

# Layers 6:

## Non-destructive Layer Painting in Corel® Painter™

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Painter's layers can be used similarly to Photoshop for arranging and compositing a multitude of visual components. However, what sets Painter's layers apart is their ability to treat any underlying imagery—no matter how many layers—as wet paint. In general, brushes that smear and blend on a layer can equally smear and blend any underlying color found below the current layer. This capability enables a highly useful technique that I refer to as nondestructive layer painting. The use of this technique dramatically expands your creative safety net, enabling you to selectively edit painted elements—as well as save time.

For my example image, I'm going to use a photograph as it dramatically illustrates the use of smeary brushes on layers. However, this same technique is equally useful with regard to imagery created from scratch.

### Overpainting

Interpreting a photograph into a painting utilizes the concept of *overpainting*. *Overpainting* is the process in which an existing image—a photograph in our example—is *interpreted* into a painting by utilizing non-paint-bearing brushes to *smear* the underlying color within the image. It is as if the photograph has been *transformed* into *wet oil paint*. A variety of brushes can be applied to the wet imagery to imbue it with a hand-painted appearance.

If you were to directly *overpaint* a photograph, you would be destroying the *original* detail, making it difficult to go back and adjust various elements that need additional enhancement. Of course, the technique of creating *source* and *destination* images via *cloning* is an option. You could then *overpaint* the *clone* (destination image) and selectively *soft-clone* back any *original* detail (source image) as needed.

*Non-destructive* layer painting eliminates the need for a clone because the base image *is* the *source* image. The layers be-

come the *destination* imagery. Instead of ending up with a flat *overpainted* photograph, you end up with the *original* photo intact and the *cloning* dispersed residing on as many *layers* as you wish. Each layer remains *editable*, enabling a great deal of flexibility.

### Smeary Brushes

In Painter, a brush is said to be *smeary* if it picks up any underlying color and either mixes it into the current color or simply moves the underlying color alone. The mechanics of smeary brushes are covered in depth in the *Creating a Smeary Oil-style Brush* Corel Painter installment. You may want to refer to it before proceeding if you are not familiar with this concept.

You may have a favorite brush that smears great on the canvas, yet refuses to perform on a layer. Why? Not all brush variants can act as layer-based smeary brushes due to the limitation of some brushes' construction. To get you started with layer painting, I recommend that you utilize the *Smeary* variants found in the *Oils Category* (Brush Selector Bar). These include the *Smeary Bristle Spray*, *Smeary Flat*, and *Smeary Round*. If these brushes are new to you, the *Smeary Round* is probably the best choice.

There are two controls you'll want to utilize in conjunction with the *Smeary* variants: *Resaturation* (Resat) and *Feature Size* (Feature). Both of these controls are available in the *Smeary* brush's *Property Bar* (below the Menu Bar). *Resaturation* controls how much color is deposited by the brush. Turn it down to 0% and it is limited to smearing only. That's what we want, so be sure to adjust it down. *Feature Size* controls the *density* of hairs within the *Smeary Round's* stroke. By default it is set to 4.7. I find this a bit coarse. I recommend lowering Feature Size to 3.0 for a finer-appearing brush stroke. You can then adjust both *Resaturation* and *Feature Size* to suit your needs as you progress through your painting.

### Initial Layer: Play It Loose!

This layer painting example begins with a photograph of an elegant doorway accented by rusticated stonework. There are many fine details within the composition. If we were to attempt to *overpaint* this image as a flat image, it would be

difficult to retain many of its fine details. The mortar joints in the brickwork make a good example of this problem. How can I apply a loose painting style to the brickwork without losing the the mortar detail? Easy: *layer painting!*

### Second Layer: Detail Restoration

This is where things can initially get a bit non-intuitive. Let's examine what we've got so far. We have an untouched photograph on our *Canvas* layer, and an *initial layer* above it containing a broadly smeared version of the underlying photo. We'll now create a *second* layer *above* the initially smeared layer. We now want to reinstate selected *fine detail* from the original photograph. But wait, the initial smeared layer is occluding the photo. What to do?

With the *second* layer selected, simply *disable the visibility* of the *underlying* layer. This is accomplished by clicking the *Layer Visibility* icon to the left of the initial smeared layer in the *Layer* palette. You can now pick up details from the underlying photograph—such as the mortar joints—using a smaller-sized brush and apply them to the *second* layer. To check the progress, temporarily *enable* the visibility of the initial broadly smeared layer. When you're finished, you enable any underlying layers' visibility to view the composite image.

The key concept to understand here is that smeary and blending-style brushes will smear *whatever underlying color is visible*—no matter what layer the color resides on. With this in mind, it is simply a matter of configuring the desired visibility of any existing underlying layers in order to pick up color and apply it to a current layer positioned above the existing layers and/or *Canvas*.

### Additional Layers: Sweetening the Imagery

I continued to add additional layers in order to visually *sweeten* the image to my liking. I created a stonework highlight layer in which I sampled a highlight color, pumped it up a bit in the color palette, then applied it as color rather than smearing the underlying color. This gives the resulting more snap and provides hand-wrought detailing. I accomplished this by increasing my brush's *Resaturation* somewhat above 0%. This adjusts the brush to lay down color. Once you get comfortable with this notion, you'll start thinking of the *Resaturation* control as a way to *toggle* a brush's behavior between *color-bearing* and *color-blending* (or in-between).

