

# Making a Collage Portrait

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**i** The term “collage portrait” refers to a painting of a subject in which a foundation image is interwoven with many subsidiary images, some more subtle than others, but all relating to the subject and contributing to the whole in a harmonious and meaningful way.



*San Francisco Heart* by Jeremy Sutton

This tutorial describes how I used Corel® Painter™ X to create *San Francisco Heart*, a collage portrait of San Francisco. It was inspired by my experience of living in San Francisco and wanting to express my appreciation of the beauty, diversity, and creativity of this City by the Bay. By sharing the principles and techniques I used, I hope to empower you to create your own personal collage.

In this tutorial, you will learn about

- acquiring source images
- creating a working image template
- adding images
- resizing and rotating layers
- controlling layer visibility and opacity
- managing layers
- working with paper textures

## Acquiring source images

Initially, you have an idea, an inspiration, or a vision. With this idea, the research process begins. Take your time. Allow the idea to gestate as you seek out and acquire imagery.

Have a good structure and organization for your project folder. The ability to locate your files quickly and easily gives you more time to be more creative. My system is to create a single project folder within which I create subfolders for the source and working images. I save my source images as TIFF files.

The next step is to determine which image will be the main compositional image (foundation), which image will support the main composition (secondary), and which images will be smaller and more subtly woven into the artwork (subsidiary).

I chose an image of the Golden Gate Bridge as my foundation image. The foundation image acts like a compositional anchor for the artwork, setting the main structure and framework onto which many other layers of imagery can be added.



*The foundation image: **The Golden Gate Bridge from Point Funston***

I selected a San Francisco heart, created when local artists were invited to paint large hearts that were placed around the city and then auctioned off to raise funds for charity, to be my secondary image.



The secondary image: **Heart at Chenery House**

I also selected a variety of subsidiary images that reflected my personal experience and view of the city.

## Creating a working image template

The working image template serves as a basis for a consistent canvas size throughout the project, eliminating any confusion when you work with source files of different size or resolution.



### To create a working image template

- 1 Open the foundation image in Corel Painter, and choose Canvas > Resize. Change the units from pixels to inches, disable the Constrain File Size check box, and adjust the image size to match the desired result. Click OK.
- 2 Choose Window > Show Underpainting, and from the Photo Enhance pop-up menu, choose Saturate to enhance the image for painting.
- 3 Choose File > Save As (Cmd + Shift + S for Mac OS® or Ctrl + Shift + S for Windows®) and name your working image template. Save as a RIFF file (the native format of Corel Painter) to preserve all data and maximize the future editability of the file in Corel Painter. Save your file to your working images subfolder for the project.



To save the latest version of your painting, choose File menu > Iterative Save. Whenever you perform an iterative save, a new version of the file is saved with a number added to the filename, and for each subsequent save, the number added to the filename increases by 1. In making **San Francisco Heart**, I ended up saving sixty versions.

**i** To help place each image, try adjusting the Opacity slider in the Layers palette so that you can see the images below.

## Adding images

You can now add images to your foundation image to construct the collage.



### To add an image

- 1 Open the image in Corel Painter X.
- 2 Choose Select > All (Cmd + A for Mac OS or Ctrl + A for Windows).
- 3 Choose Edit > Copy (Cmd + C for Mac OS or Ctrl + C for Windows).
- 4 Click the main image to make it active.
- 5 Choose Edit > Paste (Cmd + V for Mac OS or Ctrl + V for Windows).

The image that is pasted over the working image template is listed as an image layer on the Layers palette.

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




- 6 Double-click the name of the image layer in the Layers palette.
- 7 In the Layer Attributes dialog box, rename the layer more descriptively so you can identify what it is, and click OK.

## Resizing and rotating layers

You can now adjust and move the layers to place them where you'd like.



### To resize and rotate a layer by using the Free Transform effect

- 1 Select the layer in the Layers palette, making sure that the lock symbol  does not appear next to the layer name.
- 2 Choose Effects > Orientation > Free Transform.

