

MASTERS COLLECTION: VOLUME 1

# DIGITAL PAINTING

## *techniques*



3dtotal



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3DTOTAL.COM LTD



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TERRA-STOMA © DR. CHEE MING WONG

MASTERS COLLECTION: VOLUME 1

# DIGITAL PAINTING

## *techniques*

COMPILED BY THE 3DTOTAL TEAM

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## INTRODUCTION

Digital painting is huge! It's a modern, creative medium that is growing rapidly and is being used in so many industries and by so many individuals – hobbyists and professionals alike. This book is just a slice of what's out there in the digital painting world, but within this "slice" we aim to offer a comprehensive cross-section of tips and techniques from some of the most accomplished digital artists in the industry today. We cover a wide variety of popular subjects, from aliens, creatures and humans through to robots, cityscapes and natural environments, including

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weather effects and many more. The styles we cover vary from speed painting, offering a more traditional impressionistic style, through to setting up the many custom brushes that can provide precise, technical and often time-saving techniques.

Speaking of traditional media, it is important to remember that digital painting is becoming more widely accepted and highly regarded as the techniques and resulting imagery advance. Long gone is the time of sceptics who regarded painting with the aid of hardware and software as cheating; the artist still needs to be just as talented as ever before to produce the breathtaking work you can see throughout these pages. However, with the benefits that digital painting offers, such as increased speed, freedom to experiment, efficient workflows and ease of sharing work with online communities, more and more artists are discovering and embracing this incredible medium. And with guides such as this book, we strive for everyone interested in digital art to be the best they possibly can be by learning from the masters' tutorials, whilst being inspired by their gallery images.

**TOM GREENWAY**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR, 3DTOTAL



PAUL © DAARKEN



## FREE RESOURCES

Some of our *Digital Painting Techniques* tutorial artists have kindly supplied, where appropriate and possible, free resources to accompany their tutorials for you to download to follow along with their teachings. You will find free custom brushes donated by Carlos Cabrera, Mélanie Delon, Mike Corriero, Daarken and Nykolai Aleksander, and on top of these 3DTotal are also providing a base painting to accompany some of our environment tutorials by Carlos Cabrera, as well as a photo (plate) for the matte painting tutorials by Tiberius Viris.

All you need to do to access these free resources is to visit the new 3DTotal micro site at [www.focalpress.com/digitalartmasters](http://www.focalpress.com/digitalartmasters), go to the Books section, and there you will find information on how to download the files. Simply look out for the "free resources" logo on articles within this book that have files for you to download from [www.focalpress.com/digitalartmasters](http://www.focalpress.com/digitalartmasters)!

**DIGITAL ART MASTERS**

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**An Interview with Dr. Chee Ming Wong**

Read our interview with Digital Art Master Dr. Chee Ming Wong, Creative Director and co-founder of Opus Arts Limited. Chee is a master of creating aerospace, sci-fi and fantasy imagery. See more of his fantastic art and discover his inspirations in this article. [Read Interview...](#)

**New Book! Digital Painting Techniques is Announced**

Focal Press and 3DTotal.com are proud to announce *Digital Painting Techniques Volume 1*.

Compiled by the team at 3dtotal.com, *Digital Painting Techniques, volume 1* offers digital inspiration with hands-on insight and techniques from professional digital artists. More than just a gallery book \* within *Digital Painting Techniques* each artist has written a breakdown overview, with supporting imagery of how they made their piece of work. Beginner and intermediate digital artists will be inspired by the gallery style collection of the finest examples of digital painting from world renowned digital artists. [Read More...](#)

[www.focalpress.com/digitalartmasters](http://www.focalpress.com/digitalartmasters)

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# custom brushes

Any artist will tell you that the link between their thoughts and ideas and the actual paintings they produce are the tools they wield. From a traditional standpoint these have been the canvas and in particular the brushes. These are no less important in a digital context; the increasing array of brushes available and the freedom to create customized versions is paramount to the quality of digital painting today. This chapter provides an insight into the value of using custom brushes, and shows how they can be created from scratch and tailored to suit your subject matter.





© BRIAN RECKTENWALD

# ORGANIC CUSTOM BRUSHES FROM INK, WATER AND SALT EXPERIMENTS

BY BRIAN RECKTENWALD

SOFTWARE USED: PHOTOSHOP

## INTRODUCTION

Like a lot of other digital artists out there, creating custom brushes is not only a key step in creating the art, but a heck of a lot of fun all in itself! The default Photoshop brushes are quite awesome, and I use them frequently, especially in the blocking phase, but I always end up integrating one or two custom brushes as well, for control and a personal touch. I've created custom brushes from just about anything I can find, including pictures, textures, doodles and digital scribbles. But my preference is to add an organic feel to my



© BRIAN RECKTENWALD

Fig.01

brushes, so 90 percent of my custom brushes come from high-resolution scans made up of crazy experiments with ink, water and salt on drawing paper (Fig.01).

## STEP 01

Here I pull different selections from the scanned image and mess with them using Levels and Filters and painting over them with other brushes until I get an ideal base image for a new custom brush (Fig.02).

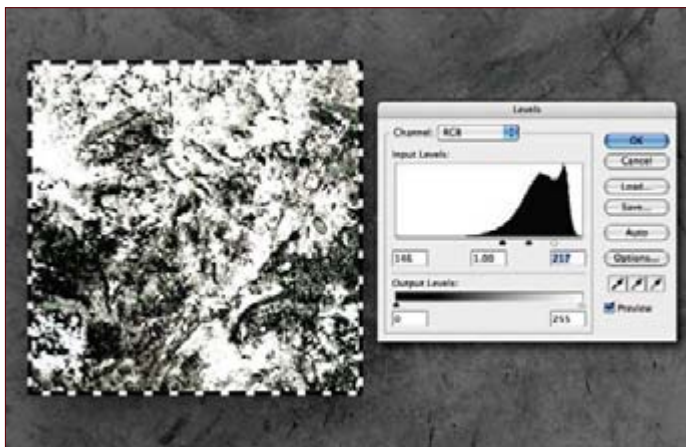


Fig.02

### STEP 02

In this example, I'm going to create a brush for use with the Smudge tool. I want a more stippled pattern, like a dry brush would give, to help add texture as I blend. After bringing contrast into the image by clamping the Levels, I begin experimenting with some filters to further pronounce the shapes (Fig.03).

### STEP 03

Then I duplicate the original texture a few times and place them on top of the filtered version. Finally, I play with different blending modes until there's a good texture/shape balance (Fig.04).

### STEP 04

Once I have my base brush, I flatten my layers and possibly resize the image. It's better to save your brush at the highest native resolution possible. However, the higher you go, the slower the drawing performance. To save this image off as a brush, go to Edit > Define Brush Preset, and hit OK after giving it an appropriate name (Fig.05). Now you can access this brush at any time in the Brushes window.

