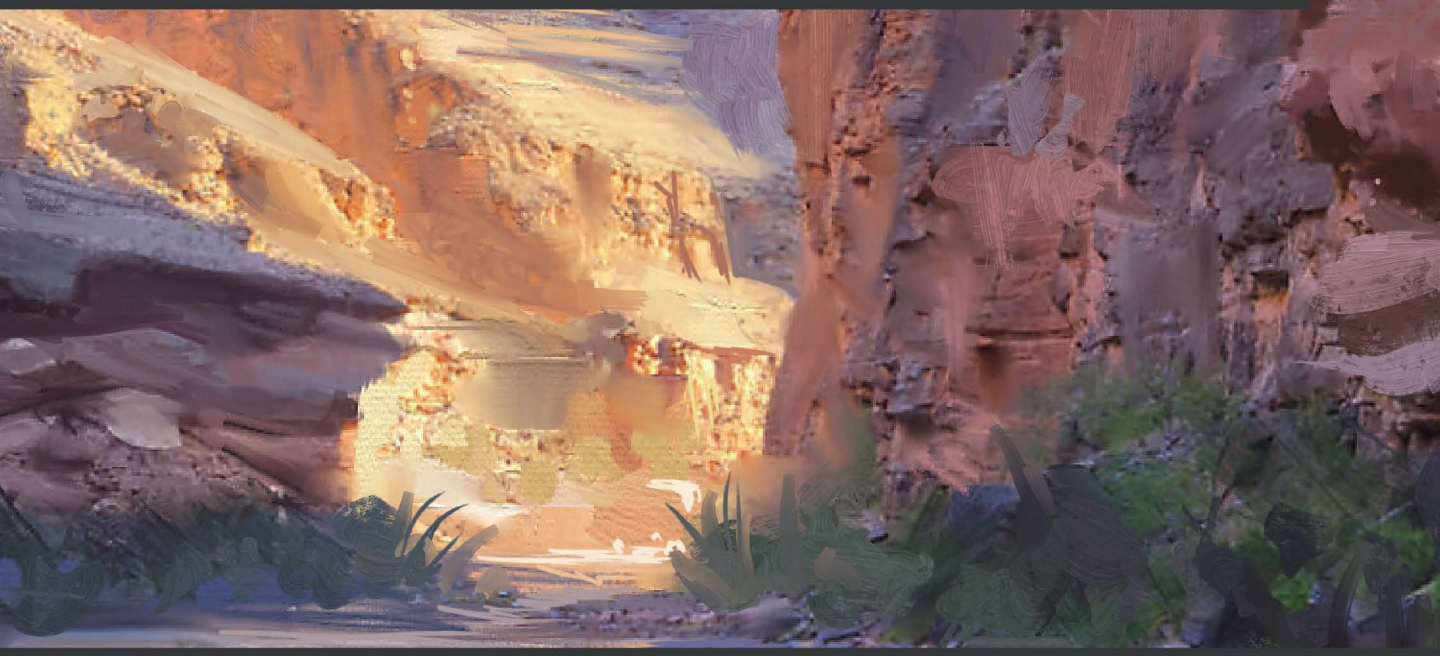
Draw and Paint Better with Krita

Discover pro-level techniques and practices to create spectacular digital illustrations with Krita



Wesley Gardner

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Packt

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To my wife, Brittany, for believing in my dreams, and in me. This absolutely could not have happened without your love, guidance, and support. To say "I owe you one" is an understatement. I love you to the moon and back.

To my daughter, Gracelynd, and my son, Oliver: You are both my world. Stay kind, stay humble, work hard, and your dreams can come true, just like mine have. I hope this gets me some "cool dad" points with your friends someday.

To you, for taking a chance and embracing your creative side. The world is a better place because you are in it.

Go make cool art.

– Wesley Gardner

Contributors

About the author

Wesley Gardner is a freelance illustrator and artist. Some notable clients include Cubicle 7, Adidas, Monte Cook Games, Guildhouse Games LLC, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., Black + Cameron, and BAM! Box. Wesley's work has been featured in various intellectual properties such as Warhammer 40k, Mad Max, League of Legends, Old Gods of Appalachia, Varia, plus more that are currently in development.

Wesley is open to freelance/contractor opportunities in the board game, card game, motion picture, and video game fields, and is well-versed in a variety of production styles, including photobashing, 3D rendering, keyframe art creation, or traditional painting. Wesley is proficient in the Adobe Creative Cloud ecosystem, alongside a large number of PC-based digital painting and photo manipulation software, as well as various 3D and game development engines, such as Blender, Unity, and Unreal.

When Wesley is not taking on professional client work, he can be found creating tutorials and teaching resources covering art techniques, with topics ranging from color theory and composition, creating custom brush packs, and getting traditional looks for digital paintings.

Due to all of this experience, Welsey has been given the title "Featured Artist" for Escape Motions and their Rebelle 5 product in 2022, as well as an "FXPose" feature in Issue #190 of ImagineFX Magazine.

I want to thank the team at Packt for their endless patience with a first-time author, and the developers of Krita for developing an outstanding creative platform.

A huge thank you to the Krita artist community for being incredibly kind, supportive, and creative. To my coworkers (past and present), mentors, and mentees alike, you have collectively taught me more than I can ever repay. I'm a better man and artist because you entered my life.

Lastly, a huge thank you to my Mom and Dad. Who knew that I'd go from tracing Spider-Man comics on the living-room floor in 1991 to being a published art instructor in 2022? Those art kits at Christmas sure paid off. I love you both, thank you for everything. I hope I've made you proud.

About the reviewers

Joann Le Blanc initially completed three-years' scientific courses at university (in biology and genetics). After that, in 2001, at the age of 23, he was selected at the GOBELINS animation school in Paris and became a traditional 2D animator in 2003.

He studied 3D Animation, LayOut and Compositing _on B-Studio, B-Color, proprietary software at BUF-Company (worked on the set of Oliver Stone's *Alexander* in 2004) and AttitudeStudio (worked as a main storyboard artist for the 3D TV show *Skyland* done in motion capture),and also worked in television for several years (ON Animation Paris).

In 2017, he worked in London at Warner Bros. studios for *The Third Floor*, animating for *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*.

He lives in Montreal and has been a Canadian citizen since 2019. He mostly works in the VFX and video game industries (including for Warner Bros., working on trailers and real-time productions) using Krita as his main software for storyboarding.

Riox Yara has been a Krita artist since 2019, mainly focusing on character illustrations. Since 2021, she has been striving to work as a freelance digital artist professionally. She is curious about the world and what it can offer her, and has worked directly on the Spanish translation of *The Fallout Bible*, which is a work made by fans for fans of Fallout.

She is currently in her second year of college studying graphic design and is vigorously working on her professional career as a digital artist. Her love for bread is somewhat peculiar for a 19-year-old.

Yo! Reader. Don't be fooled by the title of this book. This book teaches you more than just how to use Krita; it teaches you a philosophy of life. Trust me.

I would like to thank Chayam Majumdar for telling me about this book and for introducing me to Rashika, who was an excellent co-worker, and Wes, who is an exceptional author and artist. There is no doubt that my sisters and mother hold an important place for me. Above all, I want to thank my most precious friends: Andrew, Dexter, Fernando, and Manuel. They continue to support me no matter what crazy things I do or get up to. :)

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Other Books You May Enjoy

Preface

Krita is a free, open source digital painting program with industry-leading functionality and a creative suite of tools that enables you to bring any visual idea to life. It allows for a fast, clean approach to creating digital art, without the hassle of pay-to-play or subscription license fees. But just like all other art software, it takes time and effort to learn it.

This book provides a comprehensive look into functional tools, visual problem-solving, and leading painting techniques using Krita to unleash your inner artist. You'll learn about the functionality and tools of Krita for creating digital and print-quality work, as well as exploring manipulation toolsets, custom brush creation, overviews of color spaces, and layer management. As you progress, you'll get to grips with the "key styles" needed to make professional-grade digital art, through techniques such as photobashing, 3D paint-overs, and more traditional painting methods, along with covering how Krita handles these workflows. After that, you'll work through a few step-by-step art pieces using the skills and tools learned throughout the book.

By the end of this Krita book, you'll have a solid understanding of the Krita work environment and be able to bring your artistic visions to life with a myriad of leading industry-standard techniques.

Who this book is for

If you're an artist wanting to take your artwork and portfolio to a professional level, then this book is for you. You'll need some experience in using art creation software (ideally Krita, Photoshop, or Clip Studio Paint) before you jump in, but beginners willing to use external sources to keep up will find plenty of useful information. Artists looking to upgrade their skills for working in the entertainment industry will benefit the most from this digital art book.

What this book covers

Chapter 1, *Getting Started with Krita*, covers the installation and general settings of Krita to get you off to a strong start!

Chapter 2, *Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color*, reviews aspects such as color modes, resolutions, canvas sizes, and the definition of a color, and we also simplify the color wheel.

Chapter 3, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, discusses the use of layers in your work and setting yourself up for success by grouping layers in a logical way.

Chapter 4, *Utilizing Brushes and Tools*, breaks down Krita's brush engine, including making custom categories, using brush features, and customizing Krita's UI for an optimum workflow.

Chapter 5, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*, showcases some often-used layer blending tricks, bringing new clarity to your work in a non-destructive way.

Chapter 6, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*, goes over topics such as layer masks, selection tools, a quick introduction to perspective tools, and refining brushwork in interesting ways.

Chapter 7, *Changing the Feel with Painting, Values, and Sliders*, shows you the power of Krita's filter options, allowing you to change things such as the tone, mood, and contrast of your work with just a few simple clicks.

Chapter 8, *Controlling Chaos – Organizing Your Workflow*, walks you through industry-standard organizational skills, allowing you to revisit your own personal work in the future more clearly, and even work alongside colleagues in a professional art studio environment.

Chapter 9, *Setting Up a Still-Life Study*, covers preparing your work area, finding good references for studies, prepping your canvas, and controlling your mindset for a time-tested art exercise.

Chapter 10, *Enforcing Fundamentals*, showcases best practices for doing various types of art studies, using repeatable and effective steps that will get you great results no matter your artistic goals.

Chapter 11, *Working with Concept Art*, introduces you to the more "imaginative realism" side of painting and illustration with definitions of concept art, learning good compositional tricks, the power of keeping your ideas open-ended, and embracing the digital tools Krita provides to create thumbnails of those ideas.

Chapter 12, *Refining and Creating Cinematic Concept Art*, shows how to take your ideas to a final "polish," painting over photographic textures, mixing and matching your best ideas between thumbnails to make a stronger piece, the process of rendering, and preparing your final piece with various postprocessing effects for maximum visual impact.

Chapter 13, *Going beyond These Pages*, brings the book to a close, allowing you to reflect on the progress you have made throughout the book, view your overall progress, and understand where Krita and your imagination can take you.

To get the most out of this book

This book is a hybrid book, covering both some professional-grade tips for general digital illustration and the use of Krita in your artistic journey. Familiarity with art terms (such as composition, rendering, and brushwork) will come in handy, as will a basic knowledge of using a computer (how to open programs, save files, and so on). We will cover all of this (and more) in detail, but it's always great to have a head start!

Software/hardware covered in the book	**Operating system requirements**
Krita 5+	Windows, macOS, or Linux
Stylus or pen tablet (a touch-tablet that does not have a screen built into it)	Windows, macOS, or Linux
Touchscreen tablet	Windows, macOS, or Linux

While not mandatory, I highly recommend the use of a stylus, pen tablet, or touchscreen tablet device to mimic a more traditional artistic approach. This book and the steps can be followed only using a mouse, but certain tips and tricks you will learn will be aided by having a touch-based tablet device.

No matter whether you're a digital painting newcomer or a tenured professional illustrator, this book should provide some guidance and food for thought about your working approach, methods, and overall artistic goals.

Download the example code files

You can download the example Krita files for this book from `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`.

Download the color images

We also provide a PDF file that has color images of the screenshots and diagrams used in this book. You can download it here: `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/9781801071765_ColorImages.pdf`

Conventions used

There are a number of text conventions used throughout this book.

`Code in text`: Indicates code words in the text, database table names, folder names, filenames, file extensions, pathnames, dummy URLs, user input, and Twitter handles. Here is an example: "Import a custom image (in `.jpg`, `.png`, `.gif`, `.pdf`, `.tif`, and dozens of other image types)."

Bold: Indicates a new term, an important word, or words that you see on screen. For instance, words in menus or dialog boxes appear in **bold**. Here is an example: "To see the different options available, click on the down arrow next to the current **Color Model Type** graphic."

> **Tips or Important Notes**
>
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Get in touch

Feedback from our readers is always welcome.

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Part 1: Intro to Krita and Digital Art Terminology Review

In this part, you will learn (or review) industry-standard digital art terminology while learning about the ins and outs of Krita as software. We will discuss digital art fundamentals such as canvases, color modes, the Color Wheel, layer management, brushes, and Krita's toolset for various working styles.

This book is primarily a digital art book, with Krita acting as the vessel for our artistic journey. In order to get the most out of this experience, we will review the fundamentals!

This part comprises the following chapters:

- *Chapter 1*, *Getting Started with Krita*
- *Chapter 2*, *Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color*
- *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*
- *Chapter 4*, *Utilizing Brushes and Tools*

1
Getting Started with Krita

As we have established, the goal of this book is not to be a technical manual about Krita (as Krita's official documentation is *way* better at that than I will ever be!). However, there are some fundamentals that we are going to cover to make sure we start our Krita journey in the best possible way. Whether you're a seasoned professional or someone who is brand new to digital art, you're certain to find something interesting here!

This chapter is going to cover some of my basic hardware recommendations so that you can get the most out of your Krita painting experience. We will look at a quick overview of Krita as a piece of software, learn how to download and install Krita, and go over Krita's default **user interface** (**UI**) once you have the software installed.

In this chapter, we will cover the following topics:

- Recommending hardware – tablets and upgrades
- What is Krita, and what makes it different?
- Installing Krita
- Breaking down the Krita UI

Technical requirements

We will be installing Krita from the official website's **Download** page at `https://krita.org/en/download/krita-desktop/`.

Recommending hardware – tablets and upgrades

Normally, in technical guides (especially in other great books from Packt Publishing), there's a *Technical requirements* section that lists the necessary requirements that you might need to participate in the guided practices or workshops within the book. However, this book has been set up a little bit differently, as it does not require specific hardware (other than a machine that meets Krita's system requirements, which we will cover later). There are a few items that I'd like to touch on that will make your digital painting journey *much* easier. They come as my personal recommendations.

The first thing I'd like to cover is the different types of tablets you could consider. If you already have a tablet, feel free to skip ahead; however, if you haven't made the plunge, I very much encourage you to take a look. Here are some of my thoughts on what to look for. Afterward, we will take a look at some recommended hardware upgrade paths to ensure your computer is giving the performance levels that you require.

The graphic drawing tablet

If you want to push your digital painting and illustration skills to the next level and have not done so already, I *highly* recommend investing in a graphic drawing tablet (also known as a pen tablet) or a touch monitor tablet (also known as a touchscreen tablet) set up for your computer. There is a myriad of choices you have regarding sizes, styles, and brands when it comes to your tablet purchase, but you'll notice there's no one-size-fits-all solution that will work for everyone. So, find something that fits within your budget (on Amazon, some graphic drawing tablets start at $40!), and be sure to do your research!

For instance, I used the **Huion H610 Pro V2** graphics tablet (as pictured in *Figure 1.1*) for my first year of professional digital art, and I still have it kicking around:

Figure 1.1 – The Huion H610 Pro V2 graphic drawing tablet

It was a fantastic starting point for me, as it came in under $80 and had all the cool features (such as pen pressure, pen tilt, and programmable buttons on the side) that I saw my digital art heroes (such as Craig Mullins, Sparth, and Barontieri) using at the time.

Graphic drawing tablets are devices that only require a single USB slot, so they can be used with a large number of computer setups (and even with some cell phones, depending on your phone's capabilities). It is a perfect way to get in the door without breaking the bank, and it comes highly recommended not only for the projects within this book but for your overall enjoyment of digital art in general.

The graphic drawing monitor/pen display

If you are looking to "level up" your digital art workspace, a drawing monitor could be the next step. Drawing monitors mimic drawing or painting in traditional media in terms of how they allow you to use a stylus to draw and paint directly on the screen itself, but they need a computer to attach to. They will come with power cables, input cables to attach to your computer, and depending on the make or model, charging stations or docks for the stylus pen. There are many companies, sizes, and styles to choose from, so shop around and find something that fits within your budget! While the higher-end *Wacom* drawing monitors can be a few thousand dollars a pop, entry companies such as *Huion* or *XP-Pen* start around the $300 range, maybe even cheaper during a holiday sale or a special event, so keep a lookout!

As I write this, my **Huion Kamvas 20** (as pictured in *Figure 1.2*) is sitting right next to me, acting as my third monitor. I have had fantastic luck with driver support and features such as pen tilt and pen sensitivity within Krita:

Figure 1.2 – The Huion Kamvas 20

If you want to go beyond the pure hobbyist level, I do think the touch tablet might be worth the additional cost investment for the cohesive nature of mimicking drawing or painting on a traditional sketchbook or canvas. However, both tablet options are great for hobbyists and professionals alike! Remember, impactful art is up to the artist creating it; the tools just make communicating the ideas easier!

Speaking of tools to help your craft, you might have your computer at the ready but be interested in upgrading some of the internal hardware to really get the best out of your new tablet device. Let's talk about general computer upgrades!

Upgrading your computer

If you want a quick cheat sheet on things to look for regarding upgrading your computer to get the most out of Krita, your best bet will be to look at the following items:

- **Central Processing Unit** (**CPU**): Since Krita has so many moving parts and different systems that talk to one other (regarding file management, import/export capabilities, and layer calculations), you will want to make sure your computer's processor is up to the challenge of handling multiple tasks at once. Newer Intel and AMD processors should be up to the task, but if you are noticing your machine is lagging while you paint and it is a bit older (for example, 2016 or earlier), it might benefit you to look at upgrading the CPU. The CPU is the "brain" of the computer, and as we all know, it's always good to have a sharp mind!
- **Random Access Memory** (**RAM**): Since digital art deals with displaying images on the screen, and more advanced techniques such as photobashing and matte painting will use multiple images combined to make a cohesive piece, you will want as much memory as you can afford. Krita's official documentation lists 8 GB of RAM as a system requirement, and I would say that is a fair assessment. You can get by with less; however, you might notice a slowdown in performance when making complex or larger documents. Upgrading the amount of RAM your system has will improve load times, ensure certain tools (such as transforms, warps, and blending modes) respond quicker, and display results more instantly on the screen. Think of RAM as your computer's "immediate memory," for example, having papers on your desk. They're right there at your fingertips, so they provide information quickly without having to search (as opposed to a hard drive's memory, which we will cover later). In this case, having more RAM would be the same as having a bigger desk to hold more immediately accessible items. Krita also uses a great **swap** feature, allowing you to allocate your RAM more heavily to specific tasks and items of your choosing, such as the canvas size, the brush engine, and the editing tools while offloading (or, in this case, "swapping") things such as extended undo history or recent file directories to a hard drive's memory. Essentially, this will free up more RAM for you to use in the moment while you create! Pretty slick stuff.

- **Graphics Processing Unit** (**GPU**) or **graphics card**: Many artists and tech people might tell you that a graphics card should be the *first* component of this list, but I disagree. Because of their limited availability and moderate-to-high asking price compared to both CPU and RAM upgrades, I put a graphics card behind those two on the list. Yes, having a graphics card will give you additional processing power *and* memory (as Krita can utilize the additional boost of power that a graphics card grants you). However, I would argue that you could comfortably get solid CPU and RAM upgrades for less than the price of a single graphics card in the current market. If you can get a graphics card for a fair asking price, or do not mind spending on some outright ridiculous markup, a graphics card is a good choice for getting that boost of performance you might be looking for with your Krita workflow.
- **Solid-State Drive (SSD)** or **Hard Drive (HDD)**: In many ways, your computer's hard drive is its filing cabinet. The faster you're able to access information within it, the more productive you can be. In practice, getting a solid-state (meaning no moving parts) hard drive will allow files to be retrieved, loaded, and brought into RAM faster. Think of an SSD upgrade as adding a brand new six-lane highway to your computer, making sure there are no pesky traffic jams (such as program loading times, data crashes, or slow boot-ups) between when you click on a button to do a task and the conversation between your operating system, CPU, RAM, GPU, and data, to make that request a reality. Additionally, solid-state drives have the benefit of having lower power consumption and higher reliability than a standard hard-disk drive due to the lack of clunky internal moving parts. The likelihood that you will have the ill-fated "hard drive crash" and lose all your data goes down exponentially with a good SSD.

Now that we have some of the basic recommendations for technology and hardware upgrades out of the way, let's get into the main reason you're probably reading these pages: Krita!

What is Krita, and what makes it different?

Krita is an open source digital art software that is available free of charge for Windows, macOS, and Linux. It utilizes many key features that hobby-grade and professional-grade digital artists, illustrators, and animators might want or need in their workflow and is updated on a very consistent basis. We will cover the installation of the Windows version, along with notes about installing the Linux and macOS versions, later in this chapter.

Krita on Mobile?

While there is currently an Android mobile version of Krita in beta, I am not listing "mobile" as a platform, as it is not officially released. However, feel free to download the mobile beta and poke around if you have a device that is capable! You can find up-to-date information about the status of any and all mobile versions of Krita from the official Krita website (`Krita.org`).

Krita, as we know it, came to be in 2002. However, some interesting history traces the beginnings of the Krita project all the way back to 1998! Krita has been going strong ever since, and in 2012, the Krita Foundation was formed by the collective Krita community to ensure the longevity and success of Krita going into the future. The goal of Krita is to be the go-to software for digital artists from all walks of life, and regular donations and fundraisers aided by the Krita Foundation ensure that can be the case.

Whether you are just starting your digital art journey or are a tenured veteran in your respective art industry, you understand there is a *ton* of digital art software to choose from when it comes to digital painting and illustration. Krita is different in quite a few ways, but I would put one feature above all the others: *it has been created by creators, for creators*.

The Krita Artist Community

Krita has another fantastic feature, and that's the overall art community it has nurtured over the years. Various artists, at all levels (from absolute beginners to decades-long seasoned art professionals), are available for guidance, advice, and sharing creations! You can check out the Krita Artist community by navigating to `https://krita-artists.org`. See you there!

While Photoshop will always be considered an "industry standard" in the digital art realm, first and foremost, it started off as strictly a way to edit photographs. Creating digital art in Photoshop was almost a "happy accident" that resulted from features being added to Photoshop over the years, as opposed to being built from the ground up for digital painting and art. On the other hand, Krita has stayed true to its initial goal of being a heavy-hitting digital artist suite, by bringing in tools heavily used in Photoshop and adapting them to a more matter-of-fact way for visual painters and illustrators to use. These subtle changes range from filters, to the way perspective rulers work, to slight tweaks of the color wheel and natural brush engines to mimic the feel of traditional painting on a canvas. We will be covering all of these features (and many more!) throughout this book to create our projects. So, you will see the depth and breadth of possibilities that Krita can provide for yourself.

The biggest "difference" Krita provides upfront is the low barrier of entry: it is **free**! The only real thing Krita requires is the time to download and install it, and you are using the same software as some of your favorite professional artists at no charge. While I love the fact that Krita does not cost anything to download and use, I *highly* recommend donating to the Krita Foundation if and when you can, as our ongoing support as the Krita community can ensure the software stays as fresh as possible, for as many people as possible. Digital creativity should be available for everybody, and I believe we can act as ambassadors to make that a reality!

Another fantastic feature that we will cover, which makes Krita different, is its nature as an open source piece of software. So, what does open source mean in this case? Well, the full code base (programmed in Python) is available to look at, modify, create extensions for, and customize to your liking. The full-time Krita development team is less than ten people, with multiple volunteers committing changes, edits, and updates regularly, and each new release brings about fantastic changes because of this hybrid team's hard work. The UI is fully drag and drop, allowing you to set up your workflow in any way that feels comfortable for your creativity. I am friends with quite a few other Krita artists, and let me just tell you: not *one* of our UIs looks the same! That sort of flexibility is very hard to come by in the digital art and software industry. However, Krita's open source nature makes it one of the most inviting, customizable tools that you can use in your digital artistic journey.

Custom interfaces, life-like brushes, awesome tools, and regular updates, all for free? You bet! Let's finally get to the installation of Krita. Then, we will discuss some basic things that you will see the first time you load the program.

Installing Krita

Krita is free and available for Windows, Mac, and Linux. Because there is a myriad of different ways to install Krita on different operating systems, here, I will just cover the Windows version step by step.

Installing Krita is easy, as the official website has everything you need to get started! If you are downloading the macOS version, please bear in mind that you will need macOS 10.12.0, or later, for the most current versions of Krita.

As your first step for downloading and installing Krita onto your Windows device, you should ensure that your system meets the minimum system requirements. While you could download and use Krita with a slightly older setup than is recommended, I do believe the boost of performance you will have when using the minimum system requirements, or greater, is well worth the investment.

System requirements

As of writing, Krita's system requirements for Windows PCs use Windows 8.1, or higher, as your operating system, 4 GB of RAM, and OpenGL 3.0 (which should be standard, even on the vast majority of built-in integrated graphics cards – no standalone graphics card is required!)

Krita's `.appimage` file for the Linux 64-bit version is readily available from Krita's main download page. It is also included in many Linux distribution packages, but you might have to enable extra repositories. Krita's official website (`Krita.org`) has detailed tips and commands for more specific Linux setups, including Fedora, OpenSUSE, Debian, Arch, Flatpak, Snaps, and more.

Additionally, Krita's website recommends a graphics tablet, which we covered in-depth earlier. You can use a mouse, but trust me, painting with a graphics tablet or touch device is a game-changer!

A step-by-step example (for Windows)

Now we will begin our step-by-step installation guide for the Windows 64-bit version of Krita.

> **Note**
>
> As of writing, I've installed both Krita 4.4.5 (which was current at the time) and the beta version of Krita 5.0. So, some of the images you see here may differ slightly from what you see during your first installation.

Now, let's begin with the installation process:

1. Navigate to Krita's official website (`http://www.krita.org`), and click on the **Download** option in the main navigation bar.
2. You will see a **Download Krita** graphic, which defaults to **Windows Installer 64-bit**, as shown in *Figure 1.3*:

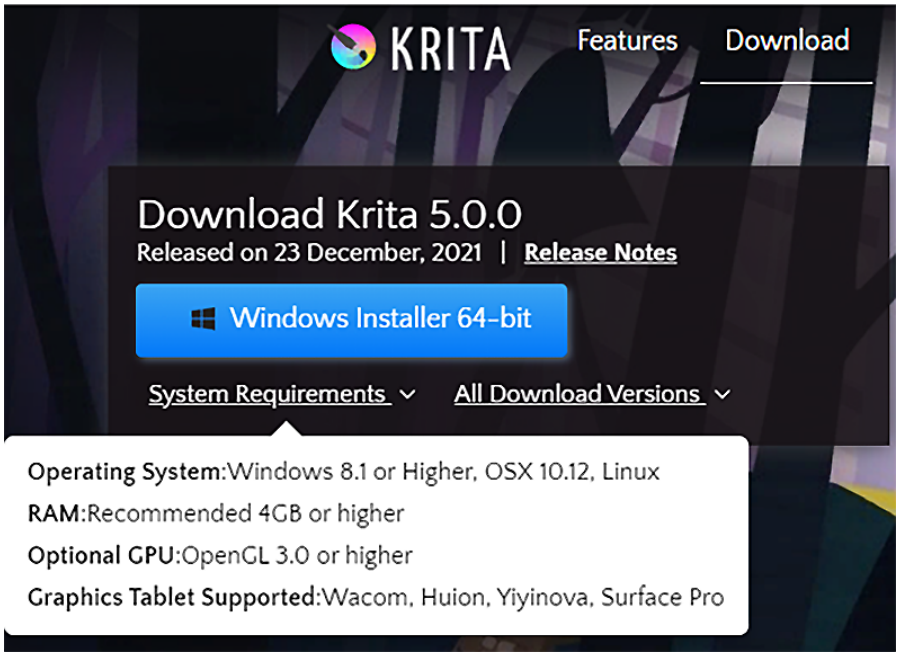


Figure 1.3 – The Download Krita page as of Krita 5.0

While this is the Windows installation tutorial, note that you can click on **All Download Versions** to bring up the macOS installer and Linux `.appimage` files if needed.

3. Choose your version of Krita (for us, this will be the Windows Installer 64-bit version). You will see a prompt asking you to save the file, as shown in *Figure 1.4*. Click on **Save File** when prompted:

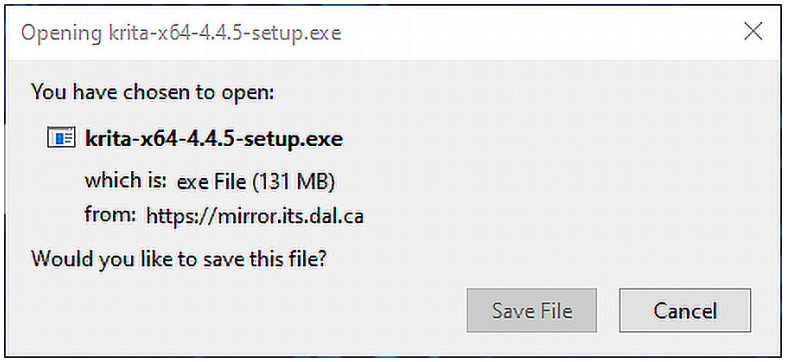


Figure 1.4 – The Save File prompt for the Krita installer version 4.4.5

4. Once downloaded, locate your downloaded setup file from your download location (many browsers now default to their **Download** folder in the upper-right corner of your browser window). Double-click on your setup file.
5. In Windows 8.1 or greater, you might see the **User Account Control** window pop up, which asks **Do you want to allow this app to make changes to your device?**. This looks very similar to *Figure 1.5*. Click on **Yes** when prompted:

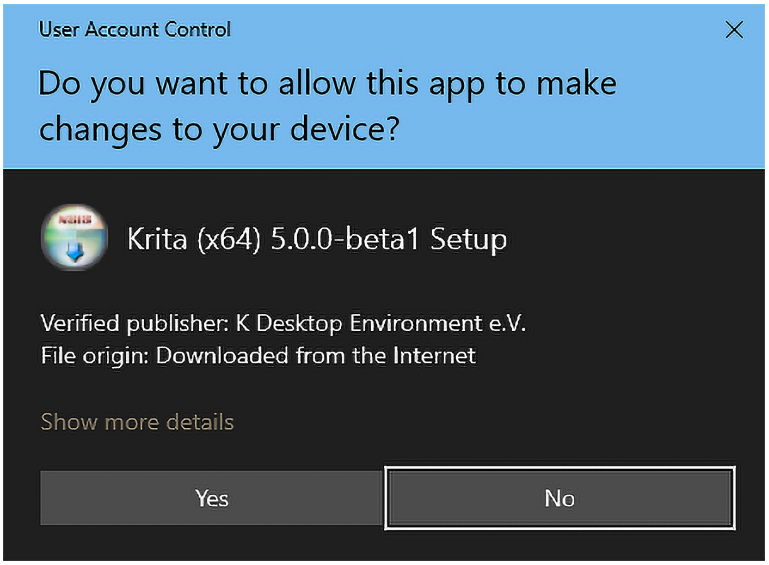


Figure 1.5 – The Windows User Account Control permission prompt for Krita 5.0 (beta)

6. For the next step, you will be prompted to choose a language to use during the setup process, as shown in *Figure 1.6*:

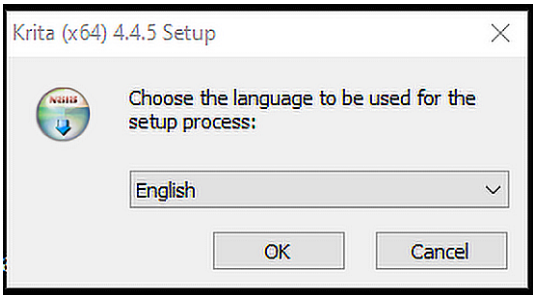


Figure 1.6 – The language selection setup prompt

Please note that you can select from over 60 languages inside Krita once it is installed, as we will cover later in the *Breaking down the Krita UI* section of the chapter. Krita (and this setup process) should automatically default to your system language setting within Windows.

7. The next portion of the setup will be the **End User License Agreement** (**EULA**). I know these can be a bit mundane, but if you are interested in the open source nature of the Krita project and the development libraries used in development, I suggest giving it a quick read! Click on **Next** until the installation process starts, as shown in *Figure 1.7*:

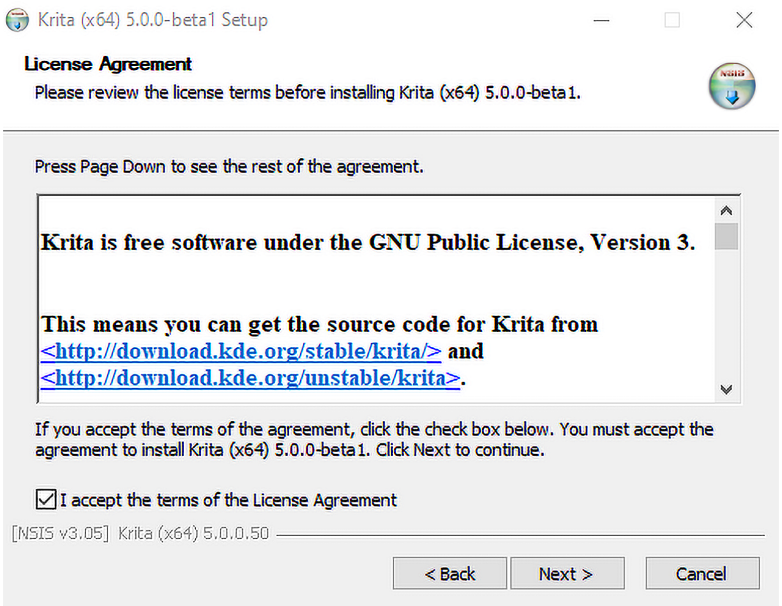


Figure 1.7 – Krita's EULA prompt

8. Once you have completed these steps, you should see a screen showing a full installation log. It will give you a confirmation message of **Completed**, as shown in *Figure 1.8*:

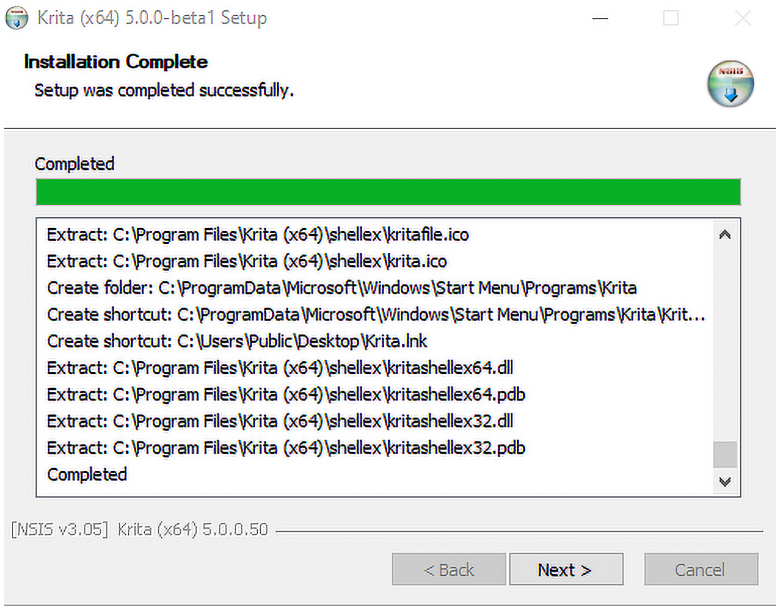


Figure 1.8 – A successful installation prompt

   Click on **Next**, and that's a wrap!

9. Once installed, you should have a prompt to either **Launch Krita** or exit the installer to return to the desktop. You are ready to start mastering Krita!

Now, let's take a bit of time to look at the default layout of Krita once it has been installed and start introducing customizations that you can use to make it feel a little more like home!

Breaking down the Krita UI

Now that your Krita installation is complete, it is time to open the program for the first time!

Once the installation is complete, find the Krita shortcut icon on your desktop, or locate Krita in the file location you chose during installation. Double-click on the shortcut and Krita should greet you with a loading/splash page to let you know the assets are loading (as shown in *Figure 1.9*):

Figure 1.9 – The Krita loading or splash screen for Krita 5.0 (beta)

Your "New" Install

One thing to bear in mind is that your "splash screen" might look different from mine, and that is okay! One of the benefits of Krita being open source is that once you customize the software to your liking, a large amount of those UI changes will carry over to newer installations of the program on the same device (the tools and dockers might change slightly based upon updated features). Since I have used Krita for many years, each new version still has "my" layout, with my brushes and tools on the left-hand side, while the color wheel, sliders, and layer controls are on the right-hand side. Even if it has been years since your previous installation of Krita, you might be surprised to discover that certain tools are exactly where you left them when you load in from a fresh installation!

You will notice a fairly standard startup screen, and if you are familiar with digital art software, the layout might have some familiar features (as shown in *Figure 1.10*):

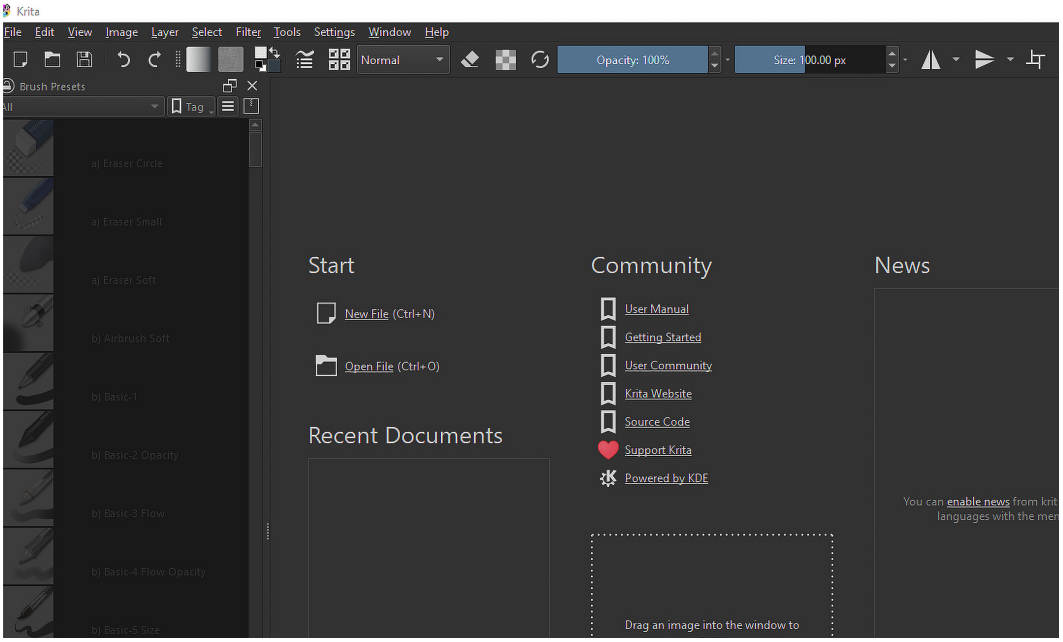


Figure 1.10 – My default Krita startup screen from a fresh installation (Krita 5.0 beta)

For the rest of the chapter, we will do a quick overview of the main components that make up Krita's basic layout and build up our comfort in terms of navigating the program.
I know this part might appear basic, but as any good artist knows, the fundamentals are key to success!

While the initial startup screen might appear somewhat daunting when you first open the program, remember that everything you might need to get started on your masterpiece is at your fingertips. We are going to go line by line, in almost a "glossary" style of tour, and discuss what we are looking at.

> **Dockers and Tool Visibility**
>
> If something from these images is not automatically showing for you, a quick way to check the visibility of a given tool within Krita is under the **Settings** > **Dockers** menu command.

The file menu and toolbar

Starting from the upper-left corner of your screen, we will look at the traditional **File** menu (as shown in *Figure 1.11*):

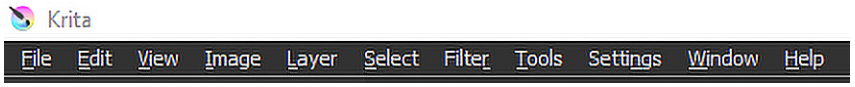


Figure 1.11 – Krita's traditional File program menu

The **File** menu is your core functionality menu within Krita. Features such as creating new documents, loading, saving, program settings, and more can be accessed through this menu. Bear in mind that the **File** menu stays static (that is, it does not change) depending on the current tool you have selected or the project you have loaded into your workspace, so be sure to familiarize yourself with the functionality of each option, as they will always be available to you! We will be covering a large portion of what this entire menu has to offer throughout this book.

Next, directly under the **File** menu, we have the contextual **Toolbar** menu (as shown in *Figure 1.12*):

Figure 1.12 – The contextual Toolbar menu

I want to note that this **Toolbar** menu is contextual, as the options provided to you on this menu will change depending on the tool you have currently selected. For instance, the **Toolbar** menu will give different options if you have the brush tool selected, as opposed to the options it will provide when having the text tool selected. Each tool provides a myriad of options; later in the book, we will discuss how to customize your toolbar with options and sliders of your choosing!

The workspace

If we continue to use the layout, as shown in *Figure 1.10*, the next items we will look at will be my standard workspace (as shown in *Figure 1.13*):

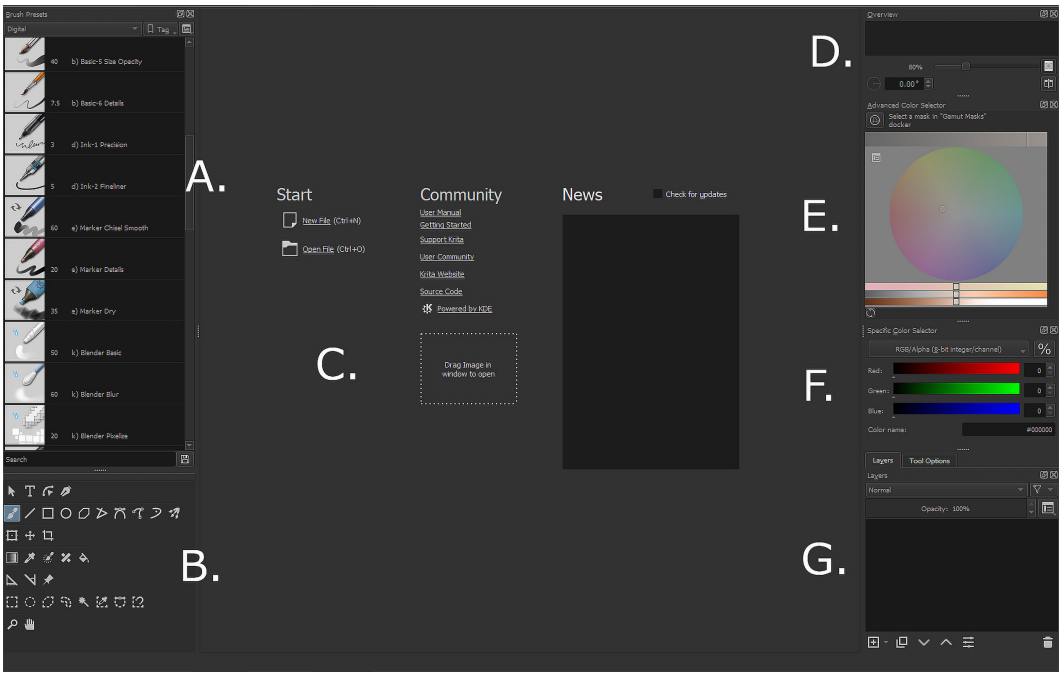


Figure 1.13 – A guided look at the main work area of Krita

Here is a quick breakdown of my standard setup within Krita, along with some notation regarding what each tool is. Remember, you can mimic this layout if you like or customize the sizes and locations of these (and other) tools based on your preferences:

- **Brush Preset docker** (A): This allows you to have your favorite brushes, erasers, and illustration tools quickly accessible at any time.
- **Toolbox docker** (B): Similar to the Brush Preset docker, the Toolbox docker allows you to quickly access a lot of important formatting, editing, selection, and warping tools so that you can manipulate your image in a variety of ways.
- **Work area** (C): The work area is the general area on which your canvas will be located. Within this area, you can zoom, rotate, scale, and flip your canvas with a variety of tools and keyboard shortcuts that we will review throughout the book.

- **Overview** (D): This is the area in which you'll see a "zoomed-out" version of your current project. This is a must-have for me, as I love to see the "readability" of my art as I work, even if I'm zoomed in and working on specific details!
- **Advanced Color Selector** (E): This is a tool that we will become much more familiar with in upcoming chapters. Some features of this tool include custom color wheels and various sliders for the hue, saturation, and brightness of your selected color.
- **Specific Color Selector** (F): This is slightly more specific than the **Advanced Color Selector** tool (hence its name!). It gives you more subtle customization of the tones, temperatures, and overall "mood" of your selected color. Once again, we'll do a deep dive into what this truly means throughout the rest of the book.
- **Layers panel** (G): Your **Layers** panel will definitely be a staple of your workflow. Controlling your layer organization is a very important skillset and one that we will review in great depth throughout the book. This area allows for adding layers, deleting layers, changing blending modes, grouping content, masking content, and more.

Additionally, we will be looking at a large number of these features and settings throughout this book. So, while I did a quick overview of each tool I use on a regular basis, note that we will be taking a *far* more comprehensive look at these tools throughout the remainder of this book. I am very much a person who likes to learn by doing, and I believe the best way to really get comfortable with using the tools of Krita is to use them in the context of creating artwork. Seeing another artist's Krita UI setup is always interesting, and I hope this quick rundown will help you to decide which dockers and settings you would like at your fingertips.

The pop-up palette

Speaking of having features at your fingertips, one *very* cool feature that Krita offers, which will be helpful during your art journey, is the **Pop-Up Palette** (as shown in *Figure 1.14*):

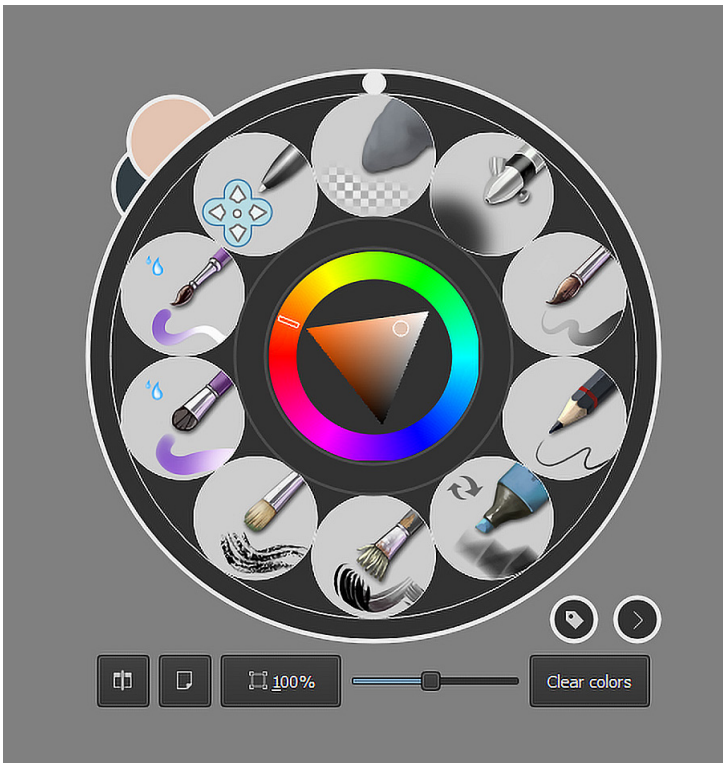


Figure 1.14 – The pop-up palette

This is a shortcut system within Krita that allows you to bring up your most used or favorite brushes within your workspace, without needing to fuss around with clicking on bulky menus or constantly changing your docker settings.

To bring up the **Pop-Up Palette** feature, you simply need to *right-click* when you are in your workspace area. The small tag in the lower-right corner of the pop-up palette will allow you to change your brush preset categories, which are displayed in the pop-up palette radial menu.

Additionally, note that there is a miniature color wheel in the middle of the radial menu, foreground and background color swatches in the upper-left corner of the radial menu, and various display options for tool customization and canvas visibility.

Customizing your workspace

Now that you are familiar with some basic terminology within Krita, the first order of business is to set up the program in a way that makes the most sense for you!

Every digital artist is going to have slightly different needs or have their own "go-to" features that they consider to be essential when creating the artwork they love. Krita uses a powerful system of **Dockers** (that is, windowed tools that can be locked or "docked" to each other and/or anchor points of the program itself). The full list of dockers is substantial (as shown in *Figure 1.15*) and allows for several options and workflows within Krita:

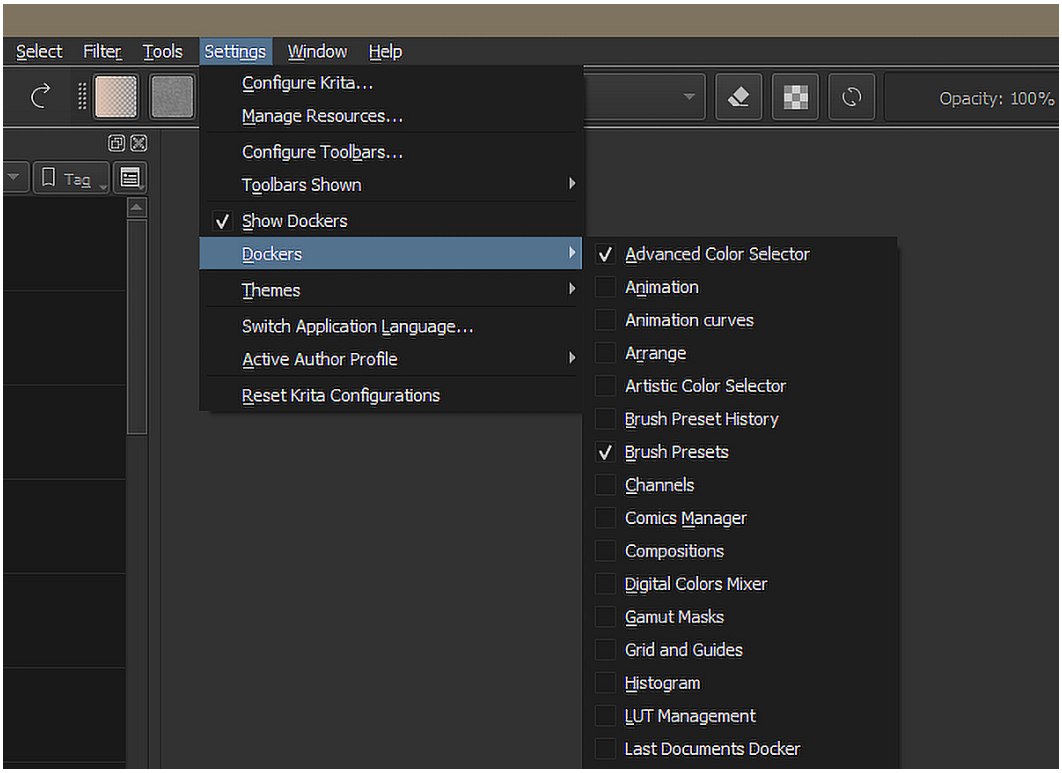


Figure 1.15 – The location of various docker options

As you can see from my setup, I only keep a small number of dockers activated at one time, as I enjoy keeping my work area free from clutter. Feel free to activate any docker that you think sounds interesting and give it a spin!

Experimenting and editing your docker locations and settings in your workspace is cool, but what if you want to have separate workspace setups depending on what type of project you are working on? Working with digital painting will require different "must-have" features as opposed to say photography, animation, or graphic design.

Krita makes having "custom loadouts" *very* easy, and the program already comes preloaded with some standard workspace loadouts that you can try for yourself:

1. You can get to this menu by navigating to the **Window** > **Workspace** option in your **File** menu (as shown in *Figure 1.16*):

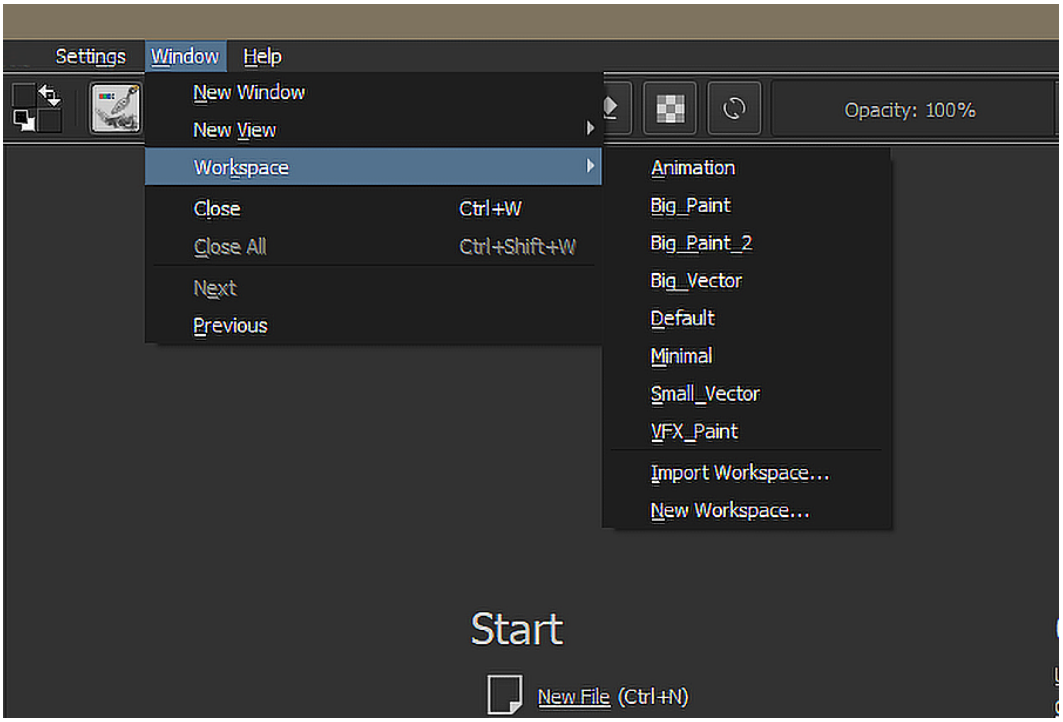


Figure 1.16 – Krita's workspace selection menu, showcasing various workspace layout options

2. Once you have explored your docker windows and would like to save what you currently have, you can click on the **Window** > **Workspace** > **New Workspace** option.
3. You will be prompted to enter a custom name for this **Workspace** (as shown in *Figure 1.17*).

4. Once saved, your custom workspace will be added to the list of options found under the **Window** > **Workspace** menu in the **File** menu bar:

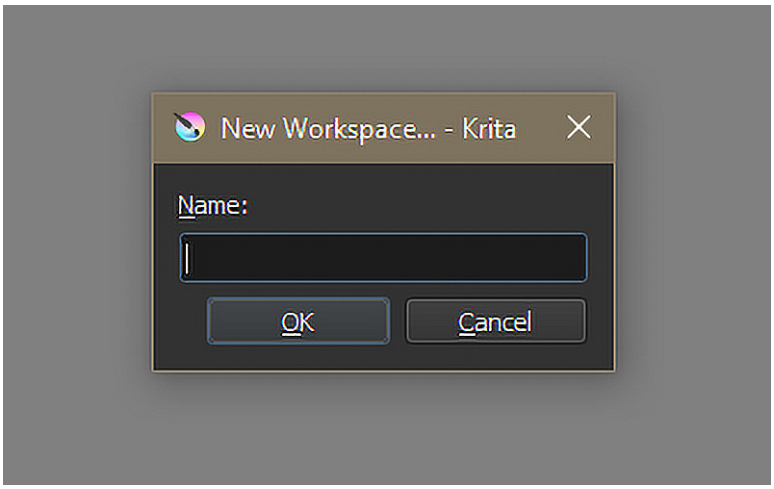


Figure 1.17 – The New Workspace prompt

Sharing Your Workspace

Krita has the ability to actually import the workspaces of other artists! Under the **Window** > **Workspace** window, you will see an option entitled **Import Workspace**. These are stored as Krita workspace files (`.kws`), and they will be located in the **Krita** > **Share** > **Krita** > **Workspaces** folder of your Krita installation directory. This is great for newer artists who are receiving training or even sharing workspaces in a studio environment to ensure everyone is using the same tools, leading to more consistent results!

Congratulations! You have now created your own custom workspace! This functionality might not seem like much at first, but it is a crucial asset that will serve you well. No matter the task at hand, you will be prepared with all of your favorite tools for the job, all at the click of a button due to your understanding of workspaces.

Configuring the toolbars

While we've touched on how to customize our workspace, note that Krita also allows you to make your own customized toolbar. The number of options available for toolbar customization is *staggering*, literally allowing you to browse through every single action that Krita can take and then add shortcuts to those actions. The number of options is easily in the thousands, ranging from text augmentation and canvas options to importing Python plugins and showing system information for bug reports.

However, for our needs, I will be adding the **Reference Images Tool** feature (as we will be using this feature in a later project!). Let's add that option to our custom toolbar next:

1. Similar to getting the full list of dockers available in *Figure 1.15*, you will receive the **Configuring Toolbars** prompt by clicking on **Settings** > **Configure Toolbars** in the **File** menu at the top of Krita.
2. Once you click on this option, the **Configure Toolbars** menu will be displayed (as shown in *Figure 1.18*):

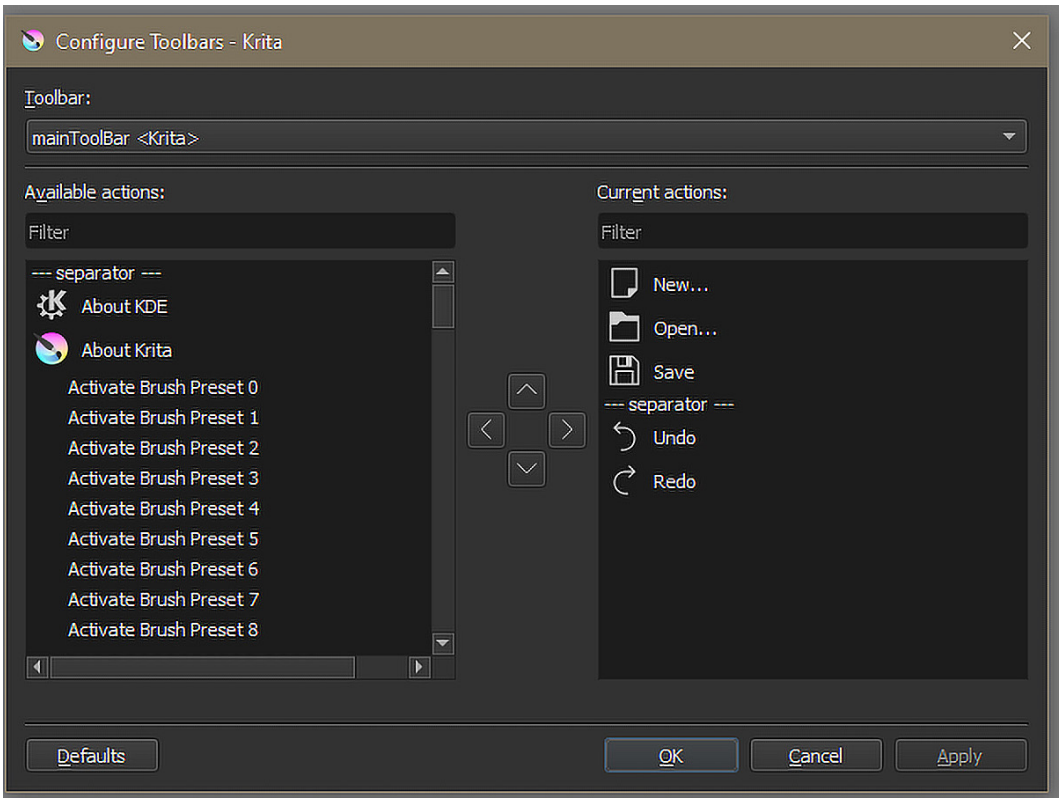


Figure 1.18 – The Configure Toolbars prompt

3. Once the **Configure Toolbars** prompt has appeared on the screen, under the **Available Actions** filter, type in `Reference`. You will notice a few options pop up, including one option entitled **Reference Images Tool** with a push-pin icon in the list.

4. Select the **Reference Images Tool** option (with the push-pin icon) and drag it to the right-hand side of the menu (as shown in *Figure 1.19*):

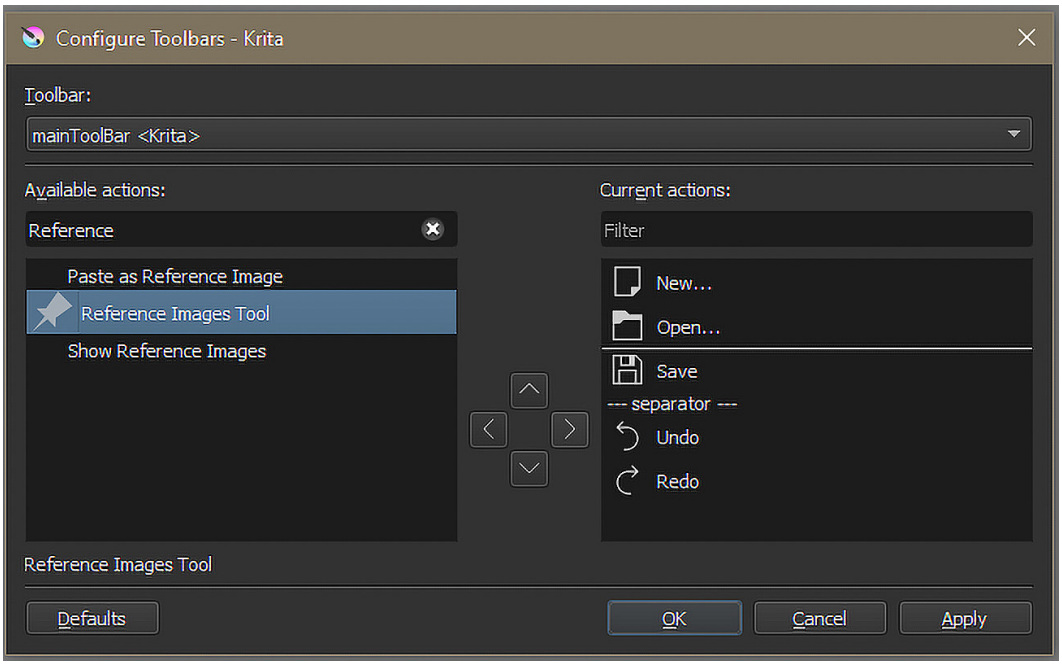


Figure 1.19 – Getting our Reference Images Tool shortcut configured in our custom toolbar

5. Go ahead and select **Apply** once the shortcut appears in the list at the location you would like.
6. Note that the change takes place immediately on your **Toolbar** section after selecting **Apply**.
7. Continue adding any other shortcuts that you might find useful and apply the changes.
8. Once you are done, click on **OK**.

There we have it! Your change has taken a global effect on Krita. That means every time you load the program, your customized toolbar should be available! Regarding your custom workspaces, Krita will *usually default to the most recently used workspace*. Saving your custom workspaces is highly recommended as swapping back and forth between them will be as easy as clicking on a button instead of having to memorize layouts that you liked in the past!

> **Returning to True Defaults**
>
> At any point, if you would like to return to either of the default toolbars or workspaces, you can use the **Reset Krita Configurations** option in the **Settings** menu.

Now that we have glanced at some docker and toolbar customizations, we can briefly discuss some interesting, advanced options in the overall configuration of Krita.

Configuring Krita (advanced)

To get to the more advanced software setup area of Krita, click on **Settings** > **Configure Krita**. You will see several options (such as **Display**, **Canvas Inputs**, **Keyboard shortcuts**, **Tablet** settings, and more). All of these can enhance your workflow within Krita tremendously. If you have specific shortcut keys that you like, custom Python scripts that you would like to run, want to set file handling options, or even change the way multiple projects being open will appear on screen, this is the area where you can tinker to your heart's content.

For this book, we will look at two main configuration areas: **Author profiles** and **Color Selector Settings**.

Setting your author information

Author information within Krita is a cool feature that allows every image you create in Krita to have metadata embedded into it! When an image you create in Krita is exported with the author information embedded, if a viewer right-clicks on your image, your information will appear in the image's description. The information allowed in the author information embed is varied and can include your name, website, email address, physical address, phone number, or fax number.

To set a customized **Author Information** feature within the **Configure Krita** prompt, perform the following steps:

1. Click on the **Author** icon on the left-hand side of the **Configure Krita** prompt.
2. To create a new author persona, click on the + button in the upper-right corner of the **Author** prompt.
3. Create a new name for this author persona and begin filling out the information that you would like embedded in your Krita-exported images (an example is shown in *Figure 1.20*):

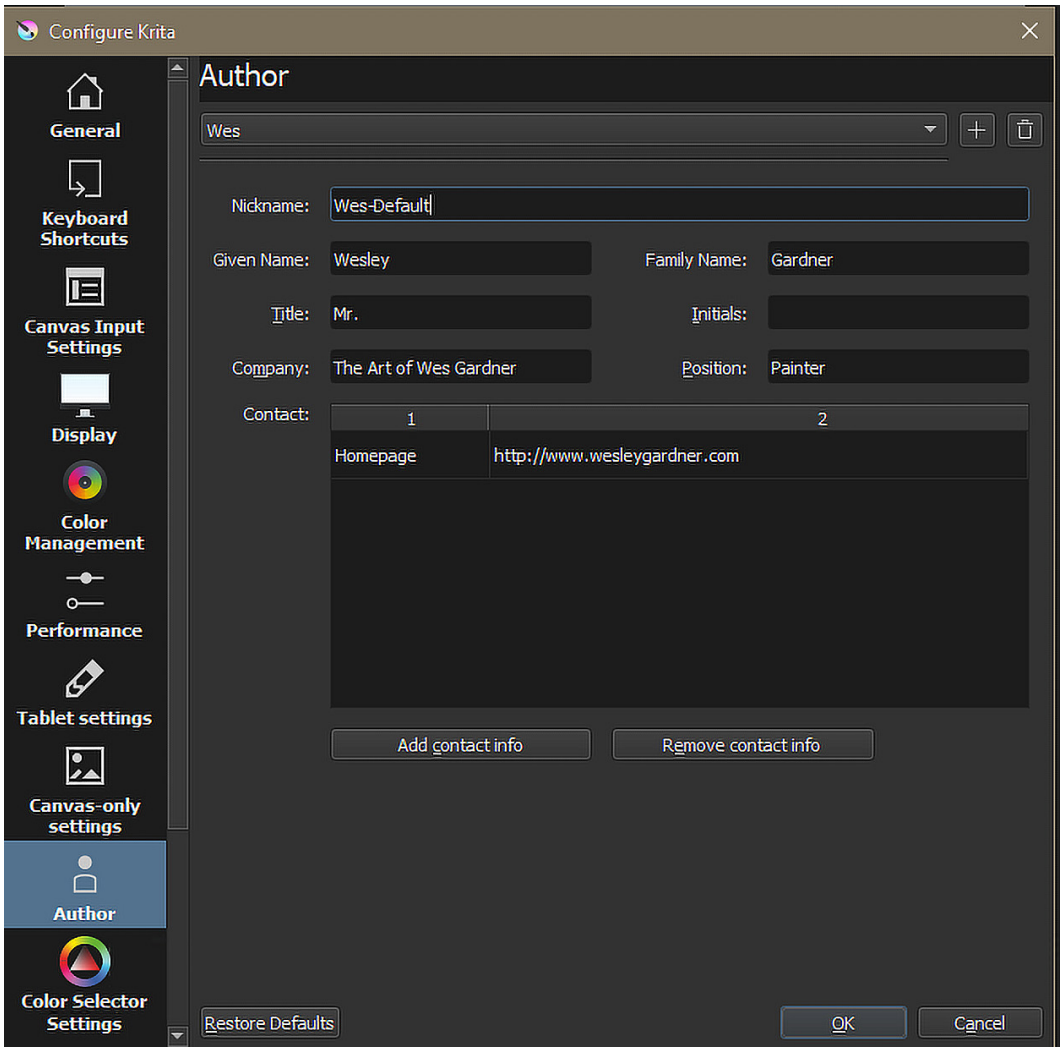


Figure 1.20 – The Author information panel

4. After filling out the information that you would like to provide in your image's metadata, click on the **OK** button to save your changes.

Now, let's make sure that your new author profile has been enabled so that you can receive that sweet credit for your artwork online! To enable your newly created author profile, perform the following steps:

1. Click on the **Settings** menu. Then, scroll to **Active Author Profile** near the bottom of the list.
2. From here, you will see all of the author personas you have created (as shown in *Figure 1.21*):

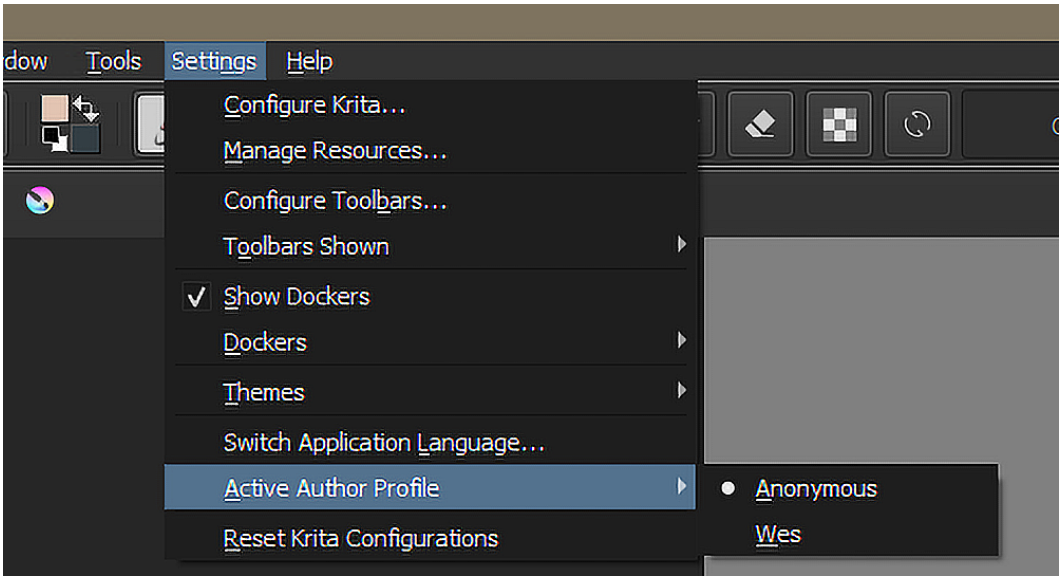


Figure 1.21 – Activating your custom author profile

Now you can make as many author personas as you wish!

Exporting Images with Author Information

To successfully export your images with your author metadata, make sure that the **Sign with Author Data** option is checked while exporting your image. Please note that only JPG and PNG exports allow the metadata to carry over and, initially, the export's metadata fields will only provide what you have listed as the **Nickname** value and the first entry of **Contact** information. In the example shown in *Figure 1.20*, my file would export with `Wes-Default` (`http://www.wesleygardner.com`) as my metadata.

Color selector settings

In the next chapter, we will be looking at a comprehensive guide on how to color in Krita (and, in general, digital art). To get us up to speed and set up for the upcoming chapter, let's look at a few of the **Color Selector Settings** options that Krita provides in the **Configure Krita** prompt (as shown in *Figure 1.22*):

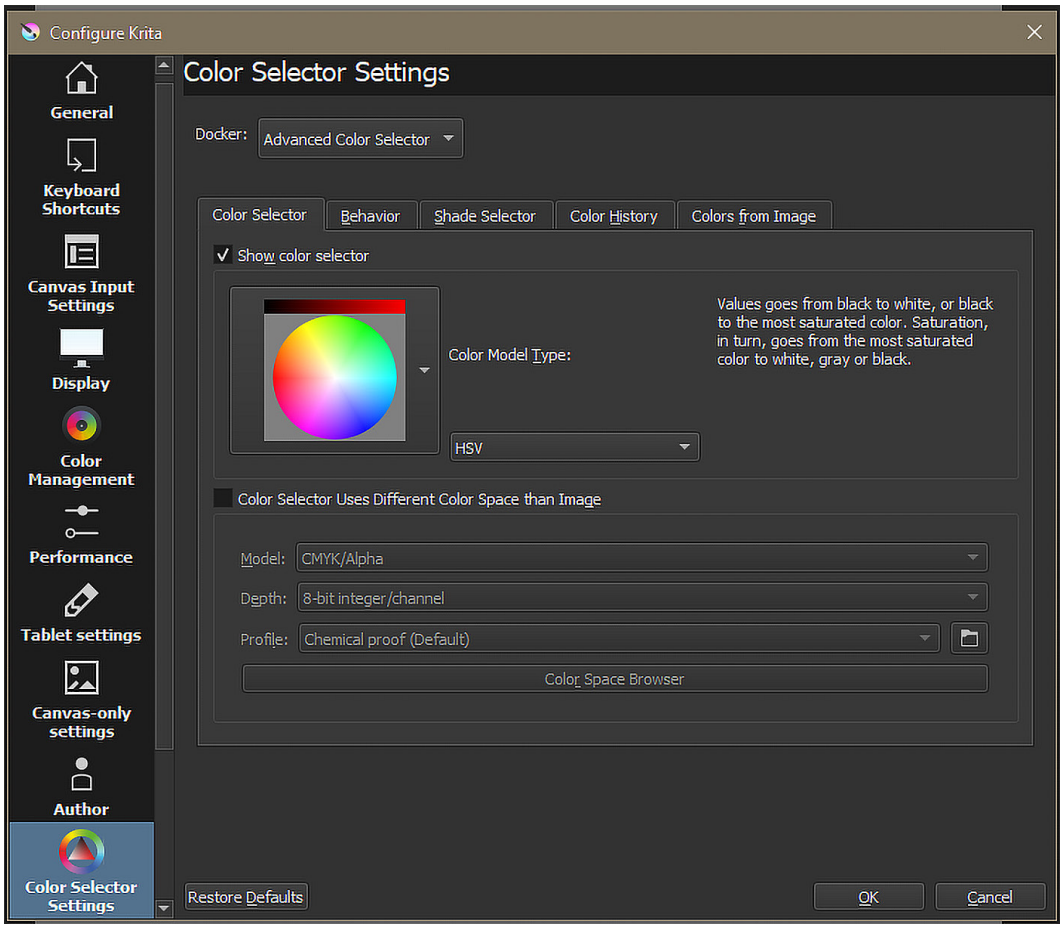


Figure 1.22 – The Color Selector Settings panel

As you can see, there are a variety of options available for color within this screen. For our setup, we will look at the **Color Selector** panel, customizing the look of our selector itself and the mode in which it displays information.

You have a variety of options for choosing your "color wheel" within Krita. To see the different options available, click on the down arrow next to the current **Color Model Type** graphic. A list of different graphics should be displayed (as shown in *Figure 1.23*):

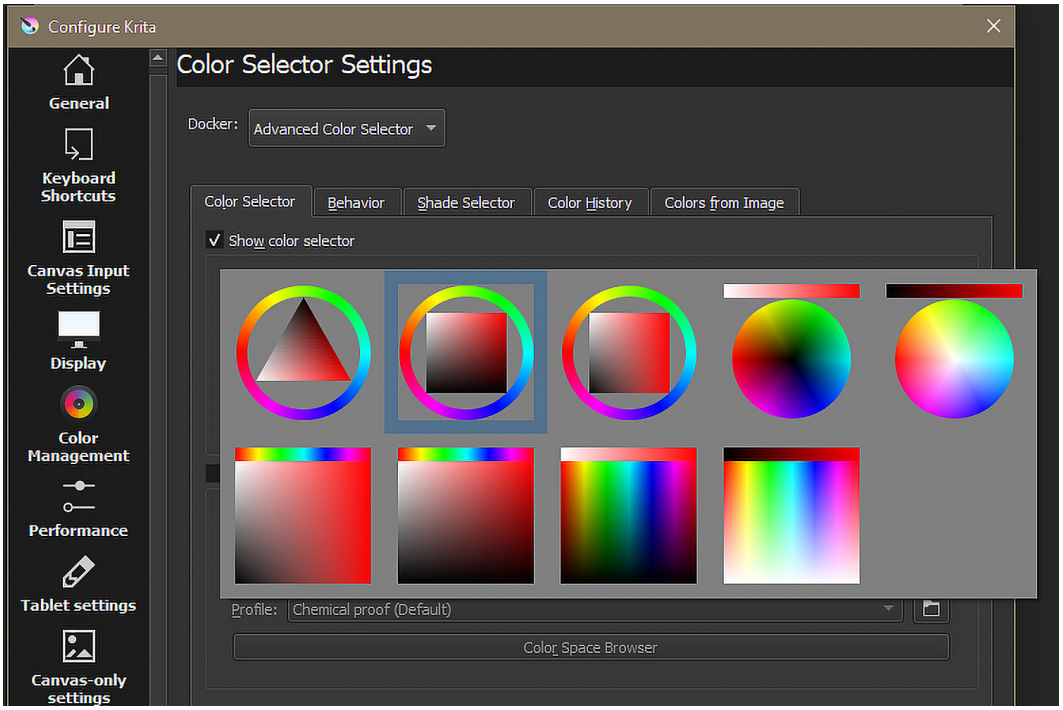


Figure 1.23 – The full range of color wheels available in Krita

Wow, there are so many options! Which one should you choose? My recommendation is to select the color wheel that makes the most sense to you. My usual color wheel is the rightmost option on the top row in *Figure 1.23*, and will be the one I recommend using if you want to follow directly along with the examples in this book. After selecting your preferred color selector, go ahead and change the mode in the drop-down menu to **HSL** (as shown in *Figure 1.24*):

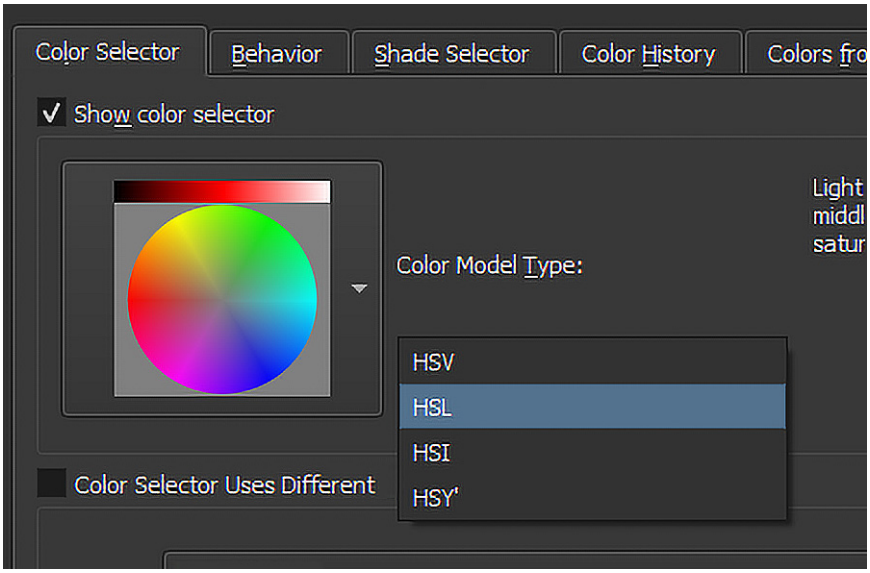


Figure 1.24 – The color mode hue/saturation format selector

Do not worry if you are not sure what the hue and saturation modes mean. We will cover that (and much more!) in the next chapter when we discuss color.

While we are moving forward through the book, we will keep discussing UI customizations and how slight tweaks could help your workflow become more refined, structured, and easier to handle.

The beauty of Krita's UI is in its flexibility, and the more you experiment with different setups and settings, the greater and more enriched your digital art experience will become.

Summary

In this chapter, we looked at the basics of Krita, hardware recommendations, and a few customization options for Krita's interface and tools. We learned about dockers, toolbars, workspaces, the pop-up palette, and more advanced options to make Krita feel like our own personal art studio. Getting comfortable with Krita is a foundational component of being an effective digital artist, as the more comfortable you feel when using the tools provided in Krita, the more you can focus on the fun part of creating art!

In *Chapter 2*, *Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color*, we will do an extensive deep-dive into what makes up color. We will not only look at how Krita displays and uses it but in general, how to best utilize color theory in the creation of art. We will discuss the differences (and similarities) in how the human eye perceives color in traditional art versus digital art, what the differences are between RGB color and CMYK color, how to build any color from memory, highly effective ways to read the color wheel, and even dissect the components that make a color what it is.

Join me in the next chapter, where we will cover topics such as resolution and color theory. These topics may seem intimidating and dense at first, but hopefully we will break them down into something much more approachable and easy to understand!

2

Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color

Welcome to the second chapter! In the previous chapter, we discussed what makes Krita unique, installed the software, and discovered some fun ways to customize your **user interface** (**UI**) to make sure you have everything you need to get creating.

This chapter will be discussing a few things that seem to be "gotcha" topics for a sizeable portion of digital artists, even at intermediate and advanced levels. My goal for this book is to be a reference that acts as your "art buddy"—something you can take off the shelf year after year and find something new to chew on. No chapter will encapsulate this more so than this one.

In this chapter, we will discuss the following topics:

- Breaking down resolution, aspect ratios, canvases, and **dots per inch** (**DPI**)/**pixels per inch** (**PPI**)
- Evaluating color modes—**red, green, blue** (**RGB**), **cyan, magenta, yellow, and blacK** (**CMYK**), and the RGB/RYB difference (additive versus subtractive color)
- Understanding basic color theory
- Clarifying the color wheel

First, we are going to cover some key terms and definitions regarding digital screens and your options regarding the creation of digital art. This quick review will help us refresh our knowledge of a few of the fundamental terms regarding our craft. We will then look at how digital color works in relation to "traditional" color theory, and some effective ways to use the color wheel that may make your life easier going forward!

While this book is focused on using Krita to create your digital art, this chapter is more all-encompassing on digital art in its totality. Think of this chapter as a "crash course" for the topics discussed, taking advanced topics and breaking them down into repeatable, impactful steps to help you produce your visions the way they were meant to be seen!

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0 +)
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus

> **There Are No Rules! Well…Sort of.**
>
> In this chapter, I will be giving very general recommendations when it comes to formatting your artwork in Krita. *In no way, shape, or form are these "requirements" for your art*. These come from my experience working with a variety of professional clients, and as many times as I've followed these general guidelines, I've broken them as well. When in doubt, your client is always right, and their request for a certain aspect ratio or resolution takes paramount! Art directors often give "template files" or "art bibles" that list ratios, resolutions, and dimensions that you are required to use. If it's for personal work, these choices are up to you and you alone!

Breaking down resolution, aspect ratios, canvases, and DPI/PPI

Let's go ahead and break down some terms in a "definition" style list first, and then we will talk about the functional, everyday impact these topics will have on your workflow when it comes to working with clients or personal work. Here we go:

- **Resolution**—The *number of pixels, usually listed in a "width by height" format, that a given digital device can display*. Popular resolution terms you may have seen are 1080p (1920 pixels wide x 1080 pixels tall) or **4k** (3840 pixels wide x 2160 pixels tall).

- **Aspect ratio**—The *ratio of the width and height of a given display or canvas, usually given in a width:height format, using the lowest common denominator of each*. For instance, both 1080p and 4K resolution examples would be 16:9 aspect ratios, while older non-widescreen televisions (such as **cathode-ray tubes**, or **CRTs**) would have display aspect ratios of 4:3, being more box-like in appearance. More on this in a bit.
- **Canvas**—The canvas is *your functional working space for a project in Krita*. This is a document (consisting of layers) that you create that has the capability to be edited and manipulated in various ways, including painting. Canvases can be created in any aspect ratio, with any resolution settings (within the confines of your computer's hardware capabilities, of course, but more on that in a minute). Basically, this is your painting area! If you think of canvases you can purchase at a store, or the various sizes of papers available for traditional art, you can start getting an idea of the possibilities you have when creating a digital canvas.
- **DPI** and **PPI**—*DPI and PPI are both terms used in relation to the amount of visual information provided within a 1-inch area of an image*. DPI is a term used for physical printing, such as newspapers, magazines, and other physical deliverables. PPI is used for images displayed on digital devices such as computer screens, cell phones, and tablets. The higher the number of pixels or dots within a 1-inch space, the more clarity, detail, or "sharpness" an image will have. *For this book, we will exclusively be working with "PPI" when we make our images*, as we are creating our artwork on a digital canvas, for presentation online. Just know that for our purposes as digital artists, DPI and PPI are interchangeable. The functional difference between PPI and DPI comes more into play when you're browsing around for a professional printing service, as DPI can change depending on the printer manufacturer. One company's 300-DPI printer may have the same clarity and print quality as another company's 700-DPI printer: there's no "industry standard" dot size or shape when it comes to physically printing something, so it's worth shopping around your local printers to find the perfect fit for you if you're interested in creating prints of your work.

There are a ton of combinations when it comes to mixing resolution, canvas sizes, and aspect ratios. For your personal art, having so many options may seem overwhelming. Where do you start?

Next is a "quick guide" list of sorts, and some notes discussing the decisions for these combinations in creating your artwork.

Print versus digital resolution (PPI) settings

Setting up a canvas is all about context and intent. There's a lot of problem solving that you can do before you even put a brush to canvas, and that begins with setting up your document in a way that best matches what your final output's use case will be. Here, we will discuss some differences and important distinctions between working with projects that would be mainly viewed digitally and work that would be used for creating prints.

Digital-only

If you are creating work with the intent of it to *only be seen on a digital screen, I would recommend sticking to 72 PPI for your image (unless required to go larger by your client, of course!)*. Your height and width dimensions can be variable depending on your project (such as posting to a web portfolio versus posting on social media), but staying at 72 PPI will ensure Krita will have enough headroom to use any and all types of tools you throw at it. Your brushes will respond faster, resizing and cropping items on your canvas will be smoother, and you'll overall improve the real-time speed at which you'll create, as you won't be waiting around for parsing and loading of tools or effects. Digital screens, even with high resolutions such as 4K and 8K, are great at calculating and presenting 72-PPI images with stunning clarity.

Print

If you are working with the intent of printing (whether as a gift, selling prints as a business, or pursuing mixed media), *I recommend sticking to 300 PPI or above* for your images. While these files will require more system resources and may cause a slight slowdown depending on your system's capabilities (such as **random-access memory** (**RAM**) and **central processing unit** (**CPU**) performance), the clarity of your art is paramount when translating it from a digital screen to a physical printer.

There's no specific "mathematical ratio" of translating the PPI setting of your art to a printer's DPI setting (unless one is provided by your printing **service provider** (**SP**)), so you want to work with a canvas that allows for the highest density of information possible as a "better safe than sorry" approach. Going over 300 PPI is possible, but in my experience, there are diminishing returns that don't make it worthwhile. Going to 1200 PPI when creating your image will *not necessarily* be "four times clearer" than 300 DPI. The cost of printing would go up (specialized printers would be needed), and the amount of slowdown on your computer would be exponential (as you are literally growing the amount of information per inch of canvas space to be functional). It's just not worth the hassle.

Out of dozens of professional clients I have worked for, exactly one (!) required a piece larger than 300 DPI/PPI in resolution. Consumer-grade printers can go upward of 4800 DPI, but I would argue that past a certain point, a higher DPI is just wasted ink. 1200 DPI is usually the upper limit I've found in professional conversations with printmakers and photographers, but I would definitely not recommend working with a canvas at 1200 DPI for digital painting. The amount of memory needed to work in real time showing each brush stroke effectively manipulating the canvas would be too much for the vast majority of machines.

Landscape versus portrait versus freeform

While knowing our finalized intent of print versus digital is critical, so are the main resolution and dimensions we want to use when creating our piece. Setting up your canvas's size to better align with the goal you want in your work will solve some compositional problems, even before they might arise! Let's look at three of the most popular and often-used image dimension ratios for professional and personal work alike: landscape, portrait, and what I like to call "freeform".

Landscape

Landscape images often follow a general rule of "fat rectangles", so having an aspect ratio of 16:9 (widescreen panoramic) is a safe bet, as are ratios such as 2:1, 3:1 (both considered panoramic), and 6:4 (standard 35-**millimeter** (**mm**) format).

Functionally, let's say we're making a wallpaper landscape for a client, and they want you to paint a piece that fills their new 4K display for their office building to greet customers as they approach an information desk. For thumbnailing and first-draft passes, I would create a new document and set the canvas size at 3840 x 2160 at 72 PPI, as shown in the following screenshot. This would fit the exact specifications of what they're asking for (a 16:9, 4K-resolution digital-only presentation), and you could display these thumbnails on the actual screen for the client to see and approve:

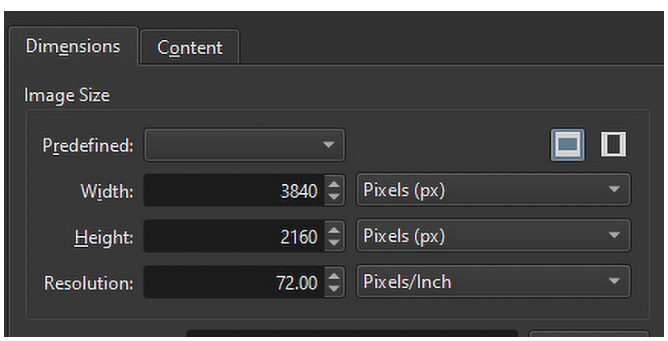


Figure 2.1 – A 4K-resolution (3840 x 2160) canvas example

However, once I got the go-ahead from the client to finalize my art, I may transfer what I have into a canvas that doubles in width and height but stays at 72 PPI. This would allow me to work on a 7680 x 4320 canvas and be able to have enough space to really nail down some fine details and would scale perfectly down to half-size for their 4K display for an extra pop of clarity.

Staying at 72 PPI for this piece will allow Krita some more breathing room to process your work, as when you start making your width and height dimensions larger, the number of system resources (the amount of RAM, most commonly) required for a smooth workflow for brushes and tools grows as well. There'd be no need to go to 300 DPI, as they wouldn't be printing this piece. Job well done!

Portrait

On the flip side (literally!), think of **portraits** as "tall rectangles." These will usually be taller than they are wide, so you can safely take the ratios of landscape images and invert the numbers. Ratios such as 9:16, 1:2, 2:3, and the like should serve you well. Once again, if you're creating these for digital displays only (such as social media posts or online portfolios), 72 PPI is a perfect resolution for personal work. If you're printing, go for 300 PPI.

Let's say you want to break in your new inkjet printer by completely filling up a piece of computer paper with a portrait. For this task, I'd mimic the size dimensions of a generic piece of printer paper (8.5 inches wide by 11 inches tall) and work in 300 PPI in Krita, as shown in the following screenshot:

Figure 2.2 – A portrait canvas example, mimicking the dimensions of computer paper for printing

This will allow my inkjet printer to use all the visual density of a 300-PPI piece, as it would convert 1-to-1 for my 300-DPI printer. Just know, the higher your printer's DPI setting, the more ink it's going to use!

Freeform

As we discussed earlier, there are no "rules" in art. There *ARE*, however, these pesky things called "requirements", and each website seems to have different ones! Creating an art post for Instagram will have different requirements than a post for Twitter, Facebook, or an online portfolio, as each website has its own visual identity, branding, and aspect ratios that display best on its platform. *When in doubt, always check the documentation of the platform you are wanting to post art on, as many social media sites have frequently asked questions (FAQs) discussing image formatting for optimal presentations*. I consider these "**freeform**", as the needs of each site can change, meaning your presentation style should remain free enough to form to each site's specifications. Remember: social media is digital, so 72 PPI is the sweet spot in relation to resolution. You arguably won't get much **return on investment** (**ROI**) if you go too much higher than that.

Make a lot of projects, in many aspect ratios, using a variety of DPI/PPI settings. What difference does bumping your resolution from 72 PPI to 150 PPI make in regard to the clarity of your digital art? Is it worthwhile converting a 72-PPI image to 300 PPI by copying and pasting, and resizing to fit the new canvas? A huge benefit of working as a digital artist is having the ability to experiment. Experimentation is key for truly understanding the impact these settings can have on your work, so I'd recommend playing! Prepping your canvases for art projects is a topic that could have an entire book dedicated to it, so my biggest piece of advice is to practice!

That was our quick look at canvas settings! Hopefully, this takes some of the fear you may have of "making the right decisions" when setting up your document. The more digital art you make, the more these decisions will come as second nature to you as you'll have experience in knowing what works best for your workflow.

Now, let's get into the nitty-gritty of digital color theory (be sure to grab a snack—it's a whopper of a topic!).

Evaluating color modes

Now, let's start our coverage of color modes! We are going to cover quite a bit in this section, including the following:

- Fundamentals of digital color space (RGB versus CMYK)
- Krita's terminology and settings for color
- Some differences between digital and print as it pertains to color

Out of the many sections in this book, I believe that the color portion may be the one that will be most beneficial to return back to from time to time as a reference. The more years I spend creating art, the more subtlety and range I learn about using color to share my artistic voice more effectively.

> **Color Experts?**
>
> This may seem weird to say, but I'm a firm believer there's no such thing as an "expert" when it comes to using color in relation to "choosing the right color while painting on a canvas." While some artists are extremely gifted in their color understanding, thinking of an "expert" means there's a tangible finish line where you stop learning, which is not true! The following information will discuss the mathematical differences between color modes in regard to bit depth and light versus pigment, but the act of using color artistically is very subjective and up to the individual. In the color wheel portion, we will talk more artistically about making strong choices when it comes to using color.

Before we dig too far into the nitty-gritty of color, we should define the "technology" aspect of how we will interact with it within Krita. Enter color depth, bit depth, color modes, and setting up your canvas.

RGB, RYB, CMYK, and bit depth

Something to keep in mind before we get into discussing using these acronyms is making sense of them in the context of one another. Please keep in mind that these are *extremely general* breakdowns of each topic, and each one could easily fill an entire 400+-page book on its own. For the purposes of this book, we want to keep these complicated topics easy to digest (as our emphasis will be on digital painting, and painting techniques). I highly recommend doing a deeper study through these topics if you're interested in the more specific details.

RGB

The **RGB** color model is a way of using colors in regard to light. As you add more pigment (or light) to the three primary colors (red, green, and blue), you will be *adding* brightness, which will then push the colors closer to pure white, hence the term **additive color model**. Full amounts of red light, green light, and blue light overlayed and stacked on top of one another will make pure white.

In digital art, we work primarily in an RGB color model. Each of these colors (red, green, and blue) is broken down into separate **channels**—basically, grayscale-mapped lightness and darkness maps that tie brightness values with each color hue independently. You can manipulate each channel separately, making for some interesting effects and editing opportunities. We will cover just a few of these throughout this book.

Sometimes, you may also see the term **RBG/A**, which is our RGB color channels with an added equation for an **alpha** channel.

> **Alpha Channels**
>
> An **alpha** channel is the property name given to the opacity (or viewability) of the contents on a layer, with an alpha set to 0 (or 0%) as invisible, while an alpha setting of 1 (or 100%) is fully visible. This comes in handy when working in certain file types (such as `.PNG`, `.GIF`, `.TIFF`, `.TGA`, and `JPEG-0000`) with the ability to hide various amounts of information in an image. Think of when you create a logo: you'll want the logo by itself, with no white or black background integrated into the image (this is where alpha channels come into play).

The main takeaway with RGB (or RGB/A) is to remember the following: this color model deals with the use and properties of *light* instead of physical pigments.

RYB

Considered the "traditional painting" primary colors, **red, yellow, and blue** (**RYB**) is often mentioned along with the likes of pigment stacking or a **subtractive color model**. As the opposite of additive color (where the more pigment or color you add, the brightness or light value increases), with subtractive color, the more pigment you mix together, light is *subtracted* from the mix (as the light can't penetrate the multiple layers of physical pigment molecules as easily), causing the colors to darken.

You will often hear about traditional painters getting "muddy colors" due to mixing too many colors together, which forms a darkish-brown neutral color. This is due to the colors themselves canceling each other out (which we'll talk about in the color wheel portion in a bit). When you're adding more pigment information (in this case, colors of paint on your palette) on top of each other with layers, the thick stacks of paint on top of one another start to block the light from traveling through the mixture on your canvas. This leads to a "mud" comparison, as it becomes difficult to discern specific hues or values with your paint.

In essence, "additive" and "subtractive" are terms in relation to light, and how the eye perceives light passing through colors.

CMYK

CMYK is a term used for pigments as it pertains to printing. Since printing transfers information into a physical space, it follows the rules of a subtractive color model (the more pigments you overlay, the darker the result). CMYK uses four ink plates and halftones (opacity percentages) to give a seemingly limitless amount of color and works by masking colors onto a light background.

To get the colors for the CMYK process, you would remove the primary colors (in this case, red, green, and blue) from white light, in essence removing them and only leaving the two remaining primary colors, combined together to make a new hue.

