

KRITA

The Gimp isn't the only great drawing tool for Linux.

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Q Krita – isn't that the KDE-based graphics editor you reviewed in a previous issue?

A Yes it is. We reviewed version 2.8 back in issue 2. We liked it. But more importantly, we don't think enough people know about it. One of the reasons why it's sometimes overlooked is because it's part of KDE's Calligra suite of applications, which includes a word processor, a spreadsheet and a presentation package alongside an ideas-mapping tool and a vector drawing application. Not only is it easy for Krita to get lost among its fellow roommates, but the drawing components in office suites haven't always set the world on fire.

Q You mean like the Draw app that's part of LibreOffice?

A Sadly, yes. Krita is a worthy application in its own right, and perhaps being bundled into such a broad suite of loosely related

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applications isn't doing it any favours. This is a shame, because it has the potential to become the best image creation tool on Linux.

Q But we already have The Gimp, which is great!

A Exactly. That's popular misconception number one. The Gimp is a venerable, powerful and stable pixel editing tool. We couldn't do our jobs without it – whether that's loading Photoshop files on Linux or exporting PNG files with alpha channels intact. But Gimp fulfils a very specific requirement; image editing and transformation. It's not great at image creation and its development has slowed to a crawl. It's lacking CMYK support, for instance, which is essential if you're working with print, limiting its use as a tool for professionals. It's also burdened with a rather stupid name.

Q Krita hardly rolls off the tongue either...

A That is true. But at least the word 'krita' is Swedish for 'crayon' which says something about Krita's target audience. Could the same be said for The Gimp? And there's also another big advantage with Krita's name; you can safely let your children type 'krita' into a Google image search without looking over their shoulders.

Q Why don't you have a go at Gimp's GUI while you're at it!

A It has something to do with glass houses. There seems to be something of a tradition with graphical editors that the GUI needs to be as sprawling and as incomprehensible as possible. Adobe Photoshop has this problem, as does Blender. And so too does Krita. But as with all these tools, after you get used to the layout, it's no longer a problem but a feature. We just feel for beginners when presented with so many options and buttons to click.

And things are getting better. We could have forgiven you a few years ago if you thought Krita looked like an interesting idea in need of a little extra effort. But those times are gone and Krita is now a fully fledged application, and incidentally, one of the most powerful of its kind regardless of operating system.

Q What advantage does Krita have over Gimp?

A First, it's important to understand that Krita is a different kind of application. It's meant primarily for creation rather than editing, and specifically, creation by drawing. Krita can edit images, enable you to select areas, create layers and add filter effects – many of the same things you can do with Gimp. But Krita is not very

good at being pixel perfect. Instead, it has many tools that can emulate the various elements that traditional artists use to create their art, and when these are combined with the all the other features, it becomes a fully fledged creation tool – from initial ideas and concepts through to the finished image. One of its best features is being able to work with both bitmap and vector layers at the same time.

Q Does that mean Krita is only going to be of use to iPad-loving David Hockney?

A Not at all. Of course, you can choose to create images with a tablet and a stylus – Wacom tablets, in particular, have become a great option since the community-sponsored Wacom Linux Project gained momentum. For many illustrators that's the only way to work, and many illustrators choose to use Krita for exactly this purpose. But Krita is for everyone. Drawing can be useful. But it's also fun and educational. Remember Deluxe Paint, for instance?

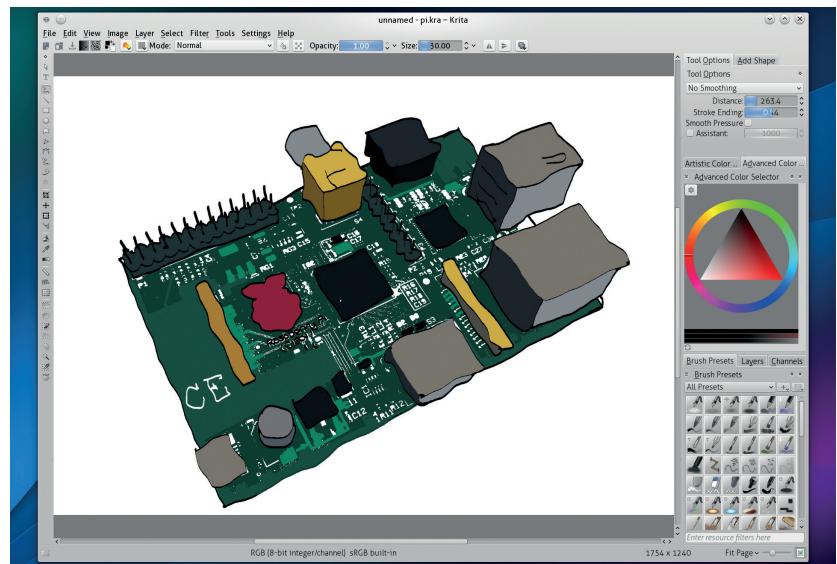
Q Wasn't that a drawing application for the Amiga?

A Yes! In the 80s, back when everyone loved Electronic Arts, Deluxe Paint was a drawing application bundled with those early machines, and was created by Dan Silva to coincide with the release of the Amiga 1000. Deluxe Paint helped all those early adopters see the full potential of the Amiga's graphics capabilities, as well as realise their own latent drawing talent. But it also helped them master the mouse. This was important because for new users, the mouse was a completely alien concept.

All this is a long-winded way of saying that tools like Krita are a good thing not necessarily because they're for artists, but because Linux is the Amiga of modern times, and awesome software like Krita enables new users to experiment and play with all kinds of new software.

Q What's so very good about Krita then?

A It's powerful, so it takes a while to master. But you can get plenty of instant gratification by creating a new document and choosing one of the



Even though Krita is designed for drawing, it can still process and use bitmap images

dozens brush types and simply sketching onto the blank canvas. The results can be uncannily like drawing with pencil, or crushing charcoal into a page, or squeezing gouache into a canvas. It feels like the first time you played with Deluxe Paint or Photoshop. But it's the brushes that are Krita's real asset, because there are so many models and so many types to choose between. We've never seen anything like Krita's brush engine.

Q But The Gimp has lots of brushes too!

A It does. But there's more to Krita's brushes than a repeated bitmap and an opacity setting. It uses drawing tools and brush engines to build models that modify pixel data to approximate a specific brush type. This is one of those instances where a picture is worth a thousand words, so rather than explaining the details we'd suggest just trying a few. Open Krita, create a blank template and use the 'Brush Presets' palette (known as a docker in Krita's uber-modular GUI) so select one you like. Now select the pastel brush and a nice colour and start drawing. There are approximately 1 billion other options for drawing stuff too.

Q Didn't we read in last issue that Krita was launching a crowdfunding campaign?

A The Krita team are experimenting with what could become a successful model for other open source

projects, and that's using crowdfunding to help with development. This is in marked contrast to Gimp, for example, which has struggled to get funds, despite its ubiquity and widespread adoption. The spark behind Krita's campaign was the widespread positive reaction to the previous release, which was mostly attributed to the full-time work of developer Dmitry Kazakov. The new campaign asked for €15,000, enough to pay Dmitry for six months, and split those six months into 24 separate features all estimated to take two week's worth of work. That way, backers could see exactly what their funding would bring. Highlights include some spectacular warp and perspective transform tools, colour correction in OpenGL and a resource manager. We're happy to report that Krita reached its target, so we'll all be able to benefit. If you still want to contribute, you can donate to the project and everything will help secure Krita's future.

Q Anything else you want to rave on about?

A Did we mention it has supported CMYK for ages? That's what's making all these images look so crisp and lovely.

Q So where can we learn more about becoming the next Alexander Rodchenko?

A We've included a taster tutorial in this issue (see page 76). Go there now and be amazed! 📺