



Masking in Photo RAW 2026

From Selection to Perfection

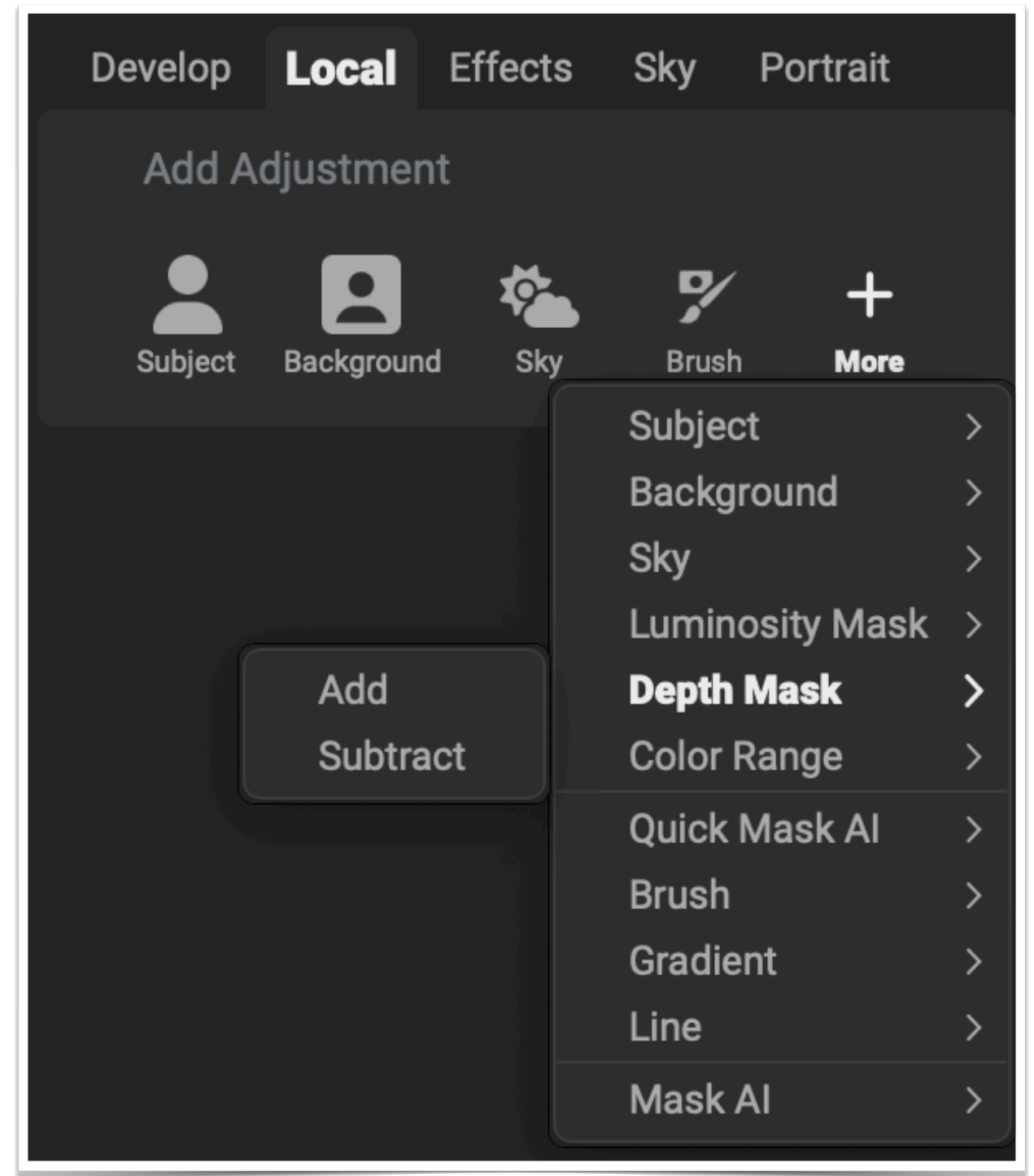
Section 01

Types of Masks

The New Masking Panel

One of the most exciting updates in ON1 Photo RAW 2026 is how much easier masking has become. The new **Masking Options panel** now brings all of the key choices together in one place, making it faster to decide exactly where you want your adjustment to apply. You can choose to target the **Subject**, **Background**, or **Sky**, or work manually with the **Masking Brush**. If you open the **More** menu, you'll find advanced options like **Depth Mask**, **Luminosity Mask**, and **Color Range**, giving you even more flexibility when editing.

On the next few pages, we'll take a closer look at each of these mask types in Photo RAW 2026, exploring how they work and when to use them to achieve precise, creative results.



01 Types of Masks

Subject



Uses AI to detect and isolate the main subject in your photo. Perfect for brightening people, animals, or objects without affecting the background.

Background



Automatically selects everything except the main subject. Useful for darkening or blurring backgrounds while keeping your subject untouched.

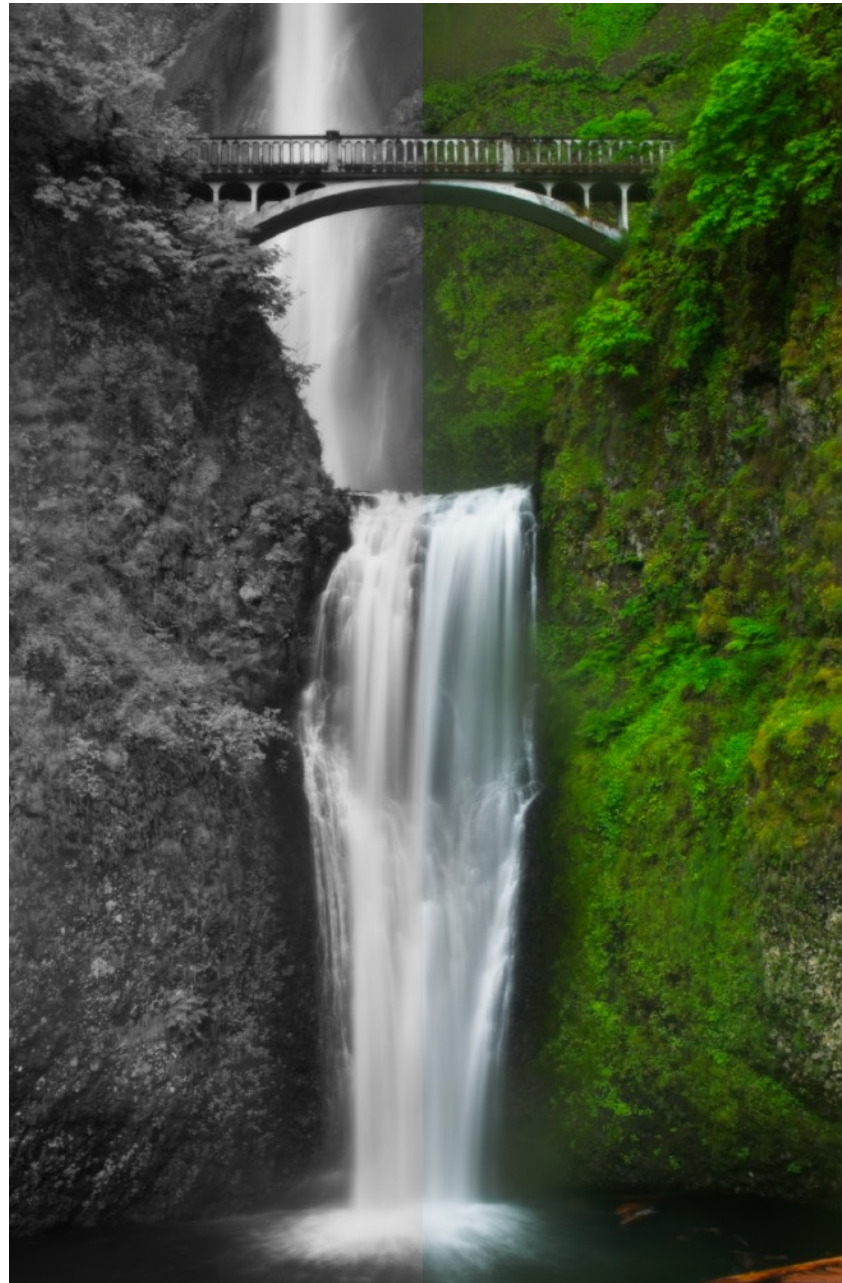
Sky



Detects and isolates the sky, even around trees and fine edges. Great for adding drama, color grading sunsets, or replacing dull skies.

01 Types of Masks

Luminosity



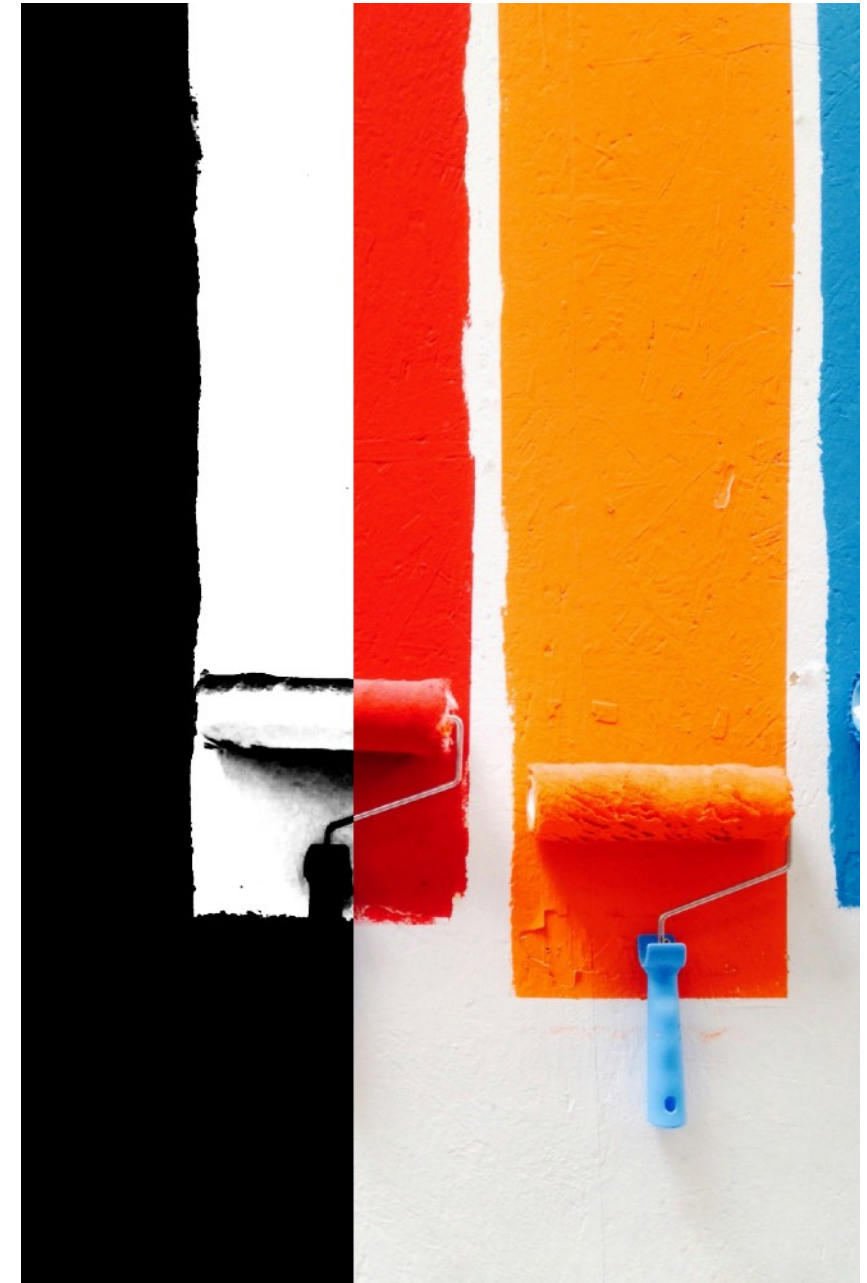
Creates a mask based on brightness values in the photo. You can target highlights, midtones, or shadows—ideal for balancing exposure or adding contrast.

Depth Mask



Uses depth information to separate areas closer or farther from the camera. Helpful for enhancing foreground subjects or subtly adjusting distant backgrounds.

Color Range



Selects areas based on specific colors you choose. Perfect for isolating foliage, clothing, or any dominant color tones.

