

by Natascha Roeoesli

# ELEMENTS

DIGITAL PAINTING TUTORIAL SERIES

The 'elements' series is a guide to basic 2D Digital painting and can be followed in most software packages supporting paintbrushes and layers.

Each month 2 or 3 professional artists will cover a specific theme or 'element', resulting in 2 or 3 different styles and techniques which can be viewed side by side. This month we cover Fabrics.

SUBJECTS:

Issue 01 : Jan 06 : part 1 : SKIES

Issue 02 : Feb 06 : part 2 : TREES

This Month : Issue 03 : Mar 06 : part 3 : FABRICS

Next Month : Issue 04 : Apr 06 : part 4 : ROCK & STONE

Issue 05 : May 06 : part 5 : WATER

Issue 06 : Jun 06 : part 6 : FIRE & SMOKE



**Introduction**

First of all, there are two different approaches to painting fabrics. If what you want is to achieve a realistic look, there is no escape from using references.

In this case, I would advise against using a photograph, since they sometimes trick the eye. Besides, you learn more painting from real life – even when it comes to fabrics. Instead, use something you have handy which consists of the texture and fabric you want to work with. When you've located a suitable item, place it on the table next to you. (At this point I should add that, if your personal preference is painting from photos, this is of course fine too.)

This time around, I would like to introduce you to a different way of painting fabrics or clothing. It's the way I normally work, and it's a bit more intuitive and semi-realistic than other

methods. The technique in question demands a certain level of imagination, as well as a basic understanding of gravity and of how folds work.

**Folds in general**

Most people tend to make the mistake to paint folds in straight lines without any interaction of themselves. Folds depend on a great amount of all different kinds of influences. Gravity, of course, to name just the most obvious one but also on the shape underneath, the thickness of the material or the movement/direction of the element underneath.

Folds interact. They might go on top of each other, break, curve or create little wrinkles much like skin, as a matter of fact (grab your wrist, push the skin towards your hand and then bend the wrist in order to have your hand point at you to create some basic skin folds). Folds get pushed together if you bend your

arm, or get pulled together at a place where there is a button sewn on.

Folds do have a tendency to follow a certain direction but there is always that one little rebellious fold that goes the other way which actually creates the realistic feel to a fabric or surface. Make it a habit to study folds whenever you can. If you are sitting in a restaurant, try to make out what causes folds to look different and try to memorize that.

**Step 1: Create a colour scheme and decide on a fabric.**

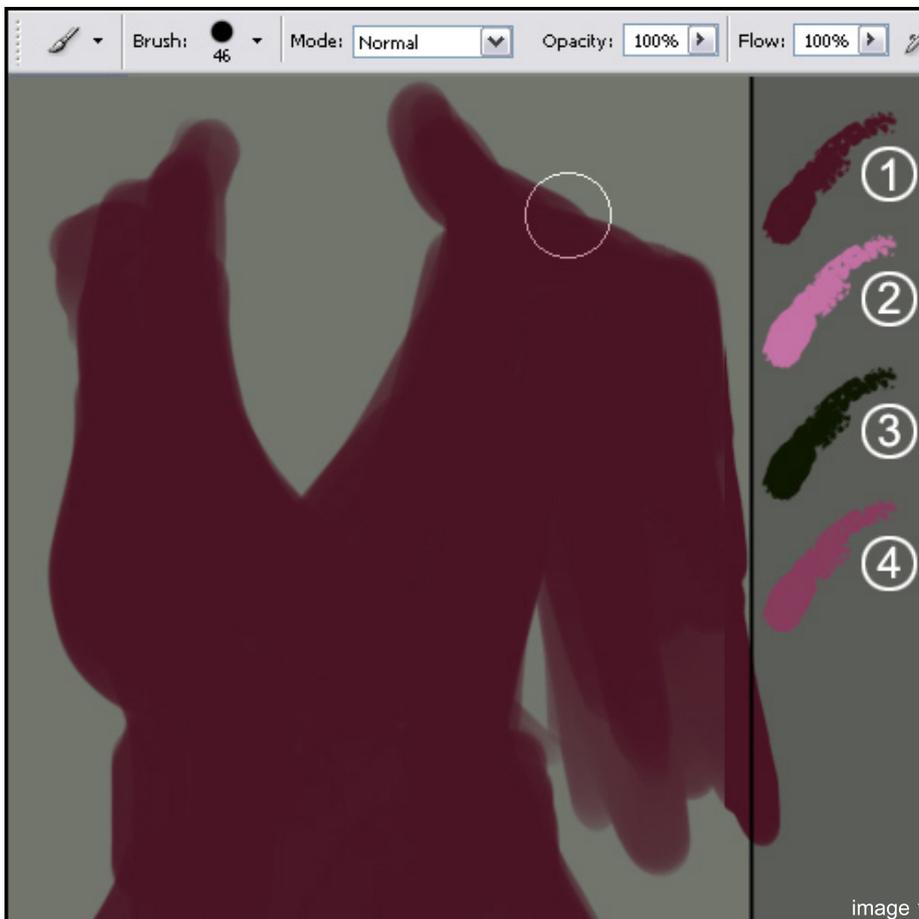
We plan on painting an asian-influenced silk dress today.

