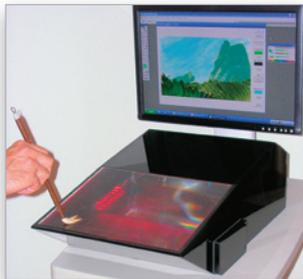


reviews

Get the inside scoop on all the latest Photoshop gear

OptiPaint Review by Sherry London

Use real brushes to paint into the computer



"You can even finger-paint on this device!"

PRICE:	\$2,495
FOR:	Windows
FROM:	Light Strokes
PHONE:	415-272-7506
WEB:	www.optipaint.com
RATING:	◆◆◆◆◇

I've never had as much fun on the computer as when I used the new Light Strokes OptiPaint system. I could fulfill my fantasy about block printing and watercolor work without the lengthy cleanup and mess. And, oh yes, you get to play in water too!

You can use sponges, string, almost anything you can think of that you can wet and that won't scratch the surface of the plexiglass input area. You can even finger-paint on this device! There's a camera inside that takes pictures of the wet areas left by objects and brushes as you paint. And if you don't like your painting, you can rub the Undo control back and forth until you find the place to which you want to revert.

OptiPaint, invented and produced by Richard Greene of Light Strokes, works by being able to capture any white or light-colored wet object that makes contact with its surface. If you can picture your Wacom tablet turned into clear plexiglass and housed in a container that's a bit bigger than a consumer model flatbed scanner but about twice as high, you have a bit of an idea about this unit.

Brushes, sponges, tissues, and string

It took a while to get used to this system as I found it very hard to predict where I was going to paint; but it got easier as I gained experience. I discovered that I could place something on the painting area and see a video overlay of the location onscreen while the

unit wasn't painting. That way, I could first place the objects while the unit wasn't recording and then press Start. The device would record the sponge locations until I pressed Stop. Then I removed the sponges and wiped down the unit.

The best thing is being able to use real brushes and other physical objects with OptiPaint. I tried shaped sponges, then a cut-up kitchen sponge, then I twisted a tissue into a circular roll and tried that. I also used some string and fine yarns—all dipped in water—and was able to make creative drips and splatters. And at a low opacity, the brushstrokes created a very natural watercolor wash. I really had a blast!

Important facts

The OptiPaint software is a plug-in to most Photoshop filter-compatible hosts. You can paint in Solid, Texture, or Blur mode. But the unit isn't all fun and games: It's expensive—\$2,495 + \$95 shipping and handling—and it takes up a lot of desk space—

13.25" (W) x 23" (L) x 7.6" (H). The device can only work with an 800x600-pixel area at a time and the software currently works in Windows only and only accepts 8-bit color images.

My main complaint is that although you can change colors in the plug-in, you can't choose a color from the image or a preset palette. You need to pick the color in the Color Picker every time.

The unit and the plug-in worked beautifully and I received a very fast fix to the one bug that I found. Should you go right out and get one? I can't really answer that. If money's no object, my answer would probably be yes; however, it takes a lot to justify this type of investment unless you're painting (and selling) watercolors or background images.

I'd love to see OptiPaint eventually operate the way that the Wacom tablet does—as a regular input device rather than as a plug-in. The technology is fascinating and I can't wait to see how it develops. ■



Reprinted by permission of the National Association of Photoshop Professionals (www.photoshoper.com)