01 Types of Masks

Quick Mask AI



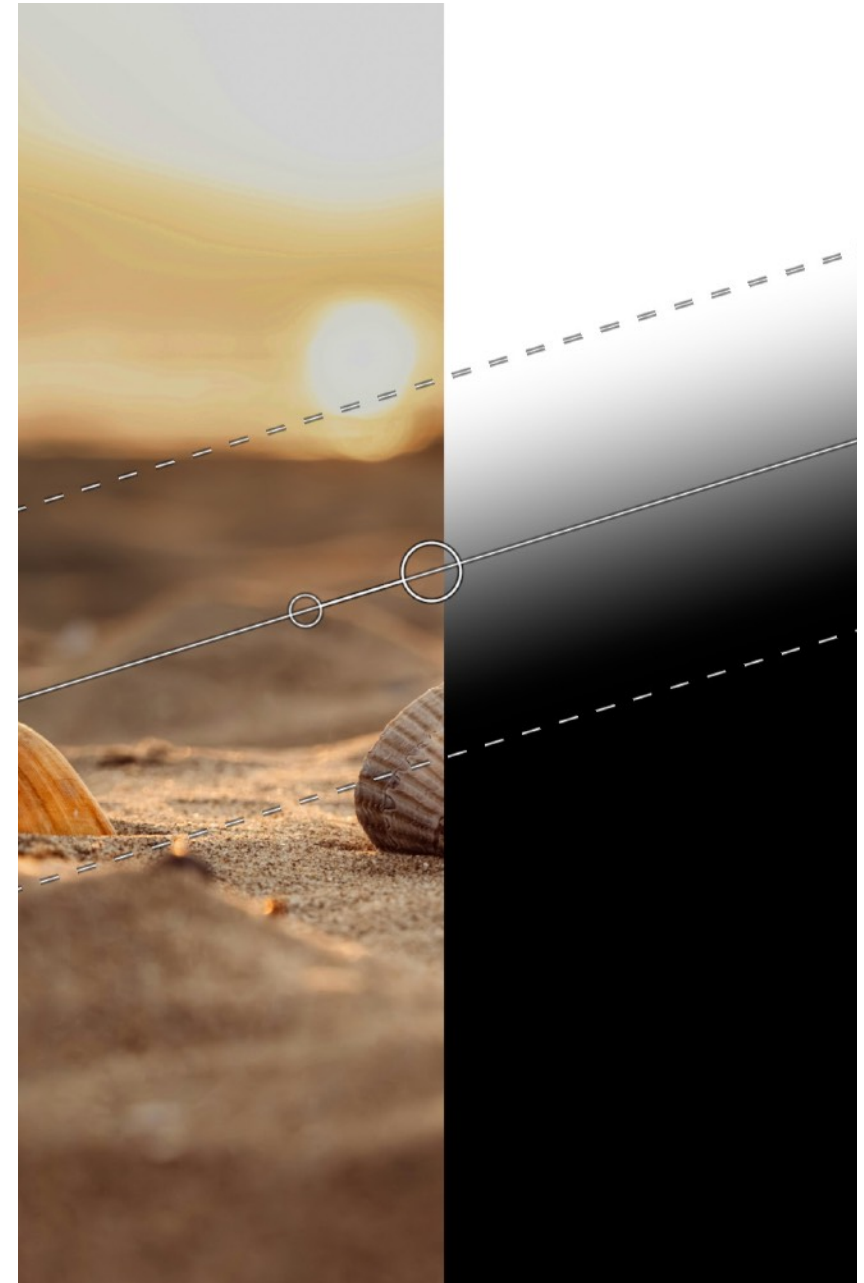
Lets you select an area, and ON1 refines the mask automatically with AI. A fast way to target complex shapes without careful brushing.

Brush



A manual tool for painting masks exactly where you want them. Ideal for precise edits and fine control over specific details.

Gradient



Applies a smooth transition of the mask across an area. Great for darkening skies, brightening foregrounds, or creating gradual effects.

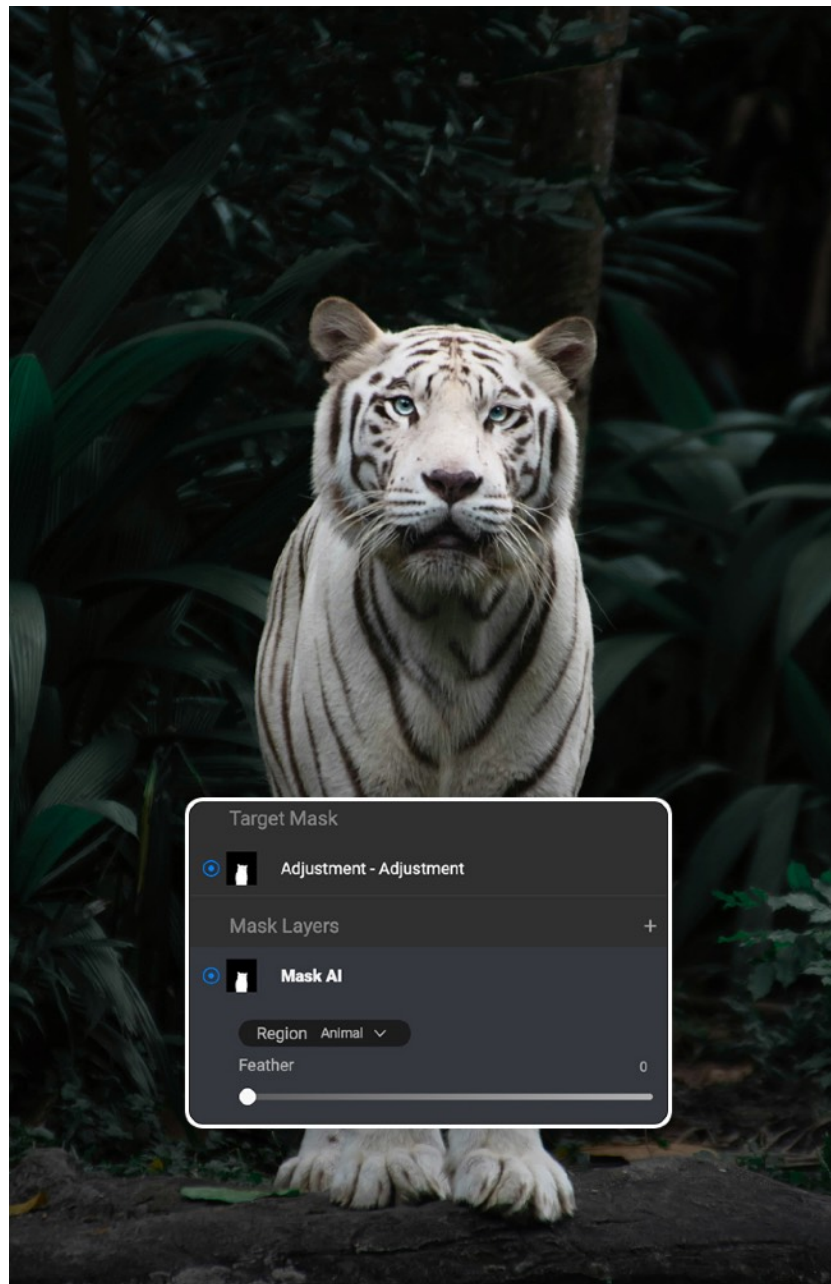
01 Types of Masks

Line Mask



Creates a straight-line gradient between two points. Perfect for architectural shots or controlled adjustments along horizons.

Mask AI



An advanced AI tool that intelligently detects regions like people, animals, plants, buildings, and more. Great for quickly selecting multiple elements in a scene with just a few clicks.

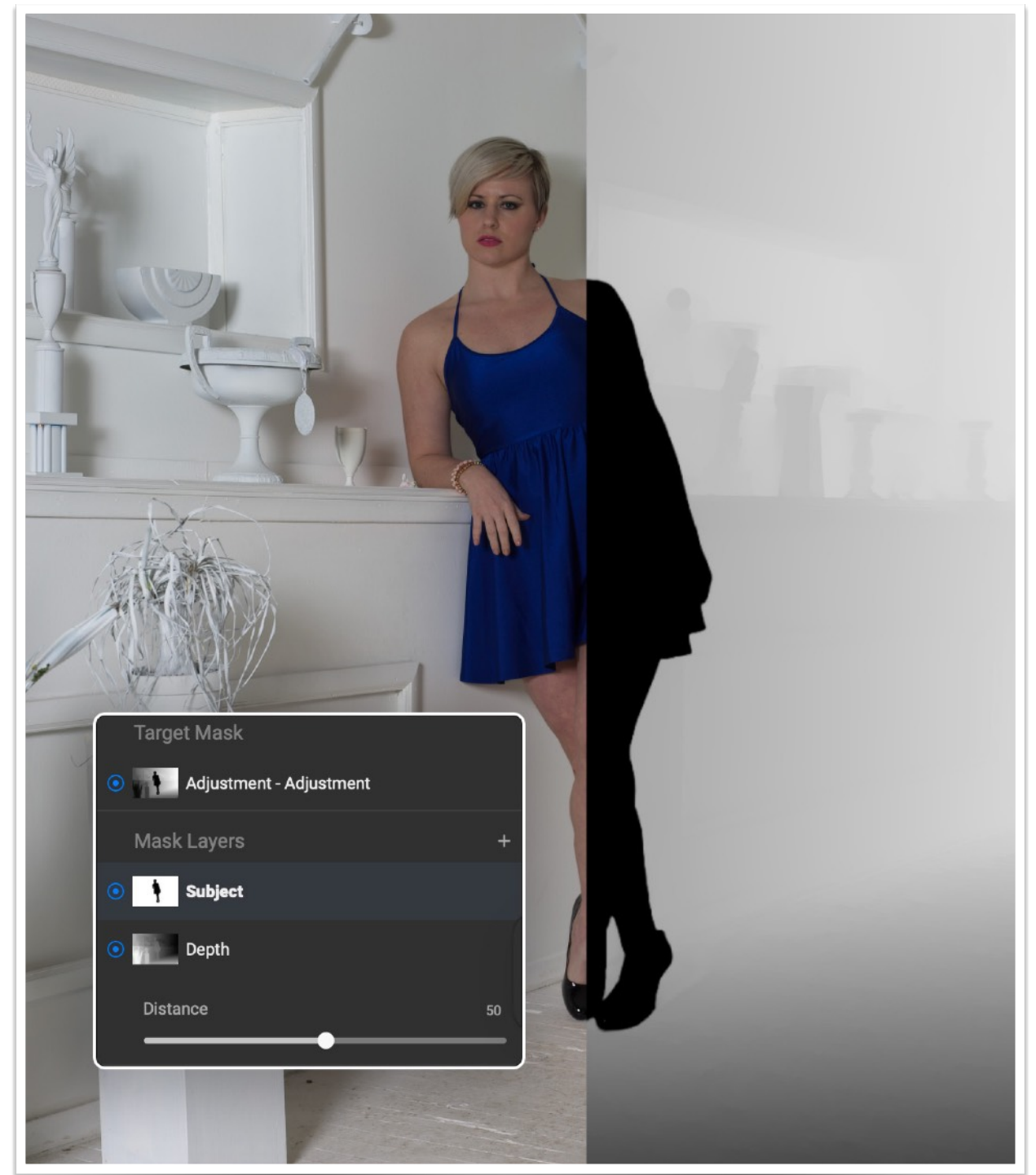
All of these masking tools can be used anywhere in Photo RAW that supports masking. That means you're not limited to just one panel or feature—you can apply masks in **Local Adjustments, Effects Filters, Layers, Sky Swap AI, and Portrait AI**. Once you understand how each mask works, you'll be able to use them across the entire app to control exactly where your edits apply.

Mask Layers in Photo RAW 2026

A big new feature in ON1 Photo RAW 2026 is **mask layers**. Instead of being limited to just one mask per adjustment, you can now combine several together—like AI masks, gradients, brushes, or ranges—into a single adjustment.

You can **add masks** to expand a selection, or **subtract masks** to protect certain areas, all within the same adjustment.

It's important to understand the different sections of the **Masking Panel** itself. On the next page, we'll break down each part of the panel—Target Mask, Mask Layers, and Overlay Options—so you can see how they work together to give you full control over your edits.



Masking Panel Breakdown

All of these controls are found in the **Masking tab**, located right above the Layers pane in Photo RAW. From here you can access the Target Mask, add Mask Layers, and use the Overlay Options to fine-tune and visualize your selections.

1. Target Mask

Where to find it: Accessed in the Masking tab, located right above the Layers pane in Photo RAW.

What it is: The main mask applied to the adjustment or filter.

How it works: This is the starting point for masking. For example, if you choose “Subject,” the Target Mask is automatically created around your subject.

Purpose: It defines the primary region where the adjustment applies.

2. Mask Layers

Where to find it: Also in the Masking tab, stacked under the Target Mask section.

What it is: Additional masks you can add on top of the Target Mask.

How it works: Each layer can either add to or subtract from the main mask. For example, you can add a Depth Mask to limit the adjustment to the foreground, or subtract a Brush mask to protect specific areas.

Purpose: Lets you combine multiple masks (AI, Brush, Gradient, Depth, etc.)

3. Overlay Options

Opacity: Controls how strongly the mask overlay is shown on screen (doesn't affect the edit, only the preview).

