

Painting a Photograph in Photoshop by Cindy Gosselin

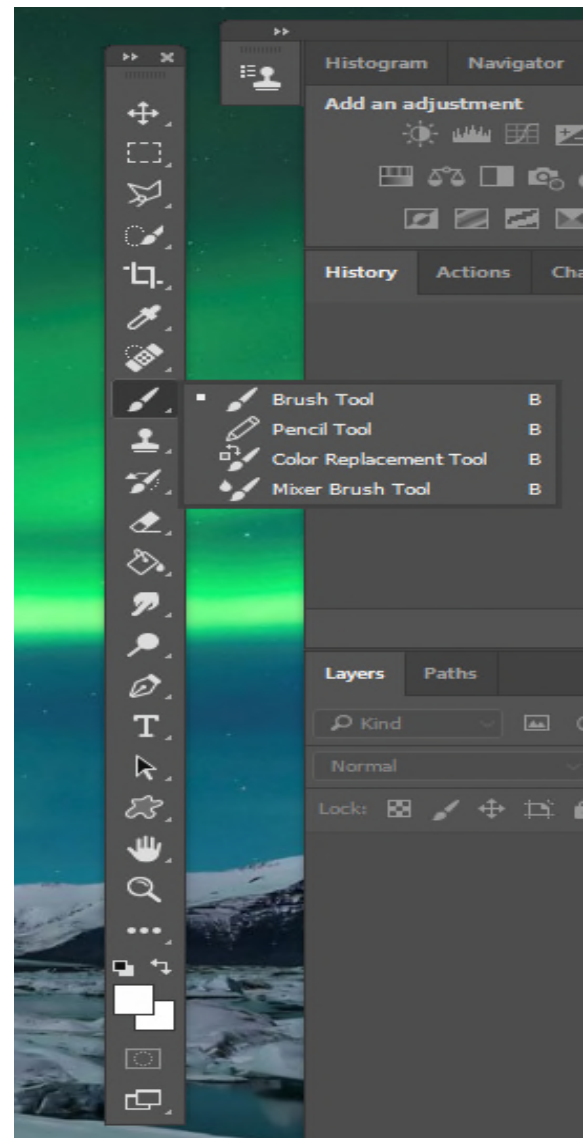
You've probably seen photographic images that have been transformed to resemble paintings. Some photographers create these looks using plugins such as Topaz Impression, ON1, SnapArt, Dynamic Auto Painter, Reactor Player, etc. Other photographers are adept in the use of Corel Painter to create their works of art. Results can be fantastic, complete with brush strokes and textured canvases. This article will set you on the path of how to exclusively employ Photoshop to create painted masterpieces from your original images.

This article is not intended to be all inclusive or a complete instructional study. I hope it does serve to introduce you to the basics of painting in Photoshop. On each day that I choose to paint an image, I learn something new and inspirational. Additionally, this is only how I accomplish my paintings. I feel that it is important for each photographer, and now we can call ourselves photographic artists, to develop their own style. Be warned; painting in Photoshop is addictive, and definitely fun!!

The Tools!

The main tool in Photoshop, used to convert your image into a painted look, is the MIXER BRUSH. Many of you are familiar with the brush tool; it serves as the main tool used to clone or heal. The mixer brush actually resides under the brush tool in the Photoshop toolbar. The icon for the mixer brush is similar to that of the brush, except that it has a small "teardrop" above the brush. If I were to paint my house, I would use a paintbrush loaded with the paint color I desired. In contrast, we will use the mixer brush to move and blend colors that already exist in an image.

