Creating a Cloud Sponge in Corel® Painter™

John Derry

Clouds are one of nature's amazing displays of fractals. What are fractals, you ask? The world is full of them. Fractals are self-similar patterns that are repeated at all scales of view. A fern is a prime example; the shape of a fern leaf is repeated whether the leaf is large or small. While not always obvious, clouds are also made up of pattern elements that repeat at any scale. Clouds can be very difficult to illustrate convincingly, so I'm going to show you how you can create a fractal-based Cloud Sponge in Painter. We'll be using an existing brush variant (Sponge) to create a new sponge variant with a cloud fractal as its Dab. Let's get fractalized!

Creating a Fractal Source Pattern

To make a convincing cloud sponge dab, we'll need a source of fractal imagery. Conveniently, Painter has a fractal generator built right into it: The *Make Fractal Pattern* dialog. This tool is located in the Tool palette's *Pattern Selector flyout menu*. Alternatively, you can use *CTRL/CMD+9* to launch the *Pattern palette* to access the flyout menu. Note that you must have a document open in order for *Make Fractal Pattern* to be available (not grayed out).

The *Make Fractal Pattern* dialog has several adjustable parameters which can be used to control the appearance of the fractal pattern field. Feel free to play around with the sliders to get a sense of how they affect the fractal preview. For my example, I've set *Power=-98%, Feature Size=100%, Softness=35%, Angle=0%, and Thinness=100%*. Output Size is toggled to *512* (512X512 pixels). Keep the *Channel pop-up* set to the default *Height as Luminance* setting. Press *OK* and Painter will generate a new file with the fractal pattern on the canvas.

It is generally a good idea to apply the *Negative* command (*Invert* in Photoshop), found in *Effects: Tonal Control*, to the resulting fractal. Basically, you want the black areas of the fractal pattern to predominate over white. This is because the dark areas will become the mark made by the Cloud Sponge.

Modifying An Existing Variant

We are going to use an existing variant, the *Sponge* (Brush Selector Bar: Sponges) to create our Cloud Sponge. Select the Sponge variant. In order to preserve the existing Sponge variant, create a copy by using the *Save Variant* command (Brush Selector Bar: Flyout menu) and save a new variant named *Cloud Sponge*. This gives us an exact copy of the *Sponge* variant to modify while *preserving* the original Sponge variant. Be sure to now *select* the new Cloud Sponge variant from the *Sponge Variant pop-up* list in order to make it active for Dab surgery.

Selecting & Capturing a Cloud Dab

Select the *Oval Selection Tool* (Tool palette) by pressing the *O* key. Select a circular area in the central portion of your fractal pattern. We want this selection to have a soft edge so we'll feather it. Access the *Feather* command via the *Selection* menu. Set the feather amount to *50* pixels. This will give a nice soft edge. At this point, you have a soft-edged circular selection positioned over your fractal pattern. We are now going to set the stage for capturing a Dab for our Cloud Sponge.

With the selection active, *Cut* the selection (Edit: Cut) or *CTRL/CMD+X*. *Select All* (Select: All) or *CTRL/CMD+A* and *Clear* the canvas (Edit: Clear or press the Backspace/Delete key). Now *Paste* (Edit: Paste) or *CTRL/CMD+V* to copy your soft-edged circular fractal pattern to the blank image. Using the *Layer Adjuster Tool* (Tool palette), position the circular pattern in the center of the document and *Drop* the layer (Effects: Drop) to the *Canvas*. Press the *R* key to activate the *Rectangular Selection Tool* and make a selection slightly larger than the visible soft edge of the circular fractal pattern. Select the *Capture Dab* command (Brush Selector Bar) to *Capture* your fractal pattern. We're almost done.

Adjusting the Cloud Sponge's Behavior

There are a couple of adjustments we need to make in order for the Cloud Sponge to properly behave. To make these adjustments, go to the Brush Controls: *General* palette. Change the *Subcategory pop-up* from *Grainy Hard Cover* to *Soft Cover*. Set the *Opacity pop-up* from *None* to *Pressure*. These changes

will provide you with a pressure-controlled, soft-applying Cloud Sponge.

