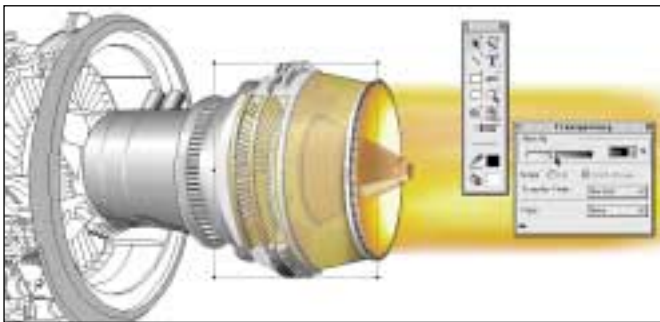


An integrated vector illustration, image editing and page layout application with comprehensive transparency capabilities

Deneba Canvas Professional Edition Version 6

BY PETER DUDAR

THE PACKAGING PROMISES A “COMPLETE SOLUTION FOR ILLUSTRATION, photo editing, page layout and Web design,” and we’re skeptical. Powerhouses like Adobe and Macromedia are re-configuring their applications into integrated suites, but



SpriteLayer
Transparency effects. (from top) Change an objects overall opacity with just a simple slider adjustment; repositionable wire frames let you adjust vector gradients; paint out part of a layer to reveal hidden content with a pixel-based channel mask.



Deneba claims to do it all for \$375 (US). To be fair, Deneba doesn't expect *Canvas 6* to displace *Illustrator*, *Photoshop*, *QuarkXPress* and their equivalents at the high end (*Microsoft Office 2000 Premium* is probably more of a concern) — but to some extent, *Canvas* can thumb its nose at them. With its new Sprite-layer technology, for instance, *Can-*

vas seems to have transparency totally licked, which can't be said for *Illustrator*, *Freehand* and *CorelDraw*.

THE CANVAS 6 INTERFACE

The interface is not ideal. To start, you select one of *Canvas*' three document types: illustration, publication, or presentation. All documents can be multipage and multilayer, but each window type differs slightly. The publication



The enhanced interface. (from top) the customizable Toolbar; the Docking bar, with user-placed palette and menu tabs; the publication window's Text Ruler; the Toolbar and its Paint sub-palette.

window, for instance, has a 'hardwired' text ruler. Yet all commands work anywhere. It would be preferable to have one window type and deploy 'hardwired' elements as floating palettes.

Otherwise, interface elements are highly customizable. You can insert shortcuts for commands or tools into *Canvas 6*'s Toolbar (colors, strokes, object styles, font and type sizes). Toolbar sets can be saved; and you can also input keyboard shortcuts. The application is not scriptable, but this streamlining of repetitive tasks compensates somewhat.

Canvas' interface designers are very keen on multiple-level menus and palettes. The Paint tool, for instance, has both. Most submenus and subpalettes can be dragged from their default positions and left floating. Or they can be attached as tabs to the new Docking bar near the top of the screen. The downside to this highly customizable, multi-level construct is clutter.

Context menus can be accessed at any time by simply control- or right-clicking on an object. (To edit an object path, double-click to display it as a wireframe.)

SPRITE LAYER TECHNOLOGY

SpriteLayer Technology is *Canvas 6*'s way of easily creating *Photoshop*-like layer effects involving transparency and blending of images. However, transparency and lens effects are not applied to layers, but object types: vectors, bitmaps or text. (So if you import a layered *Photoshop* file, each layer is interpreted as a separate object — and further editing is a whole new ball game.) There's no limit to the number or combination of objects that can be affected, and objects' editing properties are retained.

Canvas 6 has four types of transparency: overall opacity, vector transparency gradients, vector mask and channel mask. To change an object's overall opacity, simply access the Opacity tool slider. You can also select *Photoshop*-type transfer modes (multiply, screen, overlay, soft light, hard light, darken, lighten and difference).

With a vector mask, you can attach any type of object (or group of objects) to any other object as a transparency mask (think car windshields). Transparencies are stackable. *Canvas 6* maps transparency levels based on the lightness or darkness of the masking object, accounting for complex tex-

ture and pattern fills.

To fade an object to transparency, you apply one of four vector gradient tools: radial, directional, rectangular, or elliptical. Just drag across the selected object and repositionable wire frames indicate the extent of the effect and the selection (think vignettes or blended graphic objects).

To create a pixel-based channel mask for any object type, press Option or Ctrl and double-click; then grab something from the toolbox. To paint out part of a photo and reveal an underlying illustration, try a soft brush. SpriteLayer objects are always editable, but if you need to edit grouped objects, use the Direct Selection tool if possible; if you ungroup objects, *Canvas* dumps the transparency channel.

