

# The Big Picture

BY DAVID MCDONALD



This digital fine art painting was created using the Art History brush in Adobe Photoshop 7.0. The rendering took me approximately seven minutes to complete. The technique is well suited for everyday sign work.



Using the Art History brush in Adobe Photoshop to achieve a "painterly" look from a photo.



**T**HERE ARE MANY useful features in Adobe Photoshop and the Art History brush can be a valuable tool for anyone incorporating an illustration with their day-to-day sign work. Because I have a digital camera, I find this tool to be worth its weight in gold.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words — with regard to signage I have to agree. With the surge of large format printing in use today we are seeing more and more illustrations appearing in the outdoor advertising arena. We have been printing with the Gerber EDGE for quite some time now and have had many requests to include a photo relative to the project.

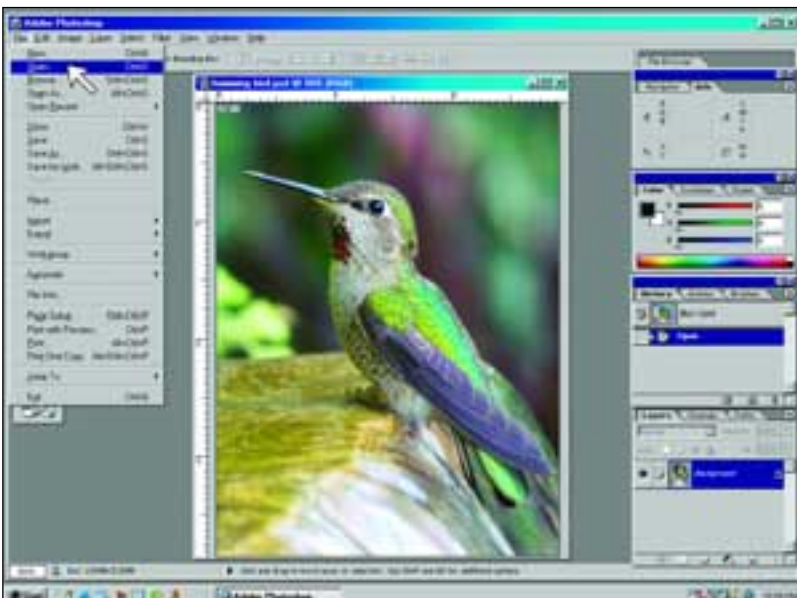
Sometimes I will find that some designs just don't look good with a realistic photo because they become too formal. An informal design might be better suited to a more *painterly* rendition of the same photo.

How can we achieve this without breaking out the artist colors and sacrificing many hours to accomplish this one task? It can be done using the Art History brush in Adobe Photoshop (version 5.5 and higher). In this article I will walk you through the simple process to transform a photo into an impressionistic painting that can be printed for a sign project.

## HISTORY AS I KNOW IT

Why is it called Art History? Because it uses the history palette to paint from. What this means is that you can assign the painting to a step that was accomplished previously in the history palette and when you paint with the Art History brush, the character of the brush is assigned to that step selected in the history palette.

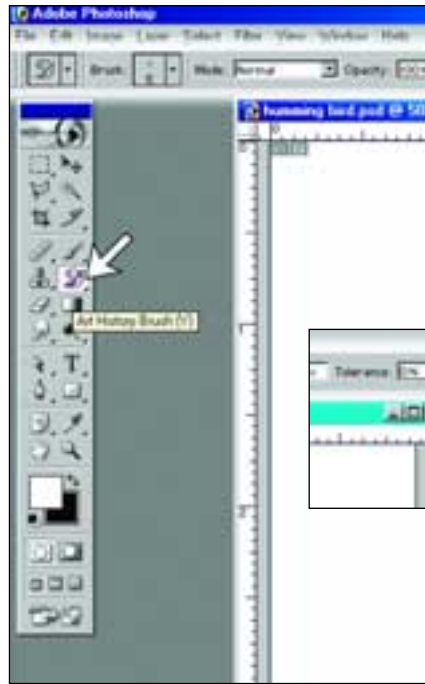
Once learned, this technique is quite simple to do — although you can take it to extremes using various layer techniques, building up a beautiful piece of digital fine art. The Art History brush allows you to use all of the available layer blending modes and has a few adjustable settings that alter the outcome of the brush stroke.



First you need to open the image in Photoshop (on the task bar select File>Open). Grab the bottom right corner of the image and drag to better fill the screen.



Next you need to fill the entire canvas with white. In the tool bar select the default color icon. This will change the default colors to black and white. Toggle the white color chip to the foreground. On the task bar choose Edit>Fill (short-cut keys=alt+backspace in Windows or option backspace on the Mac).



From the toolbar select the Art History brush. In the Art History brush palette select a small brush size (try 4 or 5 pixels). Set the tolerance to "0" and set the brush type. (For this exercise I chose "tight long".)

The most important of these settings is the size and shape of the brush. Shapes like tight, loose, dab and curl can be selected and the opacity of each stroke can be adjusted at any time during the painting process. The tolerance setting allows you to control whether you can continue to apply paint over the area that has already been stroked. A setting of "0" will allow you to continue to paint over areas already painted whereas a setting of "100" will save your painted areas on the canvas. The *area* setting allows you to control (in pixels) the area each click of the mouse or stroke will occupy on the canvas.

### THE PROCESS OF PAINTING

I snapped this photo of a hummingbird bathing himself in our backyard and thought it would make a good study for this tutorial.

The photo is first opened in Photoshop. Next you need to select the entire image or canvas and fill it with white paint. Make sure the history palette is opened on the screen (short-cut key F5). There you will see the two steps that you previously executed (open and fill).

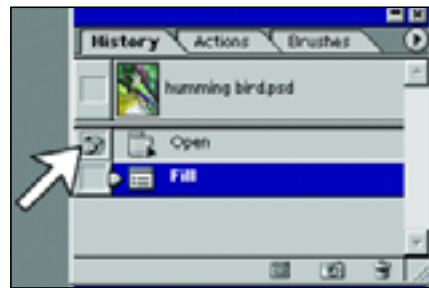
From the tool bar, select the Art History brush and click on the icon box to the left of the *open* History State in the history palette. With the Art History brush still selected adjust your brush size to a somewhat small size and choose the *tight long* brush shape from within the Art History brush options palette.

Now you are ready to paint! By clicking or painting with the brush on the white canvas you are essentially erasing the white History State to expose the original opened Image State. Doing so will leave behind the characteristics of the pre-setup Art History settings — pretty cool huh? It's that simple! The photo of the hummingbird took me about seven minutes to complete.

The next time you need to incorporate an illustration within your design and a painted look is the answer, give this technique a try!

*Until next time, thanks for listening!*

*David and Robin McDonald own and operate Avila Sign & Design, a custom sign shop in Grover Beach, Calif. They may be found on the Internet at [www.avilasigndesign.com](http://www.avilasigndesign.com).*



In the history palette click on the icon box located to the left of the History State you wish to paint "back" to (in this case the "open" state). Now all you have to do is start painting!



Click drag and paint. Here I am about halfway through the photo. The illustration shows the look of this style brush (tight long) as I click once away from the work.



Here is the technique used on a real world job. I found this photo of the golf scene from a license free stock photo collection. Painting the photo creates the illusion that it might really be a photo from the resident golf course!



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