

Corel comes through with major upgrade

**Creative Software
procreate Painter 7**

by Lidka Schuch

Good news for the fine arts crowd: Corel has listened to its faithful *Painter* users and made version 7 much easier to work with. Creative tools, user interface, text controls, compatibility, usability and color management—all have had major facelifts in Corel's second program upgrade since *Painter* was acquired from Fractal Design.

USER INTERFACE ENHANCEMENTS

First of all, *Painter 7* is a fully Carbonized application with an Aqua interface which runs wickedly fast under OS X. But even if you don't have OS X, *Painter 7* is slightly faster than previous versions, as long as you give it a hefty 150 MB RAM partition. Of course it also runs on the suggested memory allocation of 40 MB but you'll have to forget about processing really large format, hi-res images with lots of layers.

Remember those huge, clunky *Painter* palettes? Thank heaven they are a thing of the past. Palettes are still grouped into three main categories—Art Materials, Brush Controls and Objects—but now

they are resizable and scrollable, which means that you don't have to see what you don't need to see (Figure 1). This idea may not be quite as slick as Adobe's palettes with its drag-and-drop tabs but it still works very well in helping to avoid an unnecessary mess of palettes on your monitor.

Zooming is also much easier now. Instead of a pre-set zoom in increments there is now a sporty continuous zoom slider and a box into which you can type an exact zoom factor. You'll find a zooming panel similar to Adobe's Navigator at the bottom left corner of the *Painter* window, located right next to the zoom slider (Figure 2).

Keyboard shortcuts are vital to any professional workflow; these, too, have been revamped and reorganized to make them more intuitive and comply with inter-software standards. Now you can access any tool with a simple one-letter shortcut (such as B for the Brush tool or W for the Magic Wand tool).

And the addition of context-sensitive (contextual) menus to the program is yet another step in making *Painter* a really professional application. All commands from palette flyout menus are now available using Control-click on Macs or right mouse button-click in Windows.

CREATIVE TOOLS: WATER COLOR, LIQUID INK, PERSPECTIVE GRIDS

New **Water Color** and **Liquid Ink** layers represent a really wonderful addition to *Painter*. Water Color existed in previous versions but it was awkward and worked only on the Canvas layer (wet layer)—and the strokes were not editable when dried. To delete a stroke you still had to dry it.

Now there are simply three kinds of layers for painting: regular, Water Color and Liquid Ink. They are all fully editable at any time, and you can have as many as you wish. A new Water Color or Liquid Ink layer is added automatically when you use either media's brushes.

The nine new Water Color flow controls simulate the natural interaction of water color dyes with paper much better than before (Figure 3). You can use an existing brush from the list, or you can create a custom brush by adjusting any of the nine controls.

Wetness lets you control the dilution and spread of the dye. The larger the wetness, the more the stroke expands on the surface and the less obvious brush hair.

Pickup allows you to control how much the stroke merges with the background color. A setting of zero means that colors don't mix at all.

Dry Rate controls how fast the water dries on the paper. The higher the value, the longer it takes for a stroke to dry and the wider it spreads.

Evaporation Threshold lets you set the minimum amount of water that can diffuse onto paper. Low values mean more diffusion.

Diffusion Amount controls the proportions between dye and water on brush. High diffusion creates soft edges, just like painting on a very absorbent paper. Low diffusion simulates painting on dry, non-absorbent paper.

Capillary Factor controls the paper grain effect on diffusion. The lower the value,



Figure 1. You can now **RESIZE** or **SCROLL** all palettes.

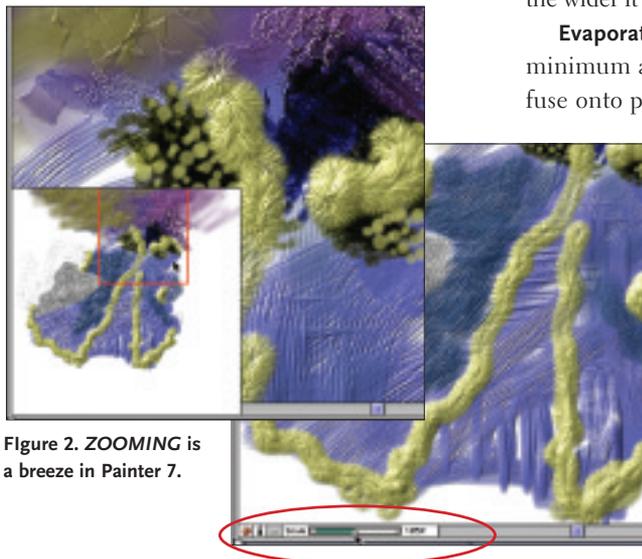


Figure 2. **ZOOMING** is a breeze in Painter 7.



Figure 3. WATER COLOR brushes and controls. Could you wish for anything more?

