

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO *Digital Art*

## SOMETHING I WISH I HAD WHEN I WAS STARTING OUT

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Digital art is one of the most prevailing forms of art in the present day. It's one of the visual art forms that use digital technology – or soft work – as an integral part of the process. Though, I'm not going to bore you with the history of digital art like most webpages do. I'll just say that it's interesting, fun and a growing interest of artists and freelancers. You don't only enjoy doing it, but also earn a few bucks while you're at it.

*Sound fun?* Let's get started.

But before we move on, let me tell you that this guide is for beginners – actual beginners – who have never had a hands-on experience in digital art. In this guide, I'll take you through some of the many different aspects of creating digital artwork, how to monetize it, beginner's mistakes, devices and applications you can use, uploading art on social media, some important points to consider and finally, a little tutorial of an illustration that I did using my phone. So if you're interested, follow along.

## Getting Started

Just like anything else, it will take some time to master this form of art. You will be making and re-making mistakes – a lot of them – correcting them and making them all over again. But that's just how you learn. There will be struggles and maybe a lot of negative criticism but through constant practice, you can make it work.

## Devices & Applications

You can make digital art in almost any device. A common misunderstanding among people who want to start out in digital art is that they will need a huge, touch-screen desktop or even a graphic tablet to make digital art. Nope. If you have as little as a smartphone and some memory on your device, you're good to go. If you're low on resources and starting out on digital art now, count yourself lucky, because when I was starting out, I had no access to desktop software and there were next to no effective mobile applications for this purpose.



# Smartphones

Let's get started with smartphones. Smartphones may or may not come with styli (a physical drawing tool). Here, first and foremost, you will have to consider buying a stylus if your smartphone doesn't come with one and if you're not comfortable using your fingers for drawing. If you can draw with your fingers, it's good too. I had no stylus either.

I've experienced and worked with a lot of mobile applications for drawing, but my favorites so far are Adobe Illustrator Draw and Medibang Paint. Here's a review of a few of these applications so that you may install what works best for you.

## [ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR DRAW](#)

*Click the links!*

Now that you are in the digital art scene, you will hear "Adobe" a lot. Adobe has by far the best digital drawing software for desktops and fairly good mobile applications too. As for Adobe Illustrator Draw – Draw for short – it gives the artist the freedom to use multiple drawing layers and has canvases of different sizes including print sizes such as A4 and A3. It has an easy interface as well as compared to other applications which would confuse a beginner with its vast array of options and menus. However, it has a limited amount of brushes to choose from, only five to be exact and does not let you add text to watermark your drawings or to make comics. The primary use of it is for illustrations and it integrates with Adobe Photoshop (a desktop application) via Creative Cloud, which you can use to edit your illustrations further, if needed.

## [PICSART | PICSART PHOTO EDITOR](#)

Now this application, I'll never dare to delete from my phone. It's a multi-purpose photo editor which also has a drawing ability. Its editing area will save you the effort of redrawing an entire illustration because of a few errors. It lets you merge different photos (or drawings), apply effects, add texts and watermarks and adjust the image size as well. I use it for post-processing the illustrations I create in Adobe Draw. The only reason I don't use its drawing feature is the zoom capability. The illustrating world needs a lot of zooming and drawing and detailing, so it's not fair if you can't zoom your drawing enough. With that said, it's better than Adobe Draw if you talk about brushes. PicsArt gives you a lot of freedom on the brushes and brush settings. It also gives you the freedom to use multiple layers.

## MEDIBANG PAINT

Medibang is slightly better than all the above because it gives a lot of freedom in choosing canvas sizes and also lets you select DPI (resolution) levels. A beginner at this point would not know why resolution is that important – well, it will come into play when you attempt to monetize your work, as discussed later in this guide. It lets you add text and work with multiple layers! If someone was to make me choose one drawing smartphone application for the rest of my life, Medibang would probably be it.

## Desktop Computers

Two common things about almost all desktop softwares is that they are a 100% harder to understand than smartphone applications and they are not free, unlike most smartphone applications. I would recommend taking a crash course on the software you are going to work with, or at least watch free tutorials on media websites.

