

Painting a Face with Digital Watercolor in Corel® Painter™ IX

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The hallmark of Painter has always been its ability to emulate traditional painting media in a digital environment. The program's watercolor brushes have provided some of the best examples of this. The good news for those of you who loved these brushes in the past is that they are back and better than ever in Corel® Painter™ IX.

If you love the look of traditional watercolor paintings, you'll be thrilled with the Digital Watercolor brushes, as well as several additional features, in this latest version of Corel Painter. Here are the most significant enhancements:

- Your digital watercolor paintings stay wet between painting sessions. In the old days, you could not close a painting and open it again while maintaining a wet watercolor layer. You can now do this in Corel Painter IX. Working with Digital Watercolor brushes is similar to finding your traditional watercolor painting still wet after leaving it out in the sun for the day. What a great feature!
- The behavior of watercolor strokes stays dynamically adjustable. This means that when you change the settings of the Wet Fringe slider, the strokes you have painted are updated according to your new settings. Be aware, though, that this only works if the Diffusion slider is set to zero (0). If your Diffusion slider is set to any other value, the stroke does not update, and you will need to use the Undo command. This new feature allows you to experiment with the look of the entire painting.

In this tutorial, I'll paint a face, using the new, improved Digital Watercolor brushes in Corel Painter IX.

Before beginning the tutorial, please note the following important guidelines for using the Digital Watercolor brushes in Corel Painter IX:

- As with traditional watercolors, it is best to work from light colors to darker colors.
- Create a color set to use with these brushes. Colors in a color set act as the digital counterpart of the puddles of color in a traditional watercolor palette.
- Use colors that are much lighter than you ultimately want them to appear. As you layer colors, they become progressively darker.
- Use multiple layers. Not only can you paint with Digital Watercolor brushes on individual layers and maintain both the Wet Fringe and Diffusion settings, but you can manipulate the opacity and change the composite method of the layers.
- If you paint on one layer, make generous use of the Dry Digital Watercolor feature (Ctrl + Shift + L). Dry the layer whenever you are happy with your progress. Before you dry the layer, be sure to save the image in case you decide that you do not like subsequent changes. Then, use the new Iterative Save feature

- in Corel Painter IX to resave the image. This feature allows you the luxury of retrieving an earlier version at any point.
- Finally, be sure to use all of the Digital Watercolor features that would not be available with traditional tools and media - in particular, the ability to erase.

Let's begin painting our image. In this particular painting, we do all the work on the canvas layer and make frequent use of the Dry Digital Watercolor feature and multiple saves. (Although not all of the images are shown in this tutorial, 40 different versions of the image were saved.)

1. As with traditional watercolor painting, I do the initial sketch with a pencil. In this case, though, I use a variant from the Pencils category in Corel Painter IX, and I sketch on the canvas. I create a new custom palette containing all of the Digital Watercolor brushes I will use: Simple Water, Gentle Wet Eraser, Dry Brush, and Variable Chalk. (I use Variable Chalk for some finishing touches at the end of the painting process.) I also create a new color set containing all of the colors to be used in this painting. Figure 1 shows the Corel Painter IX layout with the sketch, custom palette, and color set displayed. Notice in the figure how light the colors are in the set. I begin with light colors because they will darken as the image is layered. Finally, I select the Water Color Pad paper texture.



Figure 1

2. Use the Dry Brush and the Simple Water brush for most of the work in this painting. Set the Simple Water brush to a size of about 50 pixels. Using colors from the color set, block some blues into the background. Remember that when painting in watercolor, you want to build up thin layers of transparent paint to ultimately produce dark and rich colors. Figure 2 shows some of the background colors painted.