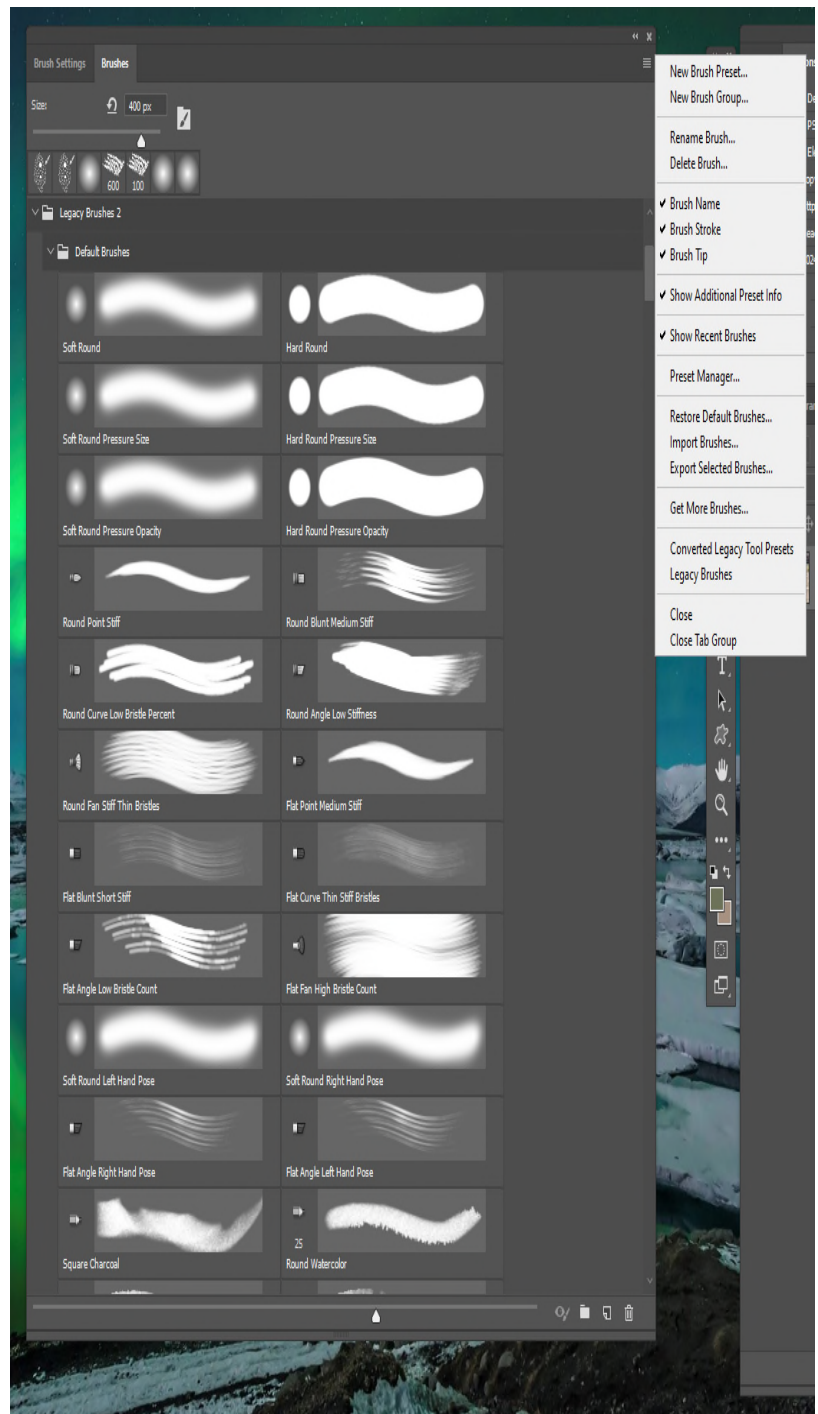
Another highly desired tool for painting in Photoshop is a tablet; complete with a stylus pen accessory. There are many brands on the market; I use a Wacom Intuos Pro. Using a stylus pen, as compared to a mouse, is preferred for painting in Photoshop.



Brush presets

The brush tool has various brush presets from which to choose. You should be familiar with the soft round brush or the hard round brush, for example. The mixer brush also has many options from which to choose.

I find it useful to keep the brush panel open, and ready for use. Clicking on the upper right drop down menu and choosing “brush name”, “brush stroke”, “brush tip” and “show additional preset info” will allow you to easily recognize all the attributes of the brushes you will be using. Your Photoshop brush panel should now resemble the figure on the right. Take advantage of all the inherent Photoshop brushes by loading dry media brushes, faux finish brushes, M brushes, Natural brushes, thick heavy brushes, legacy brushes, wet media brushes, etc. Any of these can prove useful as mixer brush presets during a painting session. You may find it useful to experiment with various brush presets to observe the types of strokes that are produced.



