

Painting *speed* with Corel® Painter™ X

Ryan Church



City Chase by Ryan Church

In my professional life, my role is to bring the film director's concept to life through imagery. Finding time to produce a personal piece is rare, and the project is almost more challenging because I don't have a script or description to work from. There's almost too much freedom! But I've had the idea for this painting for a while — a typical action scenario with futuristic design elements. I initially set out to do a quick and gestural illustration inspired by the word and concept *speed*. I had no preconceived notions of design, as I wanted the composition to drive the piece. In other words, I wanted this experience to be 85% about illustration and 15% about design. In the end, the painting became a lot more detailed than usual. The loose gesture served as a strong framework for the detailed design of the architecture and vehicles.

In this tutorial, you will learn about

- painting the background
- blocking
- adding major elements and details
- strengthening the composition

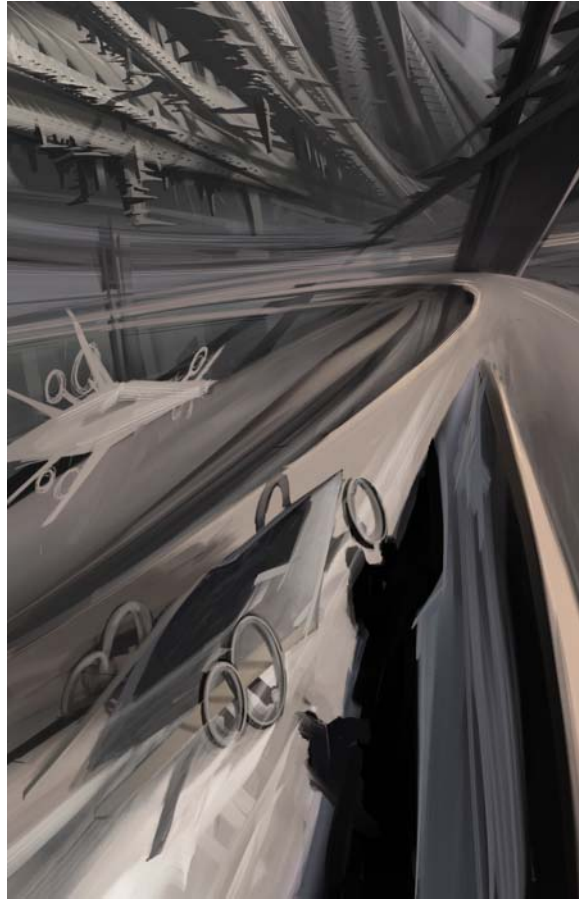
Painting the background



To help you plan a composition, try using the Divine Proportion tool and the Layout Grid tool. To show the palettes for these tools, choose Window > Show Divine Proportion or Window > Show Layout Grid.

My first step was to use the RealBristle Brushes to create the “bones” for the painting. Starting with a neutral gray background, I pushed paint around for a while and did several quick gestures. By using the RealBristle brushes, I forced myself to think in terms of gesture and rough value. I knew that detail and design would come later. When I begin a painting, I like to work purely intuitively and to experiment with a variety of aspect ratios and compositions. The result, in this case, was a vertical-format, one-point perspective piece with blur in the foreground to imply speed and motion.