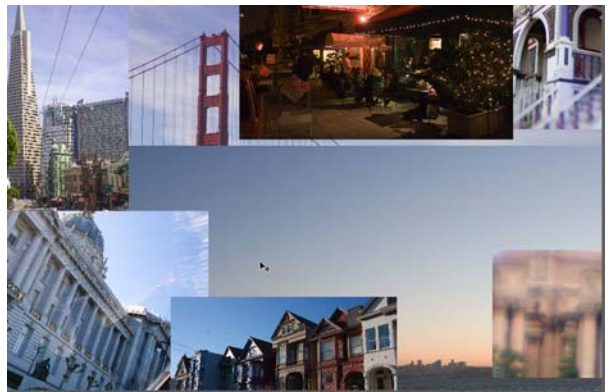
This converts the image layer into a reference layer with faintly visible control handles (small squares) in the corners and halfway along the sides.

If the layer is larger than the background canvas, the control handles may be situated beyond the edge of the image. You can put your image in Screen Mode (Cmd + M for Mac OS or Ctrl + M for Windows) and zoom out (Cmd + minus sign [-] for Mac OS or Ctrl + minus sign [-] for Windows) to see the handles.

**3** Do any of the following:

- To resize the layer while keeping the aspect ratio the same, hold the Shift key down while dragging a corner control handle.
- To move the layer, click and drag the image.
- To rotate the layer, hold down the Cmd (Mac OS) or the Ctrl (Windows) down while dragging a corner handle.

Repeat this process for other subsidiary images. If you have more than four layers, and wish to see them all in the Layers palette at the same time, hold the tip of your cursor down on the last row of pixels along the bottom of the Layers list, and then drag down.




*Multiple layers are each resized using Free Transform.*

## Controlling layer visibility and opacity

You can make parts of your layers disappear, or allow colors from lower layers to affect them, by using layer masks and composite methods.




### To control layer visibility with layer masks

- 1** On the Property bar, enable the Auto Select Layer check box.
- 2** Click the layer with the Layer Adjuster tool , or click the layer in the Layers palette.



*If you see black appear on the layer, undo the brush stroke and reselect the Layer Mask. If you want to bring back any of the layers, make white your main color.*

**3** Choose Effects > Orientation > Commit Transform. This changes the layer from a reference layer to an image layer, which you can paint on.

**4** Click the Create Layer Mask button  at the bottom of the Layers palette.

A layer mask, which has a white square with a black frame, appears to the right of the layer thumbnail in the Layers list.

**5** Click the layer mask to make it active.



*A layer mask icon appears to the right of the layer thumbnail.*

**6** From the Brush Selector bar, choose Digital Airbrush from the Airbrush category.

**7** In the Colors palette, move the cursor to the lower-left corner of the Saturation/Value Triangle, and choose pure black as your main color (front square).

**8** Paint black onto the visible part of the layer in your image. You will see the layer image disappear. To adjust the size of the brush, or the strength of the effect, adjust the Size and Opacity values on the Property bar.



*Painting into the layer mask with black Digital Airbrush.*

**9** Repeat this process for each layer.



*Layer masks have been created and adjusted for each layer.*



### **To control layer opacity with composite methods**

When you have multiple layers in place, you can experiment with blending them. Composite methods let you change a layer's opacity so that its colors are affected by colors in lower layers. There are several methods you can choose from, each one providing a different effect. I used Overlay for the heart image.

To apply a composite method, do the following:

- Select a method from the Composite Method menu in the upper-left area of the Layers palette.



*Choosing the Overlay composite method to blend layers*

## **Managing layers**

Grouping layers lets you control layers as a unit, which is helpful when working with sets of layers that you want to keep together. You can move, rename, hide, show, lock, and set options for a group just as you do for a single layer.

However, you must collapse the group into a single layer if you want to paint on it. By collapsing layers, you can use brushes to paint over, blend, smear, and distort your imagery across all layers.



### To group layers

- 1 Hold down the Shift key as you select the layers you want to group from the Layers palette.
- 2 Choose Layers > Group.



### To collapse a group

- 1 Select a closed group from the Layers palette.
- 2 Choose Layers > Collapse.

