

Creating a Pixel Art Illustration in PHOTO-PAINT

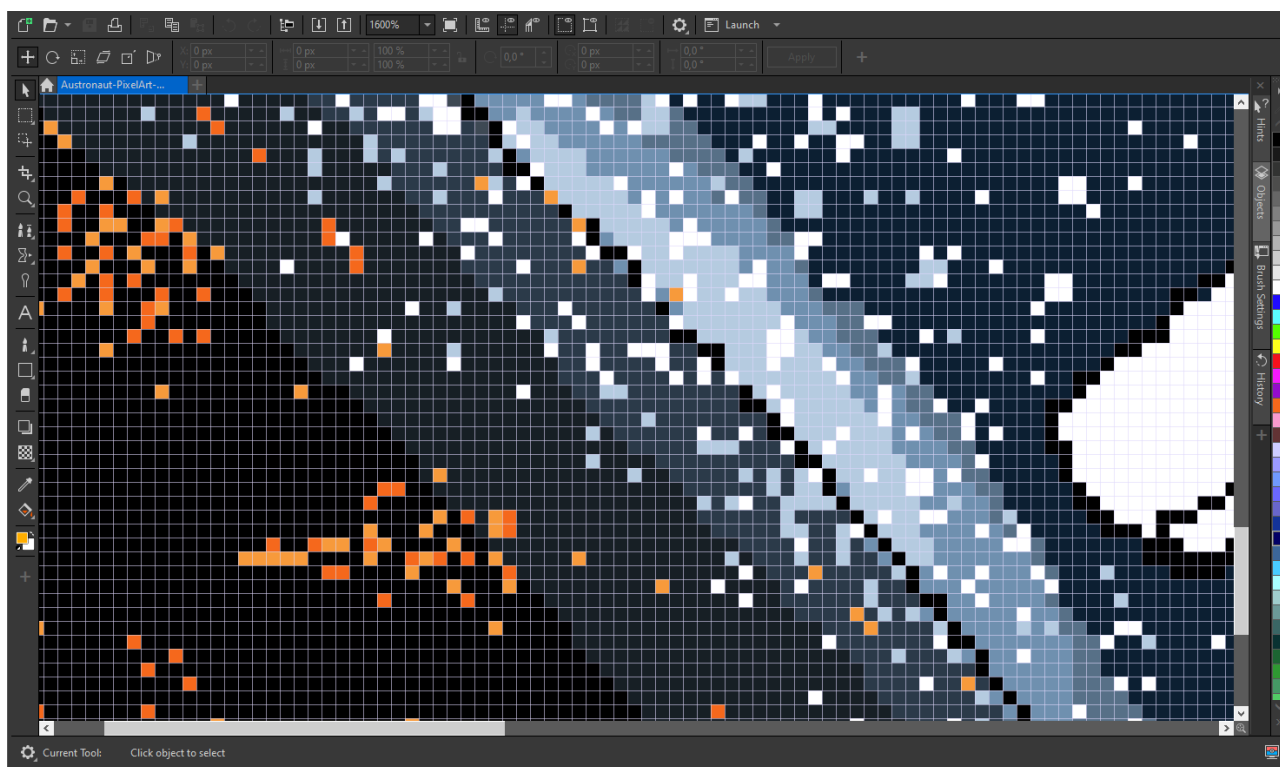
By Stefan Lindblad

Watch the illustration come to life in the [speed drawing video](#).

