



**THE ILLUSTRATION**

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## ILLUSTRATIVE TECHNIQUES

# Psychedelia

Tired of churning out multi-layered early 90s-style, space-age noise? Then introduce some swinging 60s psychedelia...

**C**lient demand is always shifting, as it meanders through emerging trends. One of the styles in vogue right now is retro chic: a backlash against the faceless, flat-coloured, monotone vector style; against the shiny, cyber-fuelled age of polished illustration. Clients are looking for something different to your scratchy, layered *Photoshop* illo, something that's funky, fun and bright.

In this tutorial we peek under the hood of an illustration that is exactly this: a *Charlie's Angels*-stylee *Photoshop*

flashback. We'll dissect the working method behind it into techniques that you can apply to your own work. What you will discover is that some of the most effective illustration work is, in essence, a simple creature once broken down into its component parts. Style is *how* you wear, not what you wear.

Be prepared to let down your guard and work quite speedily, rolling with the inevitable mistakes. We'll even go old school in Part 3, encouraging you to doodle with marker pens. For this tutorial, our advice is to forget about the History palette...

**DOWNLOAD**

Click here to download the files you need to complete this tutorial

Artwork and expertise provided by Richard May – you can contact him on  
[w] [www.richard-may.com](http://www.richard-may.com) or  
[w] [www.pixelsurgeon.co.uk](http://www.pixelsurgeon.co.uk).

## Part 1: Back to basics

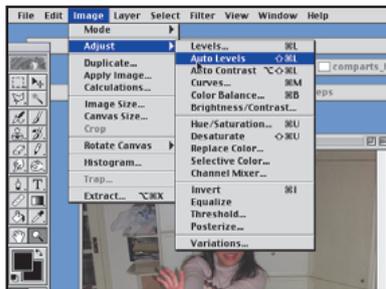
Our image will begin with a photograph – take your pick from the selection in your tutorial files included in the download, or choose one of your own...

### RGB mode

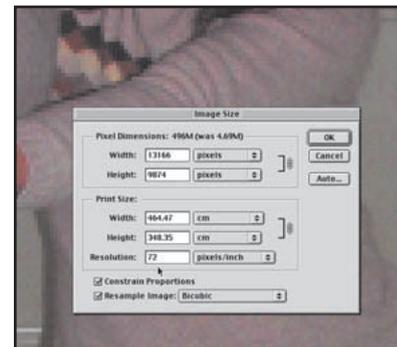
Instead of working in CMYK mode, work in RGB with CMYK Preview mode turned on at all times. It's not 100 per cent accurate, but it will save you time. Provided that your monitor is calibrated correctly, what you see on screen is what you'll get upon printing. For illustration work of this nature, it's an acceptable way of working.



**1** We've provided three images for you to choose from. They were taken with a Nikon 880, but any camera will suffice. Alternatively, you can use your own digital image or just scan in a photo...



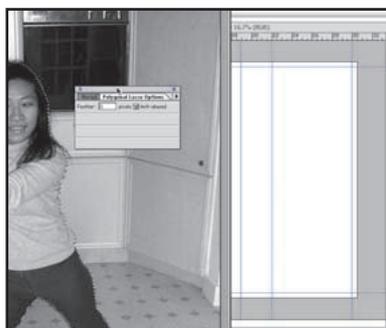
**2** Use Auto Levels to bring some much needed contrast and definition to these slightly murky photographs. No other image correction is needed, so there's no point going crazy with the Rubber Stamp tool unless your subject looks like the Elephant Man.



**3** Resize the image from 72 to 300dpi. Don't worry about the inevitable image artefacts, it's not a problem here.



**4** Desaturate, then select the Polygonal Lasso tool and cut around your subject. There's no need to create a work path, unless you're intent on doing so, and the resulting angular edges (a result of this rough cut-out process) are part of the style. Just make sure that you set the tool to Anti-alias.



**5** Next you need to create a new canvas measuring 295mmx225mm (width by height) at 300dpi with a white background. This will be your main working area.



