



INTRODUCTION TO GRAPHICS

Real Shadow Retention

Information Sheet No. PS920

How to Maintain the Original Shadows, and Keep Them Transparent While Compositing:

This is an old trick from Photoshop genius guy, Ben Willmore. He's been teaching a great class at the Photoshop World Conference & Expo (www.photoshopworld.com) on channels, and his technique for not only maintaining the original shadows in your photo, but making them transparent while you composite your object onto another background, is just pretty darn cool.

The trick is based on loading a selection of just the luminosity of your photo, then inverting it so you get just the shadows selected. Of course, there's a keyboard shortcut for loading the Luminosity channel, and it uses so many fingers that this move has its own nickname—The Claw (I think the term was originally coined by the Photoshop Diva herself, Katrin Eismann). So, kudos to Ben for coming up with the technique, and hats off to Katrin for giving the keyboard shortcut that makes it happen with such a cool Photoshopesque name.

Step 1 PUT A SELECTION AROUND JUST YOUR OBJECT, NOT THE SHADOWS

Open a photo of an object whose shadows you want to keep intact and transparent when you put the image over a different background.

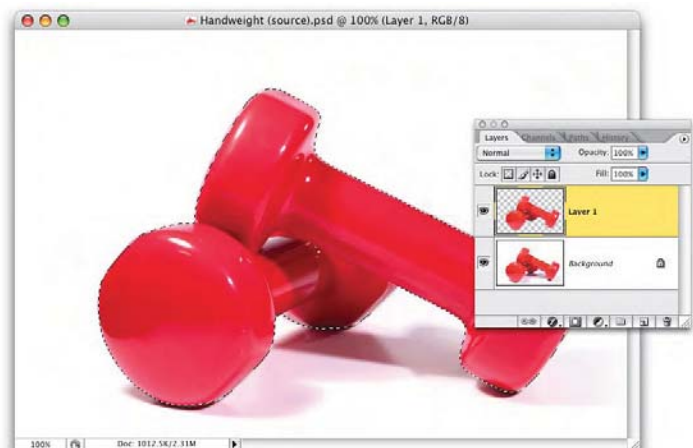
In this case, you want to put this set of red hand weights onto a totally different background while maintaining the interesting shadows that are already in the image. Start by making a selection of just the weights themselves, using whichever selection tool

you're most comfortable with (the Magnetic Lasso tool might do most of the work for you on this one, but of course, you can always use the Pen tool—the Cadillac of selection tools).



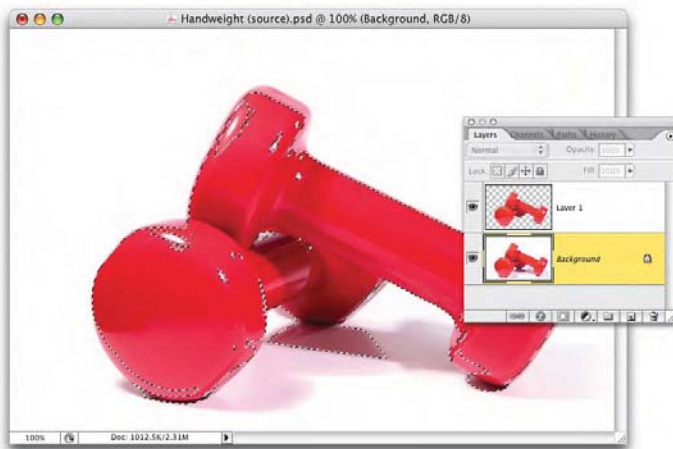
Step 2 PUT THE SELECTED AREA UP ON ITS OWN LAYER (CONTROL-J)

Once your selection is in place, press Control-J to place the hand weights up on their own layer (as shown below).