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

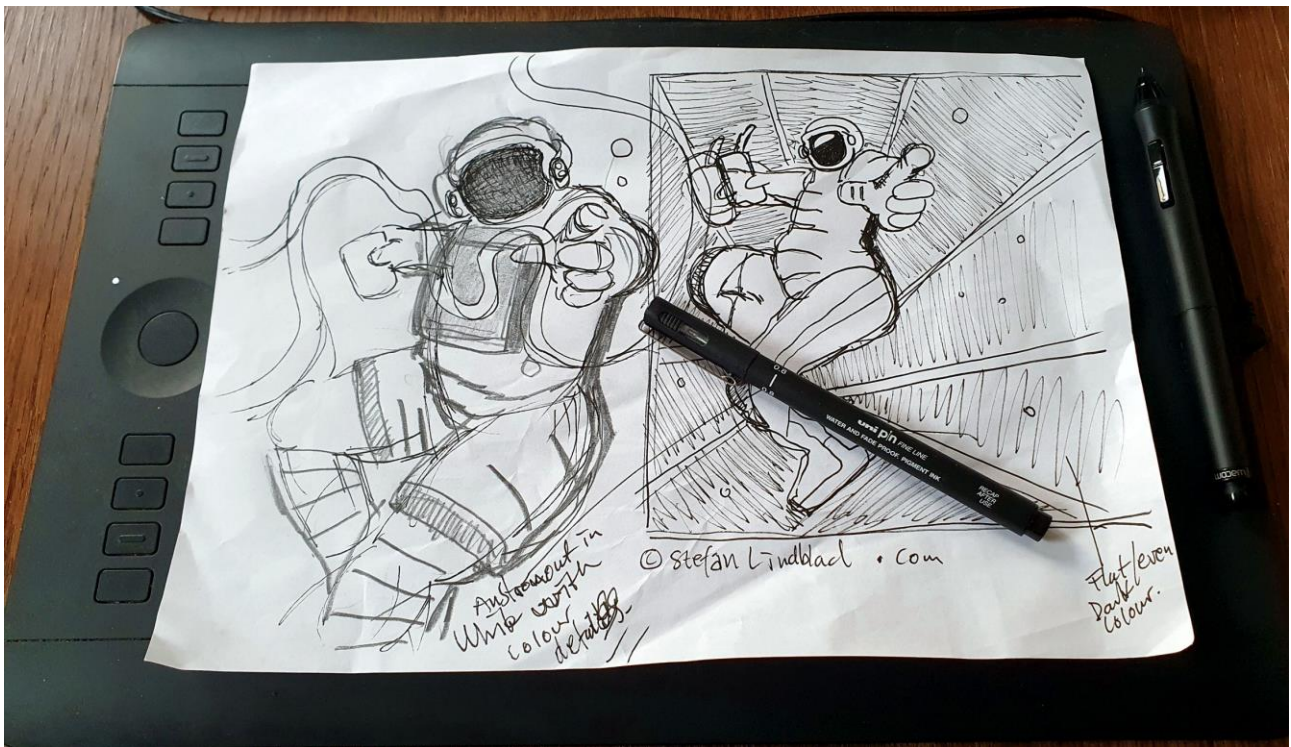
Even if you made a large draft in a sketchbook, you still start any pixel art image in a very small image size. So small you can clearly see the pixels grid. And when finished with the image, you resample it to a larger size which is usually not done when working with digital painting, photos and illustration.

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.



Planning your Pixel Art Illustration

Before you start creating your pixel art, it is helpful to create a sketch or draft first. You can sketch on paper with a pen or use a digital pen in PHOTO-PAINT. Import your sketch into a new document and when the draft is no longer needed you can simply delete the draft object.



