

➔ DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION WITH ADOBE PHOTOSHOP

AN ILLUSTRATION TUTORIAL FOR THOSE OF US WHO CAN'T DRAW

In this tutorial I will let you in on some concepts and approaches that I have employed in the illustration above and teach you how to achieve that look.

So, have you ever wandered through those seemingly endless image galleries with amazing illustrations out there in the Internet and suddenly started hating yourself for not having picked up the pencil at age five and becoming a gifted illustrator? If you answer to this question is somewhere in the general area of “yes”, I will try to let you in on some techniques that will enable you to create

amazing results without ever having to pick up a real pencil or brush (though I did employ my WACOM-tablet, it is not required if you know how to handle your mouse). Luckily, modern software has supplied us with enough tools to take a “shortcut” here and there to achieve a look that would otherwise have required years of experience and dedication. So, let's plunge in...

TIME NEEDED

about 3 hours


SKILLS REQUIRED

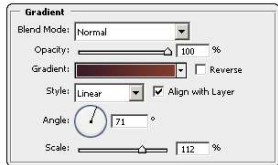
I will try to explain as much as possible in detail but basic knowledge of Photoshop's functions and it's concepts of use are a precondition for completing this tutorial

ABOUT

Patrik Hübner is a web-designer and digital illustrator currently working out of Paderborn, Germany.


Find out more at www.madpotato.de

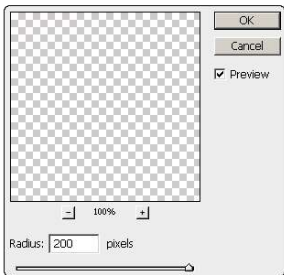
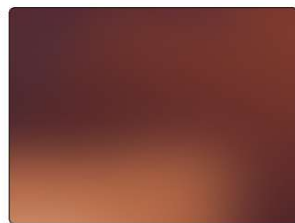
1 Go ahead and create a new document with your desired resolution. In this example we will use a resolution of 2048x1536. Create a new rectangle  that is the size of your image and will serve as a background-plane. Choose *Blending Options...* and create a *gradient overlay* with #3d1c27 as your foreground- and #803a2d as your background-color. Choose



an angle of 71 degrees and a scale of 112%. Already at this stage you should think about keeping everything organized - so go ahead and create a folder by the name of

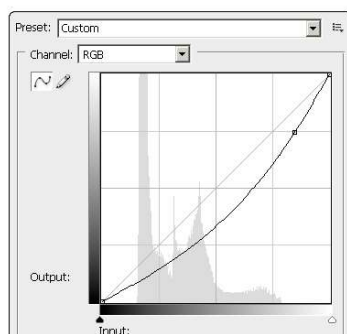
background or something alike and place the plane (name that too - it WILL make your life easier) in that folder.

2 To spice up the background-gradient with some more color variations, choose a soft round brush around the size of  450px with the color of #c88661 selected as your foreground color. Create a new layer (*Shift+Ctrl+N*) and paint



away in the lower left area of your canvas. To make the new layer blend smoothly into the rest of the background, use the *Gaussian Blur*-filter (*Filter→Blur→Gaussian Blur...*) at a radius of 200 pixels. Repeat those steps with another layer in the upper left area and a foreground color of #452b3c - you might also want to choose a slightly smaller brush size. (Hope you remembered to name those layers as this is the last time I'll be reminding you of that...)

3 This step is purely optional! To further alter / dramatize the colors, add a *Curves*-layer and alter the *RGB*- (or any other) color-channel to fit your needs.



If you don't want to use a dynamic *Curves*-layer, alternatively select the three background-layers and merge (*Ctrl+E*) them. After that you can alter the colors of the background-layer permanently by adding an *Adjustment-Curve* (*Image→Adjustments→Curves...*) or pressing *Ctrl+M*.

