

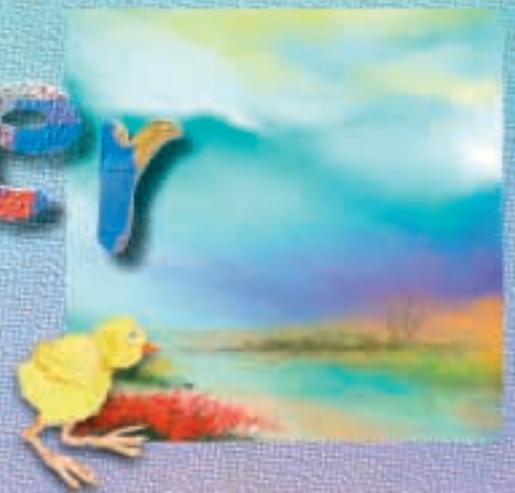
GRAPHIC EXCHANGE



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Pecking Your Way through Painter



BY LIDKA SCHUCH

When Corel announced its acquisition of MetaCreations' Painter software (formerly Fractal Painter) in April, there were fears that this long-time favorite of computer artists might get shuffled into the background due to the company's focus on its flagship products such as CorelDraw and WordPerfect—or worse yet, be buried under the weight of Corel's financial difficulties.

Happily, it seems that Corel recognizes what a treasure Painter 6 represents, and although it has not yet released a new version, it appears that Corel Painter has been granted its rightful position as a cornerstone product for the digital art market.



This was definitely brought home as Donald McDonell and I were walking the floor at Seybold San Francisco in September. Suddenly we found ourselves in an odd looking crowd—floral pattern dresses, long, often greying hair gathered in ponytails, paint under fingernails. Yes, these people were definitely not computer geeks, nor were they business executives. They looked like...hmmm...a bunch of fine art painters, perhaps?

Indeed, these were artists assembled in front of the Corel booth, waiting for the next hands-on Painter workshop to begin. Curious, we manoeuvred our way to the front of the logjam, only to discover (much to our disappointment) that the workshops were booked solid.

Our interest now piqued, we took some time to refamiliarize ourselves with this venerable digital art staple, a program that has always had its small but loyal following and one which still offers enough unique features to distinguish itself from the dominant player in the market, Adobe Photoshop.

Our considered opinion is that Corel's acquisition of Painter 6 was an excellent move. The world of Fine Art lays wide open—there remains a still untapped market of people who paint, and who would love to transfer their skills to the digital environment. Certainly, they love the smell of turpentine and linseed oil, and the feel of a brush loaded with paint. And yes, they are often afraid of technology. But a new, computer-literate generation is growing up quickly. Desktop printing is getting more and more sophisticated, and techniques for printing with textures are being developed. Above all, nothing can beat the fact that one can gain access to an entire art studio in a single box full of switches—called a computer.

Painter's interface is very friendly—just add talent and tech-

Painter 6 PALETTES AND TOOLS.



A PAINTER'S TAKE ON COREL PAINTER 6

DONALD MCDONELL TALKS WITH ARTIST DANNY IZZARD ABOUT DIGITAL PAINTING



It seemed to us that the best way to find out how easy a traditional fine arts painter could make the transition to painting software would be to find a top class artist who typically uses a computer only for e-mail and typing letters, and let him or her test drive Painter 6.

Danny Izzard of Toronto fit that description exactly. After many years as a commercial film and documentary director, Danny committed himself six years ago to painting on canvas full time. He is one of only a handful of Canadian fine artists who makes a comfortable living from selling their art, exhibiting and selling his paintings all over North America and Europe.

So it was that Danny came over to Studio L, spent three hours with Painter 6 and came up with the colorful image of a rooster and a hen which appears at the end of this article.

He then discussed the pros and cons of electronic painting with Graphic Exchange contributor Donald McDonell:

DONALD: Danny, we asked you to create a painting using the latest version of Painter from Corel, knowing you were a successful artist and also knowing you had little or no experience with computer-generated art. How did it go?

DANNY: When you and Lidka approached me to try Painter 6, I thought, why not expand my horizons in the true spirit of art and challenge myself? I arrived as a total computer virgin with great skepticism. I had a small sketch in mind—The Chickens. I began very fearfully and within ten minutes I was sort of in a cold sweat. I was ready to quit! Within fifteen minutes I had got a grip on myself, and decided not to walk away. I took a deep breath and started again...and by the twenty-minute mark, I found that I was starting to get what I wanted. Within

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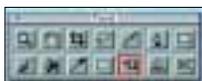


nique and you can start using it in a flash. It didn't take me long to do my first electronic doodle, and that was a few years back when I was still using Painter 3 with its awkward brush controls and not-quite-there concept of floaters.