For instance, if you mix pure white light and remove the red wavelength, you will get a cyan hue (an even mixture of the two remaining primary colors, green and blue). White light and removing the blue wavelength would leave yellow (a mix of red and green), and white light with removed green would leave magenta (a mix of red and blue).

Black is used to "pick up the slack" for darker darks, as it's easier for printers to mix subtle amounts of black with different hues to make greater color and value ranges instead of using exponentially larger amounts of cyan, magenta, or yellow halftones. You can get very dark darks without black ink, but the fiscal cost of printing goes up considerably as more ink would be needed to stack in order to block light.

Bit depth

Think of **bit depth** as the "size" of value information a color channel can allow in a digital space. Krita uses four main bit-depth options, and this refers to the amount of information on a given channel (the independent values for red, green, and blue). The higher the bit-depth count, the more information or data per color channel. Here's a quick breakdown of Krita's four options as it pertains to bit depth for your images:

- **8-bit (true color)**—With this bit depth, each channel will use values up to 256 (ranging from 0, which represents none, to 255, which represents maximum) to represent the amount of the given channel's hue present in the color. This can allow for the creation of over 16 million colors!

> **Reading RBG and RGBA**
>
> If we're using an RGB(A) method, the numbers would be presented in the format "x,x,x,x", each part corresponding to the hue acronym in R, G, B, A. Full red would be 255, 0, 0, 1, for instance, showing maximum (255) red, no green (0), no blue (0), and 100% opacity (1). Full blue, but at 50% visibility, would then be notated as 0, 0, 255, .5, meaning no red (0), no green (0), maximum blue (255), and 50% visibility (.5, as alpha works on a 0-1 scale).

- **16-bit (integer)**—This is sometimes known as **deep color**, and essentially doubles the amount of color information per channel. Some screens can't even tell the difference between some of the more subtle shifts of color present in 16-bit depth, but the file's data information can allow for smoother transfers between hues and values, as more data is present in the file.
- **16-bit (float)**—Very similar to 16-bit-integer depth, but allows for decimal-point coordinates for even more refinement. For instance, while a 16-bit-integer depth scale may look at coordinates such as 2, 5, and 12, a 16-bit float has the capability to look at ranges such as .7 or .921 when mapping color.
- **32-bit**—This is even higher precision and is the standard for **Image Maximum** (**IMAX**) and **high-dynamic-range** (**HDR**)-capable films, using color management solutions such as the popular OpenColorIO system. Krita natively works with OpenColorIO, meaning it can be used for video-production pipeline work for Hollywood films. Awesome stuff!

As you can see, there are a lot of equations and mathematics going on behind the scenes in order to bring your colors to life within Krita. While this information can be overwhelming, throughout the book, I will be giving notes about decisions we'll make in regard to creating specific bit-depth pieces.

Primarily, I work in an 8-bit integer/channel mode on a vast majority of my personal pieces; however, if I'm working with a client that provides 16- or 32-bit images (such as a movie studio), I'm glad Krita has the capability to open and work with them. Just as with resolution, the higher your bit depth, the more resources your computer should have to interact with it at an effective rate.

I work primarily in an 8-bit mode because the response time for brush strokes, warping layers, using blending modes, and save/load times is much faster than for 32-bit. 16-bit is a great "middle ground," allowing for smoother gradients (as there's more color information per channel, giving a more exact representation of hue shifts) and higher value ranges. The performance hit is less drastic than going from 8-bit to 32-bit, but the feel of certain brushes and features will feel slower and less responsive depending on their complexity, even on the jump from 8-bit to 16-bit.

Digital screens are *very* good at showing 8-bit depth and haven't steered me wrong in creating my art. You still get a luscious, beautiful color that showcases the way you want, with a more responsive painting experience—what's not to love? If you prefer working in 16-bit or 32-bit modes and you don't feel any slowdown with your workstation, go for it!

Going from RGBA to CMYK – digital to print

We have discussed the difference between additive (RGBA) and subtractive (print) color models from a technical standpoint, but what does all of that mean in relation to creating digital art and printing it? At any point, you can change your color mode between RGB and CMYK within Krita!

To change between these two color modes while you work, proceed as follows:

1. Browse to your **File** menu and click the **Image** option.
2. On the drop-down menu, select **Convert Image Color Space**. You will be greeted by the **Convert Image Color Space Option** window, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

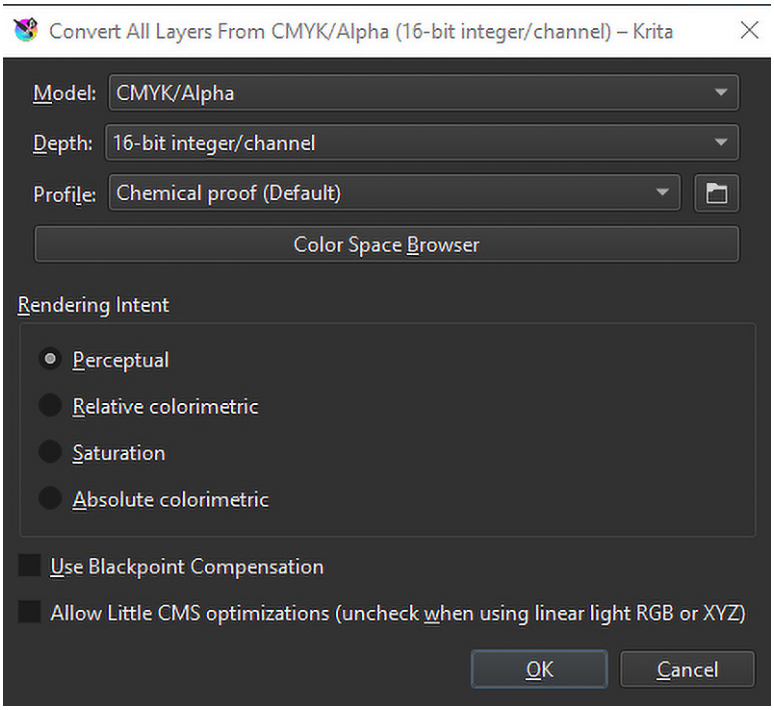


Figure 2.3 – Convert Image Color Space Option window

3. To change between CMYK and RGB (or from one color model to another available color model), click the **Model** drop-down menu.
4. You can also convert your bit depth by clicking the **Depth** drop-down menu and selecting between **8-bit**, **16-bit**, and **32-bit**.

Going Back and Forth between Color Models and Bit Depths

If you have the ability to go back and forth between bit depths and color models, why would it matter which settings you used when you initially made your canvas? As we discussed earlier in the book, intent is everything. The more you mess with depths and color models after creating your initial canvas, the more awkward and unnatural your work will appear. Each time you make a "behind the scenes" adjustment such as this, you're fundamentally changing the foundation of your image. Going from CMYK to RGB, back to CMYK? Generally, your colors will appear more muted, less vibrant, and less cohesive as the conversion algorithm is making your decisions for you. Changing bit depths will alter the amount of information and data on the canvas, impacting the blends and gradients you are able to achieve. I highly advise making your color model and bit-depth decisions before you begin and sticking with your choice.

You will also notice a setting on this window called **Rendering Intent**, which gives four options: **Perceptual**, **Relative colorimetric**, **Saturation**, and **Absolute Colorimetric**. Each one of these gives differing results in relation to transferring your current colors into another "map" when the image conversion takes place. Reds and blues may be altered more heavily than greens or purples, for instance, so it is worth playing around with settings to match the color-impact effect you are looking for. We will take a look at this later in the book when we start doing some advanced techniques such as photobashing and creating work for prints, as these properties deal with transferring color ranges for printing. While they may seem super-advanced based on their fancy names, the changes between each are subtle and are usually handled by a printing team.

Recommending canvas sizes and settings

There is a heavy amount of information in the preceding portions of the chapter, and I can tell you that once you find a workflow that works for you, feel free to stick with it. Going from digital to print is something you will have to experiment with, as settings such as bit depth and color models have learning curves. The best way to find out the difference between RGB and CMYK for printing is to print! Look at the colors, look at the clarity, and make a choice that feels the most natural for you.

To wrap up this portion, before we move on to breaking down colors and reading the color wheel, here are my go-to settings when creating pieces:

- **Digital**—If I'm working on a piece purely for digital reproduction (whether on an online portfolio, social media, or something for a client with digital intent), I'll work in either 8-bit or 16-bit integer bit depth at 72 PPI, in an RGB color space model.

- **Print**—If it's in print, I will usually work in 16-bit integer or float bit depth, at 300 PPI/DPI, in the CMYK color space. This is the most natural fit, as most printing companies I've worked with require 300 DPI and have top-of-the-line CMYK color-space replication processes. If the printing option you use requires RGB color mode, making the switch using the **Convert Image Color Space** process we previously looked at will give stable color reproduction and shouldn't darken or lighten your hues or values too much. However, going from RGB to CMYK has a more drastic impact (as you're essentially removing light from your hues and values).

I *very rarely* use 32-bit bit depth when creating personal images, as I feel any "improvement" I see in my work is not worth the hit on performance. However, if a client provides (or requires) content that needs to be in 32-bit, I will gladly oblige. Different creative industries work with different professional pipelines and have very specific requirements, so it is important to become familiar with the ways individual settings (such as differences in bit depth) can impact your work. Remember, your client's needs come above your own when it comes to industry-standard and shippable, deliverable items.

We have looked at some Krita options for setting up canvases for your digital work and setting yourself up for success with your initial setup in regard to how color will display. Now, we are going to look at color as a feature in and of itself, dissecting a key prospect of art that has been studied for centuries.

Understanding basic color theory

Coming into this section, we are going to enter more of the "general artistry" part of the chapter. That means that while we may see a few Krita options and screens, the overall tone of the remainder of this chapter can be used in any form of visual communication, not just Krita (or digital painting).

I was trained as an observational artist in an atelier setting, meaning I've done enough still-life paintings and figure drawings to last 20 lifetimes! What it also means, though, is that my understanding of color and its different aspects is heavily influenced by in-person, professional classroom training under a mentor. Much of it comes from painting from life, and the overall idea of color for me is very contextual.

Breaking down a color

Before we get too deep into the theory behind color and the observational approach, however, we will define each of the three aspects of color. We will be going into a deep discussion about these three properties in the *Clarifying the color wheel* section of this chapter in a bit, but let's just refresh our understanding of the terms themselves.

Hue

This is the most misused and misunderstood aspect of color, as **hue** is the *perception of the color we see in its unaltered, original context*. Normally, people will interchange the words *color* and *hue*, and while that can technically be correct, hue is only one-third of the story of defining a color.

If you say, "yellow school bus" or "red apple," you would be naming the hue as a basic descriptor. Orange basketball. Green frog. This discusses the color at face value, not adding any sort of tint, tone, shade, or editing to the pure origin of the color, meaning you are naming the color's hue. Hue can also be referred to as an object's or subject's **local color**.

However, simply naming a hue by itself is limiting as it may not give enough information. While you could call "powder blue" and "ocean blue" both just "blue," that wouldn't quite be descriptive enough, would it? That is where the other two qualifiers come into play.

Saturation

Saturation is *the amount of "intensity" or "vibrancy" of the hue*. What we think of as a rich "candy-apple red" will have a higher amount or saturation of red (or be more red-saturated) than the amount of red found in pink, for instance. An orange peel would have a higher saturation of orange hue than sand, which only has trace amounts of orange hue within it depending on the time of day.

As our previous blue example would show, "ocean blue" would have a higher saturation of blue hue than "powder blue," which would have the amount of blue softened down with varying degrees of grays and whites.

Value

This is *the lightness or darkness of hue and/or saturation, usually mappable in a grayscale capacity from pure black to pure white*. While value may be the most basic to understand of these three descriptors, I am of the belief that value does the absolute most of the three aspects when it comes to making appealing, compelling paintings. In fact, you can make spellbinding pieces of art without even using hue or saturation at all.

There is an old art-school saying that I *completely* agree with, and something that we will be proving throughout the projects in this book: *Value does the work, color gets the credit*.

When people make comments on art, most of the time they will be describing the interplay of values (lights versus darks) more so than any specific color saturation or hue. You'll often hear feedback or critiques of art, like so:

"Wow, that landscape looks so inviting because of the light coming through the trees!"

"I love the mood of this, it's so cinematic!"

"The highlights really pop!"

"Those colors are so bright/dark/deep—it really adds to the atmosphere!"

"Those crisp edges interplay with those softer, more careful edges in a great way!"

Every single one of these comments notices *value* first and foremost, even though the viewer may not realize it. The differences between light and dark are more readily apparent and noticeable both up close and at a distance than hue shifts or saturation changes (unless they are extreme, which we'll talk about in the color wheel portion of this chapter).

Edges are just the intensity in which values change (sharp edges are a forceful, immediate change in value, while soft edges have a gradient between light and dark). The deepness of a color discusses the light or dark value just as much as the color's saturation. Readability of a piece (being able to tell what is going on in your painting) is directly correlated with value, while saturation and hue don't make nearly as much impact. I may seem like I'm really trying to push this, and you're right—I am!

Value does the work, color gets the credit. Repeat it to yourself, pin it to your desk, and do whatever you have to do to focus on your lights and darks (grayscale) above all else. I've heard this said to me before, and I will echo this sentiment: *If your values are correct, you can use whatever color you want and the piece should still work*.

Now that we have defined the aspects of what makes up a color, let's talk about the "three questions" you can ask to correlate these options to decision making when trying to find a color for your art.

The three questions

As we will discuss in the color wheel portion of the chapter, a color can only work in relation to the other colors surrounding it. This may seem a bit tricky, but with the following three questions, we will be on the right track to simplifying our decision making when using and choosing colors using either the hue/saturation/value sliders or the color wheel:

- "*Is the color I need warmer or cooler than the color next to it?*"

  This question will lead us to choose our *hue*. If we need a warmer color, we can go toward the reds, oranges, and yellows, while if we need a cooler color, we can head toward the greens, blues, and purples. Remember—for maximum control, you can go *through* the color wheel to get to your destination, traveling through and playing with those beautiful grays!

- "*Is the color I need more or less vibrant than the color next to it?*"

  This question will lead us to choose our *saturation*. If the color needs some more "pop" or vibrancy, we'll up the saturation level, but if we need to lower the intensity of the color (very useful for putting things "in the distance" or "background" of your piece), we would lessen the amount of saturation present.

- "*Is the color I need lighter or darker than the color next to it?*"

  This question will lead us to choose our *value*. If we need to lighten our color, we can add white, while on darkening it we would subtract white (which pushes us closer to black). Keep in mind that this doesn't mean your lightest lights will be pure white or your darkest darks will be pure black, as this will *destroy* all the hard work you've done with balancing your colors. Think of pure black and pure white as "never use these while painting" colors, as even in the darkest night scene or the brightest day scene, pure black and pure white simply don't exist. There's color and light everywhere—it's all about context!

We will dig into each one of these in detail during the color wheel portion, but since they directly correlate to our current topic, I felt it necessary to get you introduced to the concept here. You will notice throughout the book that I'll constantly be asking these questions before I make choices regarding our projects. It's a great roadmap to follow to ensure that you're always making progress with your piece.

With that being said, let's finally dig into the real meat of this chapter—a single item that you can spend decades studying and finding new ways to read and that never runs out of surprises: the color wheel.

Clarifying the color wheel

Before we get too far into the depths of this topic, I want to make it very clear that we will be using the *"RGB" color wheel* (the default of Krita and most digital art software) instead of the more traditional "RYB" color wheel that you would use in traditional oil, acrylic, watercolor, or gouache painting. As we reviewed at the end of *Chapter 1*, *Getting Started with Krita*, we will be using the **HSV** color model type in the **Color Selector Settings** section of Krita, as seen in the following screenshot:

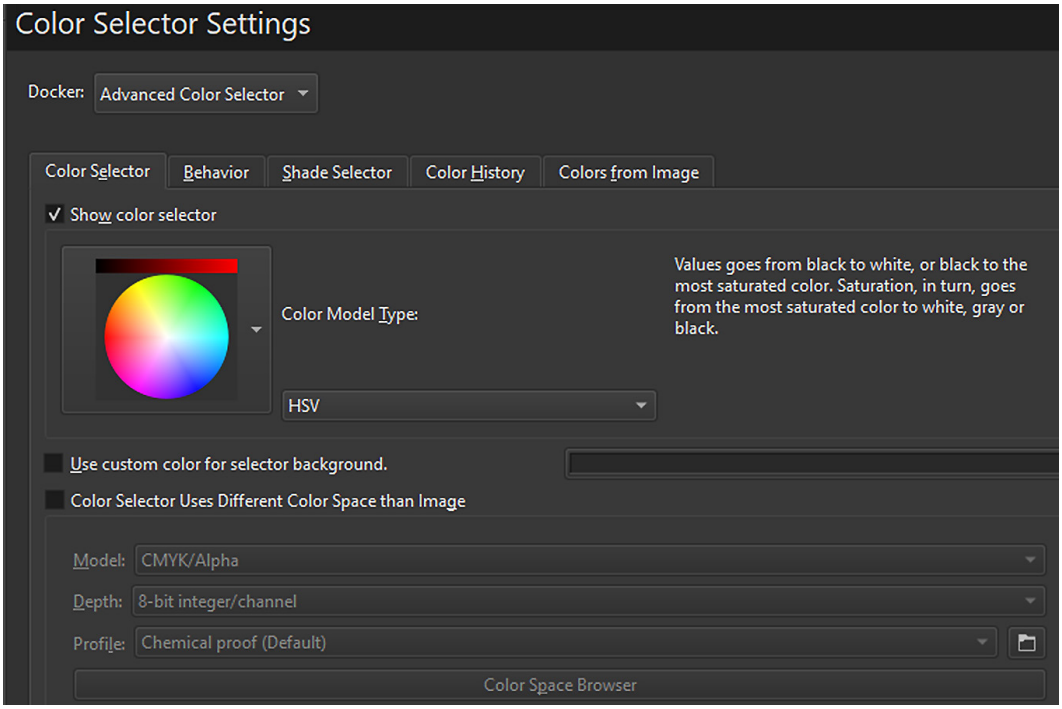


Figure 2.4 – The HSV color wheel selection in the Color Selector Settings section of Krita

What is the **color wheel**? In the most basic of terms, the *color wheel is a method of mapping colors in relation to one another*. There are a variety of color wheels you can use in visual arts, but since we are working with the additive color theory that digital art provides through using light, we will use the RGB color wheel.

We will be breaking this color wheel down into a lot of subsections and discussion points, so get ready to dig in!

Changing the Pace

You may have noticed that this chapter hasn't had a lot of images up to this point. I'm happy to say, that is about to change! While aspects such as bit depth, canvas sizes, hue, saturation, and value can be defined in a very direct way, comparing colors directly creates a need for more visual aids to lead to those lovely "a-ha!" moments of understanding.

Dissecting a color

Since we have recently reviewed the terms of HSV, let's discuss how to read the increase or decrease of these aspects in relation to the color wheel we have chosen.

Hue

You will go between different hues by going *around* the color wheel, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

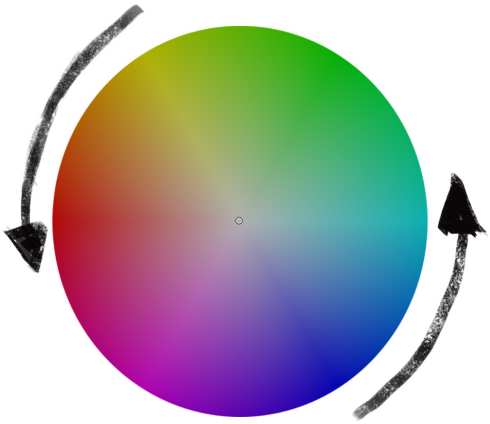


Figure 2.5 – Going around the color wheel for adjusting hue

This is most likely the way most people (especially non-artists or younger/newer artists) see the color wheel when first looking at it. You may see the wheel and think "*I'm currently on orange, and I need something more green, so I'll use my mouse and move to the green side of the color wheel*". While this isn't necessarily wrong, this is missing the nuance of balancing proper saturation and value when making your color decision. If you approach the color wheel in this way, you may run into "loud" colors clashing for attention, or colors that don't seem to work together.

Saturation

In order to change the saturation of a hue, you will move *through* the color wheel, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

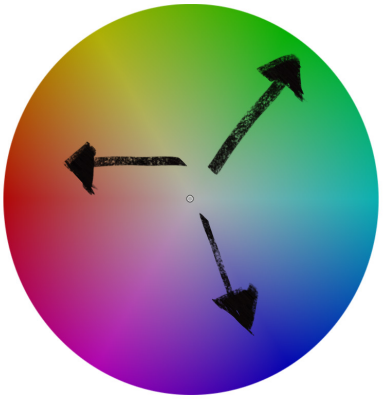


Figure 2.6 – Moving through the color wheel for adjusting saturation

The key idea to remember here is this: *The closer you are to the edge of the wheel, the more saturated your color will be. The more you move to the middle of the wheel, the less saturated your color will become.*

We chose the HSV color wheel in Krita for a reason: the middle of the wheel is true neutral (or gray, with varying values depending on the brightness selected). Remember when we said that color is only relative to the other colors surrounding it? Gray is the perfect way to compare colors with one another. *In fact, I personally think gray is the most useful color for an artist.*

> **Gray is my Favorite Color for Painting**
>
> "*Wait, what? Gray, the absence of color, is your favorite color?*" It's true! While many people may think that gray limits your options regarding color, I feel that it gives more impact to every single color decision you make. 50% gray is the perfect equalizer— it's always warmer than your colds, colder than your warms, lighter than your darks, and darker than your lights. Instead of jumping from orange to green, jump from orange to gray. You'll notice that the gray…. appears green!? We will discuss why that happens when we discuss warms versus cools in a bit.

Now, let's discuss value in the context of the color wheel.

Value

This one is a little bit more involved than the other two, as you can discuss value in multiple ways on the color wheel.

Of course, if you adjust the lightness or darkness slider above the HSV color wheel, as illustrated in the following screenshot, it's going to have a direct impact on your value:

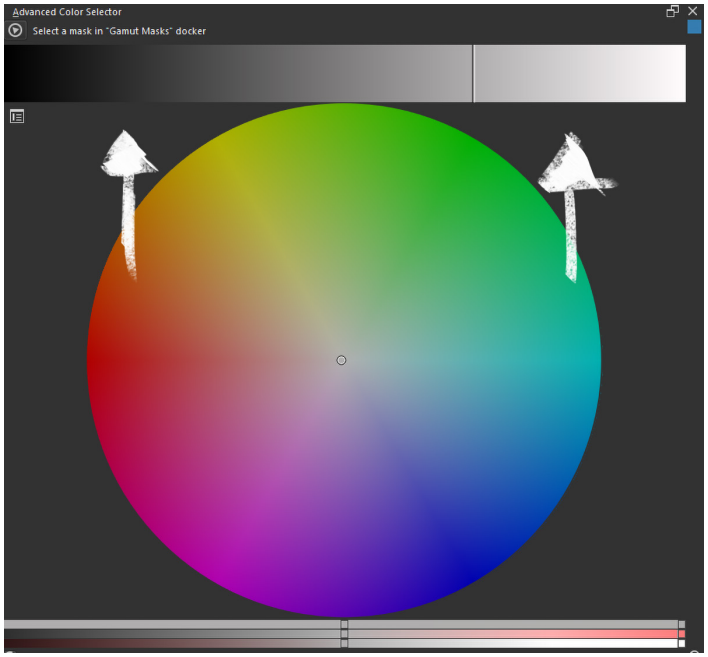


Figure 2.7 – Arrows pointing to the value slider above the HSV color wheel

The *lighter the slider, the lighter the value, while the darker the slider, the darker the value*. Pretty obvious stuff, right?

But what if I told you that *specific hues and saturations have their own intrinsic lightness value*? That on any color wheel, at any time, without touching the value slider to make the wheel lighter or darker, certain colors are lighter or darker than others?

There is a perception in society that artists and painters, by our very nature, see more of the world than other people, meaning that we notice things that the layperson may never notice and catalog that information to bring up at random in our art, like a magician. However, I'd counter that point by saying that as artists and painters, it's our job to *actually see less*. An example of this? Learn to see the world in grayscale.

Learning how to see the world in grayscale is actually a *very* valuable skill to learn, as it will help you break down what you are observing in a more simple, concrete way.

Color Blindness

There is a misguided opinion that if you have limited or full-color blindness, you cannot be an effective, emotive, or professional artist. This is demonstrably false. Claude Monet, Ilya Repin, Edgar Degas, and William Blake were all color blind, just to name a few. Remember, artists don't train themselves to see *more* than the rest of society—they train hard to see *less*, as reality is easier to replicate on the canvas if it is simplified and stylized. Remember: *value does the work, and color gets the credit*.

The best way to see this theory in action is to look at our HSV color wheel in grayscale, as follows:

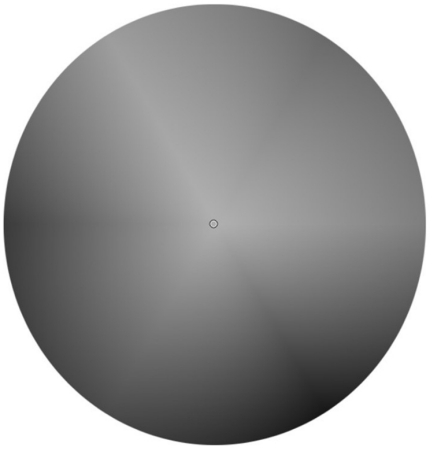


Figure 2.8 – The HSV color wheel in grayscale for natural value comparison

If we look closely at our grayscale version of the color wheel, you'll notice some interesting things. If you look just at "light versus dark", it appears that our greens and yellows (the upper left of the wheel) seem to be lighter (with yellow being the lightest), while our blues (lower right) seem to be the darkest darks near the edge of the wheel. This goes back to our point that individual hues, by their very nature, have differences in value ranges.

Another interesting thing—do you notice the three "lines" of lighter value going through the wheel like a spoke, connecting in the middle gray area (at roughly the 3 o'clock, 7 o'clock, and 11 o'clock positions)? Those colors would be cyan, yellow, and magenta (CMYK, what are you doing here?!). We are about to discuss color relationships, and if you make a habit out of dissecting the color wheel in this way, it will help you build confidence in your decision making.

Also, the blues are the darkest-valued hues at full saturation, while yellows are the lightest-valued hues at full saturation….Wait a minute, aren't yellow and blue complementary colors on the color wheel? Once again, the revelation of color relationships, and how the "rules" of the color wheel apply to decision making, can be a powerful motivator for you once it starts making sense.

As you start dissecting the color wheel in this way, you will start noticing "happy coincidences" all over the place. Do they mean anything? Is there some insane logic to it all? That's what artists have been studying for centuries, and I believe the answer is different for each individual artist.

Color relationships

I would argue that the very idea of utilizing color to its maximum efficiency and impact *is* the relationships of hues, saturations, and values, but there are some tried-and-true color-relationship definitions (also known as "**color recipes**") that we should cover to freshen up our fundamentals.

Remember—*these color relationship examples are based on the RGB (additive) color wheel, and not the traditional RYB (subtractive) color wheel* you may have learned about in school for traditional art. The names of the terms are the same, but the hue relationships they represent are slightly tweaked, as outlined here:

- **Complementary colors**—Complementary colors are hues directly opposite of one another on the color wheel (red and cyan; yellow and blue; green and purple).
- **Analogous colors**—Hues located directly next to each other on the color wheel (orange and red; cyan and green; purple and blue; and so on).
- **Triadic colors**—Hues located in three equally distanced positions away from one another on the color wheel (such as the cyan, yellow, and magenta example we discussed earlier).
- **Monochromatic colors**—Colors that are of the same hue, but differ in saturation or value.

With the textbook color relationships we all know and love out in the open, let's discuss a key concept that truly changed my perception of the color wheel, and simplified it to such a degree that I went from having zero confidence in choosing colors to….well, a bit more confidence!

Warm versus cool colors

Having a digital art space and color wheel can seem mundane if we've been around it for a bit, but here's a terrifying thought: with digital art and Krita, you have access to every single color ever made, in every hue and alteration, all at once, immediately, every second that you work on your artwork. Eep—the pressure to make the right choice can be too much to handle!

There are so many options on a color wheel that it can be hard to nail down the mood we may want to capture in each piece, especially if we want to work from imagination. Having a way to simplify the wheel will do us a world of favors in our art career, and the most interesting and dynamic way I've found is to discuss colors in a *warm versus cool* capacity.

In the most basic terms, *warm colors are your reds, yellows, and oranges, while your cools are your blues, purples, and greens*. Warm colors tend to remind us of warmth, fire, the sun, and comfort. Cool colors may remind us of water, ice, clouds, and the breeze of nature.

While the RGB (additive) color model and RYB (subtractive) color model are slightly different in the location of the hues, just know that the aspect of warm and cool colors never changes, meaning it is a great theory to learn to transfer from creating digital art to traditional art, and vice versa. The same "tricks" you learn regarding color temperature will work across both traditional and digital art and will allow you the flexibility to create what's in your mind, no matter which style of painting you enjoy most.

In the following screenshot, we dissect our HSV color wheel into warms and cools:

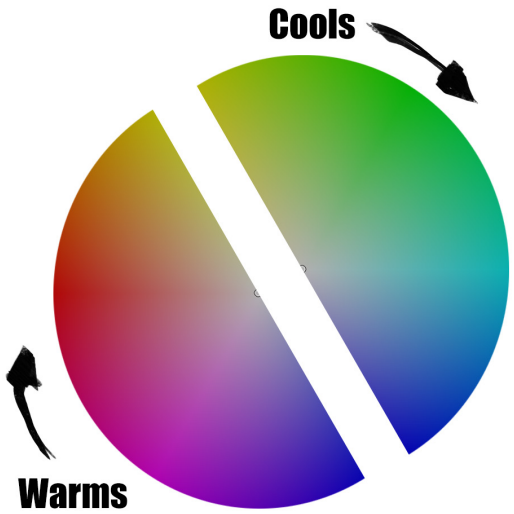


Figure 2.9 – The HSV color wheel split between warms and cools

The temperatures of warm and cool may seem fairly straightforward at first glance, but it is wise to keep in mind that *color temperature is relative, instead of absolute*. It is very possible to have "cool warms" and "warm cools" by moving your color selector closer to the temperature change you would like.

Remember how we discussed saturation earlier in the chapter, and said that by moving through the color wheel, you are lowering and increasing the amount of saturation for a given color? The same applies to temperature—as you move through the middle of the color wheel, your colors are making temperature changes. The closer you are to the outskirts of the color wheel (high saturation), the more absolute the "cool" or "warm" feeling, while inching closer to the middle (the grays) allows for the nuance of adding temperature changes at a delicate rate.

For instance, let's take a look at the following screenshot, and answer this question: out of these three examples, which example takes the red color provided (the top portion of each example) and juxtaposes it against a "cooler" color as it relates to color temperature on the color wheel?

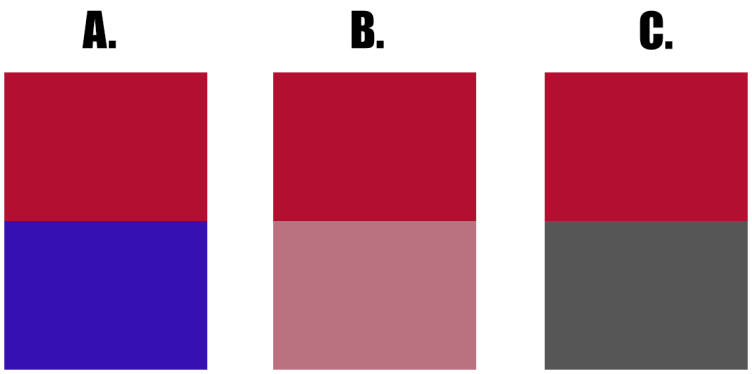


Figure 2.10 – Warm and cool color-comparison exercise

The correct answer, of course, is *all of them*! Let's look at this in more detail:

- **A.**—This one is pretty self-explanatory, as clearly, the bottom half of the example is more "blue" in nature, making us think of warm versus cool in a very literal sense.
- **B.**—This one's slightly trickier, as we've introduced a touch of gray and lowered the saturation, meaning that in the color wheel, the bottom color would be closer to the center of the wheel, meaning it is making the journey over to the cooler side of our colors.
- **C.**—The most extreme example of the main idea represented in **B.**. Even though the "saturation" is the same (very high), gray is a neutralizer and is removing the red "hue", therefore giving us the optical appearance of being the "opposite" of red (or, in this instance, warm).

The most effective way I've found of discussing temperature and hue in relation to one another is to *add "more" or "less" qualifiers before your hue of choice*. If you need to cool down your reds, for instance, you can "add *more* blue", or if you want more total control over the shift to cool, you can "add *more* gray", which will remove some of the warmth but at a lesser rate than going straight to the blue portion of the color wheel with your color selector. This is shown in the gradient example provided in the following screenshot:

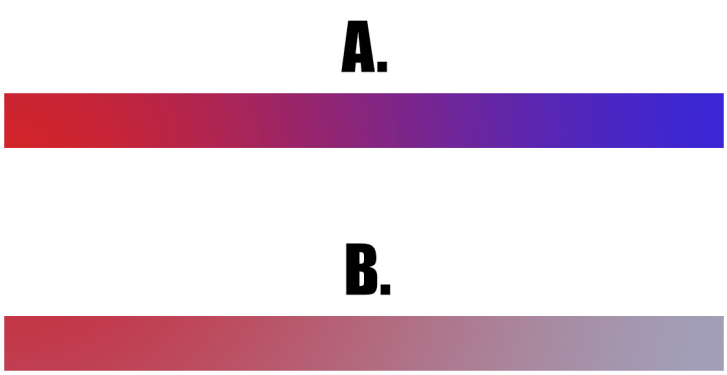


Figure 2.11 – Two gradients going from "warm" to "cool"

I fully stand by my opinion that grays are powerful in the right hands, and will allow you to get some absolutely stunning results. Subtlety goes a long way when it comes to impactful color usage in art, and your control of grays will showcase your understanding of those subtleties.

In our gradient example in *Figure 2.11*, you have to remember that warm and cool are terms relative to one another. While example **A.** may have a wider **gamut** (*the amount of distance between hues on the color wheel*), example **B.** also shows a change from warmer to cooler, albeit at a more delicate rate. In fact, for example **B.**, I didn't even move to the "blue" part of the color wheel—it's all grays by simply lowering the saturation amount!

Limited palettes

Now, I know what you're probably thinking:

"I think I know what Wes is going on about, but it's really hard to translate this from reading it in a book to actually applying it to real painting!"

This is absolutely true! My advice—if you want to have a "crash course" on understanding color harmonies and how the relative nature of color temperatures can be a *lot* stronger than we give it credit for, I urge you to try your hand at using a **limited color palette** or setting rules on how many colors you are allowed to use on a piece.

My favorite limited palette of all time would have to be the **Zorn palette**, named after the Swedish painter Anders Zorn (1860-1920). He was famous for primarily using a small set of oil paint colors for a vast majority of his works and had a true mastery of not only controlling color but controlling the contrasts of color temperature as well. The Zorn palette usually consisted of only four colors (as seen in the following screenshot), those being *Ivory Black*, *Titanium White*, *Cadmium Red*, and *Yellow Ochre*:

Figure 2.12 – The traditional Zorn palette (Ivory Black, Titanium White, Cadmium Red, and Yellow Ochre)

This palette may seem too limited if you're not familiar with using it, but has a surprising amount of versatility. You have your warms (Cadmium Red and Yellow Ochre), your cools (Ivory Black and Titanium White, as black and white are both created with high amounts of blue wavelength), your lights (Titanium White), darks (Ivory Black), and your saturations (Cadmium Red and Yellow Ochre).

Need a green? Mix Yellow Ochre with slight amounts of Ivory Black and a nice helping of Titanium White (as they both include blue) to make a nice, deep olive green. Need orange? Equal parts Cadmium Red and Yellow Ochre. Blue? Mix equal parts Titanium White and Ivory Black, and you'll have a nice, rich gray that, in context, will appear blue. If you need pure pops of highly saturated color, you can use any of the four colors straight "from the tube" (or, essentially, without mixing with anything else). Yes—it's true that you won't get super-bright cyans, magentas, or neon colors of any hue, but that's why it's a limited palette. It limits your options and really has you rack your brain in regard to finding the color, shade, tint, or tone you may need only using what is given to you.

Remember our three main questions from earlier? Here they are again:

- Is the color I need *warmer* or *cooler* than what I have currently?
- Is the color I need *more* or *less* vibrant than the color I have currently?
- Is the color *lighter* or *darker* than the color I have currently?

The Zorn palette (and many other limited palettes) can answer these questions just as easily as using the entire HSV color wheel provided to you by Krita. For the warmer and cooler question, just add either your red or yellow to warm, or white or black to cool. For the vibrancy question, although it can be a little trickier, using a more direct "from the tube" color may actually increase your vibrancy without adjusting the value too much. For lighter or darker colors, add your whites/blacks for those, and use red/yellow for your "neutrals" to give your piece a little more personality.

Have a look at this personal landscape piece I made using the Zorn palette:

Figure 2.13 – A landscape using the Zorn palette

It was an absolute joy to work on this landscape, as, since my palette was limited to only four colors and the saturation/values within those colors, I was able to focus on things such as brushwork, lighting, and edge control. Limiting your options like this may seem as though it limits your creativity, but I would argue that you are actually *more* able to focus on your creativity, knowing that any decision you make in regard to color and temperature should "work" within the confines of your goals.

Learning color fast

There is a lot of information to unpack in this chapter, and the information is better understood by doing rather than reading. If you have the budget, I recommend going to your local store and buying a cheap pack of acrylic paints and some brushes. Try your hand at some paintings, or even create your own limited palette color wheels!

You will get more comfortable with color more quickly, and start noticing the nuances of some of the topics we've covered in this chapter. Since digital art can be trickier to nail down in regard to a workflow of "mixing" colors in real time, mixing real paint pigment will allow you to see immediate results. Then, you can transfer this knowledge over to Krita for when we start on our projects.

When we begin our projects, we will be discussing every step of the process and the decisions we make regarding value and color. Having a solid grasp on color and value will help immensely and start to inform your own personal painting style. Every person on the planet perceives color slightly differently, so instead of thinking of finding the "correct" colors for your painting in a "right or wrong" way, find the combinations that speak to you and your eye the most.

Color is, to put it mildly, pretty complex stuff. However, it doesn't have to be scary! I hope some of these topics were covered in a way that was either a nice refresher or even a brand-new revelation for you regarding color and the way we can utilize it. Remember—practice makes perfect!

Summary

During this chapter, we looked at basic terminology for setting up our digital canvases and covered such items as resolution, bit depth, and color space. Then, we did a full overview of digital color in relation to traditional color and how our eyes interpret information through the presence or lack of light. We continued that idea by comparing the preparation of our colors for digital or print when creating our art, and the differences that DPI or PPI play in displaying our art. We discussed the three aspects of what creates a color (hue, saturation, and value), the color wheel, color palettes, color relationships, and color temperatures.

Phew—that's a lot of color!

In the next chapter, *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, we will introduce the idea of file management when working in Krita. Layers are one of the huge benefits of working in the realm of digital art, and we will discuss some great ways to utilize them to help speed up your workflow. We will also cover the importance of a solid layer naming structure, grouping layers together and using layer collections to help inform decisions throughout our artwork.

Let's now hop on over to the next chapter and get started preparing our canvases for our step-by-step projects for our portfolios!

3
Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups

Coming into this chapter, I bet you are ready to put your new knowledge and refreshed theory into action! That's great news, as in this chapter (and all chapters going forward), we will be doing some hands-on exercises to better understand the functionality of Krita as a program.

In this chapter, we will be dissecting one of Krita's foundational tools and some of the biggest boons that digital art provides you as a creator: layers, blending modes, and layer groups. In this chapter, we will be covering the following:

- Defining layers, layer blending modes, and layer groups
- Controlling a landscape painting composition using layers
- Starting our landscape painting using our layer structure and Krita's built-in brushes
- Grouping our landscape into layer groups for maximum efficiency
- Refining our painting by utilizing some basic layer management skills to help us prepare for bringing this painting to a polished state later in the book

We have our hands full for this chapter, so let's get started by breaking down what a layer is, how it works, and why using layers has such a huge impact on your artistic quality of life in Krita.

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0 +)
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard and either a mouse, a tablet, or a touch device with a stylus

Understanding layers – the secret weapon of digital art

Like we've done previously, let's start this chapter by defining some of the key concepts we're going to be diving into.

Layers

Layers are transparent by default, and act as a "stack" of canvas information, presented and visible in order from the top to the bottom of the stack. Think of stacking transparent sheets of paper, sized to the dimensions of your working canvas, on top of one another that can take information you put onto them, including paint, text, or effects. The **Layers** panel (*Figure 3.1*) is your quick-glance guide for layer management:

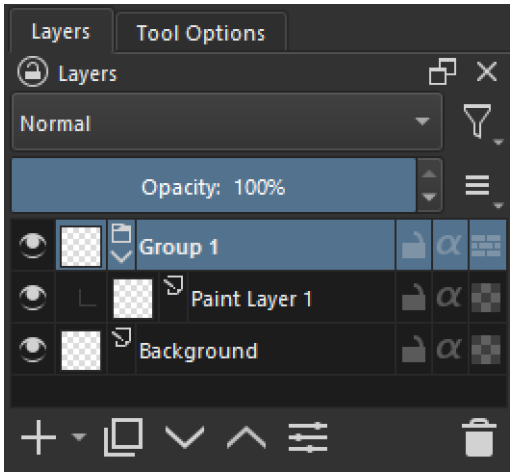


Figure 3.1 – The Layers panel

The **Layers** panel has quick-access tools at the bottom of the panel to speed up your process, including (from left to right) the following:

- **The Add button** – Add new layers, new groups, specialty layer types, masks, and more.
- **Duplicate Layer** – Duplicate the selected layer, layers, or group.
- **Move Layer Down** in the stack (can also be done by dragging and dropping the highlighted layer or layers in the list).
- **Move Layer Up** in the stack (once again, can also be done by dragging and dropping).
- **Layer Properties** – Where you can change the name of your layer, color coding, color modes, and more.
- **Delete Layer** – Delete the layer, layers, or group that is selected in the **Layers** panel.

These features can also be accessed with hotkeys, so it's up to you what you use!

Blending modes

Since layers can stack on top of one another, and in digital art we are dealing with aspects of light, **blending modes** allow the changing of the interaction and communication of information from one layer to another. The **Blending Mode** selector is part of the **Layers** panel docker, located above the **Opacity** slider (as shown in *Figure 3.2*):

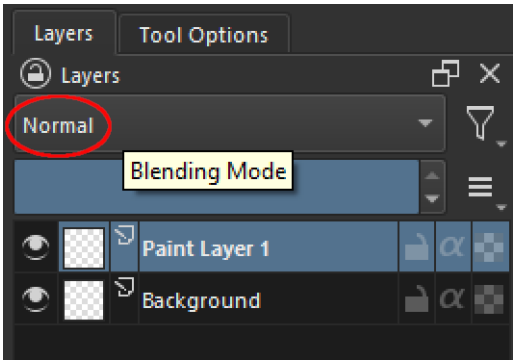


Figure 3.2 – Blending Mode (currently on the Normal option, which is the Krita default blending mode)

Think of this as "mathematical rules" that you're telling a layer to use within a Krita document, such as "display only values lighter than what is in the layers below it," or "use a formula to multiply the base layer and blended layer, darkening the color and value." We will be using these a *lot* in later chapters for different effects and will go over some of the most frequently used layer blending modes at that point.

Layer groups

A **layer group** is a collection of layers, combined into a folder (or group). While a layer group in and of itself may not seem fancy, it is an absolute game-changer once you realize its potential. Layer groups display in the **Layers** listing, as shown in *Figure 3.3*:

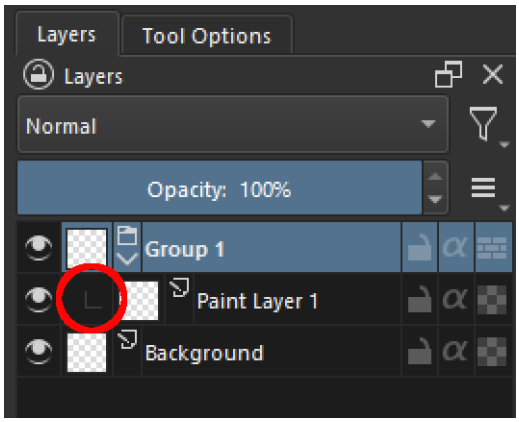


Figure 3.3 – A layer group named Group 1, which has Paint Layer 1 as its only included layer

You can tell which layers are in a group by the anchored **L** shape on the left-hand side of the layer (circled in red in *Figure 3.3*), representing the anchor and inclusion within the group above it. Each layer within a group may stay separate from other layers in the group and utilize separate blending modes within the group. In fact, layer groups (the entire folder) can use blending modes!

Layer groups are pivotal for the organization of your image's contents and can be used in a variety of ways to make drastic moves and tweaks to your compositions. We will be using a basic landscape setup to showcase this later in this chapter.

There's only so much we can do by discussing layers, blending modes, and layer groups… so let's get started by structuring our layers.

Controlling your landscape composition with layers

For the remainder of this chapter, we will be using a lot of things we have discussed in previous chapters and combining them with the knowledge we're developing about layers and groups. Please keep in mind that this is primarily the setup step for a final project we will be completing near the end of the book. Once done, you can then add the project to your portfolio!

> **My Krita Docker Setup**
>
> We are about to paint, and I want to make sure that you know exactly what dockers and windows I have open, as some of the screenshots going forward may be zoomed to a level where you can't see my entire window. For a quick look at my fullscreen setup, please review the first chapter's screenshots about setting up Krita!
>
> My open dockers are (in order) **Advanced Color Selector**, **Brush Presets**, **Layers**, **Overview**, **Palette**, **Tool Options**, and **Toolbox**.

Setting up our file correctly is paramount to improving our workflow and speed of creation and revision, so let's get started with painting our landscape:

1. Make sure Krita is open (a pretty important step!).
2. Click **File** | **New** on your main menu (or you can use the *Ctrl* + *N* hotkey, as shown in *Figure 3.4*):

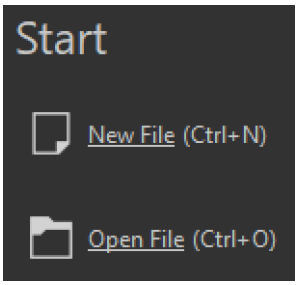


Figure 3.4 – Default Start window in Krita 5 showing the New File icon and hotkey combination

3. On the **Create new document** window, insert `1920` for your image width, `1080` for your image height, and `72` for your resolution (in pixels/inch). Set the color model to **RGB/Alpha** and **8-bit integer/channel** for the color depth, and keep the default **Color Profile** setting (in Krita 5's beta version, the default should be **sRGB-elle-V2-srgbtrc.icc (Default)**). These settings are shown in *Figure 3.5*:

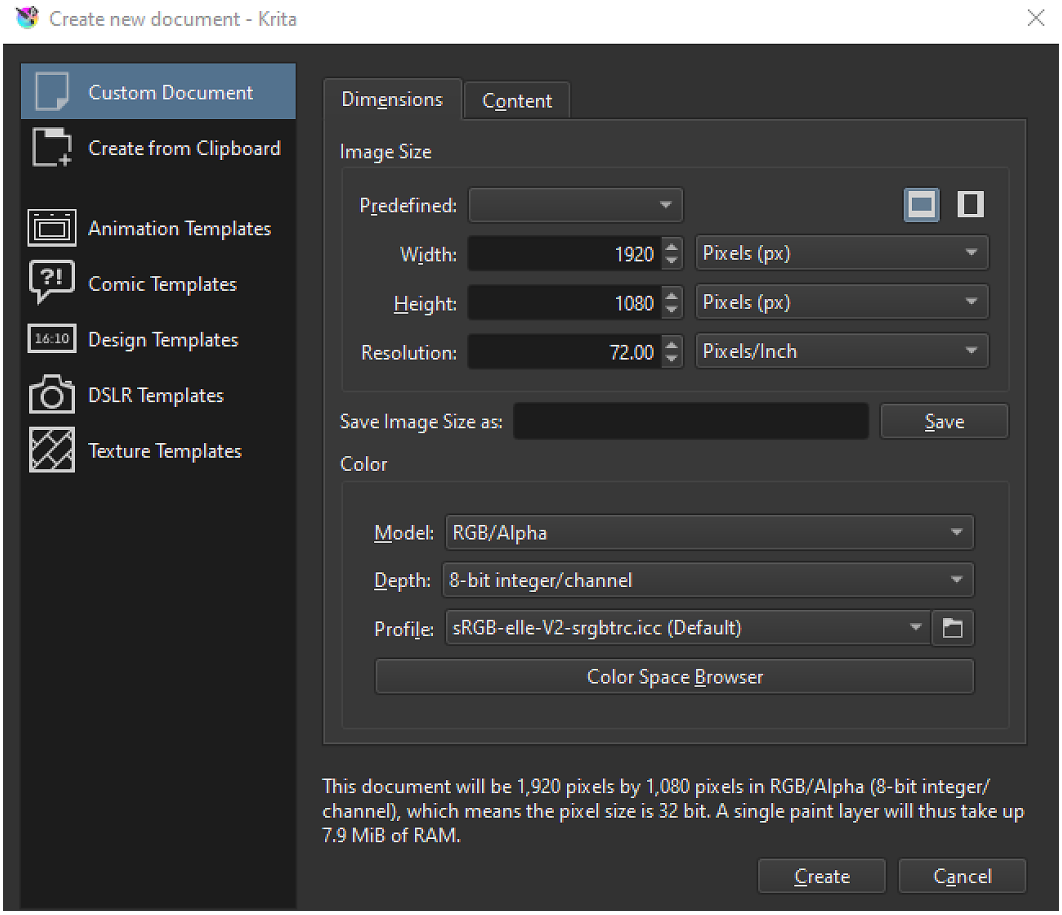


Figure 3.5 – The settings for the Create new document window for this project

4. Click **Create**. Your new work canvas should load into your canvas area, and your **Layers** panel should display two layers, one called **Background** and one on top of that called **Paint Layer 1** (as shown in *Figure 3.6*):

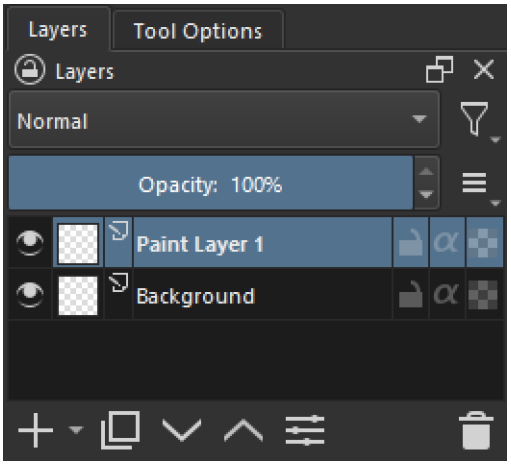


Figure 3.6 – Your "starting" Layers panel, with Background and Paint Layer 1

5. Double-click on the words **Paint Layer 1** in the **Layers** panel. This will allow you to edit the name of the layer.
6. Change the name of **Paint Layer 1** to **Background Plane** (as shown in *Figure 3.7*):

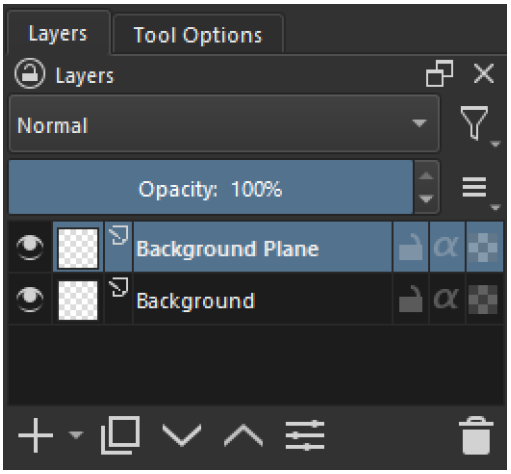


Figure 3.7 – The Paint Layer 1 layer renamed to Background Plane

7. As it may be a bit confusing to have a **Background** layer right next to a **Background Plane** layer, let's change the name of the bottom **Background** layer to **Starting Layer**.

8. You will now have two layers, **Starting Layer** (the bottom-most layer) and **Background Plane** (the layer above **Starting Layer**), as shown in *Figure 3.8*:

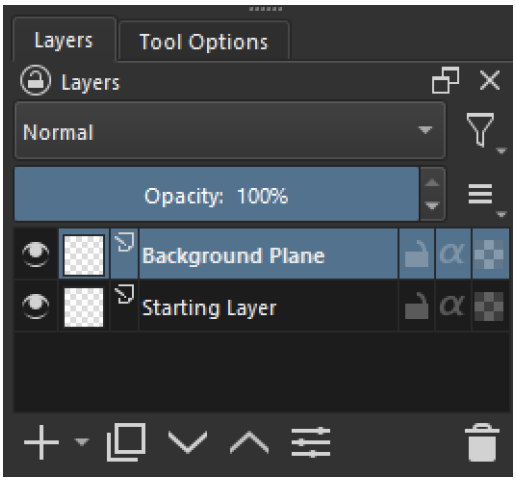


Figure 3.8 – Your two layers so far: Starting Layer and Background Plane

9. Click the **Background Plane** layer to select it.
10. Once the **Background Plane** layer is selected, click the bottom-left plus sign (+). This will create a new paint layer, defaulting to the name **Paint Layer 1**.

    Notice that when you hit the plus sign (and not the drop-down arrow next to it), it automatically creates a paint layer above your selected layer. If you had **Starting Layer** highlighted, your new paint layer would be sandwiched between your **Starting Layer** and **Background Plane** layers.
11. If **Paint Layer 1** is between your **Starting Layer** and **Background Plane** layers, click the up arrow (^) on the bottom bar (the fourth option from the left) while the **Paint Layer 1** layer is selected.

12. Double-click on your new **Paint Layer 1** layer and rename this layer to **Midground Plane**.
13. You should now have three layers, in this order: **Starting Layer** as the bottom-most layer, **Background Plane** as the middle layer, and **Midground Plane** as the top-most layer (as shown in *Figure 3.9*):

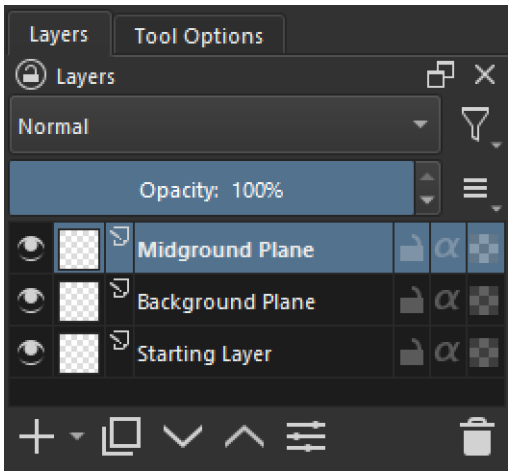


Figure 3.9 – Your three layers – Starting Layer, Background Plane, and Midground Plane

14. With **Midground Plane** selected, click on the plus icon on the bottom-left toolbar (+) to create a new **Paint Layer 1**.

15. Change the name of **Paint Layer 1** to **Foreground Plane**.

    You should now have four total layers. In order (from bottom to top), they should be **Starting Layer**, **Background Plane**, **Midground Plane**, and **Foreground Plane** (as shown in *Figure 3.10*):

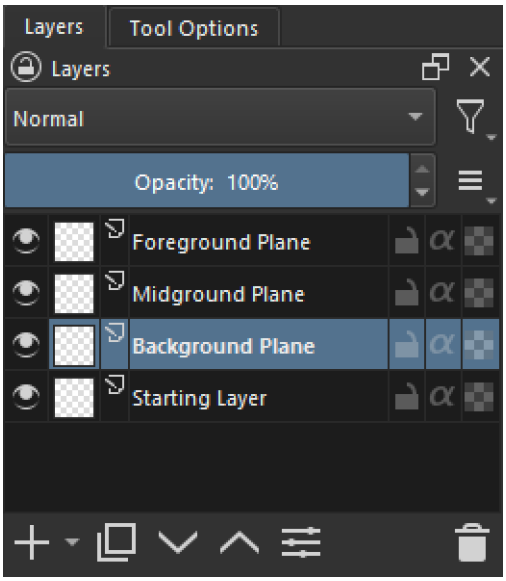


Figure 3.10 – Your four main layers – Starting Layer, Background Plane, Midground Plane, and Foreground Plane

16. Be sure to save your file (use the *Ctrl* + *S* keyboard shortcut)!

Setting up our layers in this way before we get started can help us stay organized during our painting process. Some artists enjoy creating layers "as needed," meaning they'll start with a single layer and work until they feel they need a new layer. Other artists like to preplan their pieces much like a traditional watercolor or oil artist, separating their layers the same way they'd think about separating their process to adhere to drying paint layers on a canvas. There's no right or wrong way to work; just think of layers as a tool that fits within your workflow and do what makes sense for you!

Now that we have our layer structure set up, let's go ahead and begin our actual painting!

Starting our painting

We are all set to get started, so let's start painting! Keep in mind that this will be a very fast "blocking-in" phase where we experiment with shapes for our landscape composition. Feel free to get as detailed or basic as you would like in this portion, as we will be adding a lot of detail to this piece later in the book.

Let's have our layers do some heavy lifting for us! We are going to begin our painting, keeping our layers and layer management at the forefront while we work:

1. Select your **Background Plane** layer.
2. With this layer selected, choose your brush tool (default hotkey *B* on the keyboard).
3. Select a brush that you like the look of, as we will be blocking in a basic background. I have chosen the **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush from the **Digital** section of the **Brush Presets** window (as shown in *Figure 3.11*):

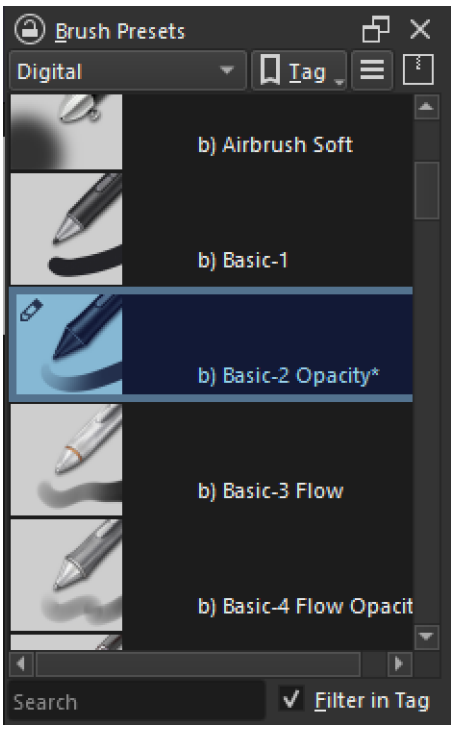


Figure 3.11 – Our Basic-2 Opacity brush from the Digital section of Brush Presets

4. With your brush selected, go ahead and select a very light, nearly white, neutral color from the value slider above the HSV color wheel. Think of this selection as *80% or 90% on the scale* (with 100% being all the way to the right, or pure white).

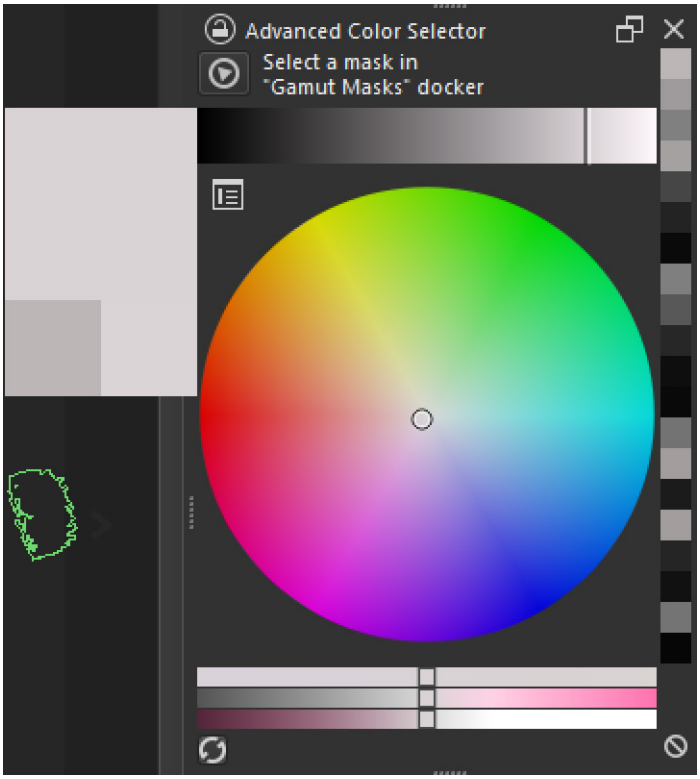


Figure 3.12 – Choosing a neutral light value on the HSV color wheel

5. Paint! This is going to act as our "bright sky and clouds," so feel free to create some shapes while slightly tweaking the value slider (the slider above the HSV color wheel) to bring about some variety and forms for our clouds.

> **Feel Free to Make It Your Own!**
>
> Since we're now starting the full tutorial portions of the book, just know that *you* are the artist here! Feel free to use my painting as a guide and follow along exactly with the images and steps I provide if you feel more comfortable doing that, but never feel like it is the "correct" way to paint! Experimentation is one of the most enjoyable parts of digital art, so go wild!

I've made my basic background and feel like there's enough here to guide the next parts of the piece (shown in *Figure 3.13*):

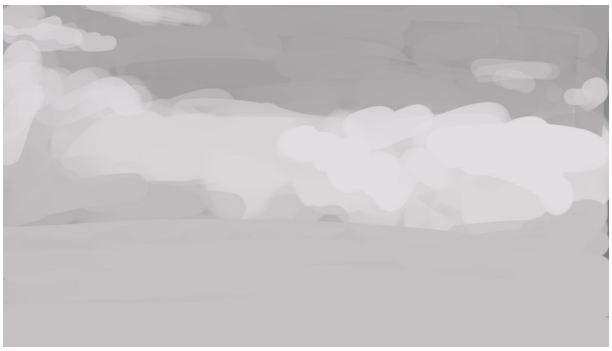


Figure 3.13 – Our basic Background Plane layer, utilizing the Basic-2 Opacity brush and lighter values

6. Once you feel satisfied with what you have, select your **Midground Plane** layer.
7. On the HSV color wheel, move the value slider closer to the *midpoint of the slider* (our goal is to be at *50% gray, or true midtone*), as shown in *Figure 3.14*:

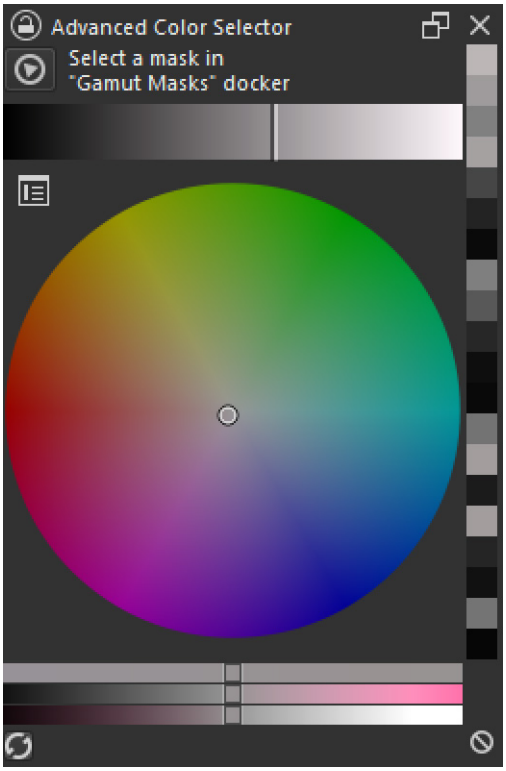


Figure 3.14 – Our value slider (above the HSV color wheel) in the midtone value area

Now we're going to place some basic "jagged" shapes to mimic mountains.

8. Select a brush (I will be staying with my trusty **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush) and start placing a set of triangles, varying the height, width, and intensity of your strokes. This will act as your midground mountain range.

   Once I've spent a bit of time refining the shapes to make an appealing flat look (*Figure 3.15*), I think I'm ready to move on to the next block-in step:

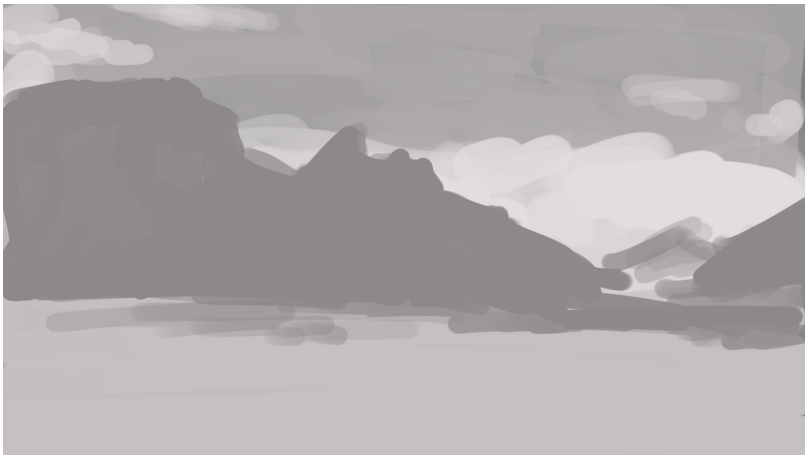


Figure 3.15 – My "mountain range," painted with 50% gray on my Midground Plane layer

9. When you've approached a point where you feel happy with the variety, sizes, and angles of your midground mountain shapes, go ahead and click on the **Foreground Plane** layer.
10. On the HSV color wheel, move the value slider more to the left to darken the values once again. *Don't go all the way to full black* though, as that would limit your options considerably when we start rendering! Right around the 25-to-30% spot on the value slider should do the trick (*Figure 3.16*):

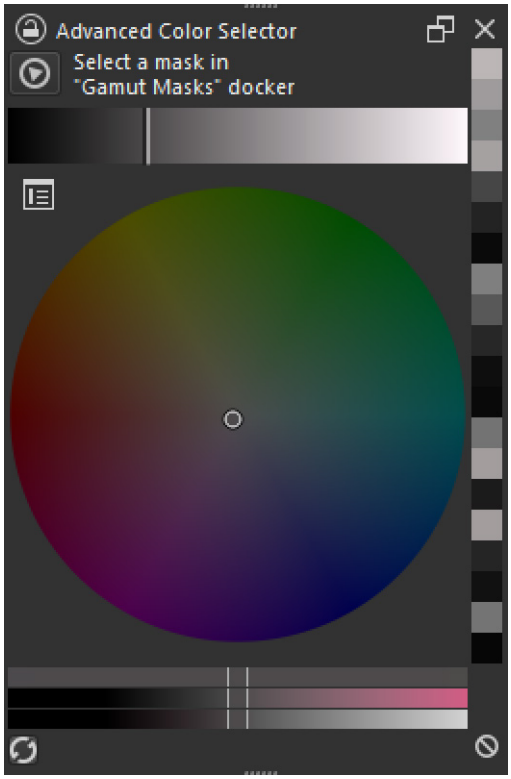


Figure 3.16 – Our darker value selected for our Foreground Plane layer

11. Select a brush (once again, I'm sticking with my **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush), and make some more refined, larger, darker triangle shapes. These will act as your foreground mountains.

12. I refined a few of my darker shapes and decided that I'd like this mountain range on a body of water. I used my **Foreground Plane** layer and my current darker values to roughly sketch in a lake, using soft vertical brush strokes instead of horizontal brush strokes to simply show a variance in subject type that is easy for the eye to read (*Figure 3.17*):

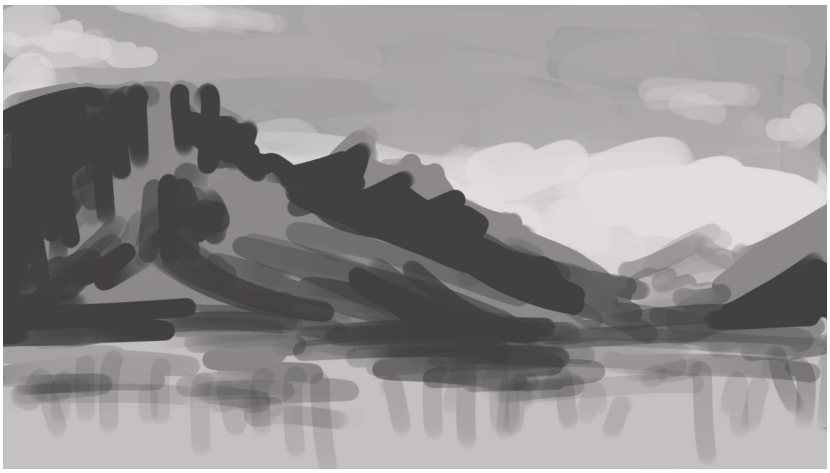


Figure 3.17 – Darker values added to Foreground Plane, as well as a basic "lake"

This will help us refine where the horizon line is located and give us some more information to work with when we want to add some features of visual interest later.

13. Be sure to save your file! (You can use the *Ctrl* + *S* hotkey to do this quickly!)

For the next steps, it's a good idea to start organizing your layers to make it easier for you to find exactly what you want to work on, and comfortably make edits without destroying the hard work you've done and the design you've made so far.

Grouping our layers

What we have so far may not feel like a masterpiece, and that's okay! This is a very early stage (one of many "ugly stages" of a painting), mainly used to throw down some ideas and see whether they read well to the eye. For client work, you can expect to do a lot of thumbnailing like this, so it's pretty good practice to work quickly and be organized.

We're going to start grouping our layers, bringing in some more rendering, and performing some deliberate brushwork. Once we get going on this portion, I hope you see the importance of the early steps, as they act as the foundation for the rest of our piece!

Let's set up some layer groups so we can work freely on our background, midground, and foreground, while giving us some flexibility in the type and number of layers we can create for each plane of our landscape:

1. In the **Layers** panel, make sure the **Background Plane** layer is selected.
2. With the **Background Plane** layer selected, click on the drop-down arrow to the right of the plus sign (+) on the lower left of the **Layers** panel. This will bring up the full list of options for your layers, masks, and selections (as shown in *Figure 3.18*).
3. Select **Group Layer** (the second option in the list).

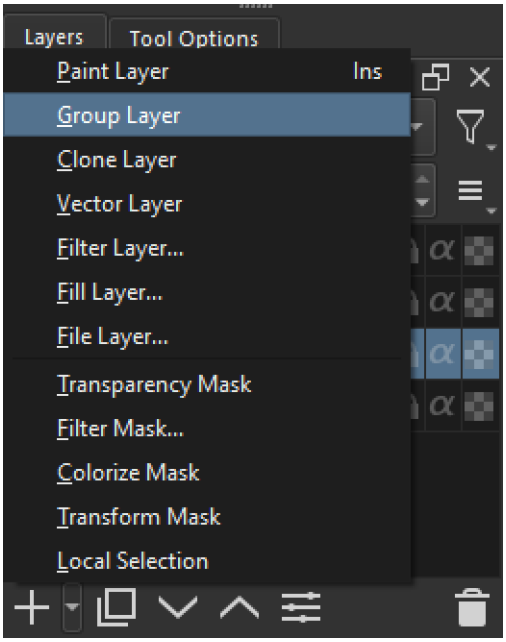


Figure 3.18 – The full list of layer, mask, and selection options in the Layers panel

This will create a new entry above our **Background Plane** layer, called **Group 1** by default. Notice that instead of a small paper-and-pen icon to the left of the words, there is a small folder icon (as shown in *Figure 3.19*):

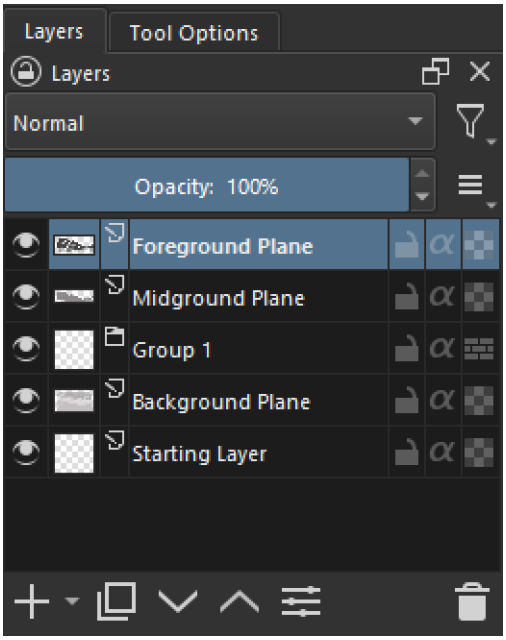


Figure 3.19 – Our Layers panel, now with our new Group 1 group above our Background Plane layer

4. Select the **Background Plane** layer.
5. Click and drag the **Background Plane** layer on top of the **Group 1** folder.

   If you were successful, you should see that the **Background Plane** layer has now moved over slightly, as well as having an additional anchor icon on the left-hand side. You will also notice that the **Group 1** folder icon now has a small down arrow, symbolizing that **Group 1** now has layers within the group, as shown in *Figure 3.20*:

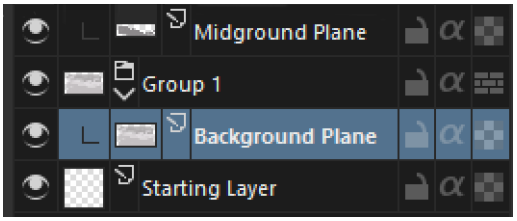


Figure 3.20 – Our Group 1, now with an inherited Background Plane layer

6. Let's go ahead and repeat this group creation process to create groups for our **Midground Plane** layer (creating **Group 2** above it) and **Foreground Layer** (creating **Group 3** above that).
7. Be sure to drag and drop each respective layer to its respective group, with **Midground Plane** inside **Group 2** and **Foreground Plane** inside **Group 3**. After you are done, you should have a **Layers** panel that looks as in *Figure 3.21*:

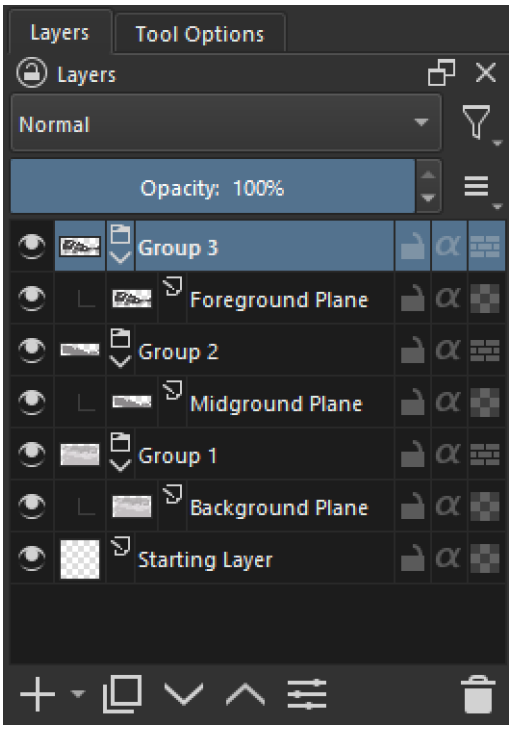


Figure 3.21 – Your current Layers panel with your landscape plane layers within three separate layer groups

Now, to polish this step off, let's go ahead and rename our groups to make things easier to make sense of, before we fully dig into our painting!

8. Select the **Group 1** layer and change its name to **Background**.
9. Select the **Group 2** layer and change its name to **Midground**.
10. Select the **Group 3** layer and change its name to **Foreground**.

You should have a **Layers** panel that looks as in *Figure 3.22*:

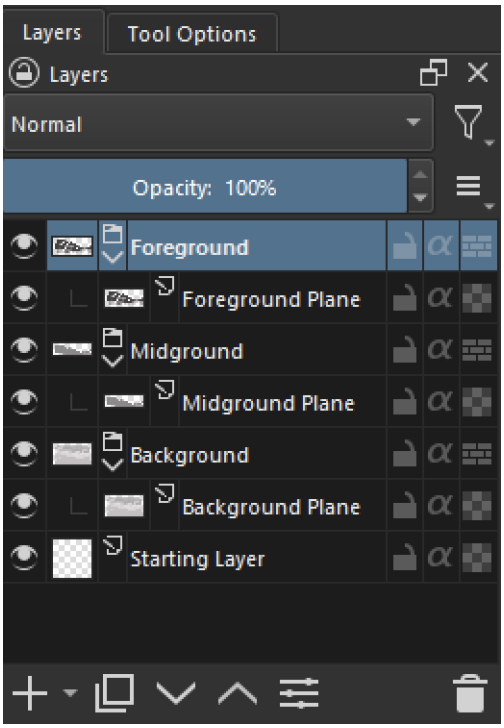


Figure 3.22 – Your fully named groups, consisting of each respective plane layer

11. Now, for maximum cleanliness, go ahead and click on each group individually, clicking its respective down arrow (the down arrow that is below the tiny folder icon to the left of the group's name), as shown in *Figure 3.23*:

Figure 3.23 – The down arrow and small folder icon for our Foreground group

This "minimizes" the contents of each group, and is a *very* good way to keep track of where you are at in regard to painting! *Figure 3.24* shows you just how clean this will make your **Layers** panel look:

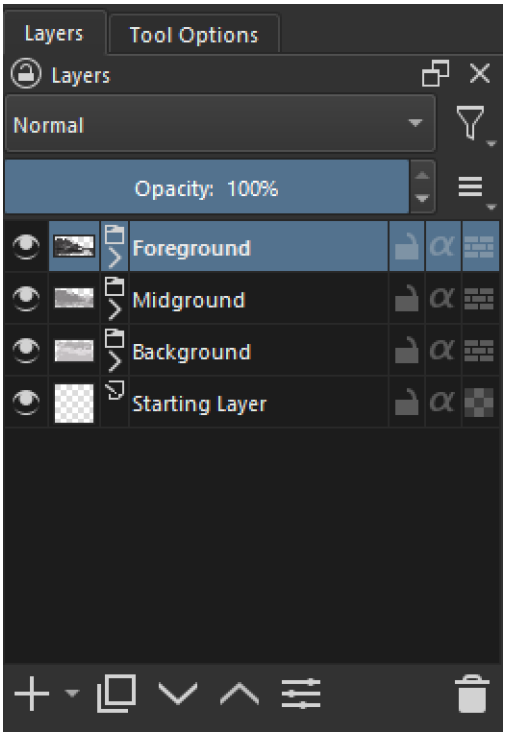


Figure 3.24 – The cleaner, "minimized" group listings on our Layers panel

Now that we have created our groups for our separate landscape planes, we are ready to start diving into the details of our painting!

Refining our painting

Since we now have our planes in their own groups, our painting session will speed up considerably and allow for some great editing and tweaking while retaining our specific image planes. Let's refine our image's background:

1. On the **Layers** panel, click the left-most eyeball icon (the visibility icon) next to the **Foreground** and **Midground** groups. This will hide these groups in their entirety, so anything within the folders of the group will be hidden as well.

2. Click on the **Background** group and click the arrow underneath the tiny folder icon to "maximize" the group, showing us our **Background Plane** layer. Your **Layers** panel should look as in *Figure 3.25* at this point:

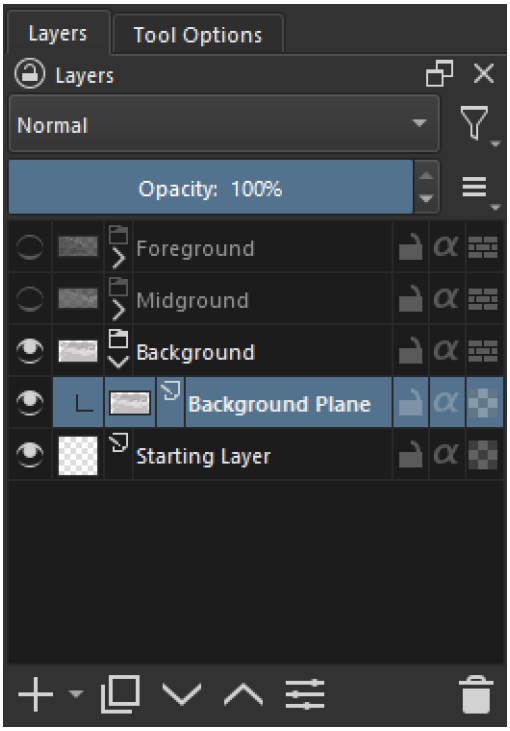


Figure 3.25 – The Background group is active, while Midground and Foreground are hidden

3. Make sure the **Background Plane** layer is selected.
4. Click the plus icon (+) on the bottom left of the toolbar to create a new **Paint Layer 1** above the **Background Plane** layer.

   You will notice that the new **Paint Layer 1** is already inside of the **Background** group, and it happened automatically! The power of working in this "group method" is the speed with which you can locate specific areas of your image that you would like to edit, without being disruptive to the rest of your composition. Everything you create within the **Background** group will *always* be under **Midground** and **Foreground** in your composition, and once we add some details to those groups, you'll see your landscape start taking shape.
5. On your new **Paint Layer 1**, start refining some shapes for your clouds and adding subtle value shifts by sliding the value slider (the one above the HSV color wheel) left or right.

Quick Landscape Tip

With landscapes, you can utilize a great trick known as **atmospheric perspective**. Essentially, atmospheric perspective dictates that the further something is away from the viewer, the less saturated and less refined something might be. With our landscape being created with a more traditional "foreground, midground, background" painting approach, think of it like this: if you want something to "come closer" to the viewer, have it get darker and more refined, but if you want to "push something back," be sure to lighten the value and make your brush strokes less refined.

At any point, if you want to see how your refinements are integrating with the rest of your piece, feel free to "unhide" your **Midground** and **Foreground** groups to see your changes in real time as they relate to your entire composition!

Once you feel that you like the look of your clouds and sky in your **Background** group (*Figure 3.26*), feel free to move on to the **Midground** group for further refinement:

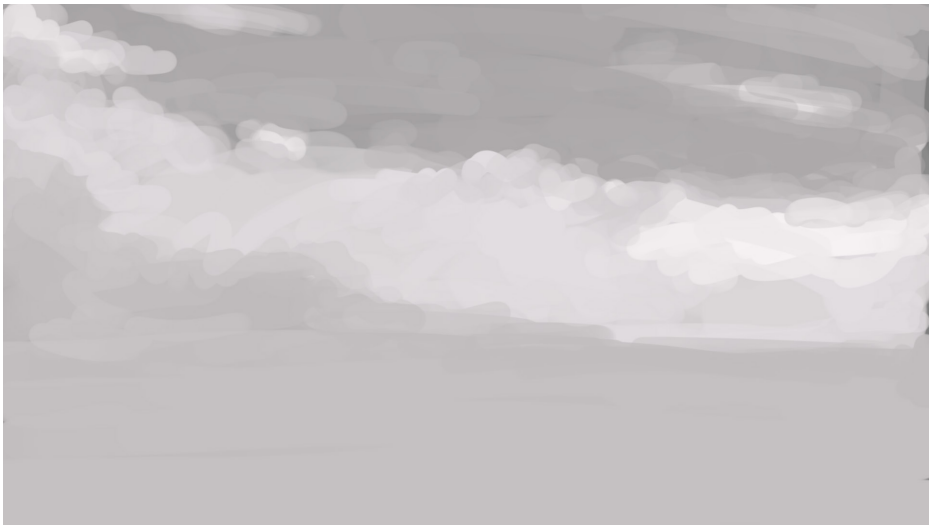


Figure 3.26 – Our refined Background group, with our Midground and Foreground groups hidden

6. Select your **Midground** group folder and "maximize" the group by clicking the arrow icon to the left of **Midground**, under the tiny folder icon.
7. "Unhide" your **Midground** group by clicking the eyeball icon to the left of the **Midground** group entry.
8. With your **Midground Plane** layer selected inside of your **Midground** group, click the plus sign (+) to create a new layer entitled **Paint Layer 2** inside of your **Midground** group.

Your **Layers** panel should look as in *Figure 3.27* at this stage:

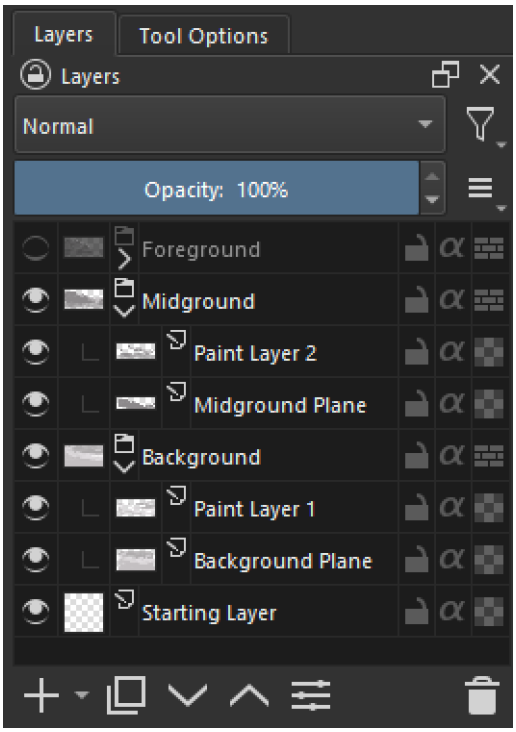


Figure 3.27 – Your Layers panel while working inside of your Midground group

Since we are keeping our **Background** layer group visible for the duration of this piece, we can successfully start modifying and editing our **Midground** group to take advantage of our more refined background.

9. Paint any composition adjustments you would like to make by working within your **Midground** group and rendering out some more specific shapes, while playing with the value slider above the HSV color wheel to get some nice variations within the middle of the slider. Remember to stay within the midtones, as we don't want to mess with our illusion of depth!

> **Color Picking**
>
> We're primarily working in black-and-white values right now, but it's helpful to know the hotkey for Krita's color picker (also known as the eyedropper) tool. The default hotkey for this is *Ctrl* for Windows and *Cmd* for Mac, but you can easily change this setting in Krita's settings. To do this, click **Settings** | **Configure Krita** | **Canvas Input Settings** | **Alternate Invocation** to modify the color picker/eyedropper to the shortcut you are most comfortable with.

A helpful trick to stay within your current value range is by color-selecting values that are already on your canvas. This will allow you to utilize your already-established values without introducing new values that may "break" the illusion of depth you are creating.

10. At this stage, I recommend that you introduce a few more value shifts within your midground **Paint Layer 2** (making sure that the midground's "lightest values" are not as light or bright as the "darkest" background values), and use a larger version of your brush to "blot in" some messy circles with a light touch to add some visual variety. You can also make some sharper silhouettes for your "darker" midground shapes and overall, you'll hopefully start feeling happy with where you're at so far (*Figure 3.28*):

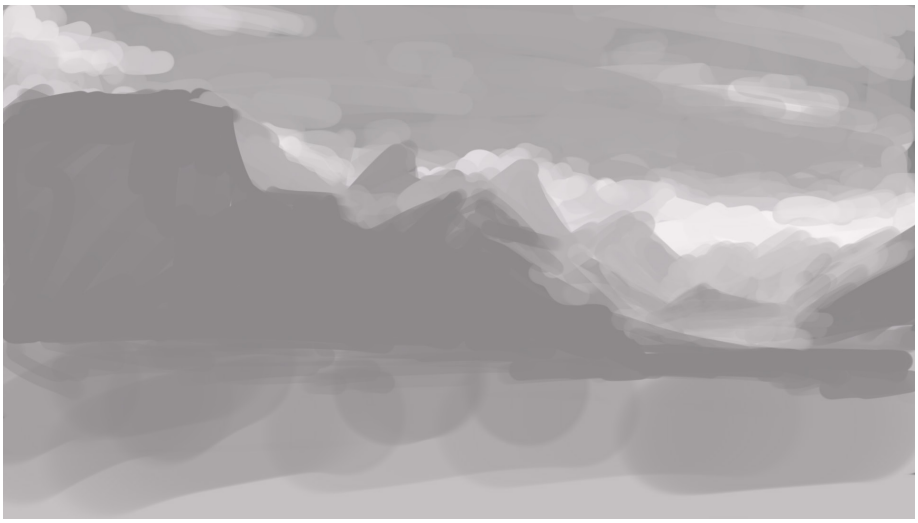


Figure 3.28 – The more refined Midground group on top of the more refined Background group

Now that we feel comfortable with the direction the midground and background are headed in, we can start working on the **Foreground** layer group.

11. First, make sure your **Foreground** group is visible by clicking the eyeball icon to the left of the group.
12. Make sure you "maximize" the **Foreground** group by clicking the arrow underneath the **Foreground** group's tiny folder icon.
13. Make sure your **Foreground Plane** layer is selected from within the group and click the plus sign (+) on the bottom left of the **Layers** panel to add a new layer called **Paint Layer 3**.

Your **Layers** panel should look as in *Figure 3.29* at this stage:

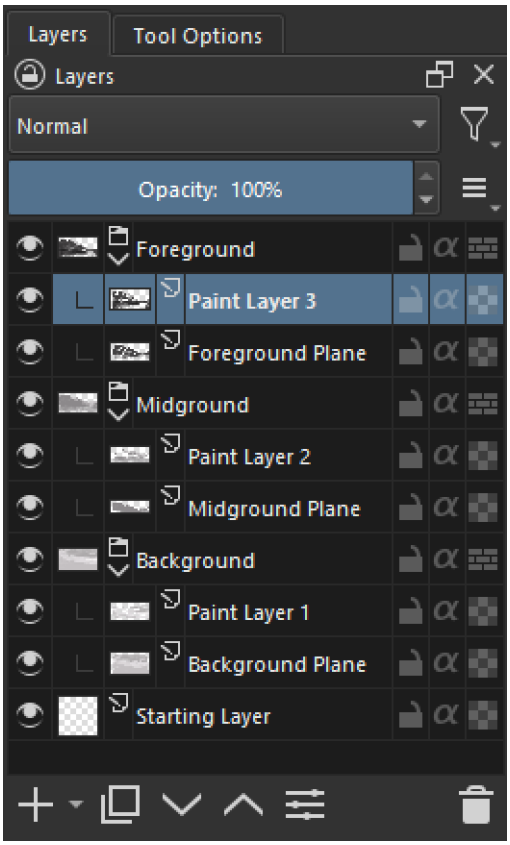


Figure 3.29 – Your full Layers panel with grouped Foreground, Midground, and Background groups visible

14. Now that you're on **Paint Layer 3**, start painting in some details for your darkest planes. You can also add a variety of brushstroke sizes and shapes to drive home the variety of the rocks here.
15. A neat trick you can do is use your darkest value (remember, *not* pure black!) to draw your horizon line and blend that line into the rocks themselves. This gives the viewer's eye a place to "rest" and form the foundation of your mountain's scale. For more massive mountains, create the horizon line lower on your canvas to allow room for your mountains to have a larger spectrum of variety in relation to width, height, and real estate on your canvas.

16. Once you feel comfortable with where you're at, I think our block-in phase is complete (see *Figure 3.30*). Take your time and make something that gets you excited to continue. Don't worry, we'll revisit our landscape and bring it to a portfolio-ready finish before you know it!

Figure 3.30 – Our completed block-in phase with all layers and groups visible

Phew, there we have it! Like I've said previously, this phase is very much a "foundational" phase of our painting, and you'll notice there's quite a bit of stuff missing. Where's the color? Where's the texture? Trust me, there's a method to this madness, and your hard work here is going to pay off in a *huge* way later. The amount of time you spent preparing your image's layers and groups is going to speed up the texture work, color passes, and finishing touches that we'll be showcasing later in the book.

Summary

In this chapter, we actually started a painting! Technically, we also learned about the importance of layers, layer modes, and grouping layers. While we primarily only worked within the **Normal** blending mode during this chapter, it's still an important feature to point out as we will be deep-diving into more blending modes later in the book.

We also discussed some basics regarding landscape painting, including integrating our values and brushwork in an organized, structured way. Hopefully, you are already able to see the "illusion" of a landscape, even though we're only using three primary groups of content within our painting (those being our foreground, midground, and background groups). As artists, it is our job to mimic the sense of three dimensions on a two-dimensional plane, and keeping our values organized and structured aids in that goal tremendously.

In *Chapter 4*, *Utilizing Brushes and Tools*, we will be continuing our refinement of this landscape and utilizing custom brushes and tools to really get the most out of our composition. We will also be setting up the UI to ensure that we have everything we need at our fingertips.

For good measure, we'll also be discussing some more professional secrets on getting a huge amount of impact by using some of Krita's incredibly realistic built-in brushes…in fact, they're some of the best digital painting brushes I've ever used!

Fantastic work in this chapter! Let's keep it up and go ahead with creating our perfect brushes!

4
Utilizing Brushes and Tools

Welcome to *Chapter 4*, *Utilizing Brushes and Tools*! In the last chapter, we finally got our hands dirty by starting our landscape piece by creating specified layers, grouping those layers, and formatting our layers in a way that makes logical sense for our project (namely breaking down items into foreground, midground, and background working areas). While we mentioned what brushes we used to create the first steps of our masterpiece, we didn't discuss why we chose our specific brushes, or talk about how we can go about making edits or changes to our brushes. That's what this chapter is for!

In this chapter, we will be looking at the power of Krita's brush engine and the way in which its functionality can aid us as we move forward with our landscape painting during *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*.

So, in this chapter, we will cover the following topics:

- Exploring brushes
- Customizing your brushes
- Exporting our resources
- Importing a resource bundle

With our chapter's goals laid out in front of us, there's nothing left to do but to get started!

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0 +)
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard, and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus

Exploring brushes

Before we get too far down this rabbit hole (and trust me, it's a *biiiggg* rabbit hole!), let's define what a brush is in context to Krita. Essentially a **brush** is a collection of customizable settings, mapped to an image (or **brush tip**), used to lay down visual information onto your canvas via your input device (such as a mouse or tablet). Many brushes exist natively when you first download Krita, and you can also download customized brush packs from various artists who have exported their Krita brush presets (which we will get to in the *Exporting our resources* section of this chapter).

Brushes have *hundreds* of settings at their disposal, and mixing and matching these settings can offer up *thousands* of different brushes with various feels that can mimic traditional pencils, paintbrushes, digital spray paint, and more. Couple these settings with the fact that you can create your own brush tips from scratch, and that number grows to a near-infinite number of choices. While we could write an entire 300+ page book just about brushes, I want to give you the "greatest hits" as it were, some key settings and features to keep in mind to give you the biggest impact for the least amount of stress. Don't worry, from here on out throughout the rest of the book, we will be discussing various tweaks and changes to brushes as we work on our projects. For a full rundown of every setting for your brushes in full detail, I *highly* recommend the official Krita documentation.

Krita's Official Documentation

Krita, as we're learning, is a fantastic piece of art software that can work at the highest levels of production. Along that same line, Krita's official documentation (also called the *User Manual*) is *fantastic*, and I cannot stress enough how well-organized and helpful it can be in learning the technical ins and outs of the program. If you ever want to dig deeper on a technical aspect we discuss in the book, I can say with a good amount of confidence that the official Krita documentation will cover what you're looking for.

At the time of this book being written, the official Krita documentation can be found online here: `https://docs.krita.org/en/user_manual.html`. Also, Krita has a fantastic YouTube channel (if you prefer a more audio-video presentation style) which can be found at `https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkIccKaHDGA8lYVmUerLhag`.

As we have established previously in the book, my main goal for us throughout this journey is to think like a painter first and foremost, channeling your inner artistic know-how to solve problems you may encounter during your digital art career (whether professional or hobbyist). This way of thinking helps when discussing the brushes, customization options, and the brush engines in Krita, as it will better guide you to make stronger design decisions. What would you look for when buying traditional art supplies? What would you look for in an ink pen, or mechanical drafting pencil, perhaps?

With that way of thinking being at the forefront of your mind, let's discover Krita's brush presets to get a solid understanding of how the program showcases and categorizes its menu of brushes for you, then we can explore how to work with tags to save your favorite brushes for later use.