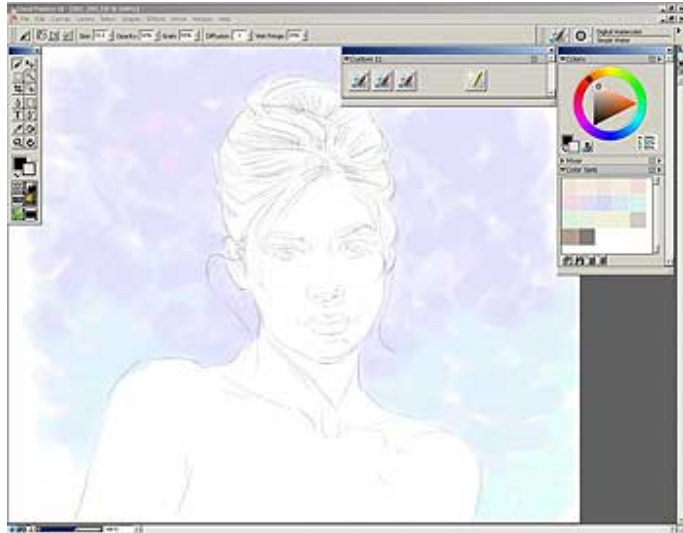


Figure 2

3. Select one of the flesh colors, and paint across the entire figure, including the hair, as shown in Figure 3. Dry the layer, and save the file using Iterative Save. From this point on, you should dry the Digital Watercolor layer and save the image for each step.

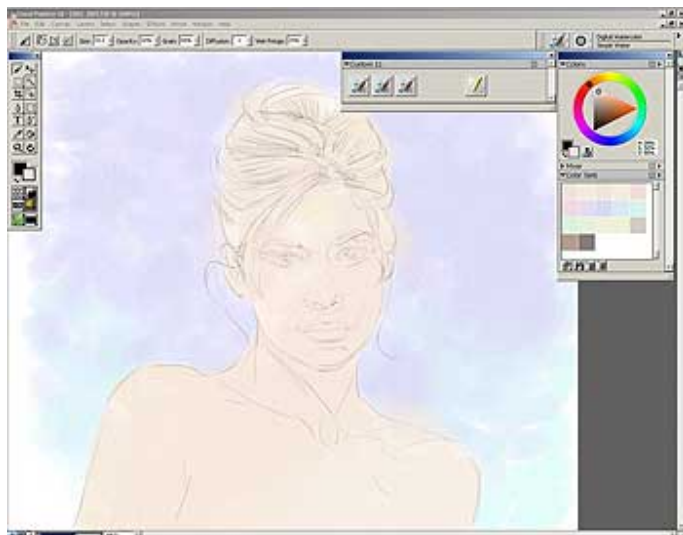


Figure 3

4. Using the same flesh color as in step 3, begin to layer the colors slightly to begin to separate the different value areas in the face. You can see the subtle shading in the forehead and around the eyes. Pick a pinker color from the color set, and add this color to the cheeks, ears, and under the chin, as shown in Figure 4.

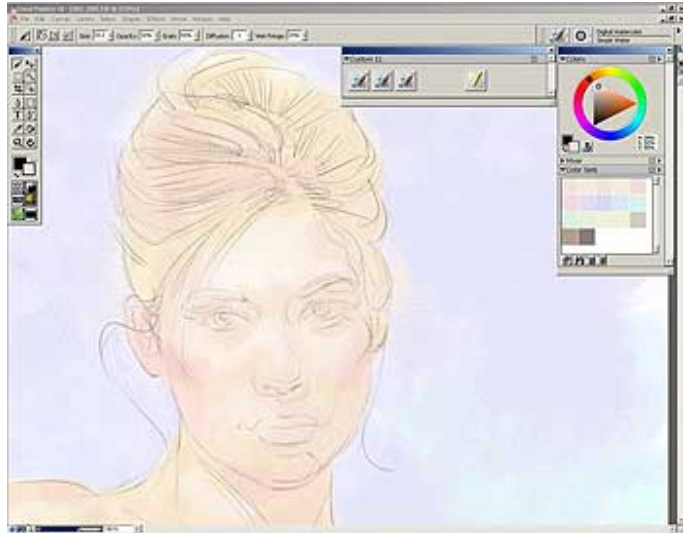


Figure 4

5. Select one of the darker colors, and begin to paint the dark hair and the shadowed areas of the skin (see Figure 5). Note that I make no effort to blend any of the edges. As in traditional painting, I allow the brush strokes to stand as painted.

