
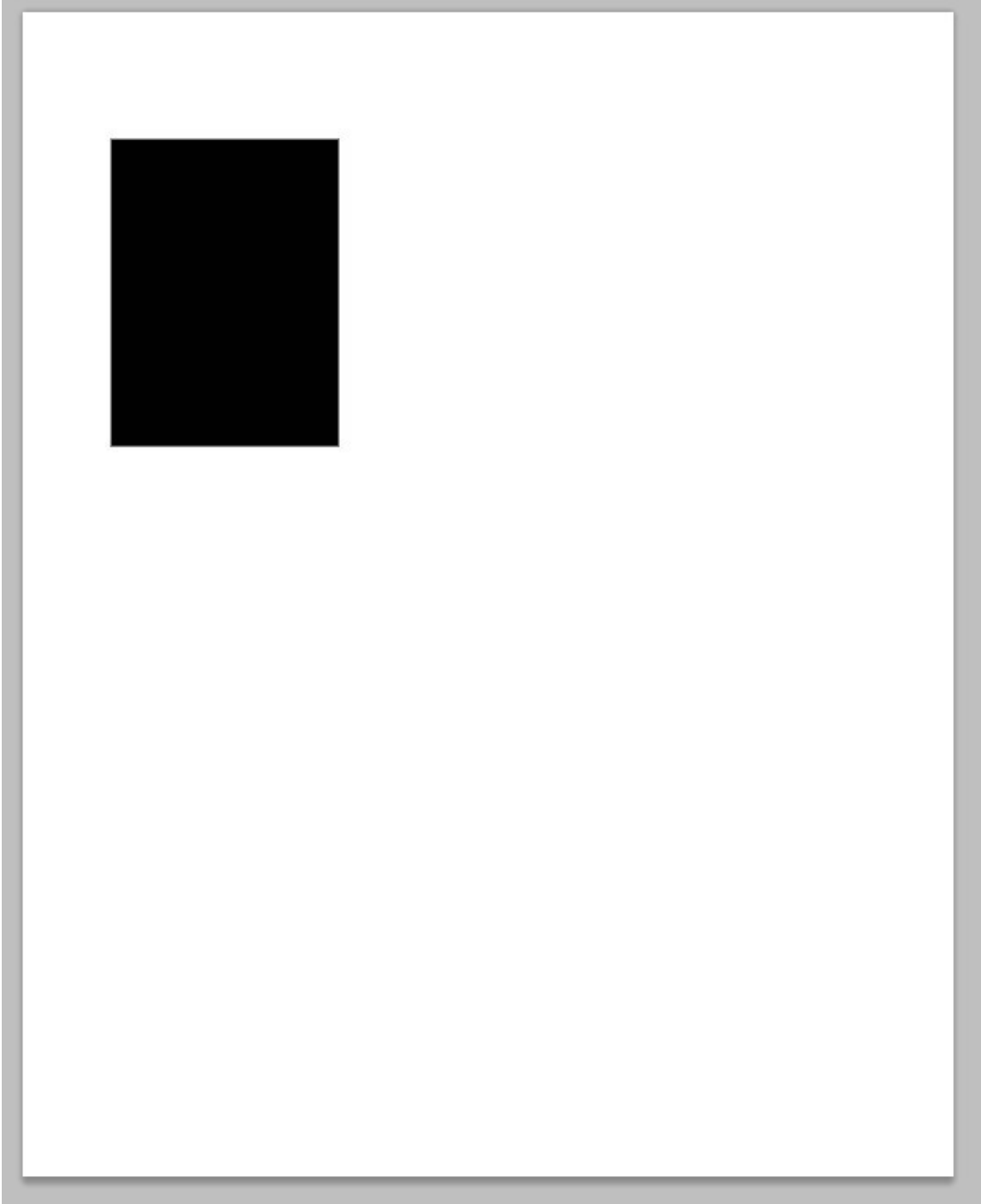


Clipping Masks

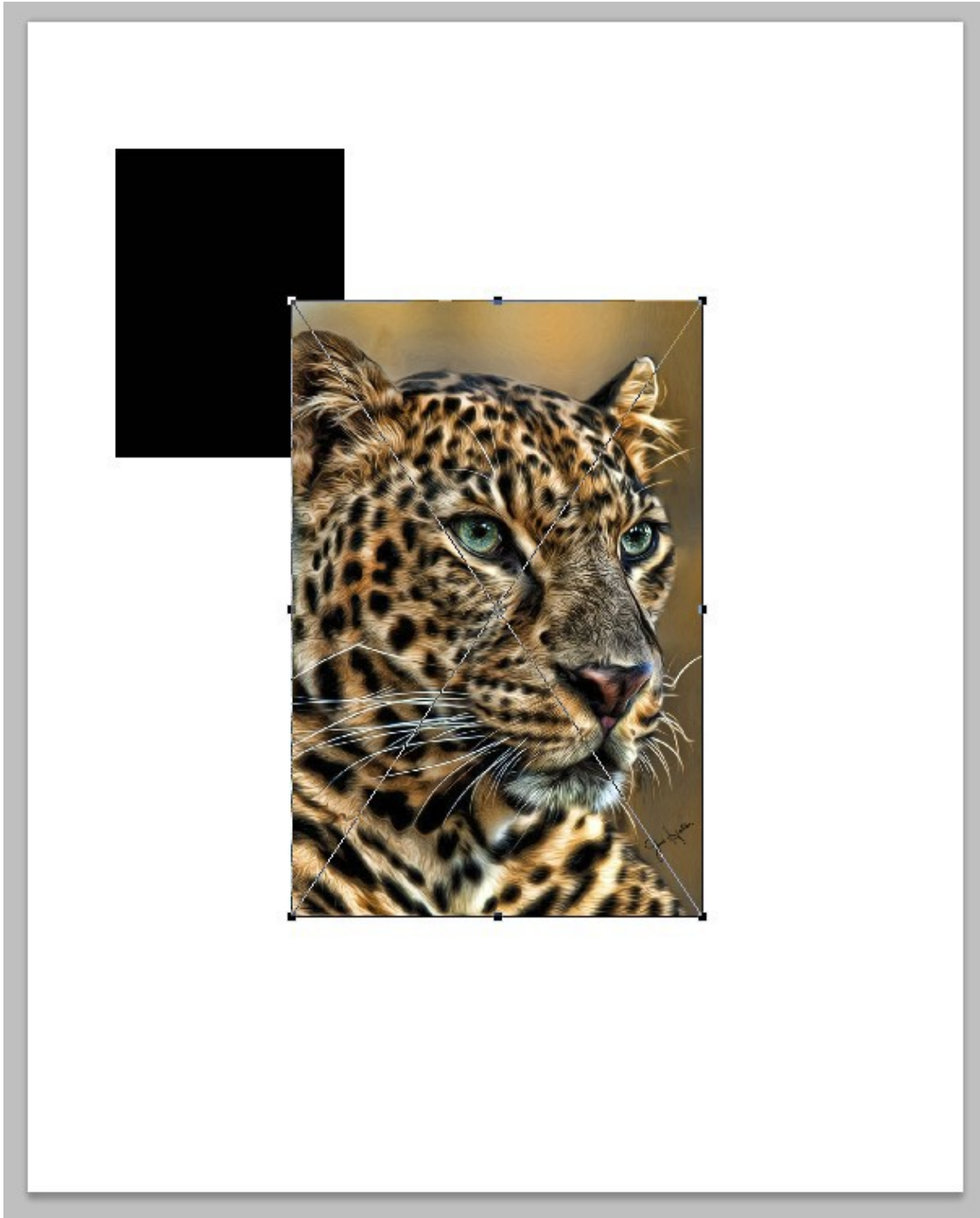
By Joe Holler

Clipping Masks are a very useful tool in Photoshop, but before I describe how I use them, I would like to lead you through a short exercise designed to demonstrate what they are and how to make them.