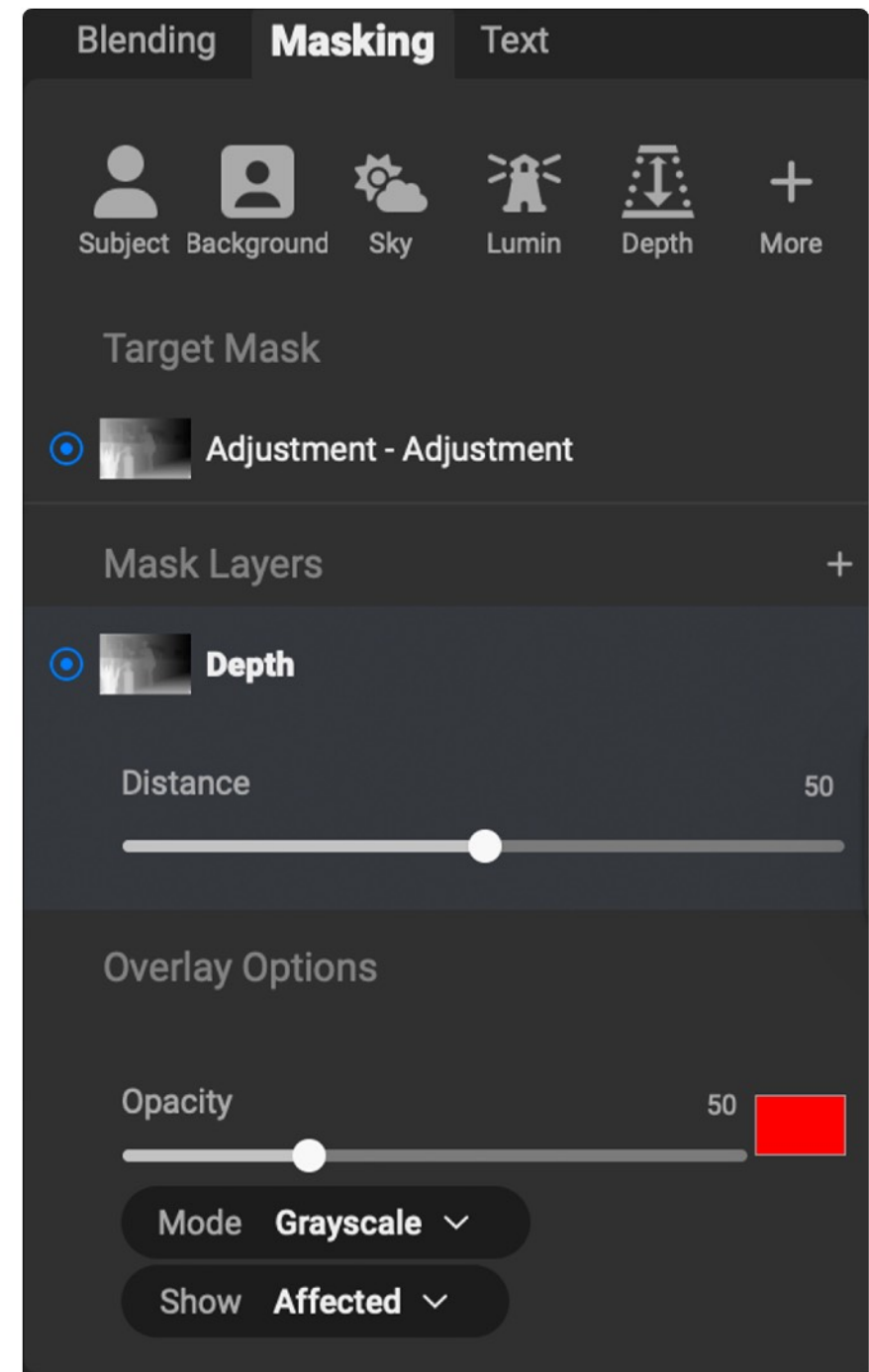
Mode: How the mask is displayed. Common options include:

Grayscale — White = affected, Black = protected.

Color Overlay — Shows masked areas in a solid color. Use the color square to pick a custom overlay color for better visibility.

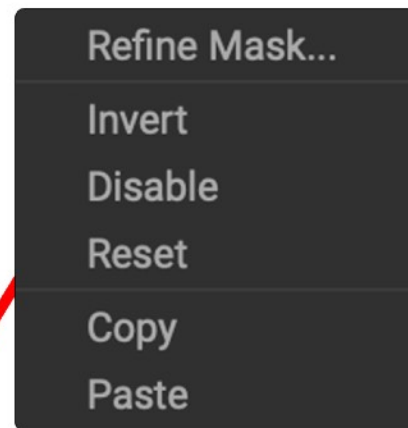
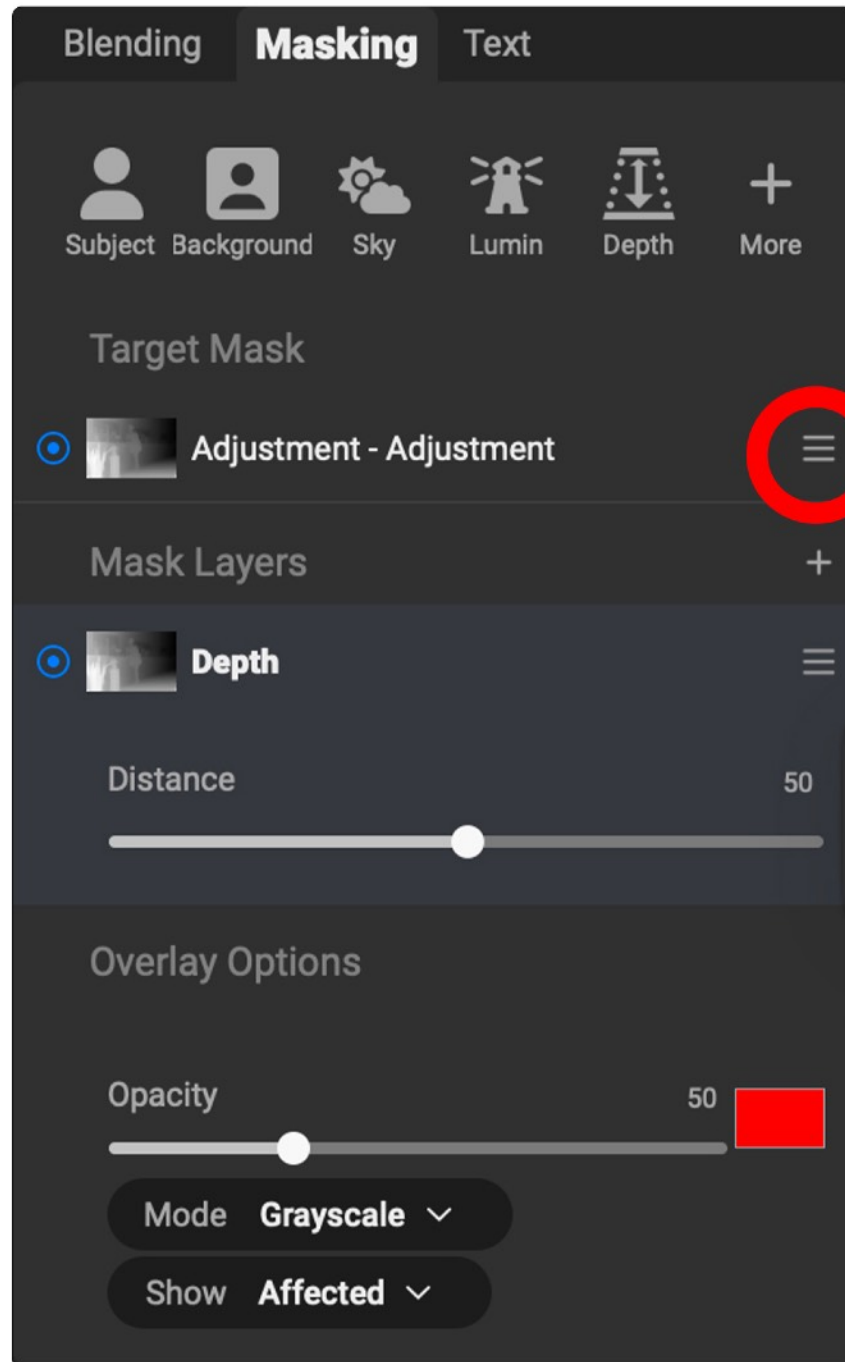
Color Overlay When Brushing — Temporarily shows the chosen overlay color only while painting.

Show: Determines whether you preview the Affected (where the edit applies) or Protected (where the edit is blocked) areas.



The “Hamburger” Menu in Target Mask

This menu gives you quick options to refine, invert, disable, reset, copy, or paste your mask, making it easier to manage and reuse selections.



Refine Mask... Opens the Refine Mask dialog.

Invert: Flips the mask so the affected and protected areas swap. For example, if the subject is masked, inverting switches the mask to the background.

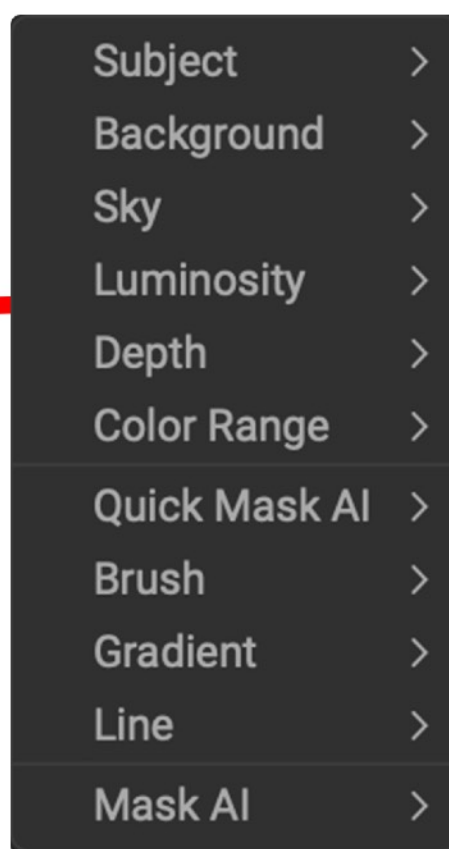
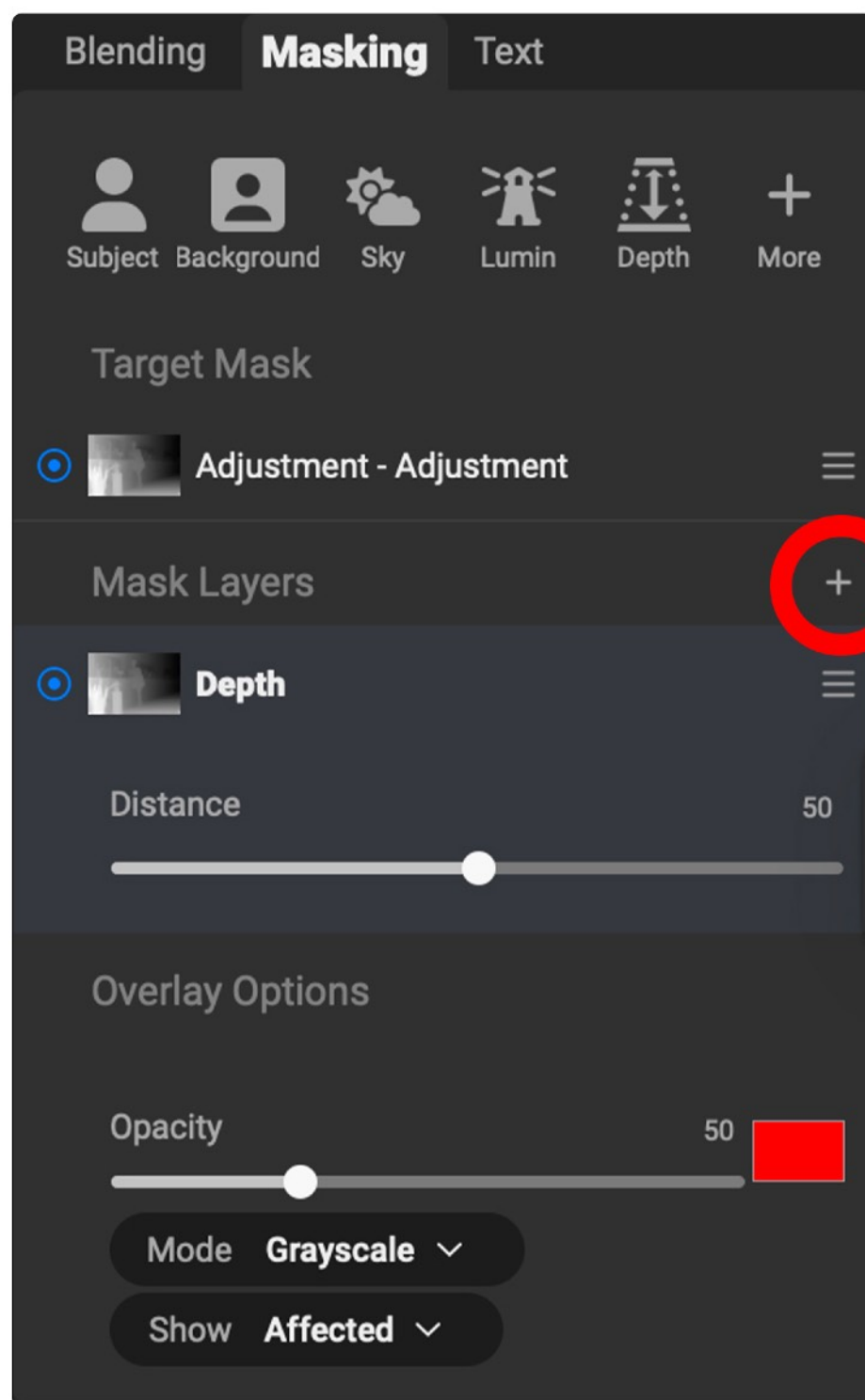
Disable: Temporarily turns off the mask without deleting it. This is useful for comparing the effect with and without the mask applied.

Reset: Clears the mask and returns it to its default state, removing all adjustments you've made to it.

Copy: Copies the mask so you can reuse it on another adjustment, filter, or layer.

Paste: Applies a previously copied mask onto the current adjustment, filter, or layer.

