

Photoshop/Illustrator

Expressive lighting effects

Lighting effects are an effective way to add a detailed illustrative touch to a photo. **Justin Maller** demonstrates how to go about combining several lighting techniques

Lighting effects are a versatile set of techniques that have recently come back into vogue in advertising and the fashion press. Lights and tracing motion effects can become part of the composition, adding brightness and motion to an image. They're an excellent trick to have up your sleeve because of the flexibility they offer and if you've got a few different methods in your toolbox, you can easily create a dense, detailed effect to use as a focal point, or simply add some subtle highlight touches to an existing traditional or digital illustration. Either way, with enough refinement and practice, the end results of combining these techniques will benefit almost any photograph or composition.

In this tutorial, I'm going to look at (among other things) ways of bringing originality to digital lighting by introducing and vectoring traditional sketches, as well as examining some nifty Illustrator-based stroking techniques that achieve results with the greatest of ease.



Designer

Justin Maller is from Melbourne, Australia. He is currently working as a full-time freelance graphic artist, while creatively directing the crew over at depthCORE. See <http://depthcore.com> and his personal portfolio at superlover.com.au.

On the disc

The file you need to complete this tutorial can be found in Disc Contents\Resources\lighting.

Time needed

2-3 hours

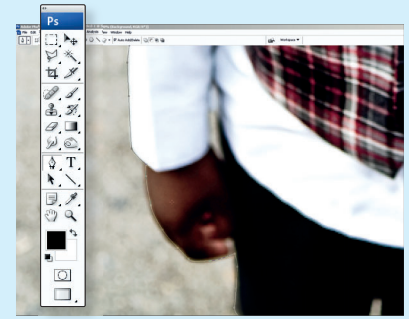
Skills

- Etching and defringing
- Feathering
- Lighting custom shapes





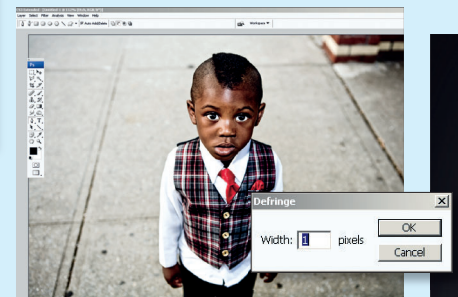
01 Open Photoshop and import 'soft.jpg' from your CD. This wonderful image was captured by New York-based photographer Parris Whittingham, who's been kind enough to share it with us to use for this tutorial. Be sure to head to <http://pswhittingham.com> and check out the rest of his fantastic portfolio.



02 The first thing you're going to do is carefully trace around the edges of the young man in the image using the Pen tool. Zoom in to around 300% and trace the outline carefully, a process commonly referred to as etching. Use as many anchor points as is necessary to get an accurate selection.



03 When you're satisfied, right-click on your completed outline and select Make Selection. Ensure that the Feather Radius is set to 0, Anti-aliased is on and the New Selection box is ticked. Copy and paste the selection into a new layer and name it 'Etch'.



04 Defrining (Layer>Matting>Defringe) is a process I'm pedantic about because it gives etched layers a much smoother and cleaner feel, and it's so easy to do that there's no reason not to apply it every time. This layer should only require a 1-pixel defringe, but experiment to see what suits you.