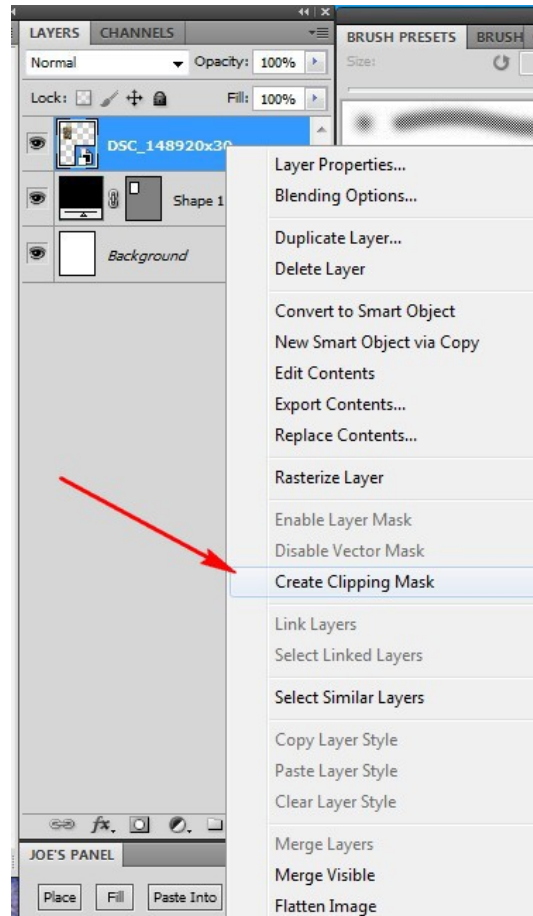
Let's start by making a new Photoshop document by clicking on File | New. Any size will do but I chose 8 by 10 inches with a white background for this demonstration. Select the Rectangle tool from the toolbar , and make a rectangle on the picture. The rectangle will be filled with the foreground color. Notice that a new layer was created above the background layer in the layers palette.



Make sure that the layer with the rectangle is the active layer. And click on File | Place and select an image. Notice that another new layer has been created above the layer with the rectangle. The image will appear as a smart object with an X across it. This will allow you to change its size without losing quality.



Click and drag the image on top of the rectangle. Hold the shift key down to preserve proportionality and click and drag one of the corners to resize the image so that it is slightly larger than the rectangle both lengthwise and widthwise, then press the enter key. Right click on the layer for the picture you just place and choose “Create Clipping Mask”.



The image will now fit within the rectangle and you can click and drag the image and it will stay within the borders of the rectangle.

A Clipping mask can be any shape or color. In the next example I took some text of my name and placed an image of smoke above it and created the clipping mask.



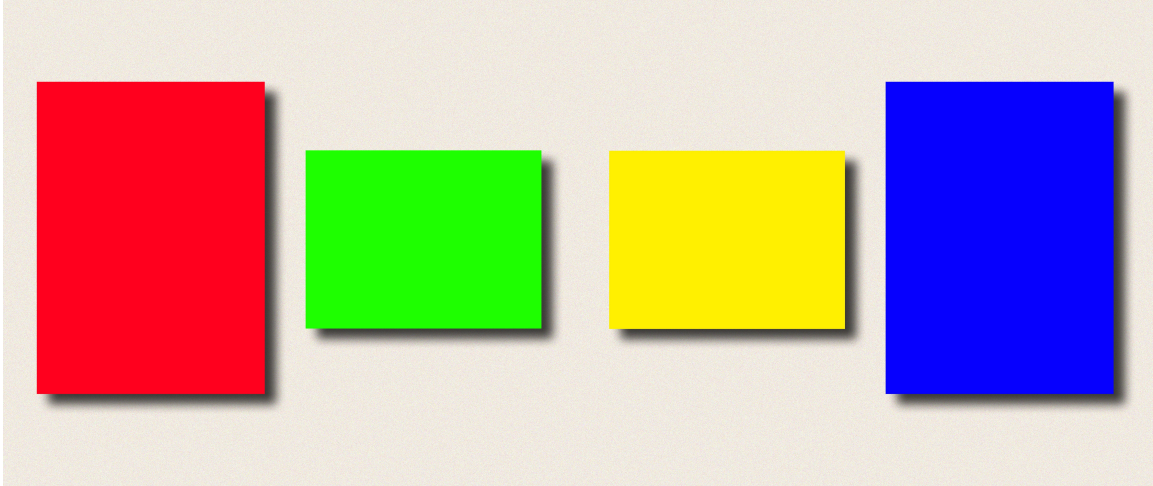
Clipping masks are cute but what good are they? I use them when making page layouts for photo books. The remainder of this article is a sequel to an article I wrote about creating page layouts using Photoshop. (Make a link here to the other article) So, you should read that article first.

