Photoshop January 2018 Update

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Photoshop came out with an update in January of 2018 and this lesson will cover the new features added to the program.

Select Subject

With the new Select Subject feature, Photoshop will attempt to determine what the subject of your photo is and try to isolate it from the rest of the image. It will be more successful at doing this if the subject is very different from the rest of the image in color, tone or sharpness.

The Select Subject command can be found in many different areas of Photoshop. One way to access the feature is by going to the Select menu at the top of the screen and choosing Subject. It can also be accessed in the Options Bar when the Quick Selection Tool or the Magic Wand Tool is active. The Options Bar is the bar containing settings that runs horizontally above your image window. There is also a Select Subject button within the Select & Mask dialog. I mainly use the Select & Mask feature when trying to isolate furry, fuzzy or hairy subjects.
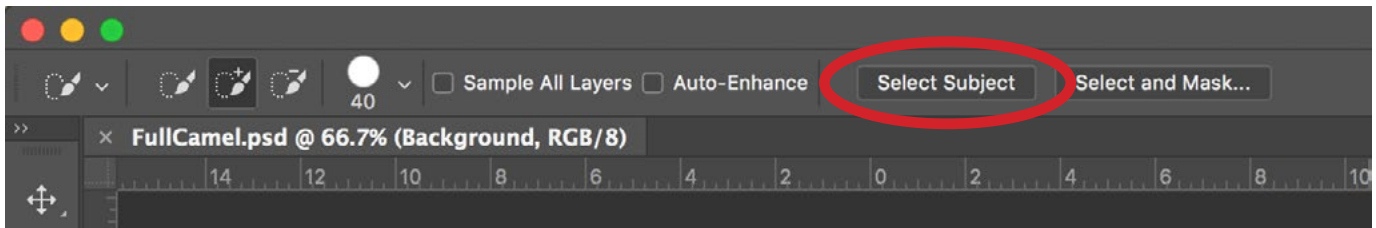
The Select & Mask button can be found in the Options Bar when the Quick Selection Tool or the Magic Wand Tool is active.

After choosing the Select Subject feature, Photoshop will make a selection around what it thinks the subject is. You can get a better preview of how accurate the selection is by viewing it in Quick Mask Mode, which places a red overlay on the image, representing the area that is not selected. Toggle Quick Mask Mode on and off by tapping the Q key.

Left: The Select Subject feature was used to select the sloth. You can see that the selection is not perfectly accurate. Above: The selection is being viewed in Quick Mask Mode.

The selection that Photoshop creates is likely to be inaccurate, and you will need to make some refinements. You can refine the selection within Quick Mask Mode by using the Brush Tool to paint with black (to subtract from the selection) or white (to add to the selection). If the foreground and background colors are set to black and white, you can quickly switch between the two by hitting the X key.

You can also refine a selection by using the Quick Selection Tool. By default, the Quick Selection Tool will add to a selection when you click and drag on the image. You can, however, change the tool's behavior by using the settings on the left side of the Options Bar. There, you'll find icons for creating a new selection, adding to a selection and subtracting from a selection. These settings will change the way the tool behaves.
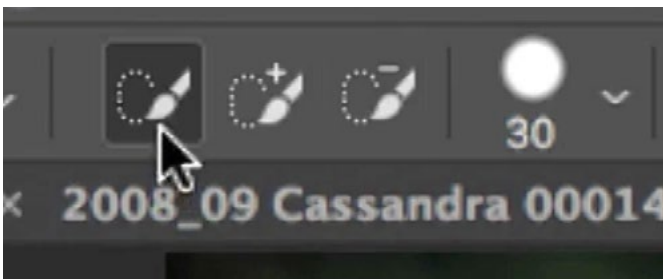

Left: When the Quick Selection Tool is active, you can change the way the tool behaves by using these settings, located in the Options Bar. Right: The Brush Tool is being used to refine the selection while in Quick Mask Mode.

