

HOW TO MAKE A CONTRAST MASK

Introductions :

This tutorial is an adaptation from [a tutorial for GIMP](#) by Eric R. Jeschke. I have tested that tutorial in the Paint.Net environment and the results are awesomely stunning, in comparison to built-in Brightness/Contrast. Since reading and doing that tutorial, this technique becomes my favourite and a staple each time I'm doing a picture editing and so, never turned back. The reason ? You can read that material and see the examples shown in this tutorial to know why.

In this tutorial, I'll show you the process, the plug-ins needed to complete the task, and several picture examples also comparisons between pictures so that you can choose between applying a contrast mask or just using the conventional way to enhance your pictures.

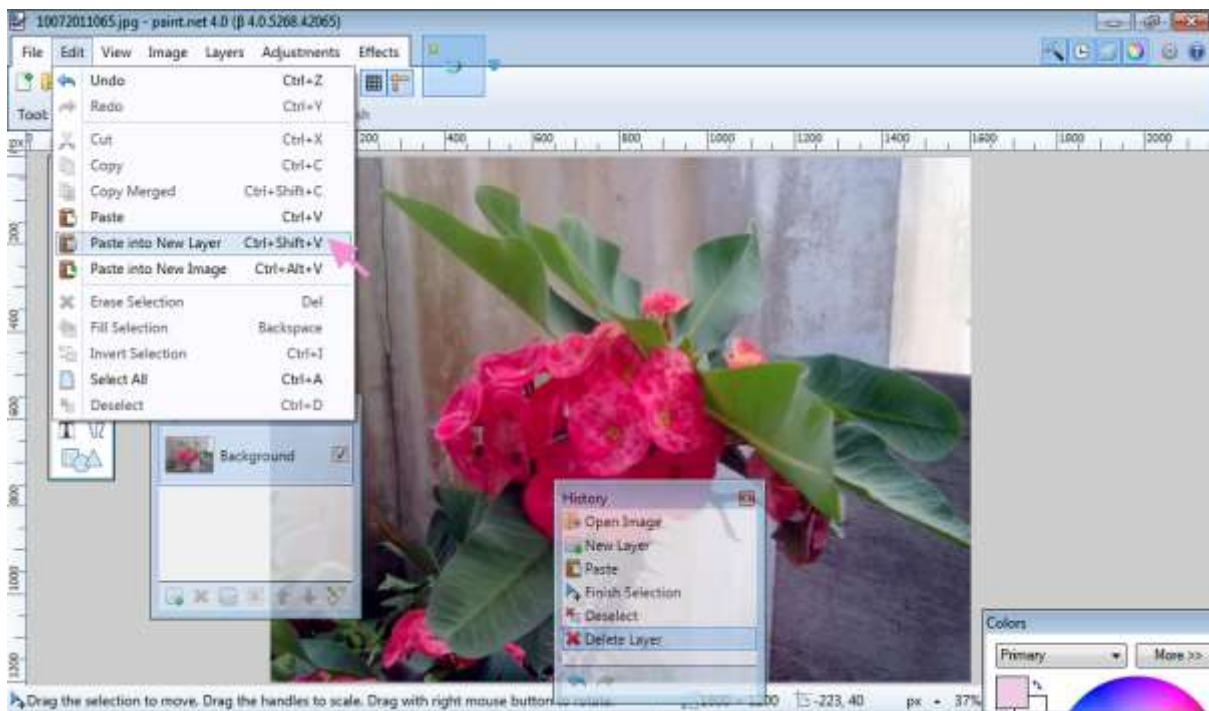
Here are the original picture that I'm going to use for this tutorial :



I just want to show up the details at the flower petals clearly while make whole picture brighter and rich in colour. And let see how this technique popping my intentions out.