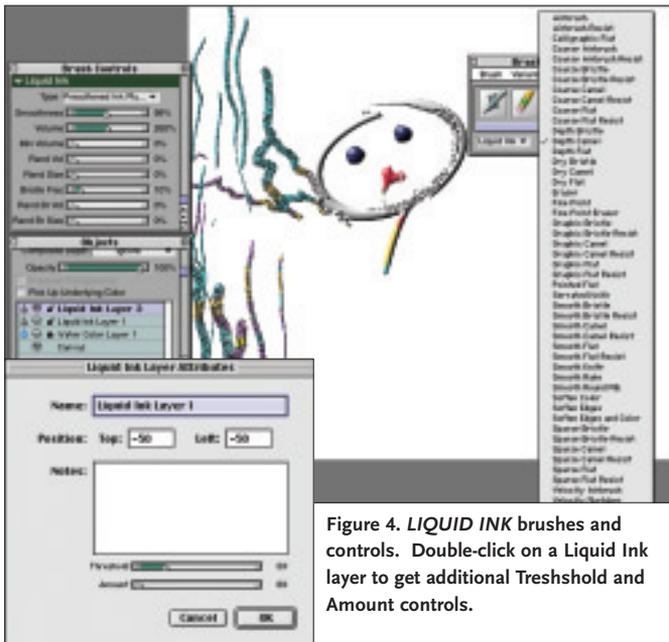


Figure 4. LIQUID INK brushes and controls. Double-click on a Liquid Ink layer to get additional Treshhold and Amount controls.

the smoother the edge of a stroke.

Grain Soak-In lets you control how grainy the dye will dry on paper.

Accurate Diffusion means a smaller diffusion bracket, resulting in a finer, more accurate effect.

Wind allows you to specify a direction towards which the dyes diffuse.

Wow, who could want anything more?

Liquid Ink technology is also brand new. As with Water Color, you have to use

Liquid Ink media on a Liquid Ink layer. Liquid Ink simulates the viscosity and surface tension of a thick, gluey ink.

Once you have selected a Liquid Ink brush, you can adjust the controls to build custom brushes, or just use preset brushes from a very long list (Figure 4).

There are also two new effects added to *Painter 7* (in the Surface Control flyout menu from the Effects pulldown menu):

Color Reduction and **Serigraphy**.

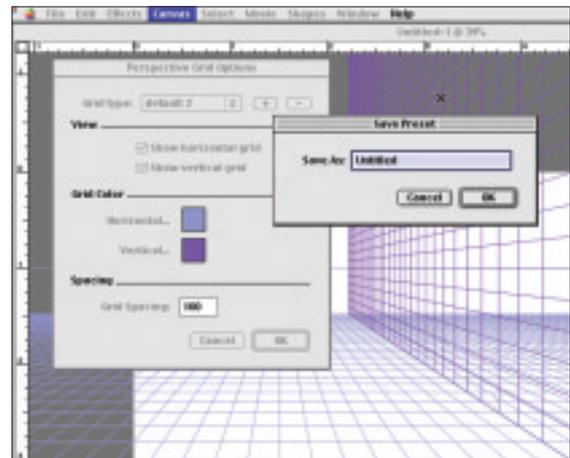


Figure 5. To use PERSPECTIVE GRIDS choose Show Grid command from the Perspective Grids flyout menu in the Canvas pulldown menu.

Last but not least is the addition of **Perspective** grids (Figure 5). You may use preset grids, or edit and save your own. Grids can be edited only by dragging the far horizon line or the very front of the grid with the Grid Perspective tool, which repositions the vanishing point. Unfortunately there are no controls for placing the whole grid at different page coordinates, or even flipping it horizontally (along the vertical axis). But gee, I still wish *Adobe Illustrator* and *Photoshop* had this feature!

USABILITY: NEW BRUSH LIBRARIES AND QUICK COLOR SETS

We are happy to report that it is finally easy to organize, store and exchange brush libraries. No more Brush Mover needed. You can make a new brush library simply by creating a new folder in *Painter's* Brushes folder and copying XML files of your favourite brushes to this location. You may load a custom brush library by selecting the Load Library command from the list of brush categories (Figure 6).

Were you used to painstakingly creating custom color sets based on an image by adding colors individually with the Eyedropper tool? Now it's just a matter of choosing the Create Color Set from (ei-



Figure 6. Loading a CUSTOM BRUSH LIBRARY is very simple in Painter 7

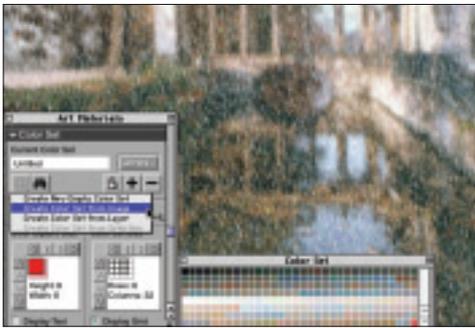


Figure 7. Creating a **COLOR SET** based on either an image or just one layer is now a breeze. Just choose the appropriate command from the Color Set palette.

ther) the Image or Layer command from the Color Set flyout menu palette (Figure 7). You can also save color sets for further use in other files.

