

Fielding's Review

Akvis

ArtWork

Runs on Windows 7/Vista/XP and on Mac OS X 10.4-10.7. \ \$72 USD for Home version (either Plugin or Standalone, 5 styles), \$129 USD for Home Deluxe (Plugin and Standalone, 6 styles, including new Pastel), \$189 USD for Business (Plugin and Standalone, 6 styles, including new Pastel, for commercial use).

In other reviews of [Akvis](#) software, we have seen how it can be used to improve portraits (MakeUp), add weather and other effects to landscape photos (NatureArt), improve the texture of digital photos and remove imperfections (Noise Buster, Multibrush), and convert any photo to look as if it were drawn with a pencil (Sketch). And there are a lot more, as you know if you have ventured to the Akvis site to see the other programs the company has. This time we're going to look at one of the most remarkable.

Digital photography is fun and a great creative outlet, but have you ever looked at a scene you've photographed and wished you instead had the talent to recreate it in oil? Or pastels? Or pen and ink, linocut, or watercolors? Don't have the time, talent, or art supplies? Don't worry about it. You can convert any digital photo into just the perfect example of any of those art media. And it will be done instantly and so well no one will guess that it is a digital conversion. You don't have to take my word for it. Download a free copy of ArtWork, install it, and use it for ten days.

Akvis ArtWork comes in two versions, Home (as either a plugin to a photo-editing program, such as Photoshop, or as a standalone application) and Home Deluxe or Business version. The latter two aren't really two separate applications. They both install as plugins and standalone versions. The Business license, for commercial uses, is higher priced. The Home Deluxe version is for personal use only.

All versions allow for the processing of digital photos to have the appearance of having been done in oil, watercolor, comics, pen & ink, and linocut. Batch processing makes it even more convenient.

Each process is adjustable with its own set of controls and options for adding text and a textured background, such as canvas or cracks.

As you adjust your various controls, the area of the photo within a preview window on the photo instantly shows you how that adjustment will look. When you're ready to process the photo, just click

one will achieve the transformation. Of course, you can always try again if you're dissatisfied. A navigator window and sliding size adjustor enable you to zoom in to any area or zoom out to a full view of the image.

It's as simple to use as it can be, but if all of that is still a little confusing as you learn, hovering your mouse cursor over any tool will open up in the lower right corner of the workspace an explanation of what that control does and how to use it. If you want to simplify the process even more, select from presets of these controls to experiment with any look you want.

Naturally, photos of different sizes require different settings to look right, but with all these options, it's possible to achieve perfect results. You can also save any settings you create and give them a name you choose.

Oil: Controls include simplicity, stroke curvature, maximum stroke length, stroke thickness, stroke intensity, stroke density, microdetails, saturation, and relief. The power of this single effect alone is enough for us to endorse this program. It delivers beautiful results every time. We got very excited about how well it performed for us.

Watercolor: The soft look of a watercolor painting can be achieved through adjusting six controls, including variance, stroke intensity, blurring, and glazing. A smearing option can also be checked. Or use any of its six presets. We weren't as impressed with this effect simply because it is best used on larger scenes of landscapes, not portraits or other illustrations.

Comics: The results are usually pretty good, though a halftone dot pattern should be available in future upgrades (which are free, by the way). Control the effect with nine controls, including level of detail, posterizing, smoothing, blur, outline thickness, and radius of simplicity. There are only two presets.

Pen & Ink: We found the results done by Sketch 12.5 more satisfying. There are only two presets, default and poster. Needed are more controls than the five provided. You can choose the background and line colors. It was fun to experiment with line thickness and see how it effected the amount of detail being rendered. If you can't also buy Sketch, you'll be more than satisfied with the realistic drawing of Pen & Ink.

Linocut: Five controls and four presets, along with options for ink and background color, strive to achieve the stark look of a linocut drawing. The heavy black lines are adjustable but were never enough to deliver the detail we wanted. This effect does not have the preview selection area over the photo like the others. You have to render the whole effect every time you want to check on a new adjustment setting, which takes a few more seconds to achieve but is no problem to wait for.

Pastel: Available in the Home Deluxe and Business versions, this setting competes with Oil as the program's most remarkable effect. By adjusting just six controls, or by choosing any of the nine presets, you can instantly create a rendered image that will fool anyone into thinking they are looking at a genuine pastel drawing! As with the oil effect, you can make the effect as intense or as subtle as you wish. If you don't like the direction of the strokes of the pastels, you have a pen tool that you can write straight lines across the problem areas of the image to force the next render to conform those lines in the direction you want. You can erase these lines and redraw them if you need to. You can also smudge any part of the image with a special tool as well. These tools are also available with the oil effect. The pastel effect is well worth the additional license fee. We were so impressed with it we chose to include two examples of its effects with this review. Online at the Akvis site you can see examples of the other ArtWork effects.

Akvis ArtWork has few competitors, the most prominent being Alien Skin's Snap Art 3, which has a few more effects but comes only as an Adobe plugin and sells for \$199. ArtWork gives you more control over how the effect will look and is a lot easier to learn to use.

Like other Akvis programs reviewed here, you don't have to take our word for it. Just download and install the program and use it for ten days, then make up your own mind. We think you'll agree it's an awesome program that will vastly extend your creativity in this new world of digital image technology. And even if you don't decide you want it, you're going to have a lot of fun using ArtWork.

Akvis ArtWork is also available in the Akvis Alchemy Bundle which includes the full line of Akvis programs at a discounted price.





Original and pastel-rendered close ups show the striking and realistic differences ArtWork can make. Effect is deliberately more extreme than preferred to highlight texture and strokes.