In general, you can use the Select Subject command to create an initial selection, knowing that you'll need to further refine the selection by painting in Quick Mask Mode or by using the Quick Selection Tool.
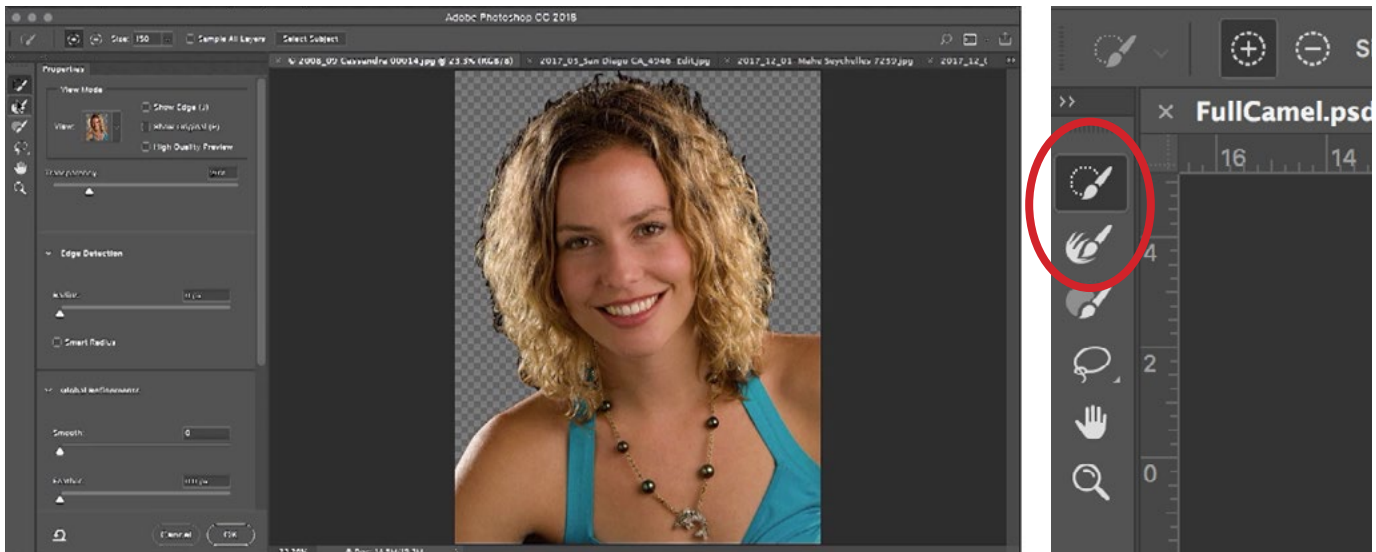
Note that the Select Subject command is not very good with graphics like logos. If I needed to isolate a graphic, I'd likely turn to a different tool (or tools) instead.

There are two instances where I find the Select Subject feature is very useful. One of these is within actions. In the past, an action could not be used to create a selection. You would have to insert a stop within the action that tells the user to manually create a selection. Now, the Select Subject command can be used as a step in an action. Because the selection may not be perfect, I may insert a stop (a set of instructions), telling the user to inspect the selection. If the selection is used to create a mask, then at the end of the action, I would make it so the mask is visible as an overlay so the user could then go on to manually refine the mask. To view a mask as an overlay on the image, tap the backslash key (\ ).
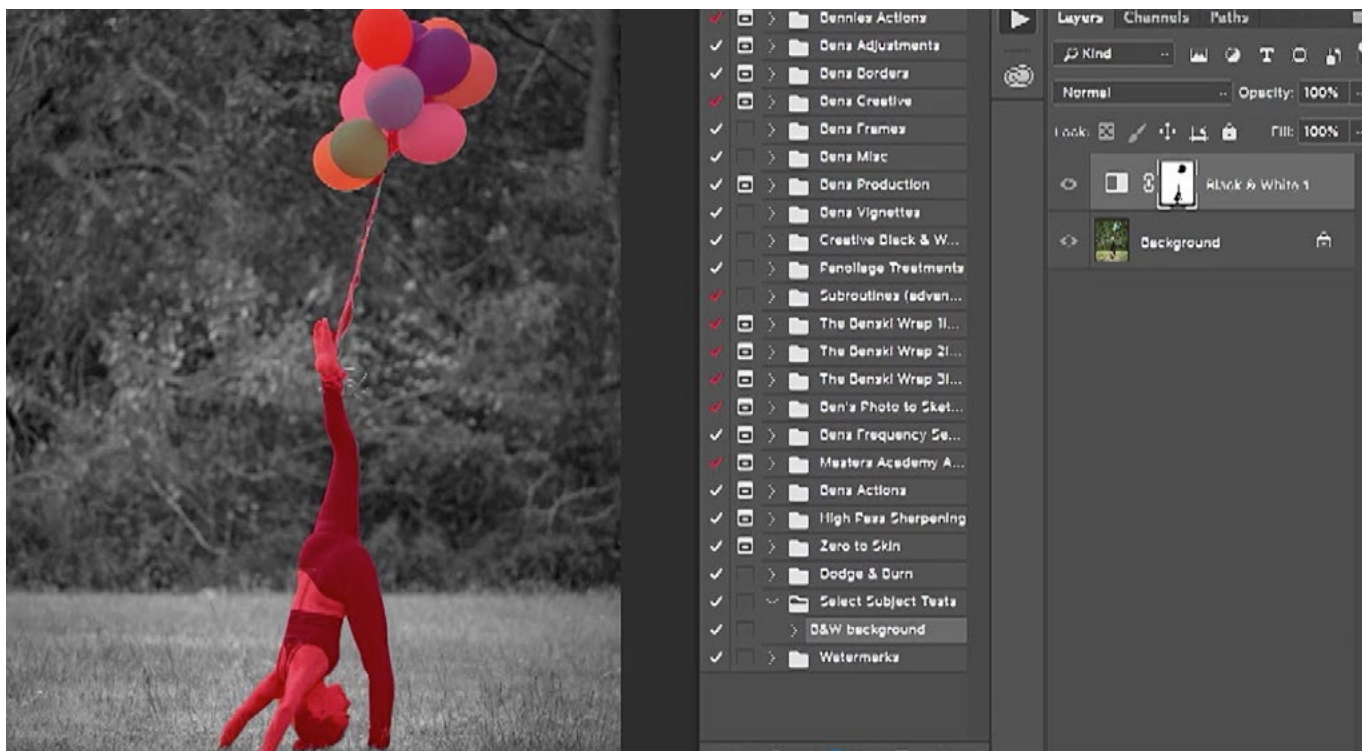
After using the Select Subject command as a step within an action, the selection was converted into a mask and we ended the action with mask active and visible. This allows the user to go on and manually refine the mask/selection.