Adding Multiple Mask Layers



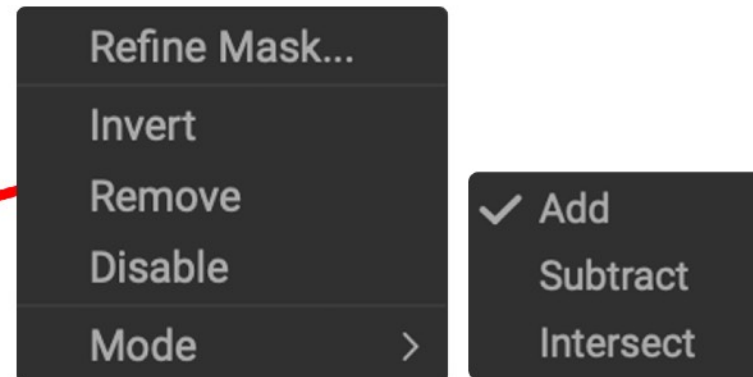
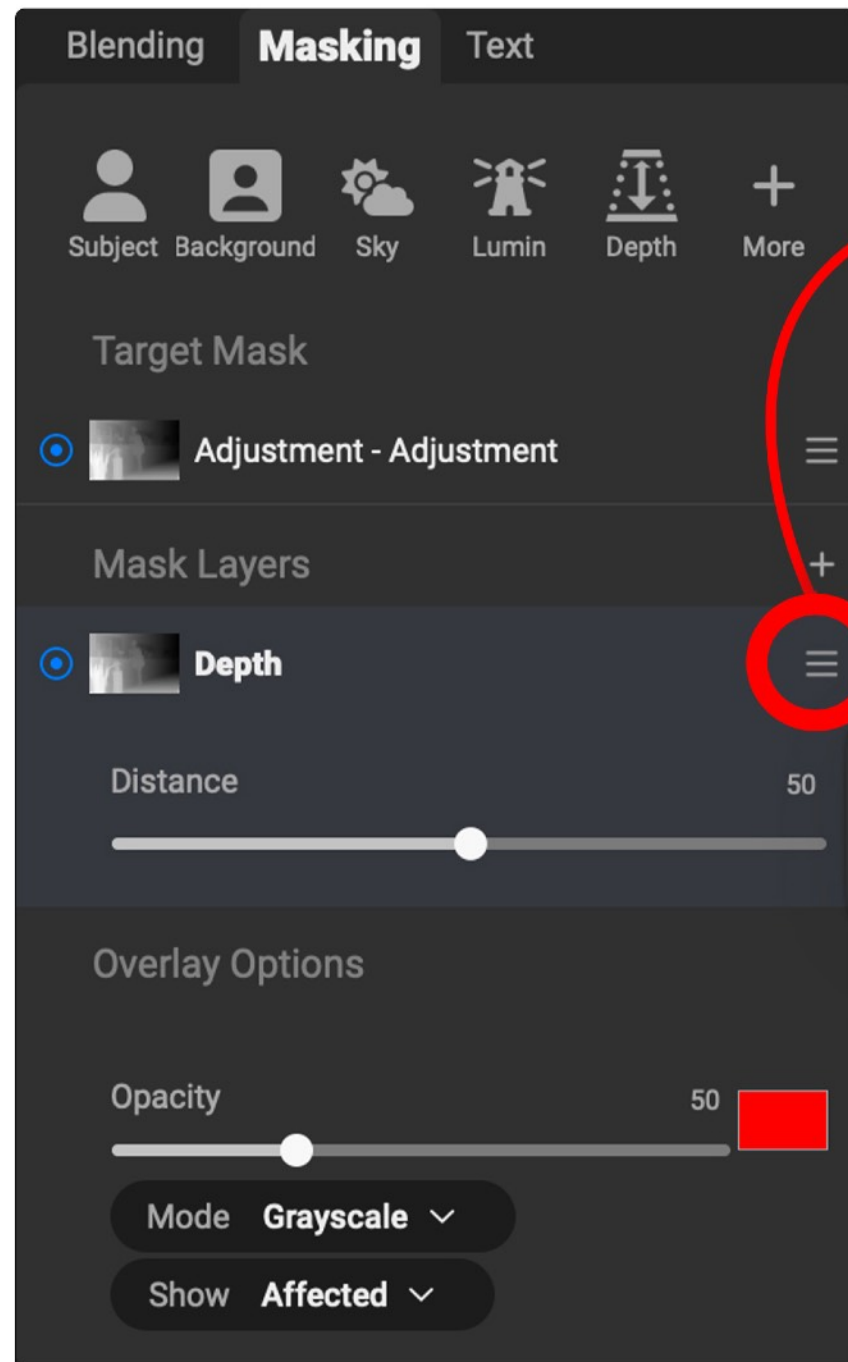
In the Mask Layers section, selecting the plus (+) icon opens a menu where you can choose from the full set of masking tools—AI selections, range-based masks, or manual brushes. Each time you add one, it creates a new mask layer inside the adjustment.

This allows you to stack several masks together within a single adjustment. For example, you might start with a Subject Mask and then add a Gradient Mask to light only part of the subject, or pair a Depth Mask with a Brush to include both foreground and specific details.

With the plus button, you can build multiple masks into one adjustment for greater control.

The “Hamburger” Menu in Mask Layers

The Mask Layers menu gives you quick controls to refine, adjust, or remove individual mask layers within your adjustment.



Refine Mask... Opens the Refine Mask panel.

Invert: Flips the mask layer so the affected and protected areas switch places.

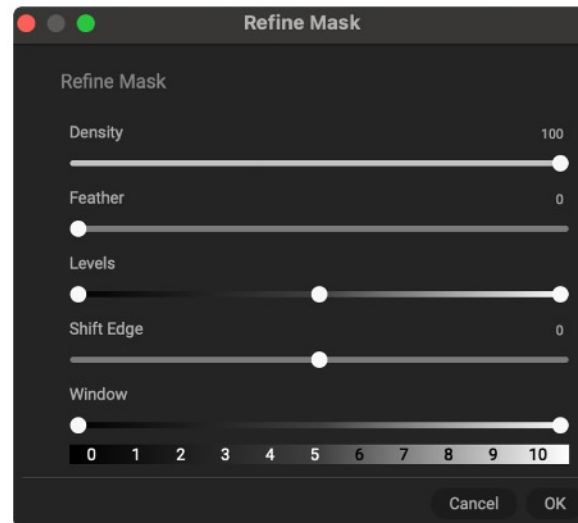
Remove: Deletes the selected mask layer entirely from the adjustment.

Disable: Temporarily turns off the mask layer without deleting it, allowing you to compare the effect with or without that layer.

Mode: Controls how the current mask layer interacts with the Target Mask. The three options are:

- **Add** – Expands the mask by applying the new selection on top of the existing one.
- **Subtract** – Removes the new selection from the mask to protect those areas.
- **Intersect** – Keeps only the overlapping area between the current mask and the Target Mask. For example, combining a Subject Mask with a Gradient Mask lets you target just one side of a subject.

The Refine Mask Panel



Density

Controls the overall strength of the mask. Lowering density reduces how strongly the adjustment affects the masked area, letting more of the underlying image show through.

Feather

Softens the mask edges by blending them gradually into the unmasked areas. Useful for avoiding hard, unnatural transitions.

Levels

Lets you remap the black, gray, and white points of the mask. You can push more areas toward black (protected) or white (affected), or refine the midtones for subtle control.

Shift Edge

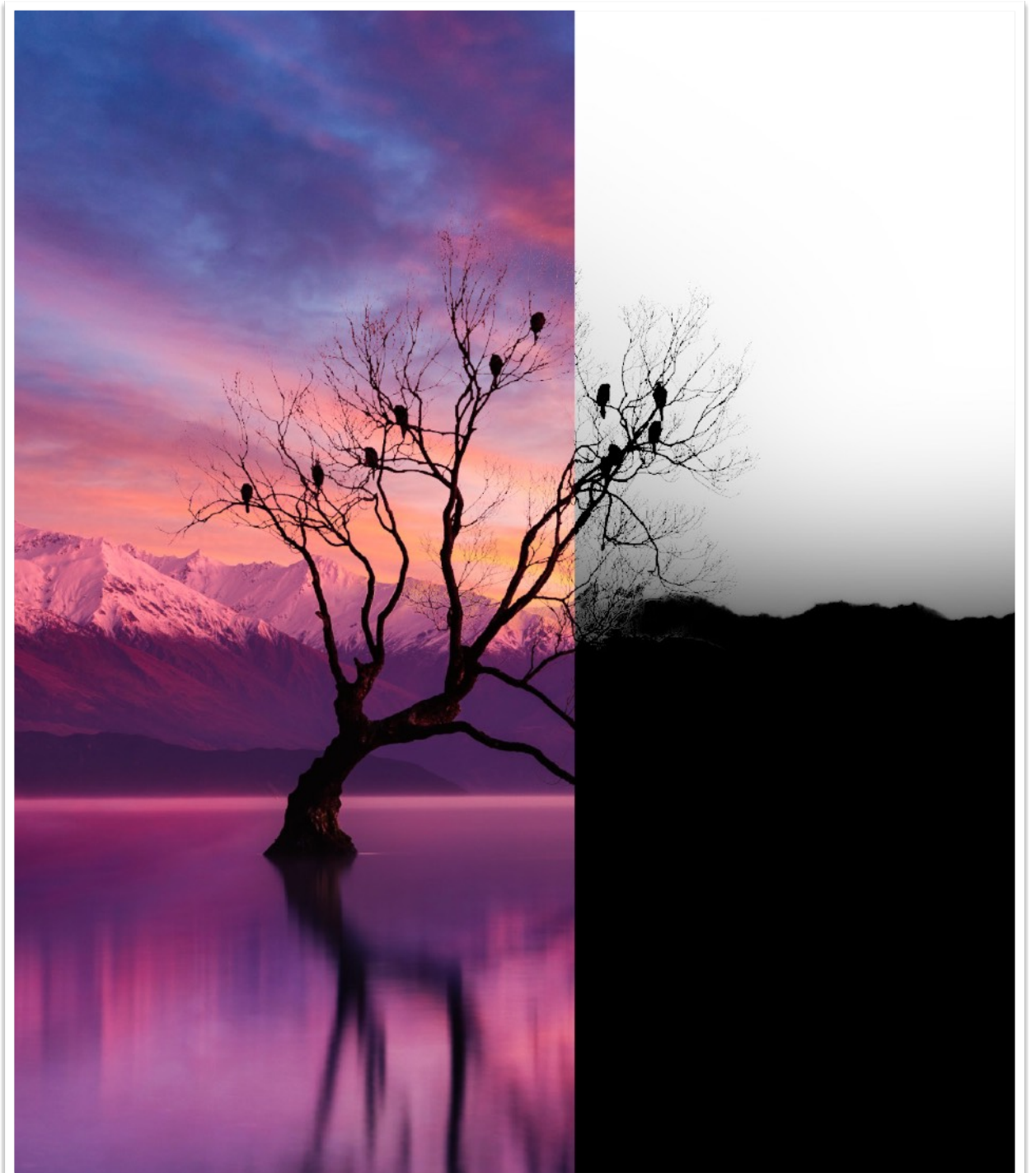
Moves the entire edge of the mask inward or outward. Shifting inward protects more of the subject, while shifting outward includes more of the surrounding area.

Window

Sets the tonal range that the mask will affect, similar to adjusting a luminance range. Narrowing the window tightens the range; widening it expands it.

Let's jump into some examples.

Now that we've covered the basics of the Masking Panel and how mask layers work, it's time to see these tools in action. In the next sections, we'll use different types of masks to creatively edit our photos—brightening subjects, shaping light, balancing skies and foregrounds, and even combining masks for more complex looks. These examples are designed to show you practical ways to use masking, so you can start applying the same techniques to your own images with confidence.



Section 02

Masking Subject & Background

02 Masking Subject and Background

Let's relight a scene!

To get familiar with masking in ON1 Photo RAW 2026, let's start with something easy: using **Subject Mask** and **Background Mask** on a portrait. This will let us adjust the subject and the background separately, so we can light the scene in a more natural, balanced way.

