



# digital art techniques for beginners:

a free tutorial



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# DIP YOUR BRUSH IN Digital Art

Whether you're intrigued by or indifferent to digital art, you should know that it's not necessary to abandon paints and brushes to enter the digital age.

■ By Ursula Roma

*God and The Devil Argue Over the Details (giclée on stretched canvas, 60x36) by Kevin Mack*

It can seem overwhelming: the digital art phenomenon. Every day new programs are invented for artists looking to enhance and expand their creative process using digital tools. We can proclaim our purity and reject the computer, or we can use it in different—radical or subtle—ways. Some artists create work from start to finish on the computer; some use the computer to modify work, and some use it to produce work that they'll add to a collage. In this article we'll take a look at all three possibilities.



## Adding and altering color

As for me, I've loved and adored my Apple Macintosh, using it primarily for producing graphic design work, for more than 20 years. The computer indeed has made design and layout much less process-oriented. I can't imagine going back to waxing type, cutting with X-Acto blades and taping key lines. For the last 10 years, however, I've used my computer for much more than designing type and images. On my Mac, I not only create illustrations but also manipulate, adjust, change, enlarge, reduce, saturate, de-saturate, pixellate, brighten and print artwork.

The myriad number of programs out there can be confusing. Basically, there are two types: vector-based and pixel-based. Vector-based drawing programs, such as Adobe Illustrator, CorelDRAW, Microsoft Expression Design and XaraXtreme, help you create original digital artwork using digital drawing techniques. Pixel-based painting programs like Adobe Photoshop, Corel Painter, ArtRage, Alias Sketchbook Pro, Corel Paint Shop Pro and others help you create original digital artwork using digital painting techniques. These are just a few of the programs available, and some artists use multiple programs in the process of creating one piece of digital art. They may scan the art into Photoshop, make some changes, then bring it into Illustrator and finish it, and so on. As long as the file formats are compatible, the variation of uses and outcomes are endless.

### Step 1: Adding color by way of computer

I most often make a piece of art with traditional fine art techniques, such as pen and ink, scratchboard or cut-paper. Then I add color in Adobe Photoshop, though typically Illustrator would be appropriate, too, because of its flexibility to change size and other characteristics of the drawing.



Here is the original, intricately patterned cut paper artwork Ursula Roma created with black paper and an X-Acto knife.

The computer provides a very efficient way to explore color ideas and combinations. No more markers to buy—no more photocopies to make.

**Benefits:** The computer provides a very efficient way to explore color ideas and combinations. No more markers to buy; no more photocopies to make, correct and paint on; no more smudging and ruining a piece beyond repair. I experiment on the computer until I create a finished piece of art that satisfies me, and I might mix several programs in the process. As in traditional painting, sometimes the accidents create the nicest effects (and you don't have to re-gesso the canvas).

### Step 2: Using digital images as design elements

Merle Rosen combines computer-generated imagery with traditional media, acrylic mediums and vary-

■ **Ursula Roma** is an graphic designer, muralist, illustrator, sculptor and painter; she lives in Cincinnati.



For an advertisement in a newspaper, Roma needed to create a halftone version, so she converted the image to grayscale in Photoshop with one click of a mouse, then easily adjusted the contrast and curves of the halftone.

Without much effort the Heart Illustration series was now ready to accommodate a variety of applications. The client could use the heart to create prints and adorn T-shirts, or to appear in ads.

"I cleaned up the edges but didn't want to get too far away from this looking like a hand-done piece," Roma says. Then she scanned the original and started to add color. "I selected the colors from a palette that can be adjusted to get a million choices, and I filled the spaces and shapes simply by pouring color into the selected area. The heart image called for warm reds and cool blues, so I sampled many combinations of those two, which proved easy to accomplish using Photoshop, especially since I knew I could revert to the original if I made a mistake.



## How do you label works created with computer programs?

Sometimes people use many programs—they may scan the art into Photoshop, do some work to it, then bring it into Illustrator and finish it. Most of the time, the program isn't listed, but you can mention the size and type of paper the work was printed on or the printer that was used if the print is hanging in a gallery.

## Plenty of programs

### Vector-based programs:

- Adobe Illustrator  
[www.adobe.com/products/illustrator/](http://www.adobe.com/products/illustrator/)
- CorelDRAW  
[www.corel.com](http://www.corel.com)
- Microsoft Expression Design  
[www.microsoft.com/expression/products/Overview.aspx?key=design](http://www.microsoft.com/expression/products/Overview.aspx?key=design)

- Xara Xtreme  
[www.xara.com/xtreme](http://www.xara.com/xtreme)

### Pixel-based painting programs:

- Adobe Photoshop  
[www.adobe.com/products/photoshop/family](http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop/family)
- Corel Painter  
[www.corel.com](http://www.corel.com)
- ArtRage  
[www.ambientdesign.com](http://www.ambientdesign.com)

- Corel Paint Shop Pro

[www.corel.com](http://www.corel.com)

### 3-D Software

- Houdini  
[www.sidefx.com](http://www.sidefx.com)
- Zbrush  
[www.pixologic.com/zbrush/features](http://www.pixologic.com/zbrush/features)
- MOI3D  
[moi3d.com](http://moi3d.com)
- Maxwell Render  
[www.maxwellrender.com](http://www.maxwellrender.com)

ing processes to achieve a singular vision. Rosen uses digital images copied from her earlier works, which she scans directly into the computer, or she works with images taken with cameras. To the digital copy she then adds artist's materials, such as paint, drawings and collage elements to create new surfaces and intriguingly beautiful images.

How does she transfer the digital copy? Rosen embeds computer manipulated digital images into gel "skins" (Golden clear tar gel and soft gel are favorites). To do this she coats the front of the digital reproduction with several layers of gel medium. Once those layers are dry, she soaks the paper backing in water and

then rubs the backing off. The digital skin can then be incorporated into various applications. (To see photographs of this process, go to [www.artistsnetwork.com/acrylic-gel-transfer](http://www.artistsnetwork.com/acrylic-gel-transfer).)

**Benefits:** These digital images can be added to artwork in layers under transparent textured surfaces or as transfers, which can then be drawn or painted on with traditional materials. Thus, one piece of art can have many different visual outcomes. Images can be printed on top of various surfaces using new Golden digital grounds. (To learn more, go to [www.goldenpaints.com/mixmoremedia/acgelskin.php](http://www.goldenpaints.com/mixmoremedia/acgelskin.php)).

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For this painting (*Untitled*, above), Rosen took a digital image of a previous painting; she embedded the digital image in a tar gel skin, then painted the reverse side with tinted soft gel, which acted as a glue to attach the skin to a Claybord panel. She then added more layers of tar gel, matte medium and iridescent paints to embellish the piece.

Rosen manipulated a digital photo of a dead seagull in Photoshop for (*Untitled*, at right), then made the print into a tar gel skin by painting the gel directly onto the ink-jet print in multiple layers. She painted the reverse side of the print with iridescent pearl interference paint before adhering it to the canvas.