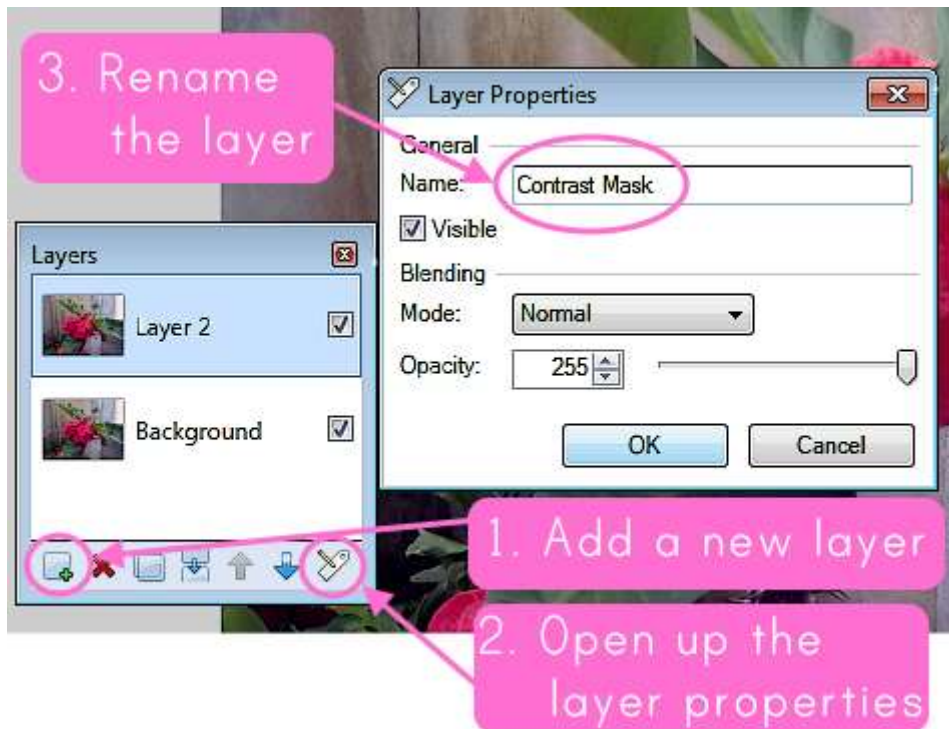
The Process :

1. Load the image to Paint.Net- By copy-pasting or just conventionally opening up it.



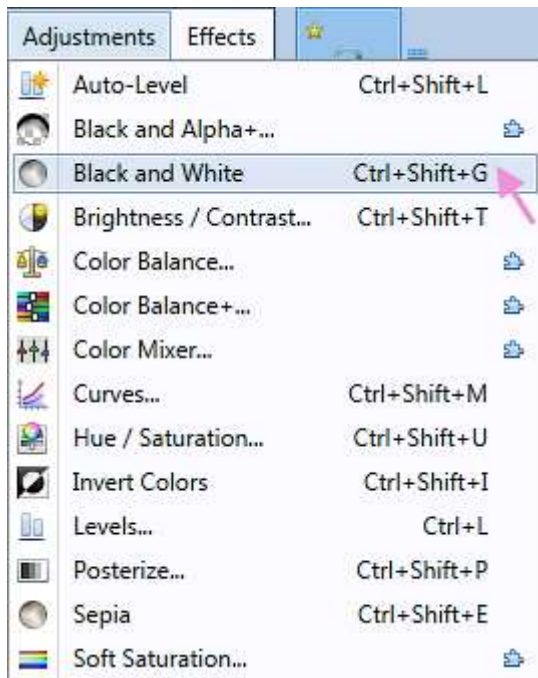
2. Duplicate the image by copy-pasting the image. To make you life easier, JUST using 'Paste into New Layer' command and then rename the layer.

OR, following the steps in the picture below :

