmas trees, and on those trees many decorations are glass balls: baubles. If you are designing a Christmas card or just playing about, you may want to create your own Photoshopped baubles.

The basic process is very simple but once you have done it you can play to your heart's content to create your own abstract baubles.

I have described two approaches here: playing with "Polar Coordinates" and playing with "Twirl". Don't worry what "Polar Coordinated" means... it's just a way to mess with the image!

I have used Photoshop because that is what I have. It should be possible to do the same kind of thing in any editor. If you use a different editor, experiment and see what you can do.

This version of the tutorial includes a demonstration of how to use them in the creation of an abstract image. Thanks to Stan Farrow FRPS for providing this. Stan calls them Bubbles... but they are the same thing!



*Christmas Baubles*

## Techniques

### Polar Coordinates

This approach will create an abstract circle or oval.

First, take a brightly coloured image and convert it to a square (use the crop tool and set it to “square”). This will give a circular bauble. If you don’t crop it, you will get an oval... which is fine if that is what you want!

Now, go to the “Filter Menu” and select “Distort”. From here, choose “Polar Coordinates” and apply a “Polar to Rectangular” conversion.

This will have messed up the image pretty comprehensively. Now, flip it vertically by going to the “Image” menu and choosing “Image Rotation”. Now choose “Flip Canvas vertical”.

At this point you can do anything you like to mess up the image even more. Try anything on the “Filter > Distort” menu. How about “Twirl” or “Ripple”?

Finally, go back to the “Filter Menu” and select “Distort” and “Polar Coordinates” again. This time apply a “Rectangular to Polar” conversion. This is the reverse of the conversion you started with.

The result will be a circular image. You don’t have to stop here... go back to the Distort menu! Then crop it to whatever shape you would like.

In Summary:

1. Convert the image to a square
2. Filter > Distort > Polar Coordinates >  
Convert Polar to Rectangular
3. Image > Image Rotation > Flip Canvas Vertical
4. Filter > Distort > Polar Coordinates >  
Convert Rectangular to Polar
5. Crop to whatever shape you like (baubles are circular.)
6. Maybe add a new background.

That’s it! Now do it again with a different image.



*Cropped to a Square*



*Polar to Rectangular*



*Flip the image Vertically*



*Rectangular to Polar*

## Twirl

If anything, “Twirl” is even easier.

This will create an abstract with the same aspect ratio as your original image. You can then crop it to a circle if that is what you want.

So, if you want a circular bauble, start by converting your image to a square.

Now apply radial blur. There are several options here. Have a play until you get something “fun”.

Now, apply the “Twirl” from the “Filter > Distort” Menu. You can select the amount. You have to decide whether you want some clues to remain about the original image.

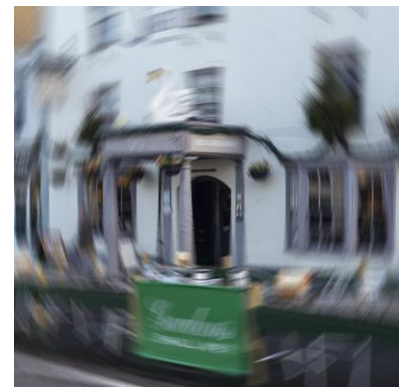
Finally, crop the image to the size you want, and maybe make a new background.(how about a texture instead of a plain background?)

In Summary:

1. Convert the image to a square
2. Filter > Blur > Radial Blur > Radial (play with settings - maybe several times)
3. Filter > Distort > Twirl (play with settings)
4. Crop to whatever shape you like (baubles, of course, are circular.)
5. Maybe add a new background.