**6** Go back to the photograph and invert the selection (Apple/Ctrl+Shift+I). Delete the background to white, then crop to the edges of the figure to reduce file size. Increase the contrast somewhat, as this will aid the next stage which is to leave *Photoshop* and open *Adobe Streamline* or your chosen vector application. Save the file.

## Part 2: Strange shapes

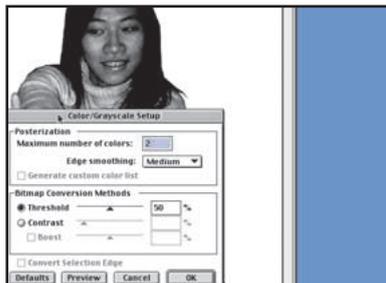
The next stage is importing bits and pieces into your favourite vector application – if you don't have access to a vector app, you'll find the EPS file on the disc (Figure.eps)...

### Photoshop vectors

*Photoshop 5.5* was used for this tutorial, but if you're using version 6 you'll know that it deals with vectors as follows. Shapes are predefined vector shapes, loaded into *Photoshop*-like brushes. These can be dragged onto your artwork and resized at will, as they use a vector layer clipping path. You can paste vector artwork and save it as paths, or allow *Photoshop* to rasterise from the off. The first two methods enable you to save paths only (any colour or fill information is lost). Only in the Rasterise option can you keep the colours, graduations and line weights from *Illustrator* or *FreeHand*. This is what we're doing with version 5.5.



**1** Open your preferred vector application and convert the bitmap image to paths. *Streamline* is custom-built for this very purpose, so if you have the app, use it as the middleman before firing up *Illustrator* or *FreeHand*. The same effect – a sort of black and white woodcut relief – can be easily achieved in *Illustrator*, but will require more time.



**2** Play around with the Conversion settings. *Streamline* can be pretty random, but you're not aiming for any predefined, perfect result. As long as the figure retains some degree of definition, you'll be fine. You can always use *Illustrator* or *FreeHand* afterwards to tidy up. Don't worry about *Streamline* creating a million messy paths, as everything will be returning to *Photoshop*.



**3** You may discover, despite your best efforts, that you're unable to coax *Streamline* into producing a satisfyingly solid or legible shape. Play with varying degrees of Contrast and Level effects in *Photoshop*. You need to achieve the sharpest result with as little midtone as possible. One option is to add a five-pixel stroke around the outside edge of the selection. This will at least guarantee the outline of the figure.

## Part 3: Free your mind

Next, we'll throw everything at the wall and see what sticks. In this case, it's what you don't do that counts...

### Scaling down

Don't decide on a final size for your figures at this stage, unless you're absolutely sure or have a page design to work around. As long as you're working within the edges of your canvas, you'll be fine and can always scale down later in relation to other elements of the piece. Basically, go with whatever looks or feels right.

### The doodles...

If you spent all your money on the *Photoshop 6* upgrade and found yourself three quid short of a scanner, the pattern doodles are on the coverdisc in both raw scan and vector versions.

### Colour vigilance

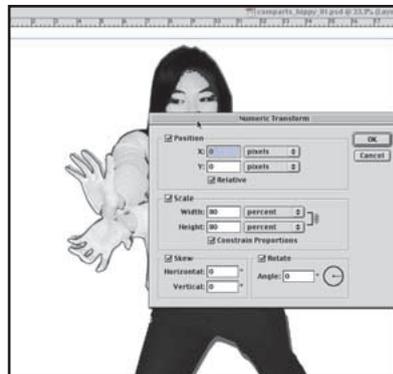
When using the Colour Picker to choose a Hue for adding scratchy brush marks, be sure to hide any overlapping Soft Light duplicate layers. It's easy to miss a minor colour discrepancy on a monitor, which may well be glaringly obvious in print. The idea is to let loose, but keep an eye on things.