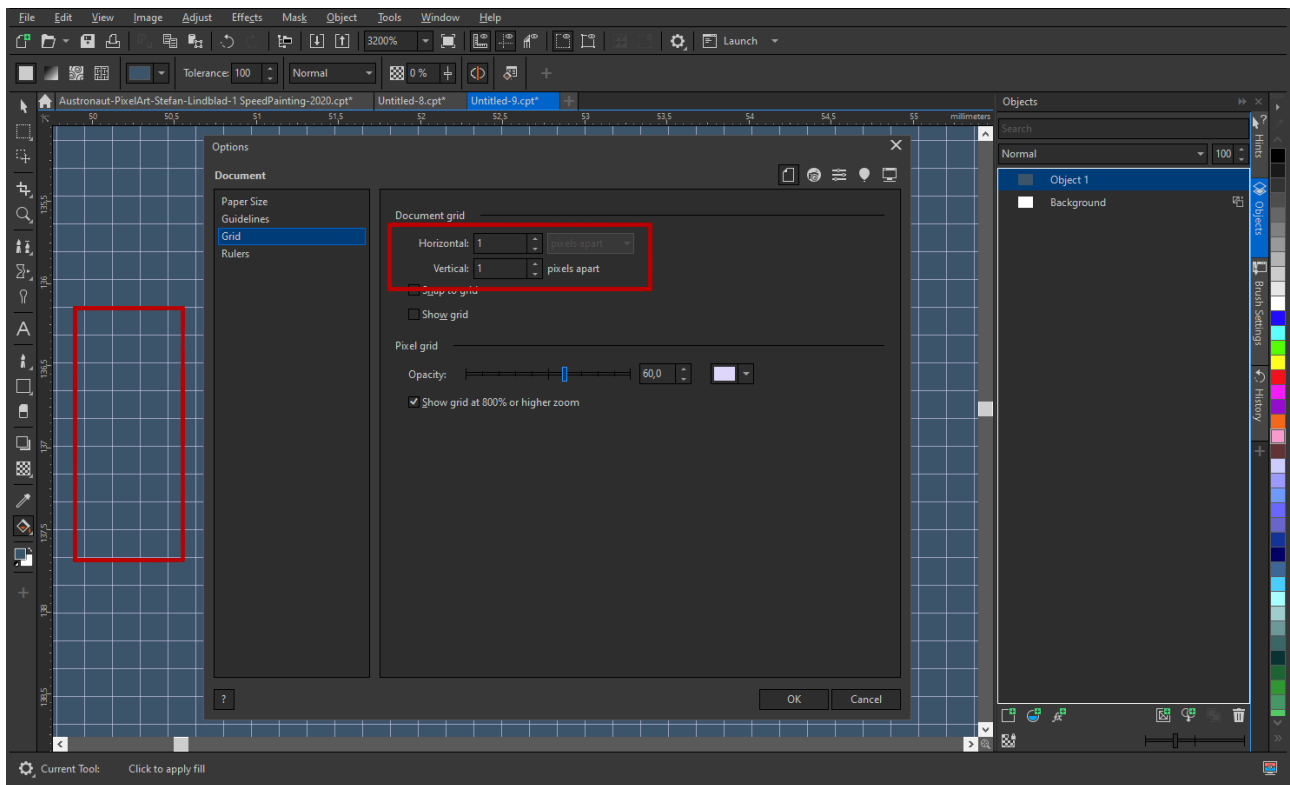
Document Setup

Create a new document (go to **File > New** or use **Ctrl + N**). In the **Create a New Image** dialog box, set the units of measure to **Pixels**, and for this tutorial I am using an image size of 150 x 150 pixels. You can choose 72 dpi or 300 dpi or any resolution you prefer. Click **OK**.

The **Document Grid** is an invaluable tool when creating pixel art and you can adjust the grid settings to make it easier:

- Under the **View** menu, make sure both **Rulers** and **Grid** are enabled.
- Right-click on the ruler and choose **Grid Setup**.
- Change the horizontal and vertical numbers to 1.
- Enable **Snap to Grid** and **Show Grid**.
- You can also adjust the opacity and color of the grid if you like.
- Click **OK**.

By changing these settings, 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.



Drawing Tools and Techniques for Pixel Art

I suggest you use a digital pen tablet or stylus pen to create your pixel art illustration. You can use a mouse, but a digital pen will always be better for accuracy and speed.

There are several tools and techniques that you can use to create a pixel art illustration, depending of course on the style of your illustration and your own preferences for PHOTOPAINT tools and drawing techniques. Here are some tools that are most helpful.

Objects Docker

To open the **Objects** docker, go to **Window > Dockers > Objects**. All your objects will be listed here as you create them, and it is an easy way to select and switch between different objects as you are building your illustration.

To create a new object, click on the **New Object** icon in the bottom left corner of the docker. It is advisable to use multiple objects for different colors and/or elements in your illustration, as this will allow you to easily manipulate, adjust or delete individual elements separate from the illustration as a whole.

If you are using a reference sketch of your pixel art illustration, it will appear as an object in the docker when you copy and paste it into the new document.