Discovering brush presets

Krita comes installed with a large amount of **brush presets** (a pre-saved assortment of brush tip and option combinations), separated into a list of categories (done with **Tags**). Knowing what type of brush you need for a specific portion of your piece is half the battle, and tagging your favorite brushes into custom categories makes it a breeze to find exactly what you're looking for. We can see an example of a full **Brush Presets** selector window in *Figure 4.1*:

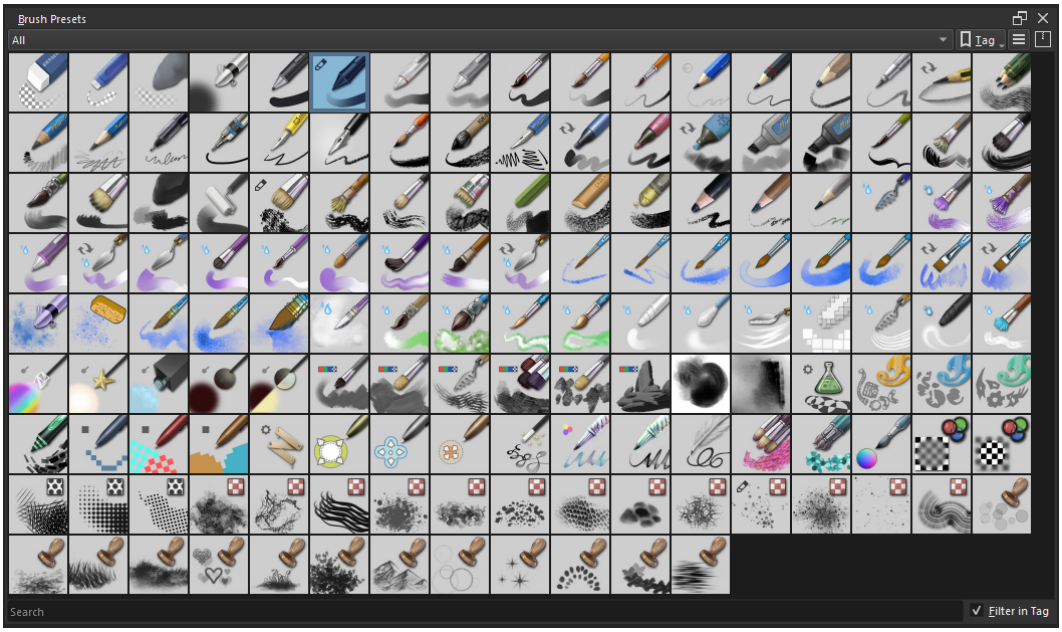


Figure 4.1 – The Brush Presets menu, displaying every one of my brush presets available (the All category tag)

Figure 4.1 is an expanded look at all my brush presets (notated by the **All** drop-down selector at the top of the window), ranging from erasers, sketching pencils, airbrushes, watercolors, charcoal brushes, mixers, stamps, and blenders. To make sure this window is active for you to be able to browse, follow these steps:

1. Select **Settings** on your main menu.
2. Make sure **Show Dockers** is active (as seen in *Figure 4.2*):

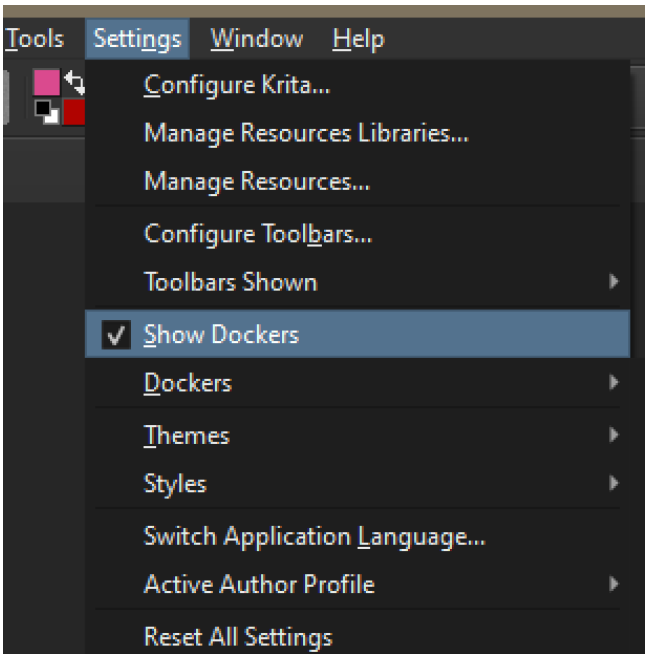


Figure 4.2 – The active Show Dockers option from the Settings menu

3. Under the **Show Dockers** option, hover over **Dockers** so the submenu expands.

4. Make sure **Brush Presets** is selected (as shown in *Figure 4.3*):

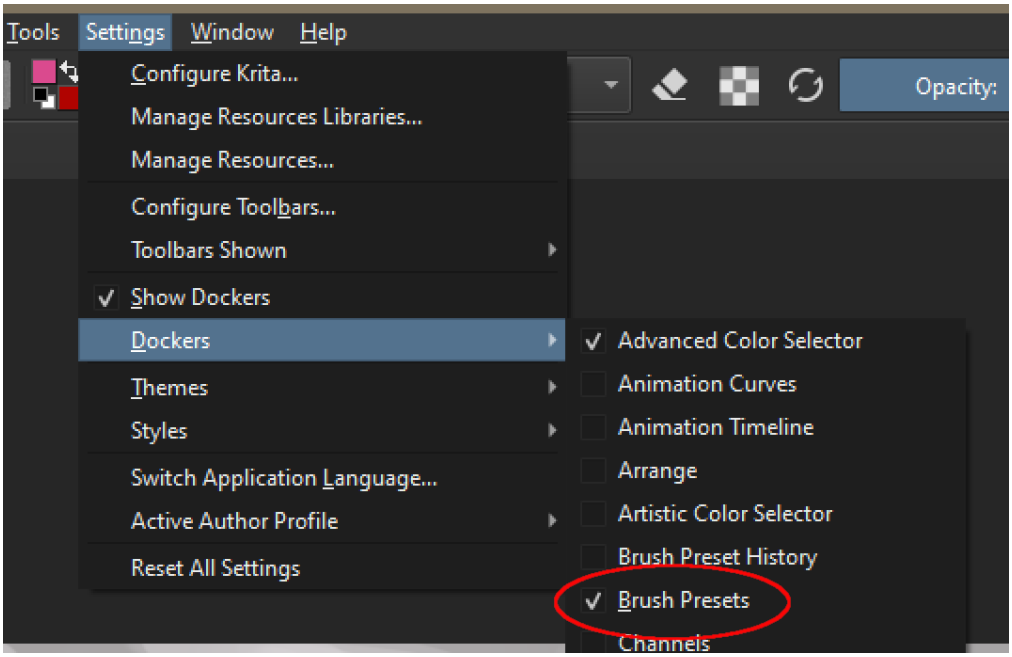


Figure 4.3 – The selected Brush Presets option under the Dockers submenu

By default, your **Brush Presets** window should appear docked to either side of your work area. To do a full "disconnect" from the side docking bays and allow you to drag and move your window around, you can click on the **Float Docker** button (which looks like two stacked windows on top of each other – shown in *Figure 4.4*):

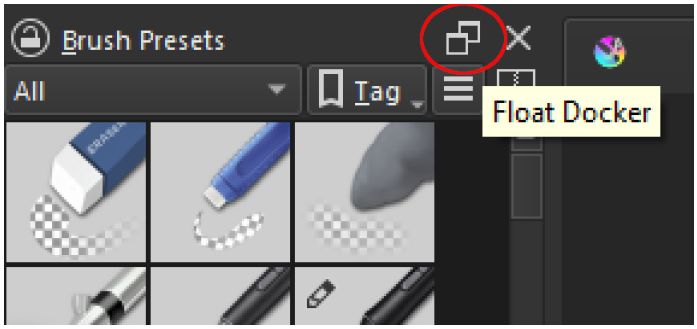


Figure 4.4 – The Float Docker button on the Brush Presets docker window

Keep in mind that every one of your dockers behaves in this way, making Krita an extremely customizable solution for painting. Feel free to experiment with dragging, dropping, floating, and re-docking your dock windows to become familiar with how Krita handles the sizing and structure of your docks as they relate to one another.

Modifying Brush Presets display options

While having all our presets for brushes displayed in an icon format is sleek, unless you have had a ton of experience with each brush and memorized their features and correlated them with their icons, you may want a little bit more information about which brush preset you're selecting.

Krita gives you a few quick options for both resizing your **Brush Presets** icons, as well as allowing you to see the name of each individual preset next to the icon.

To get to these options, follow these steps:

1. On your **Brush Presets** docker, click on the three stacked lines to the right of the **Tag** icon (also known as a "hamburger menu").
2. You will see an option to choose between displaying **Thumbnails** (which is just the icon by itself with no text) or **Details** (which has a smaller version of the icon, alongside the name of the brush in text). You will also see a slider to adjust the size of the icons themselves.

A full look at these options (and the menu's location) can be seen in *Figure 4.5*:

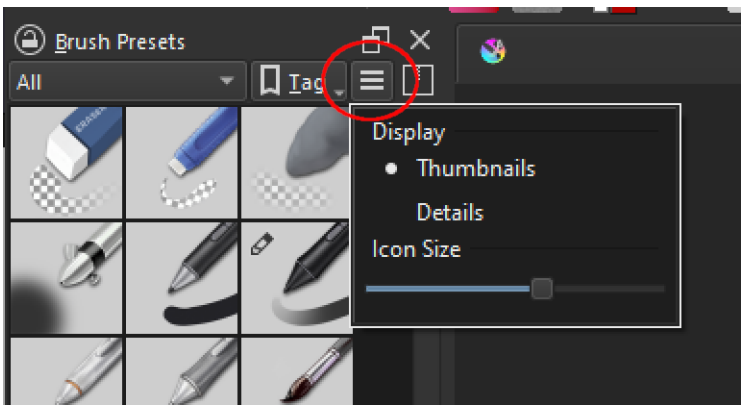


Figure 4.5 – The Brush Presets display options menu

My personal recommendation is to go for the **Details** display type with a moderately large (higher than mid-point) **Icon Size**. Of course, your personal preference takes priority here, but I enjoy having the quick visibility of the brush's thumbnail icon, alongside the brush's detailed name as well (as seen in *Figure 4.6*):

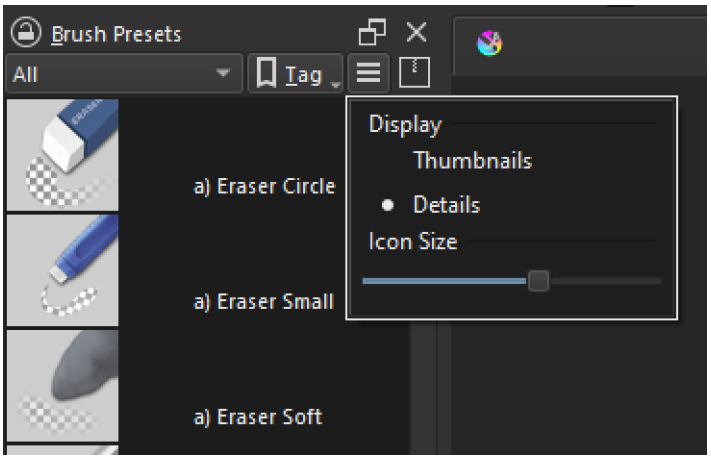


Figure 4.6 – Active Details display option for the Brush Presets docker

I have had great luck in keeping my **Brush Presets** docker in the docked position on the upper-left corner of the screen, as that location closely mimics the brush tool placements for other digital art software, such as Photoshop. It makes the "learning curve" of going from one program to another much less daunting, and anything to save yourself a headache is always a good thing!

Another great way you can make your life easier in relation to navigating brushes is the **Tag** ability.

Categorizing with tags

Tags within Krita work as a personalized category system for sorting your resources. Not only can you tag brushes (both default preset brushes and custom brushes you create), but you can also tag things such as specific brush tips, patterns, and gradients.

A great way to use this feature is to add brushes to the **My Favorites** list (a tag category that is already made in Krita by default). Let's find our brush from *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups* (from within the **Digital** category, titled **b) Basic-2 Opacity**) and add it as one of our favorites:

1. Hover your mouse over the drop-down menu within your **Brush Presets** docker, immediately to the left of your **Tag** icon (*Figure 4.7*):

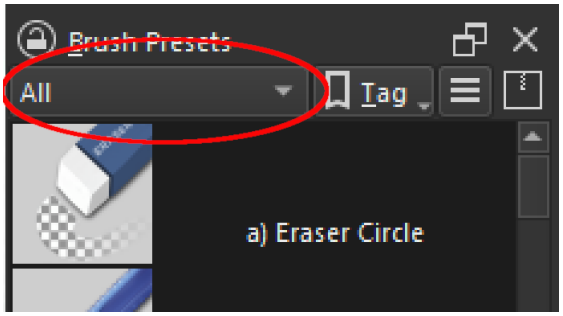


Figure 4.7 – The drop-down menu to select your Tag category

2. Click on the drop-down arrow and select the **Digital** category.
3. Once **Digital** is selected, scroll until you see the brush titled **b) Basic-2 Opacity** (*Figure 4.8*):

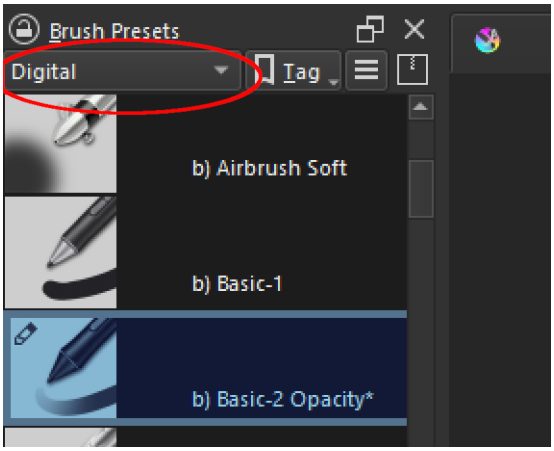


Figure 4.8 – Selecting the Basic-2 Opacity brush in the Digital category

4. Right-click on the brush in your **Brush Presets** list.

5. A submenu will pop up with options. Hover over the **Assign to tag** option (*Figure 4.9*):

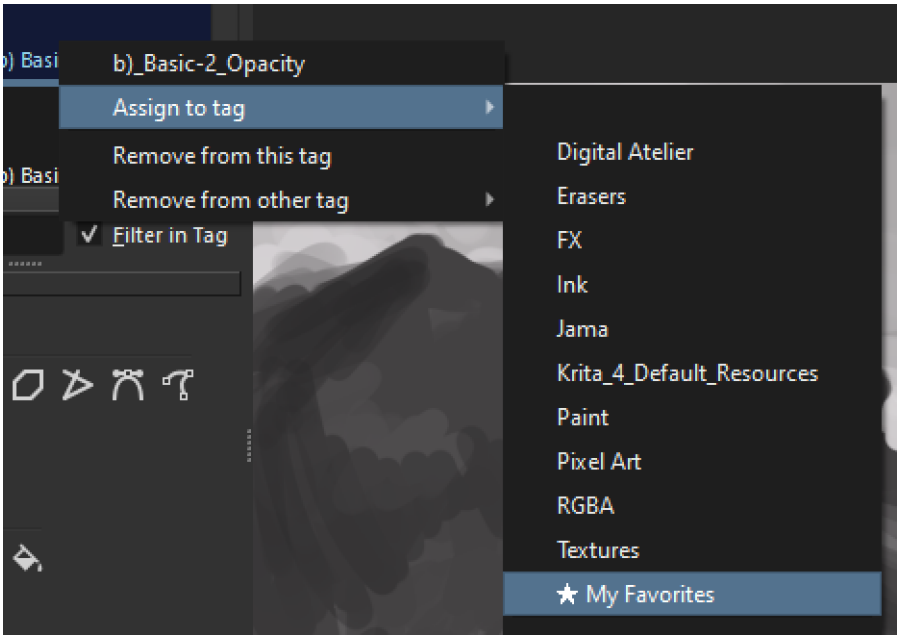


Figure 4.9 – The expanded Assign to tag menu

6. Click on the **My Favorites** option (the entry with the star beside it).
7. Now, go ahead and click on the **Digital** tag category drop-down menu, and change it to **My Favorites**.

You should see your newly-favorited **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush in your **My Favorites** category tag (*Figure 4.10*):

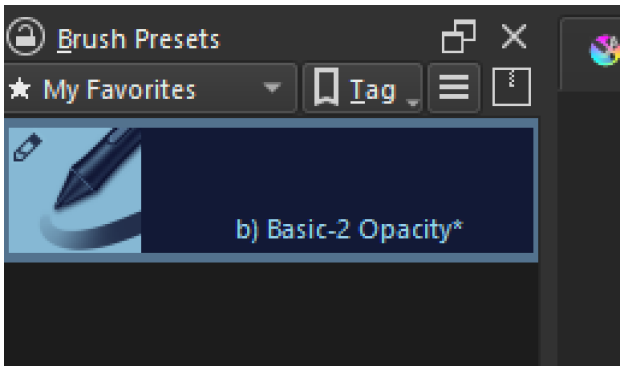


Figure 4.10 – The My Favorites category with our newly favorited brush

While this is a great way to start sorting through your most-used brushes and resources, I think that you can take this idea a step further and start making your own *custom tags*, which in turn create your own custom categories on the **Brush Presets** drop-down list. This is also a wise move, as saving all of your favorite brushes under the **My Favorites** tag will make the list very long to sort through, which sort of defeats the purpose of properly organizing your brushes!

Remember how earlier in the chapter we discussed "thinking like an artist" when it comes to your brushes? For instance, with my traditional art tools, I keep my palette knives separate from my synthetic bristle brushes, and my natural hair brushes have their own separate container as well (as cleaning synthetic brushes requires different methods than cleaning natural hair brushes). I methodically place each of these brush types by physical use case and application, making it easier for me to find what I need exactly when I need it.

In Krita, a great way to do this is by making a custom category to store your brushes in. You can do this by creating a custom **Tag** category. Let's do that now.

Creating a custom tag

The plan here is for us to categorize a nice set of brushes to choose from as we start developing and rendering the landscape painting that we started in *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*. To do this, we are going to create a custom tag called `Krita for Packt`, and place some of our favorite landscape-style brushes into the category:

1. On your **Brush Presets** window, click on the **Tag** tab (the one with the ribbon icon visible).
2. Click on the text area for the **New tag** portion of the dropdown (*Figure 4.11*):

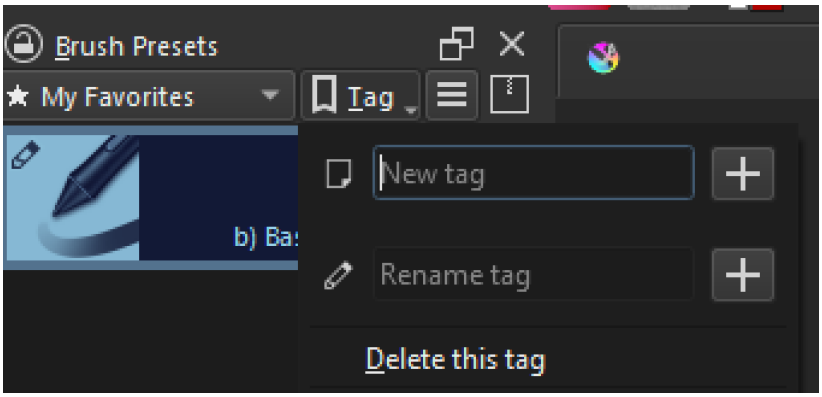


Figure 4.11 – The New tag dropdown from the Brush Presets window

3. Name your new tag something memorable! I'll be naming mine `Krita for Packt`, as mentioned earlier.
4. Hit the *Enter* key to finalize your new tag name.
5. Your new tag will show up in your **Tag** category dropdown in alphabetical order (*Figure 4.12*):

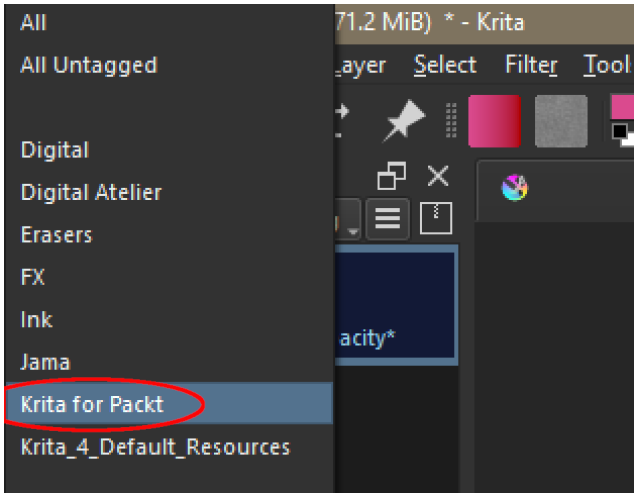


Figure 4.12 – Our new Krita for Packt custom tag category

Now that we have our custom tag created, it's time to fill in the category with some great brushes and tools that will help us with our landscape!

Filling our custom tag

As we are working with a landscape painting, there are a few types of brushes that immediately come to mind that I'll want to utilize, as follows:

- A hard round brush (a general work-horse brush, great for a variety of uses)
- A traditional feeling pencil (for sketching in finer details and adjusting edges quickly)
- A "wet" round brush (a version of a round brush that smudges edges based upon pen pressure)
- A "dry" texture brush (which will be great for impressionist rocks and random details)
- A "thick paint" brush (to allow for some nice impasto and painterly edges)

- A blender (something that mimics a Q-tip to smooth out items such as sky, clouds, and water)
- A palette knife (great for sharp edges and those great Bob Ross-inspired "happy accidents")

This mimics the type of brushes and techniques I would use for a landscape painting created on canvas with traditional oils or acrylics, and I highly recommend using workflows that you feel comfortable with. Remember, at the end of the day, digital painting *is* painting; a lot of the same rules and methods apply across the board between traditional and digital!

Let's get started on filling out our new custom tag:

1. For a hard round brush and a "wet" round brush, go to the **Digital** tag in your **Brush Presets** list.
2. A great hard round brush is the one named **b) Basic-1**, so right-click on the icon for the brush.
3. On the pop-up menu, hover over **Assign to tag** and find your new custom tag (in my case, **Krita for Packt**), as shown in *Figure 4.13*:

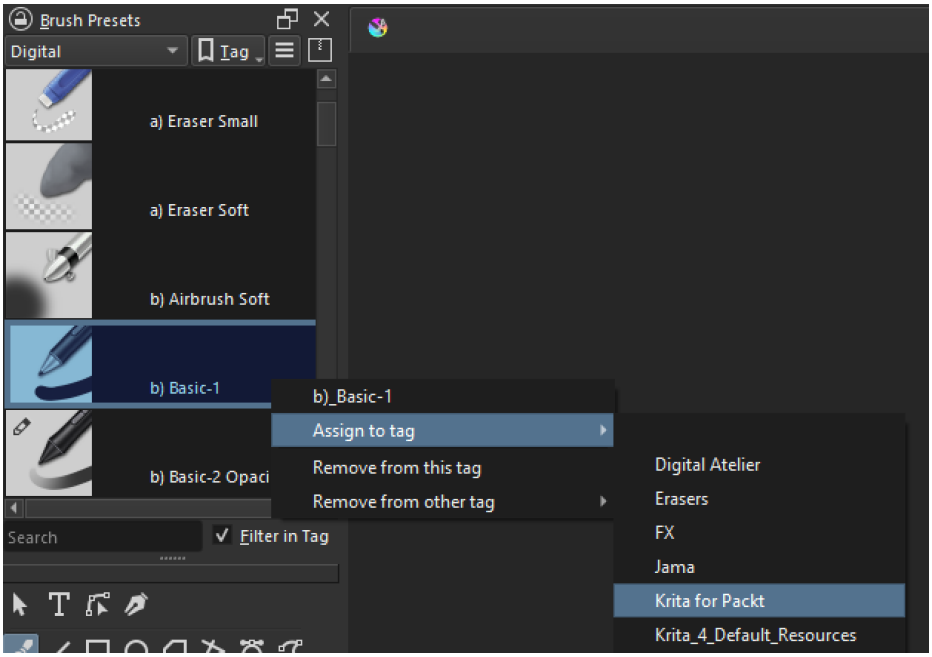


Figure 4.13 – Assigning our b) Basic-1 brush to our Krita for Packt custom tag

4. Click your custom tag in the list to categorize the **b) Basic-1** brush.
5. For the "wet" round brush, we will use our tried-and-true **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush from *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*.
6. Select **b) Basic-2 Opacity** and right-click to bring up the pop-up menu.
7. Hover over **Assign to tag**, and assign **b) Basic-2 Opacity** to our custom tag (once again, **Krita for Packt** in my case).
8. To check and make sure that your categorizing is working correctly, go ahead and click on the category header dropdown and select your custom category.

As we can see, both **b) Basic-1** and **b) Basic-2 Opacity** are currently in the **Krita for Packt** category, and things are going well (*Figure 4.14*):

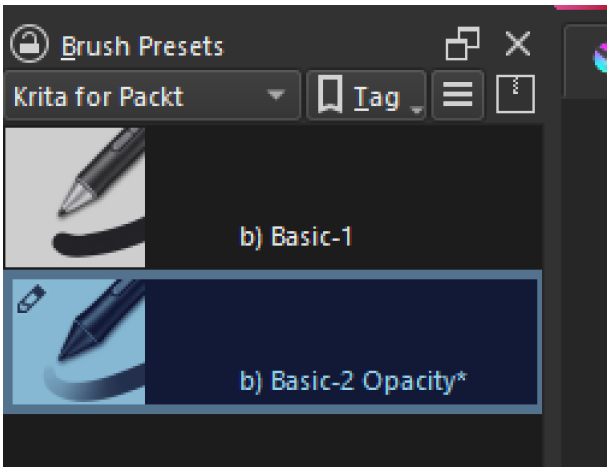


Figure 4.14 – Our two hard round brushes in our custom category, Krita for Packt

You probably noticed the asterisk (*) symbol next to our **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush in *Figure 4.14*. This essentially means I have altered some settings and/or properties of this brush to make it different than Krita's default version of the brush; this is a topic we will cover in the *Customizing your brushes* section of this chapter when we will customize our brushes in this custom category.

We have our hard round brushes sorted, so now let's find a good-quality pencil brush to add to our custom category:

1. On the **Brush Presets** window, select the **Sketch** tag category on the drop-down selector.
2. Scroll until you see the **c) Pencil-2** brush.

3. Right-click on **c) Pencil-2** and assign it to your custom tag (*Figure 4.15*):

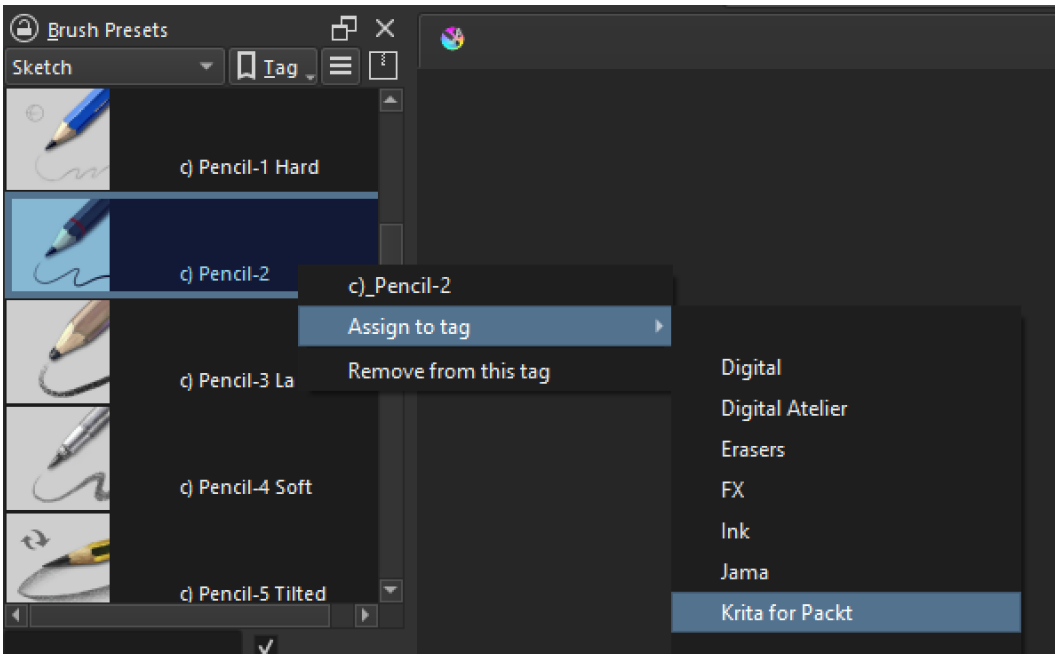


Figure 4.15 – Assigning our pencil brush to our custom tag category

Now, let's add two brushes for the "thick paint" motif, both of which will come from one of my personal favorite brush categories in all of Krita:

1. On your **Brush Presets** window, select the **RGBA** tag category.
2. We will select both **m) RGBA 01 Thick-dry** and **m) RGBA 02 Thickpaint**, and assign them to our custom tag category using the same steps as we've been doing (the *right-click* > **Assign to tag** method).

> **RGBA Brushes Side Note**
>
> A quick note about the **RGBA** brushes while we're on the topic. While I absolutely *adore* the way they mimic real brushes, they can cause considerable slowdown on certain computer setups. If you find that your machine isn't giving you an enjoyable experience using the **RGBA** brushes, feel free to use any "wet" brush from the **Paint** tag instead.

Now, let's do a quick review of our custom category and make sure our brushes have been added successfully (*Figure 4.16*). Now, we only have a few more tools left to add:

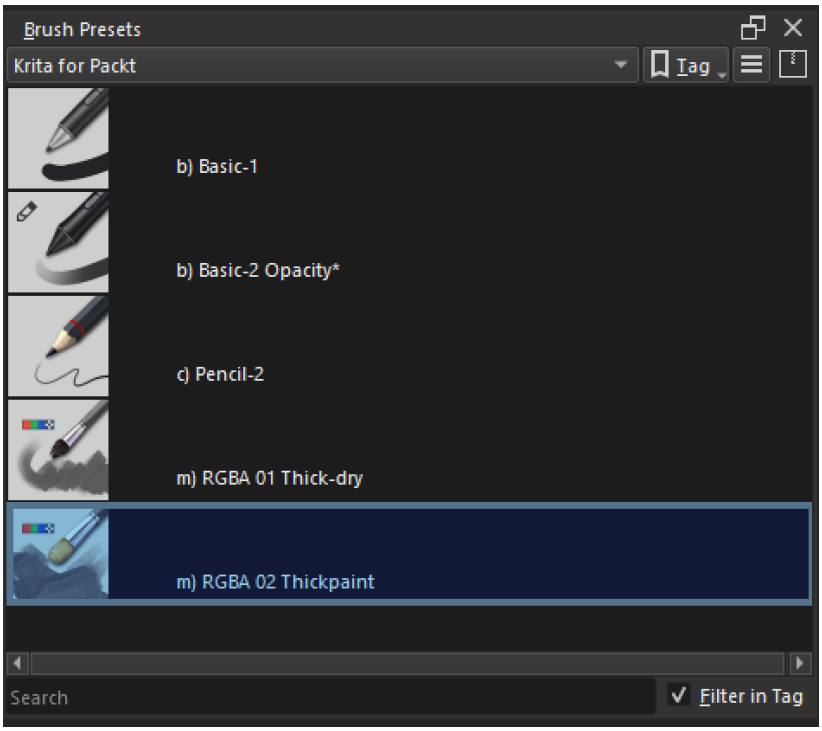


Figure 4.16 – Our Krita for Packt custom tag category

We still need a nice "dry texture" brush to add in some impressionistic rock details, so let's add that now:

1. In your **Brush Presets** window, navigate to the **Paint** tag category.
2. Scroll until you see the brush named **g) Dry Bristles**.
3. Assign your brush to your custom tag category using the right-click method.

Finally, let's add our palette knife and blender brushes to our custom category:

1. In the **Brush Presets** window, make sure you are still in the **Paint** tag category.
2. Scroll down until you see two tools – one named **i) Wet Knife** and the second named **k) Blender Blur**.
3. Right-click on each brush, and assign them to your custom category.

Phew, now your custom tag category should be fully ready with some versatile brushes, sketching tools, blenders, and thick impasto paints (*Figure 4.17*):

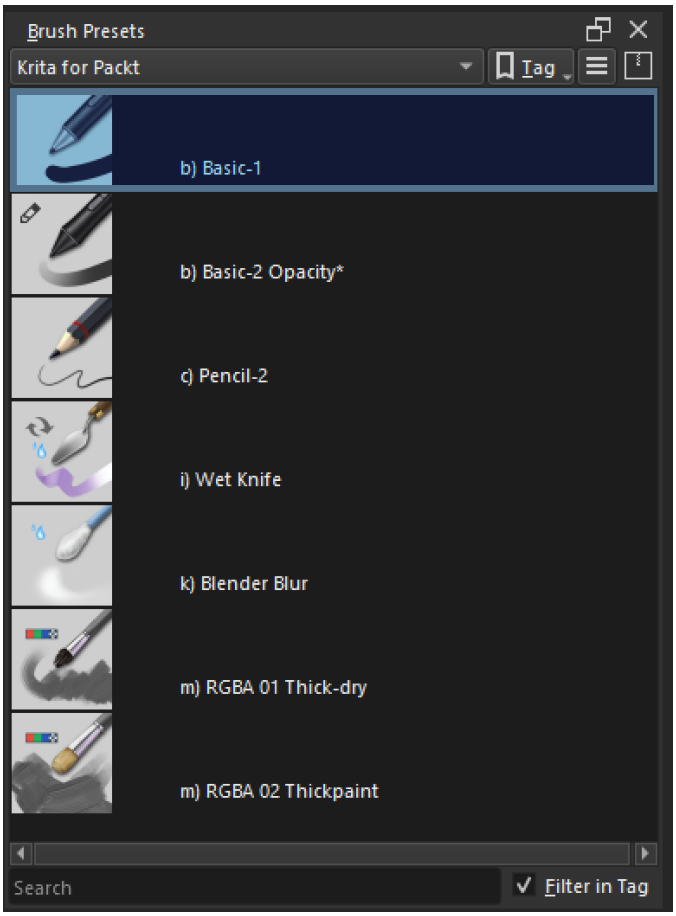


Figure 4.17 – My Krita for Packt custom tag category, displaying brushes in alphabetical order

Before we start painting with our new brushes, there's still a major strength of Krita we've yet to use, and it's where we really get to dig in and make each of these brushes our own: brush customization.

Customizing your brushes

In my opinion, Krita has some of the most comprehensive brush customization options I've ever seen in a digital art suite. This is really where Krita opens into something truly magical for digital artists – if there's a brush that you can imagine creating, odds are very high that Krita can make it happen.

In this portion of the chapter, we're going to take a look at the many ways by which we can customize our brushes, save the edits we make, and even create our own brush from scratch!

> **Your Preferences Matter**
>
> In this portion of the chapter, I'll be discussing my personal favorite options for customizing brushes within Krita. There are hundreds of different sliders and knobs worth looking at; however, I'll try keeping my brush changes (and why I made them) concise, as well as easy to understand and follow. Please tinker with every setting you find; you will be blown away with the possibilities, I promise!

Let's get started on our brush customization by opening the **Edit Brush Settings** panel.

The easiest way to bring up your **Edit Brush Settings** panel is by pressing *F5* on your keyboard with a brush selected in your **Brush Presets** window. However, it's also nice to know which icon represents this tool, so let's look at the **Brushes and Stuff** toolbar in greater detail.

As you can recall from *Chapter 1*, *Getting Started with Krita*, the **Brushes and Stuff** toolbar is where our **New Document**, **Open**, **Save File**, **Undo**, **Redo**, and brush properties are found. It's also the menu where we added our Reference Images tool while customizing our basic menu interface (*Figure 4.18*):

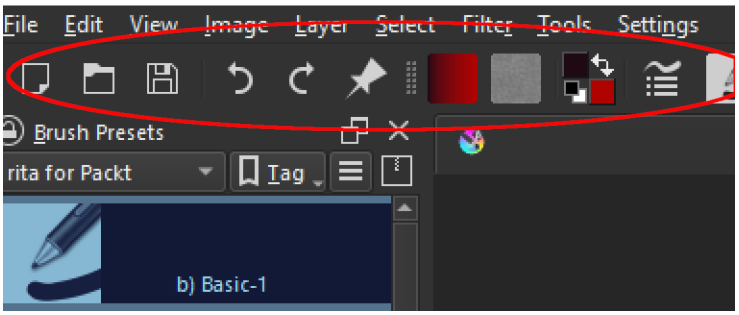


Figure 4.18 – The location of the Brushes and Stuff toolbar

While *Figure 4.18* shows the overall location and portion of the toolbar you're already familiar with from *Chapter 1*, *Getting Started with Krita*, let's shift our view of this toolbar over to the right a little bit:

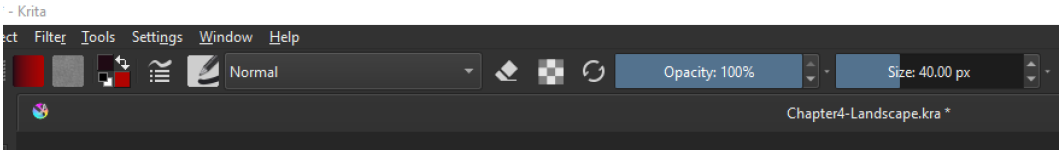


Figure 4.19 – An extended view of the Brushes and Stuff toolbar

In *Figure 4.19*, we can see a variety of options and icons. From left to right, these include the following:

- Gradient selector for **Fill** gradients
- Pattern/texture selector
- Foreground and background color selector
- Brush preset editor
- Brush preset selector
- Brush blending mode menu
- Eraser toggle
- **Preserve Alpha** toggle
- Reload brush preset button (sets your brush preset back to Krita's default for the brush)
- Brush opacity
- Brush size

Having these options at the top of all of your projects is extremely handy! You'll be spending a lot of time tweaking options to get exactly the right tool for what you need. For what we're focusing on, let's talk about the **brush preset editor**. This area of Krita is key for customizing your brushes, so the more familiar we get with it, the more productive we will be in reaching our goals of making an ultimate brush set! Let's get started by looking at the **Brush Editor** and its options.

Brush Editor

You can quickly bring up your **Brush Editor** by either clicking the icon on your **Brushes and Stuff** toolbar, or by hitting the default Krita hotkey of *F5* while you have a brush selected.

This is a hefty menu that you can spend hours tinkering around with, so while we're going to do a brief overview of everything in the menu in *Figure 4.20*, my primary focus will be on altering the "feel" of a few brushes to aid us in our landscape painting:

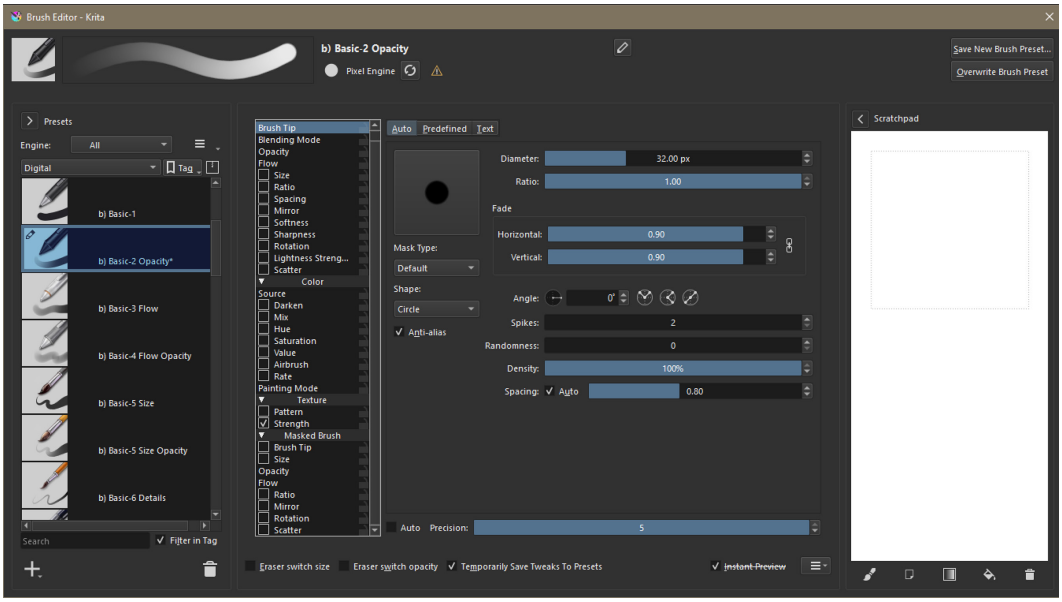


Figure 4.20 – The Brush Editor screen (extended with Scratchpad visible)

Let's do a quick breakdown of this menu. From left to right, we have the following:

- Brush selector
- Brush properties
- Brush tip editor
- Scratchpad

While these can be self-explanatory based on their name, let's have a hands-on look at what these options are by editing a few brushes from our custom category to really make them our own.

At any point, if you would like to remove your changes and refer back to the default version of a brush you're working on, you can click the **Reload the brush preset** button near the top-middle of the window (*Figure 4.21*):

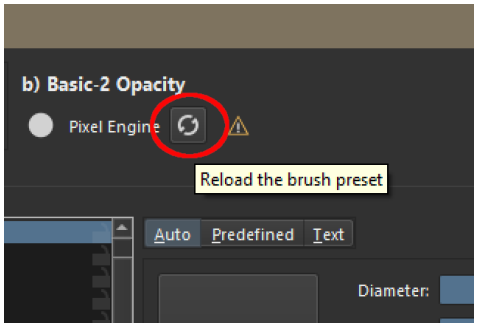


Figure 4.21 – The Reload the brush preset button in the Brush Preset Editor menu

You may also notice the small exclamation point inside of the triangle immediately to the right of the **Reload the brush preset** button. This symbol notates that the brush you have selected has been altered from the default (which also places an asterisk next to the name of the brush in the **Brush Selection** tab). This is just some handy information to have before we get too far into editing our brush, as it's nice to know there's always a "reset" button!

Let's get started by altering the feel of our **c) Pencil-2** brush (or whichever "sketching" style brush you've selected for your custom tag category):

1. In the **Brush Editor** window, make sure your custom tag category is selected in the **brush selector** (left) portion of the window (*Figure 4.22*):

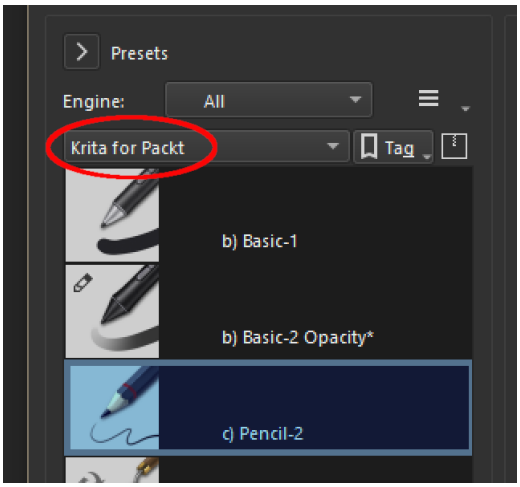


Figure 4.22 – Our custom category as selected in the Brush Editor window

I like the way the **c) Pencil-2** brush looks when the mark is placed on the canvas, however, I wish it had a bit more control over the amount of pigment/lead that was placed when I make a mark. I'd like this to feel as "natural" as possible, just like sketching in a sketchbook with a #2 pencil. To make this happen, I need to ensure there's a nice feeling of "build-up" and "drop-off" to my line density as, right now, the moment I put my pen stylus on my tablet, the brush is laying down lines at 100% width and 100% opacity.

2. With our **c) Pencil-2** brush selected, let's look at the Brush Properties area.
3. Click on the **Flow** property.
4. In the **Flow** property settings, you will notice options such as **Strength**, as well as some checkboxes such as **Enable Pen Settings**, and various graphs (*Figure 4.23*):

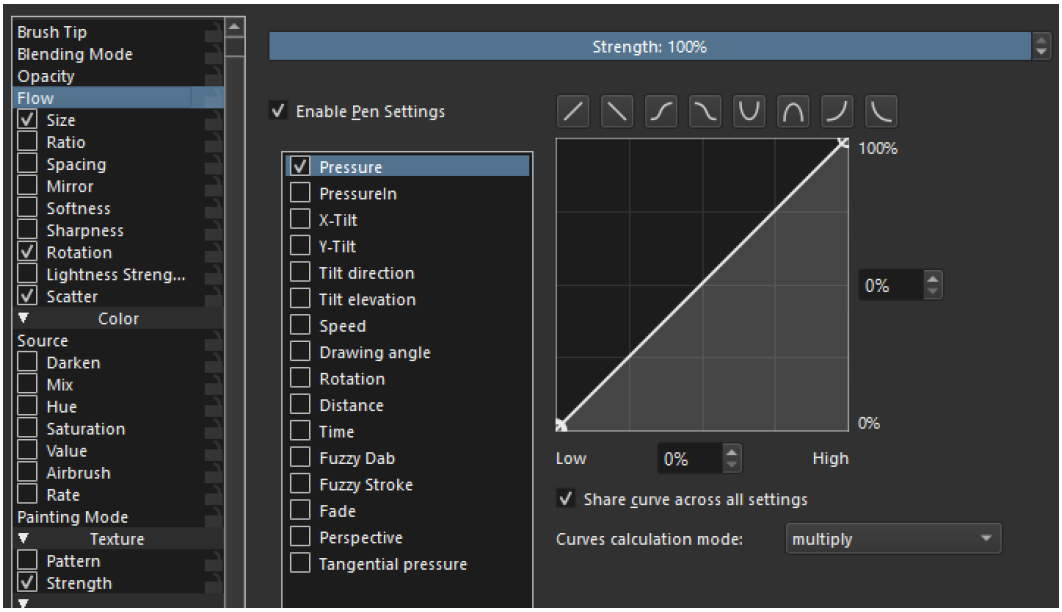


Figure 4.23 – Our c) Pencil-2 Flow properties customization area

5. To get the feel I'm looking for, I'm going to adjust the **Pressure** curve to mimic the "lazy S curve" (the third setting from left, above our pressure sensitivity graph in *Figure 4.24*). This will allow the pencil to "build up" into a smooth line based on how hard I press on my tablet.

6. I have also adjusted the **Strength** option under **Flow** to be **76%** as it more comfortably captures the grittier and more inconsistent flow of a pencil, instead of the smooth flow of something like an ink pen (*Figure 4.24*):

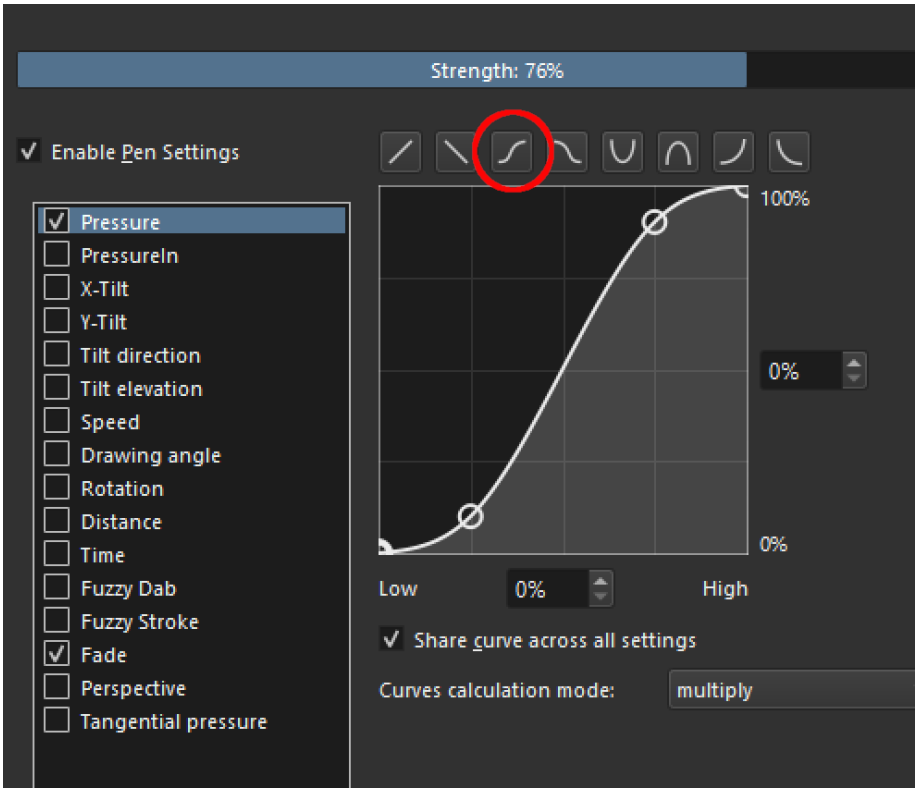


Figure 4.24 – Adjusted Flow pressure curve, and Strength settings

Let's also add a slight fade to the brush, just to see what impact it has.

7. While still within the **Flow** settings, click the **Fade** checkbox.
8. Since we have the **Share curve across all settings** option checked for the **Flow** category, our **Fade** setting has inherited the lazy S curve from our **Pressure** curve setting.
9. Uncheck the **Share curve across all settings** box in the **Fade** settings.
10. Click on the first option (the 45-degree incline in *Figure 4.25*) to change the **Fade** setting to a linear growth rate.
11. Adjust the Fade Length property as you see fit, testing the changes on your Scratchpad. I've chosen **22 pixels** for my fade length.

Your fade curve should resemble what we have in *Figure 4.25*:

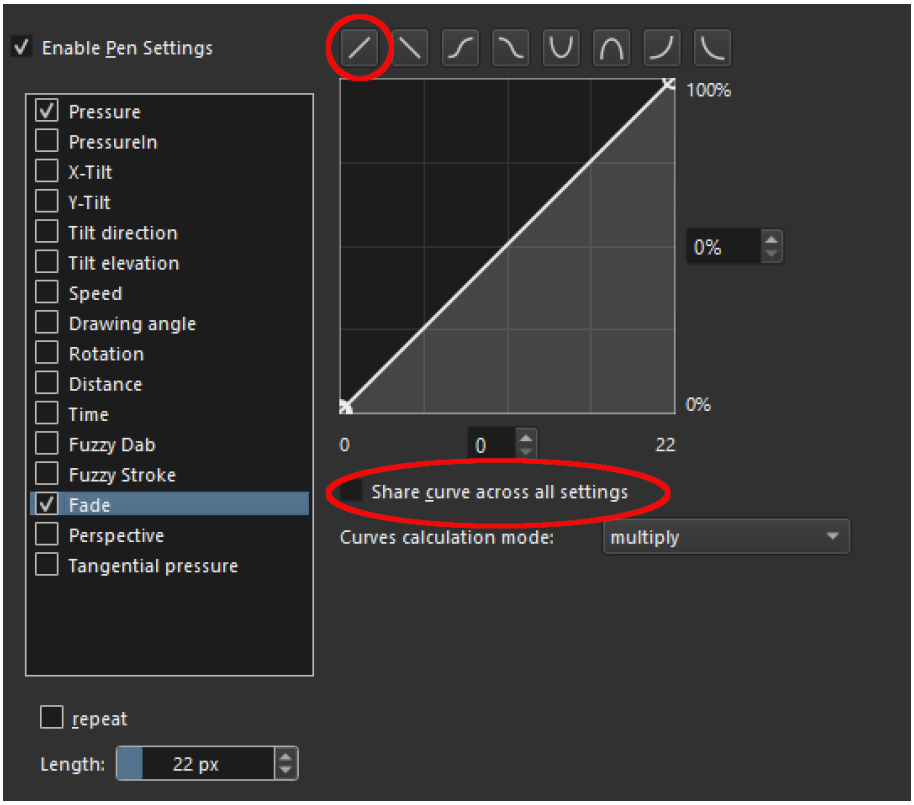


Figure 4.25 – Our Fade properties with corrected non-shared curve and custom fade length

Now that we've gone ahead and made our adjustments to the **c) Pencil-2 Brush**, let's save it as its own standalone **Brush Preset**.

Saving your custom brush preset

You have your brush that you've altered and would prefer that the custom brush be saved as its own default preset. Krita makes this extremely easy!

Finding Your Default Save Location

Depending on your operating system, your resources will be saved to a different directory on your hard drive. To know where your resources, presets, and other customizations are saved, you can open your resources folder at any time. To do this, on your **Manage Resources** page (**Settings** > **Manage Resources**), click on the **Open Resource Folder** option. This will load up your default resource directory save location. For instance, my default save location for my Krita resources on my Windows 10 machine is **User** > **AppData** > **Roaming** > **Krita**.

Let's go ahead and save our custom brush preset so we can return to this exact brush every time we need it:

1. Make sure the brush you have customized is the active brush.
2. In the **Brush Editor** window, hover over the **Save New Brush Preset** option in the upper right (*Figure 4.26*):

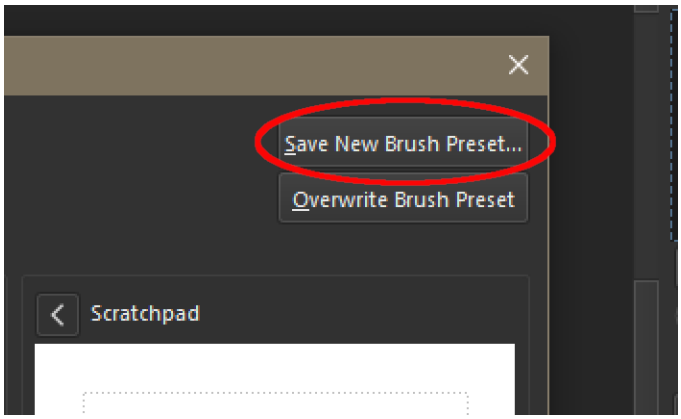


Figure 4.26 – The Save New Brush Preset button within the Brush Editor window

3. The **Save New Brush Preset** window will now display, giving you a variety of options to edit (*Figure 4.27*):

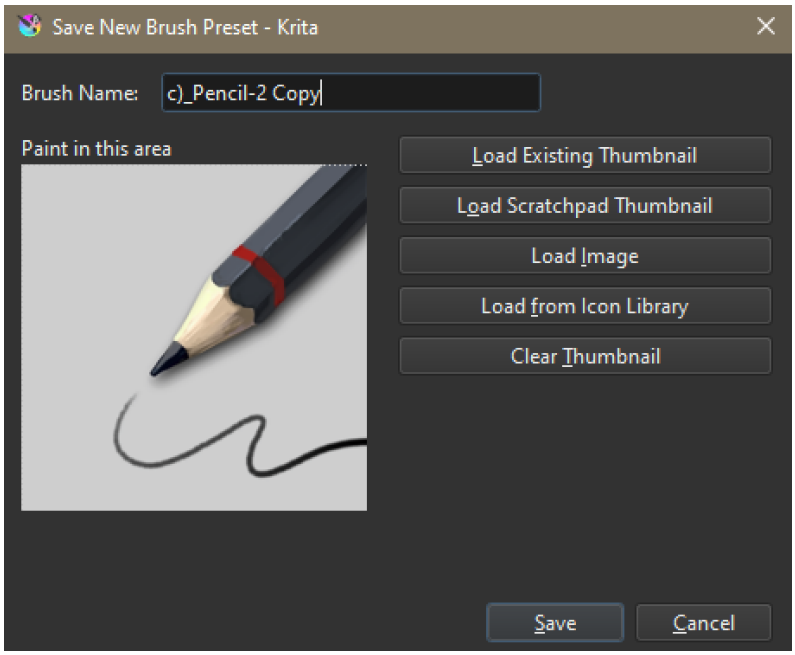


Figure 4.27 – The Save New Brush Preset window

4. Enter a name that will be easy to remember. I'm going to name my brush `Wes Pencil`.

   Now, there are a variety of options for the thumbnail. Let's review these quickly:

   a. **Load Existing Thumbnail** – Use the thumbnail that Krita already has displayed.

   b. **Load Scratchpad Thumbnail** – Load a snapshot of your current scratchpad information.

   c. **Load image** – Import a custom image (in `.jpg`, `.png`, `.gif`, `.pdf`, `.tif`, and dozens of other image types).

   d. **Load from Icon Library** – Use Krita's library of iconography to customize a new thumbnail.

   e. **Clear Thumbnail** – Delete what you currently have.

   For our thumbnail, let's select **Load from Icon Library**. This will make sure our brush's thumbnail stays visually consistent with our other (Krita default) brushes.

5. Click **Load from Icon Library**.

   The **Preset Icon Library** window will display.

6. Scroll through your **Tool image** options, adjust your hues/saturations, and add any custom emblems you would like.

   I have created a custom icon for my new **Wes Pencil** brush, the settings of which are shown in *Figure 4.28*:

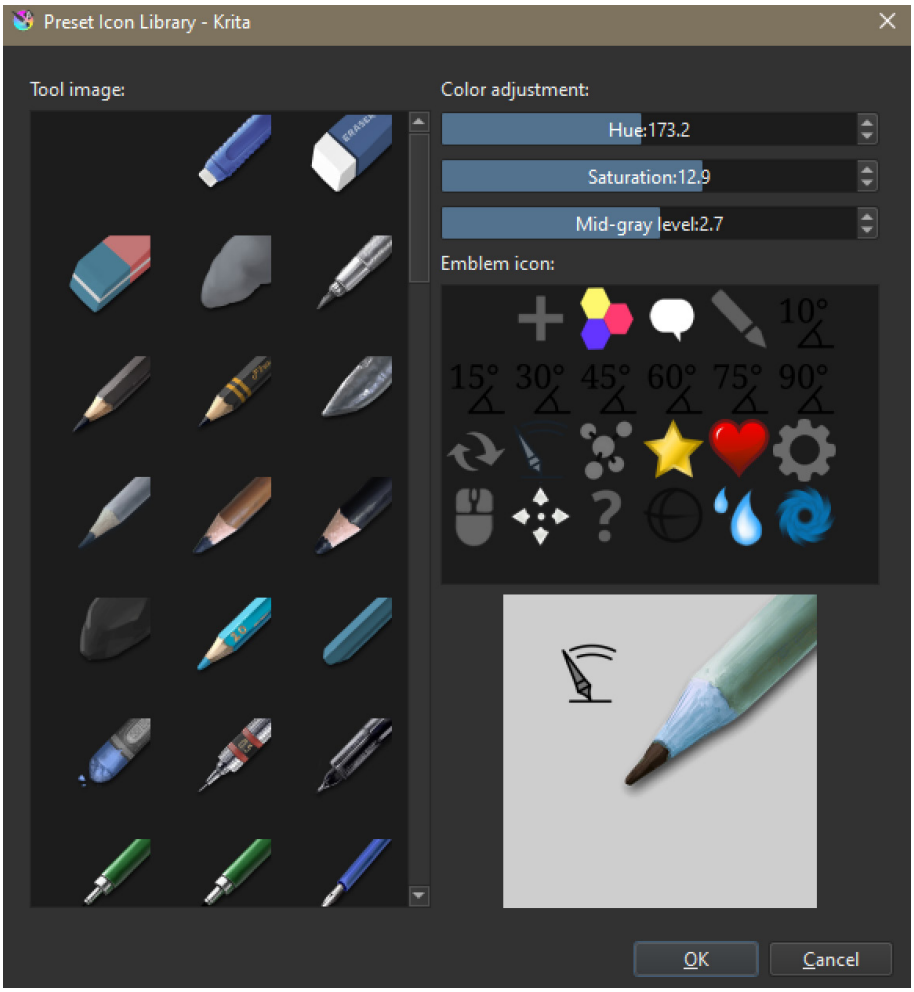


Figure 4.28 – My custom Icon settings for "Wes Pencil"

Know that you can really customize your icon with tons of icons, colors, and even custom emblems! Feel free to experiment!

7. Once you're done with your settings, click **OK**.

   Your thumbnail should have been updated accordingly inside of the **Save New Brush Preset** window.

8. Once you are happy with your changes, click **Save**.

   While your new custom brush preset will be saved, it *will not* automatically be added to your custom category tag. Let's do that now.

9. Within the **Brush Editor** window, change the category from your custom category (in my case, **Krita for Packt**) to **All Untagged** (*Figure 4.29*):

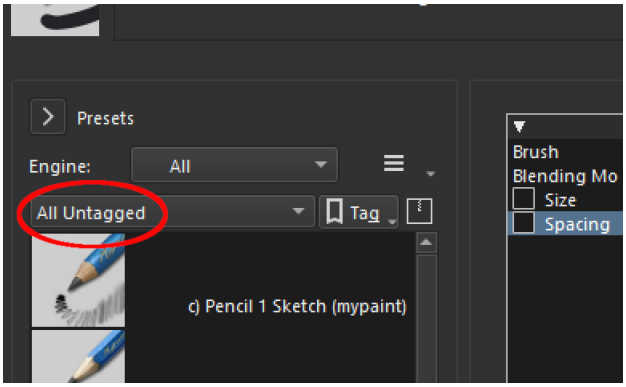


Figure 4.29 – The All Untagged category within the Brush Editor window

Your new custom brush should be in this listing (as it has no tags at the moment), at the bottom of the list by default (as it was the most recently added brush to Krita).

10. I am going to scroll down and add **Wes Pencil** to my **Krita for Packt** custom category by using the *right-click* > **Assign to tag** method (*Figure 4.30*):

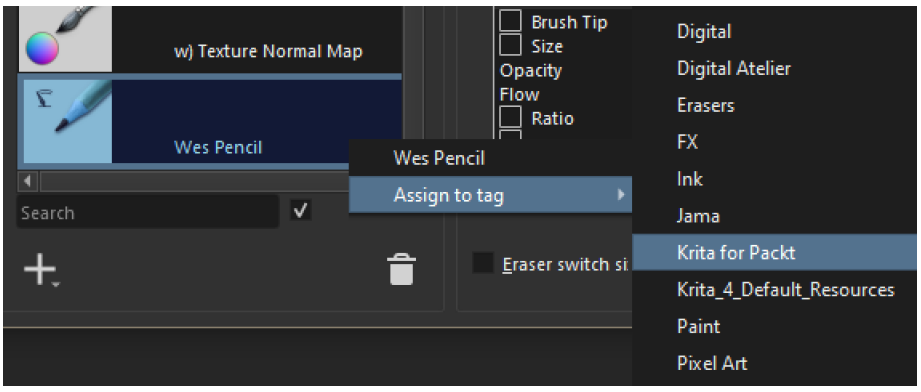


Figure 4.30 – Adding Wes Pencil to the Krita for Packt tag category

11. The custom brush should now show in your custom tag category (in alphabetical order by default)! You're all done!

This is a handy way to make slight tweaks to a brush within Krita and make something new out of it. But, what if you want to make a brush purely from scratch? That's where brush creation comes into play.

Creating your own brush

While I love using Krita's pre-made default brushes as a template to modify and create my own presets, sometimes it's fun to really dig in deep and create your own brush from scratch. Let's quickly do that now by creating a fun, all-purpose texture brush that has some color smudging and blending built in. I'm thinking I want the consistency of this new Krita brush to act like one of my traditional oil brushes as if it was dipped in an extender medium such as Liquin. Smooth, thick, and buttery is the goal!

Krita's Extensive Brush Engines

Krita has a variety of **brush engines** for various brush effects (basically mathematical calculations), each having different functionality. While there are 16 engines at the time of Krita 5.0 beta, I am going to focus on only one here for our new brush, the **Color Smudge** engine. Other engines that are most often used within Krita defaults and your everyday brush creation are **Pixel**, **Quick Brush**, **Sketch**, **Bristle**, and, as of Krita 5.0, compatibility with the open source **MyPaint** brush engine.

While we could spend entire chapters focused on the small intricacies between these brush engines, just know that all an *engine* refers to is the mathematical calculations used to put data (whether raster or vector) onto a canvas. Krita's official documentation not only offers full overviews of the feature-sets of these engines, but also breaks down the math in a clear, concise way if you're interested in the finer details of brush programming.

Let's create our new thick brush for our custom tag category:

1. With the **Brush Editor** window open, click the plus (+) sign at the bottom-left of the window.

   A full listing of available brush engines will display (*Figure 4.31*):

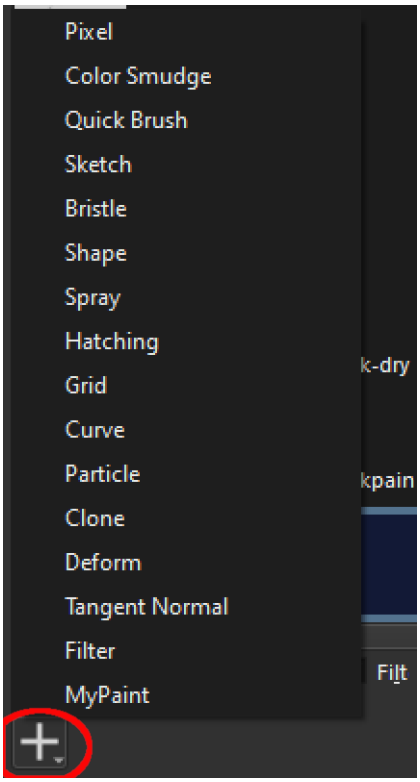


Figure 4.31 – Full listing of available brush engines for brush creation in Krita 5.0 beta

2. Click on **Color Smudge** near the top of the list.

A new brush named **defaultSmudge** should appear, defaulting to **Pattern** in the **Texture** selection menu (*Figure 4.32*):

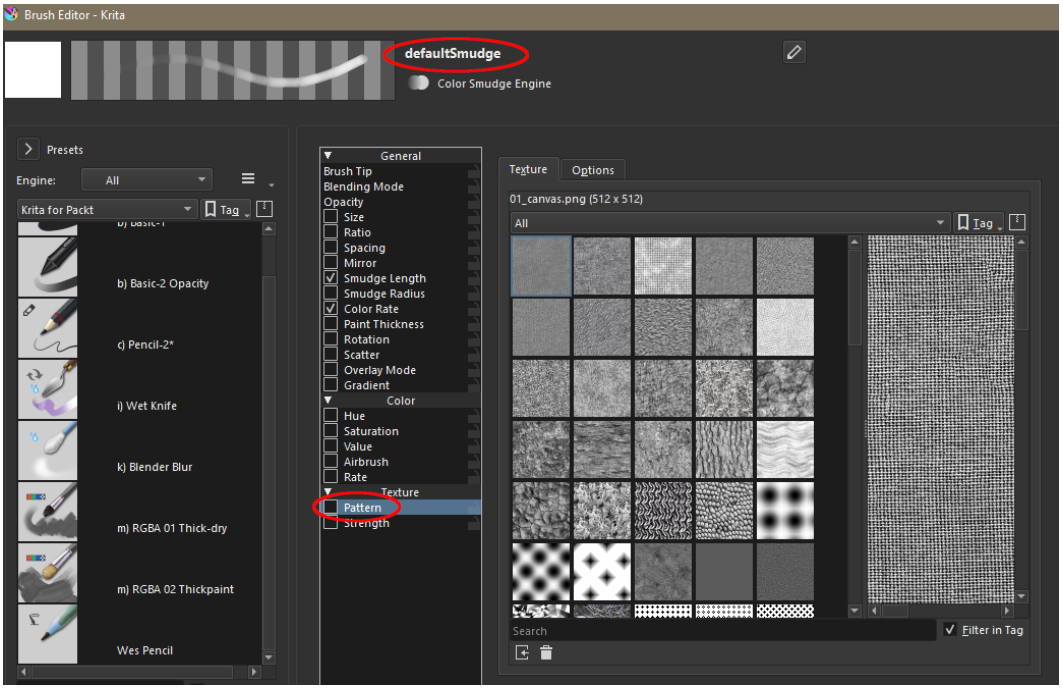


Figure 4.32 – The default settings for our new custom Color Smudge brush defaultSmudge

3. At the top of the **Brush Editor** window, click the pencil icon next to **defaultSmudge** to rename it (*Figure 4.33*):

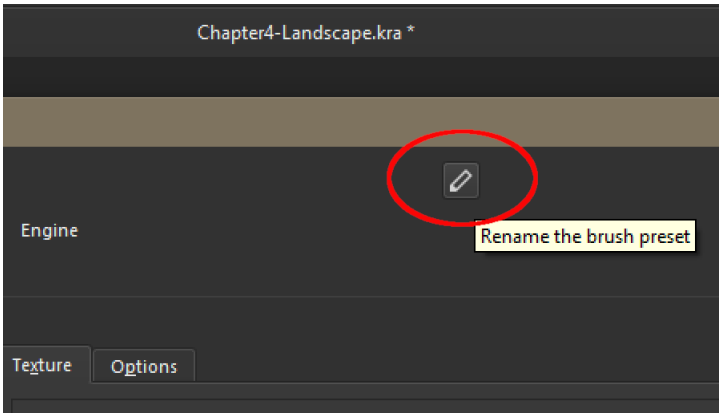


Figure 4.33 – The Rename Brush tool inside of the Brush Editor window

Let's rename our brush. I'm going to name this brush `Thick Oil with Medium`.

4. In the brush properties area (the spot with all the checkboxes), click on the very top option called **Brush Tip**.
5. In the **Brush Tip** editor area, click on the **Predefined** tab (*Figure 4.34*):

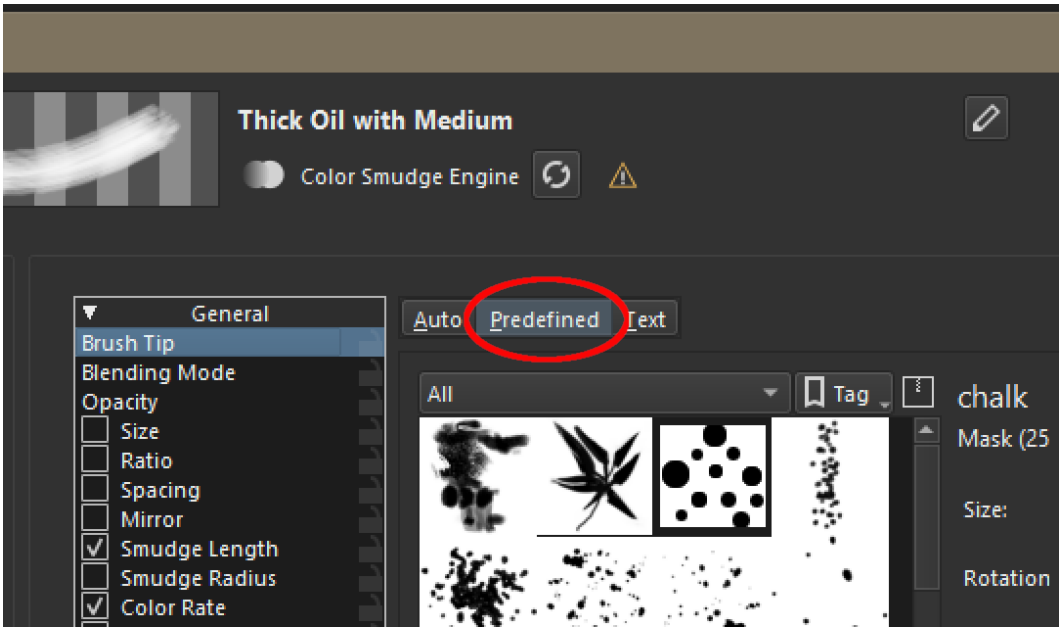


Figure 4.34 – The Brush Tip options with Predefined selected

This lets us choose from all the brush tips currently inside of Krita. If you don't see a brush tip you like the look of, feel free to import your own image by using the **Import** button at the bottom of the **Predefined** catalog of options! This will let your imported brush tip be used across Krita!

> **Quality Brush Tips**
>
> Keep in mind that brushes are "masks", meaning that they should be in *pure black and white*, with white being invisible, and black being opaque. Slight amounts of gray are fine, but just know that gray works as an "alpha channel," meaning the closer to white, the more transparent the information, while the closer to black, the more it will show up during your brush strokes. We will be discussing masks in *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*, where we talk about layers, blending modes, and layer interactions.

Since I want to mimic an oil brush, I'm going to find a nice, square, slightly chalky brush tip (as it can mimic the variance of a real bristle brush with a medium on it).

6. I'm going to select the brush tip on the third row (named **Chalk**), third from the left, on the **Predefined** tab (*Figure 4.35*):

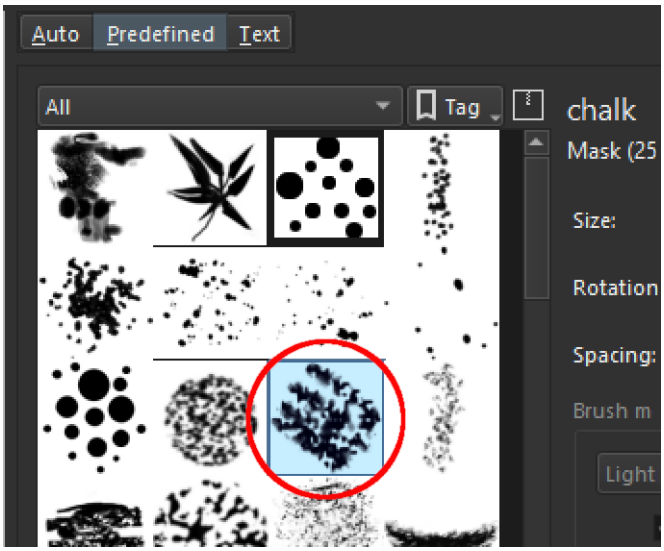


Figure 4.35 – The chalk option in the Predefined brush tip catalog listing

The great thing about using the **Color Smudge** brush engine is that most of the hard work (getting that nice, painterly feel) is pretty much done as it's a feature of the engine itself! I just want to add a bit of texture to the brush to really drive home that traditional feel, and I think we'll be good!

7. Click on the **Pattern** checkbox under the **General** category in the **Brush Editor** properties menu.
8. Select a nice canvas texture. I've selected the **26_brush-marks.png (512x512)** texture (the sixth row, third option from the left in *Figure 4.36*).

9. I'll play on the **Scratchpad** panel to make sure this is the texture that I'd like (*Figure 4.36*):

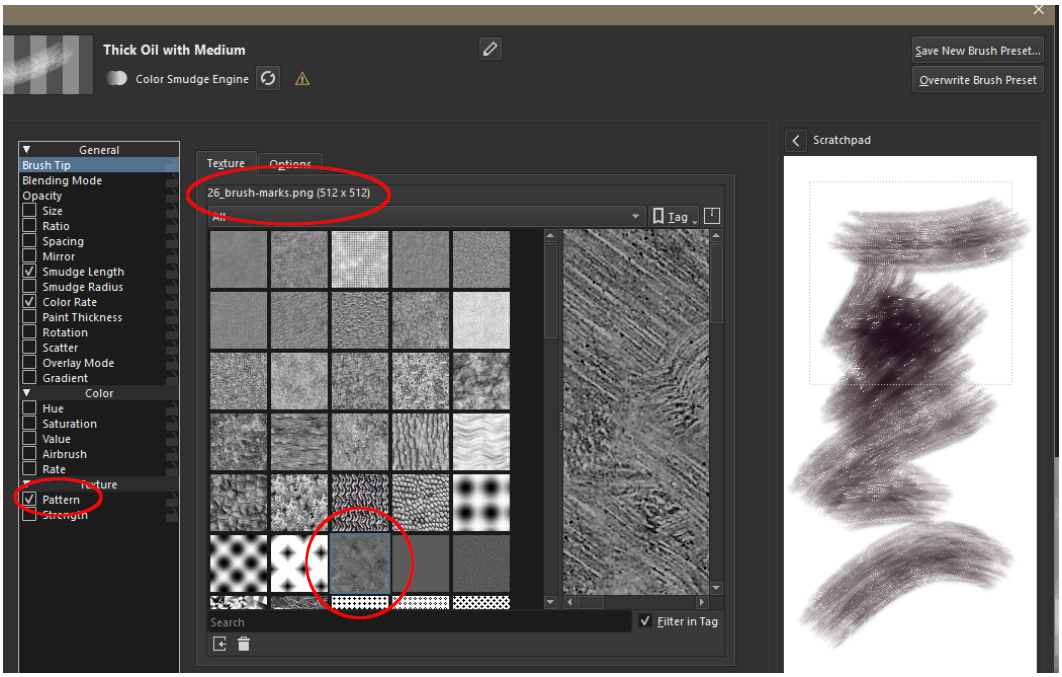


Figure 4.36 – The Pattern settings under the Texture category, with Scratchpad example

I think that's a winner! This should work great in giving us a painterly feel when we continue our landscape in *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*.

Be sure you save your brush! Instead of the **Save New Brush Preset** button, you can click **Overwrite Brush Preset**, as this is your own custom brush from scratch!

Make your changes to your icon and click **Save** when you are done (*Figure 4.37*):

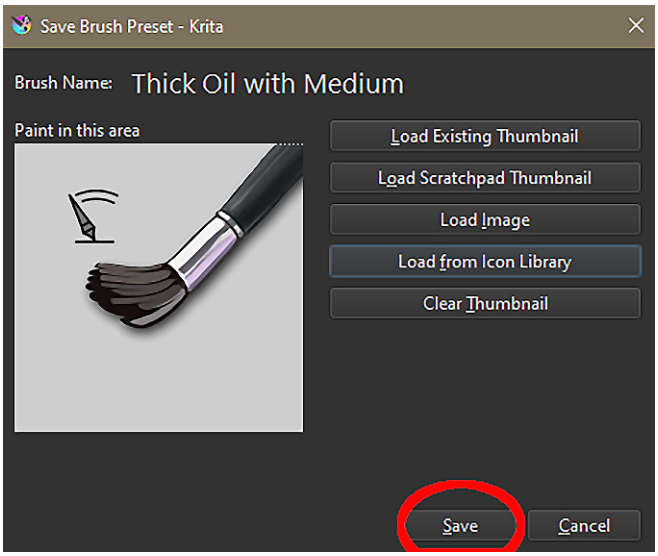


Figure 4.37 – Finalizing our new Thick Oil with Medium brush

Don't forget to add this brush to your custom category by going to the **All Untagged** category, finding your new brush, and using the *right-click* > **Assign to tag** method!

Now that we have a solid understanding of modifying and creating brushes, we're going to learn how to share our tools with other Krita users by exporting our resources!

Exporting our resources

In Krita, a collection of various elements (such as brush tips, brush presets, patterns, gradients, and tool customizations) is referred to as a **resource**.

Resources can be imported and exported within Krita, and it is yet another way that Krita's flexibility makes it a top-tier choice for digital creators. Let's create our `Krita for Packt` resource; that way, I can share all my brushes with you, completely *free*:

1. On your Krita **File** menu, click the **Settings** tab.
2. Under **Settings**, click **Manage Resources…** (*Figure 4.38*):

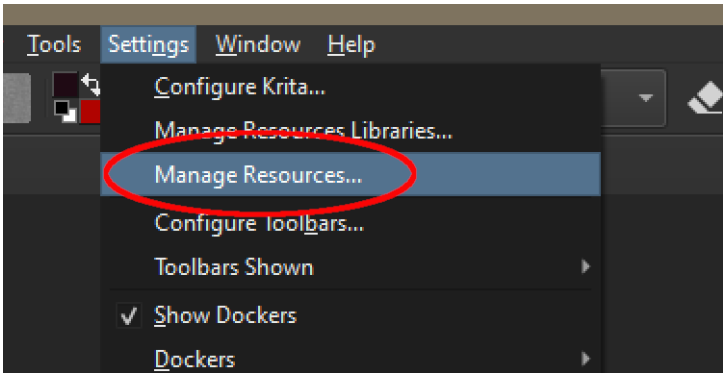


Figure 4.38 – The Manage Resources option under the Settings tab

3. This will bring up your **Manage Resources** window.

   The **Manage Resources** window is a great tool for filtering and sorting through items and options that Krita uses as its backbone. Items we are familiar with, such as **Brush Presets**, **Brush Tips**, **Workspaces**, and **Patterns** are here, alongside some more advanced options, such as **Scripts** and **Symbol Libraries**. For our purposes, we just need to look at two of the options at the bottom-right of this window – **Import Resources** and **Create a Bundle**, as shown in *Figure 4.39*:

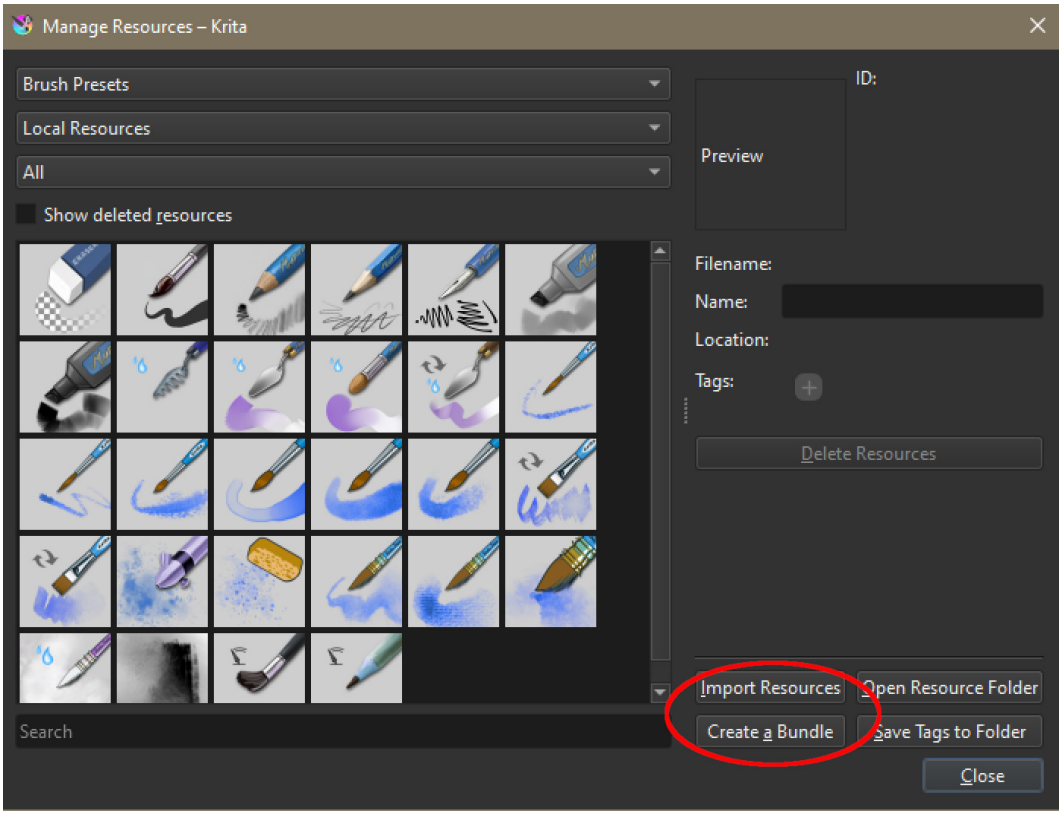


Figure 4.39 – The Manage Resources window, with Import Resources and Create a Bundle highlighted

4. Go ahead and click on the **Create a Bundle** button.

5. The **Create Resource Bundle** window will display (*Figure 4.40*):

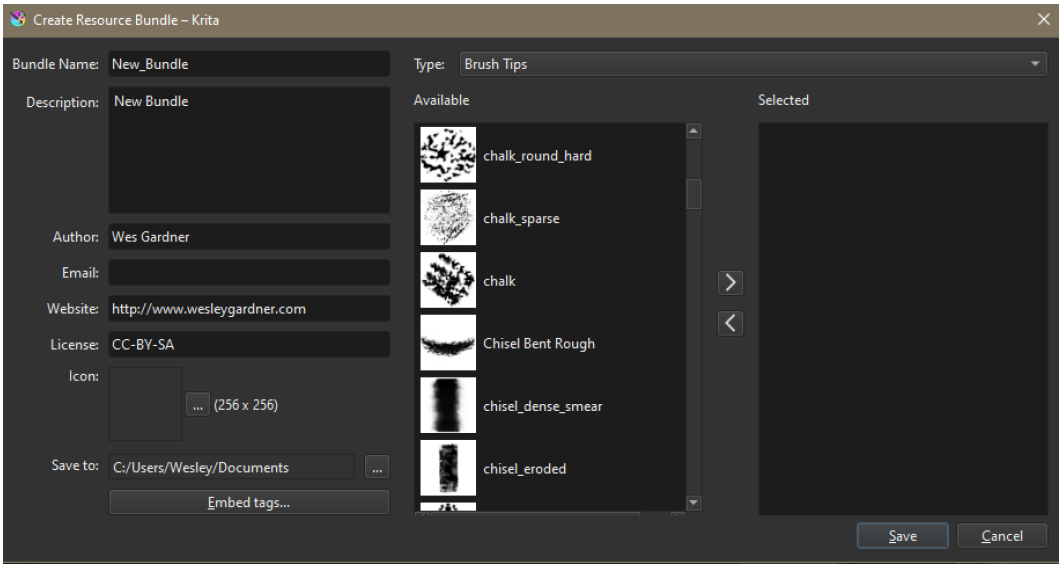


Figure 4.40 – The Create Resource Bundle window

As you can see, there's a lot to unpack here!

6. First, go ahead and fill out the information on the left-hand side with what information you would like in your **Resource Bundle**. Notice that the **author metadata** we created in *Chapter 1*, *Getting Started with Krita*, has auto-filled in their respective spots!

7. Once that's complete, you can start adding in the resources you would like in your bundle using the **Type** filter and the left/right arrows between the **Available** and **Selected** areas of the window (*Figure 4.41*):

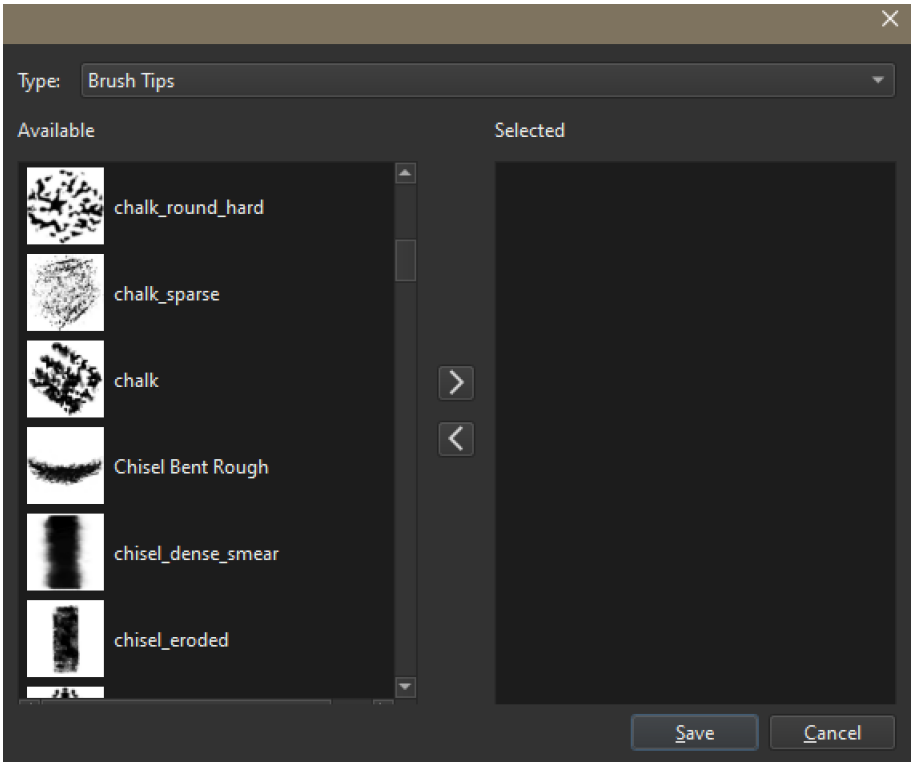


Figure 4.41 – The resource selection process within the Create Resource Bundle window

Everything must be included for your bundle to work correctly! This includes things such as **Brush Tips** (like our chalk brush tip for our **Thick Oil with Medium** brush preset) and our **Texture** pattern (also for our **Thick Oil with Medium** brush preset). If there is a missing component, while the resource bundle itself will still import correctly, some settings, brushes, presets, or more may be grayed out or might not work at all.

> **Types, and…Wait, Where'd My Stuff Go?!**
>
> As you go through each category under the **Type** drop-down menu, please know that *only tools from that Type category* will show up in the **Selected** list, so don't be alarmed if you move from a type such as **Brush Tips** to the **Patterns** type and notice that **Brush Tips** "disappears." They're still selected and part of your resource bundle, but the way Krita organizes its information on this screen, you will only see **Available** and **Selected** tools under the specified **Type** you have selected.

8. To clarify what I am including in my bundle, here is a handy list of included items according to their **Type** category:

   a. **Brush Tips**: **chalk**

   b. **Brush Presets**: **Basic-1**, **Basic-2 Opacity**, **Pencil-2**, **Wet Knife**, **Blender Blur**, **RGBA-01 Thick-dry**, **RGBA-02-Thickpaint**, **Wes Pencil**, and **Thick Oil with Medium**

   c. **Patterns**: **26-brush-marks.png**

9. Have a look at the completed bundle in *Figure 4.42*, including a custom icon, specified metadata, and a custom **Save** location on my hard drive. I also included a snapshot of part of the **Brush Presets** type category to showcase how your **Selected** items will look per type:

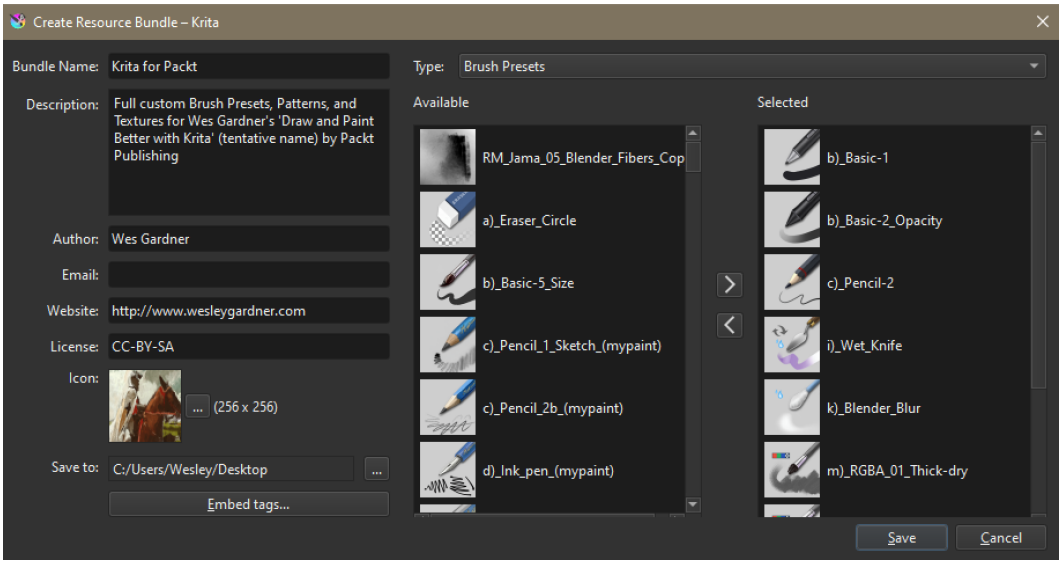


Figure 4.42 – The completed Resource Bundle creation with metadata, icon, and viewing Brush Presets included

10. When you are finished with compiling everything for your bundle, go ahead and click **Save**.

> **Bundle Naming Conventions**
>
> At the time of saving a custom bundle, you may see an error that deals with repeat names of a brush, brush tip, or another file name. For any edits you make, or repeat textures/brush tips you may use, be sure to edit the name to something new, such as adding a number or word to your file name. For instance, if you have a repeat of `chalk.png`, you can edit the name of the tip, and save it as `chalk-1.png` or `chalk-custom.png`. This should resolve those bundling issues!

That's it! You've created a full Krita resource that you can share with friends, loved ones, and colleagues!

Now that we know how to create a bundle, let's go ahead and import one!

Importing a resource bundle

Before importing a resource bundle, make sure you have a `Krita Bundle Resource` file downloaded (the `.bundle` filetype), but just know you can import all kinds of resources here, including (but not limited to) color palettes, gamuts, **SVG** (**scalable vector graphics**) files, even Photoshop brushes (the `.abr` format)! For our example, though, let's focus on a full Krita bundle resource:

1. In the **File** menu, click on **Settings**.
2. Under **Settings**, click on **Manage Resources**.

3. On the **Manage Resources** window, click on **Import Resources** in the lower-right corner (*Figure 4.43*):

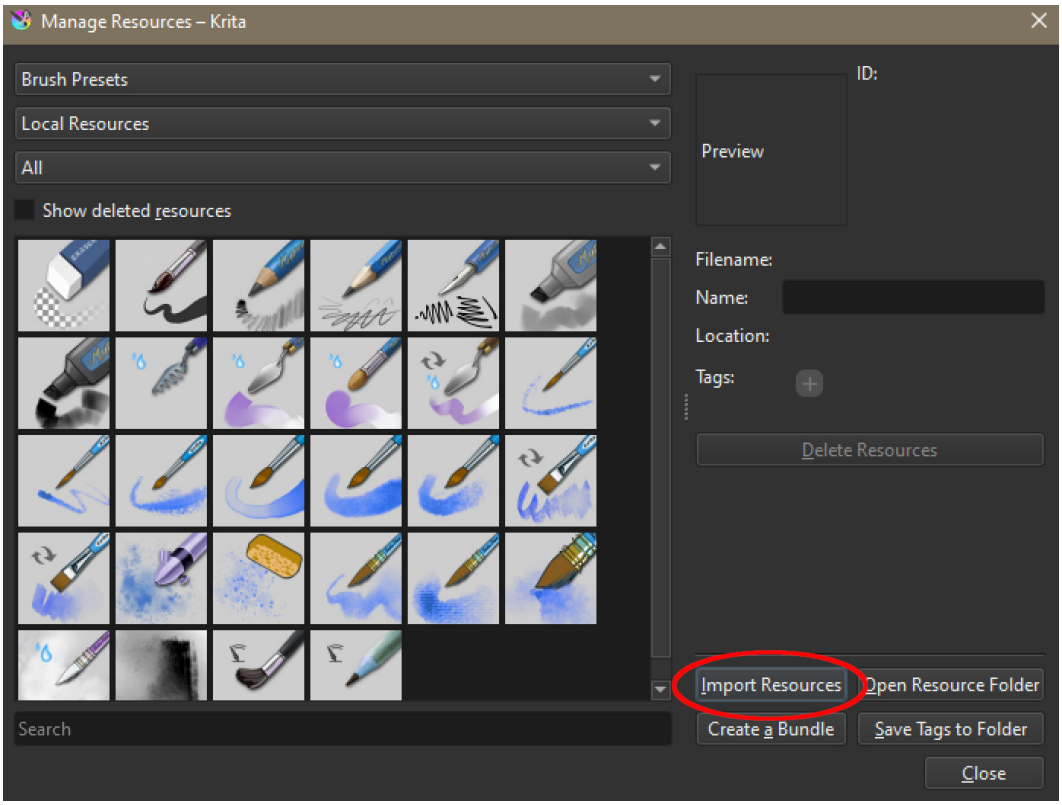


Figure 4.43 – The Import Resources button in the Manage Resources window

4. Go to the location where you have saved your Krita resource bundle (the `.bundle` file).
5. Select the file from the saved location, and click **Open**.

   Krita will load your bundle!
6. To verify that your Krita resource bundle has loaded successfully, click the drop-down menu titled **Local Resources**. This will bring up a list of all compiled resources loaded into your Krita instance.

7. Your new Krita resource bundle should show up at the bottom of the list as in *Figure 4.44*:

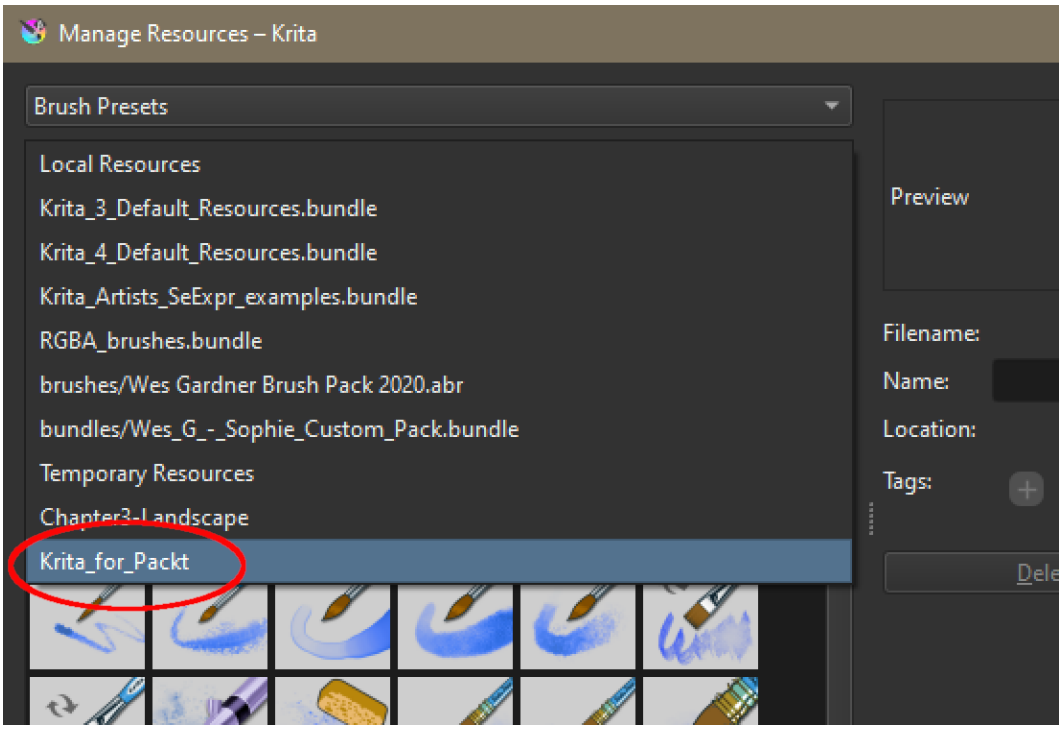


Figure 4.44 – Our Krita for Packt resource bundle is successfully loaded within Krita

That's a wrap! Not only are you able to create your own brushes, brush presets, and resource bundles, you now know how to trade them with others and import them into your installation of Krita! Great work!

