

## Blending Ideas

by Chris & Trish Meyer, Crish Design

(formerly known as CyberMotion)

### Creating vignette-like transparency around the center of attention makes it easier to blend with other footage.

In the previous article on vignettes, we discussed ways to mask or matte a black layer to create a falloff in brightness across a piece of underlying footage. The same basic techniques used to create that matte may also be used to treat footage in more creative ways, including blending a clip over a different background shot. We'll discuss those extended techniques here. As we'll be building on the vignette techniques discussed in the previous article, so make sure you read that one first!

#### Creative Colorization

The first trick is the simplest extension of the vignette techniques discussed in the previous article: Instead of using a black solid or shape layer, instead use a colored solid or shape. And instead of using just opacity to blend the vignette mask on top of the original footage, use a blending mode to create color shifts in the vignetted areas.

To colorize your solid, it's currently a bit awkward in After Effects to have to keep re-opening the Layer > Solid Settings dialog; better is to apply Effect > Generate > Fill to the layer, and to edit the color swatch in the Fill effect - it's much more interactive. This is another advantage of using Shape Layers instead of solids in After Effects: You can edit the color of the layer interactively in the Gradient Editor, and even create subtle gradient colors if you wish. In Motion, if you set the Fill Mode to Gradient, note that the Fill Color in the "HUD" - Heads Up Display - will have no effect; you need to go into Inspector > Shape > Fill > Gradient to edit the color.

Different blending modes will yield different results. The first modes we usually reach for are the Overlay/Soft Light/Hard Light family, but it is worth exploring alternatives. The "burn" modes darken the outer areas of the underlying footage while also inducing color shifts; the "dodge" modes lighten the underlying footage. Color mode colorizes the underlying footage;



Figure 1a

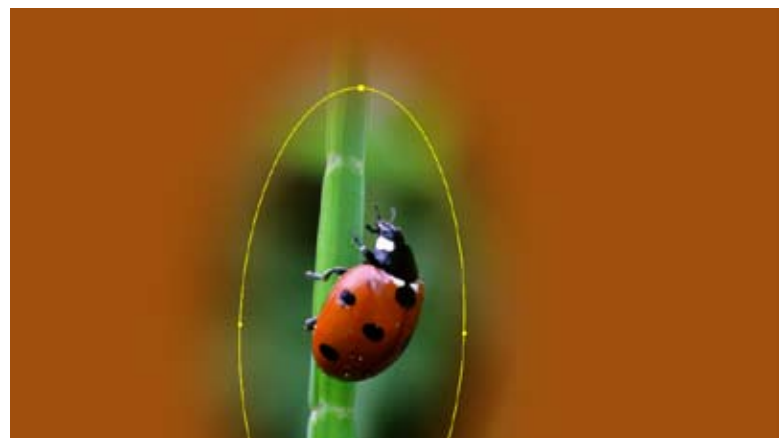


Figure 1b



Figure 1c

Figure 1: To make this ladybug stand out more from the green background (a), we drew a mask shape around the ladybug and stem, cut and pasted that mask to a colored solid placed on top of the original footage, inverted the mask to reveal the underlying hero (b), and then used Overlay mode to better blend the solid onto the clip (c). The result is more visually interesting, and helps the ladybug "pop" out of its background. (Ladybug: clip KSC-FH101-65 on [artbeats.com](http://artbeats.com), shot by kunst & scheidulin HD.)

# Tips & Tricks

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if you leave the solid or shape's color at black (as you would for a traditional vignette), this will change the underlying footage to black and white in the areas outside your point of interest. Some modes like Difference and Darker Color – the latter being new in After Effects CS4 – will yield a posterized effect.

## Selective Effects

When you were creating vignettes, the mattes you created on the black solids or shapes allowed the original image to show through unaffected in selected areas, and darkened the remaining areas. But instead of darkening the underlying footage, you can use those mattes to determine where an effect is applied.

In After Effects, create a vignette on a separate layer using the masked solid or gradient shape techniques discussed previously, making sure that the area you want to view unaffected is transparent. Start out with the vignette layer's Opacity set to 100%, and its Blending Mode set to Normal. The color of the vignette layer does not matter here, as you will be using its alpha channel instead.

