Sensitive painting with RealBristle brushes

Cher Threinen-Pendarvis

Sensitive painting requires that I thoughtfully observe my subject and express an emotional connection to my subject as I paint. In this expressive process, I become fully absorbed in applying paint, blending colors and values, and controlling the nuances of thick and thin brushstrokes.

Light and Shadow Play *by Cher Threinen-Pendarvis*

Light and Shadow Play belongs to a series of paintings of flowers that I painted by hand from direct observation, using Corel® Painter™ and my Wacom® Intuos®3 tablet.

For this painting, I used the RealBristle brushes, which are a new feature in Corel Painter X. RealBristle brushes simulate the natural movement of an artist's brush. The resulting brushstrokes and their interaction with the canvas more closely reflect the look and feel of working with a traditional art brush.

This tutorial demonstrates how to sketch and develop a still life painting from direct observation. In this tutorial, you will learn about
- setting brush tracking
- planning a composition and sketching
- developing a color theme
- building an underpainting
- modulating colors and sculpting forms
- adding and refining details

Setting brush tracking

When you draw with traditional media, the amount of pressure you use with a tool determines the density and width of your strokes. Using a pressure-sensitive stylus with Corel Painter gives you this same kind of control.

Before you begin to draw in Corel Painter, set up the brush tracking so that you can customize how the input from your stylus is interpreted.

If you plan to sketch with both light and heavy pressure, try to incorporate both in your sample brushstroke.
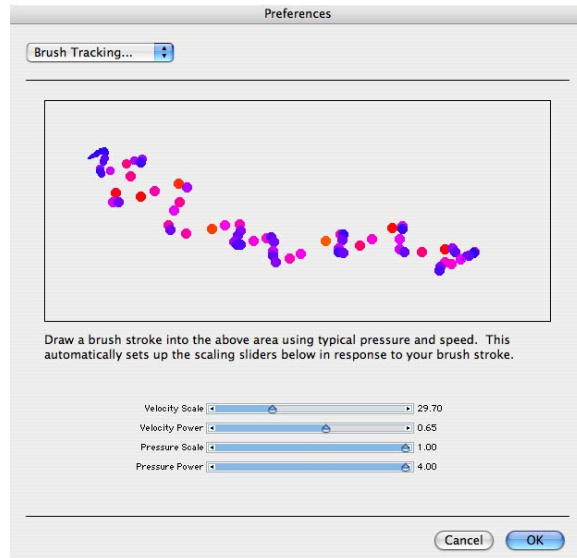
To set brush tracking

1 Do one of the following:
   - (Mac OS®) Choose Corel Painter X > Preferences > Brush Tracking.
   - (Windows®) Choose Edit > Preferences > Brush Tracking.
2 On the scratch pad, make a representative brushstroke.

Planning a composition and sketching

My first task was to prepare the still life. To begin, I placed a blooming orchid plant in soft, diffused light near a window. I chose a simple background that would not distract my attention while I painted.

Before you begin to sketch, take time to observe your subject. I planned an asymmetrical composition that had interesting negative space around the flower, dynamic curves, and subtle diagonals.

I made a few quick, conventional sketches in my sketchbook to familiarize myself with the subject and to plan the composition.

Then, working in Corel Painter, I used my Wacom tablet to create a more detailed drawing.

You can sketch directly in Corel Painter, or you can scan a conventional drawing and open it with Corel Painter.

To draw your sketch, I recommend that you choose a brush variant from the Pastels category and a dark color that complements your color palette. I sketched with the Soft Pastel Pencil brush variant and a dark reddish brown color.

From the Paper selector, I chose a coarse, natural texture paper called Coarse Cotton Canvas. You can use this paper during the development of your entire image.

For this study, I sketched directly onto the canvas instead of using a layer. While sketching my subject, I observed the forms in the flower and paid careful attention to the lighting.

To choose a brush variant

1 On the Brush Selector bar, click the Brush Category selector, and choose Pastels from the list.
2 On the Brush Selector bar, click the Brush Variant selector, and choose Soft Pastel Pencil 3 from the list.

Pastels
Soft Pastel Pencil 3
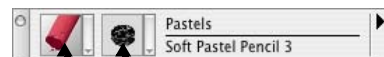
Brush Variant selector

Brush Category selector

To choose a color from the Colors palette

1 Choose Window menu > Color Palettes > Show Colors to display the Colors palette.

2 Click a color on the Hue Ring.

3 Inside the Hue Ring, click the Saturation/Value triangle to set the exact shade you want.

The Main Color swatch in the lower-left corner of the Colors palette displays the selected color.
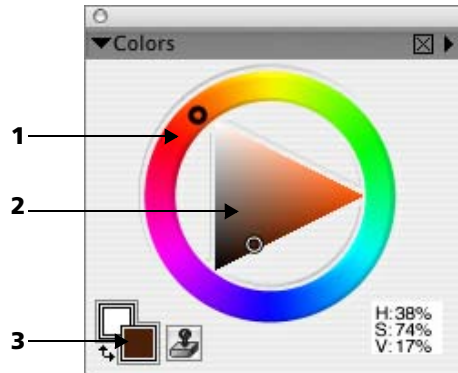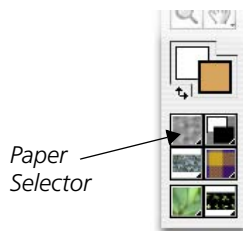

