

Background Blurring

Welcome to the *Background Blurring tutorial*. This tutorial was designed to teach you how to add depth to your images by blurring the detail in the background. If you need help with it, or find it confusing, don't hesitate to e-mail me, the information is at the bottom of the page.



If you would like to follow along using this picture, you can download it by clicking [here](#).

- 1 The image to the left has something wrong with it, granted it's subtle, but it can still be confusing to the eye. The problem with this photo is the background, it has too much detail. This picture is trying to portray the beauty that is Josie, but the background is stealing the attention!


Photographers see this a lot, it isn't hard to fix up but it sure isn't necessary. When you watch films or see other photographs, take a look at them, you'll notice that the subject (the character, or object in focus) is stealing the spotlight, this is happening because the background elements are completely blurred out leaving your eyes with no other option but to look at something they can see properly. This technique is also used a lot to create depth, which is what we'll be doing.

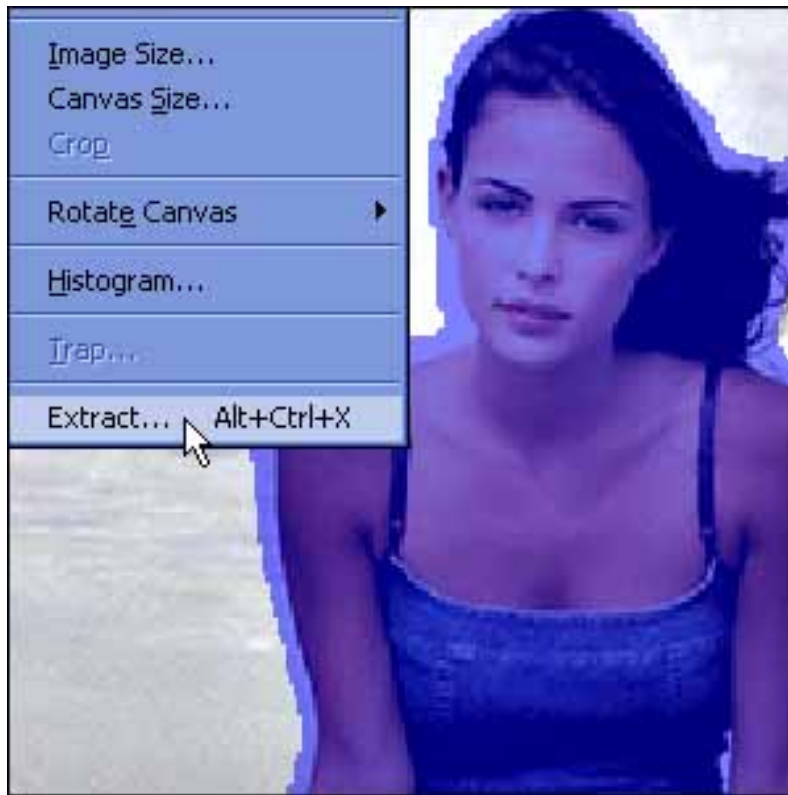
- 2 The first thing we'll have to do is isolate Josie from the background, there are many different ways you can accomplish this, but the easiest way is using the Extract command. From the main menu (and with the image's layer selected) choose **Image>Extract**, a large dialog box will open. (unless you're running at a very high resolution, it should fill your entire screen)


Next click on the **Edge Highlighter Tool** (



), use this tool to outline the contour of the part of the image you wish to extract, in this case it's Josie. Once you've outlined her,

use the **Fill Tool** () to fill the outline. If you've bled inside the the contour a bit (went

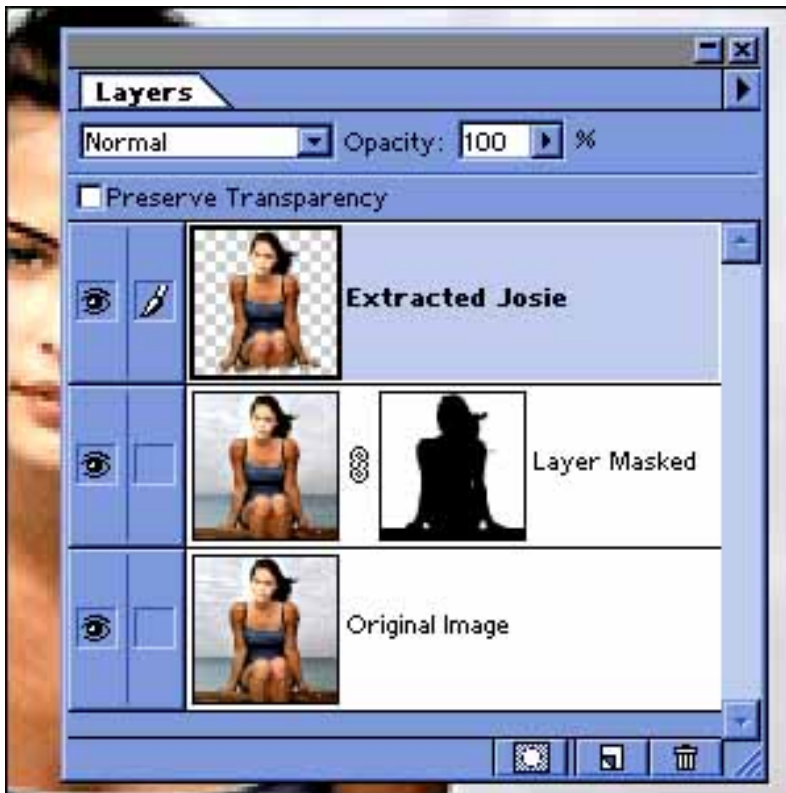



inside Josie's contour) you can use the **Eraser Tool** () to erase your mistakes.