In After Effects, make sure the Switches column is visible in the Timeline panel (F4 will toggle it), and click in the box underneath the half-moon icon for the solid or shape layer. This will convert it into an Adjustment Layer. If you then apply an effect to this Adjustment Layer, it will affect the underlying layers only where the Adjustment Layer is opaque. Any areas that are transparent will allow the original layer to peek through unaltered, with a blend between the two in the semi-transparent areas.

Experiment with different effects: Blurs are an obvious start; Hue/Saturation with the Master Saturation value reduced is a nice, subtle way to direct the user's focus. Go ahead and try other effects you might normally pass over, such as Channel > Minimax which yields a crystallized effect in the "vignetted" areas. (Note that this trick will not work with vignettes created by using Paint or Circle, as they are effects – and Adjustment Layers apply effects to the layers underneath!) Once you choose an effect, explore the various blending modes to composite the effected image with the original image underneath in interesting ways. You can also decrease the Adjustment Layer's Opacity to reduce the strength of the effect.

Motion does not have adjustment layers, but its grouped-layer approach makes it easy to replicate the result. Create a vignette as normal, and then dupli-

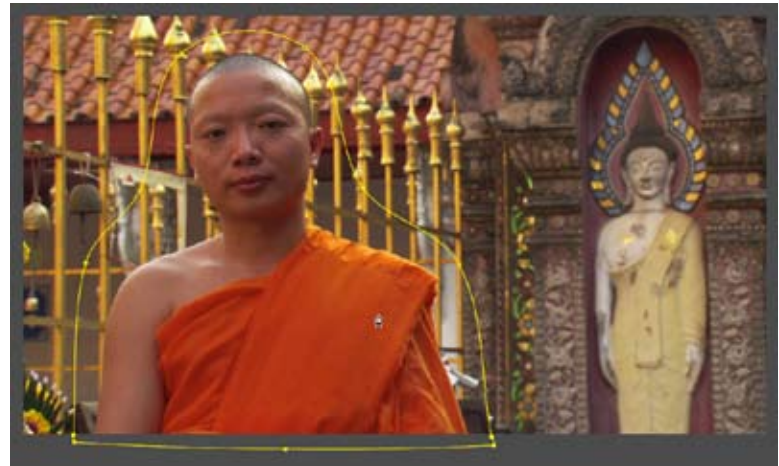


Figure 2a

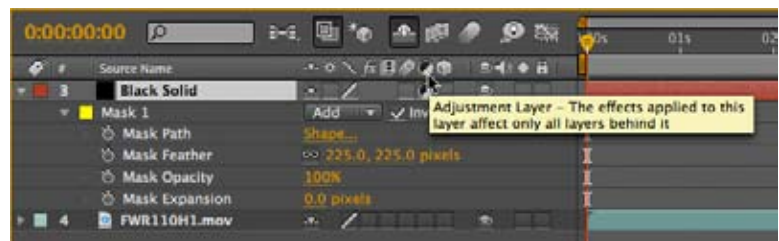


Figure 2b



Figure 2c

Figure 2: To help focus the attention on our monk (while stylizing the background), we used the Pen tool in RotoBezier mode to create a loose mask around him (a). We then cut and pasted this mask to a solid placed above the original footage, inverted it, and gave it a broad feather. We converted this solid to an Adjustment Layer (b), and applied the Minimax plus Hue/Saturation effects to this layer (c). (Monk: clip FWR110 HD from the Artbeats collection Faces of the World HD.)

cate your underlying footage layer. Right-click on the original copy of the underlying footage (the one on top in the Layers panel stack), and select Add Image Mask. With Image Mask selected, open either the HUD (shortcut is F7) or Inspector > Image Mask. Drag the Rectangle shape you created for the vignette (see the previous article on vignettes) into the Mask Source box in either the HUD or the Inspector: This will turn off the Rectangle layer, and turn it into a matte for the upper copy of your underlying footage. Then apply effects such as Blurs > Gaussian Blur or Color Correction > Desaturate to this masked copy of the footage.