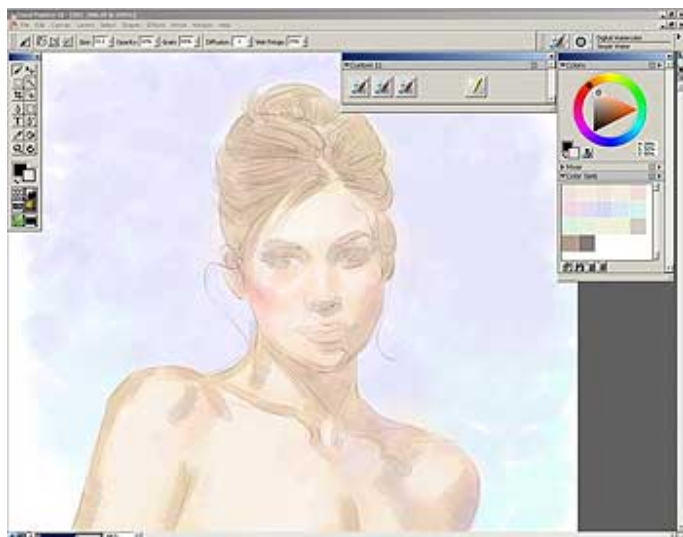


Figure 5

6. Switching between colors, continue to darken areas that are needed to build the form of the figure (see Figure 6). Note the subtle violets and blues that I introduce into the skin to help unify the background and foreground elements.



Figure 6

7. Switching to the Dry Brush, further darkened the darks of the eyes and hair. Note the rich reds I build in the cheeks. As you can see, I make no attempt to cover the original pencil sketch or blend the colors. All of these colors are built by using only the colors in the color set and simply layering one stroke over another. A nice feature of the Dry Brush is that it interacts subtly with the paper grain. Figure 7 shows a close-up of the face in which the sketch and some of the paper texture are visible.



Figure 7

- Using the Dry Brush, paint additional color into the background (see Figure 8). Notice that not only are the blues and violets being used, but that actual flesh colors are also painted into the areas surrounding the face. This helps unify the color scheme, as I did in an earlier step by adding blues into the skin tones.



Figure 8

- While you continue to work in the face, note that the background is much too light. Use the darker colors from the color set to darken the background (see Figure 9).



Figure 9

- Note that after two or three layers of color, the background approaches a value range that helps the figure glow (see Figure 10). I am still trying as much as possible to maintain the look of traditional watercolor. The lightest areas in the face, shoulder, and chest are where the least amount of color has been applied.



Figure 10

- Switching back and forth between brushes, and gradually making the brush size smaller, start to add some details into the hair and facial features. Specifically, I do some work in the nose, eyes, and line of the mouth (see Figure 11).



Figure 11

- Using a large Dry Brush of about 70 pixels in size, apply several light glazes of flesh colors over the entire image. This gives a depth and richness to the entire image, which was slightly washed out and without contrast. The painting is just about finished at this point. As with traditional watercolor, I leave this painting relatively light and airy (see Figure 12).



Figure 12

- Switch to the Variable Chalk brush, and use this brush to add back into the face a couple of highlights here and there that were covered in the watercolor process. This step is the digital equivalent of using a frisket in watercolor, or painting back into the painting with an opaque paint. I use this brush specifically because it reacts well with the selected paper texture. Figure 13 shows highlights added back into the eyes, lips, chin, corners of the nose, and corners of the eyes. If you have trouble seeing the actual strokes, this is good, because this highlighting is intended to be virtually undetectable by the viewer.



Figure 13

14. Add a subtle texture by clicking Effects menu > Surface Control > Apply Surface Texture. Although the painting process is now finished, this one last step enhances the feeling of a traditionally painted watercolor. Figure 14 shows the result and the finished painting.



Figure 14

I hope that this brief tutorial showing how I use the Digital Watercolor brushes inspires you to give these marvelous tools a try. With a little practice, you'll be able to create paintings that closely mimic the effects you can achieve with traditional watercolors.