

Auto-Painting a Photograph in Corel® Painter™ IX.5

John Derry



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In the previous installment, we covered the user interface and mechanics of the Photo Painting palettes. This installment focuses on applying these tools to a photograph. Let's get started!

Pre-Simplify Your Photograph

Before beginning the auto-painting process, you'll want to simplify your source photo and perhaps add a bit of character to the edge of the image. This is done in the *Underpainting* palette. For my image, I applied the Jagged *Vignette* edge effect and *Smart Blur* (50%). This serves to *reduce* the signature look of photographs: fine detail and hard rectangular edges.

Zeroing Out the Auto-Painting Palette

The *Auto-Painting* palette is the heart of the *Photo Painting* palettes. This is where you'll tweak the appearance of applied strokes to the canvas. By default, the slider controls of the *Auto-Painting* palette are set to produce a pleasing effect for first time users. However, I find that in practice it is a sound working method to initially *zero out* these sliders' values.

By *zeroing out*, I mean that the sliders are set to their *neutral* values, thereby not introducing any expressive bias to the initial strokes. A *zeroed out* stroke will render the stored stroke data exactly *as it was created*. In doing so, this provides you with a known baseline from which you can begin to intelligently adjust the character of the currently active stroke.

The zeroed out slider values are:

Randomness: 0%
Pressure: 100%
Length: 100%
Rotation: 0°
Brush Size: 100%

At these settings, the applied stroke will render exactly as created. The 100% settings enable you to add either *less* (-100%) or *more* (+100%) of the associated value (*Pressure, Length, and Brush Size*).

I generally begin an auto-painting session by setting the sliders to their *neutral* values, then select my intended stroke and brush variant. I then test this combination on a blank canvas to assess the stroke character. You'll notice that with the stroke zeroed out, there is no variation to the applied strokes—they are all the same size and angle.

For this tutorial, I am using the *C Curve* stroke. This stroke produces a nice curve to applied strokes, giving them a convincing hand-applied nuance. You'll find it instructive to try out the various installed strokes in the *Style pop-up* list to visually understand what they look like. Choose one that suits your imagery (or create a new one as described in the previous installment).

Once you've got your stroke selected and preliminarily adjusted, open your source photograph and make a *Quick Clone* (File menu) of it. By default, *Quick Clone* enables *Tracing Paper*. I prefer to work with *Tracing Paper* disabled (Canvas menu). This allows me to see the full effect of the auto-painting as it builds up. Choose the brush variant that you going to use. For my example, I am using the *Smearly Round* variant (Oils). As I mentioned in the first *Auto-Painting* installment, I keep the selected variant at its default size and use the *Auto-Painting* palette's *Brush Size* slider to control the stroke width. This keeps things simple.

Adding Expressive Stroke Character

Begin to add variety by adjusting the *Randomness* slider to 100% and the *Rotation* slider to 360°. The *Pressure* slider can be used to either decrease or increase the original stroke pressure. This comes in handy for adjusting the appearance of texture-interacting variants like *Chalk* and *Pastels*. Otherwise, I keep it set to 100%.

The *Length* and *Brush Size* sliders are where you'll likely spend most of your stroke adjustment time. These are the key adjustments for scaling a variant/stroke combination to your image. Because I chose the *Smearly Round* variant, I will additionally be adjusting its *Feature Size* (Brush Property Bar) to control the applied stroke's hair density. You can use the *Randomness* slider to adjust the aggressiveness of the applied stroke's randomization.

Let's Auto-Paint!

Check to ensure that the *Clone* is the currently selected image. To begin to auto-paint from your source photograph, you'll need to set your brush variant to act as a *cloner* (if it isn't from the Cloner Category). Do so by clicking on the *Clone Color* icon (the small rubber stamp in the Color Palette). This will dim out the color selector and tell Painter to instead paint using the color from the source image.

