



Pixologic ZBrush
reviewed by: Lannie Caranci



Pixologic's ZBrush is an Editor's Choice Award Winner!
"Seeing is really believing!"

June 1, 2000

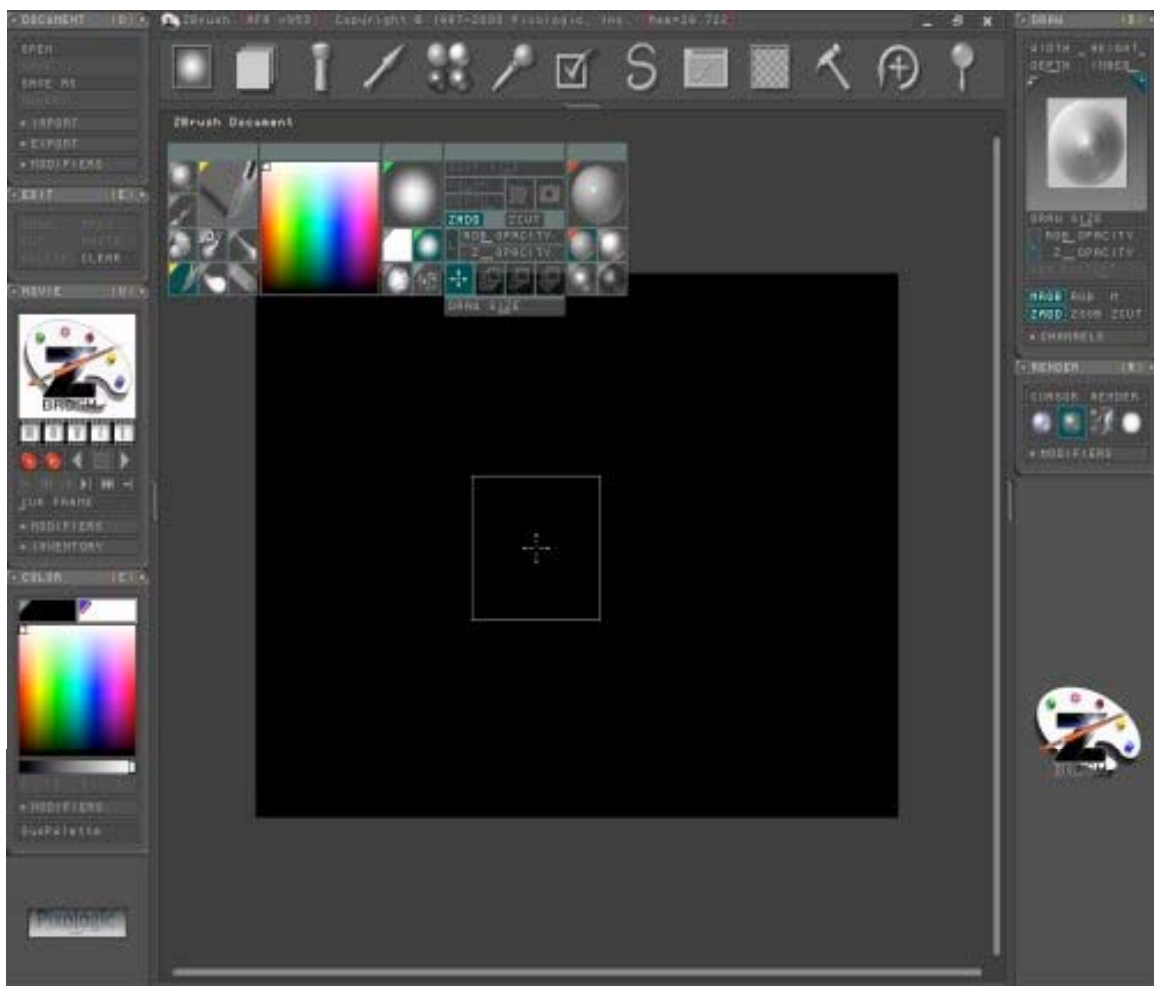
What a find! ZBrush! What is ZBrush you ask? ZBrush is truly a different approach to 3D design. Its secret is "Pixols", a pixel with a third dimension. As you paint or create 3D models it's amazing to see the depth, lighting effects, and materials appear. You can smudge, add more depth by just keeping the brush in one place, rotate objects, import textures, and export objects. Edit object shapes, use masking techniques, bend, taper, and add filters such as noise. Modify 3D objects on the fly. If this is not enough to whet your appetite – just read on.

I've been working with ZBrush from Pixologic for about 2 months and in the past week it's been like someone has turned on a light. The newest manual, called the Tool Palette, is very well written that I was able to fill in all the blanks I've had since working with ZBrush. To their credit the good folks at Pixologic have been constantly adding to the amount of information available. As it continues to mount, it is becoming very obvious to me that this is going to be one great program even when version 1.0 gets released. (Reviewed Version is 0.95) While the initial learning curve is rather steep this product is way cool. It is filled with new and easy ways to do things.

Most of all ZBrush is a multi media tool; it allows you to create and paint in 2D, 2.5D as well as 3D. In 3D it can create an almost infinite amount of models and in 2D I've been able to create some of the most unique textures I've ever seen.

The ZBrush Interface

This interface is really unique. Notice the tool palettes on both sides of the workspace all in their own drawer's and the myriad of tools across the top. When you first open ZBrush you will want to get rid of the "ZBrush Documents boxes" that are on your working surface. Just hit the tab button and you are ready to go to work.