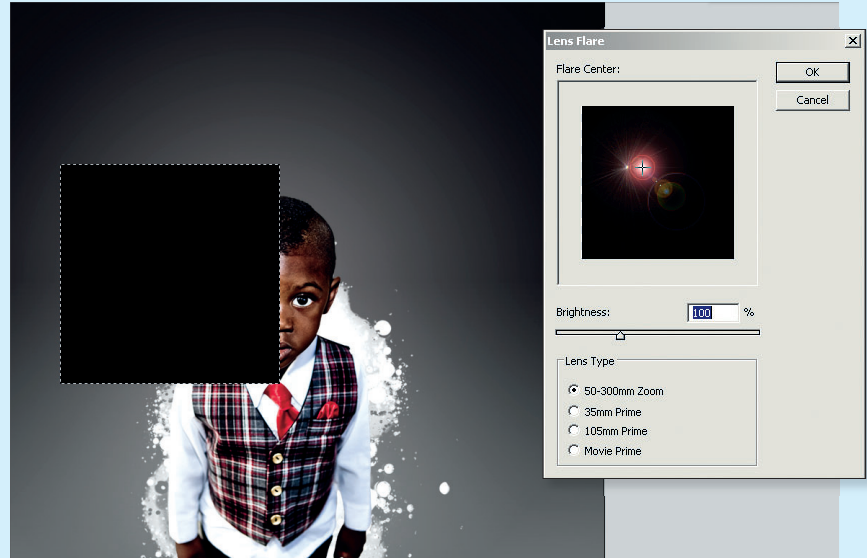


05 To add a proper focal point to this image, we're going to need a bit more height to work with. Adjust the image's canvas size so that it's a perfect 1200x1200 square. Create a new layer and drag out a radial gradient from light to dark grey to simulate a studio environment. Ensure your Etch layer resides above this in the Layers palette.





06 I like to add an area of white brushing to serve as a base origin-point for later flared materials. I've created a couple of wicked brushes for myself simply by taking photos of mixed liquids and using the Define Brush Preset. If this sounds like too much effort for you, just grab some pre-mixed brush sets off the web and paint up a detailed base.

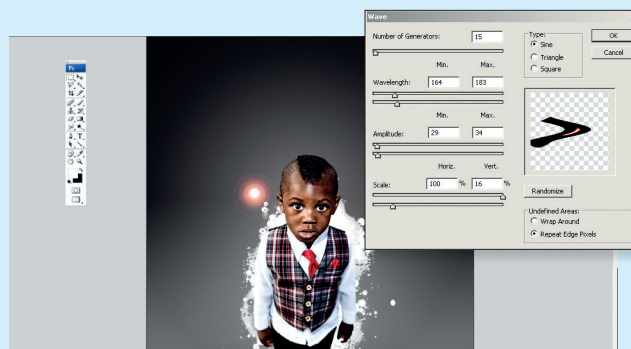


07 The first technique we'll look at is the Flare Manipulation method. To get started, create a new layer. Now make a square marquee selection (hold Shift to constrain). Fill it with black and bring up the Lens Flare filter dialog.



09 Bring up the Levels dialog. We want to cut out the midtones from this flare, so drag the shadow and highlight sliders towards the centre. This will over-saturate the flare, so bring up Hue/Saturation and bring the saturation down to 20-30 per cent.

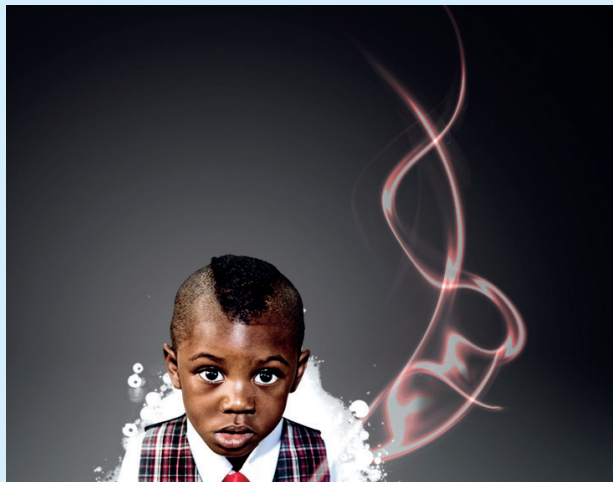
08 The best type of lens flare to use for this particular technique is the 50-300mm zoom flare set to 100% brightness. The tricky part is to get the flare precisely centred in the middle of the selection – you want to ensure that the flare sits as a perfect circle. Take your time here. When you get the right result, set the Layer mode to Screen.



