Corel Painter 2017 review: a must-have upgrade for digital artists

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Corel has released an top-notch upgrade to the best painting software around, Painter 2017. It comes with a bunch of new features and enhancements, Texture Painting, Glazing Brushes, Dab Stencils and improvements to the GUI all making Painter even better than before. Here’s an in-depth look at what Painter 2017 has to offer by artist Tom Bagshaw.

Corel Painter 2017 Review: Glazing Brushes

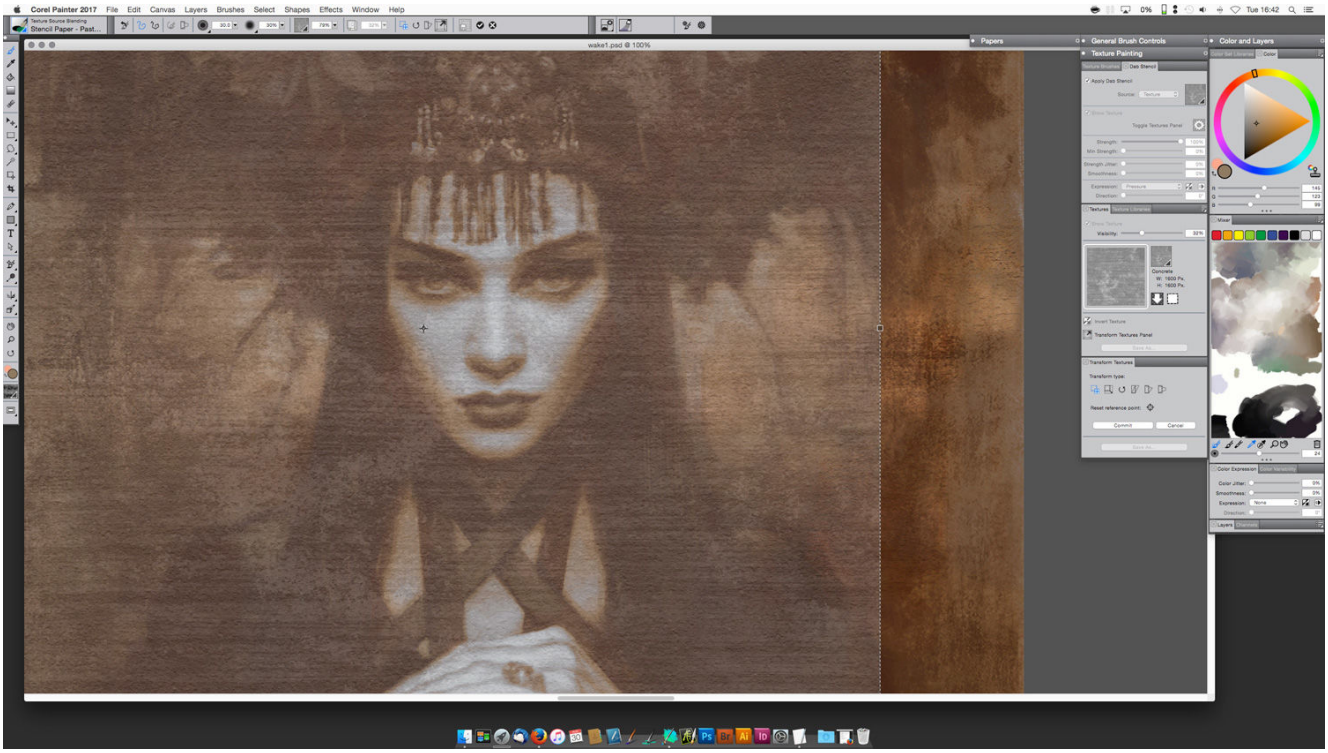
Glazing brushes allow for the application of colour as with real glazes when oil painting.
Coming from a traditional painting background, the use of glazes is a real-world technique that I’ve been waiting for a long time to see replicated in Painter.

Applied usually over the top of a monochrome or grisaille underpainting, you mix paints with successively larger amounts of oil and build up layers of semi-transparent paint to add

depth and luminosity to specific parts of your painting. Vermeer's probably the go-to painter if you want to conjure a quick image of what it looks like in your mind.

It's great to see this behaviour added to Painter's tool set – and for me the Glazing brushes are worth the upgrade price alone.

Corel Painter 2017 Review: Texture Painting



Adding texture with the new texture brushes, scale and distort the texture.

The other 'big' new feature in Painter 2017, Texture Painting – as the name would suggest – allows you to add texture to your paintings in a more refined manner. Rather than the usual way of adding your texture to a layer above and then masking out areas you don't want, the new Texture Painting brushes allow you to paint the texture directly.

There are a number of preset textures you can use but – as with other materials – there's the ability to add your own. The textures can be previewed and transformed before painting

– including the ability to give perspective distortion. With these transformation controls – plus luminance, blending modes and colour options – this adds a great level of finesse over the look of your added texture.

This feature has been closely developed with 3D artists in mind. Pre-posed ZBrush renders can now be imported via the Go-Z plugin, which retains the lighting information from the model to makw the texturing and painting aspect of the workflow a lot simpler.