## ADOBE PHOTOSHOP

Photoshop is an amazing tool widely used to create illustrations and drawings. It has all the freedom a beginner illustrator would ask for. It lets you save in a lot of different formats, lets you use unlimited amount of layers among other benefits. Photoshop specializes in photo editing and post-processing, but it's a handy tool for illustrators as well. It can be a little tricky to understand for beginners at first.

## ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR

Illustrator, as depicted by its name and opposed to Photoshop, specializes in illustrations and drawing. It has all the benefits of the mobile applications and has even more flexibility. It also lets you save scalable vectors that you can resize as per your need later on. There are other digital drawing softwares as well, for example the well-known Corel Draw and Medibang Paint for desktop computers, but I haven't had much experience with them. So I would recommend going through reviews before purchasing!

# Professional Tablets

Professional tablets like [Wacom Cintiq](#) are great to use at a professional level. For beginners however, it's good to start out and get a feel of what works for you and what you enjoy!

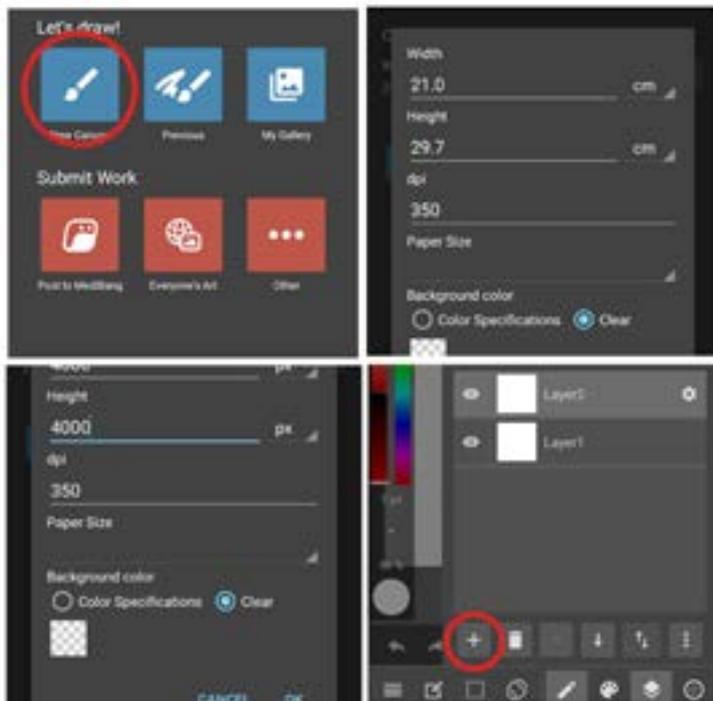
## Important Points

It's necessary to keep a few guidelines in mind when you start working with the digital canvas. I have learnt all this after experiencing a lot of failures and on a trial and error basis and I am sure you will save yourself a lot of frustration if you heed these few points.

- **Digital Art** is just like traditional art in the sense that every artist has a different style. It takes a lot of patience and constant practice for beginners to find their art style and improve it.
- **There is no "right" or "wrong" way to create art.** For example, if you are into drawing comics and are unable to draw a specific object or a part of your character, let's say their nose, like that one famous artist or in a way that it looks realistic enough, remember – it's fine. Do not put a lot of pressure on the way your drawing turns out, especially when you're a beginner. In the beginning you are finding your art style – so let it happen.
- **Always have a plan.** Never enter the drawing application or software without a plan. You'll frustrate yourself out of there. If you open a canvas and then try to think of drawing something, you will probably end up drawing and erasing and drawing and erasing until your frustration wins over.
- **Art is not meant to fit in a pre-defined standard of beauty.** Art is meant to make you feel some type of way. If a single image file has the power to make you laugh, educate you on a social justice issue, open your eyes to a matter, amuse you, sadden you or even just catch your eye for a second, it is art.

# Tutorial: Sun's Sorrows

Below is a step-by-step tutorial of a drawing I call 'Sun's Sorrows' that I've made on Medibang Paint, on my smartphone. No styli were used to draw this.



