

BIPC DIGITAL IMAGE STUDY GROUP
ASSIGNMENT 2001-9
SUBJECT: USING THE EXTRACT COMMAND

PROBLEM: Often one wants to select an image with a great deal of fine detail on the outside edge. The Eraser tools or the Magic Wand are not effective in certain situations. It is desirable to be able to select the image and all its edge detail from the background.

CONCEPT: The Extract command in Photoshop (Image | Extract) provides a sophisticated way to isolate a foreground object from its background. Even objects with wispy, intricate, or undefined edges can be clipped from their backgrounds with a minimum of manual work. Extract works best with images that display significant contrast between foreground object and background color, and where the edges aren't too detailed. An alternative to the Extract command is to use a purchased plug-in such as Extensis MaskPro, Human Software's AutoMask, Chroma Graphic's MagicMask or Ultimatte's KnockOut.

PROCEEDURE: You'll start with an image that contains only one layer. You must be working in a layer to use the Extract command. You can then duplicate the image to a new layer. You will actually change and delete pixels from the original image so always work on a duplicate (new layer).

To extract an object, you use the Extract dialog box to highlight the edges of the object. Then you define the object's interior and preview the extraction. You can refine and preview the extraction as many times as you wish. Applying the extraction erases the background area to transparency, leaving just the extracted object.

When highlighting the edge it's OK if the highlight overlaps the edge. The Extract command makes its selection by finding the difference in contrast between pixels. If the image that you are trying to extract has a well-defined interior, make sure that the highlight forms a complete outline. If you make a mistake and highlight more than desired, select the eraser tool in the dialog box and drag over the highlight in the preview. Use the tools in the Extract window to help with the complete process.

In case you want to extract an intricate image when an object lacks a clear interior use the Force Foreground option. Start by selecting the color on which to base your selection. The Force Foreground technique works best with objects that are monochromatic or fairly uniform in color. When satisfied apply the final extraction. All pixels on the layer outside the extracted object are erased to transparency.

Once you have extracted an image you can also use the background eraser and history brush tools to clean up any stray edges in the image.

ASSIGNMENT: Read the section on the Extract command in the Photoshop Help area. Then use the Extract command to extract two images and place them in a third picture. If you wish I can email you two images and a third picture to place them in. Send me an email and I will mail them to you.

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