*Self-Awareness Mechanism*  
(digital print) by Kevin Mack

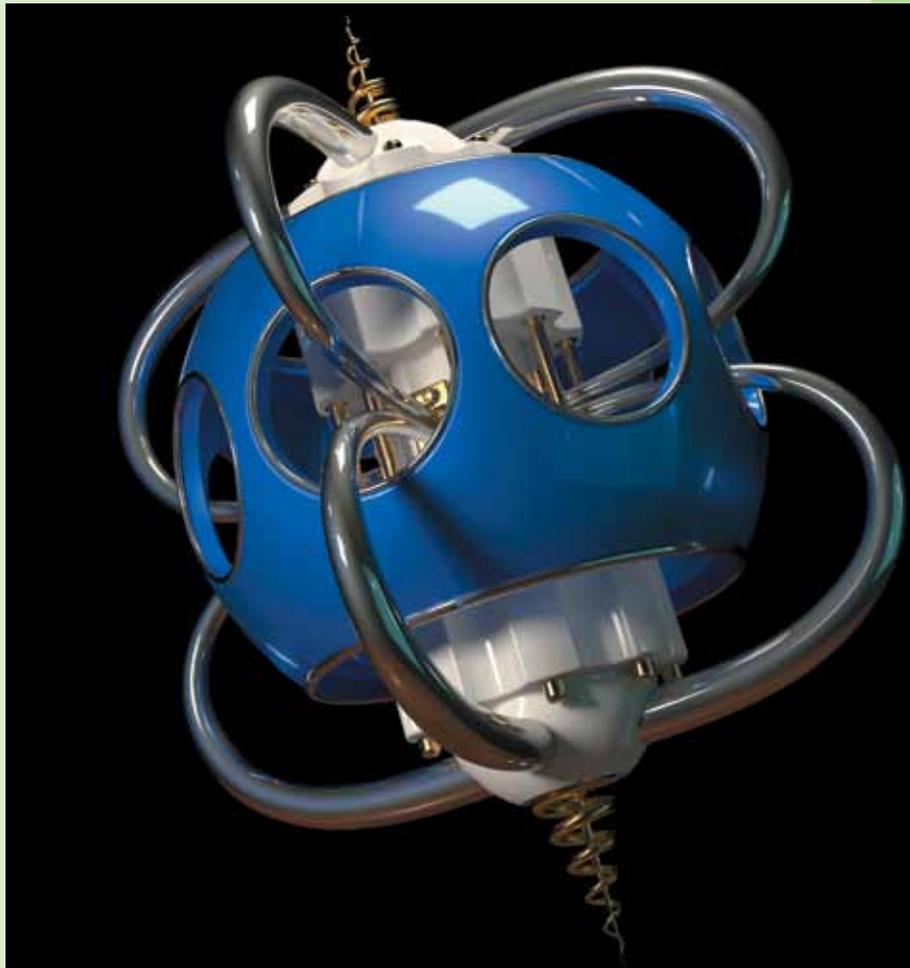
## Creating special effects in film and in prints

“The process begins with images of realistic but mostly unidentifiable objects,” says **Kevin Mack**. For his role as a director of visual effects in films, he has received many awards, including an Oscar for *What Dreams May Come* (1998); he also created stunning visual effects for *Apollo 13*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *The Fifth Element* and other films.

As for the works he shows in galleries, they begin as paintings in Photoshop, or as renderings of models created in 3D software such as Houdini, Zbrush, and MO3D.

“Often these images also serve as completed works themselves.

*Self-Awareness Mechanism* is an example of such a piece,” recounts Mack. “It’s an absurd imaginary device (reminiscent, perhaps, of a diving bell) that inspires a laugh, I hope, and perhaps some self-awareness. It was modeled using MO3D and Houdini. The materials, lighting and rendering were created using the Maxwell Renderer, which is a physically based renderer that simulates light, materials and optics at the spectral level for extremely realistic renderings.” —M.B.



## Meet the artists

- Ursula Roma  
[www.ursularoma.com](http://www.ursularoma.com)
- Merle Rosen  
[www.merlerosen.com](http://www.merlerosen.com)
- Q. Cassetti  
[www.qcassetti.com](http://www.qcassetti.com)
- Kevin Mack  
[www.kevinmackart.com](http://www.kevinmackart.com)
- Eunjung Hwang  
[www.eunjunghwang.com](http://www.eunjunghwang.com)

“My pursuit is psycho-active art ... with a bit of ironic humor. In other words, I like to make stuff that’s fun to look at.” Kevin Mack

## Using Adobe Illustrator to create a portrait

"I generally shoot photographs at a fairly high resolution to capture detail in the eyes," says **Q. Cassetti**. "In Photoshop I'll convert the image to CMYK (a color space format used by printers and graphic designers) and save out two or three approaches so I can contrast them: one being very bright and high-key; the others covering midtones and shadows.

"I bring all three 'exposures' into Adobe Illustrator and register them on different layers. I lock the layers and place a layer on top of the image. I draw the image (breaking the image into a highlight, a midtone or two and shadow) using vectors to create shapes. I build shape upon shape, adjusting colors, grouping shapes into new shapes. I edit and shift the color as I go. *Portrait of Mollie* (at right) was a test project in which I used a photograph I shot of a model lit with a single light source gelled with orange. The remarkable thing about the image is that the model was very expressive and adding the hat changed the dynamic of the image and her posture."

*Portrait of Mollie* (digital print)  
by Q. Cassetti



Q. Cassetti created this portrait of her daughter, *Portrait of Kitty* (above; digital print) from a photograph, using Adobe Illustrator.



"I build shape upon shape, adjusting colors, grouping shapes into new shapes." Q. Cassetti

### Step 3: Painting with Adobe Illustrator

As an illustrator and designer with no background in painting, Q. Cassetti (see opposite page) cites among her influences Hans Holbein and Ludwig Hohlwein, as well as American artists Charles Burns and Shephard Fairey. Cassetti creates portraits from photographs, using Adobe Illustrator. Her process is straightforward. She scans a photo into Photoshop, then brings it into Illustrator and creates several contrasting layers, which she then colorizes. Next she uses the pencil and brush tools to create and highlight details within the portrait. This process can take many hours to several days, depending on the amount of detail she wishes to retain for each image.

