

CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW

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THIS ISSUE : TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Converting photos to classic artwork styles using the latest digital software

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Welcome to **CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW**

A new online magazine project...

I have always enjoyed testing out new graphics software and used to create review pages on the Cybia website at one time. This proved to be quite a popular section but as I got sidetracked with other projects I found that I had less time to continue writing reviews, so I had to drop that section of the site during the last overhaul.

As a result I'd been feeling out of touch with all the latest software releases over the past year or two! So I decided to not only make the effort to bring myself back up to speed with things, but also share my findings with other software users in the form of this free online magazine.

Please bear with me while this publication finds its feet during the first few issues. The reviews will be pretty simple and straightforward to begin with, but the aim will be to introduce more in-depth showcases and tutorials in future too. I also hope to bring you some exclusive freebie links and special offer discounts on the products reviewed, so keep watching!

I am also looking for experienced users to write reviews, tutorials and other articles for future issues, so if you would like to be involved then please get in touch, thank you.

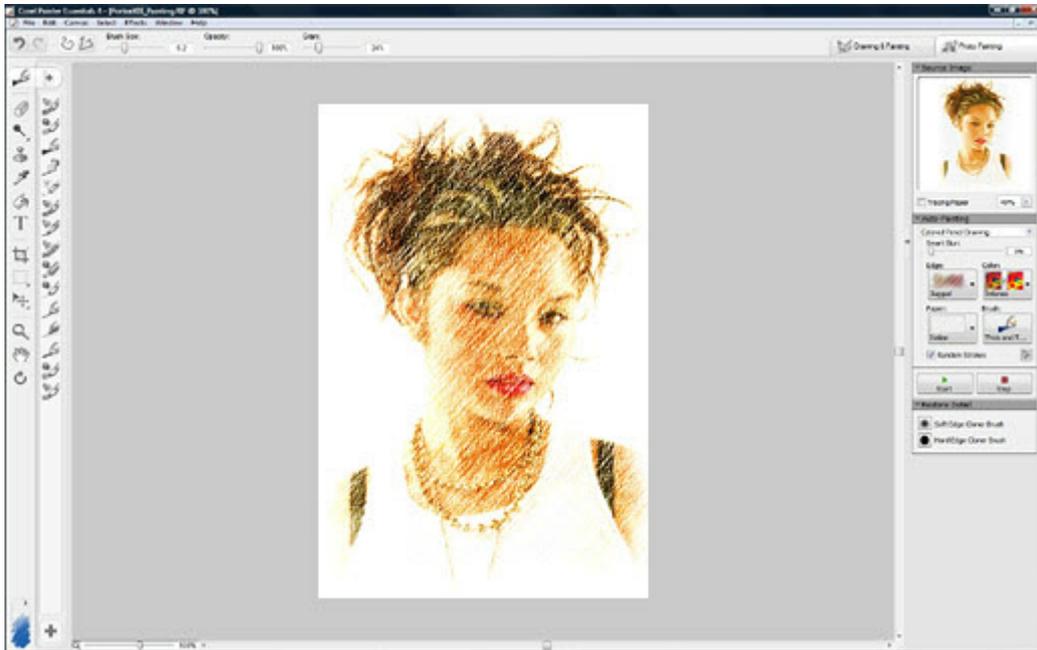
I hope you enjoy this first issue. Be sure to let me know what you think as I always welcome feedback, thank you.

Steve Upham
Editor



Painter Essentials 4

A basic version of Corel's professional paint application, with some nice media effects...



Although this software has inherited some fine freehand painting features from its big brother, Painter, it is the media conversion tools that are of interest for the purpose of this review.

Essentials offers a selection of preset styles that will automatically convert your photos to a more hand-painted look. It claims to create a painting from a photo in just 3 easy steps - although you can spend a lot more time than that adjusting all the settings to achieve the style you want.

This is one of the new breed of apps that doesn't just apply a standard filter effect to your images, but *repaints* it using thousands of individual brush strokes. It's an impressive step forward.

So how easy is it to use? It's pretty straightforward actually, so users who may be inexperienced with graphics software should be able to pick up the basics in no time. There is also scope for tweaking the styles past their preset values, so the program should also appeal to those who are a bit more savvy with this kind of software. Having said that, you should remember that this is a cheap

and cheerful app and not aimed at the professional user. Although that shouldn't stop anyone from using it to great effect for certain tasks.

You get a decent selection of media styles and brushes, from oils and acrylic to watercolour and pencil drawing. I found that the oil styles in particular were quite effective and capable of producing good results, with a bit of experimenting.

I did notice a few odd quirks when opening and saving files, which I felt spoiled an otherwise smooth workflow. But overall the program worked very well and produced some nice results. The interface is well designed, with all the tools and options organized for ease of use, so there's not a lot you can say bad about this software really - especially at the price.

Painter Essentials is a useful app to add to your creative toolkit and worth considering if you are looking for a quick and easy way to produce natural media effects in your work. Use it by itself, or integrate into your creative workflow alongside other graphics software.

AT A GLANCE

PRICE

\$99.99

(but watch for offers)

PLATFORM

Windows / Mac

FEATURES

Media Styles...

Oils

Watercolour

Pastel

Pencil drawing
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?

Yes, 60 day trial

COMPANY

Corel

WEBSITE

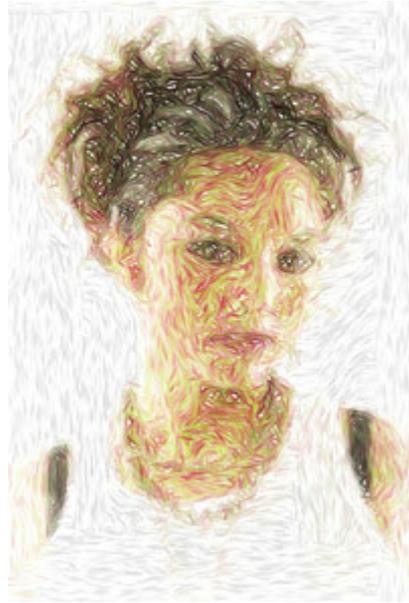
corel.com

*"Useful app to add to
your creative toolkit"*

BUY NOW

**CREATIVE
SOFTWARE REVIEW**



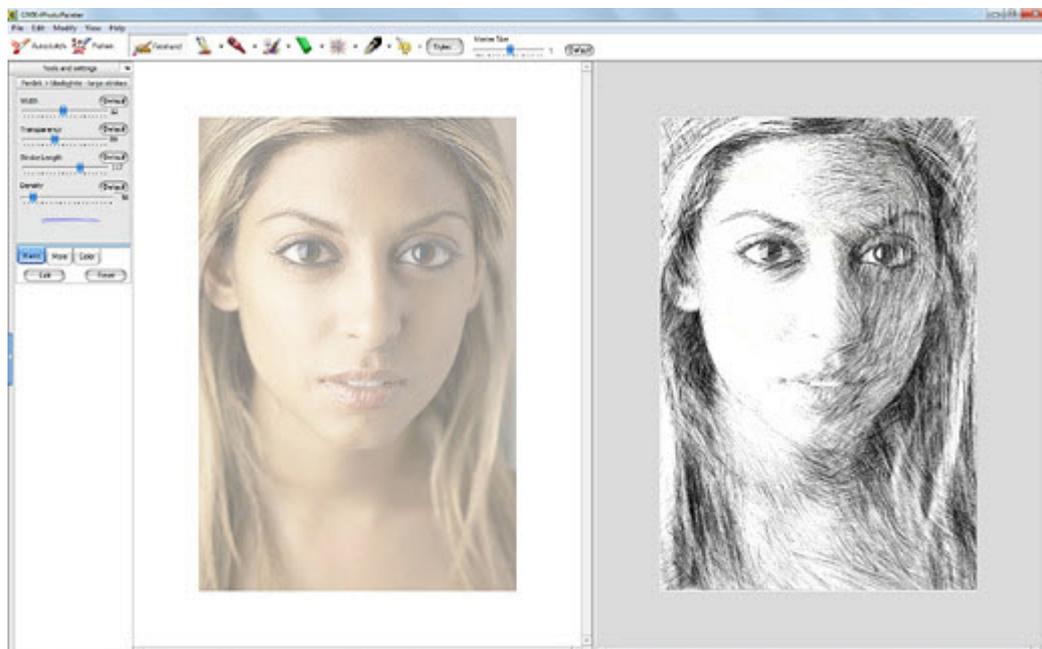




Painter Essentials 4 - Classic Oil Painting Style

GMX-PhotoPainter 1.1

Transform your photos into pieces of art using a variety of natural media styles...



PhotoPainter concentrates its talents on providing a variety of original ways to help convert your photos into pieces of artwork. Don't let the clean, uncluttered interface fool you, as this is a very powerful application in the right hands!

The thing that makes this program unique is the brilliant way it allows you to paint using the different freehand modes. The *Autosketch* option helps the strokes follow contours in the image as if by magic. In *Pattern* mode it paints in a more set pattern style. In *Freehand* mode it lets you set the direction and length of the brushstroke, which is probably most impressive of all. In order to really know how this works in practice you have to try it for yourself.

You can also let the app do the hard work for you and apply any of the styles to the whole image, without any painting by hand. This is a useful way to start an effect, then you can brush over any areas that you want to tweak further. This feature also allows you to render the final output to a higher resolution if required, which means you can work on a fairly

low-res image and then let the software repaint it for you at a larger size later.

There are a good selection of natural media styles provided, ranging from oil and watercolour to pastel and crayon. One of my particular favourites has to be the pen & ink style.

You are not limited to just using one setting at a time either, which is very useful as it allows you to start with large brushes and then increase the detail in certain areas as you progress. Or mix several different media styles. This gives much more control over the painting, rather than just applying one set style and/or brush size to the whole image.

The brush feature is surprisingly fast too, considering the complexity of how it seems to work. Plus you can modify the settings to create an almost endless variety of different style presets.

This is a brilliant piece of artistic software and the original way it works does set it apart from the other apps in this issue. So even if you do already have similar programs, this is definitely one to consider adding to your kit.

AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$59.00

PLATFORM
Windows / Mac

FEATURES
Autosketch mode
Pattern mode
Freehand mode
Media styles...
Oil
Crayon
Watercolour
Pastel
Bristle
Pen & Ink
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes

COMPANY
Gertrudis Graphics

WEBSITE
gertrudisgraphics.com

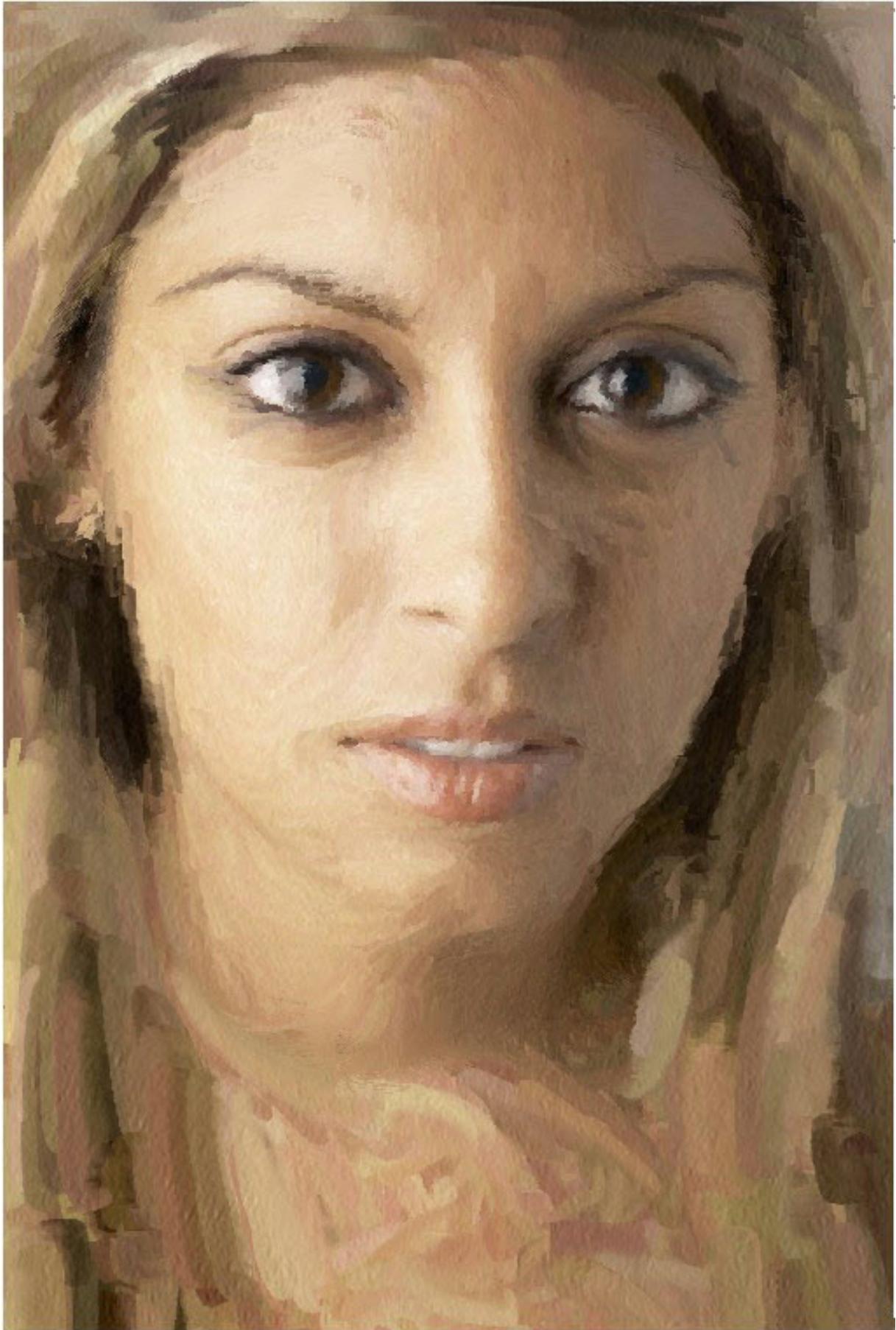
"A brilliant piece of artistic software"

BUY NOW (WIN)

BUY NOW (MAC)

CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW





GMX-PhotoPainter - Mixed Size Brushes



GMX-PhotoPainter - Pen & Ink Style

FotoSketcher 2.0

Turn your pictures into artistic masterpieces with this fantastic free application...



FotoSketcher is not only one of the most exciting programs of its type, but it's also FREE! It provides a solid collection of natural media styles, from pencil sketching to various painting effects. While some of the settings may not be as comprehensive as the other apps in this issue, they do provide you with a good range of options which are capable of excellent results.

The black and white pencil sketch preset is a favourite of mine, along with the recent addition of a vintage photo setting (shown in the screenshot above). Watercolour and oils also produce fine effects, plus the brushstrokes preset *repaints* the image with individual strokes like in some of the commercial apps.

Another great feature is the ability to add a frame and mount automatically to the final image. There are only a small selection of frame presets included at the moment (I am hoping that future versions will add even more!) but they do work really well. And you can change the mount colour and size too, which makes it very versatile..

You can also add a texture overlay to create a real canvas look to the painting. Plus you can choose to soften the image for extra effect, which works well with the pencil settings in particular. And you can add text as a title or signature too..

There is also a basic dialog box for modifying the source image before applying any effects. This is useful for tweaking the brightness, contrast, saturation and blurring/sharpening, without having to open the image in another graphics app first.

For those of you who enjoy being able to choose different styles for the interface, FotoSketcher comes with numerous *skins* to choose from, which is a nice touch I think. The screenshot above shows the default *Office 2010 Black* skin.

Overall this is a well thought out piece of software. I cannot praise this application enough. Not just because it is free, but because of the quality of effects it can produce. I've been using this regularly ever since I first downloaded it and I look forward to seeing how it continues to develop in future versions.

AT A GLANCE

PRICE

Free

PLATFORM

Windows

FEATURES

Enhance image
Texture option
Frame & mount
Add text
Interface skins
Media styles...
Pencil sketch
Oil pastel
Pen & Ink
Watercolour
Oils
Brushstrokes
Cartoon
Vintage photo
and more

COMPANY

David Thoiron

WEBSITE

fotosketcher.com

"I cannot praise this application enough"

DOWNLOAD

CREATIVE
SOFTWARE REVIEW





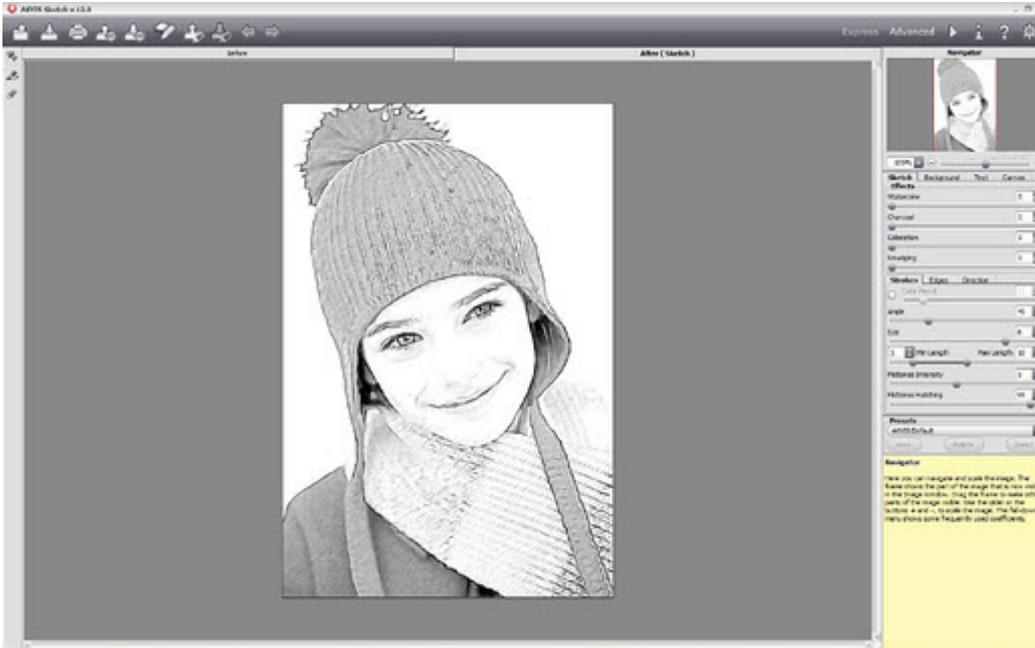
FotoSketcher - Cartoon Style



FotoSketcher - Pen & Ink Style

Artwork 5 & Sketch 12

Available as both standalone versions or plug-in filters for Photoshop users...



Although these are two separate apps, I thought to review them together as they are both natural media converters and work well with each other. In fact, I felt that these effects should really have been combined into one product as they feel a little sparse on features (especially when compared to some of the other software in this issue) and would be a much stronger product as one.

Having said that, these are definitely good quality programs. They both share the same clean and professional interface and are fairly straightforward to use. Akvis have a good range of useful tools for the digital artist and photographer, all of which work well together. They also have the benefit of being available as both standalone editions or plug-in versions, for those who prefer to work inside their favourite image editor such as Photoshop. Plus both Windows and Mac users can enjoy these effects, they are available for both operating systems.

The Artwork product concentrates on painted effects, such as watercolour and oils, although the boundaries blur a bit

with the inclusion of pen & ink, as I would have expected that to be more part of the Sketch application. And even more confusing is finding a watercolour option in Sketch! As I said earlier, to me it would have made more sense to merge these two programs into one, as that would create a more fully-featured product.

I did really like the default pencil mode in the Sketch program though (shown in the screenshot above). It produced some very nice results on all the images I tested with it, so if you needed to use this effect a lot in your work then it would be worth the price of the product just for this one feature!

I can't say I warmed to the Artwork application as much though. It's a handy addition to use alongside Sketch, but I don't think I would purchase it by itself as there are better paint effects around.

I also noticed there weren't many presets either, to help users get started. It would be nice to see these expanded in future versions. But even with the issues mentioned in this review, these products are still worth a look.

AT A GLANCE

PRICE (each)
\$72.00 (Home)
\$129.00 (Deluxe)
\$189.00 (Business)

PLATFORM
Windows / Mac

FEATURES
Media styles...
Oil
Watercolour
Comics
Pen & Ink
Linocut
Lead pencil
Charcoal
Pastel
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes, 10 day trial

COMPANY
Akvis

WEBSITE
akvis.com

"These products are worth a look"

BUY ARTWORK

BUY SKETCH

CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW





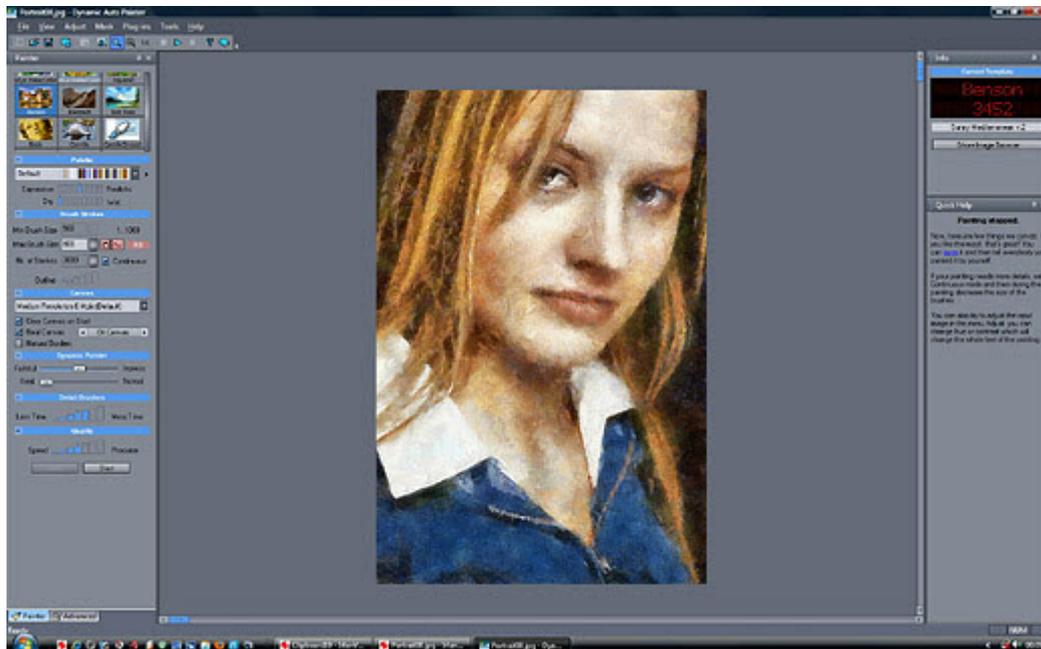
Akvis Sketch & Artwork - Example Styles



Akvis Sketch - Example Style

Dynamic Auto-Painter 2.5

At last, a convincing way to replicate traditional hand-painted styles ...