### STEP 05

It's now time to set up the Smudge tool brush settings for use with our new brush. We'll be able to pull a lot of mileage from

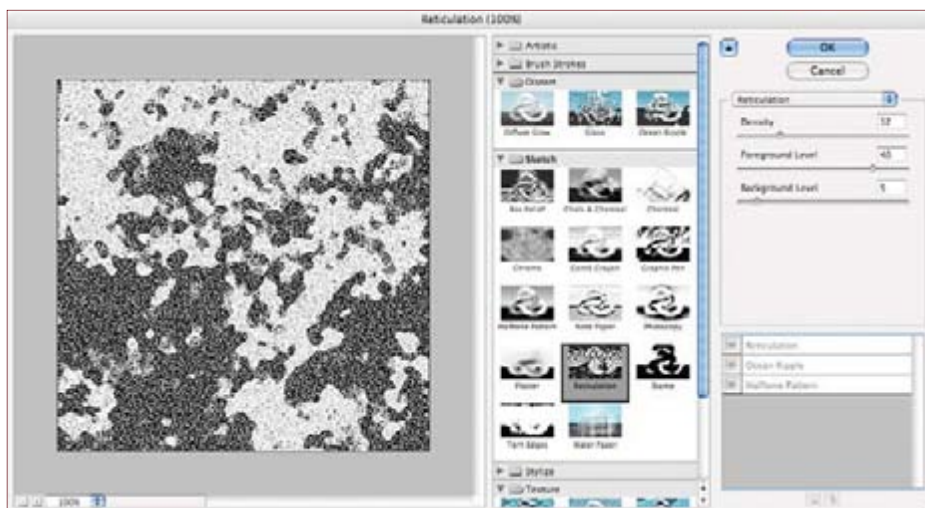


Fig.03

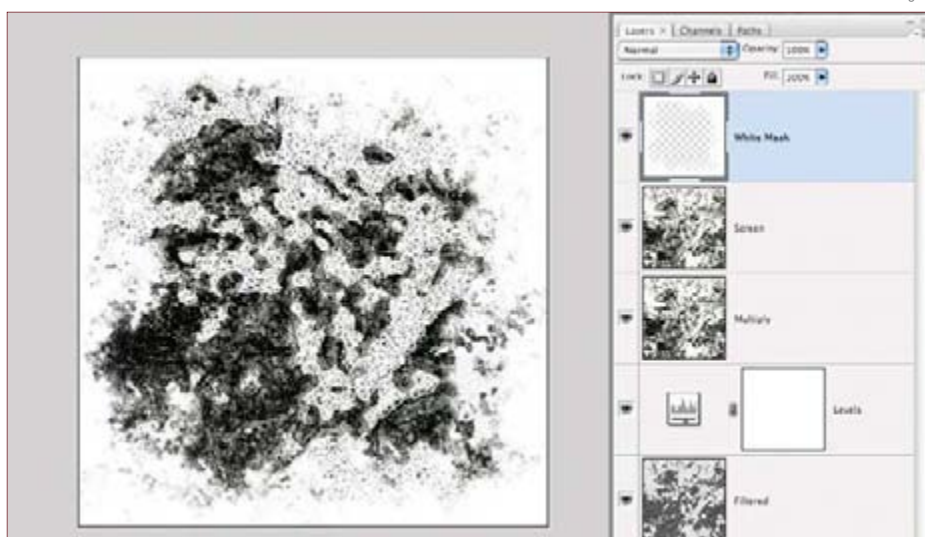


Fig.04

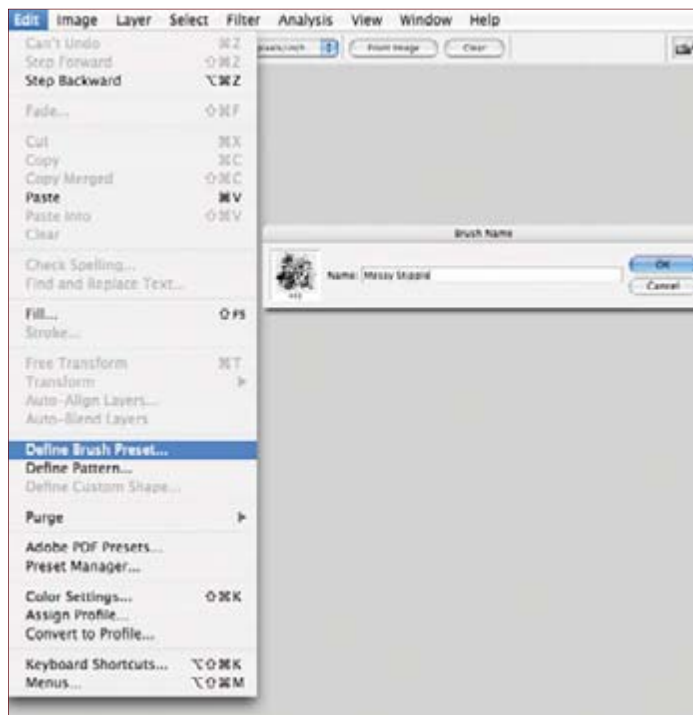


Fig.05

this brush simply by adjusting the Shape Dynamics, Scattering, and Other Dynamics settings, without having to swap out a new brush image. Another important value to adjust and tinker with as you go is the Strength setting. An example of this brush in action starts with a canvas of broad brush strokes (a default round brush with Strength and Hardness of 100) and then a Cutout filter applied (Fig.06).



Fig.06



Fig.07

STEP 06

I now select the Smudge tool and load our new brush image (Fig.07). For rapid, first pass blending I want speed and spread ability, so at this stage I'll use a smaller brush size with just the Shape Dynamics and Other Dynamics settings adjusted (Fig.08a – b).

STEP 07-FINAL

At this stage I'm constantly changing the strength and sometimes turning off the Other Dynamics setting. After some cross-hatching to bring out some tonal gradation, I change my