DRAWING AND ILLUSTRATION

Canvas 5's arsenal for technical illustration included Boolean operators (add, outline, subtract, punch, slice, divide, trim), 17 automatic dimensioning tools, Object Styles, conversion to Béziers, clipping paths, and a SmartMouse toggle for placing one object on specific points of another.

The toolset has been enhanced in version 6 with a Trim command for use on intersecting lines or arcs, an Offset Path command, a guide layer for positioning guides or grids in front or back of objects, a Knife tool that slices through complex vectors (affecting only selected objects), while retaining object fills such as gradients; and others.

The new Transform palette enables you to define vector objects by inputting coordinates and dimensions, plus factors like rotation and skew. The Fillet path editing option, accessed through the Context menu, rounds off corners using radius values. And attributes can be transferred to objects by first copying a source object to the clipboard and then applying the Paste Attributes command.

Select *Canvas' Arc* tool, place the pointer where you want to start the arc, and drag. The arc grows as you drag and appears with adjustment handles on release. Arcs or circles can also be defined by setting a radius or clicking any three points. For flow charting, first type something, click the Data tab in the Object Specs palette and select diamond, rounded rectangle or oval; connect your elements with Smart Lines that snap to the text objects.

Dragging the new Gradient Vector tool lets you interactively set gradient direction and length on selected objects. Perhaps the most interesting style available is the shaped gradient which conforms to the object outline, rendering more realistic shading.

IMAGE EDITING

Canvas 5 had fair image processing capabilities: you could convert vectors to bitmaps and apply Levels, Curves, Color Balance, Hue, Saturation, Brightness and Contrast correction filters. Its range of painting tools was comprehensive enough. You could retouch images with Smudge, Sharpen,

Blur, Dodge and Burn tools. And images could be imported via digital camera or scanner.

With version 6, the list of effect filters is now up to 30, with the inclusion of Motion Blur, Radial Blur, Zoom Blur, Twirl, Ripple and Spherize — and compatibility with third party *Photoshop* plug-ins has been enhanced.

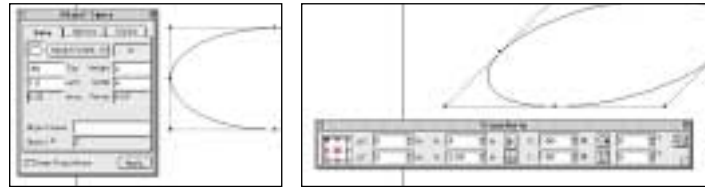
Selection capabilities now include Marquee tools, the Magic Wand tool, Column and Row tools, Grow and Similar functions, and the Color Range command.

Image editing commands can be applied to multiple paint objects. And an Acquire command enables you to import multiple images one format at a time.

Canvas' cropping tool is ersatz; you have to drag corners one at a time to make a single crop, so you can't preview the results.

Canvas 6 doesn't have the feature depth and higher automation capabilities of *Photoshop* (like Actions), but it manages more than just the basics. And *Canvas' responsiveness*

Object Specs and Transform palettes. (left) The Object Specs palette provides object data and object styles management. (right) The Transform palette creates vector objects using coordinates and dimensions.



has improved in image editing and screen redraws, thanks to proprietary object caching and code optimization. Speed-wise, it seems comparable to *Photoshop 5* on my Mac G3.

PAGE LAYOUT

PageMaker users will recognize the terrain: there are layers, text blocks needn't be pre-defined, images are imported by loading the cursor, overflow text is loaded from windowshade handles on text blocks, and page icons run across the bottom of the window.

To set up your publication, you first access the Document Setup palette, which provides a Facing Pages option. Unfortunately, there's no equivalent to *QuarkXPress' automatic text box* option for instantly accommodating pages of imported text. To create column layouts,



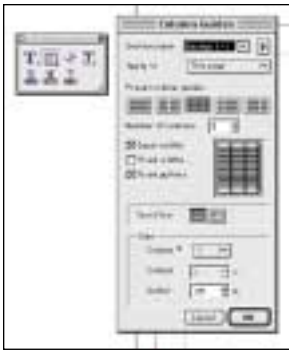
DENEBA CANVAS 6

Recommended system requirements
Power Macintosh, OS 7.5 or later, 16 MB RAM (32 MB recommended)
Pentium compatible processor, 24 MB RAM for Windows 95/98 (32 MB recommended) or 32 MB RAM for Windows NT (64 MB recommended)

Estimated street price \$375 (US)
Upgrade \$199 (US)
Includes 30,000 clip art images, 2,450 URW Type 1 and TrueType fonts.

Demo version available at
www.deneba.com

Deneba Software
Phone: 305-596-5644
E-mail: postmaster@deneba.com



Section tool and Column Guides palette. Column layout management.

you next access *Canvas 6*'s new Section tool, which opens the Column Guides palette. You then select a preset or create custom guides; they can be applied to the current page, all pages, left pages or right pages. The Section tool can also be used to create column guides by dragging.