Corel Painter 2017 Review: Interactive Gradient Tool and Express Paint

The Gradient tool has been given an overhaul, expanding on the basic tool every Painter user knows. You add a gradient to a layer, shape or mask as usual – but now it can then be edited using nodes.

Start and end nodes can be moved around, colours changed and more nodes added along the path – which can be edited in the same way. There are a bunch of presets available and the ability to create your own.

The Gradient tool also has a setting for Express Paint.

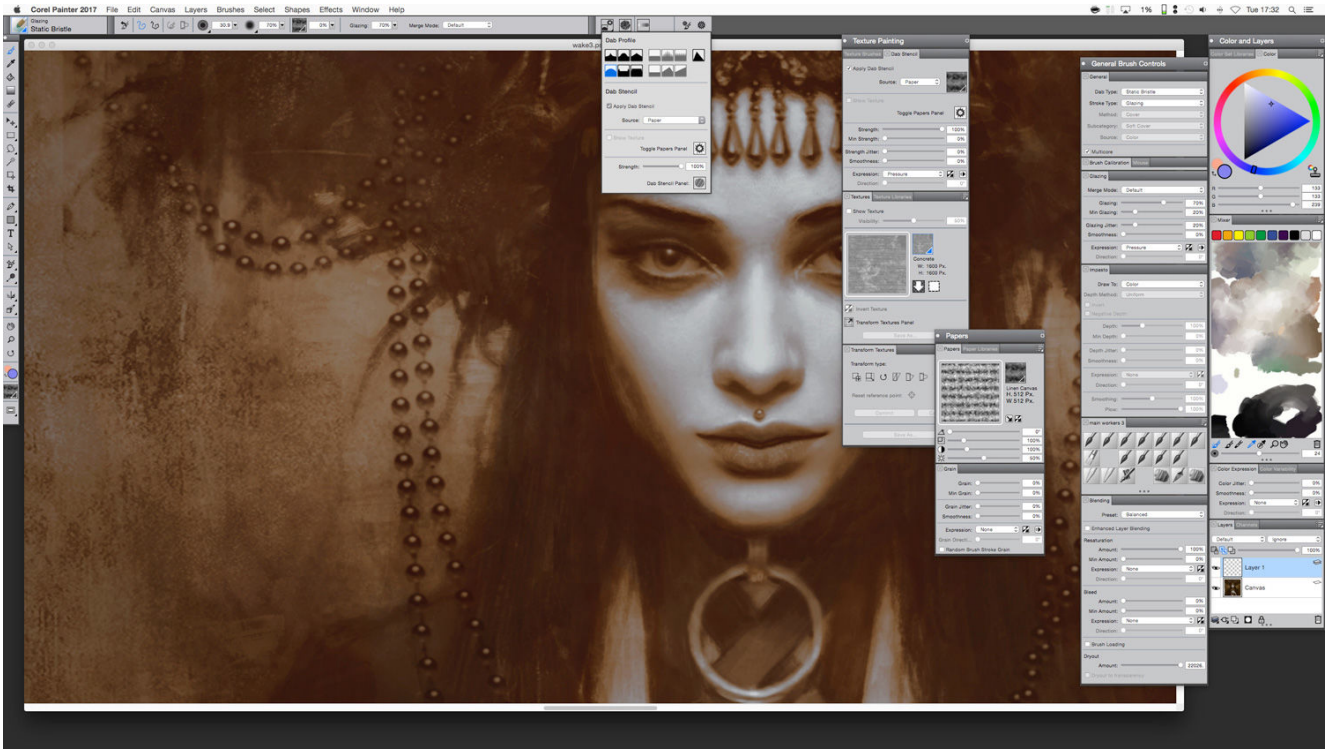
Express Painting is a really useful addition, mainly aimed at quickly filling a blank canvas with a base or a textured gradient fill as a background.

Using it, a smooth gradient fill can be automatically textured with some simple presets. Strokes, dabs and random smoothing can be applied and scaled to give that background or base layer some more painterly texture.

Corel Painter 2017 Review: Enhanced Dab Stencils

The improved Dab Stencil brushes now allow you to control the brushstroke based on the paper, flow-map or texture source. You can combine them as well, so a brush that shows through a paper texture can also show a flow-map at the same time – which makes for much more realistic marks. You'll see less of the repetitive tiling showing through on larger areas, for instance.

Corel Painter 2017 Review: Palette Drawers



The improved Property bar and Palette drawers can down on a cluttered UI.

One problem with Painter has always been that with all of the controls that you have over so many different brushes, tools and textures, the interface itself can get incredibly cluttered with all the available palettes.

Over the last few years Corel have tried to address this and

with the 2017 release they have added another way to organise things. Palette Drawers are a way to combine panels and palettes in a collapsible group which can be minimised with a double click on the header.

There are a variety of presets but they can also be created on the fly or saved as new presets for the workspace. This is especially useful when it comes to organising your more frequently used controls and media. Brushes, papers, control pallets, shortcuts – all can be added to a labelled palette drawer and closed off when not in use, great if you're working with limited screen space.