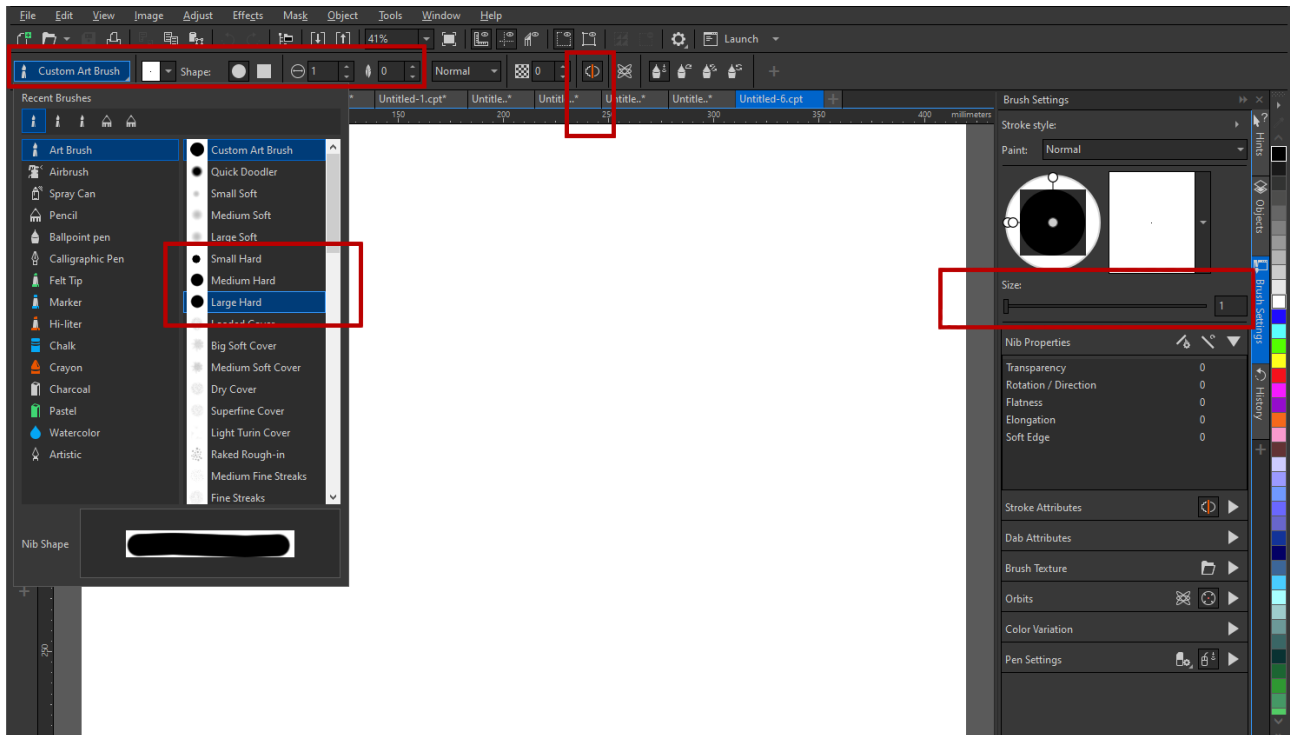
In the top right corner of the docker, you can lower the **Opacity** of the sketch object to make it easier to see your drawing. You can also use the **Visibility** (eye) icon beside any object listed in the docker to hide the object, and you can use the **Delete** icon in the bottom right corner to delete your sketch once you no longer need it.

Paint Tool and Eraser

The **Paint** tool is the main tool I use when creating pixel art. When you activate the **Paint** tool there are several options on the property bar:

- In the **Brush Picker**, select a category and brush type (in this tutorial, I used the **Art Brush** category and **Quick Doodler** brush type).
- From the **Shape** dropdown menu, make sure to choose a hard shape without any blur.
- Important! Make sure the **Anti-aliasing** icon is turned off.
- Disable the **Pen** attributes (Pressure, tilt, bearing, rotation) as they are not required.
- You can change the **Nib Size** by adjusting the number on the property bar or by holding down the **Shift** key while dragging up or down.

TIP: You can also adjust the **Paint** tool settings by using the **Brush Settings** docker (**Window > Dockers > Brush Settings** or **Ctrl + F8**).