**Benefits:** You can transform a photograph into a vibrantly colored, expressive work of art that can suggest more about the subject's personality than a straightforward, realistically rendered painting. 🌐



## From drawing to digital print and animated movie

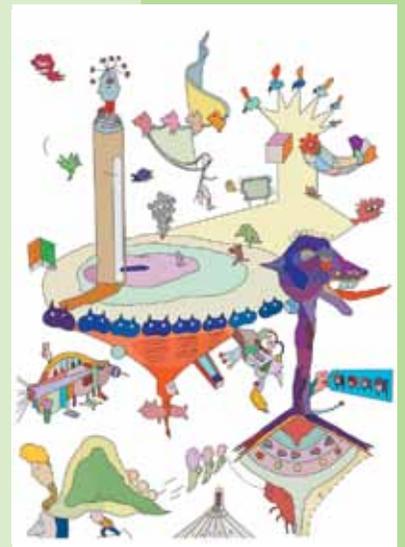
The pictures shown on this page are from a series of digital prints called *Future Creatures*, which are also being developed into an animation project with the same name.

**Eunjung Hwang's** process starts with a hand-drawn drawing or painting (mostly in pencil or in gouache on paper). The artist doesn't "consider the drawing as part of the process for the final work or digital print," but contends that the drawing and the print exist as "separate works."

"I scan or take a photo of the original drawing," she says. "Then I draw everything on the computer again—loosely basing my creation on the drawing. It's not that I scan the image and then retouch it; it's more that I re-create the image on the computer. For this process, I use a Wacom Tablet in the same way I use my pencils. When I first started this process, I used Painter (software), but now I use Flash. I like Flash because it's simple and easy to use; it takes up only a little file size; it creates vector-based graphics much more successfully than Painter does and, also important, I can create animations, not only images and prints."

Born in Seoul, Korea, Eunjung Hwang lives and works in New York City. She completed an MFA degree program in computer arts at the School of Visual Arts, New York, in 2002. Her animations and new media works have been shown at a number of exhibitions and festivals internationally, including Exhibit 3 (The Digital Hub, Ireland) and Impakt Festival 2003 (the Netherlands).

*Bubble* (above; digital print) and *Pigs* (below; digital print) by Eunjung Hwang



A traditionally trained painter turns to digital art, using 3D modeling to explore a fascination with flower and female forms.

# turning in virtual space

BY MCCRYSTLE WOOD



**W**HAT IN THE WORLD would compel a traditional artist, one long grounded in the archival milieu of painting, drawing and printmaking, to cross over to the dark side—to make digital art, despite the fact that it's excluded or rejected from exhibitions—fits into no category listed in the prospectus for competitive shows, and is, in fact, reviled by a majority of artists? Here's my story.

**ABOVE:** This is a slightly more literal female partial torso. The transparency and iridescence suggest a mystical or transcendent quality in *Femme* (digital image). Strange objects inside the body suggest the life experiences that we collect over time.

Way back in 1987, as I casually looked out the window of a friend's apartment, I noticed a spiral of smoke trailing into the sky.

A strange location for smoke, I thought, and then, making a quick cognitive map of the city, I realized it was coming from my own studio! By the time my friend and I got there, it was dark; there were huge flames, sparks in the sky,

firemen and trucks everywhere. I looked into the tall, arched windows of my beautiful studio on the sixth floor and saw flames. "That's my whole life up there" was all I could say to the reporter who had positioned herself next to me. The studio was gone—hundreds of paintings, sculptures, handmade tools, paint, rolls of canvas, stretchers—everything, gone. No place to work, no materials to work with. But not all was lost; I could still go home. There I had a Macintosh 512K computer (rudimentary by today's standards), with software called MacPaint with which I could create primitive images and then print them out with my dot-matrix printer in black and white, on roll paper with holes on the edges and perforations between the sheets. Hardly a medium to make art, you would say, but that was long ago.

Today my work is constructed digitally,

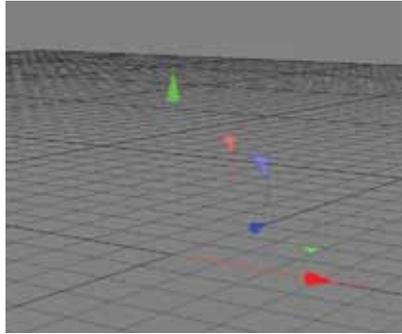
*Text continued on page 14*

# Creating Virtual Objects

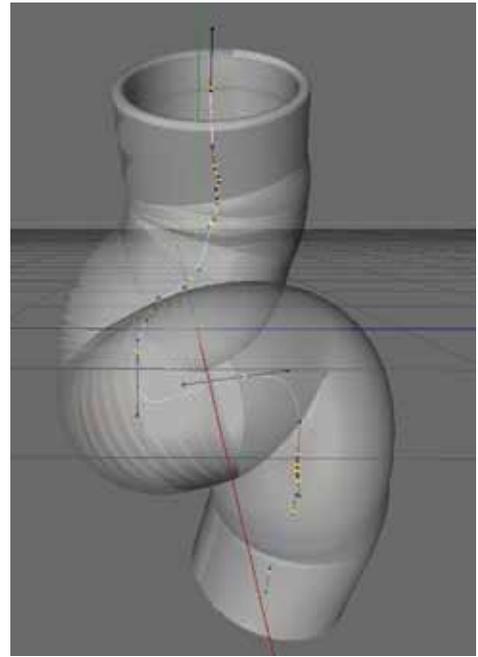
I usually begin with a body or a flower in mind. The body is always abstract and organically built; the flower is invented but may loosely resemble an existing flower. *Mademoiselle* began with the idea of a young woman. I wanted her to be lovely and sweet and pure with all the hope for the future. A primary visual resource for this and other works is the work of Maria Sibylla Merian, a German artist and naturalist (1647–1717) who documented the metamorphosis of a butterfly.

## Want to Try 3D Modeling?

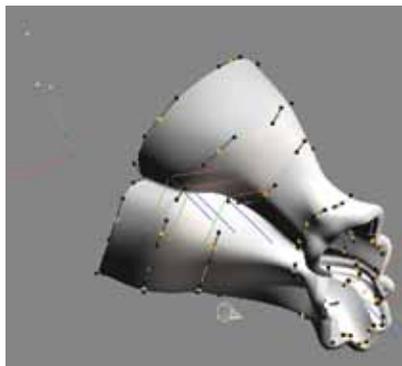
- **Google SketchUp** ([sketchup.google.com](http://sketchup.google.com)) is one of the easiest introductory software programs for 3D modeling. It's free, easy to download, has tons of tutorials and works on both **MAC** and **WIN**. It's possible to do impressive-looking work in 3D after just an hour or so by just playing around to learn the tools.
- What you'll need—hardware and software requirements: Google the phrase "Google SketchUp system requirements" to bring up the specs to improve performance.
- Take a class at a regional college. In one semester you'll have a complete introduction to the basic concepts, and you'll be able to create sophisticated images and animations.
- Read a book. A superb book with visual explanations, *Getting Started with 3D: A Designer's Guide to 3D & Illustration* by Janet Ashford, John Odam and Victor Gavenda, describes the entire process of 3D modeling from start to finish. The book was first published by PeachPit Press in 1998, and updated versions are available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
- Check out a few other industry-standard 3D modeling software titles: 3ds Max; Blender, FragMotion, Maya, Lightwave 3D, Softimage and ZBrush.



