

# GHOSTING AN IMAGE

In this Adobe Photoshop tutorial, we're going to look at a way to give a photo a more "ghostly" appearance.

I'm a fan of horror films, but I admit I'm a bit shallow in that I usually just watch them for the special effects. I'm usually sitting there thinking to myself, "I wonder how they did that". So while playing around in Photoshop one night, I came up with this little technique for taking a living, breathing person and making them appear more like a ghost, which is why I called it "ghosting an image". It's a simple effect with only a few steps involved and they're easy to do.

Of course, as with most photo effects, it helps if you start with the right type of image. A photo of your kids playing at the beach on a summer afternoon may not be the best choice. Then again, you never know till you try it.

Here's the photo I'll be starting with:



The original image.

And here's the "ghosting" effect we're after:

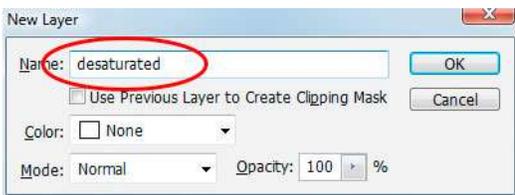


The final result.

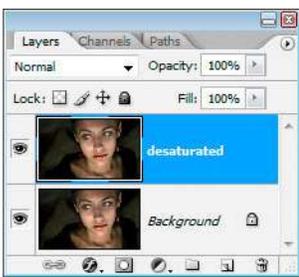
Let's get started!

## Step 1: Copy The Background Layer

As always, we never want to work directly on our Background layer, since it contains our original pixel information, so the first thing I'm going to do is copy it. I'm a big fan of naming layers and you should be too, so I'm going to use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+Alt+J** (Win) / **Command+Option+J** (Mac) to bring up the **New Layer** dialog box. I'm going to name my Background copy layer "desaturated", and we'll see why in a moment:



Photoshop's New Layer dialog box. Name your layer "desaturated".



This gives me a copy of my Background layer in the Layers palette, which Photoshop has named "desaturated":

Photoshop's Layers palette now showing my Background layer and the copy above it.

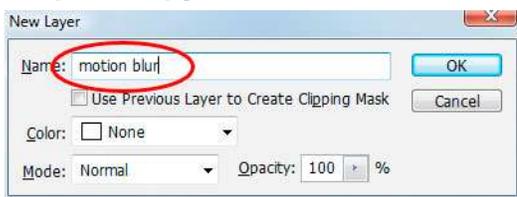
## Step 2: Desaturate The Background Copy Layer



With my “desaturated” layer selected in the Layers palette, I’m going to, you guessed it, desaturate it to remove all the colors. To do that, I’ll use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+Shift+U** (Win) / **Command+Shift+U** (Mac). The image now appears black and white:

After desaturating the layer, the image appears black and white.

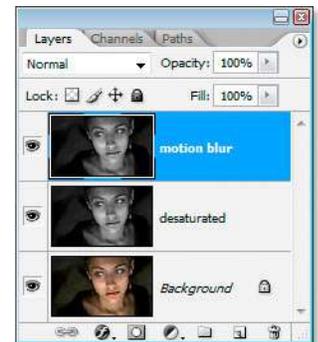
## Step 3: Copy The “Desaturated” Layer



I need to make a copy of my “desaturated” layer at this point, so with it selected in the Layers palette, I’ll use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+Alt+J** (Win) / **Command+Option+J** (Mac) once again to bring up the **New Layer** dialog box. This time, I’ll name the layer “motion blur” (left):

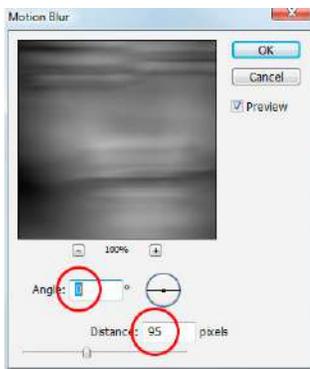
Create a copy of the “desaturated” layer and this time name it “motion blur”.