Dynamic Auto-Painter has to be one of the most impressive applications I have come across in a long time! Even though there are now other similar apps competing with this program, this one stands out for me because of the sheer quality of the output. Nothing else even comes close to replicating the traditional painting styles of this software.

If you want to create your own Monet or Van Gogh style piece of artwork, for example, then it's as simple as loading your photograph, selecting the preset, then clicking a button to start the process. Watch in amazement as the program automatically *repaints* the image in front of your eyes, stroke by stroke! I have to admit this blew me away the first time I saw it and still impresses me how it manages to achieve this effect.

As I mentioned earlier, the quality of output is second to none. Not only the amount of detail in the brushstrokes, but also how well it replicates the style of the *Old Masters*. This isn't just a quick filter effect, the program actually does paint the picture for you, based on the settings you

choose. And you are not limited to the supplied presets, as you can modify them extensively or even create your own from scratch. You can spend a serious amount of time just experimenting with all the settings, which makes this a very powerful and versatile application.

The final image can be painted at four different resolutions, from 2.5 to 16 megapixels. You will get a different level of detail with each setting, with the highest option being the best quality and suitable for printing at poster size. In fact I have had a few large prints done of images created using this software and they turned out really well, so I can personally recommend it!

This is definitely one of my favourite pieces of software purchased in recent years. Mediachance make some fantastic programs that not only look great, but create top quality effects and at very affordable prices too. I urge you all to check out their website and download the demos. I will be reviewing more of their products in future issues, so please keep watching.

AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$49.95

PLATFORM
Windows

FEATURES
Media styles...
Cezanne
Monet
Sargent
Klimt
Sunflowers
Tempera
Watercolour
Realism
Pencil
Aquarell
Chalk
Illustrator
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes

COMPANY
Mediachance

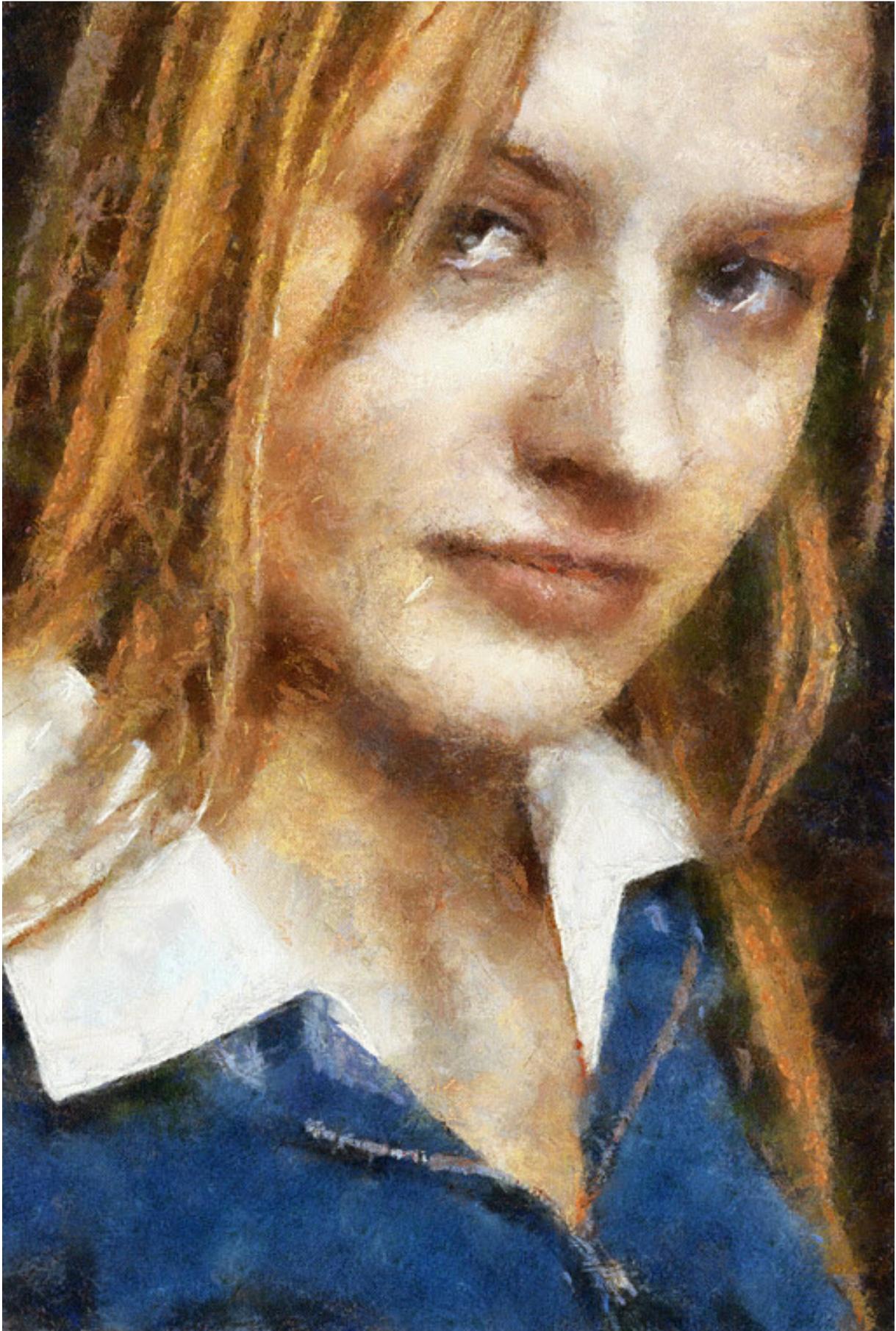
WEBSITE
mediachance.com

"One of my favourite pieces of software"

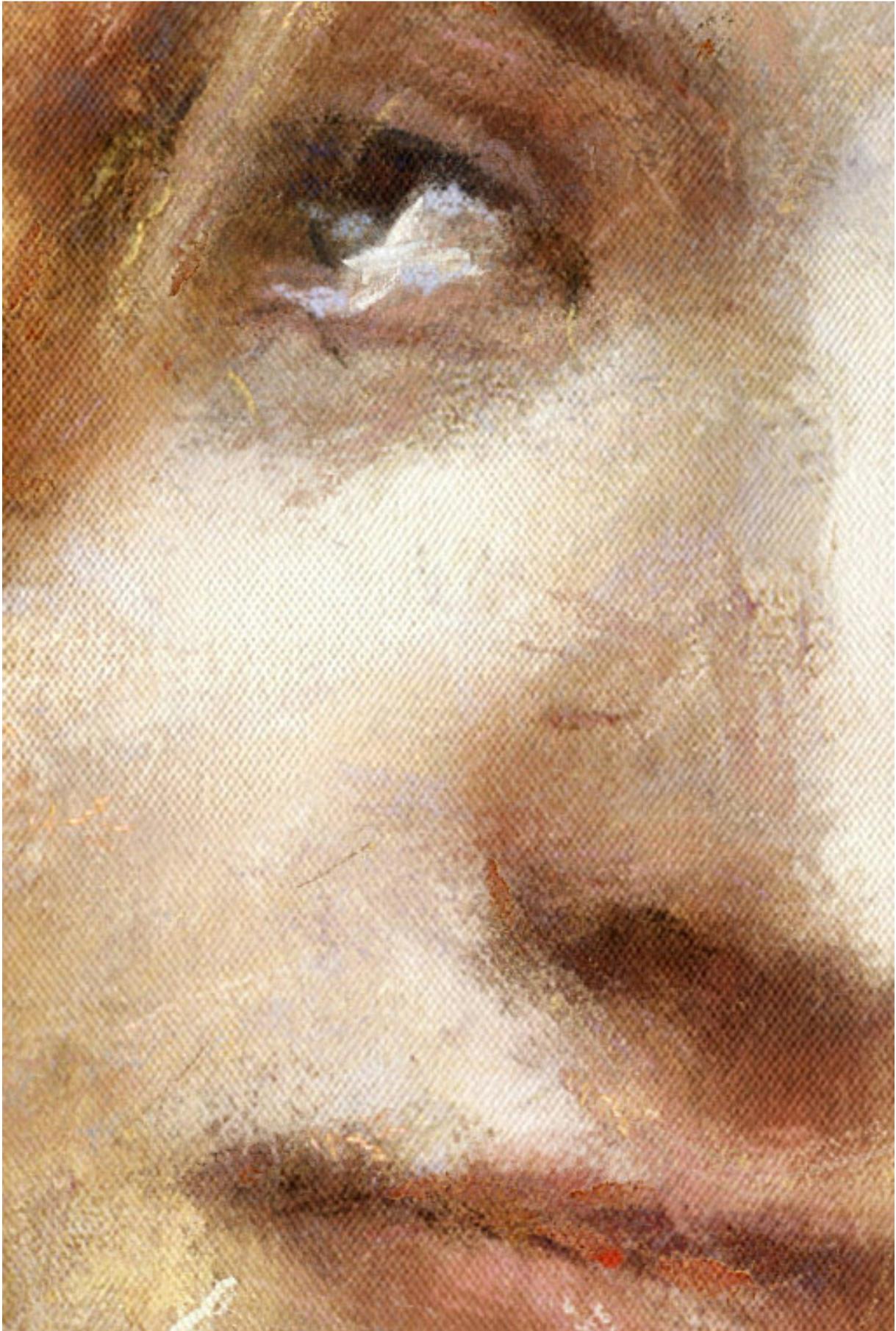
BUY NOW

CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW





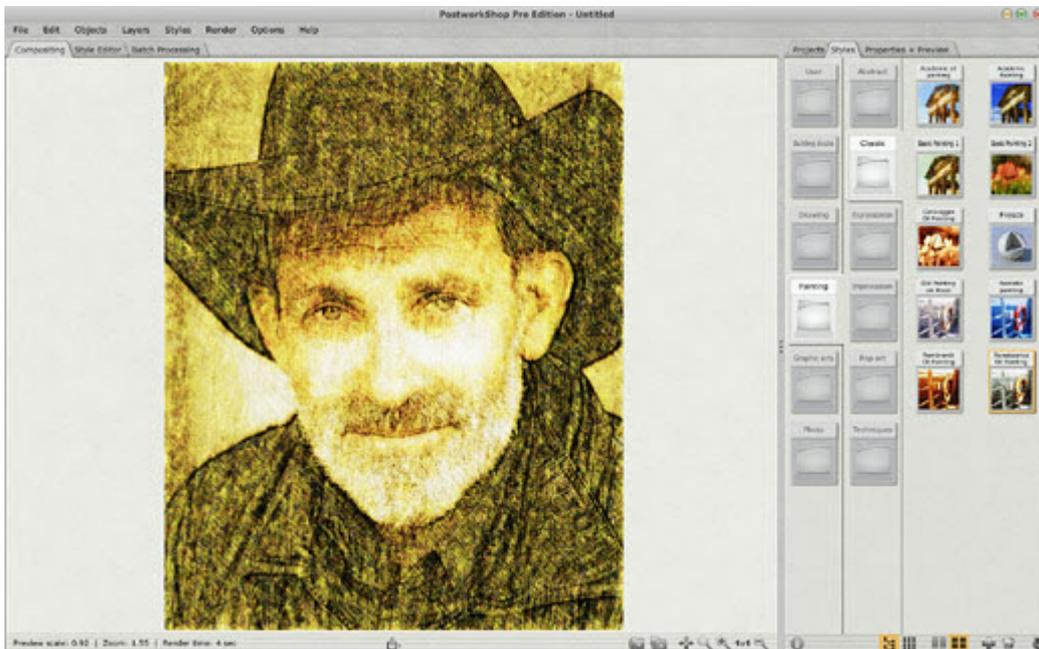
Dynamic Auto-Painter - Benson Style



Dynamic Auto-Painter - Closer view of painted detail

PostworkShop Pro 1.1

Probably the most powerful software available for quick and easy postwork effects...



