



ZBrush 1.1

Revolutionary Program Combines Painting with 3-D

By Ben Long

### Summary

Pros: Unique combination of 2-D-and 3-D-painting tools; excellent performance.

Cons: Nonstandard interface; approach to painting can be hard to learn.

Price as rated: \$292

Company: Pixologic,  
888/748-5967 <http://www.pixologic.com>

No matter how much graphics experience you have, odds are you've never seen anything quite like ZBrush 1.1. Part 3-D modeler and renderer, part paint program, this unique application lets you easily create complex images with sophisticated color and lighting effects. Paint programs normally work in two dimensions, treating each pixel as a point on a 2-D grid. But ZBrush stores a z dimension that contains depth data for each pixel, along with texture information. The program lets you quickly compose intricate paintings with depth, texture, and shading, though learning to use it may take some time.

Digital Quarry

ZBrush forgoes the Mac's menu bar and windows in favor of a custom interface: a drawing window surrounded by movable, collapsible palettes. There's nothing wrong with ZBrush's interface, but because it's so wildly unusual, you may not be comfortable navigating the program's features for some time. And many of the tools are context-sensitive, so it can be difficult to remember how to get to a particular tool or option.

## PICTURES

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fish.gif

Something Fishy: ZBrush 1.1 lets you create 3-D-like renderings, complete with textures and lighting, using nothing more than paint brushes.

Fortunately, you don't have to know anything about splines, extrusions, or lathes to use ZBrush's 3-D tools. To begin, you simply draw a 3-D primitive; then you use brushes to push and pull on its surface and sculpt it into the desired shape. At any time, you can specify or change the color and texture of your 3-D object or rotate, scale, and move it. ZBrush's performance is stunningly fast, even at the highest rendering quality.

### The Key of Z

ZBrush is more than a digital-sculpting program; its huge assortment of brushes lets you use complex geometries and textures. Because the brushes apply pixels in 3-D space, they can create and interact with any 3-D geometry in your scene. For example, when you start painting, you see a thick glob of 3-D paint. Continue painting the same area, and the glob will get deeper and deeper as the strokes are layered on. As the paint becomes thicker, it interacts with the lighting in your scene, and highlights and shadows appear as ZBrush automatically calculates lighting and texture detail in real time. If your scene contains any 3-D objects, the brushes follow their contour and geometry.