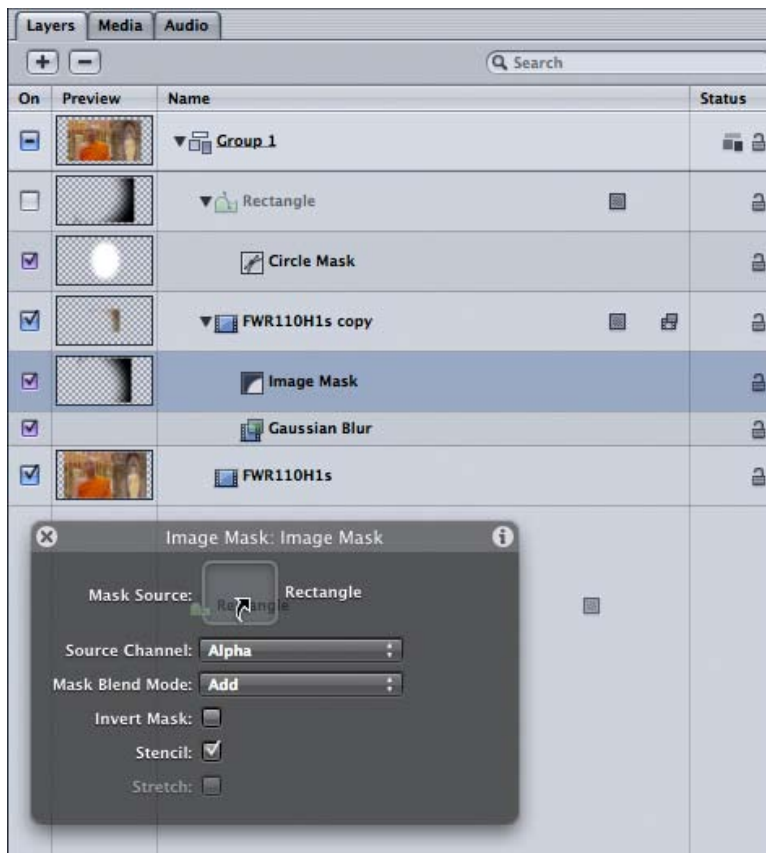


Figure 3

Figure 3: To create the equivalent of an adjustment layer in Motion, you need to use the vignette layer as an Image Mask applied to a copy of your original clip, and set it to Stencil mode. Then apply the desired effects to this copy.

## Transparency Windows

Another great use of these vignette techniques is to blend one piece of footage on top of another. Rather than use a feathered mask, gradient, or paint strokes to affect the transparency of a black solid or shape

layer, instead you use it to affect the transparency of your footage to blend it with another piece of footage. A nice broad feather will help merge the images together.

If you prefer the mask approach to vignettes, then just draw a mask on top of your foreground footage around the area you wish to keep (and therefore highlight), using mask feather and optionally mask expansion to control the falloff.



Figure 4a

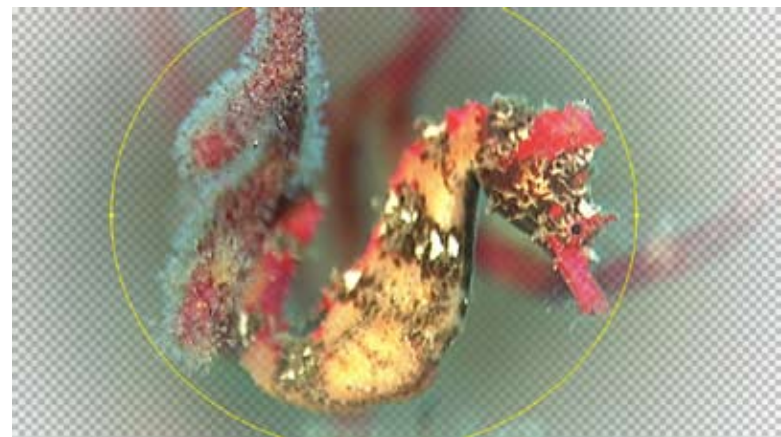


Figure 4b

Figures 4c and 4d appear on page 4

Figure 4: To help make this seahorse (a) look even more magical, we masked it with a very broad feather (b) and placed it over an abstract water background (c). We then hue-shifted the background to better marry together the two shots (d). (Seahorse: clip AGG-FH114-07 on [artbeats.com](http://artbeats.com), shot by AQUA Geo Graphic. Background: clip LAB128H from the Artbeats collection Liquid Abstracts HD.)