PostworkShop Pro is a serious piece of software for the digital photographer who needs to turn their images into something more artistic. Or even for 3D artists who would like to give their renders a bit of creative punch. This app will provide you with a seemingly endless amount of possibilities.

The program is available in three versions, to cater for all budgets. You can now get the Basic Edition for FREE by using the following voucher code : CPN4890710839. If you like what you see then you can purchase one of the other editions to unlock the full potential of the software. For this review I have used the Pro version.

There are plenty of amazing presets to get you started, plus you can download more from the website. Or you can create your own from scratch using the Style Editor. This is as simple as dragging and dropping different options from the sidebar and linking them together in a selected order. This is really where the power lies in this application, as it allows you to design your own combination of

settings to suit your exact requirements. It can take a bit of trial and error to create a new effect you like at times, but it's quick and easy to play around with. But be warned ... you can get lost for hours in the Style Editor, just experimenting with all the various combinations! Great fun.

Because of the complexity of some presets, it's useful that the program only renders the preview image at screen size, to save time. But when you are happy with the result it will render the full size image for you with the effect applied. If you are using very high-res photos then it can take a little while to process, but it's worth the wait!

If you have a lot of images you need to process then you can take advantage of the handy batch conversion feature. But for maximum control you should edit each one individually, so you can tweak the settings to suit each picture.

This software is probably the most versatile of all the products reviewed in this issue, down to the fact it can produce such a wide range of different styles. Highly recommended.

AT A GLANCE

PRICE

\$99.00 (Pro)
\$49.00 (Artist)
\$19.00 (Basic)

PLATFORM

Windows / Mac

FEATURES

Media styles...
Charcoal
Pencil
Abstract
Impressionism
Pop Art
Comic Book
and many more

DEMO AVAILABLE?

Yes

COMPANY

Xycod Ltd

WEBSITE

postworkshop.net

*"The most versatile of
all the products
reviewed in this issue"*

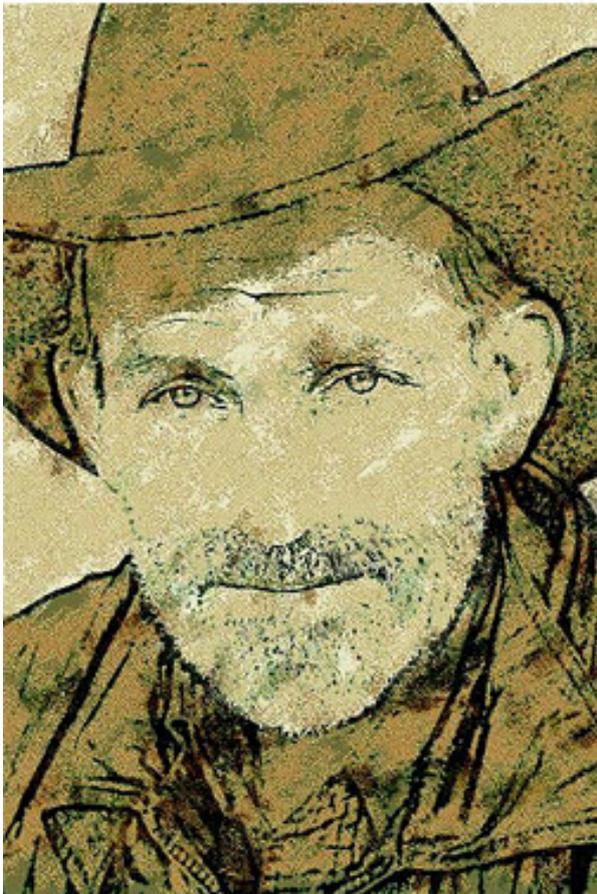
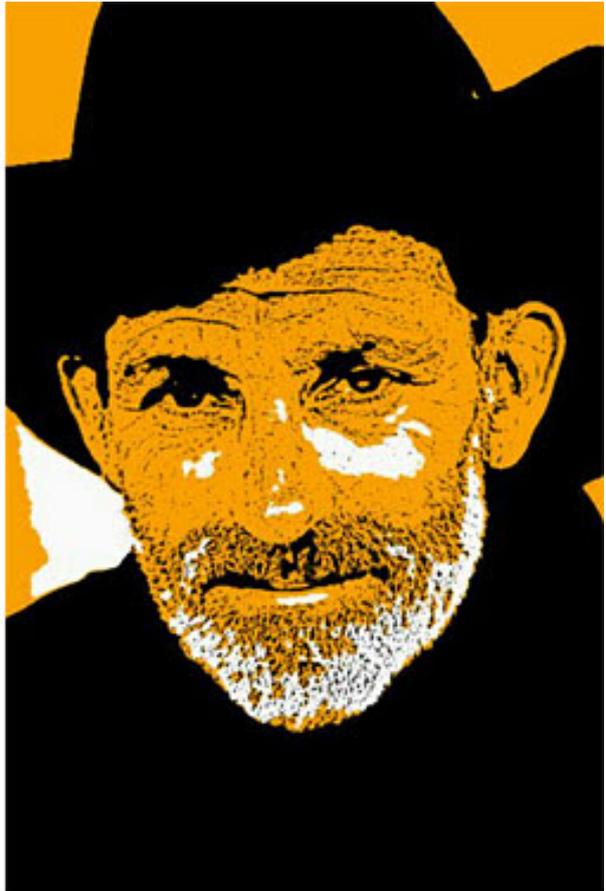
BUY PRO