I now have three layers in my Layers palette, including my new “motion blur” layer at the top:



The Layers palette now showing my three layers.

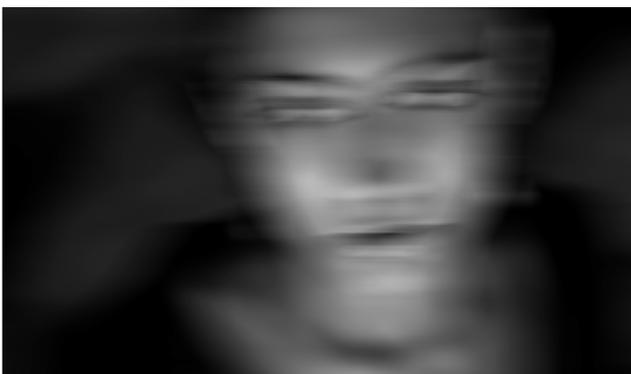
## Step 4: Apply The Motion Blur Filter



Photoshop’s “Motion Blur” dialog box.

I feel like I’m giving away the endings with my layer names, but oh well. With the “motion blur” layer selected, go up to the **Filter** menu at the top of the screen, select **Blur**, and then select **Motion Blur**. This brings up the “Motion Blur” dialog box. Normally you’d apply a motion blur to an object that’s, you know, in motion, but applying it to a stationary object tends to give it a ghost-like effect, which is what we’re after. When the dialog box appears, set the **Angle** to **0°**, and then drag the slider bar at the bottom to the right to increase the **Distance** value until your image is blurred out quite a bit. Here I’ve set mine to **95 pixels** (left):

Here’s my image after applying the Motion Blur filter:

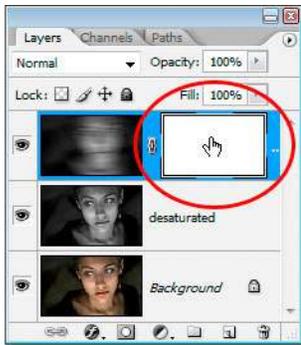


The image after applying the “Motion Blur” filter.

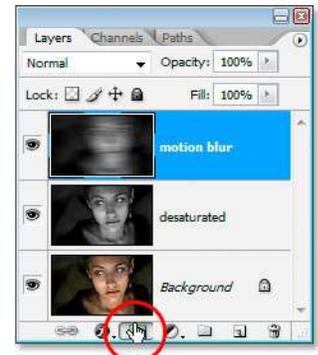
## Step 5: Add A Layer Mask To The “Motion Blur” Layer

Our image already looks a little spooky with the motion blur applied, but now we’re going to bring back some of her face, and we’re going to do that using a layer mask. With the “motion blur” layer selected, click on the **Add Layer Mask** icon at the bottom of the Layers palette:

This adds a layer mask to the “motion blur” layer:



The layer mask is now added.



Click on the “Add Layer Mask” icon at the bottom of the Layers palette.

## Step 6: Paint With Black On The Layer Mask To Reveal Some Of The Face

Grab your **Brush tool** from the Tools palette, or press B on your keyboard to quickly select it. Then press **D** on your keyboard to make sure **black** is selected as your foreground color (Note: If your layer mask was already selected when you pressed “D”, your foreground color will actually become white, since white is the default foreground color for a layer mask. If that’s the case, simply press **X** to swap the foreground and background colors, which will set your foreground color to black). Go up to the **Options Bar** at the top of the screen and lower the opacity of your brush to around **10%**:



Lower the opacity of the brush to 10% in the Options Bar.

