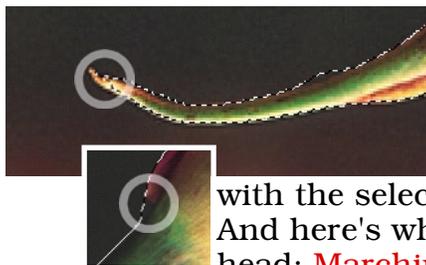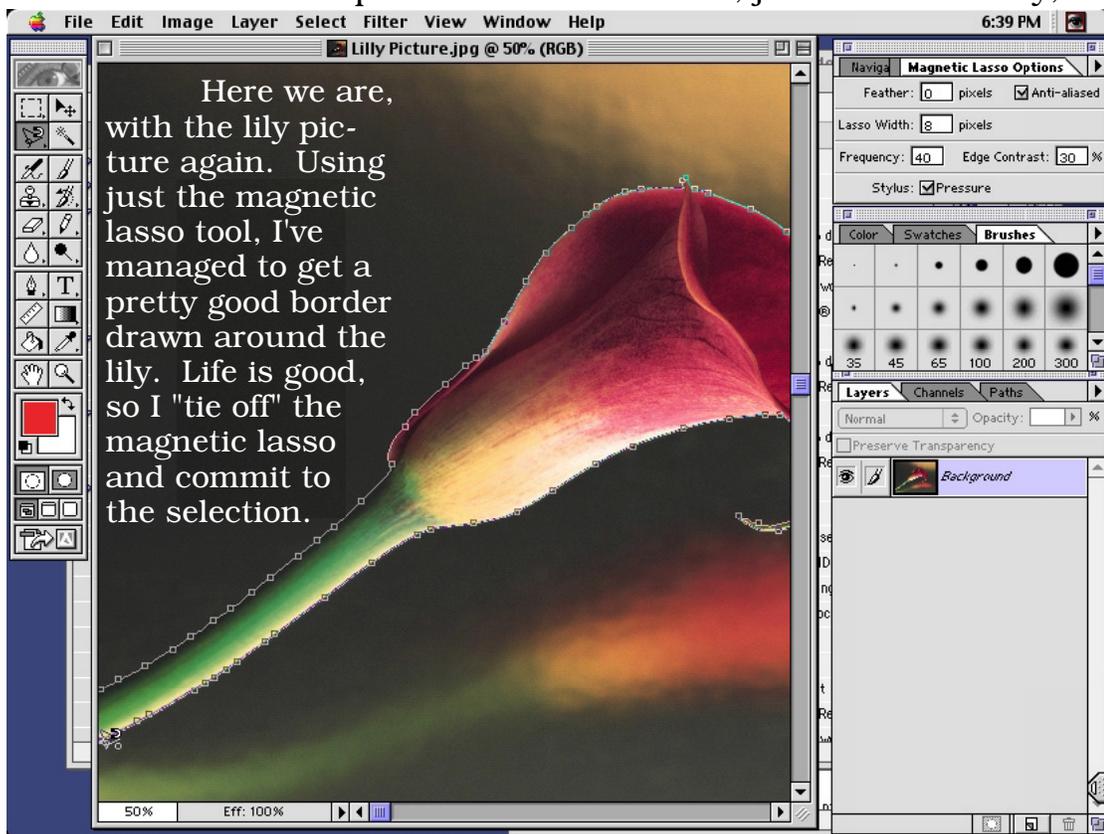# Lesson 8.5
Fine-tuning & saving selections

In this lesson, I'm going to show you how to use one layer to store a perfect selection outline that you can return to again and again. Everything I've taught you about selection tools is all well and good, but so far two big things have been missing.

1. No matter what tool you use and how carefully you use it, no selection outline you create will ever be perfect.

2. Once you create a satisfactory selection, it's hard or impossible to re-create it, should you later decide you need those marching ants again.
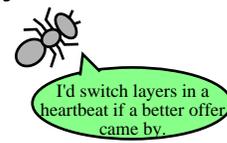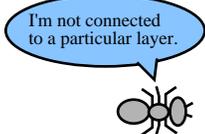
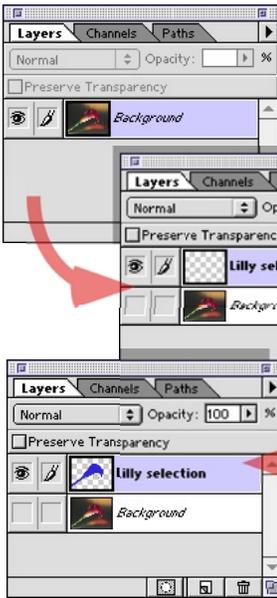The solution to both problems is to put your selections on another layer.

It's only fair to tell you that the following technique is the *second* best I know for creating a really tight selection outline. Using the masking button in color channels is the first best, but that technique is tricky and involves about a dozen things we haven't covered yet. Don't worry, I'm not wasting your time with this lesson. I *know* how to use masking color channels and I still use this technique at least half the time, just 'cause I'm lazy, really.

