Create an Impressionistic Image using Corel Painter Essentials 4 and Photoshop
By
Joseph R. Votano, USPhotoGroup

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If, like me, you browse the web to look for ways to create an impressionist style image in Photoshop, your experience may be like mine, very disappointing. But as luck would have it, there is a relatively painless way to create impressionist style images. The required software is **Corel Painter Essentials 4 (CPE4)**, a relatively inexpensive program (under $50 USD) and much less expensive if you hunt around. And, of course, you'll need our beloved Photoshop CS2 or CS3.

Ok, let's see how to go from Image A below to its impressionist styled Image B on the right. I tried to get similar results using every Photoshop CS3 technique and brush stroke I could think of but even after 3 hours of trying, nothing worked to my satisfaction. When you see how easy it is to get Image B, *you'll never look back.*

Image A

Image B

I.   Install Corel Painter Essential 4 (CPE4).

If you are using Windows XP, the installation is flawless. Just insert the Corel Painter DVD into a CD/DVD player hooked up to your computer and you are off. If you don't have a DVD or CD/DVD player you are out of luck. Suggestion, buy one, they are under $60 in many electronics stores and you will eventual need one anyway. It's a fact of life in today's world. Oh, yes, the same Corel Painter Essentials 4 DVD contains both Mac and PC versions.

<u>If you are a VISTA user</u>: once the program is installed; create a shortcut to install the CPE4 icon on your desktop. If you don't know how to create a shortcut icon, follow these steps:
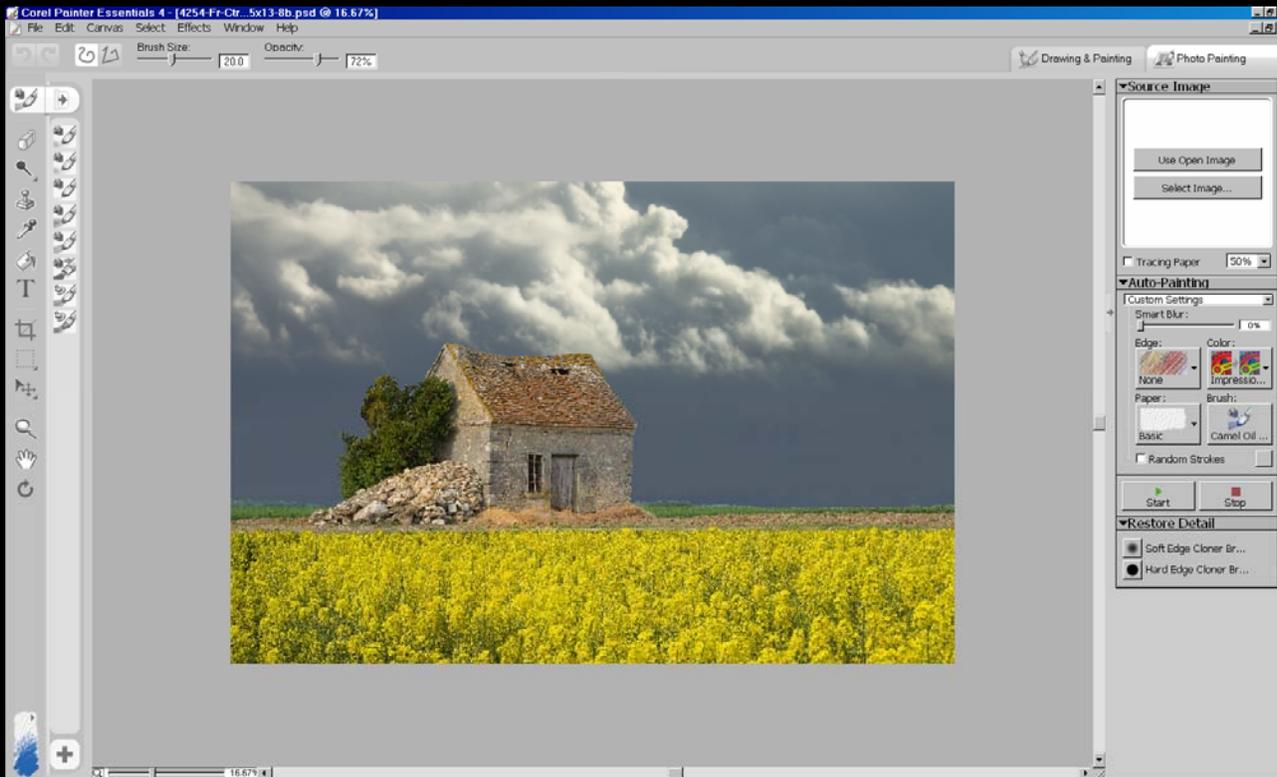
1.   Go to Program Files on your main drive (usually C:), find the folder labeled "Corel", then its sub-folder labeled "Corel Painter Essentials 4".
2.   Find the executable file "**Corel Painter Essentials.exe"**.
3.   Right click on this filename and select "Create shortcut", click on "Yes" to put the CPE4 icon on your desktop.
4.   Go to your desktop, <u>right</u> click on the **"CPE4**" icon, and, in the popup menu, select "**Properties**" then in the next window, "**Compatibility**", check the box for "**Service Pack 2"**, and click the "**OK**"'s.

