Composing an Intuitive Painting in Corel® Painter™ X

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"The Divine Proportion is found within the macro and micro aspects of this universe we call home, and now it can be found within the engine of Corel Painter too. Corel has harnessed the power of the old masters and placed it at your fingertips."

In this tutorial, I cover how to create a composition for an intuitive painting by using two new layout tools that are available in Corel® Painter™ X: the Divine Proportion tool and the Layout Grid tool.

In this tutorial, you will learn about
- the Divine Proportion and Rule of Thirds
- preparing your workspace
- setting up the layout tools
- starting a sketch
- adding layers, textures, and basic colors
- reducing the number of layers
- developing the subject
- adding details and adjusting contrast

The Divine Proportion and the Rule of Thirds

The Divine Proportion tool takes advantage of the Fibonacci spiral—a pattern that can be found in all organic living beings, as well as inorganic structures, from crystals found deep within the earth, to the organization of the galaxy. It is a powerful tool that was used by Renaissance masters. The spiral is a complicated mathematical calculation, but in Corel Painter X, you can easily apply the spiral to plot the composition of your masterpieces. Not only can this tool be used to gain insight into harmonious compositions, but from a design standpoint, it can also help guide the proportions of visual elements.

The Layout Grid is a simple grid that makes it easy to divide a composition proportionally. For example, you can easily apply the Rule of Thirds. The Rule of Thirds proposes dividing a composition into nine equal sections using two vertical lines and two horizontal lines. To create an interesting composition, you can position your main subject at one of the four points where the lines intersect. This technique is popular in photography and drawing.

When you create a composition, you can use the Divine Proportion, or the Layout Grid, or both. The grids appear as overlays, so you can always see them as you apply brushstrokes.

Preparing your workspace

I have found that it's always worth taking a few moments to set up an efficient workspace by choosing and arranging the tools and palettes I want to use. For example, for this piece, I added colors to the Mixer palette based on colors inspired by the works of Velazquez and Sargent. I opened a custom palette that contains my favorite papers and patterns. I often choose papers at random from this window to ensure a chaotic blend of creativity. I opened the Papers palette because it gives me extra control over the size, contrast, and brightness of a chosen paper. I also created a custom palette that contains all the brush variants I need for this piece.

I created a blank document based on the Divine Proportion ratio (1000 pixels wide by 1600 pixels high, at a resolution of 72 dpi).
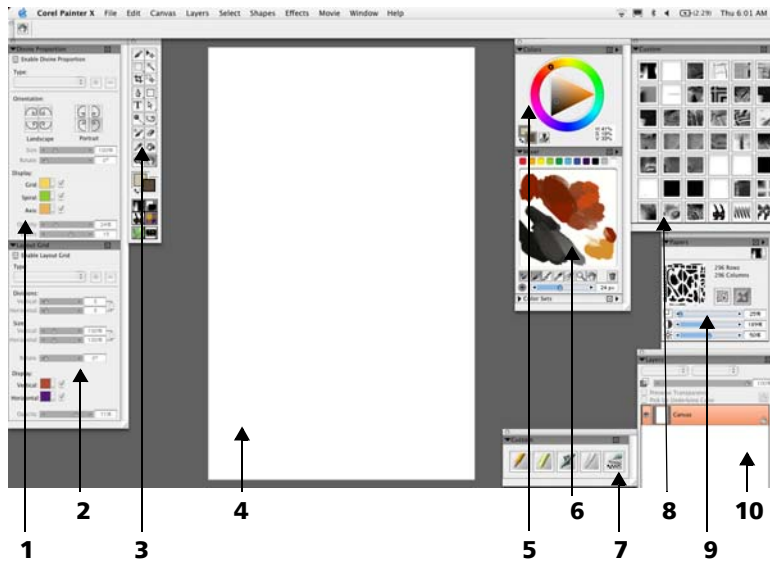
My workspace: (1) Divine Proportion palette, (2) Layout Grid palette, (3) toolbox, (4) canvas, (5) Colors palette, (6) Mixer palette, (7) custom palette with brushes, (8) custom palette with favorite papers and patterns, (9) Papers palette, (10) Layers palette.
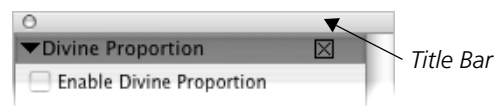
To open and arrange palettes

1 From the Window menu, choose the following palettes:
  - Show Divine Proportion — opens the Divine Proportion palette and Layout Grid palette. Click the palette arrow to maximize the Layout Grid palette.