BUY ARTIST

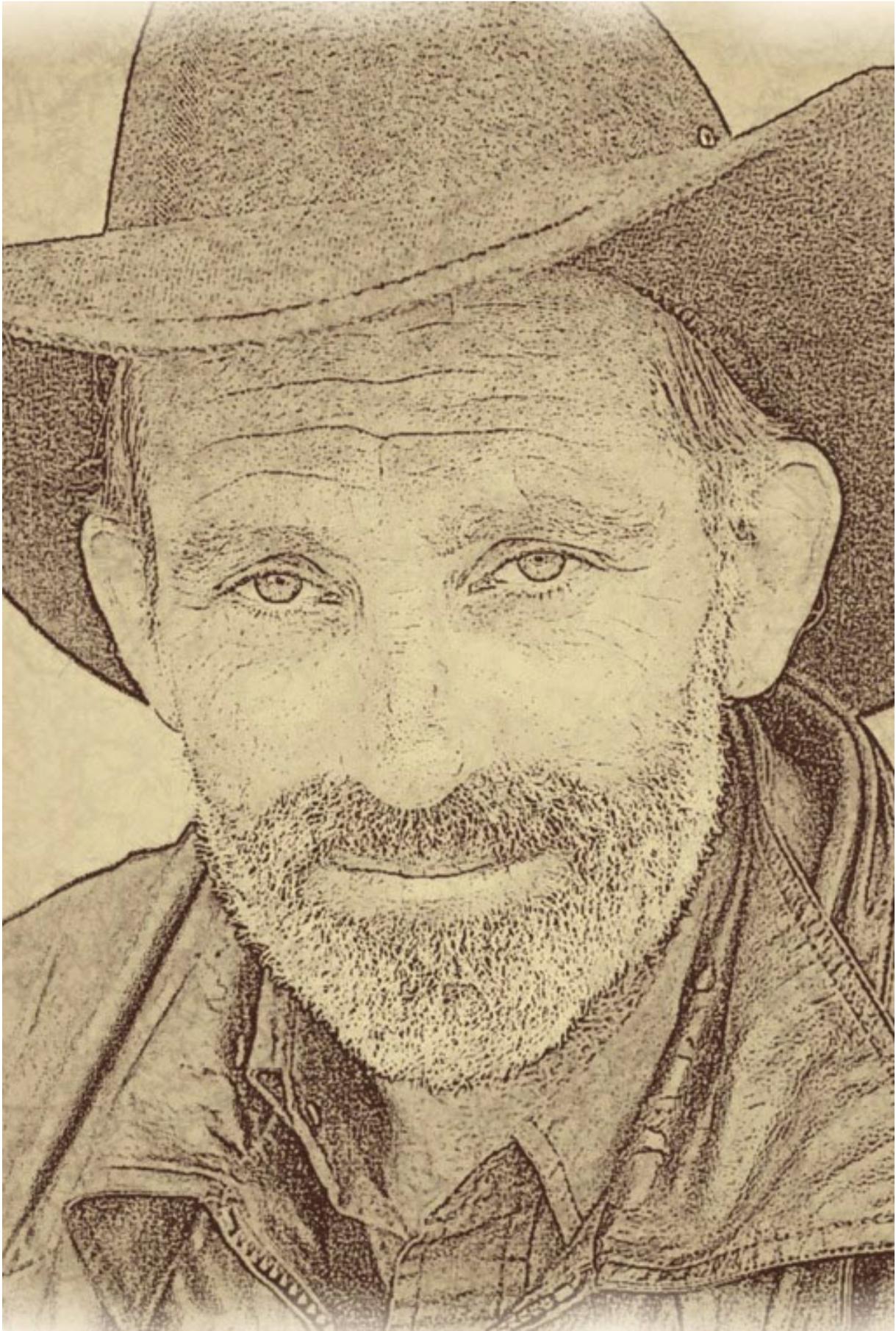
BUY BASIC

**CREATIVE
SOFTWARE REVIEW**





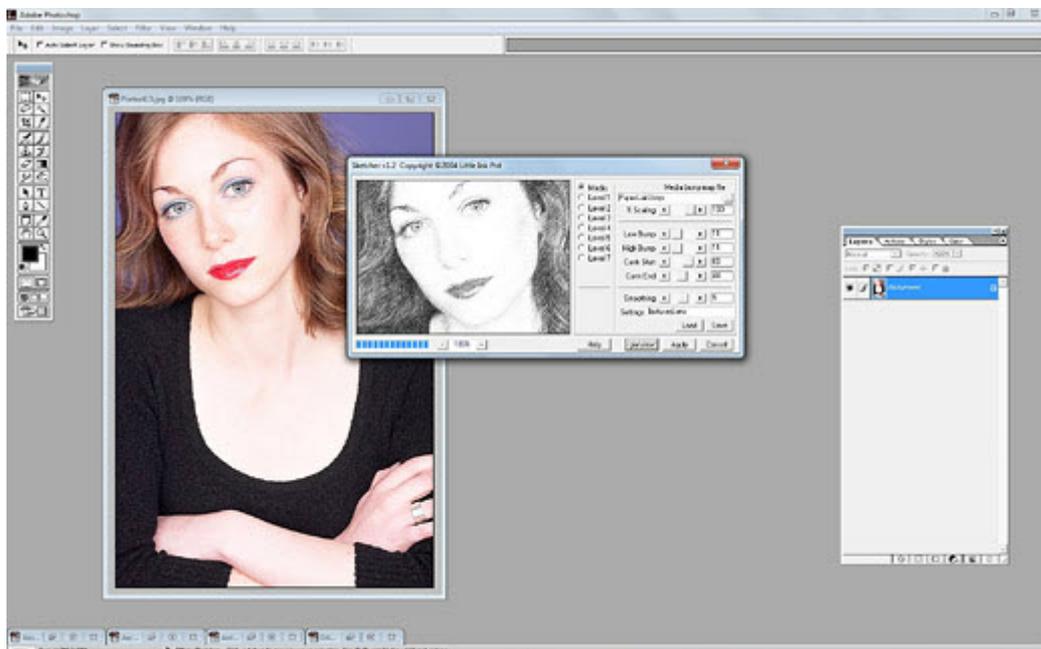
PostworkShop Pro - Example Styles



PostworkShop Pro - Antique Sepia Drawing

Sketcher 1.2

If black and white sketch effects is your thing, then this plug-in is a great choice...



Sketcher is a plug-in filter for use with Photoshop-compatible hosts, so you can use it inside your favourite graphics software, such as Elements, PSP, etc.

The dialog box and preview window is a little on the small side, but that's my only complaint. The effects are just superb and it produces the highest quality, most detailed and realistic pencil type sketches of any software I've tested so far. You really need to try this for yourself to see what I mean. It's also great for pen & ink, plus halftone and screen patterns too.

The plug-in only comes with a few presets to get your started, but you can download some extra ones from the Little Ink Pot website. With a bit of practice you can also create your own custom settings for this plug-in..

This is a Windows-only filter so Mac users have to miss out on this little gem I'm afraid! At the price it's a bargain, so definitely one you should add to your plug-in collection. For a few pounds extra you may also wish to get the PhotoGrey and Thredgeholder Pro filters, as these work well alongside Sketcher.



AT A GLANCE

PRICE
£12.00

PLATFORM
Windows

FEATURES
Plug-In filter
Media styles...
Pencil sketch
Pen & Ink
HalfToner
Soft Media
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes

COMPANY
Little Ink Pot

WEBSITE
littleinkpot.co.uk

"Definitely one you should add to your plug-in collection"

BUY NOW

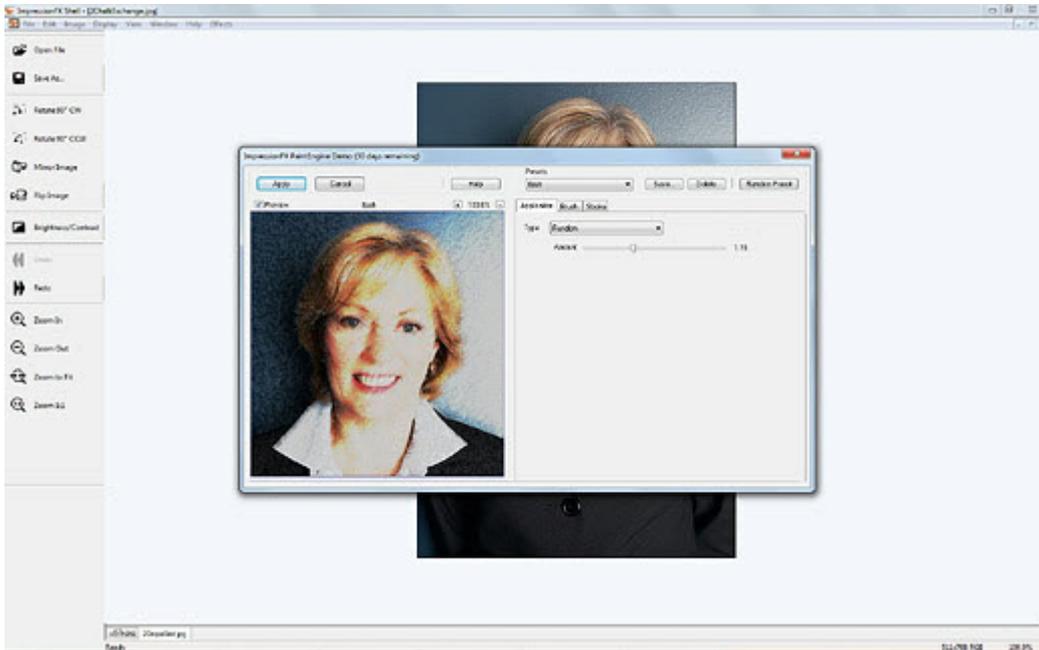
CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW
★★★★★



Little Ink Pot Sketcher- Soft Media Style

PaintEngine 1.1

The commercial version of this old favourite is now available...



PaintEngine was originally released as a free beta version a long time ago, and remained a favourite plug-in of mine for many years. The effects were great, although the small non-resizable dialog box and preview window was always an issue. So I was pleased to find that the product has finally been released as a fully developed commercial version. The dialog still can't be resized, but it's a much better layout now with a larger preview window, which really helps.

You can either run the plug-in filter through your favourite host program, such as Photoshop, or use the standalone editor that comes with the product. This is surprisingly good and always a useful addition in my opinion, as it's a quick and easy way to use the effect without having to go through a full-blown editor.

You get plenty of presets and sliders to tweak, so you can spend many hours just experimenting with this product. But I can't help feeling it's been left behind a little by the more recent paint software out there. Especially as it's not cheap either. But saying that, I still like it!



AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$95.00

PLATFORM
Windows

FEATURES
Media styles...
Cutout
Electrified
Fine spray
Galactic
Portrait oil
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes

COMPANY
ImpressionFX

WEBSITE
impressionfx.com

*"Spend many hours
just experimenting"*

BUY NOW

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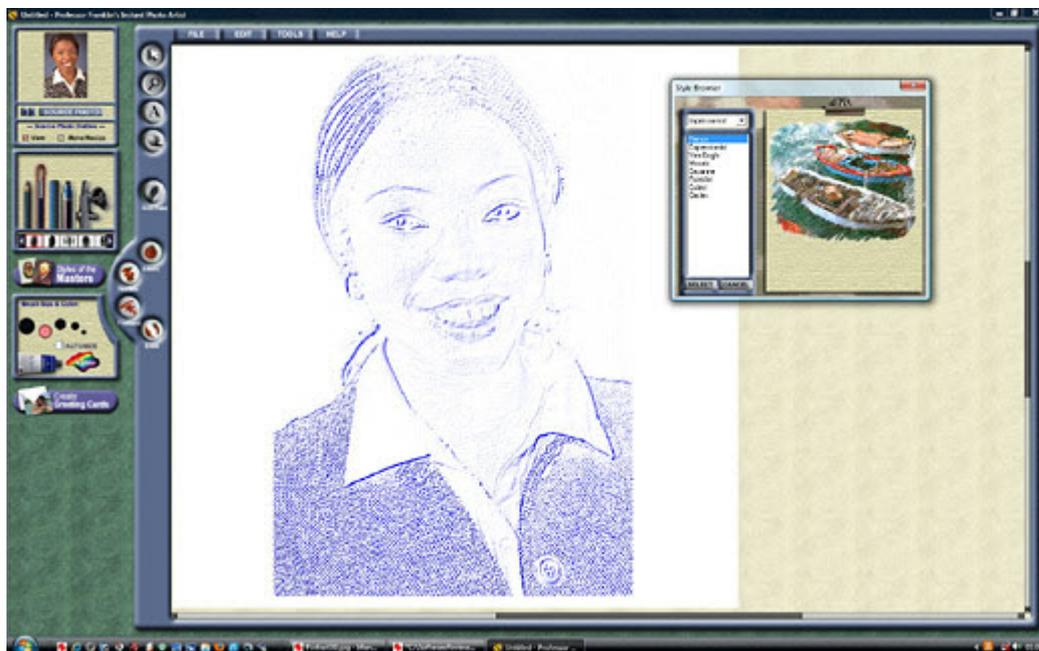




PaintEngine - Example Style

Instant Photo Artist 2.0

Another application offering a selection of interesting effects...



The first thing you will notice about this software is the unconventional interface. To be honest the style doesn't appeal to me and looks rather on the amateur side, which is a shame as it does have a few nice features and interesting effects up its sleeve.

The promo blurb claims "Turn any photo into a masterpiece - no experience needed!" It's stretching the truth a bit I suppose but I guess this is capable of producing some decent results for users who don't have any experience with graphics software of this type.

It works by allowing you to paint over your photo, rather than just acting as a quick overall conversion. This is a method you will either love or hate as it takes longer, but allows you more control over the final effect.

I must admit this was my least favourite program from all the ones I tested in this issue. I also felt the price was a bit high for something that was aimed at the home market. If it was half the price and had a better interface then I would have given it more stars!



AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$59.99

PLATFORM
Windows

FEATURES
Media styles...
Renoir
Expressionist
Van Gogh
Cezanne
Pointillist
Cubist
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes

COMPANY
SWSoftware

WEBSITE
swsoftware.com

"Capable of producing some decent results"

BUY NOW

CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW

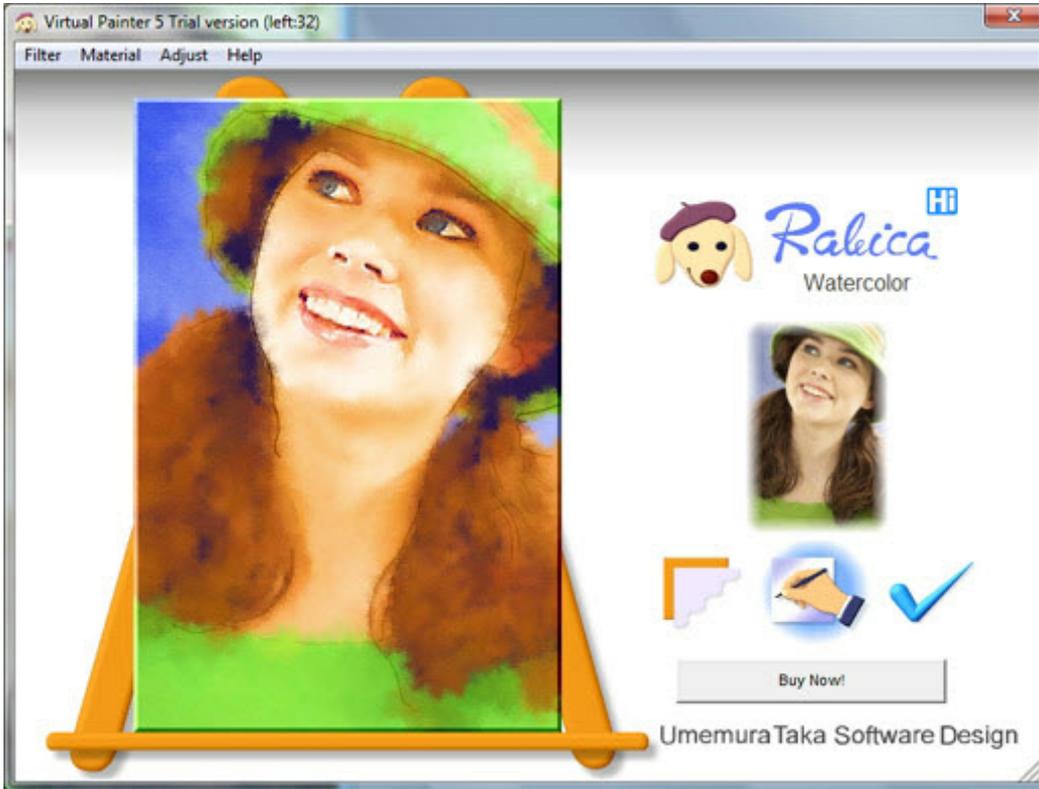




Instant Photo Artist - Example Style

Virtual Painter 5.0

The most basic interface of all, yet capable of some nice artistic styles...



Why the developers chose to use such a simple interface for this is beyond me. It looks quite dated too, as if it hasn't been updated for some years. It's capable of some nice effects though and might appeal to a wider audience if it looked a bit less like a kid's program!

There are 16 different painting styles to choose from, some of which produce some fairly good (and unique) results. You also get 20 background texture options and there are a limited amount of controls to vary the effects, which have an easy and expert mode (although *expert* is pushing the description I think!)

It's hard to recommend this one as it stands, as I do think it's in need of an interface overhaul. But the effects are quite nice so it'll be interesting to see if this does get an update in the future. At the moment though it just looks as if it's a product that has been left in limbo, which is a shame as it does have potential.



AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$55.00

PLATFORM
Windows

FEATURES
Media styles...
Watercolor
Oil Painting
Gouache
Color Pencil
Pastel
Impasto
Pointillism
Silk Screen
Collage
Drawing
Airbrush
Embroidery
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes

COMPANY
P. &A. America

WEBSITE
virtualpainter5.com

*"Some fairly good
(and unique) results"*

BUY NOW

**CREATIVE
SOFTWARE REVIEW**

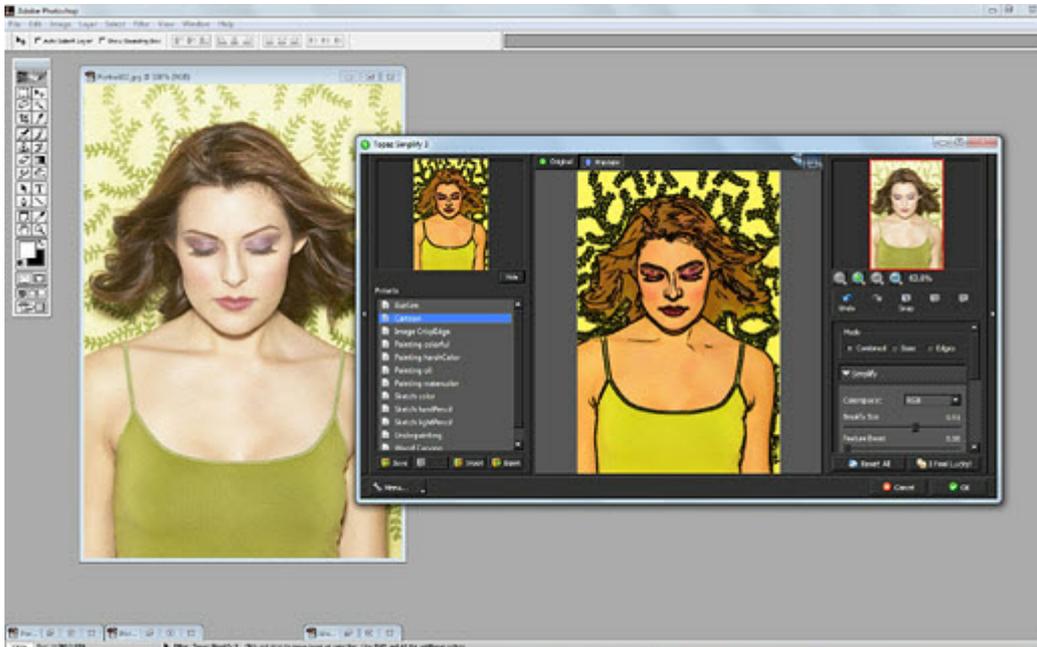




Virtual Painter - Example Style

Simplify 3.0

A simple yet elegant solution for giving your images a creative boost...



When I first came across the Topaz website I was immediately struck by the sleek professional design. Their product interface follows the same level of attention and quality, making the filter a joy to use. I always feel this an important aspect of any software, as it can make or break your creative workflow. Topaz marks for Topaz so far then.

Considering this has a fairly limited amount of initial presets, it's actually capable of a wide range of different styles. You have a lot of scope with adjusting the settings to tweak the effect. And if you just can't make up your mind then hit the *I Feel Lucky!* button and let it choose a random setting for you. This is more useful than you may think and can be an excellent way of using the filter.

While this software isn't perhaps as comprehensive as the other media effects in this issue, it is nevertheless a really nice plug-in and excellent value at the price, which is why I decided to give it the full five stars! I will definitely be testing out more products from this company in future issues, so keep watching.



AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$39.95

PLATFORM
Windows / Mac

FEATURES
Media styles...
BuzSim
Cartoon
Oil
Watercolour
Sketch
Underpainting
Woodcarving
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes, 30 day trail

COMPANY
Topaz Labs

WEBSITE
topazlabs.com

*"Really nice plug-in
and excellent value"*

BUY NOW

**CREATIVE
SOFTWARE REVIEW**

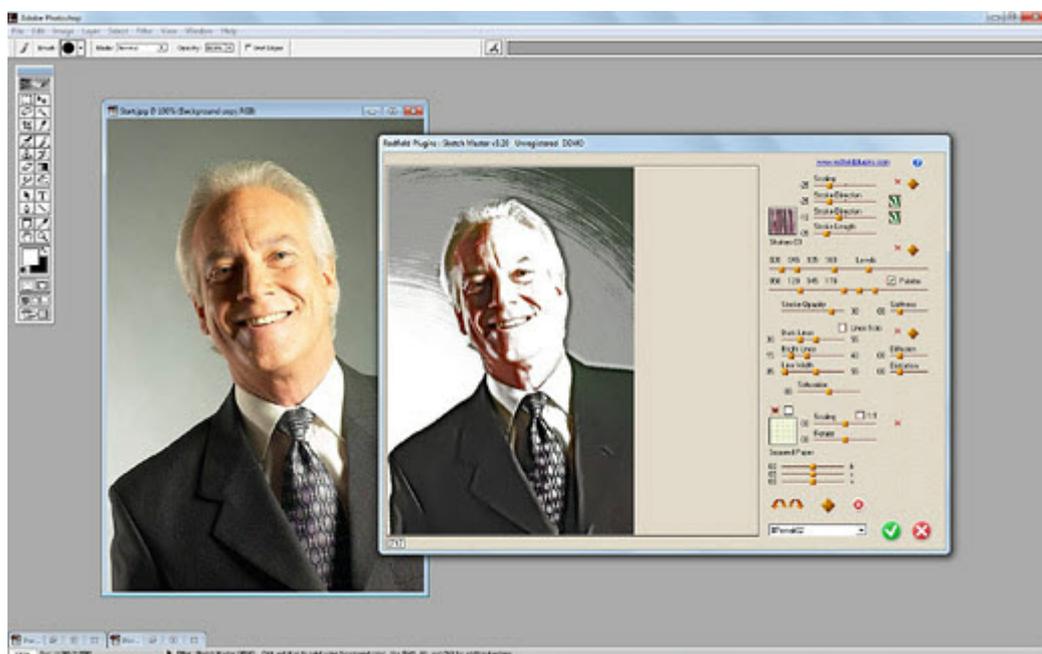




Topaz Simplify - Example Style

Sketch Master 3.2

Offering a fairly unique range of bold styles for your creative sketch work...



Redfield make a very interesting range of plug-in filters that are often quite different than what you find elsewhere. Sketch Master is a good example of this, as the style it produces is unlike anything else tested here. It's bold and gives your images great impact, so ideal for subjects like people in particular. It allows you to turn your photos into hand-drawn style character portraits. It would also be great for graphic novel artwork I think.

The effects work equally well in mono or colour. You get a selection of presets to get you started, but the fun comes from the random button, which allows you to surprise yourself with many more different styles. Plus of course there are plenty of sliders and settings to adjust the effects to achieve the final look. A selection of surface textures are also provided, or you can import your own images and save them in the library.

You can't really fault this plug-in and it definitely goes on my recommended list! A quality product at a great price. Be sure to also check out Redfield's other products, which work well together.



AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$39.90

PLATFORM
Windows

FEATURES
Media styles...
Airbrush
Charcoal
Crayon
Impression
Lead Pencil
Outline
Shaky brush
Sketch
Watercolour
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes,

COMPANY
Redfield

WEBSITE
redfieldplugins.com

*"A quality product
at a great price"*

BUY NOW

**CREATIVE
SOFTWARE REVIEW**
★★★★★



Sketch Master - Example Style

Pulp Styler 1.0

Convert your images into artistic black and white illustrations...



This is a shameless plug for one of my own software products! But I thought it may be useful to mention it while we are looking at various artwork styles.

Pup Styler will convert your images into artistic black and white illustrations. Recreate a similar style of interior artwork from the old pulp magazines, when images were often quite basic and crudely reproduced. It produces a rough pen & ink effect in black-on-white only. It is very fast and easy to use. Just click on the *Open* button and choose a suitable photograph or 3D rendered image, then click the *Start Conversion* button and watch the app automatically do the hard work for you. If the final image lacks detail then click the *Revert* button, select the *Auto-Enhance* option and click the conversion button again. This usually boosts detail in underexposed images.

You can view and save the outline layer, the shading layer, or the final composite image by selecting the relevant option on the toolbar. You can also copy the image to clipboard, for pasting into other applications, or print directly to

your inkjet or laser printer.

This application is ideal for comic book artists or anyone wanting to create a retro interior B&W illustration style.

Works best with photographs or 3D renders which have a good balance of light and shadow. Avoid using images which have gradients or heavily textured areas in the mid-tones, as the outline conversion will pick up on this and create too dense a pattern in that area.

You can load and save *.jpg, *.png, *.gif, *.tif, *.pcx, *.bmp and *.tga formats.

Pulp Styler is just a very simple automatic conversion software. Although the results can be used as final images in many cases, you may want to take these into your image-editing application (not included) for further editing later.