Blocking

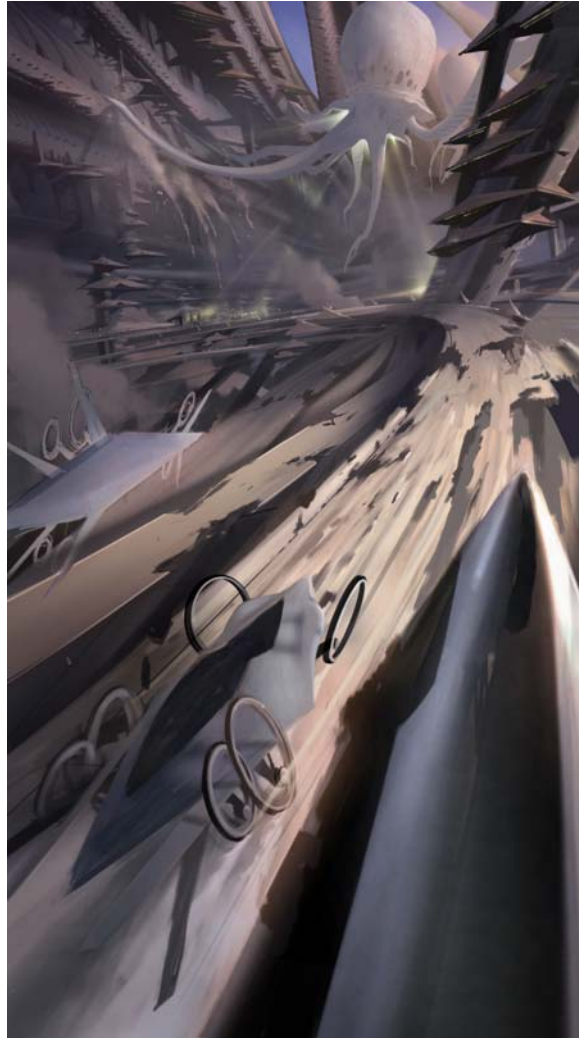


i The Rotate Canvas features in Corel Painter are essential for this step. In my experience, it's simply not possible to sketch this type of gestural accelerating curves any other way than rotating the page while using the tablet to sketch and paint. To rotate or flip the canvas, choose Canvas > Rotate Canvas, and choose the degree and direction of movement.

For the second step, I blocked in the major shapes and started to think about the design details for the piece. In this doodle stage of the painting, I try to capture all the elements in a scribbled sketch, using a variety of Acrylic, Chalk, and Pen brush variants.

I started to answer basic questions. I knew by this point that I wanted to show some vehicles and architecture, so I started to block them in, using the initial sketch as a guide. I kept things monochromatic, focusing on the darks, lights, and details. The initial sketch dictated that my vehicles and architecture were linear and pointy, so I intuitively sketched some complementary shapes.

Adding major elements



i I like using a chunky square brush at this stage to keep me focused on broad strokes. I find the Square Chalk variant in the Chalk category to be ideal for this.

i The Glow brush variant in the F-X category is a favorite of mine. You can add all kinds of lighting and color effects by using this brush with a low-contrast, dark painting.

I decided to squeeze the composition into a more vertical format and use Canvas Size (on the Canvas menu) to add pixels to the bottom of the frame. I started adding color to objects and detailing the architecture and vehicles. The biggest addition here was the “evil squid blimp” in the background. Initially, I wanted to avoid the element of confrontation but, in the end, the piece cried out for it. The soft, rounded shapes contrasted nicely with the very sharp angularity of the architecture. Along with the third vehicle, and the cracks and damage to the roadways, the squid blimp added another element of drama and storytelling to the piece.

Adding details



You can adjust the values of individual elements in a layer by choosing Effects > Tonal Control > Brightness/Contrast. Then, you can reintegrate all the layers by choosing Layers > Drop All.



To adjust highlights and shadows while preserving the underlying details, try using the Broad Water brush variant in the Digital Watercolor category.

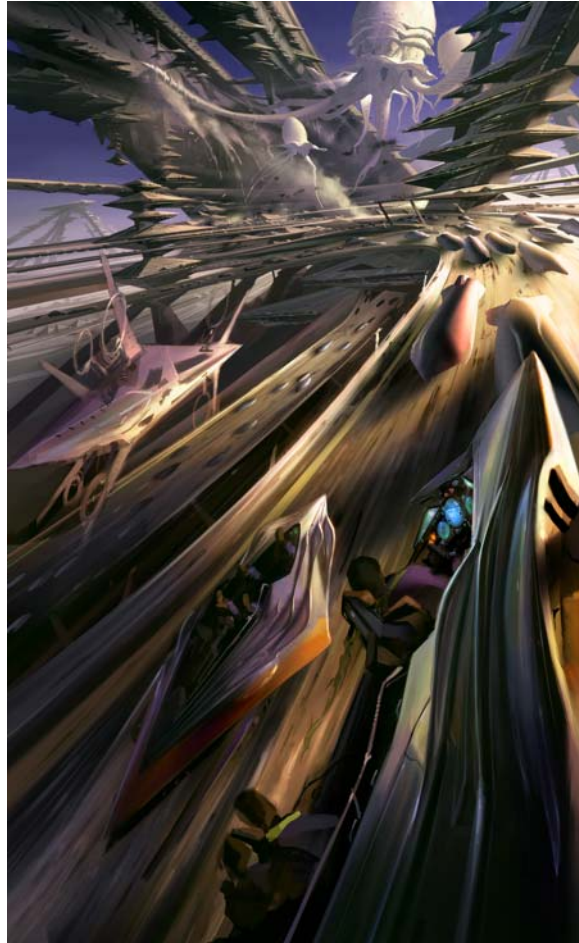
I added more pixels to the bottom of the frame and made some major compositional tweaks. I wanted to lavish more design energy toward the vehicles and increase the power of the composition by pushing my vanishing point even farther up and to the right. By selecting elements, cutting and pasting them, and moving and scaling layers, I could quickly modify the composition.