- 3 Now that you have Josie selected, we'll extract her; Click the **Preview** button at the top right of the dialog box, this will show you the extracted selection overlaying a transparent background. If you don't like the extraction that you made you can click **Cancel** and re-try it, if you're satisfied, click **OK**.

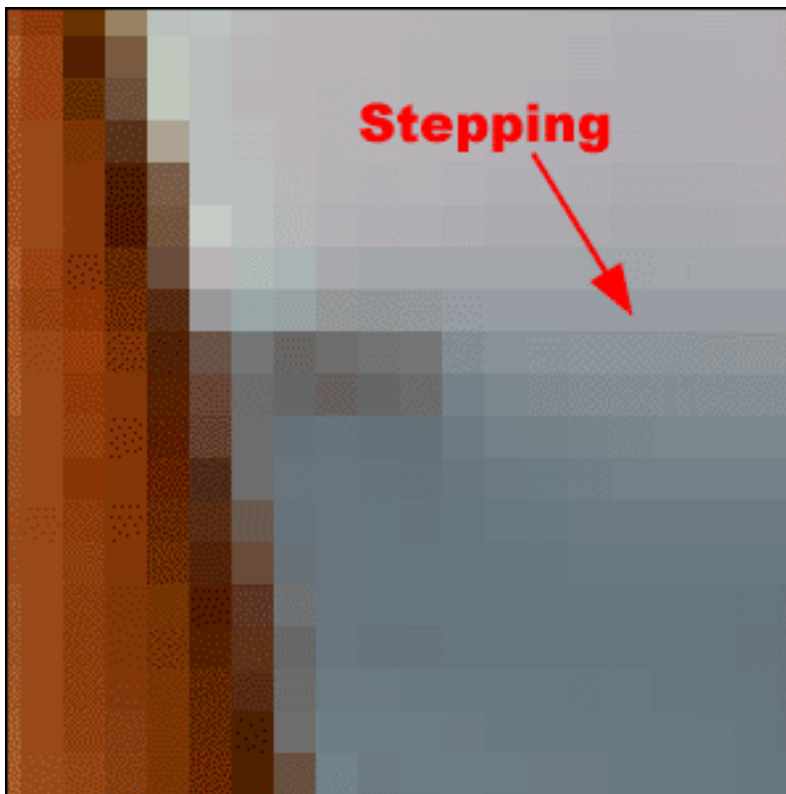
The extracted Josie will show up on a new layer in the Layers palette, control click on the Layer's thumbnail to activate the layer's transparency mask (selection). Now choose **Select>Inverse** (**Ctrl + Shift + I**) from the main menu.




- 4** With the inverted selection still active click on the original picture in the Layers stack, make a copy of this layer by dragging it on top of the **New Layer** button in the Layers palette. Rename the copied layer to "Layer Masked", then click the **Add Layer Mask** button at the bottom-left of the Layers palette. ()

The image to the left shows you the effects of adding a Layer Mask as well as how your Layers stack should look at this point.

Now deselect your selection by pressing **Ctrl + D** on your keyboard.



- 5** Click on the "Layer Masked" layer, make sure the image is selected and not the mask. Select the **Blur Tool** () from the toolbar, set the pressure to around 40-50%.

If your confused at this point, here's a recap of what we've done; We extracted Josie, and masked the inverse of her selection to a copy of the original image (layer), this enabled us to paint this layer without affecting the area defined by the layer mask.

With the Blur Tool blur the background until most of the stepping and detail has vanished as shown in the mage to the left. (You'll probably need to zoom in for this) Don't worry about blurring Josie, the layer mask (depending on how well you extracted Josie) prevents us from blurring her.

Note: You don't have to blur manually, you could also choose **Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur** from the main menu.



6 Once you've completed blurring the background, your result should look something like the image to the left. Scroll up to the top of the page and have a look at the image we started with, like I said before, subtle, but none the less you'll probably never look at a photo in the same way now. Being able to notice and improve little subtleties like this, improves your overall graphic enhancing abilities ten fold.

Congratulations, you've completed this tutorial!

Discussion

I hope you enjoyed this tutorial as much as I did making it. Now that you've completed this tutorial, take a look around the web, look at billboards as you pass them by on the road, see if you can spot the errors. If you have any questions, or there are any steps that I can further elaborate on, don't hesitate to e-mail me using the information below. Due to the amount of e-mail I get, you'll get a quicker response if you use the discussion forum. Post your question in the tutorials forum. Click [here](#) to go to the discussion forum.

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