Let's use clipping masks to make a 2 page spread with identically shaped portrait pictures on the outside and identically shaped landscape pictures on the inside like this:

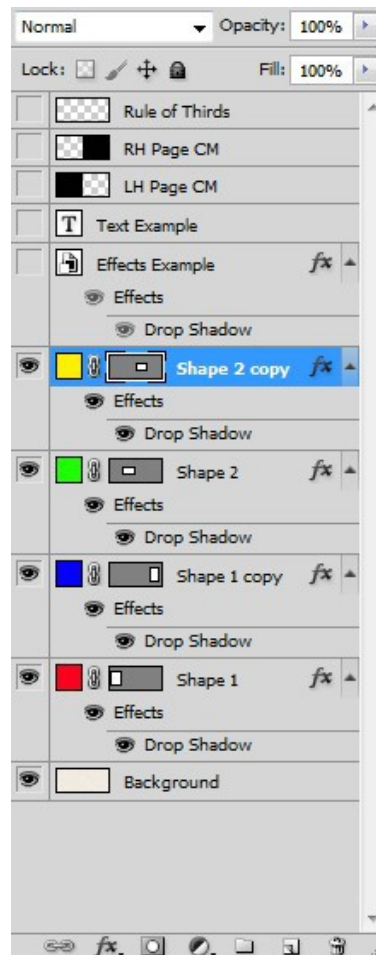
1. Start with a spread template as described in the previous article, open it in Photoshop.
2. Set the foreground color to red and make a portrait rectangle on the left side. A new layer will be created titled "Shape 1". Click on the Layers Styles (Fx) icon on the bottom of the layer palette and add a drop shadow to the red rectangle. Or, if you have a Layers Styles layer as part of your template, simply hold the Alt key down and click drag the Fx icon from one layer to another.



3. Create a duplicate layer (Alt + J). Another new layer will be created titled “Shape 1 copy”. Select the Move tool from the top of the toolbox and click and drag the red rectangle to the other side of the spread. To help you position the rectangle you can click and drag the top ruler onto you picture. If the ruler is not visible click View | Rulers or Ctrl + R. You can remove this guideline when you are down by holding the Ctrl key down and clicking and dragging the guideline out of the way. It is also useful to use the arrow keys to nudge the rectangle into place. Now you have 2 red rectangles. Change the foreground color to blue and fill the second rectangle with that color. Alt+ Backspace will fill with the foreground color and Ctrl + Backspace will fill with the background color. It is not really necessary for the rectangles to be different colors but the icon on the layers palette will also become blue making it easier to see which layer is associated with the rectangle.
4. Set the foreground color to green and make a landscape rectangle on the left side. Another new layer will be created titled “Shape 2”. Fill the rectangle with the foreground color. It should already have a drop shadow but if it does not, hold the Alt key down and click and drag the Fx icon from one of the other layers onto the current layer.
5. Repeat step 3 to create another landscape rectangle on the rights side. Another new layer will be created titled “Shape 2 copy”. Fill it with yellow. You template should now look like this:



And the layers palette should look like this:



I make a lot of photo books so once I have gotten to this point, I save this as a PSD file in a file folder for clipping masks. You never know when you might want to use the same pattern again.

Now select the rectangle into which you want to place an image. You can do this two ways. Click on the appropriate layer in the layers palette, which should be easy because they are color coordinated. Or, click on the move tool, make sure that the “Auto-Select” check box is checked on the options bar and click on one of the rectangles. The appropriate layer will be selected. Place, resize and position images into the rectangles as described above and you’re done.

Clipping masks take a little bit of practice but are worth the effort. I now have a library of templates that save me bunches of time.