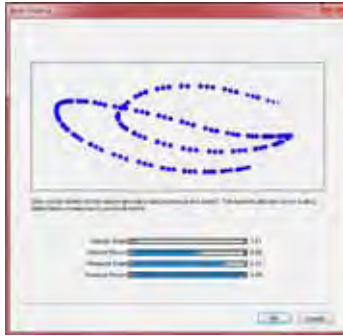


Because I use a Wacom tablet, the most important part of this opening screen is Brush Tracking. A tablet's pressure sensitivity lets me vary brush size (for instance) by pressing softly or firmly as I paint. Brush Tracking opens the Scratch Pad (right). Blank when it opens, you click and drag around it to "set" your current drawing pressure and speed. Without doing this, you may find your brushstrokes differ from one session to another.

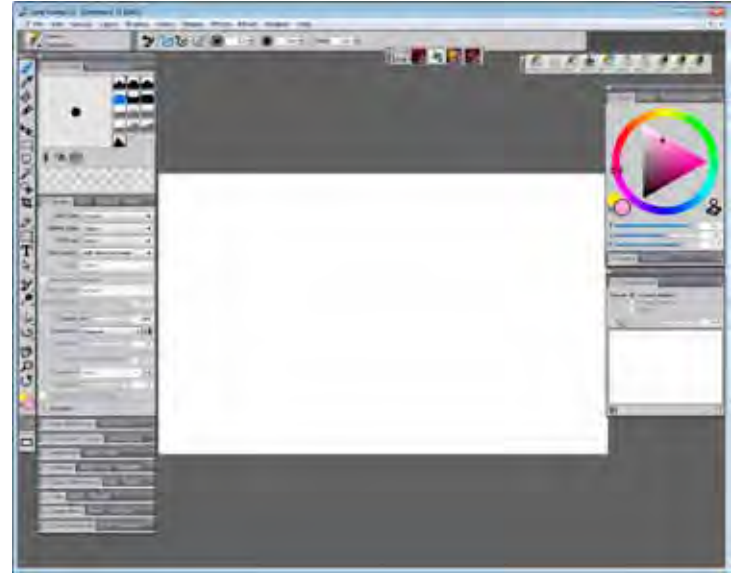


After you've done that, clicking OK takes you back to the opening screen from which you can choose your workspace. Each workspace has a different arrangement of palettes, depending on what type of artwork you're doing. There are several, including one for *Photoshop* users. In that workspace the shortcut keys have been changed to mimic those in *Photoshop*, among other things, making it easier for *Photoshop* users to transition.

Your next choice is between opening an existing image, creating a new image or working from an image template. The templates have size, base color and texture already decided upon. Creating a new image lets you define those elements.

Painter 12 not only works with images in its own .RIFF format, it recognizes (and saves to) multiple image formats such as .JPG, .TIFF and even layered .PSD files. If you decide to open an existing image, you can choose exactly how to proceed from there. You can start by using *Photoshop*-like filters and image enhancements to accentuate elements such as saturation or detail. You may choose to convert it to a painting using the AutoPainting palettes. You can also create a "Clone" of the image, and use the "Cloner" brushes to recreate it as a painting, stroke by stroke, using the brush and medium of your choice.

Or you can just start with a blank canvas, apply a base color and paper texture, and experiment with the extensive Brushes and other tools offered. See you in a year or two (it'll take that long, really!).

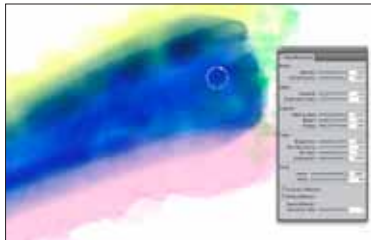


Corel Painter 12 open using the Default Workspace, shown at 1280x1024.

Whether you're a novice or an experienced artist, there are an incredible number of aids and assists available to you. Can't draw a straight line even with a ruler? Click the "Straight-line" button on the properties bar and you won't be able to do anything but. (Holding down Shift also works.) Want to make sure your focal point is placed appropriately? Use the Divine Proportion overlay to ensure the viewer's eye goes exactly where you intend.

The Workspace feature means that you decide what is and isn't visible, choosing from an incredible array of feature and tool panels that can be overwhelming. You define your Workspace by choosing only what you want to see and saving it as such. This gives you welcome control. You can open new panels as you become comfortable with their use and your needs, adding them to your Workspace as appropriate.

New brushes have been added, such as Real Watercolors (see example at right). It's a trip watching these brushstrokes "dry" just like true watercolor strokes do. Edges are darker, you see the texture of the paper, the color soaks in and the colors blend like real life.



Right-clicking brings up the "temporal color palette" where your cursor is, allowing you to change color right there. Brush size, opacity and hardness can also be changed using keystrokes without ever moving from the canvas. One new feature I particularly like is having the last ten brushes used available in a properties bar panel. It's an incredible time-saver when you're moving from brush to blender to brush to eraser and back again.

Naturally you'll get the best results with an updated graphics card, not least when you want to take advantage of the "High Quality Display" option when zooming. In earlier *Painter* versions, zooming in would produce visible pixelation. This new High Quality Display smooths out the jaggies to give you a truer representation of how the image will look when printed. It does seem to take longer to boot, compared to other graphics programs I work with.

Having enough RAM is critical, as well. I run *Windows 7*, 64bit with 8Gb RAM. Early in my trial while working on an image, suddenly the upper left corner of the image went black. Slowly this increased until the entire image was black. I finally had to close *Painter 12* and restart to restore the image.

After this happened a couple of times, I checked my Preferences. It was using my C: drive for its swap file. I have an internal 1T D: drive reserved solely for use as a scratch disk/swap file. Once I changed that setting, I had no further problems.

My biggest surprise was the change in how white is now handled. When painting an eye I wanted to add a highlight to the pupil. When I changed to white and made my brushstroke – nothing happened! After experimenting with multiple brushes and brush variants I discovered I

couldn't reliably count on my brushstrokes being laid down if I'm using white. Some even changed the color from white to a dark blue or black.

So I queried the person at Corel who provided me with the review copy. Her response was as follows, and came from *Painter's* Product Manager:

The behaviour being experienced is by design. When a brush such as a Crayon is put to use, the default METHOD of the brush is "Build up." The crayon or marker will build up and continue to build on the color that is below it...the paint continues to darken and build up. White does not show up on Yellow because it a lower order color – it blends into the yellow transparently. If you tint the white brush and make it grey, it will build up on the yellow.

If one wants white crayon to show up [on] a yellow background, simply change the METHOD to "Cover. It will paint over the existing colored paper selected.

They also provided a link <http://screencast.com/t/ZxZ30LfxBjHs> to a short demo of the different brush methods.

Apparently the change in how white is applied was made to make the digital versions act more like their analog originals. Just a little disconcerting to someone who's used it before, but probably just what a brand new user needs.

Recommended? Oh, yes.

About: Corel *Painter 12*

Manufacturer: Corel Corporation
www.corel.com

Price: \$429 full, \$229 Upgrade, \$99 Educational version
Free 30-day trial