



Illustration by Fudgestudios
WWW.FUDGESTUDIOS.COM



WEB DESIGN

FLASH MX FOR ARTISTS

It's already the leading tool for producing superb animation and interactive Websites, but more people are turning to *Flash MX* for another reason

Throughout the ages of the Web we've been constantly reminded of all the fantastic things that can be achieved with *Flash*, and never has it been more true than with the arrival of *Flash MX*. However, since the days of version 1, we've all been doing one thing without even realising it, and that's drawing.

In this respect, *Flash MX* has so much more to offer the digital artist. Once you start looking at it as an illustration tool, you'll often find yourself using *Flash* alongside dedicated favourites such as *FreeHand* and *Illustrator*. The Pen and Brush are easy to use, and the Subselection tool helps fine-tune vector shapes to perfection. A creative use of layers, symbols and bitmap controls also leads us on the way to producing stunning artwork for Web or print.

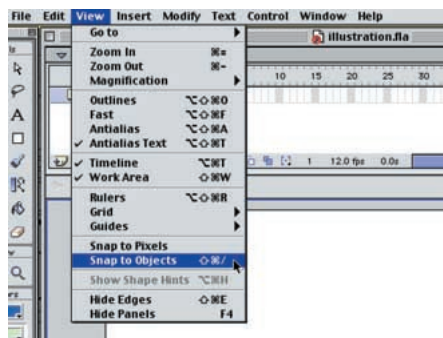
So whether you're an illustrator looking to make your first exploration into *Flash*, or an old hand keen to stretch the app with some new tricks, the next few pages will show you how it's done.



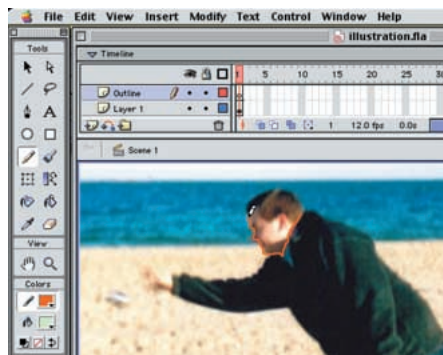
Create this image in the following tutorial. →

PART 1 DRAWING THE OUTLINES

We'll start by sketching some background shapes ↓



1 Before starting it's a good idea to alter a couple of *Flash* settings. In a new file, turn off View>Snap to Objects so you're free to draw as you would on paper, without *Flash* pulling the lines around. If you're more comfortable working with a grid, set one up now.



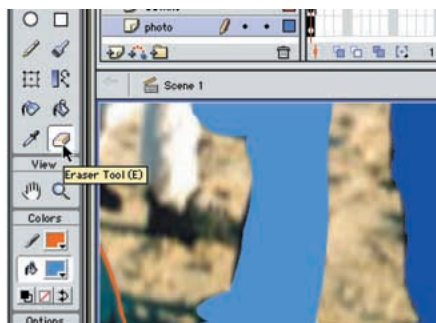
2 Import beach1.jpg from the CD and leave it on frame 1, which is where all the content will be staying. Create another layer called Outline and use the Pen tool (set to Ink) to draw the details of the bowler from the photo. Use a light colour for clarity over the darker image.



3 In two new layers, use the Brush tool (with a circular tip from the toolbox) to draw the rough shapes of the two other players watching the action. Pick a different layer and colour for each, remembering that objects become fainter the further away they are.

INSIGHT USING TABLETS

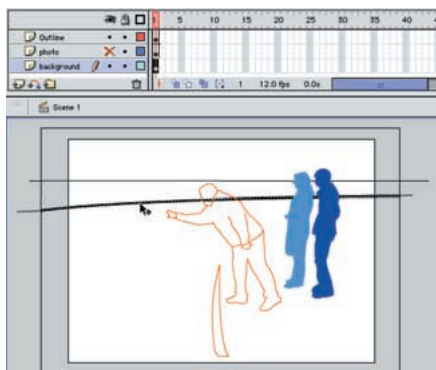
If you own a Wacom pen or similar tablet set-up, now's the time to use it. Use the Brush with the circular tip and largest width in the toolbox. Among these settings, find and hit the Use Pressure button and marvel at the pressure-sensitive brush you now get from your pen set-up, as well as a handy eraser on the other end.



4 Even though these background shapes don't need much detail, you can zoom in and use the Eraser tool to etch out of the shape. Ultimately, drawing can be as much about taking away as it is adding.



