

This tutorial will focus on shading and coloring fur. There are several different techniques to accomplish this but I'll focus on the ones I'm most likely to employ. The simplest way, from a workload point of view, to go on shading or coloring fur is simple: high rez texture images.

The first thing you'll want to do is find a good library of textures on the web. The example below is from a free texture page that can be found at <http://mayang.com/textures/Nature/html/Fur%20and%20Skin/index.html>

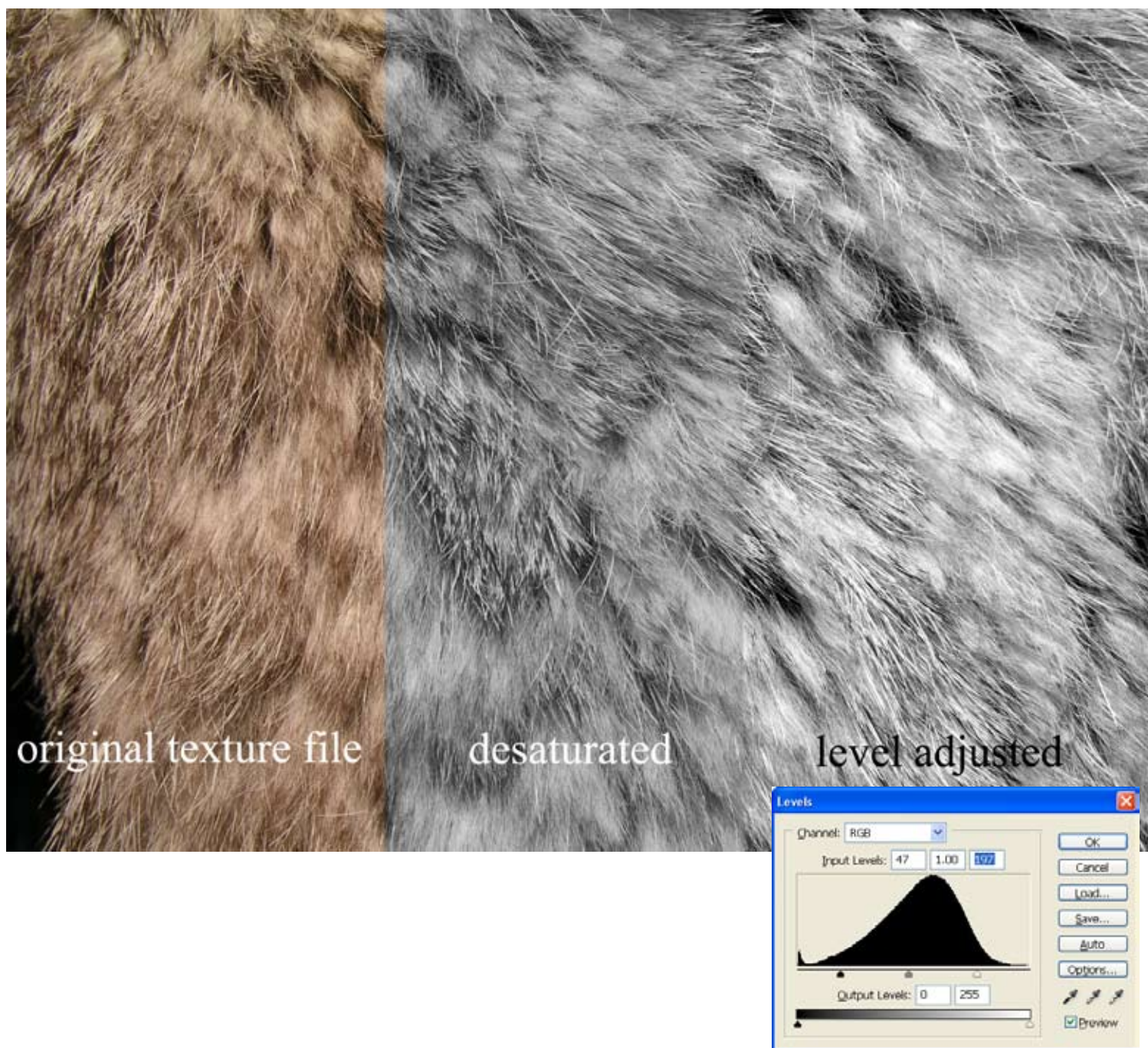
I'm not saying this is the only one. In fact, I've never used this one before but it was the first to pop up when I searched google for "fur texture." Feel free to look around and don't shy away from google's image search for good textures.



I like the way rabbit fur looks and feels, so that's the one I selected for this project. The first and obvious thing to consider is resolution, you want to try and find a texture image that's as high rez as possible, either lots of dpi (at least 300 to be considered high-rez) or low dpi (72 or so is considered web-rez) but really huge, at least 1000x1000 pixels. These are only ideal stuff. You'll need to experiment to find out what works best for you or what you can fit into your piece.

