Learn how to create a painting from a photograph. In just a few simple steps you can turn a run of the mill snapshot or stock photo into a digital painting.
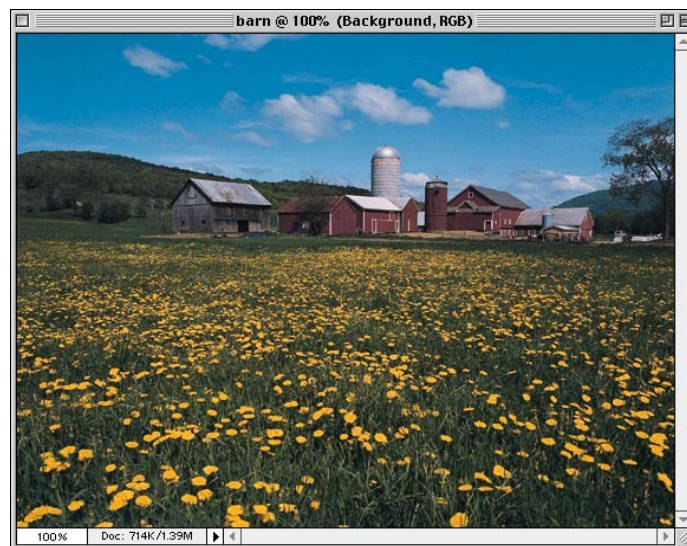

Luanne Seymour Cohen, Creative Director at Adobe Systems, makes a good impression with Adobe® Photoshop® 4.0.
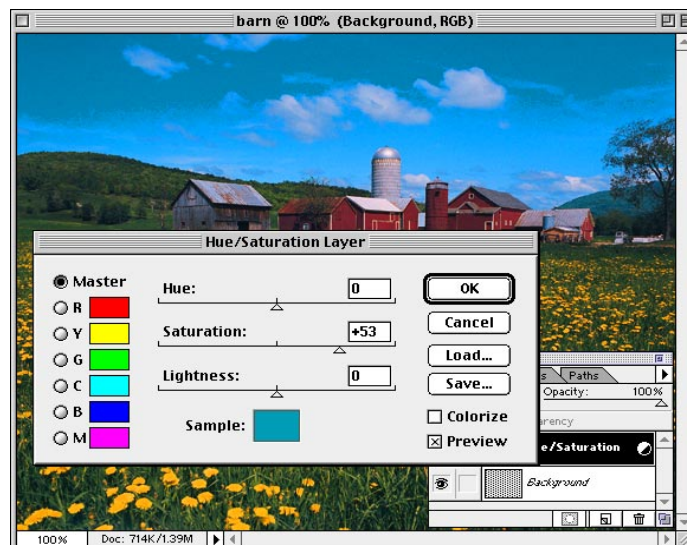
BEGINNER

PAINTERLY IMAGES

1. Open a new CMYK or RGB file. The best types of images for this technique are ones that contain lots of color and texture. Landscapes and still lifes work very well. Peopled scenes are fine but close-ups of faces don't work as well because the facial features can become too distorted or smeared.

Shortcuts
Throughout this document, "Command/Ctrl" means Command on the Macintosh and Ctrl on Windows. "Option/Alt" means Option on the Macintosh and Alt on Windows.

