

Painting in greyscale - A step by step tutorial



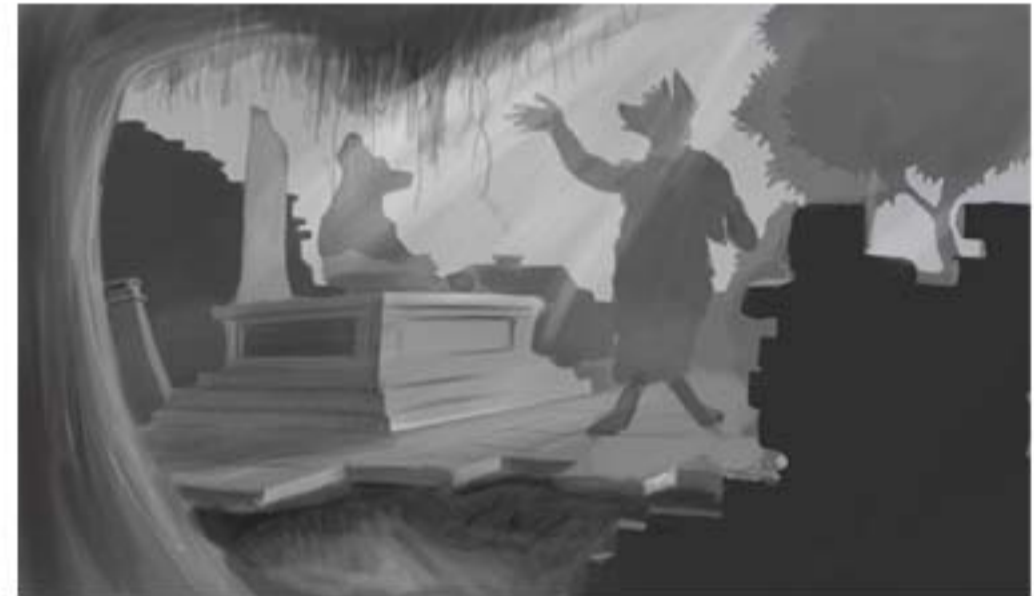
Overview

For quick concept work, a lot of time can be saved by working in black and white. The idea behind this approach is keeping things simple by separating your highlights and shadows from your colors so you can adjust them independently.

Some benefits to greyscale painting.

1. Using a grey background reduces eyestrain.
2. Midtones are already present when painting.
3. Its easier to judge overall contrast in greyscale.
4. Colors can be managed as separate layers.
5. The process is great for quick tonal sketching!

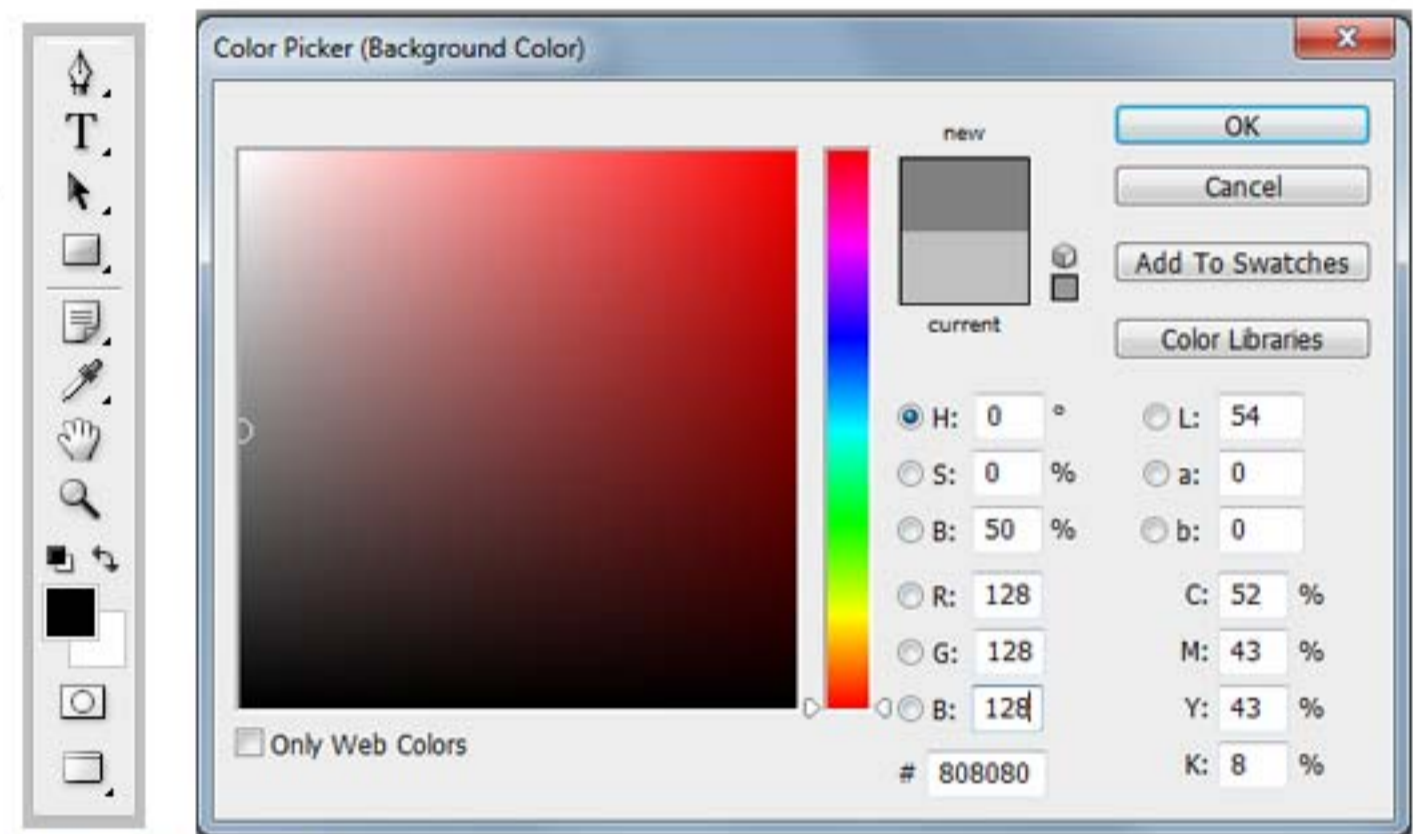
This tutorial will require some a basic knowledge of the layer workflow in Photoshop, and the process for one sample painting will be covered from the concept stages.