## Working with paper textures

Paper textures in Corel Painter X offer a versatile way to integrate all kinds of imagery, such as photos, maps, logos, musical scores, or handwriting, into your collage portrait.



### To create a paper texture template

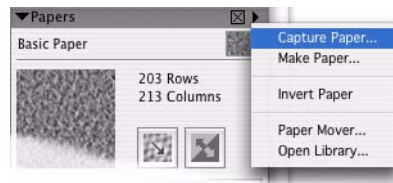
- 1 With the current working image active, choose File > Clone. This makes a flat clone copy of the working image. This working image clone copy will become the paper texture template.
- 2 Open an image that you want to use as a texture. I used an image of a San Francisco map.
- 3 Choose Select > All.
- 4 Choose Edit > Copy.
- 5 Now click the clone to make it the active image.
- 6 Choose Edit > Paste.
- 7 Lower the layer opacity by using the Opacity slider in the Layers palette. This allows you to see through the map and observe the underlying collage.



*Map layer at 50% opacity*



- 8 If the layer needs to be resized or rotated, use Effects > Orientation > Free Transform.
- 9 After you are satisfied with the scale and position of the layer, return the layer opacity to 100% and save this file as a RIFF.
- 10 Choose Layers > Drop.
- 11 Choose Effects > Surface Control > Express Texture.
- 12 Experiment with the Express Texture sliders until you get a high contrast image that preserves details.
- 13 Choose Select > All.
- 14 Choose Window > Library Palettes > Show Papers.
- 15 Choose Capture Paper from the Papers palette flyout menu.



- 16 Name and save the custom paper.  
The name appears in the Papers palette preview window.



*Captured paper texture of map.*



### To paint texture into a layer

- 1 From the Brush Selector bar, choose the Square Chalk 35 brush variant from the Chalk category.
- 2 Choose Layer > New Layer.
- 3 Select a color from the Colors palette.
- 4 Paint the texture into the image.

**i** If you want to wrap your collage around a stretcher bar (gallery wrap), consider adding a colored border and painting into it, using colors from the image. This lets you wrap the collage without losing any of your main composition around the edge of the stretcher bar. The border creates an attractive edge that enhances your painting.



*Painting into the paper texture layer*

## Conclusion

When you feel you have done enough to the image, put it aside for a day or two, and then revisit it with a fresh eye. I often find that I keep developing work long after I originally thought I was finished.

When you are ready to print your collage portrait, flatten your image and resave it. You can then experiment with printing methods and media to see what works best for your piece. After printing my collage portrait on my Epson 9600 Stylus Pro with UltraChrome pigment inks, I fixed the canvas using PremierArt Print Shield and applied a clear gloss acrylic medium and varnish, building up a physical brush stroke texture that followed the forms of the composition. I then added opaque-colored acrylic paint with a brush and palette knife to bring an extra level of life to the artwork.

Ultimately, the most important aspect of your collage portrait is not your choice of media and techniques. It is what you say in your art, what you express about your subject, the story behind the painting, and the passion you share.



## About the author

Born in London, artist Jeremy Sutton studied drawing, sculpture, and printmaking at the Ruskin School of Fine Art and Drawing, Oxford University, while earning a degree in Physics. A twelve-year career in Physics research instruments led Jeremy to move to the San Francisco Bay area of California, the heart of Silicon Valley. It was there, in 1991, that he was introduced to the computer as an art tool, a medium he has been exploring ever since.

Jeremy's artworks are in private and public collections worldwide. Jeremy is the author of four books, including the *Painter Creativity: Digital Artist's Handbook* series. His DVD tutorial *Expanding Your Creativity: The Art of Collage Portraiture* covers the techniques described here. Jeremy is a lively and engaging teacher and runs classes from his San Francisco Sutton Studios & Gallery.

See [www.jeremysutton.com](http://www.jeremysutton.com) for more examples of Jeremy's art, and [www.paintercreativity.com](http://www.paintercreativity.com) to learn about his books, DVDs, and classes, as well as to enjoy articles, tutorials, and other Corel Painter resources.

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