2. Optional: If your image has flat or dull colors, you might want to intensify them for the painting. Create an Adjustment layer by holding the Option/Alt+Command/Ctrl keys while clicking on the new layer icon. Choose Hue/Saturation. Move the saturation slider to the right to intensify the colors in your image.
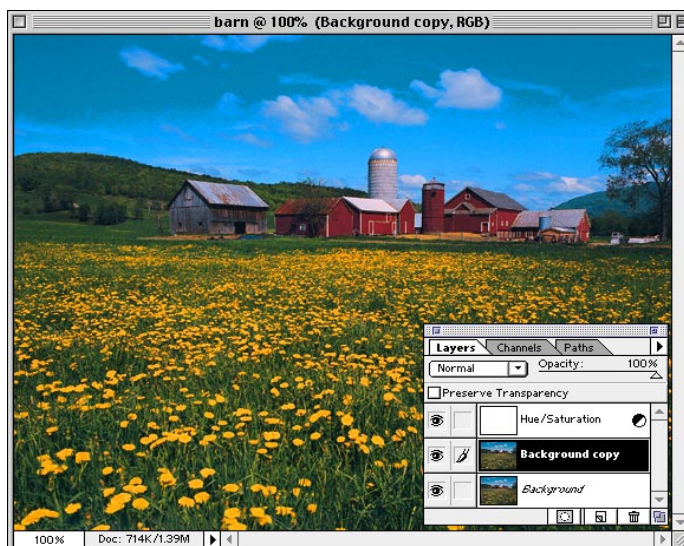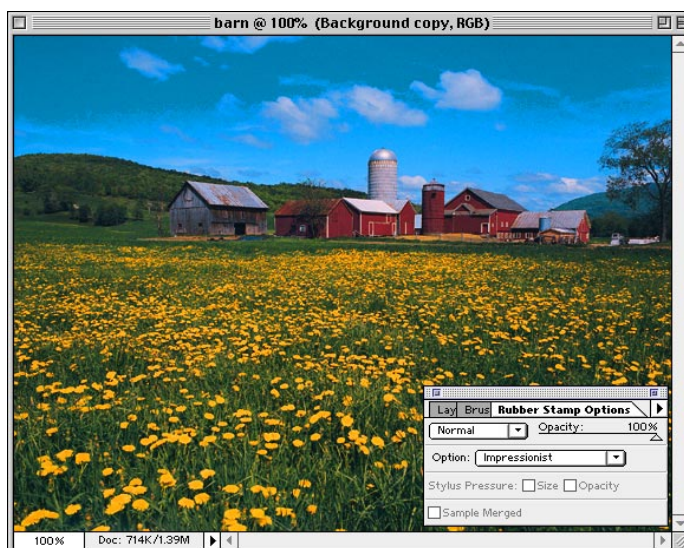

Adjustment layers
Adjustment layers allow you to alter the look of your image without actually making a permanent change to the original. They give you the flexibility of being able to change the adjustment as many times as you want. To readjust, simply double-click on the adjustment layer name and make changes in the dialog box that appears.

3. Now we will make a copy of the background layer by dragging it to the new layer icon. The original background layer will be left as is and we will paint on the copy. **Important:** Save the file at this point.
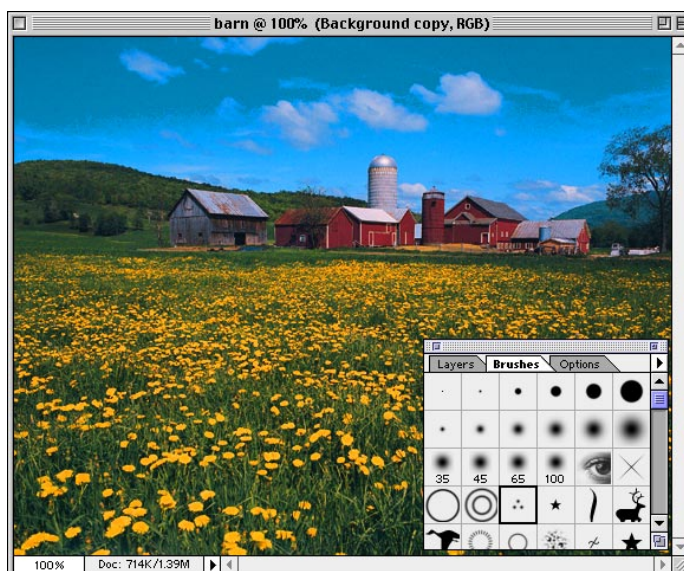

4. Double-click the rubber stamp tool and change the Option in the Rubber Stamp Options palette to Impressionist.
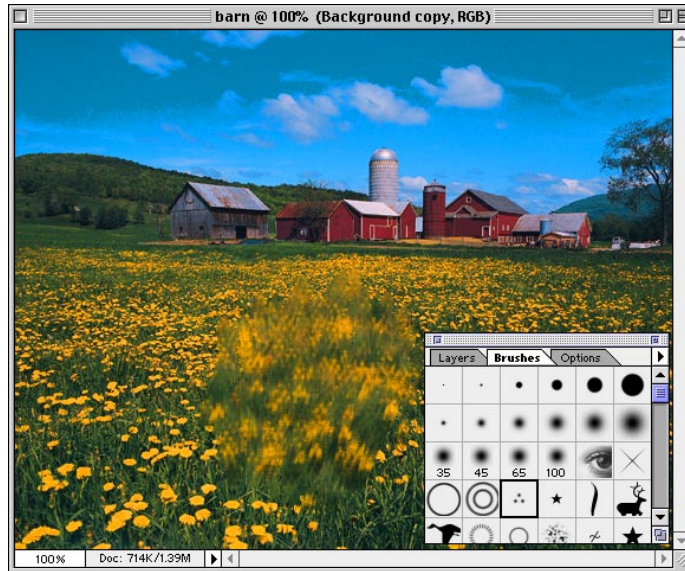

