

24-Bit Painting In Brilliance

By Marc Hoffman

With all of its power in producing complex two dimensional computer animations, Brilliance is sometimes overlooked for its power that it affords to the artist to convincingly portray realistic still masterpieces fit to hang in a gallery.

The mixture of Brilliance's many painting functions can produce some downright painterly results. Throughout this tutorial, I will attempt to show just how the program's features can produce these results.

One of my mainstays in my traditional paintings using oil and watercolor has been the subject matter of clouds. One can look at these deceptively simple formations and not see the same thing twice. They can range from wispy, high altitude cirrus clouds to the dramatic towering cumulous and cumulonimbus storm

clouds. No matter which clouds are present in the sky, they are almost always made more dramatic when they come into contact with a sunset or sunrise. When the sun nears and sinks below the horizon, light is scattered into the longer frequencies of visible light, leaving the more commonplace blue and white colors of sky and clouds far behind. Being a new user to Brilliance, I took a safe road by painting something I am familiar with: a cloud painting. I found out that the program could be used to paint clouds almost exclusively.

To begin the painting, I first started out by establishing a gradient to define the sky area. Since this painting was going to be at dusk, the gradient colors that I chose ranged from a turquoise to a violet, and finally ended in a pinkish hue. See Figure 1.

The next step I took was to block in the area that would eventually be the clouds. I chose a grayish blue hue for this. After turning on transparency at 50%, I used the freehand filled function to draw in the basic shape of the clouds. With the transparency turned on, parts of the graded sky showed through the cloud color. The results are shown in Figure 2.

Admittedly, this cloudy sunset lacks reality at this point. So, the next major step was to lay in the basic colors and values that would define this thing as a sunlit cloud. I used the largest brush in the brush selection panel. I then chose the colors that I wanted for this stage in the painting; in this case, I used an orange and a dark blue-violet. With the transparency on and set at the default of 50% and with the continuous free hand tool activated, I laid in some basic brush strokes that tended to conform to the clouds I was painting. I also overlapped the color to create some darker values in places. See Figure 3.

The next step in this process was to make the clouds appear blended, with a wispy feeling that convinces the viewer that these are clouds. To

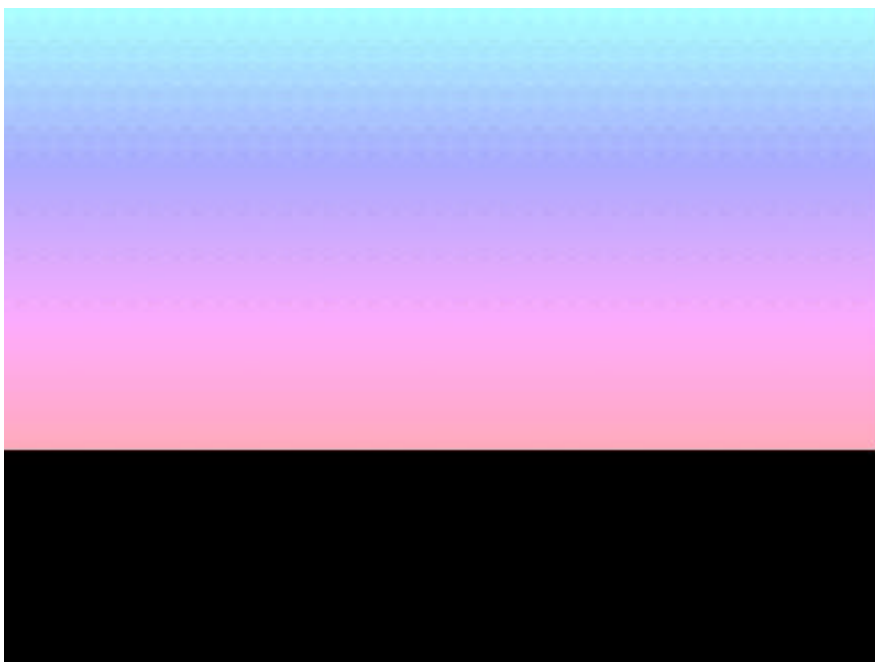


Figure 1: Establish a gradient to define the sky area.

accomplish this, I turned to two functions found in Brilliance: smear and transparency. As before, I set the transparency at the standard 50%. I then went into the draw-mode menu and selected smear. Using a large sized brush, I began to blend the areas in the cloud together. The brush stroke direction is very important here. I used a circular motion of the mouse in order to achieve the wispy appearance beginning to appear in Figure 4.

As the clouds get closer to the horizon in a real sunset, the colors tend to get much “hotter,” as they bend closer to the yellow position of the color spectrum. To simulate this phenomenon, I first selected a yellow hue. I then turned the transparency off, and selected the color option from the draw-mode menu. Using a medium sized brush and the unconnected freehand draw option, I began laying in the highlights near the bottom of the cloud bank. I also went back to the red/orange hues and reinforced some other areas in the clouds, again with the transparency turned off. These steps are shown in Figure 5.