Since Painter is a great program not just for fine art painters—it could also greatly expand creative possibilities for graphic designers and illustrators—here are a few essentials for those who are newcomers to this application.

THE TOOLS

At first glance, the Tools palette looks tiny in comparison to other graphic programs, but most of the tools are similar to any bitmap editing program:



THE TOOLS PALETTE with the Adjuster tool selected.

lasso, rectangular and oval marquees, crop tool, magic wand, eye dropper, zoom tool, type tool, brush tool and Beziér pen are all there.

The only tool unique to Painter is the Adjuster which allows you to reposition the entire contents of a layer. It is worth men-

tioning that the only way to move part of a layer's contents in Painter is to select the portion of an image you want to move, cut it and paste it into a new layer, and then use the Adjuster tool to reposition the whole layer.

THE BRUSHES

On the Tools palette, under the simple and non-pretentious icon of a brush, hide endless marking tools: pencils, pens, chalk, air-brush, oil paint brushes, water color brushes, special effects brushes, erasers, felt pens and many more. You can use impasto to add depth to your brush strokes. You can use the palette knife. You can etch, emboss, paint with gradients, patterns, paper textures and two colors at once. Each category has more options to choose



three hours—amazingly—I had a finished painting. I tried to make it feel like something I would be able to generate with my own brushes and paints.

DONALD: Give us your first impressions of working with the program.

DANNY: I loved the undo function, something I can't achieve with paint, at least with any real ease. Certainly with water colors, undoing a mistake is impossible. In fact I found Painter has a great many undos, in sequence, which was a real joy, particularly for a computer novice. It allowed me the freedom to make mistakes, so I didn't have to be a master of the tools.

DONALD: Did the scope of the program inhibit you, surprise you?

DANNY: The quality was remarkable, I was knocked out by the textural opportunities. Generally speaking, there was a tremendous range of tools and I was able to get some very unexpected results in some cases—it didn't inhibit me. I just randomly chose what appeared to

be what I needed and [it was] pretty darn close, and I got the effects that I wanted.

DONALD: You now know that you can scan in a drawing and use it as a tracing image. Does that interest you?

DANNY: Yes it does. Knowing that I can take a sketch and work it over in Painter without destroying the original and see how far I could go with it—perhaps explore its potential for a larger work.

DONALD: How about the names of brushes and tools, any confusion there?

DANNY: Most of the brush names made sense to me, chalk is chalk, conte is conte, etc. There are some clever names but each of us has our own language—most of it is bang on. And the rest wouldn't take much effort to understand.

DONALD: How did you approach color?

DANNY: If an artist is familiar with water color, or with oils used as a wash or glazing, you can do the same thing using the Painter color wheel. In fact, that's what I did. You can lay in a pale yellow and drift a bit of blue over it and end up with an

interesting green. But on the other hand, if you were working as an impasto a la prima oil painter, that's where you would want to build a custom palette.

DONALD: When an artist mixes color on a palette, say for an oil painting, a bit of this with a bit of that, it is quite a different thing. Was that a big adjustment?

DANNY: When you are mixing mud—colored mud (which paint is)—if you combine all the colors, you get dark brown. I worked in RGB, which means my colors were built by using light. Had I taken the time to build my own palette in Painter, this palette would become my favourite tubes of paint. If I took the time to make Cadmium Yellow, Indian yellow, etc., I'm sure this would be a big help.

DONALD: We saw that you just worked on one layer. You know that you could have used any number of them, which would give you lots of control.

DANNY: I didn't bother, I just wanted to go at it. I was made aware of the layering process by Lidka, but ignored it. Had I

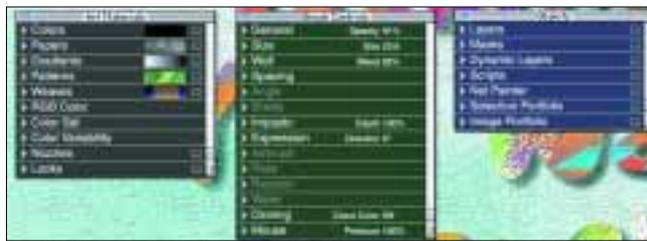
Strokes applied with various **PAINTING TOOLS:**
from water color to impasto.



from— and then you can customize each painting tool further by using the Brush Controls palette. In fact there are so many options that when the palette is expanded, it can cover your screen from top to bottom!