So why did I make this application? Well, even after testing out all the different media software I could find, I still couldn't quite achieve the specific effect I was after for certain tasks, so I decided to try and make my own. It's pretty basic but more features will be added in future versions.

AT A GLANCE

PRICE

\$9.95

PLATFORM

Windows

FEATURES

Quick conversion
Auto-enhance
Outline mode
Shading mode
Composite mode

DEMO AVAILABLE?

Yes,

COMPANY

Cybia

WEBSITE

cybia.co.uk

"Simple automatic conversion software"

BUY NOW

**CREATIVE
SOFTWARE REVIEW**

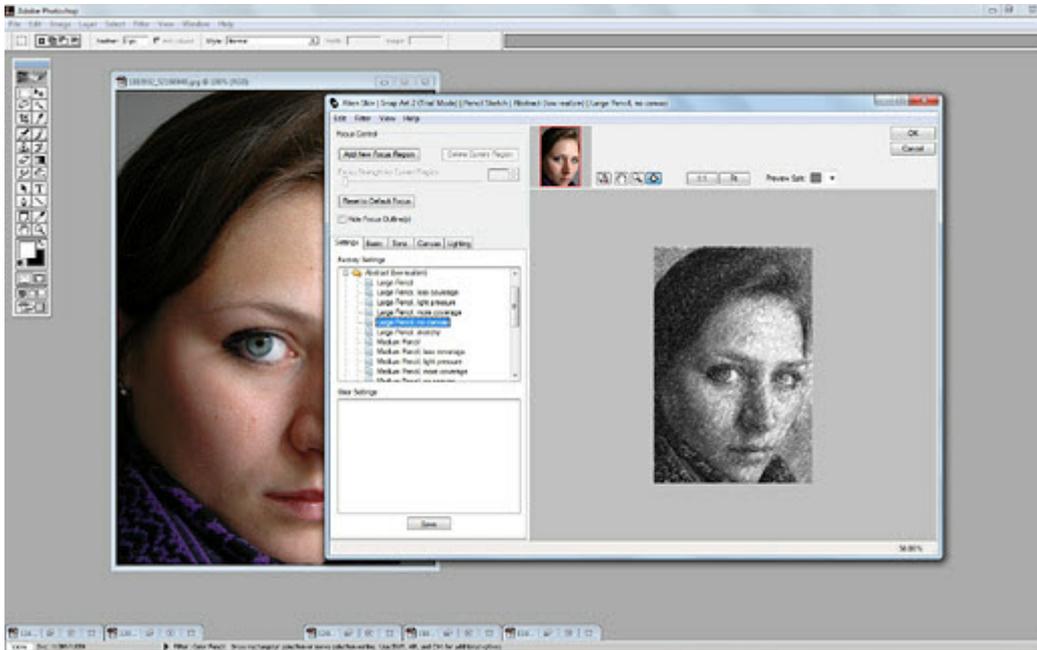
NOT RATED



Pulp Styler - Original photo, outline, shading and final image

Snap Art 2.1

The most expensive option from the products reviewed in this issue...



During the initial testing for this issue, I actually forgot about this one! I have been a fan of the Alien Skin products for many years, but I hadn't actually tried this particular plug-in before. So I thought it was about time I gave it a go and added it to the reviews at the last minute..

Once installed you get 10 new filter options in your Photoshop menu (or compatible host), but you can quickly switch between them from within each filter if you need to. It's a bit of an odd way of doing things, but it works fine.

The dialogs all follow the same format so it's easy to use. There's a fair amount of presets to get you started and the effects aren't bad, but I have to admit that they didn't wow me as much as the other products featured here.

The high price is also an issue for me as you can get better effects a lot cheaper, to be honest. So I wasn't exactly bowled over by this one! As with all the Alien Skin products the quality is good, but it's just too expensive when compared to the alternatives. I would recommend a price reduction to make it more competitive.



AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$199.00

PLATFORM
Windows / Mac

FEATURES
Comics
Impasto
Oil paint
Pen & Ink
Pencil sketch
Watercolour
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes, 15 day trial

COMPANY
Alien Skin

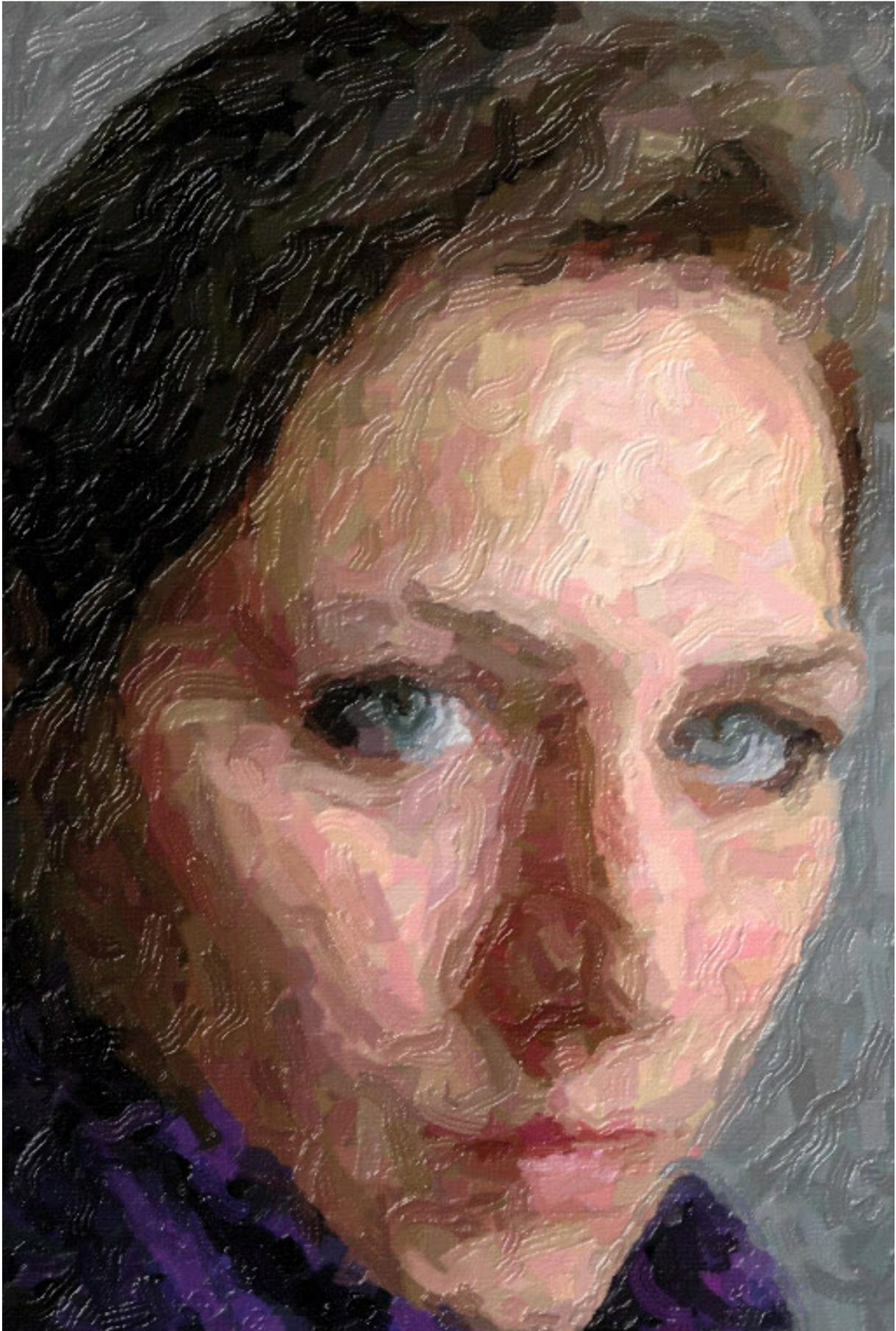
WEBSITE
alienskin.com

"Quality is good but just too expensive"

BUY NOW

CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW

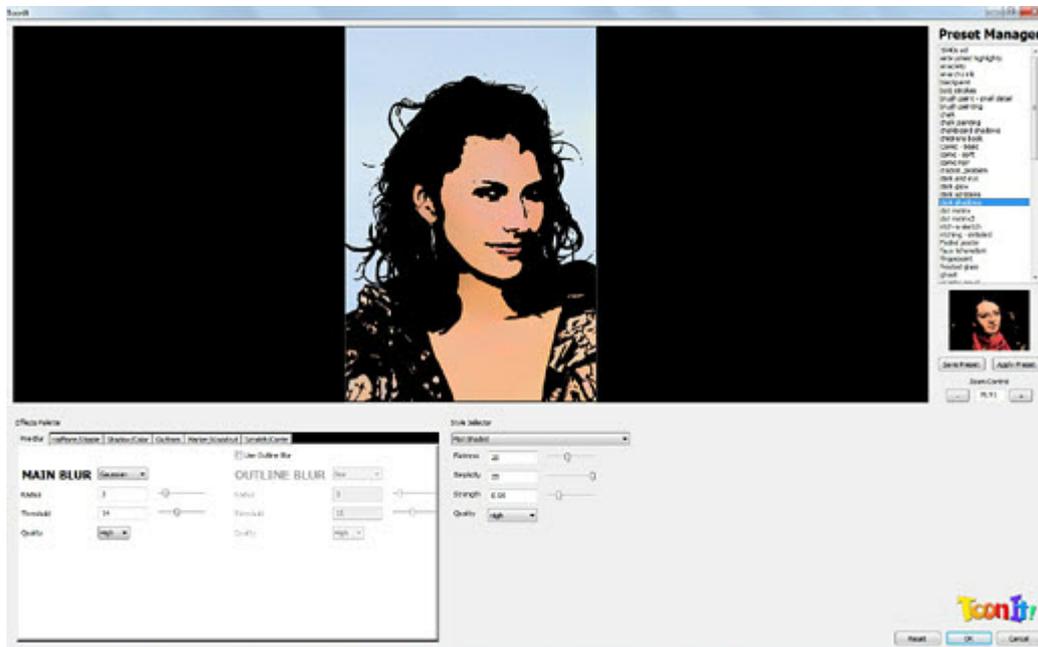




Snap Art - Example Style

ToonIt! 2.6

Uses Toonamation technology to create cartoon style effects..



This is another late addition to the issue as I only just came across the product. The info on the website looked very good so I was eager to test out the demo. I wasn't disappointed! I tested the Photoshop plug-in version, but it is also available for Aperture.

Although this isn't the cheapest filter available, it does offer you some cracking effects for your money. It would make an excellent investment for any comic book artist. The quality of cartoon style output is second to none and the variety of styles and presets makes it a powerful solution for this type of work.

Of course it's not just limited for use in comics. You can use the effects to turn your photos into bold pieces of modern artwork. Works great on portraits in particular.

One of the things I liked about this plug-in was the fact the dialog is the full size of the screen, so you are not scrolling around in a small window like some other filters. It really does make a difference to your workflow. This is a top quality product and highly recommended.



