

AMI 2012 Techniques Showcase: A more painterly Photoshop

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Brushes and handout available at www.joycehuiart.com/AMI.php

My digital painting technique involves using a hard-edged brush to lay down transparent layers of colour, keeping the brushstrokes loose and painterly.

Brushes



Stumpy Pencil brush, for sketching and touching up traditionally drawn lineart.
Created by Mike Foran (www.stumpypencil.blogspot.ca)



Painting Brush, for painting and blending. To create: start with a standard Hard Brush preset
Brush Tip Shape: Hardness 100% / Spacing 5% / Roundness 100%
Check on [x] Shape dynamics [x] Transfer [x] Smoothing
Leave everything else as default, but make sure Size, Opacity, and Flow Jitter are all set to Pen Pressure.

Adjust *Opacity* (amount of paint applied) when painting. I use 100% Opacity for blocking in and ~50-70% Opacity for blending. I leave *Flow* (rate paint is applied) at 100%.



The DM* Airbrush, for areas that require smoothing or subtle colour variation.
To create: Start with a standard Soft Brush
Brush Tip Shape: Hardness 0% / Check on [x] Airbrush [x] Smoothing
Set Flow 8%, Opacity 100%

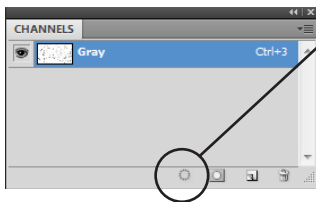
*Dave Mazierski

Preparing the lineart

1. Scan the lineart (600 dpi, greyscale, .tiff format).
2. Apply a *Levels* or *Curves Adjustment Layer* to increase contrast.
3. Use the *Dodge tool* (set to Range: Highlights) to remove any remaining grey areas.
4. Using the **Stumpy Brush**, redraw and refine where necessary.

Separating lineart

Setting the lineart on *Multiply blending mode* on top of the painted layers is a quick option for preserving the lines while painting. However, I like the flexibility of having the lineart separate from the background, so I can freely play with the colour, opacity, etc. without worrying about backgrounds or blending modes. There are many ways to do this, but this is how I go about it:



1. In the *Channels panel*, click the *Load Channel as Selection* button while on the Gray channel (check only the lineart layer is visible). This selects all white areas.
2. Invert the selection to select the lineart (Select > Inverse, or Ctrl-Shift-I).
3. Create a new layer and fill with black (Shift+F5 / Alt+Delete for foreground colour).
4. Hide the original lineart layer and lock it as a back-up.

Preparation: Lighting/tonal study and choosing a colour palette



For complex scenes, doing a quick lighting/tonal study can be very helpful to make sure you have consistent lighting, enough contrast, and a good atmosphere. Keep it loose and rough, resist the urge to refine...

Tip: Squint at your drawing periodically to check for contrast and composition

It's good practice to have an idea of your colour palette before beginning (though I tend to use adjustment tools to modify and refine it throughout the painting process).

Tip: (courtesy of DM) Pick a photo or illustration you would like to borrow a colour palette from. Use the *Mosaic filter* (Filter > Pixelate > Mosaic) to pixelate the image and essentially create swatches of colour you can sample from.

Painting



Blocking in (1)

The first step is to block in the shapes using flat colours. Use the technique you're most comfortable with, for example:

1. Create paths and shapes in Illustrator and import to Photoshop
2. Use selection tools (*Magic wand*, fill selection)
3. My method of choice: use a hard brush @ 100% Opacity and paint in the shapes. Be careful not to leave any gaps!

Tip: Perfect edges are not necessary because the lineart will be layered on top.

Rendering (2-5)

I generally work in this order: midtones (1) > core shadows (2) > highlights (3) > specular highlights (4) > cast shadows (5) > reflected/rim light (5)

I use the *Painting Brush*, reducing the opacity when smoother blending is needed. I tend to keep one finger on the B (*Brush*) key and one on the I (*Eyedropper*) key to constantly sample neighbouring colours for smooth blending. The *DM Airbrush* is reserved for smoothing out areas of colour or subtly darkening/brightening areas.

Tip: Opening a second window with a zoomed-out view of your illustration (Window > Arrange > New Window) lets you see the big picture and monitor overall contrast and atmosphere while painting at 100% zoom. It also provides a check for whether small details are visible at the actual size.

Things I try to keep in mind

- Roughing in the background early on will provide a better sense of atmosphere and lighting during the painting process.
- Limit specular highlights to areas of focus, too much can be distracting.
- Rim lights can help punch up the impact factor. The colour chosen should reflect the environment so it doesn't look too artificial.
- Atmospheric perspective creates greater depth and reduces focus on the background. Lightly brush a lighter, less saturated version of the midtone, or the background colour, on top of non-focal elements to help them recede.
- I usually shift to a cooler hue for shadows and a warmer hue for highlights.

Final adjustments (6)

1. Tinting the lineart helps unify it with the rest of the illustration, as pure black lines can often look too harsh. I usually go for a reddish or burnt umber hue, but it should match the rest of the colour palette.
2. Reduce the opacity of the lineart of objects in the background using masks
3. Use *Adjustment Layers* to improve contrast as needed (e.g. *Levels*, *Curves*) and to tweak colours (e.g. *Hue/Saturation*, *Color Balance*). I also use the *Dodge tool* (Range: Highlights) very sparingly to brighten up speculars.

Applying textures

Digital illustrations can often look too smooth and uniform. Overlaying a texture on top can help break up large patches of colour and create subtle colour variations, adding interest to the image.

Choose a texture that suits your illustration. As a general guideline, I usually set the texture on *Overlay blending mode* and reduce the Layer Opacity to ~10%.

A good resource for free, high-resolution textures is www.cgtextures.com. I highly recommend the paper and metal photos!

Side-note: alternatives to Photoshop (and Painter)

If you're interested in simple painting tools that are more cost-effective and less hardware-intensive, I recommend checking out these programs (fully compatible with .psds):

PaintTool SAI	http://www.systemax.jp/en/sai
ArtRage	http://www.artage.com
OpenCanvas	http://www.portalgraphics.net/en/oc