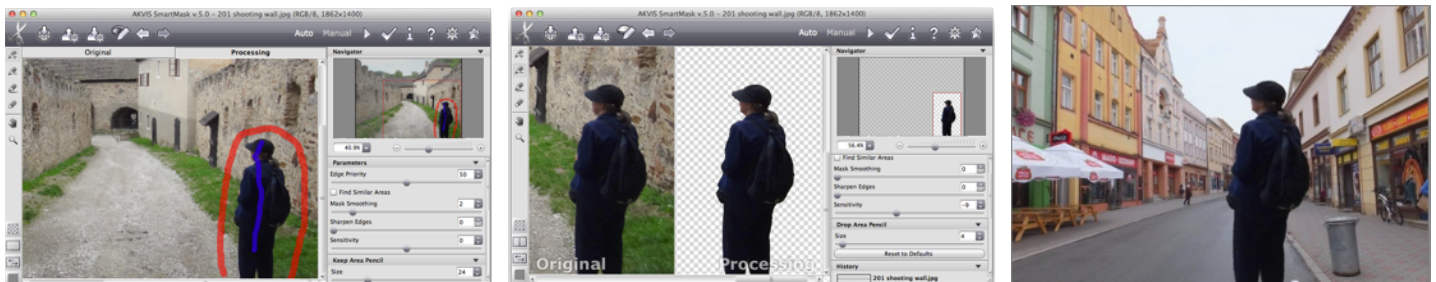


# Reviews

## Akvis SmartMask 5

by L. Davenport

Have you ever tried to remove a person/animal/item from one photo so that you can superimpose it over another - to make it look like you were someplace that you never were, or to create a collage? What a pain! Trying to select all of those uneven edges. Well that's where Akvis SmartMask becomes an invaluable tool. It simplifies the selection and masking process for both simple or complex images.

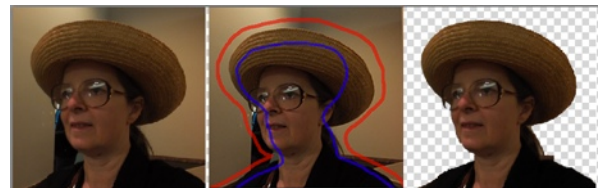


With only a few strokes (one red for delete and a couple of blue strokes for keep), I was able to quickly remove the background and then replace it with another background.

### The Workspace

The Akvis SmartMask “Workspace” has an “Original” and a “Processing” tab that lets you see if you are getting your desired results before applying it to your photo. You can also modify the “Set the View” option:

- You can divide the window in half, either horizontally or vertically, so that half of the image shows the original and the other half shows the modified Version.
- You can divide the window in half again but this time you see the same part of the image on both sides. This lets you compare the original and processed version of the image.



With only using the default settings plus a single delete and a single keep stroke, SmartMask did a good job of deleting the background in this poorly lit room.

Along the top and left side of the window are the selection and modification tools. Along the right side of the window is the Navigator window plus the Parameters panel that contains controls that lets you set the: “Priority”, “Mask smoothing”, “Sharpen edges”, “Sensitivity”, “Pencil size” and a “History” log, etc. The available parameter controls change depending on which tool you have selected. At the bottom right of the window is a History log similar to the History panel found in Photoshop.

### The Tools

Some of the hardest things to select in an image are hair, fur, fluff, tree branches, glass, or transparent material. SmartMask streamlines the process, making it very easy to do.

SmartMask has two image processing modes: auto and manual.

**Auto Mode** uses a powerful algorithm for automatic recognition of the areas that you want to select. It comes with three selection pencils: A “Keep selection” pencil, a “Delete selection” pencil, and a “Transition area” pencil.