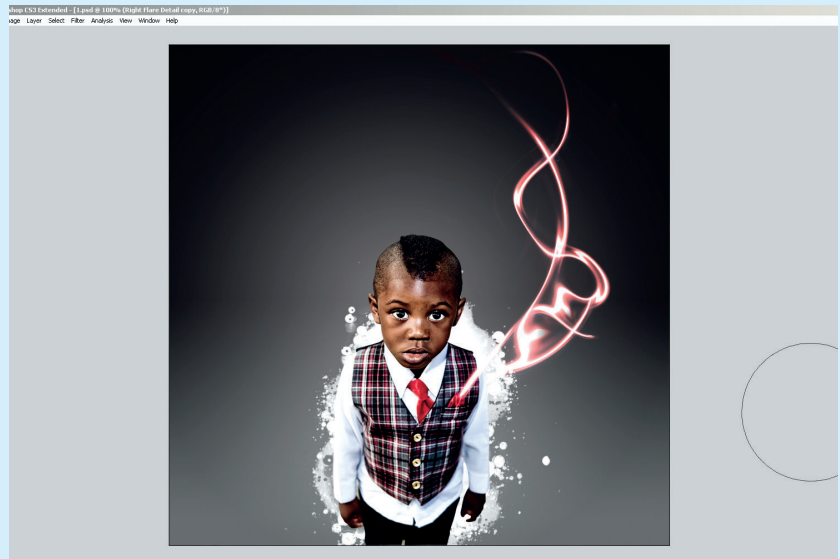
10 This is where the fun starts! Hit this layer with a Wave filter to start distorting it. To get the best result, you'll need to up the wavelengths significantly and increase the amplitude as well. There's no exact science here – what you're really trying to achieve is a lengthening and increased angle-convexity of the flare.



11 To get a proper, detailed result, you'll need to hit the layer with multiple waves (at least seven or eight). It's fine to use the same one more than once, but it's imperative you move the layer before re-applying the filter. Place the layer over the Etch when satisfied and name it 'Flare'.



12— Years ago I stumbled across an excellent variation on this technique, which adds even more intricacy and a stack of motion to the effect. Duplicate the Flare layer and hit it with your most recently used Wave distortion. Now Fade (Edit>Fade>Wave) the opacity back to 50%.



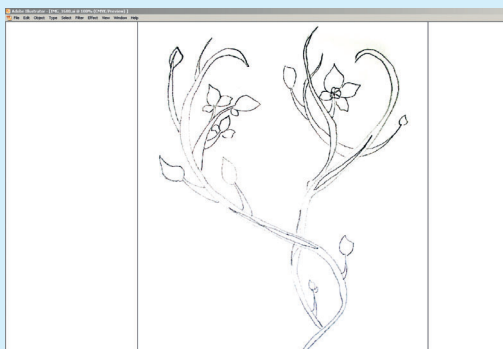
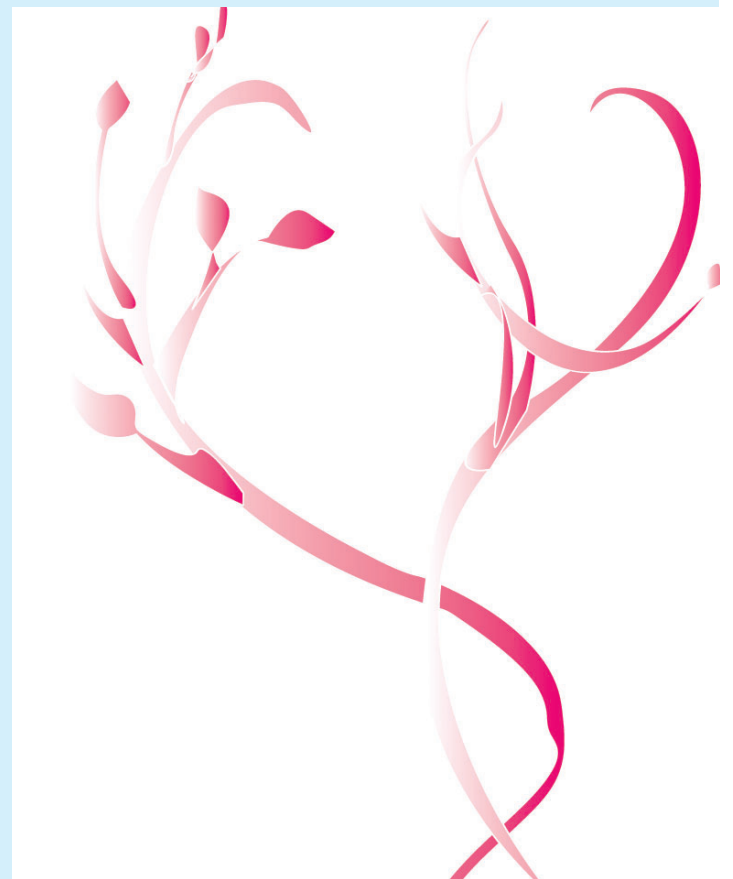
13— Duplicate and merge this layer a couple of times to restore the lighting opacity to 100% (ensure that the Layer mode is always set to Screen on all layers). You may need to burn the midtones of this layer in places as you go to avoid blending too much mid-level into your flare.



