



About the Cover

Infinite Flexibility with Layers

Gary Singh

Eric Wayne implements a technique he calls “digital impasto” in order to replicate traditional painting on a computer. In the world of analog painting, *impasto* refers to a style where thick brush strokes are prevalent, often due to the artist physically mixing the paints on the canvas, which adds a more 3D appeal and enables more opportunities for light to affect or reflect from the overall painting. Think Van Gogh or Vermeer.

Wayne’s formal training, all the way through his MFA, included traditional drawing and painting as well as performance art and installation, but it wasn’t until after college that he acquired his first computer and learned to use Adobe Photoshop. Just the process of juxtaposing transparent layers independently of each other opened up a whole new way of operating.

“I recognized that because the computer was infinitely flexible, with enough ingenuity and perseverance, anything could be achieved,” Wayne recalled. “Moving from analog to digital made as much sense as moving from the typewriter to word processing.”

The digital impasto technique emerged as a result

of Wayne’s natural affinity for traditional painters who originally used the technique. Working in software then allowed him to integrate such an approach with methods unique to the digital world. He wanted to recreate what he missed about traditional painting while simultaneously combining those approaches with elements like 3D modeling, photo manipulation, or multilayered digital collages. To Wayne, choosing pixels over oil paints seemed no different than a composer writing a concerto on a synthesizer, as opposed to working solely from an acoustic piano.

“For me, the core of art is the image, not a painted object,” Wayne explains, adding that his goal is to simply make new and original ideas for the collective imagination, no more, no less. “I also am a very process-oriented artist in that I use experimentation and mistakes extensively as a way to discover new directions, and the computer allows instantaneous and infinite reworking.”

Impasto Creatures

The cover image, *Rorschach Experiment 1*, features Wayne’s digital impasto technique, as does both his *Claw of the Mantazoid* (see Figure 1) and *Awakening Upon Death of the Bride of the Creature* (see Figure 2). The title of the cover images refers to the Rorschach Test in the sense that Wayne made some initial marks and smudges and then looked at them to come up with more ideas. Both *Claw* and *Awakening* began as collages in Photoshop. In the case of *Claw*, Wayne says it was a collage of praying mantises eating bugs, and he just wanted to use that topic as a prime opportunity for a rich texture of brush strokes.

“[It] was entirely about trying to see how far I could take digital impasto, and the image wasn’t that important,” he says. “However, in the process it became more psychedelic and wasn’t eating anything.”

Even though *Claw* started in Photoshop, Wayne also used Painter. He says the image resembles a

Figure 1. *Claw of the Mantazoid*. This piece began as a collage of praying mantises eating bugs and evolved as the artist experimented with digital brush strokes.



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“Van Gogh/Picasso hybrid, done by a schizophrenic inebriated on absinthe.” By “schizophrenic,” Wayne refers to the famous cat paintings of Louis Wain, painted during his alleged descent into psychosis.

The process of *Awakening* was a completely different story. The full title refers to two films: *The Bride of Frankenstein* and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. A shot in the chest kills the creature, and she then spiritually emerges in the timeless void, all with digital impasto techniques implemented in Photoshop.

“The expression on her face is one of extreme awe,” Wayne explains. “And the still water in her mouth suggests the complete stillness of the mind accompanying the awe. In short, she’s having an after-death experience.”

Digital Van Gogh

The digital impasto effect requires three ingredients: a way to brush or drag pigment; a way to bump it, such as embossing it; and a light source. Wayne says he stumbled on the technique many years ago. Practically by accident, he discovered that after bumping a photo and smearing it, a brush-stroke effect tended to emerge. It resembled the texture of hot buttery oil paints. After tweaking several parameters like opacity, it became a convoluted process involving multiple layers and filters.

“I started attempting to create impasto because it was the one thing that digital art was thought to be incapable of,” Wayne explained. “And it was also one of my favorite things about painting. You can do an illustration, but you can’t do something like a Van Gogh. Or so it seemed.”

The cover image and Figure 3 show close-ups of what the impasto technique looks like when one zooms in on it. The result is hauntingly real. In fact, it looks more like painting that most paintings do. Which brings to mind the many detractors Wayne claims he encounters, the ones who argue that digital art should not look like painting.

“Oil painting has no monopoly on making imagery,” he writes on his website. “If I draw with



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Figure 2. *Awakening Upon Death of the Bride of the Creature.* The digital impasto techniques implemented in Adobe Photoshop helped this piece emerge from creatures imagined from the films *The Bride of Frankenstein* and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

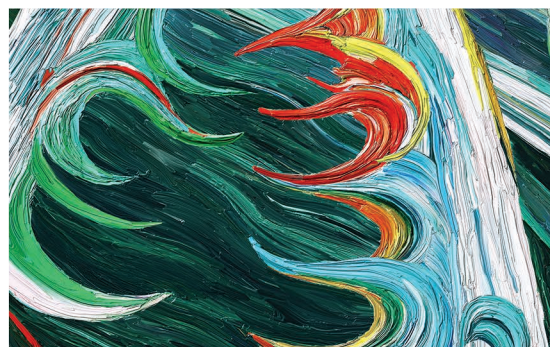
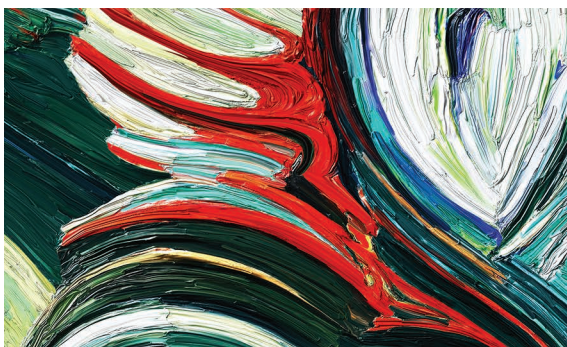
a stylus, it’s going to look like a drawing with pencil or charcoal; and if I apply color by using strokes, it’s going to look like a painting.”

In other words, the criticism is like arguing that no one should use a word processor. And that everyone should write by hand. In any event, for Wayne, his attention to detail and texture just about justifies a reason for working this way. The digital impasto technique is one that requires experience in both traditional and digital processes. When the viewer really looks at the close-up shots, as in the cover image or Figure 3, knowing that each brush stroke is painted individually, then one can ascertain the amount of work required. It isn’t easy. Claiming this flavor of digital art is “computer generated” and therefore not authentic, or that “the computer did it” or that Wayne is simply a “pixel manipulator,” is just as ridiculous as saying Microsoft Word wrote your novel for you.

“[Nowadays] programs like Painter and ArtRage do a lot of the work for you, which I only discovered in the last six months,” Wayne said. “But even if you know the technique, it’s something else to employ it effectively. Each stroke is done individually, so you still need a fundamental understanding of drawing or painting to pull it off.”

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Figure 3. Close-ups of the digital impasto technique. Each brush stroke is painted individually by brushing or dragging pigment, bumping (or embossing) it, and then adding a light source.



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