If you are wondering why I am giving you these instructions, it is because, from my experience, without them you will never open up CPE4 under Vista. It just hangs. The same holds true if you install Photoshop CS3 under a Vista operating system. Open it and it hangs. Oh, yes, to close Photoshop CS3, I find I have to go to the "Task Manager" (Control-Alt-Delete, keys together) to close it. There are patches and advice on the web for Photoshop CS3 users using wonderful "Vista".
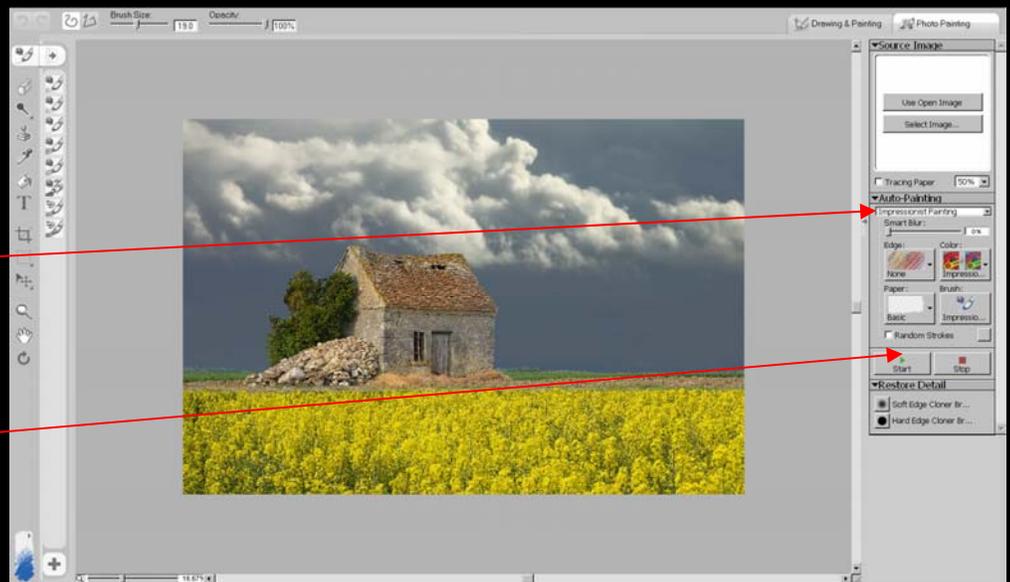
II.   Create an Impressionist Image with CPE4.

Here are the easy steps to create an impressionist style image.

1.   Open up "**Corel** Painter Essential 4" and select an image to work with, preferably in PSD format, and always in 8 bit mode. Here I am using Image A

2.   All the action is in the right palette window. Note the button labeled "Auto Painting" and beneath it, the selection box, here saying "Custom Settings"; just click on its down arrow and select "Impressionist Painting".

3.   Now everything is fixed: the brush size and type to create an impressionist painting. Leave the opacity at 100%. Click on the **"Start"** button

The program will now create an impressionist style image and I might say, brilliantly. It is quite a clever algorithm that is used. Below shows the progression of the shed picture as it develops into an impressionist one.

0.5 minutes

2.5 minutes

5.3 minutes the end

Now there is one more step we can do; - add a little specific detail to the image using the "**Restore Detail**" cloner brush. There are two choices, soft or hard.

I prefer the soft brush for impressionism. Simply click on the "Soft Edge Cloner Brush" icon. The brush size and opacity are adjustable.

Now paint over the areas containing details you want to enhance. Below are the before and after images with enhanced details in the door, roof, window, and the corners of the shed.

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Enhance these details.

Before

After

4. Save the image in a PSD format. Why PSD? Answer, you can then work on it in Photoshop CS3 with the original image as a 2nd layer.

When you open the image in Photoshop, the upper layer (Layer 2) is not active so you see only the impressionist version. It is labeled as the "Source Image", which it rightly should be since it was the original starting image.

Now, you can employ any of Photoshop's tools. You may want to saturate some colors, change the tones, or even add more details to the image. To do the latter, click on the left square in the thumbnail to bring up the eye icon then adjust the opacity to around 20-30% and up pops more detail through-out the image.
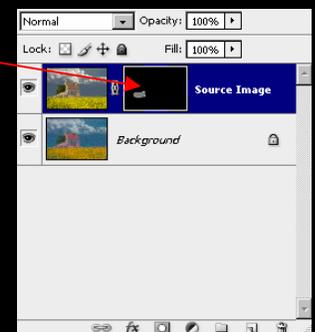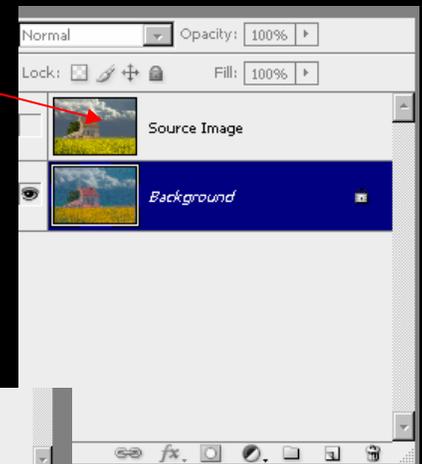
If you want to add detail to a specific area, do the following:

a. Select the 2nd layer, the source, by clicking on it.
b. Hold the Alt-key down then click on the "Mask Icon" button in the layer palette to bring up a black mask in the 2nd layer.

c. Change the foreground color to white (hit D then the X key) in the vertical toolbar then adjust the Source and brush opacities to get the detail effects you want then paint.

You can always reverse what you painted by changing the foreground color to black, just hit the X key and paint again.

In the adjusted image, note how the details in the rocks were brought out by selective detailing using the steps, a-c, above.

In conclusion, CPE4 is a real jewel for creating different impressionist and other styles, e.g., classical. Here we demonstrated the quick, automated approach. CPE4 is highly recommended if you want a fast way into impressionism.

Enjoy,

JRVotano