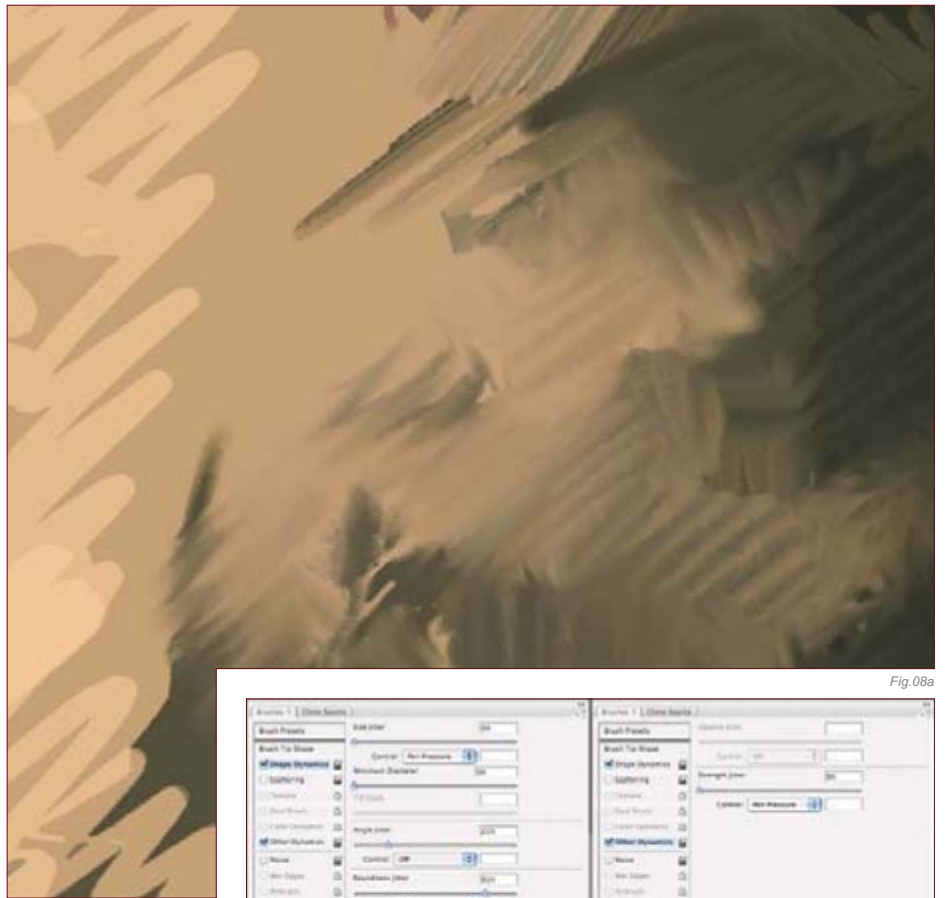


Fig.08a

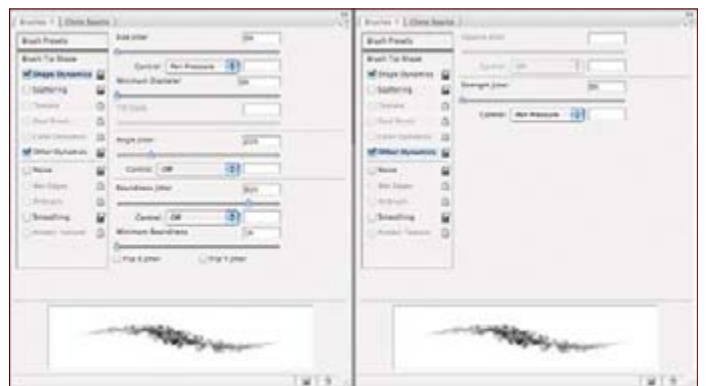


Fig.08b



Fig.09a

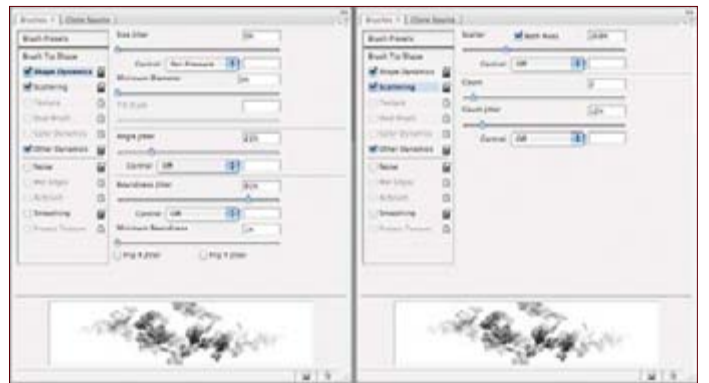


Fig.09b

brush settings to bring a softer, yet still textural, quality to the strokes by turning on the Scattering (Fig.09a – b). The rule of thumb here is that the higher the scatter, the softer the blending. Also, the higher the strength, the more the texture will come through. Adjusting the brush accordingly is also important at this stage.

To show you an example of our new brush in action, the custom brush made in this tutorial, and the variations mentioned, have been used exclusively in creating this painting of an old woman (Fig.10).



Fig.10



© CARLOS CABRERA

# HOW TO CREATE BRUSHES FROM ANIMAL TEXTURES

BY CARLOS CABRERA

SOFTWARE USED: PHOTOSHOP

The first thing we need for this tutorial is a couple of pictures to create the texture that we will be using in our brush. In this instance, I have chosen to use two photographs of my dog and cat ([Fig.01a – b](#)).

The next step is to completely desaturate the two pictures. With both images on one layer, we can achieve this simply by going to Image > Adjustments > Desaturate. We now need to place each picture in a different layer. Select the top layer and change the properties of the



© CARLOS CABRERA

Fig.01a



© CARLOS CABRERA

Fig.01b

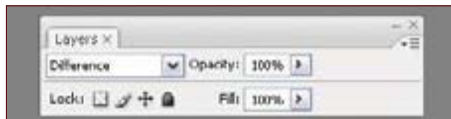


Fig.02a



Fig.02b



Fig.02c



Fig.02d

layer to Difference ([Fig.02a](#)). By doing this, we will have both layers combined in one to create a new and interesting texture ([Fig.02b – d](#)).

Now let's flatten the image (Layer > Flatten Image) and search for some original shapes

within the texture to use for our new brush.

[Fig.03](#) shows a unique shape, which I've circled in red. We will need to select it with our Lasso tool (Feather = 20%), and then cut and paste it onto a new document (CTRL + C + N + V).

