



Focus-Based Selections

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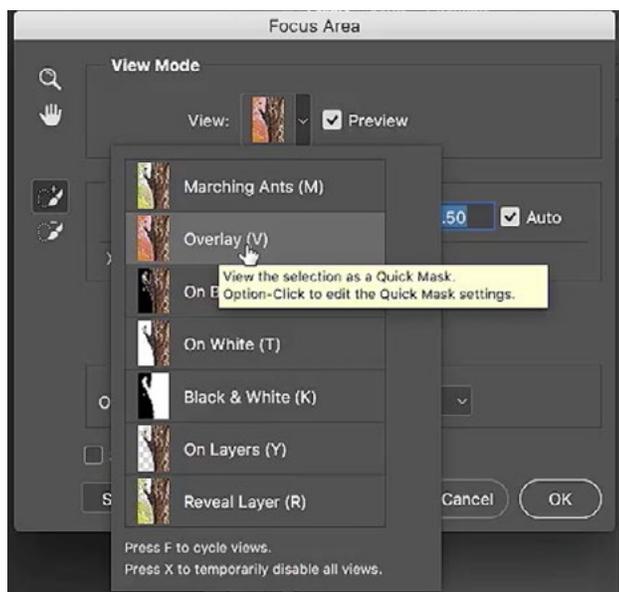
In this video, we're going to talk about how to make focus-based selections. Photoshop has some tools that will allow us to select a sharp subject or object against a blurry background. It does this by auto-selecting areas that are detailed and have a lot of contrast. Let's look at the tools we'd use to do this.

Select Focus Area: Basic

If you have a subject that is sharp against a background that is blurry, you can select it by going to the main menu and choosing Select > Focus Area. When the Focus Area dialog appears, Photoshop may "think" for a few moments and then you will get a preview of what it deems to be in focus. The preview will look different based on which View option you have selected. You can choose different preview styles by clicking on the View menu at the top of the dialog. I like to use the Overlay mode, which puts a colored cast over the areas of the image that are blurry. These are the areas that won't be selected.



This image would be suited well for the Focus Area selection tool because the subject is sharp against a blurry background.



The View mode is being chosen in the Focus Area dialog box.

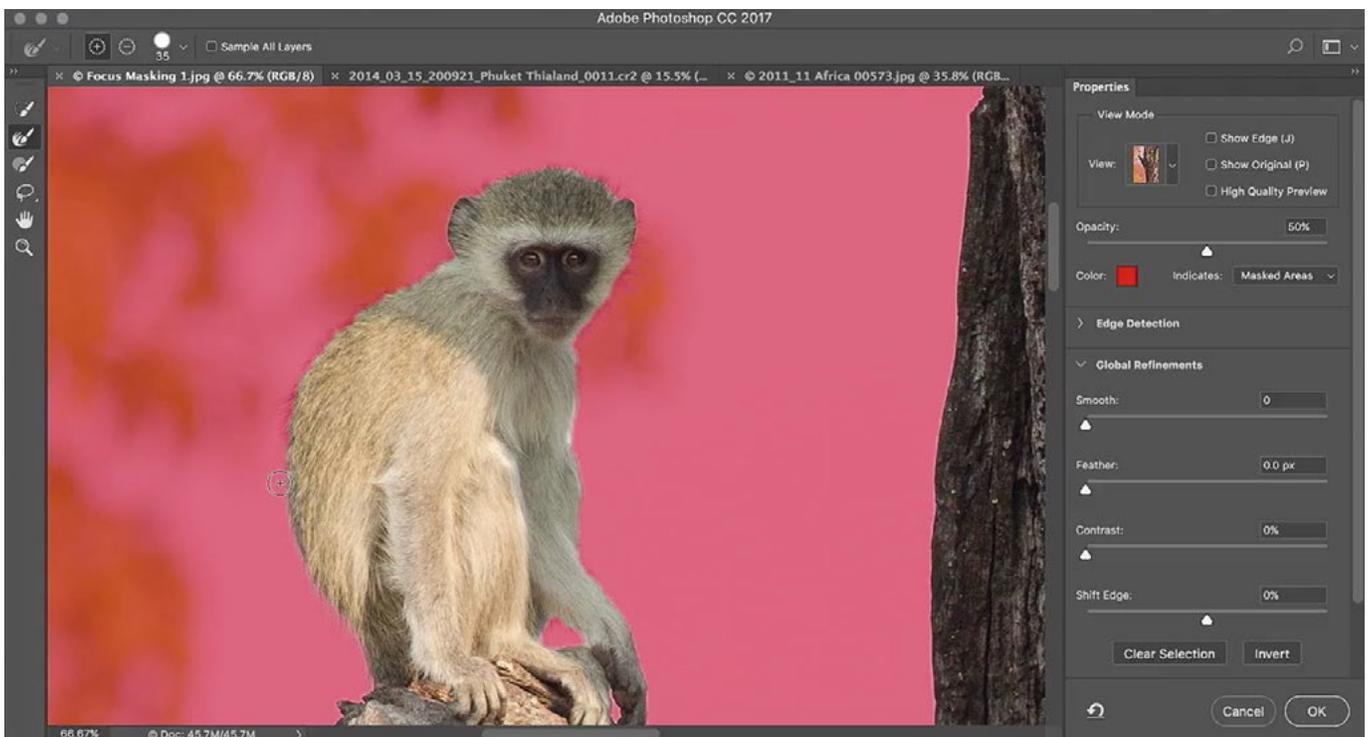
You can then manually fine-tune this selection by using the two brush tools on the left side of the dialog. Using the tool with the plus sign (+), you can paint over an area to include it in the selection. Using the tool with the minus sign (-), you can paint over an area to remove it from the selection.