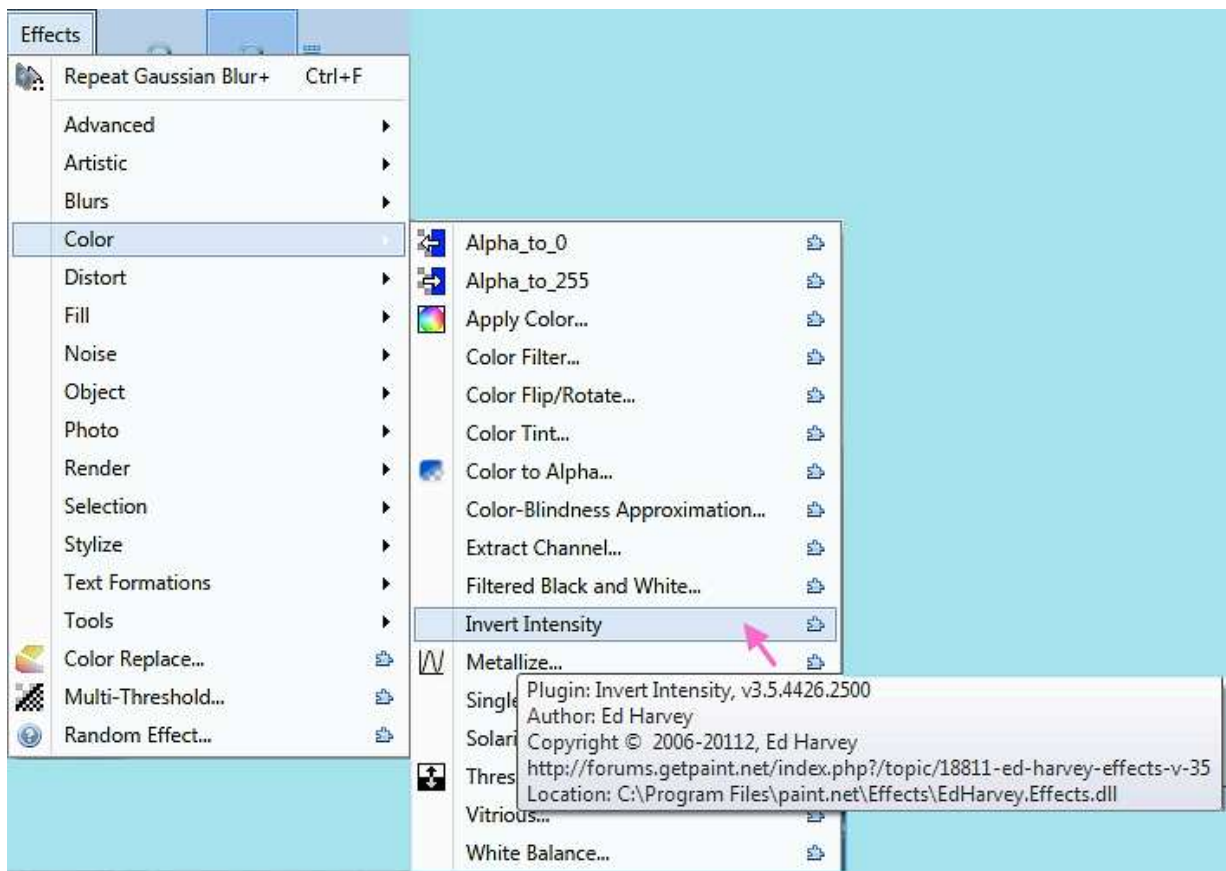


I renamed the layer as 'Contrast Mask'. This step is not really important if the contrast mask is simply just one technique applied to your picture. Somehow, if you want to apply several layering techniques to make your picture looks great, just rename it so that you'll know what you have done to your picture and not accidentally deleting the layer.

3. Go to 'Adjustments' and choose 'Black And White' to desaturate the picture.



Then go to 'Effects' and choose Color>Invert Intensity :

