

Akvis Coloriage

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This year, in a Christmas card from an old friend, I got a black and white photo of myself from when I was about 20-22 years old. I was thrilled because I have very few photos from back then. A large amount of family photos and home movies were destroyed in a house fire years ago. This black and white photo was a bit scratched and faded, but I scanned it, then used Photoshop to clean it up some.

The first photo shows how the strokes you make over a photo can add color to it. The right photo is the result.

Recently, I found an application from Akvis which can be used to colorize black and white photos—much easier than trying to do it from scratch using Photoshop. I have tried colorizing photos in Photoshop and it is very painstaking and difficult unless the subject is very simple.

Akvis Coloriage is a stand-alone application and/or a plug-in for Photoshop CS3-CS4 or Photoshop

Elements 6-8 (for the Mac version). There are also Windows versions.

When I get some new software to test, the first thing I usually do is just start using it without reading any manual or instructions. After I do that, I then look at the instructions. Some applications are so easy, you don't need much in the way of instructions, but not in this case. To get started I had to look at a few instructions to know how to define the areas I wanted to colorize.

Akvis puts the instructions right on their website rather than give you a manual or Help section. One glance at the online instructions let me know that I needed to select the proper tool (pencil) then pick a color from many preset colors and drag an outline around the part of the photo that I wanted to be that color. For

example, I chose from several "skin" colors to outline the face and hands in the photo. There were even a bunch of "jeans" colors I could pick from for the pants. I didn't remember what color my shirt was from the photo, but I thought a dark red would look nice. The "hair" colors didn't include my exact red hair coloring, but I found one that was close. It looks a little coppery but I can live with that. I chose "wood" coloring for the building and a light "metal" color for the car. There were "sky" colors also.

Coloriage contains dozens of preset colors that work well with most photos including people categories, wood, nature, fabrics, metals and so on. You can always mix your own color as well, but I found that using the presets was a good idea when possible because if a color is too bright it might cover up some of the photo whereas a more muted color gets blended in and shows more detail.

My first try surprised me because it looked pretty good. Upon zooming in closer, I could see that there were some areas that the color had run



into the wrong areas or wasn't quite right. It didn't take very long on my first try, so I wasn't concerned about starting over and being more careful. I brought it into Photoshop and added a better sky background with Photoshop's Rendering filter, but somewhere along the way, PS crashed and I lost it all because I hadn't saved it. I started over for the 3rd time and the pictures you see here (me leaning against a car) are the result. After saving a colorized photo (which ended up 18 megabytes) I printed out a copy. Since I still have the black and white scanned photo, I could easily print more of them with different color shirts and car, etc.

Coloriage can also be used to alter colors in photos that are already in color. If you don't like the color of something, just change it. You could take a picture of a room and change the color of the walls to decide on what you like before painting.

Coloriage lets you save your strokes on a picture, which would make it easier to use for testing out different colors. It is easier to replace all the colors in a stroke than to start over with new strokes.

I found that I had better results getting the color to stay where I wanted it after reading more instructions from the Akvis website. Keeping the strokes within the area to be colorized keeps it from spreading to other areas. There is also a tool that you can use to prevent colorizing parts of a photo. That is useful when you are trying to change a color in a photo that is already a color photo. I was able to brighten up my hair where a little too much gray was showing. The Akvis website offers a lot of tips and instructions for their products. The more I looked, the more I realized that this program is much more powerful than I first thought it to be.

Another interesting thing I learned from looking at the instructions is the ability to set up a multi-color stroke. You add the colors you would like to use, then when you use the pencil tool in the multi-color mode, it puts a little of those colors in as you draw the lines. It doesn't mix them together into one color but puts it in as dabs of color. I found that was good for colorizing hair.

Coloriage can be tried for 10 days free by downloading it at: <http://akvis.com/en/coloriage/index.php>

To purchase, you can choose from the \$97 standalone application or the Plug-in which is



used within Photoshop or Elements. A deluxe version can be bought for \$121 which includes both.

You need at least an Intel G4 or greater Mac with a minimum of 1GB of RAM, but twice that is recommended.

It is easy to get carried away and spend a whole day playing with this program. It is really fun and when you get a good result, it feels great. The more you play with it the better you get.

Not too bad for one of my first attempts to colorize a black and white photo.