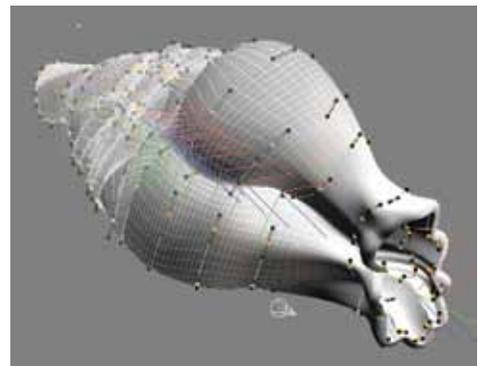
**1. The Axes:** When I begin a project, the screen is empty except for a grid that shows the three XYZ axes' directions. X is the up-and-down measurement; Y is the left-to-right measurement, and Z measures dimensions in and out from a center point. These are called *vector data*.



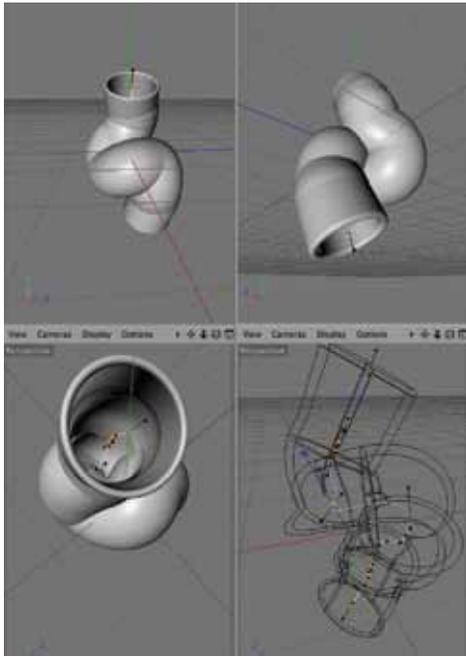
**2. Building the Flower:** Each part of the flower was built separately. I wanted the body to be a stem that curled around to indicate enough of the anatomy to show that it wasn't an actual plant, but I also didn't want to be too literal. The blue line with yellow dots is called a *spline path*. A circle is "swept" along the path to create the skin of the body shape.



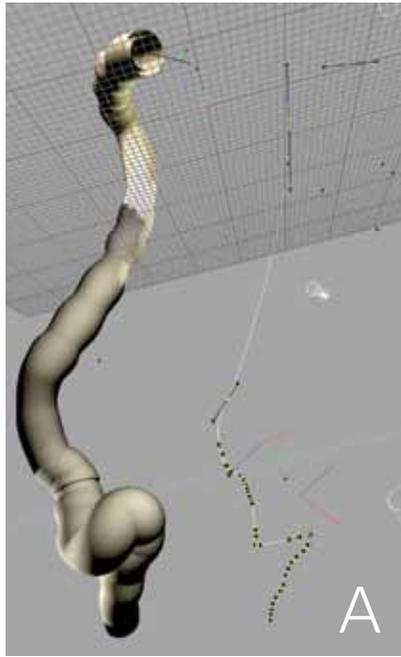
**5. Refining the Flower/Female:** The flower was built using a process called *lofting*. This process is a lot like knitting, adding to the form row by row as you would if you were working with yarn. In this case, each row is a spline path, and each spline path adds length and shape to define the skin of the form.



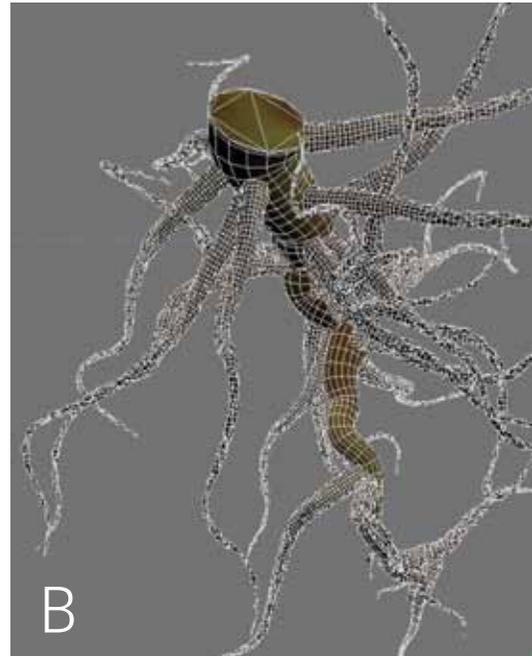
**6. Form Completed:** Here's the completed flower, showing both the rows of splines and the *wireframe* (or *mesh*).



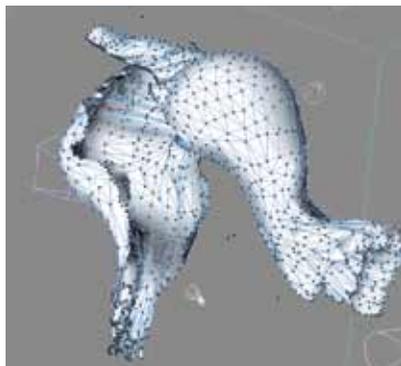
**3. Four Perspectives:** In a three-dimensional, virtual space, objects can be seen and moved from all directions. This picture shows four windows, each displaying a different perspective that I used to look at the scene. I work intuitively, quickly moving any view or window in order to work on a given shape.



**4. Building the Image:** Picture **A** shows the stem rendered and what the spline (the path that led to the artifact) would look like if it were showing. I duplicated the spline path and pulled it next to the neck so you can see what's actually inside the neck. The picture of the roots (**B**) shows that the roots are made the same way. Each one of the rootlike pieces has its own little spline path that I made. I told each one to begin at one size and end at the other size. In this case, I'm telling the pieces to be smaller and smaller. When you look at the forms, you can see a torso and other variations of a woman's body.



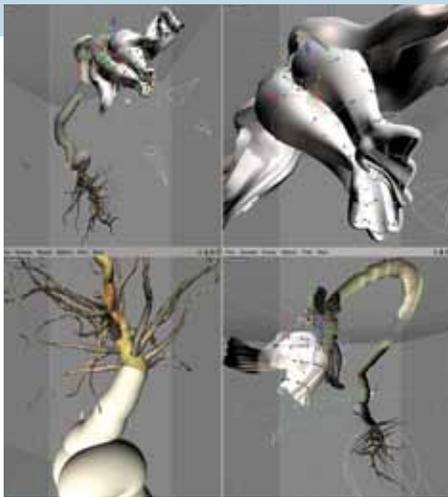
**7. Embellishing the Form:** This picture shows the flower, with *materials* (textures and colors) and lighting added. Getting to the final shape and lighting in this image took about three weeks and 45 iterations.