THE PALETTES

There are only three main palettes in Painter: Brush Controls, Art Materials and Objects. The latter two also have an endless number of options, some of them sporting long lists (like the Layers portion of the Objects palette). It would be much better if one



could tear off the options and build a custom set of small palettes, rather than struggling with a single huge one.

Among other goodies, the Art Materials palette includes textures, gradients, patterns, weaves and nozzles for the Image Hose. This last one is a tool for painting with many images at once. Imagine painting a tree with a hundred thousand different looking leaves in just a few minutes! Well, you can do it, if you create your own nozzle with leaf variants.

The Objects palette includes options for layers, masks, dynamic layers (live effects with dynamic settings), scripts and portfolios of selections and images.

WET PAINT, CANVAS AND LAYERS

Canvas is the background layer on which you can paint with more tools than on a normal layer. Only Canvas supports Wet Paint tools—water colors and dry media which are media mixing and flowing with each other. It's important to remember that if you want to erase wet paint, you must dry it first (you can find it in the Canvas pulldown menu).



taken a bit more time to figure it out, I would have chosen to put the foreground grass on one, to control it, move it, mess with it. That would be something I would explore at a later date. But I wanted to jump right in and begin now and learn later. I guess I was challenging the program to keep up with me.

DONALD: Earlier you mentioned to me that you didn't want to become a scientist or an engineer to use a paint program, you hoped this exercise would be true to the artist's experience.

DANNY: Painting is an emotional process. I tried to bring that attitude to this program, approach it like a painter and say let me go at it, I'm going to do my thing. And I found this program pretty much allowed me to do that. And for a guy who really has no computer skills, I ended up with something that very much resembles one of my water colors.

DONALD: Any real stumbling blocks?

DANNY: I don't think so, the Painter program allowed me to be egocentric,

grumpy and yet go ahead regardless. I didn't have to keep stopping and say, please let me do this. It let me do what I wanted to do, the way I wanted to do it.

DONALD: There are things to be overcome, I'm sure, like the painting being up on screen while you're drawing on a tablet.

DANNY: I could be out in the bush, getting a one-sided sunburn, eaten by mosquitoes, hassled by passersby, people wandering around telling me that they are painters. Artists learn to overcome difficulty, you deal with it. I could also be in my old Cadillac in the middle of January with the heater going, along with a laptop, I could work away without killing myself with fumes and without spilling solvents and getting paint all over the inside of the car. Now that would be nice.

DONALD: You used a tablet and stylus, how did you find working with it?

DANNY: When I paint, how fast I move the brush across the surface dictates how much paint is left behind. So if I

make a very quick move, I get a kind of dry brush effect, the paint is directly connected to the brush. Using Painter, I noticed an annoying delay before the stroke showed on the monitor, that I had to learn to anticipate. Paper and canvas have a "tooth" and an absorbency and a softness to pressure, which I have become used to. I found the tablet to be much like glass and the stylus too much like a ball point pen, and to draw with this is a very different feeling. In a perfect world, the tablet could be a little toothier, or if there were some way to feel like you are not skating on glass, that would help me a lot. Also the tablet I used was quite small. I have tried to draw with a mouse but of course that's impossible for me. But all in all, this wasn't bad. It was something I could overcome. In my world, I draw and paint from the shoulder. When you get a stylus and a tablet you end up drawing from the wrist, which is a bit of a learning

continued

It is also good to know that when you save a document into any file format other than Painter's native RIFF or Photoshop, the Canvas layer gets merged with the rest of your layers whether it is visible at the time of saving or not.

Layers are pretty much the same as everywhere else with one exception: they cannot be merged, they can only be Dropped into the Canvas layer.



TYPE CONTROLS

Type controls are found in the Objects palette under the Dynamic Layers option.

You cannot type right on the screen, but the editing controls are fairly sophisticated and you can even create text along the path, just as in Illustrator.



THE FLOATERS

Floaters are vector objects drawn with vector drawing tools. They show up in the layers palette, each

on its own layer. You can edit them with a standard set of point-editing tools in the pulldown list from the Scissors tool.

CLONING AND TRACING

The idea of cloning in Painter is very different from Photoshop's Rubber Stamp cloning tool. First of all, you have to set a source image using the Clone Source command from the File pulldown menu. However, there is a wonderful choice of cloning brushes, including the Auto Clone feature.