If you find that the selection has edges that are too crisp or jagged, turn on the "Soften Edge" check box, which is located at the bottom of the dialog and will attempt to smooth and soften the selection edges.

Select & Mask

If the subject or object you're trying to select is fuzzy, hairy or furry, the settings in the Focus Area dialog might not be enough in order for you to make an accurate selection. If this is the case, click the "Select & Mask" button at the bottom of the dialog box. This will open up the Select & Mask dialog, which is better at handling furry or hairy subjects.

On the left side of the dialog, there are a series of tools. Choose the second tool, the Refine Edge Brush Tool, and paint over the edge of the furry/hairy subject. When you paint with this brush, you are giving Photoshop control over that area. When you release the mouse button, it should improve the selection on that area.



The Refine Edge Brush Tool is being used to paint over the edge of the monkey's fur inside the Select & Mask dialog.

If the subject is equally fuzzy or hairy all the way around, you can instead use the settings under the Edge Detection tab on the right side of the dialog. This will do the same thing as the Refine Edge Brush Tool, only in a uniform matter. For example, if I set the Radius slider at three pixels, it would be the same thing as if I took a three-pixel brush and painted around the edge of the subject.

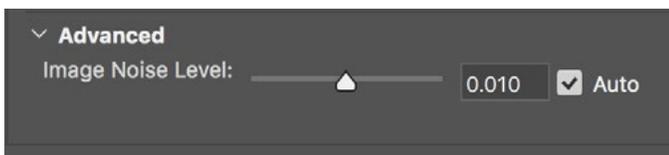
Select Focus Area: In-Depth

If the subject you're trying to isolate has some areas that are sharp and others that are going out of focus, you will need to use some more of the available settings inside the Focus Area dialog. When you first open the dialog (by going to the main menu and choosing Select > Focus Area), the preview overlay may cover up some of your subject, indicating that it is not being selected. When this happens, you'll need to use the In-Focus Range slider. The farther you drag this slider to the right, the wider the focus range will become and more of your subject should be included in the selection. You can still go in and use the add and subtract brushes to add to the selection and remove from the selection.



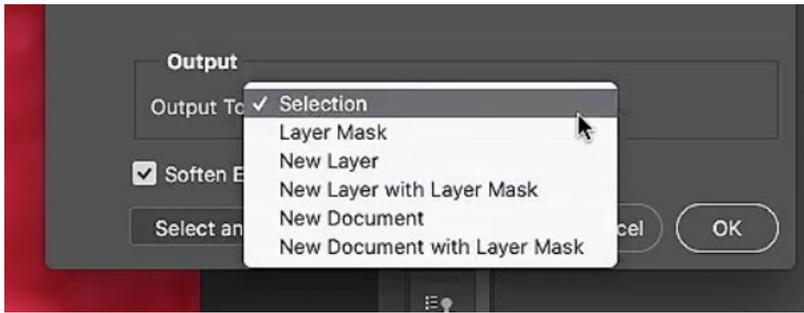
Left: We opened the Focus Area dialog for a subject that has sharp areas as well as blurry areas. **Right:** We moved the In-Focus Range slider to the right so that more of the monkey was included in the selection.

If your image happens to be very noisy, Photoshop might mistake the noise for detail and therefore won't be able to tell what's in focus and what's out of focus.



