

Turn bitmap images into editable vector art in seconds



Adapted from Adobe Illustrator CS2 Total Training Video Workshop

One of the most common tasks in illustration is taking a photograph or hand sketch and converting it into path-based vector art using Adobe® Illustrator®. Before Illustrator CS2, this meant long hours with the autotrace tool or using other applications like Adobe Streamline®. Today, going from bitmap to vector art is a matter of seconds, in as little as one click using the new Live Trace feature in Illustrator CS2.

Place and trace



Perhaps one of the most common tracing tasks in Illustrator is creating a hand sketch, scanning it into your computer, and then tracing it into vectors. Live Trace takes this once-laborious process and makes it simple.

Place a bitmap image

- 1 Scan a basic line drawing and save it in any folder on your hard drive.
- 2 Launch Illustrator CS2 and create a new, default size RGB document. Then click the Browse button  in the Control palette to open Adobe Bridge.
- 3 In Adobe Bridge, open the folder containing the scanned image, then click the Compact mode button  to shrink the window and reveal your Illustrator CS2 document. Drag the scanned image from the Adobe Bridge window into your Illustrator CS2 document.

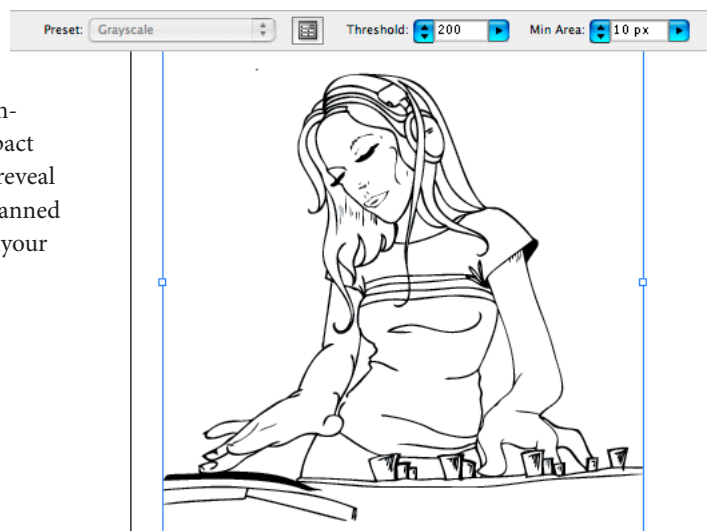
Trace the image

1 With the image selected in the Illustrator CS2 window, click Live Trace in the Control palette. In almost no time, the raster image is turned into a Live Trace object. The “Live” in “Live Trace” means the object remains in a live, editable state—you can still adjust and readjust any of the trace parameters to alter the results of the trace.

2 Click the Raster Preview button  and the Vector Result Preview button , and alter the settings in each menu. These two buttons give you a variety of preview combinations so you can easily compare the results to the original raster, while the trace is still live and easy to change.

Modify the Live Trace

1 Look at the Live Trace options in the Control palette. Adjust the Threshold setting higher and note the results—the trace is redone from the original scan using the new setting. Because a higher threshold means more pixels are included, the lines in the trace become thicker.



Because the trace is live, each change you make to the settings on the Control palette is immediately applied to the Live Trace object.



2 Adjust the Minimum Area setting higher and note the changes—any area smaller than the setting in the original image is left out of the trace, which creates more stylistic, less detailed results.

Expand the Live Trace

Once the trace results are satisfactory, click Expand in the Control palette to expand the Live Trace object into paths. Once expanded, the object can no longer be modified as a Live Trace. However, you can use any of the Illustrator CS2 features, including the new Live Paint, to modify the object as you would any art you created in Illustrator from scratch.

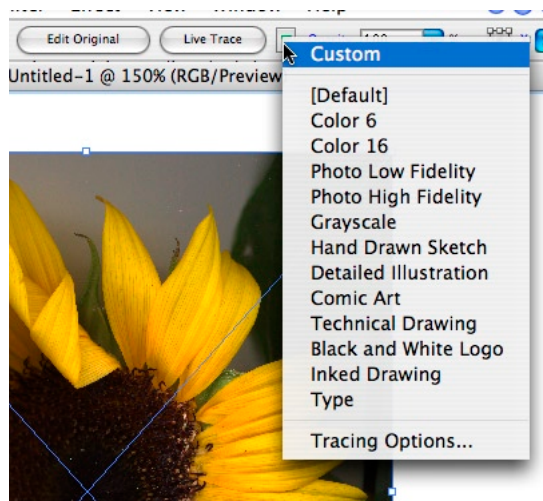
Go further with Live Trace

- Alt-double-click (Windows) or Option-double-click (Mac OS) any Live Trace object to edit the original raster image in Adobe Photoshop® CS2. Save your changes in Photoshop, return to Illustrator, and the Live Trace automatically updates.

- Place a color raster image into Illustrator CS2 and click the Preset button  next to the Live Trace button on the Control palette. Make a choice from the menu, then click Live Trace to see the results. Try some of the other presets and note the differences. In each case, Live Trace intelligently analyzes the colors in the image before applying the preset. Once you've started a Live Trace, you can change presets using the Preset menu on the Control palette.
- Before starting a Live Trace, click the Preset button and choose Tracing Options to reveal the complete set of advanced controls for Live Trace. Once you start a Live Trace, you can click the Tracing Options button  on the Control palette to access the same dialog box.

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Use the Live Trace Preset menu to set up any of a variety of complex settings modes in one click, or choose Tracing Options to customize every aspect of the trace.

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