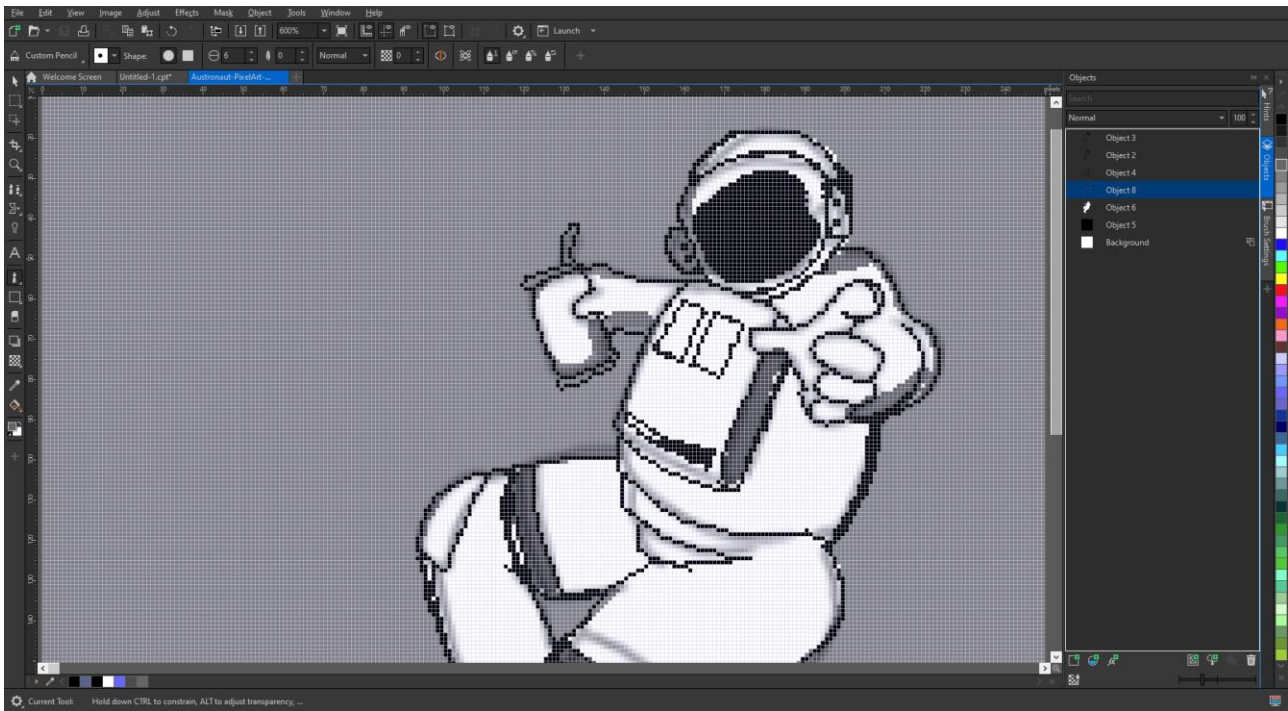
Use the **Eraser** tool to remove any stray pixels