**8. Side Petals:** I wanted her side petals to look as if they were the remains of the outer cover of the flower before it blossomed. I placed the side petals carefully along either side of the flower to create the illusion that she's bursting out of her restraints. To make the side petals, I duplicated the original flower, broke it into two pieces and then manipulated the mesh with a *magnet tool* (just as you would with clay) to "sculpt" new shapes.



**9. Creating the Illusion:** I wanted the side petals to look degraded and old, so I created a material that uses an *alpha-channel*, which creates the illusion of holes in the surface. It's a special kind of material so I don't have to put actual holes into the mesh itself.



**10. Viewing the Scene:** Next I put lights and cameras into place. This “scene” used 12 lights and 11 cameras to get just the right angle for the flower. To do this I had to be able to view the scene from many different angles as I rotated it in space.



**11. Rendering the Scene:** After all of the “geometry” is complete, I made a *rendering* of the scene. Rendering is a process that converts all of the vector information into pixels. When the pixel image is opened in Photoshop, the only changes that can be made are the color of the pixels. (Only the 3D modeling scene allows objects in the scene to be moved in space.) With this step, I completed *Mademoiselle*.



ABOVE: *Mademoiselle* (digital image)

## What Software Do I Use?

I use a program called Maxon Cinema 4D ([www.maxon.net](http://www.maxon.net)), an industry-standard 3D and animation software that enables me to express my visual ideas more closely to what I have in mind than with any other medium. Of course, the 3D component renders the resulting work dramatically different from my earlier paintings and prints, but if I were to line up a sequence of every stage of my art (in the span of 35 years—including painting, printmaking and sculpture—you would see a high correspondence and resonance among the works. The imagery, color palette and conceptual ideas are consistent and have evolved together.

*Text continued from page 10*

but intuitively and visually—just like any other art. My digital work uses no photography or Photoshop. The software I use is called **3D modeling**, and the process is very much like making a sculpture. I build or construct objects that have all the dimensions and the three-dimensional mass of a real, physical object, except that they are **virtual objects** and they exist in virtual space. *Virtual* means that they aren't physical forms, but their shape, color and position are actually seen as numbers by the 3D program. The numbers are “under the hood,” so I usually ignore them.

### Sculpting in Space

In art school I became aware of the great beauty of the female form and saw similarities between the figure and flower forms. Now when I begin to create a flower, it often becomes a figure, or a figure becomes a flower, or sometimes they exist together in a single form. If you look carefully through one of my images you may see as many as five or six different female figures, usually as part of another form.

In my version of digital art, every element in the picture, from the smallest hair to the largest flower, is created as a **wireframe** object. The **wireframe mesh** functions—and even looks—much like clay in the real world. It can be stretched, squashed, twisted, extruded and manipulated intuitively and organically in any way. A finished work is composed of thousands of these objects. Each one has a name and an address that keeps track of its location in the virtual space that's called **XYZ space** (See the demonstration starting on page 38).

In 3D modeling I create the objects and the materials, which are like wallpaper and are “wrapped” onto the mesh objects; I add cameras and lights and move everything around in space—it's a little like lighting a stage set for a play. Often when making an object, I'll build as many as 30 different versions in order to get just the form I want. The process is a lot like sketching in the physical world, except that sketching is a lot quicker!

When the “scene” is finished—when I'm happy with the way it looks—a process called **rendering** takes place. This process takes all of the mathematical data and converts that data into pixels. Once the image is in pixels, it can't be manipulated in three-dimensional space; it's a fixed size and color. And, need I say, it's a work of art. ■

## Meet McCrystle Wood

“When I began making art again, after a studio fire and many intervening years, it was scary. The whole act felt new; learning a new craft (3D modeling) took time; the work looked different, and the response was mixed and confusing. Still, the act of making the work was joyful, so I persevered,” says McCrystle Wood, who earned a BFA and an MFA from Indiana University. A professor in the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning at the University of Cincinnati, Wood is the coordinator of the Foundation Studies program. To see more of her work, visit [www.wooloo.org/mccrystle](http://www.wooloo.org/mccrystle).



**ABOVE:** Not all of my works include a flower, but all include one or more suggestions of female and male forms. In *La Pomme* (French for *The Apple*, digital image), the female is floating, upside down in the upper right part of the form. The spiral is suggestive of a sense of endlessness or maybe of rebirth and renewal.

CHAPTER TWO

## Getting Started

**W**hile you don't have to be thoroughly impressive or entirely competent, you'll get the most out of your Wonderland experience with us if you've had some basic training in Adobe Photoshop. If you're new to Photoshop, you may want to start with an online workshop or a class at your local community college. If you're standing at a bookstore wondering if your community even has a college, do yourself a favor and grab a neighboring book on the shelf that teaches the basics of Photoshop.

Once you've cozied up to your digital paintbrushes and become friendly with your image editing tools, you'll be good to go. Following are the basic supplies you'll need for your trip into Wonderland. And should you get lost along the way, we've provided a reference guide to the basic terms and techniques we'll be using.

*If Wishes Were Wings*

## Technique Guide

Our reference guide, located on page 18, includes official Adobe Photoshop terms and menu items in this guide, as well as our own pet names for in-house tricks and tips.

## Primary Tools

While not all of the following tools will be utilized every time you sit down to create a digital wonder, most of them will become your bosom buddies as they prove to be useful again and again.

### Photoshop

Most of our techniques can be handled by CS3, though for optimum performance you'll want to work with CS5. If you're working with Photoshop Elements, you'll have to upgrade because most of our tutorials will not be compatible with that version of the program.

### Digital Camera

While not entirely necessary, you're sure to get a lot of mileage out of a good digital camera. We use a variety of them, and some of the cheaper models will give you exactly what you need as a basis of an interesting piece of art, so don't get sidetracked by all the bells and whistles on the latest models. (Unless of course the salesperson at your local electronics shop is totally cute and you're in need of a bit of eye candy. If that's the case, by all means, shop till you drop.)

### Scanner

A good scanner is an essential element if you want to work with old ephemera or personal effects. While there are many projects you can enjoy that utilize existing stock imagery or other copyright-free digital images available online, a scanner allows you access to just about any piece of intrigue you find lying around your house. A piece of old fabric? Scan it and turn it into a headdress on a monkey. That antique

doily? The scanner will capture all its detail. A digital camera can also give you similar results, but a scanner often allows you to capture more detail with less visual noise.

### Ephemera

When we refer to ephemera, we're specifically addressing interesting bits of papyry things: ticket stubs, maps, photos, theater programs, lunch bags, crumbled remnants of wrapping paper. These will not only add decorative design elements to your art, but you can build them up layer by layer to create atmosphere and texture.

### Stock Imagery

Whether you use stock photography, illustration or vector graphics, much of your finished piece will likely contain stock imagery, at least for the exercises in this book. Old books (printed before 1923) and printed material are our number one source for stock imagery, but we also use photography sites and other online resources for our graphics.

