PR 486: INTRO TO DIGITAL DESIGN TOOLS

TRACING IN ILLUSTRATOR

WORKING WITH READY–MADE OR IMPORTED ARTWORK

If you prefer drawing and scanning your art into Illustrator, or you have elements or icons you've gathered from elsewhere (royalty-free, of course) and want to work with them in your Illustrator composition, you have three main options:

▸ Using the Image Trace tool to make a vector version of your drawing or found art.

▸ Importing your image into an Illustrator file and using the pen tool to trace an outline of the shape.

▸ Importing your image into Illustrator and reconstructing it using simple shapes.

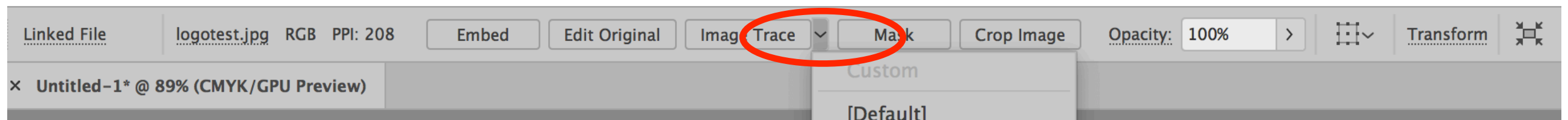# IMAGE TRACING

If you're more comfortable sketching with pen and paper, you can also open your drawing in Illustrator and use the Image Trace option.

▸ You don't need to scan your artwork; a good-quality photograph of your art will do.

▸ For best results, ink your design (if you drew it with pencil originally).

▸ Make sure you have high contrast between the drawing and the paper, and take a picture in good lighting.

IMAGE TRACING

When you do an image trace in Illustrator, you have several options. The default is to make it a black-and-white image, but there are several modes to choose from. Make sure you have the image selected with the selection tool (black arrow). Either click the dropdown button next to the Image Trace button in the top menu bar:

… or if you don't see that menu, go to Window > Image Trace to bring up the image trace options.

IMAGE TRACING

Choose different modes until you get the results you like. If you have color in your drawing, you may need to use 3-color, 6-color, or 16-color mode, or if none of those work, try High Fidelity Photo.

Once you've made your trace and you're satisfied with it, **HIT THE EXPAND BUTTON** at the very top, or with the object still selected, go to Object > Image Trace > Expand.

You won't be able to manipulate individual paths or pieces of your trace if you don't expand your trace first!

IMAGE TRACING

After the image trace is expanded, you can color it in by selecting individual paths or shapes with the direct selection tool and changing colors.

In some instances, you'll notice that even though you choose a color, it may show up in grayscale when you apply it. This happens most often when you do a Black & White image trace. To fix this, use the selection tool (black arrow) to select the entire trace. Then, go to Edit > Edit Colors > Convert to CMYK.

LIVE PAINT

As mentioned before, you can re-color your image trace by selecting shapes with the direct selection tool. But sometimes, this doesn't work if you have small gaps in your drawing, or the trace doesn't recognize an open space in your drawing as a shape (like the inside of an O, for example).

Also, there may be instances where you have a complex drawing and it would be easier to just drop in colors directly instead of constantly trying to select individual shapes (like a mosaic, for instance.)

For those instances, there is Live Paint.

LIVE PAINT

To use Live Paint, use the selection tool to select the artwork you wish to paint. Then, go to Object > Live Paint > Make. You'll know Live Paint mode is in use when your handles change and have a star-like pattern ⁜ de them:

From here, you can choose a color and roll over the parts you want to paint. To do that, it's easiest to use the Live Paint Bucket tool, which looks like this:

This tool is hiding beneath the Shape Builder tool, which looks like this: Hold down this tool to reveal the Live Paint Bucket.

