Fielding's Review

Akvis SKETCH 8.0

YOU ARE AN ARTIST! Even if you can't draw, you can achieve professional quality sketches. Your computer and Sketch 8.0 have all the skill you need. It's just as much fun as drawing but without the effort and it's much faster!

Click here to load in your photo.

Just load in a photo and click this button. That's all you really need to do. However, the options for producing a variety of renderings are limited only by your creativity.

You'll pay particular attention to this area, for it has all the options for perfecting your sketch.

This space provides information on each feature whenever your cursor icon rests over any part of the work menu selections.

You don't have to wait for the entire sketched picture to generate. This area shows you how the finished sketch will look. It updates itself with each adjustment you make. You can move the selection area to any other part of the image. This is the first version of Sketch to have this feature.

Windows and Mac home license for either plugin or standalone version $72; home deluxe license for standalone and plugin version $89; business license for standalone and plugin $139. Read system requirements here: http://akvis.com/en/sketch/system-requirements.php . Download free ten-day evaluation copy at http://akvis.com/en/sketch/index.php.

Digital photographers looking for ways to extend their creativity rely on advanced photo-editing software to enhance their work. Those with a perceptive eye realize some of their photos would look better as traditional works of art, such as watercolors, charcoal or pencil sketches on canvas. A drawn version of a photo, particularly a portrait, can enrich it with a beauty impossible to achieve by processing it any other way. But how many of us can do the job ourselves?

We've all wanted to draw at some time or other. Art lessons can be expensive and frustrating but might hone your skills. But if you have no talent and it's results you are more concerned with, rather than the joy of drawing, your only alternative has been to find an artist to do it for you. They usually draw from a photograph since it takes a long time to do a sketch.

You have probably never considered that your computer can do the drawing for you. But it's true. You need only Sketch v8.0 from Akvis software.

Any confusion about how this program works can be answered at the link above to the Akvis website. Be sure to check out the tutorials and other examples of all that it can do. The program also has an embedded help file for rapid assistance.

We at *Fielding's Review* have been using Akvis software for years in our personal photo-editing hobby. Other Akvis programs that led us to check out Sketch 8.0 were Coloriage (for adding color to black and white photos), Decorator (for overlaying colors and new textures to selected areas of a photo), and Retoucher (an indispensable plugin for removing scratches and other defects from scans of vintage photos).
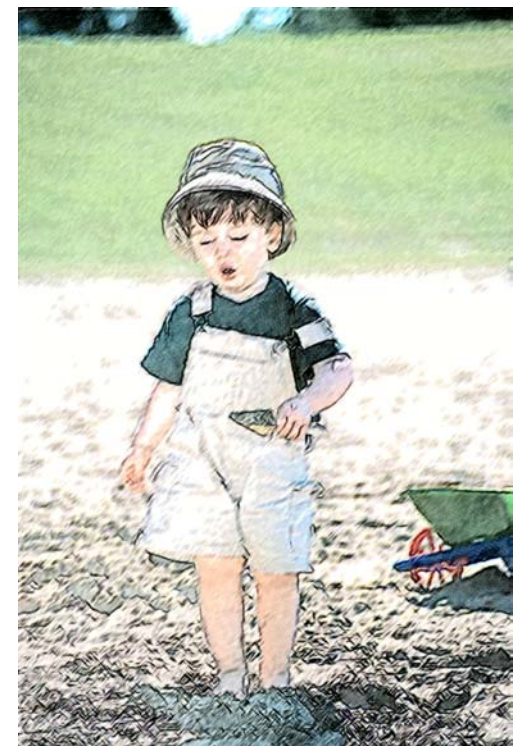
You can successfully use Sketch 8.0 from the minute you install it on your computer. Just load in a photo and click the render button and watch your photo transform. If the results aren't quite to your liking, make some adjustments and reprocess it. "Before" and "After" tabs show the original and rendered photos.

Save it as any format you choose. But you will want to experiment with its imaging techniques. You have a full arsenal of tools for changing the stroke length, size and angles; the density of hatching in midtones; and the sharpening of the image, which adds more pencil marks to the image. Clicking on the color strokes icon renders a color photo to look as if were drawn with color pencils. Color photos can also be rendered as watercolor and/or charcoal images. In black and white, you also have the option of charcoal and watercolor, plus the ability to blend in the original work in any percentage you want. The result looks like a lightly colored image outlined in pencil.

The other menu options, "background" and "canvas", are explained on page three.