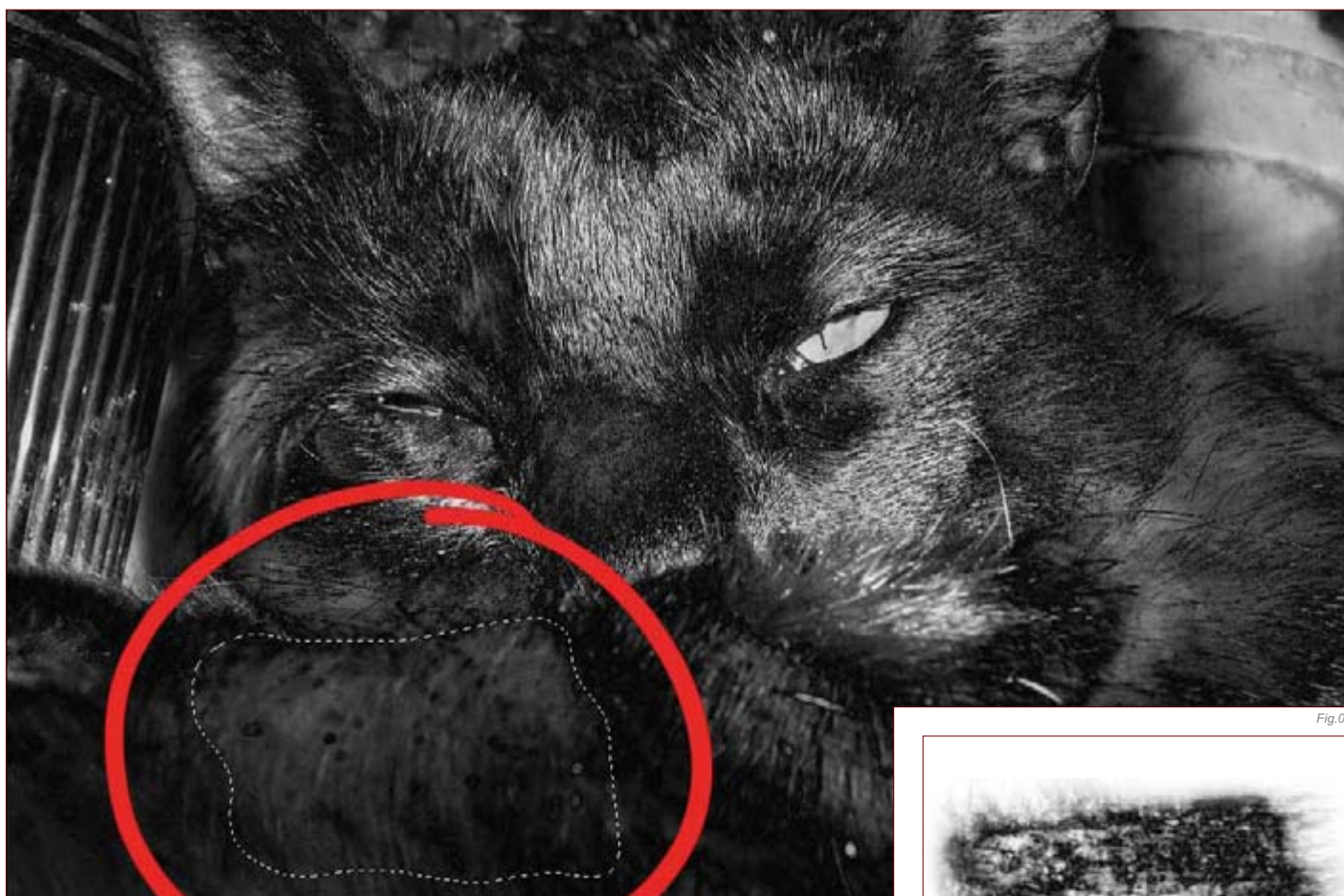


Fig.03

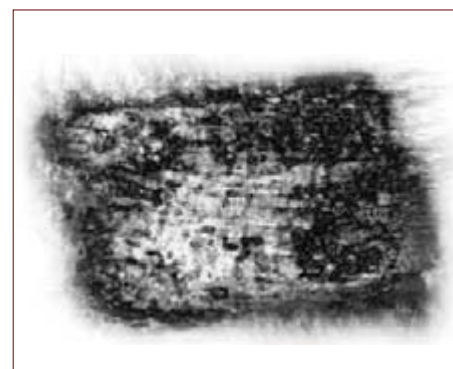


Fig.04

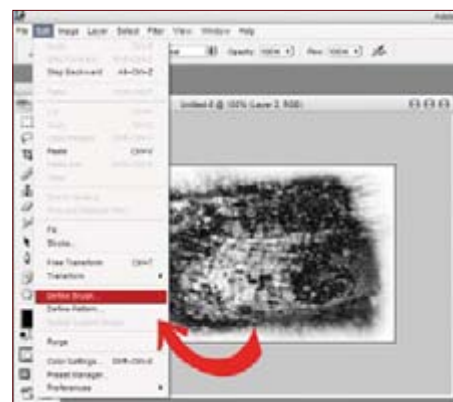


Fig.05

You will see that the new document that we just created is a potential custom brush. Now, let's duplicate the layer where our brush is (CTRL + J) and rotate it by 90 degrees (CTRL + T) at any angle. We need to change the properties of this new layer, once again to Difference, and then repeat this step two or three times until we manage to create a textured border (Fig.04).

Our new brush is now almost done; we just need to tell Photoshop to start using this new image as a brush from now on. So, go to Edit > Define Brush, and voila! We have just created a new custom brush. We can now go ahead and change the settings in order to make it even better (Fig.05).

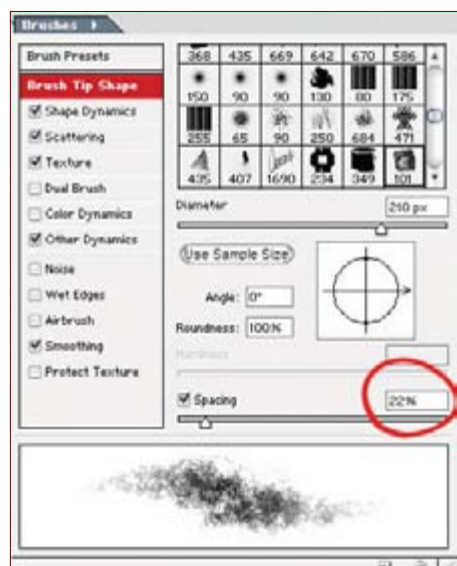


Fig.06



Fig.07

Go to the Brush tab and try out the following settings:

- **Brush Tip Shape** – Spacing 22% (Fig.06)
- **Shape Dynamics** – Size Jitter 0% and select Pen Pressure; Angle Jitter 100% and select Pen Pressure (Fig.07)

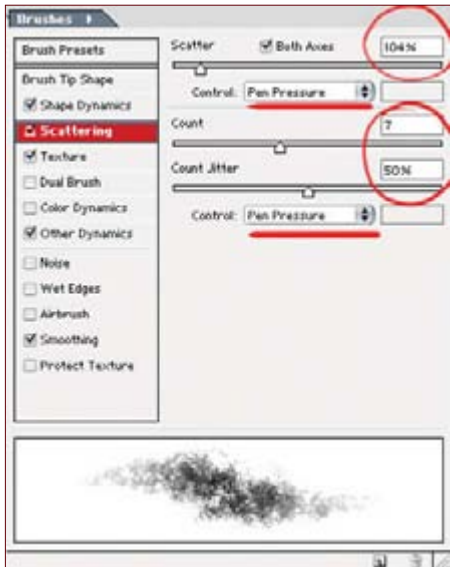


Fig.08

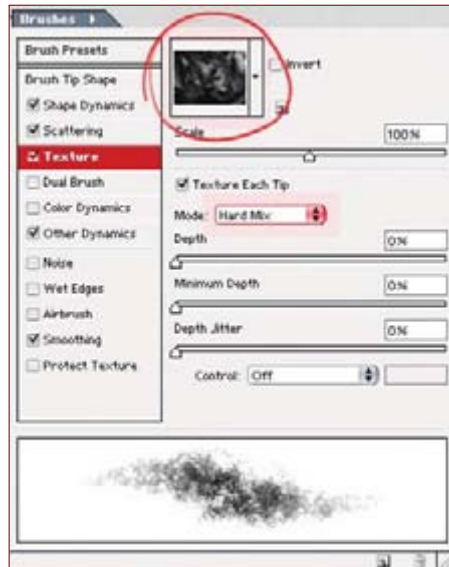


Fig.09

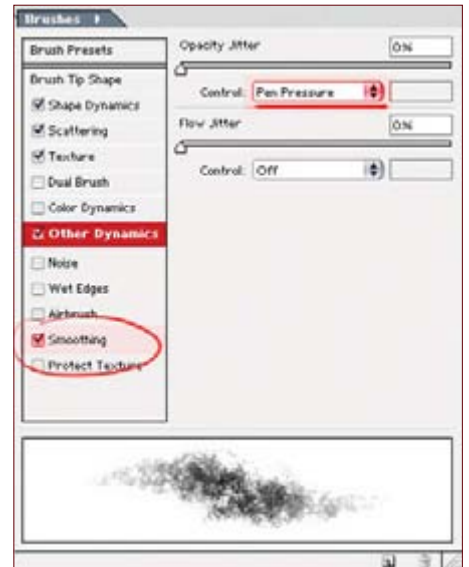


Fig.10

- **Scattering** – Scatter 104% and select Pen Pressure; Count 7, Count Jitter 50% and select Pen Pressure (Fig.08)
- **Texture** – Select a random texture and change the mode to Hard Mix (Fig.09)
- **Other Dynamics** – Opacity Jitter 0% and select Pen Pressure; Smoothing > On (Fig.10)

And that's it—pretty easy, don't you think? Here are a couple of examples of this new brush at work (Fig.11 – 12). You now have the skills to create your own custom brushes for your projects, so get creative and have some fun with them!