**1.** Launch Medibang Paint application.

**2.** Tap 'New Canvas' and change the canvas size (both width and height) from default to 4000 pixels and tap 'OK'. Make sure the background color is set to 'clear'.

**3.** A black and grey checkered square working space will be spread before you, surrounded by menus and options.

**4.** Tap the second last option (layers) on the bottom right. Tap the '+' sign to add another layer. You can rename the layer to 'foreground' for your convenience. In this tutorial, I've left it as 'Layer2'

**5.** A 'pen' brush in black and a suitable size will be selected on default. On Layer2, start drawing a bunch of wilted flowers, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. Follow Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3 to complete the bunch. Now use the fill tool on the top menu or the same brush to fill it with black, such that the illustration looks like a silhouette of a wilted bunch of flowers.



Figure 2.1



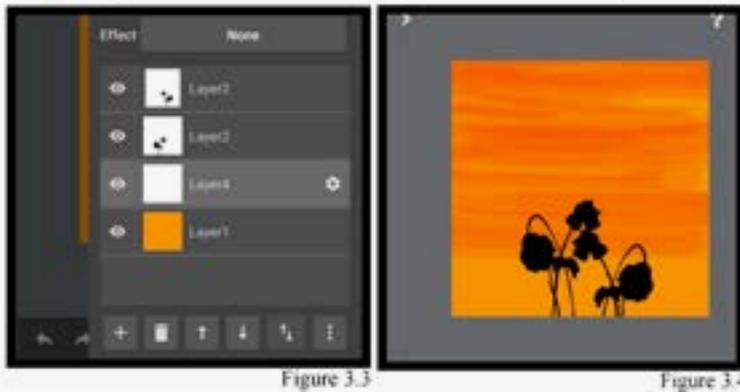
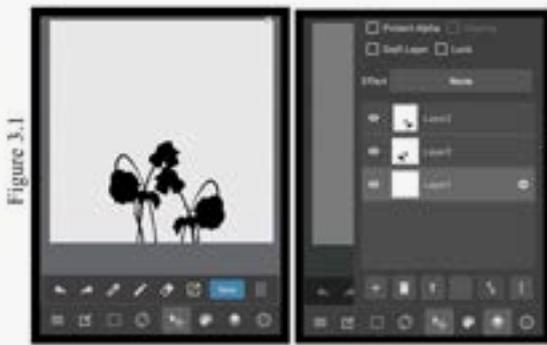
Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3



Figure 2.4



6. Now tap the layers menu again, and then the three vertically arranged dots (options) to reveal another menu containing 'Layer Management'. Tap 'Duplicate'. Another 'Layer2' will appear. Select it and then go to Layer Management again, and select 'Flip Horizontally'. Go to the working area once again and move the illustration a little bit to right so that it looks like there are two such bunches.

7. Select a suitable shade of orange from the Color Wheel above and use a plus sized 'Pen' tool to fill up Layer1.



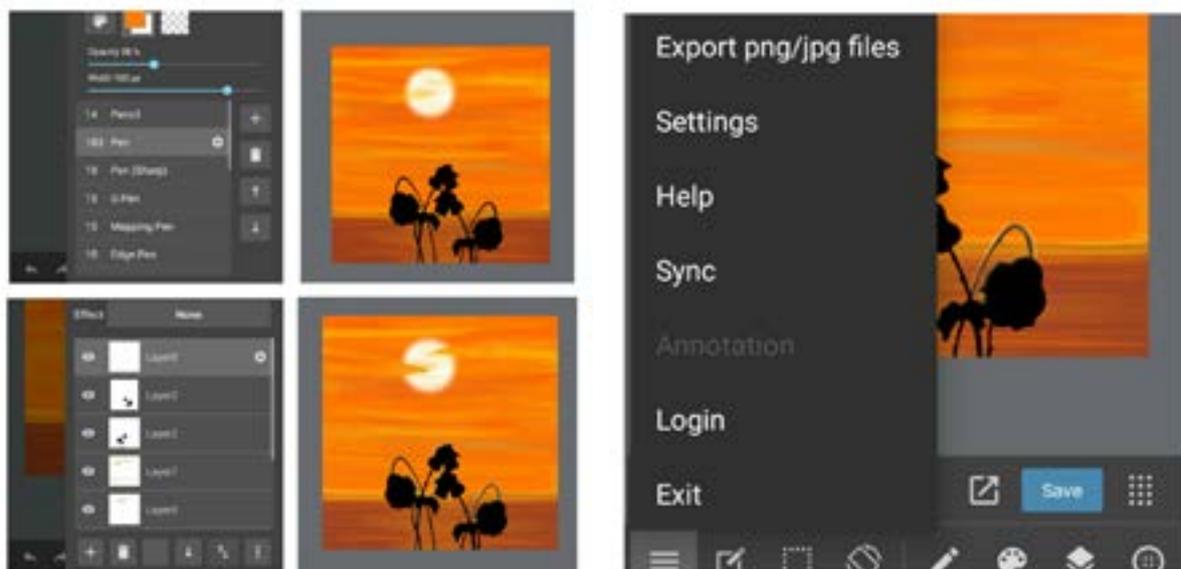
8. Add another layer. Select a deeper orange shade and setting the opacity to 50%, paint in horizontal strokes using different sizes.