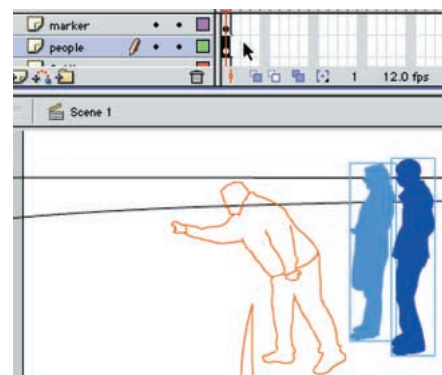
5 Turn Snap To Objects back on, select the Line tool and create a new layer. Draw the groove in the sand, with all the points snapping together to form a polygon. You can change the shape by dragging the straight lines into curves with the Arrow tool.



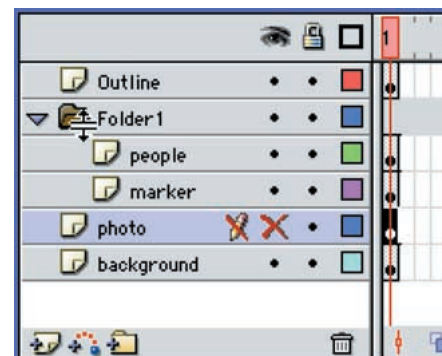
6 In a new layer sitting at the bottom of the stack, draw an empty box around the stage. Then dissect this with more lines, creating closed areas depicting the edge of the sea and the horizon. Finally, make the Photo layer invisible to view your progress.

PART 2 COLOURING AND SHADING

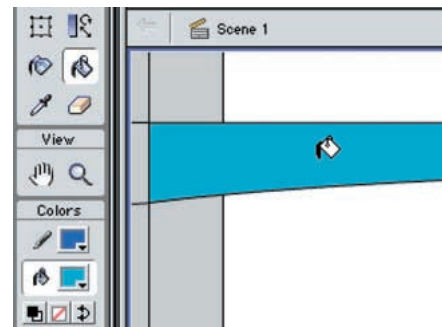
Next, tidy up and clear some space ↓



7 The layers are building up now, so it's time to organise things. Group each of the two background figures so they can't interfere with each other. Cut the figure in the person 2 layer and paste it in place in person 1. Rename person 1 and delete the empty layer.

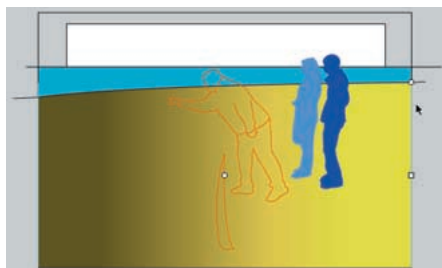


8 It's often useful to make room on the timeline by holding related layers that won't be used regularly in *Flash MX*'s new Layer Folders. Click on Insert>Layer Folder, then drag and drop each layer inside, excluding Outline; we'll be working on that one shortly.

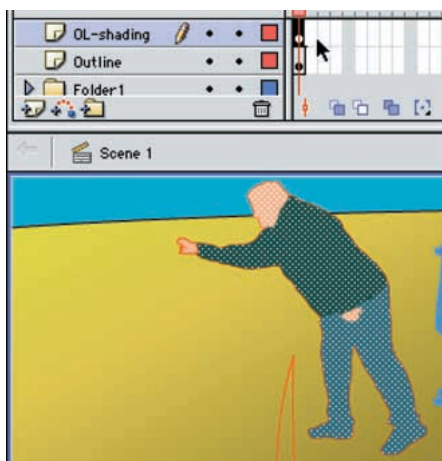


9 Before honing in on the details, it's a good idea to fill in some of those empty spaces created in the background layer. The photo layer is still useful as a reference. You can pick out colours with the Eyedropper tool, then use them to fill your shapes.

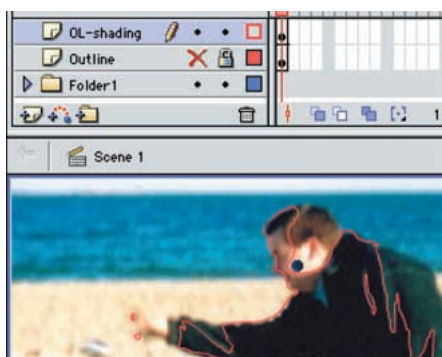
10 To emulate the colours of early evening shadow on the sand, you'll need a Gradient fill. In the Colour Mixer panel, pick Linear, then alter each of the colours on the horizontal slider. When you see the + sign by the mouse, you can also click to add more colours.