Summary

Take a deep breath; you've made it through the brushes chapter! Brushes in Krita are a huge (*huge*) topic, and they are something that gets more and more fascinating as you play around with them. As I mentioned in this chapter, the official Krita documentation is a fantastic resource if you want to nail down the nitty-gritty of technicalities, mathematics, and programming styles of the brushes and engines.

In this chapter, we reviewed the idea of brushes with more of an artistic eye, focusing primarily on creating a custom set of brushes that fit our needs, and that we can refer to for the remainder of the book. We modified existing Krita brushes, created a brush from scratch using one of Krita's powerful brush engines, and even created a full bundle of resources to share with our fellow Krita artists!

I hope you found this chapter valuable, and I'm excited about seeing the great types of resources you're going to create and share with the world!

In *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*, we're going to return to painting our landscape using the custom brush bundle we created in this chapter, and dig into utilizing various blending modes and layering techniques to bring our piece to a new level of polish!

Outstanding job so far! You should be very proud of how far you've come! We're firing on all cylinders now, so let's hop back into our landscape painting and get to it!

Part 2: Methods of Visual Communication within Krita

In Part 2, you will get hands-on with an extensive, multi-chapter project to enhance your comfort levels with some advanced features and techniques of Krita. You will take your landscape project through various phases of the illustration process, learning industry-standard organizational and working techniques using Krita's extensive library of digital art tools.

This part comprises the following chapters:

- *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*
- *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*
- *Chapter 7*, *Changing the Feel with Painting, Values, and Sliders*
- *Chapter 8*, *Controlling Chaos – Organizing Your Workflow*

5

Implementing Layer Blending Modes

In *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, we started a landscape painting, grouping our composition into foreground, midground, and background layer groups. We then discussed the naming conventions and management of our layer group structure to set ourselves up for success "later in the book." Congratulations! We've made it to this fabled "later in the book" portion for our landscape painting!

In this chapter, we will be covering layer blending modes, their uses, popular techniques, and getting our hands dirty with a little more hands-on painting. We will be bringing in a rough photographic reference for our painting and adding some color tones. The structure of this chapter will be as follows:

- Understanding layer modes
- Evaluating reference material
- Bashing our reference
- Splashing in color

This chapter is going to give us a ton of progress on our landscape, and, hopefully, simplify a topic that can be a bit overwhelming if you're either unfamiliar with the workflow or making the jump from traditional art to the digital realm.

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0+).
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard, and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus.
- Your landscape painting from the end of *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*.
- If you did not follow along in *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, a full version of my Krita file (`.kra`), as of the end of the chapter, is available here: `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`.

With our technical requirements set up and our expectations for the chapter set, let's get started by defining and understanding layer modes!

Understanding layer modes

At their most basic level, **layer modes** (also known as **blending modes** or **layer blending modes**) are *just rules in which two layers (or more, if dealing with layer groups) interact with one another using algorithms and computer logic within Krita*. For instance, the default blending mode within Krita (known as the **Normal** mode) has the basic logic of "If a layer is above another layer on the **Layers** panel, display the contents of the top layer on top of the contents of the layer below it, with relation to the transparency of the top layer's contents."

This may not seem like something useful just from the definition, however, this is a powerful benefit of working digitally. Layer blending modes are extremely valuable to learn, as the flexibility they provide can take your art to the next level by adding realistic texturing, controlling more subtle light and shadow usage, and integrating photographs into your compositions, for example.

Over 100 Options, Which to Choose?!

Something to note: Krita 5 has over 100 layer blending modes to choose from, sorted between 13 different categories. To go over every single blending mode in great detail wouldn't be a great use of our time in this book, but we will be covering how to favorite our most-used blending modes and discussing some "heavy-hitters" that are industry-standard in the key art, illustration, and concept art industries.

For a full list of every blending mode, including a logical explanation of the math involved, please refer to the official Krita User Manual's overview of blending modes at `https://docs.krita.org/en/reference_manual/blending_modes.html`.

Out of the 100+ blending modes available in Krita, I've only ever used about a dozen, but that's not to say that your workflow won't use more (or less!). Remember, having "too many" options may actually be a benefit, as I feel it's best to "have something and not need it" than to really need a functionality and not have access to it. Let's have a quick look at the location of our layer blending modes in Krita, and set up some favorites for easy access. Once we have our favorites set up, we'll make a great way to check our values at any time, at the click of a button!

Browsing our layer blending mode choices

Before we get too far into the chapter, make sure you have an image open and active in Krita, as this will ensure that your **Layers** panel is active and able to be interacted with. Since we will be using the work-in-progress landscape we created in *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, I currently have my copy of it open. If you need a copy of this file, check out the link in the *Technical requirements* section of this chapter; otherwise, get your landscape open, and let's explore some blending modes:

1. Be sure to save your file before we start making changes! I've changed the name of my file to `Chapter5-Landscape` and saved it in Krita's native filetype (`.kra`).
2. Check your **Layers** panel on the lower-right of your screen, and notice the drop-down option under the word **Layers** with the name **Normal**. This is your layer blending mode selection menu (*Figure 5.1*). For the sake of brevity (and clarity), I will refer to this as simply blending mode moving forward:

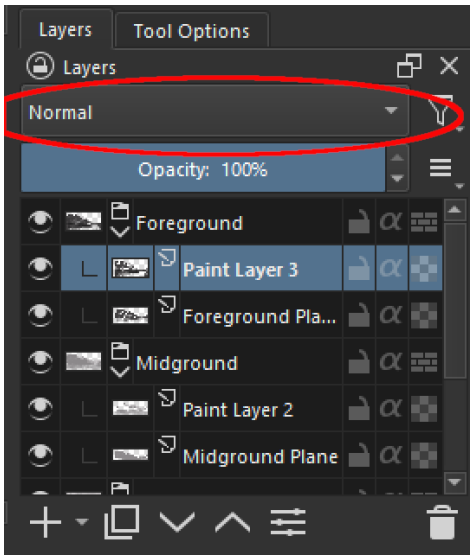


Figure 5.1 – The layer blending mode selection menu (with Normal mode selected)

3. Click on the down arrow to the right of **Normal** to bring up the full blending mode menu of options (*Figure 5.2*):

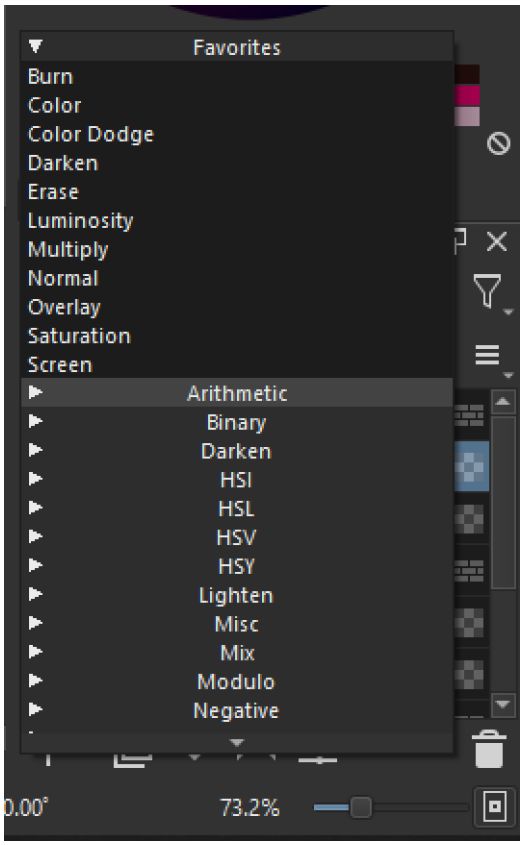


Figure 5.2 – The full list of blending mode categories, with the Favorites category expanded

You'll notice in *Figure 5.2* that I have the **Favorites** panel expanded, while the other categories are collapsed. I enjoy keeping my blending mode menu clean in this way, as it allows me to focus on accessing my favorite blending modes quickly, without having to memorize which category or location they may be in the massive list of 100+ options.

Before we start integrating our stock photos in the *Bashing our reference* section of the chapter a bit later, I want to add a few more blending modes to my **Favorites** category. Let's do that now!

4. On the **Layers** panel, click on the blending mode menu to bring up the list of categories and modes.

5. Scroll to the **Lighten** category, and click on it to expand the category to see all of the options available to you (*Figure 5.3*):

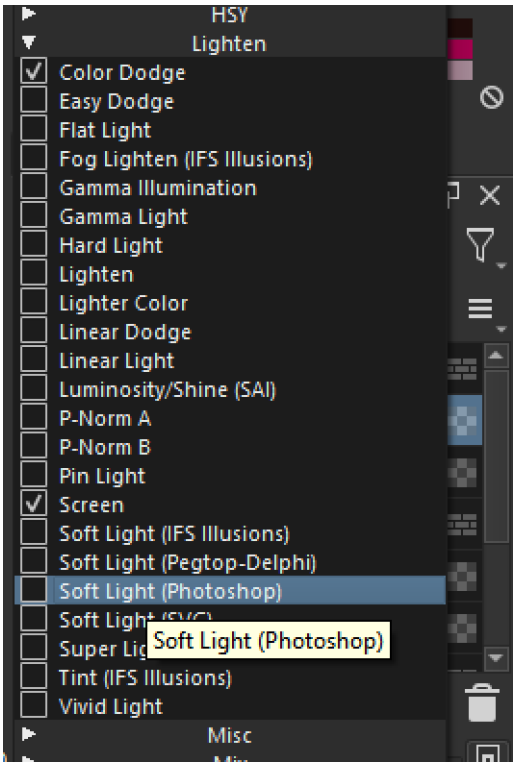


Figure 5.3 – The full list of blending mode options under the Lighten category

You will notice in *Figure 5.3* that I have my mouse hovered over the **Soft Light (Photoshop)** option near the bottom of the list.

6. To add this to your **Favorites** list, click on the **Soft Light (Photoshop)** checkbox as seen in *Figure 5.4*:

Figure 5.4 – The Soft Light (Photoshop) blending mode checked, adding it to the Favorites category

There's one more option I'd like to add to my **Favorites** category, one that will make it easier to retain some darker, sharp details from some high-resolution stock photos to use in our landscape painting.

7. Navigate to the **Darken** category on the `Blending Mode` menu.
8. Click the checkbox next to **Darker Color** to add it to **Favorites** (*Figure 5.5*):

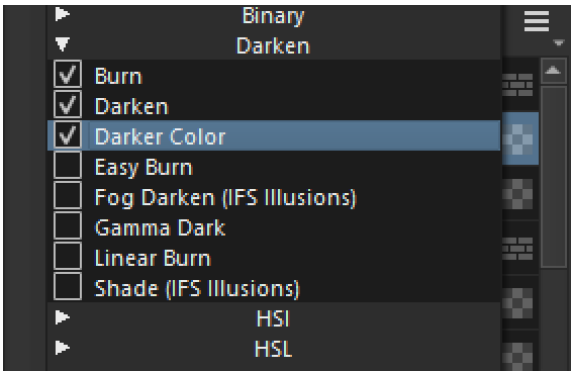


Figure 5.5 – Selecting the Darker Color blending mode and adding it to the Favorites category

9. Now that I've selected all of the blending modes I'd like in my **Favorites** menu, I can go ahead and collapse the other categories by clicking on the drop-down arrow for each category I'd like to minimize.

   This leaves me with a nice, clean list of options, only showcasing my **Favorites** category (*Figure 5.6*):

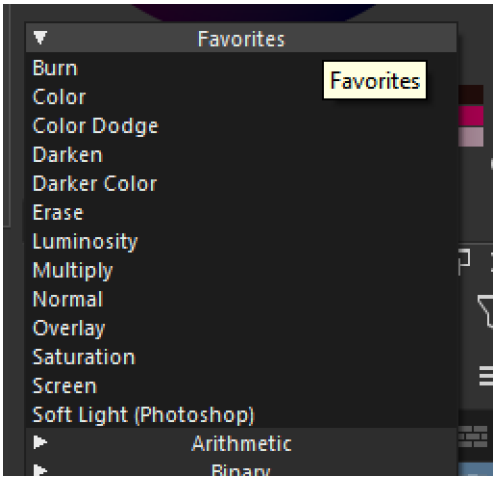


Figure 5.6 – My updated Favorites category on my layer blending mode menu

Now that the **Favorites** list has been updated, we are ready to start playing around with some of these modes!

Setting up a value checker

What I'm about to show you is actually one of the first "blending mode tricks" I ever learned, and it is one that I literally use on every single digital painting I have ever made, to this day. *Every single one*. In *Chapter 2*, *Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color*, we covered a saying that I heavily support: *Value does the work, color gets the credit*. What if there was a way to always be able to check your values and evaluate the readability of your image, at a single click of a button?

The great news is, there is! Let's set that up now:

1. On your **Layers** panel, create a new layer above your **Foreground** layer group.
2. Name this layer `Value Checker`. It should live outside of any specific layer group, as this should *always* remain our top-most layer. Your layer stack should look like *Figure 5.7* at this point:

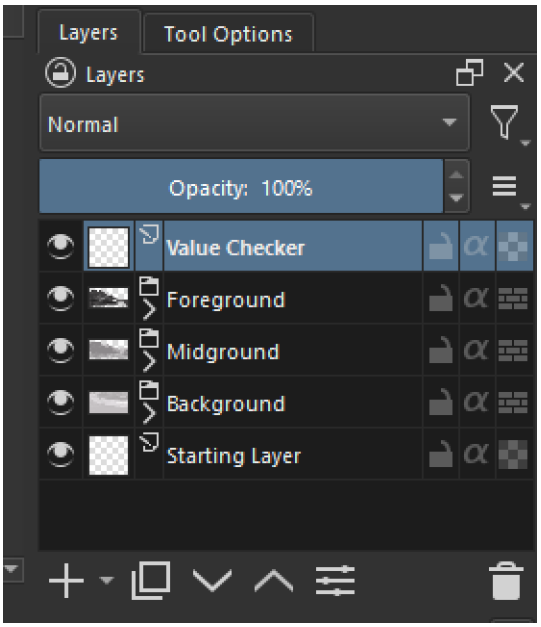


Figure 5.7 – Our Layers panel with our newly added Value Checker layer above our layer groups

3. With the **Value Checker** layer active, select your **Fill** tool from your toolbox docker. A quick default hotkey for this is *F* on your keyboard.

4. On **Advanced Color Selector**, choose *black* by either selecting it from the *HSV color wheel* directly or bringing the slider all the way to the left of the *value slider*.
5. Fill in your **Value Checker** layer with *black* by clicking on the canvas, with the **Fill** tool selected and *black* set as your active foreground color.

   Your composition should now appear 100% black (as shown in *Figure 5.8*):

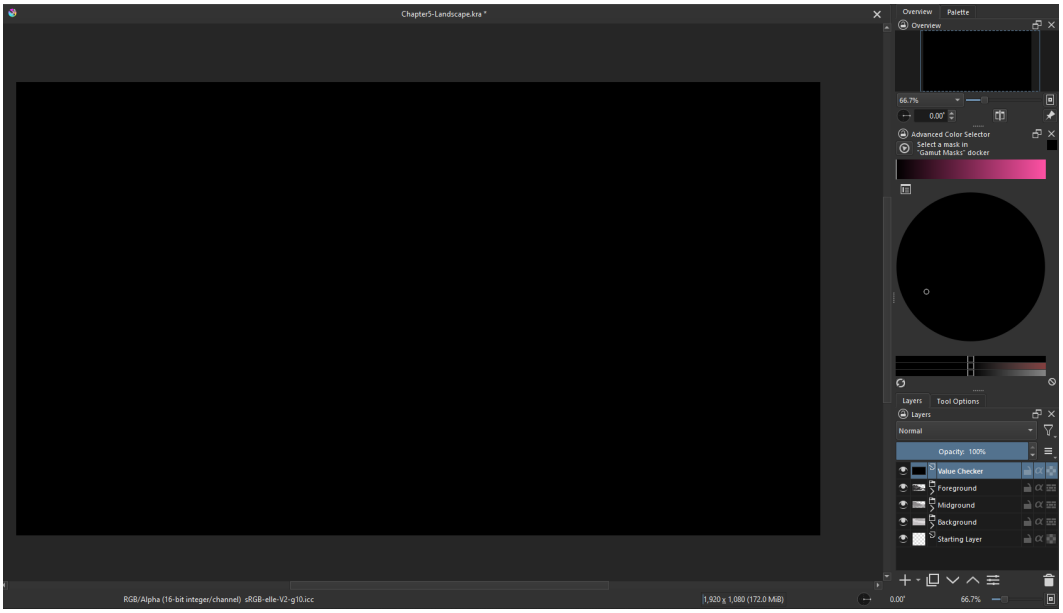


Figure 5.8 – The Value Checker (top) layer, filled with pure black, in Normal blending mode

6. On your blending mode drop-down selection menu, choose the **Color** blending mode while your **Value Checker** layer is still active.
7. You will notice that your landscape is visible once again, almost as if the **Value Checker** layer disappeared entirely! What's going on?

   When you have a layer filled with complete black (or complete white) set up with a **Color** blending mode on top of your composition, you are essentially telling Krita to *remove all color saturation* for every layer underneath your black or white color blended layer (in this case, our **Value Checker** layer). Pure black and pure white don't have any native hue information when it comes to additive color theory, meaning there's an "absence" of hue information. This **Value Checker** layer is going to allow us to check our relationship of lights and darks (in grayscale), essentially removing hue and saturation from the equation, by enabling and disabling it in our **Layers** panel.

8. Go ahead and lock your **Value Checker** layer by clicking the *lock* icon to the right of the layer name in your **Layers** panel (as shown in *Figure 5.9*):

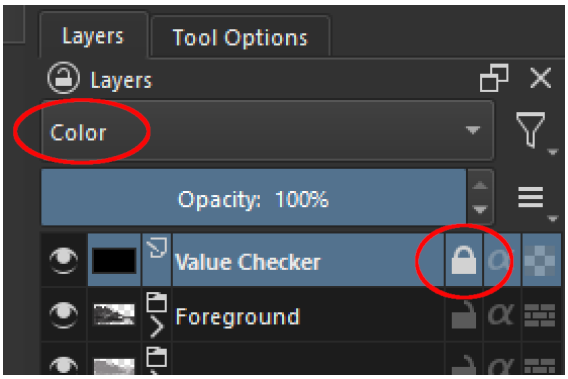


Figure 5.9 – The Value Checker layer, with Color blending mode active, and locked

Locking your **Value Checker** layer will ensure that you don't accidentally paint or make any changes to the layer. Think of this as your "black and white filter" for your painting!

Why Wouldn't I Use a Built-In Krita Filter for This?

You may see this method and wonder why I don't simply use a built-in filter from the **Filter** tab inside of Krita, such as **Color Balance**, **Desaturate**, **HSV Adjustment**, **Gradient Map**, or something similar. Often, built-in filters for digital art software may enact additional math or algorithmic calculations that may impact the actual value of the color you're looking at on the canvas. Most commonly from my experiences, I've noticed yellows may become more midtone in nature (rather than keeping their inherent brightness by being the lightest slice on the color wheel), while reds may appear darker as well (unnaturally close to matching the values of blues, for instance). Greens can actually become lighter, while darker saturated colors (such as blues and purples) can show a false positive as being black after being "crunched" by algorithmic filter passes.

This can muddy up your values in ways that may not be immediately apparent and impact your decision-making regarding color choices and value balancing. By using the *Fill a new layer with black then activate the Color blending mode* way of doing things, you are getting a very close approximation to the value of the colors you have selected for your painting, as you're not changing the inherent brightness or darkness of the content within your canvas. There is also another great perk when using this method: It can be used in the vast majority of digital painting software, not just Krita! This allows workflow continuity, no matter what program you're creating art in!

Now that we've created our layer to view our values at any time, we can start the process of bringing in some stock photo assets to integrate into our painting using our blending modes and value checks. In order to do that, we have to find some good stock assets to work with first!

Evaluating reference material

Please allow me a small aside while we start this portion of the chapter, as I want to "shake the cobwebs out" of some pre-conceived notions of reference and its relationship to art. I feel this is important to preface, as this will hopefully clarify the "why" of using reference before we get into the "how."

Destigmatizing reference in art

Reference in art can sometimes be stigmatized. Some artists feel that using reference is "cheating," that if we want to consider ourselves as artists, we should naturally know the visual and molecular properties of every item on Earth (and beyond), at every angle, under every lighting condition ever made, all the time, forever, purely from our mind's eye. That, if it isn't "from imagination," it's not worthwhile art, or the artist who created something based upon information from a reference (whether in person or a photograph) is "a hack." Using reference is *cheating*, and, therefore. a reference user is a *dirty art cheater* who *cheats*.

Tell that to the likes of Johannes Vermeer, Norman Rockwell, and Leonardo Da Vinci. Not only did they famously use references in their work but, for the likes of Vermeer and Da Vinci, using the *camera obscura* technique also makes it very likely that these artists may have even outright traced their subjects onto the canvas! Clutch the pearls, the horror!

As you can tell, I'm being facetious, and I have a bone to pick with people (whether they are artists or not) who may think that using references makes an artist "less than," or not a "real artist." I only have one real question to those who knock the use of a reference for art:

How do you know what something looks like if you don't look at it to know what it looks like?

Artists enjoy interpreting their reality and showcasing it to the world, no matter the art form. Music, dance, poetry, writing, and painting are all based on lived experiences in the artist's life. Some could even say that the entire premise of an artist sharing their vision is based upon *referencing* their lived experiences. A reference doesn't just mean a visual aid; it can be a smell, a memory, or even a feeling you want to invoke in your work.

> **Referencing Yourself**
>
> I will always consider the best reference material to be that in which *you* have a lived experience, memory, or knowledge. Your life story is different than every other human being that has ever lived, and that is *your* truth. Nobody can take that away, and nobody can invalidate it as not being important or not worth influencing your art as a reference.
>
> In fact, since you are one-of-a-kind, your interpretation of the world around you is a true original as well, and you should fully embrace it. This may seem like a heart-warming aside from your uplifting Art Coach Guardian Angel, but there *is* business practicality here as well. Your vision cannot be duplicated as the art you create can only be made by you, making the *value* of your artistic voice to clients or art buyers significant. It's your selling point. Don't ever sell it short.

You can't paint what you don't know to some extent, and experiencing something helps you get closer to knowing it. Life drawing, en plein air painting, and using photographic reference are all ways that you can bring *your* vision to life more clearly, noticing details that your brain would have no way to remember otherwise.

To wrap up this aside, just know that using references (whether in person or through photographs) is completely valid, and if you are not breaking any intellectual property or copyright laws, you can feel comfortable using as many as you would like throughout your artistic journey!

This brings up the topic of legality, and it is something very important to consider when finding reference images.

Using stock assets and references – legality

Before we start looking up reference images to use as a backbone for our landscape painting, it is important to discuss the legality of copyright law and intellectual property. Here is a quick disclaimer:

I am not an attorney, and I am *not an expert in law*. If you are unsure about the legality of using a reference for your work, contact the original artist or creator of the item you would like to reference to discuss use case scenarios. Many stock photo and reference photography packs you can purchase online have disclaimers and license agreements, making it very clear what you can or cannot do with their assets. This kind of goes without saying, but let's say it anyway: *Do not break the law*. Do not steal other creators' things. Do not steal others' work and claim it as your own. Do not infringe on another creator's intellectual property or copyright by using their work without crediting, obtaining permission, or breaking any other agreement handled within their specified license agreement contract.

If you are unsure about whether you can use an asset as a reference, or the legality thereof, *do not use the reference asset in question*.

When in doubt, *create your own reference*! If you took a photo of a landscape or family pet and would like to use that to create a direct one-to-one painting study, go for it! Is the picture something that was taken by another person? Ask permission or purchase a license to use the item in a new capacity from the original creator.

The only reference photographs I feel comfortable using for my work (both personal and professional) are photographs that meet the following criteria:

- Come bundled in a freelance-licensed reference asset pack that allows recreation or adaption clauses.
- Use true royalty-free, attribution-free, or truly open-license platforms.
- I have paid for and received from the photographer themselves, alongside a signed clause allowing a use case to reference that piece for a personal or commercial painting.

This covers essentially every base and ensures that I am working within the law and not committing any form of theft. Let's use this knowledge to find some safe, impactful resources that you can use for studies and photobashing, for example.

Discovering resources online

For this book, I will be using three primary websites to find my reference images and stock image assets. These three websites are `Unsplash.com`, `Pexels.com`, and `Pixabay.com`.

While there is some overlap in the material between these three websites, the breadth of genres and topics the photographs cover is seemingly limitless. Anything and everything from cityscapes to travel photography, landscapes, portraits, and slice-of-life are present and accounted for.

While there are other websites that host great reference material as well, these three seem to be the ones I always come back to, and their license agreements are *fantastic* for artists. Here are a few key license features that all three of the websites mentioned have in common:

- You can freely download an unlimited amount of images.
- You can use images for both commercial and non-commercial use.
- No permission is needed (although they always appreciate attribution for the photo when possible!).

Keep in mind though, that you can't legally sell the photographs as they are without significant modification, or use the resources to make a competing service. Other than that, it seems to be free rein! For instance, here's the full claim via Unsplash.com's License page (`https://unsplash.com/license`):

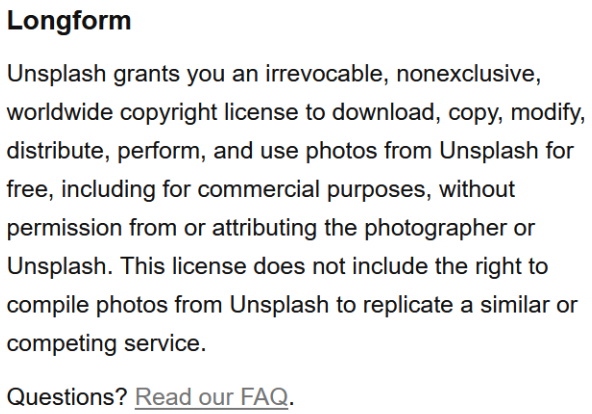


Figure 5.10 – Full Longform license agreement via Unsplash.com (circa 2021)

Now that we have established that using reference is always worthwhile, and a few great places to start our search for the good stuff, let's find a few mountain photographs that we can use for bashing some texture into our landscape painting!

> **Bashing – What Is It?**
> The term bashing (or "photobashing") comes from the idea of taking multiple assets (originally starting with photographs, but now can include things such as 3D assets), combining them together as a singular composite piece, and tying them together by painting. This "bashes" our sources together to make a central, cohesive work of art. You may also hear of "kitbashing," which is taking a collection of standalone 3D assets (a toolkit, or "kit") and combining them to make one cohesive, original piece.

Finding the right reference

With hundreds of thousands of solid resource images available to you, what should you be looking for when finding a reference for your work? As a quick cheat sheet, I always look for the following:

- A reference that matches, or is similar to the perspective of your work thus far
- Clean lighting (good contrast between lights and darks)

- Limited use of post-processing (such as heavy filters and color adjustments, for example)

Before we integrate a few photographs into our piece, we must keep in mind that the photograph's fidelity (the clarity of edges and visual information) will be far greater than the loose brush strokes we currently have. The goal is to find a reference that will "fit in" as best as possible, and give you the most visual information possible, while not overtaking your piece (making it look too photographic).

Let's finally start integrating some photographs into our current landscape painting!

Choosing our reference

I'll be heading to `Unsplash.com` to look for some mountain stock assets:

1. Go to `www.unsplash.com` in your favorite internet browser.
2. In the **Search** field, search for `Mountain`.

   Scroll until you find a few mountains that appeal to you. I'm looking for something with sharp edges, high contrast (a large difference between the lights and darks), and something that reads very quickly as what your mind's eye would consider a mountain.

   I really like the look of "mountain ranges covered in snow" by Jerry Zhang (Unsplash listing shown in *Figure 5.11* and you can also see the original listing at `https://unsplash.com/photos/ePpaQC2c1xA`):

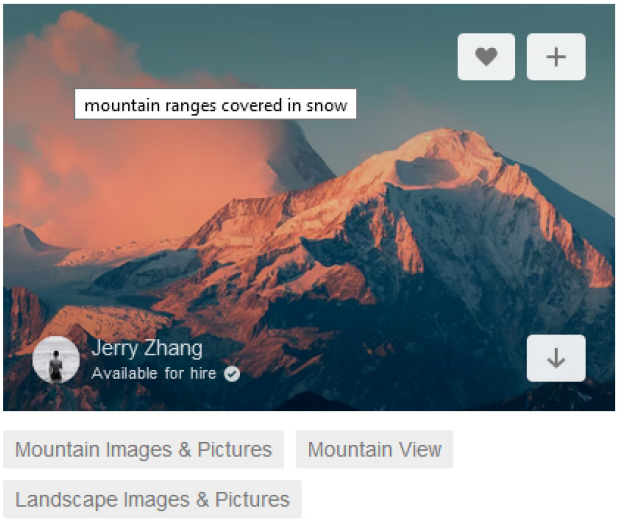


Figure 5.11 – Mountain ranges covered in snow by Jerry Zhang, courtesy of Unsplash.com

3. Go ahead and click **Free Download** (you may have to make a free Unsplash account if you don't automatically see the **Free Download** button).
4. I continue to scroll the results on Unsplash, and like the look of "grey rocky mountain under blue sky" by Andrea Ledda (listing shown in *Figure 5.12* and you can also see the original listing at `https://unsplash.com/photos/4EwI7yI5Q_8`):

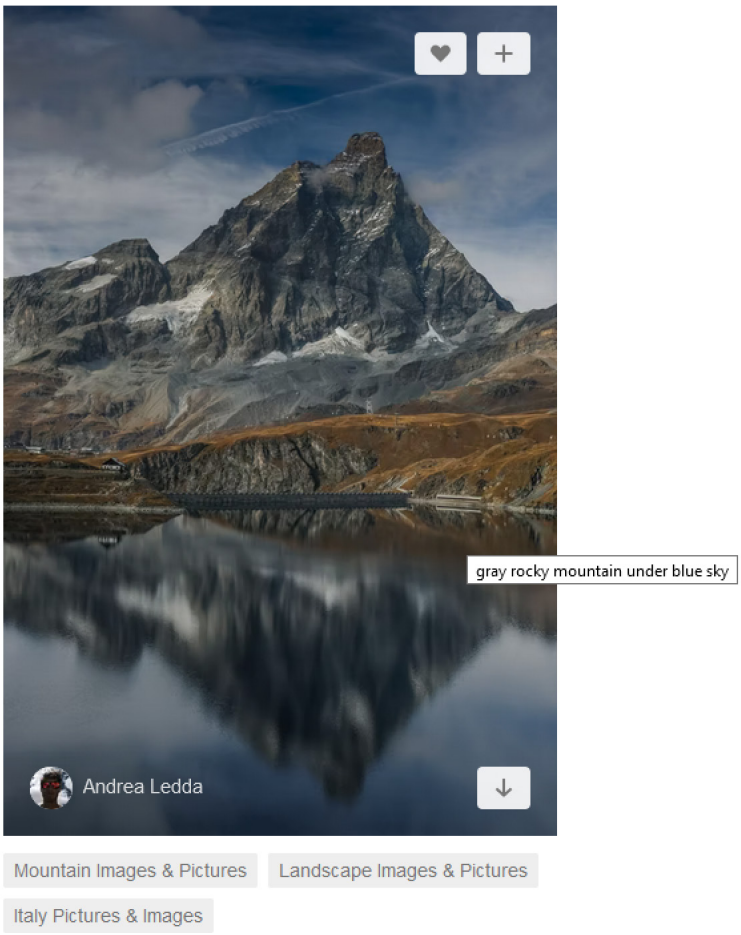


Figure 5.12 – Gray rocky mountain under blue sky by Andrea Ledda, courtesy of Unsplash.com

It has a distinct mountain that will be great for texture, but also some fantastic planes of rocky nature underneath that we can maybe use to frame our mountain range more effectively.

5. Make sure you've downloaded your images to a place that is easy to find on your hard drive.

6. Inside of Krita, make sure your landscape painting is still open and active.
7. Within Krita, click on your **File** menu and select the **Open…** option (*Ctrl* + *O* shortcut), as shown in *Figure 5.13*:

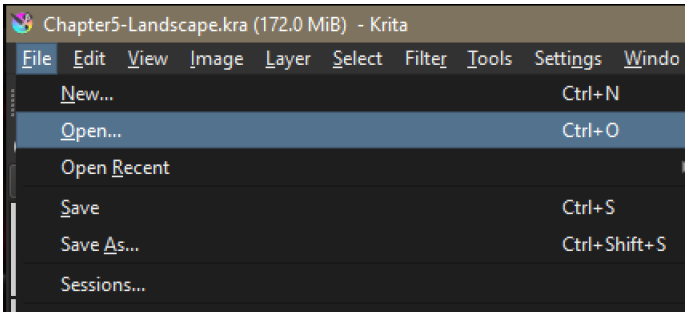


Figure 5.13 – The Open… option in Krita's File menu

8. Within the **Open Images** prompt, browse to the folder where your references are saved. Either drag a box around both images or open them one at a time (*Figure 5.14*) to bring them into Krita:

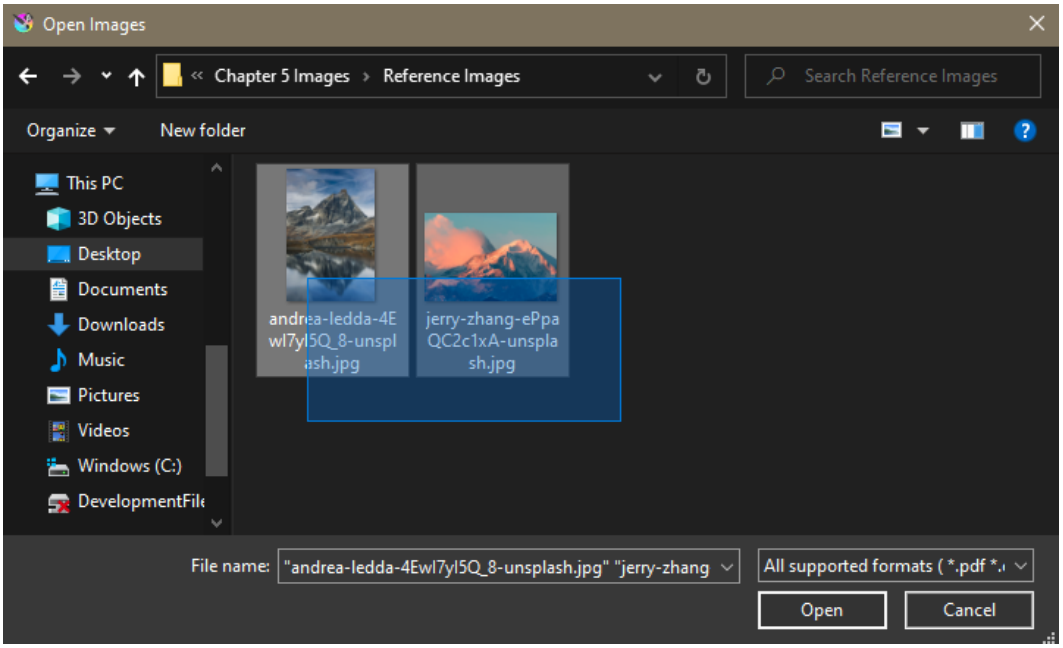


Figure 5.14 – Selecting our reference images to open in Krita

Our reference images are now loaded within Krita, and we're prepared to start the process of implementing them into our painting!

Bashing our reference

Now that our landscape painting and our reference images are all open within Krita, it's finally time to start the bashing process! To make our life easier (and also easier for any other artists we might collaborate with), let's go ahead and keep our bashed images within their own layer group:

1. Make sure your **Foreground** layer group is active.
2. Click on the arrow icon on the lower left of the **Layers** panel and select the **Group** Layer.
3. This should create a layer group named **Group 4** in between our **Value Checker** layer and our **Foreground** layer group (*Figure 5.15*):

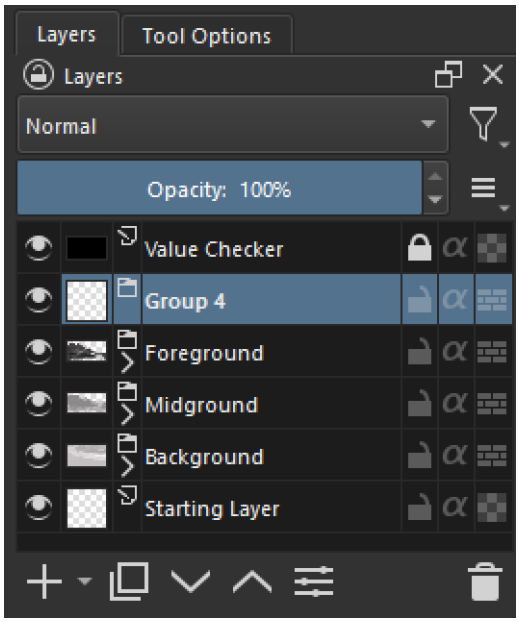


Figure 5.15 – Group 4 created between our Value Checker layer and Foreground layer group

4. Go ahead and double-click the **Group 4** layer group and rename it `Photo References`.
5. I want to first put in the photograph we found by Jerry Zhang, so I'll click on the file's tab to make sure that the file is active in my workspace.
6. With our **Photo References** tab active, I will click **Select** from the **File** menu, and **Select All** to select the entire canvas of the image.

7. With the full photo selected, go to **Edit** on your **File** menu, then **Copy Merged** (the shortcut is *Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C*). This makes a copy of all layers (even though, in this case, our reference only has one layer).
8. Now that the reference image is copied to your computer's memory, make your landscape painting the active tab in your **Workspace**, and click **Edit** > **Paste**. This will paste a full-resolution copy of the mountain photograph into a new layer above your active layer (in my case, my active layer was my new **Photo References** layer group).
9. Drag your new layer (the one with the mountain image pasted into it) into your **Photo References** layer group.
10. Your **Layers** panel should now look like *Figure 5.16*:

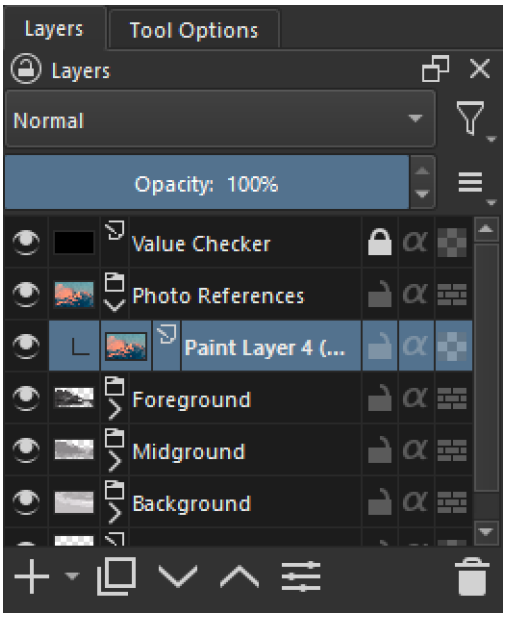


Figure 5.16 – Our first reference photo pasted into our landscape, in the Photo References group

You'll notice two things at this point: first, your pasted photo needs to be resized! Second, you're seeing everything in black and white!

In regard to the second point, this is because our **Value Checker** layer is active, causing everything underneath it to only appear in grayscale. At any point, you can hide the **Value Checker** layer to see the colors of your piece.

Let's go ahead and fix the sizing issue, however.

11. With your photo layer active (in the case of *Figure 5.16*, mine is named `Paint Layer 4 (pasted)`), click on your toolbox and choose the **Transform a Layer or Selection** tool (default shortcut *Ctrl* + *T*). This will give you anchors to manually resize and fit your image inside of your canvas for your selected layer. The tool's icon is notated in *Figure 5.17*:

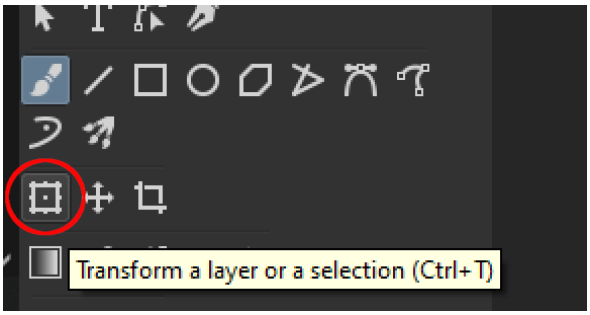


Figure 5.17 – The Transform a layer or a selection tool via the Toolbox docker window

Resize this layer until the mountain from the image is roughly the same size as the mountain in our landscape painting (*Figure 5.18*):

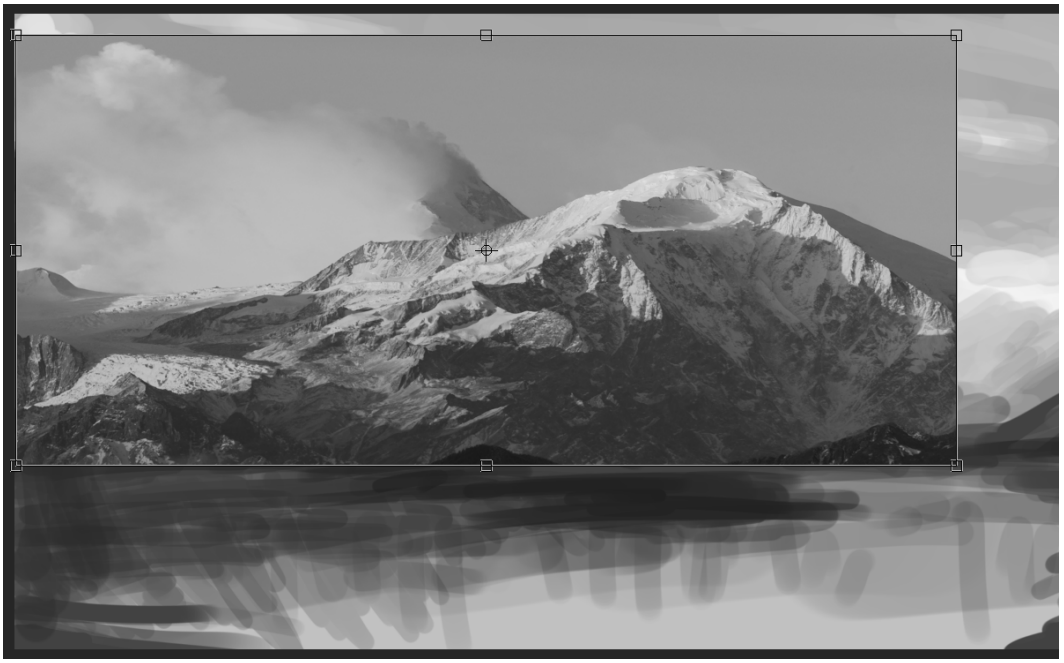


Figure 5.18 – Our first reference image, resized with the Transform a layer or a selection tool to fit our composition

You'll now notice that, while the image itself is looking okay, our mountain is "backward," or facing the wrong direction! Let's correct that now.

12. With your reference image still selected, on your **File** menu, go to **Layer** > **Transform** > **Mirror Layer Horizontally**. This will flip our mountain to face the correct way, although the mountain may not be lined up correctly any longer.

    If your mountain needs to be moved, you can select the **Move** tool (default hotkey is *T*) in your toolbox and drag the mountain into place (*Figure 5.19*):

Figure 5.19 – Our mountain reference, mirrored horizontally and moved into place with the Move tool

This is all well and good, but now the photo reference has taken over our composition! How can we successfully "bash" this image into our current composition while maintaining the shapes and values we worked so hard to create? Layer blending modes, of course!

13. With your **Photo References** layer selected, change the blending mode drop-down option to **Screen**.

> **A quick note**
>
> Please note, as of the Krita 5.0 beta, I actually have to do this blending mode change to the entire **Photo References** layer group, not just the photo reference layer itself to get the intended results.

This will give a nice blend of lights and darks, allowing us to still retain our mountain painting's overall basic shape but providing us with nice, sharp details from the photo reference itself (*Figure 5.20*):

Figure 5.20 – Our reference photo with the Screen blending mode active

Now that we have our first reference image in place, it's time to bring in our second reference image!

14. In your **Workspace** area, select the tab for your second photo reference image (in my case, the photo by Andrea Ledda we downloaded earlier).
15. Select and copy the image by using **Select** > **Select All** followed by the **Edit** > **Copy Merged** method discussed earlier in *Steps 5* and *6*.

Go back to our landscape painting, and with our first photo reference layer active, paste our newly copied photo reference. This should create a new layer on top of our first photo reference layer, set within our **Photo References** layer group automatically (*Figure 5.21*):

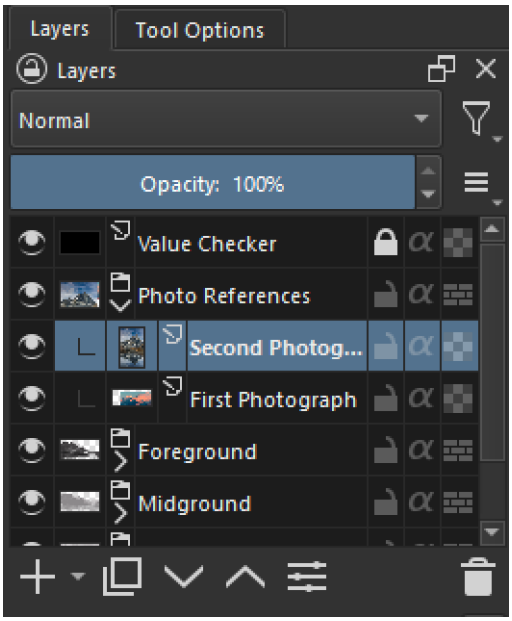


Figure 5.21 – Both of our photo reference layers (renamed), within our Photo References group

16. As you can see from *Figure 5.21*, since we have two photograph layers now, I've renamed them `First Photograph` and `Second Photograph`, respectively. Feel free to name these whatever works best for you!
17. With the `Second Photograph` layer active, go ahead and resize the image as you would like it on your canvas (using the **Transform** tool method talked about in *Step 11*).

    You should now have a solid composite (or "bash") that you're happy with! Don't worry if things appear really messy right now; we will be modifying and fine-tuning features of this messy photo bash in *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*.

In *Chapter 7*, *Changing the Feel with Painting, Values, and Sliders*, we will be applying a lot of hands-on painting using our new composite! Before we move on to the end of this chapter, though, let's add a nice splash of color to our bash.

Splashing in color

Earlier in this chapter, we created our **Value Checker** layer. While this is extremely helpful when creating our painting to ensure that our lights and darks read well, there's also another hidden benefit to this method: **color splashing**.

With this technique, you can create a myriad of different color passes for your art, extremely quickly. This is by using a new layer on top of our **Value Checker** layer, using the **Color** blending mode. Let's set that up now, and add some nice blues to our painting to set us up for upcoming chapters:

1. Create a new layer on top of your **Value Checker** layer, and name this layer `Color Splash #1`.
2. Change the blending mode option for the **Color Splash #1** layer to **Color**.

   Your **Layers** panel should look similar to *Figure 5.22*:

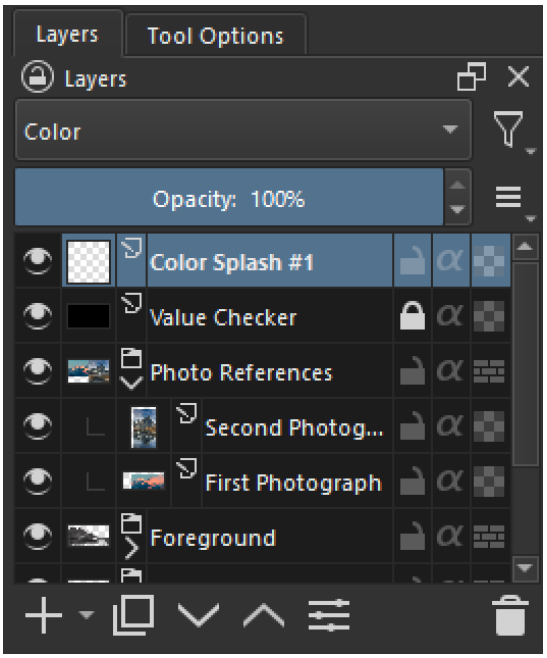


Figure 5.22 – The Color Splash #1 layer, in Color blending mode, on top of the Layer panel stack

3. With the **Color Splash #1** layer active, pick a brush and choose a blue color from the color wheel.

4. Paint the sky and underneath the mountains blue. The contrast between the blue of your **Color Splash #1** layer and the greyscale of your **Value Checker** layer should give an appealing start to your colors (*Figure 5.23*):

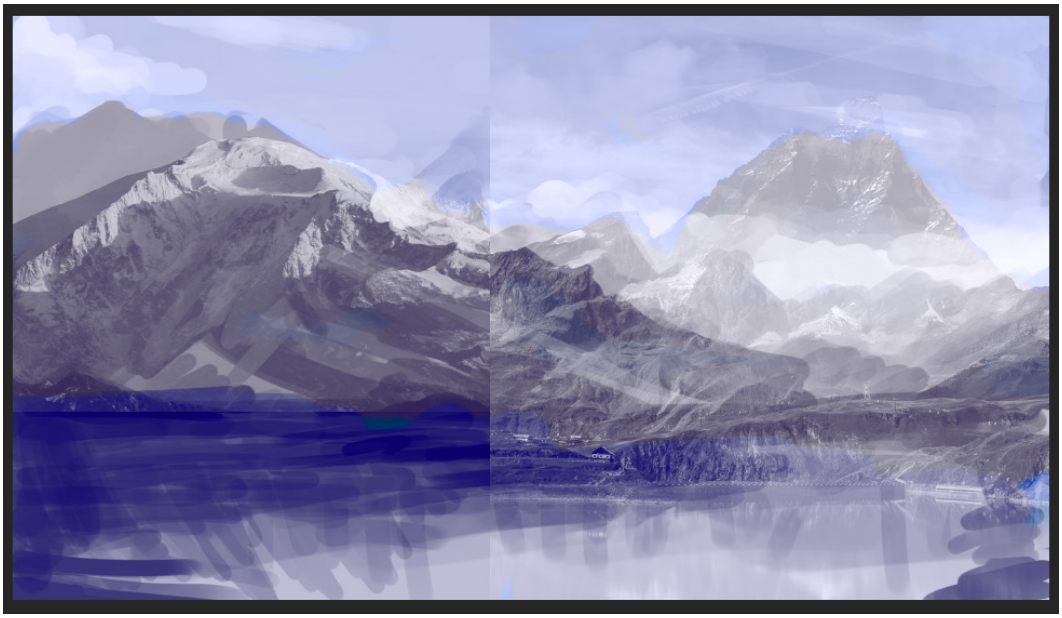


Figure 5.23 – Our bashed, color-splashed landscape painting thus far

Feel free to add additional colors to your **Color Splash #1** layer, such as some subtle browns for the rocks, and maybe even some cyans to the base of where the mountains meet the ground. We will be doing *extensive* color tweaking and refinement in *Chapter 7*, *Changing the Feel with Painting, Values, and Sliders*, so don't get too caught up in making things perfect right now.

5. Finally, save your work!

The power of this color splashing method should be readily apparent. You can create vivid, strong color decisions in a way that is non-destructive to the work you've done underneath it. This is one of the key benefits of digital art, and the Krita workflow makes things like this a breeze!

Summary

That brings us to the end of this chapter, and while we covered a lot of ground, I'm hoping that some of these techniques started getting your creativity flowing!

In this chapter, we successfully learned about blending modes and showcased the flexibility they can allow in merging different assets together in a cohesive way. We also discussed references, from the stigma they sometimes carry and the legalities of using them, to learning some valuable tips on implementing the stock resources you find within your work. We covered creating a foolproof value checker, as well as implementing colors without destroying our value work!

All of this was in service of updating our ongoing landscape painting project with some nice texture work and a very quick color pass. In *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*, we're going to be learning about some fantastic composition techniques and utilizing Krita's toolbox and masking tools, which will allow our photo references, colors, and brush strokes to start singing in harmony.

This will definitely be pushing our painting to the next level, and will set us up for our goal of having a final, portfolio-ready landscape painting we can be proud of!

Fantastic job so far! Let's hop into the next chapter!

6
Composing Using Krita's Toolbox

In *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*, we took our ongoing landscape painting and integrated some photography and color splashes to further our concept and start the process of refining our piece. In this chapter, we will be using some of Krita's awesome built-in tools to refine our shapes with masks and selections, start finalizing our perspective, and add some impactful brushwork before moving on to the push for final rendering!

The full structure of this chapter will look like this:

- Masking our layers
- Adding edges with selection tools
- Navigating perspective
- Refining our brushwork

Taking each of these topics one step at a time will allow us to dig into Krita's extensive toolsets, while also working together to refine our piece, preparing it for our final "postprocessing" passes in the next chapter!

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0+)
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus
- Your landscape file (carried over from *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*)

If you did not follow along in *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*, a full version of my Krita file (`.kra`) as of the end of the chapter is available for you here: `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`.

This chapter's going to be a fun one, covering a lot of ground in a pretty tidy page count! Let's get started with looking at a true power-player of Krita: masks!

Masking our layers

A favorite aspect of working in digital art software such as Krita is the ability to work in a *non-destructive* environment, meaning that you can manipulate visual data on a layer without removing or destroying the *actual layer data* in the process. A perfect representation of this environment is the use of **Masks**—a linked add-on connected to a layer that gives the layer information on how it should be presented. There are four main mask types in Krita 5.0, as shown in the following screenshot:

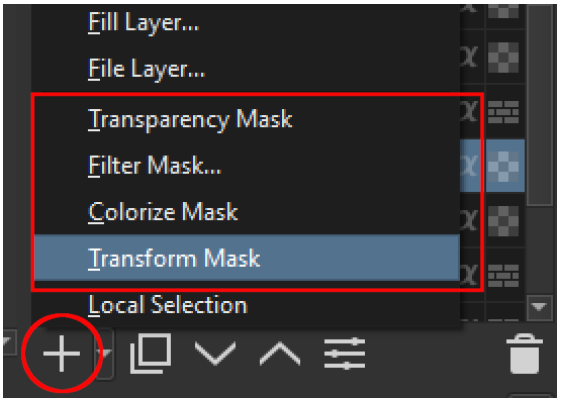


Figure 6.1 – The four main mask-type options (box highlighted) from the Add Layer menu

Masks are powerful features that have a lot of dynamic power and can be somewhat complex. We will now discuss a quick breakdown of each one of these.

Transparency Mask

Transparency Mask is a way for you to control which portion of a layer is visible, or not visible, to the viewer. This mask uses a "visible" and "non-visible" black-and-white color technique, using pure black to "hide" an area of your connected layer, and pure white to "show" an area of your connected layer. You apply the black or white with the paintbrush tool on the **Transparency Mask** itself, which is locked to be grayscale. Essentially, on this mask, you paint with your brush in grayscale and, depending on the value and location, you can hide or show information on the connected layer. We will be using this mask to "hide," "show," and "blend" parts of our mountain texture directly into our painting momentarily.

Filter Mask

Filter Mask works similarly to **Transparency Mask** but shows an area of the connected layer using a Krita filter you choose (such as **Color Correction**, **Level Adjustments**, **Blur**, and more). This also works with the black-to-white grayscale method, where any portion of the mask that is black will be "hidden" while any white area will be "visible" as the selected filter on your connected layer. A good example of this mask would be to add grainy noise, blurs, or light bloom filters to a specific area of your connected layer.

Colorize Mask

Colorize Mask was made for the primary purpose of coloring line art quickly and effectively by filling in portions of the connected layer with a specified color that you choose. This mask works a bit differently than the others, as it has its own set of sub-settings used for things such as closing gaps of line art, detecting edges of your lines, and more. For example, if you have an image of a person, you can put small **Colorize Mask** strokes of a skin tone on the face and arms area, a different color swatch on the hair, a third color on their clothes, and the algorithm (if **Detect Edges** and **Gap Close** are enabled) will automatically color in the area using your selected color. Think of this mask as a "fill bucket" of sorts, but one that provides you with more control over the rules it uses to colorize the layer it is connected to.

Transform Mask

Transform Mask allows you to make transform edits (such as rotating, scaling, and moving) to your layer without applying the transformation directly to the layer the mask is connected to. This is a great "non-destructive" way to make any scale or rotation changes to your layer quickly. A great example of this would be if you are working with a client or art director and, if they ask for items to be moved or resized, applying this layer and making the edit they request. That way, if the client/director enjoys the changes, you can retain them via keeping **Transform Mask**, but if they prefer the original, you can delete **Transform Mask** and keep the original material intact, as the changes only impacted the mask itself, not the original material.

> **Experimenting with Masks**
>
> Masks are very powerful tools, but to be completely honest, reading about them isn't the best way to learn about them. I *highly* recommend playing with these masks often, as they can really open creative possibilities that are otherwise not easily replicable with traditional art. We are working as digital artists, after all, so let's embrace the things that make our lives easier!

The best way to get a great understanding of masks is to implement them into our current piece, so let's go ahead and start using **Transparency Mask** right now!

Blending our photo information

As you can see in the following screenshot, we currently have our landscape with our newly added photographs with a bit of color overlaid on top:

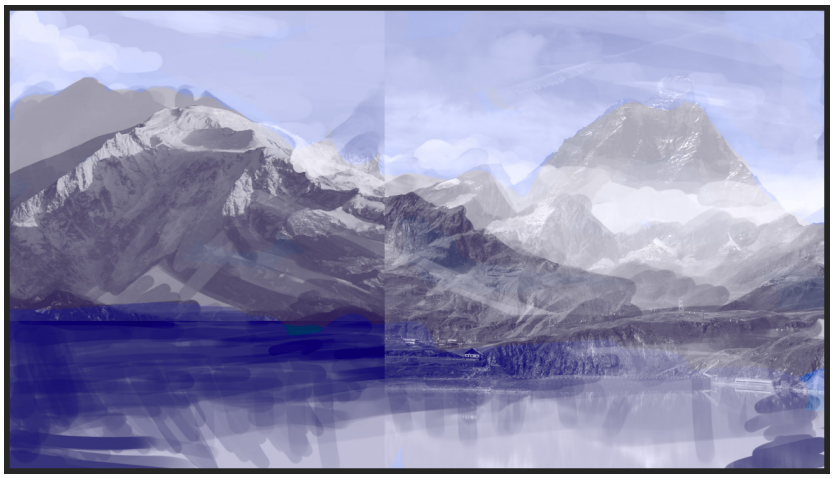


Figure 6.2 – Our landscape as of the end of Chapter 5, Implementing Layer Blending Modes

While the textures themselves seem okay, there are a lot of weird issues we need to work on and refine. Mainly, there's a straight vertical line near the middle of the composition where the two photos are overlapping, as well as some portions of the mountains that don't quite fit the shape we had painted before.

Our goal for this step of the process is to "smooth out" these transitions, allowing us to control the balance of higher-fidelity information and texture (the photograph) within the more artistic, representative shapes (our paint strokes).

Let's add some transparency masks to our photography layers, making this task a breeze. Proceed as follows:

1. Make sure your landscape image is active within Krita (either from your personal file or the file attached in the *Technical requirements* section at the beginning of this chapter).
2. With your **Second Photograph** layer selected (from within your **Photo References** layer group), click the plus (+) button on the lower left of the **Layers** panel and select **Transparency Mask**, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

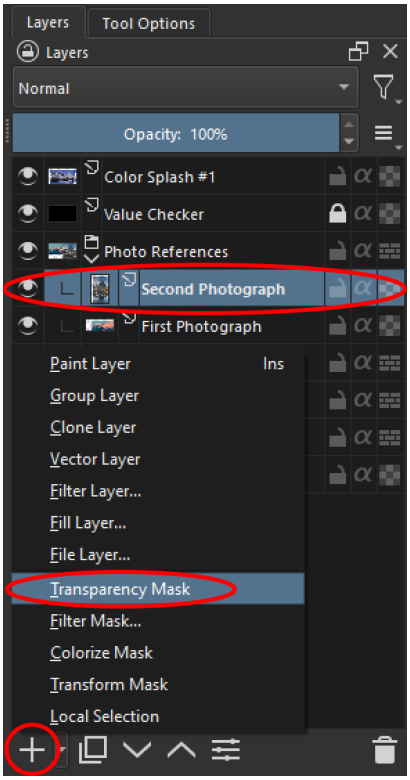


Figure 6.3 – Adding a Transparency Mask to our Second Photograph layer

On your **Layers** panel, you will now see a **Transparency Mask** layer attached to the **Second Photograph** layer, nested underneath it. The following screenshot provides an illustration of this:

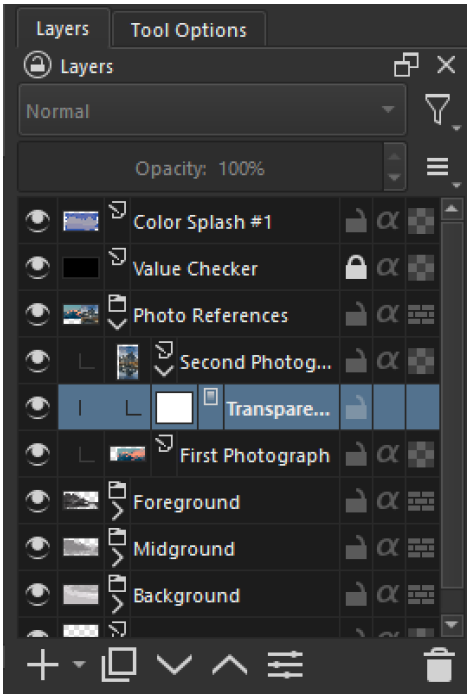


Figure 6.4 – The new Transparency Mask layer, nested underneath the Second Photograph layer

You will also notice that with the addition of this new **Transparency Mask** layer, while the mask layer is active, your color wheel will turn to grayscale. This ensures that you only work within the confines of black and white, allowing total control over the visibility of the contents being masked.

3. With **Transparency Mask** active, select a brush. I will be using my **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush.
4. Choose *pure (100%) black* from your color wheel or value slider.

5. With pure black as your active color, begin painting portions of your composition you would like to "hide." I will be painting out the vertical line that is causing the weird visuals, as well as the mountain peaks behind the horizon on the right-hand side of the piece, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

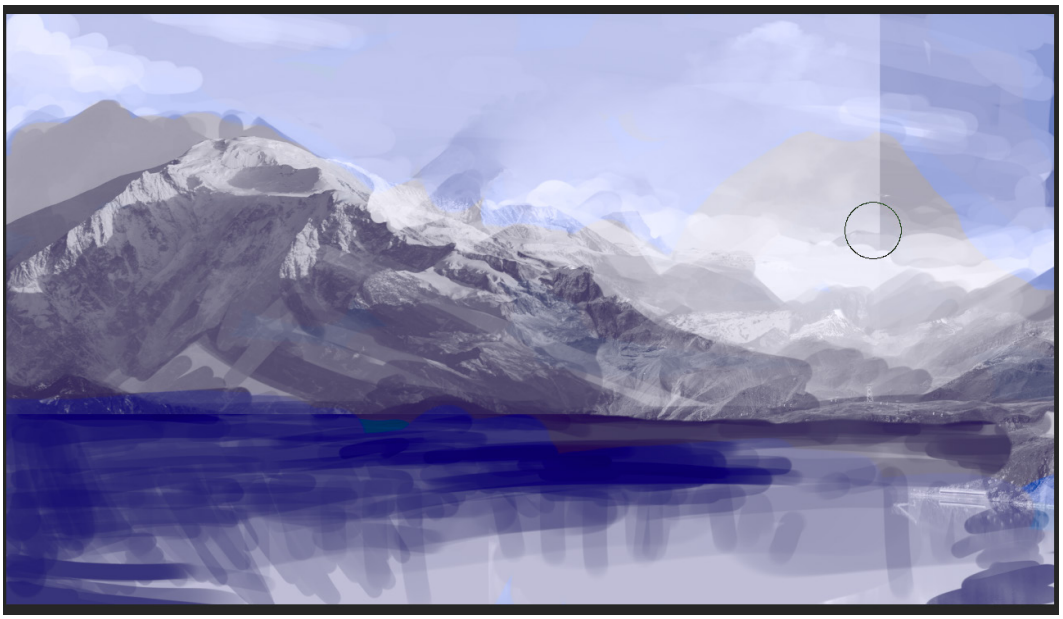


Figure 6.5 – The masked Second Photograph layer, using the Transparency Mask with black

So, on this one, I've gone a little overboard, and I want to bring some of the foreground "plane" back into the piece as it can be an asset in showing depth once we start painting on top of it.

6. To bring back a portion of the mask, change the color on your brush to pure (100%) white (or a lighter gray).
7. Paint over the portions you would like to add back in with a lighter color.

I've chosen to bring in the foreground plane on the right side, as well as to bring back a bit of the background mountain detail with a gray brush to control the opacity. You can see the result in the following screenshot:

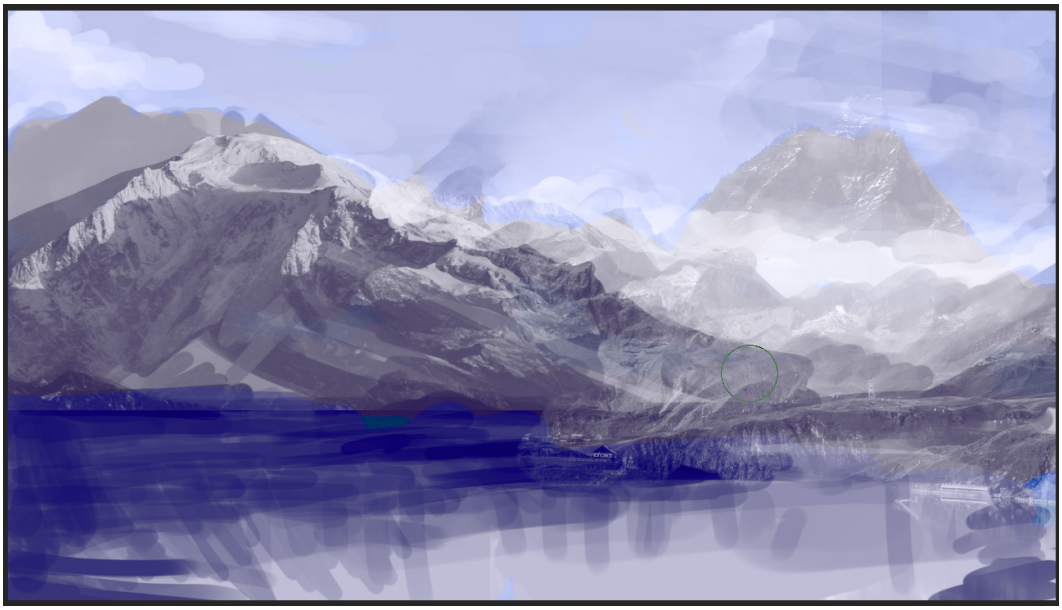


Figure 6.6 – The adjusted mask with details added back in, using a brush with white on the Transparency Mask

This should showcase the power of **Transparency Mask** well! You have your original photography data always available and can use your painting skills to "hide" and "reveal" as little or as much as you would like! Let's take a pass at the **First Photograph** layer using **Transparency Mask** as well.

8. Select the **First Photograph** layer in your **Layers** panel.
9. With the **First Photograph** layer active, click the plus (+) button on the lower left of your **Layers** panel window and select **Transparency Mask**.

Your **Layers** panel should resemble the one shown here:

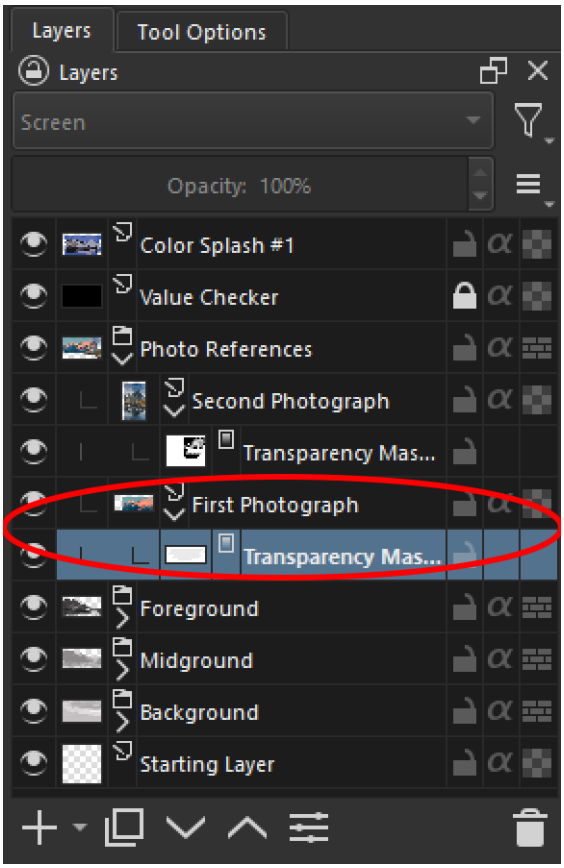


Figure 6.7 – The newly added Transparency Mask, connected to the First Photograph layer

10. On this **Transparency Mask** layer, go ahead and paint black what you would like to hide, keep white what you would like to show, and adjust the opacity of other portions using various shades of gray.

    This should not only get you more comfortable with the usage of the mask layer in general but also enable you to see exactly how masking portions of a layer, coupled with the masked portions of another layer, can lead to some really interesting dynamics.

11. On the **Transparency Mask** attached to the **First Photograph** layer, I've decided to use a black brush and "vignette" the textures inside of the main mountain shape on the left-hand side of the piece. This means I start with the most outskirt textures (closest to the edges of the mountain) as hidden, and slowly "reveal" them as we get closer to the middle of the form. Here's the result:

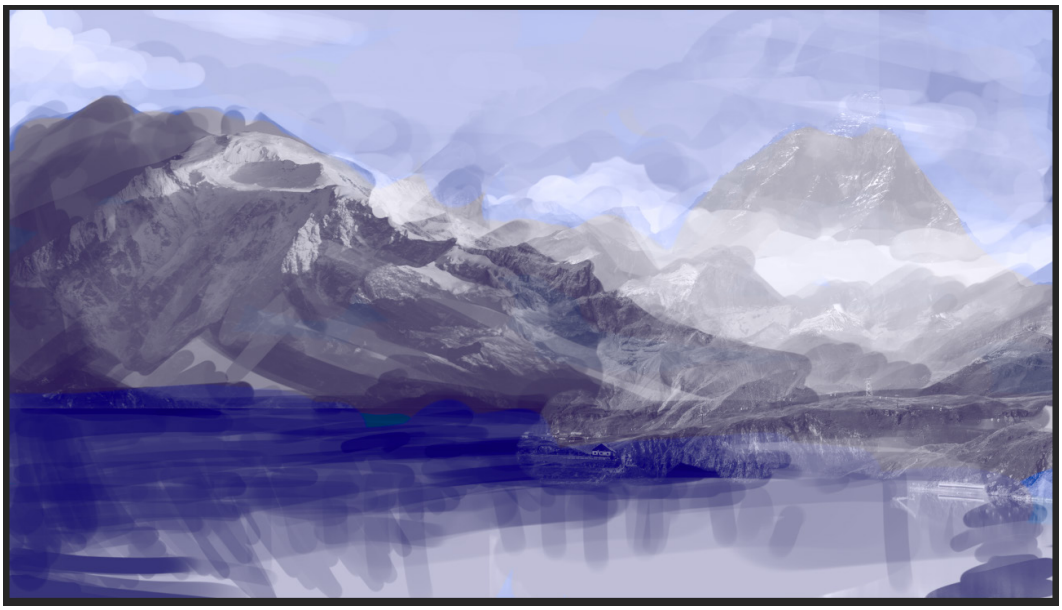


Figure 6.8 – Masking the First Photograph layer, vignetting the details near the middle of our composition

Doing this is a great setup for doing a paint-over, as it allows us a nice mix of sharp, photographic textures at our focal point and fewer crisp edges and details (due to our brushwork) near the edges of our shapes.

At this point, I think we have what we need from our photographs, and we can start incorporating some more shape language and more defined edges with some **selection tools** work!

Adding edges with selection tools

Usually, when someone makes a comment about a digital image looking "painterly," what they're referring to is the control of *edges*. Any dynamic painting is going to have a nice mix of edges, and when we do our still-life study later, in *Chapter 10*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*, we will do a breakdown of when and where to use which types of edges for maximum impact for your viewer.

In this section of the current chapter, we're going to discuss and use some selection tools to create more solidified shapes and give us the ability to work within the confines we create in order to make dynamic, interesting mountains.

Defining the tools

Let's do a quick breakdown of our selection tools to get a good grasp on which types of problems we can solve.

Have a look at the following screenshot:

Figure 6.9 – Our selection tools via the Toolbox

From left to right in *Figure 6.9*, we have the following tools:

- **Rectangular selection tool**—Allows you to drag a box of varying heights and widths around an area of a layer, selecting what is within the box's confines.
- **Elliptical selection tool**—The same functionality as the rectangular selection tool; however, with no hard 90-degree edges. It can expand and contract, making for a variety of circular shapes for your selection.
- **Polygonal selection tool**—The polygonal selection tool allows you to click "points" around your layer. When the selection becomes active once, either the original point is re-selected or the artist double-clicks, causing the final point to immediately connect to the original point and create a selection. This is a fantastic tool for very precise outlines, or creating sharp, angled shapes.
- **Freehand selection tool**—A free-form selection tool is sometimes referred to as a **lasso tool**. The freehand selection tool lets you control the "tip" of the selection, drawing freely while your input device has contact within the layer. As you lift off of the layer, the selection will "lasso" around to the origin point, allowing for a huge variety of shapes you can create.
- **Contiguous selection tool**—The contiguous selection tool (also known as the **magic wand tool**, for its likeness to a magician's wand) selects a point of color and all areas of similar color that are directly connected to that point. You can adjust the range that the tool will consider "contiguous" with the selection you choose, giving you a flexible way of selecting spots of matching hues or values quickly on a layer.

- **Similar color selection tool**—The similar color selection tool works much like the contiguous selection tool in regard to it choosing a color. However, this tool will choose a similar color across the entire piece, even if the color isn't connected or contiguous to the original point selected.
- **Bezier curve selection tool**—This is also known as the **path selection tool**, and allows you to draw a path around an area, with the ability to either have sharp transitions between points or click and drag when creating a point to curve the path from your previous point to the new point. Once you are finished, click on the original point to close the path and create your selection.
- **Magnetic selection tool**—With the magnetic selection tool, you can either place points or draw a continuous outline of an area, and the tool will "snap" to any areas of sharp contrast (such as outlines). This may sound cumbersome, but in practice, the algorithm for this tool is *very* intelligent in finding edges. This is a fantastic tool for selecting specific areas of a piece, such as flower petals, clothing on a character, or other standalone details that you would like to refine.

Now that we have a basic rundown of the selection tools that are available to us, let's go ahead and use this knowledge to create some edges for our landscape's mountain range!

Creating edges

For our piece, I'll want to retain some sharp edges at the top of our main focal point mountain, and maybe introduce some nice frozen "ice" on top of our lake. Let's get started, as follows:

1. Firstly, I would like to *disable* my **Color Splash** layer by hiding it (clicking on the *eye* icon to the left of the layer's name on your **Layers** panel), as working in grayscale (from our **Value Checker** layer) will be a more coherent way to make these adjustments. We'll add color back in later.
2. With our **Color Splash** layer hidden, go ahead and create a new layer below your **Value Checker** layer named **Selection Shapes**, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

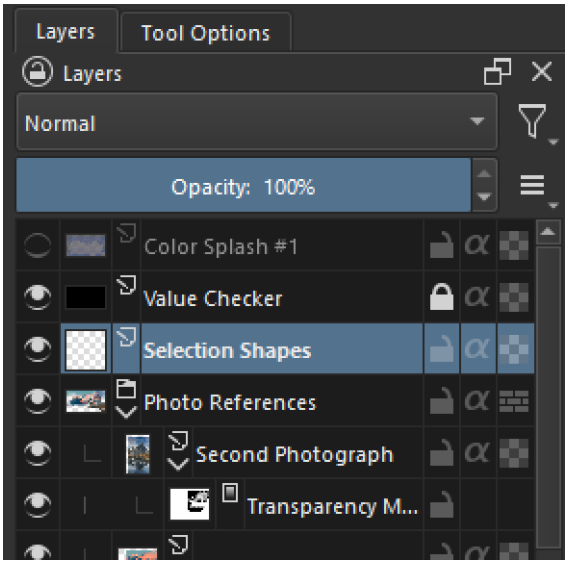


Figure 6.10 – The new Selection Shapes layer, between our Value Checker layer and Photo References group

3. With your **Selection Shapes** layer active, select the Polygonal Selection Tool (the third selection tool from the left in your Toolbox).
4. *Create points* for your mountain by clicking an outline of where you would like your peaks, valleys, and a variety of shape angles. This is what mine looks like:

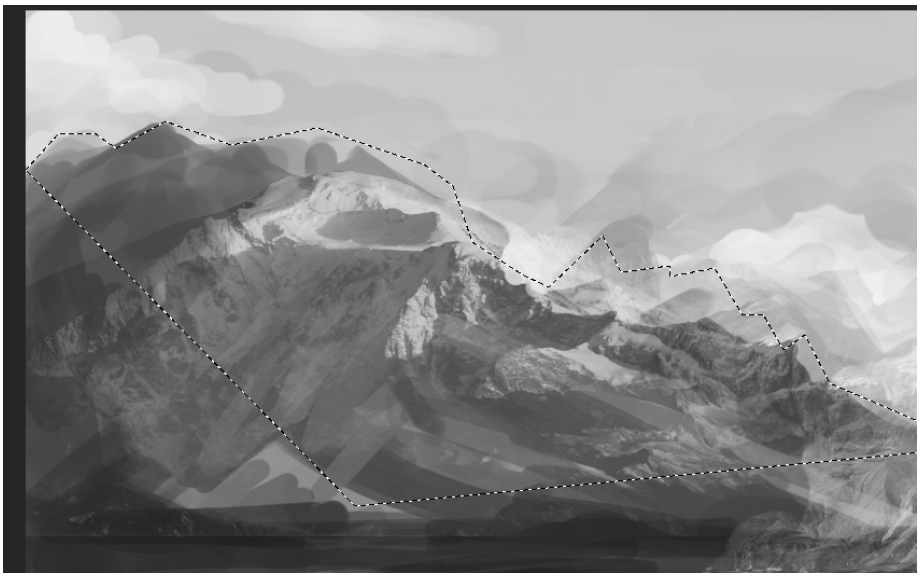


Figure 6.11 – My selection via the Polygonal Selection Tool for my main focal-point mountain

5. With your selection active (you can tell this by the "marching ants" outline of the shape that you created), you can safely *choose your brush* of choice by hitting the *B* hotkey, which keeps this selection active.
6. Use the *Ctrl* hotkey (as holding down *Ctrl* while on your canvas will change your pointer to your **Color Picker** tool) to select colors that are close to where you're painting, and "expand" those colors to the edge of the selection. You'll notice that the colors don't go outside of the selection!

   This is a fantastic way to get razor-sharp edges in your work and is something I find myself doing in every single digital painting I make!
7. Once you're pleased with your shapes, you can deselect your active selection by either clicking on **Select** > **Deselect** in your **File** menu at the top of the screen or by using the default hotkey combination of *Ctrl* + *Shift* + *A*.

   Have a look at my current mountain setup here:

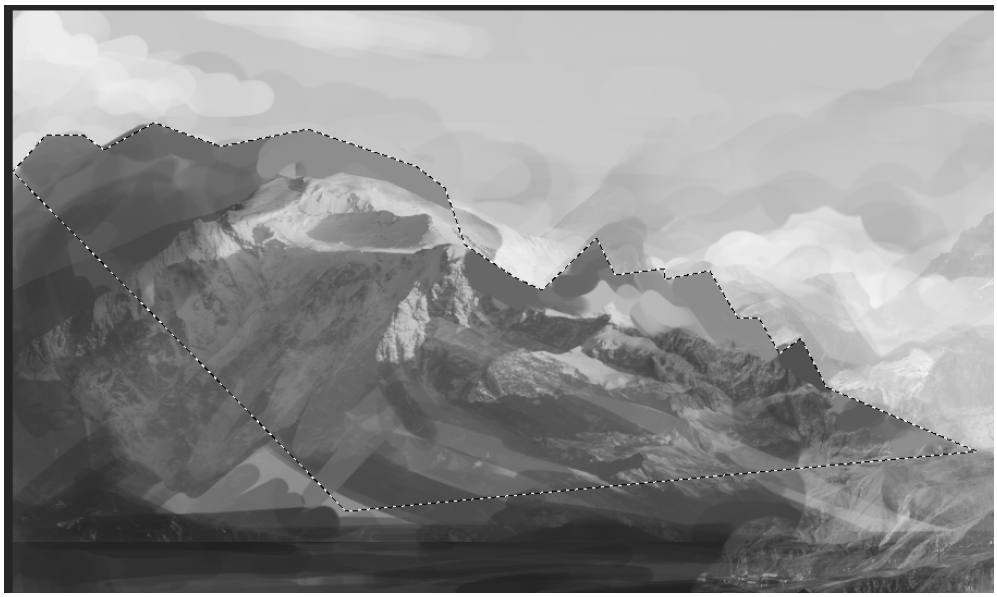


Figure 6.12 – Our brush strokes extend the values to the edge of our current polygonal selection

While the new sharp edges may look a little odd now, they will make way more sense once we add some painterly brush strokes to them momentarily.

Now that we have some more interesting shapes on our mountain, let's go ahead and create some "lake ice." For this, we are going to use the same Polygonal Selection Tool and do a quick "zig-zag" pass on the middle and lower-right sections of our composition.

8. With your **Selection Shapes** layer active, select your Polygonal Selection Tool from your Toolbox.
9. Make your first long, sharp horizontal shape on your lake, like so:

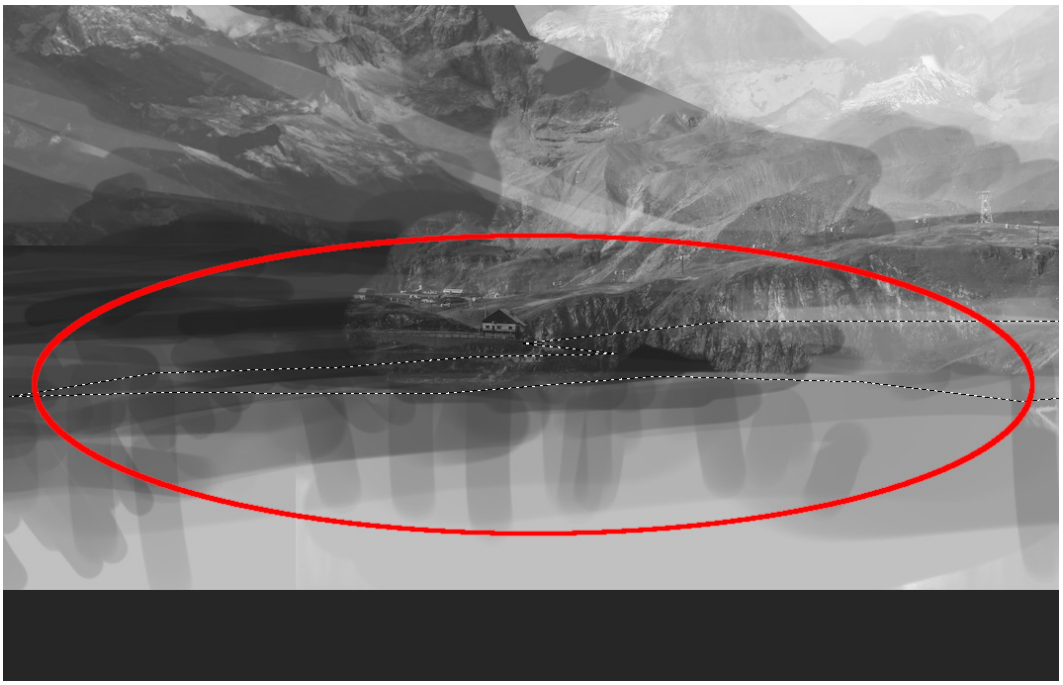


Figure 6.13 – Our first polygonal selection for our ice (circled for clarity)

A great feature of the Polygonal Selection Tool is the ability to add portions to your current selection, even if they're not connected to the first selection! Let's try that now.

10. With your Polygonal Selection Tool still active, hold down the *Shift* button while hovering over your canvas. You will notice a small plus sign (+) on top of the tool, meaning you can add a selection. (*Pro tip*: If you'd like to remove an area from a selection, hold *Alt* instead of *Shift*.)

11. While holding *Shift*, create some smaller selections going back toward our main mountain on the left. These will assist in adding depth and the impression of multiple instances of "ice," as can be seen in the following screenshot:

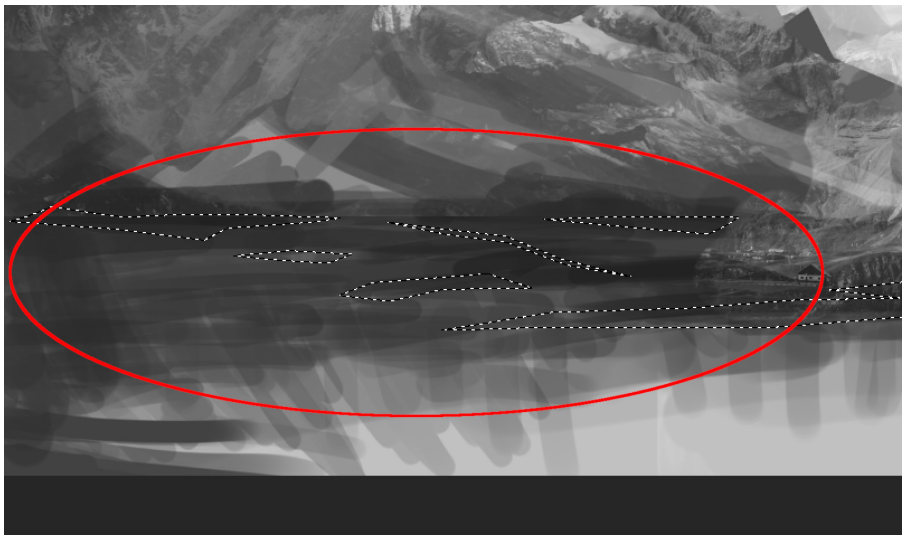


Figure 6.14 – The additional selections for our ice, created by holding Shift with our Polygonal Lasso tool

With your selections active, go ahead and swap to your **Brush** tool (using the *B* hotkey). Choose white as your color, and color in your selection shapes. Your piece should look like this:

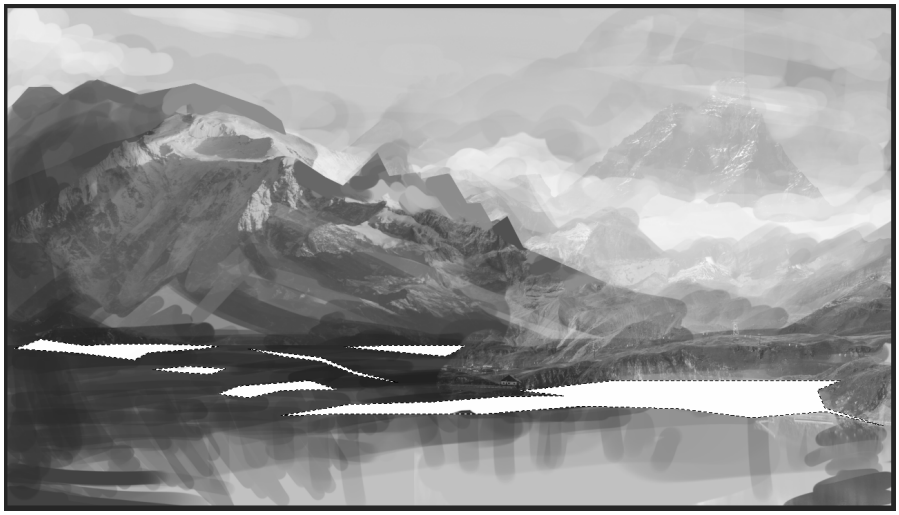


Figure 6.15 – The white ice slabs, via our painting of our Polygonal Selection Tool selections

This still probably doesn't feel like it looks correct or beautiful yet, but trust me when I say that making these graphic shapes will help *tremendously* once we start getting into the nitty-gritty of our final painting passes.

Something tells me that what we have right now looks a little "flat" on the page, and we need some additional depth for our landscape. This is a perfect opportunity to discuss a few of the perspective tools Krita has that can assist you in navigating perspective—a topic that can be a bit overwhelming!

Navigating perspective

In this portion of the chapter, we are *very quickly* going to take a look at the **perspective tools** that Krita provides. We will be doing a much, *much* deeper dive into these tools, and perspective in general, in *Chapter 11*, *Working with Concept Art* (where we make some cinematic concept art!).

For the time being, we are going to create a one-point perspective grid to assist us in making more detailed placements of our ice. Follow these next steps:

1. On your **Toolbox**, click on the **Assistant Tool**. The icon for this tool is circled here:

Figure 6.16 – The Assistant Tool (located next to the Measure Tool) in the Toolbox

2. While your Assistant Tool is active, open your **Tool Options** docker if it's not already open.

3. In the **Add** drop-down menu of **Tool Options**, select **Perspective**, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

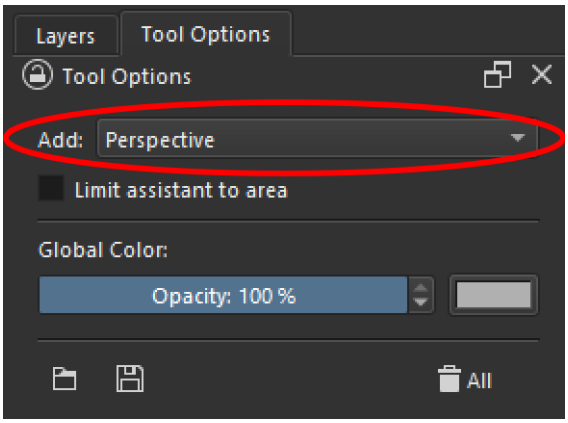


Figure 6.17 – The Perspective option is selected under the Add drop-down menu in Tool Options for our Assistant Tool

The **Perspective** option for your Assistant Tool allows you to create four corners of a perspective grid, then drag and reposition the corners to match a specific perspective plane you need. Let's set up a grid for our lake to aid with our ice placement!

4. On your canvas, with your Assistant Tool still active and the **Perspective** option selected, *click four times*, creating a box around the bottom half of our composition. This will create a rectangle with anchor points, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

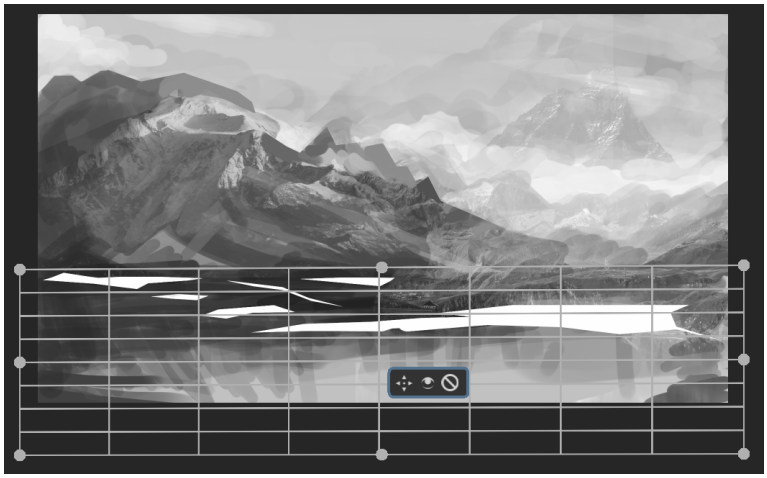


Figure 6.18 – Our created perspective grid using the Assistant Tool in Perspective mode

5. Now, we want to align our perspective grid to "match" our idea of the ice lake's perspective. To do this, *drag the bottom corners* and expand them widely out (by zooming out of your *work area*, you will have more room to adjust the width of these points)!
6. I have chosen to *squeeze the two upper points* closer together while expanding the width of the distance between the bottom two points, and "crunching" the height of the overall box to give a solid perspective that seems to read well when zoomed out. You can see the result here:

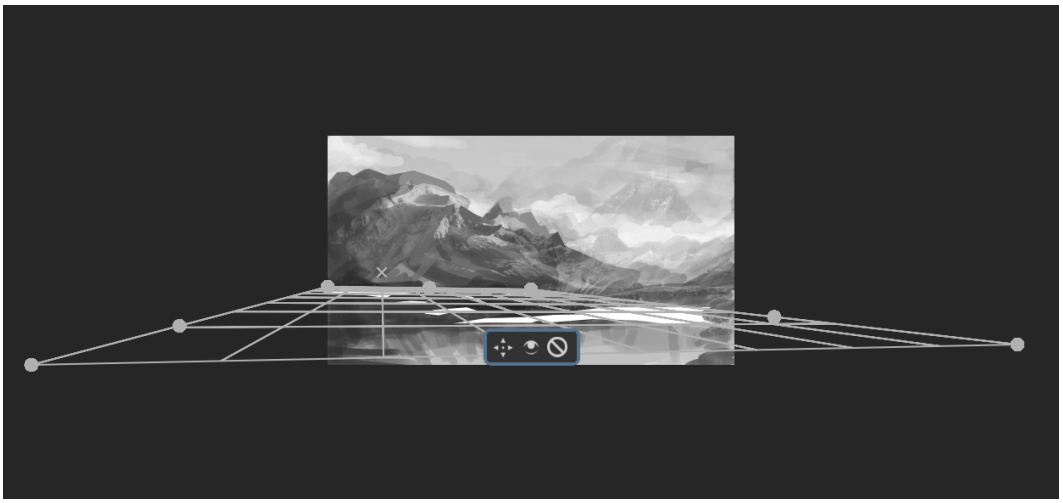


Figure 6.19 – Our corrected perspective grid using the Assistant Tool

Now that we're happy with our perspective grid, let's transfer this information onto its own layer for future use!

7. Click over to your **Layers** panel, and *create a new layer* above your **Selection Shapes** layer, named **Perspective Grid**.
8. Go ahead and select your **Brush** tool (with the *B* hotkey), and go to the **Tool Options** window.

9. Click on the checkbox for **Snap to Assistants**, as illustrated in the following screenshot:

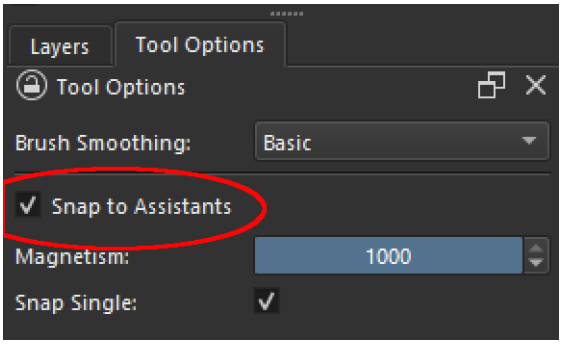


Figure 6.20 – Enabling the Snap to Assistants feature in the Tool Options window of our Brush tool

This will ensure that our brush strokes are locked to our assistant (perspective) grid.

10. Return to your **Layers** panel, and make sure your **Perspective Grid** layer is active.
11. Brush some lines onto your layer. You'll notice that the magnetism of the **Snap to Assistants** feature is ensuring that your brush strokes are following the perspective grid! The intensity of the snapping can be adjusted by changing the value of the **Magnetism** slider.