You can download a custom brush (ABR) file to accompany this tutorial from [www.focalpress.com/digitalartmasters](http://www.focalpress.com/digitalartmasters)



Fig.11



Fig.12





© DAARKEN

## CUSTOM BRUSHES BY DAARKEN

SOFTWARE USED: PHOTOSHOP

A lot of people ask me what kind of brushes I use and how I make them. Usually, when I paint, I only use a few brushes, most of which are just Photoshop presets with a few tweaks to the brush settings. When painting a figure I normally use the standard brushes and save my custom brushes for textures and backgrounds. These are the brushes I use, although a majority of all my illustrations are painted using primarily the two brushes circled in [Fig.01](#). I find that most of the time there are too many brushes to choose from, and most of them are just plain gimmicky. I like to stick with just a few of my favorite brushes when painting. This also helps to improve your speed, since you don't have to look around and try and decide which brush to use next. It also allows you to learn how to paint different textures using the same brushes, instead of relying on a brush to paint a texture for you.

Let's start making a custom brush by putting down some random shapes and lines. Try not to make anything too symmetrical, as this will make your brush look weird and fake ([Fig.02](#)). Sometimes what I like to do is use a custom brush that I have already made as a starting point. I lay that down and then start drawing

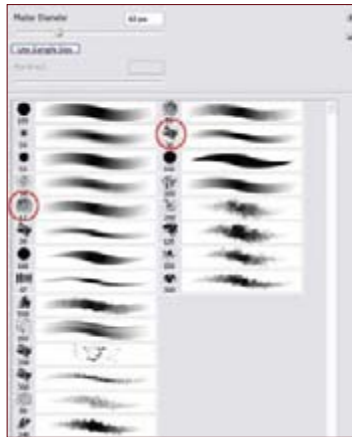


Fig.01



Fig.02



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Fig.03

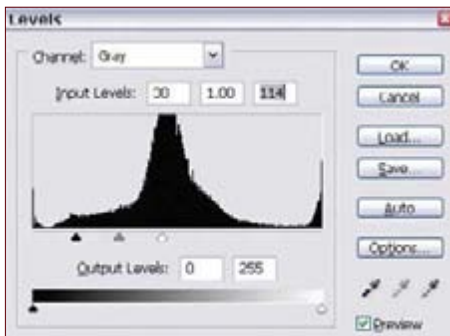


Fig.04

and erasing on top of it. Now that I am happy with my shapes I am going to open a photo to use as a texture overlay. It doesn't really matter what kind of photo you use (Fig.03); you can use any subject matter and still get a cool-looking brush. Once you have a photo, convert it to grayscale and then go to Image > Adjustments > Levels (or Ctrl + I) (Fig.04). Drag the sliders around until you get high levels of contrast within the photo, and then click OK when you're ready.

Copy and paste the photo into the document with the brush we started making. On the layer with the photo, change the layer properties to something that looks good. In this case I used Overlay (Fig.05). Now you can go back and add another layer on top of the photo and fix any parts that may cause problems or repetition (Fig.06). For example, I painted out some of the lines in the top left of the picture.

To create your brush from the image, simply go to Edit > Define Brush Preset; I'm using CS2, so the wording may be different in other versions, but basically anything that says Define Brush will work (Fig.07). This brush

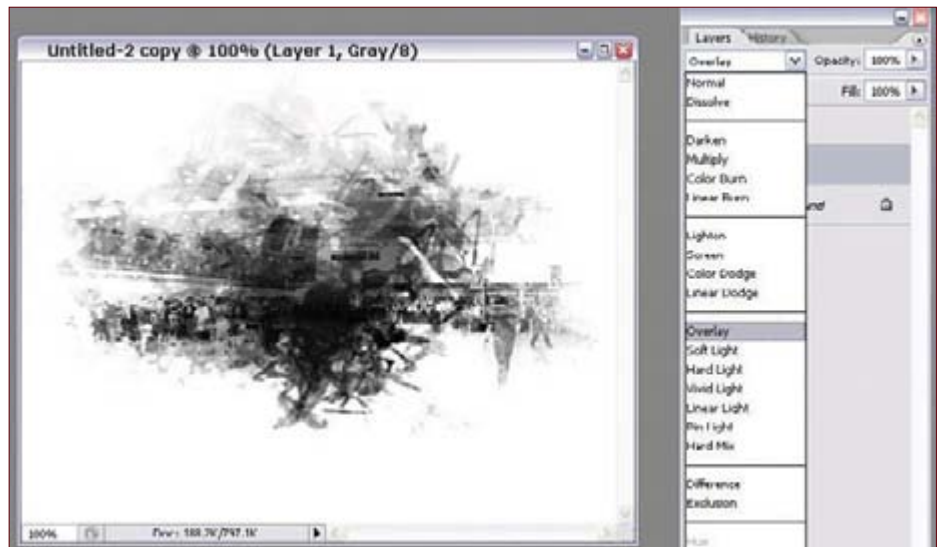


Fig.05

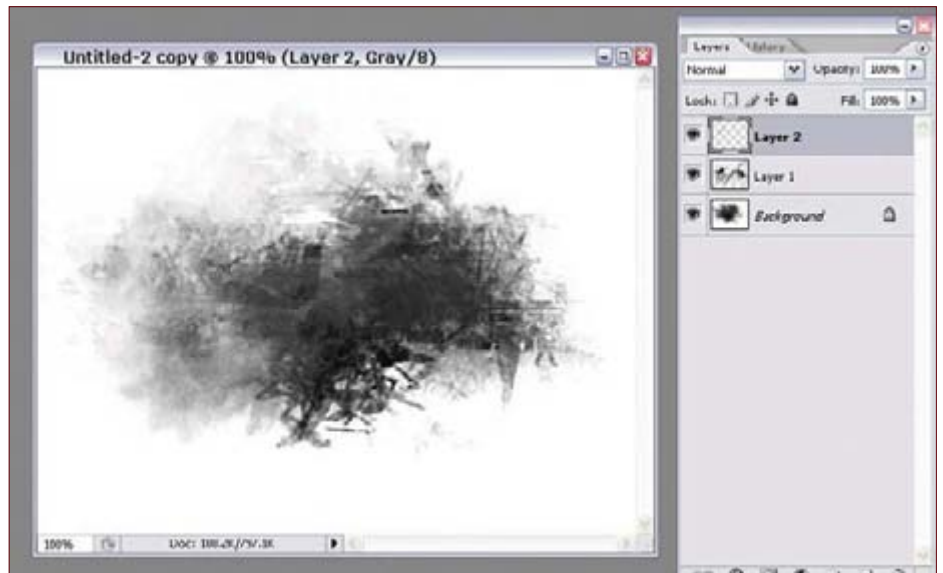


Fig.06



Fig.07



Fig.08

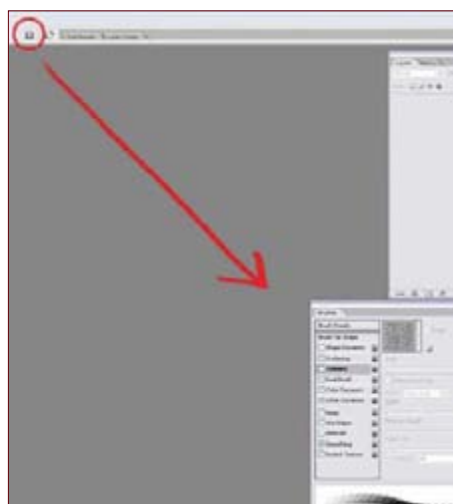


Fig.09

will now be at the end of your brush list on the Brush drop down menu. Select your new brush and give it a try. Right now the brush will look really ugly and repetitive (Fig.08) – but don't worry, we're about to fix that.