Getting started

Open your canvas in Photoshop and set your background to a neutral grey. You can do this by right clicking the color picker and setting your colors to 128,128,128. See example below.

A Wacom tablet is highly recommended for this tutorial to take advantage of pressure sensitivity. Pen pressure can be enabled by hitting F5 to open up the brush options menu. Click 'other dynamics' and enable Pen Pressure.



Set foreground color

fig 1. A neutral color creates your midtones.

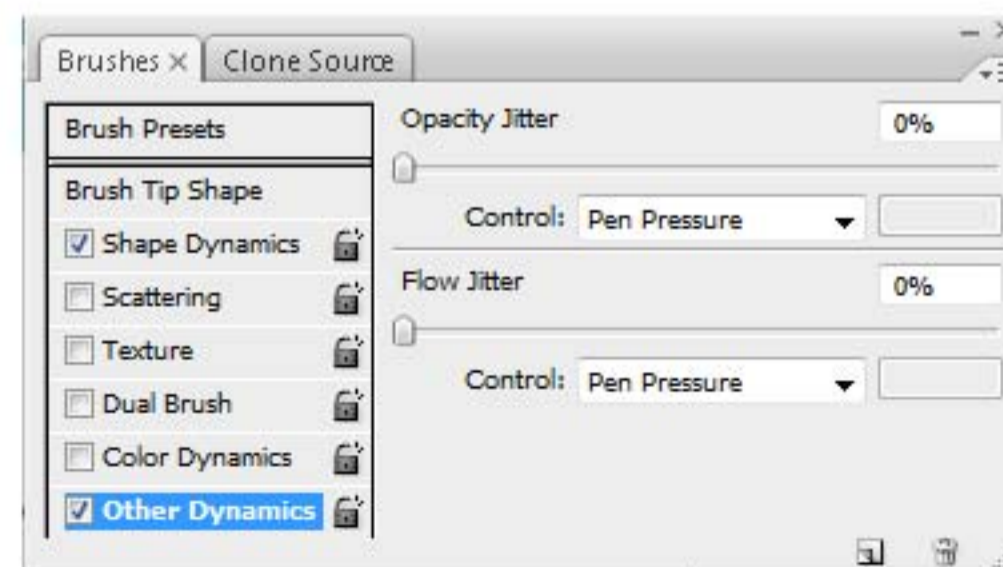
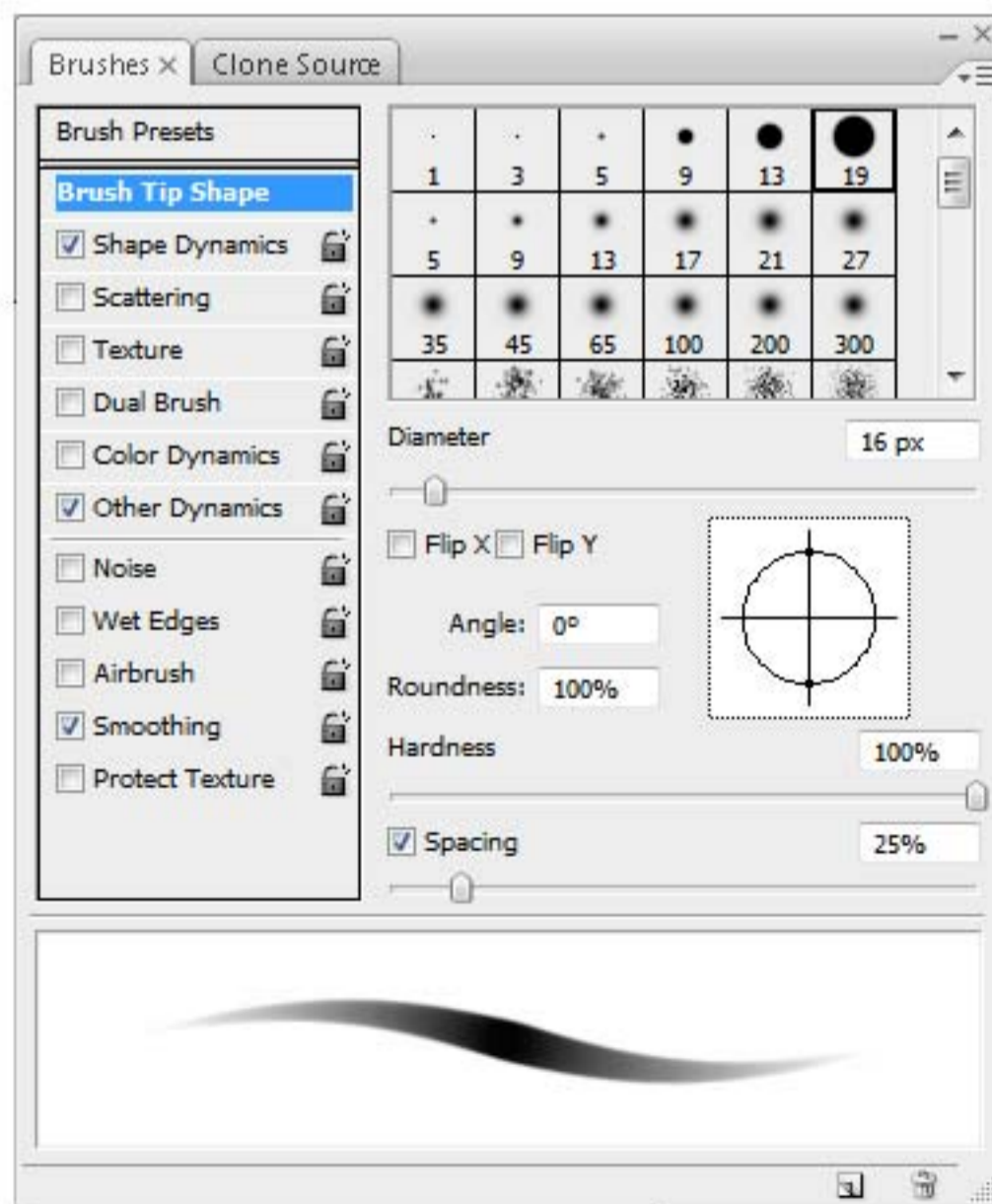


fig 2. The brush editor allows for a lot of creativity!

The sketching process

With your canvas ready, start by blocking in your shadows and highlights. I would recommend using a slightly off black and an off white for the highlights and shadows.

With this example, I had an idea of creating a parasitic wasp similar to a head crab from Half-Life 2. However, my concept went in a more unsettling direction!

Using a rough sketch, I started by blocking in the rough form with shadows, then adding details with highlights. Once the character was done, a background was painted on a separate layer to combine with the character.

These layers were stacked on top of each other to set up the overall composition of the painting.



Compositing with layers

With your black and white composition complete, you'll want to start working in color. I typically add in my colors using multiply and overlay layers. I place my warm colors on an overlay layer and my cool colors on a multiply or hard light layer. To fine tune my color palette, I'll typically add a curves adjustment layer and edit the RGB curves.



Greyscale



Hard Light Layer
w/ Blue Fill



Overlay layer with
green gradient



Vivid Light layer
with brown fill



Greyscale



Multiply Layer
w/ Blue Fill



Overlay layer with
warm colors added



Curves adjustment +
opaque detail layer

Layer breakdown

Here's a look at the final layer breakdown. Once I was satisfied with my composition, I added a unsharp mask sharpening effect to the character (filter>sharpen>unsharp mask) and made some final adjustments to all of the layers. Try this approach to see what you can create!