    Feel free to be as detailed or vague as you would like here, as this layer will only be for your reference throughout the piece's refinement and won't be part of the final piece. Have a look at my messy perspective lines in the following screenshot, for instance:

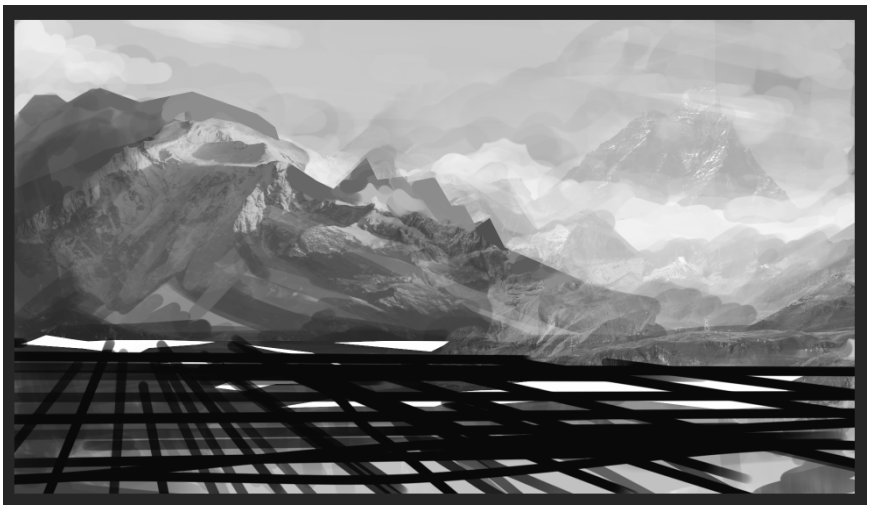


Figure 6.21 – Messy, dark brushed lines snapping to my perspective grid

12. Once you feel comfortable with your grid's transfer, feel free to either *hide* the perspective grid (by clicking on the *eyeball* icon) or *fully delete* the current perspective grid (by clicking on the *trashcan* icon). If you would like to *move* your current perspective grid, you can use the *arrow* icon to move it around your composition. A full set of icons is shown here:

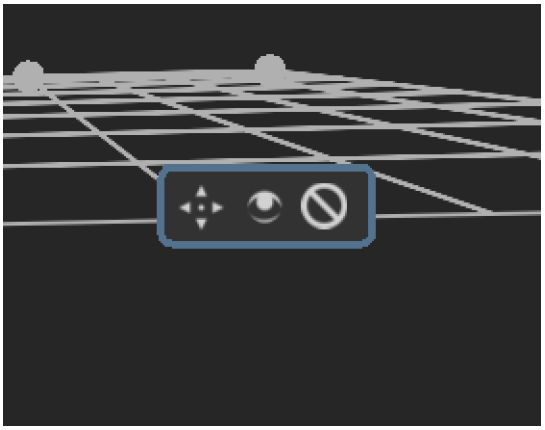


Figure 6.22 – The Assistant Tool's Move Tool, Hide/Show Tool, and Delete Tool (from left to right)

13. Return to your **Perspective Grid** layer and *lower the opacity* to something like 30% to 40% .
14. Go ahead and *lock the layer* to ensure you maintain the integrity of the layer and don't erase/paint over the information.

    Your **Perspective Grid** layer should look similar to this in your **Layers** panel after these changes are made:

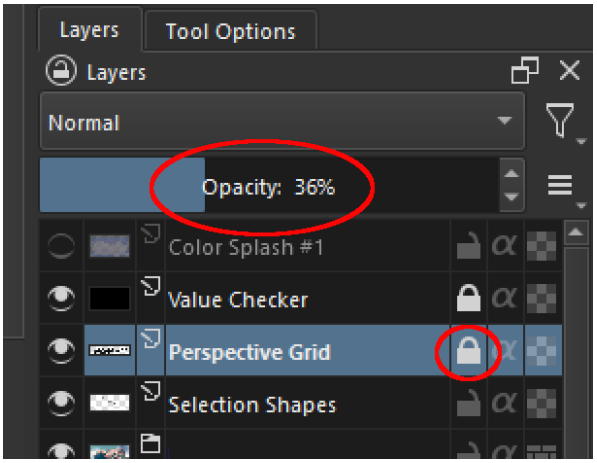


Figure 6.23 – Perspective Grid layer, locked, at 36% opacity in Normal blending mode

I know this was essentially a crash course with the Assistant Tools, but as previously mentioned, we will be doing a deeper dive into perspective, rulers, and grids throughout the rest of the book when the need arises!

From here, let's wrap up this chapter by refining some of our colors on our **Color Splash** layer and adding a bit of painterly flair with some quick brushwork over the top of everything.

Refining our brushwork

Now that we have established some more refined shapes and given ourselves a good perspective grid to work with, we can really dig into splashing color in a more meaningful way. Once this is done, we can refine our edges with some additional brushwork and bring this chapter to a close!

Let's go ahead and set up some additional colors in our **Color Splash** layer, and merge a copy of what we have so far to allow for some rich, blended painting. Follow these steps:

1. On your **Layers** panel, select your **Color Splash** layer and ensure that it is *visible* (as we hid the layer in the first step of the *Creating edges* section of this chapter).

   My main goal at this point is to add some subtle shifts of hues, bringing some interest into the middle portion of our leftmost mountain range. I plan on doing this by adding some brown and refining the shapes of the "mountain reflection" on the ice.

2. Grab a nice brown shade for your hue, and with your **Color Splash** layer selected, make some sweeping marks mimicking the directional textures of the photographic layers.
3. After you are satisfied with the brown hue splashes, go ahead and choose a dark gray and refine some of the hues of the mountain shapes we made earlier in the *Creating edges* section with our Polygonal Selection Tool.

At this point, you may have something that looks like this:

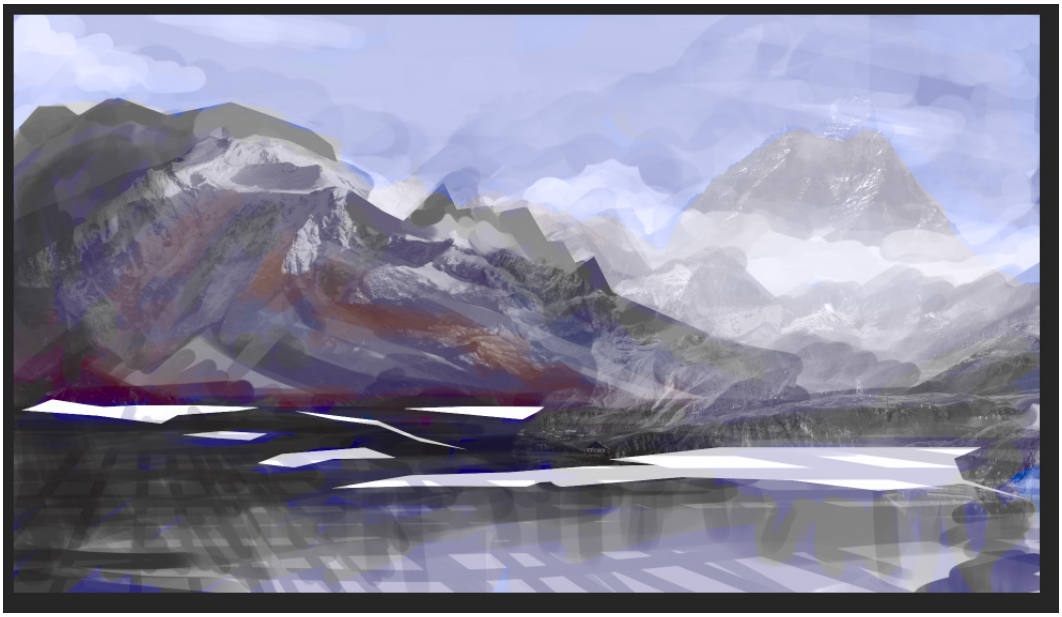


Figure 6.24 – More color splashing, blending in grays with browns and blues

We are now at a crossroads, and depending on the way you work, you can choose any of the following:

a. Continue splashing in specific colors to start setting the mood

b. Refine your values to start bringing more of a render to your piece

For me, I feel as if the color splashing isn't quite capturing the feel I'm wanting. This tells me it's probably a good idea to *refine my values* and take the piece to a bit more of a render.

Now, once again, I can do this in several ways since we've set up our Krita file in an open-ended manner. I could choose from one of the following options:

a. Working within pure grayscale (by disabling our **Color Splash** layer and *creating a layer underneath our* **Value Checker** *layer* to paint on)

b. Integrating a few of the **Color Splash** decisions (such as the blue sky, browns, and grays) and moving forward on *a new layer on top of everything*.

I'm going to choose the second option here, as I think that even if what we have in *Figure 6.24* doesn't look like much, it actually has a lot of information we can use to start our "real painting" layers.

> **Working to Your Strengths**
>
> Keep in mind that there's no right or wrong way to go about a painting process! I'm just comfortable enough with the tools to know that even with "ugly" painting of color on our **Color Splash** layer, I'm already mentally "filling in the blanks," knowing the next steps I want to take. If you're newer or less familiar with your Krita workflow, build confidence by sticking to what you know and your favorite parts of the process!

I'm going to want to create a new layer that contains the visual content we already have in our piece. This is because our thicker texture brushes are going to work more efficiently if we start painting on a layer *that already has data on it*, instead of creating a new empty layer. We will do this by making a "merged" layer.

4. On your **File** menu, go to **Select | Select All**. This will create a selection of your entire canvas.
5. Go to **Edit | Copy Merged** (*Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C* keyboard shortcut). This is going to give you a copy of the *visuals as you currently see them* on your canvas. It essentially takes a snapshot of your piece.
6. With your **Color Splash** layer active, go to **Edit | Paste** (*Ctrl* + *V* keyboard shortcut). This will create a new layer (in my case, named **Paint Layer 4 (pasted)**) on top of the **Layers** panel hierarchy.
7. Rename this new layer **Painterly Pass 1** and ensure it is the topmost layer.

Your **Layers** panel should now look like this:

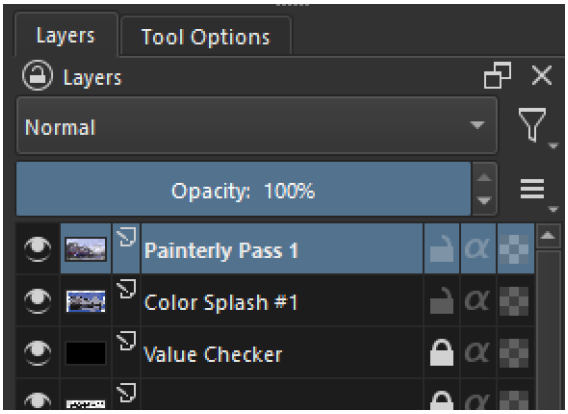


Figure 6.25 – Our new Painterly Pass 1 layer, a merged visual of all of our work thus far

Now that we're set with an "underpainting" of sorts in our **Painterly Pass 1** layer, let's go ahead and start painting on it with color!

8. Grab a nice textured brush. For this, I'll grab my **Thick Oil with Medium** brush we created in *Chapter 4*, *Utilizing Brushes and Tools*.
9. With my brush selected and my **Painterly Pass 1** layer active, I want to *color-pick* a darker gray from my leftmost mountain (using the *Ctrl* hotkey with my **Brush** tool selected).

   I want to refine the mountains in the foreground to appear darker than they are now. I also want to occasionally select a nice brown hue to integrate into the rocks near the middle, as we did on our **Color Splash** layer.
10. Now, I have some newer textures here, as I've painted some darker, looser portions within our mountain. Here's the result:

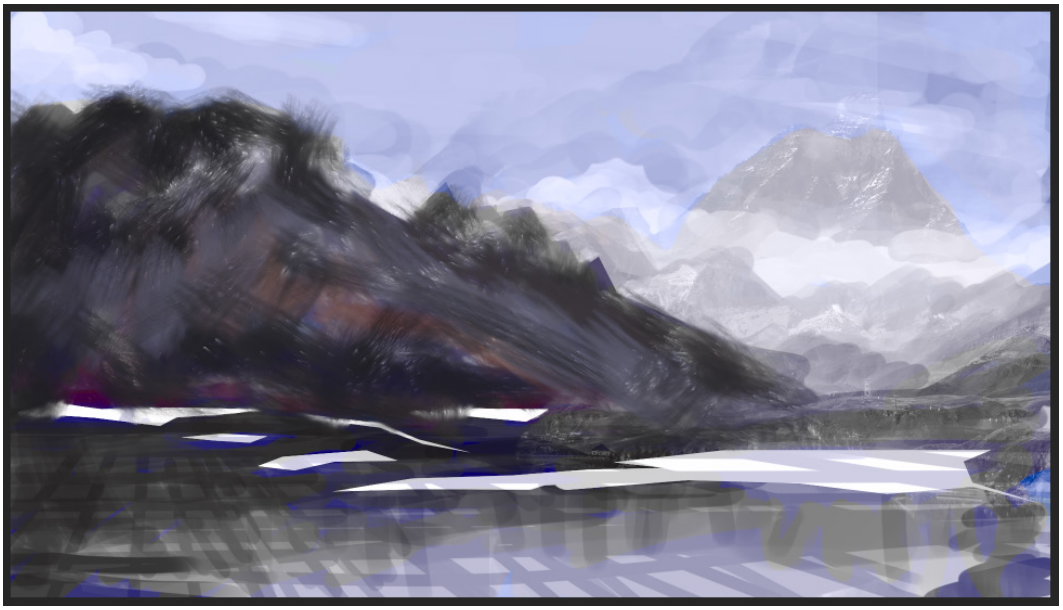


Figure 6.26 – Adding darker values and hues to our mountain with our custom brush

While the loose painterly strokes are fine for a basic block-in, let's select a sharper brush and start putting in actual detail of light, shadow, and form.

11. Select a *thick, wet brush*. For me, that will be the **i) Wet Knife** brush.
12. Select some of the *darker hues* and block in some areas on the left where our mountain won't get direct sunlight (as our light source is coming from the right side of the composition).
13. You can also select some *midtones* and create some sweeping motions in the middle of the mountain to give your mountain a sense of density, with "rolling rocks" and changes in elevation.

After these two passes, my composition is feeling more like a mountain but still feels very impressionistic, as we can see here:

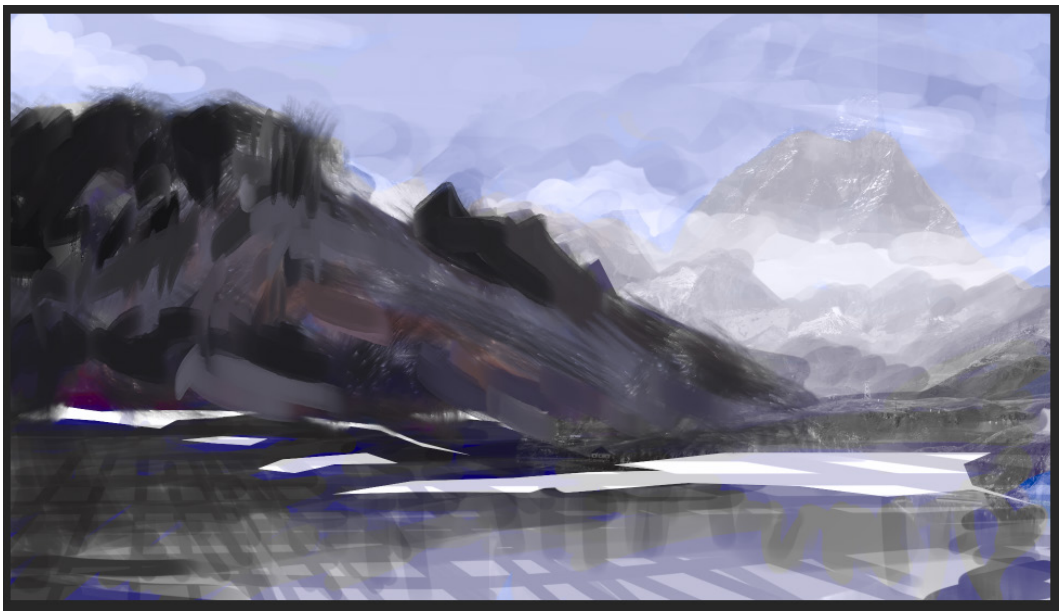


Figure 6.27 – Our mountain with more solid tonal block-in and varied brushwork

We're getting there! Now, let's go ahead and quickly integrate our ice lake into the composition and refine the values and hues to "tie in" what we have so far, keeping our perspective in mind.

14. Grab a nice gray from your piece, one that appears in both your mountain and your lake area.
15. Near the base of the mountain, go in with a softer brush (such as **b) Basic-2 Opacity**) and manually paint in a blend between the mountain's base and the edge of the lake.
16. Take this brush and extend out some of the white ice shapes, blending them with the foreground by lightly touching your tablet (as the **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush has opacity tied with the pen pressure of your tablet). You can also change the opacity of the brush if you prefer to do your opacity control that way!

What have now is a bit more coherent, as we can see here:

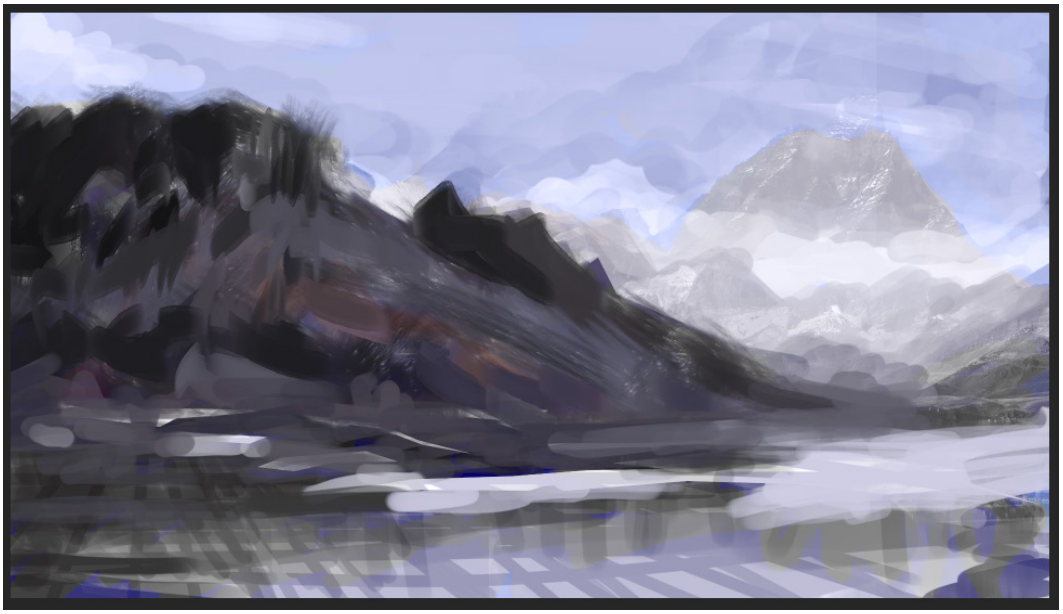


Figure 6.28 – A slightly more readable mountain range and ice lake after our brushwork

For the last part of this chapter, let's go ahead and add some detail to the foreground, showcasing the icy nature of our lake by creating a reflection and etching some fast horizontal and vertical marks with our perspective in mind.

17. With a brush you're comfortable with (I'm sticking with my **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush), color-pick (using the *Ctrl* hotkey) the *sky color* and block in some opaque shapes at the *very bottom* of our composition.
18. As your sky color is selected, *lower the brightness* of the color (*or lower the opacity of your brush*) and draw some jagged shapes coming up from the bottom of our composition. This will act as a "reflection" for the time being.

We should now have something that's starting to come together, and that certainly looks to be the case here:

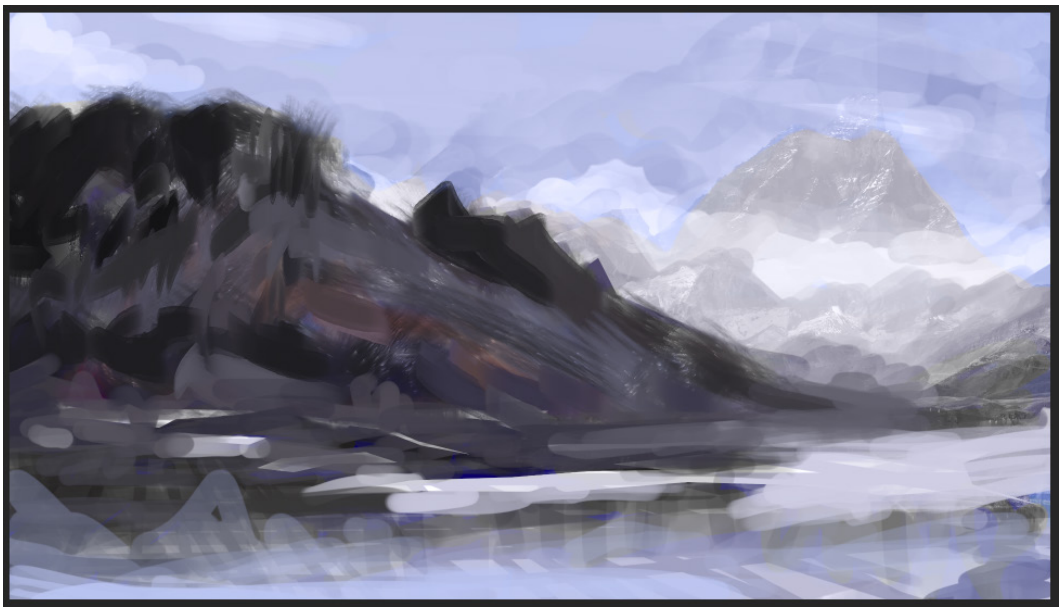


Figure 6.29 – Our impressionistic mountain and ice lake after our "reflection" pass

Now, there's still a lot of work to do on our landscape, but we are at a great stopping point for this chapter! There are a lot of moving parts that we covered here, so feel free to play around with various tools and functions that we may have skimmed. As always, the benefit of creating digital art in Krita is the ability to try things, as there's no "wrong way" to express yourself!

I hope this chapter showed a few tools that may get your imagination going, and I hope you're enjoying how well your landscape is coming along!

Well done!

Summary

During this chapter, we used a variety of tools to clean up and refine not only our image but our decision-making process as well.

First, we learned about masks and used the **Transparency Mask** feature to mask out weird visual information from our photograph layers. We then used some selection tools to further clarify our shapes, adding some sheets of ice and sharpening up some of the jagged edges of our mountains. Once our composition was a little cleaner, we then discovered the Assistant Tool to overlay a perspective grid for our reference when creating sheets of ice on our lake. Then, we created a merged copy of what we had and applied some rich brushwork, blending our hues and value control, pushing our piece to more of a "painterly" feel.

In *Chapter 7*, *Changing the Feel with Painting, Values, and Sliders*, we're going to take our painting to the finish! We will learn about color toning, color gamuts, brightness and contrast filters, and some tricks we can use with our brushwork to really make our landscape pop!

The amount of change you'll see in your landscape is going to blow your mind, I guarantee it! Let's get to it and finish our first project with style!

7

Changing the Feel with Painting, Values, and Sliders

In *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*, we discussed the importance of **masks** for our layers, and you'll notice that what we learned is going to be repeated from here on out through the remainder of the book in various capacities. We're nearing the portion of the book where your skills and understanding of Krita are bound to "level up," which means we'll be picking up the pace moving forward. You got this!

In this chapter, we'll be finalizing our overall design and brushwork, covering the idea of "changing mood" for our landscape and adjusting things such as color balance, brightness, and contrast.

Topics covered in this chapter include the following:

- Adjusting your color balance
- Controlling mood
- Modifying brightness and contrast

Since we're so far into our landscape painting, this will be a perfect opportunity to "refresh our eyes" a bit, fix some portions of the painting itself, and learn some cool tricks of the trade for balancing values and colors in the process!

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0+)
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard and either a mouse, tablet, or a touch device with a stylus
- Your landscape file (carried over from *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*)

If you did not follow along with *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*, a full version of my Krita file (`.kra`) as of the end of the chapter is available for you here: `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`.

There are a lot of fantastic "tricks of the trade" in this chapter, and I'm excited to share some of these secrets with you! Let's get started!

Adjusting your color balance

The first main step I'd like to do in this chapter is to really nail down the brushwork and painting, getting it near a "final render." However, before we start digging into the refinement of the painting, I'd like to do a slight color tweak using the **Color Balance** adjustment filter.

Let's take a look at our image as of the end of *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*. I always find it helpful to have a good "starting point" to take notes of where I'm at in regards to the process, and brainstorm some potential improvements (*Figure 7.1*):

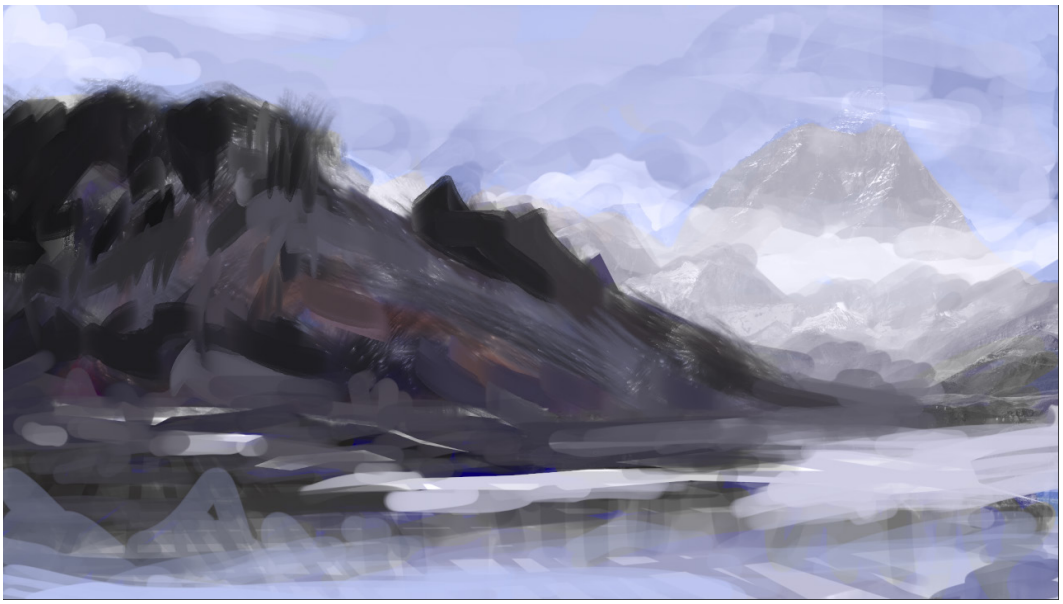


Figure 7.1 – Our landscape painting, as of the end of Chapter 6, Composing Using Krita's Toolbox

I feel like the blues of the entire composition could be pushed a little, and some of the colors could read a little "deeper" (higher saturation with darker color value), to give us some wiggle room when it comes to expanding the values for our foreground, midground, and background layers. I'll want the items closest to the viewer to be darker, the midground to be a true midtone, and our background to be pretty bright and vibrant in the highlights. This will add to the depth of the scene, and the visual interest, making our landscape "pop" for the viewer. We want this to be a showstopper!

A very fast, impactful way to get a new look for our painting is by using the **Color Balance** adjustment filter. This filter not only allows us to modify the overall color "leaning" of our painting, but also allows us to break down our color ranges into shadows, highlights, and midtones.

Let's do that now!

Preparing our painting for color balance

There's a lot of power in being able to have total control of your colors in a non-destructive way in Krita. Being able to balance your shadows, midtones, and highlights with the click of a button not only works as a great "finishing touch" for your work but can also work in the way we're using it – to refresh our eye and give a more refined, rich color palette to work from and build our painting upon!

Let's prepare our file so we can get the biggest impact with our **Color Balance** pass. We can do so with the following steps:

1. Make sure your landscape painting is open. If you haven't followed along thus far and would like to use my file, feel free to download it by referring to the *Technical requirements* section of this chapter.

   The first thing we can do to make our life a little easier is to create a "merged" copy of our painting thus far. This will allow us to have a "checkpoint" of progress, an idea we will cover in *Chapter 8*, *Controlling Chaos – Organizing Your Workflow*.
2. Make sure the top layer is selected in your **Layers** panel. My top layer is currently **Painterly Pass 1**, so I'll make sure it's the active layer.
3. On the **File** menu, click **Select**, then **Select All** (the default hotkey is *Ctrl* + *A*).
4. Once your canvas is selected, on the **File** menu, click **Edit**, then **Copy merged** (the default hotkey is *Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C*).

   Your entire canvas, as it appears in your work area, is now copied to your Krita clipboard.
5. Click on **Edit** once again on the **File** menu, then select the **Paste** option (the default hotkey is *Ctrl* + *V*).
6. This will create a new layer at the top of your layer stack. In my case, it was named **Painter Layer 4 (Pasted)** by default. I want to go ahead and change the name of that new layer to **Merged Copy**.

Your **Layers** panel should resemble something like *Figure 7.2*:

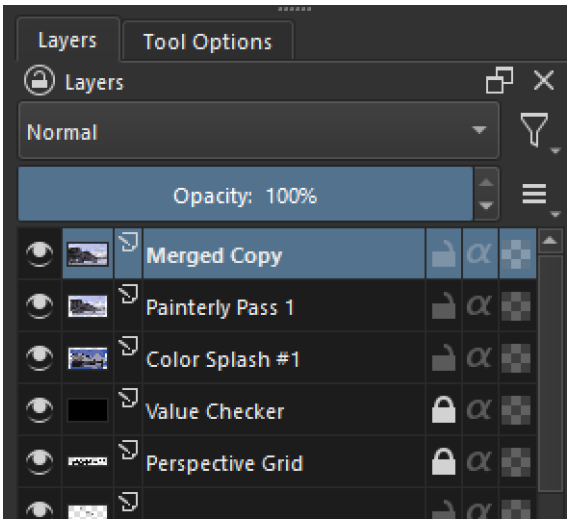


Figure 7.2 – Our updated Layers panel, with our new Merged Copy layer on top

This is going to let us utilize the **Color Balance** filter to its fullest extent, allowing every pixel of our painting to be impacted by the changes we make. The **Color Balance** adjustment filter only impacts the active layer in our **Layers** panel, so having a merged copy of our painting as our active layer will ensure that we're giving the tool the most information possible to adjust.

Let's go ahead and see what this tool is all about!

7. Make sure your **Merged Copy** layer is active. This ensures any edits we make going forward are non-destructive to what we've made previously.
8. On the **File** menu, click the **Filter** menu option, then hover over the option named **Adjust**.

9. Once the **Adjust** category expands, select **Color Balance** (*Figure 7.3*):

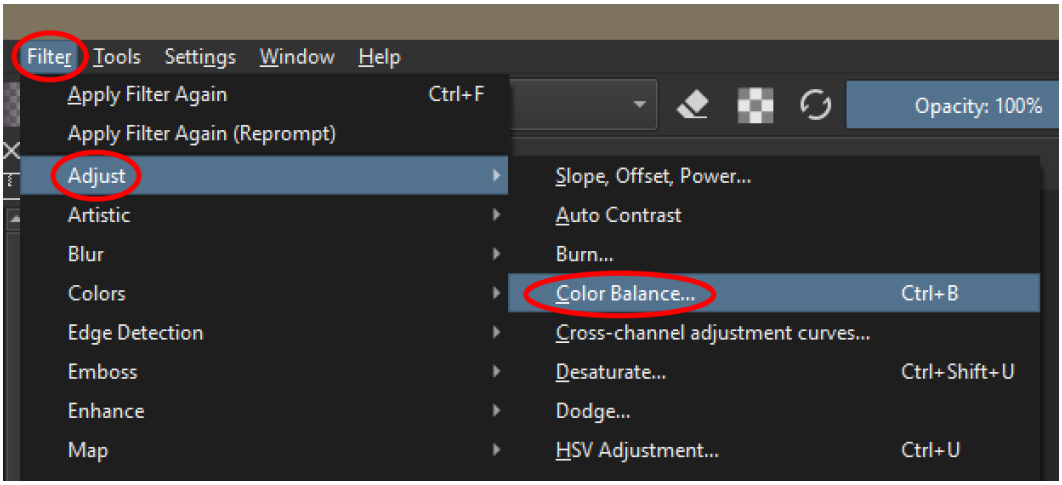


Figure 7.3 – Our Color Balance filter selection, found through the Adjust category in the Filter menu

10. A pop-up menu will come up, showing you a variety of options and sliders (*Figure 7.4*):

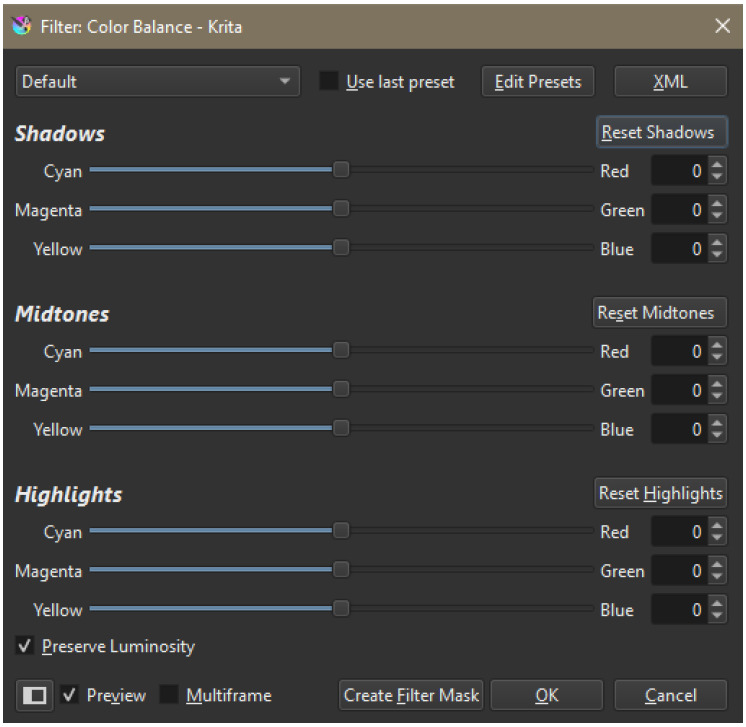


Figure 7.4 – The Color Balance adjustment filter window

The **Color Balance** window allows you to have control over the amount of hue impact based upon the direction of the sliders present. You will notice the hue sliders are all repeated under each category (namely **Shadows**, **Midtones**, and **Highlights**), with a **Reset** button on the sides to bring each category back to zero, respectively.

11. Play around with the sliders and notice the impact the adjustments are making on your image. This may seem like a vague step, but noticing the vast changes your image can go through with a subtle slider adjustment can be eye-opening!

    Our goal is to add a little bit of color vibrancy to our piece by adding some deeper colors to the darks, while also adjusting the lights to have higher saturation as well. We can also embrace the differences in the hue of our mountain and the atmosphere surrounding it, which should give us a nice contrast for the viewer.

12. I want to give a nice, rich brown tone to our mountains, and because they are the darkest values on our piece at the moment, these hues will primarily be impacted by adjusting the **Shadows** sliders.

> **Understanding the Math**
>
> While the terms used in the **Color Balance** window refer to **Shadows**, **Midtones**, and **Highlights**, you should instead think of them as "darkest darks," "average midtones," and "lightest lights." The software doesn't think in relation to your painting's narrative (as in, "here is the shadow of my character" or "here is the highlight of my building"); it only understands the values present and reads your piece as a collection of lights, darks, and midtones.
>
> Adjusting the **Shadows** slider will impact the darkest darks, no matter the context of your piece. If your piece doesn't have a lot of darkest darks and instead your darks hang out around the 50% value level, your "darks" may actually be more impacted based on the **Midtones** slider, as Krita may see your darks as registering in its "midtone algorithm." It's all about the context of your piece and further amplifies the importance of distinct, easily parsed value control!

13. I want to add some nice reds and yellows to our mountain, so under the **Shadows** slider, I bump the sliders closer to **Red** (instead of **Cyan**), don't touch the **Magenta**/**Green** slider, and go toward **Yellow** (instead of **Blue**) on the third slider (*Figure 7.5*):

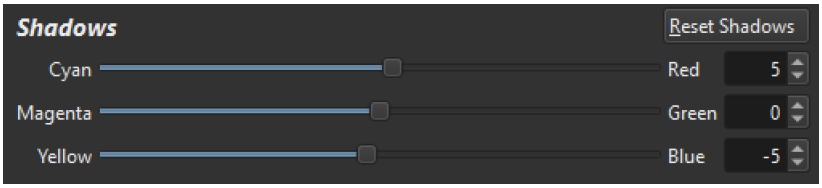


Figure 7.5 – Our Shadows sliders in the Color Balance window, with numeric values included on the right

14. Since we will be making our adjustments to our brightest brights (**Highlights**) and darkest darks (**Shadows**), we will be passing over the **Midtones** slider here.

    On the **Highlights** slider, since our **Shadows** are leaning more toward the "warmer" side of the color wheel (as we increased the amount of **Red** and **Yellow** in *Step 13*), let's move our **Highlights** slider to a "cooler" range.

    I tweak the **Highlights** slider to go more toward **Cyan** than **Red**, I once again leave the **Magenta**/**Green** slider alone, and increase the amount of **Blue** (*Figure 7.6*):

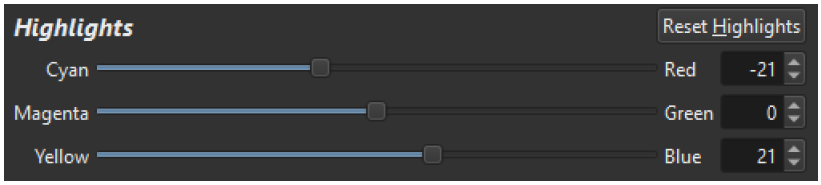


Figure 7.6 – Our Highlights sliders in the Color Balance window, with numeric values included on the right

This provides us with a nice balance of warms, cools, and gives us our overall goal of maintaining our painting's mood while making the colors more vibrant and deeper.

15. Now, once you're pleased with your overall look, you have a few options. If you click **OK**, you will immediately apply the changes to your active layer. However, I think it's best if we maintain control over this filter, so we will click on **Create Filter Mask** (*Figure 7.7*):

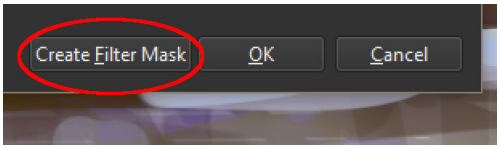


Figure 7.7 – The Create Filter Mask, OK, and Cancel buttons in the Color Balance window

This allows us to maintain total control of the location and intensity of our changes, as we can use what we learned in *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*, regarding masks to make the visual tweaks as we see fit. We will keep white on the mask for the areas of this **Color Balance** correction that we would like to keep, while for the parts we want to hide, we can brush away using black on the mask.

16. Use your preferred brush (or brushes) to hide and show parts of your **Color Balance** adjustments using the attached filter mask we just created.
17. Once you're happy with the look, be sure to save your progress thus far!

    Our **Layers** panel should resemble *Figure 7.8* at this point:

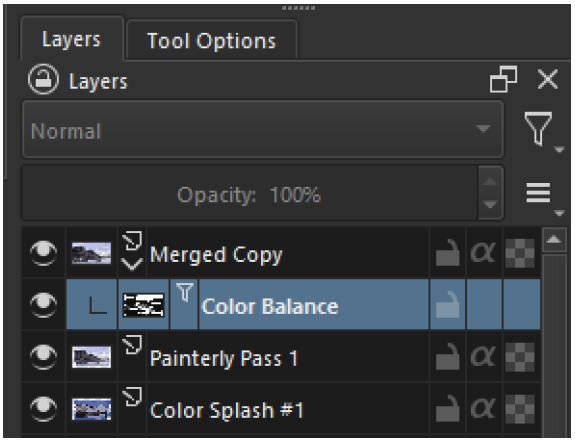


Figure 7.8 – Our Layers panel with our newly added Color Balance filter mask

We have successfully used the **Color Balance** filter to give ourselves some new colors we can choose from, to take our painting to a nice finish.

Let's do our final painting push for this landscape!

Painting using our new adjustments

Now, we'll be taking our newly-adjusted piece and using our new values and color palette to bring a better sense of cohesion to our painting. That's the benefit of making adjustment layers for the work we've done so far – we can compare our changes to things such as values and colors in order to make sure they're the most beneficial to our work. It also has a great side-effect of "refreshing our brain," giving us a new sense of momentum to add more details and rendering to really bring out the best of our project!

> **Speeding Things Up**
>
> While I'm going to show and mention a few main painting ideas, we're going to make a *huge* leap in quality in relatively few steps. Don't worry if it seems like we go from "point A to point Z" too quickly, as we will be doing a full look at the painting techniques used during this section in *Chapter 10*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*, where we do a still-life study that focuses on edges, the direction of strokes, balancing of shapes, and more. This chapter is a bit more focused on adjustments you can make *while* painting, rather than the painting technique itself.

Firstly, let's make another "merged copy" layer of our piece, now that we have some extra color hue and intensity information to work with:

1. With your top layer selected (in my case, the Merged Copy layer that has our Color Balance filter mask attached), choose **Select** > **Select All** from the **File** menu.
2. Once everything is selected, choose **Edit** > **Copy Merged**.
3. Then, choose **Edit** > **Paste**. This will create a new layer (in my case, called **Paint Layer 4 (pasted)**).
4. Rename the layer `Painting Refinement 1` (*Figure 7.9*):

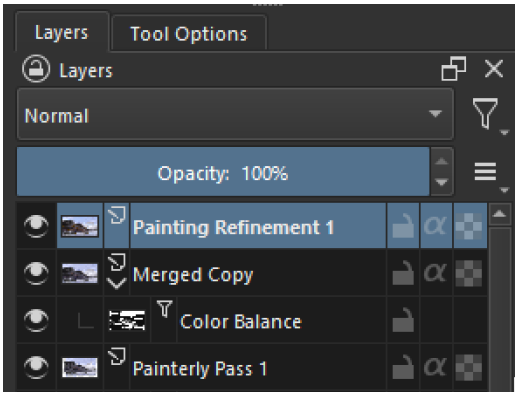


Figure 7.9 – Our new Painting Refinement 1 layer at the top of our Layers panel stack

Now we're ready to paint!

5. With your **Painting Refinement 1** layer selected, change over to your **Brush** tool and choose your favorite sharper edge brush. In my case, I want to choose the **i) Wet Knife** brush.
6. Using your stock photographs as a visual reference, add some brushwork to the middle of our foreground mountain. I'm selecting some of the lighter and darker colors when making my shapes (color picking by holding down the *Alt* key to bring up the eyedropper tool) in order to add some visual variety of hues and values.
7. Since the main light source is coming from the right side of the composition, I'll add my lightest "highlights" to the right side of some rock shapes to have the appearance of light "catching" on the ridges and edges of the rocks.
8. Be sure to also add some horizontal, brighter brushmarks to the base of your mountain. This will give a great sense of depth, as it'll appear to the viewer that the "sheets of ice" are approaching the summit.
9. At this point, my piece looks like *Figure 7.10* after just a few passes with the **i) Wet Knife** brush and adjusting the size (using the hotkeys of *[* for decreasing brush size, and *]* for increasing, respectively) of my brush for details "in the distance":

Figure 7.10 – Our refined painting so far, using harder brushes with color picking for variety

While we're definitely getting there, I feel like we need to add in some nice, thick brushwork for added visual impact.

10. Go ahead and switch over to a thick impasto style brush (I'll be using the **m) RGBA Thick-dry** brush) and further refine the foreground mountain, adding a variety of colors and sizes with your brushwork (*Figure 7.11*):

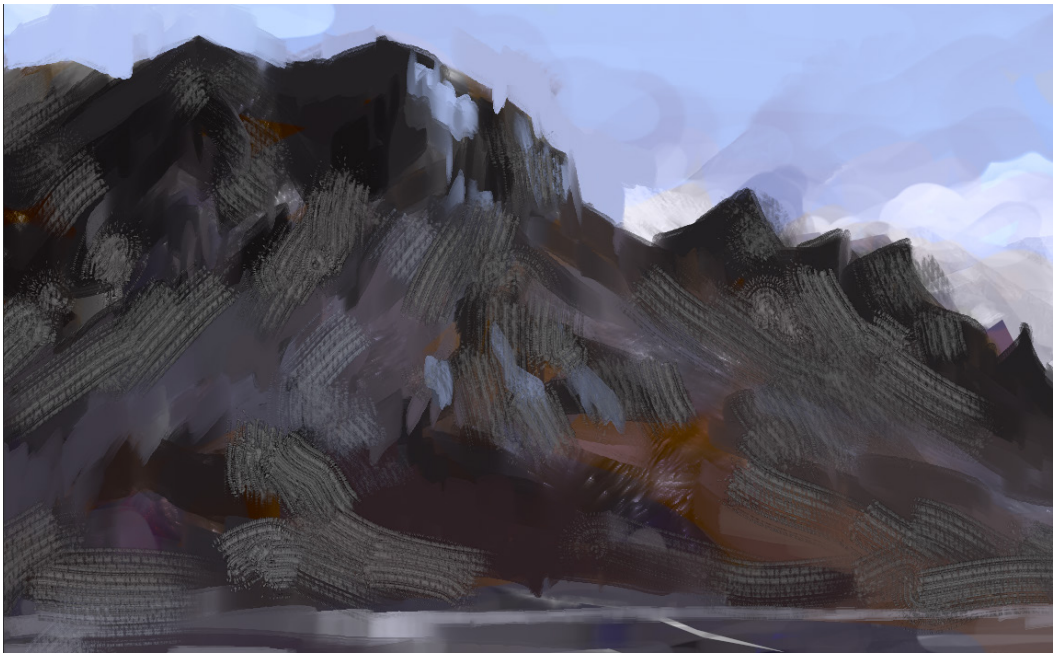


Figure 7.11 – Our painting with added RGBA Thick-dry brushwork on top

I'll now choose a smaller, more "hard round" brush to create some leading lines (marks that make a path to "lead the viewer" to our focal points) on my main mountains, and solidify some design shapes for the sheet of foreground ice, my background mountains, and my clouds.

11. For this task, I'll choose my trusty **b) Basic-1** brush, as it is more opaque than its opacity-based sibling. Now we have a piece that is ready for some blending and detail work (*Figure 7.12*):

Figure 7.12 – Our piece with some leading lines and a more structured background

At this point, I believe we're ready to go to our finishing steps to complete our painting, meaning creating some varied edges (between hard edges, soft edges, and lost edges). It also means our **Blender Blur** brush has some time to shine!

12. Select a nice blender brush (as mentioned in *Step 11*, I've selected my **Blender Blur** brush for this) and smudge some of the background and midground edges. Based on the pressure you put on the tool, the impact and intensity of the blur effect will change.

    While I use my chosen blender brush, I try to keep in mind to keep a variety of edges. I'd like to keep the chaotic, seemingly random brushwork near the bottom of the piece, as this can be used to infer "details" when seen at first glance. I also want to blur some of the color changes together in the middle of the mountain, but keep some sharp edges to signify "sharp rocks."

13. I work until I like the overall feel, keeping the brushwork and blending nice and loose (*Figure 7.13*):

Figure 7.13 – Our blended landscape after our Hard Round brush and Blender Blur passes

Now we are truly at the final steps!

14. Make a new layer. Name this layer `Finishing Touches`.
15. Select your pencil brush (in my case, it will be the **c) Pencil-2** brush). We will use this to "draw details," essentially performing a color sketch *on top* of our current painting. This is useful as a way to make very specific, precise marks for things such as mountain edges, ice portions in the lake, and random outlines and marks near things we find the most important in our composition.

16. Once you are pleased with your details, be sure to save your work!

    That's essentially it for this composition, although I highly recommend taking a nice break (maybe even a day or two), coming back, and fixing any small areas you would like adjusted (*Figure 7.14*):

Figure 7.14 – Our refined sketch layer on top of our piece brings us to the final painting result!

Congratulations, you've made a *huge* amount of progress since the start of the book, and I hope you found this initial painting project rewarding and educational! Fantastic work!

Before we wrap this project up, there are a few more tweaks and adjustments we can use to get the most out of our hard work. Firstly, let's discuss the aspect of our painting's mood, and a few tried-and-true methods we can use to further understand and push the mood of our piece.

Controlling mood

Mood, in the context of painting, usually refers to the *emotional impact* a piece can have on a viewer based on either the feelings expressed in the composition (such as the storytelling or subject matter) or the atmosphere used in the values (lights and darks) and color themes present in the painting.

Now, we can also use the humanized concept of "mood" to discuss this as well, such as "how did this painting make me feel?", which is still a very valid approach. In our instance, however, we'll be focusing on the mechanics of the painting itself, and leave the feelings to the viewer to sort out on their own!

To make this idea a little more tangible, let's first discuss a way we can control the color harmony and "color themes" of a piece in order to elicit a response. While we discussed basic warm-and-cool color theory in *Chapter 2*, *Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color*, I'd like to show a cool trick that Krita has in giving you a great limited palette to work with: **Color Gamut Masks**. After we explore color gamuts, we can take a look at another secret weapon in regard to color harmony and adjustments – the *Mother Color*.

First, let's begin by discussing color gamuts.

Choosing color gamuts

A **color gamut**, as defined in *Chapter 2*, *Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color*, is the confined distance between colors. That's all well and good, but what does that actually *mean*? In essence, a color gamut is a mask of the color wheel that confines your color choices, essentially creating a limited palette for you. This enables a high level of color harmony within your work, and can be a "secret weapon" in relation to making your art have "mood."

Here is a quick refresher on some common color gamut recipes:

- **Complimentary Color** – Two colors that are located on polar opposite sides of the color wheel (yellow and blue, red and cyan, green and purple, and so on).
- **Monochromatic Color** – All variants of a single hue. Ranging throughout the full value spectrum, monochromatic (mono meaning "one," chromatic meaning "color") colors consist of a single hue, plus its shades (adding black), tints (adding white), and tones (adding gray).
- **Analogous Color** – The term analogous color refers to a group of three colors that are next to one another on the color wheel. Red, red-orange, and orange are one example of an analogous color group, with blue, blue-violet, and blue-green being another.

- **Triadic Color** – A three-color set with equal distance between each color, creating a triangle on the color wheel. Red, green, and blue are a triadic color set.
- **Tetradic Color** – A four-color set, consisting of two sets of complementary colors. There is an equal distance between the color groupings, usually resulting in an equal color balance.

Krita actually has a built-in tool to aid us with the use and creation of **Color Gamut Masks**, and it can be found under the **Dockers** menu:

1. On your **File** menu, click on **Settings**, then select **Dockers**.
2. In the pop-out menu, select **Gamut Masks**. A window will open (*Figure 7.15*):

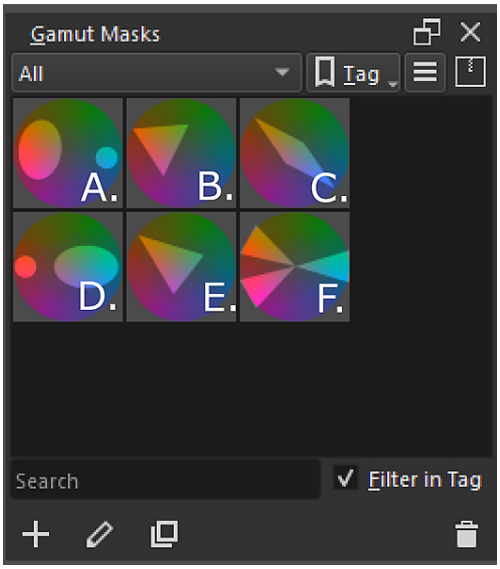


Figure 7.15 – The Gamut Masks window from our Dockers panel

3. Clicking on one of the **Gamut Masks** will enable the gamut on your functional color wheel.

   From left to right, the gamuts you can choose from by default are as follows:

   a. **Atmosphere with Accent**

   b. **Atmospheric Triad**

   c. **Complementary**

   d. **Dominant Hue with Accent**

   e. **Shifted Triad**

   f. **Split Complementary**

Our current painting has a **Complementary** color palette (blues and yellows/oranges), so we can go ahead and select it.

4. Upon selecting the **Complementary** option in our **Gamut Masks** window, our color wheel will update with the gamut enabled.
5. Use your color picker (hold *Ctrl* for the eyedropper tool) and select any color from your painting.

   You are now locked into your **Complementary** color gamut! This is exciting because you can use any color within the confines of this gamut, and your painting will maintain its current color theme and mood (*Figure 7.16*):

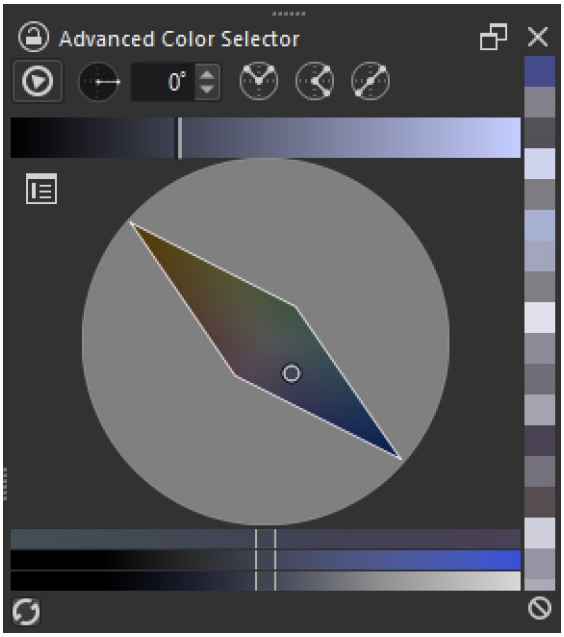


Figure 7.16 – Our Complementary color gamut applied to our color wheel

I'm such a big fan of using gamuts in this way, as it's almost like having the "correct" answer to the question of "which colors will work well with my painting?". I'm a big fan of working in confidence, and I think having the safety net of a locked range of color options to choose from can actually *liberate* you to be more expressive in other portions of your art, such as composition and brushwork.

If at any point you would like to change which gamut mask you are using, you can select it from the **Gamut Masks** selection menu. Also, if there's a time you would like to cancel out of using a color gamut, you can click the color wheel icon to return back to your non-gamut color wheel (*Figure 7.17*):

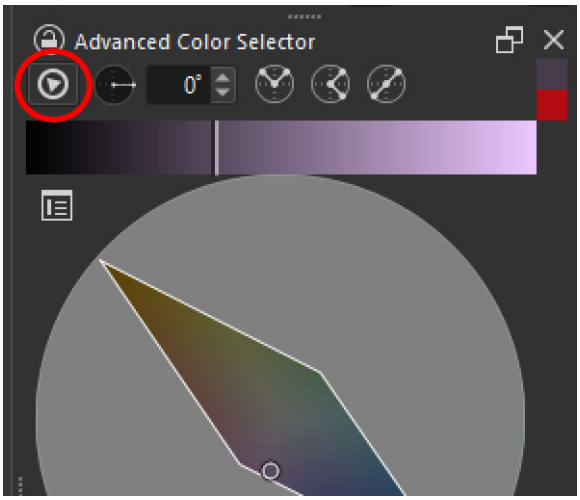


Figure 7.17 – The color wheel icon to exit out of Gamut Mask mode

I highly recommend using **Gamut Masks** if you ever have a hard time deciding on what color theme or mood a piece should provide. It's also *extremely* useful to use if you ever find yourself in a creative rut, or things you are trying on a piece aren't working in the way you intend.

For instance, if you're working on a piece and your values are exactly where you want them, but you aren't sure of colors to use over the top for a "color splash" phase, use a gamut mask to select your color range! It's sure to give you some great ideas and rev up your creative momentum!

Another great, fast way to enhance the mood of any of your work is by using the famous art technique known as "mother colors."

Utilizing a mother color

A **Mother Color** (also known through certain generations as an *anchor color* or *ground color*) is a color that is incorporated into every single color you use on your canvas. Famously, Renaissance painters would use a ground color for creating an underpainting on their canvas before beginning their layers (usually a burnt sienna or raw umber, but any color they had access to could be used). This color would then influence and "bleed" into the other layers, providing a harmonious impact on their paintings.

You can also achieve a Mother Color in traditional painting by having your chosen color off to the side of your palette and mixing various amounts of it with every other color, before putting those colors onto your canvas. This is the method I enjoy using when I work traditionally, as it can make for some bizarre (but beautiful!) colors that really test my knowledge of color temperature and value.

There are also several ways you can utilize a Mother Color within digital art, and Krita makes it very easy to do this. What I want to show you is a simple trick, one that I use a ton on both my personal paintings and my professional client work:

1. Make sure your landscape painting project is open. You thought we were done with it, didn't you?! Ha!
2. Create a new layer on top of your **Layers** panel stack. Name this layer `Mother Color`.
3. Choose a nice, rich blue that you would enjoy being part of your entire landscape. I'm choosing a midtone and mid-saturation blue (*Figure 7.18*):

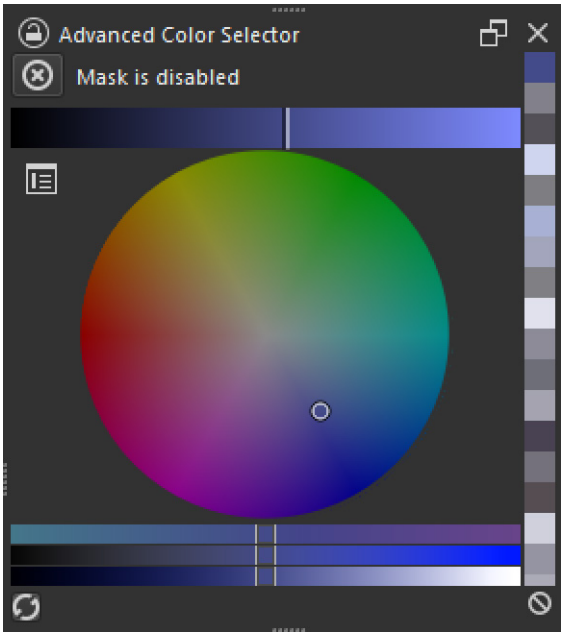


Figure 7.18 – Our midtone blue. Also notice that our gamut mask is disabled

4. Make your **Mother Color** layer entirely this blue color. You can either use a large brush, or the **Fill Tool** (the default hotkey is *F*).
5. Once your **Mother Color** layer is filled with blue, change the layer's blending mode to **Soft Light (Photoshop)**.

You will notice that our blue color has integrated itself with every other color of our landscape. Feel free to use other layer blending modes to see the impact that your **Mother Color** layer has on your composition.

6. I choose to keep my blending mode as **Soft Light (Photoshop)**, but I want to lower the **Opacity** of the layer down to about **54%** (*Figure 7.19*):

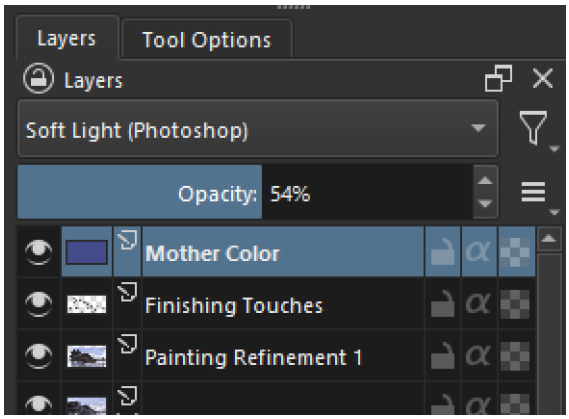


Figure 7.19 – Our new Mother Color layer, with Soft Light (Photoshop) blending mode at 54% opacity

Now that we have applied the Mother Color technique, I'm really enjoying the piece! There's still one slight tweak I'd like to make, and that has to do with the overall brightness and contrast level of the painting.

Let's adjust that now!

Modifying brightness and contrast

Brightness and contrast are probably terms you've seen before, either in the context of digital art or perhaps even as a setting on your computer monitor or television set. Essentially, **Brightness** is the overall lightness (or darkness) of a display or image, while **Contrast** is the amount of distance between the darkest darks and the lightest lights on a display or image (also known as…you guessed it, the value range!).

Wait, haven't we already done this? While it is true that your brightness and contrast decisions are made fairly early into your project by doing things such as selecting your value range (the amount of *contrast* between your lights and darks), and the location on the value scale that your piece will inhabit (the darkness/lightness, or *brightness* of your overall piece), it's never a bad thing to have a "second opinion" from Krita as you've worked on your piece for a while. Much like tweaking your colors with a gamut mask, you would be amazed at just how refreshing doing a slight tweak to your brightness and contrast can be for your project!

Now, when a task or step of your process comes up that needs solving while you work in Krita, there may be a lot of different ways to correctly solve the problem. This is why the flexibility of Krita is so fantastic! Depending on the task, however, there may be a "most correct" tool that can handle the most amount of problem-solving, with the least amount of hassle. Let's find the right tool for this brightness and contrast adjustment job!

Finding the right tool

Krita's an outlier when it comes to brightness and contrast editing, as there's no set filter or adjustment layer called "Brightness and Contrast" as you would see in other digital painting apps. You can use a variety of tools to make adjustments to your brightness and contrast levels, including the **Levels Curve** filter, the **Color Adjustment Curves** filter, and even the **HSV Adjustment** filter. While these can work, in my opinion, there is a better tool to adjust these settings.

Instead of trying multiple different filters with varying degrees of success, I've found that the ability to alter the brightness and contrast of your piece in the most straightforward way can be found by using the **Cross-Channel Adjustment Curves** filter. Krita actually *used* to have a dedicated "Brightness and Contrast" filter back in earlier versions of the software, but as of the beta of Krita 5.0, these features have been contained within this newer, more comprehensive location.

Let's go ahead and truly finalize our landscape painting by tweaking our brightness and contrast using our new filter and a layer mask. With your landscape open, we are going to go ahead and make a merged copy of what we have thus far:

1. We can do this by going to our **File** menu and under **Select**, choosing **Select All** (*Ctrl* + *A* hotkey).
2. Go to **Edit** and choose **Copy merged** (*Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C*). Then, choose **Paste** (*Ctrl* + *V*).
3. This will create a new merged layer on top of our **Layers** panel stack. Rename this layer to `Brightness and Contrast Pass`.

Your **Layers** panel should resemble *Figure 7.20* at this point:

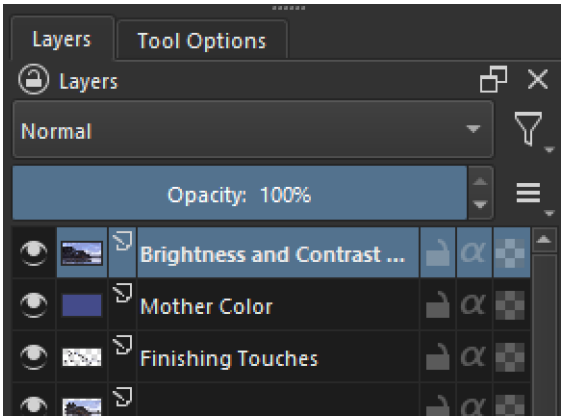


Figure 7.20 – Our new Brightness and Contrast Pass merged layer

4. With our new **Brightness and Contrast Pass** layer active, click on the **Filter** option on the **File** menu.
5. Hover over the **Adjust** category, and select **Cross-channel adjustment curves…** (*Figure 7.21*):

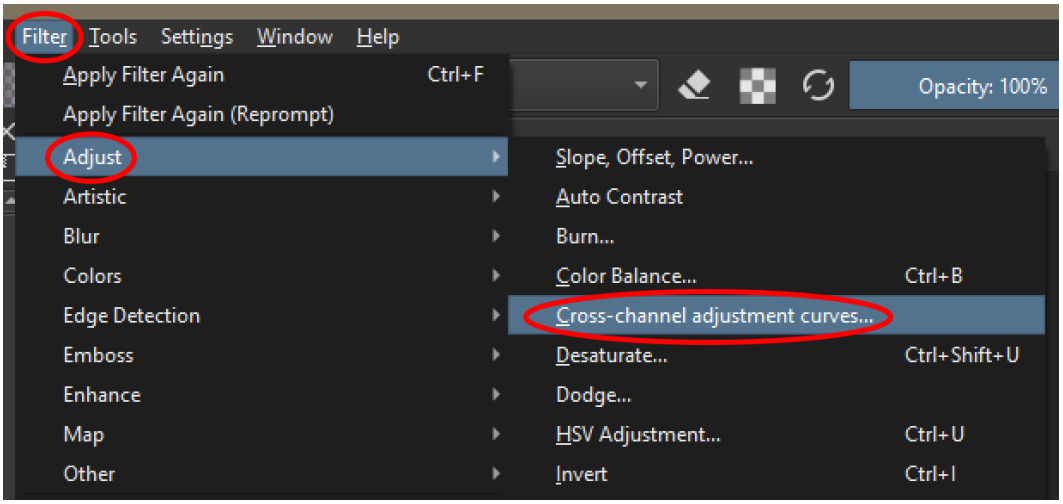


Figure 7.21 – The Cross-channel adjustment curves adjustment filter location

This will open a separate window, showing you a set of drop-down boxes and a curve adjustment graph (*Figure 7.22*):

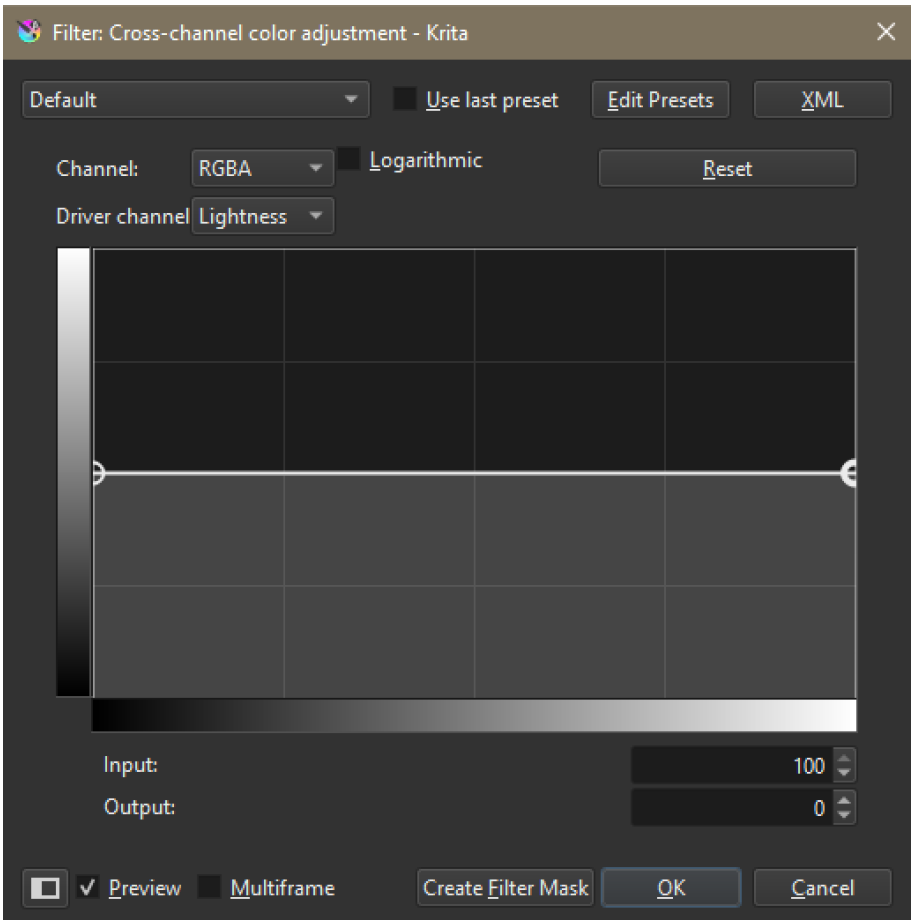


Figure 7.22 – The Cross-channel color adjustment filter, accessed through the Adjust category

While this window may seem a bit intimidating, we're only going to focus on three key aspects to simplify things:

a. **Channel selector** – This is where you will select what aspect of the image you would like to manipulate. Options include **RGBA**, **Red**, **Green**, **Blue**, **Alpha**, **Hue**, **Saturation**, and **Lightness**.

b. **Driver Channel selector** – This is where you will select what you would like to adjust within the channel you have selected. The options here include **Red**, **Green**, **Blue**, **Alpha**, **Hue**, **Saturation**, and **Lightness**.

c. **Curve map** – The map area in which points are placed upon a grid, correlating to changes related to channel, driver channel, and value. The horizontal axis represents the driver channel you selected in the drop-down menu, while the vertical axis represents the channel you selected in the drop-down menu, located above the map itself. The left-most dot represents your range of darks, while the right-most dot represents your range of light. Any dot you put in between those two will influence varying midtones, depending on the channel and driver channel selected.

For instance, let's say you wanted to alter the saturation of your reds. You would select **Saturation** for **Channel**, and **Red** for **Driver channel**. Think of it as an *Edit the* _____ *of the* _____ formula, with your channel and driver channel filling in those blanks, respectively.

6. Since we only want to manipulate our brightness and contrast levels of the piece in its entirety, go ahead and select **Lightness** for **Channel**, and also select **Lightness** for **Driver channel**.

   This tells Krita that you'd like to modify the contrast amount of the lightness of your piece, essentially acting as a makeshift brightness and contrast filter.

After adjusting the points on my grid, I'm enjoying the slight tweaks to brightness and contrast. My finalized settings can be seen in *Figure 7.23*:

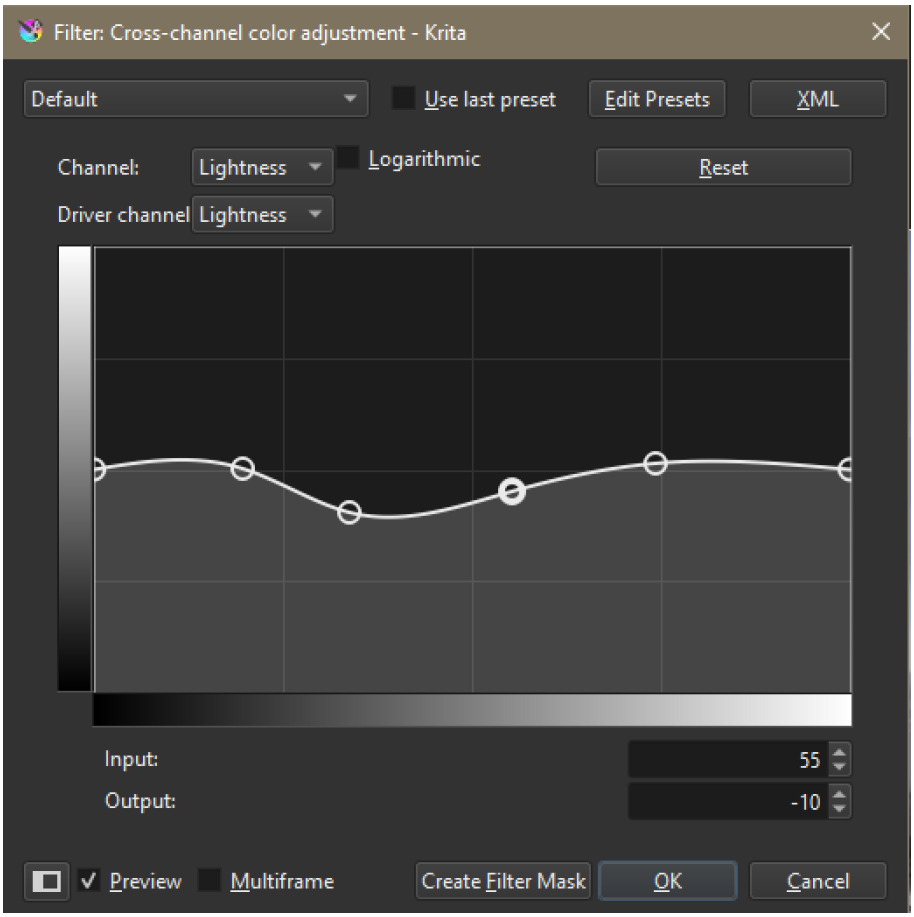


Figure 7.23 – The Cross-channel color adjustment settings for my Brightness and Contrast Pass layer

Since we want to ensure these changes are non-destructive, let's go ahead and click on **Create Filter Mask** to save our changes and attach them to our **Brightness and Contrast Pass** layer. You can always modify the visibility of this mask by using your black and white brushes to hide and show information from this layer, respectively.

Guess what? We have completed our first project (*Figure 7.24*):

Figure 7.24 – Our completed landscape painting. Well done!

Fantastic work! Be proud of your four chapters of work! Hopefully, you have a basic understanding of the workflow and some often-used tools for Krita's digital painting structure.

From here on out, we are going to really embrace what we've learned and take our art to the next level!

Summary

In this chapter, we finally finished our landscape project! First, we utilized some additional brushes to make some refinements to our painting. Then, we moved over to discussing altering the mood of our piece using the color gamut and mother color methods. Finally, we adjusted the overall brightness and contrast of our piece by introducing the **Cross-channel color adjustment** filter, discussing the overall impact of using masked adjustment filters as a finishing touch.

While we made some great progress and finalized our painting, our finely-organized file structure sort of flew by the wayside, which introduces us to what we're going to cover in the next chapter! In *Chapter 8*, *Controlling Chaos – Organize Your Workflow for Maximum Efficiency*, we are going to "package" this project for delivery, including restructuring our **Layers** panel, making new layer groups, and finally saving our project for ease of use in case we want to continue working on it down the line, or share our work with other artists for collaboration.

Let's get going!

8

Controlling Chaos – Organizing Your Workflow

In *Chapter 7*, *Changing the Feel With Painting, Values, and Sliders*, we completed our landscape painting project, which is great news! What isn't so great news, though, is that our nice and tidy project got a bit unwieldy. Extra layers, merged compositions, and out-of-order masking got us to a final painting that we can be proud of but added some ugly complexity to our file structure.

This chapter is dedicated to "cleaning up our mess," making our file more structured and accessible for working in a team environment. This process will also be helpful if we want to return to this piece in the future, as our organizational process will aid us in making edits or corrections during any revisits we may have.

In this chapter, the main topics will include the following:

- Organizing with shape language
- Retaining clarity through structure
- Taking notes

Essentially, the goal of this chapter is to teach you a few ways you can think about your file organization *after* you paint, meaning you don't have to feel guilty if, while creating your art, you are not fully focused on creating the "perfect file structure." I love getting laser-focused on my painting and feel like taking constant breaks to rename layers, move around masks, and mess with sliders and properties can take me out of my artistic flow. Fear not – we'll learn some tricks of the trade to make your work accessible, team-ready, and modular, even after you've already painted it!

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0+)
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus
- Your landscape file (carried over from *Chapter 7*, *Changing the Feel With Painting, Values, and Sliders*)

If you did not follow along in *Chapter 7*, *Changing the Feel With Painting, Values, and Sliders*, a full version of my Krita file (`.kra`) at the end of that chapter is available for you here: `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`.

To get started, we will break our painting down in the most simple way possible – shapes!

Organizing with shape language

Shape language is a term you may have seen floating around various other art, character design, or animation tutorials you may have seen, but what does it mean? While there are many different functional definitions of shape language, in the capacity of this book, shape language can be defined as *simplifying complex areas of a painting into basic geometric shapes*, giving us the "essence" of what we are trying to communicate to the viewer. Instead of focusing on the main focal points as the item's terminology or definition in the context of the subject matter (for instance, referring to something as a mountain, clouds, a vehicle, or a character), think of basic shapes that make up the silhouette of the subject matter, such as triangles, circles, ovals, rectangles, squares, and diamonds.

This is useful for clarifying our designs and breaking our artwork down into repeatable steps for others (such as an art team). Another usage for the term *shape language* can come into play when discussing the *emotional reaction* a viewer may subconsciously have to a shape. A few examples of this include (but are not limited to) the following:

- *Squares* and *rectangles* can show stability and balance (equality on all sides of the shape, or providing a sturdy foundation to build upon).
- *Circles* and *ovals* can represent peace and flow (as there's no combative "hard edge" to draw the eye).
- *Triangles* and *diamonds* can represent power and danger (as they lead to a sharp point or points, much like a dagger or pointed weapon).

These are very basic breakdowns, and you can adjust proportions to change the meanings of a shape. For instance, if you squash an oval to where it is very flat and wide, it can build tension (as it may remind the viewer of a ball or balloon under immense pressure, about to pop) instead of having the feeling of peace that is inherent with the oval's rounded edges. Playing around with the mixing and matching of these shapes in relation to one another on your canvas is a great way to make engrossing, impactful artwork.

There's much to think about regarding shapes, but this theory of emotional impact and asking the question, "what does this shape represent to the viewer?" is extremely helpful during the initial creation of the image. But what can we do after the image is already created?

This ties into our chapter's goal of proper organization. Breaking down our complex canvas into basic shapes will not only help the clarity of sending this artwork off to a team or other artists but also allow us the ability to "reverse-engineer" our own painting, looking at aspects we may not have noticed until after we finished the image.

Cleaning up our layers

Let's start our organizational process by cleaning up our **Layers** panel, before jumping into making any new layers:

1. Make sure your previous landscape painting project is open. If you haven't followed along with the project and need a copy of the file I will be using, you can download the final landscape painting Krita project by referring to the *Technical requirements* section at the start of this chapter.
2. Select your top-most layer in your **Layers** panel. For me, this is the **Brightness and Contrast** layer with my mask attached.

3. Select **Group Layer** by clicking on the side-arrow of the **+** button on the bottom-left of your **Layers** panel (*Figure 8.1*):

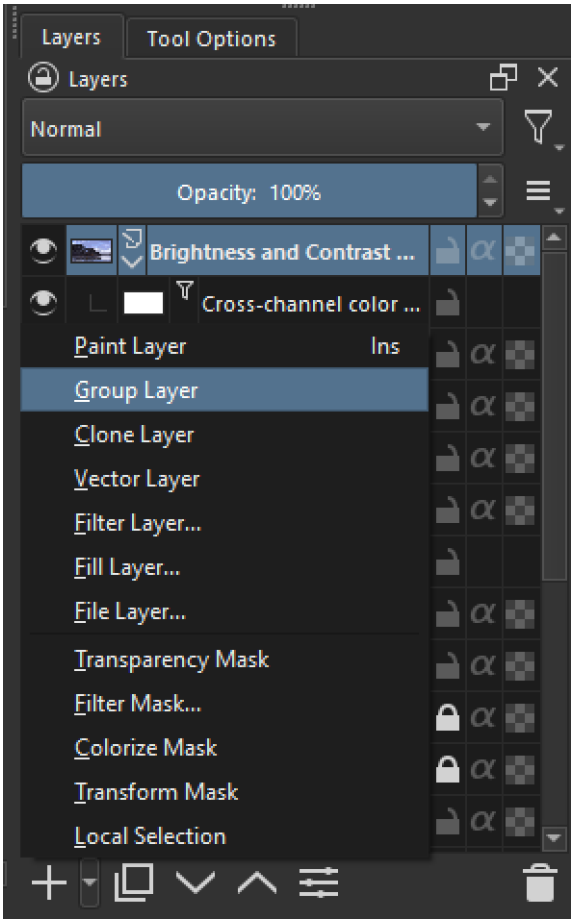


Figure 8.1 – The Group Layer option is highlighted from the Add Layer options menu at the bottom left of the Layers panel

4. This will create a default group with a default name (mine, for instance, was **Group 4**). Change this **Group Layer** name to `Completed Piece`.
5. With your **Completed Piece** layer group active, create a merged version of your image. Do this by going to **Select** on your **File** menu, and then **Select All**. Go to **Edit**, and then **Copy Merged** (the *Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C* default hotkey).
6. Now, **Paste** (the *Ctrl* + *V* default hotkey) your copied piece. This should create a new layer called **Painter Layer 4 (Pasted)** above your **Completed Piece** group layer. Go ahead and change the name to `Merged Final`.

Your **Layers** panel should resemble *Figure 8.2* at this point:

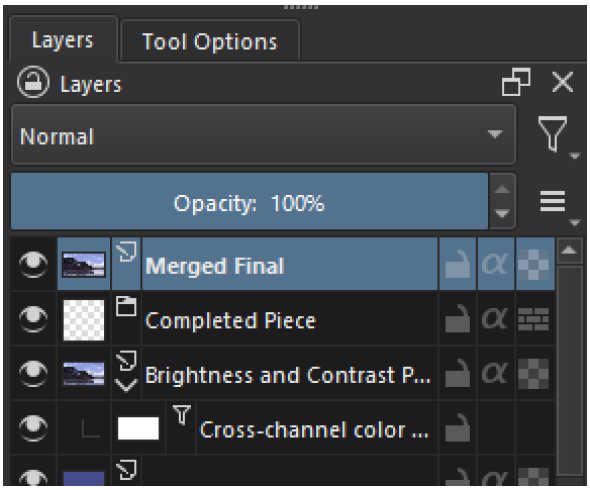


Figure 8.2 – The updated Layers panel with the Completed Piece group layer and the Merged Final layer on top

7. Select your **Merged Final** layer on your **Layers** panel and drag it on top of your **Completed Piece** group layer.

   This will cause your **Merged Final** layer to be inherited by your **Completed Piece** group layer (*Figure 8.3*):

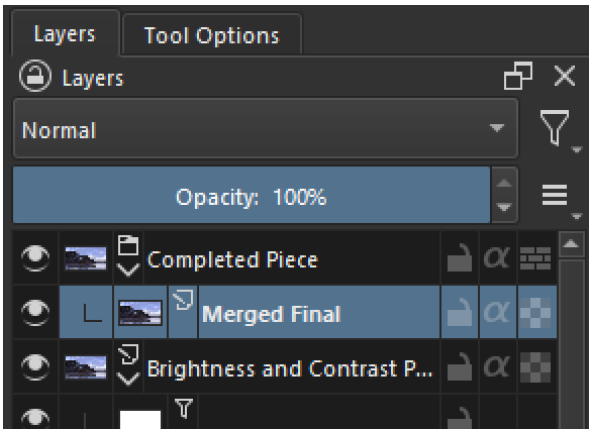


Figure 8.3 – The Merged Final layer placed into the Completed Piece group layer by the drag and drop method

This will be helpful, as we will always have access to an instant, "final" version of our painting at the click of a button moving forward.

8. For our next set of steps, let's create a group layer for all of our current layers to really clean up our **Layers** panel.
9. With your **Layers** panel still open, select your top-most layer *that is not held within your* **Completed Piece** *group layer*. In my instance, this will be my **Brightness and Contrast Pass** layer.
10. Scroll down to the bottom of your **Layers** panel. While holding *Shift*, click on your bottom-most layer (in my instance, that would be **Starting Layer**).

    If done correctly, your **Layers** panel should be primarily highlighted, as all your layers (outside of the **Completed Piece** group, of course) have been selected. This is known as a **Shift + click** selection method.

> **Inversing This Method**
>
> Currently, we are doing what's known as the *Shift-click* method of adding multiple layers to a selection at once. If you would like to do the *inverse* of this and start with everything in your **Layers** panel selected and *removing* what you don't want in the selection group, you can do so easily by right-clicking any layer within your **Layers** panel and choosing **Select** > **All Layers** from the right-click pop-out menu. Then, find the layers you would like to *remove* from your selection, and *Ctrl + click* on them. This removes the layer from the active selection group you have chosen.
>
> In this instance, after right-clicking and choosing **Select** > **All Layers** step in your **Layers** panel, you would *Ctrl-click* the **Completed Piece** layer group, which would *deselect* your **Completed Piece** layer, as well as anything nested inside of it.

11. With all your chosen layers selected, right-click once again. Your right-click menu will pop up inside of your **Layers** panel.

From these options, choose the **Group** > **Quick Group** (keyboard shortcut *Ctrl* + *G*) selection (*Figure 8.4*):

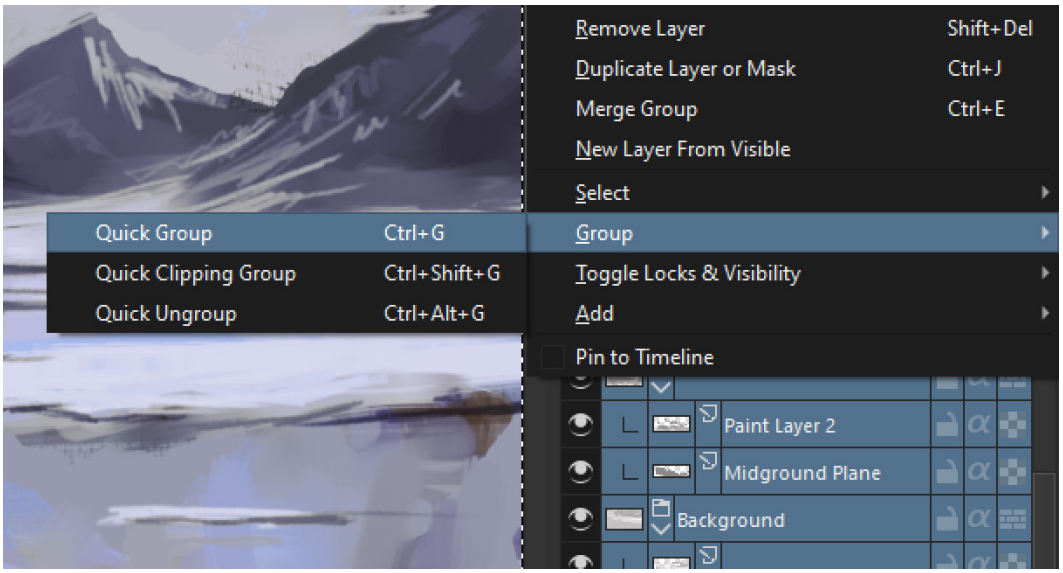


Figure 8.4 – The right-click menu on the Layers panel, selecting the Quick Group option in the Group category

This will create a new group layer with a default name (in my instance, the default name is **Group 4**) with all of your selected layers nested within it. Since group layers have multiple layers as part of a group, you may notice a bit of slowdown on your file.

12. Change the name of this group to `Step By Step Process`.

    Once you have your two groups named with your layers nested within them, check out how clean your **Layers** panel looks now (*Figure 8.5*):

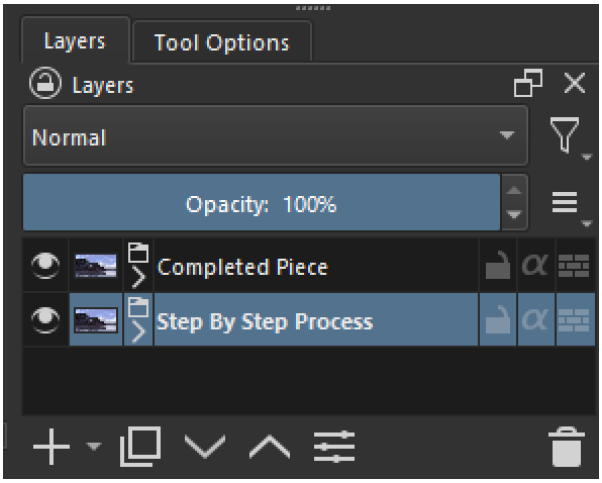


Figure 8.5 – Our newly cleaned-up Layers panel – ahhh, that's better!

Congratulations! You went from having roughly 28 lines of layer data to sort through down to a nicely compressed 2 lines! Of course, your 28 lines of layer data are still present in your file, and you can go back and edit/tweak any specific layer you'd like, but the clean **Layers** panel is going to make the next steps much more rewarding and less chaotic! Sometimes, it's the little things that make all the difference!

Simplifying it down to three (again)

If you remember way back in *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, when we first started this painting, we broke down our composition into three separate plane layers for clarity – **Foreground**, **Midground**, and **Background**.

While our painting has got much more complex since those early stages, it can be helpful for file organization to retain that separation of planes. By doing this, we can later return to our piece, make a fast selection, and edit a specific area of our painting, without having to sort through dozens of layers in the process to "find our spot" of where we originally created a specific portion of a plane, as it were.

Using our **Polygonal Selection Tool**, redefining our planes is an extremely easy process. Let's create new merged layers for our foreground, midground, and background now:

1. In the Toolbox, select **Polygonal Selection Tool** (*Figure 8.6*):

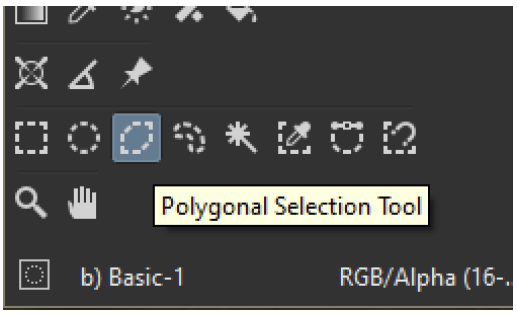


Figure 8.6 – The Polygonal Selection Tool, via our Toolbox

With my **Polygonal Selection Tool** active, I want to draw a fairly accurate selection around the ice lake. This will act as my foreground.

> **Switching Tools**
>
> If, for some reason, the **Polygonal Selection Tool** isn't working as intended (such as not displaying the "marching ants" around your selection, showing a connector line between your clicked pivoting points, or allowing you to "close" your selection by connecting the last line to the start of the first line), feel free to use the **Bezier Curve Selection Tool** instead (located directly to the right of the **Polygonal Selection Tool** in the **Toolbox**).

2. Click areas outlining the ice lake of your composition. Be sure to get close to the base of the mountains, but don't have any specific ridge or edge selected within the mountains.

3. Once you're pleased with your selection, close the selection (making it active) by returning to your starting point. This will close the selection loop and create an active selection (*Figure 8.7*):

Figure 8.7 – The foreground ice lake, as selected by the Polygonal Selection Tool

4. On your **File** menu, click **Edit** > **Copy Merged** (the default hotkey is *Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C*).
5. Then, click **Edit** > **Paste** (the default hotkey is *Ctrl* + *V*).

6. This will create a new layer with only your foreground ice lake as its contents. The name of this layer should be changed to `Foreground (Ice Lake)` (*Figure 8.8*):

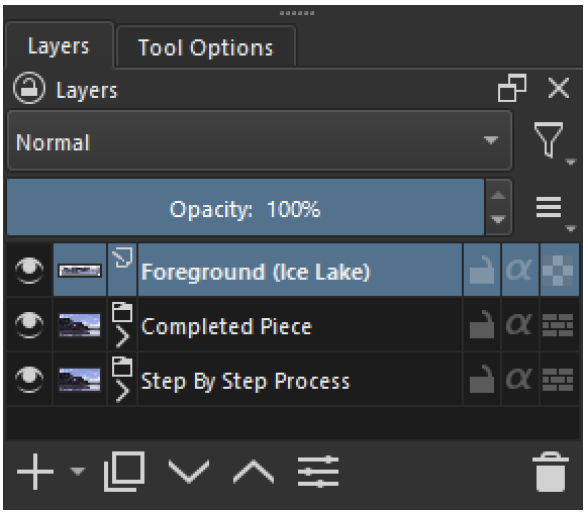


Figure 8.8 – Our new Foreground (Ice Lake) layer, on top of our Layers panel

Now, we want to make sure we lock the *transparency* (or *alpha channel*) of this layer (as it will allow us to paint within the confines of the layer but not outside of it).

7. To lock the transparency of the layer, click the *checkerboard grid icon* on the right-most portion of the layer's row on your **Layers** panel.

If I hover over the layer once I've done this, a small pop-up window will show me some properties of the layer, including a thumbnail and statuses of certain layer properties. The property I'm checking for will be the **Alpha Locked** property, located at the bottom of the list. The status is currently showing **Yes**, since we clicked the checkerboard grid icon to lock the transparency (or alpha channel) (*Figure 8.9*):

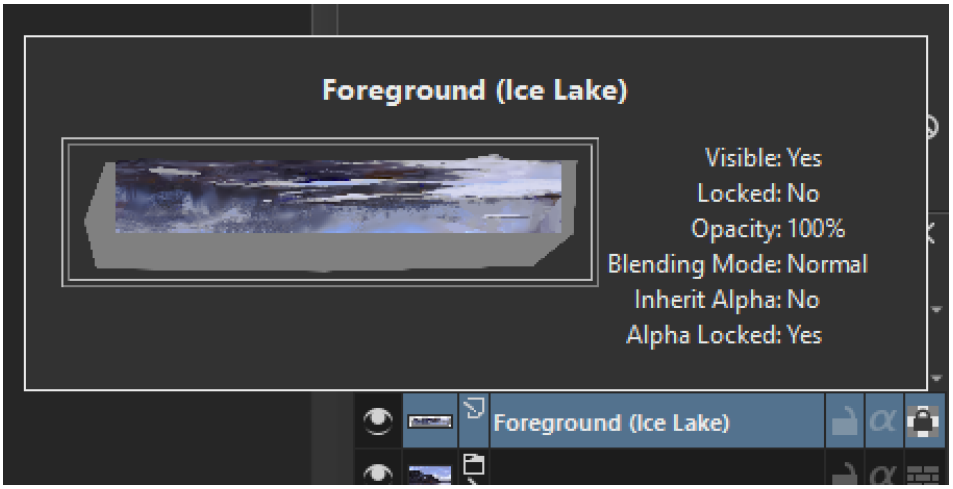


Figure 8.9 – The layer properties pop-out window

8. Next, we're going to create our midground layer, which will consist of our mountains.

   Select your **Polygonal Selection Tool** once again and use it to outline your mountains. Don't worry too much if your selection area overlaps your foreground selection slightly.

9. Once you are pleased with your selection, click **Edit** > **Copy Merged** from your **File** menu (*Figure 8.10*):

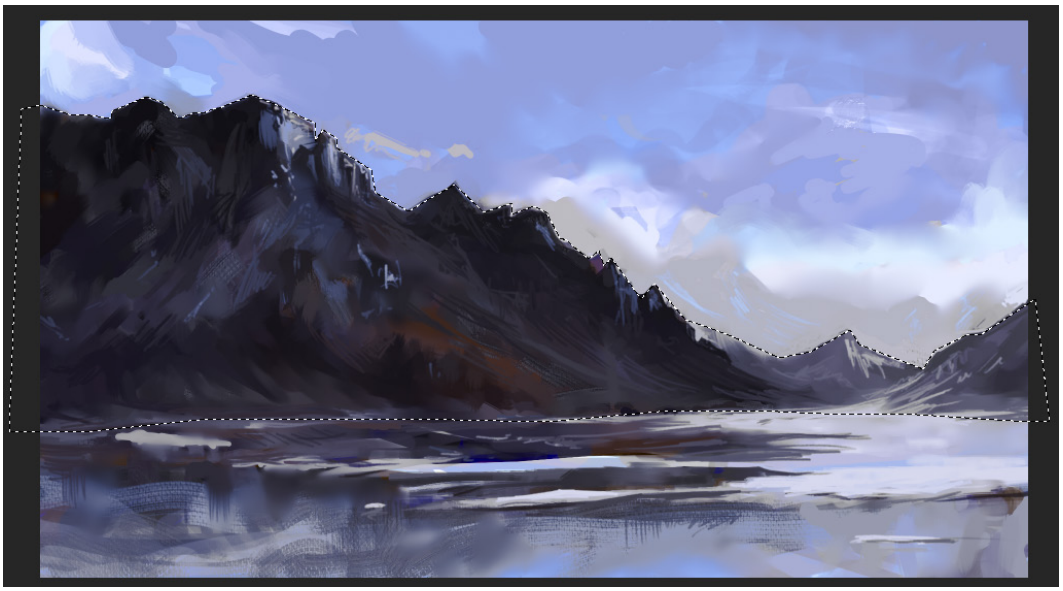


Figure 8.10 – Our selected area of mountains with our Polygonal Selection Tool

10. Now, paste your layer, creating a new layer. Change this layer's name to `Midground (Mountains)`.
11. Lock the transparency on the **Midground (Mountains)** layer by clicking the checkerboard grid icon on the right-most side of the layer row.

12. Finally, we will create our background layer.

    Using your **Polygonal Selection Tool**, choose the area of the sky and clouds, using the mountain's edges as an outline (*Figure 8.11*):

Figure 8.11 – Our background area selection using the Polygonal Selection Tool

13. Once again, choose **Edit** > **Copy Merged** from your **File** menu. Then, paste your selection to create a new layer.
14. Change this layer's name to `Background (Sky)`.
15. Be sure to lock the transparency of the layer by clicking the checkerboard grid icon on the right-most side of the layer row.

Your **Layers** panel should now look like *Figure 8.12*:

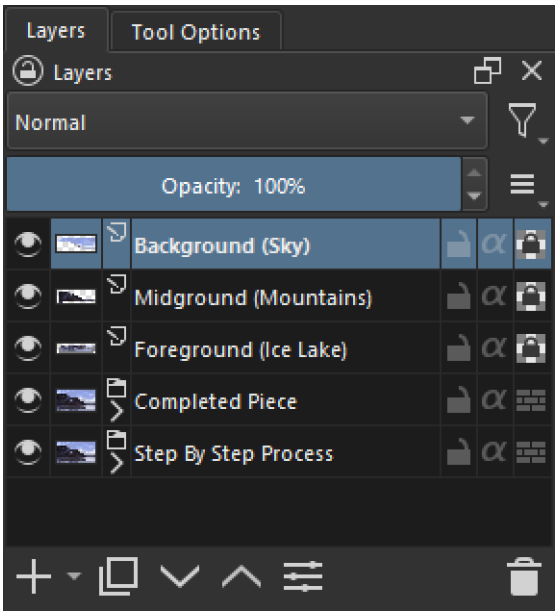


Figure 8.12 – Our newly updated Layers panel with our Background, Midground, and Foreground layers with locked transparency

Good work! While this series of steps may seem redundant, they'll tie in beautifully with our next series of steps in the chapter. There's a powerful reason we've created these custom shape selections, and it has to do with retaining the clarity of our painting through structure.

Retaining clarity through structure

Since paintings are complex beasts, it's always a good idea to re-simplify and break down our paintings at various points of their creation. Maintaining our sense of *clarity*, or *visual coherence*, is key.

So, why did we make the new foreground, midground, and background plane selections? Why make these new alpha-locked layers that essentially already existed in a previous part of our painting exercise? Let's reveal the true power of this technique:

1. In your **Layers** panel, select your **Midground** (**Mountains**) layer to make it the active layer.
2. *Ctrl-click* on the layer's thumbnail (on the left-hand side of the layer's row, next to the hide/reveal eyeball icon) (*Figure 8.13*):

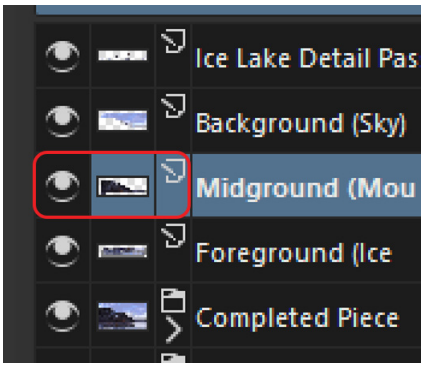


Figure 8.13 – A close-up of the Midground (Mountains) thumbnail for Ctrl-click selections

Bam! This immediately selected *only the contents of the selected layer*! Try holding *Ctrl* and clicking on another layer's thumbnail.