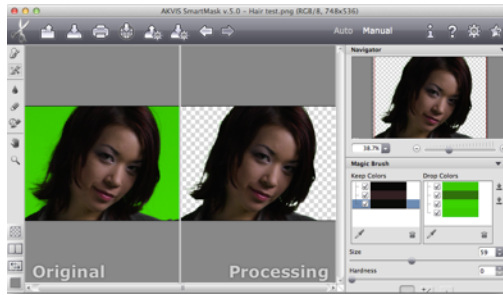
- You can use the “Keep selection” pencil to draw a blue line in the areas that you want to keep.
- You can use the “Delete selection” pencil to draw a red line around the area you want to delete.
- You can use the “Transition Area” pencil to draw a green line over difficult areas such as hair, fluff, fluff, branches of the tree, etc.

**Manual mode** includes a “Quick Selection” tool and a “Magic brush” tool.

- The “Quick Selection” tool selects an object by analyzing the colors of its neighboring pixels. So as you drag the brush over your image the selection area expands – similar to Photoshop’s Quick Selection tool.
- The Magic Brush tool works with color sets, meaning you can select a group of colors that you want to keep or delete.
- Other tools include: a blur tool, a Background Eraser, and a History brush – that you can use to bring back selected areas that you have

previously deleted.

- Sometimes it's easier to see the areas that have not been selected by using a different view mode. There are four "Change Mask View" modes: Transparent, Color background, Halftone mask, and Find Unselected Areas.



SmartMask helped me quickly remove the green background from this model's photo so I could make it look like her photo was taken at the Lednice chateau in the Czech Republic. If you look closely, I selected four different greens that I wanted removed and three different browns (for her hair) that I wanted to keep.

## Saving

When you are finished with your selection, you can save your document as an Akvis document (for further manipulation), or as a PNG, JPEG, Tiff, or as a Windows bitmap file.

There is also a share button that will let you upload your image directly to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Tumblr, or Google+.

## Akvis SmartMask versions:

Akvis SmartMask comes as a Plug-in, a stand alone application, or as a combination of the two. BTW: The demo lets you try both the plug-in and the standalone program so you can see which version you prefer.

The Home (the single plug-in OR standalone program) and Home Deluxe (both the plug-in and the standalone program) versions are for non-commercial personal use whereas the Business version is for people/business who want to sell their final artwork. Both versions allow you to install the software on two computers.

The Akvis web site has many SmartMask [examples and Tutorials](#). I suggest you watch or read through them all. This way you can see right upfront whether Akvis SmartMask will suit your needs..

If you want to see more Akvis SmartMask videos, I suggest you go to [Akvis' YouTub web page](#) and watch the SmartMask videos (BTW: they are listed at the bottom of the page).

If you like what you see, download the demo to further check out what it can do.



This is an example (from the Akvis web site). It shows how thorough SmartMask was at removing the background from all of the nooks and crannies of this ladie's flowing hair. This would be very difficult to do in other photo editor programs.

## The Skinny

**Evaluation:** I was very surprised and pleased with how easy it was to remove the background of even complex images. I also like that with only a couple of quick strokes of the keep and delete pencil tools, SmartMask was able to remove the background even from dimly lit photos.

I think it is nice that you have the option to buy the standalone version by itself. This way you can still use Smart Mask even if you don't have a photo editing program to use the plug-in with. If you are removing the background from a lot of images, I suggest that you take the trial copy for a test run. I think you will like its ease of use.

**Requires:** Mac OS X 10.6-10.9 (32/64 bit). For the Standalone version: nothing else is required. For the plug-in: A photo editor that supports plug-ins (like Photoshop). Go to [Akvis' website](#) to see if you have a compatible Photo editor.

Minimal system requirements: Intel/G4, 1 Gb RAM, 100 Mb HDD

Recommended system requirements: Intel/G5, 4 Gb RAM, 2 Gb HDD

**Company:** [Akvis](#)

**Price:** Home: Plug-in only \$69

Home: Standalone program: \$69

Home Deluxe: (Plug-in & Standalone) \$90

Business: (Plug-in & Standalone) \$120

Educational License: 30% discount off of both the Home and Home Deluxe versions.

[Available 10 day trial](#)