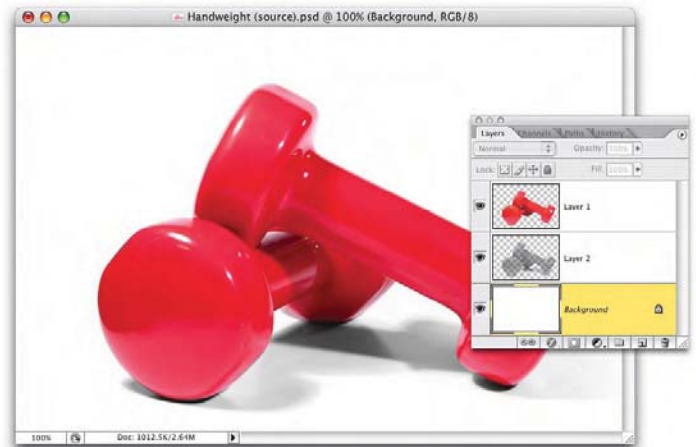
Step 3 GO TO BACKGROUND LAYER, LOAD IMAGE LUMINOSITY, AND INVERSE YOUR SELECTION

Next, in the Layers palette click on the Background layer. Now, you're going to use a keyboard shortcut that will load just the luminosity of the image. To load the luminosity, press Control-Alt-~. Once the luminosity is loaded, what you're really looking for here is the opposite of that—just the shadows. Simply choose Control-Shift-I to Inverse the selection, so instead of the highlights, you now have just the shadows selected (as shown below).



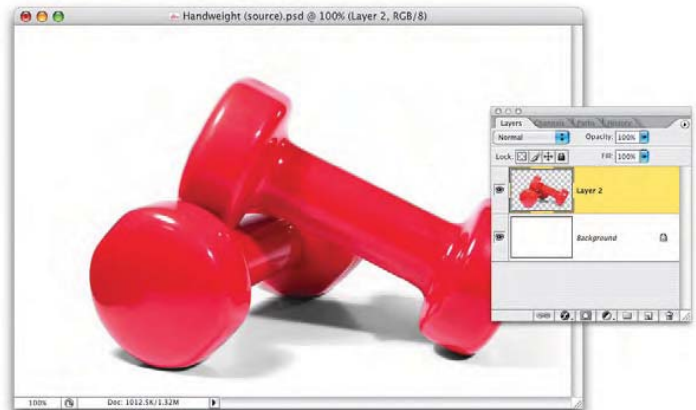
Step 4 WHILE THE SELECTION IS IN PLACE, ADD A NEW BLANK LAYER, FILL WITH BLACK, AND DESELECT

While this shadows selection is still in place, go to the Layers palette and add a new blank layer. Press D to set your Foreground color to black, then press Alt-Backspace to fill these shadows with black, then Deselect. Now, if you look at this layer by itself, it looks almost like a ghost of the shadow, with lots of transparency showing visibility in the layer, but that's okay. This is exactly what you're trying to achieve—transparency in the shadows. Now click on the Background layer, Select All, and hit Delete to erase the old contents of the Background layer, leaving you a blank Background layer, your shadows on the next layer up, then the weights on top. You can now Deselect.



Step 5 AFTER ERASING THE BACKGROUND LAYER, CLICK ON THE TOP LAYER AND MERGE DOWN

In the Layers palette, click back on the hand weights layer, then press Control-E to merge your hand weights layer with the transparent shadow layer beneath it. Well, you've pretty much completed your task—you've got just one layer with the object and its transparent shadow all ready to go (as shown here).



Step 6 OPEN NEW BACKGROUND IMAGE

Now, open the background image on which you want the hand weights to appear. In this case, it seemed totally appropriate to have the hand weights appear on the floor of this IBM-esque data room. Okay, although it's probably not the most appropriate surroundings, it does have a nice, clean, wide-open floor beckoning us to put something, anything, right upon it, and who knows—pop a set of red hand weights on the floor, and it'll look so cool that those old machines might just make a comeback. Come to think of it... nah!



Step 7 DRAG GIANT HAND WEIGHTS ONTO BACKGROUND: NOTICE SHADOWS ARE INTACT AND TRANSPARENT

Go back to your hand weights document, get the Move tool (V) and drag your layer onto the IBM-like data room. Now, if there's anything more stunning than red hand weights in a data room, it's really, really huge hand weights that dominate the entire photo. Okay, so they're a bit big—but we're going to leave them at this grotesque size because it just so wonderfully illustrates how transparent the shadows are, which underscores our modern day miracle by keeping those shadows transparent while the weights, though gargantuan in size, remain totally solid. This is just another example of why channels rock.