BETTER TEXT CONTROLS

Finally, *Painter* has also smartened up its text controls. Working with text is now as simple as in any other serious graphic app. You can use a normal text tool, and all controls are located on the Text palette located in the Object palette.

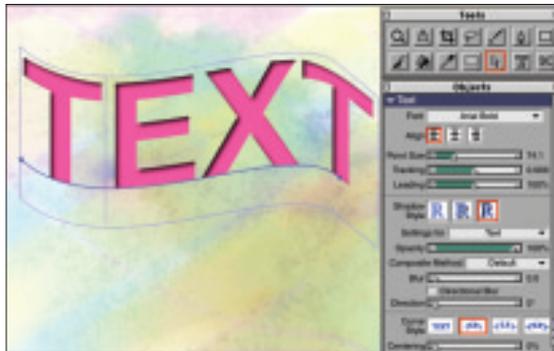


Figure 8. Working with text finally became easier. All **TEXT CONTROLS** are located in one Text palette.

The only thing missing is control over letter kerning. Yes you can track letters, but you still cannot kern them (Figure 8).

COMPATIBILITY AND COLOR MANAGEMENT

Painter 7's color management enhancements are also significant. The interface has been redesigned so that you can now create your own styles using ICC profiles or choose from the list of predefined styles for desktop printers, printing presses

(called Professional Output) and Internet. The use of predefined profiles dramatically reduces color shifts when you are working between applications.

And at last there is a choice of RGB or CMYK color modes when saving files in formats other than *Painter's* native RIF.

Compatibility with *Photoshop 6* has been improved—layers are translated intact. *Painter 7* will also open PDF files saved from *Photoshop*.

THE BUMMERS

We used a Mac G4 with 384 MB RAM to test *Painter 7*. Unfortunately the installer kept crashing until we restarted with only the base system extensions turned on.

Then we found out that *Extensis Suitcase 9* is not compatible with *Painter 7* and causes it to crash during loading.

In fairness, however, we should say that



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these were the first incidences of problems with installation and incompatibility since *Painter*'s initial release.

Painter 7 also comes with a CD full of textures, patterns, weaves, nozzles and other extra goodies—but the “ReadMe” file does not explain clearly how to go about adding these goodies to the standard ones. All it says is: “In order to use the content, you must copy the files from the CD to your hard drive.”

There isn't even a mention of where we should copy these files to! This is confusing since some of the extra goodies have the same names as the default files and folders.

If there is a document with the same name as a folder on the CD you only need to copy the contents of the folder directly to the *Painter* folder on your hard drive. If there is no file with the same name, you can copy the whole folder from the CD. (We found this out after another crash while trying to copy all the goodies from the CD to *Painter*'s folder on the hard drive.)

WISH LIST

Here is what we'd like to see in the next *Painter* upgrade.

Large size brushes (especially water color, liquid ink media and special effects) are still painfully slow. This is really a problem if you want to cover a large area with your own hand strokes.

The text palette needs the addition of kerning and baseline shift controls.

The perspective grids need to include moving and horizontal flipping controls.

We also need to be able to move portions of images within the same layer. Only selected areas of regular media layers (not Water Color and Liquid Ink) may be moved; but if you do it on the Canvas layer, *Painter* automatically adds a new layer (much like Cut or Copy and Paste in *Adobe Photoshop*). And if you do it on a regular layer, *Painter* adds a floater to the layer from which you copied or cut.

Finally, we had difficulty figuring out why, on Corel's website, the *procreate* line has been separated (literally and visually) from the original website. This just makes



COREL PROCREATE PAINTER 7

System Requirements

WINDOWS

- Windows 98, Windows 2000, Windows NT 4.0 or Windows Me
- IBM-compatible PC, Pentium 200 or higher
- 64 MB RAM
- 24-bit (800 x 600) color display
- 2X CD-ROM drive
- Mouse or tablet

MACINTOSH

- Mac OS 8.6 or higher
- Power Macintosh G3 or higher
- 64 MB RAM
- 128 MB RAM for Mac OS X
- 24-bit (800 x 600) color display (1024 x 768 for Mac OS X)
- Mouse or tablet

Pricing

Suggested list US\$479

Corel Corporation

Telephone 1-800-772-6735

Web www.corel.com

it more difficult to navigate.

Aside from a few small bugs to be ironed out, *Painter 7* is a worthwhile upgrade with major improvements and refinements. With its unique art media tools, *Painter* has always been a great addition to *Adobe Photoshop* and *Illustrator* and this version makes it even more useful in a digital graphics creative workflow. 🍌

Lidka Schuch is a graphic designer and president of Toronto-based Studio L (www.studio-L.com), a design studio and training facility offering customized courses in high end desktop graphics for graphic arts professionals.

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