workshop INTERMEDIATE PHOTO EDITING taught by Lynn Weber

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LESSON TWO:
Dealing With Distracting Backgrounds-Part 2

I hope you enjoyed Lesson One and are taking care of those backgrounds like crazy! Here's two more ways to do just that-another easy one and one that takes a little more time but teaches you some new tools. Have fun!

METHOD THREE-SELECTIVE COLORING

The Selective Coloring method keeps the background intact but just changes it to black and white while the focus of the photo is in color. This causes your focus to be on the main subject and the background fades away. This is the easiest of all the techniques on this topic!

1. Open the photo named "SelectiveColoringBefore." Duplicate it, rename the duplicate, and close the original.

2. Right-click on the background layer, and choose Duplicate Layer. Highlight both layers, right-click, and choose Link Layers. Click OK.

3. With the background copy selected (highlighted), go to Enhance>Adjust Color>Remove Color. You now have a black and white photo with a color photo hiding underneath! Make this photo a little

Distracting Backgrounds-Selective Coloring Method

This is a cute photo but there's a lot of color and pattern in the background to compete with the dancer for our attention

Everything is still in the photo, but our eye is immediately drawn to the cute little dancer because of the selective coloration.

larger on the page (by using the Zoom Tool or pressing CTRL and +)(CMD and + for MAC) so that you will be able to better see the detail of the area that you want to be in color.

4. On the left toolbar, about halfway down, you will see a pink eraser. Right click on the eraser and make sure that the top tool is chosen in the flyout menu. The brush menu will appear at the top, because the eraser tool is basically a brush.

5. The size and softness of the area that you want to have appear in color will determine the hardness/softness and size of the brush you choose. But for now, click on the arrow in the brush stroke box (the first box) and choose the soft round 100 pixel brush.

6. Now comes the big TA-DA! With your duplicated (and now black and white) layer selected, hold down the mouse button and drag the eraser tool across the area that you want to appear in color. It will erase that area of the black and white photo and enable the colored area of the photo underneath to show through! It's that easy! You may want to make the brush smaller and outline the edges of the area you are erasing and then use a larger brush to erase the part in the middle. It's also helpful to zoom in on the photo so you can get the edges erased accurately.

7. When the photo looks just the way you'd envisioned it, merge the layers by right clicking the top layer and choosing Merge Down or Merge Linked. Save your photo.

METHOD FOUR-THE GAUSSIAN BLUR

This method of dealing with the background makes the background blurry, so that it fades away and your eye is drawn to the subject in the foreground. This is the most time consuming of all the techniques, but is a really good one to know!

1. Open the photo named "GaussianBlurBefore." Duplicate it, give the duplicate a new name and close the original.


Distracting Backgrounds-Gaussian Blur Method

I thought the background in this photo detracted from Reid's handsome face.

In this photo, the background has been blurred to bring all the attention to the boy in the foreground.

2. Right-click on your Background and choose Duplicate Layer. Click OK. Click the little Eye Icon to the left of the Background layer to make this layer invisible for a while.

3. For this method, we will again be getting rid of the offending background, but this time we'll be using the Eraser Tool. The Eraser Tool is located on the left toolbar, usually about halfway down. It looks like a rectangular pink eraser.

    There are three tools here, the Eraser, the Background Eraser, and the Magic Eraser. We're going to use all three in combination to get the background completely erased and to practice using these tools. I will warn you right now
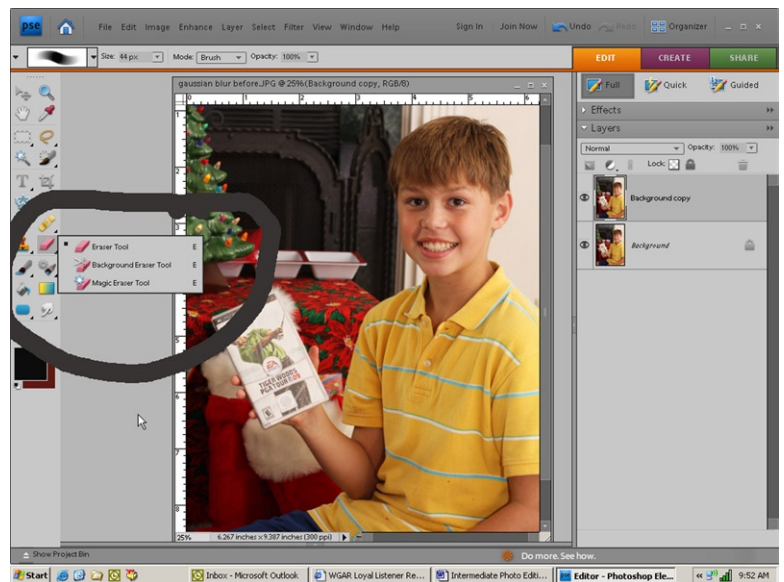
that this can be tedious. I am providing you with a photo where you can get lots of practice using all three tools. Not all photos will be this difficult to erase but some will be even harder to erase!

4.   Zoom in on the photo to about 50% and have one of the large red areas in the background of your photo in your viewing window.

5.   Choose the Magic Eraser. The settings in the little menu bar on top should be Tolerance-32, Anti-Alias and Contiguous checked, All Layers Not Checked and Opacity at 100%.