See the power this shortcut method provides? You can quickly scroll to a separated plane's layer, *Ctrl-click* the thumbnail, and have a live painting surface. The coolest part (in my opinion)? The selection can *carry over to a new layer*, acting as a mask for your edits and brushstrokes!

Let's see what I mean by adding a few more sharp edges to our foreground, further adding depth to our ice lake.

3. On your **Layers** panel, create a new layer. Name this layer `Ice Lake Detail Pass`.
4. *Ctrl-click* on the thumbnail of the **Foreground (Ice Lake)** layer.
5. Switch back to your **Ice Lake Detail Pass** layer by selecting it in your **Layers** panel. Note how the active selection (the "marching ants") are still surrounding the **Foreground (Ice Lake)** layer's information.

6. Switch to your Brush Tool (the default hotkey is *B* on your keyboard). Choose a brush, and start painting on your **Ice Lake Detail Pass** layer using the selection area dictated by the **Foreground (Ice Lake)** layer (*Figure 8.14*):

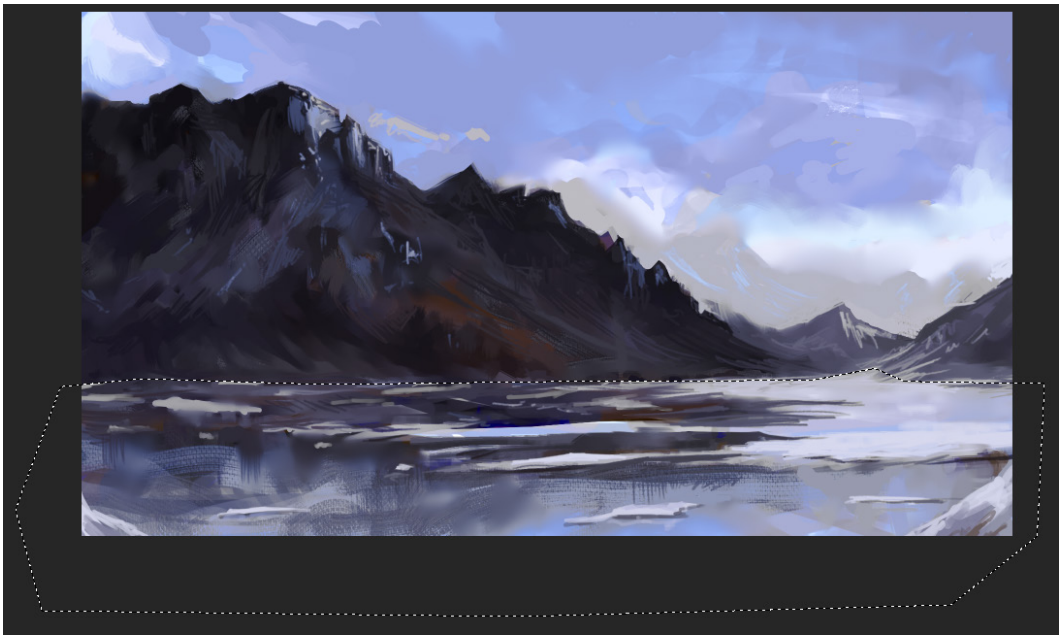


Figure 8.14 – Painting on our new Ice Lake Detail Pass layer using the selection area from our Foreground (Ice Lake) layer

7. Try painting strokes outside of the selection area. None of your painting strokes will show up outside of your selection's confines because the selected area is acting as your live painting area mask, meaning anything outside of it isn't retained.

   This is a *wonderful* way to quickly add, remove, or paint over specific areas of your painting without being destructive to what you've worked so hard for. Does a client love the piece you made for them, but they'd like a small tweak of the background color? Retain the clarity of your background layer's shape by creating a **Polygonal Selection Tool** selection of it, create a new merged layer with locked transparency, and keep it separate from the overall "step-by-step" parts of your initial work.

   Before we move on to our final portion of this chapter, let's clean up our **Layers** panel, as we've introduced some new concepts.

8. In your **Layers** panel, select your **Background (Sky)** layer.

9. While holding *Shift* on your keyboard, click on your **Foreground (Ice Lake)** layer.

   This will create a selection of all three of your planes' layers (*Figure 8.15*):

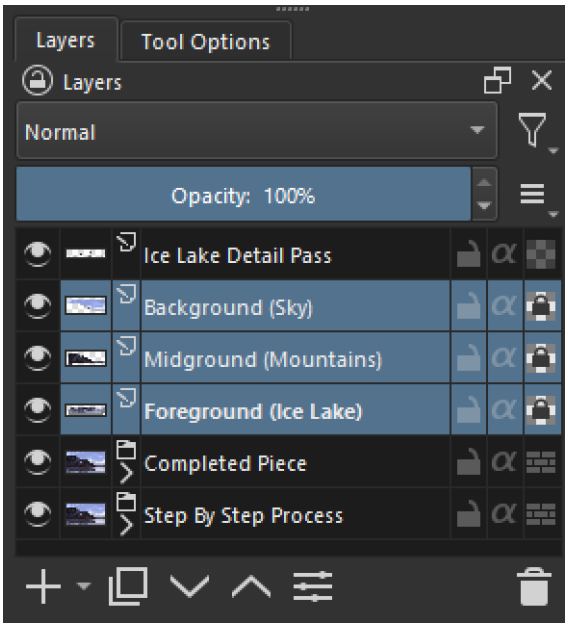


Figure 8.15 – Our planes' layers selected on our Layers panel via the Shift-click selection method

10. With all three of our planes layers actively selected, *right-click* in your **Layers** panel.
11. Select the **Group** > **Quick Group** option from the pop-up menu.
12. Rename this group from its default name to `Planes (Masked)`.

Your **Layers** panel should now look like *Figure 8.16*:

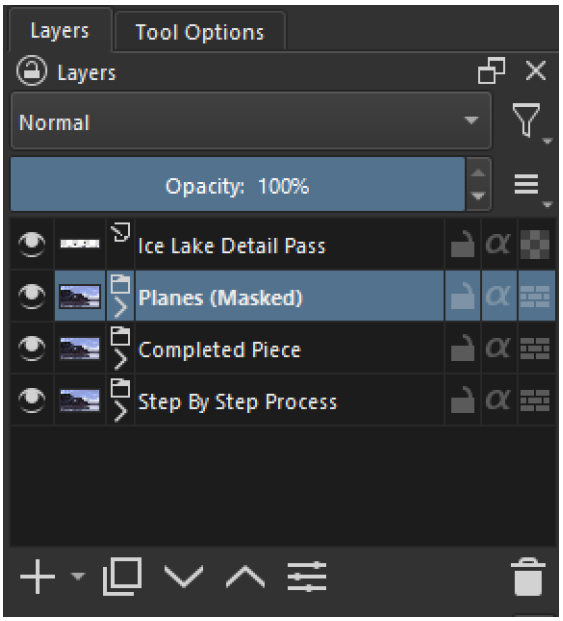


Figure 8.16 – The cleaned-up Layers panel with our new Planes (Masked) group

Now, if at any point you need to do a "quick selection" of a specific plane of your painting, you have a dedicated group that you can call back to, quickly and easily!

To wrap this chapter up, we're going to make a new category and group for our **Ice Lake Detail Pass** layer, but we're also going to discuss something that is often overlooked in a digital art workflow – note-taking.

Taking notes

While at our core we are artists, I would argue that our *primary* job is as a communicator. Surely, painting is *visual* communication, but you should never overlook the sheer power of words to convey an idea. For every one of my clients that require preliminary sketches or "value passes" (such as card art, tabletop roleplaying game art, and concept art jobs), I always send in a draft with notes not only in an email but also *embedded in the art file itself*. These can be either handwritten or typed using the **Text** tool, but no matter the method, I want to make sure that my client can follow my train of thought, or see questions I might have for them directly relating to the piece.

I've heard from a vast number of my art directors that they love that I include notes, as it helps them relay information to their team, and saves everyone time (and about 20 emails) in the process. Saving time *saves money* for companies, and if you're a skilled artist that *also* communicates well *and* you save the company money… well, congratulations! You're well on your way to safely accruing a long list of clients that will love to work with you on a regular basis.

Let's create a layer for notes to really solidify this painting as not only a work of art that we can be proud of but also a design tool that would work well in a large amount of professional pipelines:

1. Select your **Ice Lake Detail Pass** layer on your **Layers** panel.
2. Create a new layer. This will make a layer above our **Ice Lake Detail Pass** layer. Change the default layer name of this new layer to `Notes BG`.
3. Select your **Fill Tool** (the default hotkey is *F* on your keyboard) and make sure you have *black* selected as your color.
4. Fill the **Notes BG** layer completely *black*.
5. Now, lower the **Opacity** value of your **Notes BG** layer to somewhere between **50%** and **95%**, depending on your preference.

   Our goal here is to make a dark enough background so that we can write, type, and draw on a layer above this one to create our notes.
6. When you are happy with the opacity of your **Notes BG** layer, go ahead and create a new layer on top of it and name this layer simply `Notes`.
7. From here, *choose a light color* (a light red is nice, as it draws attention) that will show up well against the **Notes BG** layer underneath it. A pure white brush also works well here!

8. With your **Notes** layer active, draw, type, or hand-write notes on areas that you notice you would like to improve in your piece (*Figure 8.17*):

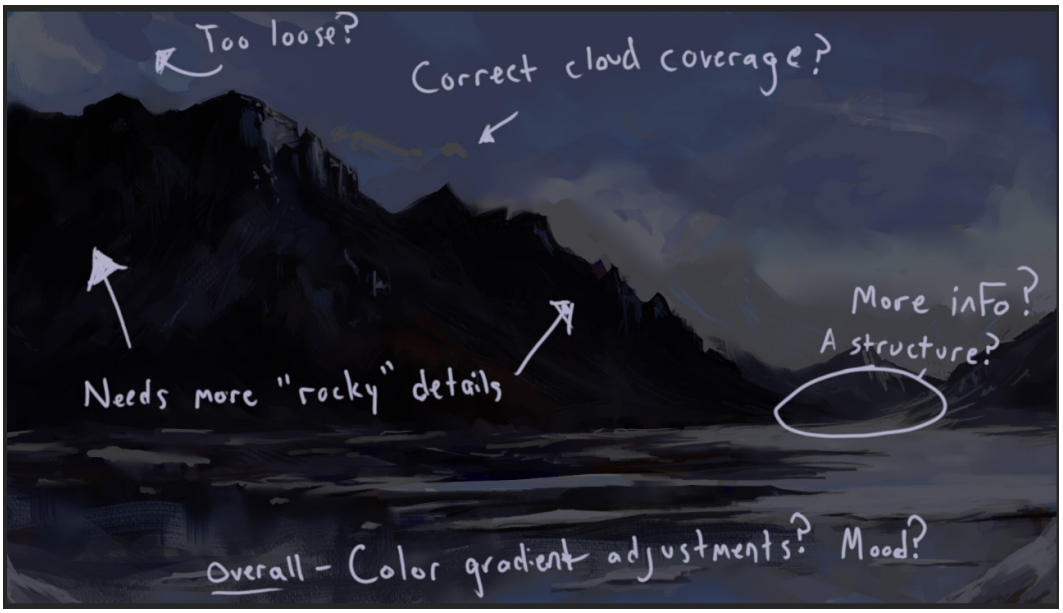


Figure 8.17 – Notes taken on the Notes layer, calling out points of interest and potential changes

Is the background a little too hazy? Would you want to add anything to this piece, such as a person or building? Where would you like to place those items? Is there anything you'd like to fully change, such as the shapes of the mountains? These are some valuable questions to ask yourself as an artist but also great information to jot down on your **Notes** layer.

To bring this entire landscape project all to a close (for real!), let's finalize and clean our **Layers** panel for the last time.

9. On your **Layers** panel, select both your **Notes** and **Notes BG** layers by using the *Shift-click* method.
10. Right-click in the **Layers** panel once both layers are selected, and choose **Group** > **Quick Group** from the pop-out menu.
11. Name this new group `Notes`.
12. Now, select the **Ice Lake Detail Pass** layer, and then *Shift-click* the new **Notes** layer group you just created.

13. Once again, right-click on the **Layers** panel and choose **Group** > **Quick Group** from the pop-out menu. This will group not only your **Ice Lake Detail Pass** layer but also the entire **Notes** group as well! Groups within groups – what madness is this?
14. Name this new group `Additional Information`.

    Your final **Layers** panel layout should look like *Figure 8.18*:

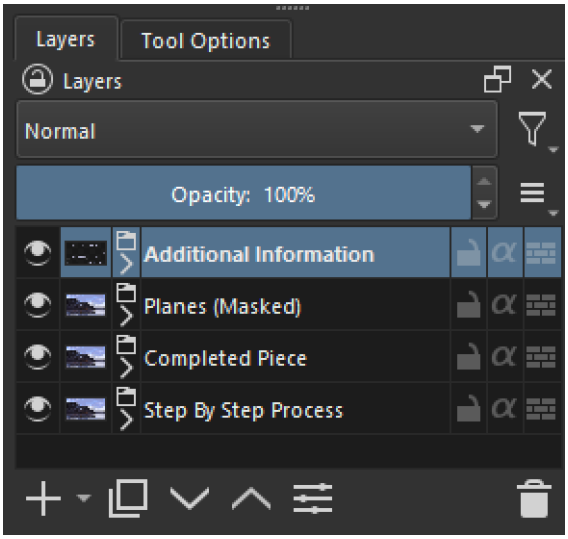


Figure 8.18 – Our finalized Layers panel for our landscape project – clean!

Fantastic work! We now have four rows on our **Layers** panel, leaving a super-clean setup that we can revisit at any time. The organizational skills learned here will also help when working in a team environment, working on revisions for your piece, or even submitting your work to an art director.

While these steps may seem like extra work, your future self will *absolutely* thank you for taking the time to break your piece down into iterative steps like this if you ever need to revisit it! Using the simple *Ctrl-click* method, you can make vast changes to your piece in a matter of seconds!

Throughout these past five chapters, we've gone through an entire crash course of using Krita from beginning to end to create a pipeline-ready landscape painting we can be proud of. It's been an outstanding job, and I hope you picked up some valuable tricks along the way!

Summary

In this chapter, we discussed organization in many forms. Through *shape language*, we were able to break down our piece into easily identifiable planes (foreground, midground, and background) for revision and quick access. We then looked at the power of retaining these clear separations by using the *Ctrl-click* selection method, where we can select only information from select layers for an unbeatable masking shortcut. Finally, we discussed taking embedded notes not only for our sake but also for the sake of our clients and art directors as well.

That brings us to the close of *Part 2*, *Methods of Visual Communication within Krita,* of the book – congratulations! In *Part 3*, *Projects Unleashing Your Inner Artist with Krita*, we are going to unleash your inner artist, and go through a crash course of formal art training! Whether you've been through an Atelier program or are self-taught, there's going to be a LOT of discussion in the coming chapters. We are going to begin in the next chapter by using Krita to lay out the foundation for an art exercise as old as time – a formal *still-life painting*!

Part 3: Projects Unleashing Your Inner Artist with Krita

Now that you understand the mechanics of Krita, it's time to put this knowledge to use in the best way possible: by creating portfolio-ready art! In this part, with the help of these two projects, you'll reinforce your comfort level and understanding of Krita while creating material that will grab the attention of your family, friends, and potentially even clients or art directors (if going pro is your goal!).

This part comprises the following chapters:

- *Chapter 9*, *Setting Up a Still-Life Study*
- *Chapter 10*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*
- *Chapter 11*, *Working with Concept Art*
- *Chapter 12*, *Refining and Creating Cinematic Concept Art*
- *Chapter 13*, *Going Beyond These Pages*

9
Setting Up a Still-Life Study

Welcome to the final chapters of the book!

I hope you've enjoyed the journey so far, and your familiarity with Krita is getting more comfortable. It's a stellar program, and I'm hoping that you're starting to see the possibilities the software can provide to aid in your artistic output.

To really drive home our mastery of this great program, we're going to hone our skills with a tried-and-true method that artists have used for centuries. Before we fully dig in, though, it will be important to set ourselves up for success.

Here's a quick breakdown of what this chapter will cover:

- Setting expectations
- Discussing our reference
- Setting up grids and guides
- Transferring what you see

From here until the end of the book, we are going to level up the difficulty of our projects to really push your artistic skillset. For this chapter, we are going to set up a canvas and transfer a stock photo to the canvas for our next project.

The project? We will be painting a still-life in *Chapter 10*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*.

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0+).
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard, and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus.
- A copy of the stock photo used for this project is provided at `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`, courtesy of `Pexels.com` and photographer *Suzy Hazelwood*.

Setting expectations

I know you may be thinking that a still-life may not be the most advanced thing you've ever made. I mean, a still-life? Those things that you make during your first week of Art 101 at university or secondary school? Why would we go back to the basics of art *yet again* when Krita allows for so much variety and sophistication with its tools and mechanics? I thought this was the advanced portion of the book! I've already done the boring artistic mechanics stuff; I'm ready for the hard stuff that will make me world-famous! I've been bamboozled!

Hey now, this book is a no-bamboozle zone! Ironically, you're going to realize that the more "advanced" we get in our projects, the more we're going to be dealing with the fundamentals of art, advanced Krita tools, and problem-solving in equal measure. There are two main points that may explain and support my way of thinking here. Why are we going back to the basics while at the same time claiming to be getting more advanced? Well, two reasons are as follows:

- By keeping our project more basic in its *expectations*, it will further provide us moments to allow ourselves to focus on, and really master, our workflow and growth within Krita. Repetition and basic problem-solving skills will promote more mastery of learning Krita and its tools at a faster rate. The next reason may ruffle some feathers!

- Krita is a powerhouse piece of software, and with the amount and breadth of the features it provides you as an artist, you should focus on improving your fundamental artistic skills to "catch up" with the capabilities the software provides. Krita isn't holding *us* back; *we* are holding *Krita* back. A sobering thought, yeah?

Both points have a common goal of being "learner-focused." It's a powerful mindset to always be a student. Allow yourself possibilities to fail, never overestimate your ability, and realize there's always room for growth.

While painting and artistic pursuits are never easy, taking the complexity out of the subject and overall goal for our project (as the photo is already chosen, and the goal is to transfer what we see in the photo) allows us the mental bandwidth and capacity to use Krita in ways that aid the goals we set for ourselves. We will have the opportunity to try new brushes, new composition tools, new techniques, and new workflows.

In my opinion, people who say there's no creativity or artistry in still-life studies because "the work has already been done for you" simply aren't approaching the subject in a way that could benefit them the most. While that may seem open-ended (as every artist has different goals), *it's important to dissect exactly why we study, just as much as dissecting what we study*.

Let's get started by discussing the reference image we'll be using. This will aid us in setting up our canvas and grids and getting proper shapes transferred onto our canvas for the next chapter.

Discussing our reference

While we gave some general guidelines for getting references in *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes,* in the *Finding the right reference* and *Choosing our reference* sections, I thought it'd be interesting to evaluate an image in "real time" to better help us with our project planning.

First of all, let's take a look at our image, titled *Three Red Apples on Wooden Surface* by *Suzy Hazelwood*, provided courtesy of `Pexels.com` (*Figure 9.1*):

Figure 9.1 – Our reference image, courtesy of Suzy Hazelwood via Pexels.com

In an atelier setting, **still-life studies** usually consist of a variety of stationary objects (such as vases, skulls, books, flowers, or other odds-and-ends) stacked and situated in a specific way, under specific lighting conditions, for students to draw from life. Students can find seating arrangements and move to get various vantage points of the materials to fully understand how light, shadows, and shapes all create forms while transferring them into a painting, sketchbook, or another type of canvas. It's a dynamic exercise, one that I highly recommend you try for yourself if you're ever able to join in a group setting or set up a dedicated still-life in your home. There's nothing quite like drawing from life.

After all that talk of dynamic angles, atelier approaches, and drawing from life, we will be using a static photograph that doesn't move, already has the lighting set up, and that we can't change.

While this may seem limiting, this particular photograph has three main elements I look for when doing a study, whether it is from life or based on a photograph:

- Good contrast between lights and shadows
- A variety of shapes and textures
- Rich hue and saturation variance

These apples *pop*. By contrasting the rich reds (which will act as our warms, seeing as how red is natively on the "warm" half of the color wheel) against the neutral wooden surface (it appears more "gray", which moves our hue toward the middle of the color wheel), we get a sense of separation of the subject from the background, while also showcasing the differences between the wood and the apple's skin texture. The grays of the wood panels appear "cold" relative to the more warm reds of the apples to give a large amount of visual color contrast, as you can see in *Figure 9.2*:

Figure 9.2 – The variance of hues (warms versus cools) and texture (apple skin versus wood panel)

We also have a beautiful repetition of shapes, not only with the apples themselves (the apples all have a modified circle appearance) but with the apple stems all facing a similar direction.

A part that I really love (and that will provide us with some options once we start transferring this to our canvas) are the lines of wood grain in the wooden panels. These lines give us the proper texture comparison versus the more smooth, circular apple shapes.

These wood grain lines also provide a few other benefits: they act as "leading lines" to frame our subject (the apples), and also provide us with a proper perspective grid if we want to stretch the composition out a bit (spoiler – we will!)

You can see how effectively these wood grain lines not only aid in leading our viewer to our subject of the apples, but how they also give us a decent perspective grid to work from in *Figure 9.3*:

Figure 9.3 – The leading lines of the wooden panels will aid in our transferring process

There's an old saying I used to hear in art school, and it's 100% true. *If you can paint an apple, you can paint anything*. Composition, edge control, proportion, hue variance, texture contrasts, subtle shifts between lights and darks, and tons of opportunities for us to have thick, gorgeous brushwork. Sounds good to me!

Now that we have looked at our stock photo and dissected a few key elements to take forward into our painting, I think it's time to start transferring our version of this composition onto our canvas. That brings us to a few key tools in Krita that will help us to get there: grids and guides.

Setting up grids and guides

There are a variety of methods to transfer an image to a canvas. In the next section, *Transferring what you see*, we will go through, step by step, getting our shapes and main composition down on the canvas with brushes. Before we get there, we need to make some decisions. This will tie into what your overall goal of the study is, and the aspects you would like to focus on.

For this project, my main goal is to make a strong composition showcasing the differences between the apples and the wooden panels. I would also like to modify the composition slightly, as it will help me work on my imagination skills while basing my decision-making on the foundations that the stock image provides. I will do this by changing the orientation of the study. Instead of doing a landscape orientation to match our stock photo (as the image is wider than it is tall), I want to create a piece in portrait orientation (taller than it is wide).

By changing the orientation, I'll be less likely to "lock in" and make an exact copy of what I see, and instead, take some slight artistic liberties to make a more engaging painting. Remember, the photograph already exists, so unless your goal is to make a one-for-one perfect likeness to hone (or flex) your draftsmanship skills, what's the incentive to make an exact, pixel-perfect copy?

With our goals established, we will now create our canvas so we can dig in and start setting up our composition. Once our canvas is set up properly, we will apply a visual grid to aid us when we start transferring our drawing. Let's get started by creating our canvas!

Creating our canvas

This project is primarily focused on adjusting an already-established composition, and allowing ourselves some freedom in adapting our source material from a photograph to an emotive painting. For that reason, I'm going to make a small canvas, both in dimension and resolution. This will allow us to work quickly, loosely, and generate ideas. Let's get started:

1. Make sure Krita is open.
2. Create a new document. **Width** will be **1200** pixels, while **Height** will be **1500** pixels.

3. We will set **Resolution** as **72.00 pixels per inch** (**PPI**) to keep our file size small and fast. Our **Color** model will be **RGB/Alpha**, and **Depth** will be **16-bit integer/channel** (*Figure 9.4*):

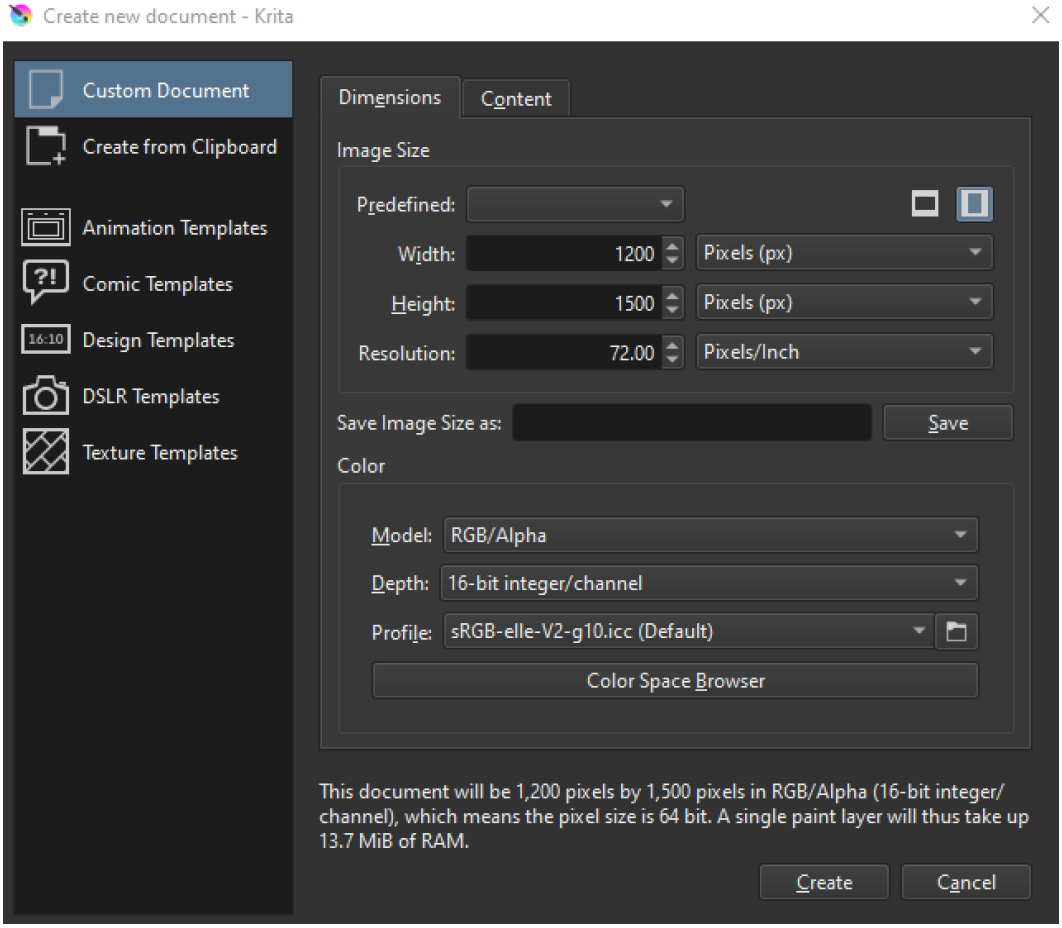


Figure 9.4 – The full settings list for our new project document

Once our canvas is created, the first thing we'll want to do is make sure our **Grid and Guides** window docker is open and accessible.

4. On your **Settings** menu, hover over the **Dockers** row and make sure **Grid and Guides** is activated within the pop-up menu (*Figure 9.5*):

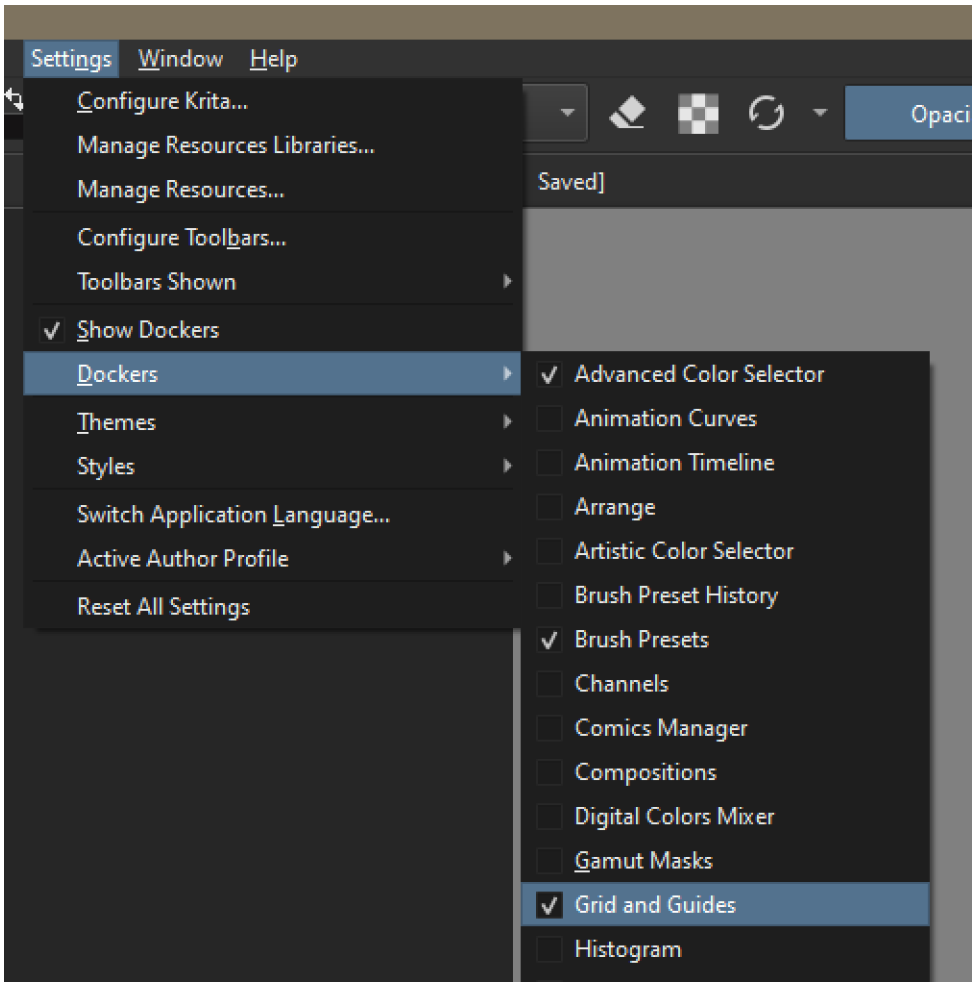


Figure 9.5 – The location of the Grid and Guides docker under the Settings menu

Once active, your **Grid and Guides** docker should give you a list of options. For this project, we will primarily be using the **Grid** tab.

Let's take a look at the **Grid** tab now (*Figure 9.6*):

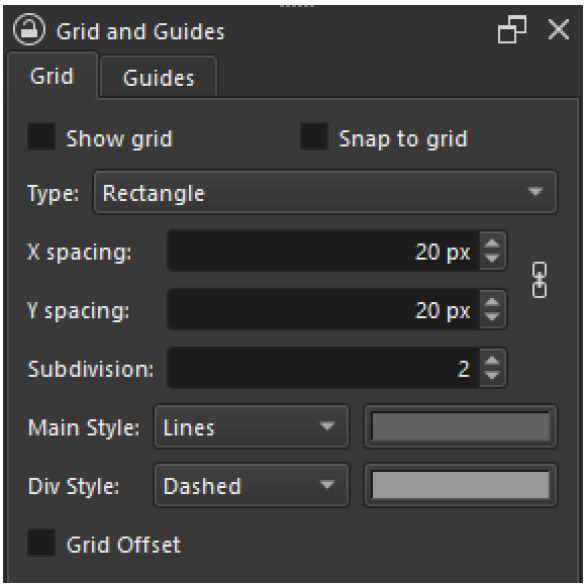


Figure 9.6 – The default settings for the Grid tab under Grid and Guides

Some key features of the **Grid** window include the following:

- **Show grid** – Toggles the visibility of the grid on or off. Note that this grid is only viewable in your document while editing it within Krita as, if you export an image with the **Show grid** option enabled, you will *not* see the grid in the final exported image.
- **Snap to grid** – Enables the ability of your **Brush** and **Text** tools to snap to the grid. Also allows the **Move** tool to move any objects or layer contents using the confines of the grid as well.
- **Type** – Here you can choose between the grid styles of either **Rectangle** or **Isometric**.
- **X spacing** and **Y spacing** – The number of pixels between each line of the grid, on the *x* and *y* axis, respectively.

- **Subdivision** – Creates subdivisions within your established **X spacing** and **Y spacing** parameters. The inner lines of each cell become subdivisions.
- **Main Style** – The visual look of the grid's main lines (as decided in the **X spacing** and **Y spacing** options).
- **Div Style** – The visual look of the grid's subdivision lines (as decided in the **Subdivision** option).
- **Grid Offset** – Changes the starting position of the grid. Normally the grid starts flush with the upper-left corner of the canvas, but **Grid Offset** allows you to bump the starting location to the right based upon your chosen **X Offset** and **Y Offset** numbers, in pixels.

A few other things to consider about the **Grid** window. On the right of the **X spacing** and **Y spacing** prompts, you'll notice a chain link icon. This allows you to keep the **X spacing** and **Y spacing** numbers the same (link icon *active*) or different (link icon *inactive*). Also, there can only be one grid per canvas, and you can save a document with an active grid as a template for later use. You can do this by setting up your image with your preferred **Grid** settings active and going to **File > Create Template from Image**.

Applying our grid settings

Now that we've discussed just what we're working with regarding the **Grid** window, let's set up our grid for our canvas:

1. Make sure the **Show grid** box is checked.
2. In both **X spacing** and **Y spacing**, enter `300` pixels.
3. For **Subdivision**, set it to `1`.
4. For **Main Style**, choose whichever is most appealing to you. I prefer the **Lines** option, with the default *dark gray* as the color.
5. Since we don't have any subdivisions, we don't need to worry about **Div Style**. We also won't be using the **Grid Offset** feature, so we can keep this unchecked.

Your settings should resemble *Figure 9.7* at this point:

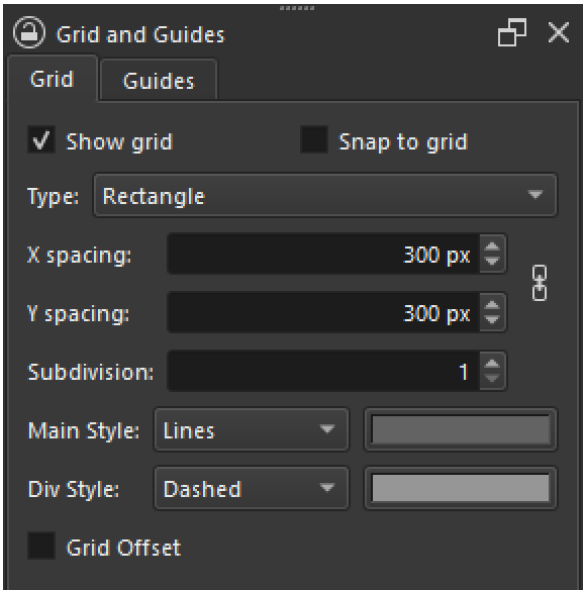


Figure 9.7 – The Grid window settings for our still-life project

Since our initial canvas was created with a width and height value both divisible by three, this gives us a nice, clean canvas of four grid blocks across (as 1,200 divided by 300 is 4), and five grid blocks down (as 1,500 divided by 300 is 5). Neat! Who says artists don't use math?

Your canvas should now be displaying the custom grid you've created (*Figure 9.8*):

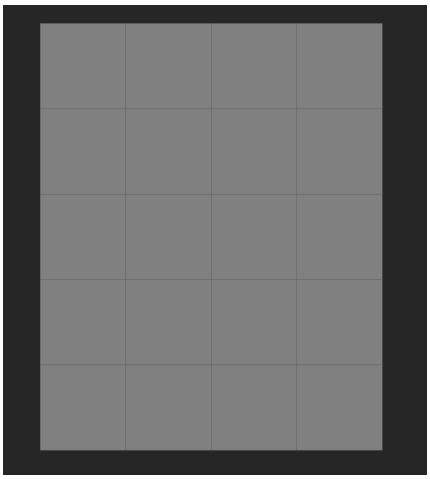


Figure 9.8 – Our canvas with our Grid settings enabled

Now that our grid is fully set and overlaid on our canvas, it's time to start transferring our stock image!

Transferring what you see

We've now entered the next part of the process, where we finally get stuff transferred onto our canvas! Before we get too far into this, we must make a decision that is pretty important: exactly *how* are we going to transfer this information? There's a topic that I need to bring up right about now, as there's been an intense stigma around this topic for generations.

What could I be referring to? Well, in *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*, we discussed the use of references in varying capacities. We even mentioned a little word, a *dirty* word, that may have captured your attention or caused wide-eyed gasps: *tracing*.

Tracing isn't cheating

The idea that tracing is "cheating" is an art stigma thing that I have some strong opinions about. In my opinion, to put it simply, tracing is *not* cheating. Now, this does have some caveats, and they deal with artist intent. Can relying on tracing slow your artistic growth regarding hand-eye coordination, eyeballing proportions, and adapting source material into something stylistic? Absolutely. Do I think you should trace other people's artwork? Absolutely not (as that gets into murky legal territory). However, I believe that artists put too much emphasis on the mechanics of "making a perfect recreation" of their intended subject and forget about more fulfilling, interesting aspects of creating images. I have two anecdotes that I use in classes to show just how little tracing means in the grand scheme of things:

- If I had a room full of 30 students, handed them a print-out of our apple stock image, and gave them an assignment saying "Trace this. The assignment is due next Tuesday," I would get 30 different versions of the same image. How is that possible? Notice in my instructions I didn't give any sort of parameters such as canvas size, materials, composition, or the "amount" of tracing involved. While some students would bring in a highly rendered replica of the image on tracing paper, other students may only bring the outlined apples on notebook paper, or focus their attention on the shadows by using a dark ink wash on a thin linen canvas. Different artists have different approaches to their art and emphasize different visual aspects of the world around them, even if they "trace."

- Let's say you're working with an art director at a studio, and they want a painting of these exact apples, and the stock photo is cleared and approved to be used by the legal department. The deadline is tight, and you outright ask if it's okay to "just trace the apples" to speed up the process and ensure you meet the deadline. The art director gives the go-ahead, so you do it. A few days go by, and at the art department meeting, the lead project producer points out your painting among all of the others showcased. They say it's outstanding, and exactly what they need for the project! However, there are a few slight things that may need adjusting: the lighting of the scene needs to be changed from bright and midday to dusk. Oh, and the color of the apples needs to be green, not red. Can the wood panel actually be more of a metallic table? And, do you mind adding an orange in there as well?

Now, you can see that recreating the exact shape of the apples by tracing doesn't really matter all that much, does it? Yes, you *can* trace the apples and it's *not* technically cheating, but you should also learn and master your fundamentals. Good fundamentals never go out of style and will get you away from the temptation of using tracing as a crutch (which it often can become if you're not careful). Let's talk about a method that uses aspects of tracing, but allows for much more creative freedom: *landmarking*.

Landmarking your shapes

Since we've discussed tracing, I want to introduce you to a method of tracing that's common in both the fine art world and the digital art space. **Landmarking** is a method of loosely transferring basic shapes and proportions onto your canvas, usually using an image as a guide.

We will be landmarking our apples and expanding our composition, all while using the **Reference Images Tool** (which we added to our main toolbar all the way back in the *Configuring the toolbars* section of *Chapter 1*, *Getting Started With Krita*).

> **Working with Opacity**
>
> Another quick method to get our stock photo onto our canvas, without using the **Reference Images Tool**, is the tried-and-true method of importing the image on a new layer, using the **Move Tool**. We can use this tool to position the image where we would like based on our grid, and lower the opacity of the layer to 10%, or whatever works best for you. Remember, there are always multiple ways to approach your problem-solving in Krita!

Let's get our stock photo added to our Krita project now:

1. Click the **Reference Images Tool** icon (the push-pin styled icon) in your toolbar (*Figure 9.9*):

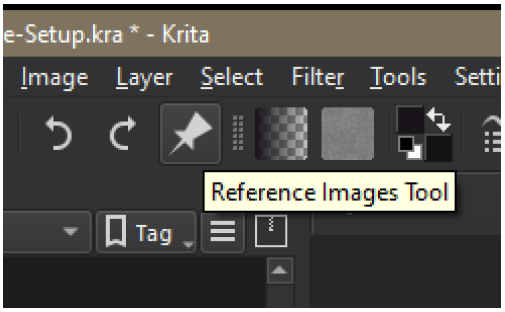


Figure 9.9 – The Reference Images Tool on our modified toolbar

2. Now, locate your **Tool Options** window. If it is not present, you can open this docker via the **File** menu by clicking on **Settings** > **Dockers** > **Tool Options**.

   The **Tool Options** tab for the **Reference Images Tool** provides you with a few options that we'll discuss quickly (*Figure 9.10*):

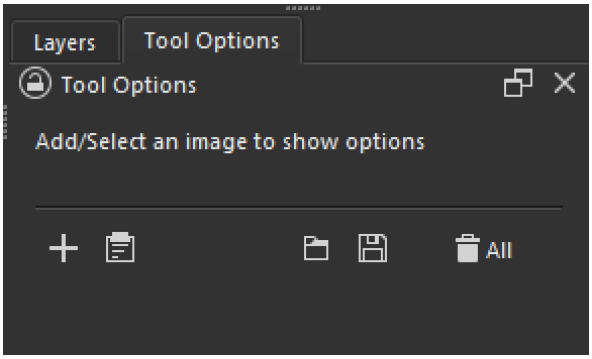


Figure 9.10 – The Tool Options tab provided for the Reference Images Tool

From left to right, our options allow for the following:

a. **Add** – Add a reference image from a file location on your computer.

b. **Paste** – Paste an image from your system's clipboard (allowing you to right-click an image online, then paste it directly into Krita as a reference image).

c. **Load Reference Image Set** – Loads a custom *Krita Reference Image Collection* (a proprietary file type for collections of multiple reference images) in `.krf` format.

d. **Save Reference Image Set** – Saves your collected references in the proprietary *Krita Reference Image Collection* file type (`.krf`) for use later using the **Load Reference Image Set** option.

e. **Delete All** – Deletes all reference images contained within a document.

Now that we've covered **Tool Options** for **Reference Images Tool**, let's bring in our stock photo.

3. Click on the **Add** button.
4. Browse to find where you've saved your stock image asset (provided in the *Technical requirements* section at the beginning of this chapter).

   This will import your stock photo (which will probably be pretty large compared to our canvas size), as well as provide a new **Tool Options** menu for the **Reference Image Tool** (*Figure 9.11*):

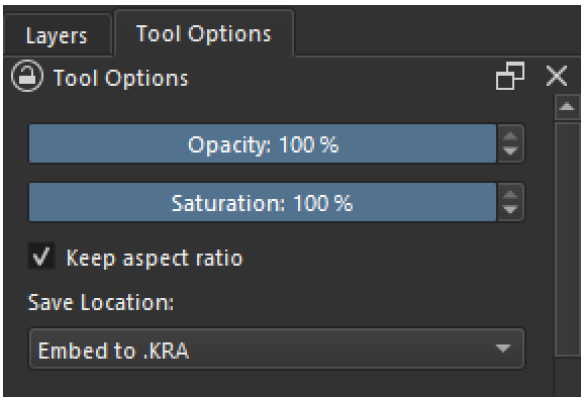


Figure 9.11 – The new Tool Options menu for the Reference Images Tool after image import

Now that you have an image imported, you have a few options such as adjusting the opacity of the image, adjusting the saturation of the image, locking the image's aspect ratio, and telling Krita whether you'd like to embed the image into your Krita file or not.

Remember, since this is a reference image embedded by a specific tool within your Krita document, any images made as references using this method *will not* export as a layer or be visible in your final export. However, if you use the *Working with opacity* method, which was mentioned earlier in this section, the image will be part of your overall export as a separate layer (if you export in a file type that supports layers, such as `.kra` or `.psd`).

5. Manipulate the settings and size of your stock photo using the tools provided. I am going to lower the **Opacity** setting to **10%** while keeping **Saturation** at **100%**. I'm also going to keep the aspect ratio locked, and keep the saved file embedded into the `.kra` project file.
6. I now want to resize my stock image using my grid as a visual aid. I'd like to keep the apples as the star of the show, but maybe make them a little off-center, leaning a bit more toward the left side of my canvas, a little lower than halfway down the canvas.

   For a quick glimpse of what is on the canvas so far, check *Figure 9.12*:

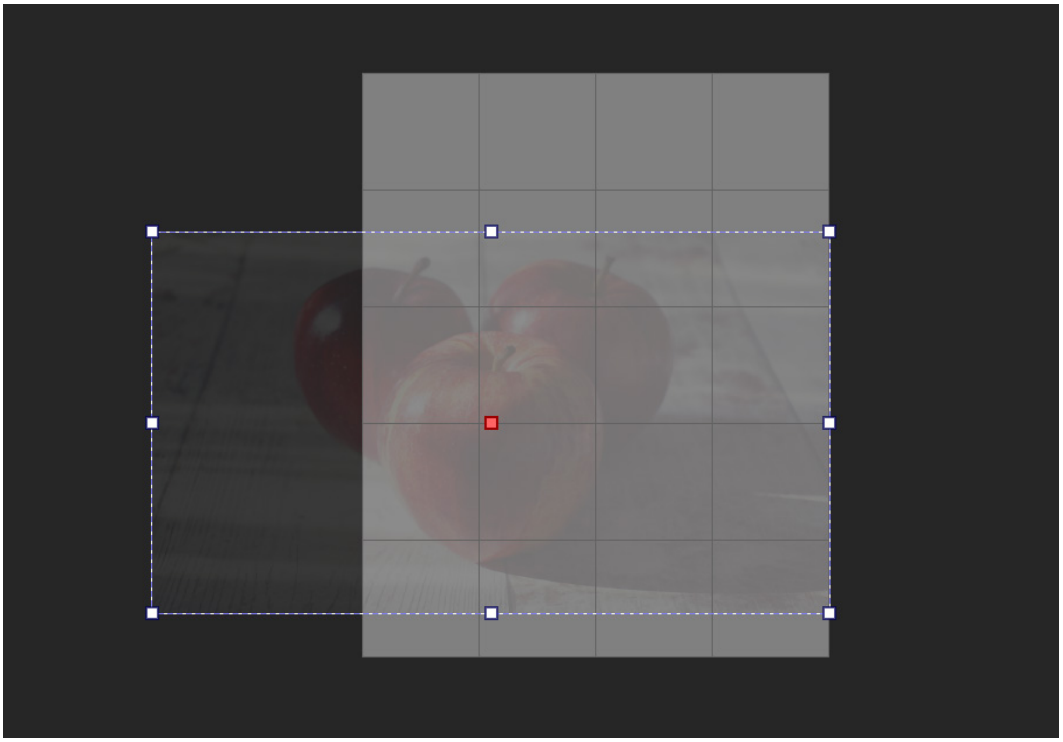


Figure 9.12 – The location of our stock photo on our canvas

This position allows us to maintain the clarity of our shapes, keep the fantastic cast shadows of the apples, and also allows us some "playing around" room near the top of the canvas, with some spare room near the bottom as well.

7. Make sure your **Layers** tab is visible, and create a new layer. Name this layer `Sketch`.

8. Switch over to your **Brush** tool (hotkey *B* on your keyboard).

   Find a good sketch brush that you enjoy the feel of. I'll be using the **c) Pencil-4 Soft** brush under the **Sketch** category tag in the **Brush Presets** menu.

9. With your preferred brush selected, *sketch* the outlines of your apples, as well as the outlines of the cast shadows and wood panel separations.

   You may have something similar to that in *Figure 9.13*:

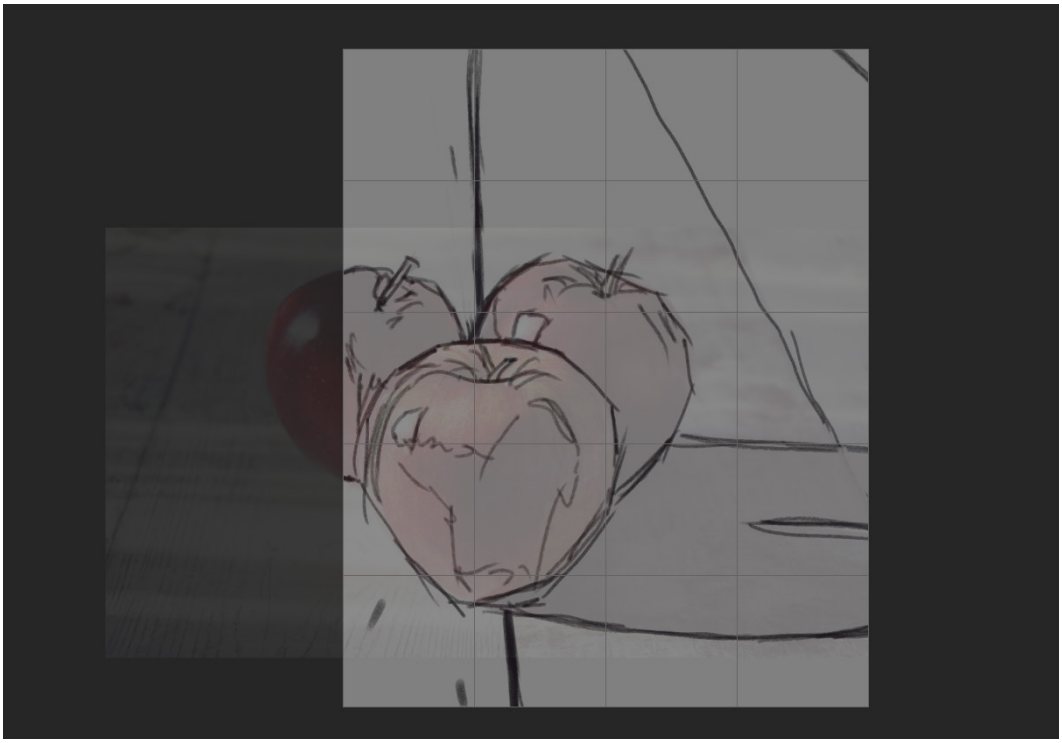


Figure 9.13 – Our landmarked apple sketch with extended information

10. Notice that I've also done faint outlines of highlight and shadow areas using a slightly softer touch with a smaller brush size.

11. For ease of readability, I'm going to do some basic cross-hatching in the shadow areas to solidify my basic outlining of shadow shapes. This will allow me to paint more confidently once we start applying some color and value shifts, maintaining my separations of light and shadow. By also adjusting the size of my brush, it's very clear for me what my "main outline" shapes are versus my "smaller detail" landmark shapes.

12. Once I'm pleased with my loose landmarking sketch, I go ahead and *delete* the reference image for the time being. While I'm at it, I also go ahead and hide my grid by *unchecking* the **Show grid** button on the **Grid and Guides** docker.

    I'm now left with a loose sketch, and we're ready to take this into the next chapter and start painting (*Figure 9.14*):

Figure 9.14 – Our loose landmark sketch is completed!

Now, if you feel uncomfortable with this quick landmarking method and feel like you would rather "eyeball it" to challenge your ability to transfer by eye, that's fantastic!

13. A simple way to do this is to enable the **Subwindows** mode in the **Settings > Configure Krita > General > Window** tab. Choose **Subwindows** as your **Multiple Document Mode** option (*Figure 9.15*), and this will allow you to open new images and drag them around your Krita workspace:

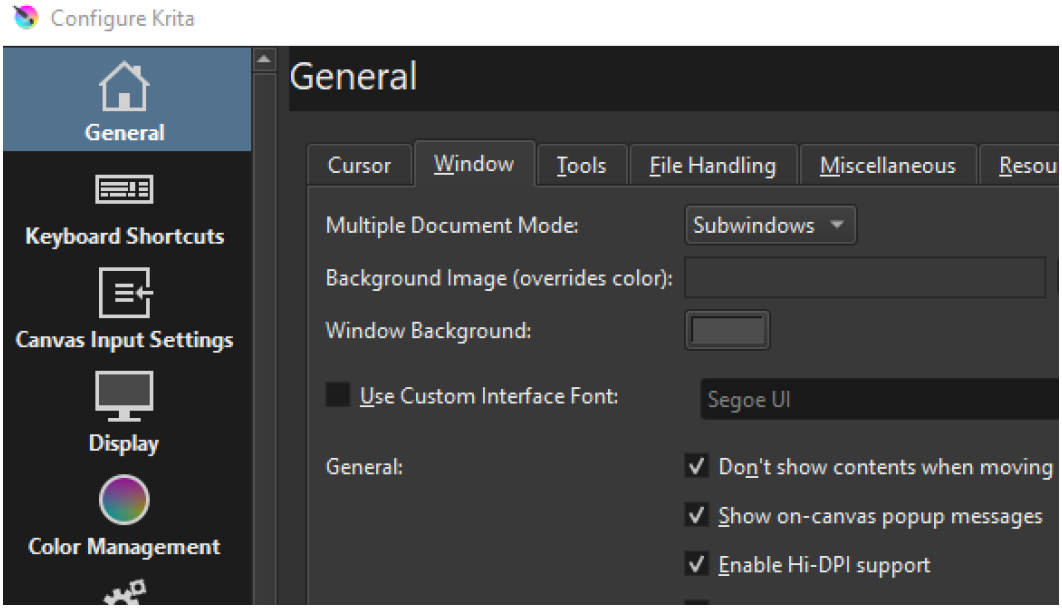


Figure 9.15 – Activating Subwindows via the General > Window tab

Once you have the **Subwindows** mode activated, you can use your workspace as more of a "reference board," allowing multiple images to be open right next to your painting area.

14. With your sketch still open, go to **File > Open** and open the stock photo image itself. Now that you have activated the **Subwindows** mode, you should see your image open in a new window beside our sketch!

15. Before we start drawing, on the new subwindow that is housing our stock photo, *right-click* on the title bar of the subwindow and choose the **Stay on Top** option at the bottom of the drop-down menu (*Figure 9.16*):

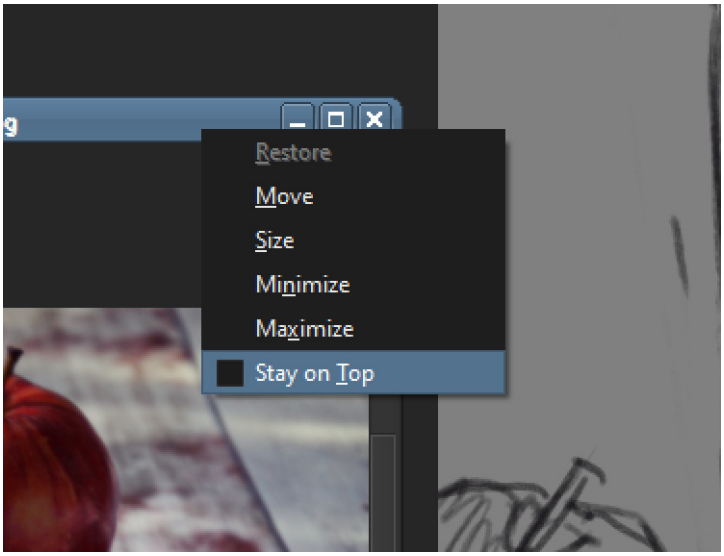


Figure 9.16 – The Stay on Top option of our stock photo subwindow's right-click menu

16. With the **Stay on Top** feature enabled for our stock photo subwindow, you will be able to draw on the `Sketch` layer of your canvas, while keeping the stock photo subwindow up! If you didn't have the **Stay on Top** option enabled, every time you would try to draw on your canvas, your stock photo subwindow would disappear, and it's no fun trying to wrangle the windows back and forth when you're trying to concentrate!

While this chapter may have seemed like a lot of setup for not much "delivery," we'll be happy we dedicated a separate chapter to this portion of our study. In the next chapter, we can jump head-first into painting, adjusting, and making this piece our own!

Summary

In this chapter, our goal was to accurately transfer information from a stock photograph to a canvas. There are many ways to approach transferring an image, all of which are equally valid. Artistic intent, knowledge of skillsets (or lack thereof), setting goals, and the willingness to use tools to aid in the pursuit of your goal is a balance each artist must find for themselves. Whether you use elements of tracing, gridding, pure transferring-by-eye, or a mix of all of these methods, Krita can comfortably handle the task at hand. The tools are there; you just need to utilize them in the way that suits your vision the best!

We looked at the **Reference Image Tool** and the **Grid and Guides** docker, activated the **Subwindows** mode for multiple windows, and broke down some helpful hints and tricks for finding a proper stock image to study.

In *Chapter 10*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*, we will be taking this study to the finish line, and primarily discuss some helpful tips on painting using actionable steps and a methodical execution, while also inviting for true artistic expression. This one's going to be a portfolio-ready piece when we're done with it, I'm sure!

Let's get painting!

10
Enforcing Fundamentals

In *Chapter 9*, *Setting Up a Still-Life Study*, we used a few features within Krita to successfully and accurately transfer an image reference onto our canvas. In this chapter, we're going to pick up the speed (and the complexity) by bringing the entire still-life study of our apples to fruition!

We are going to be increasing the complexity of some of our steps, and combining fundamentals we have established earlier in the book. This is intended, as hopefully, we will be able to "multi-task," essentially doing multiple steps in a single step.

Here's a quick look at the structure of this chapter, and some topics we will be covering:

- Working within our framework
- Blocking in values using color
- Laying in your initial colors
- Finishing touches with edge control

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0+).
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard, and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus.
- The completed sketch from *Chapter 9*, *Setting Up a Still-Life Study*. If you did not follow along in the previous chapter, feel free to use my completed *Chapter 9* Krita file (in `.kra` format) from here `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`.
- A copy of the stock photo used for this project, provided here in the `Chapter 9` folder, `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`, courtesy of `Pexels.com` and photographer *Suzy Hazelwood*.

With our files prepared, we are ready to take this still-life to the final stage! To get things going, we will first discuss what our end goal will be with our study, and how the framework we created in the last chapter will aid us in achieving our vision. Then, we will do a combined *value pass* and *color pass*, mixing both aspects in a single combined pass to achieve more dynamic colors.

We'll then use our values and colors to stretch our imaginative muscles by introducing more subtle colors for added expression. Then, we will really set our style into full gear by refining our piece with some nice, painterly edge control and finishing touches. To get started, let's evaluate the framework we created in the last chapter and see where it takes us!

Working within our framework

We have a sketched transfer of our subject (*Figure 10.1*), a high-quality stock photo to work from, and enough digital brushes and features within Krita to give us infinite possibilities:

Figure 10.1 – Our transfer sketch as it appeared at the end of the previous chapter

So, what do we do now? Before digging into our project with paint, it's important to realize there can be some pitfalls when doing direct photo studies like this. Working on every aspect of still-life at the same time is a recipe for disaster, as a few possible outcomes tend to happen:

- You can hyper-focus on a specific aspect of the piece (such as colors or texture), ignoring the "entire picture" as a standalone piece of art.
- You can rely too heavily on the stock photo to give you *exact* information, to such an extent that you don't to deviate from the reference image. So, you could potentially spend dozens of hours on something that's not only not fulfilling or engaging, but also ends up being boring to look at.
- Interest in the project can plummet if things such as values or shapes don't come smoothly as you progress. Since this image already exists, the drive to essentially re-create the image may seem not worth the hassle once the "ugly phase" of the painting process hits. This is especially true when you only do a study of a single reference image of more mundane, inanimate objects.

Essentially, the problems come down to the fact that the image doesn't move or change, and it's also not fun to be a copy machine. How can we make sure we don't fall into the "boring, academic" trap of a reference study?

Setting creative limitations

A great, effective way to counter some of these issues before they become problems is to set creative limitations. Setting creative limitations, or purposefully limiting certain choices, is a helpful practice before going into any art piece, as it allows you some boundaries to simplify your decision-making and keep your momentum up when working. There's a variety of creative limitations, such as subject matter and canvas size (which we've already solved in the previous chapter), but they can also cover things such as your color palette, brush choices, and value ranges as well.

Keeping a balance of trusting our source image's information while allowing for artistic interpretation is going to be key to making this an impactful study, and there are a few rules we will put into place to maintain a sense of ownership and add creative fuel to our project and decision making:

- We will *work with color and value at the same time* instead of going from grayscale to color as separate steps, as we have previously followed in the book.
- We will *initially allow only six colors* – two shadow tones, two midtones, and two highlight tones.
- *No pure black or pure white* is allowed at any point in the process.
- *Do not go for 100% perfectly accurate rendering*; keep things expressive and painterly while also staying refined and clean.

Having these limitations in place will force our "creative brain" to stay engaged during the entire image-making process. I know that, personally, if I don't set up fun "challenges" for myself, I have a bad tendency to become glued to my reference without making any artistic changes. While doing a one-for-one exact copy of an image can be a great exercise for our rendering and drafting skills, I feel that the best exercises hit a nice balance of referenced believability and using artistic imagination.

Before we start laying down paint, there's one more thing I'd like to discuss regarding using photographs as reference: levels.

Adjusting the levels

Levels, in the context that we'll discuss here, can be defined as *the value range of an image*, or simply asking the question "how dark are the darks, and how light are the lights?"

Images that you find on the internet tend to be "sweetened," or have contrasts and colors adjusted to make the image "pop" when viewed on a digital screen (essentially, darkening the darks and brightening the brights while adding saturation to colors). This is nice and all, however, it can skew the way our eyes process the information if we're not aware that these adjustments have been made. Instead of using nice, natural colors that we would see in nature and mixing them with traditional paint, we're more likely to take the "extreme" option that we see from the post-processed photo.

A perfect example, and something we will discuss in our apple stock image, is the darkest darks and lightest lights. In the stock image, the value extremes end up being pure digital black and pure digital white, which are not correct in regards to creating a traditional-looking still-life painting. Since it's our goal to mimic the "traditional" feel of painting with this still-life exercise, it makes sense to bring in our traditional color creation sensibilities.

With a traditionally painted still-life, your darkest darks could be created using a mix of ultramarine blue and raw umber, making for a very dark neutral brown. This could act as a "black," as it would be darker and more neutral than any other paint mixture on the canvas while retaining some personality of color, as seen in *Figure 10.2*:

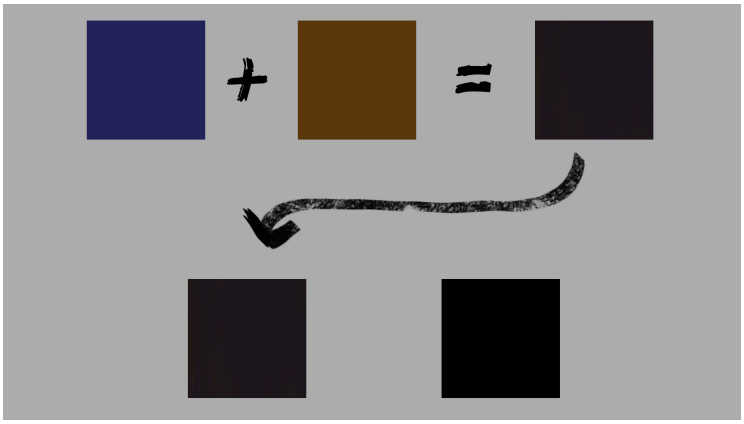


Figure 10.2 – A blue and brown mixture to create "black," next to pure digital black

Having a dark value created by mixing a warm and a cool hue works *extremely* well in keeping the color vibrant in your piece. Small tweaks to your process like this will do a lot of heavy lifting in retaining a "traditional" feel to your work. This process of creating a "colorful neutral" isn't just for shadows, it can also work well for highlights and your brightest brights!

"Pure white," in that same way of thinking, could be created using a mix of lemon yellow and titanium white. This will be extremely bright, but will also retain some of the chromas of the yellow, giving a vibrance that "digital white" or "pure white" simply doesn't have.

While you could use pure black or white paint directly from the tube when making a traditional still-life painting, in both traditional painting and digital art, pure black and pure white tend to strip the majority of life and personality from colors around them. This is because black and white have no inherent "hue" to bounce off and they tend to flatten any depth you may have achieved by using color in your piece. Remember in the *Dissecting a color* section of *Chapter 2*, *Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color*, where we discussed the color wheel and "traveling through" the color wheel instead of around it? Think of pure black and pure white as your "extremes," not existing at all on the wheel itself.

Let's make sure our photo doesn't have "pure black" and "pure white" by adjusting the image's levels, which will allow us to see the color range we will have when selecting colors for our values in the upcoming *Blocking in values using color* section of this chapter.

With our stock photo open in Krita, click on **Filter** > **Adjust** > **Levels**. You can also use the shortcut *Ctrl* + *L* to bring up the **Levels** menu immediately (*Figure 10.3*):

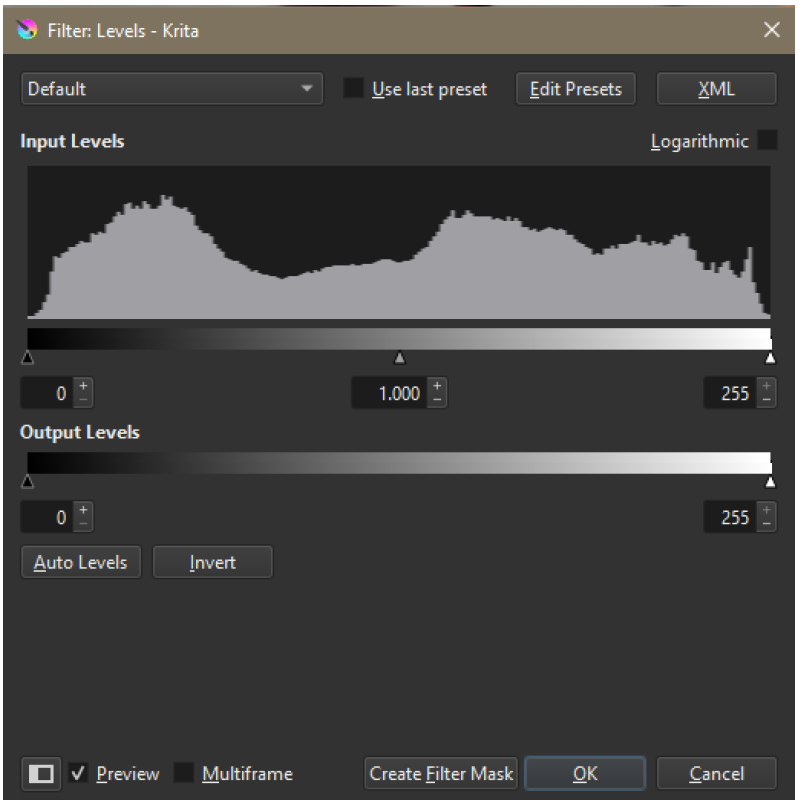


Figure 10.3 – The Levels adjustment menu from the Filters > Adjust section

We're going to look at the two main areas of this menu: **Input Levels** and **Output Levels**.

Input levels

The **Input Levels** area is a diagram that shows the number of pixels of a particular value present in your image. We read this slider from left to right, with the **0** area (left) being pure black, and the **255** option (right) being pure white. Everything in between is, you guessed it, in between pure black and pure white! By sliding the black slider icon, white slider icon, or middle slider icon, you can adjust the lightness or darkness of a specific tonal region of your image. You will also notice a "peaks and valleys" graph, which shows you how much of your image's information exists within a certain value range.

In *Figure 10.3*, it looks like our highest density is in the lights (as the right half of **Input Levels** is averaging higher for a larger portion of time), but the most extreme value would be in the darks (as the tip of that first, left-most peak is the overall highest point on the graph). By seeing this information presented in this way, we can get a quick breakdown of our image in a tonal way, allowing us some insight into what we can focus on while we paint. Namely, this graph is telling me that I'll have more room to play around with colors and hues in the lights, but the darks will be pretty contrast-heavy and drastic. With that being said, let me make sure I'm working with some more "natural" colors and fewer "post-processed" adjustments that the photographer may have made.

For instance, I am going to bump the black slider icon slightly to the right (toward the middle), and the white slider slightly to the left (toward the middle) (*Figure 10.4*):

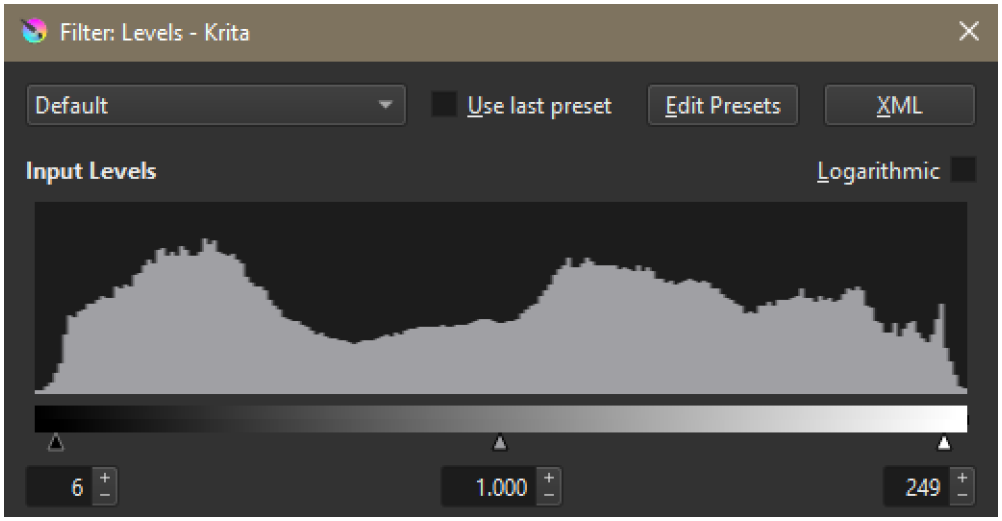


Figure 10.4 – The adjusted black and white sliders for Input Levels

You've probably noticed that the numbers for our respective outer values have changed. Instead of our black levels being directly at **0** (meaning no light), they're now bumped to **6**, meaning we're slightly lighter than pure black. Likewise, our white levels have now been changed from **255** (full brightness) to **249**, meaning the brightest white is now not as harsh, and ever-so-slightly darker than pure "monitor light" white. You will also see these changes impact your image while you adjust the sliders, so be sure to see how the image is changed! Of course, if you'd like to lighten or darken your midtones, you can move that middle gray icon to the left (to darken) or to the right (to lighten) of the gradient slider, with respect to the adjustment you'd like to make.

Output levels

Output levels define the "value rules" that input levels will play by. If you take a glance at the **Output Levels** slider, it looks like the **Input Levels** slider, but a bit more basic (*Figure 10.5*):

Figure 10.5 – Our Output Levels slider

Here, you'll see that the output levels control the "global amount" of our value range for the image, regardless of how much of each value is present in the image itself. If you'd like to ensure that your images don't have pure black or pure white in them, you can slide the respective icon toward the middle of the scale. For our purposes, I'm actually going to replicate the settings I have for the **Input Levels** gradient slider, making our darks go to **6** and our lights to **249**. This takes the aggressive "flatness" out of the darks and lights, giving us a more pleasant image to work with regarding choosing colors for painting. Now, these numeric values of **Output Levels** don't have to match what **Input Levels** show, but it's a nice starting point to find some balance in your tonal range.

A few other options on the **Levels** menu that I'd like to point out are the **Auto Levels** button, and the **Create Filter Mask** button (*Figure 10.6*):

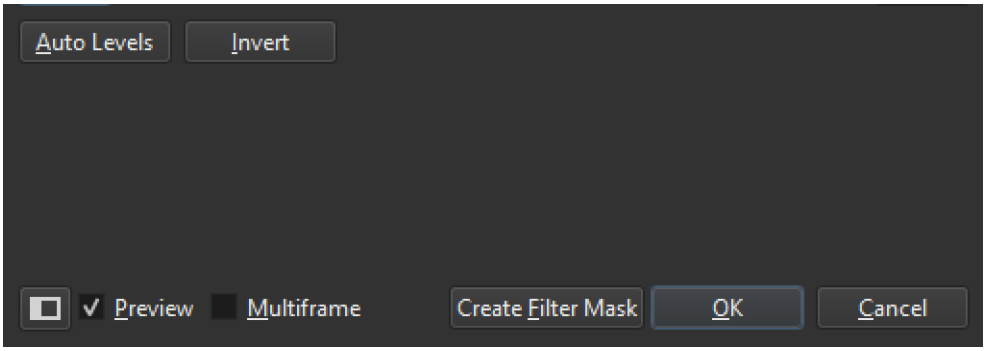


Figure 10.6 – Additional options, including Auto Levels and Create Filter Mask

By clicking the **Auto Levels** button, Krita will run a quick evaluation process on your image and dictate "optimal value levels" for what you have present in the image. If you have no real clue on where to begin on altering your image, or are just curious about how well your value control compares to Krita's algorithmic balance of values, the **Auto Levels** option may be a great way to get started! Also, by clicking the **Create Filter Mask** button, you will make all of your levels change on an editable layer mask, giving you even further control. If you would like to keep your painting the way it is, but want to have the "option" of going back and forth between a level-adjusted version and your base version, the **Create Filter Mask** button is a perfect way to go.

Now that we have tackled the idea of adjusting the tonal levels of our image, we can get into the more manual, painterly take on value control: selecting our colors for blocking in our subject!

Blocking in values using color

As we established earlier, in the *Setting creative limitations* section, we're going to tackle three of our challenges, all at the same time. First, we're only going to be choosing six colors initially, three sets of two to correspond with our shadows, midtones, and highlights respectively. Second, instead of working in grayscale to block in our initial values, we'll be working directly in color for the entire process. Third, we are not allowed to use pure black or pure white in this study; however, that doesn't mean we can't use some extremely dark or light colors!

Letting Value Do The Work

Up until this point of this book, I have been very adamant that value takes precedent over the other aspects of color (hue and saturation, respectively). Enough so, that in our previous five-chapter long landscape project, we started with a "value pass" of black and white to block in our values in *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, then added color with a layer on top of our value pass set to the **Color** blending mode in *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*. If you feel more comfortable with this "splashing color on top of values" method we practiced during our landscape project, feel free to do so! However, just know that you'll get some really interesting, vivid results if you work directly in color from the start. It's a big leap of faith to work directly in color, but I believe in you!

Our first order of business is to find our initial six colors that we will be using as a baseline for our painting. Think of this as finding your "limited palette" in place, giving you not only your tonal range but your overall mood for your piece. While I'll be looking at the stock reference, I'm actually going to choose my colors by eye. Let's take a quick look at a small portion of our stock image to discuss our problem-solving process (*Figure 10.7*):

Figure 10.7 – A small snapshot of our stock image, with all six of our tonal colors present

This is a great snapshot, as it has the full value range present in a single area of the image. While we can see some very bright colors (especially the highlight of the apple, alongside the direct light source coming in from the left, and the more yellow-orange textured areas of the apple), we have some highly saturated midtones (the very saturated reds next to the highlights, for instance), and some deep shadow colors (from the shadow of the apples cast onto the wood panels, and the darker red form shadows as the apples face away from the light source).

Doing this dissection, I've made these overall decisions for colors based on observation:

- **Highlights** – A very bright, low saturated yellow for the highest highlight on the apple, and a slightly more saturated, slightly darker red to inform the cast light from the wood panel onto the bottom of the left-most and middle apple.
- **Midtones** – The highly saturated red (although darker than the highlight red), and that nice neutral yellow-orange for the apple's textures.
- **Shadows** – The lightly saturated (although very dark) purple for the apple's cast shadow onto the wood panel, and the slightly more red version of the same value to act as the form shadow of the apples themselves.

A quick look at my palette (which will also be included as a separate layer in this chapter's final Krita document provided to you at `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`) can be seen in *Figure 10.8*:

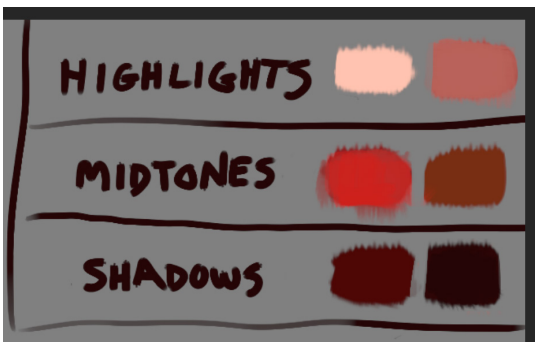


Figure 10.8 – My six selected "color values" to block in our still-life study

There's a saying about choosing values, and it goes as follows:

The lightest dark will be darker than the darkest light. The darkest light will still be lighter than the lightest dark.

While it's almost a tongue-twister for your brain to think about, essentially this can be interpreted in the following way.

On a nine-point value scale (**1** to **9**, with **5** being the exact middle gray), where **1** counts as pure black, and **9** counts as pure white, the higher the number, the higher the brightness. If your highlights end up being **7** and **9** on the value scale, for instance, your midtones *by definition of being darker than highlights*, cannot be **7** or above on the value scale. In that same way of thinking, if your shadows exist on **1** and **3** on the value scale, your midtone number cannot match or go below **3** (*Figure 10.9*):

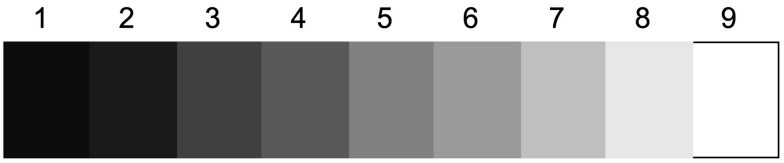


Figure 10.9 – A nine-point value scale, with 5 being pure midtone, for your reference

Essentially, *don't mix your values*! In the initial block-in phase, it's much easier to block in using simple, direct values to make sure your lights, darks, and forms read well at a distance.

Using *Figure 10.7* and comparing it with the value scale of *Figure 10.8*, we can see if we achieved our goal of value clarity (or non-overlapping) for our colors. After observation, I would argue that the results are as follows (from left to right as shown in *Figure 10.7*):

- Highlights – **8** and **6**
- Midtones – **5** and **3**
- Shadows – **2** and **1**

Awesome! Our highlights, midtones, and shadows have all been chosen and follow that golden rule of value control. Let's select your colors and add them to your project:

1. Go ahead and make a new layer on your open project, and call this layer `Six-Tone Palette`.
2. Choose your six colors, making sure you keep in mind where they land on the nine-step value graph.
3. Choose a nice, opaque brush to put your six tones onto your canvas. For placing in my tones, I used the **f) Bristles-5 Flat** brush from the **Paint** category.

4. Place your highlight color pair, your midtone color pair, and your shadow color pair in a dedicated space, separated from one another on the `Six-Tone Palette` layer.
5. Don't overlap your values; be sure to keep them separate, not only by having them physically not touch but not repeating places on the value scale! Basically, you don't want your midtone values to be dark enough to confuse your viewer into thinking they're shadow values, or your lights to be so neutral that they start approaching (or intersecting with) our midtones.

Now that we've put our palette on our canvas on a new layer, we're ready to lay in these selected colors based on our initial sketch!

Laying in your initial colors

We have our six-tone palette now as part of our canvas, which allows us to simplify our shapes and values while working directly in color:

1. With your project open, create a new layer and name it `Value Block-In`.
2. Move this layer to be the second to-bottom-most layer on your **Layers** panel (meaning the `Sketch` and `Six-Tone Palette` layers will be above it on the **Layers** panel window, while the only layer below it would be our initial **Background** layer.)

   This will be where we put our initial colors. At the end of *Chapter 9*, *Setting Up a Still-Life*, we covered a way to set up the **Subwindow** mode – a mode where you can have two Krita windows open side-by-side. This is a fantastic way to keep a reference open while you work, and will be incredibly helpful for the remainder of the study.

A quick look at my workspace setup can be seen in *Figure 10.10*:

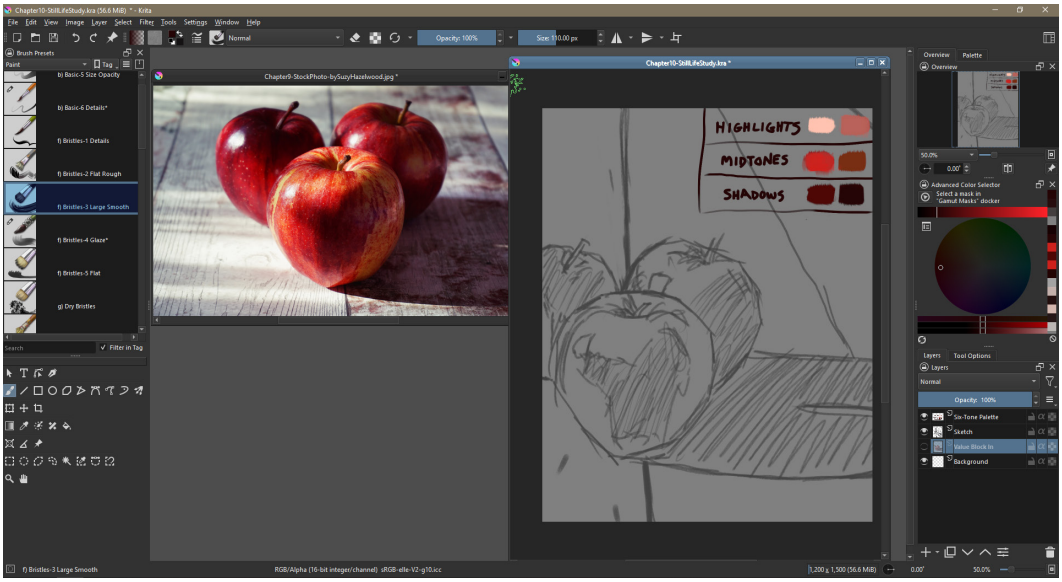


Figure 10.10 – An overview of my workspace, using my stock reference as a subwindow

Having our stock image set up directly beside our painting canvas is incredibly valuable as, at any time, we can select our stock image subwindow and zoom, move, and manipulate the image to aid in our painting process, all without covering our canvas. Even though we've placed in our guiding sketch to aid in the placement of our values, having our images right next to one another will make this step even more relaxed.

3. With your `Value Block-In` layer selected, choose your darkest shadow color (by hovering over the shadow color you'd like from your `Six-Tone Palette` layer, and using the default shortcut of *Ctrl* + *Left-click* to select it).
4. With this darkest shadow color, go ahead and block in the cast shadows of your apples, as well as the "darkest darks" of your apples. Use your guiding sketch to help you!

   Don't worry if you're not exactly staying in your lines at this point; we will be going from "broad strokes" to "more specific shapes" as we add more layers and steps.
5. Once you are pleased with your darkest shadows, select one of your midtone colors, and block those in to be next to your darkest shadows. Once again, don't worry if some of these colors and values overlap; this is what we want to happen!

6. Finally, select your highlight colors and block those in as well (touching the midtones you have placed in).

   My quick pass can be seen in *Figure 10.11*:

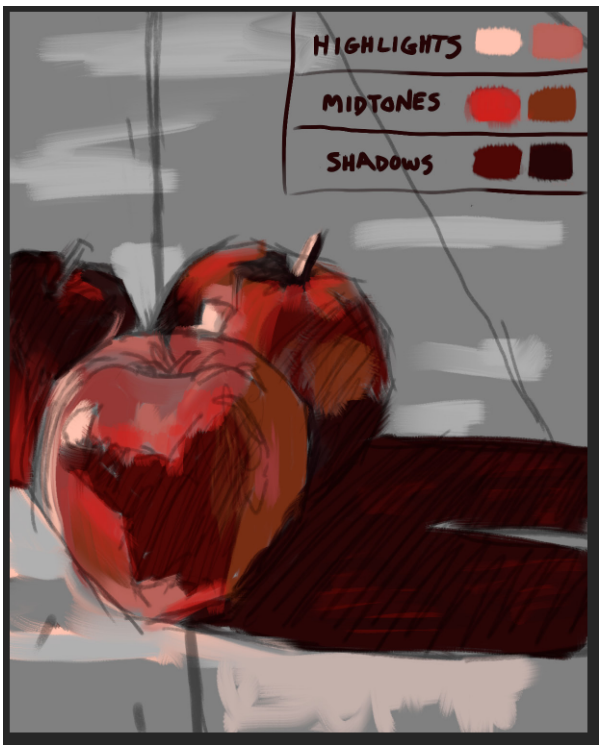


Figure 10.11 – Our initial Value Block-In layer using our six-tone palette

   Notice that, while I've stayed locked in and used only my six-tone palette, I've added a little bit of variety to my shadows, midtones, and highlights by sprinkling in the other color from their respective category.

   While the cast shadow of the apples primarily consists of my darkest dark, for variety I added a little bit of the more red-focused shadow tone. While we are still following the rules of keeping our shadows, midtones, and highlights separate, we're free to mix the two colors within each category.

7. Once you've set in your initial shadow, midtone, and highlight colors, make a new layer.

8. Name this new layer `Added Color Flair`. Make sure this layer is on top of our `Value Block-In` layer.

9. Choose a nice, wet brush for this step. I have chosen the **i) Wet Bristles** brush from the **Paint** category tag.
10. With both your stock photo and your painting canvas open, choose some colors that are not part of your `Six-Tone Palette` layer and integrate them into your painting. Feel free to color pick directly (with the *Ctrl* + *left-click* default shortcut) or use the skills you learned about comparing colors during *Chapter 2*, *Reviewing Canvas Properties and Color*.

    I make sure to start introducing some of the lighter yellows into my midtones, while ensuring they don't interfere with the lightest lights of the highlight colors I've chosen. Since this is a new layer, feel free to experiment with different colors and tonal values here, really comparing your work versus the stock image. While we don't want to have a one-for-one photocopy of our stock image at the end of this project, using it as our guide and interpreting what we see is the main goal.

    During this phase of the project, I'm constantly zooming, color picking, and noticing changes and transitions between colors, values, and shapes. A quick glance at what I have so far can be seen in *Figure 10.12*:

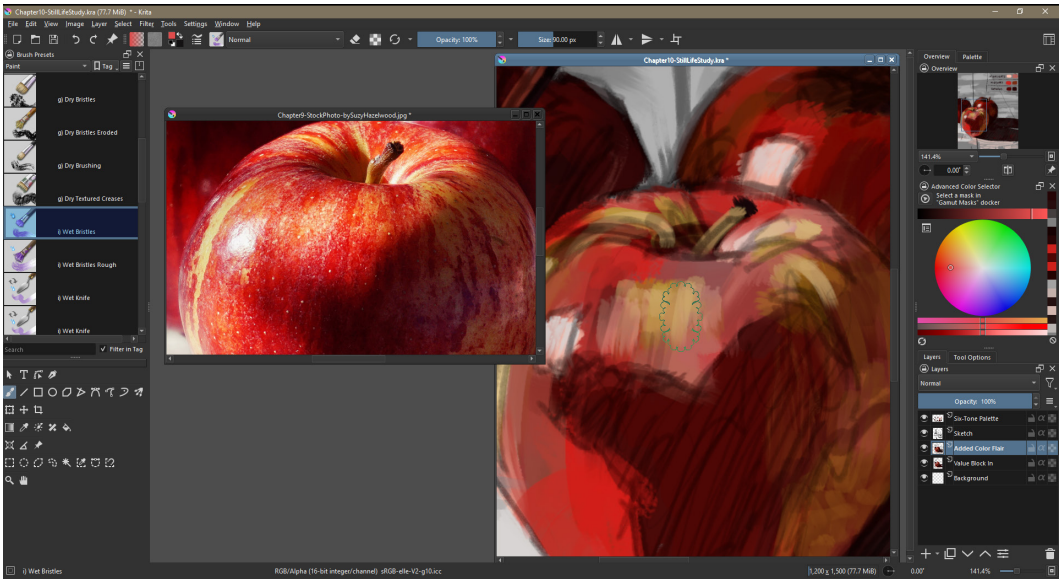


Figure 10.12 – Actively adding in new color relationships on the Added Color Flair layer of our painting

As you can see, I'm starting to lay in some "transitional colors," trying to bridge the gap between midtones-to-highlights as well as from shadow-to-midtones. Namely, I'm using a more yellow-orange color to start adding in some of the foremost texture on the apple, as well as some slightly deeper darks in the portion of the apples where the stems sit. Let's keep pushing our textures by utilizing a dry brush pass:

11. Create a new layer.
12. Name this layer `Dry Brush Textures`.
13. Choose a few brushes that can add a bit of "dry" texture to add a bit more visual interest to our piece.

    Essentially, these "dry" brushes will have gaps within their brush tips to mimic a brush whose tip has "dried out," making the spread of paint uneven. I chose **g) Dry Bristles** and **g) Dry Brushing**, both of which can be found in the **Paint** category tag.
14. Continue color picking (or eyeballing color shifts) and implementing subtle color changes using your dry brushes.

    You'll start noticing that because the spread of paint is "uneven" with these dry brushes, the apples and wood panel are starting to get a sense of depth that wasn't there previously. This has to do with the idea of controlling our textures using the basic rule of "information versus no information," a topic we'll go further into later in the *Finishing touches with edge control* section of this chapter.

> **Controlling Your Brush Movement for Greater Impact**
>
> A great tip when using a variety of brushes is to focus on the angle of the brushstroke itself while you work. Since we are painting apples, be sure to make your brushstrokes "follow the curves" of the apple. Imagine a trail of ants crawling across the surface of your object, and do your best to "trace" the trail the ants would create. This will not only ensure you retain the form of your object but will give your brushwork a gorgeous, natural feel.

You can see a quick look at my current progress in *Figure 10.13*:

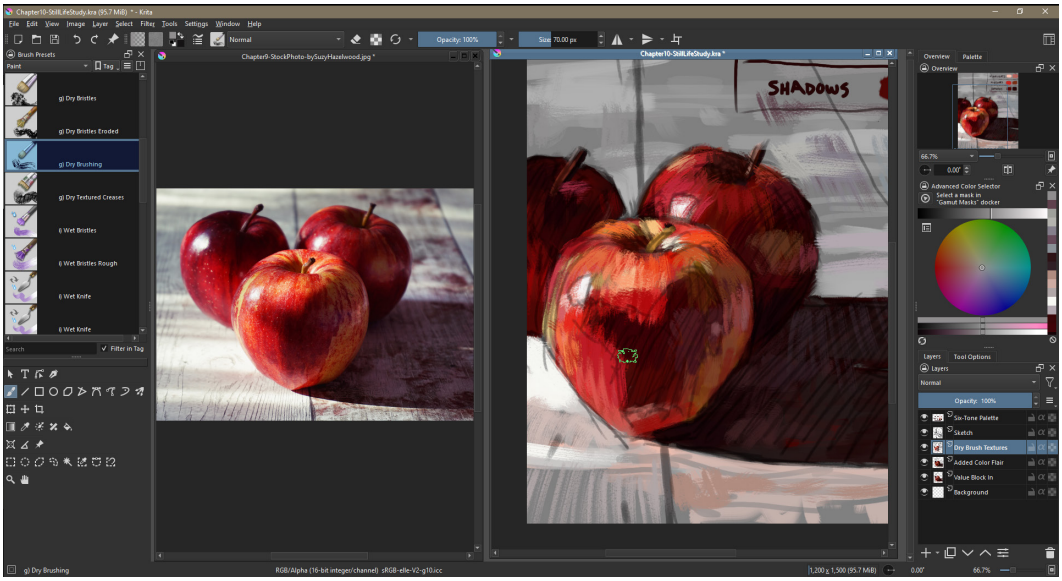


Figure 10.13 – A look at the 'dry brush' pass in relation to the stock image on the left

One thing I'm keeping in mind while I work is adding some brighter, higher saturation pops of red connecting the shadows and highlights. Another thing I'm keeping in mind is making sure that the cast shadow of the apples has some visual interest by introducing a darker shade of the wood panel's grays into the shadow area, while shifting the tint to be a bit on the cooler side.

Hopefully, you're seeing how this still-life study is coming together, utilizing your brush choices and tonal value relationships! I think we have a comfortable grasp of our composition and basic color block-ins, so now it's time to focus on finishing, with edge control and controlled rendering.

Finishing touches with edge control

Every step up until this point can be viewed as "setting up" for this final portion of our project. Newer artists, and even some seasoned professionals, seem to doubt themselves when it comes to crossing the finish line on a piece. How do you know when a piece is *done*? Are there any ways to ensure that your piece is the very best it can be? What are a few things you can do to give yourself a little more peace of mind, feeling confident that you've done everything within your power to make an impactful piece of art?

While I don't believe there's a "one-size-fits-all" magic answer, I can think of two main things to look for while you're pushing to your final phase of completing a piece of art:

- Control your edges. Make sure there's a variety of hard edges, soft edges, lost edges, and "painterly" edges.
- Find a focal point and highly render that specific area to give contrast to the rest of our piece. The human eye can only focus on one thing at a time, remember? Embrace this limitation to bring life and a sense of human emotion to your painting.

To get into the correct mindset, let's discuss the various types of edges you can have within a painting. After that, we will cover some great rendering techniques to push our piece further, tweak our piece with fine detailing and glazing, and focus on the often-overlooked technique of smudging to really add some emotional depth to your piece!

Discussing edge types

Edges can be defined as the shift of colors, planes, values, or objects in a painting. I remember my mind being blown when the realization hit that there are no such things as "lines" in real life, only edges. That's a wild idea, so let's cover some examples to aid in the understanding of that concept.

Making a "line drawing" of something is simply creating the contrast of a hard edge against a backdrop, signifying the shapes and contours of an object in relation to its surroundings. Lines in nature (such as the edge of a desk, the bits of mortar between bricks on a building, or a silhouette of a tree against a bright sky) only exist as a contrast of planes, color, and value against their surroundings. Even notebook paper (the type with the blue "lines" to guide where you write) is simply a sheet of paper with a difference between the white backdrop of the paper, and the blue "guiding line," which is simply a contrast of color in a predetermined, measured way to aid in a task.

I bring this up because thinking of edges as a *tool* you can use will level up your art significantly, and without too much effort! Let's dissect the main types of edges you can find in a piece of artwork. We can use *Figure 10.14* as a guide while defining our edges:

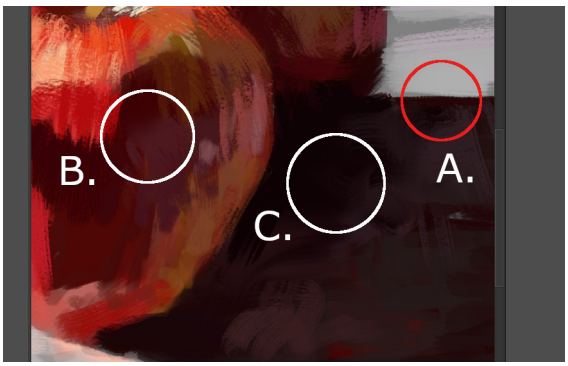


Figure 10.14 – Showcasing hard (A.), soft (B.), and lost (C.) edges in our piece so far

Here's a quick rundown of *Figure 10.13*, highlighting the differences between edge types and where they can be used for maximum impact:

- **Hard edges** consist of a sharp, sudden change from one color, value, or shape to another. In our example (**A.**), a hard edge separates the apple's cast shadow from the wooden plank.
- **Soft edges** consist of a smoother transition, usually being a more subtle gradient from one color, value, or shape to another. In our example (**B.**), a soft edge is blending midtone colors into one another for a smoother texture appearance on the foremost apple.
- **Lost edges** consist of no edge, bridging two separate shapes into one cohesive shape. In our example (**C.**), this can be seen as the form shadow of the back apple blending seamlessly into the cast shadow portion closest to the apple itself.

While these are the three types of primary edges you're likely to find in a painting, I actually want to discuss a "fourth" edge that I'm pretty fond of, even if it doesn't really exist on its own. The **painterly edge** can be defined as an edge that "breaks the rules" of edges in a fun and creative way (*Figure 10.15*):

Figure 10.15 – Painterly edges, breaking the flow of hard edges in a creative way

Notice in *Figure 10.15* how the standard "hard edges" of the apple's outline and the apple's cast shadow are broken up by smudged marks, giving the eye something of interest to look at. While these smudges, pushes, and knife scrapes don't "make sense" from a logical standpoint, they can be a fantastic way to add emotion, spontaneity, and interest to your work. We will play with these as we get closer to completing our piece.

Now that we have a basic understanding of edges and how they can impact your work, let's dive in and start rendering by using what we know.

Rendering and pushing to the final piece

We've made it this far, so now it's time to finish this piece up! I am going to be dissecting and comparing our stock photo to our painting a bit more as we work through these steps, so the pace may slow down a little bit. However, use this time to really play and experience what different brushes, edges, blur tools, and layer masks can do for you.