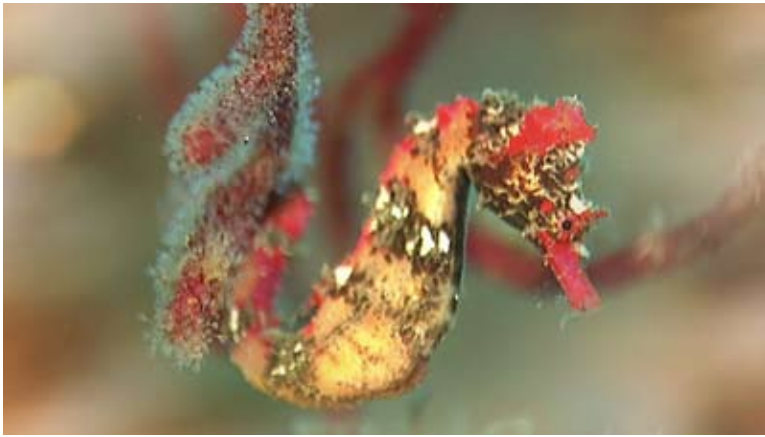


Figure 4c

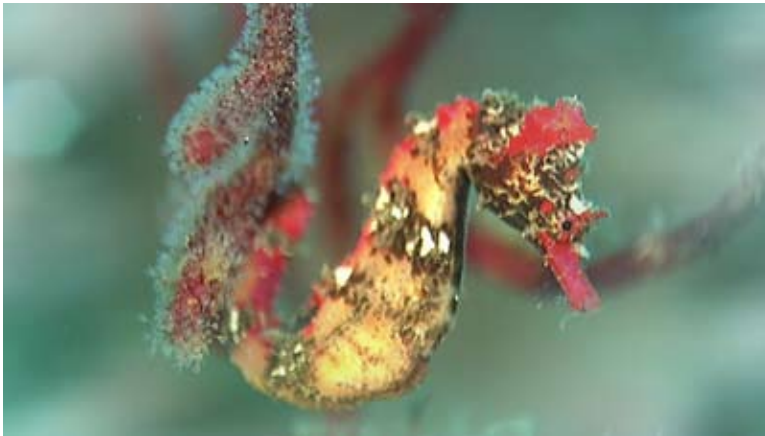


Figure 4d

If you prefer the shape layer/gradient editor approach, you will still need to create a separate full-frame shape layer, this time making the gradient opaque in the center and transparent at the end of the gradient. In After Effects, position this shape layer above your image layer in the Timeline panel. Open the Modes column (F4 is the shortcut), and set the TrkMat popup for the image layer to Alpha Matte. You might want to parent the shape layer to the image layer so that you can scale and reposition them as a group. In Motion, you would use the shape layer as an Image Mask for the image layer – see the notes above on how to fake an adjustment layer in Motion. Keep the two in the same group so that you can scale and reposition them together.

If you prefer the paint approach outlined in the previous article, you would paint directly on the image layer. However, instead of using the Eraser tool in

After Effects, use the normal Paint tool. Set the Mode to Normal, Channels to Alpha, and Duration to Constant. Then enable the Paint on Transparent option for Paint either in the Timeline or Effect Controls panel. With these settings, you can paint on the image in the Layer panel to reveal it.

### Zooming Out

One challenge with all of these techniques is how to handle a moving object that you wish to keep centered in your vignette shape. The trick in After Effects is to stabilize the footage in a precomp, and then mask, paint out, or otherwise vignette this now-stable object in a second composition downstream. Otherwise, you'll go crazy trying to keyframe layers in an attempt to keep a subject centered.

We hope this and the previous article have given you some additional tools you can use on future projects whenever you need to focus on a particular subject in a shot, and want to otherwise treat or replace the imagery around your subject. Have fun!

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*Chris and Trish Meyer are the founders and owners of Crish Design, an award-winning motion graphics studio that has created a wide variety of work for film, broadcast, corporate events, and special venues. They are one of the original development sites for After Effects, and have two books currently in print: *Creating Motion Graphics* and *After Effects Apprentice*.*