The first thing you should do is settle on a colour scheme. In cases such as this, I normally work with four different colors: a base colour; a shadow colour (pick the ambient colour – in this case the background – then make it much more saturated and darker); a highlight colour (in this case a much lighter and less saturated shade of the base colour); and a colour which is somewhere between highlight and base colour.

You can see the colours I'm using in the right hand column of the examples below, numbered from 1 to 4. It's a good idea to have your colours in a separate layer, so that you can go back to them and pick if necessary.

**Step 2: Lay down a rough shape**

Brush: Normal hard edged, Spacing 10%, Flow and Size Jitter set to pen pressure, check smoothing. With my beloved hard edged brush, I start laying down a rough shape of the dress, using colour #1. Looks quite ugly huh? Well, no worries, it's not going to stay like that! (image 1)





### Step 3: Starting to feel the forms underneath

Using colour #4, I'm beginning to search out the forms underneath (chest, bones), and to give shape to some general flow and fold ideas. As always in painting, it is of critical importance that you decide where your light is coming from. In this case, I settled on a top frontal light source which is slightly to the left.

Vary your pressure while working on those folds. Don't use the same pressure all over. Press down harder on the higher areas, and let it fade in areas that lie deeper. Let the folds find their form – you can always make this on a separate layer, and delete and start over if it doesn't turn out like you wanted. The shapes should still be quite rough at this stage, which basically helps us by adding shades of colour number #4 to work with in the next step. If you find it hard to control pen pressure manually, you can lower the flow to 50%. Still with me? It'll get more interesting soon. (image 2)