### Improvise

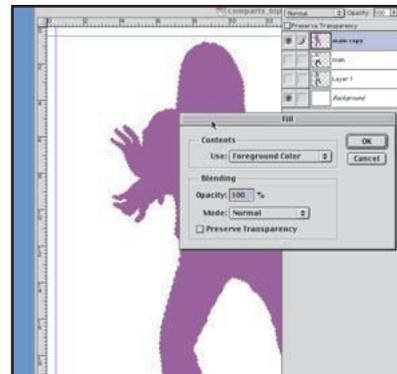
Just carve into the shapes using whatever tool comes to hand. If you're afraid of making mistakes, simply duplicate and hide the layer. Of course, you have the History feature, but as invaluable as this can be it is still easy to get lazy.



**1** Bring the vector file into *Photoshop* and rasterise. You'll discover that part of the layer may be filled with white, especially if you added a keyline by using the Stroke option earlier. One extra thing to bear in mind at this stage, is the larger the rasterised import the more leeway you'll have with positioning and general composition.



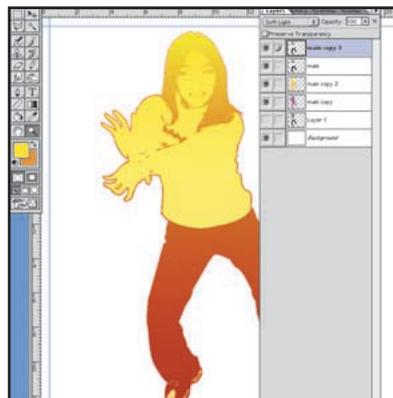
**2** Drag the black and white vector file (now a PSD) onto your canvas. The photograph layer can be used as a guide later, so bring both down to an equal size by scaling numerically. It's not important to be exact, and you may wish to discard the photo layer completely; it's not essential.



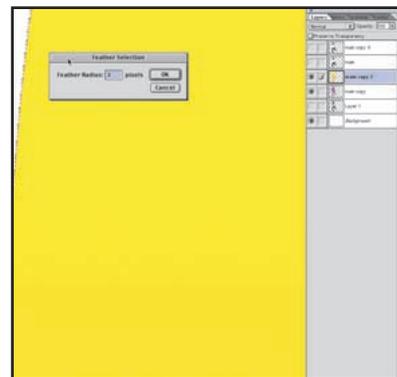
**3** Hide the photograph layer and duplicate the vector layer (which we'll refer to as the main layer). Hide the original main layer. Ctrl-click on the copied layer and fill (100 per cent opacity) with a colour of your choosing. Now bring the original main layer to the top and make it visible.



**4** Change the original black and white main layer to Soft Light, then duplicate. Now duplicate the filled layer, then Apple/Ctrl-click on the copy to select the outline. Pick two colours (whatever takes your fancy, as long as they're not from the same hue as the original fill) and create a vertical gradient to fill this outline. Ensure that the two black and white Soft Light layers are above this gradient layer.



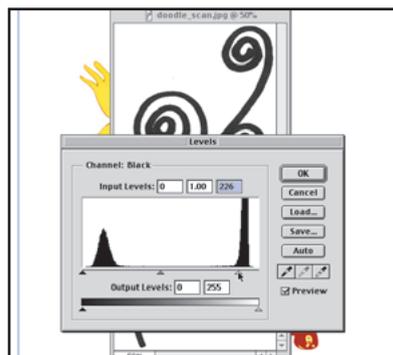
**5** Merge the layers together (but leave the original block fill layer intact for later). This in itself requires a degree of confidence, especially if you're used to keeping all layers available when working—you can do it all again if you make mistakes.



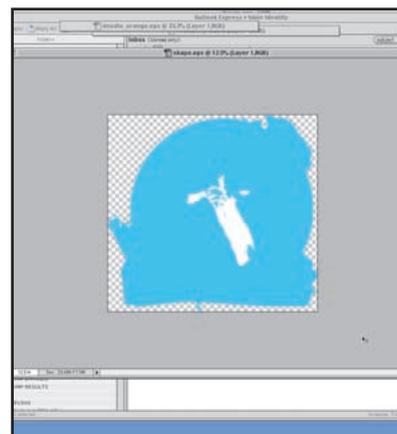
**6** At this stage, the layer may be a bit rough around the edges. To remedy this, choose Select>Modify>Contract and do so by one or two pixels. Then go to Select>Feather and do so by the same amount. Invert the selection (as in Step 6) and trim the fat by hitting Delete.