  - Library Palettes > Show Papers

  The Layers palette, Colors palette, and Mixer palette are open by default.

2 Drag the palette title bar to position each palette where you want.


Title Bar

To create a custom palette for brush variants

1 On the Brush Selector bar, click the Brush Category selector, and choose Pencils from the list.

Custom palettes can include brush variants, papers, and other items such as patterns or gradients.

2 On the Brush Selector bar, click the Brush Variant selector, and choose 2B Pencil.

Brush Variant selector

Brush Category selector
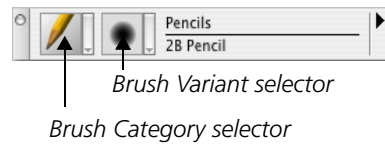
3 Drag the icon for the 2B Pencil out of the Brush Selector bar and into a blank area of the document window.

A new palette is created.

4 Drag the following brush variants to the custom palette.

Brush Category	Brush Variant
Chalk	Square Chalk
Airbrushes	Digital Airbrush
Blenders	Just Add Water
Pattern Pens	Pattern Chalk

Setting up the layout tools

Now that the workspace is prepared, we can set up the Divine Proportion grid and the Layout Grid.

To place the Divine Proportion grid

1 On the Divine Proportion palette, enable the Enable Divine Proportion check box.

The Divine Proportion grid appears on your canvas.

2 On the Divine Proportion palette, choose the orientation for the grid by clicking a button in the Orientation area.
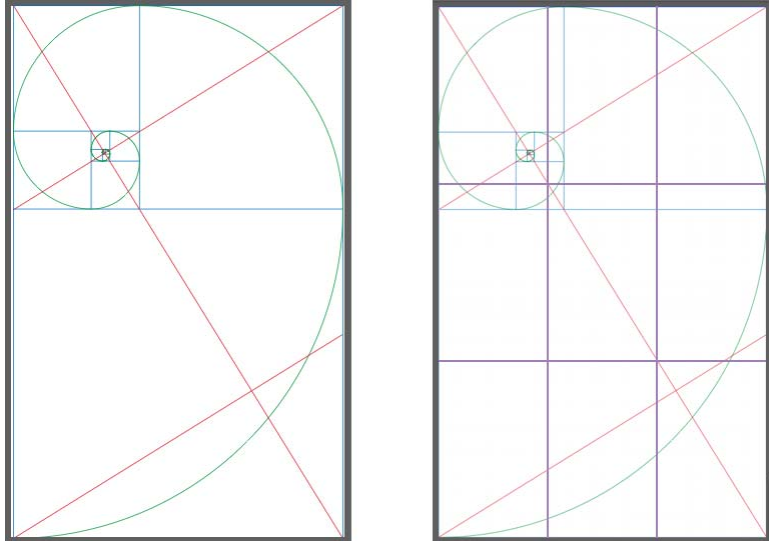
I chose Portrait Top Left.

To place the Layout Grid

• On the Layout Grid palette, enable the Enable Layout Grid check box.

The Layout Grid appears on your canvas. By default, it displays a grid that applies the Rule of Thirds.

The Divine Proportion (left) and the Divine Proportion with the Layout Grid set to divide the canvas into thirds (right).

Starting a sketch

I began my sketch by creating intuitive marks on the canvas. I didn't have a subject matter in mind. I was thinking pure composition. I created marks by matching up places where the two grids meet and overlap. After a few marks, I chose a focal point somewhere between the center of the Fibonacci spiral and one of the Rule of Third lines. After the focal point was established, I connected more lines back to it.

To sketch on the canvas

1 From your custom palette, choose the 2B Pencil brush variant, and adjust the settings on the property bar.

I chose an Opacity setting of 50% and set the Size to 2 pixels.

