

Reviews

AliveColors 3

by L. Davenport

AliveColors is a photo editing program that also has a full set of painting and drawing tools. It provides multiple tools for retouching, drawing, and vector graphics, photo enhancement adjustments, and a gallery of striking filters. AliveColors supports multi-monitor systems and lets you work with multiple images and at the same time switching between them as needed. It has been designed to support the needs and user levels from the beginner to the pro user.

AliveColors comes in three versions: a limited Free version, a Home version (that has most, but not all of the tools and effects), and the Pro version that has full functionality. You can buy a Perpetual (lifetime) license or a subscription license. FYI: This review will be based on the Pro version.

The Interface

AliveColors' user interface/window defaults to a light grey look, but there are options to change it to medium or dark looks (Figure 1) too.

Panels

Along the right side of the AliveColors window are the familiar: Layers, History, Navigator, Color, Actions, Channels, etc. panels/tabs. Here is an in-depth explanation for a couple of the Panels:

Layer Panel

The Layers Panel can be used to organize your work into grouped items, re-order your objects, etc.

There are several layer types that you can choose from when you are working on your document:

- **Raster:** A Raster Layer is a basic layer type which allows applying standard brushes and effects. Other layers can be rasterized by using the Rasterize Layer command

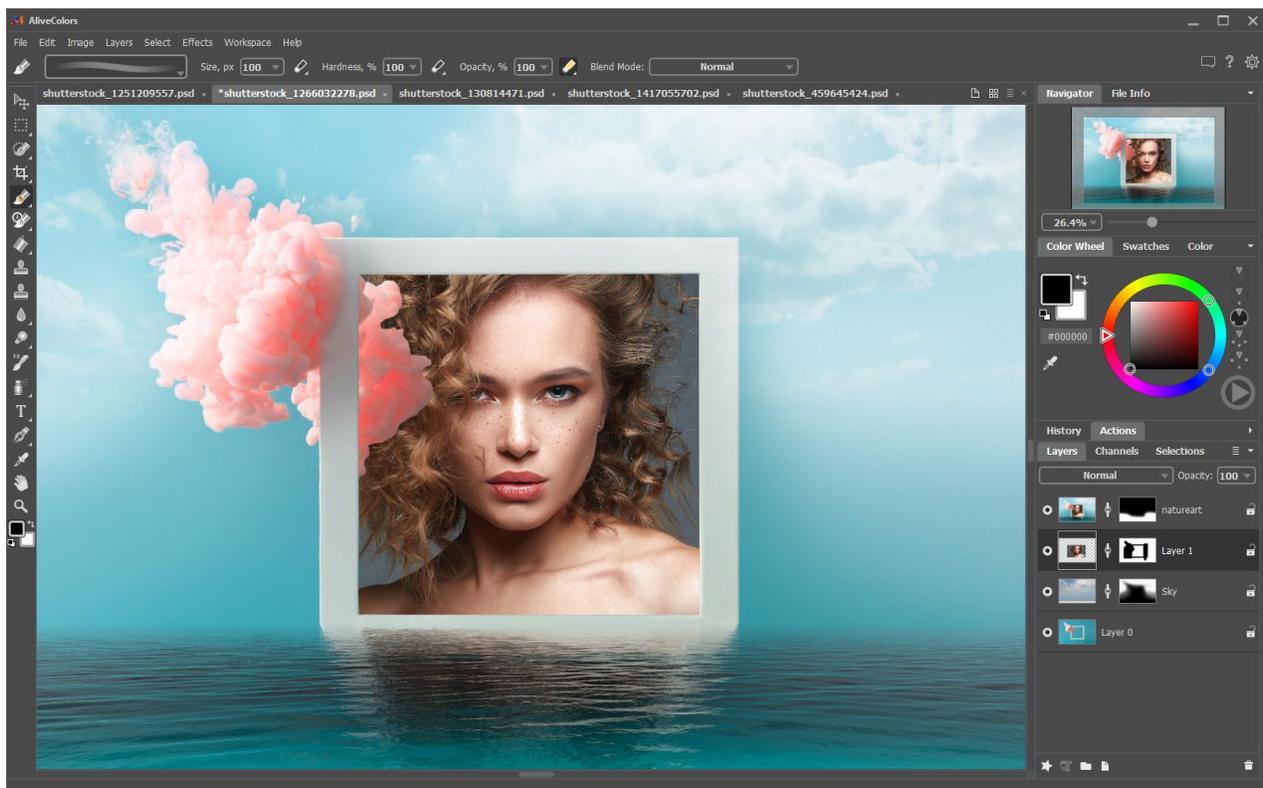


Figure 1. This is AliveColors workspace. There are tools that line the edges of the window - many of which should be familiar to digital artists. The image with its many layers appears at its center.

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- **Shape:** The Shape Layer is used to create and edit vector shapes. This layer is created automatically when using the Shape tool.

The available shapes are: Pie, Rectangle, Rounded Rectangle, Ellipse, Polygon, Star, Freeform (this allows you to create a variety of shapes by adding anchor points with a mouse click), and Freehand.

- **Adjustment Layer:** You can correct and enhance your images using nondestructive Adjustment Layers - meaning you can turn them on or off at any time. There are Adjustment Layers for Curves, Levels, Black and White, Brightness/Contrast, Hue/Saturation, Invert, Threshold, and Posterize.
- **Text:** A Text Layer is created automatically when you use the Text tool. Text layers can be used as-is or converted to a Rasterize Layer or a Vectorize Text Layer. This way each character will be represented as a separate vector shape which can be manipulated like any other vector shape. The AliveColors Pro version also lets you attach text to a vector line or shape path (Figure 7).

Tools

Along the left side of the Image window are many of the typical editing tools. Here are a few of AliveColors' other tools:

Chameleon Brush: This is similar to the Clone Stamp, but instead of making an exact replica of the area that is cloned from, this preserves the characteristics of the underlying image that you are cloning to/over.

In a test, I picked an area from the middle of a pink and white Dahlia and then cloned from the green grassy area next to the flower. The flower turned to shades of green - match-



Figure 2. AliveColors helps you unleash your creative ideas like making this Polaroid Photo Collage.



Figure 3. When you reopen AliveColors, a list of the recently opened documents appears. These can be viewed either as thumbnails or as a text list. At the very bottom of the window is the (horizontally scrollable) Learn Panel where you can find links to video tutorials for AliveColors. Both of these options can be turned off if you want a cleaner/uncluttered look for your AliveColors window.

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Figure 4. The new Glitch art effect adds digital noise and distortions to your photos or images. The color shift option has a look not unlike what a 3D image would look like before wearing the blue and cyan Anaglyph 3D cardboard glasses.

ing the grass' colors.

FX Brushes: These are drawing and painting tools for creating amazing effects. The included brushes are: Fluffy, Hair, Bristle, Thread, Veil, Smoke, FX Sparkle, and Energy.

Artistic Brushes: The Artistic brushes and filters allow you to stylize photos and create images from scratch. Here is a short explanation of each Artistic Brush:

- **Oil Brush:** This brush was designed to imitate painting with an oil brush by painting strokes with a relief. The density of the stroke varies across the entire line.
- **Roller:** This brush leaves flat, porous strokes and its paint's density varies along the line's length.
- **Felt-tip Marker:** This brush leaves constantly flowing paint and it draws smooth, elegant, translucent lines.
- **Chalk:** The Chalk brush draws soft, textured lines with porous edges.
- **Artistic Pencil:** This brush draws flat smooth lines with sharp boundaries.
- **Artistic Spray:** This brush simulates spray painting on an image. It applies paint in raised drops, scattered along the stroke.
- **Artistic Smudge:** This tool is designed for mixing different colors on artistic layers and changing the relief of painted strokes.

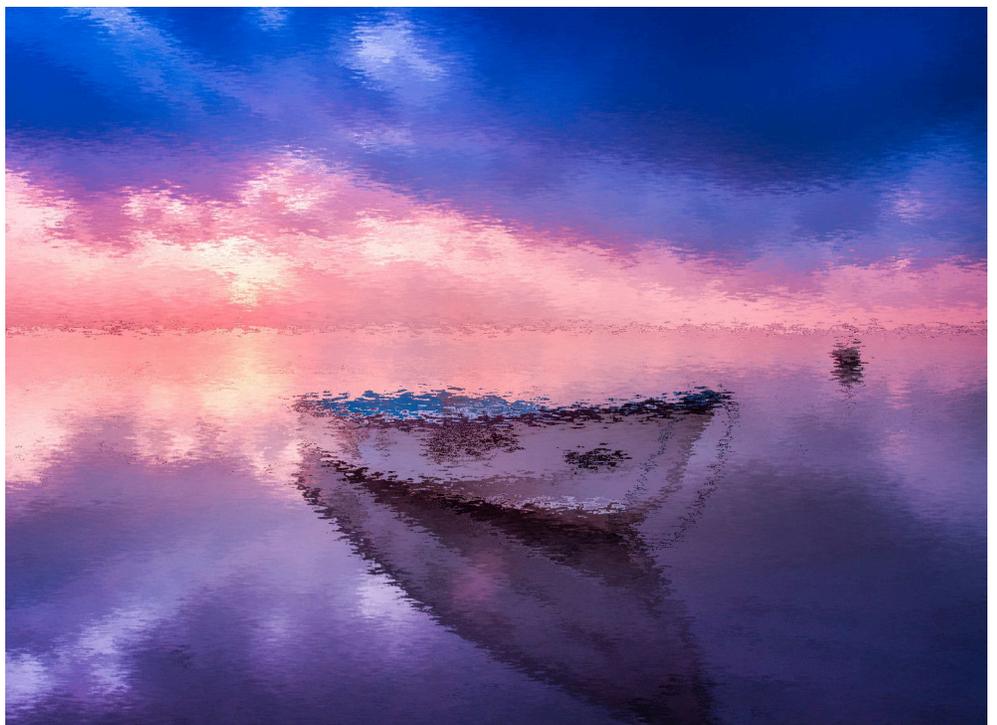
Gradient fills:

I really like that the Gradient tool not only lets you specify the start and finish colors, but you can also add additional colors (points) to the gradient. So you can make a slow transition between two colors or make a multicolored gradient resembling a rainbow. The Gradient's colors can be set manually or you can choose from a wide variety of preset gradients. Your choices are: Linear, Radial, Angular, Reflected, and Diamond gradient fills.

Effects

AliveColors comes with a wide variety of Effects which are fully modifiable, plus you can see a real-time preview of the results before applying them.

- **NEW!** Glitch art effect: This adds digital noise and distortions to your photos or images making it look like your image has been ruined (Figure 4). Glitches like these usually appear due to errors in the reproduction of



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digital recordings, technical failures, or physical damage of a device.

- **NEW!** Brush Strokes Effect: This effect lets you add strokes, grain, and texture to an image. The effect is divided into two Effects:
 - Spray: This simulates paint spraying along the specified direction (Figure 5).
 - Splatter: The new Splatter effect (Figure 6) modifies the look of your photo using splatters, splashes and blots of paint. The parameter settings let you specify the size, smoothing, and distribution of the spots.
- High Pass: This effect reveals details along the edges, improving the contrast and making the image sharper.
- Noise: The Noise menu allows to add or remove graininess in your image.
- Shadows & Highlights: The Shadow & Highlight effect allows the user to reveal details in bright and dark areas of an image and reduce contrast.
- Sharpen: The Sharpen menu lets you increase the sharpness and enhance the image detail.
- Glamour: The Glamour effect helps you process your portrait photos. It allows you to brighten and even the skin tone, get rid of wrinkles, conceal minor flaws, etc
- Two Keys: The Two Keys effect lets you use two key colors to change the color tints, replace colors, adjust contrast and brightness etc.
- Page Curl: The Page Curl effect creates a page curl on an image.
- Drop Shadow: The Drop Shadow effect adds a perspective shadow to the selected area.
- Blur: You can use the Blur menu commands to blur the entire image or just a selected area, reduce its sharpness, reduce the amount of noise, as well as create a variety of effects.
- Distortion: The Distortion effects are used for creating geometric distortions of the selected layer or area, e.g you can increase/decrease an object's width or height, Twirl the image, Ripple it, Extrude it, etc.
- Channel Mixer: This effect lets you change the image's color tones, saturation, contrast, lightness, etc. using the: Red, Green and Blue channels.
- Pixelate: The Pixelate effects merge neighboring pixels of the image into small monochrome cells (similar to the pixelation used to hide someone's identity in a photo or video). There are two styles: Mosaic - which groups the neighboring pixels into square blocks and Crystalize which changes them into various polygon shapes.



Figure 6. The new Splatter effect modifies the look of your photo using splatters, splashes and blots of paint (left part of the image - this makes it look like you are looking through a rainy windshield).

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Blend Modes

Blend modes let you mix the color and brightness of different image layers. AliveColors now has 24 blend modes. The latest additions to the program are: Hue, Saturation, Color, and Luminosity. These have been added to the original: Darken/Lighten modes, Multiply, Color Burn, Screen, Color & Linear Dodge, Contrast, Hard/Soft/Vivid/Linear/Pin lights, etc.

Actions

AliveColors includes an Actions feature. For those that aren't familiar with Actions - they are like a script where you tell AliveColors to do something to your photo, e.g. Reduce its size, then tell it to do another step - like change the image from RGB to black & white, etc. Actions are a time-saver if you are constantly doing the same adjustments to your photos. On top of this, you can select a folder with multiple images and use the Batch Processing feature to run the same Action on all of the images at once.

RAW Processing

When you open a RAW file in AliveColors, the RAW editing mode is launched. So you can preprocess the image, and then continue working in the graphic editor.

Batch Processing

AliveColors supports the Batch Processing feature which lets you apply the same settings to a series of images. This will save you time and effort.

Built-in Plug-ins

Quite a few Akvis plug-ins (that can be bought separately) are included in the AliveColors Home and Pro versions. The number of available plug-ins and their functionality depend on the license type. I will include brief descriptions of each plug-in. I will also add web links to the plug-in names so you can read their full descriptions from the Akvis web site.



Figure 7. Text can be attached to a vector line or shape path.

Akvis AliveColors Home license's included plug-ins:

- **AirBrush:** The AirBrush plug-in lets you transform your photos into works of airbrushed art.
- **Enhancer:** AKVIS Enhancer is image enhancement software that offers a fast method to fix a dark picture, improve detail on an image, increase contrast and brightness, and adjust tones.
- **HDRFactory:** You can use the HDRFactory plug-in to create High Dynamic Range images from single or multiple photos. The included Ghost Removal tool helps you remove so-called ghosts (double images) that sometimes appear when creating an HDR image. There are additional Effects tools that you can use to change the coloring of the photo plus add white or black Vignettes to the photo's outer edges.
- **MakeUp:** Have you noticed that models or actresses in magazine photographs seem to look a lot better in print versus seeing them in person? This is usually attributed to airbrush touch up done on their photos before printing them. The average person can now do the same thing with his/her photographs using the MakeUp plug-in. Gone are the wrinkles, acne, pock-marks etc. after only a few minutes of tweaking.
- **NatureArt:** In a perfect world you would be able to get that "perfect" shot/photo every time. But this isn't a perfect world, so sometimes your photo needs a little tweaking to get the look that you want. That's where the NatureArt plug-in comes in handy. Need a rainy sky with lightning bolts - no problem. Need a burning field or fire for your camp fire pit - again no problem. NatureArt can add these plus many other nature effects to your photos: Night Sky, Sun, Fire, Rain, Snow, various Cloud shapes, Rainbows, Water, and Ice.
- **Neon:** The Neon plug-in lets you create amazing glowing line effects. The software transforms a photo into a neon image that looks like it was drawn with luminescent ink.
- **Noise Buster:** The Noise Buster is a Digital Noise Reduction plug-in that reduces noise and grain in your images.
- **Points:** The Points plug-in lets you transform your photos into paintings using the technique called pointillism. Pointillism is characterized by applying a multitude of colored dots to the canvas. A complex hue is decomposed into individual colors, which are displayed on the canvas as small dabs of paint of pure color. The optical mixing of these dots gives us the visual perception of an entire painting.
- **SmartMask:** Have you ever tried to remove a person/animal/item from one photo so that you can superimpose it over another photo - to make it look like you were someplace that you never were, or to create a collage? What a pain! Trying to select all of those uneven edges. Well that's where the SmartMask plug-in becomes an invaluable tool. It simplifies the selection and masking process for both simple or complex images.

Akvis AliveColors Pro license:

In addition to the plug-ins previously mentioned, the following plug-in and the extra options added to the other plug-ins are available in the Pro version:

- **LightShop:** LightShop includes various glow elements for creating stars and light effects. You can move and change each element of the effect as well as the entire effect, adjust the blending mode, and the effect area.
- AirBrush (+ Original Colors mode, Post-Processing Tools)
- Enhancer (+ Prepress Processing)
- HDRFactory (+ Local Correction)
- MakeUp (+ Mask Editing Tools)
- NatureArt (+ effects: Lightning, Frost, Aurora, History Brush tool)
- Neon (+ Colorize option, Deformation, Post-Processing Tools)
- Noise Buster (+ Remove Moiré)
- Points (+ Post-Processing Tools)
- SmartMask: (+Chroma Key: The Chroma Key mode allows you to quickly and accurately remove a monochrome background so you can combine multiple im-



Figure 8. In addition to being a photo editor, AliveColors is also a full art program. These are two cartoons that I drew (a little while ago). AliveColors also has tools to create Oil paintings, Pencil drawings, etc.

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ages into a single composition. +Refine Edges: The Refine Edges feature is helpful for quickly editing the edges of selections or cutout objects. It is very helpful for edges with fur or hair strands.)

External plugins

You can extend the editor's functionality by adding external plugins as external modules. AliveColors is compatible with 24 (including the 10 built in versions) of the 27 existing Akvis plug-ins (all of which are sold separately). It is also compatible with the 3rd Party plug-ins: Corel ParticleShop, FX Software, Exposure Software (Exposure & Snap Art) plug-ins.

Compatibility

AliveColors has its own Akvis file format which works just fine. But for those who need it, AliveColors also supports the following file formats:

- **Import formats:** AliveColors can import over 28 file formats including many camera formats. The most common are: TIFF, BMP, JPEG, PNG, PSD, SVG, AKVIS, RAW, (some of the camera RAW formats: Canon, Panasonic, Olympus, Nikon, Sony, & Fujifilm).
- **Export formats:** Documents can also be saved/exported as: Akvis file format, PNG, JPG, TIFF, HDR (High Dynamic Range image), BMP, SVG, ODI, Akvis, and Photoshop's PSD formats.

Graphics Tablet Support

You can use a Graphics Tablet for creating or editing your images. This lets you dynamically change the appearance of your strokes based on how much pressure you apply to your stylus when drawing as well as how you tilt and rotate your stylus. You can also use a stylus to perform mouse functions such as tool selection, color selection, and parameter changes.

Testing: (Years ago I performed this test using my Wacom Tablet and Stylus - it worked perfectly). Since my Wacom tablet's driver is no longer compatible with some of my programs, I stopped using it. So I decided to try drawing with a stylus in a different way. I connected my iPad Pro to my Mac and activated my Astro Pad program & iOS app (this mirrored my Mac's desktop onto my iPad). I opened AliveColors on the Mac (which instantly appeared on my iPad), opened a new document and then I used the Apple pencil to draw the cartoons shown in Figure 8. I am pleased to say that AliveColors accepted the input from my Apple pencil, so I was able to make varying width strokes for my cartoon's outline. BTW: I like using the iPad (over using the Wacom) since you can see exactly where the tip of your cursor is as you make each stroke. It feels more natural.

Printing

Besides the standard print options, AliveColors will also print multiple copies of the image on a single sheet or print a single image on multiple sheets to make a poster. FYI: The user specifies the maximum number of the pages in which the image will be divided. Then the image scale will be adjusted to fit this number of the sheets.

The Skinny

Evaluation: AliveColors is a feature rich art and photo editing program that would be a good tool for most artists. I like that ten of Akvis' separately sold plug-ins are built into the AliveColors program. I already owned six of these plug-ins and I was pleased to see that the built-in ones were not crippled versions. So I took this as an opportunity to not only get AliveColors, but to also get the latest versions of my six plugins. The only difference between the built-in plug-ins compared to the separately bought plug-ins is that the separately bought plug-ins can be immediately updated whereas the built-in plug-ins have to wait until AliveColors is updated for the plug-ins to be updated at the same time. But I can live with this limitation.

If you are in the market for getting a graphics/photo editor I suggest that you take AliveColors' trial copy for a test run to see if all of the features that you need are included in the program.

Minimum System Requirements: 64-bit Intel, Mac OS X 10.10 - 10.15, 4 Gb RAM; Recommended: 64-bit Intel, 16 Gb RAM, NVIDIA CUDA/AMD [ATI] - Stream/App

Company: [Akvis](#)

Prices: Free (*with limited functionality*)

AliveColors Home: \$49 (*this is a lifetime license; some filters and effects are not available; can be used on only one computer and it is only for non-commercial use*)

AliveColors Pro: \$160 (*this is a lifetime license with Full functionality; you have one year of updates; it can be used on two computers and commercial use is allowed*)

Senior & Academic Discount: 30% off

Subscription Option: AliveColors Home: \$2 month / \$18 year
AliveColors Pro: \$5 month / \$45 year

There is a [comparison chart](#) on the AliveColors web site that you can use to decided which version best suits your needs.

BTW: If you bought all 10 of the built-in plugins separately, they would cost around \$566! So you can see that buying the AliveColors Pro version (that includes all 10 plug-ins) at \$160 is quite a savings.

[Available 10 day trial](#)