**WHAT YOU’LL LEARN**

- Creating a mask
- Removing and restoring areas of the image with a mask
- Using levels of gray to make the image transparent
- Disabling and enabling the mask

**ELEMENTS ONLY RECENTLY** gave us the ability to create true layer masks. This has made a huge difference to the way we can edit our images; it was a cumbersome task beforehand.

If you’re not familiar with the concept, a mask allows us to selectively hide areas of a layer non-destructively as, unlike the Eraser tool, we can restore the hidden parts whenever we want. As we’ll see here, and in the rest of the book, masks have many practical uses and are an essential part of the montage artist’s repertoire.

**DOWNLOADS**

**HOT TIP**

As well as disabling the mask, we can perform other commands by right-clicking the mask thumbnail in the Layers panel. From there we can delete the mask, this is the more permanent version of disabling it. We can also apply it. This merges the areas of the mask with the image to take permanent effect.

**WORKING WITH LAYER MASKS**

1. We can see that the image of the woman has been separated into two layers. Click on the head and hands layer in the layers panel. Now click the Add a mask icon at the top. Another thumbnail appears next to the image.

2. There’s no difference to begin with. By default the mask is set to reveal all. Grab the Brush tool. Set the foreground color to black. When we paint the mask over the area of the woman’s head, it begins to disappear.

3. We’ve removed both the head and the hands. Notice that we haven’t had to be precise; only areas on the current layer are affected. We wouldn’t normally get to see what’s behind the hidden areas, of course!

4. Switch the foreground color to white. Now start to paint over the hidden areas. As we do, the image starts to return. We could also restore the image in one operation by filling the mask with white.

5. Masks work with grayscale tones; anything in between black and white causes the image to become translucent. Press Ctrl + S to open the Fill Layer dialog. Choose 50% Gray. Click OK. We get this result.

6. We can turn a mask off at any time. This is useful for looking at the before and after states. Hold Shift. Now click on the mask thumbnail. A red cross will appear. Do the same to turn it back on again.