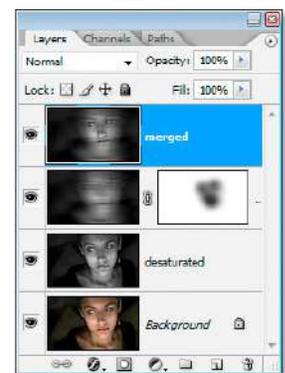


This will allow you to paint the face back in gradually. Click on the layer mask thumbnail in the Layers palette to select it if it’s not already selected (it will have a highlight border around it if it’s selected), and then with a large, soft-edged brush and black as your foreground color, paint over the middle area of the face in short, gradual strokes to bring back some of the eyes, nose and mouth, leaving the rest blurred out. Be sure to stay well within the boundaries of the face so everything blurs out nicely from the center:

The image after masking away some of the blurring effect.

## Step 7: Merge All Of The Layers Onto A New Layer

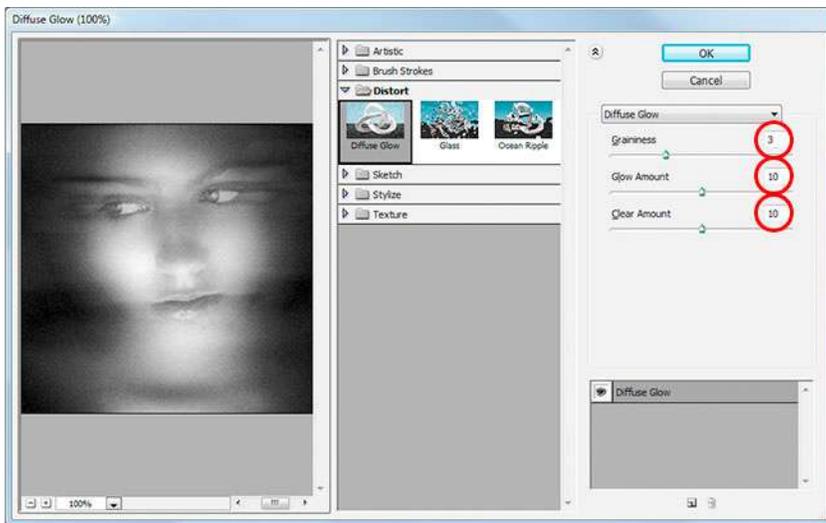
We’re going to merge all three layers onto a new layer at this point, and we can do that with the keyboard shortcut **Shift+Ctrl+Alt+E** (Win) / **Shift+Command+Option+E** (Mac), which takes all three layers and merges them onto a brand new layer at the top of the Layers palette. Double-click on the name of the layer and rename it to ‘merged’:



Merge all three layers onto a new layer at the top of the Layers palette and rename it “merged”.

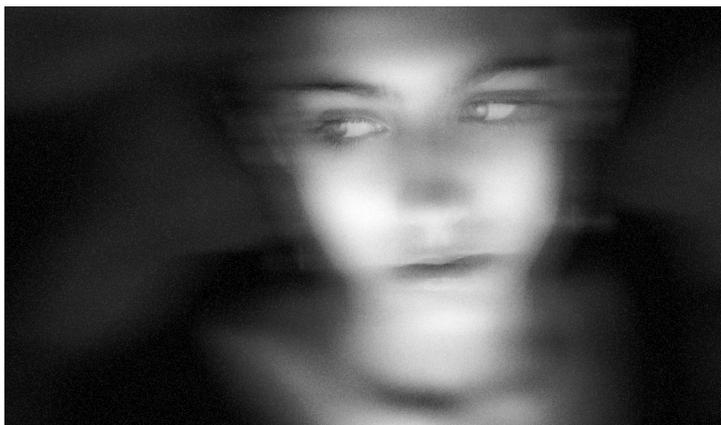
### Step 8: Apply The “Diffuse Glow” Filter To The Merged Layer

With the new “merged” layer selected, go up to the **Filter** menu at the top of the screen, select **Distort**, and then select **Diffuse Glow**. This brings up Photoshop’s Filter Gallery (it doesn’t actually say Filter Gallery anywhere at the moment but it’s the Filter Gallery) set to the Diffuse Glow filter options. You may have to play around with the three options a little depending on the image you’re using, but for my image, I’ve set **Graininess** to **3**, **Glow Amount** to **10**, and **Clear Amount** also to **10** as circled below:



Photoshop’s Filter Gallery set to the “Diffuse Glow” filter options.