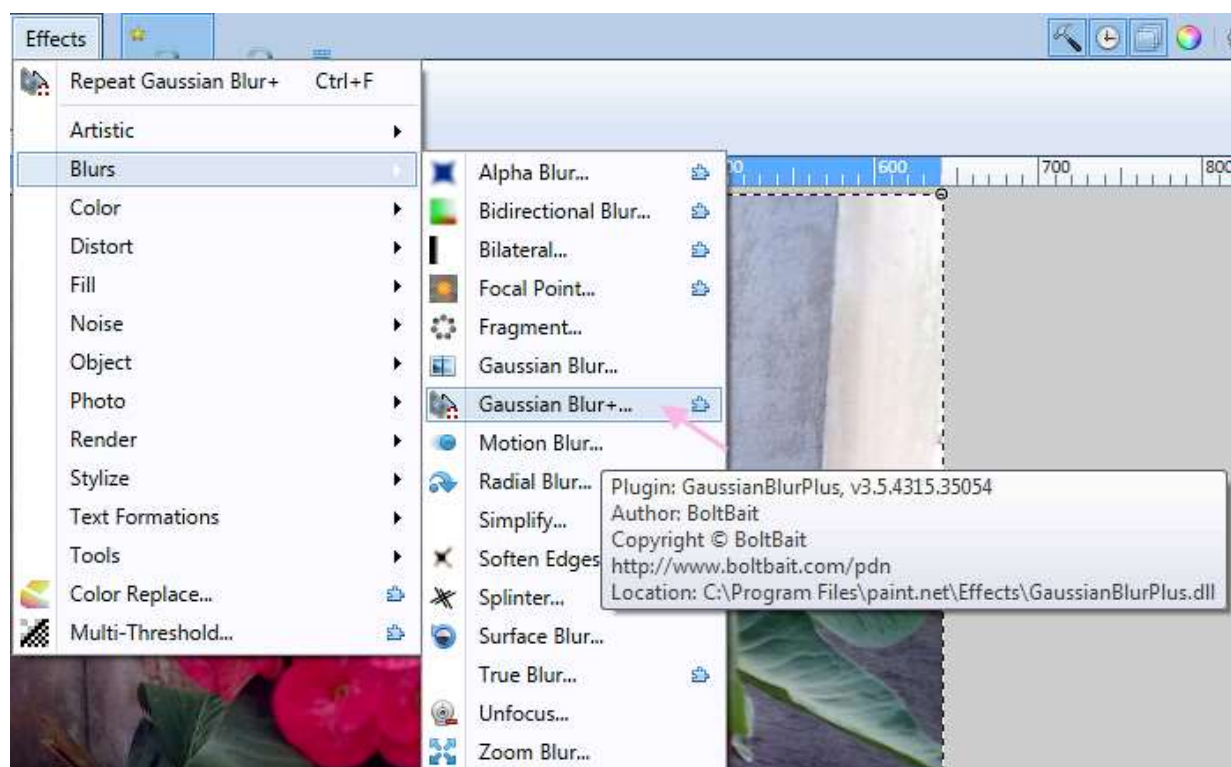


And your picture will looked like this afterwards:



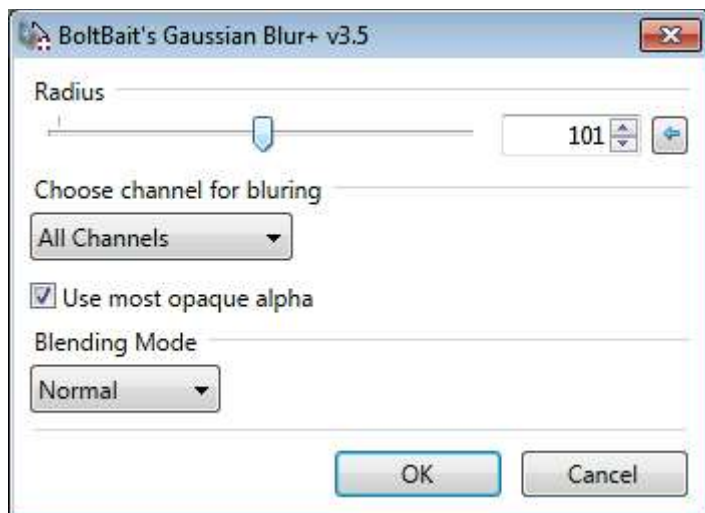
This negative layer will be combined with the background layer to create a combination that has been mentioned by Mr. Jeschke as 'light with dark, dark with light to reduce the overall contrast'.

4. Go to 'Effects', choose Blur>Gaussian Blur+



(Note : You can use build-in Gaussian Blur too, but for this tutorial I choose Gaussian Blur+)