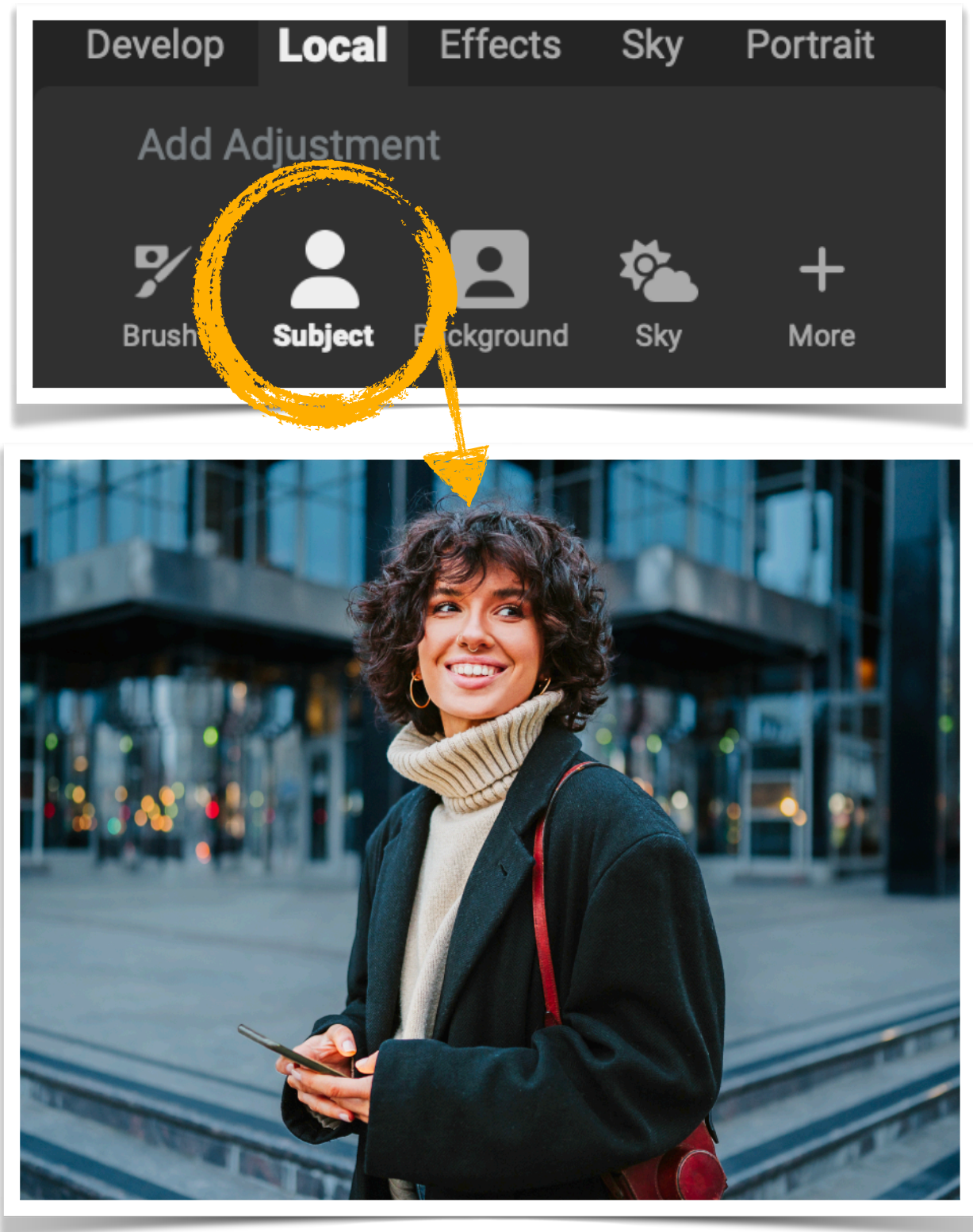


02 Masking Subject and Background

Goal: Brighten the person, darken/style the background—fast.

1) Target the Subject

- Go to the **Local Tab**.
- In the **Masking Options**, choose **Subject (Add)**.
- Photo RAW instantly analyzes your image and applies the adjustment to just the subject.
- Brighten the subject by raising **Exposure** slightly, lifting **Shadows**, and maybe adding a touch of warmth with the **Temperature** slider.



02 Masking Subject and Background

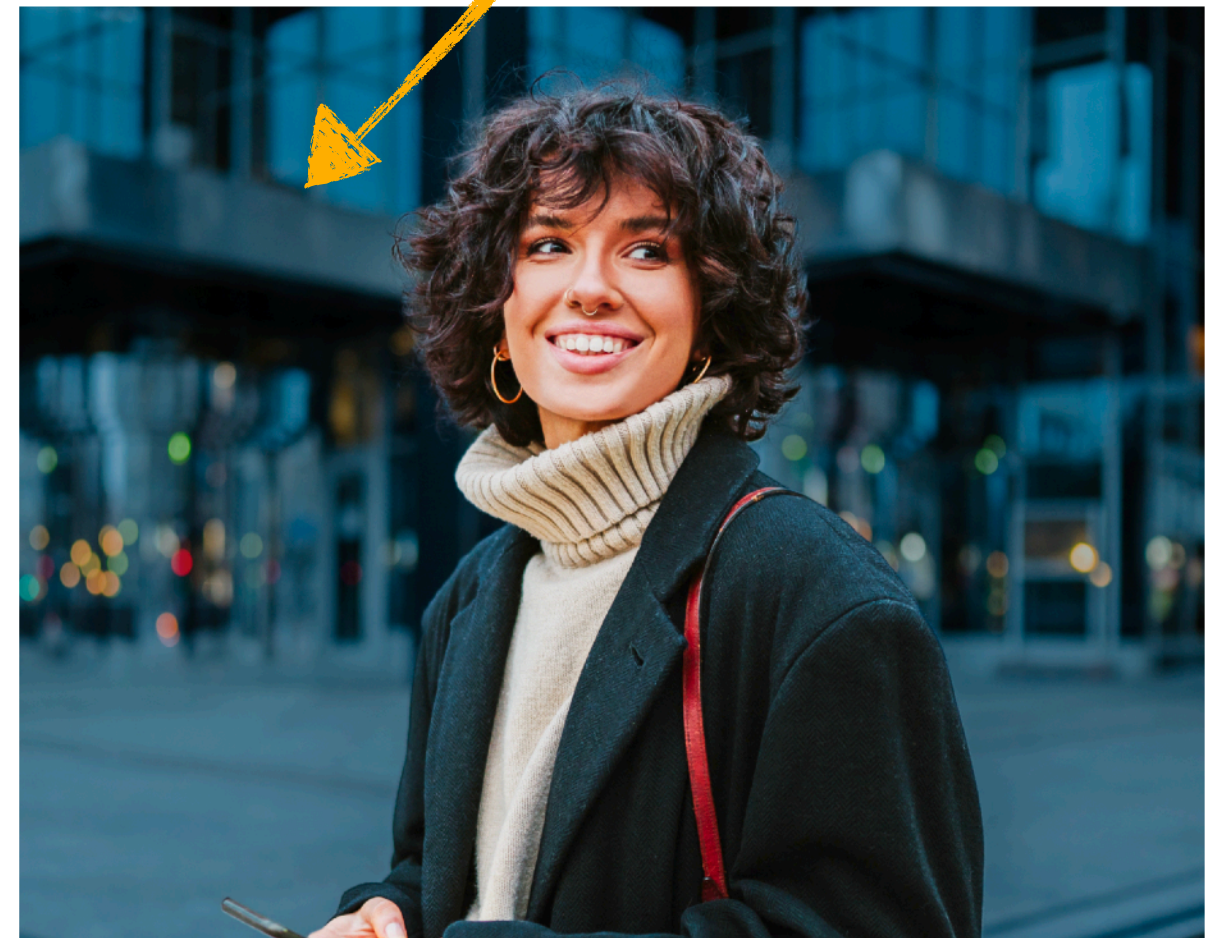
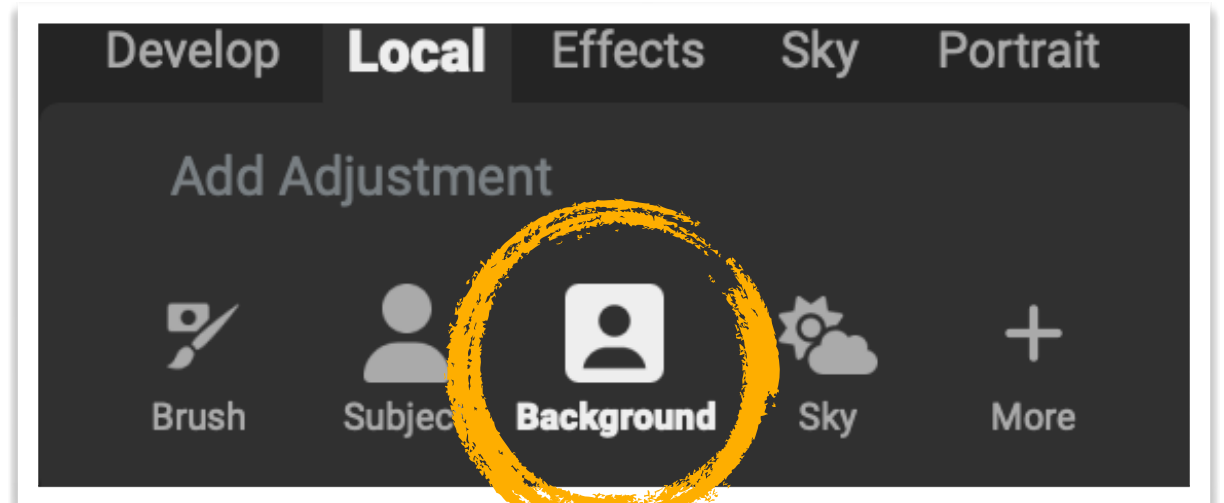
Goal: Brighten the person, darken/style the background—fast.

2) Target the Background

- In the same Local Adjustment, click **Masking Options** again and select **Background (Add)**.
- This creates a second mask on the same adjustment, applied only to the background.
- Darken the background by lowering **Exposure** a little, or cool it down with a slight **Temperature** shift.

Why this works:

With just two Local Adjustments, you can shape light in the scene—brightening the subject while styling the background independently. No extra layers, no complicated setup—just a couple of clicks in the Masking Panel.



Section 3

Combine Depth and Subject Masking

03 Combine Depth and Subject Masking

Combine Depth and Subject Masking

In this section, we're going to explore how mask layers let us solve a common lighting problem in portraits—background falloff. By combining a **Depth Mask** with a **Subject Mask** inside a single Local Adjustment, we can brighten areas that fall into shadow behind our subject while keeping the subject perfectly protected. It's a great example of how the new masking tools in Photo RAW 2026 make complex edits simple and intuitive.



03 Combine Depth and Subject Masking

1. Use the Local Tab and add a Depth Mask

In the **Local Tab**, click the **More** button in the Masking Panel and choose **Depth**. By default, this selects the areas closest to the camera, giving us a view of how depth is being interpreted in the photo.

2. View the mask overlay

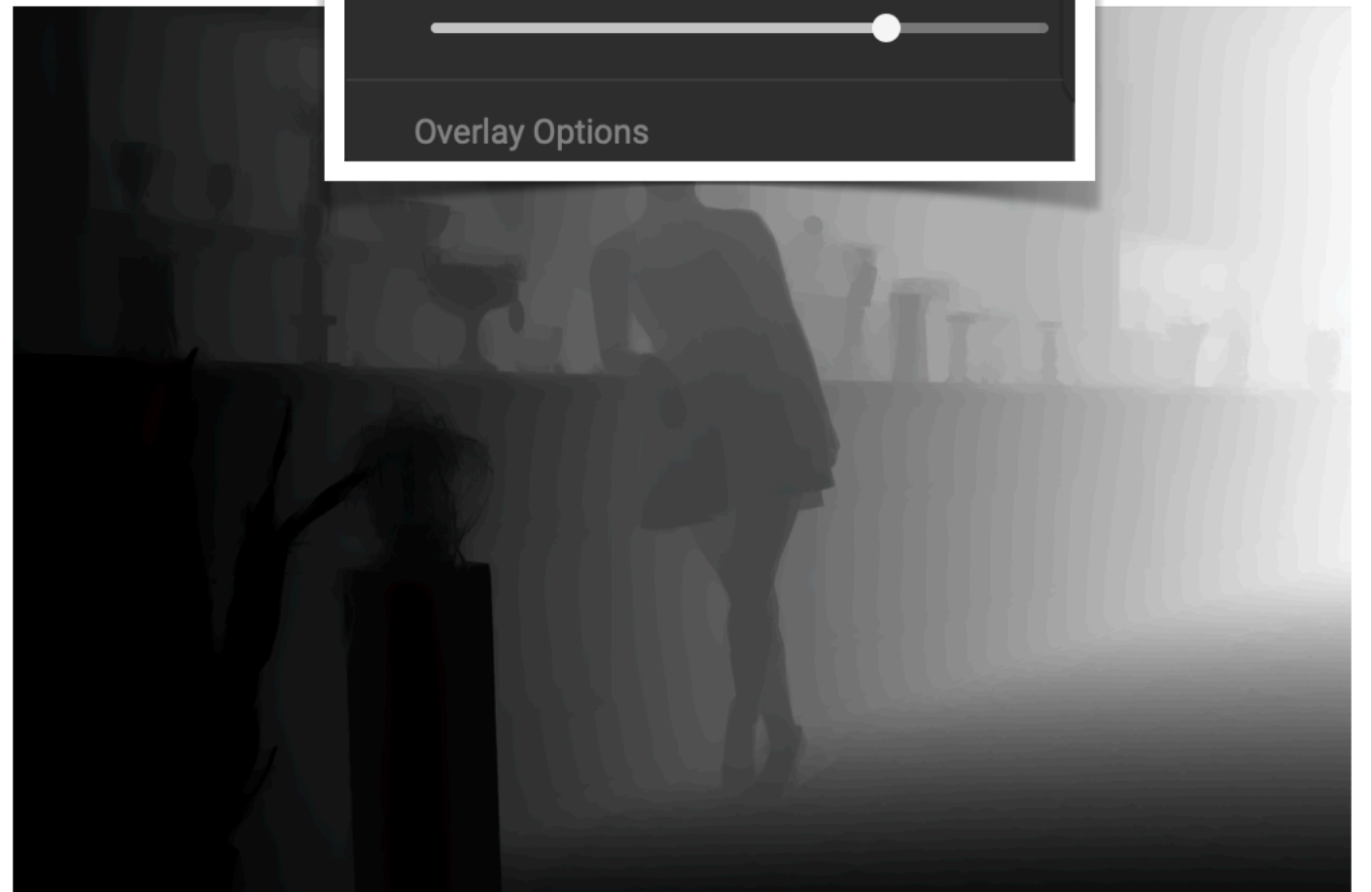
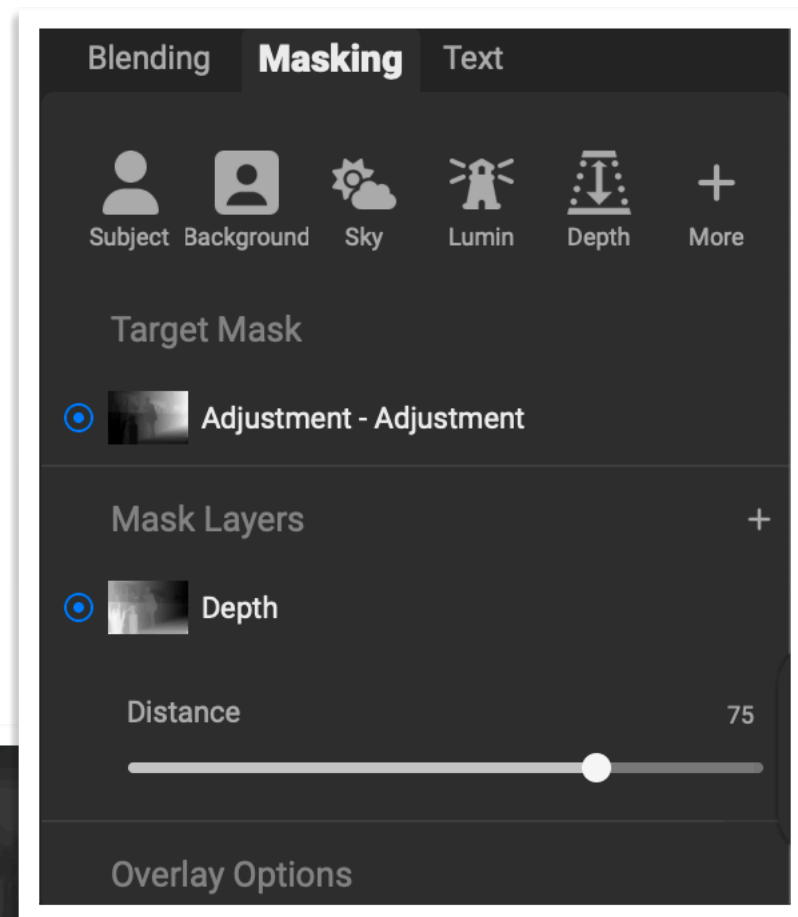
Press **O** on your keyboard to see the mask. This shows exactly what parts of the image are being targeted before making any adjustments.