Adding Color and Effects

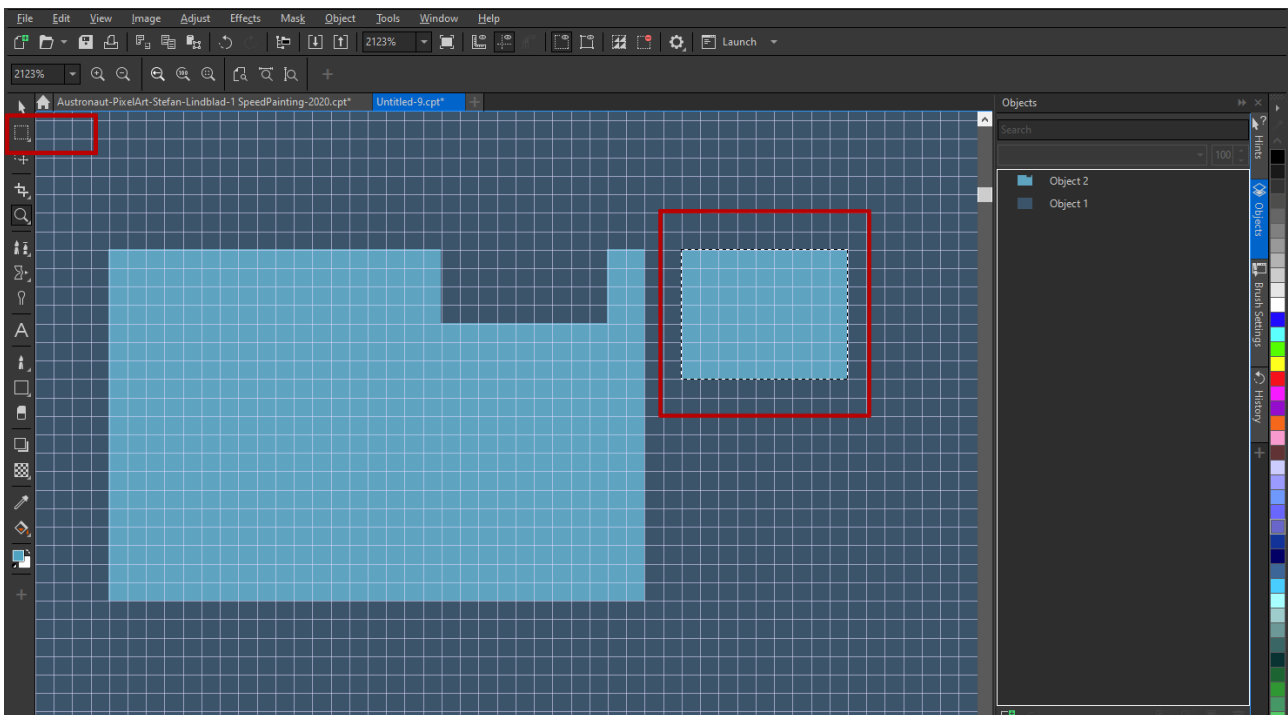
There are many ways to add color and effects to your pixel art illustration.

1. When using the **Paint** tool, simply click on a swatch in the **Color** palette to paint with a different color.
2. Use the **Eyedropper** to sample color from your sketch or reference image if you want to match color exactly.
3. I strongly suggest you start with a flat colored background. Simply create a new object and use the **Fill** tool (**F**) to fill with your background color. With a colored background the grid will contrast better and be helpful when you start to draw. You can always delete the background object if you don't need it anymore.

TIP: Remember that you can always change the document grid color to make it easier to see against the background or other colors in your illustration.



4. Use one of the **Mask** tools, for example the **Rectangle Mask (R)**, to create a selection area and fill it with color or patterns using the **Fill** tool.