The Image Noise Level slider can be accessed by clicking on the Advanced tab to expand it.

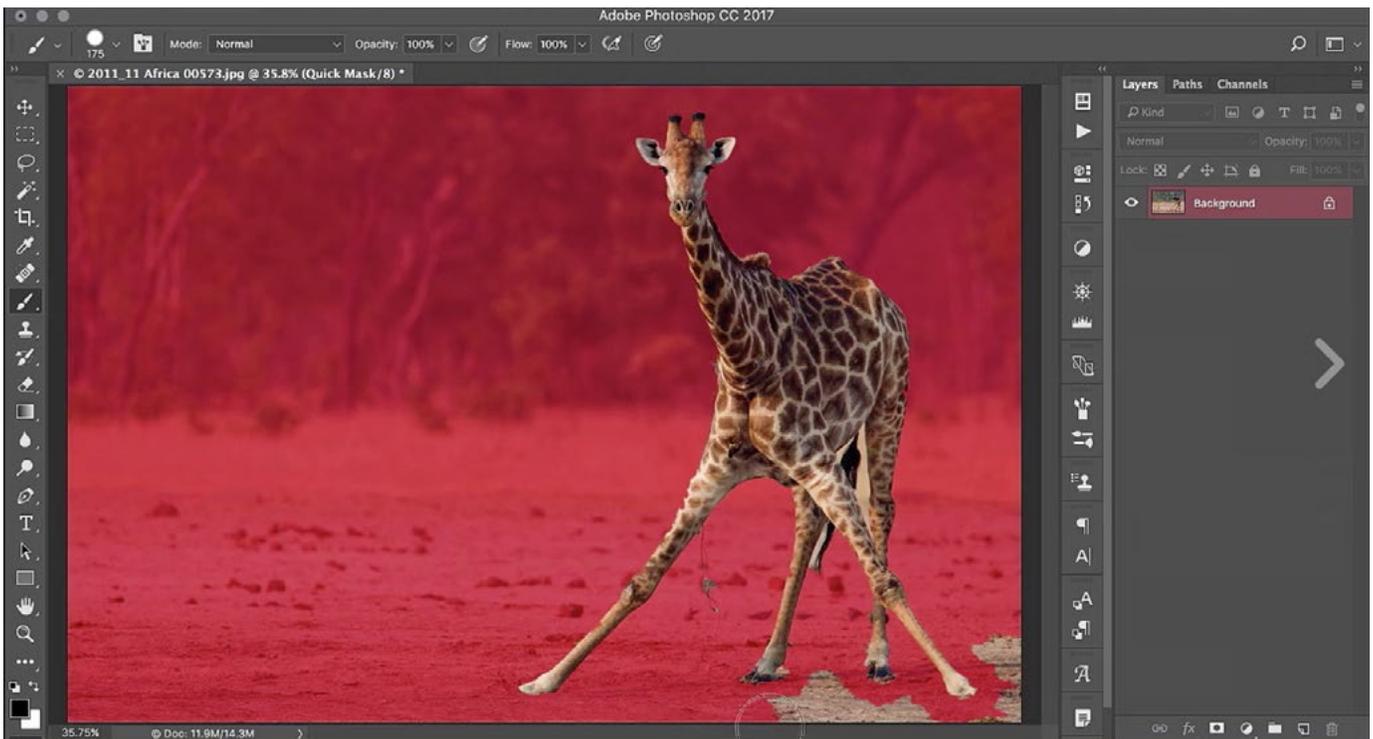
To compensate for this, you can expand the Advanced settings tab, which will give you an "Image Noise Level" setting that you can use to tell Photoshop that what it's working with is noise and not actual detail. You'll have to bring that slider up until the noise is ignored.



The Output To menu in the Focus Area dialog.

The Output To menu allows you to specify what kind of end result you'd like. I most commonly want either a Selection or a Layer Mask, but there are a handful of other options available here such as New Layer, New Document, etc.

After you're done working with the Focus Area dialog and you're back to your image window in Photoshop, you might have to manually clean up your selection a bit (or a lot). One way of doing this would be to use the Brush Tool in Quick Mask Mode. Hit the Q key to enter Quick Mask Mode. In this mode, everything that is selected will remain clear and everything that's not selected will have a red overlay. When you paint with white, you will add to the selection and when you paint with black, you will take away from the selection. Use the brush to fine-tune your selection and then hit the Q key again to exit Quick Mask Mode.



Here, we are painting on the document with black in Quick Mask Mode, which is removing areas from the selection.