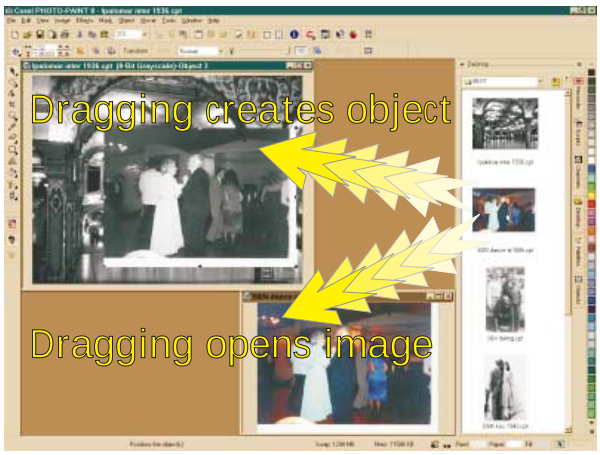
The Palomar Ballroom...

Creating Fantasy with the help of Photo-Paint's Clip Mask



The Task

My mother and father recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. They met in September of 1937 at the Palomar Ballroom, in Los Angeles. The Palomar is known as the birthplace of swing, dating back to Benny Goodman's legendary performance there, in 1935.

For their anniversary party, I wanted to create a large (4 x 5 foot) graphic, using a photo of the ballroom that I obtained, after weeks of searching. My intention was to take three different photos of them at various times in their life, and insert them into the ballroom, as if they were actually there.

In prior Versions

I've done similar projects before, but my methods were considerably different. Previously, I would take the images that I wanted to superimpose on the background photo, and spend a great deal of time carefully constructing a mask so as to copy only the portion needed into the main image.

Paint provides a variety of masking tools that can be used in various combinations to yield the desired result: color masking, freehand, magic wand, and the most useful the mask paintbrush. The problem was, that once I decided the mask was as accurate as needed and performed the copy and paste, it was pretty much a done deal. Sure, I could edit the pasted object to some extent, erasing unwanted areas, but there was no way to put back something that was already erased.

How to do this in Photo-Paint 8

The first screen capture shows my basic work area. I had already scanned and saved the four images I was planning to work with. The older photos were all black and white, so I scanned these as grayscale. The newer photo was color, and since I might use it in the future for something else, I scanned it as color. Next, I opened the scrapbook, and browsed to the folder containing my four images. (I've purposely set the thumbnail size extra-large, so they are easier to see.)

By dragging a selected image onto an empty area of the Paint work area you open the image. On the other hand, if you wish to create an object within an open image, simply drag the selected image from the scrapbook directly into the window of the background image. In so doing, the image is automatically converted to the same color-depth as the base image. (*Note: If the imported object is considerably larger than the background image, you may have to zoom out until you can see sizing handles in the image window, in order to resize it.)*

Ok, so I've created a floating object of the dancers on top of the ballroom image. But, it is still in its rectangular form; not at all the result I'm looking for.

The Beauty of Clip Masks

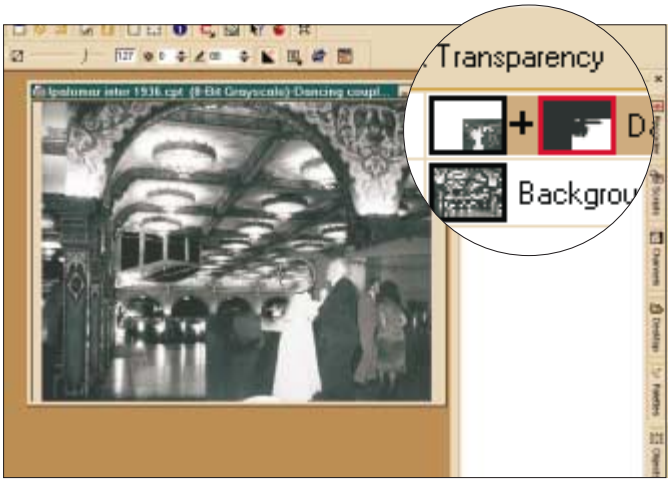
Clip masks are not the easiest things to comprehend—until you actually experiment with them. After dragging the dancing couple (taken at Mom and Dad's 50th) onto the background image, I selected ***Object*** ➤ ***Clip Mask*** ➤ ***Create*** ➤ ***From Object Transparency.*** Now, what the heck does that mean?! Basically, as shown in the screen capture, the area of the object that is already transparent, remains transparent, while that which is opaque, remains opaque. So far, that means I've done precisely nothing… or so it would appear.