**7** Now, whip out a marker pen and have a doodle. Draw whatever you like, providing that it's in keeping with the overall style of the image you're creating and can be used as a pattern. Don't, for example, start drawing TIE Fighters.



**8** Adjust the Level sliders to remove any unwanted noise, save and open in your vector application in order to convert to paths and add colour fills, then go back into *Photoshop*. Alternatively, add colour fills in *Photoshop* by Apple/Ctrl-clicking on the layer and repeating the previous steps for adding fills and effects.



**9** Drag the doodle file onto the main canvas, then open up shape.eps (on the disc) and drag this anywhere onto the canvas.

## Part 3: Free your mind, continued...

### Be individual

Bring in layers from previous images you've created to add shapes and textures. Not all of the elements of this illustration are on the disc. If you're simply attempting a carbon copy of what you see here, you're missing the point.

### Cropping for speed

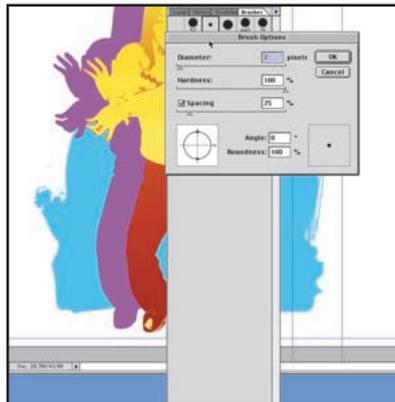
It may sound like the most obvious thing in the world, but as you add more layers, your canvas will gradually take on weight. Huge files slow you down and break up your workflow, so be sure to occasionally select the entire canvas and crop. Some layers with Soft Light effects may float off the edge without you noticing. You can't keep track of everything so, as long as everything looks like it's within your work area, crop to save.

### Duplicate

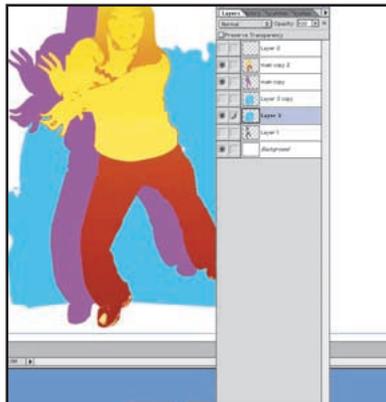
A useful trick is to duplicate a layer, then work on the duplicate with the Eraser tool with soft edge. Wipe out various sections to achieve more dramatic graduation effects over specific areas. Just use the Colour Balance to bring your overlaying layer into line with the one beneath.

### Always subtract

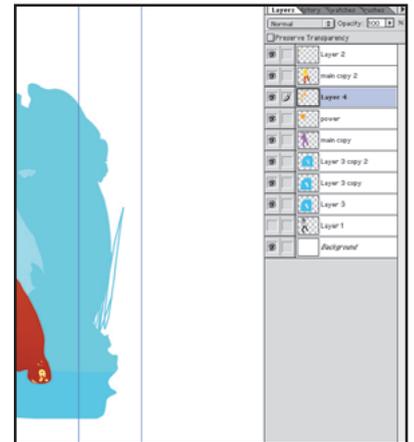
A successful illustration is one that does the job with the least amount of fuss. Better to spend more time taking elements away from the final image than you did adding them in the first place. Treat the image as you would a real canvas; just throw everything you have at the wall. Then spend most of your time deciding what to leave out.



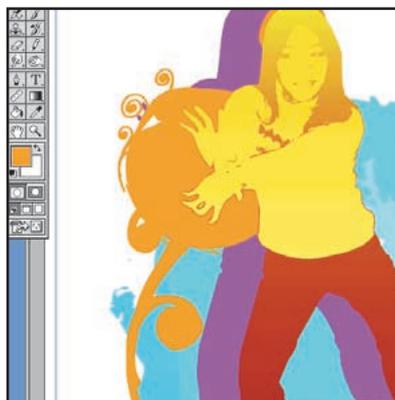
**10** Bring the original block fill, figure layer back and offset it behind the main figure layer. Don't worry about the colour scheme being all over the place, as you'll be bringing everything into line later. After you've created the figure shadow, position the shape layer behind it (wherever looks good).