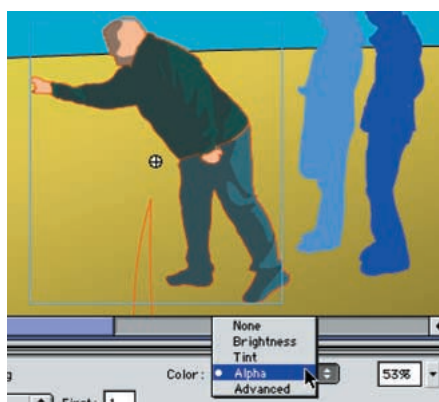
11 Fill the 'beach' shape in the background layer using the new Gradient fill. It needs some adjusting, so pick the Fill Transform tool and click on the filled shape. The above image shows the three handles for the fill, enabling you to change the centre, rotation and size.



12 Now let's get to work on the main bowler. Use different colours to fill the shirt, trousers and skin tones, perhaps selected from the photo again. Next, copy and paste in place the fills as one into a new layer above outline. This will enable you to add some shading.

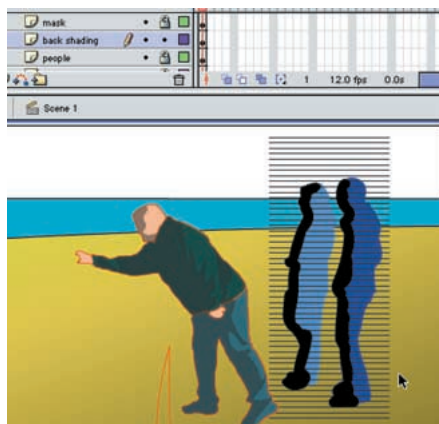


13 Start using the Eraser to rub away at the shading layer (make sure all other layers are locked first), leaving the shadows remaining. Feel free to use the photo as a guide, while viewing the shading layer as an outline so you can see what you're doing (see the timeline controls).



14 Change the colour of the shading so it's a grey block and Convert to a Graphic Symbol. Then, in the Properties bar, change the alpha of the shading until it blends well, over the main image, darkening the actual colours as a real shadow would.

15 You can use a different shading style for the background figures. In a new layer called 'mask', placed above the people layer, use the Brush tool to paint on shaded areas. As this is background imagery, don't worry about being too neat.



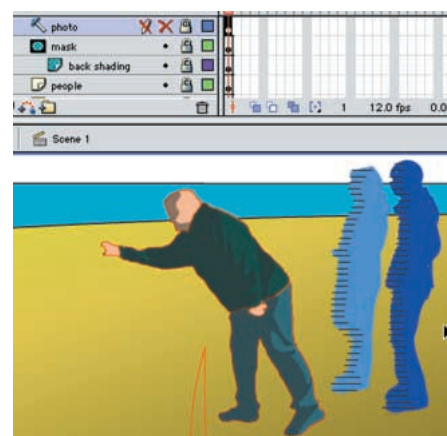
16 In another layer between people and mask, draw a set of lines (use Copy, Paste and the Align panel to space them evenly). This could in fact be anything from spots to a scribble; the idea is simply to create a texture for shading.

INSIGHT PATTERNS

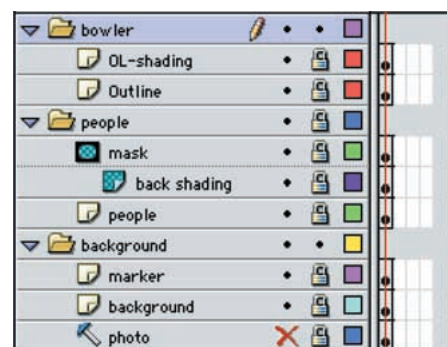
Repetition and patterns can be easily created in *Flash MX*, which is good news as they're often useful for communicating ideas. Build a library of graphic symbols that you think you're likely to reuse and align them on the stage as necessary. Don't forget the other manipulation tools, such as Free Transform. You can create a sense of perspective by showing smaller instances of a repeating symbol appearing in the background.

MIX AND MATCH

While *Flash MX* is useful for the creation of certain graphics, don't forget your other tools such as *Photoshop* and *Illustrator*. Some of the best results come from dragging content from one app into another and then continuing. Make sure you're using the right tool for the job though, because it's easy to get distracted.



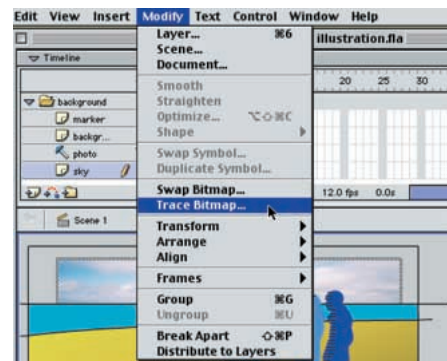
17 Now make the mask layer into just that, showing only the lines where the shading was applied. At this stage you might like to Test Movie as an SWF, but remember that you'll also see the photo layer, so turn this into a guide layer first.