Begin the auto-painting process by clicking on the Auto-Painting palette's *Play* button (green triangle at the lower right corner of the palette). The source photograph will begin to be rendered by the current stroke/variant combination. At this point, it is likely that the scale of the strokes need to be adjusted. Click on either the *Stop* button (red square to the left of the Play button) or anywhere in the image to stop auto-painting.

Use the *Undo* command (CTRL/CMD+Z) to clear the initial strokes and adjust your *Length* and *Brush Size* sliders. Initiate auto-painting to observe the change in the applied stroke. If necessary, *Undo* and tweak the *Length* and *Brush Size* sliders as needed. I additionally adjusted the *Smeary Round's Feature Size* to get the desired hair density.

Localizing Brush Size for Subject Emphasis

A trick of traditional painter's is to use small, more refined strokes for areas containing the painting's subject. This enables finer detail and directs the viewer's attention to these important areas. I simulate this technique by initially auto-painting my source photograph with intentionally larger, coarser strokes. I then use the *Lasso Tool* (Tool palette or L key) to create a loose selection around my subject area. I apply a wide feather (40-50 pixels) to the resulting selection using the *Feather* command (Select: Feather).

I'm now ready to apply refined strokes to only the selected area with these finer strokes subtly feathering into the already applied coarse strokes. As before, you'll need to adjust the *Length* and *Brush Size* sliders to achieve the desired result. I additionally adjusted the brush's *Feature Size*.

Fine Tuning the Subject Emphasis

Once I arrived at the desired auto-painted brushwork, I wanted to further refine my subject's emphasis. This is done using the *Restoration* palette's *Soft Cloner*. This airbrush-like tool enables you to locally restore selected areas of the pre-simplified source photograph. Use light pressure to slowly bring areas of the subject into crisp focus. A little bit goes a long ways, so ex-

ercise restraint. The goal is to maintain the painted appearance of the image while adding a hint of detail in order to catch the viewer's interest.

Create Your Own Recipe

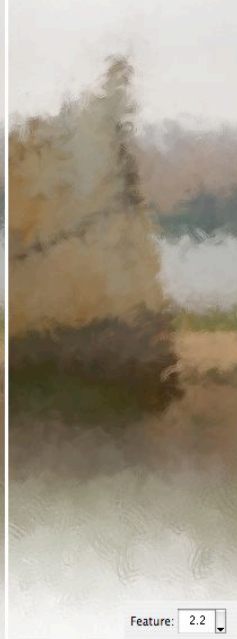
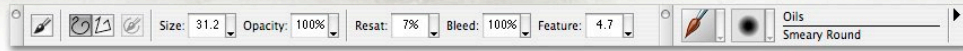
This tutorial provides a simple formula for auto-painting images. The results will be very different depending on the stroke/variant combination used. I used 2 levels of brush size; more levels can be employed for greater stroke complexity. Try using different strokes at various points in the auto-painting process for even greater variety. For the more adventurous, you can further embellish an auto-painted image with some of your own hand-expressed strokes. Have fun!

Viva la Painter!

John Derry is a pioneer of digital painting and one of the original authors of Corel® Painter™. Since 1985, he has leveraged his background in drawing and painting to advance the look and experience of traditional art-making tools on the computer. John has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Fine Art and is a practicing artist and photographer. He is currently serving as Corel's Painter Ambassador-at-Large. John's Web site is at www.pixlart.com.

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▼ Auto-Painting

Stroke: C Curve

Randomness: 100%

Pressure: 100%

Length: 100%

Rotation: 360°

Brush Size: 100%

▼ Underpainting

Style: None

Edge Effect: Jagged Vignette

Amount: 40%

Smart Blur: 50%

Reset Apply

▼ Auto-Painting

Stroke: C Curve

Randomness: 100%

Pressure: 100%

Length: 60%

Rotation: 360°

Brush Size: 35%

▼ Auto-Painting

Stroke: C Curve

Randomness: 100%

Pressure: 100%

Length: 30%

Rotation: 360°

Brush Size: 15%

▼ Restoration

Soft Edge Cloner brush

Hard Edge Cloner brush

Brush Size: 36.8