I created new topmost layer, filled with *50% gray*, and then set this new layer to the *Hard Light* Composite Method (Layer

palette > Method Pop-up control > Hard Light). This technique offers the option of applying various level of *gray*—including *black* or *white* to the layer while the value of 50% gray remains *transparent*. This is true for the *Soft Light* and *Overlay* Composite Methods, as well. I'm including this variation to demonstrate the flexibility of layer painting with different Composite Methods.

Using *white* as my color, I applied a bit of texture to the *Hard Light* layer with the *Square Chalk* variant (Brush Selector Bar > Chalk Category). I chose the *Artists Canvas Paper* (Tool Palette > Paper Selector) as my current paper. This provides an illusion of lightly painted areas at the image edge in which the top areas of a virtual canvas show through the already painter areas.

Next, on a new layer, I selectively added some drips and splats to the image to provide yet another degree of spontaneity to the image. This was accomplished via two custom *Image Hose Nozzles* I created; each containing variations on paint drips and splats. I sampled underlying colors in order for the resulting drips and splats to appear consistent with the area of the image I applied them to.

Finally, I created another *50% gray* layer and set it to the *Overlay* Composite Method. Using the *Digital Airbrush* (Brush Selector Bar > Airbrush Category), I used the color black to slightly burn the shadow area of the doorway and white to dodge the sunlit side. This helps give the overall image more depth.

### The Final Image

My final image consists of six layers, plus the base source photo on the *Canvas*. I have repeatedly opened the image and decided to make further adjustments to it. For example, the *dodged & burned* doorway element seemed too heavy after reviewing the image, so I simply adjusted the *opacity* of the layer to my liking. I also decided to adjust some of the colors of the drips & splats, so I simply enabled *Preserve Transparency*—which allows only *non-transparent* areas of a layer to be painted over—and used the *Digital Airbrush* to selectively re-color some of the drips & splats. At any time, I can add a new layer at the desired level in the layer stack and add or adjust content. By saving the image in either Painter's *RIF* or Photoshop's *PSD* formats, the layers are preserved and can be further altered at any time. And the original untouched photograph remains at the bottom of it all!

## **Try It Out!**

Whether you work with photography or create from scratch, non-destructive layer painting provides the artist with an amazingly pliable technique for creating—and editing—imagery. A bigger safety net definitely offers a bigger creative sandbox to play in. Give it a try on your next image!

*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](http://www.pixlart.com).*

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## Layer Schematic

**Entrance Shading**  
Overlay Compositing Method



**Drips & Splats**  
Default Compositing Method



**Canvas Texture**  
Hard Light Compositing Method



**Stonework Highlights**  
Default Compositing Method



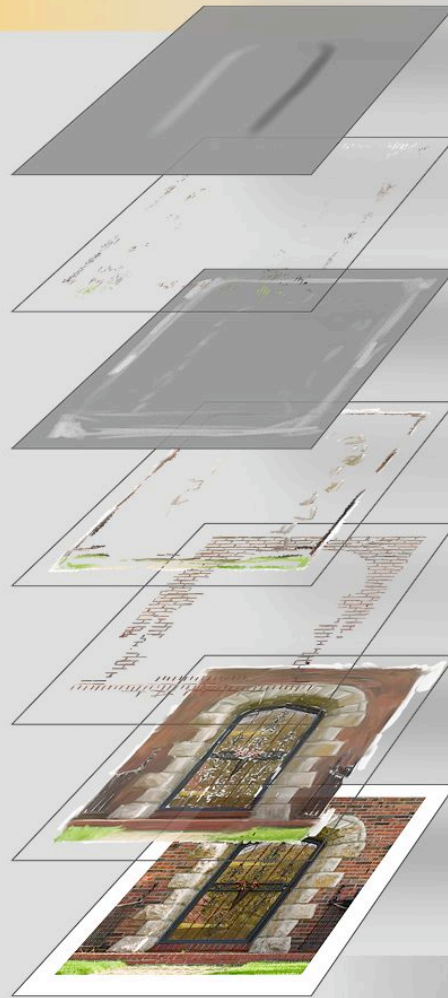
**Brick Mortar**  
Default Compositing Method



**Overpainting**  
Default Compositing Method



**Source Photo**  
Canvas



## Detail Restoration Painting Technique

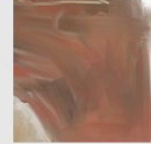
**1**



**Source Photo**

A new layer is created immediately above the source photo.

**2**



**Initial Coarse Paint**

A smeary brush is used to overpaint the brickwork. The mortar detail is ignored.

**3**



**Fine Detail Paint**

The coarse brickwork layer visibility is disabled. A new layer is created above. The fine mortar detail is overpainted on the new layer.

*Photo layer example intentionally screened to highlight mortar overpainting.*

**4**



**Combined Layers**

The lower coarse brickwork layer visibility is enabled. The fine mortar and coarse overpainting are now visually combined.

## Final Painted Image

## Source Photograph