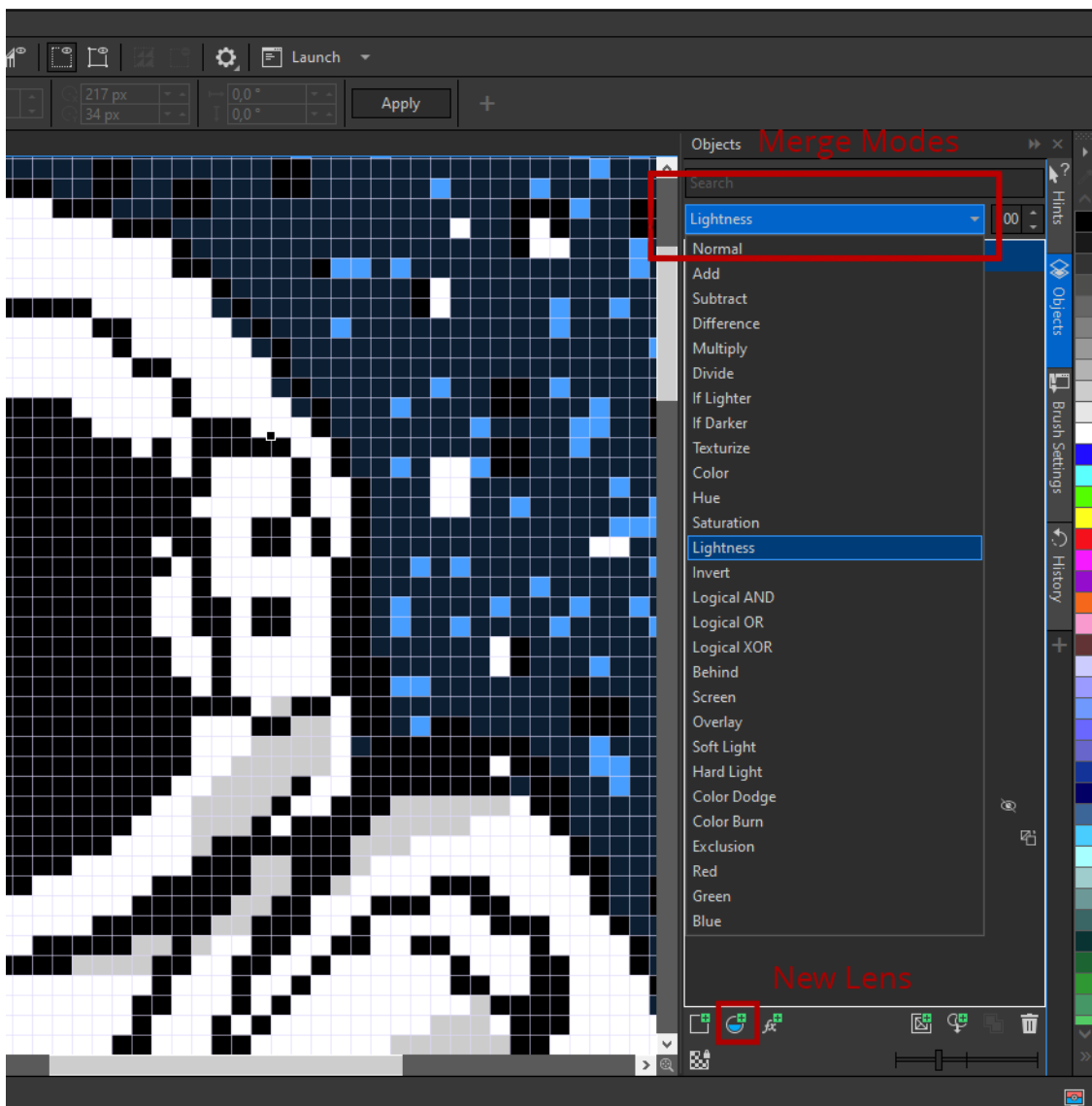


5. **Merge Modes** alter the way brushstrokes or objects combine with the background or underlying objects. You can create some interesting effects by experimenting with different modes from the **Merge Mode** dropdown list at the top of the **Objects** docker.

6. **Lenses** allow you to apply effects to an object or selected area.

- Select the object that you want to apply a lens effect to or use a **Mask** tool to define an area to apply a lens effect to.
- Click on the **New Lens** icon at the bottom of the **Objects** docker.
- In the **New Lens** window, select a category and type of effect, then click **OK**.
- Depending on the type of effect you selected, you will be presented with further options to adjust the effect settings.

NOTE: By using **Lenses** and **Merge Modes** in the **Objects** docker, you work non-destructively, meaning that you can add, remove or modify these effects and your original object(s) won't be altered.

