Using Corel PHOTO-PAINT to create a pixel art style illustration

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Follow this step-by-step process to learn how to maximize any type of pixel art.

Pixel Art

Pixel Art, old as it is, is still a very popular drawing and illustrating style. It goes back to how the old computer games used to look. Its previous limitations are now its biggest advantage and reason for being – individual pixels create a pixelated look.

One very common way — and most obvious way to create the style — is to start any image in very small image size. So small so that you can clearly see the pixels grid. And when you are finished with the image, you resample it to a larger size which is usually not done when working with digital painting, photos and illustration.

This means that if you intend to create an illustration for a printed magazine or large format canvas, billboard – or any type of screen, you plan your image and follow the basic rules and it will be fine.

General settings

Create a new image (File > New... or Ctrl+N). You can choose 72 dpi or 300 dpi or any resolution you prefer. In the Create a New Image dialog box, choose Pixels, and work in sizes of around 150 to 100 pixels. You can work even smaller or larger if you like.

Grid settings are very important. Go to the Property Bar and click the Show Rulers icon (Ctrl+Shift+R). Right-click the ruler, choose Grid Setup, and change the Document Grid distance to about 1 x 1 pixel apart in the Options dialog, and leave the rest as is. Click OK to save. By changing this setting, you will have a grid that shows exactly where the pixels are and you don’t have to always zoom in to 800% to see where the pixels are.
First sketch a draft & draw those pixels!

Start with a draft. You can draw the draft on a paper with a pen, or with a digital pen in Corel PHOTO-PAINT. Import your sketch to a New Image and when the draft is no longer needed, simply delete the draft object.
Create a new object by clicking on the **New Object icon** at the bottom of the **Object Manager Docker**. Choose the **Paint Tool (P)**, and go to the **Brush Settings Docker**, or the **Property Bar**, and select **Custom Art brush**. Choose a simple brush and a hard round or squared nib with a nib size of 1 Pixel. I suggest you use a digital pen tablet from Wacom or any other brand. You can always use a mouse, but a pen tablet will always be better for accuracy and speed.

In the **Property Bar**, turn off anti-aliasing and activate **View > Grid**

Work with multiple objects in the **Object Manager Docker**. To convert the Background Object to a transparent object, simply click the icon shown on its object.

Regardless if you choose to convert it or not, I strongly suggest you quickly create a flat colored background. Simple create a normal object and fill it with the **Fill Tool (F)**, with your flat color choice.
Shading

Shading can be tricky sometimes, especially when you have to think about pixels going astray as you draw. Therefore, use the Magic Wand Tool (W), and select the object and area you intend to shade. Paint the shade and deselect the Mask when finished by clicking on the Remove Mask icon (Ctrl+R), on the standard Toolbar. Voila!

Merge Modes and Lens objects

You can of course use all the merge modes and lens objects you like in the Object Manager Docker. If needed, simply use the Mask tool (Toolbox > Mask tools), and select the area or object and add the merge mode or lens object you need. By using the Lens and Merge mode in the Object Manager Docker, you work non-destructively, meaning you can always go back and forth and make changes if needed. Draw your illustration close to the pixels, so it snaps the brush nib to the pixel grid.

Draw with the Mask and Fill tool to fill larger areas

You can always use a Mask tool, for example the Rectangle Mask (R), to select larger areas following the pixels, and fill with color or patterns using the Fill tool (F).

Color Palettes

You can choose any of the color palettes you have installed. Just go to the Quick Customize Button on the Dockers panel and choose the Color Palette Manager Docker. You can also choose to simply go with the 8-bit color palette. Some may say that’s the way to go, while personally, I choose the color palette best suited for my illustration project.

Resample your drawing!

When you are finished with your drawing, go to Image > Resample... and choose 200% or 1600% and simply change Pixels to millimeters and set the width size. For example, change to 290 mm depending on the size you need for your printed image. In the Resample Dialog box, deselect Anti-alias, and then click OK.
Your painting now has the size you need, and the pixels are crisp and sharp. Save your image with a new name and the new size and keep the original file. Now with the new size image, choose **Save As (File > Save As...)**, or export with a color profile (RGB, Adobe RGB 1998 or CMYK or Pantone). It all depends on which platform and final product you want for your image.