

After many months of waiting, Clares successor to the popular ProArtisan graphics package has finally arrived, completely revitalised for the Desktop. The price tag of £135 inc. is fairly hefty, so is ProArtisan 2 worth both the money and was it worth the wait?

IN THE BOX

I was pleased to find that the usual flimsy card wallet has been replaced with a proper box for this release. ProArtisan 2 comes on two discs, one for the application itself and another resource disc full of pictures. The 78-page manual starts off with a tutorial which gives a good taste of the package's features. I found this to be a good way of getting into the package, but was disappointed that there weren't any more worked examples. However, the manual redeems itself by having an appendix full of short exercises, some of which make use of the files on the resource disc. The bulk of the manual is dedicated to a description of all the menu options: I found

ProArtisan 2

Reviewed by Richard Hallas



Eye spy with my little i

some of the explanations rather sketchy, and often wished for more detail.

IN USE

ProArtisan 2 endeared itself to me immediately by having a full set of extremely attractive high resolution icons for multisync modes. In fact, it is recommended that you use a high resolution screen mode if possible, as ProArtisan 2 stores all its images internally in a high resolution, 24-

bit colour format. A minimum of 2Mb RAM is also recommended, and full support is provided for the Computer Concepts and State Machine graphics cards.

Clicking on the icon bar icon pops up a small window which allows you to create a new sprite. This helpful window tells you how much memory is available, how much is

required for the picture size you have selected, and will convert all measurements between pixels, centimetres and inches. There is also a preset range of page sizes. Clicking on Create opens up the main picture window, to which is attached an ArtWorks-like toolbox which can be flipped between horizontal and vertical. This toolbox represents what would otherwise be the main menu. The first five buttons in the toolbox

Eat your heart
out Salvador
Dali

each invoke a different mode, namely: Painting, Drawing, Sprites, Input-Output and Image Processing. Clicking Menu on the main drawing window brings up a different menu for whichever of these modes is selected. The toolbox also lets you open the palette window, and provides access to the so called frisket mode, the zoom settings and a single-stage undo.

FRISKETS

In the real world, a frisket is a frame carrying a piece of parchment which protects the non-printing areas on a hand printing press. The ability to use simulated friskets in a picture is ProArtisan's real claim to fame, and is a splendid idea: you simply define a frisket to cover up the parts of the picture you don't want to touch, and then any painting or image processing tools you use will only affect the uncovered areas.

This idea is easy to grasp and very effective; it's just like putting a piece of transparent plastic over the areas of picture you want protected. Friskets can be made out of almost any drawing operation in ProArtisan 2 or you can draw into them directly, and they can be as simple, or as complex as you wish. This feature must surely be one of the main selling-points of the package, and its usefulness cannot be understated.

PAINTING

A wide range of painting tools is provided in the Painting menu. There are a total of twenty preset brush shapes, one of which you can edit. Usefully, by choosing a brush with Shift held down, you can see the actual shape in use, as it replaces the pointer arrow.

The last item on the Painting menu, Blends, is the most important in many ways. There is a preset range of 16 blends, any of which you can edit. You simply pick the start and end colours, and the computer shows as many intermediate colours as it can find in the palette. The blends are used for graduated fills, but their other uses are far more extensive than is at first apparent. Many other tools can make use of them, such

as the Magic Brush, this ingenious feature lets you define up to sixteen colours which, when painted over, will be replaced by other colours of your choice.

The Crayon and Texture tools both make use of a range of sixteen pre-defined textures. You can either apply them in solid colour, using the crayon, or actually paint textures onto existing areas of the picture (very effective with the canvas texture). A Special sub-menu leads to some interesting special effects such as very realistic charcoal-style smearing.

The Spray Can has a novel extra feature: you can spray one area of your picture onto another area! All you do is select a source point for the spray, and then spray a copy to a different place.

The range of fills provided is comprehensive. As well as the plain, graded and circular fills (which operate by dragging an arrow to indicate angle and distance, as seen in other packages) there is also a 3D option, which uses the current blend colours to create a kind of bulging effect, working horizontally from the edges to the middle. This can be quite effective, although I was surprised that it would only work in one direction. Fills can be banded or dithered, and there is also a `spitestretch` fill which fits a sprite into any shape you choose.