Here’s my image after applying the “Diffuse Glow” filter:

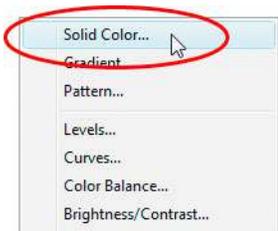


The image after applying the “Diffuse Glow” filter.

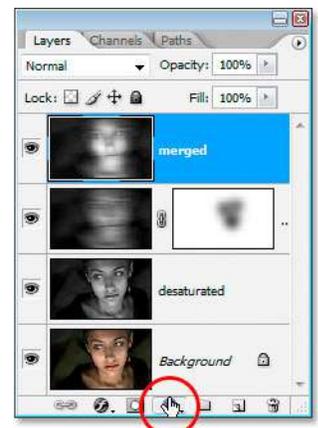
### Step 9: Add A Solid Color Fill Layer

All that’s left to do now is add a little color, so with the “merged” layer still selected, click on the **New Fill Or Adjustment Layer** icon at the bottom of the Layers palette (right):

Select **Solid Color** from the top of the list:

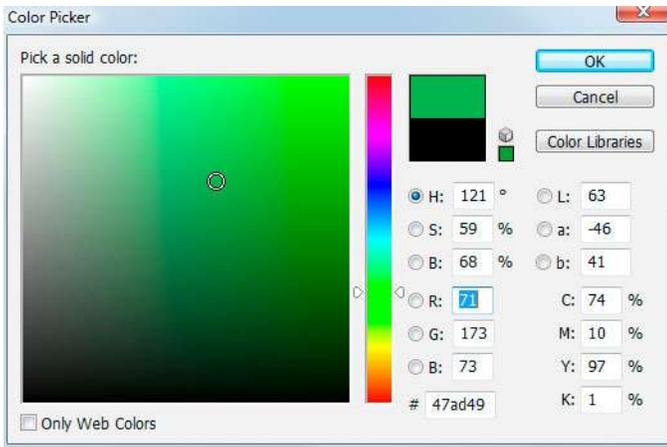


Select “Solid Color” from the list.



Click the New Fill or Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette.

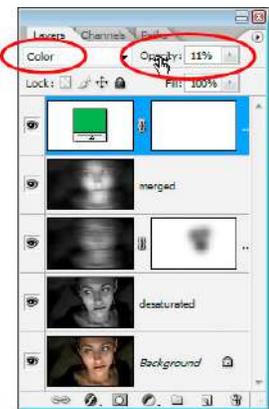
This will bring up Photoshop’s **Color Picker**. I’m going to choose a green color:



Photoshop’s Color Picker.

Click OK once you’ve chosen a color to exit out of the Color Picker. Your image will now be filled entirely with the solid color, so we’ll fix that next.

### Step 10: Change The Blend Mode Of The Fill Layer To “Color” And Lower The Opacity



With the Solid Color fill layer selected, go up to the **layer blend mode** options in the top left of the Layers palette, click on the down-pointing arrow beside the word “Normal” and change the blend mode to Color. This will colorize the image with the color you’ve chosen (green in my case). The color will most likely be too intense though, so move over to the right to the **Opacity** option at the top of the Layers palette and lower the opacity to reduce the intensity. I’ve lowered mine considerably, all the way down to **11%** for just a hint of color:

Change the blend mode of the Solid Color fill layer to “Color” and lower the opacity.

And we’re done! Here is the final “ghosting” effect:



The final result.

And there we have it!

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