



Corporate Flow



Illustration



Image Editing



Automation



Web



Text Effects

Canvas Tips and Techniques



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Alpha Channel Masking

Step 1

Masks serve many purposes for graphic artists. They are used to manipulate, edit, and compose images. In this feature we will introduce you to the basic concepts used to create a mask, using Canvas's Alpha channels.

In this example the goal is to select the golfer and mask the sky background, isolating the golfer.

First select the image and add a visibility mask. (Image> Add Visibility Mask) This will allow us to easily remove the background later in this exercise

Note: Easy masking techniques only work on images that are simple to begin with. Anytime you need to mask a complex element of an image out of a background containing differing contrasts or colors, things get a lot more complicated. However, for images like the one in this example, the Alpha channel method works very well. Once the basics are mastered, the additional use of Canvas' image editing tools can help you create more complex masks.

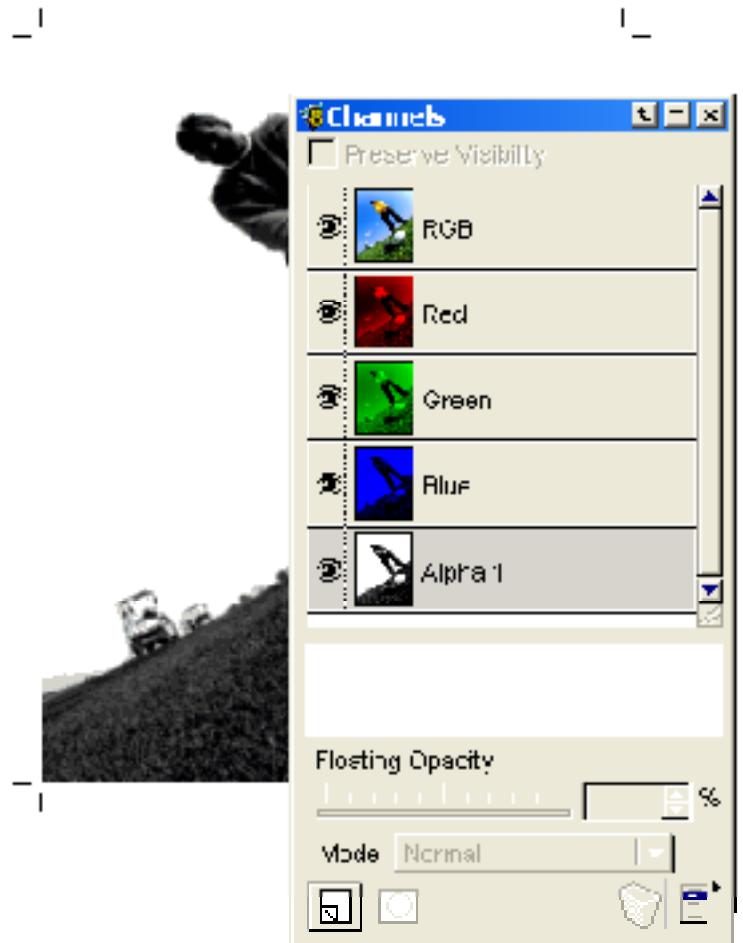


Step 2

Next, make sure the image is in RGB color mode (Image>Mode>RGB Color). Then place the image in paint-edit mode by double clicking it. Open the Channels palette (Image>Show Channels) and check each of the color channels to see which one reveals the greatest contrast. As you can see, in both the Red and Green channels the golfer's clothing blend into the background. The Blue channel seems to provide the greatest level of contrast between the background and the object we want to select. So for this example, I used the Blue channel.

Alpha Channel Masking (Continued)

Create the Alpha channel by dragging the Blue channel onto the New Channel icon at the bottom left of the palette. Then double click on the new channel and rename it Alpha 1.