3. Invert the Depth Mask

In the **Mask Layers** section, open the **hamburger menu** for the Depth Mask and choose **Invert**. Now the mask is applied to the background instead of the foreground, which is exactly what we need to correct light falloff behind the subject.

4. Push the mask farther back with the Distance slider

Move the **Distance** slider to around **75**. This shifts the effect deeper into the scene, ensuring the mask is focused on the background and not interfering with the subject.



03 Combine Depth and Subject Masking

5. Brighten the background

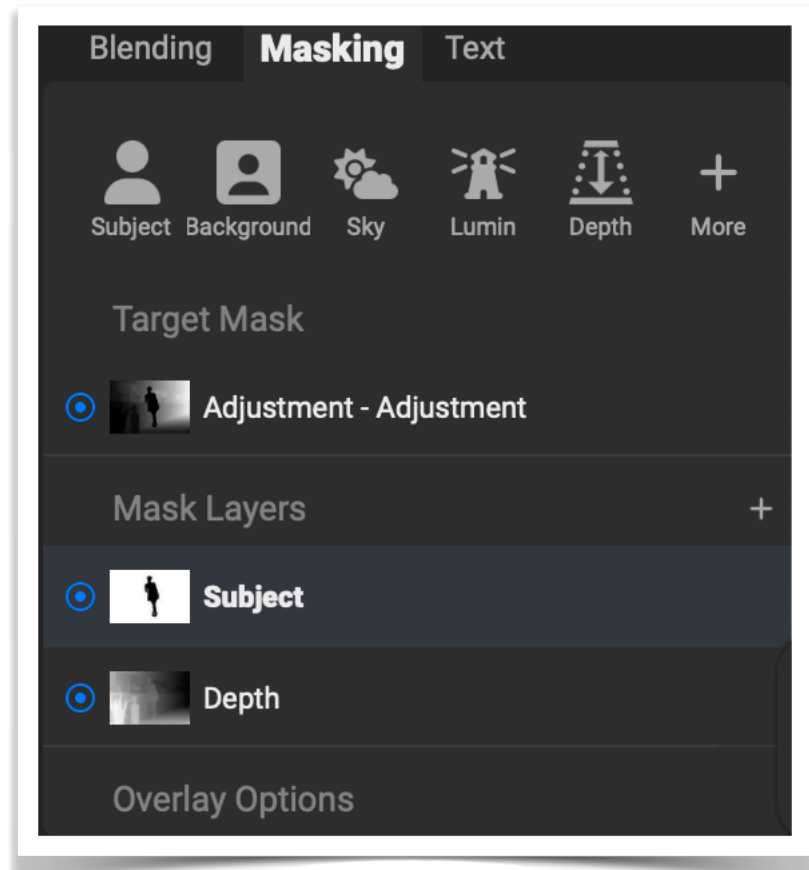
Increase the **Exposure** slider to about **+1.5**. This helps lift the darker tones in the background and balances out the light falloff.

6. Protect the subject with a Subject Subtract Mask

In **Mask Layers**, click the **+** icon, hover over **Subject**, and choose **Subtract**. This ensures the subject is removed from the Depth Mask, keeping the adjustment focused strictly on the background. Press **O** again to check the mask is behaving as expected.

7. Create a second Local Adjustment for the subject

Back in the **Local Tab**, choose **Subject** from the Masking Options. This time we'll enhance the portrait directly—lifting **Midtones** and **Whites**, and warming the **Temperature** slightly to make the subject stand out naturally against the corrected background.



Section 4

Sky Swapping, Selecting, and Refining

04 Sky Swapping, Selecting, and Refining

Combining Sky Swap AI with Quick Mask AI

In this section, we're going to look at how different masking tools can work together in a landscape photo. We'll start by using **Sky Swap AI** to quickly replace or enhance the sky, then pair it with a **Quick Mask AI** to refine specific areas of the scene that need extra attention. Once we have both masks in place, we'll use the **Refine Mask** controls to shift edges and make sure the transition between sky and landscape feels natural and seamless. This is a great example of combining automated AI selections with hands-on refinement to create a polished, realistic result.



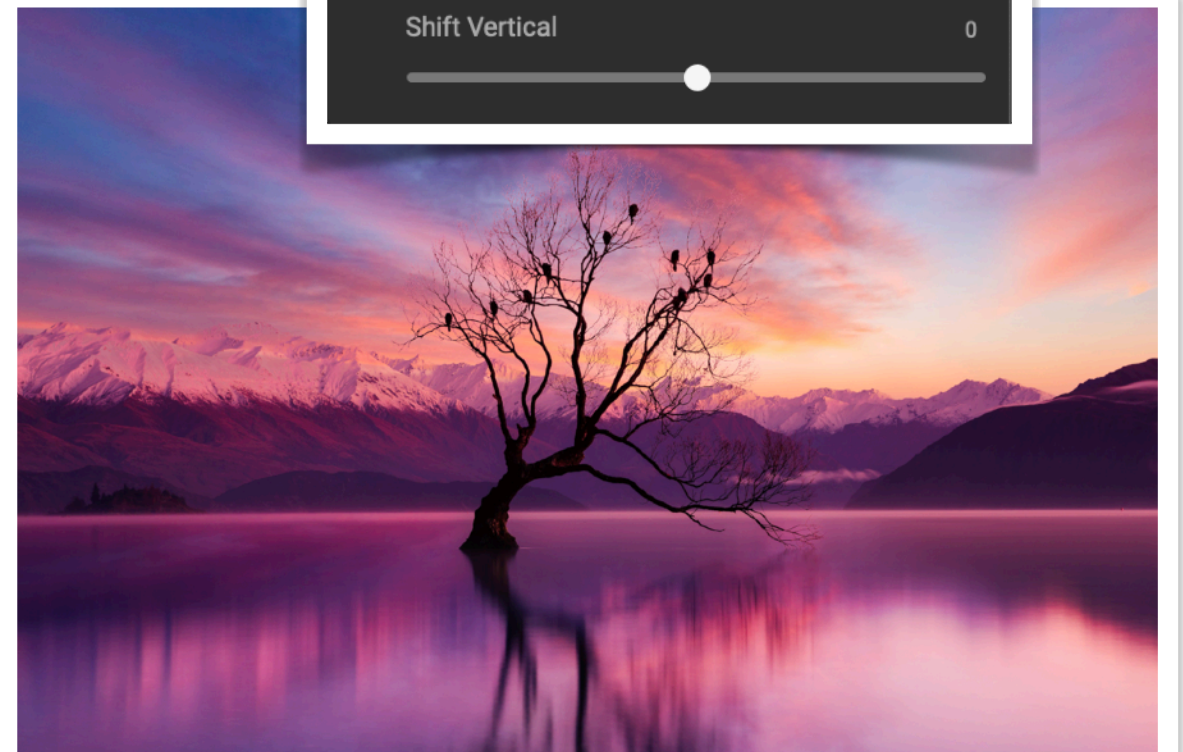
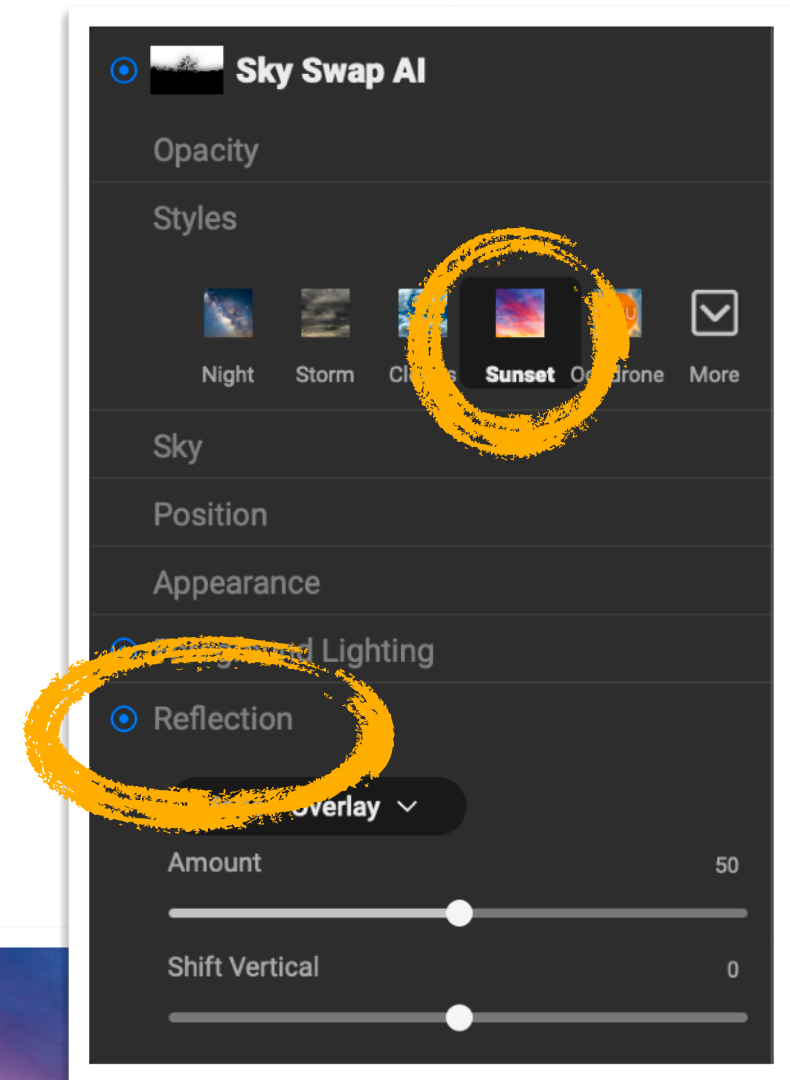
04 Sky Swapping, Selecting, and Refining

1. Swap the sky with Sky Swap AI

Go to the **Sky Tab** in Photo RAW and open **Sky Swap AI**. The tool automatically detects the sky so you can simply choose a replacement. For this photo, the **Sunset** preset style in the Styles section works perfectly.

2. Enable a reflection

Scroll to the bottom of Sky Swap AI and open the **Reflection** pane. Turn on the reflection to match the new sky in any water or reflective surfaces.