Again, these areas needed to be blended, and so I turned the transparency on, increased the brush size, selected smear, and blended as before. I continued this process throughout the cloud as shown in progress in Figure 6.

To finish out the painting, I used a combination of color, smear, transparency, magnify, and many of the other assorted tools in the Brilliance arsenal. The stencil masking was used for the stripe on the road, as well as the bezier curve tool to create the stripes and the road itself. The final work, Nebraska P.M., is shown in Figure 7.

The line separating fine art and computer art has all but vanished, and in my opinion, these two arts can be one in the same. This is shown rather clearly in Brilliance. With the combination of transparency and smear functions, coupled with a dye sublimation printer, those masterpieces are fit to hang in a gallery.

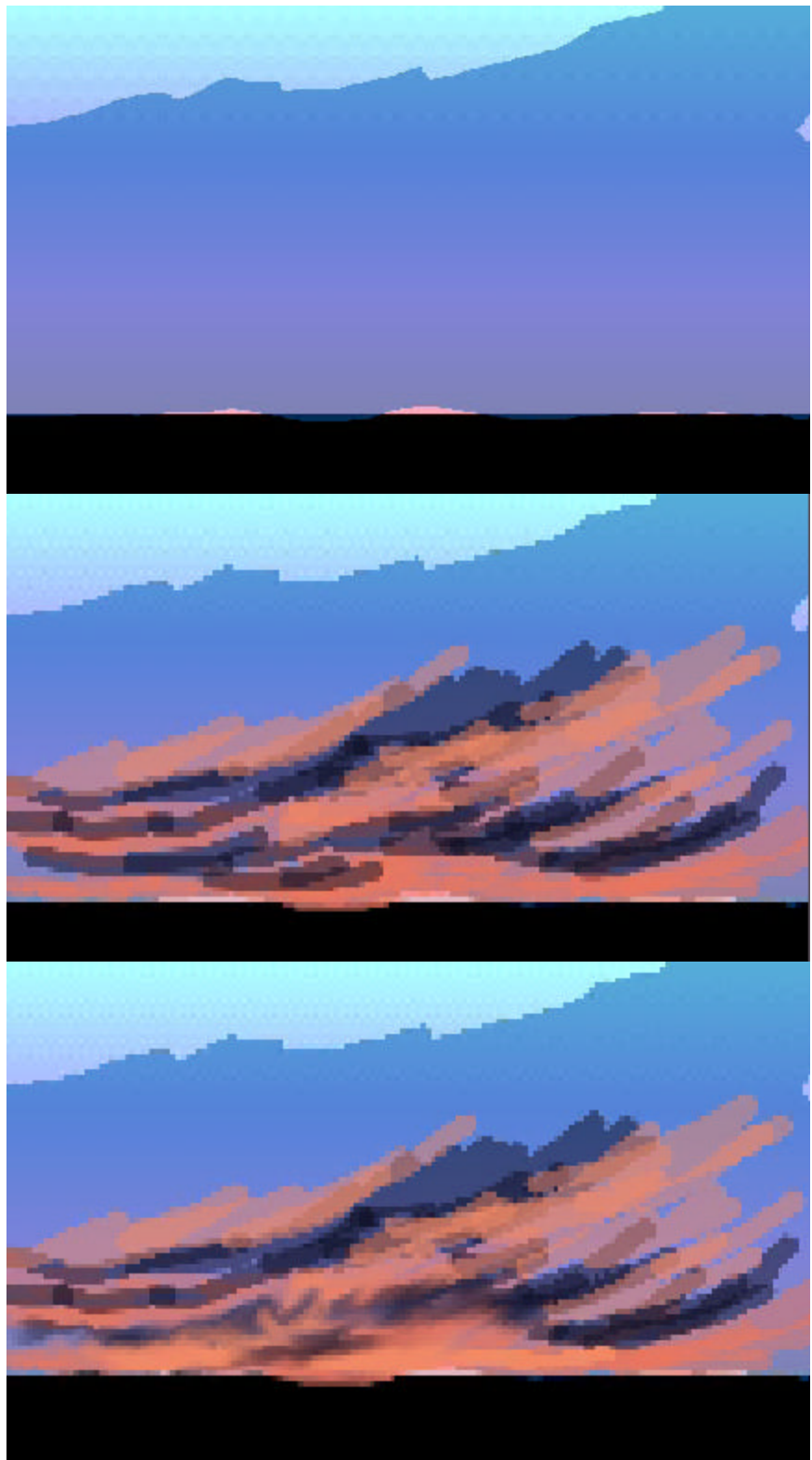


Figure 2 (Top): Use the freehand filled function to draw in the basic shape of the clouds and, with the transparency turned on, parts of the graded sky will show through the cloud color.

Figure 3 (Middle): Turn the transparency on and set at the default of 50% with the continuous free hand tool activated, then paint basic brush strokes that tended to conform to the clouds.

Figure 4 (Bottom): Smear and Transparency are used in to blend the areas in the cloud together with a circular motion of the mouse to achieve the wispy appearance.