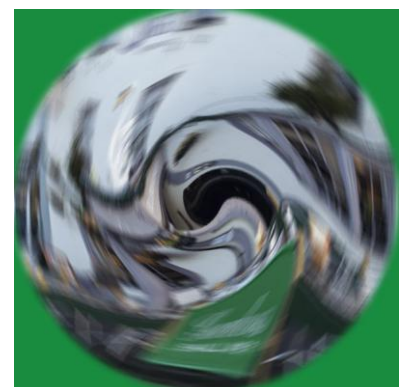
*Convert to a Square*



*Radial Blur*



*Twirl*



*Crop with a New Background*

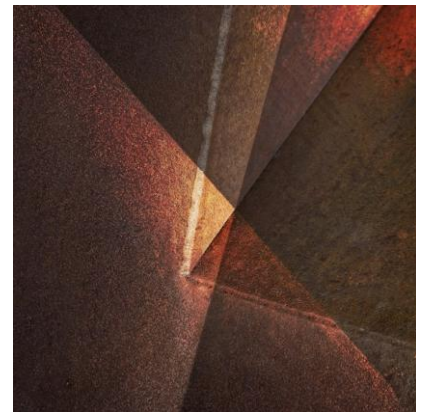
## Examples

### An Abstract Image from Stan Farrow FRPS

#### A: The Basics

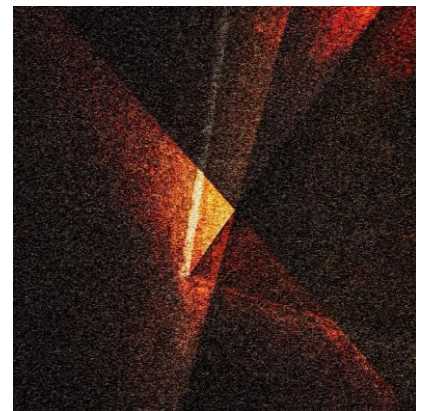
I first worked on this during Covid lockdown, and then forgot all about it. After many months I have now worked out how to do it again. I had really forgotten everything, including the starting point. Although there are some YouTube tutorials on-line, I still had to work out what was what from my file numbers and EXIF data, as well as my hazy memory, in order to back-engineer my original image to produce this recipe.

I started with a square double-exposure shot of angular steel at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. It was two different photos, overlaid as layers, and using “soft light” as a blending mode in Photoshop. It could easily have been just a simple photo instead. Anything would work so long as it is colourful and contrasty, without too much white.



*A Double Exposure to Start*

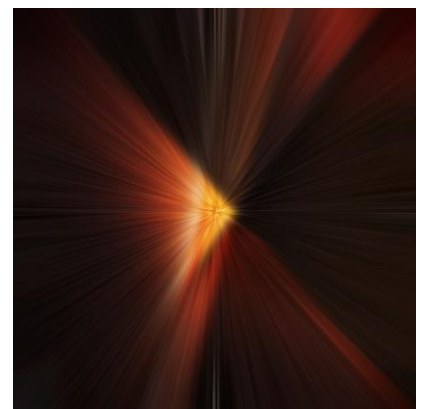
In Photoshop I went to “Filters” and then “Pixellate” and chose “Mezzotint” choosing “Short lines” in the option.



*Pixellate*

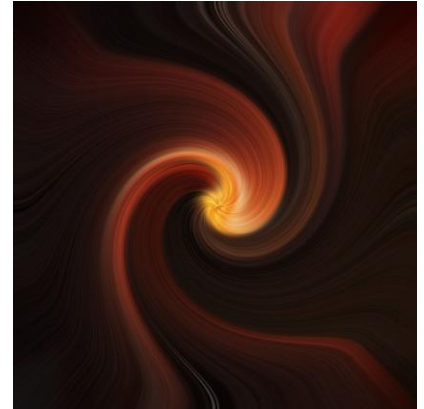
I duplicated this pixellated image **twice** to create three layers. (I only needed two layers, but I kept one as a spare).

To each of the top two layers I applied radial blur at 100% **three** times (twice on a draft setting and once on a fine setting).



*Radial Blur*

To one of the top layers I applied a “Twirl” filter in a **clockwise** direction with a 240 degrees setting.



