How to Vignette

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Introduction

This document explains several methods for creating vignettes with Picture Window. To *vignette* means to create a soft-edged border around an image.

In old fashioned portraits, a white border was often used, making the image appear to fade gradually into the surface of the paper. But, a vignette can also be black or, less frequently, some other color or textured background.

Sometimes the shape of the vignette is geometrical— oval being one of the most popular, but it might also follow the irregular outline of the subject as in a portrait. Sometimes the shape of a vignette carries a message of its own, like a heart-shaped vignette surrounding a double portrait. And sometimes a vignette is unintentional such as the darkening in the corners of an image caused by a filter that protrudes into the field of view or a lens that has insufficient coverage for the size film being used.

Step 1—Image Preparation

Because vignetting deals with the space surrounding the subject, it is a good idea to start with an image with plenty background surrounding the subject. If you start with a tightly cropped image, effective vignetting can be difficult as you may not have enough image to work with. If you don't have enough space around the subject, try extending the image using the *Border* controls in the *Crop* transformation and then cloning part the background into the border to give yourself more room.

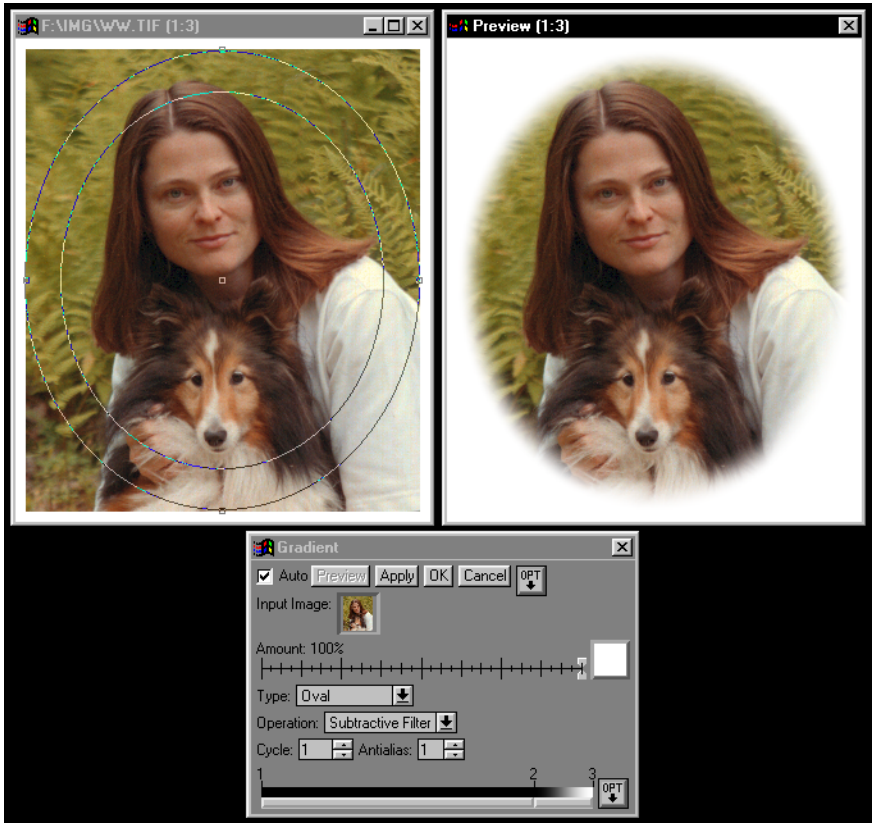
While vignetting works well with color images, it is something of an old-fashioned effect and sometimes looks better when the image has been converted to black and white or a sepia tone. If you use a color image, sometimes reducing its saturation also makes the vignette more pleasing, especially if you choose a white border.