Let's have a quick comparison shot to see where we can start our refinement process (*Figure 10.16*):

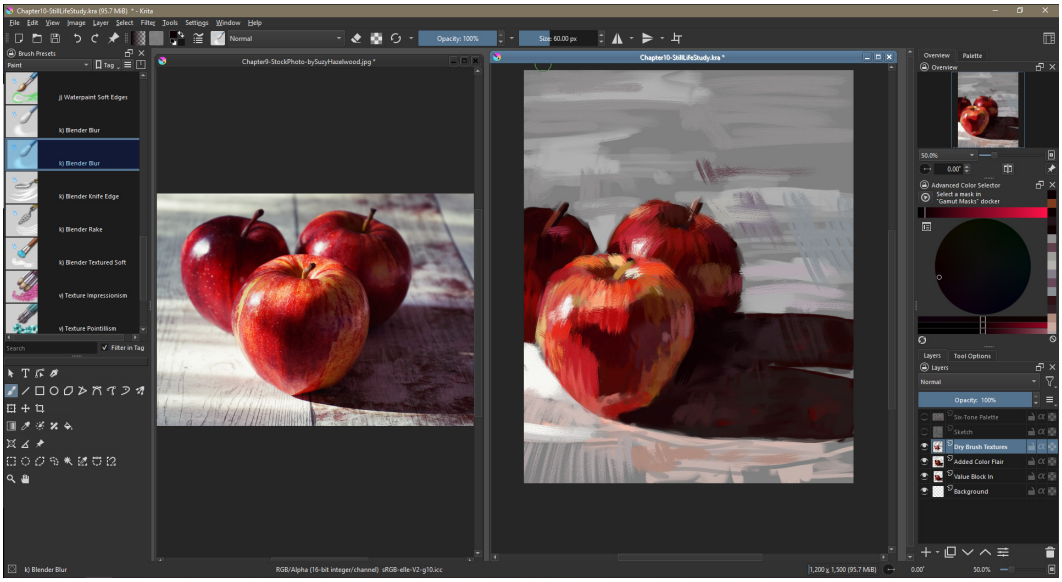


Figure 10.16 – A zoomed-out comparison shot of our stock image and painting side by side

It's a good idea during your painting process to zoom out and do an at-a-glance comparison with the item you're doing a study from. There are a few things I already notice about my painting when compared to the stock photo that I want to look at during this final push:

- The shadows, midtones, and highlights need to be slightly blended in order for the apples to read as round, tactile three-dimensional objects.
- The wooden plank still needs some texture variety to make its surface read as different than the skins of the apples.
- I really like the shapes of the apples, however, I want to make sure that the edges of each apple (the silhouettes) are very sharp, allowing me to go in and add some painterly edges for dramatic effect at the very end.

With these thoughts at the front of my mind going forward, I feel comfortable knowing where we're headed. You know, it's always helpful to have directions to guide your journey!

Let's go ahead and merge our image at this point, so we can really start digging into our brushwork, allowing all of the colors and edges to aid in our paint's believability:

1. On your **Layers** panel, go ahead and hide your `Six-Tone Palette` and `Sketch` layers. We don't want our sketch lines to interfere with our painting as we start refining our brushwork!
2. With our `Six-Tone Palette` and `Sketch` layers hidden, go ahead and click **Select All** > **Copy Merged** (the *Ctrl* + *A* shortcut for **Select All**, and *Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C* for **Copy Merged**).
3. Paste your merged copy (*Ctrl* + *V shortcut*). Rename this new layer `Merged Copy`.
4. With your `Merged Copy` layer selected, choose a nice blender brush. I have chosen the **k) Blender Textured Soft** brush from the **Paint** category tag.
5. Start blending between the high saturation midtones and your shadows on your foremost apple (as seen in *Figure 10.17*):

Figure 10.17 – Blending in our midtones and shadows using a textured blender brush

A great technique for blending is to use a "circular" motion when you approach an edge. Having a variety of brushstroke directions will aid in the believability of our painting, giving it a very traditional feel.

6. Continue blending a few smaller areas of your transition, until your edges become smooth enough to appear as a gradient. Feel free to change your blender brush for this step if you prefer a smoother look (*Figure 10.18*):

Figure 10.18 – Smoothing our edges to be softer, aiding in the believability of our form

Continue to work your way around the form of the apple, taking note of the "smooth" transitions in our stock photo and implementing those into your piece. Apply your blender brushstrokes as you see fit.

Remember, the direction of your brushstrokes (even with a blender brush) will dictate form!

After using a variety of blender brushes in and around the changes of colors and values, you should have a piece that's looking a little more like the photographic reference (*Figure 10.19*):

Figure 10.19 – Our piece after our "blender brushes" pass

Pretty cool, yeah? The impact of our blender brushes works so dramatically because we're working on our merged version of our piece, meaning that every pixel of our canvas has visual information that the blender brush can use to smooth and blend in a natural way.

7. Once you're pleased with your blender brush results, go ahead and create a new merged layer (using the **Select All** > **Copy Merged** > **Paste** method from earlier).

8. Name this new merged layer `Edge Pass 1`.

   Since our goal is a "painterly" study, it's important to keep as much visual information on the layer as possible. Using a new "blank" layer can still work if you prefer that method, but the beauty of Krita's brush engine is the natural way colors and tones can melt into one another – an effect that is not quite as impactful with a "blank" layer on top of a layer full of information. Experiment with which way you like best!

   Our goal for this layer is to refine our apples' stems, as well as work on the sharp silhouettes of our apples.

9. Choose a good default brush. I'll be using the **b) Basic-5 Size Opacity** brush from the **Paint** category tag.

10. Start placing your marks to sharpen your apples' stems. An effective way to do this is to color-pick some of your darker darks already on your canvas, and "draw" using your paintbrush (*Figure 10.20*):

Figure 10.20 – "Drawing" our detailed stem using a default paintbrush

Also notice that I'm adding in a bit of shape refinement (with hard edges) to the stem's shadow area, and the area on the apple where the stem is sprouting from. Remember, values and colors only work *in relation to one another*. So, if something isn't looking correct to your eye, make sure that the relationships are working immediately surrounding the "problem area."

Now, we're going to take this idea, and work on the silhouettes and shape relationships on each apple, not only in relation to each other but to the wood plank and overall composition as a whole.

11. Staying on our `Edge Pass 1` layer, start refining the shapes around the foremost apple using your same default brush. The goal should be a very sharp "outline" of sorts for the apple.
12. To help with this, I color-pick (*Ctrl* + *left-click*) a color right next to the edge I want to refine. This will allow my colors from the wet, blended "painting" pass to inform the edge's colors directly (*Figure 10.21*):

Figure 10.21 – Color-picking a darker red (circled) to apply to the foreground apple's edge to make it sharper (as shown by the arrow)

13. I make sure to get rid of any "noise," or bits of texture that surround the silhouette as well. We want smooth clarity for this pass!

    After a full outline of my shape, I have something that looks like *Figure 10.22*:

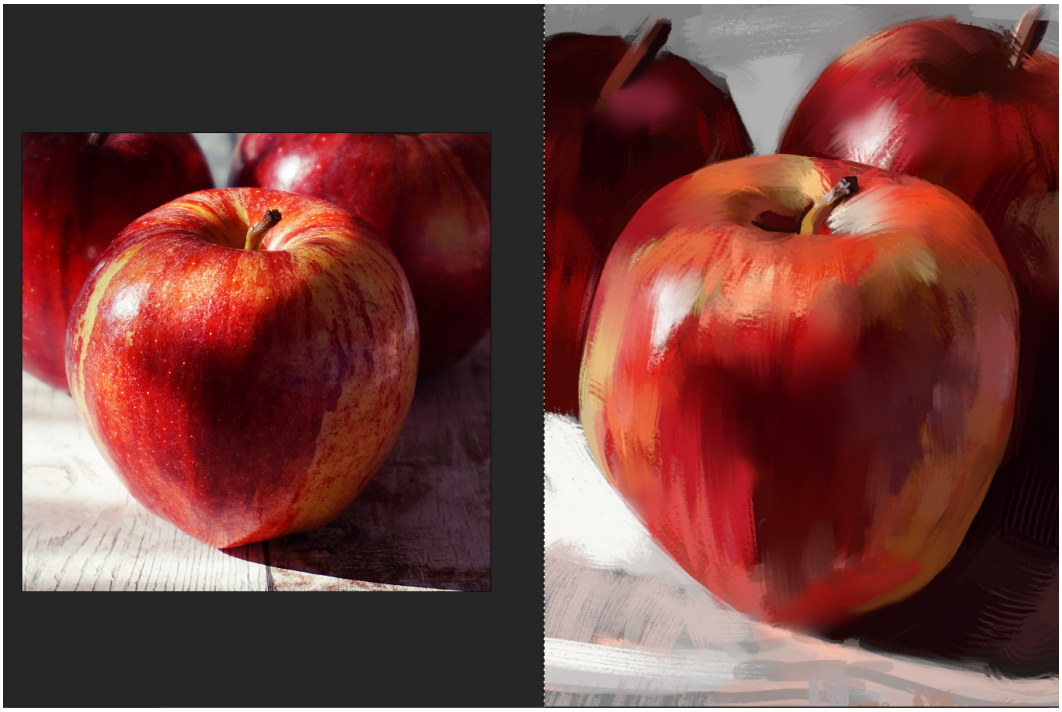


Figure 10.22 – Our refined foreground apple compared to our stock photo reference

We're getting there! It's always exciting when you get to the "controlling edges" portion of a piece, as that's where it really starts to come alive!

You'll probably notice that, because we sharpened the edge of the foreground apple's silhouette, it has now become the focal point of our piece. Perfect! We can embrace this fact by refining the wooden plank near that foreground apple, and have detail "melt away" the further we get from our focal point.

14. Stay on your **Edit Pass 1** layer, and continue using your trusty default brush.
15. Draw in a bit of wood grain detail, as well as the harsher black "guiding line" that the wood plank has, as this will guide the viewer's eye to our focal point apple even more.

16. For the wood panel detail, try "scribbling" in perspective. You'll be amazed at how much even random sharp strokes can infer about our subject when it's following the correct perspective!

    After a bit of toying around, I have a wood plank (and regarding the full composition, a lower-left corner) that I'm pretty pleased with (*Figure 10.23*):

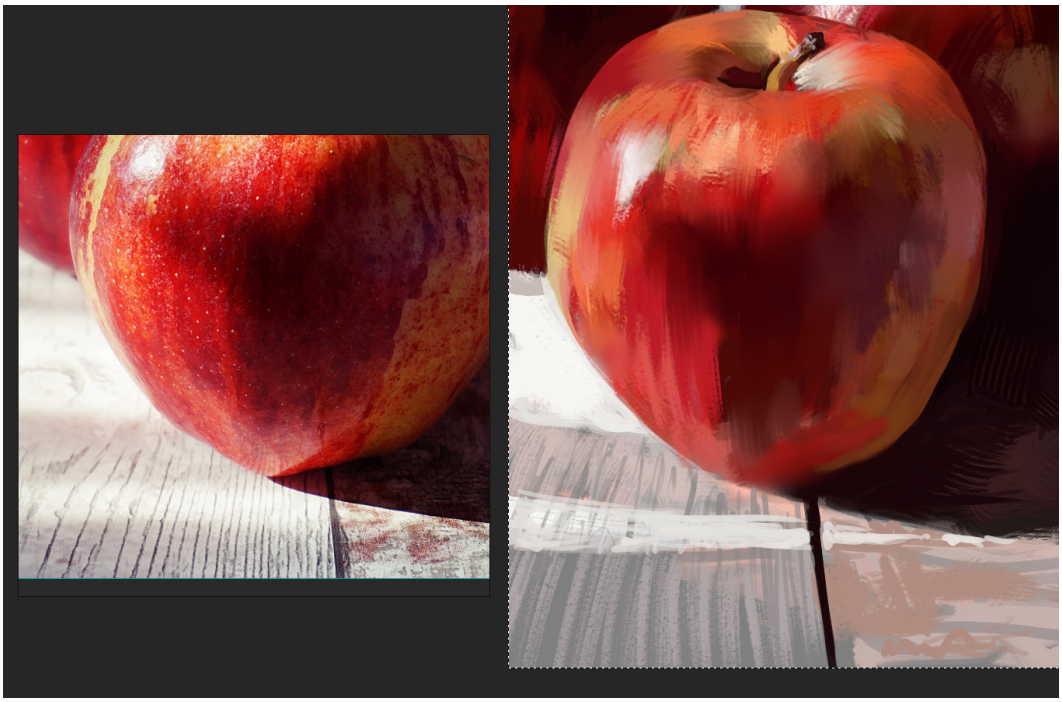


Figure 10.23 – The lower left of our study compared with our stock reference image

    Now, we're approaching our last bit of detailing and finishing touches. Exciting stuff! Let's go ahead and do a quick "painterly wash," blending some of our edges into each other, as well as refining some shapes across the composition to tighten up our rendering.

17. Create a new layer.
18. Name this layer `Glazing Pass`.
19. Find a preferred wet brush that allows for good pressure sensitivity. I have selected the **f) Bristles-4 Glaze** brush from the **Paint** category tag.
20. While looking at your stock photo, compare the amount of texture (or any visual information) to what you have in your painting.

Do you notice anywhere on your piece that looks barren or less detailed than what you'd like? Does the stock image have a certain area of texture that you'd like to see in your painting? If so, keep some of these basic tips in mind:

- If you would like to *add detail* or visual interest to an area, a *dry brush* may be a great way to go. The spacing between bristles can act as "details" at a glance and aid in putting down detail very quickly.
- If you would like to *remove detail*, or blend areas to make smoother transitions, *start with a wet brush* and use your blender brushes as a "finishing touch" after your wet brush passes. This will keep a more painterly feel, as you'll be manually creating your blends, instead of always relying on a "blender brush" to do the soft edge work for you.

With these points in mind, I know I want to glaze in some color variations into my apples, add a bit of dry brush detail to my wooden planks, then go with a blender brush to "finalize" the painting, before adding my signature and calling this project complete.

Glazing

Near the end of a piece, I enjoy the act of glazing some colors or applying a light wash of color to add visual variety to my paintings. This not only ties our colors together, but also allows some added brushstroke variety to give our painting a little extra push of refinement. Let's go ahead and glaze some subtle color shifts into our apples:

1. Make sure you're on your **Glazing Pass** layer.
2. With your glazing brush selected (mine is still the **f) Bristles-4 Glaze** brush), color-pick (*Ctrl + left-click*) some of your richer red tones from your foreground apple.
3. Do some light-touch strokes of color making a subtle "bridge" of color between areas of your apple with value shifts, such as from the front shadow of the apple, the area where the stem is resting, and the right side of the apple facing our cast shadows.

   Since our glazing brush (**f) Bristles-4 Glaze**) is a mix of a wash, a wet bristle brush, and a blender, depending on the amount of pressure you're using (if using a tablet) or the opacity setting of the brush, you will get a variety of opportunities with a single brush!
4. Continue color-picking some more subtle yellows, orange-reds, and desaturated reds, shaping our foreground apple with light brushstrokes.

After some passes of various colors, following the shape of the apple, I have something that looks like *Figure 10.24*:

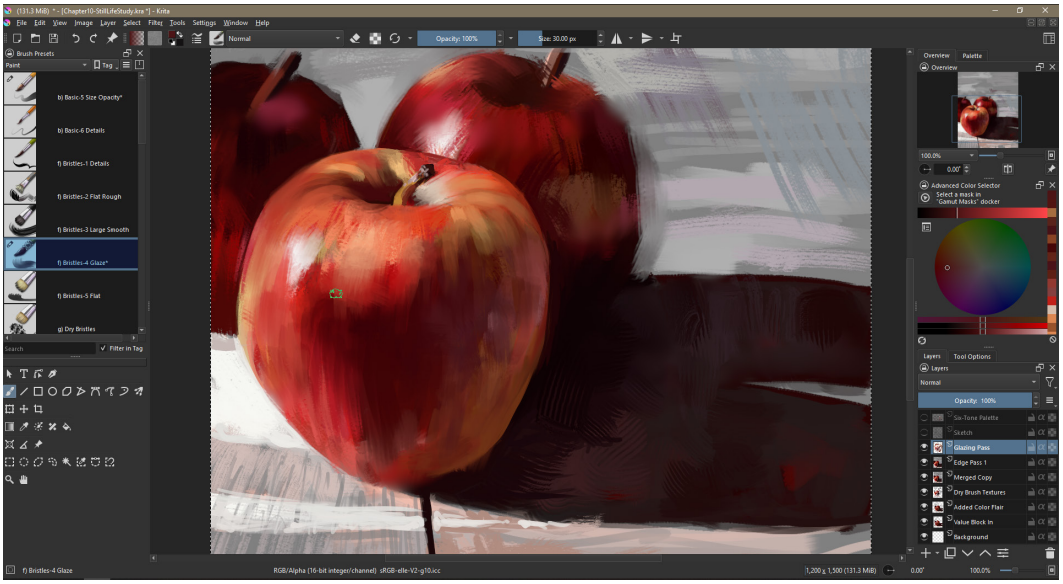


Figure 10.24 – Our nearly-completed foreground apple after our glazing pass

Now that the apple is coming together, it's time to do one final "detail" pass using some smaller sketch brushes and dry brushes, before we complete our piece with a painterly edge pass!

Adding final details

Now, we're ready to add our final touches, using dry brushes and some detail brushes:

1. Create a new layer.
2. Name this layer `Final Details`.
3. Select a nice dry brush. I have chosen the **g) Dry Bristles** brush from the **Paint** category tag.
4. Color select (*Ctrl* + *left-click*) some of the darker textural areas at the front of the apple.
5. Apply some dry brushstrokes (at various sizes by using the *[* and *]* bracket buttons to make the brush size smaller and larger, respectively) in the shadow areas to add some visual information. Scribbles may work well here; just be sure to follow the shapes and forms we've already established!

The finishing portion of this painting may seem repetitive (pick a brush, paint in some details, smooth out those details, rinse, and repeat), but that's because it *is* repetitive. **Rendering** (bringing a painting to a polished finish) is a skill of patience. Your willingness to spend the time necessary to paint over portions of your piece, seemingly over and over again, separates having "okay art" and art that will turn heads, especially when creating for a client or art director.

In fact, I can speak from personal experience. On a 6-week deadline for a card game I was illustrating, the initial sketch, color block-in, and value refinement phases approved by my art director took a total of 2 working days. The rest of that 6-week deadline timeframe? Dedicated *solely* to the rendering and texture of details. Your patience with rendering, and the link to overall image quality, can't be overstated.

6. After more repetitive steps, applying some sharp edges, color refinements, and wet-and-dry brushwork (all on the same **Final Details** layer for optimal blending and integration), you should have a piece that you're pretty pleased with! A quick glance at mine (next to the stock image) can be seen in *Figure 10.25*:

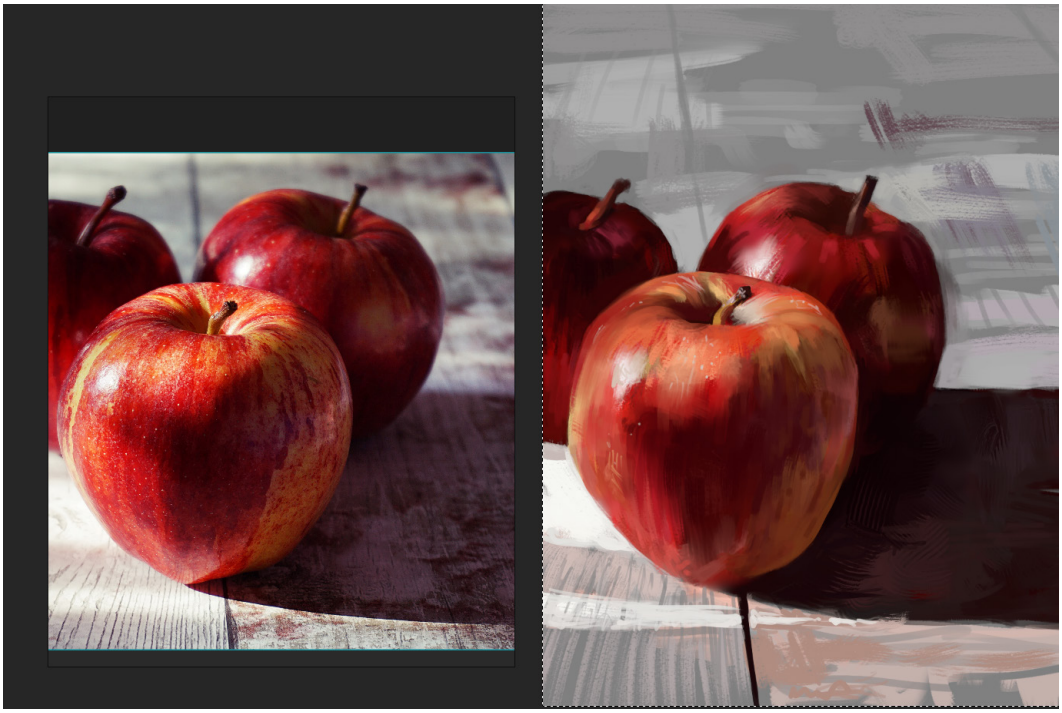


Figure 10.25 – Our apple study compared to the stock photo after our "details" pass

Now that we have some great clarity, detail, and sharp edges on our apples, it's time to do a quick "painterly pass" to our edges to bring this to a close!

Smudging our paint for the finish

We've already established that by using a mix of wet brushes and blender brushes, we can "smudge" some paint, creating a realistic "painterly" effect. This mimics a traditional painter's differences of pressure and directional pull on a brushstroke, as, unless you're using tools such as a ruler, straight-edge, or another guide, there are going to be "wavering" edges in a piece of art. To finalize our piece, we're going to do the same to our work:

1. Create a new merged layer (**Select All** > **Copy Merged** > **Paste**).
2. Name this merged layer `Final Pass`.
3. Select a wet brush and a blender brush. For my wet brush, I have chosen **i) Wet Textured Soft** and for my blender brush, the **k) Blender Textured Soft** brush, both found in the **Paint** category tag.
4. Focus your attention on the dark cast shadow and brighter wood plank area (*Figure 10.26*):

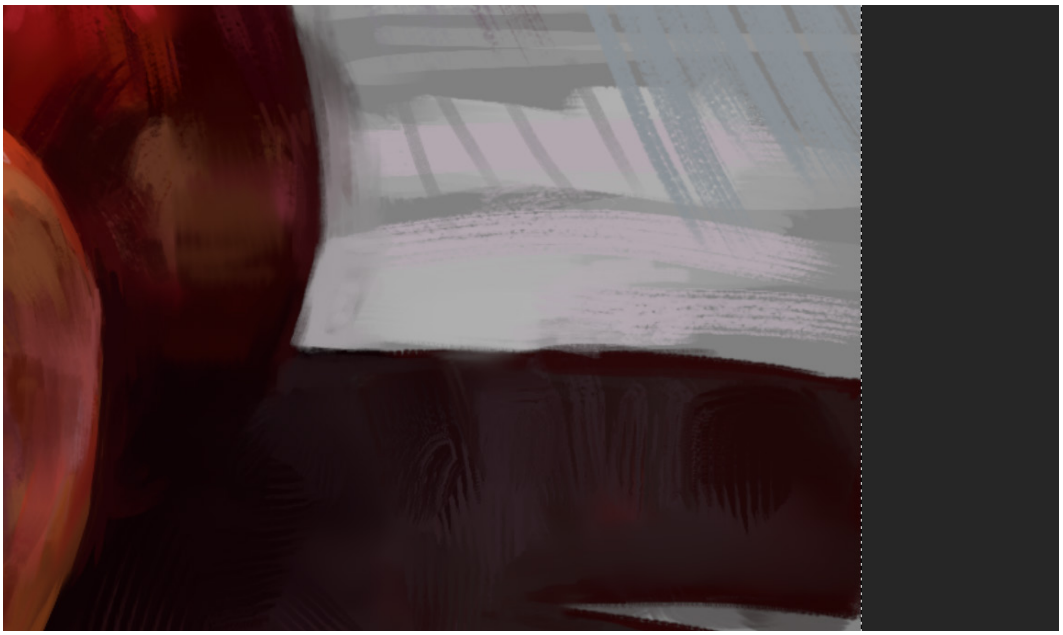


Figure 10.26 – The cast shadow of our apples contrasted with the wood panel

5. Using your wet brush, color-pick (*Ctrl* + *left-click*) the wood plank color, and lightly mimic a few sweeping "I" and "H" gestures (vertical and horizontal strokes, no diagonals) with your brush, going from within the wood plank area (the lights) to inside the cast shadow area (the darks).
6. Go over these same brushstrokes with your blender brush, using the same "I" and "H" motions (vertical and horizontal) in the same locations, smudging the tips of the brushwork into the forms you have established (*Figure 10.27*):

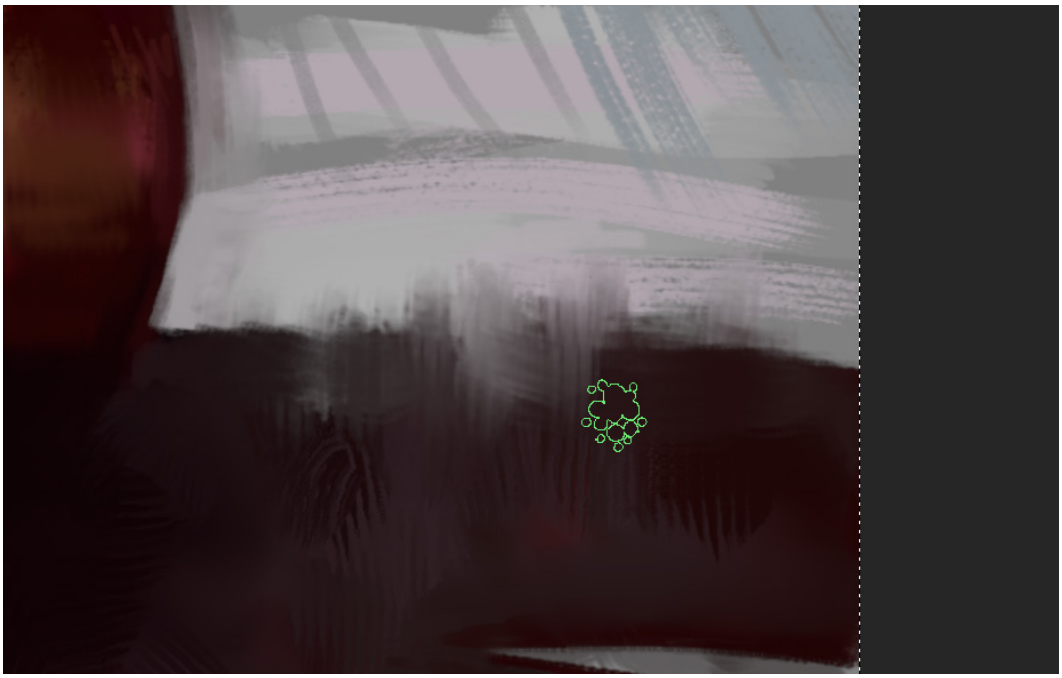


Figure 10.27 – Our "I" and "H" shapes of wet and blender brushes for painterly edges

7. Find other areas of harsh contrast around your painting and continue your wet brush to blender brush method of making "painterly" edges. Usually, places that have your hardest edges work best for this technique.
8. For an added impact, vary the sizes of your wet and blender brushes during these steps. I'm going to make a point to blend out some edges on my two background apples, as it can add a nice "depth of field" effect, further pushing our foreground apple as our focal point.

And that's it! I hope you're pleased with your still-life study! I know there's a ton of information in this chapter, but I'm confident that the more you practice these techniques, the more you're going to find a workflow that works naturally and comfortably for your paintings!

My final study can be seen in *Figure 10.28*:

Figure 10.28 – Our completed still-life study! Well done!

A fully labeled Krita file of this painting can be downloaded from the `Chapter 10` folder at `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`, to compare your work with mine!

Outstanding work on this project and the skills we've utilized and learned in this chapter are going to come in very handy for our final project….one that we'll get started on in the very next chapter!

Summary

In this chapter, we took the initial transfer sketch of our still-life study, and brought it to the final piece! We utilized **Levels** to equalize our lights and darks, creating a limited tonal palette for ease of blocking in our values. Then, we chose six color tones to act as our values, learning the appeal and workflow of staying with a limited palette. After blocking in our initial colors, we started refining texture using a variety of brushes, then did a few "painterly" passes with some wet brushes and blenders to tie our final piece together.

In our next chapter, *Chapter 11*, *Working with Concept Art*, we will be creating thumbnails of environments for a fictional video game. We will be developing ideas using very loose brushwork, but focusing on some critical ideas of perspective and compositional tricks to sell our ideas to a potential art director. Mood will be the main driver of our work, and we'll even learn some great ways to present our ideas to really streamline our presentation!

We're prepping for the grand finale…let's get to it!

11
Working with Concept Art

In *Chapter 10*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*, we took our traditional painting technique to the next level by utilizing Krita's varied feature set to mimic an old tried-and-true art school classic: a still-life. Now, it's time to pick up the pace and enter a fairly new illustration style (compared to our centuries-old atelier still-life), one that actually has some misconceptions in the greater entertainment art industry: concept art.

In this chapter, we will be discussing what concept art entails, the differences between creating concept art and illustrations, various fundamental techniques to aid in the creation of concept art, and some tips and tricks I've learned throughout working with various professional clients in this capacity.

Here's a rundown of topics we will be covering in this chapter:

- Defining concept art
- Understanding perspective
- Utilizing composition tricks
- Keeping things loose

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0+)
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard, and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus

Defining concept art

Before we begin our journey on our final project, I think it's only fair to give a definition of what "concept art" means in the case of this book. In my mind (and professional experience), there are two "types" of concept art:

- Very rough block-ins for characters, environments, or visualizing key moments of a video game, movie, commercial, or another visual project. This can be as quick as a sketch on a napkin during lunch with a client, or a set of multiple options of an item, person, or location for our client to choose from, such as "mood paintings" (which is what we'll be making) or "turnarounds," where we create a front, rear, and side view of an item or character to assist team members with other specializations in a company or team environment (such as 3D modelers, technical artists, and lighting artists, for example).

Here is an example of a conceptual "mood painting" that I created for a personal project (*Figure 11.1*):

Figure 11.1 – A quick "mood painting" concept of a ship entering a foggy area. Notice the blend of colors, loose linework, and messy brushes

- A much more refined, "finished" piece of artwork created for a movie, video game, commercial, or another visual project. This is the type of artwork you would see referred to as "key art" or "marketing art," also being collected and published in the popular *The Art of* _____ books you have probably seen for sale online and at your local bookstore. This is the style of concept art we will be creating and completing in *Chapter 12*, *Refining and Creating Cinematic Concept Art*, using the rules we learn during this chapter.

As an example of this second type, I've taken the image from *Figure 11.1* and done a "marketing art" pass, making sure to keep the overall mood and composition intact, while bringing about a sense of completion to the illustration with a mix of photobashing, impasto brushwork, and removing the line art. You can see the results of this pass in *Figure 11.2*:

Figure 11.2 – The "marketing" art version of our ship idea, developed using various techniques, such as edge control and photobashing

Notice that *Figure 11.2* has a more comprehensive feel, pushing our initial concept to a new level of detail. While you could say that *Figure 11.1* is a "sketch" while *Figure 11.2* is a "final," the same theory applies when it comes to stages (and uses) of concept art. Sketches lead to designs, designs lead to sketches, and all of these can lead to a finalized illustration used for various purposes.

Concepting Styles – Which Is Best?

I feel it necessary to separate these two definitions of concept art as, if you search for "concept art" on the internet, you're more likely to find examples of the *second* bullet-point definition of the term (the more refined, finished work used for marketing, such as our example in *Figure 11.2*) rather than the first. Many times, the "napkin sketches" and initial design documents are in sealed project files, owned by their respective developers and companies, never seeing the light of day. Concept art, no matter what the stage of completion or complexity, is valuable during all stages of a product's development cycle. There's no "correct" way of defining concept art; it all depends on the task at hand. When in doubt, ask your client or team what they need! If it's a personal project, ask yourself what kind of sketching could help you solve problems later down the line!

The muddy reality of "concept art" can give hobbyist artists, students, and even new professional artists a wrong (or rather, misguided) idea of what concept art is and how it's utilized in a professional pipeline. *Concept art does not need to be attractive to be effective*. It is primarily used for *problem-solving*, and dissecting designs in a capacity that is useful and actionable for various team members to use in their creative process. Remember, as a professional painter (or hobbyist, or even a hobbyist wanting to go professional), your aim is to be a visual *communicator* before anything else, no matter who your final audience ends up being. Communication is key!

I wanted to open this chapter in this way to get your mind prepared for our final project. Instead of the atelier, "paint what you see," objective, realistic approach to creating artwork, this final project is going to venture into imaginative realism. How do you paint what *doesn't* exist?

Contextualizing concepts

In order to paint what doesn't exist, you should approach your fictional reality with the artistic foundations present in *real* reality. What makes a solid image when you're painting from life? Things like composition, focal points, color choices, brushwork, and edge control don't just disappear when you work from imagination; if anything, they're more important than ever! Using artistic fundamentals can give us context while we create something from imagination, whether it is for personal work or from a professional prompt. Let's get to the good stuff. Let's discuss our prompt for our final project:

Create an environment for a video game that a player would be interested in exploring. Use whatever is in your artistic toolbelt to make an image that is compelling, nice to look at, but gives a sense of exploration of a world that is not our own. Trinkets or machines of a past or future civilization can add to the sense of wonder, but above all else, make the image engrossing.

This may seem like a broad description open to tons of interpretation, but I can assure you that this is closer to a professional prompt than you might think. Sure, you may have something such as an **art bible** (a design document outlining the visual identity of a brand, intellectual property, or already-established creation to ensure that future designs "fit well" with what is already established) to aid in this task when working with a client, but a lot of the time, you're on your own. This is where communication with your art director or fellow artists on the project is the key.

Making a list, checking it twice

Now that we have our brief, your mind is probably racing with ideas! Or, just as common, you may have a mental roadblock in front of you, the trusty "paralysis by analysis" that rears its ugly head when we don't know how to get started. This prompt is very broad in its expectations, but there are some keywords from our creative brief that we can dig into to get the creative juices flowing. Let's make a list of some of these keywords, with some very quick "brainstorming" ideas that come to mind for each to help us contextualize this prompt with some actionable items:

- *Exploring* – Something vast (large area), with several travel opportunities (various focal points?).
- *Compelling* – Sort of an empty phrase in my opinion, but maybe something that catches the viewer's and player's eye (high contrast near focal points, maybe?).
- *World not our own* – Some sort of visual dissonance (shapes that don't fit together, or the rules of gravity don't apply, for example).
- *Trinkets* – Small doodads or man-made items (pipes, books, torches, or crystals that emit unnatural lights).
- *Machines* – Larger man-made items (things that make the world functional such as gears and pulley systems). These could tie into the *Trinkets* by using similar shape language (diamonds or spheres, for example).
- *Past or future* – Dilapidated machinery? Or, maybe a nice mix of both future *and* past (such as the worn-out ships in Star Wars or Battlestar Galactica, having new fancy technology that is "old and rusty" in the lore of the world).
- *Sense of wonder* – This ties into *Exploring* and *Compelling*; maybe use complementary colors with some higher saturation near the focal points as well.
- *Engrossing* – Once again, kind of an empty phrase, but the first thing that comes to mind is "atmospheric" (such as dense fog or clouds) to ground you in the environment and give a sense of depth.

Alright, so we've made decent progress, even without lifting our stylus! We went from having a very open-ended creative brief to a prompt that is a little more digestible and easy to understand:

A big environment that features some machinery that looks large and other-worldly, with a moody atmosphere and bombastic colors with good lighting.

While this is still an open-ended description, these are terms we can work with! It's taking a creative brief that is very *emotional* in its expectations and creating some *logical* context for us to utilize our artistic problem-solving skills. Making a list and brainstorming ideas is a fantastic way to get through the muck of a dense description of what a client might need. In fact, I highly recommend this exercise for *every* piece of art you make, no matter if it is from imagination, for a client, or a study from life. The more information you have before beginning, the more you are setting yourself up for success!

Looking at our newly-revised prompt, I'm excited to get started! I already have a few ideas (three in particular), but I need to do a few quick reviews of some very basic art fundamentals. This first fundamental deals with not only creating a compelling and coherent image but will also greatly help us with a number of our bullet-listed keywords: perspective.

Understanding perspective

Perspective, in its most simple sense, is the technique in which you take something that is two-dimensional (a drawing or painting) and give its contents a sense of three-dimensional space. Alternatively, you can think of perspective as the viewer's eye line. What is our *perspective* of what we're looking at? Are we above our subject, looking down? Are we eye-level with what we're looking at? Are we viewing our subject from below, or does it have a crazy effect such as fish-eye lenses? Each one of these options can give the viewer a different narrative of your artwork and can be very impactful in selling a concept correctly. Let's break down the three most used perspectives in painting, all of which are considered *linear perspectives* – one-point, two-point, and three-point perspectives. Let's start with one-point perspective.

One-point perspective

One-point perspective is defined as *a perspective grid that consists of a single vanishing point (or "one point") on a horizon line* (or the viewer's eye level) (*Figure 11.3*):

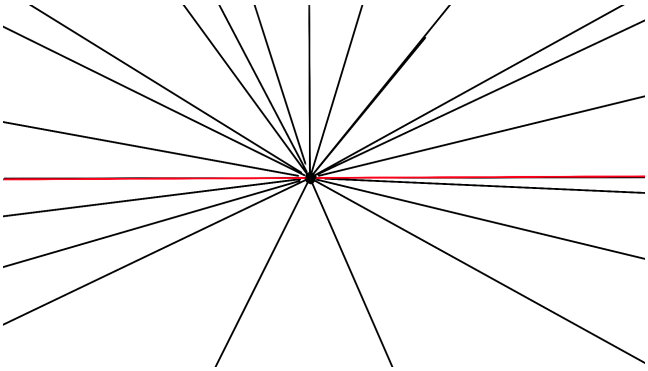


Figure 11.3 – A one-point perspective grid, with the red line acting as the horizon line

Notice how each line goes back to the single dot (vanishing point) on our horizon line (the straight horizontal line in red). This is the most basic form of adding depth to an image and can be highly effective at giving clear focal points, a sense of stability (as there's not a lot of variance in directions for the eyes to travel), and a clean design sense. You can see this a lot in background environment design for television, movies, and even architecture prompts.

A great example of one-point perspective in the real world is this photograph, entitled *Taj Mahal under Clear Blue Sky*, by artist Fuzail Ahmad, courtesy of `Pexels.com` (*Figure 11.4*):

Figure 11.4 – Fuzail Ahmad's photograph showcasing the clarity of one-point perspective (courtesy of Pexels.com)

A gorgeous image with a very clear, centered focal point. There's no mistaking where we should be looking, or if we wanted to use this as a visual reference for our prompt, where we should be exploring!

I recommend doing quite a few pieces using one-point perspective to start developing your comfort with using things such as horizon lines and vanishing points. How does your composition change if your horizon line is higher on the page? What if it's lower, giving you more room to explore the sky? What if your vanishing point isn't centered on the page, but on the extreme left or right of your image? Does that potentially change the meaning or emotional impact of the image?

Once you have a solid grasp on developing a one-point perspective image, you can add a bit of complexity by going for two-point perspective.

Two-point perspective

Two-point perspective can be defined as *an image with a single horizon line, but two vanishing points*. While this seems self-explanatory and not much of a change from one-point perspective, I would argue that the complexity of images you can create using two-point perspective is *vastly* higher than using only one-point (*Figure 11.5*):

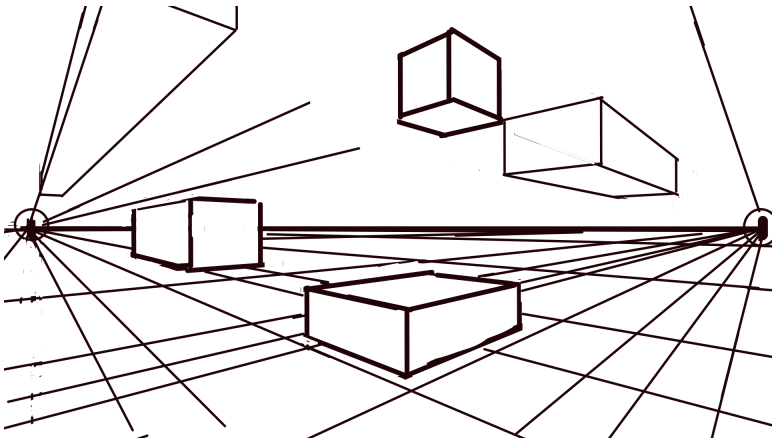


Figure 11.5 – Two-point perspective, with circled vanishing points on the extreme left and right of the composition

Notice in *Figure 11.5* that even creating multiple basic shapes, such as boxes, already gives a dramatic sense of depth. Much like one-point perspective, the only lines *not* headed toward one of our vanishing points are the lines that go straight up and down, giving a sense of verticality. Two-point perspective is a valuable asset in giving the viewer options on which direction their eye could follow, and works as a perfect "fork in the road" for a video game player to make an exploration decision.

You will likely see this type of composition in cityscapes, particularly at a crossroad or junction where two roads meet. A great example of this can be seen in the following photograph by Anna Tis, courtesy of `Pexels.com` (*Figure 11.6*):

Figure 11.6 – Anna's image gives us a great choice of direction – which way should we explore?

Something to keep in mind, especially with Anna's image, is your vanishing points can actually exist outside of your canvas! While the vanishing point on the right-hand side of the image is on the right-most edge, the left vanishing point exists a few inches *off* the page (which we can find by using a ruler on the building's upper and lower edge, as well as the upper and lower lines of the windows on the left side of the building. I've done this exercise in *Figure 11.7*:

Figure 11.7 – Our two vanishing points, with the left-most point existing off Anna's image

A great exercise to get accustomed to two-point perspective is to find images or paintings that interest you, which you think may have a two-point perspective, and grid them out (as I've done in *Figure 11.7*). Remember, the more information you have, the easier it will be to add your own spin on things! Finding perspectives is a *fantastic* skill set for matte painters, landscape painters, environmental concept artists, photographers, and cinematographers.

Once you feel comfortable with your two-point perspective, it'll be time to put your skills to the test with three-point perspective.

Three-point perspective

Here's perspective hard-mode, in my opinion! **Three-point perspective** can be defined as a perspective grid that not only has two vanishing points on the horizon line but a third vertical vanishing point above or below the horizon line. This gives a very dynamic sense of scale and depth but is *exponentially* more difficult to work with than one- or two-point perspective (*Figure 11.8*):

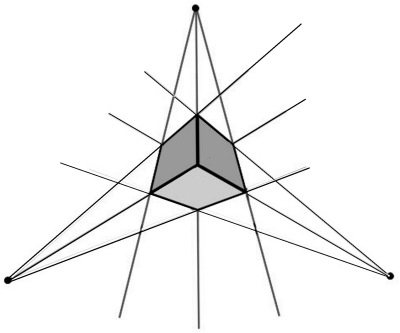


Figure 11.8 – Three-point perspective, showing two horizontal points and a third, higher vertical point

Adding in the third vanishing point has always been a challenge for me, and I personally think that my lack of confidence in using three-point perspective has held back some of my creativity throughout the years. Like anything else in art, the more you practice a skill, the easier it will become, so I'd like to try my hand at three-point perspective for one of my concept ideas in this chapter.

Pushing Yourself

Growth usually happens when you leave your comfort zone. Putting yourself out there and pushing yourself past your points of comfort is *always* a positive when it comes to creativity and honing your skill sets. Do you have a "weakness" that always makes you nervous to attempt it, such as vehicles, environments, or character designs? That's probably the thing you should focus on the most for maximum artistic growth!

The thing I love about viewing photographs, movie scenes, and paintings or drawings that have three-point perspective is the sense of dizzying depth. If you have a character standing on the edge of a skyscraper, three-point perspective with the vertical vanishing point below the horizon line would be an *incredible* way to sell your audience on that sense of height. On that same line of thinking, if you'd like to create a monolithic structure or foreboding item that dwarfs us as a viewer, creating three-point perspective can give a great sense of being "a small person in a larger world" if angled with your vertical vanishing point above the horizon line. For instance, take this stunning photograph from Jeremy Levin, entitled *Low Angle Shot of Gothic Themed Cathedral*, courtesy of `Pexels.com` (*Figure 11.9*):

Figure 11.9 – Jeremy Levin's Low Angle Shot of Gothic Themed Cathedral

While cathedrals are already ornate buildings heavy with details, showcasing one using three-point perspective from the ground level (sometimes known as "worm's-eye view" instead of the above-looking-below term of "bird's-eye view") almost gives a further sense of how intense and mammoth the structure seems. So many ominous, romantic stories to be told!

Going Higher than Three-Points

Can you go higher than three-point perspective, such as four-, five-, or six-point? Yes! My personal recommendation, however, is to ask yourself why you're choosing to go higher than three-point. Is there a narrative reason, such as looking through a fish-eye lens (five- or six-point perspective), or distorted reality (four-point perspective) to do so? As we've seen, adding a *single* additional vanishing point to our perspective grid exponentially increases the difficulty level of our drawing, although it's worth pushing your artistic boundaries if you're brave! For the purposes of this overview, I'll just be covering one-, two-, and three-point, as those are the fastest to create and revise in a professional setting. In your personal work, go as crazy as you'd like!

Making your choice – linear versus curvilinear

You have your full pick of perspectives when creating your art, so it would be wise to understand what your artistic intent is *before* making your choice. Staying with one-, two-, or three-point perspective is an example of adhering to **linear perspective** (as seen in *Figures 11.4*, *11.6*, and *11.9*), while going above that (four-, five-, six-point, or above) would represent **curvilinear perspective** (where your image will appear as if it is being viewed through a curved lens, as seen in the grid and real-life comparison shot in *Figure 11.10*):

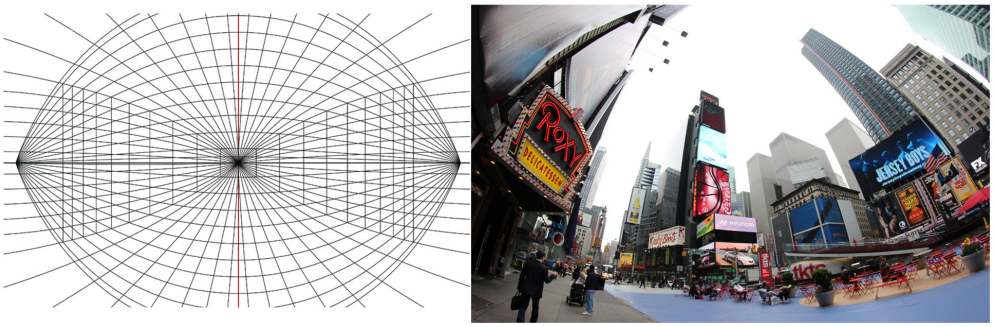


Figure 11.10 – A grid and a real-life example of a simplified curvilinear perspective

Much like other aspects of art, there's no one "right answer" that is going to be the perfect solution for solving your problem. It's all up to your ability, creativity, and execution. For this book, I will be adhering to linear perspective, as it's quick and gets our point across quickly.

While figuring out the perspective of your artwork is a great way to solve problems before they occur, another question ties together with that choice: where do I put items such as my focal points, or my main points of interest when working from imagination? This brings us to the ever-important concept of *composition*.

Utilizing composition tricks

Composition is a term that has quite a few meanings within visual arts, but two of the most common definitions I've come across are as follows:

- The placement and/or location of items in a piece of art relative to one another
- How the "entire piece" works together (think of a composed piece of music, or the way all of the components in a car work together for functionality, for instance)

For this chapter, we will be covering the *first* definition (dealing with the tangible location of focal points, angles, and shapes on our canvas) of composition. In regard to the *second* definition, I'm hoping *every* chapter of the book is helping you piece together your perfect methodology for that! Color, theme, movement, value, edge control, and item placement all combine to make the second definition come to life. That, come to think of it, could be defined as *style*.

Much like our introduction to various linear perspectives in the previous section, we're going to take a very quick glance at a few rules, or *guidelines*, that can help us place our subject matter on the canvas in a visually appealing way.

Defining art rules

While I am of the belief that art doesn't have a set of "rules" that an artist must always follow, I *do* hold the belief that certain techniques have been tried and proven to be impactful over the course of hundreds of thousands of art pieces for many generations of artists. Not only that, but these results can also be repeated, meaning that an artist can embrace their learnings and findings while using these methods, and essentially use them in a capacity they find most impactful for their own work through experience.

You may have heard the saying *It's important to learn the rules, so you know how to break them*, and I find this to be true with things like composition. There's no *correct* way to compose your images, but if you're at a loss during the creative process, these upcoming composition tricks can definitely give you the upper hand and help you get started. After all, it's impossible to edit what doesn't already exist, so just get your stuff on your canvas!

There are two composition guides we are going to cover that are both effective not only in drawing and painting, but in every visual medium, including (but not limited to) animation, cinematography, photography, and illustration. These are the *Rule of Thirds* and the *Golden Ratio*. Let's take a look at the Rule of Thirds first.

The Rule of Thirds

The **Rule of Thirds** is a composition technique that states that if you cut your canvas into three rows and three columns of equal size (creating a 3x3 grid that matches the height and width of your entire canvas), an area where your vertical and horizontal grid lines pass through one another is a great area to put a subject you would like your viewer to focus on (*Figure 11.11*):

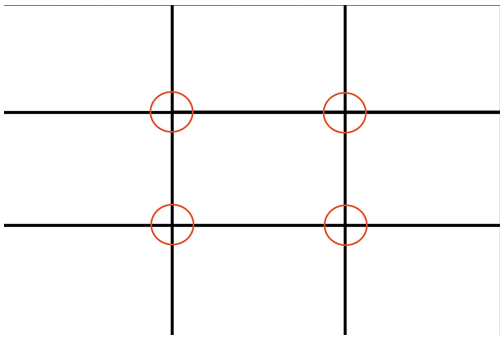


Figure 11.11 – A landscape template (1,500 px wide x 1,000 px tall), with a Rule of Thirds grid applied

As you can see in *Figure 11.11*, I've circled the four areas where our vertical and horizontal lines intersect. Placing points of interest near one of these intersections (or multiple, if your content allows it) is a great way to draw attention to it. There's stability, but since the material isn't perfectly centered on the canvas, it brings a little bit more drama to the material.

Likewise, you can also break up your composition into thirds, using either the three rows (going horizontally across the canvas) or the three columns (the three vertical subsections) to balance out your piece's information. Coupling two smaller shapes in the leftmost column, while putting a single larger shape in the rightmost column, will still bring a sense of balance to your piece (*Figure 11.12*):

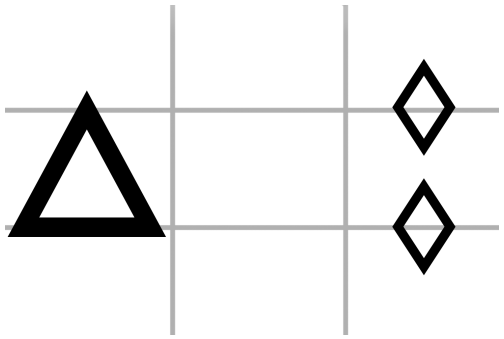


Figure 11.12 – Three shapes, one large and two smaller, placed using the column principle of the Rule of Thirds

I've lowered the opacity of our Rule of Thirds grid to help you notice the balance that having our shapes within the columns can provide. While there's nothing technically in the "center" of our composition, there's still a nice sense of balance, as we could visualize a scale being "balanced" between the weight of these two columns. Here, in *Figure 11.13*, I show one of my landscape paintings that uses this balancing technique, including the Rule of Thirds grid overlay:

Figure 11.13 – A landscape painting of mine, balanced by the Rule of Thirds grid

Notice that I've measured the "weight" of items to be balanced between the extreme right and extreme left of the canvas. While there's a large tree trunk leaning toward the middle coming from the right-hand side, there are multiple, smaller trees doing the same thing coming from the left. Also notice that I've purposefully *not* centered the sword directly in the middle of the canvas, instead choosing to have it leaning in the reverse direction (almost perpendicular) of the larger tree trunk, hopefully bringing the viewer's eye back to the middle of the canvas.

I've also tried to put something interesting in *all nine squares* on the canvas, building visual interest, but also allowing the eye places to rest by using less information in key locations (bottom-right and bottom-left corners, respectively).

Cutting the CRAP

There's actually a funny way you can remember four of the most important composition placement tricks. The acronym **CRAP** stands for **contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity**. By *contrasting* shape sizes, you can draw attention to one over another. By *repeating* certain design motifs (in this case, the diamond shapes) you can bring about a sense of unity in your work. Where the items are *aligned* can draw attention to them in unique ways (such as our Rule of Thirds intersection example in *Figure 11.11*), and the *proximity* of items can either bundle them together or make them feel separate for dramatic effect (such as the shape proximity differences in *Figure 11.12*).

The Rule of Thirds is a tried-and-true method of placing your focal points, or information you think should grab the attention of your viewer, which has existed for hundreds of years. However, many people find the straight-up-and-down nature of the Rule of Thirds to be too stoic and limiting for their creativity. For those people, I bring you the Golden Ratio!

The Golden Ratio

The **Golden Ratio** is another method in developing areas to distribute information and visual weight to our work. You may have heard this called the **divine proportion**, as it is a proportion of dissecting widths, heights, and width versus height that has been found and documented in nature for centuries, but was most popularly brought to light in artistic circles (pun intended) by Leonardo DaVinci and his illustration work within the Luca Pacioli book entitled *De Divina Proportione* (or, *On the Divine Proportion*) which was published in 1509. Here is a well-known example of the Golden Ratio labeled with some measurements (that will hopefully make more sense momentarily!) (*Figure 11.14*):

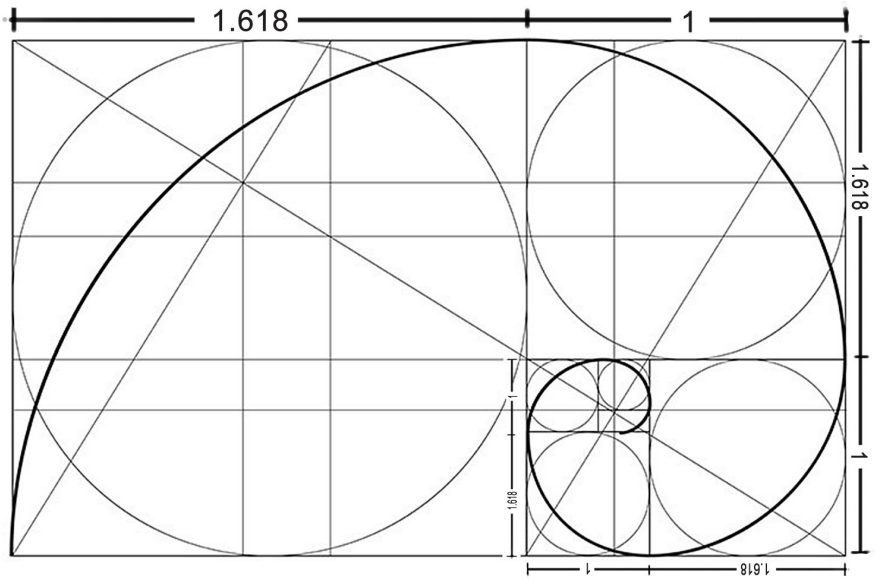


Figure 11.14 – The Golden Ratio shown with collapsing ratios showing the limitless nature of the proportion

What? What is that thing? In a mathematical sense, the Golden Ratio equals (roughly) 1.618 to 1, or 1.618:1. This is considered a "magic ratio" because mathematically, the line of your width or height can be divided into two parts in such a way that the entire length of the line, divided by the long part of the line, is *also* equal to the long part of the line, divided by the short part of the line.

See, that makes it perfectly clear, right? No? I thought not.

I won't even *begin* to act like I'm some sort of master of understanding how or why this ratio works. Trust me, I'm no DaVinci, and I'm definitely no Pacioli. I will say, though, that there is merit to this ratio being found in nature. There's a sequence of numbers that is very similar to the Golden Ratio (known as the **Fibonacci sequence**) where when starting from zero, if you add the next number in the line, you create the next number in the line. For instance, let's make a small number sequence example:

1. 0 + 1 = 1. The last two numbers written here are 1 and 1.
2. So, 1 + 1 = 2. The last two numbers written here are 1 and 2.
3. So, 1 + 2 = 3. The last two numbers written here are 2 and 3.
4. So, 2 + 3 = 5. The last two numbers written here are 3 and 5.
5. So, 3 + 5 = 8. The last two numbers written here are 5 and 8.
6. So, 5 + 8 = 13. You hopefully get the idea!

At this point, our Fibonacci sequence is 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 13 but could continue forever.

You can continue this trend until infinity, which is a neat exercise in itself and probably a cool parlor trick. However, there's something interesting about this structure. What if you were to *divide* the total of each equation by the number that came before it? For instance, with 5 + 8 = 13, you could do the following:

- 13 / 8 = 1.625

Hmm, interesting. That's kind of close to 1.618. What about 8 divided by 5?

- 8 / 5 = 1.6

What about 5 divided by 3?

- 5/3 = 1.6 repeating

These are all eerily close to 1.618, and if we were to keep going with the Fibonacci sequence until we're in the six- or seven-digit number territory, it'd be *more accurate and closer to 1.618, every single time*. Once again, I have no earthly idea what it means, and if I think about it too long, I'm probably going to be putting lines of yarn on pictures and talking about aliens.

Investigating These Proportions

There are examples of this ratio not only in nature (for example, flowers and seashells) but in items you probably have near you right now. In fact, go and grab your credit card; it follows the Golden Ratio very closely. A standard-sized credit card is 86 mm long x 54 mm tall. 86 / 54 = 1.592, very close to the 1.618. Sure, it's not exact, but it's a very helpful and abundant reference when discussing the Golden Ratio to fellow artists.

How does this relate to art and object placement, though? If you look at the circles within each quadrant of *Figure 11.14*, there's a nice sense of size harmony and relationship between the shapes. Also, the curved nature of the spiral path itself is incredibly effective at showing the viewer's eye where to look. There's a great sense of momentum to the spiral, and your eye actually wants to stay inside of the composition, which is as valuable as gold for us artists (once again, pun *absolutely* intended).

My advice for using the Golden Ratio? The most direct way is to place items on the spiral, leading them to a focal point where the spiral becomes the smallest. This can be used for environments, portraits, still-lifes, and other studies such as master studies, as seen in *Figure 11.15*:

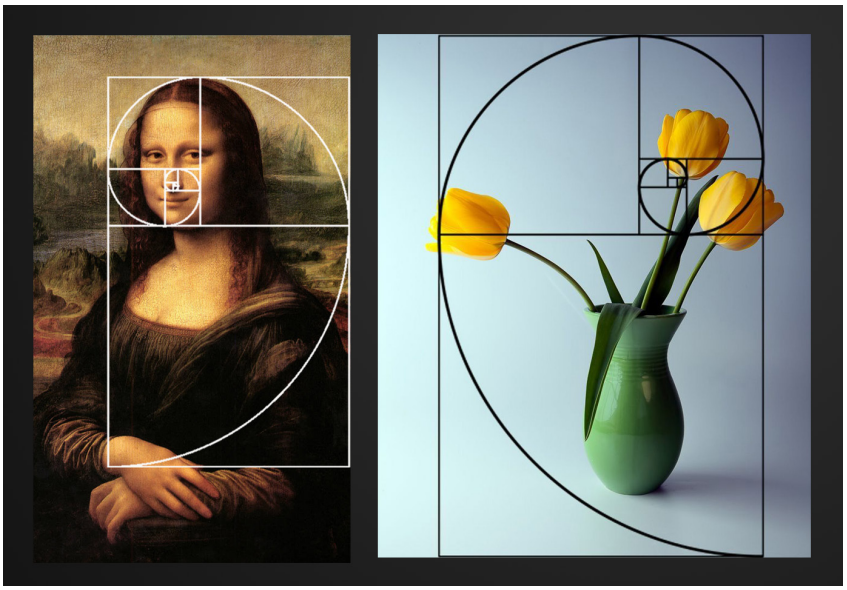


Figure 11.15 – The Golden Ratio applied to the Mona Lisa and a still-life of flowers in a vase

A great exercise is to use classic art from artists such as Vermeer, Velasquez, or DaVinci (as shown in *Figure 11.15*), and see if the Golden Ratio appears (and if it does, how many times).

There's a little bit of controversy with the Golden Ratio, as there are many artists that think it's all nonsense, and you can "just slap the Golden Ratio on top of anything" and it would theoretically work. That *may* be true in a reductionist sense, but in my opinion, having *any* guide that allows us to be more confident in our creativity is at least worth exploring. It's always best to compare results for yourself and use what works best for you based on experience.

Comparing the two methods

That brings us to the question: when creating our artwork, which "rule" is better to follow, the Rule of Thirds or the Golden Ratio?

This is actually a trick question as, not only is there not one "correct" answer, but what if I told you that they're actually more similar than they are different? Let's take a look at *Figure 11.16*:

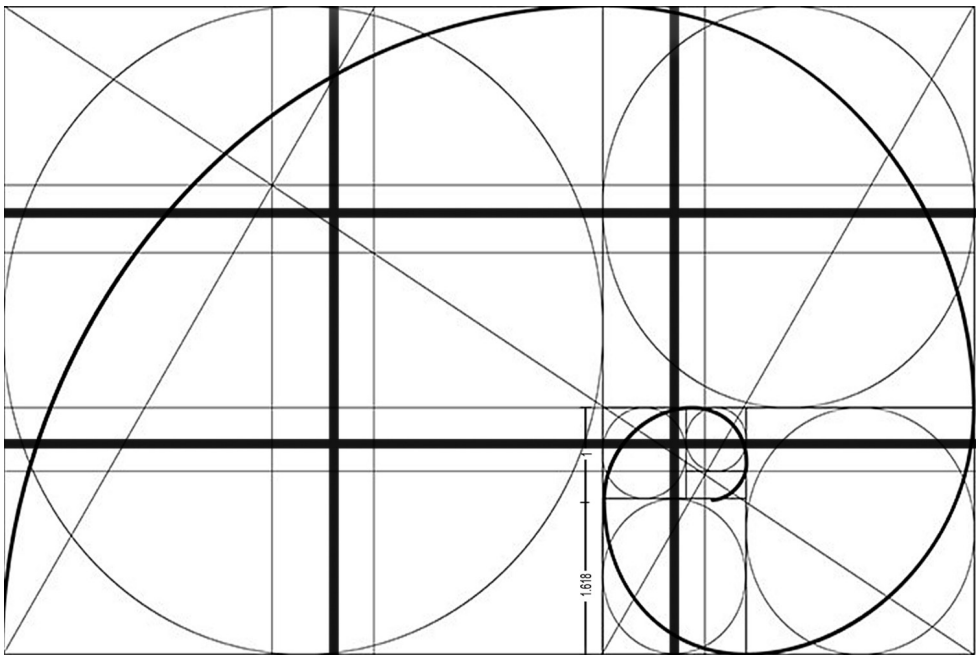


Figure 11.16 – The Rule of Thirds grid overlayed on top of the Golden Ratio

Notice how the Rule of Thirds grid fits snuggly inside the structure of the Golden Ratio? The horizontal lines are very close to the middle of the Golden Ratio's box structures, while the lower-right "intersection point" of the Rule of Thirds grid is a little above and on the inside of the Golden Ratio's "spiral focal point."

All of this is to prove a point: whatever method of composition you choose, you can't really make a "mistake," as creating a visual image follows more tried-and-true "rules" than just answering the question, "Where do I put these items on my canvas?" Things such as value, shape dynamics, hard versus soft edges, perspective, and color choice can give a lot of impact to your work, even if composition isn't at the front of your mind. That being said, *solving the problem of composition early can help you work more confidently* in the other aspects of image-making, making the entire image-making process more comfortable and rewarding from the early stages. Remember, you can't build a good house without a foundation.

To close this chapter, we are going to discuss possibly my favorite part of creating conceptual art, and that leads us to the sheer amount of art you can create on a short time schedule. In order to do this, you must keep things loose while working.

Keeping things loose

Since concept art usually exists in a pre-production environment on a project, its main purpose is often to inspire the rest of the creative team you're working with. Some of my favorite moments of professional work so far come from being part of the pre-production phase known as the "Blue Sky" phase. The **Blue Sky phase** is all about ideation, and daydreaming about "how cool would this be" when creating the first batch of art. This allows producers, executives, and other artists to become inspired by possibilities before making design decisions on what to keep or what to remove in the context of designs, mood, and "feel" that the art provides.

When I worked for adidas on their X9000 shoe commercial campaign in 2019, we had some Blue Sky sessions to create some inspiring cyberpunk art using location scouting images pre-approved by the advertising campaign's executive team (*Figure 11.17*):

Figure 11.17 – Some loose "Blue Sky" mood art for the adidas X9000 shoe campaign. Courtesy of adidas and Black and Cameron Productions

You can see the mix of photobashed assets, color correction, painterly strokes, and general atmospheric fog passes. While I wouldn't consider this "marketing art book ready" by any means, it worked wonders in allowing the design team to get a sense of what we could (or more importantly, couldn't) budget into our filming time. We only had roughly 2 weeks for the entire production turnaround, so things had to be efficient, fast, and accurate. In a production pipeline, it's much cheaper for companies to license out concept art from illustrators to "see" their ideas rather than filming/producing/adjusting footage and "hoping" their vision comes to life. As is often said, time is money, and skilled illustrators can save time and headaches, allowing for smoother production pipelines.

Our goal for this final project, then, can correlate to a "Blue Sky" phase of pre-production for the video game we're creating the environment for. In certain genres of video games (namely massively multiplayer online games or other roleplaying games such as World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy XIV, Neverwinter Nights, or Guild Wars 2), the "blue sky" concept art can be used for backgrounds, loading screens, and behind-the-scenes special features for players to unlock or enjoy during their adventures. Even though the main usage of these images is primarily for ideation and creation of content, they *themselves* can be utilized as content if it is of a high enough level of quality.

Keep your art inspiring, loose, and grounded using tried-and-true compositional techniques, and you'll be making winning images that are sure to be pivotal in the success of a variety of projects. Logical problem-solving combined with emotional storytelling is always in demand and will ensure you will go far. Buckle up, it's time to get started on our final project and bring this book to a close!

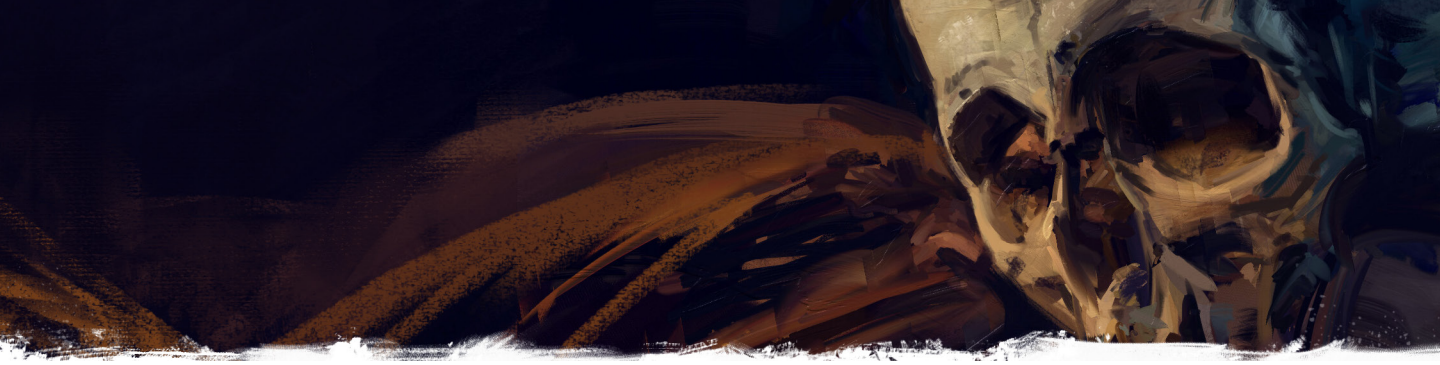
Summary

In this chapter, we discussed various forms of constructing an image, namely dealing with *perspectives* and *compositional techniques*. We first defined three different types of linear perspective, and where each is most impactful when creating images. We then covered two compositional techniques: the *Rule of Thirds* and the *Golden Ratio*. While both are extremely effective ways to plan out your images before getting started, remember that there's no "right" or "wrong" way to go about it. Art's never that easy, remember?

We then quickly covered the idea of keeping ideas flexible and loose, defining the *'Blue Sky' phase* as a powerful phase of a pre-production pipeline. We can solve problems, try crazy ideas, and do so with a variety of techniques without breaking the bank (both the physical money spent for a production crew and our personal mental bank of ideas as an artist).

With what we've learned in this chapter (coupled with the other lessons learned so far in the entire book), we can now move forward to *Chapter 12*, *Refining and Creating Cinematic Concept Art*, where we will develop two thumbnail value sketches using our prompt, alongside our newly-reviewed perspective and composition theories. After we try our hand at two thumbnails, we will choose a favorite, and push it to "final production-quality," meaning not only will it work as a "Blue Sky" ideation, but as something quality enough to be published as part of our imaginary project's marketing materials.

It'll be our most dense chapter yet, but what else would you expect for the grand finale? You've done incredibly so far, so let's finish this thing off with style! See you in the next chapter!



12
Refining and Creating Cinematic Concept Art

In *Chapter 11*, *Working with Concept Art*, we discussed using perspectives and composition templates (namely, the Rule of Thirds and the Golden Ratio) to pre-plan our final project: a cinematic piece of concept art that would be worthy of being published in a "Making Of" style artbook for a fictional video game.

Think of this as our "capstone assignment" – something that will utilize tricks and techniques we have learned throughout this book. We will put Krita, and ourselves, to our highest creative capacity and push ourselves past any preconceived "art skill plateau." Since this book is aimed to be a drawing and painting book, and Krita is the ship that has taken us on this voyage, it's only right that we ride Krita into the sunset! Or something like that – I'm not sure where I was going with that allegory.

Get your game face on – it's time for the grand finale! In this chapter, we will cover the following topics:

- Creating two thumbnails for comparison
- Choosing our strongest composition
- Learning industry-standard paint-over techniques
- Applying finishing touches and post-processing

Technical requirements

To follow along with this chapter, you will need the following:

- Krita (version 5.0+)
- A way to interact with Krita, such as a keyboard and either a mouse, tablet, or touch device with a stylus
- A copy of `GoldenRatio-ForReference.png`, which can be found in the `Chapter 12` folder at `https://static.packt-cdn.com/downloads/Krita_Sample_Files.zip`

Creating two thumbnails for comparison

Welcome to the final project! While the chapters in this book have mainly been a mix of theory chapters and practical step-by-step chapters, this chapter will be a hybrid where we are going to create our images step by step, but by discussing design and creative sensibilities during the process. I say this because I don't want you to feel like you *have* to follow along step by step with what we're creating in this chapter: it's a narrated tutorial on problem solving while creating a piece of art. There is a lot to cover in this chapter, so it's going to be fast-paced with a lot of moving parts. Let's get started!

> **Taking Your Time**
>
> If you ever feel like your ability in a skill that we are covering is lacking, feel free to do outside studies, or follow up on techniques that were discussed earlier in this book. I expect this project to take between three and six full painting sessions of multiple hours each, so take all the time you need to feel good about what you're creating! I believe in you. At the end of this chapter, you're going to have a fun, imaginative environment painting you're going to want to show *everybody*, whether you're a hobbyist having fun or a professional looking for your next gig at a studio.

Deciding on our options

Since we're creating two thumbnails, we should probably make them as different as possible. First, let's review our project's prompt from the *Contextualizing concepts* section of *Chapter 11*, *Working with Concept Art*:

"*Create an environment for a video game that a player would be interested in exploring. Use whatever is in your artistic toolbelt to make an image that is compelling, nice to look at, but gives a sense of exploration of a world that is not our own. Trinkets or machines of a past or future civilization can add to the sense of wonder, but above all else, make the image engrossing.*"

As you may recall, we put this open-ended prompt through our "logical artist" mental filter, and came away with this more clear-cut description:

"*A big environment that features some machinery that looks large and other-worldly, with moody atmosphere and bombastic colors with good lighting.*"

Since we reviewed composition techniques and perspectives in the previous chapter, let's utilize that knowledge. We have already set one project up in "landscape" orientation (our photobashed mountain project from *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*, *Chapter 6*, *Composing Using Krita's Toolbox*, and *Chapter 7*, *Changing the Feel with Painting, Values, and Sliders*). We've also created a project in "portrait" orientation (our still-life study from *Chapter 9*, *Setting Up a Still-Life Study*, and *Chapter 10*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*). We've looked at projects that use each canvas orientation so far, so let's go ahead and use this final project to create a thumbnail with each orientation type. This will give us a variety of options to approach our problem solving while we're creating our thumbnails.

With one of our thumbnails being in portrait orientation and the other being in landscape orientation, we can use those differences to use one of each of our compositional guides from the previous chapter. This will give us a variety of options, where, if a certain design or technique doesn't quite fit with one thumbnail, we may be able to alter it and apply it to the other.

Since we have two canvas orientations that we want to use (landscape and portrait), multiple linear perspectives that we have reviewed (one-point, two-point, and three-point perspectives), and two main compositional techniques (the Rule of Thirds and the Golden Ratio), this will make for a great variety. Let's establish our canvas templates using what we've discussed so far. Our two thumbnail compositions will consist of the following:

- A *landscape orientation* thumbnail that uses a *one-point perspective* and applies the *Golden Ratio* to our composition

- A *portrait orientation* thumbnail that uses a *two-point perspective* and applies the *Rule of Thirds* to lay out the composition

So far, we've established that we will only take *one* of these to a final, pre-production level of quality, but giving both compositions their fair shake only seems like the proper thing to do. Therefore, we will take both pieces to a point of *value thumbnail with color wash*, and then choose our favorite at that point.

This will allow us to go through our design sensibilities and try out some loose brushwork and good value control, while not being too "sacred" with our ideas. We can try anything because only the strongest will get the time-intensive rendering passes! Remember, the goal of this project is to expand your imagination and go for a true "what-if" scenario for your video game environment, so don't be afraid to shake things up creatively and get out of your comfort zone!

With our pre-planning out of the way, it's time to formally get started with our final project! First, we are going to get our canvases set up for efficiency and speed, and structure each of them with the grids and compositional overlays we may need. Let's do that now!

Preparing our first canvas

Since we are going to be doing loose paintings for our thumbnails, we could keep our canvases relatively small (in terms of height and width, as well as resolution) to make painting extremely fast (since our computer's processing power won't be taxed as much as if we were working on a large canvas with high resolutions (> 100 ppi, for instance).

To start, let's go ahead and set up our landscape-oriented canvas for our first thumbnail:

1. Go ahead and make sure Krita is open.
2. Click on the **New File** button under **Start**. Then, use the *Ctrl* + *N* hotkey or go to **File** > **New** to bring up the **New File** window.

3. First, we will create our landscape thumbnail. Here, our settings are going to be **1920** pixels for the width and **1080** pixels for the height, at **72.00** pixels per inch, using the **RGB/Alpha** color model at an **8-bit integer/channel** depth. These settings can be compared to the ones shown in the following screenshot:

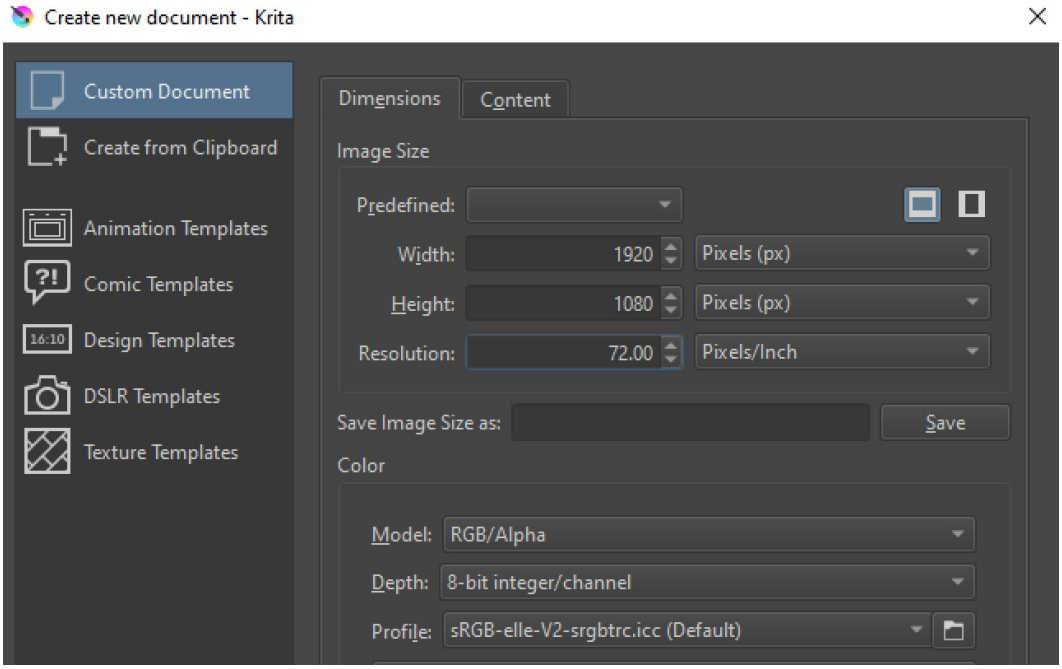


Figure 12.1 – The New File settings for our landscape orientation thumbnail

4. Click the **Create** button to create your landscape thumbnail canvas.
5. With that, your blank canvas should be up and ready to work with! The first thing we should do is rename our layers.

6. On the **Layers** panel, rename your **Paint Layer 1** layer to `Sketch` by either double-clicking the name of the layer in the **Layers** panel or *right-clicking* the layer and selecting **Properties** in the pop-out menu. This will bring up the **Layer Properties** window, which will allow you to rename the layer in the **Name** field at the very top of the window:

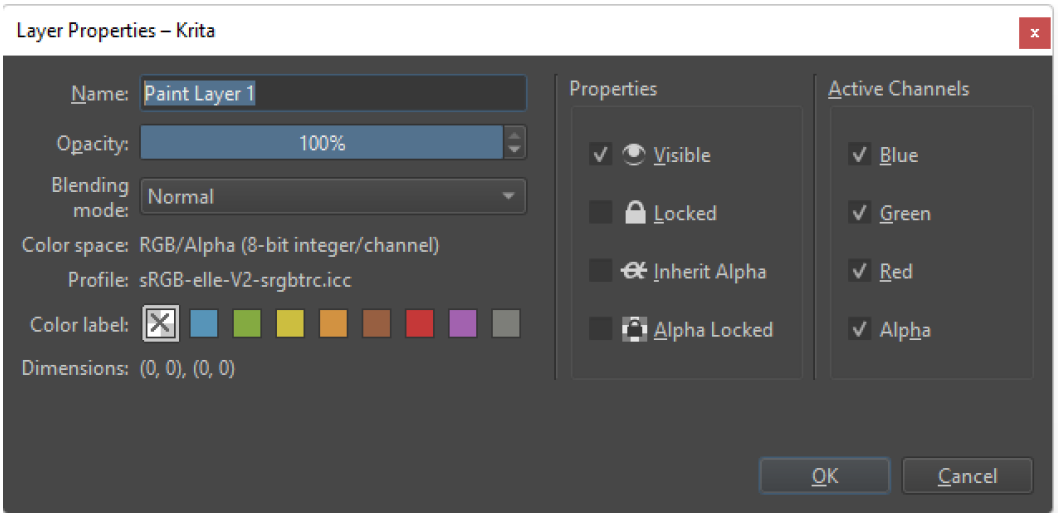


Figure 12.2 – The Layer Properties window, with the Name field of Paint Layer 1 highlighted

7. If you've used the double-click method, once you've typed in `Sketch`, hit *Enter* to save the change. If you used the **Layer Properties** method, click the **OK** button once your settings have changed.

   Next, we're going to be using our Golden Ratio image template, so we should import that into our project. Before we do that, though, we should save what we have!

8. Click **File** > **Save** or use the *Ctrl* + *S* hotkey to save your project. I'm saving mine as **Landscape-Thumbnail**, in the native Krita file format (`.kra`)
9. Once your project has been saved successfully, go ahead and click the **File** > **Open** option (or use the *Ctrl* + *O* hotkey) on the main menu.
10. Select the `GoldenRatio-ForReference.png` image that was provided in the *Technical requirements* section at the beginning of this chapter.

Your Krita work area should switch over to the newly opened `GoldenRatio-ForReference.png` file, making it the active image:

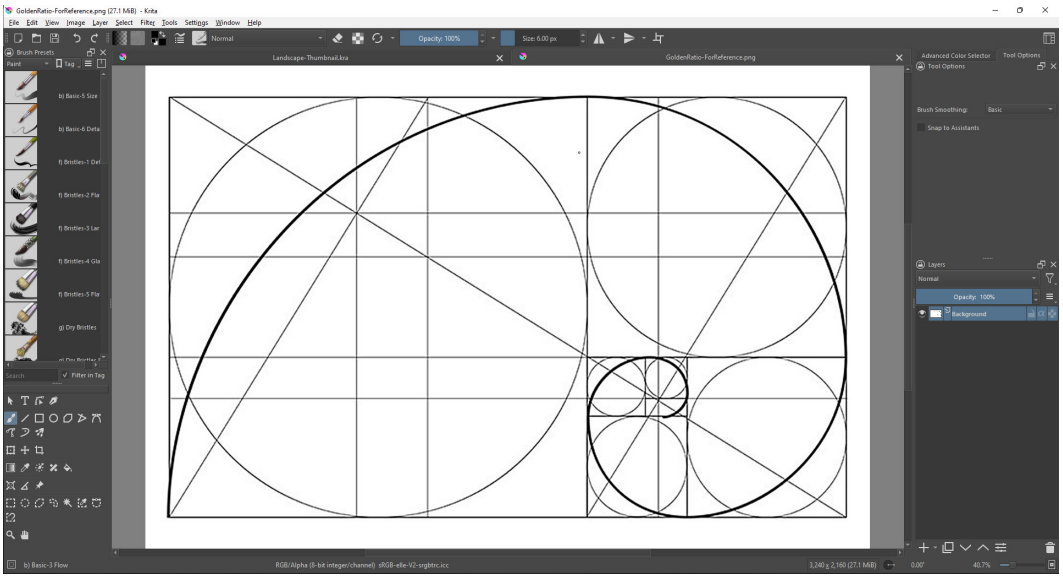


Figure 12.3 – Our imported GoldenRatio-ForReference.png image set in a tab next to our project

11. With the `GoldenRatio-ForReference.png` tab open, click **Edit** > **Copy** from the main menu, or use the *Ctrl* + *C* hotkey to copy the Golden Ratio image.
12. Click back over to your Krita landscape painting project (with mine being **Landscape-Thumbnail**).
13. Click **Edit** > **Paste** or use the *Ctrl* + *V* hotkey to paste the Golden Ratio image into your project file. It will paste onto a new layer, which you can rename *Golden Ratio* using the layer renaming method of your choice.

    Depending on your canvas settings, you may notice that the Golden Ratio image we've imported is much larger than our canvas. Don't worry – we can just transform it in place!
14. With your Golden Ratio layer active in your **Layers** panel, use the *Ctrl* + *T* hotkey to enter the **Free Transform** mode. This will allow you to manually change the outer corners, height, and width of the Golden Ratio layer information.

15. Resize the Golden Ratio layer so that it fills up most of your canvas but leaves a tiny bit of room near the outer borders:

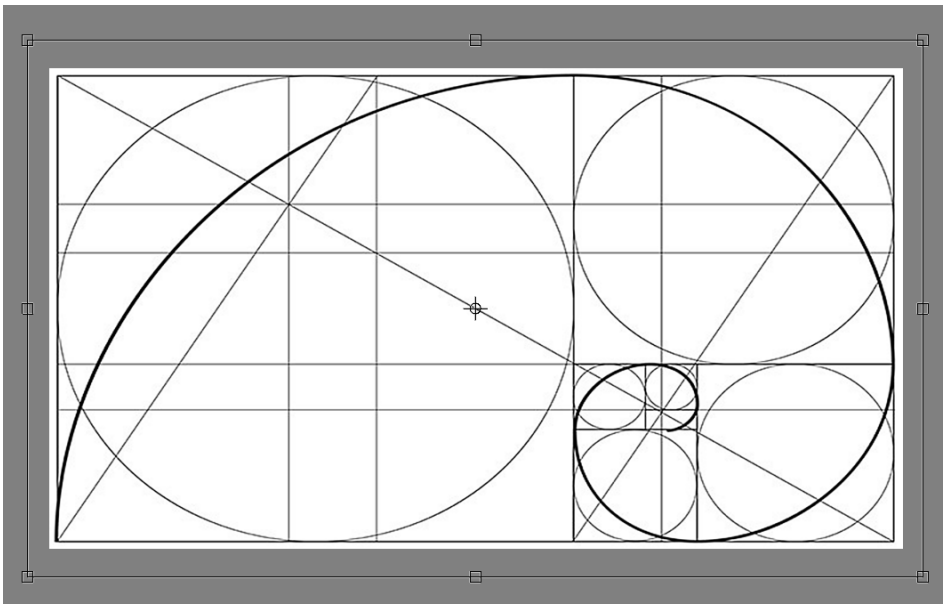


Figure 12.4 – Our Golden Ratio layer with the Free Transform sizing anchors, sized to fit our canvas

16. Once the Golden Ratio layer has been sized the way you would like, hit *Enter* to accept these changes.
17. Now, we will want to lower the opacity of our Golden Ratio so that we can paint underneath it (on our **Sketch** layer). Lower the **Golden Ratio** layer's **Opacity** to **20%** using the dial above your **Layers** panel when the **Golden Ratio** layer is active:

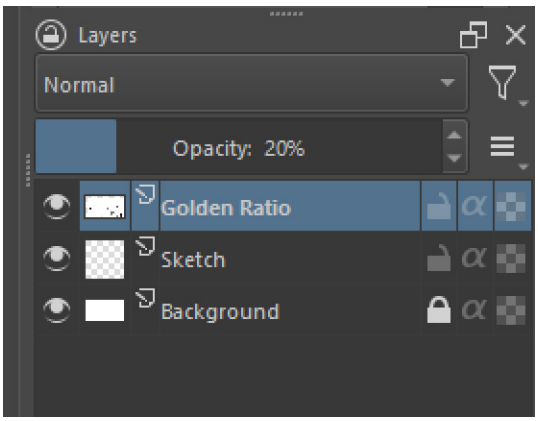


Figure 12.5 – The Golden Ratio layer adjusted to have its Opacity set at 20%

18. Be sure to **Save** (*Ctrl* + *S*) your file now that we have everything set up how we want it!

Now that we've created our layers so that we can start the thumbnail, let's go ahead and create our second canvas for our portrait-oriented thumbnail.

Preparing our second canvas

Let's go ahead and create our second canvas while keeping our first canvas open (but on a separate tab). The decision to have two active paintings going on at a time may seem odd, but there's an interesting thing I've found in my experience: if you have immediate access to both images and can just click between the two at a moment's notice, *both* paintings tend to feel similar (in a good way). This is probably because you may have the same brush or brushes loaded (that will stay the same between tabs) and the colors of your **Advanced Color Selector** are global (meaning the same color is active as you go from tab to tab). The decisions you make in one project can immediately influence the other with a simple click of your mouse to change tabs!

Another fantastic thing I've found is that having multiple projects open helps fight against artist's block. Feeling stuck in a certain location in one painting? Save, then swap over to the other piece for a bit. Your problem solving from the first project may roll over and help solve an issue you may have been having with your second, and vice versa.

> **Taking Breaks**
>
> Of course, we're not art machines, so regular breaks are not only recommended but encouraged! A great night's rest can end up saving you time in the long run as you can see your work with fresh eyes once a new day starts. Be sure to stay hydrated and take breaks at regular intervals: your art (and mental well-being) will be better for it!

Let's go ahead and get our portrait-orientation thumbnail canvas created and add a Rule of Thirds grid to it:

1. In Krita, create a new file by going to **File** > **New** or using the *Ctrl* + *N* hotkey.

2. In the **Create new document** window, set **Width** to `1750` pixels, **Height** to `2250` pixels, **Resolution** to `72` ppi, **Color Model** to **RGB/Alpha**, and **Color Depth** to **8-bit integer**:

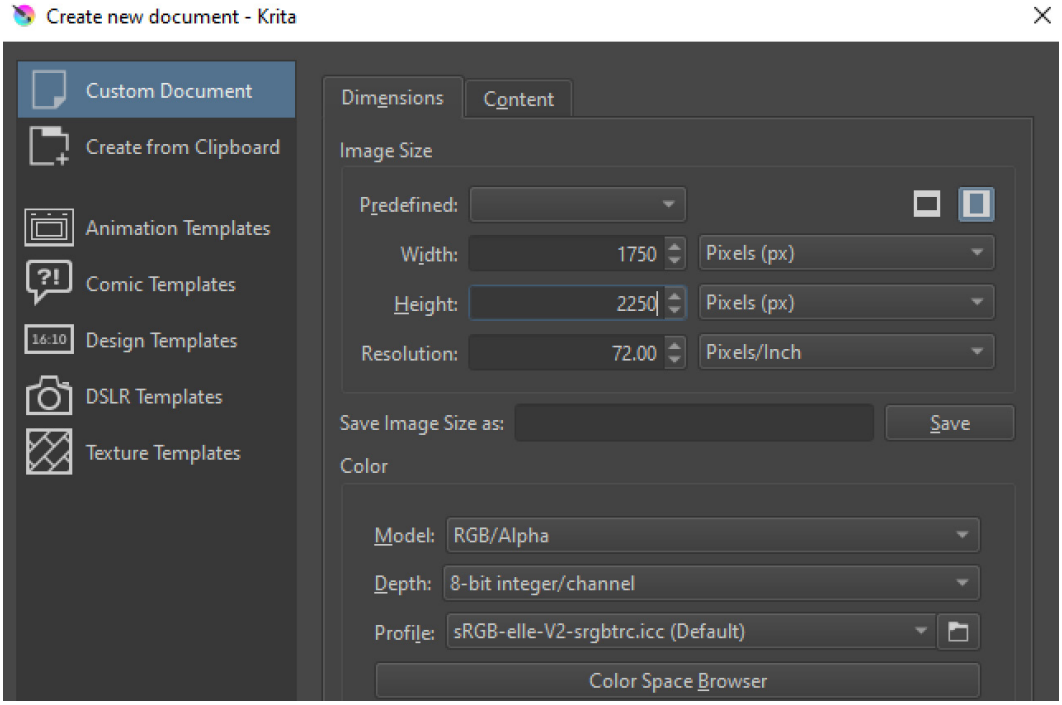


Figure 12.6 – The document settings for our portrait-orientation thumbnail

3. Click **Create** once you've entered your settings to create your canvas.
4. Go ahead and save your project by going to **File** > **Save** or using the *Ctrl* + *S* hotkey. I'm saving my project as *Portrait-Thumbnail* in the native Krita file format (`.kra`).

   You should now have two tabs open in your work area, with your first project being next to your newly created second project:

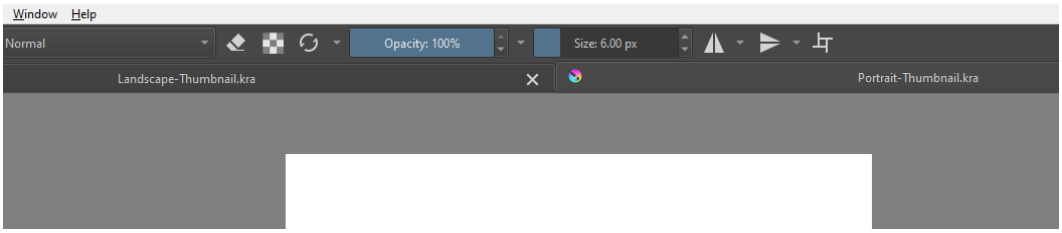


Figure 12.7 – Our two project files open simultaneously in Krita, separated by tabs

5. Now that our second project has been created, we should add our Rule of Thirds grid. Since the Rule of Thirds is a mathematical calculation that depends on the size of your canvas, you shouldn't "stretch" an image of a 3 x 3 grid onto your canvas. Instead, you should use the **Grid and Guides** functionality we discussed in the *Setting up grids and guides* section of *Chapter 9*, *Setting Up a Still-Life Study*. For a full overview of the mechanics of this tool, be sure to review that section. For this chapter, we'll quickly discuss the necessary settings.
6. Make sure your **Grid and Guides** Docker is available by clicking on **Settings** > **Dockers** and making sure **Grid and Guides** is set to active:

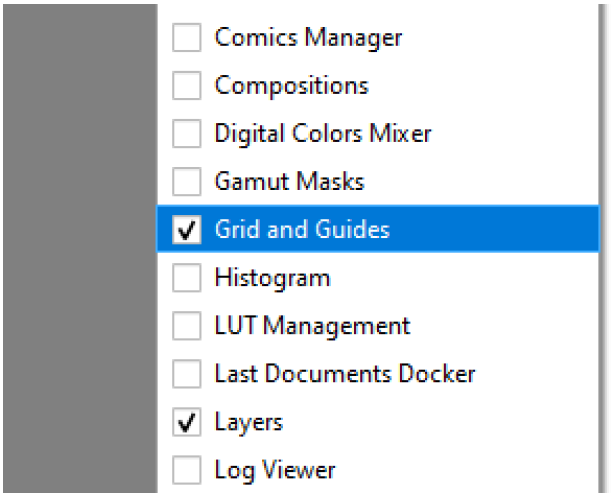


Figure 12.8 – Our Grids and Guides checkbox set to active via the Settings > Dockers menu

7. Once our **Grid and Guides** Docker is activated, we need to do a little math! The Rule of Thirds is a very easy grid to make as you just need to divide your width and your height by 3 to get your **X spacing** (width) and **Y spacing** (height) values, respectively. Since our canvas is currently **1750** pixels wide (*x* axis) and **2250** pixels wide (*y* axis), our values should be as follows:

   a. 1750 / 3 = *583.3333*, so we can round down to *583*, or round up to *584*, for our **X Spacing**.

   b. 2250 / 3 = *750*, so that will be our **Y Spacing**.

   c. We only want one main line, so we can set our **Subdivisions** to `1`.

   d. Since we've done the math manually ourselves, we can leave **Grid Offset** for both the *x* axis and the *y* axis set to `0`.

8. If you notice that your **X Spacing** and **Y Spacing** are locked to be the same, click the chain-link icon to the right of the **X Spacing** and **Y Spacing** fields to unlink the sizes. This should allow you to enter two separate numbers for spacings. You should end up with a **Grid and Guides** window that looks as follows:

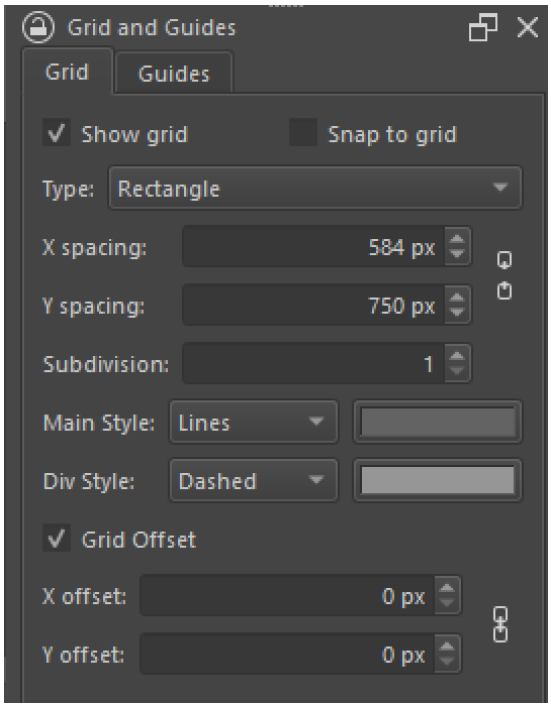


Figure 12.9 – Our Grid and Guides window. Notice the unlinked icon next to the X and Y spacing values to allow for separate numbers

Now that we've set up both of our canvases, we can start painting our thumbnails! Since we have the portrait thumbnail ready to go, let's start with that one!

Starting our portrait-oriented thumbnail

In *Chapter 11*, *Working with Concept Art*, we had an entire section titled *Keeping things loose*, and that's exactly what we're going to do for our thumbnails! Let's review our truncated brief so that we can have it at the forefront of our minds:

"*A big environment that features some machinery that looks big and other-worldly, with a moody atmosphere and bombastic colors with good lighting.*"

Alright! So, when I read this prompt back, there are a few things that stick out that we can use – the terms "big" and "good lighting." "Big" tells me we can use large brushes to put in huge shapes fast, while "good lighting" tells me we should have a clear separation of our foreground, midground, and backgrounds while controlling our values in grayscale to nail our lighting. Our sense of depth can be directly tied to value control here, so it should be of the utmost importance. The great thing about having our Rule of Thirds grid overlaid on our canvas the entire time is that we'll never be without a solid visual foundation!

Since this is a thumbnail phase and I want to work quickly, I'm only going to work on one layer for my value pass. If you're fairly new to digital painting or art, I *highly* recommend using three different layers for your foreground, midground, and background, respectively. We covered this method in *Chapter 3*, *Utilizing Layers and Layer Groups*, in detail, so I highly recommend starting in this way to build your comfort level in maintaining clarity of depth.