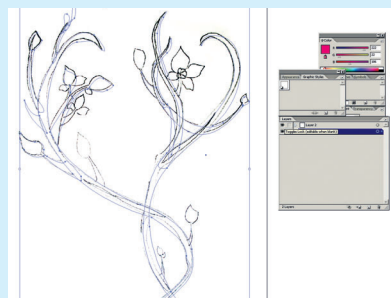
14— Repeat the previous two steps three or four times until you get an intricate feathered flare effect. Repeat the Levels and Hue adjustment you performed in Step 9 to keep the flare vibrant and reduce washout.



15— Reposition the feathered flare so it curves down his left arm and off screen. You may need to clean this up with a Layer Mask to make sure you don't get unwanted splashback on the other side of the figure. You may like to duplicate and flip this layer horizontally to work in other highlights.



16— Time to create the main Custom Shape lighting effect. Grab a pen and paper and sketch out an organic, curvaceous shape. Draw with the figure in mind; we want to frame him with the shape. When done, scan the drawing and import it into Illustrator.



17— Get the Pen tool in Illustrator and trace around your shape, smoothing lines and adding a bit of polish to the sketch. Do the tracing in segments, rather than doing one outline for the entire shape – the reasons will become apparent in a couple of steps.

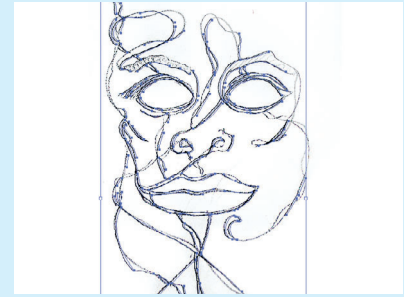
18— Set the outline stroke colour to white and the stroke width to 0.5. Set the fill to be a linear gradient; you want to configure the gradient to run from white to a reddish pink reminiscent of the pink highlights in the lens flare to get the best effect.



