

Shapes 5:

Converting a Photograph into Shapes in Corel® Painter™

John Derry



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Painter's Shapes feature is typically used for creating hard-edged vector art. However, it is possible to utilize a photographic source as the starting point for creating Shapes art, as well. The result can be some uniquely graphic results.

Initial Photograph

The photographic subject of this exercise is an old manual typewriter. Photographs are sometimes referred to as *continuous tone* graphics—they are made up of a tonal scale of many levels. Prior to the ubiquity of full-color printing, photographs were often reduced to *line art*—they were black and white only. This enabled printing of photographic sources with a single ink—usually black—on white paper stock. Today, this effect is often employed to produce a retro graphic effect. This exercise details the process of converting a continuous tone image to line art.

Outline with the Pen Tool

In order to accentuate the typewriter, it is necessary to remove the dark background surrounding it in the photo. The *Shapes Pen* tool (Tool palette) is used to outline the typewriter.

Convert to a Selection

After outlining with the *Pen* tool, the resulting *Shape* is converted into a selection via the *Convert to Selection* command (Shapes menu).

Knock Out the Background

With the typewriter isolated from its background, it is time to convert the photograph to line art. In this instance, it is accomplished via the *Distress* effect (Effects > Surface Control). *Distress* reduces continuous tone information to line art by interposing the current *Paper Grain* with an image and either emphasizing or de-emphasizing the *Paper Grain* in relation to the luminance values present in the photograph.

The result produces illusion of continuous tonality by the varying *Paper Grain* elements' size. The eye interprets the varying spot sizes as gray levels. Even though the photograph has been reduced to a single color—black on a white background—it is still readable as an image of a typewriter. In this example, the *Small Dots Paper Grain* was used, but different *Paper Grains* can be used to produce a wide variety of interesting results.

Conversion to Shapes

Conversion to *Shapes* is a two step process. First, the pixel-based line art is converted to a selection via the *Auto Select* command (Select menu) using *Image Luminance*. This creates a selection based on the luminance values of the pixels that comprise the line art typewriter image.

The resulting selection is then converted to *Shapes* via the *Convert to Shape* command (Select menu). It is important to note here that highly complex selections comprised of thousands—or even hundreds—of selection elements can be cause for Painter to get unstable, resulting in a crash. The primary limiting factor is the amount of available memory Painter has available. For the best results, reduce the complexity continuous tone art as much as possible when converting to line art.

Resolution Independent Scaling

To manipulate the resulting set of *Shapes* as a single entity, use the *Shape Selection* tool to drag a rectangle around the image, then Group them (Layer menu). With the *Layer Adjuster* (Tool menu) active, a set of adjustment handles appear at the corners and sides of the *Shapes* group. To re-size proportionally, hold down the *Shift key* and drag a corner handle.

Because this is not in the domain of *Shapes*, this line art object can be scaled without any loss of quality. It is *resolution independent*.

That's All There Is!

Shapes provides a variety of tools and techniques for elegantly handling situations in which pixel-based tools won't do the job. Shapes is a handy tool in Painter's arsenal. It pays to get familiar with them for those unique situations that just can't be done any other way.

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.

Converting a Photograph into *Shapes*

in Corel® Painter™

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1 Initial Photograph



8 Resolution Independent Scaling



2 Outlined with the Pen Tool

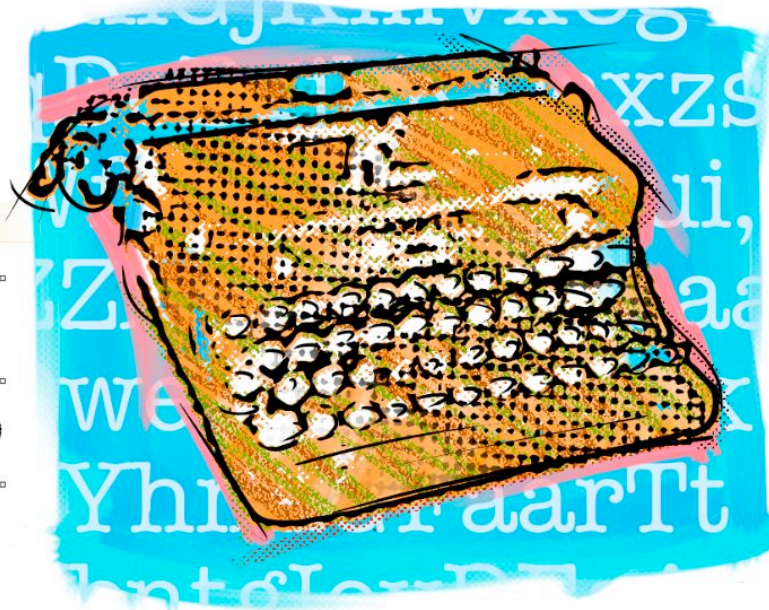
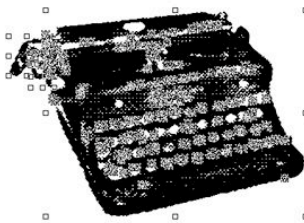


Converting imagery to *Shapes* can possibly lead to an unstable situation. Painter can become overwhelmed by conversions to *Shapes* that result in large numbers of individual elements. The primary limiting factor relates to the amount of memory the host system is operating with.

3 Converted to a Selection



7 Conversion to Shapes



4 Knocked-out Background



6 Resulting Line Art



5 Converted to Line Art with the Distress Effect