LIVE PAINT

The Live Paint Bucket can be a little squirrelly (steady wrists and precise pointing devices help), but you'll be able to see what parts of your drawing can be painted in when you roll over your drawing and see a red outline:
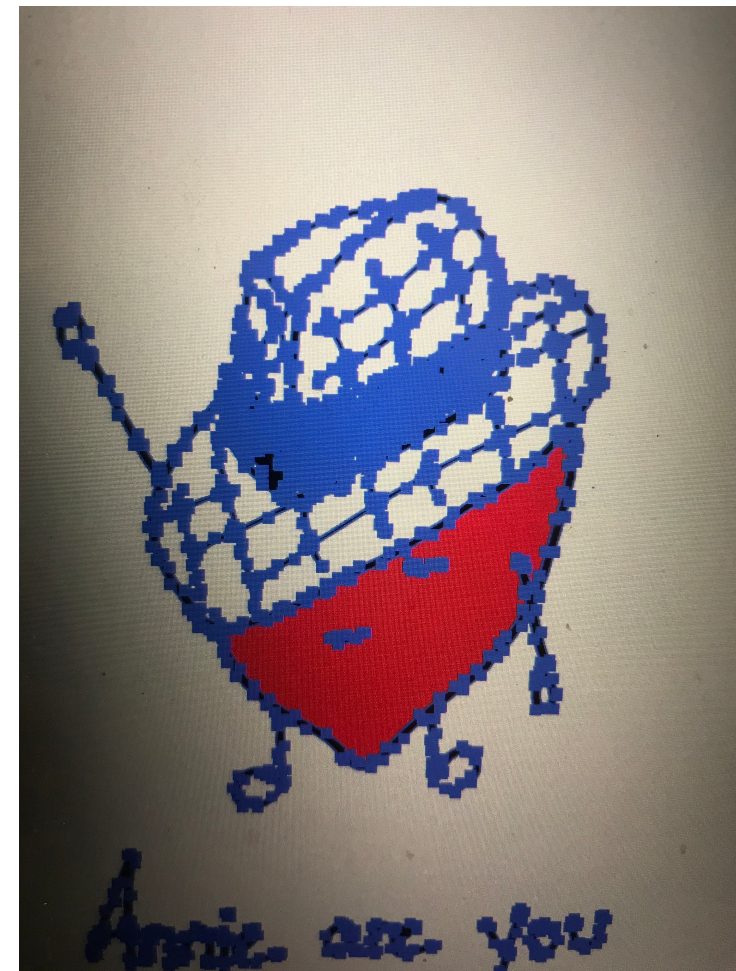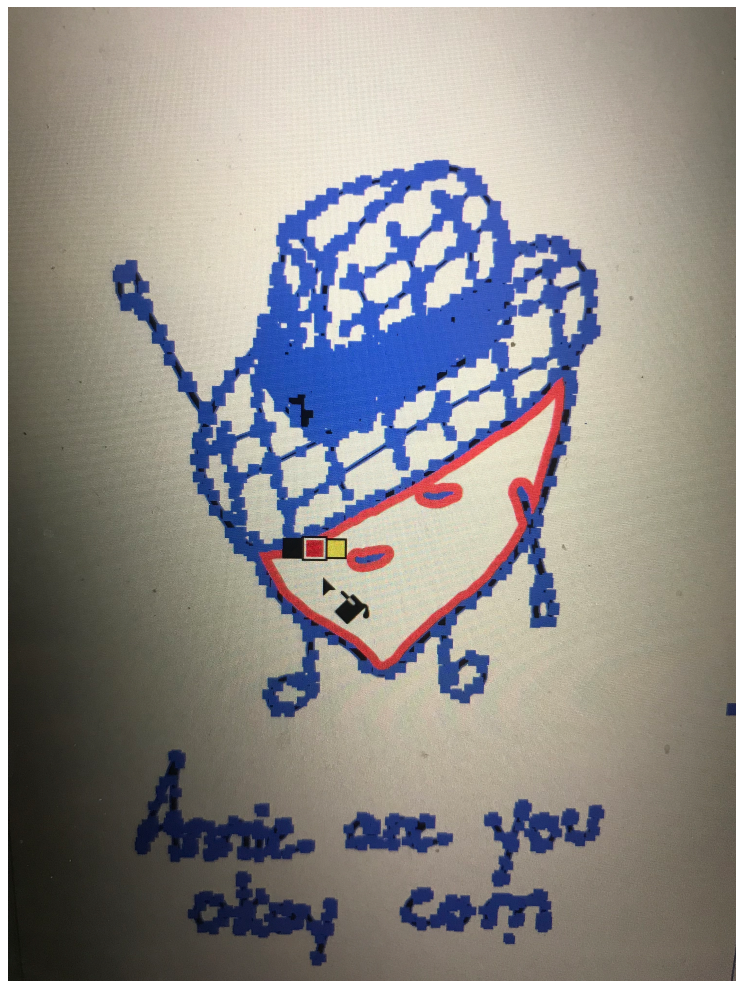
OTHER TRACING TECHNIQUES

Image Trace isn't the only way to trace an object. Many people use photographs as reference material and draw on top of the photograph.

This is helpful if you want to mimic the shape of an object, or if you want to build an illustration of a person or object and use the images as reference to draw shadows and shapes. (One prominent example of this is Shepard Fairey's Obama "Hope" poster.)

BRINGING IN OUTSIDE ASSETS

If you're going to try to trace a shape, it's helpful to bring in an image and lock it down in the background. To do this, simply drag your image onto your empty canvas. Embed it (click Embed in the top bar).

Then, under layers, click the tiny arrow to expand the objects inside that layer. Find your image and click the empty box next to the eyeball. You should see a lock when you click the empty box. That will lock the image in place so you can trace over it without moving it by accident.