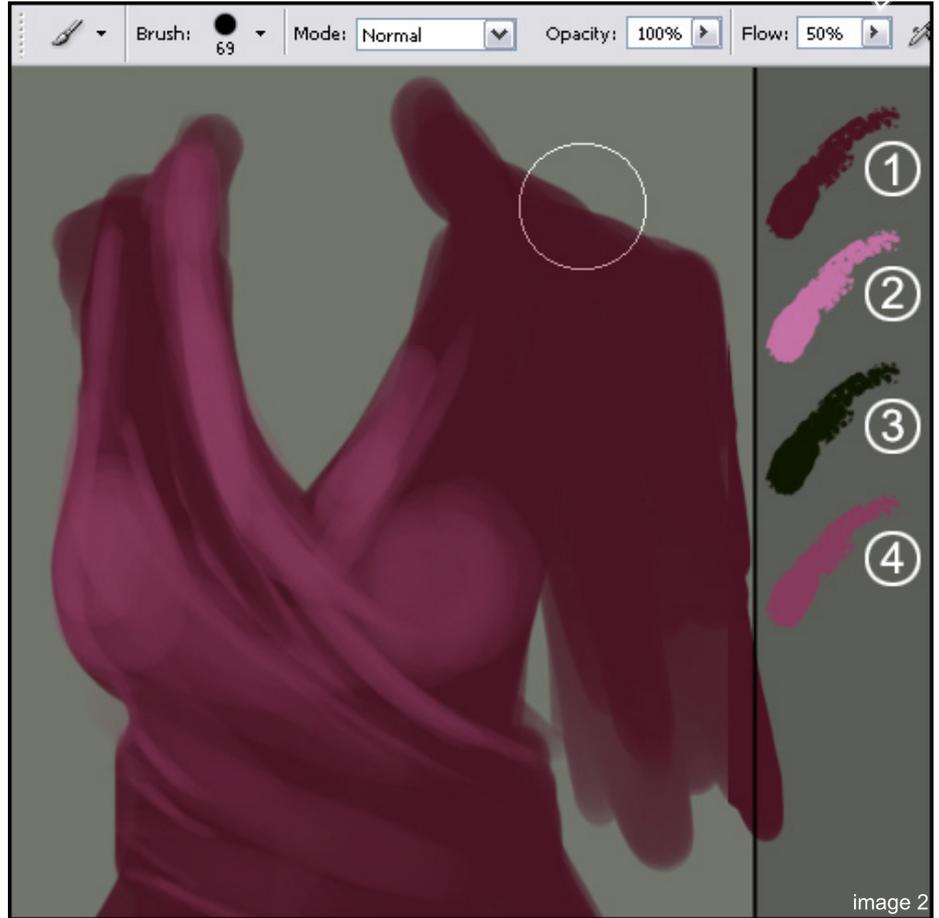


image 2

### Step 4: Color picking

Now that I have a VERY rough idea, I start picking colours from all the shades I created. I try to find folds and work on them some more. Deepen lower/shadowy/darker parts in between folds, and slowly blend colours together. It still looks quite strange, doesn't it? Have patience, though, we're getting there! (image 3)