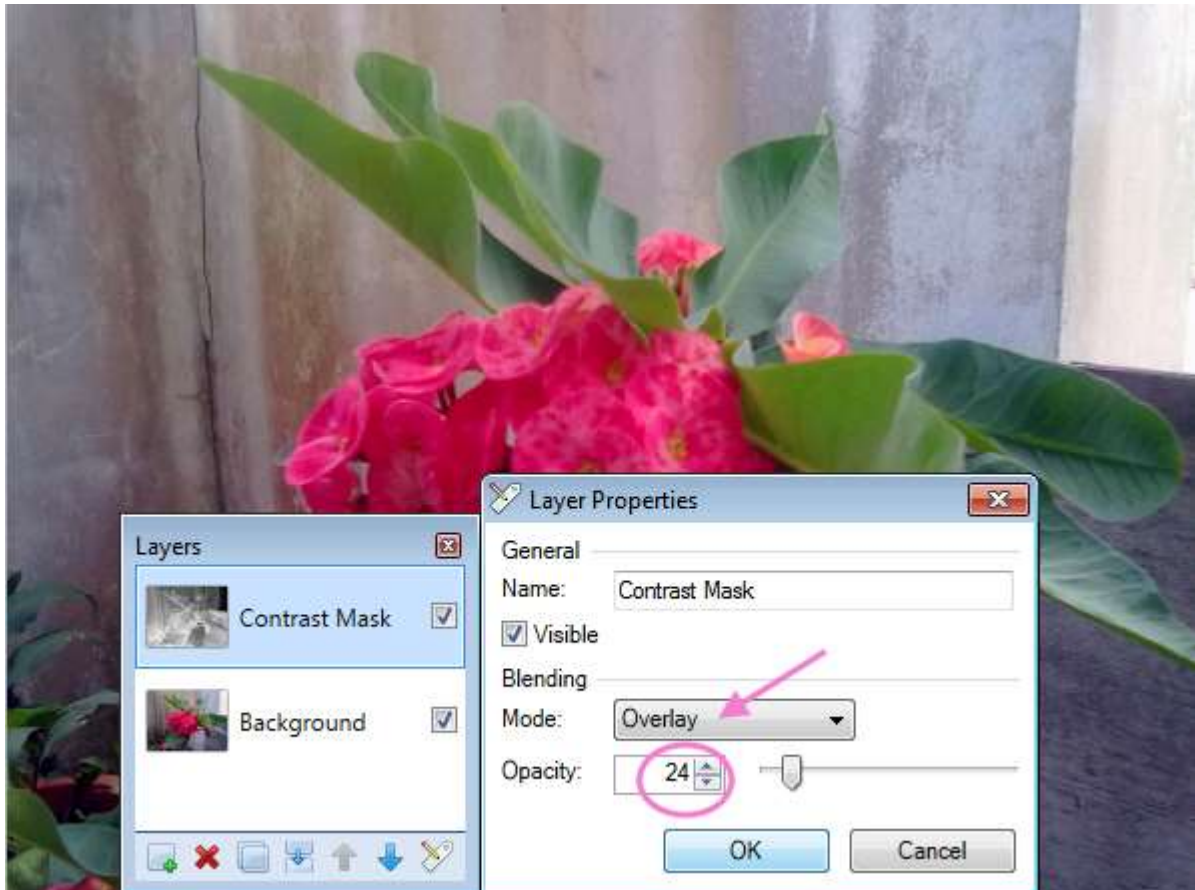
Here are my settings :



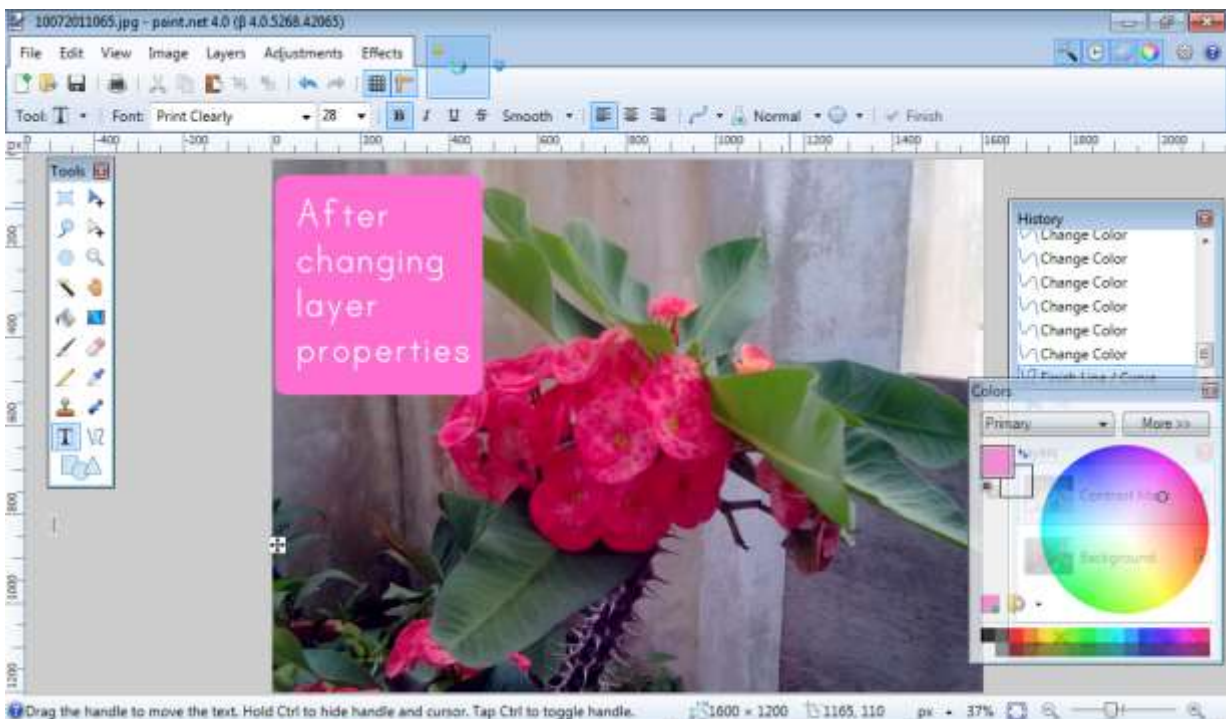
For those who used build -in Gaussian Blur, I suggest to pick a value range between 20-40.