2 Click a color on the Colors palette.

3 Sketch on the canvas.

I used straight, interconnected lines to begin my sketch. To draw in this mode, on the property bar, enable the Straight Line Strokes button. Each time you click, you set a point on the canvas which is connected to the previous point by a straight line. To discontinue the line, press V. To return to freehand drawing, click the Freehand Strokes button on the property bar.
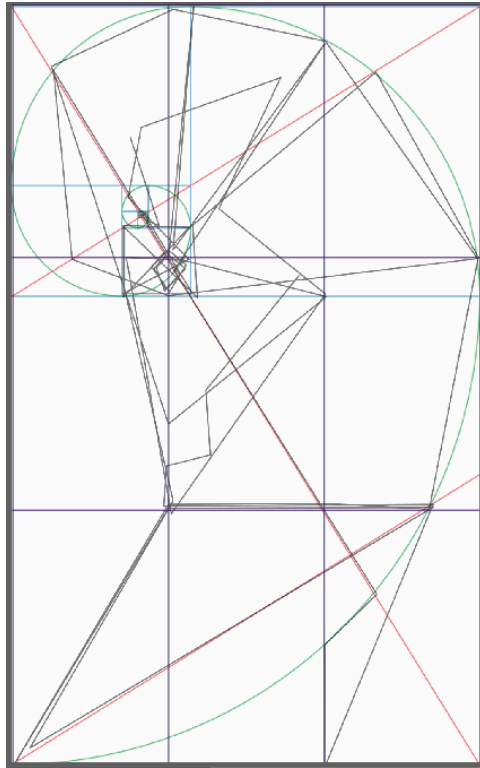
Adding layers, texture, and basic colors

At this point I had a very vague direction for this image. I created a new layer and explored the blossoming content by applying shapes and colors with the Chalk brush variant.

Although the default papers in the Paper Selector are a great starting point for adding texture to a drawing, for bolder and more unique textures, try using some of the additional papers that are on the Corel Painter X CD or create custom paper from a photo, pattern, or drawing.

 To apply color and textures

1 On the Layers palette, click the New Layer button , and choose Multiply from the Composite Method pop-up menu.

The Multiply setting lets you see the sketch lines through the chalk.

If the Layers palette is not open, choose Window > Show Layers.

2 From your custom palette, choose the Square Chalk brush variant.

3 On the Papers palette, click the Paper Selector, and choose a paper texture from the list.

Palette menu arrow
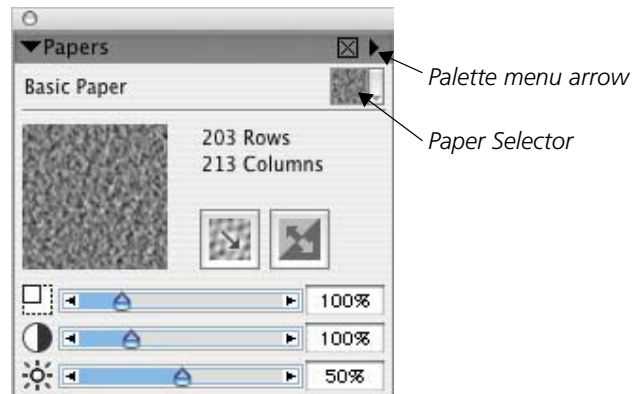
Paper Selector

If you want to modify the paper, try experimenting with different settings in the Papers palette.

4 Apply broad shapes of color and texture to the canvas.

To add papers to the Paper Selector

1 In the Papers palette, click the palette menu arrow, and choose Paper Mover.

2 In the Paper Mover dialog box, click Open.

3 Navigate to the Corel Painter X CD, and choose Extras > Paper Textures, or navigate to any location where you have stored Corel Painter paper textures.

4 Click a .papers file, and click Open.

5 In the Paper Mover dialog box, drag the papers you want from the pane on the right to the pane on the left.

The name of the paper displays between the two panes.

6 Click Done to return to the Papers palette.

The papers you added now appear in the Paper Selector list.

To create a custom paper

1 Open a photo, pattern, or drawing that you want to use as a paper texture.

If the image has multiple layers, you must drop them to the canvas by choosing Layers > Drop All.