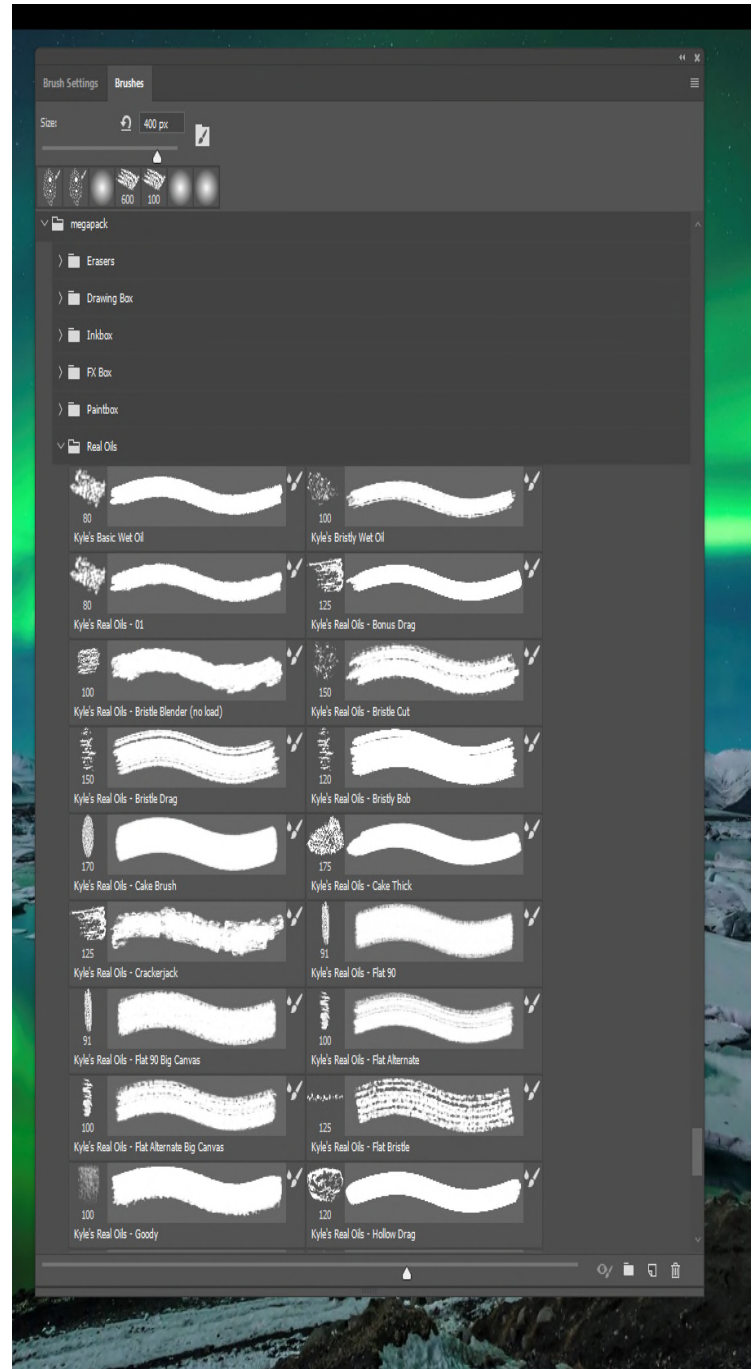
Equally important, if you've downloaded other non-Photoshop brushes, the brush panel might look like that on the right.

Note that the brushes inherent in Photoshop (in the above panel) do not contain the tiny icon in the upper right of each brush name. Most Photoshop brushes can be used as BOTH regular and mixer brushes. With the inherent Photoshop brushes, you have hundreds of brushes at your disposal.

This second brush panel screenshot shows imported brushes from Kyle T. Webster. Note the icon in the top right of each brush, indicating use of these brushes as a mixer brush. Not every brush will be a mixer, and therefore will not have this icon indication.

More brushes? You can definitely get more brushes!! As seen in the attached brush panel, I have downloaded several sets of brushes from Kyle T. Webster. Kyle has great brushes for use in paintings. And, as a registered Photoshop user, all of Kyle's brushes are free. To download Kyle's brushes, use the dropdown in the brush panel to "get more brushes." You will be taken to the Adobe sight where Kyle's brushes are located. I suggest downloading the "megapack." These brush presets will definitely expand your arsenal of available brushes. In the subset called "real oils" there are over 40 mixer brushes that create beautiful brush strokes in the development of your works of art.