The application of Gaussian Blur is for increasing the overall sharpness. After applying the contrast mask, the overall sharpness in the pictures are always decreased.

5. Go to layer properties and set the contrast mask blending setting option to 'Overlay'. Adjusting the opacity of the layer (by using the slider) to see how the background layer blends up with the contrast mask layer.



Click OK and you'll get the picture like in the screenshot below :



Here are the picture after flattening and saving :



Compare it with the original picture :



And compare it with conventional 'Brightness and Contrast' :



(Brightness : 0, Contrast : 14)

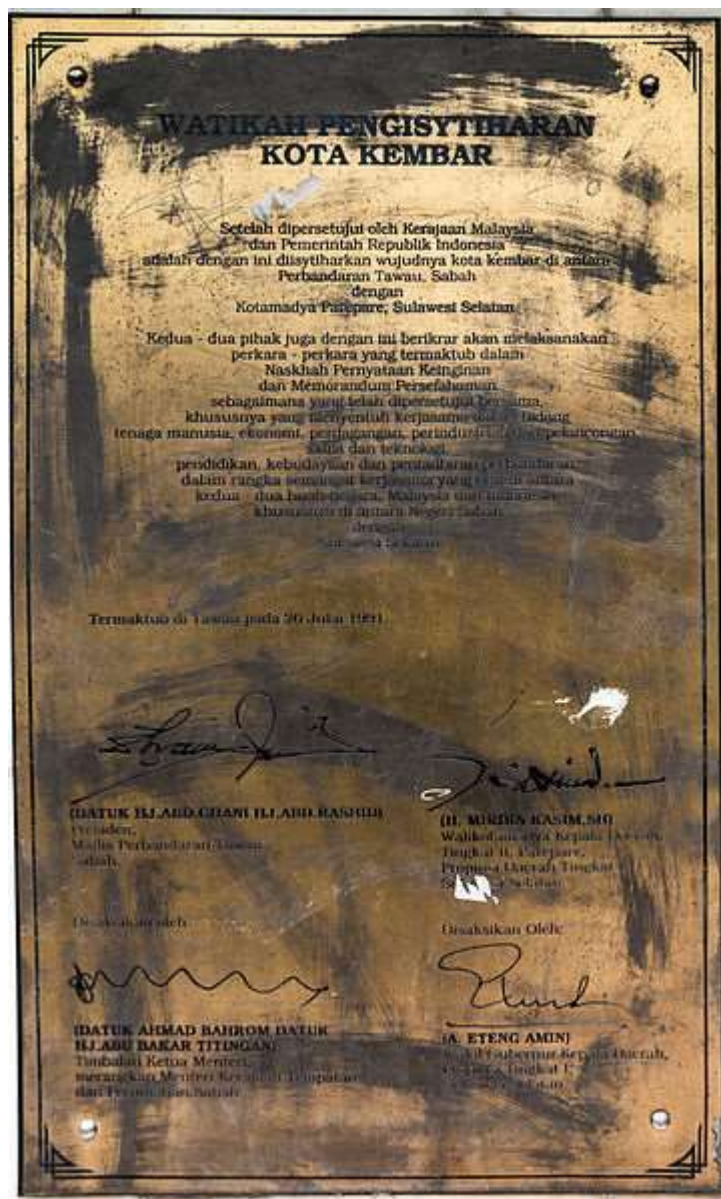
Which one your prefer the most ?