Here's where the power of clip masks is revealed. Notice, that in the object docker, the clip mask is linked to the object to which it is applied (the plus sign) and is selected. This means, that any painting or other processes I do, will be applied to the clip mask itself.

The effect of painting on a clip mask, however, is quite different than normal painting. You are painting degrees of transparency, not color. In other word, if I paint using black, I'm making the portion painted transparent. If I paint in white, that portion becomes opaque. (If an area is already completely

transparent or completely opaque, it does not change.)

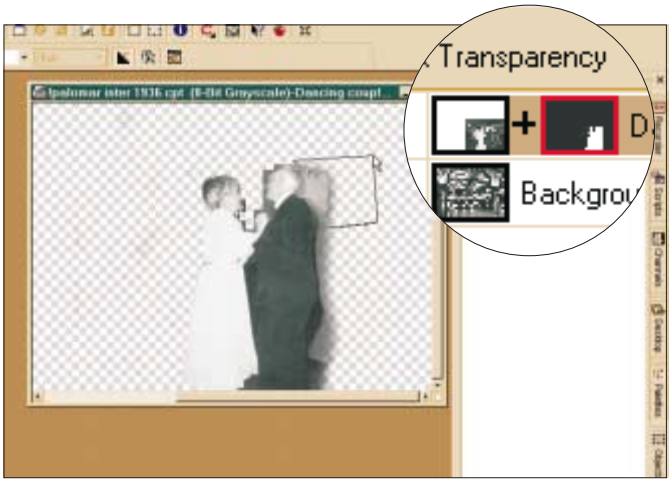
In the next screen shot, I've been painting with a large black paintbrush. Notice, that the background image is now showing where I've painted. Notice too, that I've managed to lop off part of my mother's head in the process. Whoops!



This is where the advantage of this clip mask technique becomes apparent. If I change colors to white, I can paint her head right back into the picture. "Why?" Because, I've not really done anything to the object itself. I'm just painting transparency and opaqueness on the mask that is linked to it. All the original pixels of the object are still there.

Beyond Painting with Black & White

You are not limited to using the paintbrush when editing a clip mask. Any tool can be used. In the next screen shot, I've turned off the background layer, which makes it easier to see what has been made transparent and what hasn't. I've switched to the polygon tool, so that I can "erase" a larger area at one time. In the capture, I haven't double-clicked to finish drawing the polygon, but when I do, the bordered area will disappear. Later, I'll zoom in and use a small paint brush, to get the details.



You may be wondering what happens when you paint with some other color besides black or white. You end up painting a degree of transparency. But, you have to be careful. If you paint over a fully transparent area, it becomes partially opaque. Likewise, if you paint over an opaque area, it becomes partially transparent.

Where this would be most useful, is along intended borders, especially ones that might be a bit ambiguous. Once you've shaped the clip mask to your liking, you can use a grey tone to paint along the border, resulting in a softer transition to the background image.

What to do after shaping

Once you shape the clip mask to your liking, you have two choices. You can leave the clip mask in place or you can combine the mask with the object, permanently deleting the transparent pixels. I've found no compelling reason to combine object and mask, other than to make your image less unwieldy.. With the clip mask in place, you can still do just about anything you want to the object. Simply select it, instead of the clip mask, and you can apply special effects, perform image adjustments, even apply drop shadows. Once all three objects were in place and masked, I applied perspective shadows to them, to make the image look more realistic.

The Final Image

After placing the three images into the ballroom, I converted the image to a duotone, so that I could get a nice sepia-tone effect. (Note: I could have converted to duotone right at the start, and when objects are dragged in, they are automatically converted to duotone. I wanted to add a banner to the image, and decided that that would be better done in Draw. I discovered a problem. Draw didn't recognize the duotone and the image reverted to grayscale. Of course, I could easily convert it to duotone again within Draw. If printing separations is not an issue, you can also convert the duotone to color, once you get the effect you like. There are some advantages to doing so… but that's another topic.