### Digital Textures

Reading of this book, and your subsequent tour through Digital Wonderland, will assure one thing: Textures are your new best friend! We'll be pulling from a number of sources to create our own custom textures, but many can be found free of charge on stock art and photography sites. You can also use your own photography as the basis of intriguing textures you'll use repeatedly in your projects.

### Paints, Papers and Pens

If you want to use your new Photoshop skills on top of a manual collage or other piece of art, you'll want to start with these basics to make your foundational piece of art. There are plenty of books and online tutorials about making collages with these traditional materials. You'll use your scanner or digital camera to get these collages to the screen.

## Something to Say

Few of our pieces come from a doodle. Fewer still come from a preconceived notion of what the finished piece will look like. The majority of our pieces, and certainly the strong ones, start with an emotion or intention. Silas or I will have an idea and begin shaping that idea with mood and atmosphere on the digital page. We move elements around until we achieve the right feeling. Whether we use verbal (words in the design) or nonverbal (images only) communication, our best art has something to say.

Just like a great story brought to the screen through motion pictures, the actors, scenery, music and lighting are all important, but it's the dialogue in most cases that brings that story home. What's your story at this present moment? What do you want to convey? Who is your viewer? These are questions that, when answered, or even contemplated, can provide the biggest source of inspiration and guidance for your art.

### Sense of Wild Abandon

The most thrilling things happen when we voyage into the unknown with a sense of adventure. Digital art, unlike many of the traditional manual art forms, allows for radical experiments that can be replicated or erased in a matter of moments, without "ruining" your canvas. Let these new freedoms create in you a reckless sense of wonder and wild abandon. You cannot go wrong because every new turn, even if it was one you hadn't intended on taking, will reveal new and surprising creative horizons. Lighten up! Stay loose! Welcome surprises. And if you absolutely insist on sticking to your original vision, there's always the "undo" tool! We have a banner hanging above our studio door with a quote from Scott Adams that reads, "Creativity is making mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep."

*Love Is*



# LOVE

is the Creator's gospel to mankind;  
a volume bound in rose-leaves, clasped  
with violets, and by the beaks of  
hummingbirds printed with peach  
juice on the leaves of lilies.

Herman Melville

# Technique Guide

Throughout this book, we refer to many basic Adobe Photoshop terms but also mix in a few of our own. You may know some of these tools by other names, so we've written the following technique guide to establish many of the names of the tools we'll be using.

## Adjustment Layers

Adjustment Layers are basically nondestructive layers that contain the effects of the Layer Blending Modes (see right). This allows you to add an Adjustment Layer without physically changing the image data. Therefore you can go back in at any time and change the parameters of the Adjustment Layer without causing loss of image material or decline of image quality.

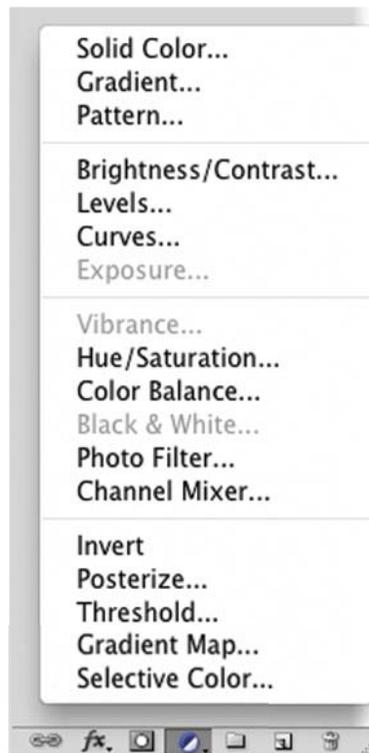
Think of it as a tinted transparency that floats on top of your image and can be removed or altered without permanently affecting the underlying picture.

To apply Adjustment Layers, go to the layer palette and click on the symbol of the black-and-white half circles on the very bottom.

## Layer Blending Modes

These are modes that will change how a layer will relate to (or visually mix with) the next underlying layer.

The best way to understand this tool is by using it on various surfaces. Often the result is unpredictable, which adds an element of surprise to the creative process. You activate/change the Layer Blending Mode in the drop-down menu at the top of the layer palette.



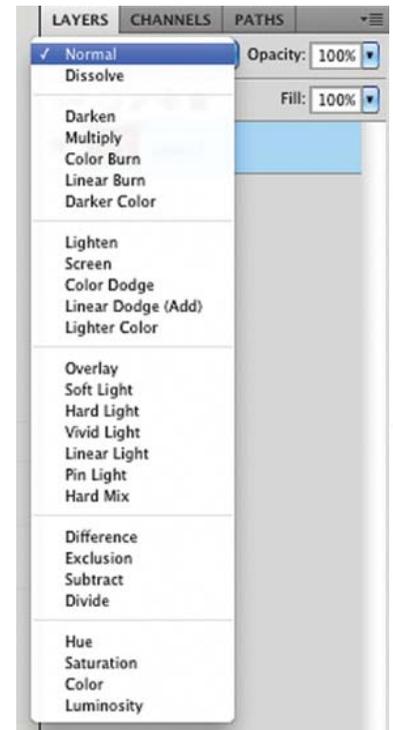
*Adjustment Layers*

## Color Tinting

Color Tinting is another term we made up that simply describes a process to affect the overall color tint. (For more on this technique, see "Applying Textures," page 32 step 4.)

## Drop Shadow

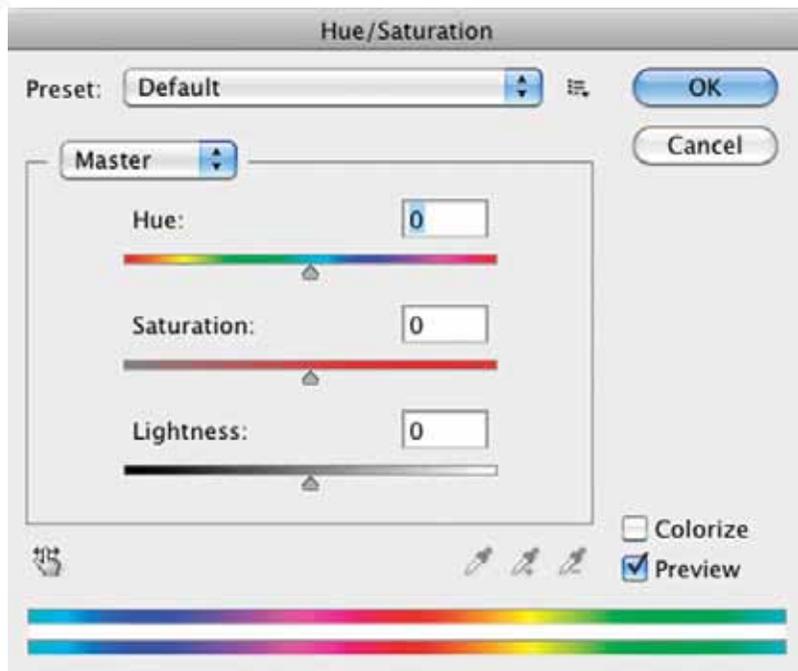
The Drop Shadow in Photoshop terminology is a layer style that can be found via the menu: **Layer > Layer Style > Drop Shadow**. It creates a shadow behind a chosen element, so