6.   Position the cursor, which now looks like an eraser, over one of the red areas of the background and Click. This should erase a patch of red. Continue clicking on areas of red until most of the red is gone. We could have Unchecked Contiguous in the menu bar and erased most of the red with one click. However, this would have erased all the red in the photo including some of the parts we want to keep. Your photo should look sort of like this

7.   Continue positioning your cursor over other colored parts of the background and clicking until large areas of your background are gone. If you click on an area and it erases part of the photo you want to keep, simply press CTRL+Z (CMD+Z) and that selection will be undone.

8. Now we're going to switch to the Background Eraser. I have my photo zoomed in to 200% to help with the accuracy of the erasing. Click on the Brush dropdown menu. For this amount of zoom, I have my brush set at 50 pixels and Hardness at 100%. Discontiguous should be selected and the Tolerance is set at about 10%. We're going to work around his shirt and there isn't much of a color distinction between the shirt and the background, so the Tolerance is set low. When there is a bigger color difference the Tolerance can be higher.

9. Position your cursor, which is a circle with crosshairs inside, on the right side of the photo, where his shirt meets the background. The crosshairs should be just outside the edge of the shirt.
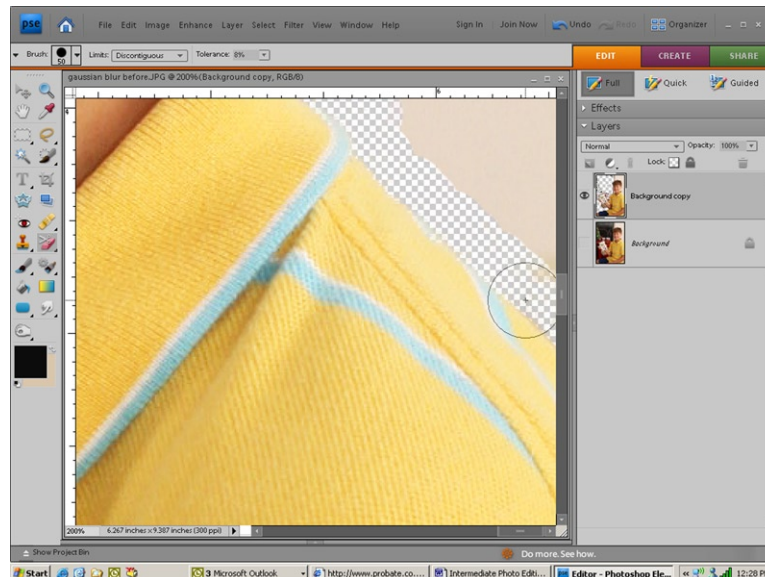
10. Making sure that the crosshairs remain CLOSE TO but OUTSIDE the edge of the shirt, slowly paint or click your way around the edge of the shirt. This will make the background disappear. Should you accidentally move the crosshairs onto the shirt, press CTRL+Z (CMD+Z)and that erasure will be undone.

11. Continue all the way up and around his head, then around the rest of the selection. When you get to areas where the color difference is more pronounced, you can increase the Tolerance. In areas where the color difference is very slight, around the game for example, the Tolerance will be set very low. In small areas, like the crook of his arm, the brush size should be set smaller,

also. If you are having a difficult time around the game, where there is fur from the stocking in the background, just leave this area. We will clean it up later. When you get all the way around the selection, it will probably look something like this

12. Now we are ready to finish cleaning up with the Eraser Tool. Zoom the photo to 50% and set the brush as a Hard Round Brush with a size of 50 pixels (hover over the brush choices to find this.) Hold down the mouse button and drag the eraser tool over the background of your photo. You should be able to get it fairly well cleaned up except the area just around the boy.

13. Now we're going to do our final clean-up. Since we will be replacing the background in an altered state, it isn't necessary that we clean up every single pixel around the selection, but the more we can clean-up, the better chance we have of our photo looking good in its final state. Zoom your

photo in to 300% and set your brush as Hard and 8 pixels. Holding down the mouse button, slowly move your Eraser tool around the edge of the selection, erasing all the final bits of background that you can. I warned you this might be tedious!

We're almost done! Stay with me for just a few more steps!!!

14. Choose the Magic Wand tool from the left tool bar. It is near the top and looks like a stick with a sunburst on top. In some versions of the software it is housed with other tools, so you may have to look around a little for it.

15. Still working in the duplicate layer, position your Magic Wand cursor in the background space and click. You should now have marching ants all around the background that you have deleted.

16. In the top menu bar, click on Refine Edges to get the dropdown menu. Set Smooth at 15 and Feather at 1.5. Click OK. Click CTRL + D (CMD + D) and to get rid of the marching ants. Click CTRL + Zero (CMD + Zero) to return the photo to a viewing size.

17. In the Layers Palette, click the Eyeball to the left of the layer where you have deleted the background to make it invisible. Click the Eyeball in the layer with your original photo to make it visible again.

18. Select the background layer. In the top menu bar, choose Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur. Set the Radius at 20 pixels and click OK.

19. Click the Eyeball in your duplicate layer, the layer with the background removed. Now you should have both layers showing, with a blurred background and the boy in focus in the foreground.

20. One more step—select both layers, right-click and choose Merge Layers and Save. Hurray! You did it!

HOMEWORK

Hopefully you have learned about some new tools and techniques for working with your photos. I look forward to seeing your before and after photos in the gallery! If you need help formatting your photos to post, please refer to the Getting Started document in the Welcome Forum.

GETTING READY

In Lesson Three, we will be learning how to add a person to a photo.