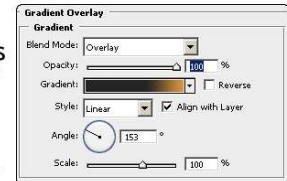
4 Ok, not bad, we got ourselves a nice background to start from. Now it's time to bring our subject into the game. I used a 3D-render that I had previously modelled and rendered in a satisfactory resolution but this tutorial will work equally well on any photo that you want to


transform into a digital illustration. Go ahead and cut out your subject and place it on a new layer inside of your document.

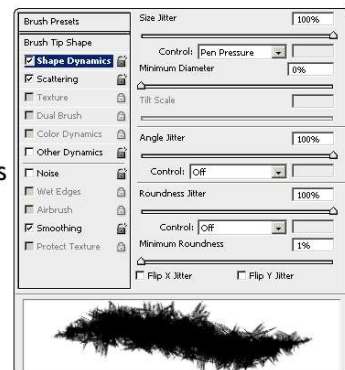
If you have employed a 3D-renderer simply select the alpha-mask (that you have hopefully told the application to create for you) inside of your image. If you want to cut out parts of a photo, use the *Polygonal Lasso-Tool* or the *Pen-Tool*. If you have trouble getting satisfactory results in cutting out your image, please read up on the subject - there are many fine step-by-step-tutorials out there that should get you started!



5 Well, she isn't exactly a beauty, now is she? So let's go fix that and explore one of those "shortcuts" that Photoshop offers to turn just about any average image into something way more appealing. Open the *Blending Options...* dialog of the layer that holds your subject and add a Gradient Overlay with *black* as your foreground- and #df983b as your background color. Set the *Blend Mode* to *Overlay* and select an angle of 153 degrees. Pay attention to the fact how the black darkens your subject while the yellow gives it a more vivid look.

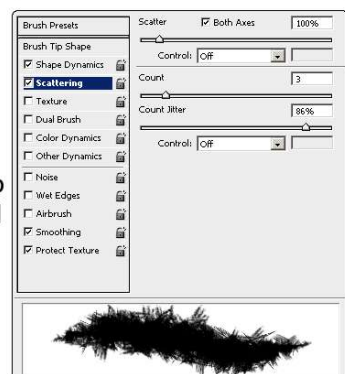



6 Now it's time to make ourselves a nice brush! Select the *Brush-Tool* and then the  *Chalk brush*. Open your brush-settings and modify the brush to fit these settings. The *Pen Pressure* control will allow for smoother transitions (especially on your WACOM if you own one) while the other settings guarantee a degree of randomness that we'll be wanting in the next step.



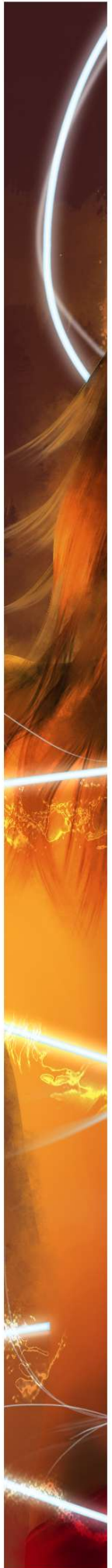
If you're done setting up your brush go ahead and save it for later use.

Alright, ready for the next "shortcut" to creating a nice piece of art?



7 The reason why you have just created that brush is, that you're now able to use it with your  *Smudge*-tool to create texture-variations and that speckled brush-style.

Duplicate your layer containing the subject twice and name the three layers something like *Subject_Bottom*, *Subject_Middle* and *Subject_Top*.



Hide the layers *Subject_Middle* and *Subject_Top* and start using your *Smudge*-tool with a size of around 100px with a movement that goes away from your subject. Try to create nice textures and different layers of depth by using different brush-sizes. You can actually go wild and smudge away as we will pay more attention to preserving the details of the woman on the *Subject_Top*-layer later on.