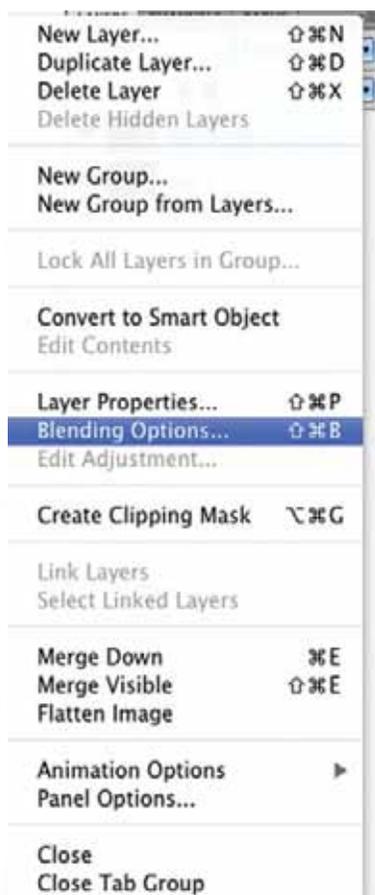
*Layer Blending Modes*

as to make it appear more realistic. It is a very frequently used effect but, without some hand alteration, can appear flat rather than three-dimensional.

See page 20 to view the Layer Style menu. See the tutorial on page 131 for a technique on how to achieve a more realistic Drop Shadow. There are other helpful tips in the typography section beginning on page 122.



Hue/Saturation



Layer Blending Options context menu

## Rough Cut and Fine Cut

These are not Photoshop terms, but we use them to describe options for cutting an element away from its environment. Rough Cut refers to a quick cut out of an element. The edges stay rough. This is a good option if you just want to see, for example, how a particular figure will look against a background you've created. You may place it here, or move it there, or discard it altogether. It would be a waste of time to put a lot of effort into cutting it out properly just to find out you might not end up using it after all. Fine Cut is the step of cutting out an element precisely, once you know you want to keep the element and use it in your project.

For a Fine Cut, you'll most likely use the following tools: Quick Selection tool, Magic Wand, Pen Tool and Lasso, but most of all, the Masking Mode. If you want to learn more specifics about the mentioned tools, please consult your Photoshop manual or the Help option in the program.

## Layer Blending Options

Not to be confused with Layer Blending Modes! The function of the settings in this window will help control what portions of the underlying (or current layer) will become transparent. There are a multitude of options in this dialog box, but our main focus within the parameters of this book will be the transparency, which is accomplished by moving the sliders back and forth. This is described in more detail in our first tutorial on page 23.

You can get to the Layer Blending Options by clicking on the far-right

## Golden Ratio

The composition of an image always consists of two or more elements (or areas of the image) standing in a particular relationship to each other. The Golden Ratio is a term used in graphic illustration stating that the ultimate weight distribution in any composition is a ratio of 2:3. We elaborate on this on page 124.

## Hue/Saturation

This tool can be found in the menu: **Image > Adjustments > Hue/Saturation.**

With it you can change the saturation of colors and also make very drastic color alterations. For best results, use it on an Adjustment Layer (see page 18) in order to maintain maximum flexibility on any future alterations. Changes made with this function via the main menu are permanent, while the Adjustment Layer can be changed any time later in the process.

little context-menu symbol on the upper gray bar of the layer palette. Or find it under **Layer > Layer Style > Blending Options**.

The actual window looks like the image to the right.

## Layer Opacity

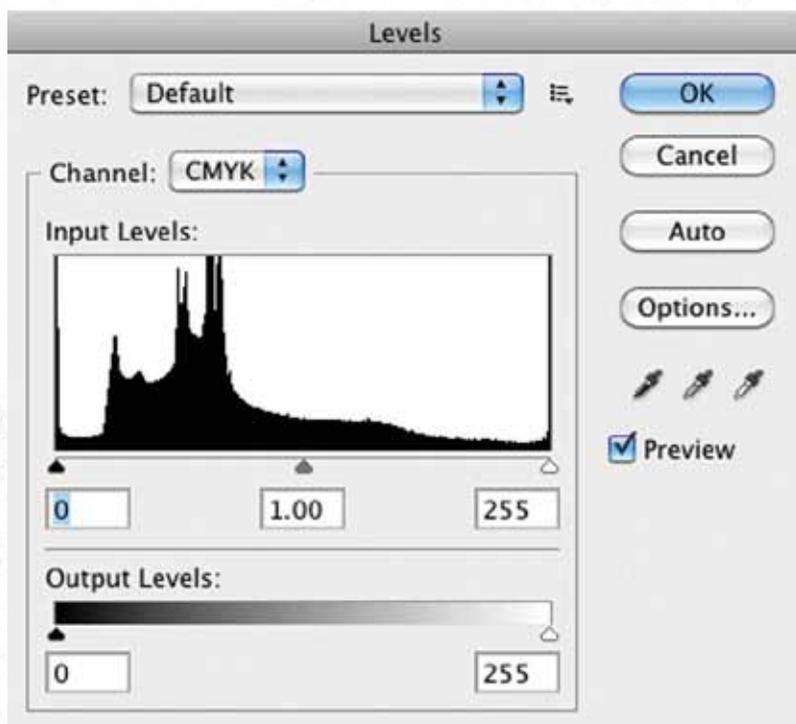
A layer's overall opacity determines to what degree it obscures or reveals the layer beneath it. A layer with 1 percent opacity appears nearly transparent, whereas one with 100 percent opacity appears completely opaque. Use the opacity slider in the top right corner of the layer palette.

## Levels

This tool allows you to change the balance of light versus dark in your image. There are many ways in there to lighten or darken a picture or to take the depth out of the black areas. Most of the time you will use the middle slider to simply alter the balance of the weight between light and dark. (This tool is also best used on an Adjustment Layer).



*Layer Style menu*



*Levels menu*

## Magic Wand

The Magic Wand tool lets you select a consistently colored area (for example, an object surrounded by blue sky) without having to trace its outline. You specify the selected color range, or tolerance, relative to the original color you chose.

## Masking

The Quick Mask Mode allows you to paint any area red (temporarily) with any brush size to specify areas you want to turn into a selection. It is often the most effective way to create a selection with maximum control over the exact edges.