The Colors palette: (1) Hue Ring, (2) Saturation/Value triangle, (3) Main Color swatch

To choose a paper texture

1 In the toolbox, click the Paper Selector to display the available paper textures.

2 Choose a Coarse Cotton Canvas from the list.

*Paper Selector*

The Paper Selector is in the toolbox.

The process of sketching helped me become familiar with my subject. The next step is to develop a color theme for the painting. Save your sketch before you proceed to the next step.

Developing a color theme

I used the Mixer palette to create a color theme based on the colors I observed in the still life. For my painting, I increased the saturation of some colors.

Just as you would use an artist's palette, you can create colors on the Mixer pad and then paint with them. Corel Painter simulates the experience of dipping your brush in the palette and then applying the oily paint to your image.

You can save your Mixer pad colors for later use.
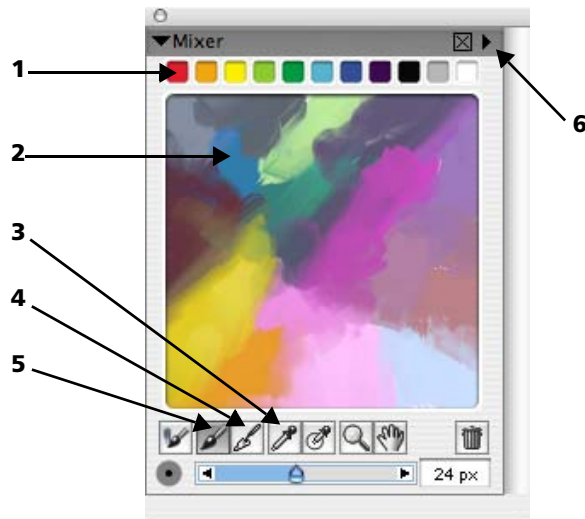
The Mixer palette: (1) color well with color swatches, (2) Mixer pad, (3) Sample Color tool, (4) Mix Color tool, (5) Apply Color tool, (6) palette menu arrow

To add colors to the Mixer pad

1 On the Mixer palette, click the Apply Color tool , and do one of the following:
   - Choose a color from the Colors palette, and paint on the Mixer pad.
   - Click a color swatch in the color well, and paint on the Mixer pad.

To sample a color from the canvas

1 In the toolbox, click the Dropper tool .
2 Click a color on the canvas (or any open image).

   The Main Color swatch in the Colors palette displays the selected color.

You can add Mixer pad colors to the color well by choosing the Sample Color tool on the Mixer palette, clicking a color on the Mixer pad, and holding down Command (Mac OS) or Ctrl (Windows) while clicking a color swatch.

![brush icon] To blend colors on the Mixer pad

1 On the Mixer palette, click the Mix Color tool ![tool icon] .
2 Drag on the Mixer pad to blend colors.

![brush icon] To save Mixer pad colors

1 Click the palette menu arrow, and choose Save Mixer Pad.
2 In the Save Mixer Pad dialog box, choose a location in which to save the Mixer pad (MXS) file, and type a filename.
3 Click Save.

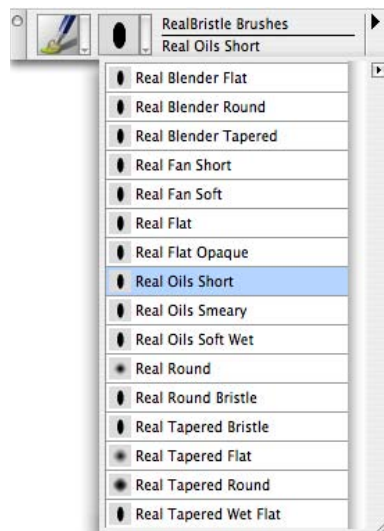Now that you have your basic colors on the Mixer pad, it's time to build the underpainting.