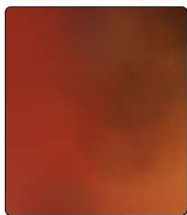
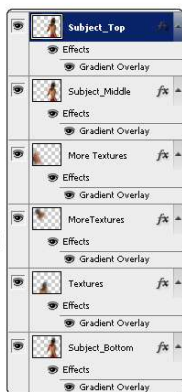
Notice how you are slowly building up a nice foundation of appealing textures and pay attention to parts that seem overly exaggerated or not smudged at all.

8 Unhide your layer *Subject_Middle* and repeat the smudging with a slightly smaller brush, again varying the brush-size to create depth.



Finally unhide your layer *Subject_Top* and continue to smudge with a small brush, paying attention to preserving the details and merging the silhouette with the textures that you created in the steps above. Now, that's already much better than the original 3d-image we started with, isn't it?

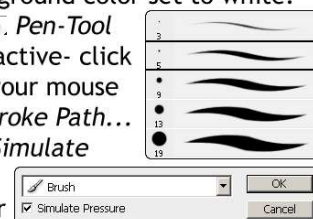
9 Before we add the special effects let's add some more textures to the background so that it blends in better with the overall design of the image. To do that you will now exaggerate the smudging effect that we've used before: Duplicate any of your *Subject_*-layers (*Ctrl+J*) and smudge it with a large brush (400px and upwards) until all that remains is pure texture without any trace of the subject. (You can of course use any other image as well for this but make sure your colors match your overall composition.) I repeated this process two more times until my canvas was filled with enough appealing textures. Now, place the layers below *Subject_Middle* and *Subject_Top*. Remember to use different brush sizes to create the effect of depth in your textures and that this step -and how many layers you'll have to create- depends on your subject and empty space that you wish to fill!



10 It's special-effect-time! Let's start by adding some nice vector-lines like the one to your right to create a sense of movement and of course to add some more eye-candy to the image.

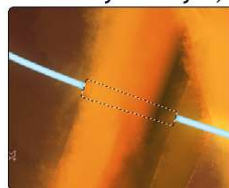


You could now go ahead and grab any of those great brush-packs out there but I prefer creating these things myself as it allows me to create patterns that are as large as I might require them to be (many brush-packs offer resolutions of 1000px and less which most of the time are not suitable for print-projects). Grab your *Pen-Tool* and make sure it is set to *Path*. Draw any line you would like to see on your image and select the *Brush-Tool* with a hard brush of a diameter of around 5px and your foreground color set to white.



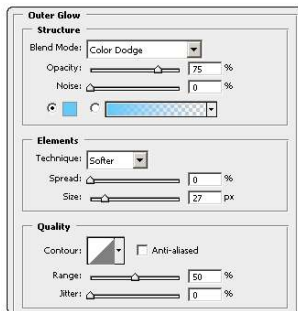
Now switch back to the *Pen-Tool* and -with your path still active- click with the right button of your mouse on the path and select *Stroke Path...* Check the box that says *Simulate Pressure* to make the beginning and end of your stroke thinner. To further enhance the effect of the vector-line you can also apply a minimal amount of blur (don't just experiment with the *Gaussian Blur!*). Finally, set the blend-mode of the layer to *Overlay* and remove the path. Repeat this step with different vectors until you are satisfied with the results.

11 Ok, now it's time to add that beam of energy around our lovely lady. Use your *Pen-Tool* to draw a path like the one to your right. Repeat the steps of step 10 (new layer → select brush → select pen → *Stroke Path...* → *Simulate Pressure*) with a brush-size of around 10px. You should now have created a nice looking, spirally white line around the lady. To create the illusion of the line disappearing behind the arms of our lady, add a *Layer-Mask* to your layer, use your *Polygonal-Lasso-Tool* to select the areas you want to remove from the line and finally fill the selection with black (make sure you have your *Layer-Mask* selected when doing that).