Tracing Paper is another great Painter feature. To use it, you have to first set the source image (File>Clone



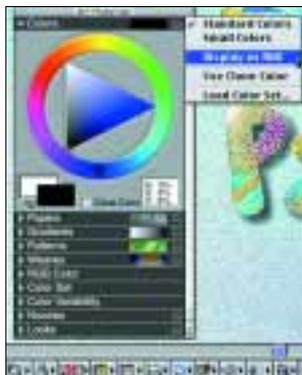
Source) and then choose Tracing Paper command in the Canvas pull down menu. The entire image greys out and you can now trace it with the brush of your choice.

COLOR MODES AND SETS

In Photoshop you can work with CMYK or RGB sliders regardless of your document's color mode. Unfortunately, Painter has no option for using CMYK color sliders in RGB documents.

Yes, you can work in HSV (Hue, Saturation and Value, better known as Hue, Saturation and Brightness) color mode, but most artists prefer the red, yellow and blue pigment mixtures over the HSV model. However, it pays to take time to build your own custom color palettes. Also, you can work only in RGB color mode. Only when saving your file to a non-RIFF file format do you have the option to change the color to CMYK.

Painter has no GCR/UCR custom settings. Its default RGB to CMYK



separations produced nice, saturated colors; however the black plate appeared to be light, with insufficient detail.

IS IT WORTH OWNING PAINTER?

Painter 6 can add a real hand-made touch to designers' and illustrators' digital art. For fine art painters, it can be a whole studio in a box. It is a wonderfully unique program which complements Photoshop, Illustrator, FreeHand and, of course, CorelDraw.

For the title page of this article, I worked on a 225 ppi, 8.5" x 11" RGB image, using a 450 MHz Power Mac G4 with 320 MB of RAM. The program generally performed in real time, although the larger the brush diameter in use, the slower it draws the stroke. Even increasing the memory partition to 100 MB didn't seem to make much difference.

So, even if you don't need top-notch equipment to begin using Painter, you'll need to upgrade when you start working in large formats or with high-res documents. ■

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THE CHICKENS. Toronto artist Danny Izzard (shown below) was left by himself to master an old Mac 7300 running Corel Painter 6 and a small drawing tablet. He had barely touched a computer prior to this exercise, much less created art using software such as Painter. Much to our amazement (and his) the painting shown at the left was finished from scratch in about three hours.



DANNY IZZARD is a second generation painter—in fact, his father is a successful painter living in Vancouver. He is also a director/cameraman and producer of commercials and documentaries. Danny has won many awards for his film work, including the International Best 30 Second English Language TV Commercial awarded by the Hollywood Radio & Television Society. He paints nearly every day in his studio in Toronto, working both on commission and on his own art. He recently had a show of his work from around the Island of Corsica, in Corsica (which is where *The Chickens* originated).

curve, but you can get used to it. Look, I've gone out to paint with dried up watercolors, only three of them work, or a brush that has been left too long and is all dried up. You just adapt.

DONALD: The tablet you used was a small, older one, with only 99 levels of sensitivity. You were also working on an old Power Mac 7300. So you don't have to have the latest and greatest to use this program. Did you start out with any misconceptions that have changed about digital painting?

DANNY: A lot of computer art work, I think, is overly crisp and highly modeled and there is often no evidence of what I call, "the hand-of-man"—the chaos of happy accidents that artists can capitalize on. Painter allowed me this, and that was the surprise, I guess.

DONALD: It's a big advantage, ending up with a digital file, and that is being able to enlarge it, and print it out on nice watercolor paper stock. Do you see this as interesting to the traditional painter?

DANNY: There is also a great opportunity for reproduction, and for the artist, there

is a great fear that once a work leaves your hands it will get messed up. With a color inkjet printer, the artist has not lost control. He or she can make wonderful miniatures, greeting cards, and invites to shows or even actual limited editions, signed artist's proofs. I think Painter 6 is really ready to play your game.

DONALD: Artists and paint go together. Would you ever change?

DANNY: Even though this may not be my number one medium, I was surprised how user friendly it was, how quickly I was able to pick it up. The results were very satisfying to me. If I were to put some time into a work, I could come up with something substantial.

I have revised my opinions, which were that computer art is stiff and mechanical. This is a beautiful program! It can help you create relevant, valid, hand-of-man, real art—no doubt about it. ■

Donald McDonell is a veteran Toronto art director who now specializes in Web design. He works out of Studio L and collaborates with Lidka Schuch on many projects.