Next we're going to change the brush's settings by opening the Brush Settings window. To do this, either click the Brushes button, or go to Window > Brushes (or simply hit F5 on your keyboard). You'll now be able to get a good-



Fig. 10a



Fig. 11a



Fig. 12a



Fig. 10b



Fig. 11b

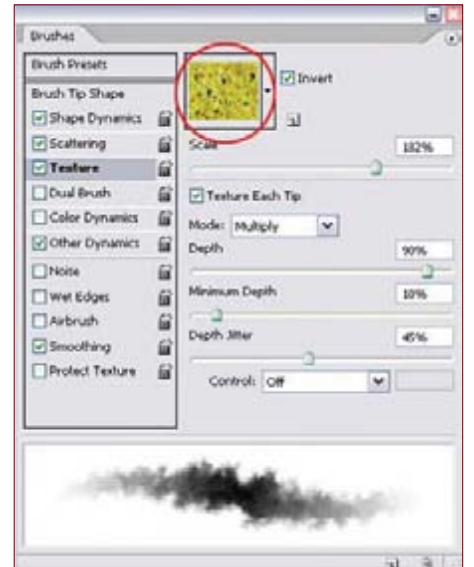


Fig. 12b

looking brush by playing around with these settings (Fig. 09). I would advise you to spend some time dragging all the sliders back and forth so that you can get a feel of what each setting does, and find which ones you like.

For this particular brush, click on the first setting, called “Shape Dynamics”. This will bring up different options on the side. By selecting Size and Angle Jitter we can break up some of the repetitive shapes that are found in

the original brush (Fig. 10a – b). Now click on the second option: Scattering. This will take the basic shape of the brush and spread it out so that you’re painting with several instances of the same shape, instead of all of them being in the same line. You can also control the density of the brush here (Fig. 11a – b). To add some more texture to the brush you can click on the Texture button. Clicking on the picture of the texture brings up a dialog box where you can select which kinds of textures you want to use (Fig. 12a – b). Finally, click on the Other Dynamics option. This controls the opacity of the brush based on pressure sensitivity. This is a little sample of what the new brush looks like after changing the settings (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13

Here are some examples of other custom brushes in my collection (Fig. 14):

**Brush A & B:** This rectangular brush has some nice texture to it that I like to use when painting skin. I usually use this brush as the



BRUSH A & B

BRUSH C

BRUSH D

BRUSH E

BRUSH F

base layer to get the main shapes in, and then I come in on top of it with other brushes (Fig.15a). I use this brush a lot because of its versatility. When used at a very small size, you can get some really sharp lines, while at larger sizes you can get a lot of texture (Fig.15b – c).



Fig.15a



Fig.15c

**Brush C:** This is another brush that I use mainly for creating texture in the background (Fig.16a – b).



Fig.15b

**Brush D:** This speckle brush is really good for painting things like dust, hair, dirt, pores, etc. (Fig.17a – b).

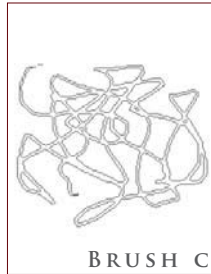


Fig.16a

**Brush E:** I usually use this brush for creating texture in the background (Fig.18a – b).

**Brush F:** The brush I use the most is the default round brush. Even though it has no texture attached to it, I can still get a lot of variety with this brush (Fig.19a – b).

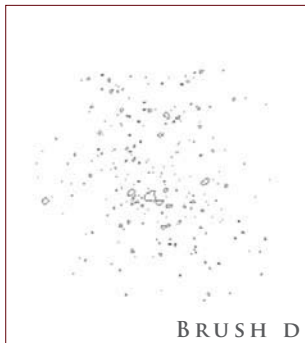


Fig.17a



Fig.17b



Fig.18a



Fig.18b

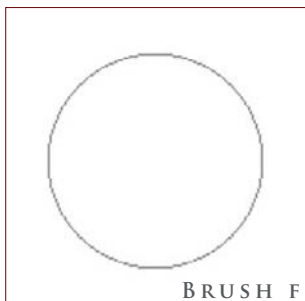


Fig.19a



Fig.19b

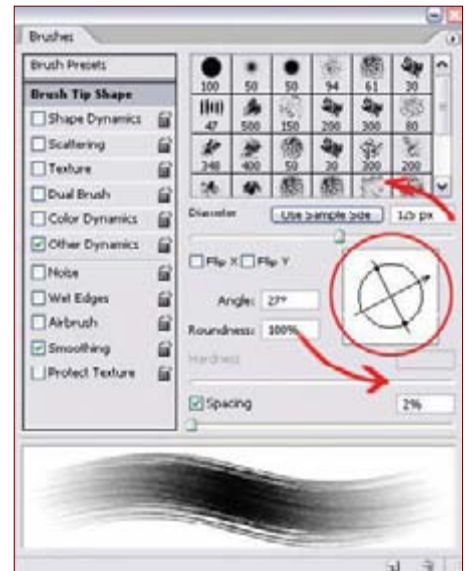


Fig.20

You can also rotate your brush in order to get brushstrokes in different directions. Just go to the Brush Tip Shape options and drag the circular slider around (Fig.20).



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# CREATING CUSTOM BRUSHES TO SAVE TIME

## BY MARC BRUNET

SOFTWARE USED: PHOTOSHOP

Using Photoshop, we have all had this thought at one point: “Man, wouldn’t it be great if there was a brush that could do all this, instead of me wasting my life on it?!” Well, in this tutorial, I will explain how I create my own custom brushes and how I use them in order to save me an incredible amount of time when I paint.