DRAWING

ProArtisan 2's Drawing menu should be familiar to anyone who uses Draw, as the tools it contains are similar to those in Draw and operate in the same manner. Of course, you cannot edit the paths after you have placed them as you can in Draw. There are Rectangle, Ellipse, Polygon (up to 32 sides), Line and Curve tools, and also a Text-Entry window from which you can select any outline font. A Style window lets you choose Fill Style, Line Thickness etc, and it is possible to turn on a screen grid, to which the drawing tools will optionally lock. ProArtisan 2 can also import Draw files directly into its pictures.

A DIP IN THE POOL

Clicking on the Sprites icon in the toolbox

opens up a small window entitled Pool. You can drag sprite files into this window to be merged into a sprite pool, from where you can use them directly in your work. Sprites in the pool can be individually renamed, flipped and deleted, and information is provided about the dimensions and memory consumption of each. You can also select the opacity of the sprite for pasting, or choose from a range of preset pasting options.

The Sprites menu lets you cut sprites out of your picture in both rectangular and irregular shapes, and a special Magic Wand is good at extracting multi-coloured irregular details of pictures automatically. For the purposes of cutting, you can also select a range of colours to be treated as transparent. Sprites can be rotated and scaled, and you can map a sprite into any four-sided object or wrap it around a sphere.

MISCELLANEOUS FEATURES

ProArtisan 2 creates sprite files, but it will load sprites which have been compressed by Acorn's Squash utility directly, and can also save sprites in that format. Although sprites are stored internally in a greater range of colours than can be displayed by current hardware, users of graphics expansion cards will benefit because ProArtisan 2 will make use of the enhanced palettes which they provide in 256-colour modes. With either of these cards installed ProArtisan 2 will let you define the palette yourself. You can even get an analysis of the colours used in the picture.

The printing facilities are quite extensive and very easy to use. As well as the usual percentage size and portrait/landscape options, there are also buttons to centralise the image on the page, or you can specify the position of one corner in centimetres or inches. All this is helped by a graphic representation of your image on the page, and you can drag the thumbnail-size image around to position it.

IMAGE PROCESSING

ProArtisan 2's most impressive menu is certainly the Process menu. As well as a section for manipulating friskets, there are two

sub-menus attached which are entitled Filters and Effects. All these tools work in conjunction with friskets, which makes them enormously powerful, as the shapes which they can be applied to can be as complicated as you wish.

Filters are provided for colour and greyscale shifting, brightness and contrast processing, noise removal, threshold detection and anti-aliasing, as well as others.

The Effects are even more interesting: the delightful Emboss feature makes a 3D picture out of a 2D one; you can apply a texture to the picture, or wrap the whole picture round a sphere. There are many other options, but perhaps the most interesting is the Generic Filter. This window in itself provides a range of sixteen processing filters, some similar to ones on the Filter menu. The powerful part is that you can redefine any of the filters by altering the rule shown in the window. This is quite complex, but gives you a huge range of image processing options.

CRITICISMS

I did encounter quite a number of bugs, which was a pity because in general the package is beautifully implemented. However, Clares know about the bugs, so they will probably have all been fixed by the time you read this.

I wished there were more keyboard shortcuts: there is currently a grand total of five. Comparisons are bound to be made with Revelation ImagePro. Whilst this is not the place to make an exhaustive comparison, I did find that I missed ImagePro's huge flexibility in handling of motifs, where virtually any tool can use a sprite rather than a colour. ProArtisan 2 is not quite as flexible in this respect, although it does make up for it in other ways. I particularly liked the

PRODUCT INFO

Product	ProArtisan 2
Supplier	Clares Micro Supplies 98 Middlewich Road, Rudheath, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 7DA. Tel. 0606 48511 Fax 0606 48512
Price	£135 inc. VAT £67.50 as Artisan upgrade; £87.50 as upgrade from any other art package until