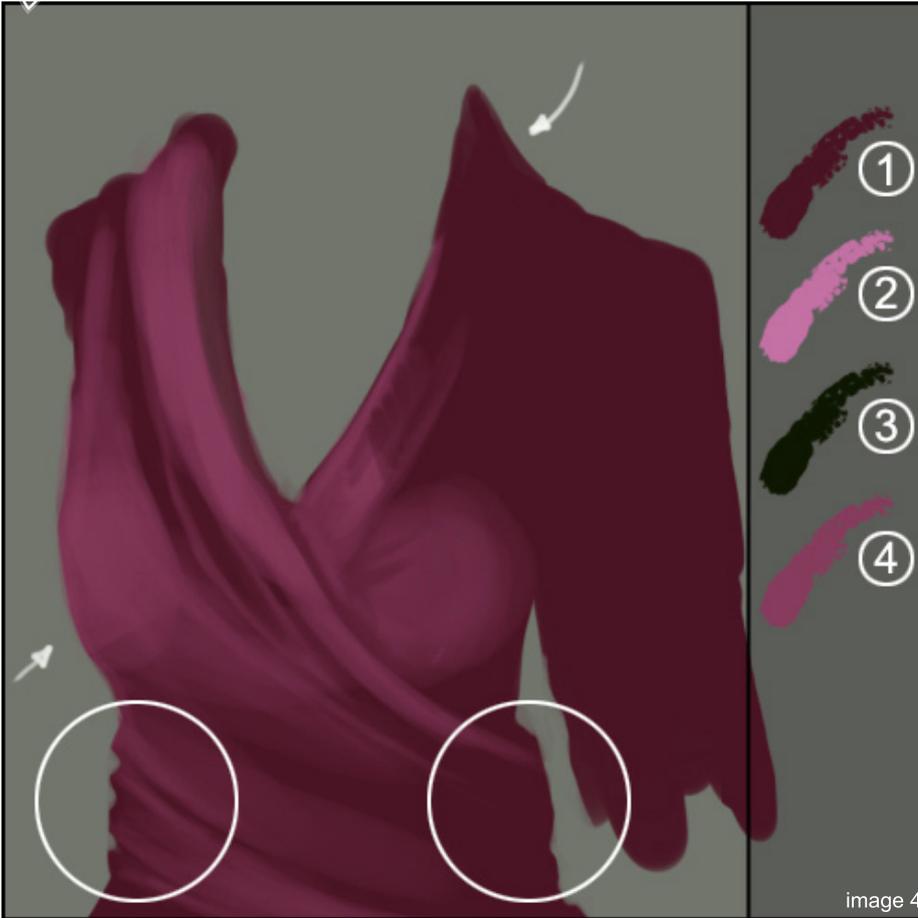


image 3



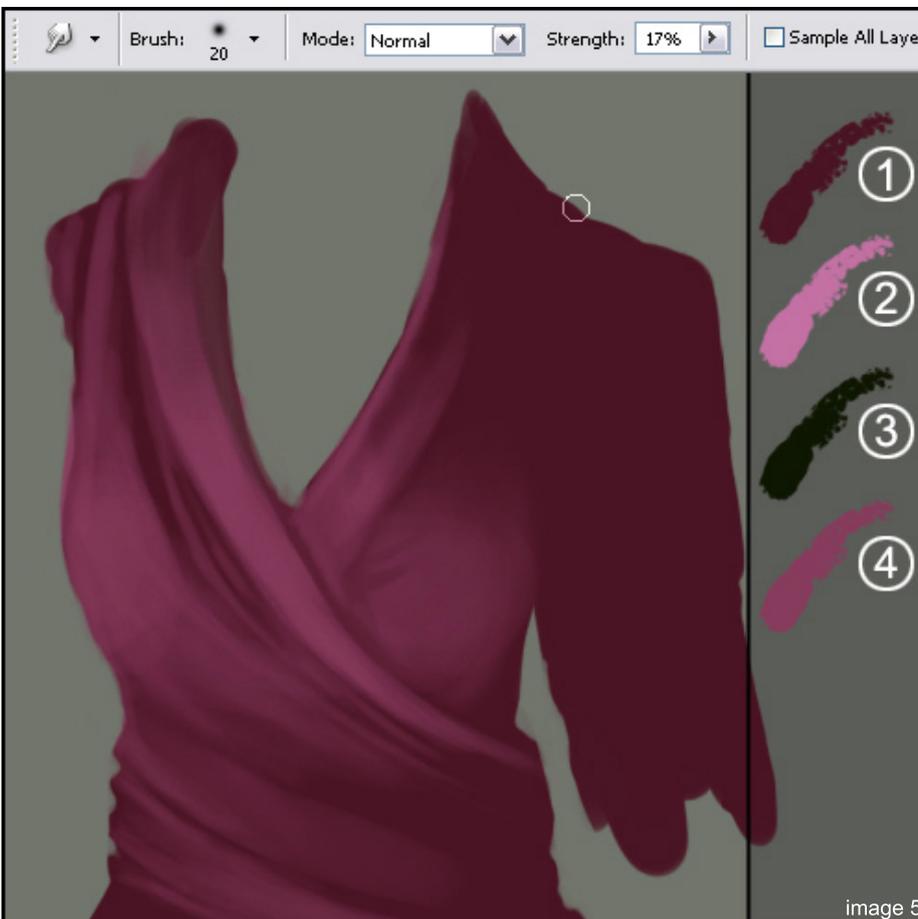
**Step 5: Correcting the shape**

It's important that you have a good shape to work from. Just pick the background colour and correct folds and outlines. Basically, it's a matter of cleaning the rough shape you made in the second step. (Take a look at the waist area to see some minor changes). (image 4)



**Step 6: Smudging and blending**

Fabrics contain a great number of edges and folds, some of which are smooth, while others are more rough/harsh. In order to smooth some of them out, we use the smudge tool (just make ABSOLUTELY sure you don't overuse it). To be honest with you – it all looks a bit too smudgy in this step, but since we'll work things over again with the normal brush, it doesn't really matter for now (image 5).



## Step 7: Shadows

Up to this point, we've only used two different colours (keep your hands off the highlights for now). It's time to add some shadows to the somewhat monochromatic form we have now. Use colour #3 to deepen some of the inbetween fold sections. Just like last time, vary your pen pressure in between folds. Deeper value = deeper shadow/fold, lighter value = shallower fold.

Also, don't use the shadow color everywhere, but reserve it for the darkest and deepest folds. As you can see, I didn't use a lot of the shadow color. Don't forget the seams (like where the sleeves are attached). Notice how the whole mess is slowly coming together? With the current colour combinations and no harsh highlights, the fabric looks like stretch or some sort of soft cotton. We could actually settle down with those colours and refine from here. However, our plan was to paint silk, right? Right. (image 6)

## Step 8: Highlights

Here come the highlights. If you want to understand how to paint different fabrics, you need to know what actually causes them to be different. The fabric we had in the previous step didn't have any highlights because the surface was of a different type than silk, and it had more texture. The clothing in step 7 didn't create any specular (reflected) light at all. Silk, on the other hand, is very smooth to the touch, and it's surface is flatter. The smoother a surface is, the more light is reflected. (image 7)

Let's assume what we have in Step 7 is cotton. Due to the fact that cotton reveals a very rugged surface under a microscope, light doesn't have enough smooth surface to bounce off directly and instead bounces off in all different kind of directions which creates a dull effect.



