Cartooning with CorelDRAW

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Welcome to the world of cartooning. To be a successful cartoonist, you need three things:
(1) skills
(2) a good toolkit
(3) inspiration

The fact that you are reading this tutorial indicates that you are either a graphic artist or have the basic skills and wish to advance. It also indicates that you have the CorelDRAW Graphics Suite — the finest graphic toolkit in existence. This leaves inspiration, a whimsical elf that visits, strangely, only the prepared.

This tutorial is about technique rather than tools. It will take you through all the phases of one complex project from start to finish, including a recovery from a mistake and the inclusion of a new idea midstream. Essentially, the process consists of five phases: research, preliminary sketches, final drawing, lettering, and applying colors. Note that the tutorial does not go into the operational details of the various tools used. It is assumed that you have a basic knowledge of the CorelDRAW Graphics Suite. If not, please revisit this material when you are a little more familiar with the software.

The cartoon for this tutorial simulates a commissioned work for a science and philosophy magazine, which will cover Existentialism in an issue to commemorate the birthday of the philosopher René Descartes. So, the idea is to portray Descartes and Existentialism. Given that the magazine is about the lives and achievements of great thinkers, it would be an added bonus if other personalities were worked into the piece.

An idea was born:
(a) Descartes thinking himself into existence with the caption, “I think, therefore I am.”
(b) Descartes sitting in the classic Thinker pose to honor the sculptor Auguste Rodin.
(c) The thought balloon looping into itself in a Klein bottle fashion to honor the mathematician Felix Christian Klein.
(d) Finally, the title of the cartoon, “Eine Klein Nacht Existentialism,” alluding to Mozart’s most famous work, “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik”. The title contains a pun on Klein and is translated as “A Little Night Existentialism.”

So, with apologies to Descartes, Rodin, Klein, and Mozart, here’s the finished piece (Figure 1).
Research

A period piece such as this one has to have, within the leeway of cartooning, a modicum of veracity. The portrait, the pose, the costumery, and the incidental elements (Klein
bottle, in this case) must bear some resemblance to the truth. This requires research. It must be quick, or profitability goes out of the window.

In the old days, illustrators maintained huge filing cabinets full of well-organized, alphabetically arranged clippings from magazines, newspapers, posters, etc. It was called “the artist’s morgue” and was a collection of pictures for reference purposes. Today, the artist’s morgue is the Internet, and the collection of clipart that comes with the CorelDRAW Graphics Suite.

Note that in the context of this tutorial, a sketch refers to a pencil drawing.

**The Thinker**

A quick search for “The Thinker” produced scores of pictures of the statue from which the study in Figure 2 was sketched.

![Figure 2: Modest thinker](image)

**René Descartes**

Similarly, a search for Descartes allowed the study shown in Figure 3.
Klein bottle

One last item remained — that mathematical oddity called the Klein bottle (a portly cousin of the Möbius strip). Again a search on the Internet revealed a plethora of renditions, from which the study in Figure 4 was sketched.
Final drawing

With the research now complete, I was ready to make the first concept sketch (see Figure 5).

![Final drawing](image)

Insofar as the pose was concerned, this sketch was satisfactory. There was one thing not quite up to par — the face itself, which looked more like a Middle Eastern prince than Descartes. Further study revealed that there was a similarity between the philosopher and the rock star Ringo of the Beatles. The latter I could draw with ease.

Looking at the inscription on one of the Descartes statues, it occurred to me that having his famous Latin phrase “Cogito, Ergo Sum” engraved on the pedestal would be most fitting. So, I needed to do two things: correct the face and add the famous phrase.
Modifications

Those proficient with a graphic tablet and stylus could make the following changes directly in CorelDRAW by using a scan of the sketch as an underlay and drawing over it. I prefer to use pen and ink, and a light table.

Change of face

This task consisted of widening the lips and eyes and making the eyelids rounder and more prominent (see Figure 6).

Visualization of the engraving

I typed out the phrase “Cogito, Ergo Sum” in CorelDRAW, using the Garamond font. Then, using the Fit Text to Path feature, I placed the text on a curve that resembled the base of the pedestal. I used a print of this image as a guide for the final ink drawing. Deviating ever so slightly from the font (compare the “G”), I made the final rendition closely resemble the actual engraving I had seen (see Figure 7).

Figure 6: A new face
Final inking

Again, you could make the final drawing directly in CorelDRAW by using a scan of the sketches as an underlay and drawing over it with a graphic tablet and stylus. I tend to produce stronger strokes with pen and ink.

I placed Descartes the Thinker, his new face, and the Latin engraving on the light table and carefully aligned them. Then, I laid a new sheet of paper over the composite and drew the final picture in ink (see Figure 8).
Vectorization

I scanned the drawing as full-size (7 × 9 inch) line art at 600 ppi. After cleaning it up in Corel PHOTO-PAINT, I vectorized it, using the Trace feature in CorelDRAW (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Descartes, vectorized

Incidental elements

There remained the book and the Klein bottle. The book was a simple affair, drawn in ink, scanned, and then vectorized using the Trace feature in CorelDRAW (see Figure 10).
The Klein bottle was rendered with the powers of CorelDRAW. I imported a scan of the sketch and drew over it, using the Bézier tool to drop nodes on one side of the symmetrical part of the bottle. I mirrored a copy of the straight-segmented curve horizontally to see if the shape worked. (The Clone tool offers an excellent alternative to this method.) After some reworking of the nodes, I converted the straight-segmented curve to a smooth curve, mirrored it, and joined the two curves. In a similar manner, I drew the symmetrical part of the funnel. I drew the neck of the bottle and highlights also as straight-segmented curves, then converted them to smooth curves.

The basic bottle, when completed, consisted of two separate components: (1) the bulb and outer neck, and (2) the inside neck flaring into a funnel. The wine also consisted of two separate components, as shown in Figure 11. Transparency was applied to the wine.
and to the highlight on the right side of the bottle. A small blended group formed the shadow on the neck where it penetrated the bulb. The Klein bottle, an essential metaphor in the cartoon, was a major task in itself.

**Final layout**

**Thought balloon**

I laid out all the elements in CorelDRAW and drew a rough thought balloon around them in the shape of the Klein bottle, and then, using simple circles and ellipses, constructed the final balloon (see Figure 12).

![Figure 12: Thought balloon](image)

If you look at the final rendition of the cartoon, you will notice that the gaze of the viewer is guided along the bubbles of the balloon, through the buttons on Descartes’ jacket, to the Klein bottle on the ground.

**Starry night sky**

I created two spraylists of different-sized stars and different densities, using three fundamental shapes, as shown in Figure 13. I followed two rules in spraying the sky. These rules are based on physical principles:

1. There are no bright stars near the horizon.
(2) The density of stars decreases toward the horizon.

For artistic effect, I added a few large four-spiked stars higher up in the sky.

![Figure 13: Spraylist for the sky]

**Caption**

While the title “Eine Klein Nacht Existentialism” is typeset, the caption “I think, therefore I am” is hand-lettered to give the piece a comic-strip flavor. The most difficult thing about hand-lettering is spacing. This difficulty is easily overcome by using CorelDRAW.

To typeset the text in CorelDRAW, I used the DomCasual font, and then stretched it horizontally until it had the typical width-to-height ratio of comic-strip lettering. I then placed a print of it on the light table and hand-lettered over it with a felt-tip marker on a new sheet, in my own style. I scanned the drawing as line art, and after cleaning it up in Corel PHOTO-PAINT, I vectorized it, using the Trace feature in CorelDRAW. Note that the goal was not perfect letters (for which I could have used a font), but rather, a casual look (see Figure 14).
If you are proficient with a graphic tablet and stylus, you could do the lettering in CorelDRAW. Use the typeset caption as an underlay, and draw single line segments over it. Then, adjust the outline pen properties to get the desired look. In Figure 15, the first result uses round corners and round line caps. The second result is obtained by adding a stretch of 50% and an angle of -45°. Remember to enable Scale With Image to maintain the look at different sizes.

Colorization
I applied the colors in CorelDRAW.
This cartoon was intended for process printing, so a CMYK workflow was followed. As the painting was done directly on the screen, the display had to be reliable through proper color management (so that a blue applied on the screen would not eventually be printed as purple). The topic of color management is too vast to go into details here, but the following presents the strategy in a nutshell.
- Use of appropriate profiles for internal RGB, separation printer, and monitor
- Color management arrows: Internal RGB ➔ Separation Printer ➔ Monitor

As a verification of the WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) state of the equipment, I used the following random set of colors and compared the screen results to prints in a process swatch book. When the match was satisfactory (following minor adjustments to the monitor), I proceeded with applying colors.
The CMYK values for the colors shown are, from left to right: 1, 40, 60, 0; 20, 80, 0, 20; 0, 60, 60, 40; 60, 40, 0, 0; 40, 0, 20, 40; 60, 0, 40, 40

Color scheme

The central theme was loosely based on period paintings in which gentlemen were often depicted in rusty red jackets, blue trousers, and a dull green cape. The rest of the colors were quite generic — green bottle, blue-black night sky, earthy colors for the ground, etc. A trick worth noting is creating a blend of a color that has caught your fancy, by stepping to white on one side and black on the other to get a nicely graded palette for the object you’re about to color. This technique was extensively used throughout the colorization process for this project.

Conclusion

This cartoon took three days to complete. Considering its conceptual complexity and the research involved, and the fact that it represented a commissioned piece of work, it was a reasonable expenditure. If not for the CorelDRAW Graphics Suite (which allowed infinite variations and experimentation) and the Internet (which saved numerous trips to museums and libraries), the project might have taken a week or more. In addition, the finished product remains modifiable to suit the whims of any cartoon editor.

Breakdown:

- research and preliminary sketches: 1 day
- final ink, scan and vectorization: 1 day
- layout and colorization: 1 day

In order for a cartoon to be commercially viable, the time put in must be balanced against the returns, whether in the form of a straight payment or the prospect of future commissions. In general, a black-and-white cartoon should take about half a day, and a color cartoon, a day and a half. Special assignments can take up to a week. Of course, you are paid accordingly.

If you are approaching publishers for the first time, come up with any idea consistent with the flavor of the publication — audio, photography, science, gardening, whatever. Submit your cartoon, and be prepared for numerous rejection slips. Once you catch the fancy of a cartoon editor, it’s smooth sailing from there on with that magazine. With a
few publications under your belt, editors will soon begin to notify you of themes for upcoming editions. You then start catering to those themes, which is the start of commissioned work.

So pull out that pad or graphic tablet, and start drawing. It’s rewarding in more ways than one.

About the author

KN Pepper began drawing as a toddler and was doing professional work before reaching his teens. His first love has always been cartooning, and his cartoons have appeared in numerous magazines under a variety of absurd pen names. A physicist and engineer by training, KN has applied mathematics, optics, and sundry other principles of science to further his knowledge of form, perspective, color interplay, shadow geometry, and numerous other details that contribute to the veracity of any good illustration. A classicist at heart, he stresses the importance of an understanding of fundamental principles, real-life observations, and commitment to detail.