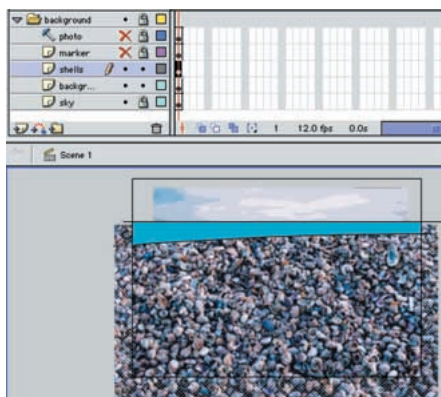
18 It's time to clear up the layers again. This time, re-organise the content in folders according to where it appears in the picture: one for the bowler, one for the people, one for the background graphics.

PART 3 SOURCE PHOTOS

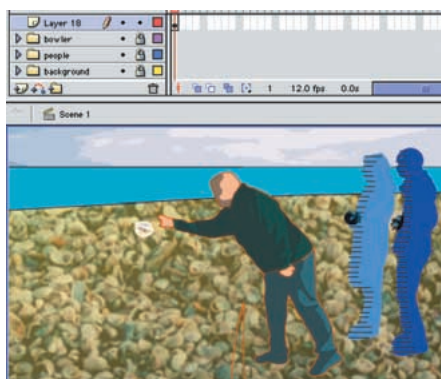
Now we'll incorporate photography for detail and texture ↴



19 To fill out the remaining top space, use sky.jpg imported to a new layer at the bottom of the background folder. You can reduce the amount of detail (and end filesize) with Trace Bitmap. It acts like a cleaner, stylised version of *Photoshop's* Posterize.



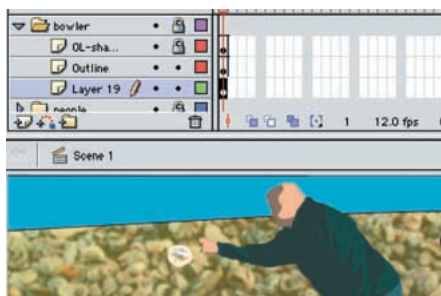
20 Place the shells.jpg in a new layer just above the background layer. If you then Modify> Break Apart the photo, it's possible to remove selections from the image. Copy the outline for the beach shape, paste in place over the photo and delete the bits you don't need.



21 Next, convert the shells into a graphic symbol, then reduce the alpha to 30 per cent, merely to suggest a texture laying over our original beach shading. In *Flash*, you can also Lasso out the hands holding the boules from the beach.jpg, then paste it back into a new independent layer to generate some extra detail.

PART 4 FINE-TUNING

We have the basis of our image, but some tweaking is still needed to clean it up ↓

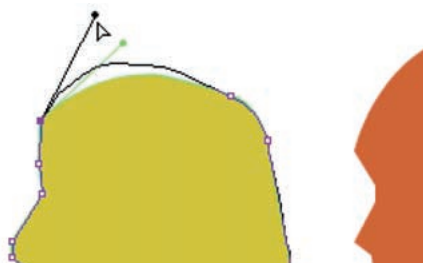


22 Delete the orange outline of the bowler, then copy and paste the whole shape in Outline into another layer underneath.



23 Select the shape in the new layer and Modify> Shape>Expand Fill by 4 pixels. Convert to symbol and change the brightness (in Properties) to form a glowing outline. The shade around the edge always relates to the colour in that part of the bowler.

24 The two people can be simplified to ensure that they remain background elements. Ungroup them so they're editable on the stage and pick two colours that are more suited to the overall balance of the image. Select both shapes and Modify> Straighten to create a different stylistic twist.



25 On doing this you'll notice some corners are a little harsh. Zoom in and click on the edge of the subject with the Subselection tool. Select the offending corner point, then Alt-drag (PC) or Option-drag (Mac) to convert it to a curve point with drag-able handles.



INSIGHT MAKING AN IMPRESSION

Your illo need not always strive to be overly complicated or realistic. The clean lines and bold images of *Flash* make clear impressions, great for communicating ideas as seen in editorial artwork, logos, Web icons or T-shirt design. The drawing and editing tools enable you to make dramatic changes to your work in just seconds; useful when time is tight.



26 Delete the outlines of the beach edge and horizon. Fill the marker shape with gradient as before and adjust using the Fill Transform tool to show the shadow of the groove in the sand. Delete the outline, convert to a symbol and darken a little so it shows up through the shell layer.

FINAL STEP

To save your work, go to File>Export Image and pick a file type relevant to the use of your illustration. You've explored a vast range of possibilities here with *Flash MX*, but there are many more. Next time someone tells you *Flash* is an animation tool, tell them otherwise...