If, at any time, you wish to purchase additional brushes for painting, please ensure that these brushes exist as "mixers." You may want to purchase brushes with specific attributes, such as fur or hair brushes. There are also many other "concept" brushes that can be purchased to add items such as grasses, stars, snow, etc.

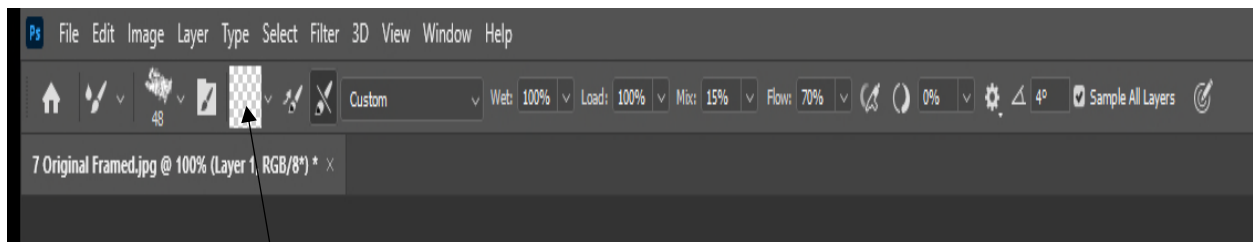


Between the included Photoshop brushes and the free Kyle T. Webster brushes, there are more than enough options to get you started in painting. Now that you have brushes, the next step is knowing how to use them in a painting.

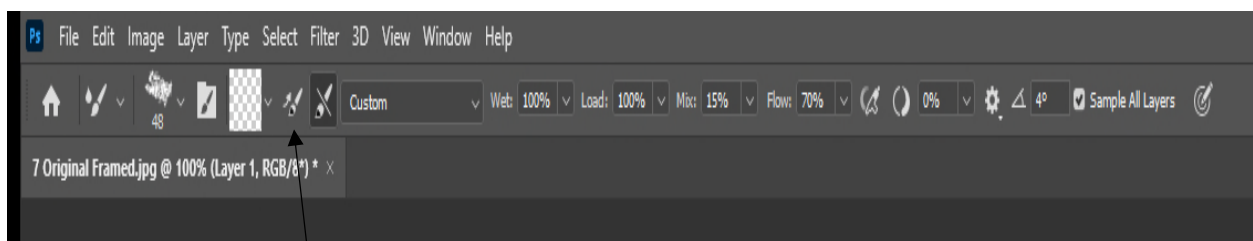
Using the Mixer Brush

When you bring an image into Photoshop, you CAN use a mixer brush to paint directly on the background layer of the image. But, there is a better, non-destructive way to paint.

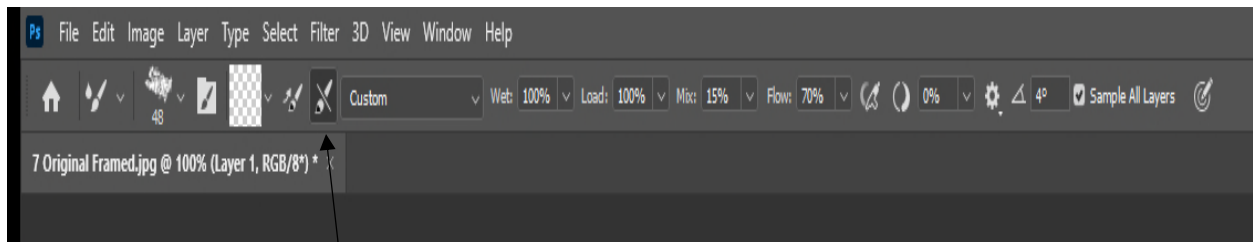
- Open the intended image in Photoshop.
- Add a new blank layer on top of the background layer (Shift+Ctrl+N (Mac) or Shift+Ctrl+N (PC) or Layer>New Layer. This is the layer where your painting strokes will reside.
- Choose the mixer brush tool in the tools palette and then select your mixer brush preset of choice; such as Soft Round, etc.
- In this example, I've chosen the Photoshop brush of "Oil Heavy Flow Dry Edges." When you have selected a mixer brush, the "ribbon" at the top of the screen has different settings than that of a regular brush. Each of these settings do mean something (wet, load, mix and flow, etc.); and you should explore and understand these settings once you advance. But, for now, there are a few features that are necessary in order to properly set the mixer brush for painting on an empty layer.