Here are some more examples :



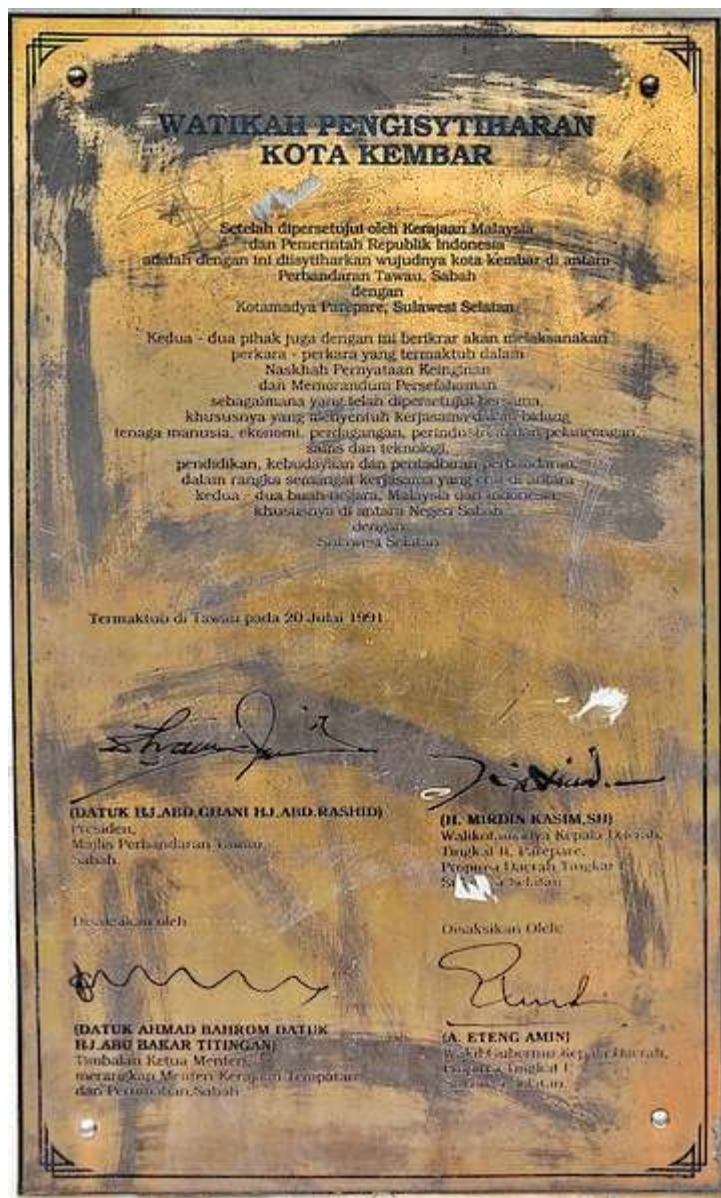
But nothing more stunning than this comparison :

Before



(Source : [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Watikah_Pengisytiharan_Kota_Kembar.jpg))

After :



Before applying the contrast mask, it is so hard to read what had been written on this metal plat !

The setting for each cases are different because different pictures, different needs.

So, all the best !



Side Note :

1. 'Invert Intensity' and 'Gaussian Blur+' are separate plug-ins for Paint.Net. Download link can be found right [here](#) and [here](#).
2. To decrease the shadows or reducing the highlights, just applying 'Curve' or 'Level'.
3. For those who're using 'Gaussian Blur+' plug-in, you can set the blending mode in the prompt box to 'Overlay'. It's better, trust me !
4. Apply 'Shadow/ Highlight Recovery' or 'Local Contrast Enhancement' to contrast mask layer. Both are also separate plug-ins available for downloads. Here are the download links : 1. [Shadow/Highlight Recovery](#) 2. [Local Contrast](#)
5. If you want to apply contrast mask effect to selected area, just applying a layer mask to cover the unselected area.