Building an underpainting

When working on location with watercolor, acrylics, or oil, I usually begin with large brushes and work quickly, because natural light changes as you work. To create the underpainting in Corel Painter, I started with large brushes to block in the background colors.
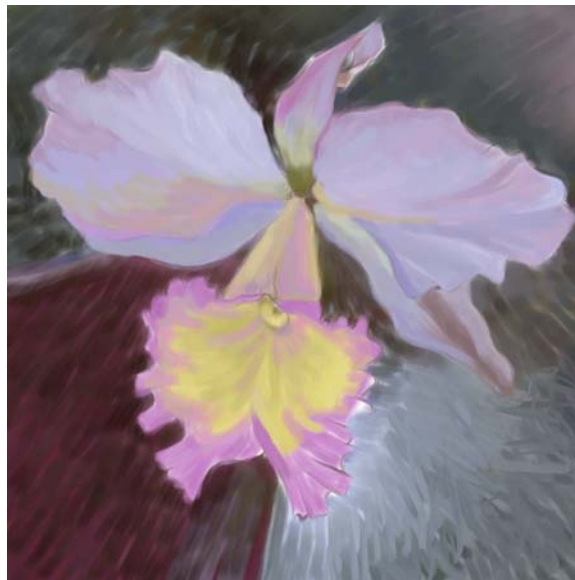

I chose the Real Oils Short brush variant from the RealBristle Brushes category on the Brush Selector bar. Using broad brushstrokes, I began painting the background areas. If you like to

blend the paint as you work, try using the Real Tapered Wet Flat brush variant from the RealBristle Brushes category. Don't focus on details at this stage.

By carefully observing my subject and focusing on the composition, forms, and natural light, I blocked in the flower shapes, using expressive strokes. I resized the brush as I worked. Then, I began to darken values that would establish the light on the forms. I developed the shapes of the orchid, flower pot, and background without restricting myself to staying within the lines of the sketch.

When the underpainting was complete, I saved a new version of the image.

You can resize your brush quickly by holding down Command + Option (Mac OS) or Ctrl + Alt (Windows) and dragging in the image window until the brush is the diameter you want.

To save the latest version of your painting

- Choose File menu > Iterative Save.
  Whenever you perform an iterative save, a new version of the file is saved with a number added to the filename, and for each subsequent save, the number added to the filename increases by 1.

Modulating colors and sculpting forms

After establishing the basic color areas, I began to layer strokes to build more complex color areas. The direction of the brushstrokes helps to establish the forms and to add dynamic energy to the image.

I blended color as I painted, using the Real Blender Flat brush variant of the RealBristle Brushes category. The Real Blender Flat variant is similar to a conventional oil brush with a small amount of wet oil paint. If you keep your brush pressed to the canvas, and brush back and forth over an area, you can build a smooth, blended transition between colors. By picking up your brush and touching the canvas, you can apply a small amount of new color. Switching between the Real Blender Flat and Real Oils Short brush variants of the RealBristle Brushes category, I painted, pulled, and blended colors, rendering the forms with expressive strokes. I continued to focus loosely on the structure of the flower petals, using various colors and brush sizes.

The Real Blender Flat brushwork is most visible on the background, on the flower pot, and in a few areas of the flower petals. To sculpt the forms, I layered color over color, creating striations in the colored paint (to suggest the folds in the flower petals).

Adding and refining details

Now, zoom in to 100%, and take a closer look at the brushwork. Do you need to add more detail to the foreground? What areas need refinement? Should the background recede more?

To move small areas of paint, I reduced the size of the Real Blender Flat brush to about 9 to 12 pixels. When I wanted to paint crisper edges on some of the petals, I used a small version of the Real Oils Short. To add accents of brighter opaque color to a few of the petal edges, I used a small version of the Real Flat Opaque.

To add richer brush textures on the background, I used the Dropper tool to sample color from the image and then switched to the Real Fan Short brush variant of the RealBristle Brushes category. Using the Real Fan Short, I loosely brushed back and forth in a soft crosshatch pattern. I continued to sample a different color every few strokes and then applied more subtle cross-hatching to the background.

Finally, to add final touches to the center of the flower, I used the Real Tapered Wet Flat brush variant. First, I painted subtle translucent strokes of orange and peach colors onto the interior. As I worked, I noticed that the highlights on the stamen were too strong. To correct this, I sampled a gray-gold color from the shadow on the stamen and brushed lightly over the brightest

areas to make them more subdued. I used a light touch on my stylus and gentle, curved strokes that followed the direction of the form. You can see this final brushwork in the two detailed illustrations that show the center of the orchid.

About the author

An award-winning artist and author, Cher Threinen-Pendarvis has always worked with traditional tools. A pioneer in digital art, Cher has created illustrations using the Macintosh® computer for two decades. She has been widely recognized for her mastery of Corel® Painter™, Adobe® Photoshop®, and the Wacom® pressure-sensitive tablet, and has used these electronic tools since they were first released. Exercising her passion for artist tools in Corel Painter, Cher has worked as a consultant and demo-artist for the developers of Corel Painter. Her artwork has been exhibited worldwide, her articles and art have been published in many books and periodicals, and she is a member of the San Diego Museum of Art Artist Guild. She has taught Corel Painter and Adobe Photoshop workshops around the world and is the principal of the consulting firm Cher Threinen Design. Cher is the author of *The Photoshop and Painter Artist Tablet Book*, *Creative Techniques in Digital Painting*, and all seven editions of *The Painter Wow! Book*.

To learn more about Cher, please visit her Web site at www.pendarvis-studios.com.