Here we are, with the lily picture again. Using just the magnetic lasso tool, I've managed to get a pretty good border drawn around the lily. Life is good, so I "tie off" the magnetic lasso and commit to the selection.

Upon closer inspection, however, I notice that it's not a perfect grab. I didn't select enough of that petal tip, and I may have selected too much of the spot where the stem meets the flower; it appears as if I inadvertently grabbed some background there. Now, I *could* use the lasso tools with (shift) and (option) to fuss with the selections, but I won't. Instead, I'll make a new layer.

And here's where there's an important point of theory to hammer into your head: <u>Marching ants are not connected to any one layer.</u> Really. Just create a new layer, hide the lily layer by turning off the eyeball, and you'll see what I mean.

I'm not connected to a particular layer.

Me, neither!

I'd switch layers in a heartbeat if a better offer came by.

With what comes next, it is very important that I **do not click** in the image window. Clicking in the picture window will, as always, cancel my selection outline. I create a new, blank, transparent layer, by use of **Shift-⌘N.** I name this layer "Lily Selection." Then I turn off the eyeball on Background. What happens? I see the ants marching around on a checkerboard void. It's a sight to see. I fill this outline with blue paint. I choose blue because the real lily image has very little blue in it. I want a color that will stand out clearly from the real image. I wouldn't chose orange or yellow; why gild the lily? (rim shot)
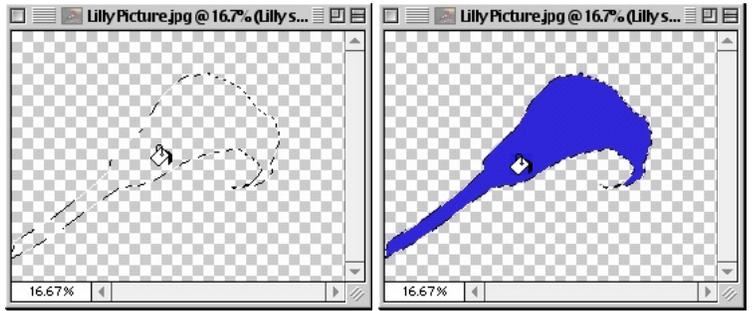
The paint bucket wants to spread paint over everything, but the marching ants keep it contained.

Anyway, with the blue lily firmly in place on its own layer, I can at long last dismiss the marching ants. How do I get them back? Easy. I select the magic wand. I set the tolerance to a low number of 4-6, and I may decide to turn off anti-aliasing. I click anywhere in the blue lily. The ants are marching back in their old line. Since, as you know, marching ants are not connected to any one layer, I can switch to Background, make Lily Selection invisible, and presto, my pristine selection has returned.

Actually, I think I'll leave Lily Selection visible for now. When it's visible, I can easily see where my ants went astray.
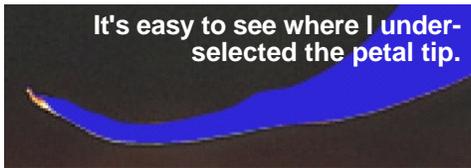
**It's easy to see where I under-selected the petal tip.**

When I make Lily Selection 50% opaque, it's also easy to see where I over-selected the base of the blossom.

In short, the overpowering blue silhouette of Lily Selection serves as a visual representation of my selection outline. Now here's the key. **If I change the blue silhouette, I am also changing the selection outline**. That's right. Using the normal painting tools of paintbrush, pencil, and eraser, I can adjust the blue area until it exactly matches the lily underneath.
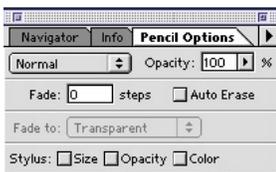
Whether I'm using the eraser or drawing with the pencil, these are the settings I recommend for adjusting the silhouette. I've turned off all of the tablet pressure options, and I'm using a very small brush with firm edges. Opacity is at 100%.
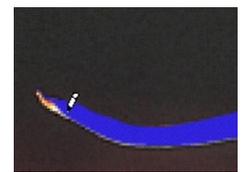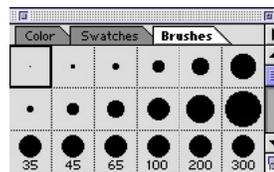
When you are retouching the blue area, make sure that you have the layer options set up like so. If the paintbrush is on Background, you can damage your real image.

I can paint and erase, paint and erase, until the blue is a perfect match for the lily. You've got all the flexibility in the world; no reason to settle for less than a perfect overlap. Whenever you need to select the lily, just visit the Lily Selection layer, use a low-tolerance magic wand, and then go back to the Background. Since your selections live on a layer, you can save your document and return to it weeks later; the ants will still remember where to go.

-Artie Moffa