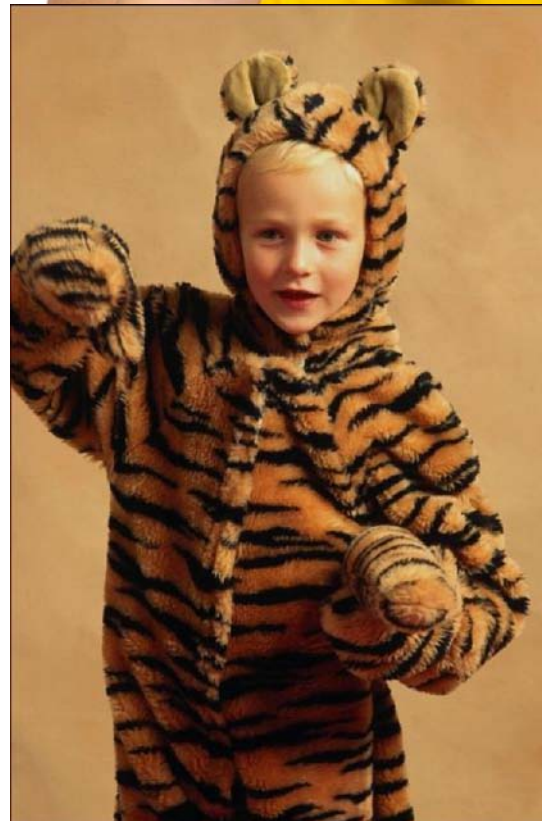**SKETCH 8.0 WORKED EQUALLY WELL ON ALL PHOTO SIZES.**

At left is the sketch in the process of rendering. The drawing fades in while you watch. Below are the default color and black and white renderings.

If you are in a hurry to have your photo rendered into a work of art, Sketch 8.0 is the fastest way to do it. But we found the program is so easy to use, it's fun. We couldn't stop experimenting, even with photos we weren't particularly interested in seeing converted. We continued on for no other purpose than to see what the program could do with them. So we rarely simply converted a photo and closed the program. We encourage you to download Sketch 8.0 for your ten-day evaluation period. After that (or any time before), you can buy it at the Akvis site and receive a license number to register it.

The variety of effects possible with Sketch 8.0 seems infinite. When you go to the "Canvas" menu set, you are presented with the option of adding more than a hundred textures to your sketch. You get an ample variety of realistic canvas textures and a few dozen that are strange choices for textures, such as mud cracks and seeds! "Texture Properties" allows for altering the texture effect by repetition, reflection, and alignment of the texture pattern, and you can increase or decrease its scale. "Texture Application Parameters" permits the brightening of the texture and several choices for determining how embossed the effect will look best, including how the sketch will be distorted as the texture is applied.
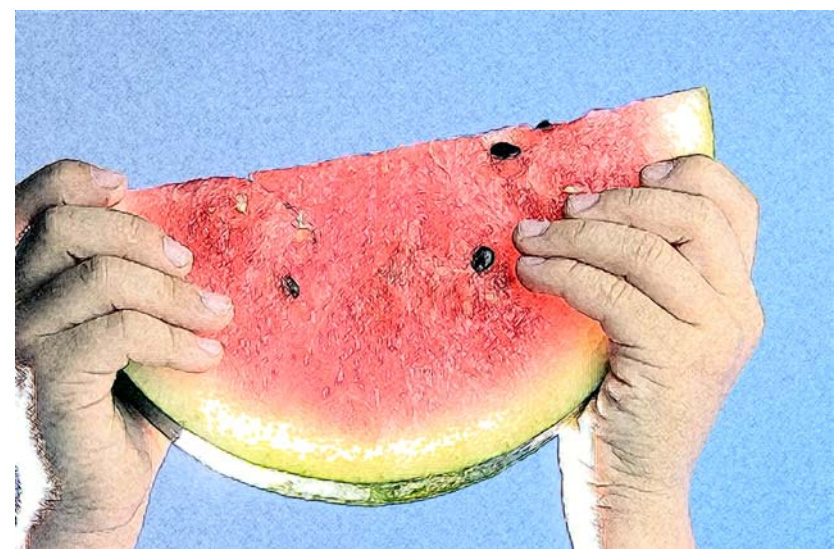
The previous menu, "Background", gives you the ability to blend the original photo and the sketched version in two ways. For example, left in the first option, the default "sketch", there is no blending of the two images. "Sketch & Photo" mode will blend the sketch and the original photo according to your selection of which area to turn into a sketch and which to leave unaltered. (See the *Rhythm on the Range* lobby card example.) The pens and eraser on the far left toolbar have the tools for this function. You outline in blue the area you want to have sketched. The red pen is used to outline the area immediately outside the blue selection to define what area to keep untouched. Simple and easy! An eraser tool enables you to remove either of these colors if they need to be redrawn. The last option "Sketch & Blur" mode you blur a part of the photo by using the blue pen to determine what part to have blurred.