The true power of ZBrush lies in the unique tool palette setup. Each palette has sub-palettes and drawers. From an interface point of view, probably the most unique feature is that when you move the cursor over a measurement name it changes to the actual measurement and is editable. Below is a look at the palettes, both

left and right and a few of them opened up so you can see the plethora of alternative controls.

The image displays several ZBrush tool palettes and their expanded views:

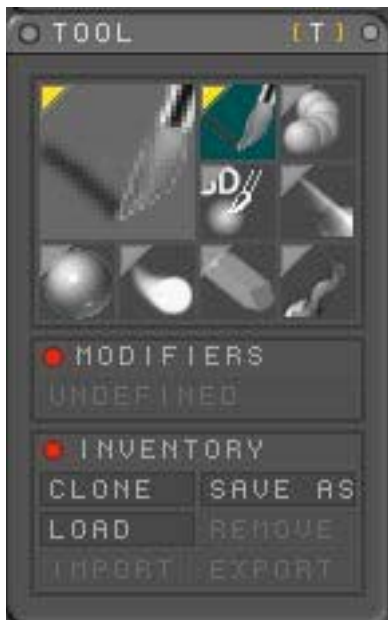
- Texture Palette (TXTR OFF):** Shows options for modifiers (Repeat H, Repeat U, Auto, Planar, Cylindrical, Spherical) and inventory (New, Clone, Clear, Remove, Export, Import).
- Document Palette (O):** Includes Open, Save, Save As, Revert, Import, Import Image, Import All, Export, Export Image, Export All, Modifiers, Width, Height, and Resize.
- Transform Palette (F):** Features icons for move, rotate, scale, and other 3D manipulations, along with Depth, Color, Edit, Size, and Info (550.00, -114.00, 1280.00) sections.
- Render Palette (R):** Contains Cursor, Render, Modifiers, Blur, Edge, Size, Zebra Modifiers, Zebra Shift, X, Y, Z, and ANGL controls.

Callout boxes provide additional context:

- Texture:** "These are the palettes that are available so far. By clicking on them they will unroll to reveal a multitude of sub-palettes and controls." and "In textures you import .psd files only, so far. You can export your images as .psd and .bmp. They are adding to this list."
- Document:** "Under 'Document' you have to open 'Modifiers' to see the black space below 'Resize'. This is where you change the color of your work area."
- Transform:** "Transforms allow you to move, rotate, modify, scale and do all kinds of 3D manipulations."
- Render:** "Render lets you have even more control. Render in 3D, 2D and 2.5D. There are even modifiers in render that give you blur, edge and size control."
- General:** "The vast amount of palettes hold an incredible number of unique tools that make ZBrush truly a best buy."

As you drill down to the specifics, probably the most important feature of ZBrush is its unique tool palette. Each tool that is selected generates its own unique set of parameters such as

modifiers, deformations (bend, twist), and much more. Here are the tool setting for the "Simple Brush" tool.



For me, the tool palette is where I have spent most of my learning time. The variety of tools available is tremendous. Not only do you get to choose from many 2D and 3D tools but within each tool selection are an incredible amount of settings that allow each element to be bent, skewed, sized, and so much, much more. As an example I created this chain by using the ring tool, creating an HDivision of 4 so that it had 4 distinct sides, skewed it a little, and used my favorite, "squiz"ed it. I then exported the single link as an .obj file and manipulated it in Bryce.



That's just the beginning. As you explore ZBrush in in depth you will find a unique tool called Sweep Profile 3D. This is a cool tool. Simply form the profile of the object you want to create and this tool acts as part lathe, part interactive design tool. I wanted to

create a perfume bottle. So I created the bottle and the stopper. I set the modifiers so that the bottle had definite facets. I did this by limiting the HDivision and VDivision and kept the smoothing off. The result was a quick draw and quite impressive.

Another really neat tool is the smudge tool. Take a 3D sphere use the simple brush to both add and subtract "paint"; create eye sockets, then smudge in the ears. Here, my husband attempted a self portrait (pretty close – too much hair) but with a little practice you can get really good. The last two pictures were done by a Pixologic artist. Can't wait till I get that good at it.



Since I use many 3D tools imagine my excitement when I found that you can export ZBrush images as textures. Wow! When you use any of the tools, add in a texture, or import an image as a texture and then smudge it, sculpt it and, in general get crazy with it you get some of the most unique images you can imagine. Here are some of the many textures I created.



Comments

ZBrush is a unique, new, exciting program. Even though the learning curve is a little steep once you get the hang of it you create incredible pictures, models and textures. ZBrush supports .psd format for import of textures, backgrounds and alphas. For export of final images, alphas and textures it supports .psd and .bmp formats. Pixologic has informed me that they are adding other formats. This is definitely a "work-in-progress" that has amazing potential. If the beta is any indication of what's to come, this is a must have in your 3D Art kit.

Pricing And Availability

The ZBrush commercial release version is now available at a special introductory price of \$292.50 (50% off) for a limited period of time. Following the introductory offer ZBrush will be available at a suggested retail price of \$585.00.

A free ZBrush demo is available as a pre-release demonstration version.

System Requirements

ZBrush is currently available for the Windows platform and will be followed by the Mac OS in the near future. I used Windows 2000 with a Wacom tablet and it worked just fine.

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