AT A GLANCE

PRICE
\$129.00

PLATFORM
Windows / Mac

FEATURES
Brush painting
Childrens book
Fingerpaint
Graphic novel
Comic noir
Line drawing
and more

DEMO AVAILABLE?
Yes

COMPANY
Digital Anarchy

WEBSITE
digitalanarchy.com

"Quality product and highly recommended"

BUY NOW

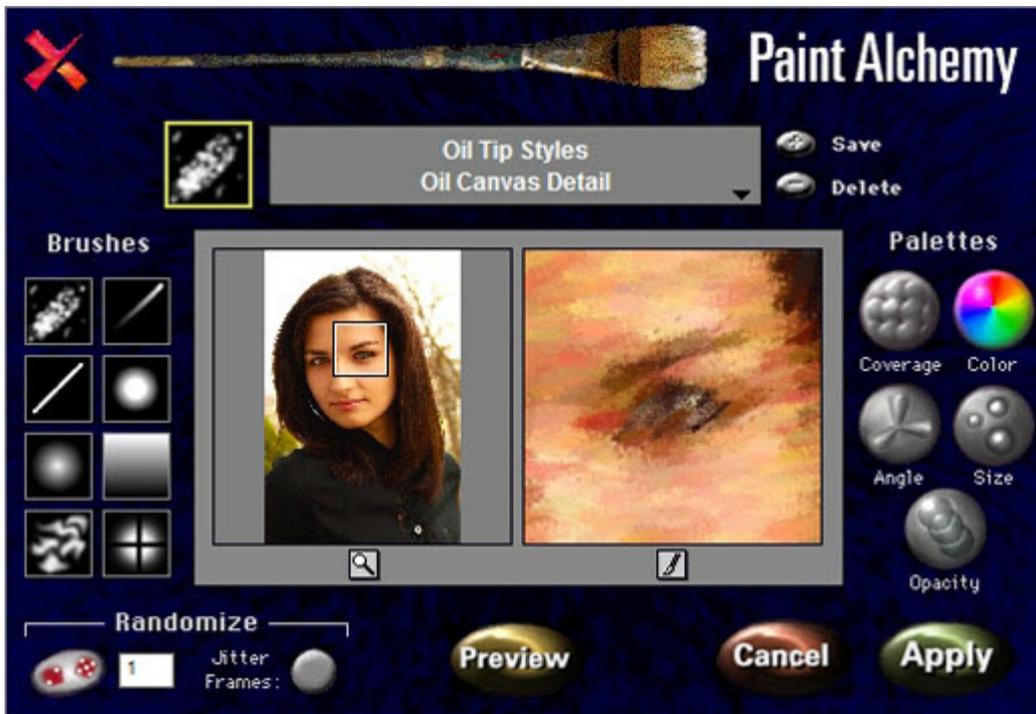
CREATIVE SOFTWARE REVIEW
★★★★★



ToonIt! - Example Style

Some Old Friends!

Products come and go, so here are a few older media effects that are no longer available...



AT A GLANCE

PLUG-INS
Paint Alchemy
Impressionist
BuZZ.Pro

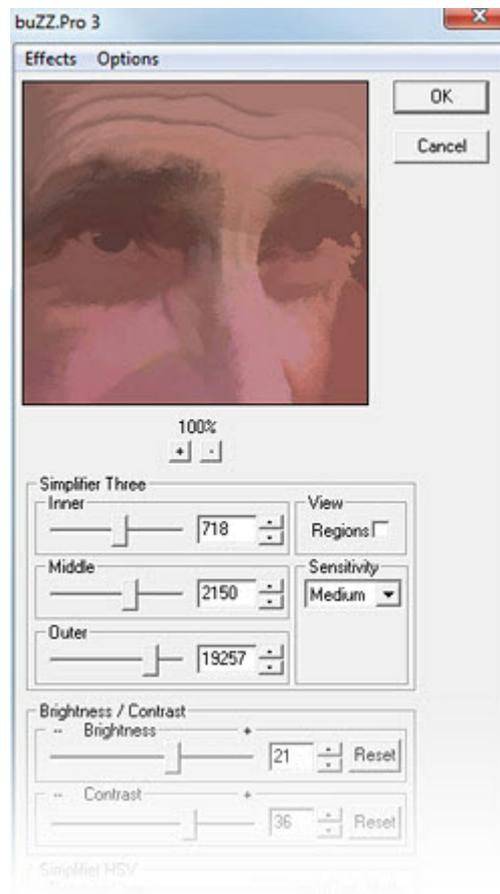
*"Impressionist
produced some good
effects for its day"*

In the early days of graphics software there wasn't much choice when it came to natural media effects. So when Xaos released their Paint Alchemy plug-in for Photoshop, it was very impressive stuff! The interface (shown above) looked very professional and was ahead of its time I think. But of course now it looks quite small when viewed on modern screens, which run at higher resolution.

Another similar filter was called Impressionist and came bundled with Microsoft Image Composer. The interface wasn't so fancy but it had a lot of features and produced some good effects for its day (see example image on one of the following pages).

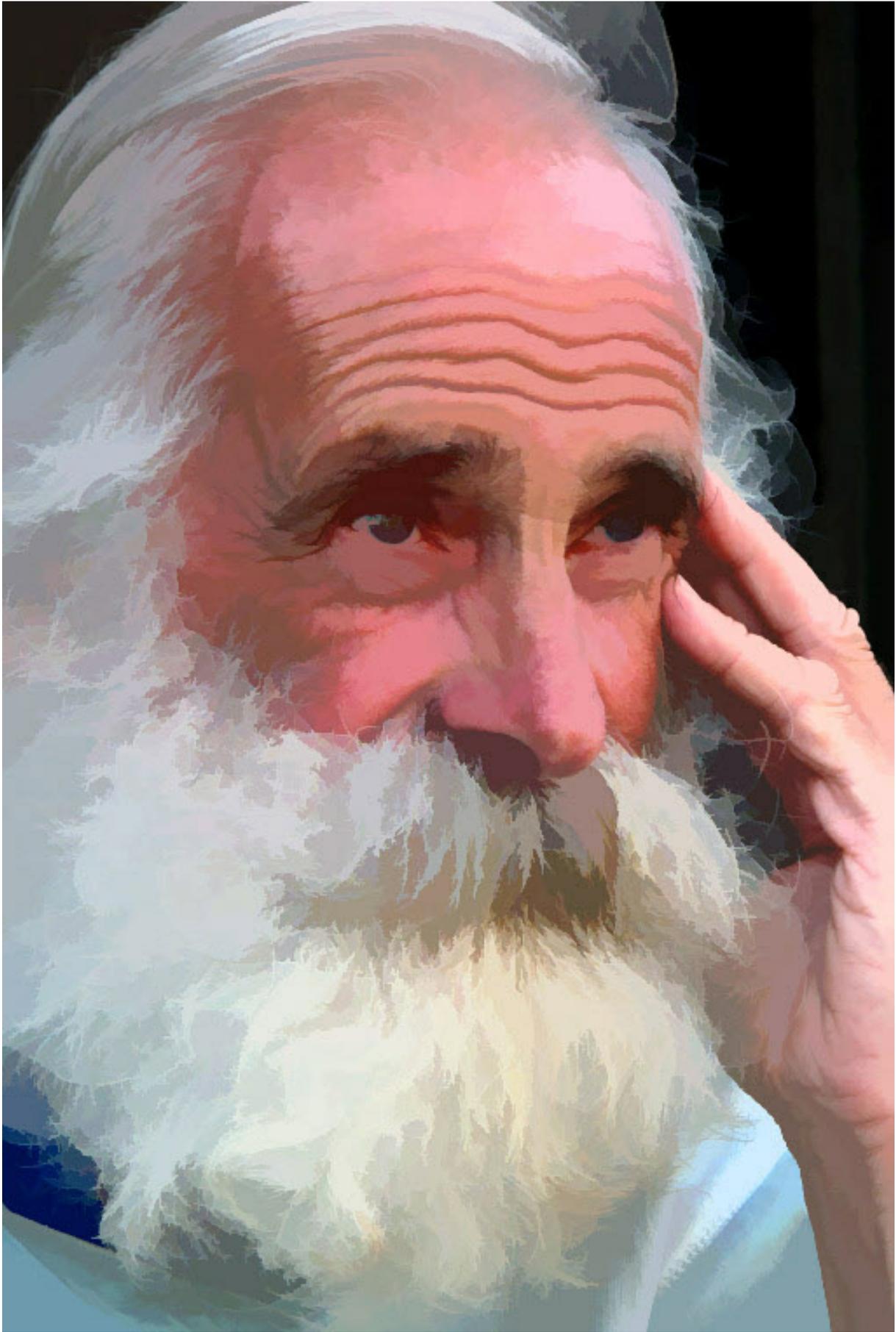
BuZZ.Pro was also a nice plug-in that simplified your images to create a flat painted style. It came with several other useful options which you could *stack* within the filter, which offered unique and effective approach.

Unfortunately these products are a few that have disappeared over the years.



**CREATIVE
SOFTWARE REVIEW**





BuZZ.Pro - Example Style



Impressionist - Example Style

Final Words

Find out which of the products from this issue were considered the best...



Sometimes it is difficult to compare software against each other and just pick out one as the best, as each product tends to have its own unique features or way of doing things. This is especially true of the apps reviewed in this issue, as even though they all cover traditional media styles, they all have qualities that set them apart from the others. So I find it impossible to give out a single award at the end for *Best Traditional Media Software*, and as such I will recommend a few of the products in my conclusion.

I have to say that this type of software really has come a long way over the past few years. Gone are the days when a simple filter effect from your image editor will do! Media effects have developed into much more sophisticated tools for replicating traditional artwork. Some of them excel at painted styles, while others do a fantastic job of sketching effects.

You really need to test out the demos for yourself to find out which ones best suit your own needs. All the software reviewed here have demo versions

available for you to try out first.

Although it is difficult to choose between them, here are my final recommendations from this issue...

BEST SKETCH EFFECT

Little Ink Pot Sketcher

BEST INTERACTIVE MEDIA

GMX-PhotoPainter

BEST OVERALL SOLUTION

Xycod PostworkShop Pro

BEST VALUE SOFTWARE

FotoSketcher

BEST TRADITIONAL PAINTING

Mediachance Dynamic Auto-Painter

BEST COMIC BOOK STYLE

Digital Anarchy ToonIt!

I hope you enjoyed reading this first issue of Creative Software Review magazine. Feedback is always welcome!

MORE INFO

ABOUT

Creative Software Review is a FREE online publication dedicated to all types of creative applications and resources. So if you are a digital artist, designer, photographer or just enjoy using graphics software as a hobby, then you may find the issues a useful reference guide to what tools are available. The first few issues will concentrate on fairly straightforward reviews, but the aim is to add in-depth tutorials and other articles in future. Where possible, sometimes the magazine will also offer readers special discounts on some of the software titles being reviewed.

SUBMISSIONS

If you develop any graphics software and would like it to be reviewed in a future issue then please get in touch and let us know the details. Reviews are always FREE. A full version of the software, or at least a fully-functional demo (no features disabled), must be provided for the reviewer to fully test the application.

ADVERTISING

If you are interested in advertising your graphics software or related products in future issues then please get in touch. Prices are available on request. Please note that ONLY graphics-related ads are allowed.

WEBSITE

For further information and to download issues of the magazine, please visit : creativesoftwarereview.com

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