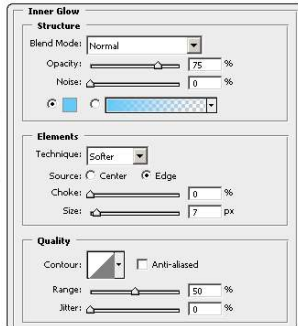


Finally we'll add both an *Inner*- and *Outer-Glow* to the layer by double-clicking the spirally layer or selecting *Blending Options...* from the layer's context-menu.

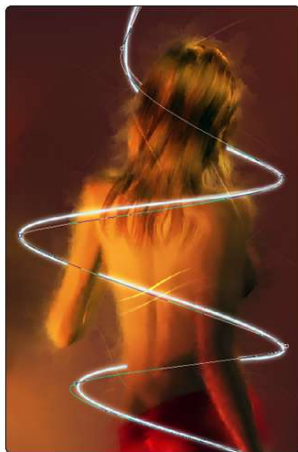
Use the settings to your right to modify the appearance of your layer. The blue color has a color code of #64caf9 but you can -of course- use any other color as well. Pay attention to the *Blend Mode* of the *Outer Glow* as this is especially important.



Once you have set up your layer, duplicate it (*Ctrl+J*), select *Clear Layer Style* from the duplicated layer's context menu and use the *Gaussian Blur* with a strength of around 6-10px to add an even intensified glow-effect to the energy beam.



12 To spice it up a notch, we're also going to add another, alternative stroke to add a secondary layer of movement. Use a smaller brush-size with an *Opacity Setting* of 50% and repeat the stroking process.

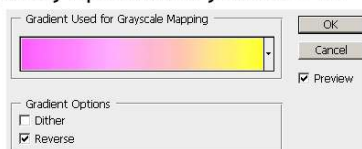


It would also be nice to have some form of sparkles or debris to support the vividness of the energy beam. You could again employ brushes or refer to step 10 for information on how to add random vector shapes or sparkles but we're going to use a different approach to generate a vivid, generative beam: The *Displace-Filter*. Duplicate the first energy beam you created (the one with the layer style), remove the *Layer Style*, select *Filter* → *Distort* → *Displace...* and set a value of 50 for both the *Horizontal* and *Vertical Scale*. Photoshop will now ask you to select a displacement map - select AEIKO001.PSD (cp. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT / SOURCES / FURTHER READING) and -when you are satisfied with the results- change the *Blend Mode* of the layer to *Overlay*.



Duplicate the first energy beam you created (the one with the layer style), remove the *Layer Style*, select *Filter* → *Distort* → *Displace...* and set a value of 50 for both the *Horizontal* and *Vertical Scale*. Photoshop will now ask you to select a displacement map - select AEIKO001.PSD (cp. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT / SOURCES / FURTHER READING) and -when you are satisfied with the results- change the *Blend Mode* of the layer to *Overlay*.

13 This final step is purely optional! If you want to make final adjustments to the overall feel of the image and / or create several color schemes, simply add a *Gradient Map Adjustment Layer*.



➔ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, SOURCES & FURTHER READING

- An up-to-date version of this tutorial and any previously published versions can be found at my portfolio over at <http://www.madpotato.de>
- Step 11 has been heavily inspired by Luxa's tutorial "Electrifying Energy Beams" which presents even more ideas and insight on how to further enhance your energy beam: http://luxa.org/tutorial_electrifying_energy_beams.php
- The displacement map AEIKO001.psd required in step 12 is available from: <http://files.filefront.com/AEIKO001psd/;5412515;/fileinfo.html>

The displacement map was originally included on a CD of the creative magazine computerArts - <http://computerarts.co.uk> - and it's licensing status is unknown to me - if you want to market your results, do check out if there are any limitations!

- If you had trouble cutting out your image in step 4, consider checking out this tutorial on how to use your *Pen Tool* to cut out images: <http://www.melissaclifton.com/tutorial-pentool2.html>
- The overall design of this tutorial has been heavily inspired by computerArts' large collection of extremely informative tutorials - if you've enjoyed this tutorial you're going to love theirs: <http://computerarts.co.uk>

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Patrik Hübner - digital illustrator and webdesigner
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