The GIMP

If you want to be able to create, edit, save and convert just about any kind of image files with great power and flexibility without paying the high prices that typically accompany commercial software then you are ready to try the GIMP.

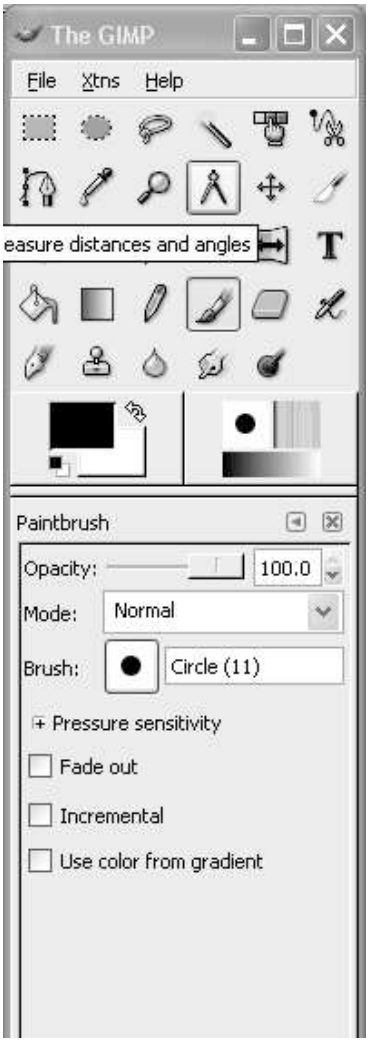
Short for Gnu Image Manipulation Program, the GIMP is an open-source software application that compares to packages like Photoshop and Paintshop Pro. Open-Source software is free for all users. Such software allows all users to contribute suggestions and direct improvements as the software evolves. This column has featured a number of other open-source programs and a glance at back issues may prove beneficial for the interested reader. Among these have been the audio editing program, Audacity and Course management system, Moodle.

As with these aforementioned programs, the GIMP works on all computer platforms, including MacIntosh, Windows, Linux and Unix. It is very easy to use and offers an amazingly wide range of file formats. In order to get started using the GIMP, you need to first download it from: http://gimp.org/ Installation is the only aspect of using The GIMP that is at all difficult since it also requires installing an emulator program that allows some Linux or Unix based software to function properly in a Windows or MacIntosh environment. These can also be downloaded from the same site and installation information is quite clearly indicated. For Windows users, the emulator is GTK+ and for MacIntosh users it is known as X11. Once the emulator and program have been installed you are ready to begin learning how to use the GIMP.

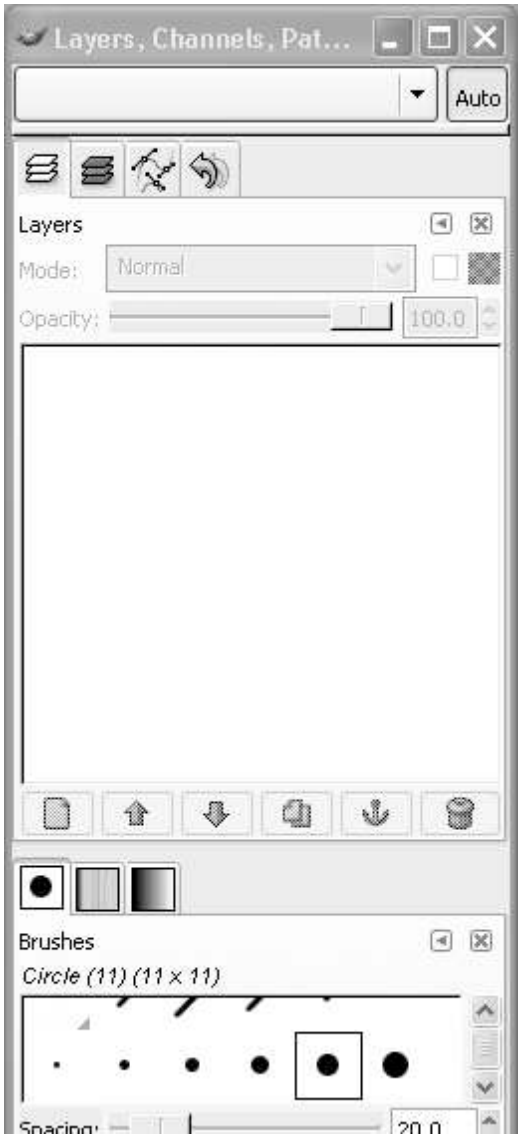
Using The GIMP

Once you begin using the GIMP you will realize that the menus are a bit different from the typical Microsoft windows with which you may be accustomed. Everything functions quite similarly, however, as you will soon realize.

There are two screens that comprise the program. The first of these is the GIMP itself, which contains all the various tools, fills, etc. This is also where you choose your editing tool and select files to be opened through the conventional File menu.



The second window is named, “Layer’s, Channels, Paths, Undo, Brushes, Patterns, Gradients”. This is the active window that actually displays an open image. It is also the window that allows you to add advanced features.



Advanced features are accessed by right-clicking on your picture (or ctrl-clicking on a MacIntosh), and there are some very impressive features! These include a number of filters (in fact more than the number offered by Photoshop). Filters are used to alter images in ways that are familiar and new, such as Old Photograph, that lets you add Sepia tint, mottle, a border and some random scratches.

In addition to these filters there are layers, image and color transforms, the ability to feather selections, and a number of other transformational abilities. The terminology associated with this program is common to all image editing programs. However, many of these may be new to readers. In order to learn more about much of this terminology,you may want to read more about the GIMP.

Learning the Basics

In addition to learning the terminology itself, some basic GIMP functions can be learned quickly and easily. You may want to change the size, contrast, brightness or another

feature of an image. A simple tutorial covering the basic functions of the GIMP can be found at http://gimp.org/tutorials/Lite_Quickies/. Tutorials for a number of more sophisticated functions can also be found at http://gimp.org/tutorials/

As with any sophisticated image editing program, there is far more than can be covered in an article of this length. However, it is sufficient to say that GIMP is an effective replacement for any of the expensive image editing products on the market today. And with the Money that you save you may be able to purchase some related equipment such as a quality digital camera, scanner and tripod and still have some left over.