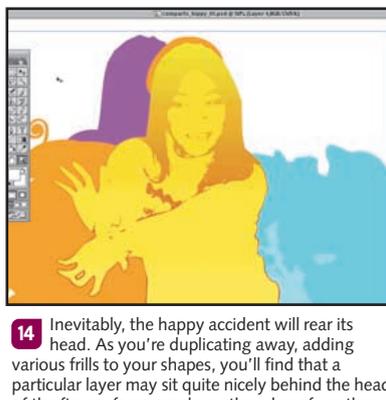
**11** Duplicate the shape layer, and Apple/Ctrl-click to fill with a gradient. Play around by multiplying the layer many times and applying various layer effects. There are no definite rules here, provided that the overall composition works. No two illustrations should look the same.



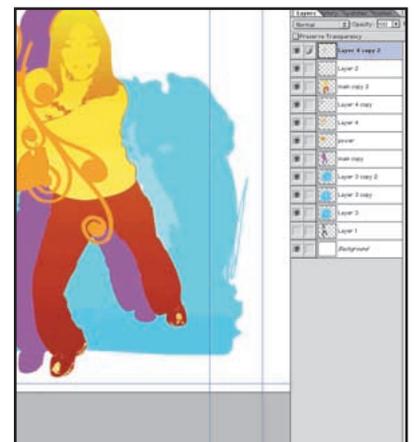
**12** If you feel inclined, go for some scratchy effects using an anti-aliased brush set to about six or seven pixels in diameter. Be sparing – too much and you'll be on a train to Gimmick Island.



**13** Create another layer and use the Elliptical Marquee tool to draw a simple circle, filling with a solid colour (the same colour that you chose for the doodle colour fills). Duplicate the doodle shapes a few times and arrange them around the solid circle fill.



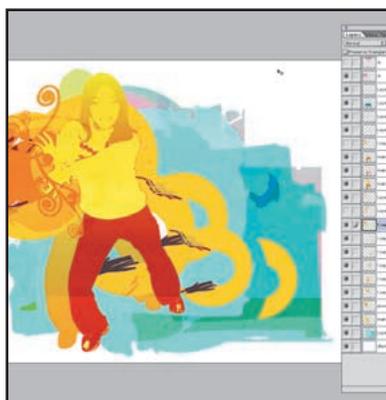
**14** Inevitably, the happy accident will rear its head. As you're duplicating away, adding various frills to your shapes, you'll find that a particular layer may sit quite nicely behind the head of the figure, for example, or the edge of another shape will create an unexpected feature on the other side of the illustration. This is what it's all about. The idea is to play around until the illustration has a certain weight and balance. As vague and non-committal as this may sound, there's no other way to get things looking 'right'.



**15** Bring some of the doodle layers to the top to add a sense of depth. You're not going for a 3D look, but the image will look lifeless if everything appears to be on one level.



**16** Time to add some gradients. If over-used, they're ostensibly cheesy and dated, but we're deliberately going for that cool, retro look. Still, use them sparingly. Simply choose your layer and experiment. You'll often find that a completely different colour scheme will be more suitable.



**17** The only other thing to do now is keep building and adding effects and shapes, and take elements away if things get too crowded. You don't want to overdo it. The background can also be extended as far as you like, depending on the context of the final image.



**18** The last stage is to bring things slightly more into line, colour-scheme wise. Use your judgement. A good trick is to copy the canvas, then flatten the copy and invert. Drag the copied canvas back onto your original as a separate layer (ensuring that the positioning is exact). Add a hue or colour or the often-misunderstood Difference effect (which may give you a nice pseudo keyline). This calms things down a touch. If your illustration is suddenly a different beast, that's a good thing. ☺