Now that we have established our working method, let's get started on our portrait-oriented thumbnail:

1. Grab a brush that allows for a little bit of texture but places a heavy, opaque mark, depending on the pressure that's applied. I'm going to choose the **f) Bristles-3 Large Smooth** brush from the **Paint** category in my **Brush Presets** panel. If the bristle brushes or more "wet" brushes don't work well for your machine, something such as **b) Basic-2 Opacity** would be great as well and be easier on your system's resources.

2. My first order of business is to "tone" my canvas, so I'm going to choose a *roughly 50% gray value* from my color wheel and lay in some brushstrokes to start warming up:

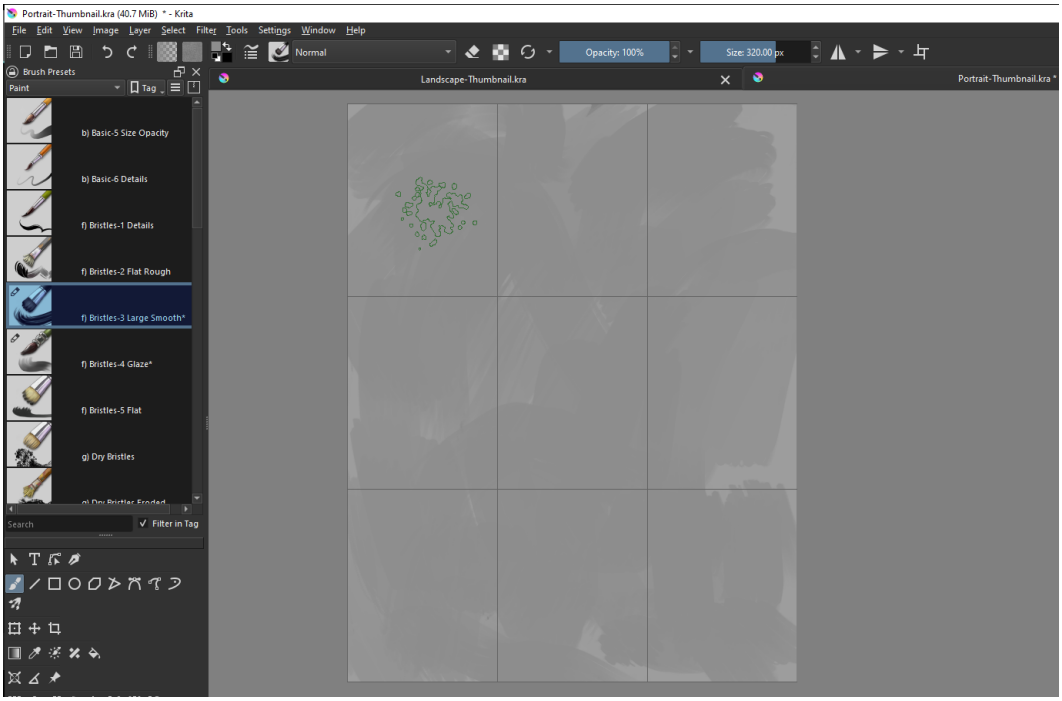


Figure 12.10 – A quick 50% gray wash using a large bristle brush to tone our canvas

Toning our canvas in this way gets rid of the blinding white that was staring back at us, as well as gets us over the "blank canvas syndrome," which can keep us from getting started.

Since I'm working on one layer, I'm going to do some "sketching," but by using a paintbrush instead of a pencil or finer point tool. This is going to allow me to utilize those bigger brushes to make larger shapes quickly. Also, we will have the benefit of getting "happy accidents," where paint can start to blend and give us random nooks and crannies that we may be able to utilize later.

3. I'm going to choose the **f) Bristles-2 Flat Rough** brush, also from the **Paint** category. I'm going to select a darker gray, maybe closer to *70% black* (or a 7 on the 10-step value scale).

4. Apply some long, vertical strokes using a variety of brush sizes (a quick way to change brush size is to use the bracket keys, *[* and *]*, on your keyboard to decrease and increase the brush's size, respectively). You can also resize your brush by holding down the *Shift* key, clicking down on your canvas, and panning your mouse left or right to make your brush's size smaller (*left*) or larger (*right*).
5. I'm thinking of an idea of large rock formations, almost creating a valley between tall mountain-esque towers with random horizontal shapes to break up the silhouettes:

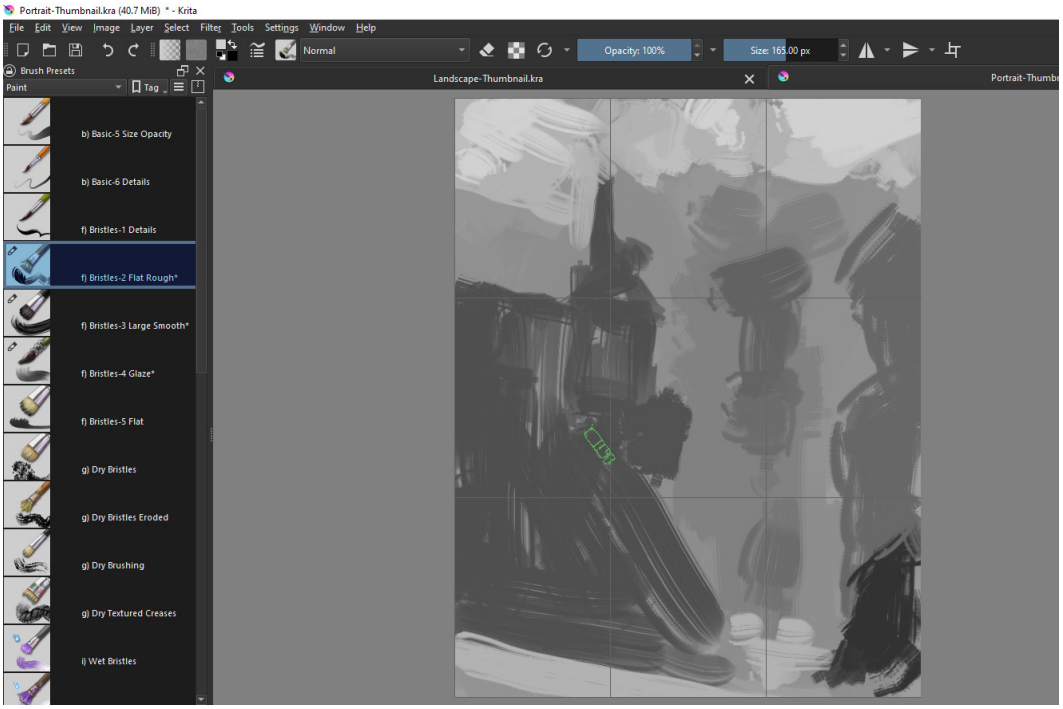


Figure 12.11 – Our vertical brush strokes, starting to place our value structure

The somewhat random, chunky marks near the top of our left-hand side shape will come in handy as they could easily become a "machine" or "ancient technology" that our prompt requires. Also, notice that two of our main vertical "structures" literally fall upon the two vertical Rule of Thirds lines. This is why having our grid set up and active is so valuable during this phase!

> **What about Perspective?**
>
> As you may recall, we established that this piece will be in a two-point perspective. While this is still the plan, I think we should continue blocking in some of our shapes, and decide on what the actual content of our image could potentially be, before we start worrying about the time-consuming part of setting up a proper perspective. Remember, it's important to work fast and loose at this point – we're not tied down to anything yet.

6. I want to embrace some of these shapes we've started establishing, so I'm going to use the **f) Bristles-2 Flat Rough** brush and add a bit of visual interest by painting in some darker darks where I think the foreground could be and adding a few spots of bright light, almost creating a "slice of light" to start manipulating shapes and forms:

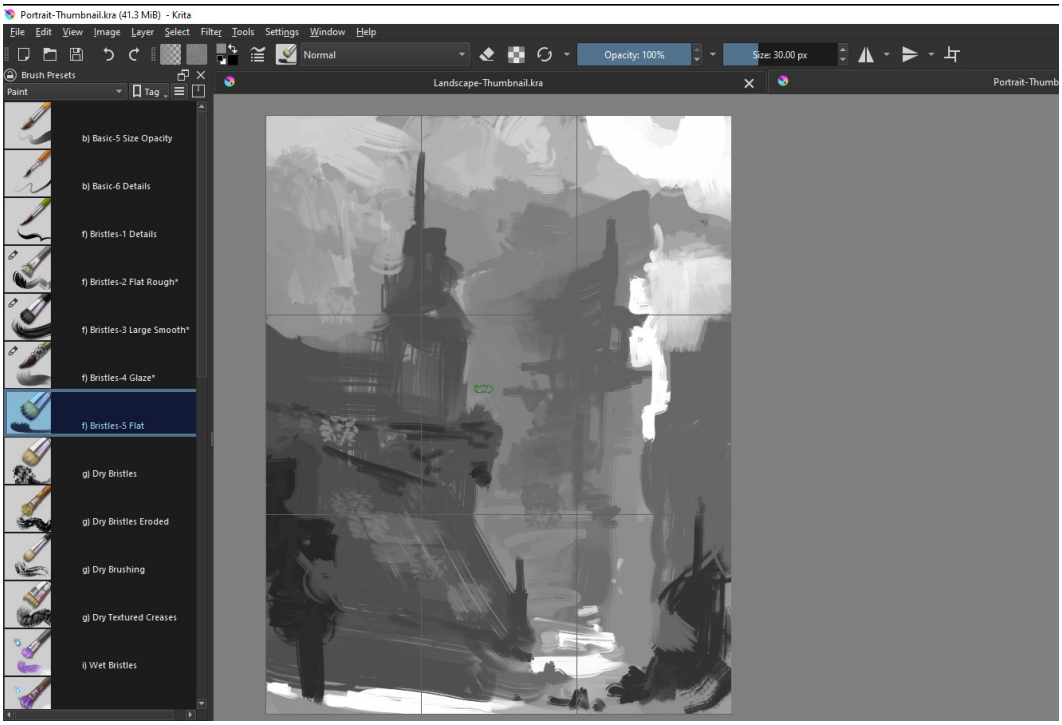


Figure 12.12 – Adding some darker darks and brighter brights to bring about interesting silhouettes

This is already feeling pretty cool, and we're only a few minutes in! I'm starting to get a sense of what this environment could be, and using the Rule of Thirds grid we created is helping define some interesting shapes.

For instance, notice that the right-most shape flattens out directly on the top horizontal Rule of Thirds line, while the "antenna" of our left-most structure traces over the left-most vertical line of the grid:

Figure 12.13 – Utilizing our Rule of Thirds grid to great effect to position structures

Yeah, we are getting our money's worth with the grid! While we could keep going with this one, we have another thumbnail to create! Before we take a break from this one, let's go ahead and do a very rough color splash-in so that we can get a sense of a color combination we like.

Splashing in colors

It's time to splash in some colors! This is a repeat of the method we established in the *Splashing in color* section of *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*. Head back to that section if you want to understand the mechanics behind this method a little more clearly. Let's get started:

1. Create a new layer. Name this layer `Color Splash` and change the layer's **Blending Mode** setting to **Color**. Your **Layers** panel should look something like this:

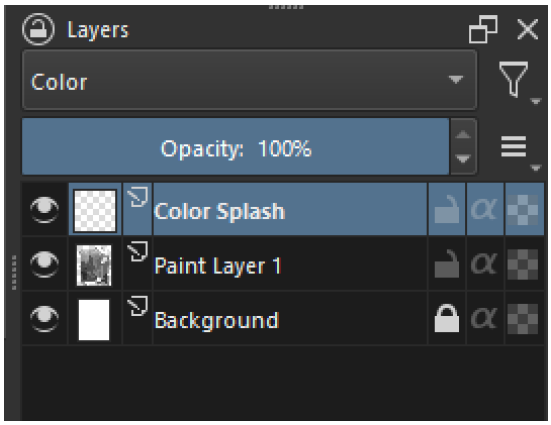


Figure 12.14 – Our current Layers panel for our portrait-oriented thumbnail. Notice that the Color Splash layer is on the color blending mode

   Since this is an outdoor scene, we can have a nice blue sky with our mountain-esque shapes acting as a warm contrast by using warmer, neutral orange (meaning closer to gray in saturation).

2. Select a large brush and paint a gradient of a *mid-saturated blue* on the *upper half* of your composition, and an *orange-brown* color on the *lower half*.
3. Follow the shapes of your mountain-esque structure shapes when placing color, making sure that they maintain clarity by giving them various shades of orange, brown, and gray to contrast with the blues of the sky. To add variety, you can also add splashes of more saturated colors (such as a red and a green, in my case) to areas you think might be a focal point for the viewer:

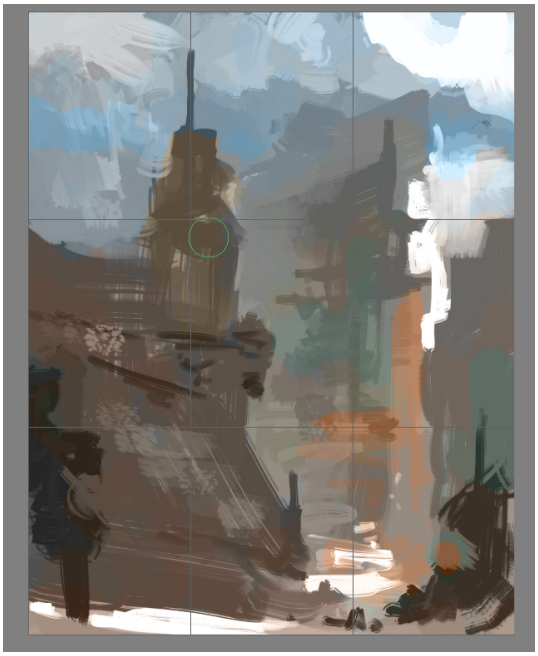


Figure 12.15 – Our color-splashed portrait thumbnail

I know you may be thinking this looks like a total mess, and you'd be right! It doesn't matter about the details or formal structure of anything yet since we haven't even begun on our second thumbnail, so locking in designs right now may be jumping a little too far ahead.

On that note, let's start on the second thumbnail – I'm getting excited about the possibilities! Once we nail down a quick composition for the second thumbnail and splash in some colors there, we will be ready to compare both of our color thumbnails and choose which one we'd like to take to the final!

4. Be sure to save what you have for your portrait-oriented thumbnail so far!

Now, let's hop over to our second thumbnail and get started.

Starting on our second thumbnail

For our first thumbnail, we decided on a vast, vertical outdoor scene that integrates mountain-esque canyons, a bright cloudy sky, and some brightly saturated "points of interest." While we could continue down this path with our second thumbnail, we can use this new thumbnail as an opportunity to shake things up and try something quite different.

Instead of a vast, fresh-air-filled landscape, what if we made a murky, darker alien interior? It can still be vast in scale with some dramatic lighting and large machines, but the feel would be much different than our first thumbnail while still being in keeping with the goals that were established in our prompt. Having two drastically different thumbnails will make it a little more varied when we're selecting the strongest composition of the two. Let's get started on our landscape-oriented thumbnail:

1. Click the tab for your landscape-oriented portrait in Krita to make it your active project.
2. You should have your three layers, with your **Background**, **Sketch**, and **Golden Ratio** layers presented from bottom to top:

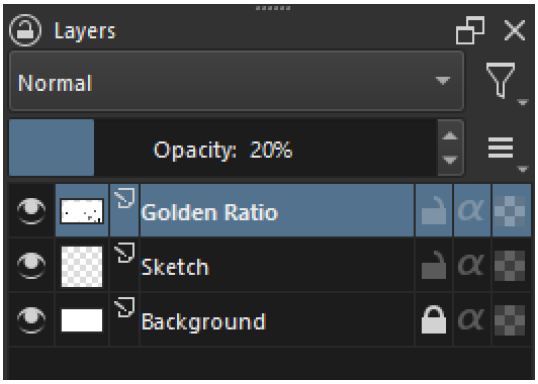


Figure 12.16 – Our landscape-oriented thumbnail's Layers panel at this point

3. Click on the **Sketch** layer to make sure that you'll be putting your values on the layer below your **Golden Ratio** layer.

Being Able to Always See by Multiplying

As we begin working on the **Sketch** layer, you may notice that the **Golden Ratio** layer can be fully hidden, especially if the values you put down on your **Sketch** layer match that of your lower-opacity **Golden Ratio** layer. A great way to ensure that you always see what your **Golden Ratio** layer has, even at a lower **Opacity** setting, is to set the **Blending Mode** setting of the layer to **Multiply**. This makes all the lines from our **Golden Ratio** layer darker than anything below it, allowing you to see it more clearly as you work. This is a very helpful trick if you're painting and want to use line art, sketches, or hand-made perspectives while doing so.

4. Much like in our first thumbnail, find a large opaque brush that can be used to tone our canvas using a midtone, roughly *50% gray*.
5. Tone the canvas using your midtone value and large opaque brush.
6. After your canvas has your midtone grays on it, using the same brush, follow the spiral provided by your **Golden Ratio** layer, using it to create a "curved cavern" of sorts by making the outside of the spiral darker than the inside:

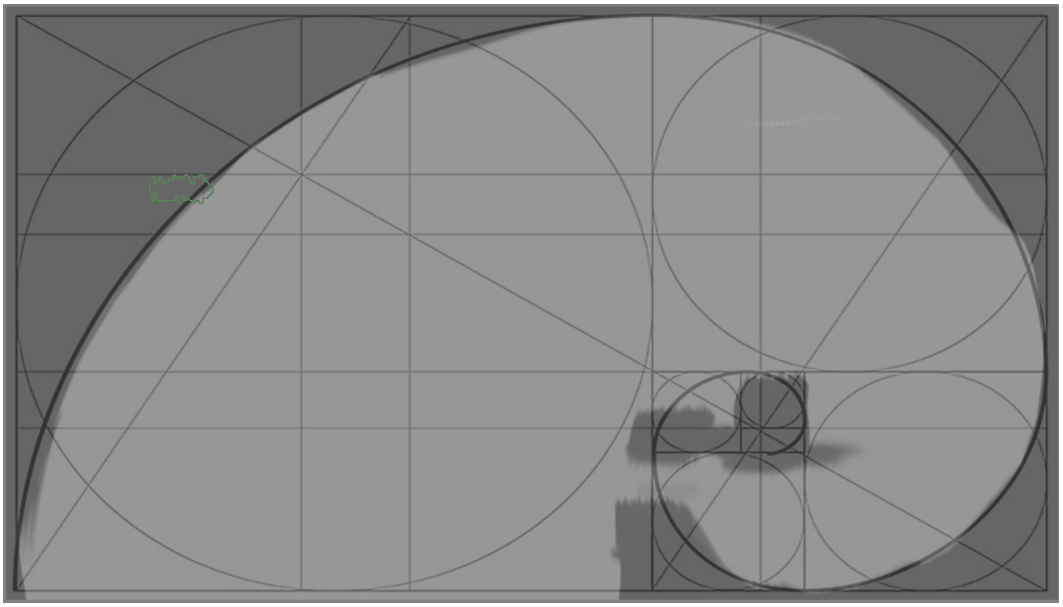


Figure 12.17 – Our first few values added, following the spiral of our Golden Ratio layer

7. I've also added some dark marks near where the spiral's focal point exists. I'm not sure what's going to go here yet; I just want to mark it as important.
8. Using this shape as a foundation, I'm going to add a variety of shapes, edges, and curves to the "inside edge" of this spiral to make it look less organic and smooth, and more man-made (as this can work well with our machinery and technology motif from the prompt).

9. While I'm adding these shapes, I also want to start establishing lighter and darker values, including adding a floor (to guide our viewer and/or player into the composition) using the **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush and creating a few "light bloom" shapes using the **b) Airbrush Soft** brush from the **Digital** subcategory to add our strong, moody light source:

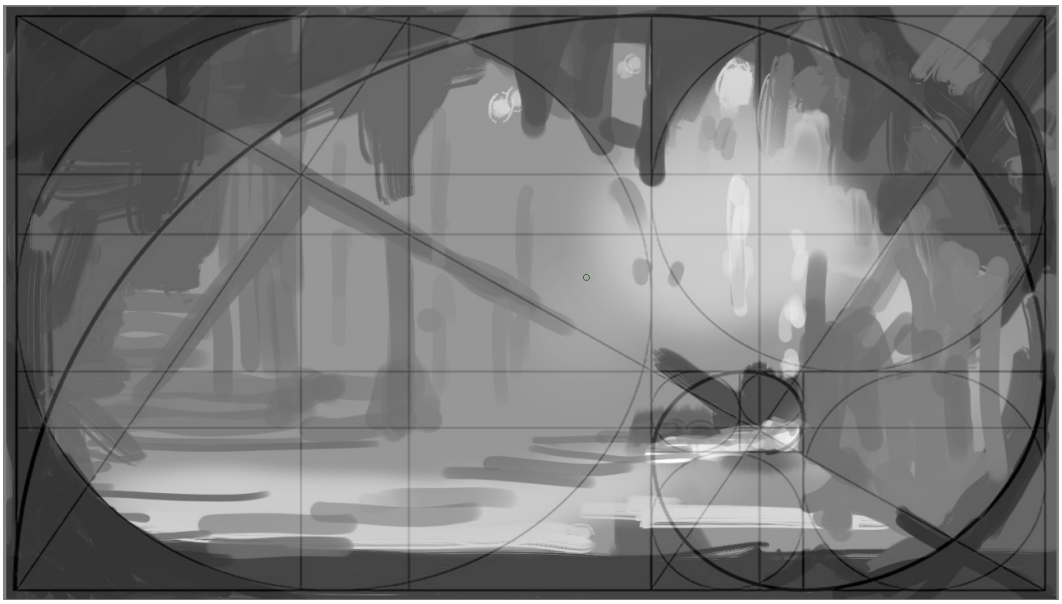


Figure 12.18 – Our additional lights and darks, following the lines provided by our Golden Ratio image

Notice how I'm almost "coloring in the lines" using some of the **Golden Ratio** layer information? Tracing the lines in this way is going to ensure I adhere to the main shapes and proportions of the tried-and-true ratio, allowing me to add my creativity on top. Once again, at this point, it doesn't matter what marks exist, as this is just a casual brainstorming session.

Let's go ahead and add some colors and see what we're working with!

10. Create a new layer. This layer should be above your **Sketch** layer, but below the **Golden Ratio** layer. Name this `Color Splash`. Be sure to change this layer's **Blending Mode** setting to **Color**.

    Since our first thumbnail contained some bright blues, orange-browns, grays, and a few pops of red and green, let's work a bit different here and stick with a more simplified color range. Oranges and purples go well together, allowing the purple to act like the "cool" color, while the orange can be our light source and source of warmth for the viewer.

11. Using a large brush, while on your **Color Splash** layer, select a deep, saturated purple color.
12. With this purple color selected, paint over your darker tones (essentially, your foreground, floor, and "outer spiral").
13. With your orange, paint over your lighter tones. This should bring a nice, if weird, contrast. This works in our favor, as the mixture of colors seems "alien" to what we're used to on Earth, adhering to the "otherworldly" motif of our prompt.
14. Go ahead and hide your **Golden Ratio** layer. You should have something that looks close to the following:

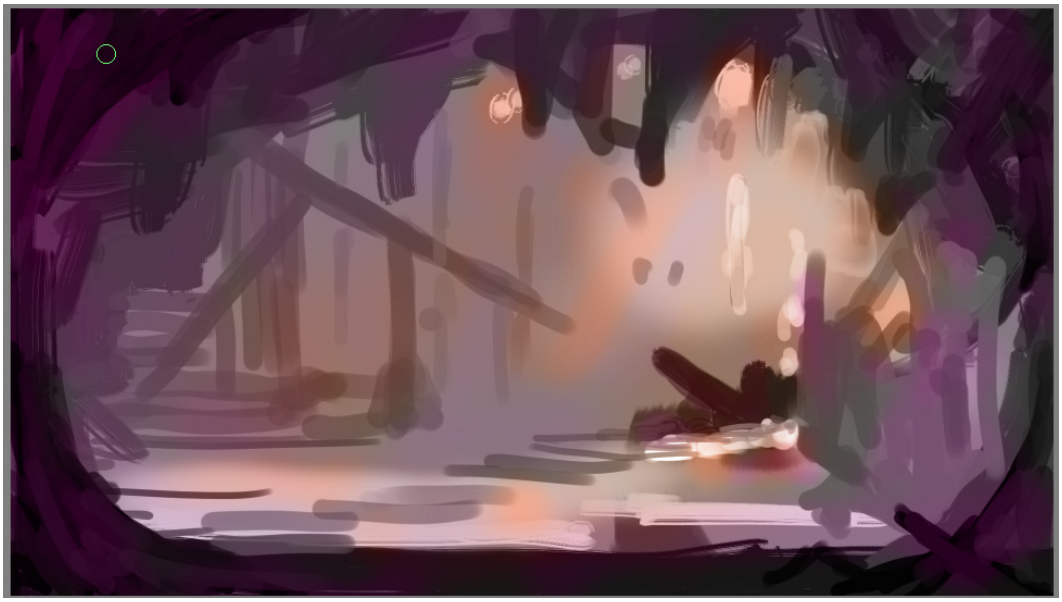


Figure 12.19 – Our color-splashed thumbnail with our Golden Ratio layer hidden

Now that we've hidden the **Golden Ratio** layer, the piece is standing on its own! Our focal point still works (from the mix of the Golden Ratio itself and keeping it darker to heighten the contrast for the viewer), and now we have an interesting-looking composition that has a myriad of possibilities.

I think we're at a pretty good stopping point for our color splash on this second thumbnail, which can only mean one thing: it's time for the moment of truth – choosing our favorite thumbnail!

Choosing our strongest composition

In a perfect world, we would love all our paintings equally. However, I can tell you with *absolute certainty*, that will *never* be the case. As your skills develop and take shape, paintings or drawings you may have loved at one point in your hobby or career may end up being outright *embarrassing* to you months or years later. One of the *strongest skills* you can develop as a working illustrator or painter *is learning when to scrap an idea or be able to objectively see the pros and cons of your work*. There is a term called "*the artist's curse*," which is an idea that states that we will never be able to enjoy our art in the same way we enjoy the art of others. This stems from two primary places:

- We have been with our artwork since it was a blank canvas, so all we see are the "decisions" we made during the production of the work, instead of the work as a collective whole. We constantly harp on about what we "should have done," instead of what we *did* do.
- As human beings, we tend to *undervalue* our worth and *overvalue* the worth of others. Statements such as "Oh, I could never do that" seem to happen a lot when you're looking at your favorite artist's work. However, if someone compliments your work in the same capacity, you brush it off as them "being nice." Don't feel bad about this dichotomy – it's normal! Just be aware that it happens to everyone and give yourself a little bit of credit for performing the miraculous feat of creating something from nothing!

If there's a lesson to take from this, it's to be kinder to yourself, while also understanding where you'd like to improve in the future. It's a healthy mindset and it greatly reduces the amount of stress you place on yourself.

With that being said, let's look at the two thumbnails side by side and make a bullet-point list to figure out which piece we will take to the final stage:

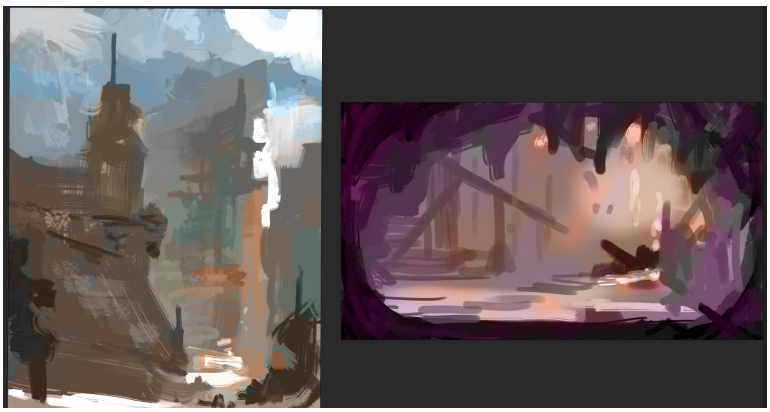


Figure 12.20 – Our two thumbnails, side by side for comparison and self-critique

My main goal with this comparison is to look at the strengths and weaknesses of each initial concept. We can use this stage to do our first set of mental "edits" of our images, choosing what we could potentially keep or get rid of in either piece. Here's a quick breakdown of my thoughts while looking at them side by side in *Figure 12.20*:

- The piece on the left looks a bit more "majestic" to me, as the buildings and structures have more room to breathe and establish a sense of place, including more interesting shapes and the possibility of "cultural touchstones" for our fictional world.
- The lighting in the right-hand piece, while cool, doesn't leave a lot to the imagination in my opinion. While the purple and orange do give a sense of otherworldly-ness, they may have to be tweaked a bit to catch the eyes of our viewers and players.
- On the left-hand piece, the blue sky and orange-skewed mountains seem a little too ordinary and obvious, not selling the idea of an "alien world" that we're going after with our prompt.
- I'm liking the more contrast-focused nature of the right-hand thumbnail, but the overall structure and possibility of the left-hand thumbnail. Is there maybe a way to mix the two?

By breaking your ideas down in this way, you can take your favorite parts from each composition, creating something greater in potential and possibility than your combined attempts thus far. Reviewing each piece at its basic level, and doing this compare-and-contrast exercise, I've come to this conclusion:

Let's take the foundation of the left-hand thumbnail (our vertically-focused, portrait-oriented piece) and integrate the higher contrast, non-Earth color scheme of the right-hand thumbnail (our landscape-oriented purple and orange piece). Also, let's keep with the motif of "crazy colors" that are out of the ordinary, but not limit ourselves to just the purple and orange – let's have fun with it!

Refining our idea

Give a salute and wave goodbye to our landscape-oriented design: you served us well, mighty thumbnail! There's an old saying that you have to "get through the rough ideas to get to the good ones," and that's why this process is critical in the pre-production phase of any project. By ruling out what you don't want, you end up with something that ticks all of the right boxes.

Now that we have decided on which thumbnail we'd like to move forward with, it's time to set our focus on refining our winning idea:

1. Close the thumbnail that you won't be taking to the final stage. (At this point, that is! You can always keep thumbnails to use later for some neat ideas, as we will discuss in *Chapter 13*, *Going beyond These Pages*.)
2. Use this step to make any general, sweeping changes (such as colors, values, or shape layout) to the thumbnail you are going to keep.
3. I am going to make a new color splash layer (naming it **Color Splash 2**) and add some more outrageous, varied colors such as cyan, red, and purple using a soft brush (the **b) Airbush Soft** brush from the **Digital** subcategory, for instance) to allow the hues to blend into one another gradually:

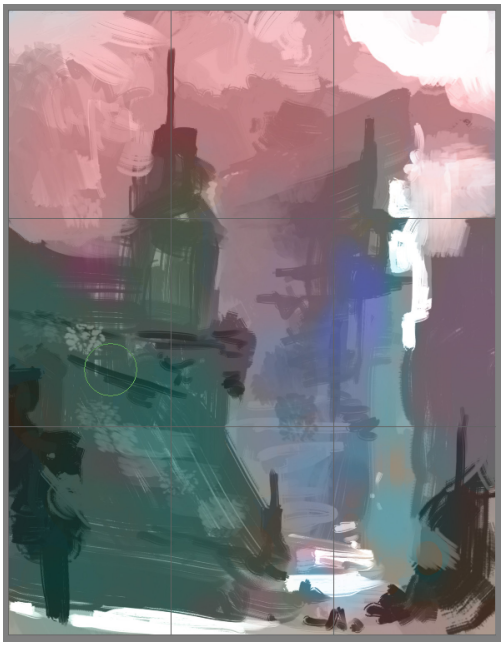


Figure 12.21 – Our recolored thumbnail. That's more like it!

Yeah, that feels way more interesting! The standard "blue sky" look we had before wasn't giving us an interesting feel, and while we could have made a great painting using the more traditional color palette (and it'd be easier to find references!), this piece is meant to spark the imagination. *It's always important to do what's best for the piece, not necessarily what's best for your ego!*

Since we're liking where this color and value setup is going, let's go ahead and make a merged layer of what we have so far.

4. Select everything on your canvas by using the **Select** > **Select All** menu option (or the *Ctrl* + *A* hotkey). Once everything is selected, go to **Edit** > **Copy Merged** (or use the *Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C* hotkey).
5. Paste your selection (using **Edit** > **Paste** or the *Ctrl* + *V* hotkey).
6. Name this new layer `Merged Layer`. Make sure this layer is at the top of your **Layers** panel!
7. On your **Merged Layer**, start refining your shapes and values by color selecting (using the *Ctrl* key while hovering over a color you want to select on your canvas) and controlling your edges to make more defined shapes. We still want to stay loose in our decision making, but giving a little bit more depth and structure to our piece using our new color palette will start giving our artistic eye something to latch onto to develop further:

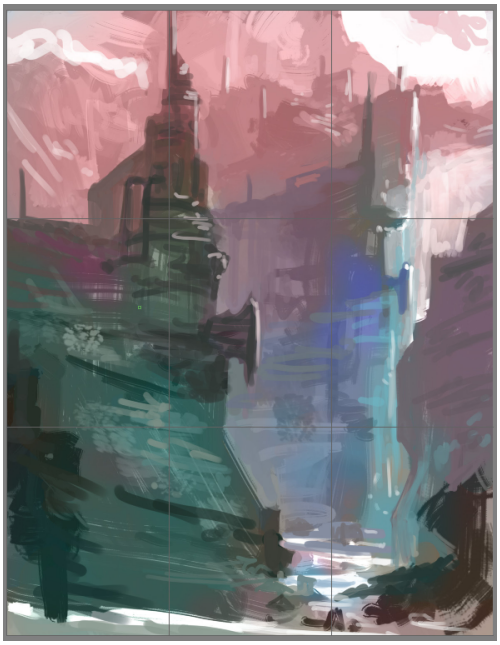


Figure 12.22 – Our slightly refined thumbnail using a smaller brush and color picking

By adding these small lines and brush strokes of "details," we're starting to come up with something that is feeling more coherent. Notice the repeating shapes of antennas and pipes as our silhouettes become more vertical.

There's one shape in particular, though, that has captured my attention and has given me an idea that may dictate the direction the entire piece starts to go in:

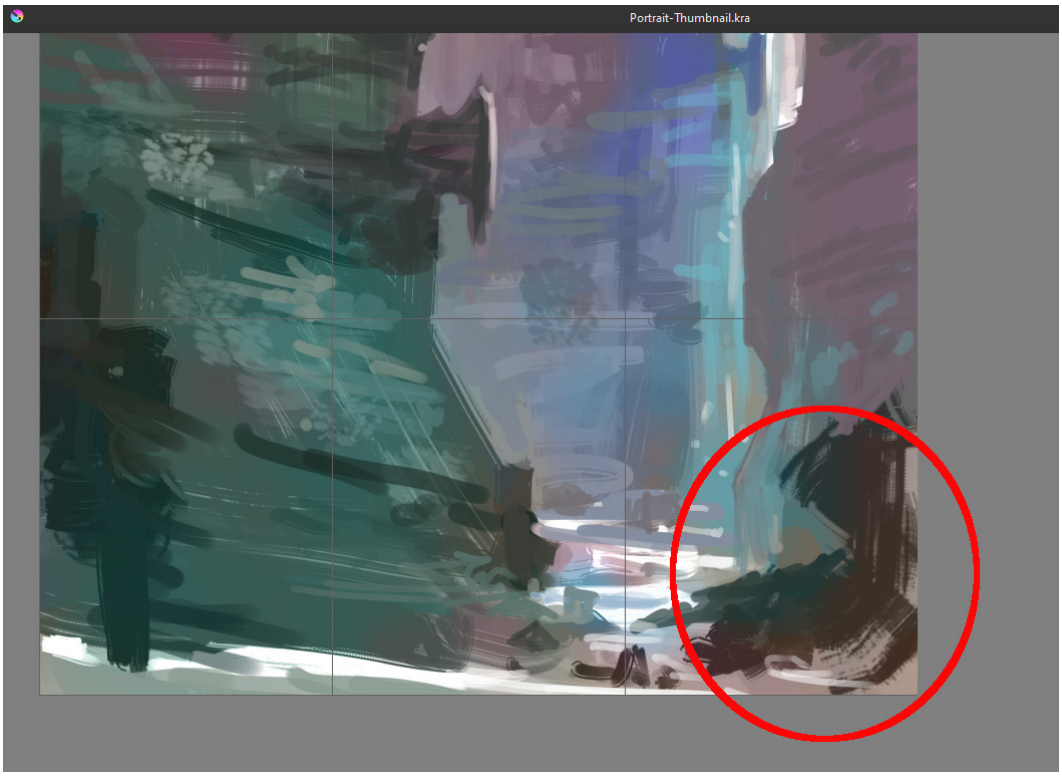


Figure 12.23 – An interesting shape has appeared; what can we make of it?

I originally put down this streaky mark thinking "I don't know, this could be a big rock or something for scale," but looking at the flow of the line and the structure of the base, it's making me think of a dragon! Dragons are awesome, yeah? What if this composition was showing us a massive tower in the background, almost a "docking bay" of sorts, with a variety of dragons and dragon riders positioned and flying around?

This idea checks all the boxes we need for our concept: otherworldly, vast, dramatic lighting, and it gives our viewers and player a place they'd want to explore. I mean, who doesn't want to fly around on a dragon? That being said, I think I want to move the dragon shape over to the left-hand side of the foreground, as having it on the lower right seems a bit cramped (and dragons need room to stretch!).

Now that I have my solid "finalized" idea, it's time to start blocking in the shapes we need before we integrate our textures.

8. Create a duplicate layer of our **Merged Layer** so that we can make some dramatic changes while keeping what we have so far as a backup. Do this by right-clicking **Merged Layer** and selecting **Duplicate layer or mask** (or using the *Ctrl* + *J* hotkey), or hitting the double-page icon at the bottom of our **Layers** panel:

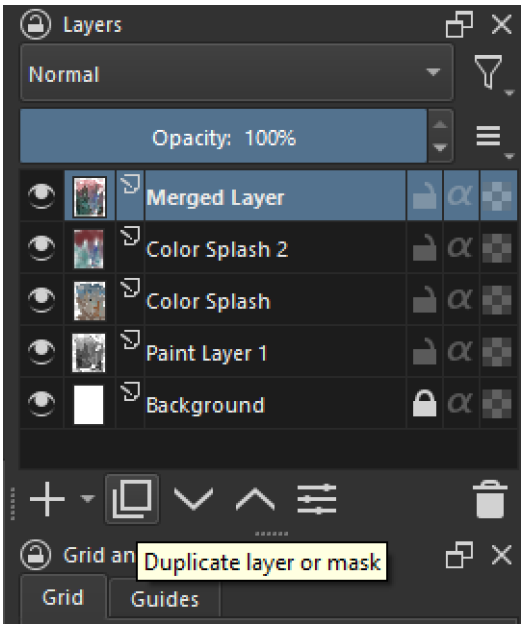


Figure 12.24 – The Duplicate layer or mask button at the bottom of our Layers panel

9. Name this new layer `Merged Changes`.
10. On the new **Merged Changes** layer, I moved the dragon shape over to the lower left while refining it to read as a dragon, alongside a few smaller humans for scale. I want them to face the inside of the composition as I want this to be something that draws the viewer into the composition.

I also want to add some dragons flying around the composition (leading the viewer into the background tower), and edit the shapes of our machinery/towers so that they fit a little better with a high-fantasy topic such as dragons (making curved edges that come to a sharp point, such as dragon's teeth, might be a cool idea here):

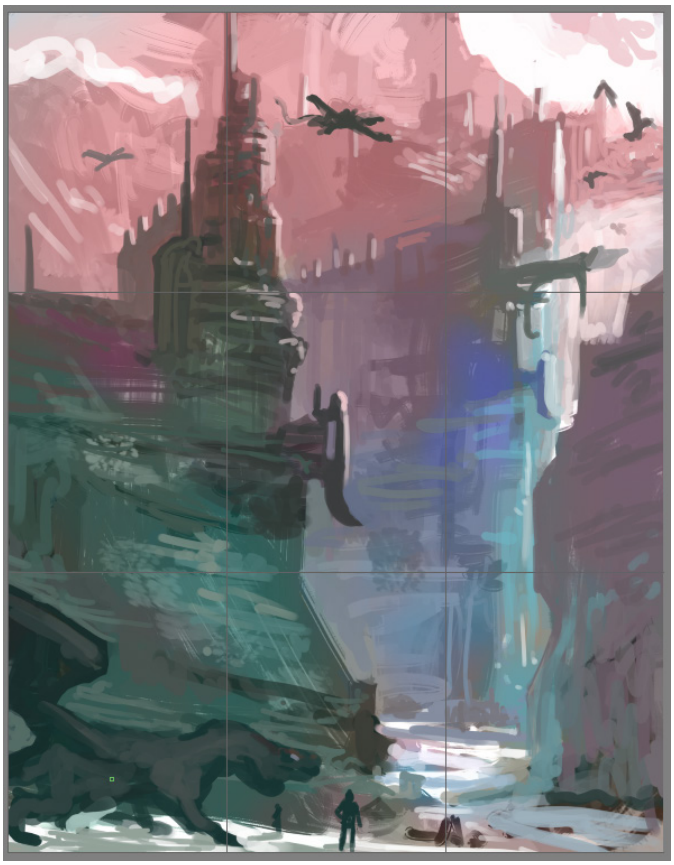


Figure 12.25 – Our artwork taking shape

Here, I'm making sure to refine my edges, adjust the values a bit, and start getting a sense of location and mood. It's starting to come together, and once you start getting excited about the possibilities your art is providing you, that's a great indicator that you're ready to push to the final stages of your work.

I think we are at a great point to start going to the final stage, so let's create a new merged copy of this and increase the canvas size so that we can start rendering details and applying some photo textures to speed things up! We'll be using a version of the techniques we discussed in the *Bashing our reference* section of *Chapter 5*, *Implementing Layer Blending Modes*. In the next section, we'll discuss some "tips and tricks" that I've learned from my own experiences and industry veterans on how to quickly and effectively utilize paint-over techniques.

Learning industry-standard paint-over techniques

We are at a place where we are confident with our idea, and it's time to push to the final stage! There are two important steps I do at this point (well, one of them I always do; the other one is optional, but we'll discuss that momentarily):

- Make a merged copy of our work thus far, create a new file, paste our merged image into it, and then increase the size to what we want our final output's width, height, and resolution to be before we start rendering. This is the step I *always* do, as I want to make sure every brushstroke and decision I make is going to make it to our final output.
- Grab a large number of photo references to photobash. This is the "optional" part, so if your project doesn't need or require a photobash, don't feel pressured to do this part. While it's a great way to speed up getting your textures and visual information in your painting, it's *not* a requirement. To speed up this portion of the chapter (and so we don't have a 500-page chapter dedicated to rendering every single rock on a mountain), I'll be using photobash techniques here.

Let's get started on our final render by creating a properly sized canvas that we can start painting on:

1. Create a *merged copy* of what we have on our canvas. You can utilize either the **Select** > **Select All** and **Edit** > **Copy Merged** methods, or use the *Ctrl* + *A* and *Ctrl* + *Shift* + *C* hotkeys.
2. Then, create a new document by either clicking **File** > **New** or using the *Ctrl* + *N* hotkey.

3. To save a bit of time, you can use the **Create from Clipboard** option in the **Create New Document** prompt. This will not only bring in the resolution and dimensions of what's on your clipboard, but a copy of the content as well, placing it as the **Background** layer on the new project's **Layers** panel:

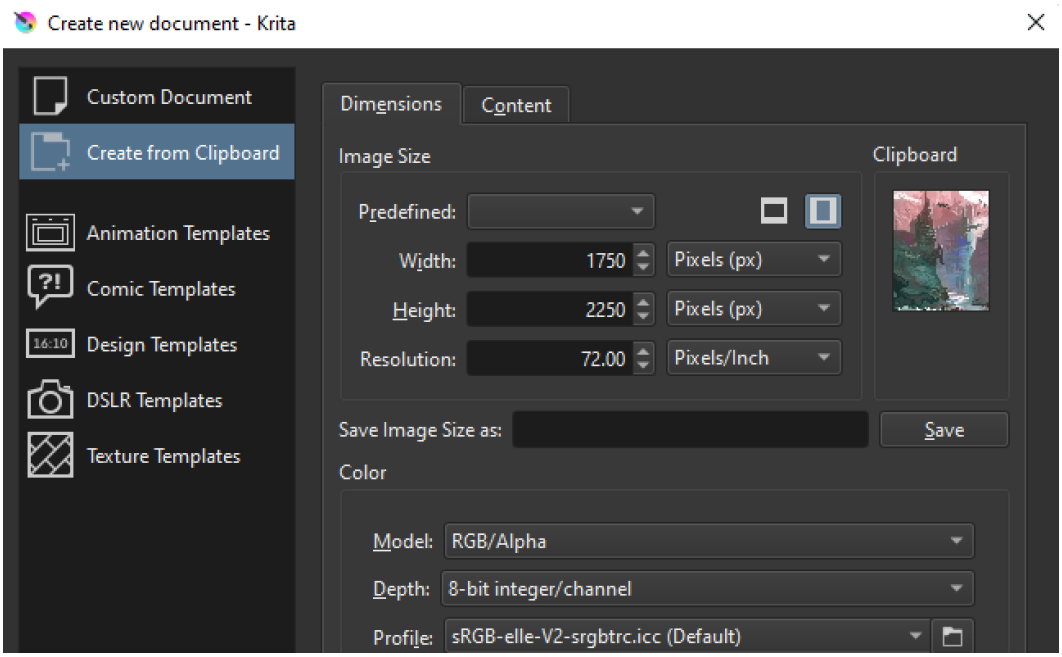


Figure 12.26 – The Create from Clipboard option while creating a new document

4. Once your new file has been created, be sure to save it. I'm saving mine as `Dragon Rider Temple`, in native Krita format (`.kra`).
5. Now, we need to resize our canvas to what we'd like our final output to be. Click on **Image** > **Scale To New Size** or use the *Ctrl* + *Alt* + *I* hotkey combo to bring up the **Scale To New Size** window.
6. The default settings in this window will be what our image is *currently* sized at. The only thing I want to do is change **Resolution** from **72** ppi to **300** ppi, which will scale up our width and height from *1,750 x 2,250* to *7,293 x 9,375*, respectively. This is due to having the **Constrain proportions** box checked, allowing the scale ratio of the width and height to remain locked while we change the pixels per inch setting. I'm also going to keep **Filter** set to **Auto** as that will allow Krita to use the most effective rescaling algorithm when upscaling our image:

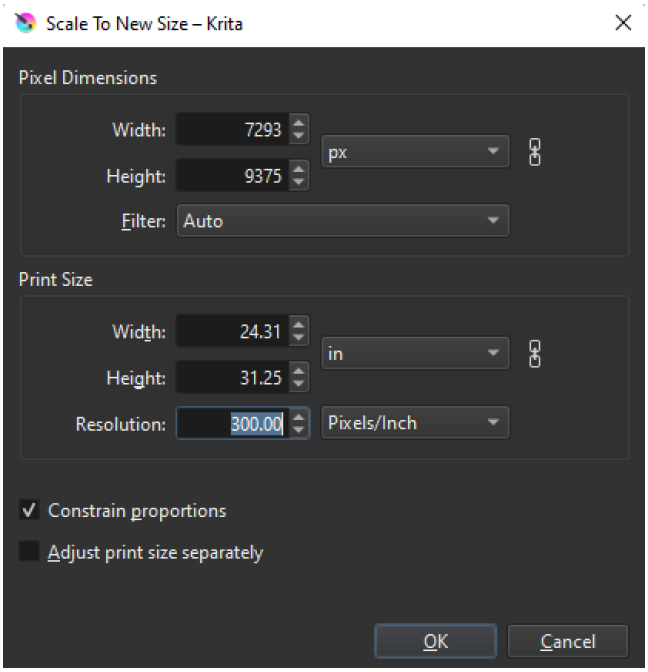


Figure 12.27 – The Scale to New Size window with our width, height, and resolution adjusted with Constrain proportions checked

Once you're happy with the new dimensions and resolution settings, hit **OK** to commit these changes. Depending on the new size and resolution you've chosen, you may have a few seconds of processing time while your computer is doing some number-crunching to scale your image correctly.

Now that our canvas is the size we'll be exporting the finished piece out at, we can safely start placing some photo references to help us add detail! As we mentioned earlier in this section, this portion is entirely optional as you can just start rendering using the methods we discussed throughout *Chapter 11*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*.

I'm going to head over to the trusty site `Pexels.com` and look for the following items:

a. *Iguana* and *Lizard* (for the dragon design inspirations and scale textures)

b. *Mountain* and *Canyon* (to get a variety of rock textures and formations to have on file)

c. *Clouds* and *Fog* (for, well, clouds and fog!)

d. *Rocky Trail* (to assist in the ground-level texturing and our zig-zagging trail going into the distant canyons)

I will combine all of these references (I get between three to four per set of keywords) into a single document (acting as a reference board), notating them by category for organization purposes:

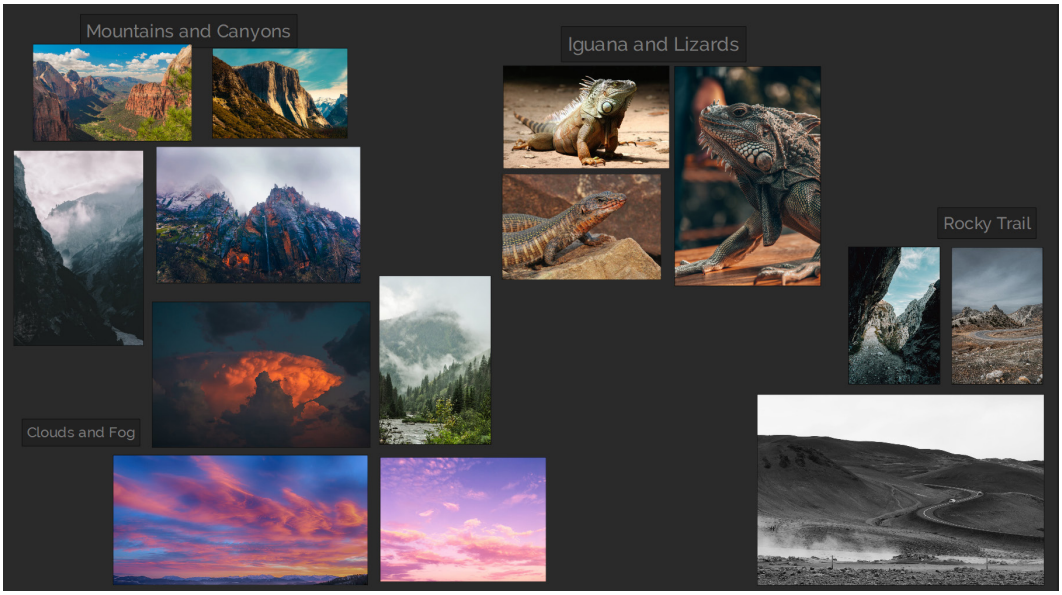


Figure 12.28 – My custom reference board using prompt searches from Pexels.com

Keeping our preferred references on a single file can be extremely helpful since just copying and pasting from our reference board can save a ton of time during the photobashing and referencing process. I will be attaching a copy of this exact reference board (warning: it's pretty huge, whopping in at over 18,000 pixels wide!) for you to use if you're following along!

We have our photos, we have our reference board, and we have our full-size canvas. Let's get to the finale of this project by applying our photobashing on top of a value-pass version of our piece, applying our initial color splash, and then rendering it to completion!

Applying our photo textures

Since all of our reference images have different color keys and lighting setups, let's simplify this step by creating a "value checker" layer:

1. Create a new layer named `Value Checker`. Fill in this layer with pure black or pure white, and change its **Blending Mode** to **Color**. This will desaturate all the colors in our painting, allowing us to work only in values.

2. *Underneath* this **Value Checker** layer, start copying and pasting your images by using your transform tools, transparency masks, and layers to manipulate and shape the textures so that they "fit" your already-established shapes:

Figure 12.29 – Our value-filtered photo textures after they've been added to our composition

Depending on the quality of your image (the resolution of not only your canvas but the images that you've used to do your photobashing), your file size may grow *exponentially*. For instance, before resizing my canvas and adding my photo textures, my total file was 49 MB in size. After making these changes – that is, adding photo textures, applying transparency masks, and doing the value checker tweak – my file is clocking in at a whopping *4 Gigs* in size. This can cause some *extreme* slowdown, and even with a pretty beefy computer, it can cause Krita to crash if you're not careful, so be sure you save your work (using the *Ctrl* + *S* hotkey):

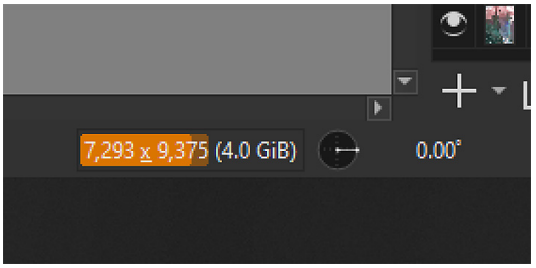


Figure 12.30 – Using high-resolution photobashing techniques at 300 ppi can take a toll!

> **Auto-Saving Is a Life-Saver!**
>
> A great feature Krita comes with is the ability to set a timer to "auto-save" files after a certain duration passes in the program. This is extremely useful and ensures that you'll always have a relatively recent backup in case disaster strikes! I can't tell you how many times a power outage has halted my progress, only for Krita's auto-save feature to recover my work from only a few minutes prior. You can customize these settings by going to **Settings** > **Configure Krita** > **General** > **File Handling**. I have my timer set to save *every 7 minutes* as anything shorter than that and my machine starts to use a lot of system resources (namely, CPU and RAM), while much longer than that and I would have made a lot of progress that would end up being lost. Find a time that works well with your working style, and *save* yourself some heartache! Yes, that pun was intended.

3. If Krita starts to run slowly or becomes unresponsive I recommend using the **Scale To New Size** function to lower the fidelity back down to a more manageable level by either lowering your ppi (if you're working above **72** ppi, for instance) or lowering the width and height values (while keeping the proportions intact with the **Constrain Proportions** box checked in the **Scale To New Size** window). Since Krita's algorithm is smart enough to resize everything in the composition equally, you'll still retain your high-quality work but get Krita to perform significantly better as a result of making the image smaller in terms of computer resource intensity requirements.
4. Now, take your **Background** layer (the layer that consisted of the merged copy of our color splash from our thumbnail) and duplicate it. Then, move this duplicated copy to the top of your **Layers** panel (even on top of your **Value Checker** layer) and change its **Blending Mode** setting to **Color**:

Figure 12.31 – Our color-splashed version of our post-photobash piece

5. Use this new color layer to correct and edit any colors that may look out of place. Keep the rules of *atmospheric perspective* in mind (the further something is from the viewer, the more it matches the value and hue of the background sky) and *light theory* (nothing can be brighter than the light source, and the further something is away from the source of light, the less light it receives).

   For instance, I'm thinking of either cutting back or focusing on the saturated blue as it's causing a lot of attention to be drawn to it now since it's large. I also want to integrate the green and cyans into the foreground mountains more to ensure the reds of the sky creep into the background elements a little more, as well as to maintain some brighter white light on the right-hand side of the composition.

Now that we have our colors where we want them, it's time to make some adjustments to our piece and refine some shapes. From there, we can push to the most time-consuming steps of rendering. For now, let's look at a few shapes and see whether we can improve on our ideas to make them a little more cohesive.

Improving our design sense

While I feel good about where the piece is going, I feel like it's a little disjointed. Why would dragons be flying around an industrial-style structure? What is tying our designs together, and does it make sense as a magical, mythical place that the viewer would want to explore?

This is an important turning point in our piece. Earlier in this chapter, there was a callout section called *Taking Breaks* that discussed the importance of stepping away from your piece for a few hours (or a few days, if your schedule allows). This allows you to clear your mind and come back to your work with a fresh perspective. I've done this, and when I came back, my thoughts of the piece being disjointed reared their ugly head. Let's talk about the editing process.

Let's take a look at the four main items that I want to change or alter in a fairly dramatic way:

Figure 12.32 – Four main areas I want to address before going to the final render

For clarity (and speed!), let's quickly review what my thoughts are on these four areas, plus what my plan is to refine them before moving forward with the piece:

- **A**: While this tower can be a great, hi-tech focal point, I think that this is prime real estate in our composition (as it is at a Rule of Thirds intersection and a large focal point of the overall piece). Since it is of primary importance, I think it should fit more thematically with the idea of dragons, so I'm thinking of adding a rock-based "dragon head" monument of sorts, almost acting like a statue of a fallen dragon from legends of old in our imaginary world.
- **B**: For this area, while I like the idea of a physical "landing pad," I do feel like this idea is a little too ordinary. What if we took these more stoic shapes and added a bit of chaotic energy? Instead of a rigid, flat surface, what if there were more curves and pivots in different directions, almost like a tree trunk and some massive tree limbs? This may be a bit too "out there" for our imaginary art director, but since this is a concept art piece, it's a perfect time to experiment! Throw ideas at the proverbial wall – you'll never know what sticks!
- **C**: I need to adjust the darks and lights in this portion. While the idea of a flat plateau of rock for our structure to sit upon is a neat one, I think that if we're moving more toward a "massive statue" dedicated to a legendary dragon, we should emphasize the size of this monument by removing a plane change.
- **D**: Once again, if we're thinking of changing the motif of our left-most structure to a monument, we should probably make the head of it the focal point and remove anything that may take away from that. I love the design of this little doodad (it almost looks like a viewing room that you would see in a lighthouse or the Space Needle in Seattle, Washington), but it may not fit if we're shifting gears.

Let's go ahead and make some of these adjustments with some darker line art, almost as if we're taking notes on our composition:

1. Create a new layer and name it `Notes and Changes`.
2. Choose a simple brush that you feel comfortable using as a "sketching" brush. I will be using the **b) Basic-6 Details** brush from the **Digital** subcategory.
3. Using pure black, draw very rough changes you would like to integrate into your piece.
4. If there's anything you would like to *remove* from your piece, go ahead and *change your brush's color* to *red* (as we'll be "red-lining" or "red-inking" things we want to remove, just like a copy editor on a piece of writing).

You can see my (very rough) sketching and red-lining pass in the following figure:

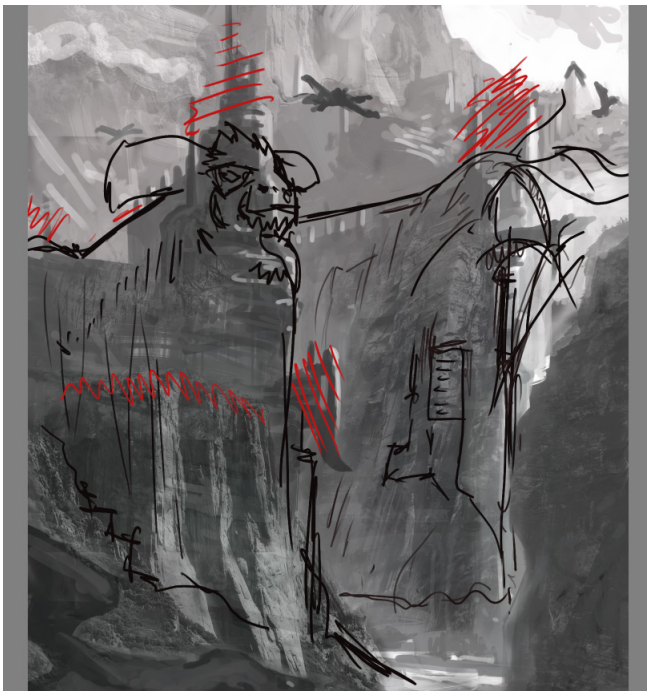


Figure 12.33 – Our Notes and Changes layer using black for changes and red for removal (with a grayscale background for clarity)

I've removed the unnecessary portions of the buildings and structures that would be taking away interest from our changes. We want to drive home the otherworldly nature of what we're making, so letting those new assets shine would be in our best interest.

Before we start rendering, let's integrate these changes quickly by using a basic brush, color picking, and doing some edge refinement.

5. Create a new layer and name it `Implementing Changes`.
6. Find a nice brush to block in some new shapes. I will go back to using my trusty **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush for this one.
7. In the areas you would like to *remove*, color pick some colors around these areas (for instance, since we're removing the tall tower on the left of the composition, we can pick a color from the pink mountains around where portion **A** is notated in *Figure 12.32*).

8. Remove these items by *painting over them with the nearby colors* you have selected. Since your **Notes and Changes** layer is still active, simply paint over the portions you have marked in *red*.

   You can see my removal process in the following figure:

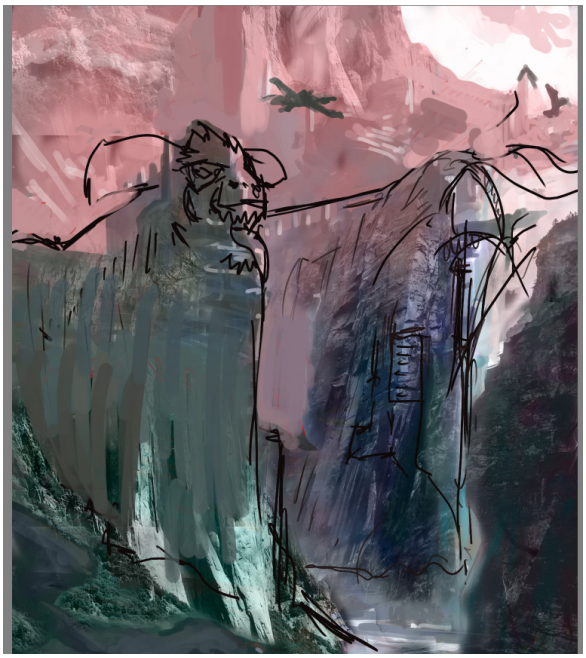


Figure 12.34 – Our removal phase color picking and painting over our red-marked edits from our Notes and Changes layer

   As you can tell, this is already reading a little more clearly! Now, let's take this same idea and block in the new items we want to add.

9. Make sure you're still on your **Implementing Changes** layer.
10. Using your same brush (I still have my **b) Basic-2 Opacity** brush selected), use the same color-picking technique, but pick the colors of the items you're *adding into*. (For instance, we can color pick from the remnants of our left-most structure and mountain to *fill in* the rest of our dragon's head.)
11. Go ahead and *continue blocking in your new material*. It is up to you whether you'd prefer to keep the black outlines from your **Notes and Changes** layer intact. For clarity of following along and seeing my steps, I'm going to keep mine intact for you. Remember, we'll be painting over these anyway during our main render pass!

> **Keeping Things Interesting**
>
> As a quick tip (and to ease the rendering steps momentarily), feel free to slightly shift your hues and colors during this block-in phase. This acts as a "rendering roadmap" of sorts, so anything that you want to add or adjust to aid in the upcoming rendering phase is helpful!

12. Be sure to save (using the *Ctrl* + *S* hotkey) when you're at a good point!

    You can see my blocking-in pass (with the **Notes and Changes** layer's black outlines still mostly intact) in the following figure:

Figure 12.35 – Our Implementing Changes layer, as dictated by painting over our Notes and Changes layer

Ahhh, that's better! It feels a little more open, and a little weirder and more interesting! Also, I'm liking how the "tree trunk" shapes from the right-hand side are starting to point at our other dragons on the right.

I think we're at a pretty good spot now – I'm confident in taking this to the "final" render stage. I put "final" in quotation marks as this isn't necessarily going to be the finished, fully rendered final image that would grace the cover of a magazine or something, but it will be solid enough to turn into our imaginary "art director" to integrate into a mood board. We're keeping everything loose and open-ended but refining our ideas enough to be able to discuss them with our peers for further feedback.

Now, take a break, grab a snack, and do some stretchy yoga moves – we're about to dive into the most time-consuming part of any piece of art, regardless of whether it's a "quick" piece of concept art or a full painting you intend to sell to a gallery for six figures: the rendering phase.

Rendering

As we established in *Chapter 10*, *Enforcing Fundamentals*, rendering can be defined as bringing a painting to a polished finish. You can do this in a variety of ways:

- **Brushes**: Dry brushes for details, hard round brushes for specific drawing, detail, and refining edges, and soft brushes to allow for atmosphere, fog, and softening edges.
- **Edges**: Sharp edges to bring focus, soft edges to lose focus or imply softer forms, and lost edges/painterly edges to bring artistic flair and emotion near focal points.
- **Contrasts**: Repeating shapes, breaking shape patterns, values, complementary colors, and size proportion comparisons such as our dragon versus our mountains, and our rider versus our dragon.

Instead of discussing each step that I will perform regarding fully rendering this piece (as I plan to spend upward of 4 hours doing the rendering pass on this one so that I can maybe refine it further for my portfolio), I want to provide a cheat sheet on the brushes, edge techniques, and contrasts I'm planning to use. Let's look at them in the same order they were mentioned in the previous list:

- **Brushes**: I plan on using the **b) Basic 2-Opacity**, **b) Basic 6-Details**, **d) Ink-1 Precision**, **k) Blender Basic**, **m) RGBA 01 Thick-dry**, **m) RGBA 03 Rake**, and **m) RGBA 05 Impasto Details** brushes as my heavy-hitters, making up a vast majority of my brushwork.
- **Edges**: My mountains, dragons, and architecture will have relatively sharp outlines while having smoother edges within each form. I want the texture of the impasto brushes to allow for a variety of edges where possible (namely, the mountains and ground), and softening edges where I want to bring mist, fog, and clouds to separate planes and lead the eye of the viewer and player.
- **Contrasts**: The red background will work well with our more cyan-inspired foreground, with our midground being a nice transitional gray (with hints of blue and purple). The size comparisons of the dragons will bring a nice sense of scale as we will repeat some general shapes (such as their wings and tails), making the viewer figure out that the dragons are similar.

The following are a few general tips on rendering:

- Be *patient*. The time that's spent during this portion of a piece can be the difference between a good piece of art and a piece of art that will get you noticed/hired/commended by your peers.
- After enough practice, the rendering process can be *relaxing* instead of stressful. If you are a fan of podcasts, audiobooks, or other audio/video material, you could implement this into your "rendering time," giving you something to preoccupy your mind while you whittle away on the small details of a piece.
- *Stay committed*. The longer you stare at your piece, the more you're going to want it to *be done*. You'll start noticing problems where there are none, you'll start second-guessing your choices, and often, you will feel like the time you are investing isn't going to amount to much. This is where techniques such as "flipping your canvas" (changing your perspective on a piece by flipping the canvas horizontally via **Image** > **Mirror Canvas Horizontally** to notice things in a new way) can be refreshing and useful. Another great strategy? Sleep on it! When you wake up the next day, you may notice exactly what you want to fix or come to the realization that you have a better painting than you thought you did. A win-win!

After about 4 hours of rendering, here's what we have of our Dragon Rider Temple piece so far:

Figure 12.36 – Our piece, "Dragon Rider Temple," after 4 hours of rendering

You'll notice that some *dramatic* changes were made during rendering, namely, to our structures, the rendering of our foreground dragon, and the overall "vibe" of the piece.

For the foreground dragon, I wanted to add a nice, pronounced contrast, leading me to choose a warmer orange color to play against the cyans of the mountain behind it. I also wanted to separate the form of the dragon from the background, so the bright rim light, even if it's not realistic, is an effective tool to achieve this:

Figure 12.37 – The foreground dragon, using complementary colors and rim light to separate forms

I also wanted to develop the structures we added during the *Improving our design sense* section of this chapter to make them feel a little more "alien" in nature, embracing the high-fantasy feel of the dragons by implementing some strange structural brushwork under our dragon head monument while giving our tree-trunk type shapes almost a transparent, ethereal glow-type feel:

Figure 12.38 – The structures, featuring a few new design ideas

We've gotten our piece to a point where we can present it to a committee or art director, and I'm feeling happy with what we have! I feel like it meets the prompt well, but also leaves some room for interpretation and refinement based on feedback from our fictional art director. It's always a good idea to keep an open mind (and an open canvas!) for other ideas that could improve your piece. Never be sacred with your ideas when you're working in a professional pipeline, as anything can be improved with tweaking and feedback! Be confident, work well with others, and you'll have a storied career ahead of you.

To seal this deal, let's do a few of my favorite "finishing touches" – things that will get you a few "oohs and aahs" when your piece comes across a person's timeline or art share.

Applying finishing touches and post-processing

Post-processing can be defined as tweaks that you can make to your image after the fact to further enhance and finalize your image. This can include (but is not limited to) color corrections, level (value) adjustments, light bloom effects, noise filters, and sharpening passes. Let's dig into a few of these, starting with adding some cool light bloom effects.

Creating our light bloom

To add some dramatic flair to our concept design, we can add some cinematic "light bloom" effects, where saturated bright hits of light can be sprinkled about our composition, drawing in our viewers with some fancy contrasts. These are pretty easy to create in Krita and only take a few steps:

1. Grab a nice airbrush (such as **b) Airbrush Soft**) and create a new layer. Name this layer **Light Blooms** and set the blending mode to **Color Dodge**.
2. Choose a color, preferably one that matches a background hue (in our case, maybe a red or gray-purple).
3. Lightly apply some brush strokes around points where you would like light to be "bloomed" or "blown out." This can help draw the eye, but also add a mystical touch to your work. I want to add a few light bloom hits to our upper clouds, as well as the gaps of the canyons with the fog near the ground:

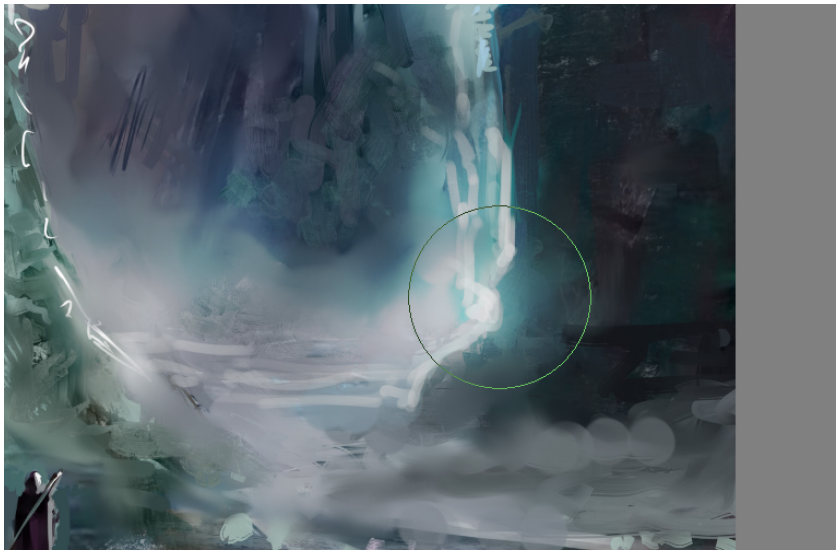


Figure 12.39 – Our "light bloom" effect gives some cool ethereal lighting effects

The most impactful area you can place these light bloom effects in is where a hard edge of a foreground element overlaps with a more atmospheric, out-of-focus background element, as we have in the preceding figure. Experiment with other locations, but *remember to be subtle*! It's just like seasoning on food – a little goes a long way if done properly!

Adjusting colors

We've added some cool lighting, so let's do a quick color correction to get one last look at our colors and how they work together:

1. Create a merged copy of our image on a new layer. Name this new layer `Color Adjustment`.
2. Click **Filter** > **Adjust** > **Color Balance**.
3. From here, make some edits to the **Shadow**, **Midtone**, and **Highlight** tones. Keep in mind the theory of "warm light and cool shadows" or vice versa to guide your decision making. Let's take a look at my image, and the settings I used in the **Color Adjustment** layer:

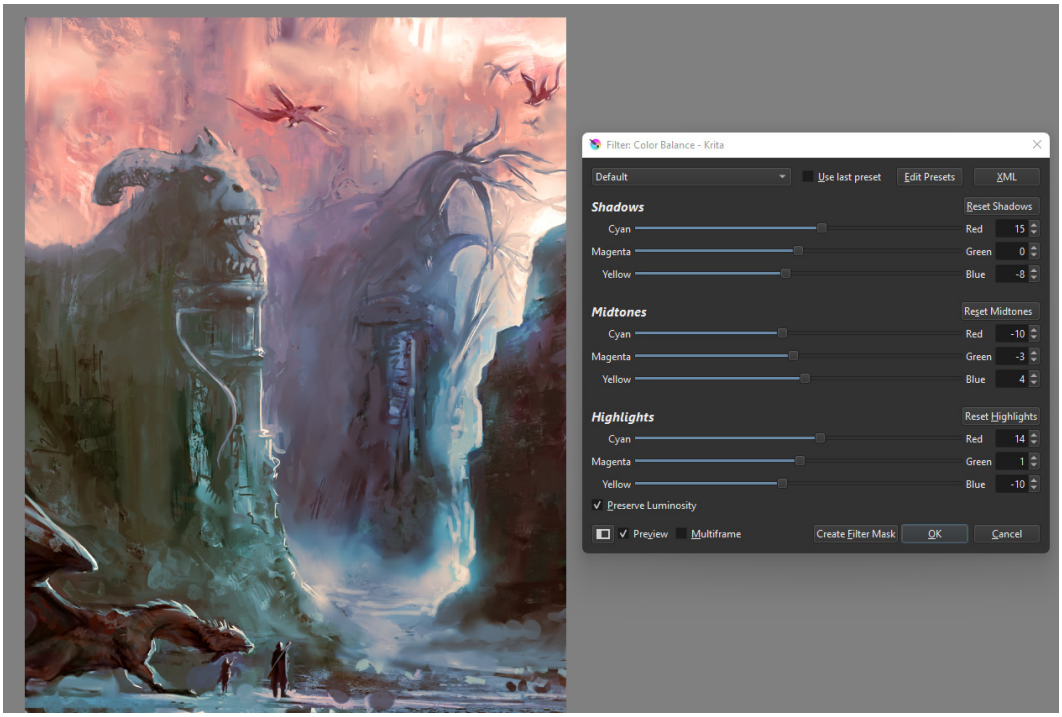


Figure 12.40 – Our image after adjusting its colors with the settings shown

4. The colors are slightly more vibrant, the contrasts became slightly higher, and overall, the piece reads a little better at a distance. Job well done!

There are only two steps left in my normal post-processing ritual, so let's get to them! First, let's run a quick sharpening filter to bring out those brush strokes and edges.

Running a sharpening filter

Using **Sharpen** and **Unsharp Mask** are great ways to bring about clarity and crispness on your edges. Technically speaking, these filters "sharpen" the edges of contrasts on your piece, giving a higher fidelity and increasing contrasts for things such as painterly edges and hard edges. Think of it as "outlining" edges that have the potential to stand out from one another in terms of their composition.

I'm going to run a quick **Unsharp Mask** filter on my **Color Adjustment** layer since this layer already has the full amount of visual information I need as it's a merged copy of the image:

1. With the **Color Adjustment** layer active, click **Filter** > **Enhance** > **Unsharp Mask**.
2. With the **Unsharp Mask** filter (and really, any of the sharpening filters), making a little tweak goes a long way in changing the amount of information that's presented via the filter. You may be tempted to crank the knobs all the way up, but you'll essentially end up with a disaster of pixels, blown-out contrasts, and wild-looking colors.

While making a blown-out, psychedelic pixelated mess might be a cool effect in and of itself, it's not what we're needing for this piece. All we need to do is enhance the clarity of some of our paint strokes and add some crispness to the hard edges, so I'm going to apply just a touch of increase to the **Amount** and **Threshold** properties. The full settings, plus a zoom-in of how it is impacting my edges and brushstrokes, can be seen in the following screenshot:

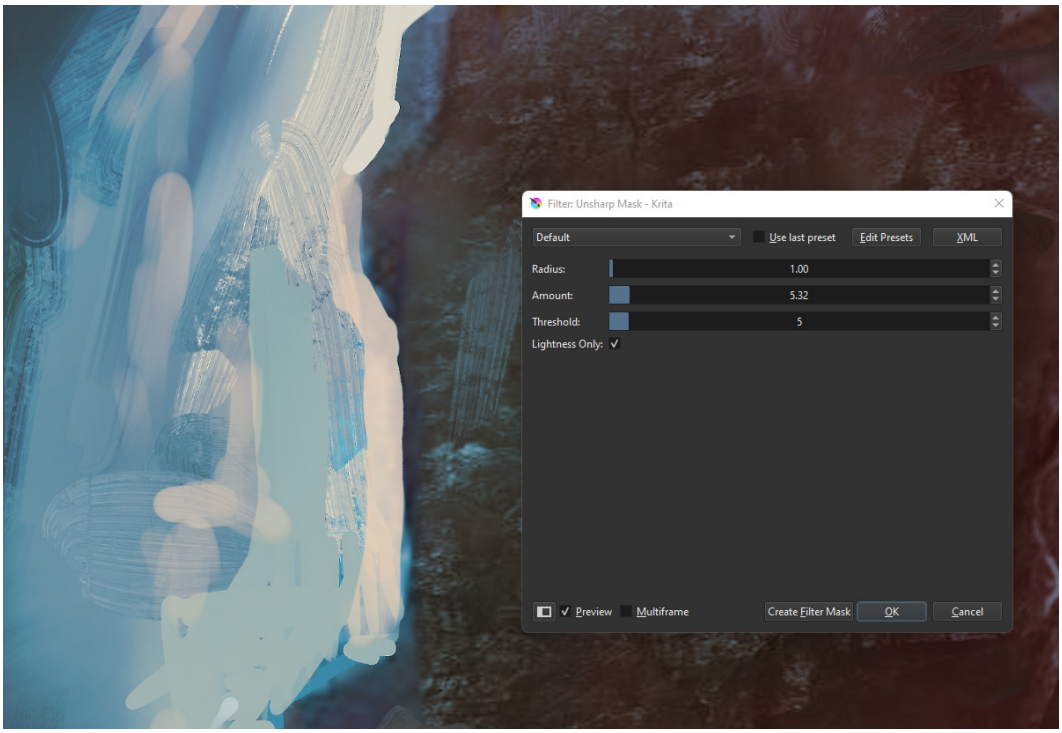


Figure 12.41 – The Unsharp Mask settings, with brushstrokes on the left-hand side for comparison

I always enjoy the look of a nice sharpening mask as it helps accentuate more painterly brushwork. Of course, if you'd like to only have your **Unsharp Mask** impact certain key areas of your piece (which is especially helpful near focal points), you can click **Create Filter Mask** to save these settings into a mask and control visibility that way.

There's one final step that I like to do to "finish" a piece, especially if it goes in my portfolio: adding a noise filter.

Adding a noise filter

Noise (also known as *visual noise*, or sometimes known as *visual static*) can be defined as a special effect that gives your work a more "filmic" look as it adds grainy pixels of red, green, and blue hues to your painting, giving a great approximation of "film grain." It's very easy to do this in Krita, gives you complete control of the effect, and the results look superb! To create a convincing, filmic noise filter, follow these steps:

1. Create a new layer and name it `Film Grain`.
2. Fill this layer with *100% black*. You can either paint this in manually or use the **Fill** bucket tool (the *F* hotkey) with black set as your foreground color.
3. Once the full black has been applied to your **Film Grain** layer, click **Filter** > **Other** > **Random Noise**.
4. A window will appear, and you will immediately see the black canvas fill up with red, green, and blue "static" pixels of noise. The default value for **Level** is 50, but I'm going to lower it to 26. I'm also going to keep **Opacity** at **99** as I'll be controlling the opacity of this layer manually momentarily:

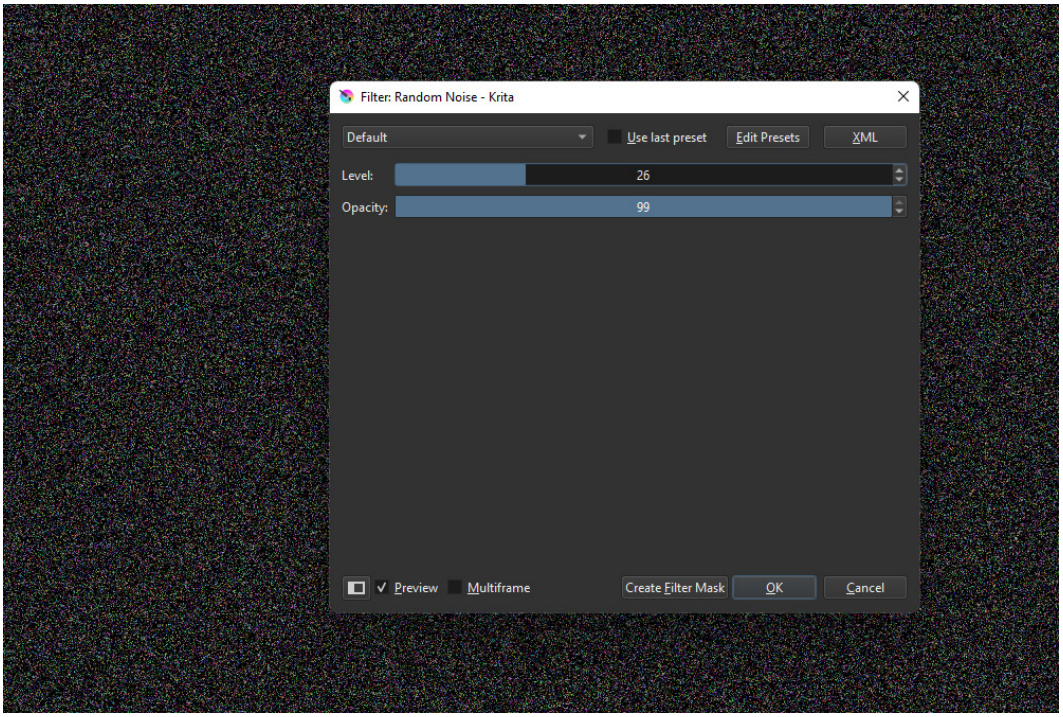


Figure 12.42 – Our Random Noise settings on our black Film Grain layer

5. Once you're happy with your settings, click **OK**.
6. Now, for the magic! Change the **Blending Mode** setting of your **Film Grain** layer to **Screen**. This will remove the black and lighten the noise pixels.
7. Lower the **Opacity** setting of your **Film Grain** layer to around *30%*.

   As you zoom in, you'll still see the clarity and sharpness of your brushstrokes (due to the **Unsharp Mask** filter we ran), but everything will "mix" well as the noise gently softens the colors to be more harmonious (since all of the colors are now impacted by the red, green, and blue noise pixels evenly, acting as a "*mother color*" of sorts).

   And there we have it! A successful, portfolio-ready piece of concept art that you can wow your friends, colleagues, and potential employers with! You've used all of the tips and tricks you've learned from the book thus far and integrated all of the lessons into one giant project that you can be proud of:

Figure 12.43 – Our completed concept art piece, "Dragon Rider Temple"

Woohoo, congratulations! This is a piece you should feel proud to show off, and hopefully, it successfully integrated and got you to practice a lot of the topics we've covered in this book. Feel free to continue with this piece, make further refinements, or start a new concept art piece from scratch using the methods we've covered!

You're only limited by your imagination and should have a solid understanding of Krita and many of its bells and whistles to make your artistic journey more rewarding, more capable, and, honestly, just more fun!

Summary

Wow, what *didn't* we do in this chapter? You started with nothing more than a blank canvas and a few general layout ideas, and ended up with a portfolio-ready piece of concept art, completely from your imagination!

We discussed using our tools and knowledge (namely our ideas of *perspective*, and some layout aids in the form of our *Golden Ratio* image and our **Grid and Guides** setup to do a proper *Rule of Thirds*) to make a strong start. Then, we discussed the power of *values* and *shape language* to build a few basic, but visually appealing, thumbnails to compare with one another. After that, we covered the all-important task of *looking at our work objectively* and learning some skills to help us in making the best choice between images when we are faced with multiple compositional options for a project.

Once we decided on our favorite thumbnail, we made some edits to colors and shapes to find a nice middle ground to keep the best of each of our two thumbnails. Then, we covered the act of rendering and finalizing a painting while staying loose and open with our decision making.

Finally, we learned how to "finalize" our image, bringing some great special effects such as light blooms, film noise, and sharpened paint strokes to the forefront to showcase what we've learned throughout this book.

Needless to say, I'm very proud of how far you've come and how your understanding of Krita (and digital image making in general) has hopefully graduated leaps and bounds since the beginning of our journey together.

You know what they say, all good things must come to an end, and in *Chapter 13*, *Going beyond These Pages*, we will bring this book to a close. We will cover things you should keep in mind during your journey in visual arts, as well as ways you can work on your artistic weaknesses. I'll also provide some recommendations on further reading and communities to be a part of and discuss the single most important rule of all visual art…

See you shortly!

13
Going beyond These Pages

We've made it! Congratulations if you've been following along step by step, project by project! If you're using this book as a general reference, I hope that each time you picked it up, you found what you were looking for! For this final chapter, I wanted to bring this experience to a close with some general tips for artistic improvement, give some shout-outs to other Packt Publishing books that may enhance your abilities in digital drawing and painting, and give a few platitudes for you to remember on your lifelong artistic journey.

In this chapter, we will cover the following topics:

- Finding your niche – what Krita can do for you
- Working on your weaknesses – exercises for artistic growth
- Reading recommendations – where should you go from here?
- Remembering the single most important rule of art

Throughout this chapter, instead of tutorial images, I'll be sharing some images from my portfolio, featuring both client and personal work. Let's get started by discussing Krita's capabilities and how they can shape your journey as a digital artist.

Technical requirements

For this chapter, you may want to prepare the following:

- Your favorite drink
- A nice pile of snacks
- A comfortable place to sit

Finding your niche – what Krita can do for you

Throughout this book, we went through three different project styles:

- A basic landscape to learn about layers, blending modes, and color splashing
- A still-life study, bringing a traditional artistic approach to a digital art project
- A piece of imaginative concept art using all the skills we've learned throughout this book as a "capstone" project to go into a portfolio

The projects were set up in this way to give you a range of experiences and working styles within Krita.

> **Where's the Animation Stuff?**
>
> I also know that Krita has some *incredible* animation tools, but as I'm not an animator by profession or by hobby, I didn't feel comfortable giving advice for that art medium in this book. In this chapter, I'll provide a link to a fantastic Krita community that has a wide range of artists from multiple disciplines, including all of the animation tips and tricks you could ever want!

I'm a digital painter, illustrator, and art instructor by profession, so that's where the focus lay with these projects. I'm hopeful that each project provided a few problem-solving techniques that can be used for your projects, whether they match the "style" of what we did together here in this book or not.

Krita's strength is in its versatility, and it's a piece of software that can (and *will*) grow alongside you and your skills. Every time I open up Krita, I'm surprised by how well it can handle pretty much anything I throw at it. Photobashing, traditional-style painting, even graphic designing thumbnails for videos or websites – Krita doesn't break a sweat. As shown in the following figure, I wanted to do a vibrant color study with loose brushwork in a mishmash hybrid style of three of my art idols – Anders Zorn, Craig Mullins, and Joaquin Sorolla:

Figure 13.1 – A loose-brush color study in the style of Anders Zorn, Craig Mullins, and Joaquin Sorolla

I highly recommend finding your artistic niche and tailoring Krita to be your powerhouse toolbox for that craft. Do you have a huge interest in doing art for video games or books? Card games? Traditional-style portrait painting? Children's books? Television commercials? Fashion design? No matter what your goals (whether professional or hobbyist), find your preferred workflow in Krita and make it happen. Trust me, as we discussed previously, Krita can keep up with us no matter what we throw at it and its flexibility is second to none in customizing your perfect workspace.

Another benefit of Krita's versatility is, let's say you want to change your niche or dabble in a different style altogether. Since Krita has so many features, the only investment you need to make to change up your artistic goals is the time and dedication it would take to learn the new workflow. Once you know the ropes of Krita, the custom UIs, and your favorite brushes and tools, you'll be amazed at how fast you will learn new mediums.

Speaking of, let's talk about a few key exercises you can perform to improve your overall artistic skillset.

Working on your weaknesses – exercises for artistic growth

This section is going to be very short but will cover a few very dense topics that you can study (using either this book, other Packt books, or online resources) to improve your art skills. I will put my top three recommended exercises in bullet-point form, as they're not long or difficult to describe:

- **Draw basic shapes intersecting with other shapes**: As I get more and more work in the industry, I'm noticing that the fundamental of "shapes on shapes," or 3D shapes (such as a cube with a sphere or cone on top, in various perspectives) intersecting with one another, makes up at least 85% of the problem-solving in concept art, key art, and marketing art. The following is an example of this:

Figure 13.2 – A mountain painting, focusing on "shapes within shapes" to show light and form

I focused primarily on how different shapes of rock could protrude out of a mountain, and the different ways they could catch fantastical light. Believability in how shapes relate to each other is *the* job, and exercises that help you define basic forms will improve your art dramatically in a small amount of time.

- **Master studies**: Find your favorite artist and do a master study. This can be a study of their brushwork, their composition, their values, or a one-to-one, stroke-by-stroke recreation of one of their pieces. I always feel like I make huge improvements after I do a master study, as I get the experience of solving similar problems that my art heroes have, and I get to understand why they made certain decisions. For instance, I learned a lot from this painting study of a marble statue:

Figure 13.3 – A master study of a statue, focusing on edge control and brushwork

Transferring one artistic medium into another is a great way to further your understanding of both.

- **Still life**: There's a reason we included a still-life project in this book! While a lot of people may find these mundane or boring, I've had an immense amount of success by taking my time doing still-life studies. What's so powerful about this is that you can focus on getting a photo-realistic likeness of your still-life, or you can use it as an excuse to try brand-new mediums within Krita (such as gouache, watercolor, ink on board, or charcoal). You can even improve your traditional art chops in this way as well!

There is a ton of exercises, techniques, and foundational skills you can practice to improve your artistic skills. Don't limit yourself to only trying one thing – the power of working in a digital format is how fast you can experiment with things such as color, sizes, techniques, and formats. As proof, here's a true blast to the past: my first main attempt at "photobashing," circa 2019, using Krita and a busted-up old Wacom tablet I had owned since 2006:

Figure 13.4 – An old photobash painting, circa 2019! *Wipes tears* Man, we grow up so fast!

With the flexibility of Krita, I had the confidence to try my hand at a technique I had only dreamed about learning, and now look – I'm writing a book on the topic! It's crazy what possibilities decent tools can open up for you!

On that same point, I'd like to do a shout-out to two other books from Packt Publishing that you may enjoy, and are perfect supplements to this book if you want to improve your overall comfort and understanding of creating digital art.

Reading recommendations – where should you go from here?

I'm honored to be one of the first (if not *the* first!) authors for Packt to cover Krita! That being said, there are a few other authors that have done *incredible* work discussing a few other programs you may be interested in learning as a digital artist:

- *Learn Clip Studio Paint – Third Edition*, by *Inko Ai Takita* and *Liz Staley*: This book covers another great digital art platform, Clip Studio Paint! They cover creating comics, using 3D figures and objects to create line art, color palettes, and more. This is a natural successor to this book if you wish to further your understanding of the craft!
- *Mastering Adobe Photoshop Elements 2022 – Fourth Edition*, by *Robin Nichols*: If you're interested in the Adobe suite of products, there's no better primer for Photoshop than Robin's, in my opinion. You'll go deep into digital art mainstays such as metadata, keywords, backing up your media, some advanced drawing and painting techniques, and more. It's a true masterclass that's highly recommended!

I suggest taking a good look at what Packt has to offer since I learned how to program JavaScript thanks to some of their books! That feels like a lifetime ago – before I went full-time as an artist… But, as they say, that's for another book, ha!

Now, all joking aside, it's time to bring this book to a close. I want to leave you with some motivational, "artist guardian angel" advice that has served me well, as well as teaching you the single most important rule for all visual art. Yes, I'm being serious.

Remembering the single most important rule of art

Before we cover the "single most important rule of visual art," I want to give you a few choice things to think about:

- **Done is better than perfect**: You've probably heard the saying "quality is better than quantity." While I agree with the sentiment, I think quality *and* quantity will make you *that much better*. Defeat your instinct of being a perfectionist – it's self-defeating in nature. I would rather say you make 30 "okay" pieces of art, rather than one "great" piece that took you 30 times as long to make as the others. Why? I'd be willing to bet that after the 30 "okay" pieces, you'll be more confident in your skills, you will have solved more problems successfully, and the quality of your last few pieces will be *better* than your "great" piece that took you 30 times as long. Work hard, and work often. You've got this.

- **Your voice matters**: There is only one you. I've seen many incredible creators stop their hobby or their passion outright because they feel they're "not good enough," or "not adding anything of value" to the craft they're looking to learn. Keep this in mind: you are the only you that has ever, and *will ever*, exist. There's nobody that can tell your story the way you can, nobody can express ideas in the same way as you, and the world is a better place because you're in it. We want to hear stories from others – that's how we grow as a people. The world needs more creation and less destruction, so don't be afraid to put yourself out there.
- **Fail fast and fail often**: The only way to get better at something is to be bad at it first. Art, just like any other tangible skill, can be learned. Think about this: can you drive a car? Can you ride a bike? Have you learned a language or the rules of a game or sport? Before you knew how to do these skills… you didn't know how to do them! I know it sounds obvious, but the point is this – be kind to yourself, show yourself grace during the learning process, and allow yourself to fail fast and often. You learn from your mistakes and failures, and the beauty of working in digital art is how fast and often you're able to fail. Make it a habit: you have to get *through* the bad paintings to get *to* the good ones.
- **If you don't like it, change it**: On the same line of thought as our previous point, the fact that we are creating works of art in a digital format allows us a lot of liberties regarding changing and editing something we may be working on. If you're ever in a rut when it comes to a project you're making, take some time away to get a refreshed perspective. When in doubt, sleep on it, or take a break to play your favorite game or do one of your favorite hobbies. You'll return with a "new tank of gas" in your creative tank and be ready to tackle problem-solving in a more coherent way. Save many variations of a piece, save often, and know that you can always change something that's not working. Digital art – isn't it *awesome*?

Now, without further ado, let's discuss the single most important rule of visual art. If you take nothing else from this book, take this next sentence, post it up on a placard in your home or office, and think about it every day:

If it looks good, it is good.

That's it. That's all there is to it. If you find a workflow in Krita that works well for you, that breaks every single rule or lesson I taught in this book, but you like the look of what you created, then you've succeeded as an artist.

If it looks good, it is good.

When you make your biggest strides in your work and "level up" your skills, you're going to notice new ways to solve problems and add emotion to your work. You'll be excited to crank out new stuff, apply for those art jobs, and even hang your art in your own home. While you go through the learning, the successes, and the failures, you'll always return to the number one rule.

If it looks good, it *is* good.

When you make art for loved ones, make emotional art to get through hard times, apply your skills by teaching a family member what you know, win awards for your work, seal a contract with that dream client, or take a 12-year break from not so much as *picking up a pencil* before being pulled back into your calling (guilty as charged here), when you return to the craft, there's only one rule that matters.

If it looks good…

It *is* good.

I'll leave you with something I always say to my students once they graduate from a mentorship or semester with me:

Go make cool art.

Summary

In this chapter, we discussed how Krita can grow alongside your artistic growth, some key exercises to always level up your skills, some amazing books from Packt to further your learning, and a few rules and motivational ideas to take with you far beyond these pages.

I want to take this final moment to personally thank *you*. Thank you not only for taking a chance on this book but also for adding your artistic voice to the world. As I said previously, I think creation always defeats destruction, and your creative voice has made an impact on the world for the better. Thank you so much for allowing me to be part of your artistic journey – I'm honored.

I'm rooting for you – know that you always have an art guardian angel in me, and know that you have what it takes to make your dreams come true, too.

With great power comes great responsibility, and I can't wait to see the art you create that changes the world.

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Hi!

I am Wesley Gardner, author of Draw and Paint Better with Krita. I really hope you enjoyed reading this book and found it useful for increasing your productivity and efficiency in Krita.

It would really help me (and other potential readers!) if you could leave a review on Amazon sharing your thoughts on Draw and Paint Better with Krita here.

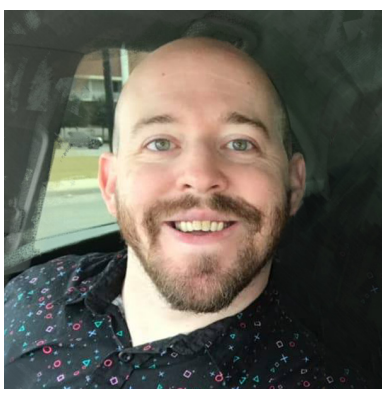
Go to the link below or scan the QR code to leave your review:

`https://packt.link/r/1801071764`

Your review will help me to understand what's worked well in this book, and what could be improved upon for future editions, so it really is appreciated.

Best Wishes,

-WesG



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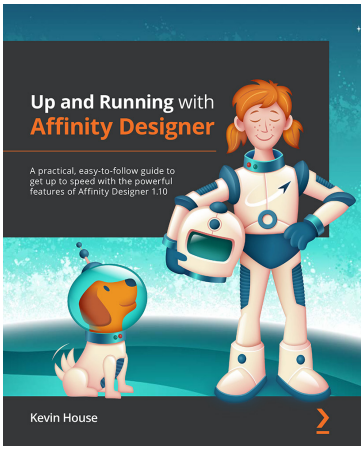

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