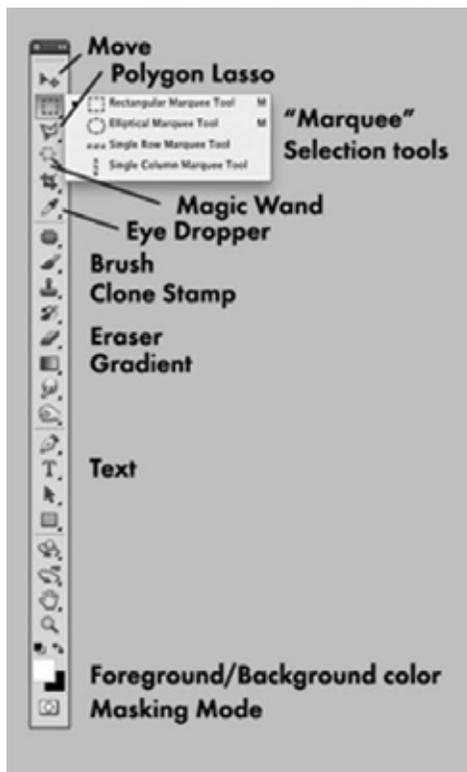
To use this feature, turn the Quick Mask Mode on and off by using the tool on the very bottom of the tool palette.

When you return to the normal mode, you will see that the previously painted areas are now a selection, ready to be copied or pasted or otherwise edited.

## Quick Selection

The Quick Selection tool makes a selection based on color and texture similarity when you click or click-drag the area you want to select. The mark you make doesn't need to be precise, because the Quick Selection tool automatically and intuitively creates a border.

Click or click-drag over the area that covers the range of colors in the object you want to select, and then release the mouse button.



Tools menu





## Tools of the Trade for Play

Your sense of adventure and willingness to be surprised are the best tools for play. Playing is all about discovery, and for that we must yield control to the muse. Sometimes it's easy to play. We wake up feeling frisky and can't wait to get to the studio. Other days we need a prompt. Or a smoking-hot branding iron.

My friend Walter relayed a story from his early days as a professional fashion-magazine photographer in the 1950s. He showed up for his first day of work, and his boss handed him a pair of black high heels. "Photograph these and make them appear alluring." Walter went away and did just that, handing in his results the next day. His boss looked at the glossies and responded, "Well done. Now do it again from a different angle." Walter found this to be a strange request, but he did as he was told. Again, the following morning, his photos earned a "well done" and another directive to shoot again. This scenario repeated itself for the first two months of his job, until he felt he knew these shoes intimately—too intimately. He was seeing them in his sleep, in waking visions, and it was driving him crazy. When he finally blew up at his boss, saying he couldn't take it another day, he was rewarded with a smile. "So now you're ready." He was given a fashion shoot with a live model the next day, but now recalls that the tedium of those two months taught him more about photography than anything that followed in his forty-year career as a professional photographer. "It drove me mad, but it taught me to see creatively."

While I'm not going to assign sixty days of repetitious assignments, I am going to suggest a few exercises for courting the muse and a few for keeping your artistic eyes seeing creatively.

### Respond to What If

Select a handful of digital elements; start with twenty or so. Load them into Photoshop and forbid yourself, for the sake of playfulness, access to any other elements. (This works equally well with a manual collage; just gather your ephemera and place it in your work space. Turn your back on all other elements.) Create a background for your elements that pleases you. Now arrange the elements one at a time. Perhaps use some and not others. Twist them, turn them, scatter them, but allow each layer to be built upon the previous layer. The idea is to let each element tell you what's next until you feel the piece is finished.

Note: Sometimes this experiment ends with surprising and delightful results. Other times you'll want to use the results to line your birdcage. However, the emphasis should be placed not on the result, but on what you learned along the way. Every piece, every step is teaching us something. If it's not, you're not taking risks.

### Do Over

Once you've created a piece you love, play with deconstruction. Save the original, and then open it in Photoshop and tear it apart. Create three other pieces using only elements or layers from the original piece. Remember those paintings by Andy Warhol that showed the portrait of a famous person in various color palettes? It's almost as if Andy couldn't decide which color set was best, so he found a way to use them all at once. Well, this is like that, only you're not trying to do one piece in different colors, you're instead using the basics of your first piece to answer the question "What else might this be?"

### Quick-Fire Experiments

Set your alarm clock or kitchen timer for one hour, or thirty minutes, or ten. It's up to you what time frame you

choose, but we've found one hour or less to be ideal. Any more than that, and you're more tempted to edit. During your block of time, create willy-nilly. Let yourself go. Listen to the canvas and what it has to say as it evolves. The idea here is to make spur-of-the-moment choices and to build one spontaneous movement upon another to see what emerges in a short amount of time. We're tricking the brain into right-side enthusiasm and attempting to muffle the critical left side of the brain that wants to criticize or edit. It's all about the riff!

### One Color Family

Choose a handful of elements in one color family. All reds and oranges, or all blues and purples. Perhaps black and gray. For this one piece, play only with one color family. Stripping away the possibilities of deep contrast forces our eyes to see differently.

### Two Least Favorite Colors

A friend of mine told me a story from his college years. One of his professors asked each student to write down their two least favorite colors to work with. Once all students had written down the colors and turned them in, the professor gave them their next assignment: Create a painting using only those two colors. There are gifts waiting for us inside our resistance. Try this out. Work with your two least favorite colors and watch what arises as you loosen your resistance.

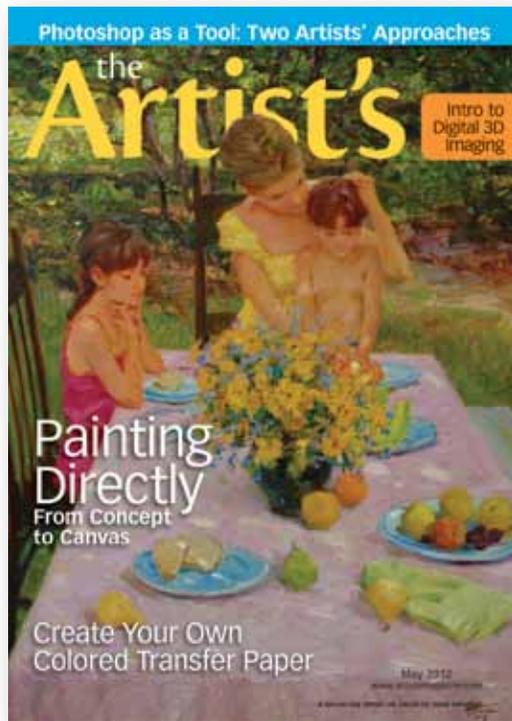
### Storybook Character

This is one of my favorites! Find a face that inspires you. It can be from an old photograph, a Victorian painting or a snapshot of you. Take it into Photoshop and create a fairy tale around it. Will this be Sleeping Beauty? Prince Charming? Little Bo Peep? Little Boy Blue? Whoever this figure is, tell the story using visuals, but don't tell the story with environment. Create a body, a dress or a headdress that tells the viewer who this character is. (When we played with this experiment, the result was Alice in Wonderland, as seen on page 8).



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