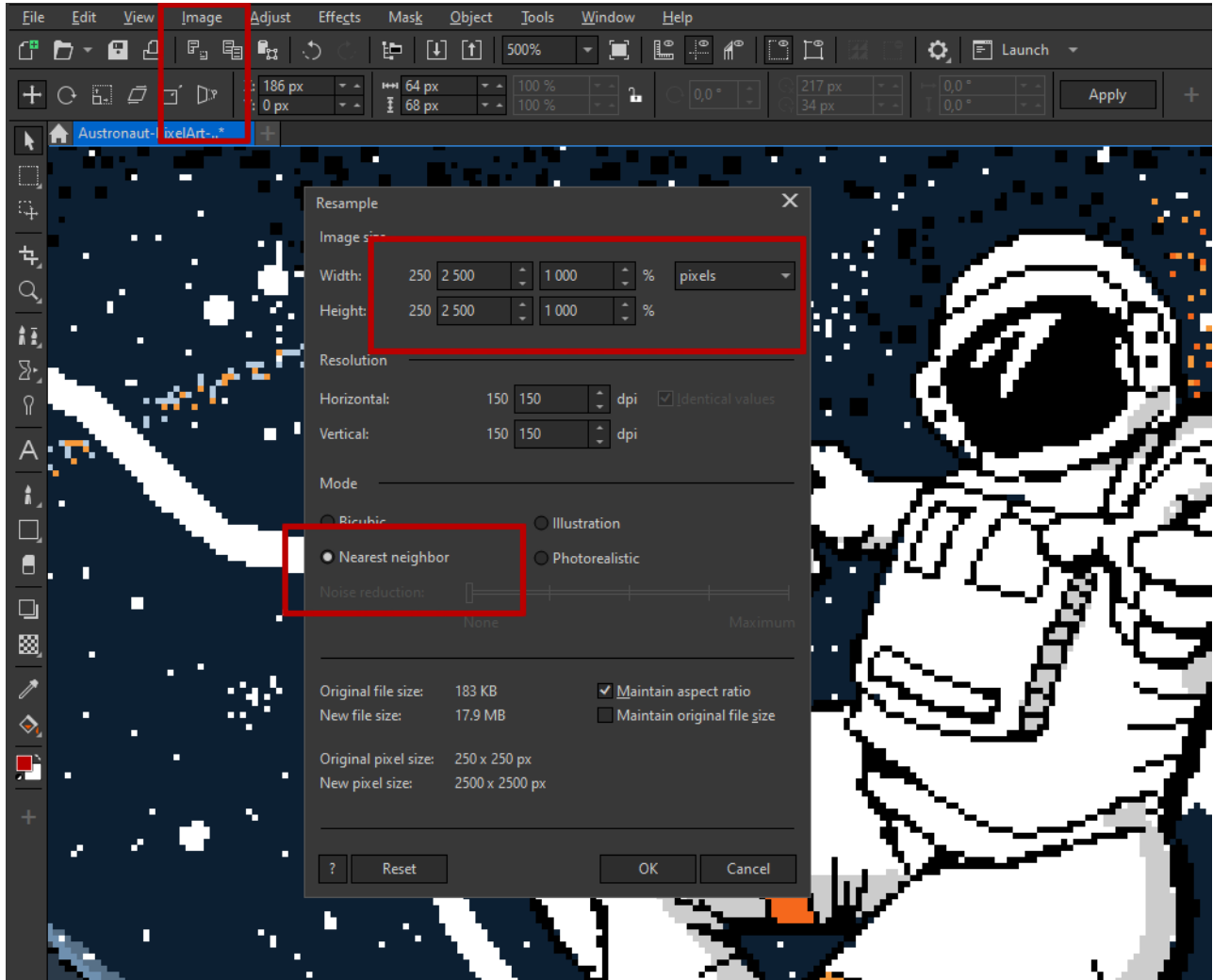


7. You can choose any of the color palettes you have installed. Just click the **Quick Customize** (plus) button on the **Dockers** panel or go to **Window > Dockers** and choose the **Palettes** docker. You can also choose to simply go with the 8-bit color palette. Some may say that's the way to go, while personally, I choose the color palette best suited for my illustration project.

Resampling your Pixel Art Illustration

Once your illustration is complete, you can resize it to meet the specifications of your project.

Go to **Image > Resample** and enter the new image size and resolution. Select **Nearest Neighbor** as the mode and click **OK**. The resampling mode is important here – only **Nearest Neighbor** will produce clear, sharp results at larger sizes.



Your illustration 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 **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.

Adding Text

As an optional step, you may want to add text to your pixel art illustration using the **Text** tool. In this example, when my illustration was completed, I added the word “Illustration” and my name “Stefan Lindblad” as separate text objects. Then I used the **Pick** tool and guidelines to align the text.



PHOTO-PAINT has tons of tools and effects to let your imagination run wild and free. Have fun drawing and painting your own pixel art, and share it in our [graphic design gallery](#).