5. Before you begin painting, you'll need to choose a brush that approximates the texture of the subject matter. You can use the default brushes in your brush palette. But for the flower field in this image, I'm going to use a custom brush. Select Load Brushes from the Brushes palette. Go to the Photoshop folder and open Brushes > Assorted. (Mac users: Goodies > Brushes & Patterns > Assorted Brushes.) The extra brushes will appear in the brushes palette.

Custom brushes
You can use any image or part of an image to create a custom brush. The most effective brushes are created with black and gray pixels on a white background. Once you've created the brush image, select it and choose Define Brush from the Brushes palette.
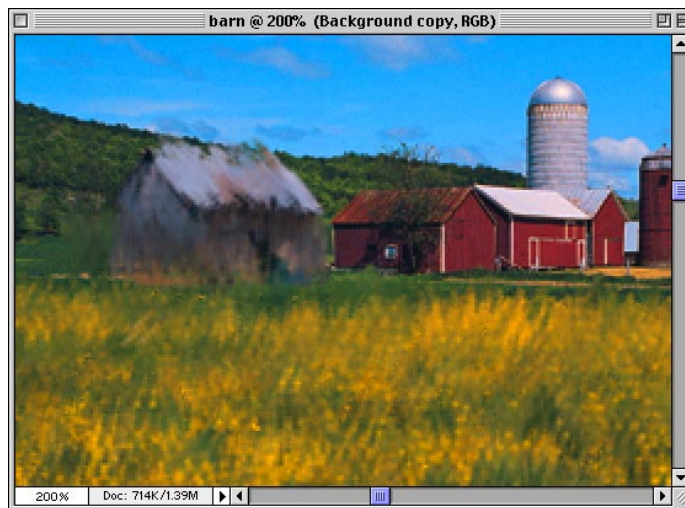
6. Select your brush and begin painting the image. The impressionist tool samples the colors that are in the saved image and allows you to smear them. It's as if the photo was made of wet paint and you are moving it around with a brush. **Note**: Do not save the file while you paint! If you want to keep interim copies, choose File > Save a Copy. If you save the file during the painting process you will no longer be painting with the original source pixels.
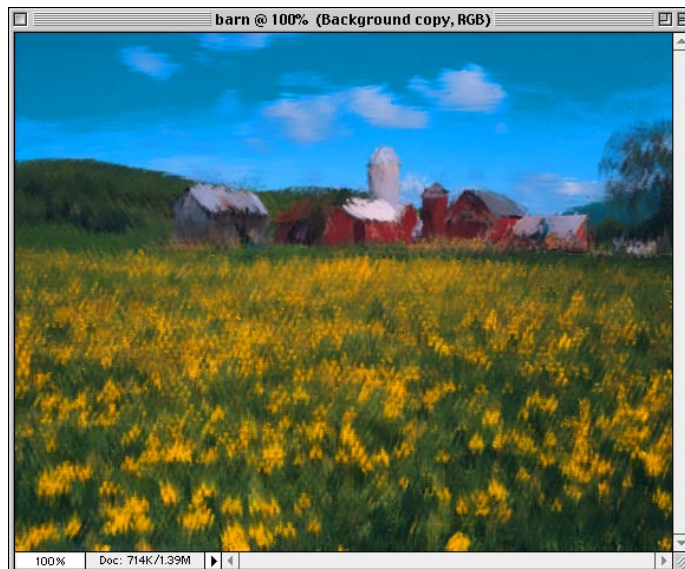
7. You may want to zoom in to paint certain sections or objects in your image. Or change the brushes or brush stroke direction based on the subject matter. In this example, I tried to match the brush stroke direction to the texture of the rusty shed.

8. Continue brushing the entire image until you are satisfied with the result. You may want to go back over certain areas with a smaller brush, if you want to recover detail that might have been lost.

Photograph: DigitalVision.