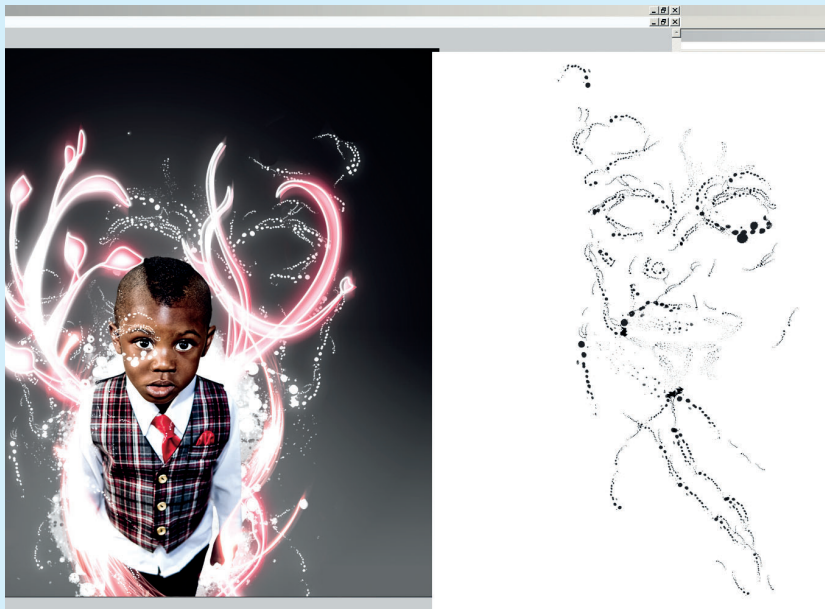
19 Copy and paste the object into a new layer in Photoshop. Set it behind all layers except the background. Now, to get the lighting glow happening, duplicate and apply a Motion Blur of around 20 pixels on a 45-degree angle. Duplicate the base layer again and add a Gaussian Blur of around 10 pixels.



20 Contract the base layer selection by 5 pixels. Create a layer and fill with white. Create an inner glow with Gaussian Blur. In Illustrator remove the fill. Copy and paste the outline into your Photoshop file, floating it over the shape layers. Duplicate and blur in a new layer to finish the Outline Glow.



21 Knock up another sketch (anything will do, just make sure it has lots of detail) and import it to Illustrator. Use the Pen tool to trace around the shapes and lines. There's no need to complete the shapes here, because you won't be filling them – just add as much detail as possible.



22 Ensure that the Fill is disabled, set the stroke colour to white and alter the Stroke brush to an artistic ink splatter that neatly traces your illustration with splashes of paint. When satisfied, copy and paste the results into Photoshop as pixels. Position the layer behind the Etch and resize it so it interacts neatly with the Shape layer. Duplicate and place over the Etch, framing the figure's face.

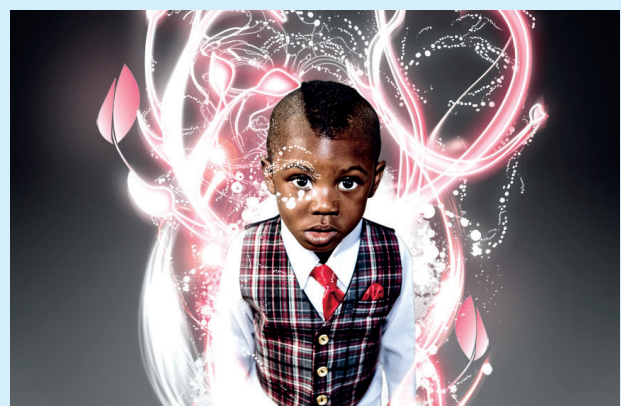


Adjustment layers

This is another thing I'm pedantic about and insist upon adding to each end of every piece I make. I've tied this piece together by adding a Color Balance adjustment layer – a small touch that makes the world of difference. In this particular instance, all I have done is bump the slider heavily towards blue in the shadows, the midtones towards cyan and the highlights towards yellow. The results speak for themselves.



23 Now that the base structure of the image is in place, revisit each of the techniques we have examined and experiment with them to add finer detail to the piece. The great thing about these lighting techniques is that they interact very naturally with each other, so you can easily use one to tie the other together and get a very intricate result.



24 Adding some more obvious sketched elements can do wonders for the piece. Here I've quickly drawn some leaf elements and brought them into the composition using the Custom Shape technique and also introduced the original face sketch to the lighting structure using the Outline Glow effect.