Try It Out

The most obvious use of the Cloud Sponge is to paint clouds! Fill a new canvas with blue (or a gradient of light to dark blue) and select *white* as your current color. Paint a few experimental strokes. Apply varying degrees of pressure to increase and decrease the cloud fractal.

I also find the Cloud Sponge useful for creating a soft-edged vignette around images, particularly photographs. Create a new layer over an existing image. Select White as the current color. Paint from the outer edges inward toward the image. Apply lighter strokes as you get closer to the desired vignetted edge. The resulting vignette has a nice dreamy quality.

If you want more information about Captured Dab brushes, take a look at the *Creating a Captured Dab in Corel Painter* tutorial.

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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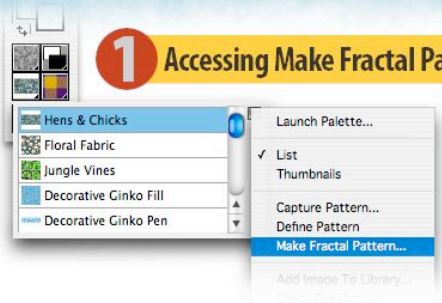
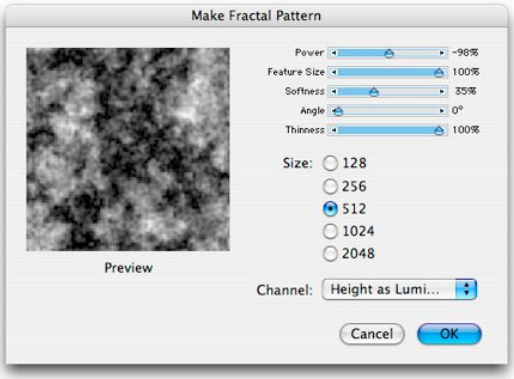
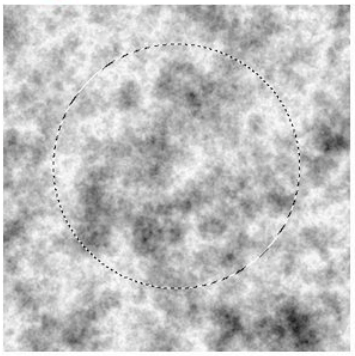
1 Accessing Make Fractal Pattern Dialog



2 Make Fractal Pattern Dialog

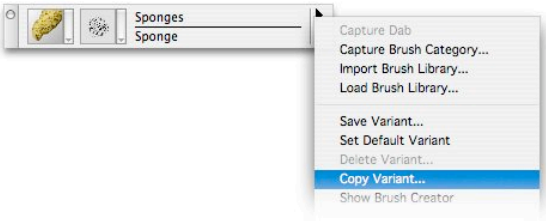


3 Selecting the Dab

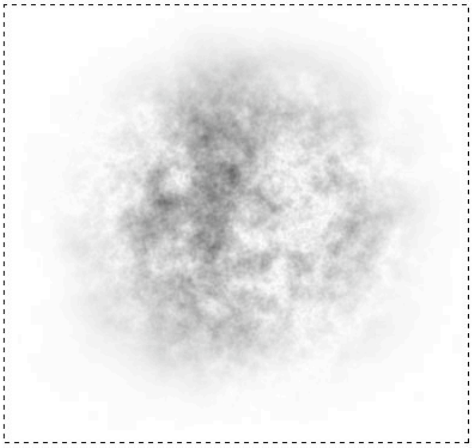


4 Feathering the Selection

5 Copying the Sponge Variant

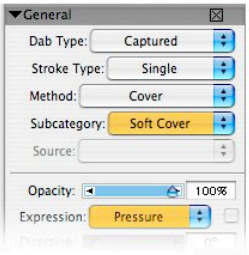


6 Selecting the Feathered Cloud Dab

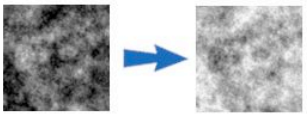


7 Capturing the Cloud Dab

8 Adjusting the Brush Behavior



Used as Cloud Brush.



You may want to apply the *Invert* command (Effects: Tonal Control) to the resulting fractal pattern.

Used as Vignetting Tool.