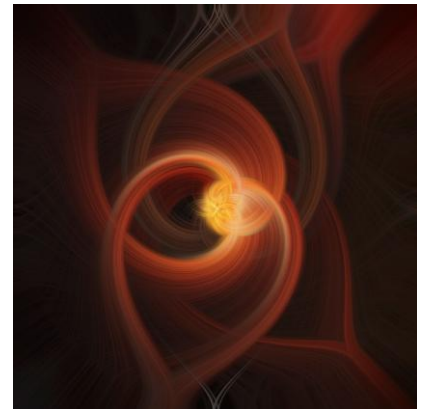
*Clockwise Twirl*

To the other top layer I applied a “Twirl” filter in an **anticlockwise** direction, again with a 240 degrees setting. The setting is arbitrary.



*Anticlockwise Twirl*

Now I changed the blending mode of the top layer to “**lighten**” so that both layers were apparent.



*Lighten Blending Mode*

Now I flattened the image and adjusted the tonality with levels or curves and sharpened things a bit. After that my initial file looked like this:



*Adjust Tonality etc.*

## B. Bubble Embellishment

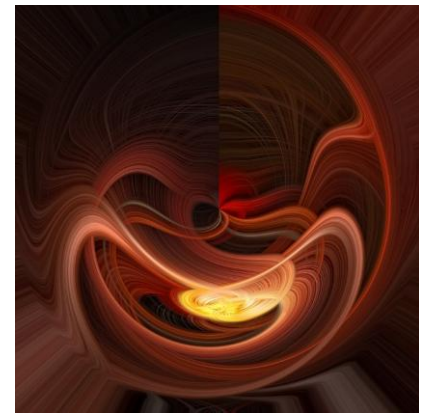
I thought the central highlight was a bit distracting, so I wanted to create a couple of “bubbles” to put on top to hide it a bit. I did this by starting with a **copy** of the baseline image, and saving it as a separate file. Then I applied a “Polar Coordinates” filter (Filter > Distort > Polar coordinates) set at “rectangular to polar”.

You will notice that there are two features about this version that you don’t want: Firstly there is a vertical joint” at the top and secondly the image is square not circular. So the first thing is to cut and paste a circular version into your baseline image.

You can make your selection using the “circular marquee tool”, starting at the top left-hand corner of your square image and holding the “shift” key down as you drag the tool across your image to the bottom right corner.

Once you have pasted your “bubble” into your baseline image it will be far too big. Re-size it by using “Ctrl” and “T” simultaneously to get “handles” to enable it to be dragged to a smaller size. Using “Tab” while you do this will maintain the 1:1 proportions of the image. The result will look a bit like this.

At this point you may need to adjust the contrast of your “Bubble” using curves or levels in Photoshop. It will still have that nasty vertical joint. You can erase that using a layer mask (or the eraser tool) and a broad brush. The “bubble” will appear a bit transparent as a result so that is not a bad thing. It will look like this now:



*Polar Coordinates*



*Cut Into a Circle*



*Resized Bubble*



*Contrast and Retouch*

The final step is to make and insert further bubbles of different sizes before flattening your composition and adjusting the overall contrast.

That's it! Phew! I hope you have enjoyed getting here!

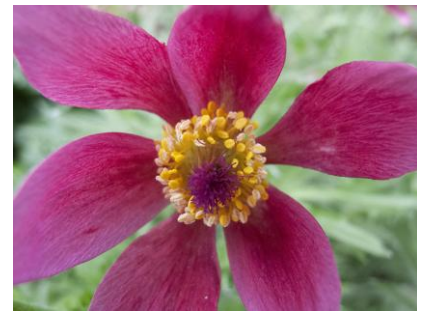


*The Final Image*

### **A Circular Frame**

You don't have to stay with a simple pattern. You could use it as a frame or combine several baubles to create a bigger pattern.

For example.....start with this flower...



*A Simple Flower*

Play with Polar Coordinates to get this...



*Polar Coordinates*

Finally, put a picture in the middle...



*Add a Picture*