Corel Painter 2017 Review: Artist Layouts

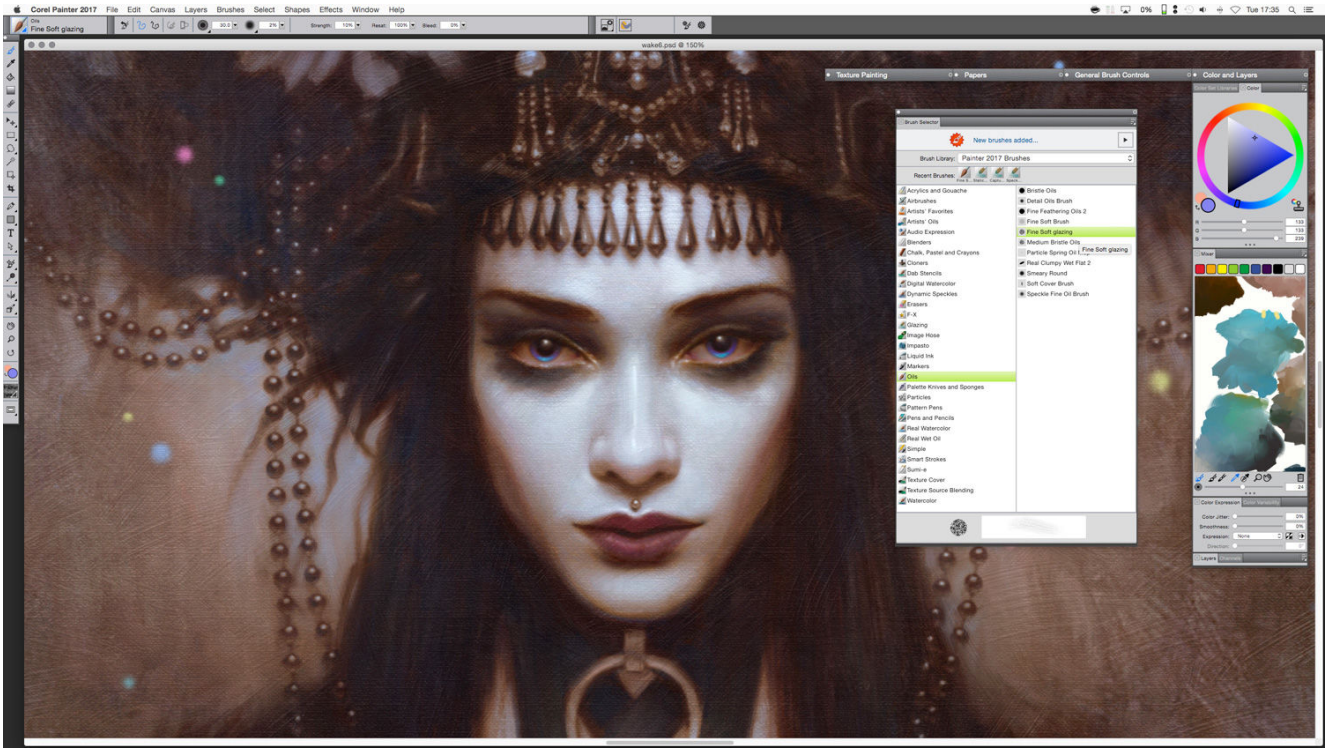
Particularly useful if you're new to Painter are the Artists Layouts. A selection of interface layouts designed for the best workflow in a variety of fields, Manga, Photo-art, Illustration, Fine Art, there even a New to Painter and a Minimal UI layout which display a set of relevant palettes and tools.

The layouts can be edited to your liking and saved as custom versions. If you've got a couple of workspaces that you use a lot you can also switch between them quickly with the 'Quick Switch' feature, a toggle can be set up in the keyboard shortcuts.

Corel Painter 2017 Review: Brush Selector

The Brush Selector, which is really the core of Painter, is now a panel that can be undocked from the property bar and used as a floating panel. This allows much better access to the brushes, especially useful if you want to look through the

hundreds of brushes Painter can offer without the Brush selector constantly minimising!



You get better access to the Brush Selector now it can roam free.

Corel Painter 2017 Review: Property Bars

Another great update, the property bar displays the most relevant controls for your currently selected tool. New flyout menus and palettes can be accessed directly from the property bar rather than having to find them in the mass of available palettes.

Now you can access dab profiles, different media like papers as well as view brushstroke information. This goes a step further on from the Advanced Brush Controls, almost replacing it in fact but the ABC is still there in case you prefer it. Having used Painter for a long time now, this is a really useful addition and really does improve your workflow.

Some other enhancements for 2017 are the enhanced eyedropper

and improved zoom.. A small thing to many, the eyedropper has been given a tweak now letting you sample average colours from 3×3 to 101×101 pixels – together with the ability to sample from either the active layer or from all visible layers.

The zoom function has been refined to give finer levels of control, basically the magnify doesn’t jump in such large increments.

And as with each incarnation of Painter, Corel go to a lot of trouble to improve the brush speed and performance- 2017 is no different and again, theres a noticeable improvement in a lot of the brushes.

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