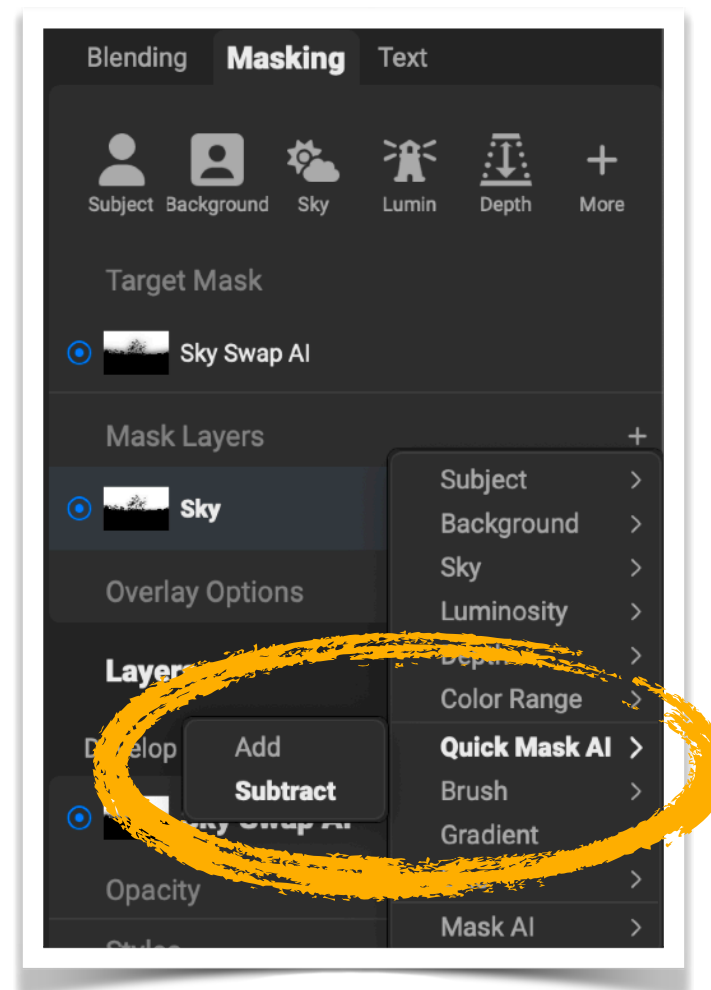


04 Sky Swapping, Selecting, and Refining

3. Clean up the mountainous areas with Quick Mask AI

Some of the mountains may not be properly separated because their colors are similar to the sky. To fix this, go to the **Masking Tab** and into **Mask Layers**. Click the + icon, select **Quick Mask AI**, and choose **Subtract**. This tells Photo RAW to remove unwanted sky from the mountains.

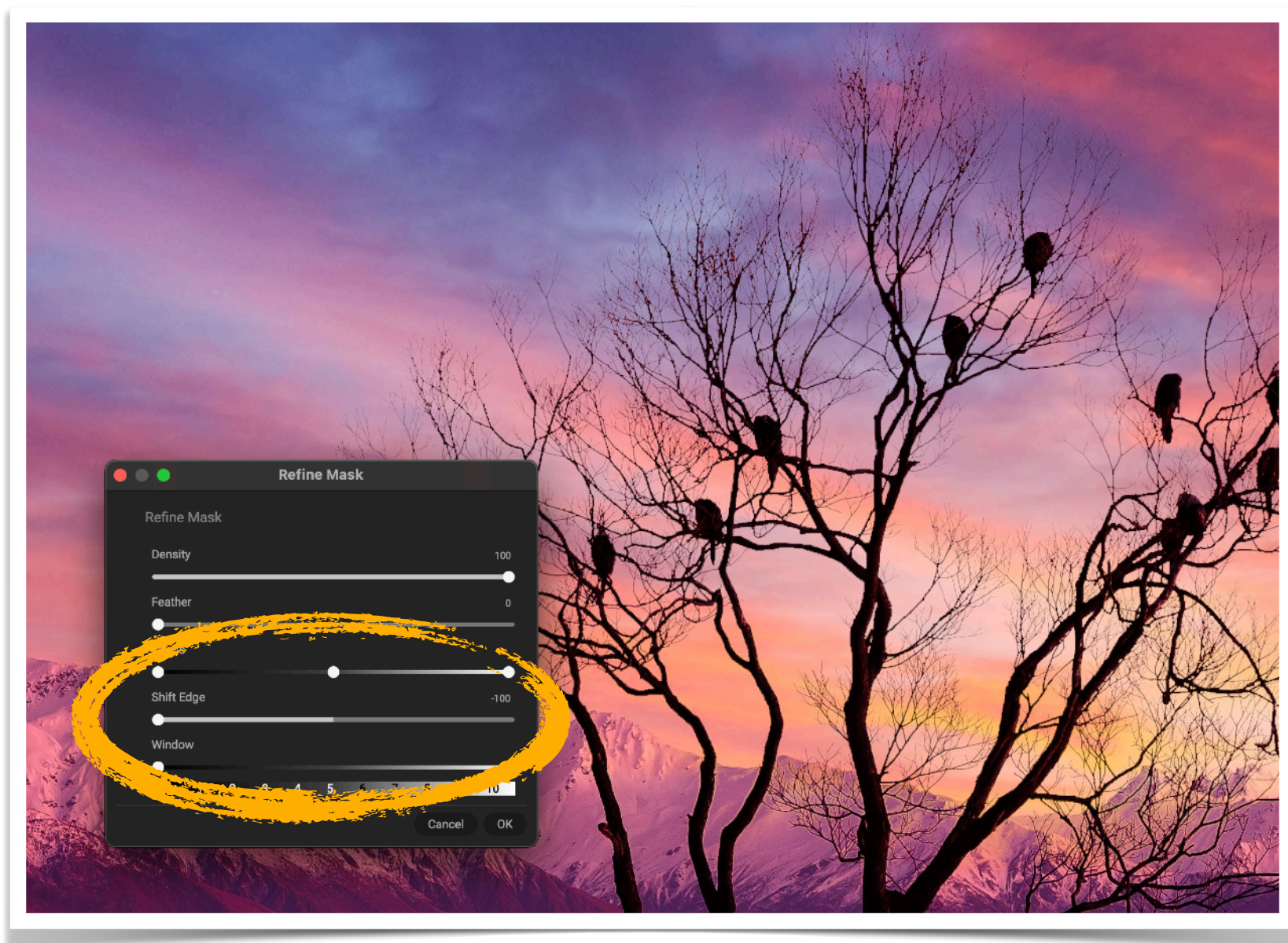
With Quick Mask AI active, hover your cursor over the mountain regions. When they highlight in blue, click to select them. You can select multiple areas. Focus mainly on the snowy peaks near the top—don't worry too much about areas behind branches, as Quick Mask may not fully detect those. When finished, click the blue check mark at the top-right to apply your selections. The added sky will now be removed cleanly from the mountain areas.



04 Sky Swapping, Selecting, and Refining

4. Refine the mask edges

To make the blend look more natural, go back to **Mask Layers**, select the sky mask, and open the **hamburger menu**. Choose **Refine Mask...**. In the dialog, move the **Shift Edge** slider all the way to **-100**. This pulls the mask back from the edges, reducing halos around the trees and branches and making the sky replacement appear more seamless.



04 Sky Swapping, Selecting, and Refining



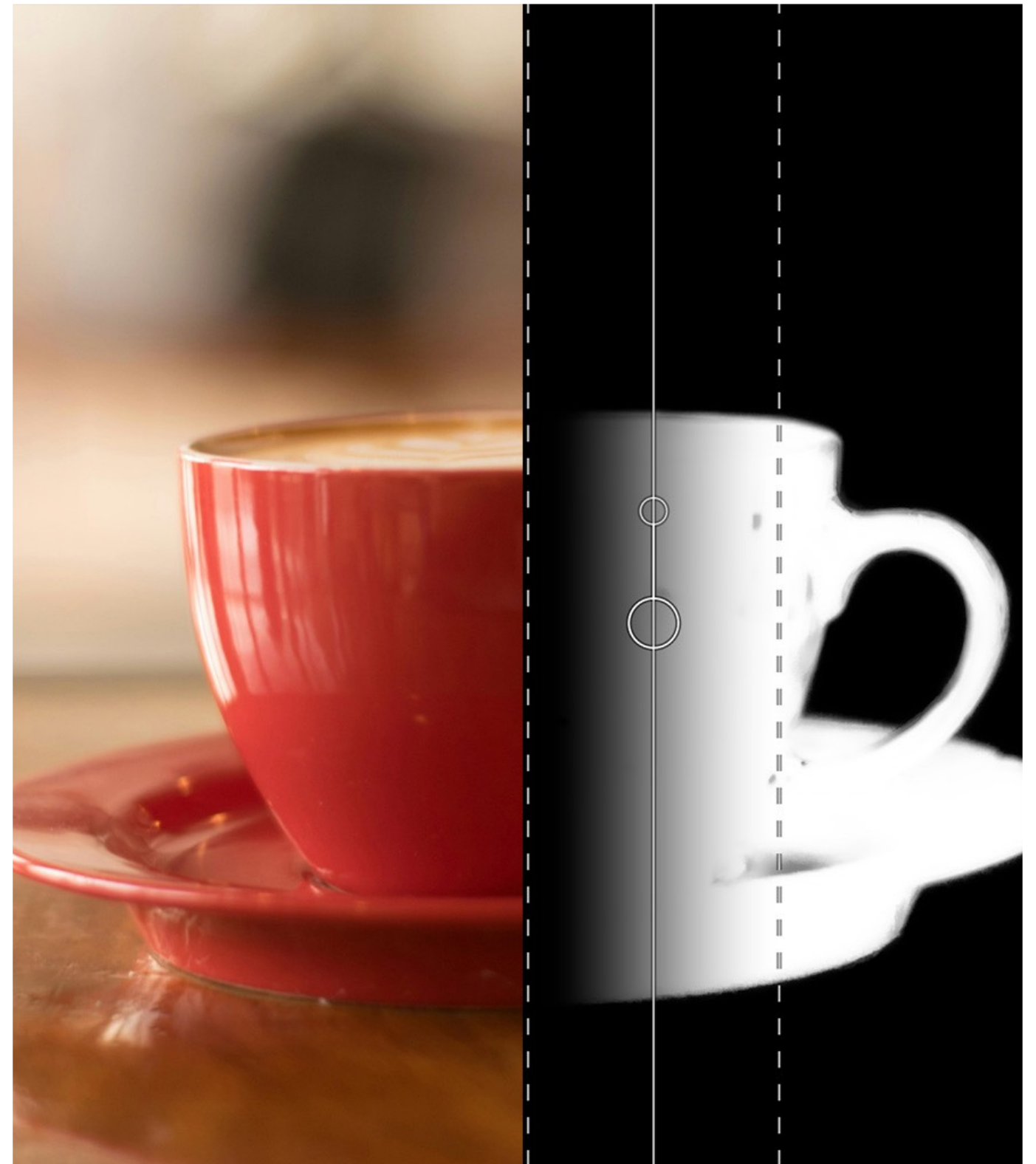
Section 5

Using Intersect Mode

Using Intersect Mode to Combine Masks

Sometimes you don't just want to apply a mask broadly—you want to focus it on a very specific part of the photo. That's where **Intersect Mode** comes in. By combining two different mask layers and telling them to overlap, you can zero in on only the area where both masks meet. For example, you might intersect a **Subject Mask** with a **Gradient Mask** to apply an adjustment to just one side of a person, or use a **Depth Mask** with a **Luminosity Mask** to brighten only the brighter tones in the foreground.