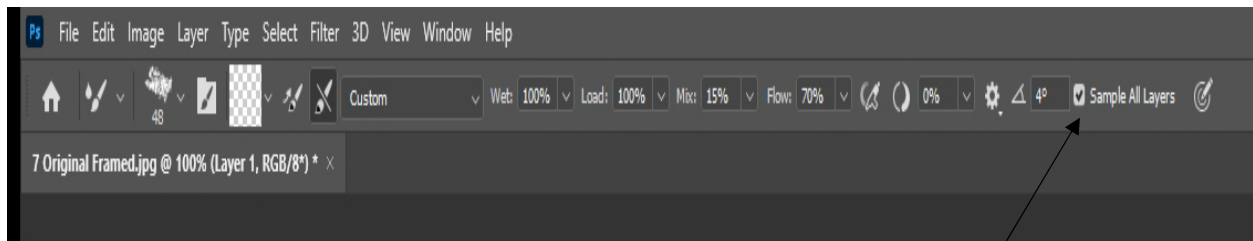
- o The grid, (5th box from the right), must be transparent (checkerboard pattern). If it is not, there is a small down pointed carat. Click on that and select "clean brush".



- o There are then two brush icons to the right of this transparent grid. The first brush will need to be "disabled" (a lighter appearance).



- o The brush with a slash through it will need to be “enabled” (a darker appearance).



- o Lastly, the box on the far right (sample all layers) should be checked. By “sampling all layers”, the colors are drawn from the original image as you paint on any subsequent blank layers.

You are now ready to paint an image. Remember when you “colored” a picture as a child? That’s essentially what you’ll do here – and you don’t even have to stay within the lines! Use your mixer brush to follow the contours and colors that exist in your image. Paint on the new blank layer. Pick up your brush often, so that colors do not get “muddy” or drab. You can move your brush in both back and forth directions. Experiment with adjusting the brush size or magnification of your photograph, as necessary, in order to maintain the content and structure of the image as you apply the paint strokes. You are now painting and the possibilities are endless. At any time, you can delete this layer or erase areas that you are not satisfied with. Additionally, you can add a second (or third, etc.) blank layer and continue to paint. (When you’re happy with a section of the image, these new layers can serve to protect what you’ve already accomplished).

Where to start

I would suggest beginning your painting journey by creating “backgrounds” using the Mixer Brush. Pick an image that has a color palette you like. Then add a blank layer, select the mixer brush tool and a mixer brush preset and move and blend the image to create a new background from your original image. I now have dozens of these hand painted backgrounds. You can even add textures, change saturation, color etc. on any of these backgrounds. And they’re entirely yours, and are completely original. Additionally, they can now serve as backgrounds for images that do not have the desired color or effect in the original photograph. You can “extract” the

subject matter from one photo and place it into one of your original backgrounds and then paint the new composition.

Some of my preferred Photoshop mixer brushes for making backgrounds are: (Heavy Smear Wax Crayon, Hard Charcoal Edge, Rough Round Bristle, Soft Oil Pastel, Wet Brush 60, Pastel Dark 64, Round Fan with Texture, Flat Point Scatter no Spacing – try them all). Here is one of my favorite backgrounds, painted entirely with Photoshop mixer brushes, created from an original image of backlit grasses.



After you've created some backgrounds, and are used to the feel of the mixer brush and perhaps even the Wacom pen, you are ready to move onto additional subject matter. Anything can lend itself to a painting; try flowers, seascapes or landscapes, people and portraits, still life compositions, etc. My favorite subject matter tends to be that of birds and animals. Much of this subject matter has come from zoos and nature preserves.