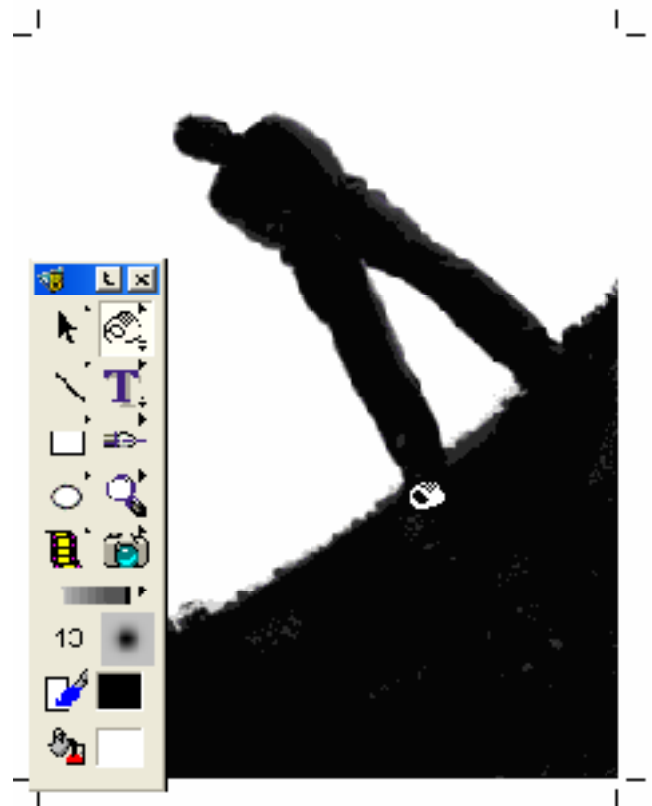


Create a new Alpha channel by dragging the Blue channel over the New Channel icon at the bottom of the Channels palette.

Step 3

With the image still in paint edit mode, choose the Burn tool from the Paint tools palette and darken any dark areas inside the section you are trying to mask. You could use the Dodge tool to lighten any dark spots in the background as well.

Note: The Airbrush tool may also be used to darken or light the alpha channel. Use black or white from the color palette.



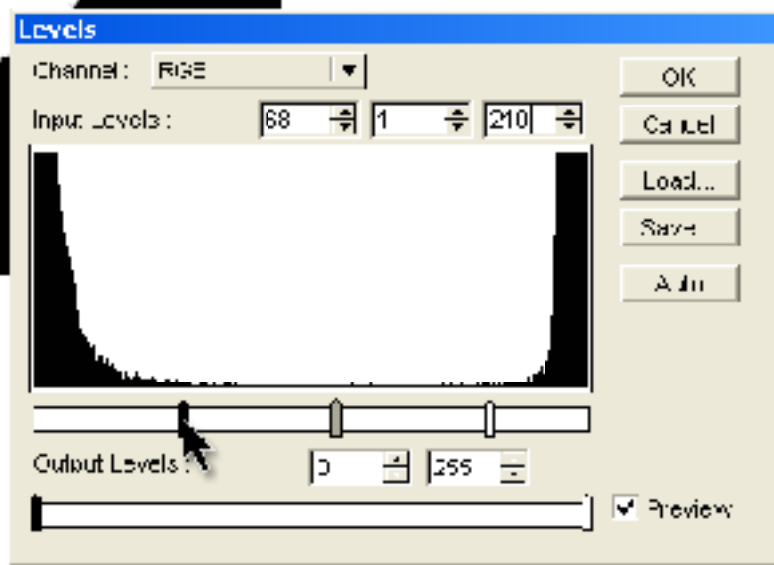
Use the Burn tool to darken the light areas within the image.

Alpha Channel Masking (Continued)

Step 4

Next, open the Levels palette (Image>Adjust>Levels) and bring the Input Levels together until you get a smooth, strong contrast between the foreground and the background. Be sure to have the Preview button checked in order to see the results as they happen. The resulting image should be as close to black and white as possible.

Note: Bringing the Input Levels too close together may result in a mask with jagged edges.



Step 5

Now select RGB in the Channels palette, hold down ALT (Windows) or Option (Mac) and click on the Alpha 1 Channel, this will load the new mask as a selection.



Alpha Channel Masking (Continued)

To complete, press Delete to remove the background. Since a Visibility mask was applied first, the background becomes transparent, allowing the image to be placed over other objects.

Note: For a softer edge, feather the selection before deleting the background (Image>Select>Feather).



The completed masked image.

Experiment by placing the final masked image over different backgrounds. Or assemble complete layouts using text and other elements. The sky's the limit. Remember that the beauty of creating image compositions in Canvas is that all of your elements remain completely separate and editable so changing your mind is never a problem.