image 6

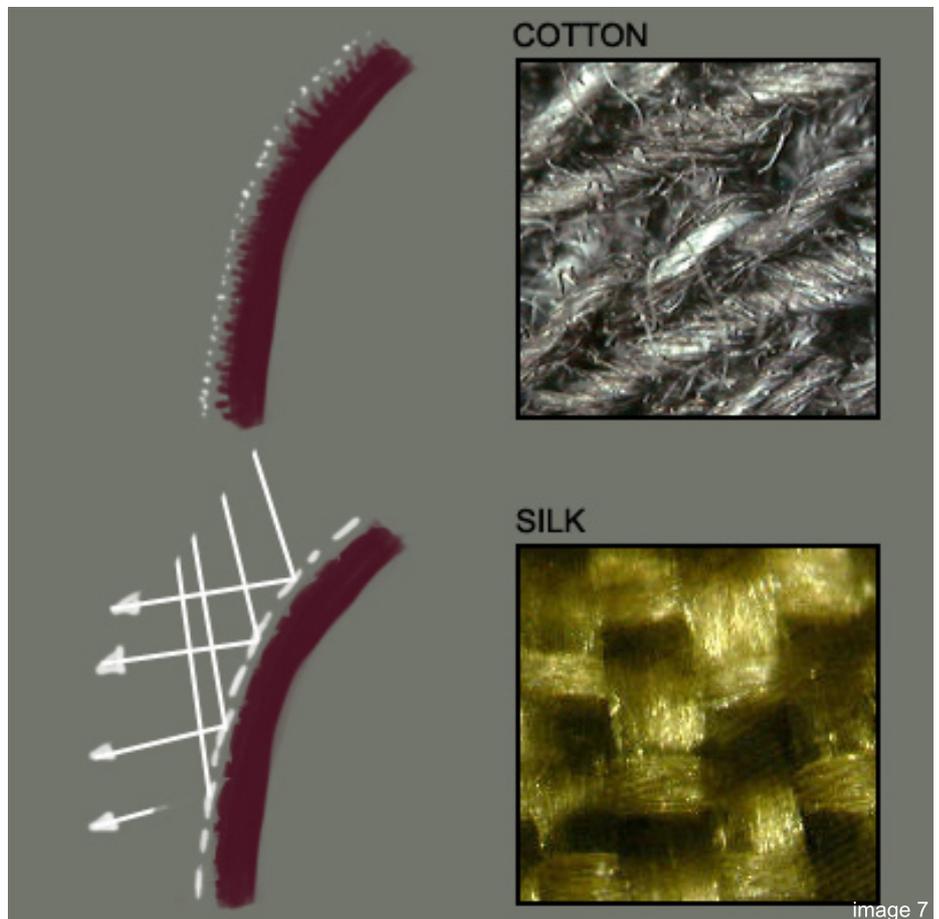


image 7



Silk on the other hand reveals smooth threads, which the light can bounce off directly into the viewers eye. This effect is what creates the bright specular effect.

Now that I've bored you with a bit of theory - it's on to the practice!

This is a somewhat difficult step to explain. But, as always, make sure you still remember where you placed your light source. Start with a big brush and grab color #2. Once more, make sure you vary the value of the color by pressing down more or less depending on the angle and height relative to your light source. Make some crazy brush stroke and try to see if you can create a look that works for you.

Besides adding the actual highlights, I'm also color picking all over the place and refining shadows. A little trick is to first create a bigger shadow area, then pick a lighter color again

before painting a smaller fold in between (you can see this on the leftmost side of the left collar part).

In general, silk doesn't have many folds. It's a smooth and thin material, which in this case is quite tightly stretched over the body. The fabric looks much more like silk now, don't you think? (image 7)



### Step 9: Ornaments and embroidering

You can add an unlimited amount of detail to fabrics. In this case, I settled on some asian-influenced imprints. I picked a new color (a slightly yellower and brighter shade than the main color) and started painting in some leaves and random patterns. This is quite a delicate procedure. Embroiderings and patterns need to follow the body, and since they are imprinted on the silk, they also need to follow the same light and shadow physics. If you just paint everything in the same color, it will look flat and unconvincing. You can paint over shadows for now, but don't forget to erase those parts later. To further add to the effect, I changed the color I used for the leaves to a brighter and more saturated hue, and I revisited the patterns on the parts with the most highlights (on the edges of the collar and on the highest part of her chest). It's hardly noticable, but it adds to the overall feel.