Sketch can be used alone or as a plugin with Photoshop or any other photo-editing program that allows plugins. Due to irregularities in some photos, you may need to adjust the saturation or brightness to achieve the best results.
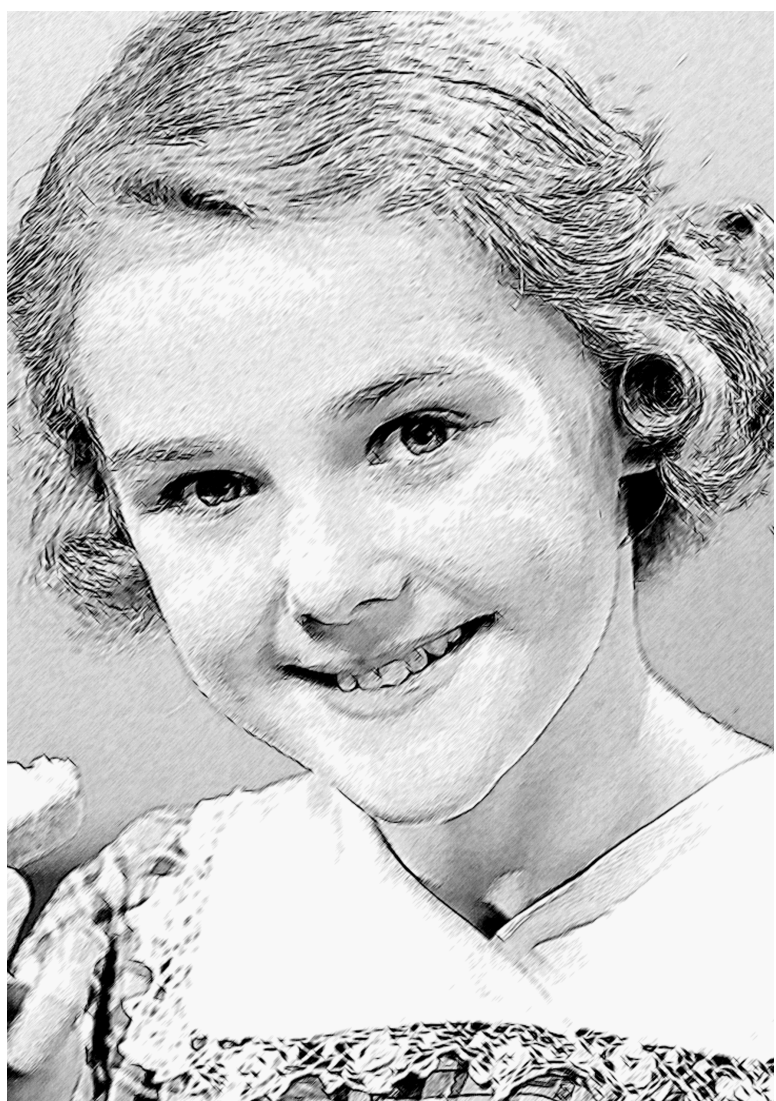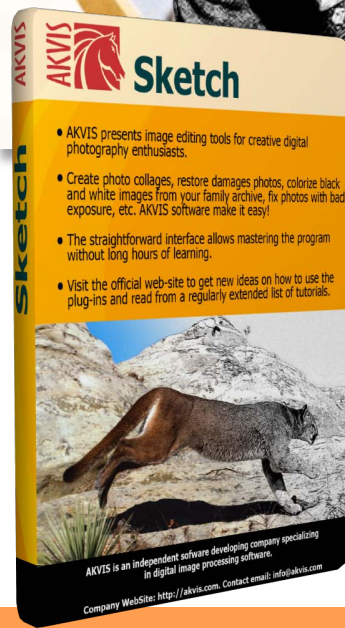
If you're particularly pleased with adjustment settings you have made, you can save them as a preset for use with other sessions.

These examples show the the use of the "Background" options. Both were sketches using the default settings. Above left is the original lobby card. The top right shows the original lobby card unchanged except for Crosby and Farmer sketched with the "color strokes" option checked. Below that is the same sketch in default black and white.

Our extensive tests of Sketch 8.0 yielded consistently satisfactory results. Some photos needed more adjustments than others, naturally, but the effects achieved matched what a highly skilled artist could achieve. We also tested Sketch 8.0 against Alien Skin's Pencil sketch feature in that company's $149 Snap Art plugin. The photo on the above right shows the best results we could achieve with full coverage. The Sketch 8.0 rendering is on the right, achieved with the default setting.