The other instance when the Select Subject feature can be very useful is when the subject is fuzzy, furry or hairy. With a subject like this, I would first open the Select & Mask feature, which can be found under the Select menu or within the Options Bar when there is a selection tool active. The Select Subject button can be found at the top of the Select & Mask dialog. I'd first use this command to make a general selection around the subject. Then, I would use the Quick Selection Tool (The top-most tool in the Select & Mask Toolbar) to make any initial refinements. Then, I would use the Refine Edge Brush Tool (the second tool in the Toolbar) to paint over the areas where the fuzzy or hairy parts of the subject interact with the background. This will tell Photoshop to further refine the selection in those areas.


Left: The Select & Mask dialog. The Select Subject button can be found at the top. Right: The Toolbar within the Select & Mask dialog. After applying the Select Subject command, I would use the Quick Selection Tool to make any manual refinements and then the Refine Edge Brush Tool to clean up the area where the hair interacts with the background.

The Refine Edge Brush Tool is being used to clean up the selection in the area where the hair interacts with the background.

Decontaminate Colors slider within Select & Mask

There is another new feature that has been added to Photoshop and it can be found within the Select and Mask dialog. This feature used to be included when Select & Mask used to be called Refine Edge, but when Adobe changed it to Select & Mask, the feature was removed. It has now been brought back. In the settings panel within the Select & Mask dialog, you'll find a "Decontaminate Colors" check-box. Below this check box is an amount slider, and that is the new feature. The Decontaminate Colors setting will attempt to remove any remaining background color that is sticking to the hairy or fuzzy part of the subject after the mask has been created. In the previous version of Photoshop, I found that this setting was too strong but I had no way of decreasing the effect. Now, the Amount slider allows us to lessen the effect of the Decontaminate Colors setting.
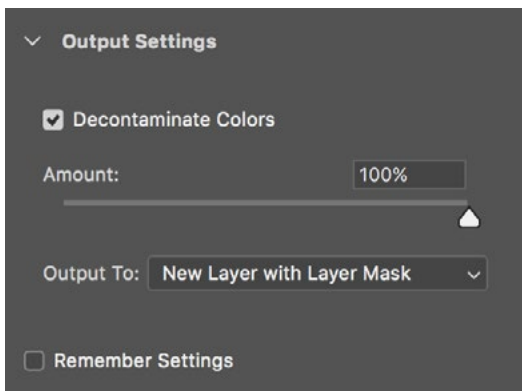
Above are views of the subject before the Decontaminate Colors check box was turned on (left) and after it was turned on (right). Left: The Decontaminate Colors check box and the Amount slider can be found under the Output Settings within the Select & Mask dialog.

Other new features:

- If you use Windows and have more than one screen hooked up to your computer, you can now independently change the Photoshop interface size for the multiple screens. In the past, this was not an option. To change this setting, go to the Start menu and choose Settings > System > Display and look for the choice called Scale & Layout.

- In the past, the maximum amount you could zoom in on your image was 3200%. Now, the maximum zoom view is 12,800%. This may be useful if you design icons and need extreme control on a pixel level.