If you don't have the patience to paint textures yourself, you can always create a brush from some random flowers you painted and use it on a separate layer on top of everything. Set it to screen (or try out different layer modes) and brush off the parts that go over shadows. To refine those, it is always good to paint over them and only use the brush as base (image 8).





## Step 10: More refining and embroidering

First of all, I refined some of the edges around the waist/belt to make it look more like some stiff asian asymmetric belt. I added some trimming to the collar and a different pattern to the left side. The fact that I used those lines helped me to further accentuate the shape under the clothing. This is a little trick I like to use quite often. Note how the lines are brighter on top of the folds, and how they almost vanish into the shadows. Also pay attention to how the line follows the fold and note its "ups and downs." Once more, I used only the pen pressure to create highlighted and duller areas on those little lines. (image 9)

## Step 11: Finishing touches

Color picking here and there, I corrected some more details. I blended colors better and deepened some shadows. Even though silk is very smooth, it bothers me if something looks too "rendered", or as in this case, a bit "rubbery".

You could go over the fabric with a speckled brush and create the feel of textures manually, while using darker colors in the highlighted areas and brighter colors in the shadowy ones. There is, however, a quick and dirty method: I created a layer on top of everything and filled it with a neutral gray (128,128,128). Use the Add noise Filter on that layer (Filter -> Noise -> add Noise) with the settings to "uniform" (don't click monochromatic) and a high amount of grain. After this, set the layer mode to overlay and reduce its opacity until it looks nice. Voilà! (image 10)

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image 9

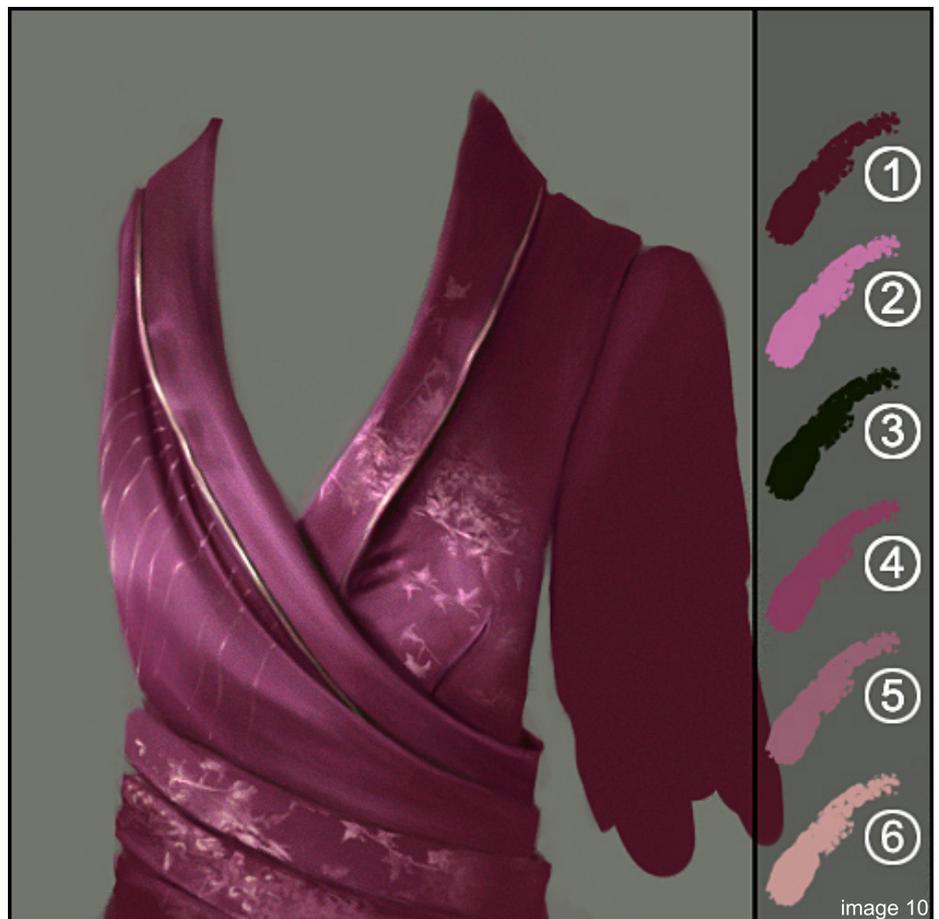


image 10