When text flows into a Section, linked separate columns of text are created. Though you can load your cursor with overflow text, it flows into just one column at a time. You can

pre-link empty text objects, but links can only be applied one at a time. So *Canvas* is not for long publications.

Canvas 6's multiple master pages are enhanced with master layers. With them, you can add layers to your current master and then reveal only pertinent layers — for instance, you can separate graphics from text or alternate text can be placed on different layers. A Document palette serves as a command centre with layer and master icons attached to each page.

The redesigned Text Ruler (cf. *QuarkXPress*'s Measurements palette or *PageMaker*'s Control palette) is more efficient for ongoing use than the cluttered Type palette. And here's a nice touch: a click converts it into a styles ruler for quickly applying paragraph and character styles.

Canvas 6 has a Find command for selecting objects by type and attributes, plus a Collect for Output command, but where's the usage dialog for verifying fonts and imported graphics in use?

The runaround controls are *underwhelming*. There's just one wrap type; you can't adjust it manually; repel settings work on just three sides within a single column; and text objects that don't touch your graphic are not affected.

Canvas 6 enables you to bind text to a path or flow it across multiple paths; interestingly, the text stays in place even if you delete the path. And it can be re-aligned by dragging Bind Position handles that appear alongside it.

Microsoft Word type features include an Auto Correct function, as well as interactive spell checking and correction: *Canvas* visually cues you when a word is misspelled; clicking on the word displays its correct spelling. Also, you can now find and replace text globally based on font, type size, style or characters.

WEB PUBLISHING AND PRESENTATION TOOLS

Not much has developed in this part of *Canvas* since version 5. For presentations, there's on-the-fly anti-aliasing.

Web-wise, *Canvas*' uses its integrated Colada tools to automatically convert your files into Websites. You simply choose Save As > Colada Web. You can also create rollovers by just dragging images representing up, over and down

states into the Colada Buttons palette, assemble animated sequences with equal ease in the Colada Animation palette, and assign URL links from within *Canvas*. And the resulting pages can be zoomed and panned in a browser with no loss of detail. Problem is, Colada produces slow, uneditable Java-based Web pages. Visual editors like *Dreamweaver* or *CyberStudio* display Colada pages as solitary Java logos. (Deneba doesn't use Colada on its own Website.)

COMPATIBILITY AND PREPRESS

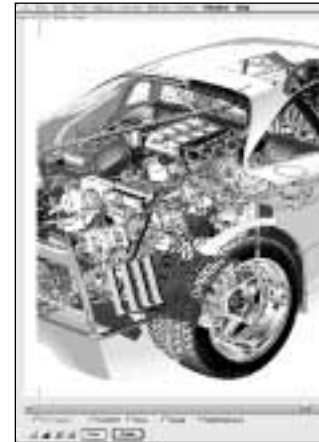
Canvas 6's import/export support includes technical formats such as DWG, DXF, CGM, or IGES; text formats such as TXT and RTF; publishing and graphics formats like *Illustrator*, *Photoshop*, *CorelDraw*, EPS, TIFF, Kodak PhotoCD, DCX or PDF; OS standards like PICT, WMF, EMF and BMP; Internet formats such as GIF, JPEG, PNG and QuickTime; and others. (Note the PDF support, which *QuarkXPress* has yet to make good on. And wouldn't it be amusing if *Canvas* could open *PageMaker* and *QuarkXPress* files?)

Others have reported that *Canvas* rarely crashes; it crashed plenty on my Mac G3. And *Canvas* doesn't tolerate Adobe Type Reunion v2.0.

Canvas 6's Collect for Output command includes fonts, and issues warnings related to resolution, gamut, graphic complexity, font sizes and ink coverage. Professional output features include a built-in separator, universal trapping, and object-level overprinting for basic trapping. *Canvas* now supports the Kodak Digital Science Color Management System and ICC color profiles. The enhanced Print Preview command lets you see prepress settings (gamut, overprint, choke and spread) based on your current print settings and page setup (Mac) or printer setup (Windows). You can also preview separations by first accessing the Print dialog.

No matter how good it is (unfortunately), lack of support is the Achilles heel of any application in professional prepress. Your service bureau is not likely to use *Canvas* — they'll want you to submit EPS files. Apparently, Deneba's technicians have rigorously tested *Canvas* EPS files for fidelity with *QuarkXPress* — and actually suggest outputting *Canvas* files through *QuarkXPress*!

If the prepress issue doesn't deter you, *Canvas 6* is a pretty good deal for the price. I'm not thrilled with the publication interface, but for short publications it'll do the trick. Technical illustration is still *Canvas*' strong suit, but it also provides decent image editing, and weds the two functions expeditiously with SpriteLayer technology. *



Preview separations. Just select Separations in the Print dialog and click Preview.