We will first try to mimic the stroke of a pencil – one of the main brushes I used to paint *Sky Machina*, along with a textured dry brush. At first, the brush creating process seems a bit tedious, but as soon as you get the hang of it you’ll pretty much fall in love with it. You can create a brush out of everything you paint! So first, let’s open a new file of about 500

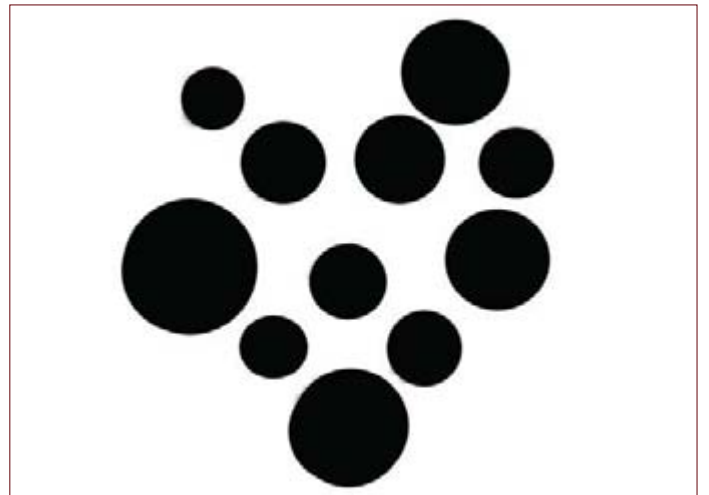


Fig.01



Fig.02



Fig.03

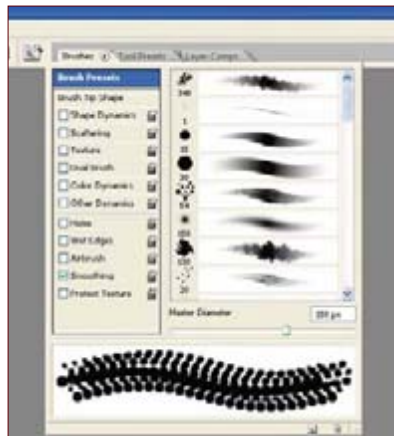


Fig.04

by 500 pixels and draw whatever you want (let’s draw dots for the sake of this tutorial). Now go to Edit > Define Brush Preset (Fig.01 – 02). And that’s it! Well, that’s not exactly it, but following that the only things left to do are to rename your brush (Fig.03) and tweak it to get the effect you want, in the Brushes tab on the top menu.

Opening the Brushes menu, we notice a bunch of options used to customize the basic brush that we just created (Fig.04). So, at this point, I suggest you open a new file with a white background to test the brush as you make the tweaks. You don’t need to change that much to get a decent result though. There might seem to be a lot of options but they’re all very intuitive and you can see the result right away in the Brush Preview window.

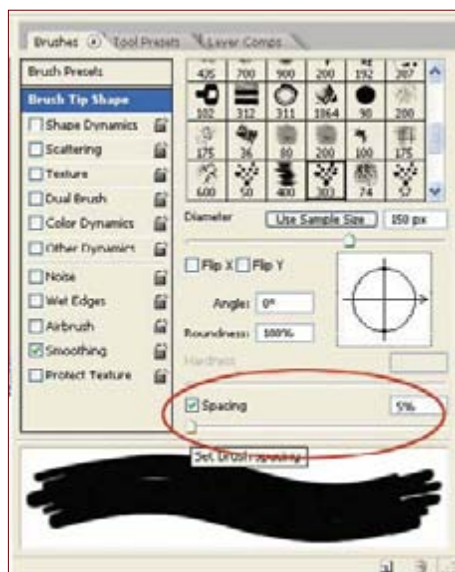


Fig.05

Here we'll change the brush Spacing, since we want to eliminate the gap between each shape to make it look like a single stroke, so I'll change the spacing from 25 to 5%. Notice how the stroke now feels even and continuous (Fig.05). I then check Shape Dynamics so that the lighter I press with the tablet pen, the thinner the stroke will be (Fig.06). You can just leave everything else at the default settings. Now skip to Dual Brush – this option is really where the party's at! Here your brush can really become something special. For this brush I'll use the triangular-shaped brush in the Thumbnails menu, which is full of tiny holes so it'll give me the pencil look I'm trying to achieve. Simply change the values, as shown in Fig.07.



Fig.10



Fig.11

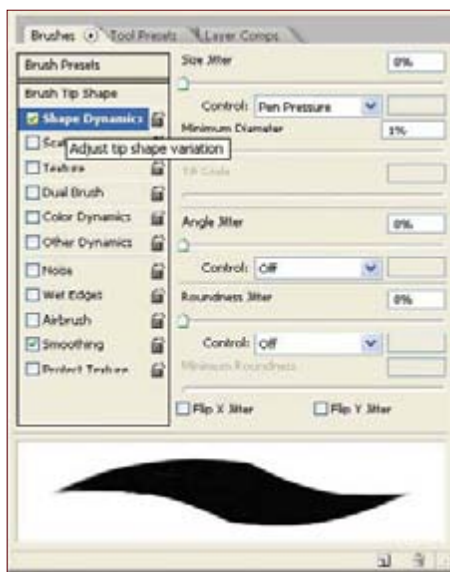


Fig.06

If I try the brush at this point I already get the result I wanted (Fig.08). The only thing left now is to activate the Opacity change with the Pen Pressure so that, if I press lighter on the tablet, the stroke will be lighter too (Fig.09). It's just more intuitive and easier to work with this way. Save the newly created brush under something like "Pencil brush" – and that's it! See the difference (Fig.10)? Use this new brush as you would use a real pencil to create all the different opacities and brush sizes you need. It's a really nice brush to do line art digitally, or simply to get a little more texture than you would get with a regular round brush for example (Fig.11).

The other main brush I use, besides the regular hard-edged round brush found in the default Photoshop brush set, is another custom brush. This one is kind of like the one we just created, as it's based on the same starting shape, but it has a texture associated to it. So let's start with the same previous dots and save it



Fig.12



Fig.13



Fig.14



Fig.15

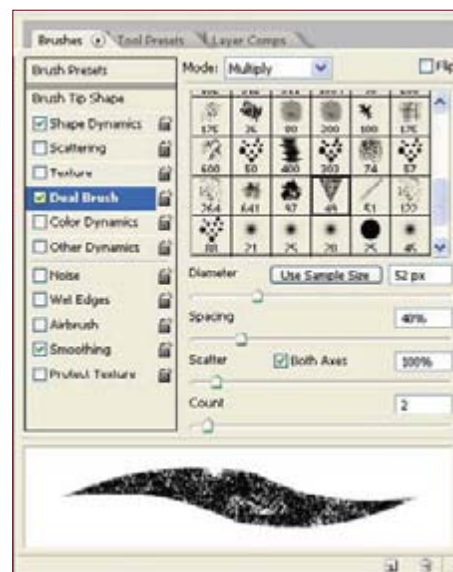


Fig.07

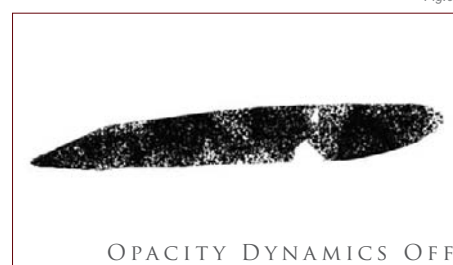


Fig.08

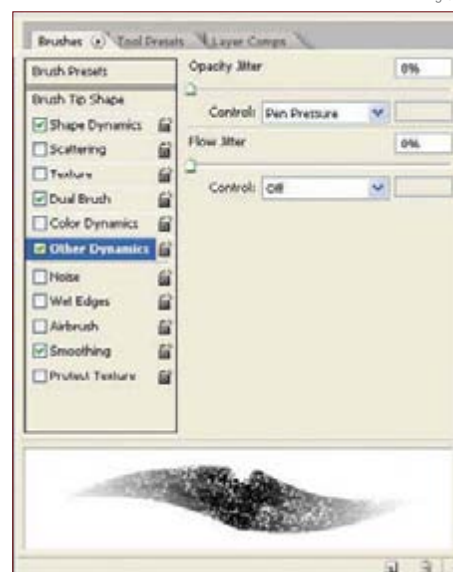


Fig.09

as something like "Dry brush". Again, in the Brushes tab menu, let's play with a couple of the options ... Firstly, drop the spacing to 5%, just like with the previous one, check Shape Dynamics and Other Dynamics, and leave everything else at default. Then check Texture, and leave everything at default there as well. Let's step back at this point, save the brush we have here, and move on to creating the texture that the brush will use.