Beyond the Basics

If you wish to continue your "Painting in Photoshop" journey, there are resources available to assist you. If you want to paint in the style outlined in this article (sometimes referred to as "Clone Painting"); make sure any course or tutorial uses Photoshop, in conjunction with the mixer brush and your own images, as the painting properties. Here are some of the resources I am aware of, and can recommend:

- Elevate Your Art: This is by far the most comprehensive resource for Photoshop painting. This will definitely "up your Photoshop painting game quickly." The quality of education is excellent and every facet of the process is detailed. Individual courses are offered, such as fur painting, etc. There is also a "Beyond the Brushes" subscription membership which is designed to "guide you through deliberate practice in every set of skills needed to become a master."

- Kelby One: Kelby One has a tutorial entitled “An Introduction to Digital Painting in Adobe Photoshop” by Victoria Pavlov.
- YouTube: By searching under “mixer brush Photoshop painting” you can find various posts on this technique, several by the Photoshop Training Channel.
- Local Classes: Look for local classes in your area; many photographers teach Photoshop painting in the photography club environment.

The Paintings

Believe me, there will be images you consider to be failures. But keep going.... I promise you that there will be images that you will love. For me, personally, the failures came when I painted the image TOO realistically. This was caused by magnifying the image too much and/or using a mixer brush that was sized too small. My finished painting looked EXACTLY like the original image. As you progress, you will learn to loosen your brush strokes and move color around and blend strokes with freer movements. Like most photographers, I will not be sharing my failures!

A successful painting is realized when YOU love the results. Here are a few of my favorite paintings, along with their original captures. (Note: I do have several paintings of people, mostly candid images, taken at Renaissance fairs. Since I do not have model releases, I felt it best to not publish those images here).

- The King

This was one of my very first paintings. The original image was taken at a zoo. I wanted to put this lion into a more natural setting. I extracted him from the green grasses, and actually placed him into the background that was shown earlier in this article. I hand



painted the grasses with a normal brush and used a mixer brush preset to paint the lion. The eyes were painted with a soft round mixer brush. Then, recently, I “re-painted” The King to give it a more ominous mood. After repainting, I used various hue/saturation/curves and levels adjustments to give it a “night time” stalking quality.



- Best Pals

These Friesian horses were taken at a Friesian horse farm in Vermont. I loved the pose of the two horses, but no matter where I situated myself, I could not get an image where the horses were free of the fence. As with the lion, above, I extracted the two main subjects and placed them onto a hand painted, darker background. I used one of



the Kyle Webster mixer brush presets (Real Oils Sargeant 2017) to paint the horses. I even had to “create” a mouth on the front horse. It took a couple of tries, but I finally got a result I liked. (TIP: as noted above, since you’re painting on a new layer, you can always erase what is not working). A texture was also added to the background.



- Deserted in the Desert

For this image, I did not extract the car, but painted the entire image as it was originally shot. I used various mixer brushes (as noted in the section on “where to start” to blur



and blend out the background). Then I painted the car with a one of Kyle’s oil mixer brushes. I used a grass concept brush (one of Kyle’s concept brushes) and then extracted a tree from another image (transformed into a silhouette with levels), creating a composite painting.



- Burrowing Owls

Paintings can be created with any style that appeals to YOU. I first painted these burrowing owls very naturally, appearing to be peering out from a natural environment. But then I changed the background and added some grasses for a different mood and feel. Remember, the possibilities are endless.



- Iris

This flower was painted more realistically. Hopefully, though, you can still see flowing brush strokes. The flower was extracted from its original setting and added to a complementary colored background before painting.



- Hérons

I loved the pose of these herons. I decided to paint it as the sky was bald, it was difficult to see the chicks, and I wanted to highlight the interaction between the herons. I have a painted version where both herons are painted as shown in the original. I then ultimately cropped it as a vertical, which I liked better



- Range Riders

I am under no delusions that these horses appear real. But I liked the figurines that were purchased at a local hobby store. Painting to the rescue! Extracted the subject matter and added it to a green/brown background and then painted every part of the image with a mixer brush.



PSA Painting Digital Dialog Group

Lastly, I am a part of PSA's Digital Dialog Group. The group can be found here:

<http://psadigital.org/groups/> . Group 56 is dedicated to "painting." Any PSA member can log onto the site to see the entries in the monthly digital dialog. Take the time to look through the various member contributions, and read through how the paintings were accomplished.

Remember my warning in the beginning? Painting in Photoshop is addictive, and definitely fun!! Enjoy your creations.