

22 A / NONDESTRUCTIVE EDITING - LAYER MASKS

The following section deals with Photoshop more as an artist studio and not just as an extension of photography. You will work with layers and layer masks using Photoshop as a flexible design tool to generate a digital composite of multiple images.

See also “22B Non Destructive Editing - Quick Masks.” While Layer Masks are perfect for making composite images, Quick Masks are ideal for using the same method for creating specialized selections.



Dali Atomicus, Philippe Halsman, 1948.

This version of the photograph shows an element missing in the final print: the hands holding the chair. Also, the final print contains one of Dali's paintings (“Leda Atomica”) in the frame on the easel.

A SAFETY NET

Digital tools such as Photoshop are used for small and large image manipulations, such as the slightest adjustment to the tonal range or the creation of an alternative reality.

In the photo *Dali Atomicus*, photographer Philippe Halsmann suspends the laws of physics using only a 4x5 camera. Halsmann reports that the image was

captured after “six hours and twenty-eight throws,” we don't know how many unhappy cats it took.

We will create our own composite putting something into the image that was not there originally without the need to harm cats. We'll focus on working in a nondestructive manner so our edits and modifications to the original images are placed in separate layer masks, allowing us to make changes to our composite image at any time using the original images we layered together.

NONDESTRUCTIVE EDITING

Editing which does not alter the information contained in original image. When you work nondestructively you can always go back to the original image.

Layer Masks use something called an **alpha channel** to create parts of an image which are transparent. This way we can place other images behind our image to create a **composite**. We could simply erase parts of the image on top to see the image we place below, but if we make a

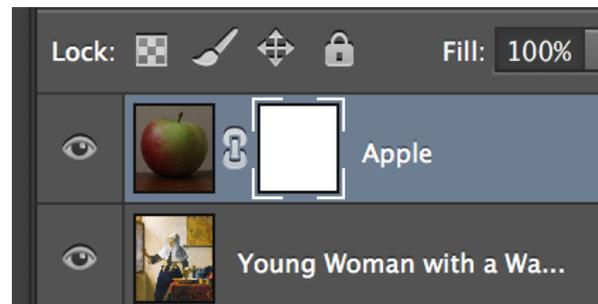
mistake there is no way of replacing what we have erased. This is where layer masks come in. Instead of erasing we are simply hiding part of the image and can simply brush in or brush out parts of the mask we don't want.



The alpha channel, or Layer Mask, is a special greyscale layer associated with a specific layer in Photoshop that determines what parts of the image are opaque and what parts should be transparent. You edit the layer mask with painting tools. Manipulating the Layer Mask allows you to hide or show parts of an image in a very simple manner. If we want to hide (make part of the image transparent) we simply paint in the layer mask with black. If we show too much we can simply switch our paint color to white. Using white we can paint back portions of the layer. Where the mask is white the image will appear (that portion of the layer appears opaque).

TIP

When you are using a layer mask **MAKE SURE** you are painting on the mask and not the image. Notice in the illustration how next to the apple the mask is highlighted. If the apple were highlighted we would just be painting on top of our image!



WORKING WITH LAYER MASKS IN PHOTOSHOP

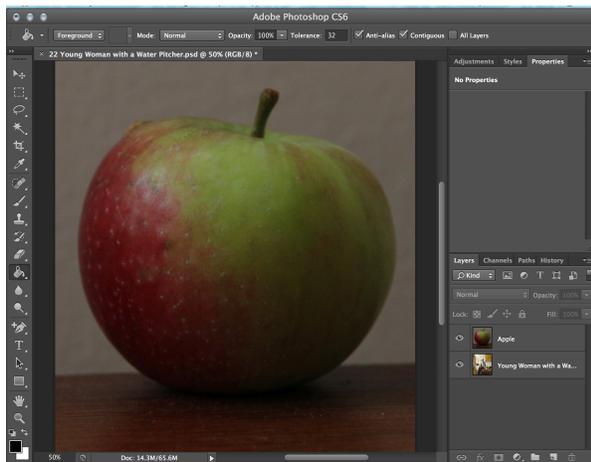
In this exercise we are going to vandalize a classic Vermeer painting by adding a modern apple. To do this we will create a composite of two images and use simple layer masks to combine them.

YOU WILL NEED:

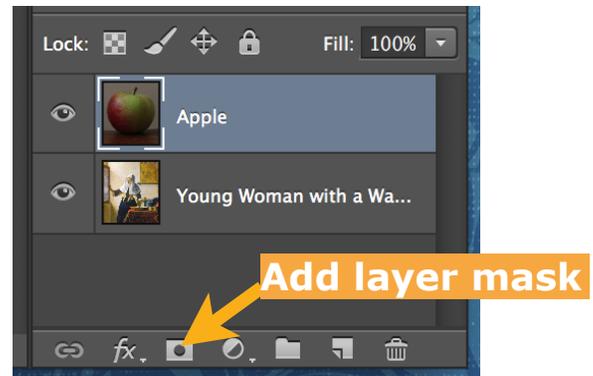
- A computer running Photoshop CS6
- A background image (e.g. Vermeer painting from the example files)
- A foreground image (e.g. “sad apple” from the example files)

STEPS:

1. In Photoshop Use File > Open to open the file exercise file. You should notice there are two layers an apple and a Vermeer painting.



2. Add a layer mask to the apple layer by first selecting the layer than clicking on the add layer button. This button looks like a folder with a circle in the center.



3. Now we are going to begin hiding the parts of image we won't need. In your tool palette select the paintbrush tool and make sure your color is set to



black. Double check to make sure the mask is selected and begin painting. You should see the Vermeer peaking through.

4. You can experiment with different brush sizes and settings to get a look that works for you. Once you have the transparent areas painted on the mask you can switch your color to white and replace anything you accidentally hid. Notice in our illustration we got so excited we made a hole in our apple. You can also see where the hole in the layer mask. Simply switch to white and begin repairing your image.



might you do to blend them together? One way could be to simply mask away the bottom of the apple, so it appears to be in the tray. You can also consider putting the Vermeer layer above the apple and then using another layer mask so the apple appears. Try either of these until you are happy with the results. If you have time try both and see which was quicker, easier, better? Trying different approaches and then thinking about how they worked is all part of learning tools like photoshop.



5. Once you are happy with your apple resize it and try to position it in the bowl on the table. If you left your apple large while masking you might notice parts along the edges that you missed. Simply paint them out using the masking skills you have developed.



6. Now we have the apple near the bowl, but it doesn't look quite right. It seems like it is floating in front of the bowl and definitely not part of the same world as the Vermeer. What

ETHICS AND IMAGE MANIPULATION

In certain situations, the digital artist must be ethically aware of the manipulation that occurs when they change an image. The National Press Photographers Association maintains a code of ethics that journalism students and professionals should abide. Explore some of the rules, do they affect how you think about image manipulation?

Journalists and news photographers strive for accuracy in their image-based reporting. There are historical cases of digital manipulation which are often used to illustrate a violation of the NPPA code of ethics (e.g. the National Geographic 1982 cover image of the pyramids that started much of the discussion and debate over image manipulation).