2 From the Select menu, choose All.

3 In the Papers palette, click the palette menu arrow, and choose Capture Paper.

4 Type a name for your paper in the Save Paper dialog box.

You can adjust the Crossfade slider to smooth the edges of the paper texture.

5 Click OK, and close the file from which you captured the paper.

Your new paper appears in the Paper Selector list.

To begin, I chose organic paper textures to make the composition more fluid. I chose a limited pallet of crimson, ivory, black, grey, and bone white. These colors let me play with the mood.

Reducing the number of layers

When creating an intuitive painting, one where you surrender many of your creative decisions to the "flow," I want to stress how important it is to trust your decisions. One action that implies trust in yourself is working on fewer layers.

Layers are an incredible tool and they let you experiment with new possibilities; however, they can also be an incredible crutch of indecision. Juggling them can take time and they can increase the size of your file unnecessarily.

🖌 To flatten all layers

• From the Layers menu, choose Drop All.

With one flat canvas, I started to see an image coming into focus. I used the Chalk brush variant to apply more textures and further refine the image. I used the Just Add Water brush variant to blend colors.

I chose paper textures with sharp angles to contrast the heavily organic textures I began with. I applied the paper textures opaquely. I defined the form of the image and added more contrast.

At this point, I could see that the image wanted some kind of skull profile. This decision agreed with me, so I proceeded with the intention of creating a skull.

Developing the subject

I overlaid some earthy sienna colors to add tone and value and began to refine the skull idea. After volleying some interesting patterns with the Pattern Chalk brush variant, I could see the

concept of a headdress beginning to emerge. I focused more attention and detailing to the idea that this skull had some type of elaborate headdress.

To apply patterns by using Pattern Pens

1 From the custom palette, choose the Pattern Chalk brush variant.
2 In the toolbox, click the Pattern Selector and choose a pattern from the list.
3 Adjust the settings on the property bar, and apply brushstrokes to the canvas.

   The brush variant applies the pattern using the color that is selected in the Colors palette.

Adding details and adjusting contrast

I toggled the Divine Proportion spiral on and off and added new strokes to the composition

I used some Mayan and Peruvian inspired paper textures. The skull started taking on a more exotic character and this decision pleased me and opened up new ideas.

I added detail with the Chalk and Pencil variants, and softened edges with the Airbrush variant. I use a limited number of brush variants; I prefer to do more with less than doing less with more.

I have a skull sitting on my desk, so I used it for reference as I refined the form and silhouette of the skull.

I liked the graphic quality of the image, but there was an opportunity to add more form and value. On a new layer, I used the Digital Airbrush brush variant to apply a light sienna color, using a low opacity setting. I continued to use the Airbrush to add areas of value and shadow.

I applied a final layer of detail and sharpness to areas that I wanted the eye to flow towards and I adjusted the overall contrast.

To adjust contrast

1 From the Effects menu, choose Tonal Control > Correct Colors.

2 In the Correct Colors dialog box, adjust the Contrast and Brightness sliders, and click OK to apply the changes.

   The tone curve in the Correct Colors dialog box lets you see how much you are adjusting the contrast and brightness.

Conclusion

When I began this tutorial, I was in San Francisco; as I finished it, I found myself in Bali, Indonesia. Bali is a magical place where the gods are alive. Upon my arrival in Bali, I was advised to make a sacrifice to the gods. In addition to offerings of money and sugar, I could offer this image by turning it into a depiction of one of Bali's more powerful entities, Rangda. I added Durga's bangles, snaggy teeth, bulging eyes, and I created a small cityscape at the bottom of the composition to create a more godlike scale.

I hope you enjoyed this tutorial. Thanks for your time. Manifest greatness friends.

About the author

Andrew Jones has been involved in creating concepts for films and video games for the last seven years. He has worked as an artist for Industrial Light and Magic, Black Isle Studios, Retro Studios and is currently working as an art director for Massive Black.

He was the conceptual force behind Nintendo's Metroid Prime and Metroid Prime 2: Echoes. Andrew is a co-founder of an Internet art community (www.conceptart.org) in which he actively participates. He also teaches conceptual art workshops around the world.

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