9. When you're done creating a picture similar to Figure 4.1, continue by adding a brown colored strip on the lower one-fifth of the working area.

**10.** Select a shade of bright yellow from the wheel and setting a small width, paint horizontal strokes in places on the top four-fifth of the working area. This will give an extra detail to the background.

**11.** Now lower the opacity to 4% and paint horizontal strokes on the point the brown and orange parts meet. Change the color to orange and repeat. Now, select an 'Airbrush' from the brush menu and select pure white color. Change the opacity to 100% and a suitable brush size.

**12.** On a new layer, Layer5, paint a circle in a suitable position in the orange part. This will be the sun. Use new layers Layer6 and Layer7 to paint strokes or clouds on parts of the sun. At this point, use yellow or orange colors only. On a new layer, Layer8, use a small sized Airbrush in 20% opacity and outline the parts of the flower silhouette that is facing the sun. This action will give a special effect to the flowers.



**13.** The illustration is complete! Now tap the first option on the bottom left and select 'Export PNG/JPG'. Select your preferred file format to save in. I would recommend using a JPG as they're commonly used. Once you choose an option, you will be directed to your phone's gallery.

## Common Mistakes & Avoiding Them

Making mistakes is a part of learning. But it's not necessary for you to commit the same mistakes as your predecessors. For your convenience, keep in mind these few 'nevers' and 'always's.

- **Never compare your work.** Your work is yours and it has a touch in it that's unique to yourself. I've done it before and believe me, it wasn't pleasant. Most of the time I didn't know that I, as a beginner with two-months experience, was comparing my work with a professional's online gallery, who was years deep into the field.

- **Never enter the illustrating application or software when you're blank.** I had heard this before, but I still committed this mistake and the results weren't good. Whenever I did that, the outcome was almost always me leaving it all frustrated, not feeling like drawing for the next few weeks.

- **Never underestimate an art block.** Art blocks are very real and the one who tells you otherwise is wrong. Never push yourself to draw when you're not feeling like it. It will be a disaster.

- **Always keep saving your work in the process of making it.** If there's one thing all digital artists hate about digital art softwares and applications, it's that they like to crash unexpectedly when the device is low on disk space or for other reasons. It's better to take precautions than to look at your desktop background in awe and anger and frustration of losing all your work in a blink.

- **Never pay heed to critics on social media that hate.** Nowadays, social media is a more hate than acceptance. Don't let it lower your spirit, especially if you are a beginner. Your art style will develop with practice of 10 to 12 months at least. If you decide to put it out there within that time, remember not to pay attention to negative and discouraging comments.

- **Always work with multiple layers.** Sometimes, you will mess up on a tiny little part of an illustration that is overlapping another part. If you're working on a separate layer, the mess will be easier to handle.

- **Always watch or read a tutorials.** You can learn about a lot of things like that. There are many important aspects of illustration like shading, mixing and text formatting that were not covered in this guide. You can learn something different from every tutorial that you follow.

*Huda Z.*