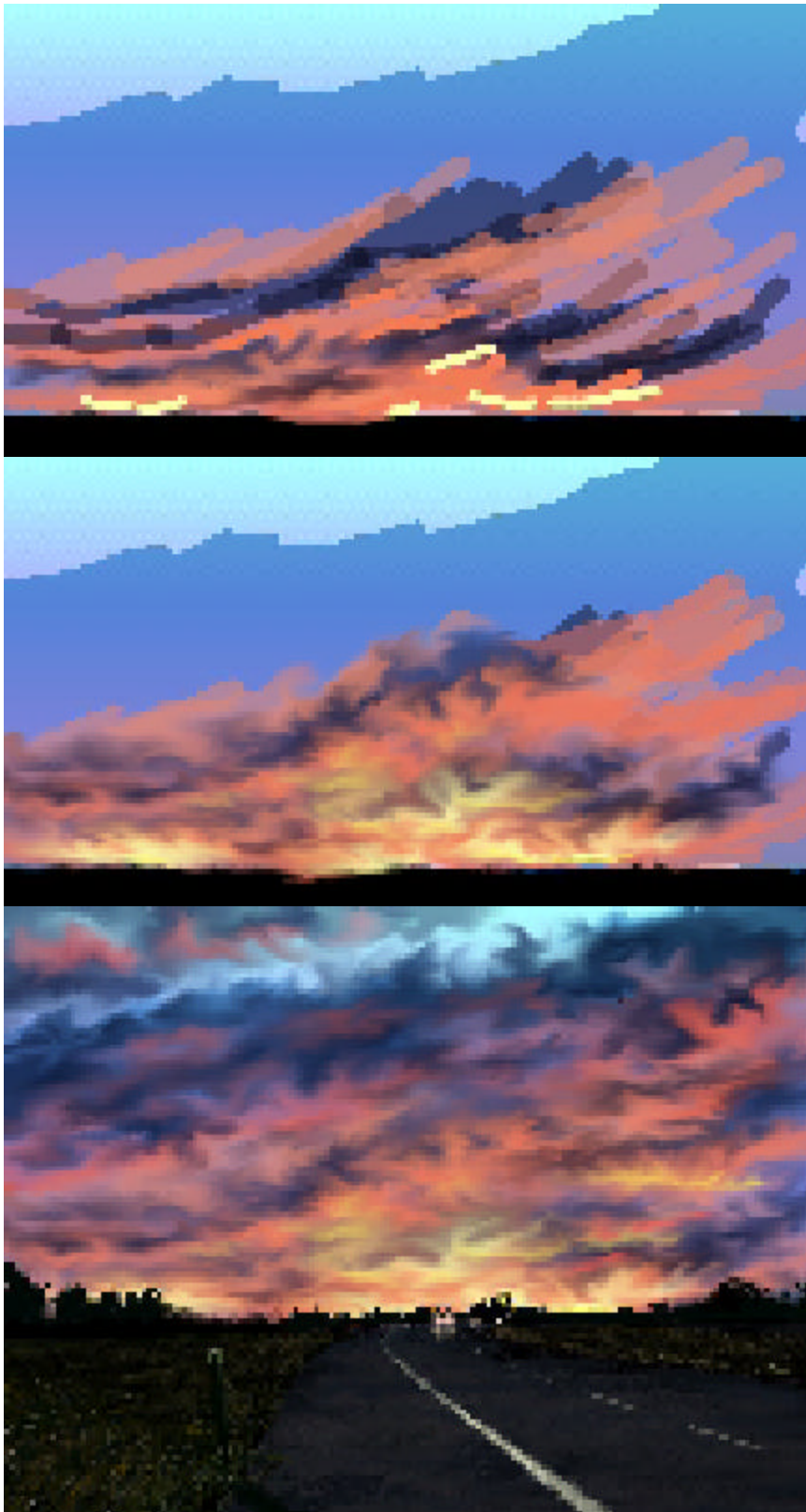


Figure 5 (Top): Use a medium sized brush and the unconnected freehand draw option to lay in the highlights near the bottom of the cloud bank.
 Figure 6 (Middle): Use an increased brush size with smear to blended the cloud.
 Figure 7 (Bottom): Use a stencil masking for the stripe on the road and the bezier curve tool to create the stripes and the road itself.

Experimentation

In conclusion, here are a few tips that might prove useful. Brilliance cries out for experimentation; more so than any other paint program on the Amiga. Having an Undo feature that is limited by a pre-set RAM area is great. If something doesn't come out just right, then it can be undone once, twice, three times, etc. So don't be afraid to make a mistake or two. It can be corrected easily. Also, much

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of the time, I will photograph cloud structures that I find interesting, and I'll take more than one photo of the same subject matter. I will then use these photos as a reference. Through experience, I have found that trying to copy a photo "verbatim" proves to be a hindrance instead of a help. This is why I use them as reference material only. So don't be afraid of "going out on a limb" and improvising a little. As with anything in computers, the techniques above can be used in just about any way imaginable. It is up to the artist to figure it all out.

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