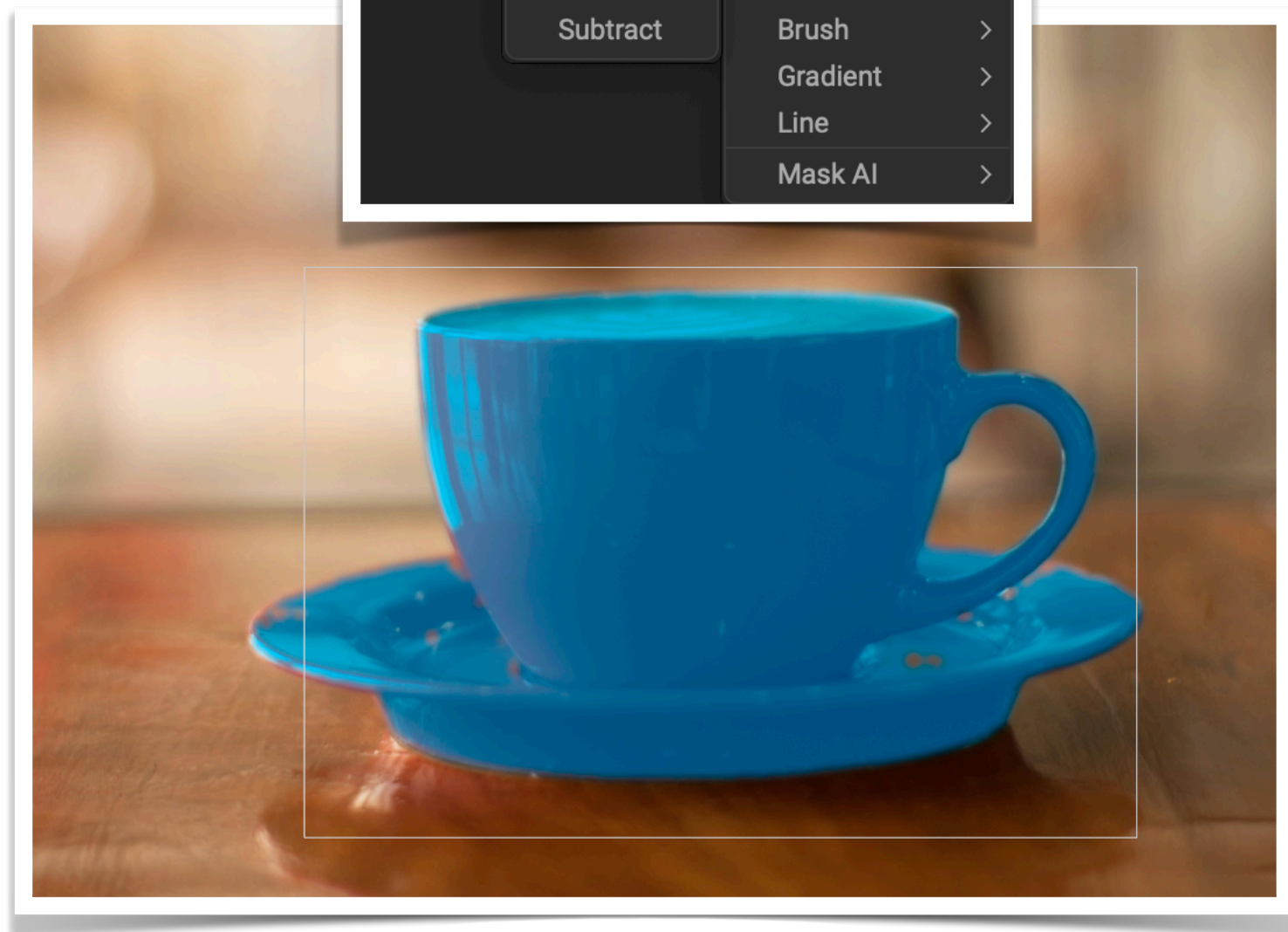
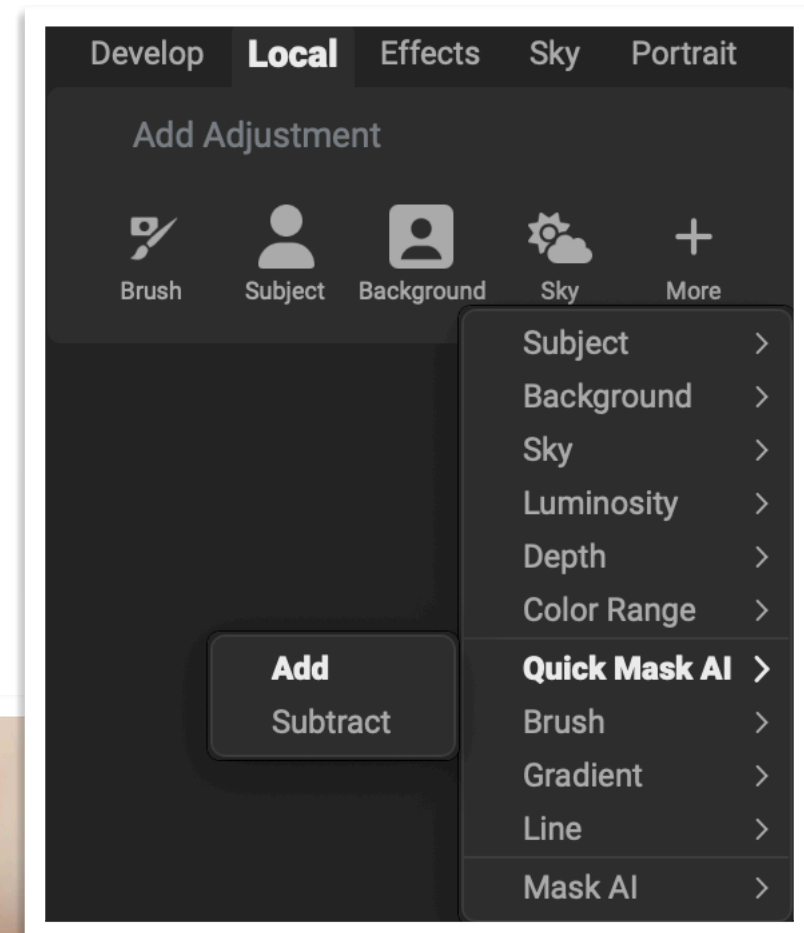
In this section, we'll explore how to use Intersect Mode to combine masks in this way, giving you a powerful method for making precise, creative adjustments.



1. Create a Local Adjustment with Quick Mask AI

Go to the **Local Tab** and in the **Masking Options**, open the **More** menu and choose **Quick Mask AI** → **Add**. This lets you select an area directly in the photo to apply your adjustment.

Pro tip: Instead of clicking, you can click and drag to draw a rectangle around an object. Photo RAW will identify what's inside the box and select it. Draw a box around the **coffee cup** so it becomes highlighted in blue.



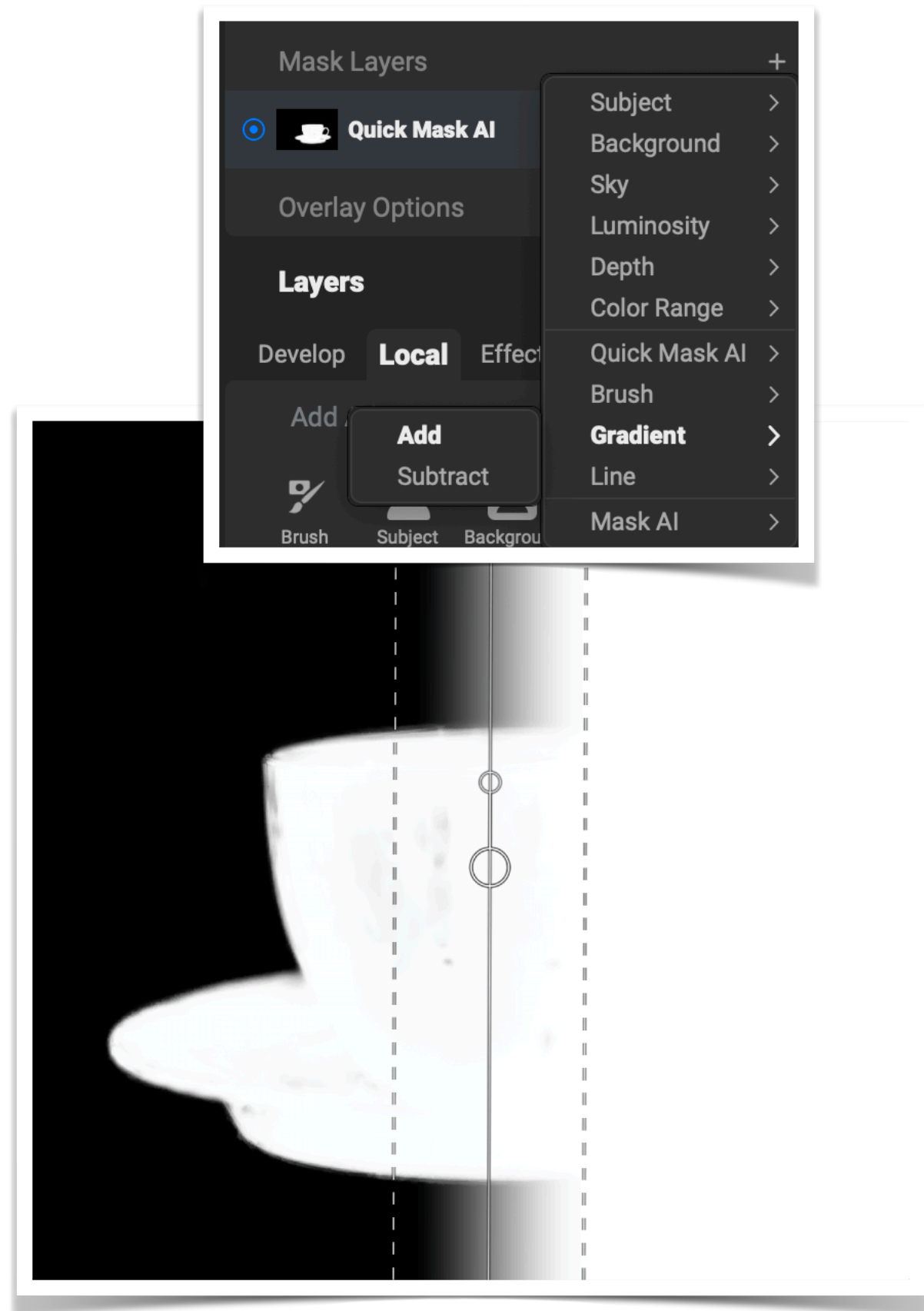
3. Brighten the coffee cup

In the Local Adjustment controls, raise the **Exposure** to about **+1.0**. This brightens the whole cup. But since we only want the brightness on the right side—where the light falls off—we'll refine the mask further.

4. Add a Gradient Mask as a second layer

In the **Mask Layers** panel, click the **+** icon and choose **Gradient** → **Add**. This lays down a gradient mask. Use the smaller rotation handle to turn the gradient so it's applied only to the right - aligned with the right side of the cup. Drag the larger handle so the soft transition runs through the middle.

Tip: Press **O** to view the overlay and make sure the gradient is aligned correctly.

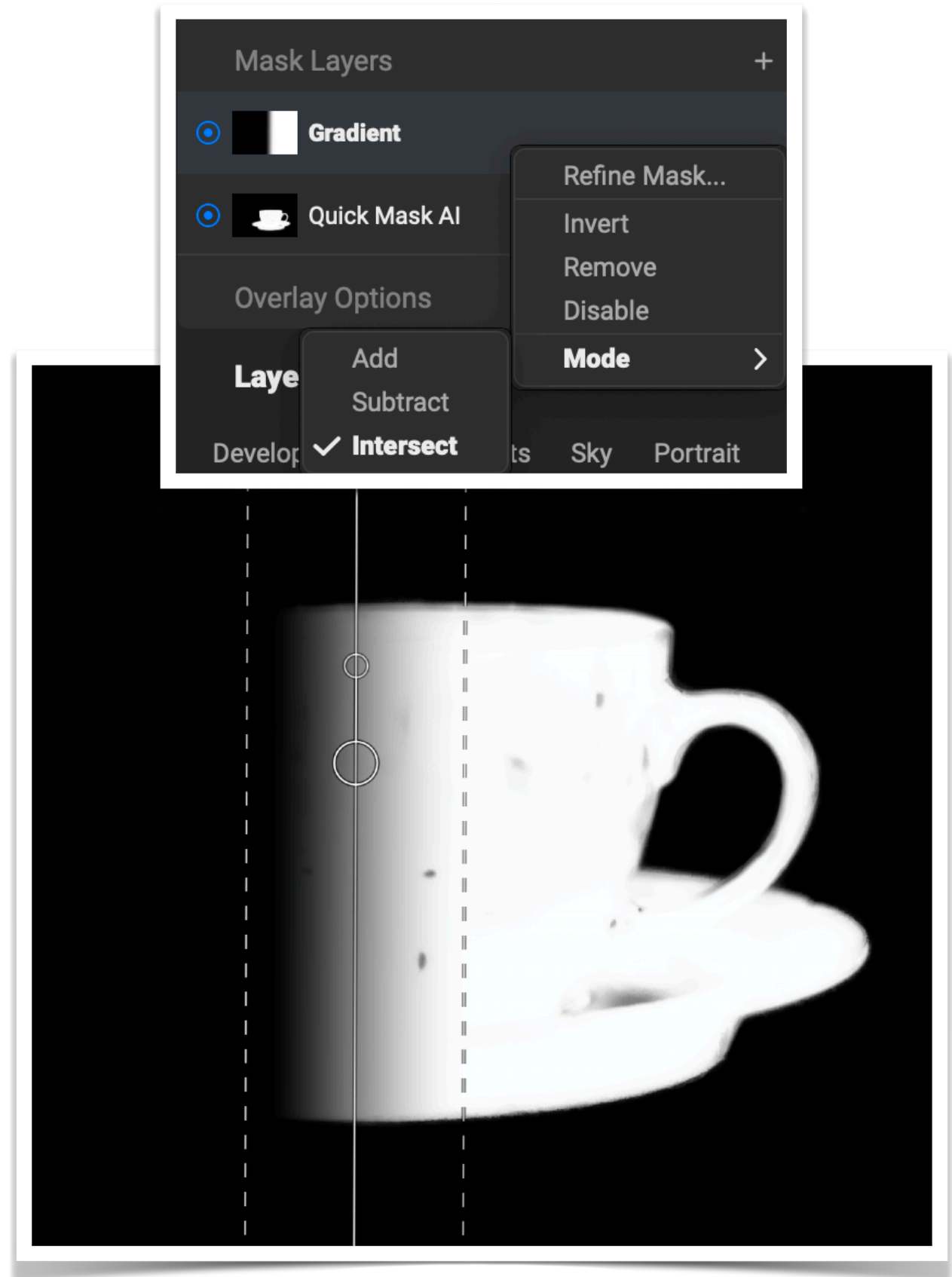


5. Intersect the two masks

With the Gradient mask selected in Mask Layers, click the **hamburger menu**, go to **Mode**, and choose **Intersect**. This combines the Gradient with the Quick Mask AI so the adjustment only applies to the area where they overlap—the right side of the cup.

6. Final result

The coffee cup is brightened, but only on the right side where the light naturally falls. This creates a subtle, realistic correction using two masks combined with Intersect Mode.



05 Using Intersect Mode