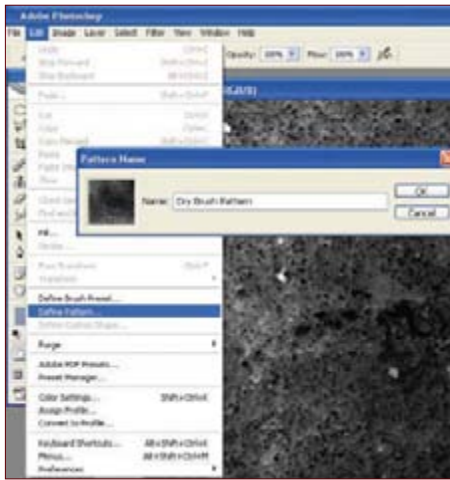


Fig.16

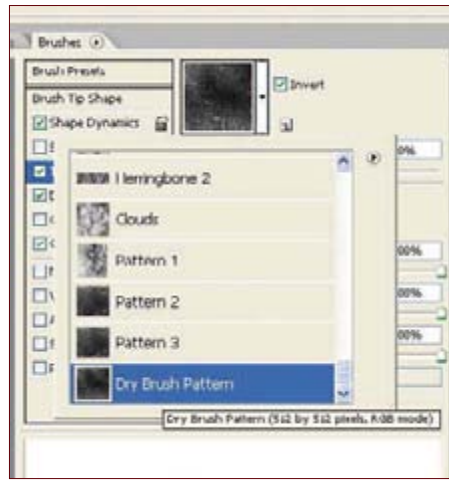


Fig.17

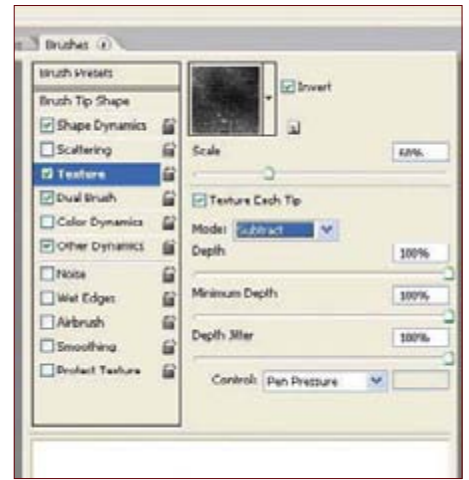


Fig.18

There are a bunch of default textures you can find when you click on Textures in the Brushes tab menu, but none of them will help us here. So let's make our own! A very quick and simple way I have found is to take a photo of concrete, or any similar surfaces, take it to Photoshop, play with the Brightness/Contrast until you have a really contrasted and uneven texture, invert the colors (Ctrl + I), desaturate it, and then go to Filter > Brush Strokes and throw an Accented Edges filter on it (Fig.12 – 15). This should do! Now all you have to do is go to Edit > Define Pattern, save it under something like Dry Brush Pattern (Fig.16), and it should automatically appear in the pattern library.

Let's go back to where we were with our dry brush. In the Texture menu, browse the patterns and find the one we just created (Fig.17), adjust the scale to 60% and make sure that Texture Each Tip is checked. Select Subtract as the blending mode and leave

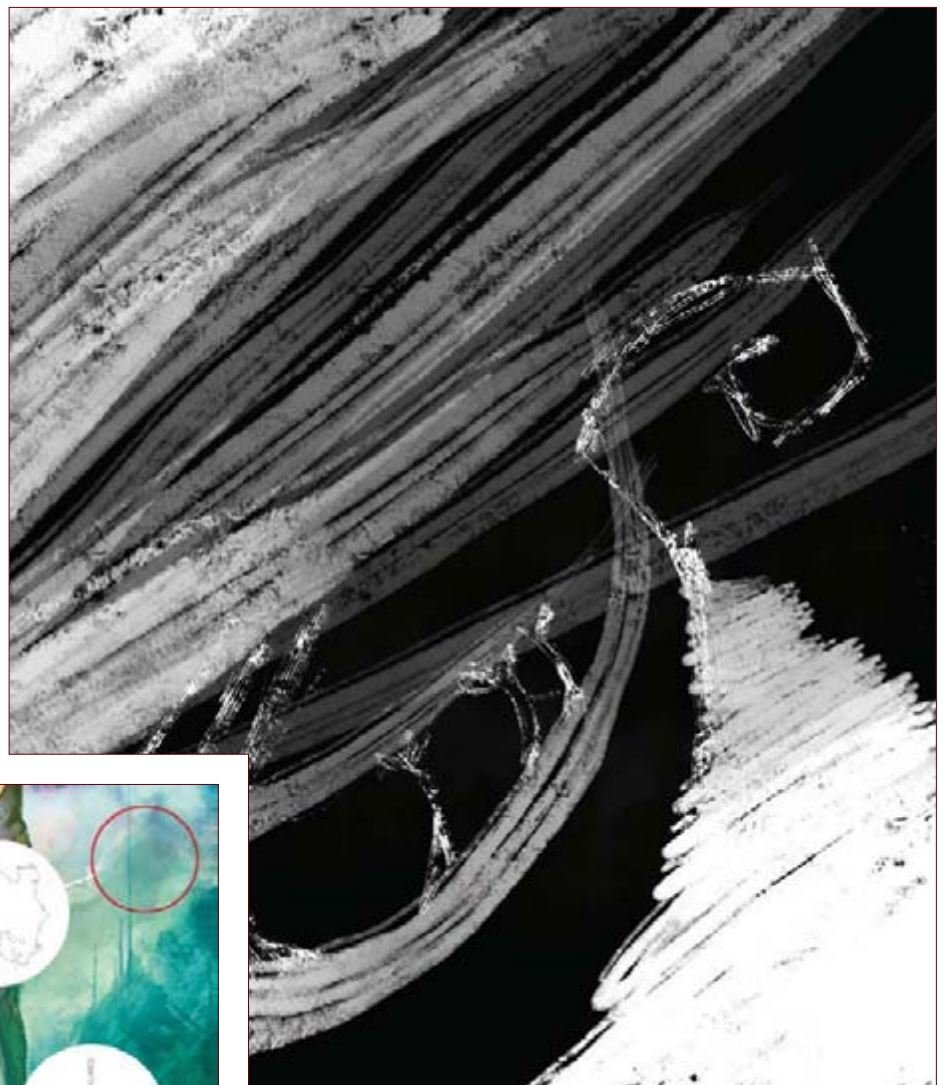


Fig.19

everything else at 100% (Fig.18). The brush is now done, so save it and enjoy the texture madness (Fig.19)!



Fig.20

To get a little more diversity with the textures, I used the brushes seen in Fig.20 as well. Everything else, though, was done with the two custom brushes just created (Fig.21).