

Wacom Pen Tablet

Van Gogh never used a computer mouse; when he went to school, they used quills. When he grew up, he used a paint brush in the most exquisite fashion!

Today's child knows exactly what a computer mouse is. When he/she grows up, a mouse is the accepted way to get a lot of work done. If he/she also loves digital photography, Adobe Photoshop may become their home away from home. Unfortunately, in Photoshop, a mouse can be somewhat like a sledgehammer driving a tack.

For the finest artistic touch, it's hard to beat a pen tablet!



Here's a picture of a pen tablet, a mouse, and a pen. While the mouse works most software on your computer, consider the pen your personal paint brush for fine tuning delicate image features.

Desktop Real Estate

The tablet is like a mousepad, but depending on your choice, it can be considerably more powerful. The tablet takes up desk top real estate. The bigger the tablet, the more the bucks. The mouse is about 2 x 4; a 6 x 9 actually takes 10.5 x 10.5 of desktop space. The pen usually sits in a little holder off to the side.

So, you've really have the best of both worlds; you've got a mouse for normal operation and a pen for the finest painters touch.

Van Gogh could dab his brush into a deep red color, gathering a lot of paint, then paint heavily on the canvas. Or, if in a delicate mood, he could barely touch the canvas. A big aspect of the tablet is using the pen's opacity to decide how hard you press on the line you're painting on the screen. In effect, you can go from a broad fuzzy pattern to a sharp hard-line pattern by merely changing opacity and brush size.

Quick Mask Painting Technique

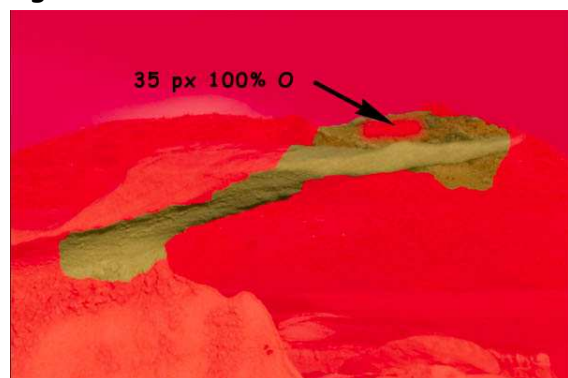
I want to quickly mask a hoodoo.



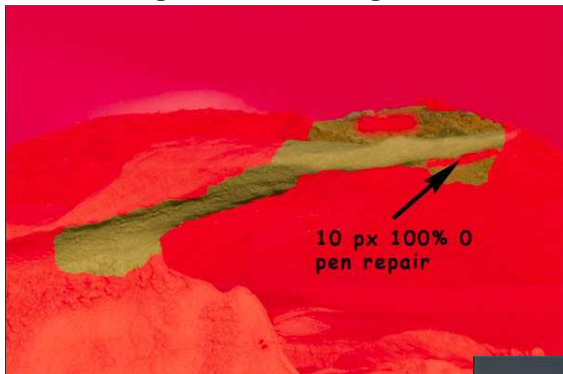
With raw file open, I choose the Quick Selection tool, then select a 25 pixel soft brush and sweep it across the hoodoo with the mouse.

Oops! While the mouse followed the hoodoo's bottom, when I got over toward the narrow hoodoo tip, it selected the background as well. Darn...

The red color in this image shows the deselected portion of our image. The selected portion shows original data from our digital capture. In the image above, it's marked by marching ants.



My initial 35 pixel 100% opacity brush at normal blend mode will quickly use the black foreground to change where I've select and refine our selection.



But, I'm going to need to be much more careful in my selection, both on the hoodoo base and at its tip. With bracket keys [], I change brush size, pick up the pen, said its size to 10 pixels with black foreground, and begin painting along the hoodoo base.

Oops; the hoodoo's tip is not in the selection. I change foreground to white

and very carefully include that pesky tip.

Switching out of Quick Mask mode, I look at the partial selection (right). It's barely beginning to take shape, but I've got more time to put in before I have a selection which reflects real data.



A Pen's Fine Touch...



This final Quick Mask did not take long to do, simply because I only trying to show a technique. Edges aren't precise.

To show a little bit of why I wanted to do that masking, our next image used the selection as an alpha channel to make a mask on an adjustment layer. I'll cover these techniques later.



As noted on the image, I boosted brightness and contrast to only show some minor difference. At this point, I've paid no attention to either the sky or red hills in the background.

A day or two later, all this masking effort finally provided the image you see at the right.

Without the pen, it would've taken two to three times as long just using the mouse!

You became a painter and avoided all that the carpal tunnel syndrome...