While I was adding detail, I found that the inclusion of figures to the foreground vehicles really helped me get into the painting. In the thousands of illustrations I've done, this trick always seems to work. When even a quick silhouette of the back of a figure's head is placed in the foreground, the viewer is instantly pulled into the painting and relates to that figure in a powerful, but subliminal, way.

i The Digital Airbrush variant in the Airbrush category is ideal for adding atmospheric perspective.

i Try using the Scratchboard Tool in the Pens category to do free sketching of traffic and other detail elements.

Strengthening the composition




I needed to make some tough edits to improve the piece. The image had started to feel a bit claustrophobic, and the weird spiky architecture I was developing for the background was hard to understand. Showing more sky opened up the piece and strengthened the composition. This change allowed me to use the blue haze to help the background recede and create more depth in the piece. I warmed up the foreground elements to further accentuate that effect.

Making final touches



Here is the final piece. In addition to the final detailing, the most obvious change is the replacement of the third foreground vehicle with more cityscape and evil squid blimps. Making this change was a tough decision, as from the very beginning I had intended to show the design of the foreground vehicles. I thought it was very important to show a bottom view to help the viewer understand this strange design. I also wanted to show the two positions of the landing gear. In street mode, the landing gear would act as wheels; in flying mode, the landing gear would vector 90 degrees and act as hover fans. In the end, I simplified the formerly goofy-looking wheels of the middle craft, to better communicate the design. Ultimately, this helped the composition by increasing the depth. By eliminating the midground element (the craft on the far left), and using brush variants from the Blenders category to

 Try the Grainy Water variant from the Blender category to create an effective motion blur.



create a motion blur in the foreground, I added a sense of drama and speed. This helped fulfill those first visceral expectations for the piece.

I usually start with some design in mind, but in this case I started with a composition and developed the look and design of the subjects afterward. The detail was fun to execute — rendering different materials, lighting, and textures keeps the interest level high and allows for the contrast that's desirable in a concept illustration.

One advantage of working with Corel Painter X is that I can continue to work on this painting, now that I have all the details figured out. For instance, I can use the Blender brushes to loosen up the image and increase its dynamic, kinetic qualities. Making these changes would be difficult to do with a photographic image, but it lends itself to the capabilities of Corel Painter X with its Natural-Media® tools.

About the author

Ryan Church is best known for his role as a Concept Design Supervisor and Industrial Light & Magic Senior Art Director on *Star Wars: Episode II* and *Star Wars: Episode III*, as well as for his design work for Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*. Ryan also did design work for several unproduced versions of Paramount Picture's *A Princess of Mars*. He holds a B.S. with honors in Transportation Design from Art Center College of Design, where he has since taught Advanced Entertainment Design. His clients and former employers include Lucasfilm, Industrial Light & Magic, Paramount Pictures, Blue Sky Studios, Bay Films, Walt Disney Feature Animation, Walt Disney Imagineering, Universal Studios, Mattel, and Electronic Arts. He is currently working on James Cameron's *Avatar*.

To learn more about Ryan, please visit his Web site at www.ryanchurch.com.

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