Step 2—Making the Mask

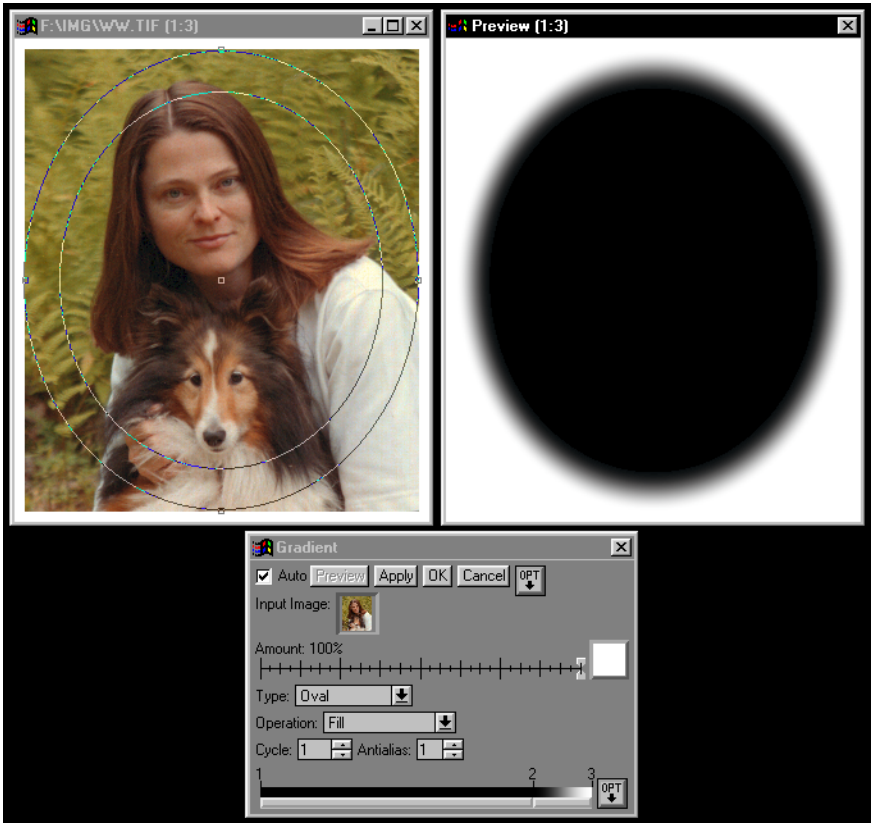
The next and most important step is to create a mask for the image. The mask defines which parts of the image will remain intact, which parts will be replaced with the border color, and which will be somewhere inbetween. To make things easier in subsequent steps, create the mask image so that it is black (transparent) where the image will show through, white (opaque) where it will show as the border color, and gray (partially transparent) in the transition area.

Oval Masks

The easiest way to create an oval or rectangular mask is to use the Gradient transformation. If you want a white border, you can create the entire vignette by using the Subtractive Filter option as illustrated below:

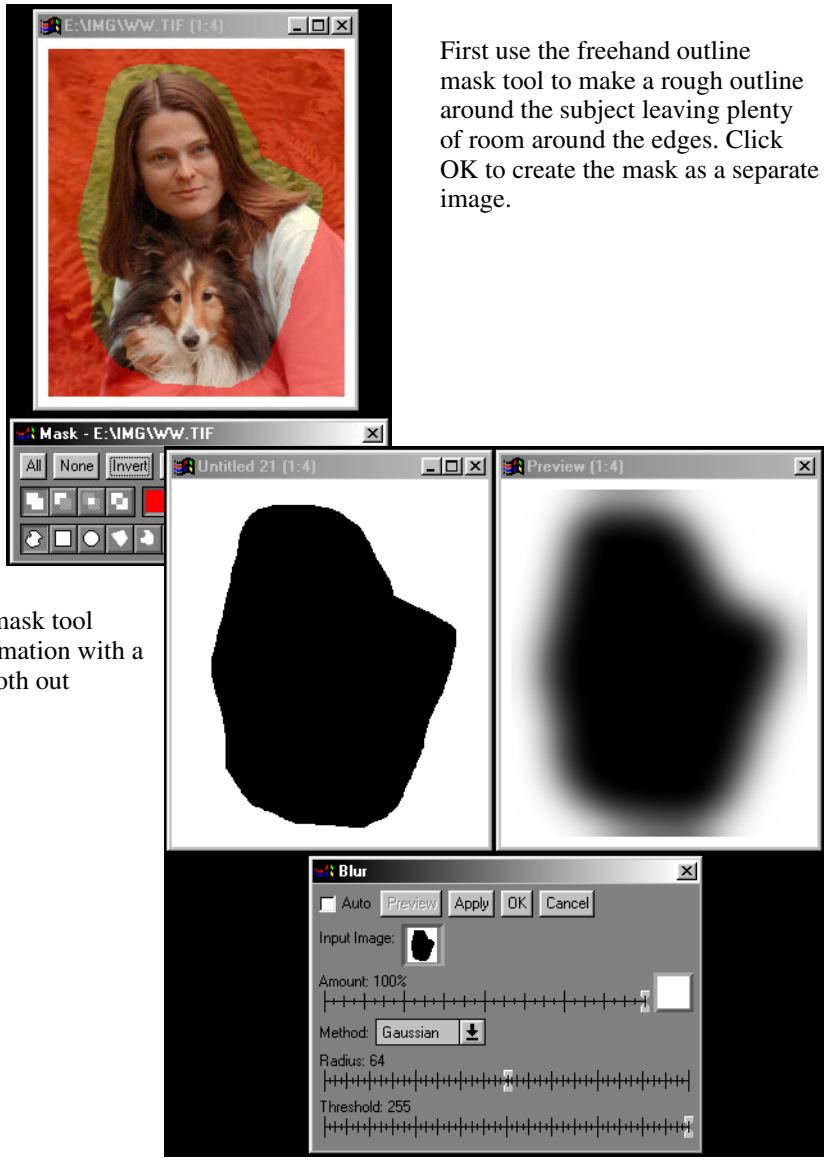


Even if you want a colored border, using Subtractive Filter is a good way to preview the effect—just remember to switch back to Fill before clicking OK.



Irregular Masks

The procedure for irregular masks is a little different:



First use the freehand outline mask tool to make a rough outline around the subject leaving plenty of room around the edges. Click OK to create the mask as a separate image.

Then use the Blur mask tool or the Blur transformation with a large radius to smooth out the edges.

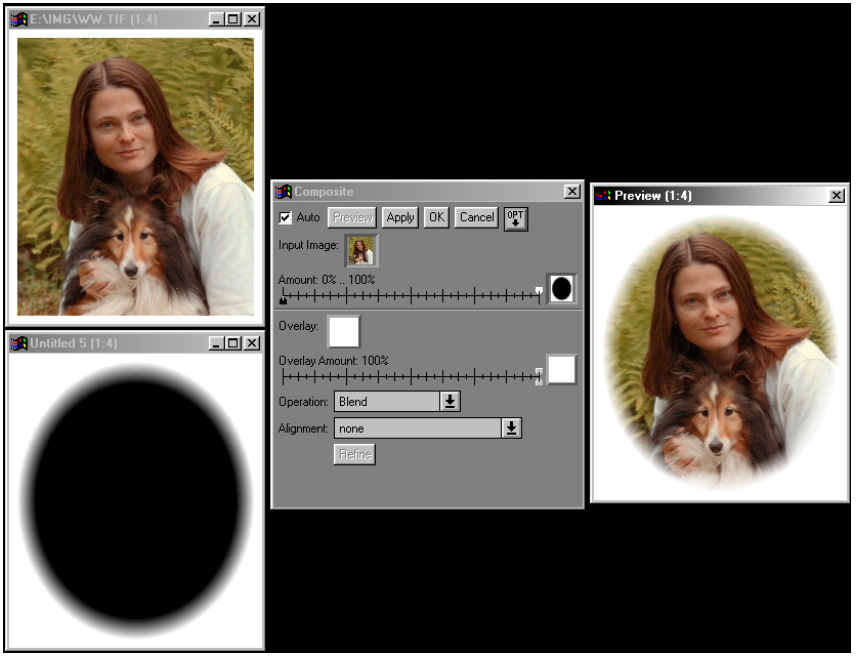
Step 3—Using the Mask to Create the Vignette

While there are several other transformations you can use to create vignettes, the Composite transformation is probably the most versatile and the most direct. Here's the procedure:

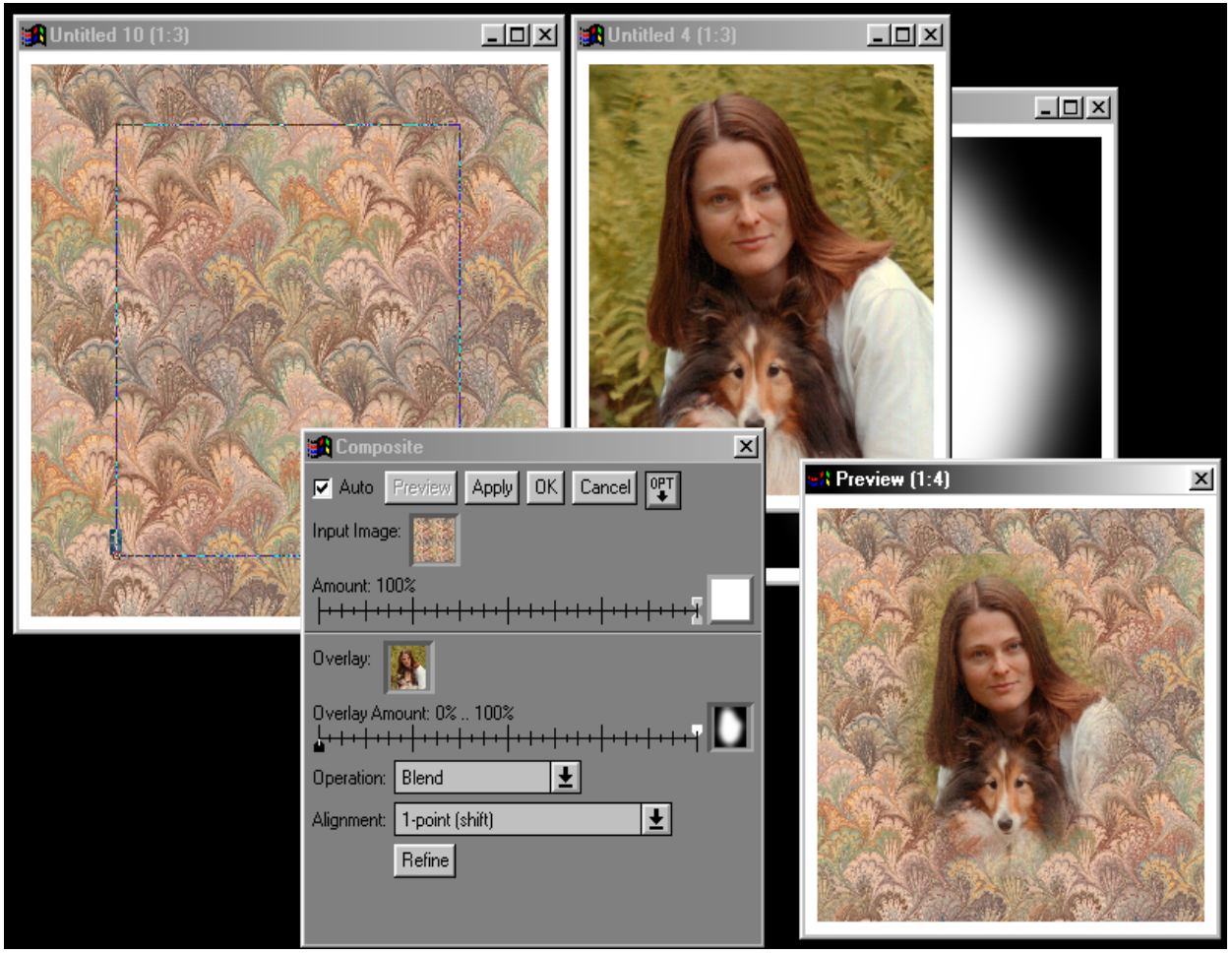
1) Click on the image to select it and then select Transformation/Composite from the main menu. This pops up the Composite dialog box with the image selected as the input image.

2) Click on the small white square to the right of the Amount slider. This should pop up a list of potential mask images. Select the mask you want to use.

3) The default overlay color is white -- if this is OK, just click OK and you're done. To vignette to a color other than white, click on the white square labeled "Overlay" and click on Select Solid Color. Then use the color picker to select the desired background color. Click OK in the Composite dialog box to complete the process.



You can also vignette to a non-solid color using the Composite transformation (or using the Layout transformation). This is perhaps more easily done by starting with a background image and then overlaying the subject over the background in select areas using a mask as in the example below:



Note that 1-point alignment was used to position the photo against the background. You could also scale, rotate or distort the photo by using additional alignment points.

Step 3—Varying the Saturation

As mentioned above, vignettes sometimes look better when the image is desaturated. This is easy to do with the Saturation transformation. Here are some examples: