Getting Started in ZBrush

Donna Kamper

ZBrush is a computer program that renders three-dimensional sculpts of just about any object you can imagine [1]. These sculpts can then be printed in 3D as a mold or final product.

If you've watched *AntMan* or any *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie, you've seen *ZBrush* "in action." But *ZBrush* isn't limited to movies. With *ZBrush* you can design jewelry [2], create monsters [3], build prototype cars [4] or animate the molecular anatomy of the Ebola virus [5]. The possibilities are endless.

For someone without experience in the 3D world, it is a very different program. The concept of working in 3D itself can be perplexing. While you'll find multiple videos and other instructional aids on the Pixologic site (*ZBrush*'s creators), it's easy for a beginner to get lost. When you don't know the language it's hard to follow directions.
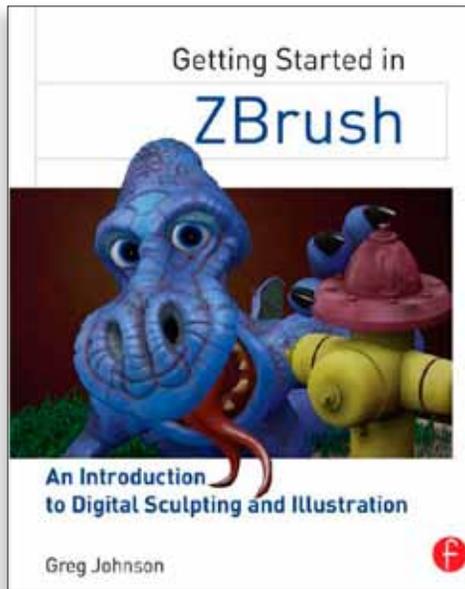
Without question there's a lot of information on the Internet and YouTube, but they may be years old. Often they don't begin "at the beginning" and previous *ZBrush* experience is needed. Even more frustrating is when you need to find out something specific, like why the "bindibble won't conswable when you move widdershins." Good luck.

There are a number of *ZBrush* books, granted, most of them four and more years old and few for beginners. The most recent *Introduction to ZBrush* was released in 2011 concurrent with the release of *ZBrush 4*. Since then *ZBrush* 4 has updated seven times. A lot has changed. Getting current information seems almost impossible.

Fortunately I discovered *Getting Started in ZBrush*. This book has been invaluable in helping me learn how to use this program. It's basically a series of instructions taking you from absolutely know-nothing to creating a sculpt, posing it and building props to add to the scene. Best of all, having been published in 2014 it's pretty much up-to-date.

The instructions are clear and easy to understand. They follow each other in natural progression without skipping over or around information you need later.

After an introduction, Chapters 2 and 3 explain concepts, walk you through the interface and explain some of the tools. Chapters 4 through 22 are separate "lessons" covering some aspect of 3D sculpting including painting and posing.

Your final sculpt is a rather cartoonish dragon, hanging out by a fire hydrant. As you build the character piece by piece, more and different tools and techniques are introduced. It's easy to be overwhelmed in a program of this complexity. Author Greg Johnson has designed a course that takes the absolute novice to a reasonable level of comfort. For me, that "level of comfort" is reached in a program when I can use, explain and teach it at a basic level. This book brought me to that point.

I discovered Rotation is not always friendly.

Hey, pal, a little help up here?

In addition to the information contained in the book there is a rich companion website. For each chapter you can download zipped workfiles and follow explanatory video(s).

The videos are real-time and very useful. They run roughly between 10 and 30 minutes but be aware they can be neither rewound or fast-forwarded. If you miss something, you miss it and have to start over from the beginning. But what he's doing is clear as are his explanations. They're high-res enough that you can read his screen to see what Brush, Alpha, Texture or setting he's using. That makes it a lot easier to follow.

This book hit all my needs quite nicely: Up-to-date information in easy-to-digest lessons, set out step-by-step; information about how/why certain things happen is clear and understandable. If you are considering learning *ZBrush 4*, this would be the book to start with.

Dragon body-building grabbed from the video.

About: *Getting Started in ZBrush*

Author:	Greg Johnson
Publisher:	Focal Press
	www.focalpress.com/cw/johnson
ISBN-10:	0415705142
ISBN-13:	978-0415705141
Price:	$49.95, $45.13 @ Amazon (Paperback)

References:
1 http://www.zbrush.com/zbrush/features/ZBrush4R7/

2 http://www.zbrushcentral.com/showthread.php?135212-Mouse-Jeweller-s-Work-Bench

3 http://pixologic.com/blog/2015/07/zbrush-was-used-to-help-create-the-ants-of-marvels-ant-man/

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frcLHREUGfI

5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG1RxZOIyYM