Bring the image you want to apply as a texture into photoshop. You want to desaturate it so it can be used to enhance your coloring job, not interfere with it. (The desaturate hotkey is ctrl-shift-u or cmd-shift-u on mac.) This gives you a black and white version of the original, but you're still not done. You need to tweak the levels of it to make it a bit more high contrast so your texture work shows up. (The hotkey for that is ctrl-l or cmd-l. Move the white slider, on the right, and the black slider, on the left, more toward the center until your general value is a bit more contrasted. This makes the blacks and whites "pop.")

This seems kind of pointless, now, but will make more sense later.





Now it just so happens that I have an uncolored bunny picture that I can use for my examples.

When using a texture image manually, one of the most frequent mistakes I see is not scaling your texture to your image. If the subject you're furring is a four inch drawing, each hair in the coat isn't going to be a meter long and at a density of four hairs per inch. You want to use your transform tool on the texture image until it's properly scaled. (Side note: You could do a lot of this stuff using the texturizer filter in the filters menu, but I find it to look really crappy and inorganic when applied to something like this. It's just not made for it.)

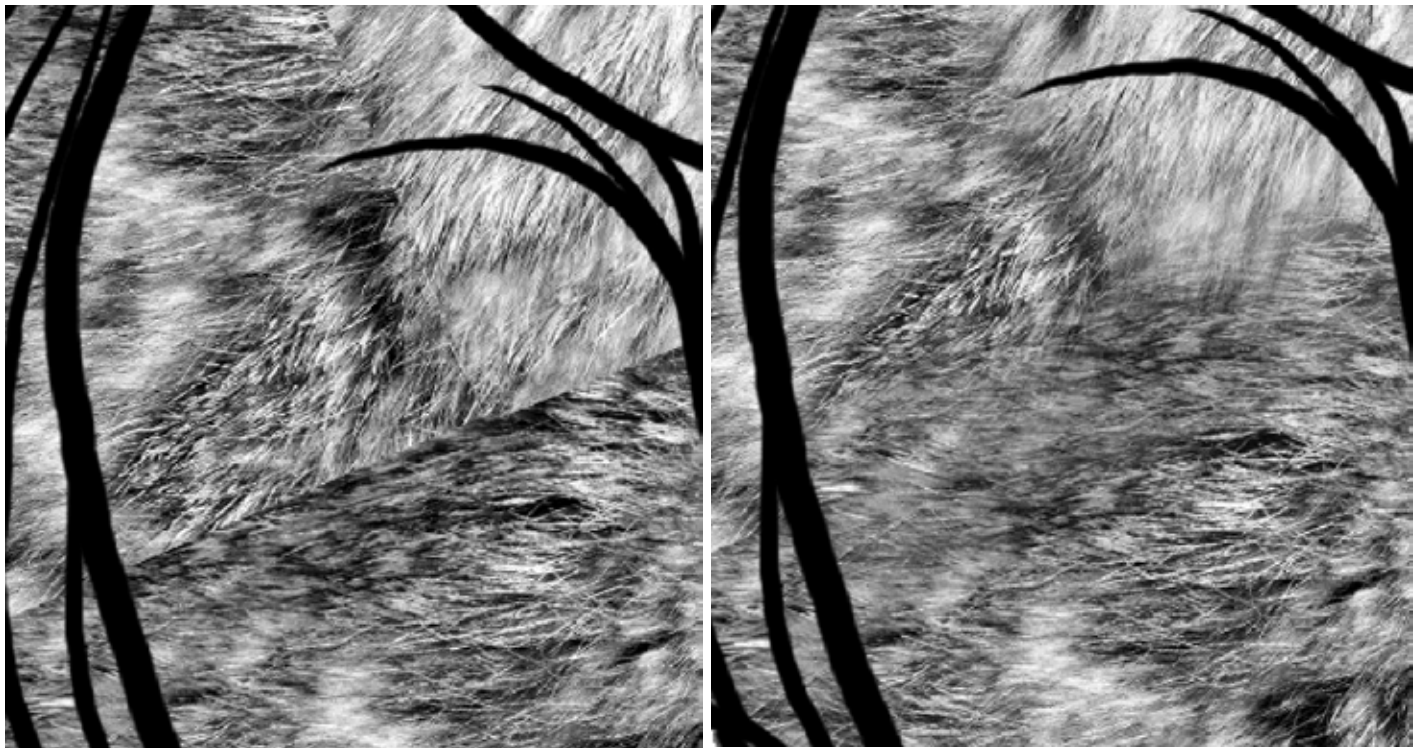
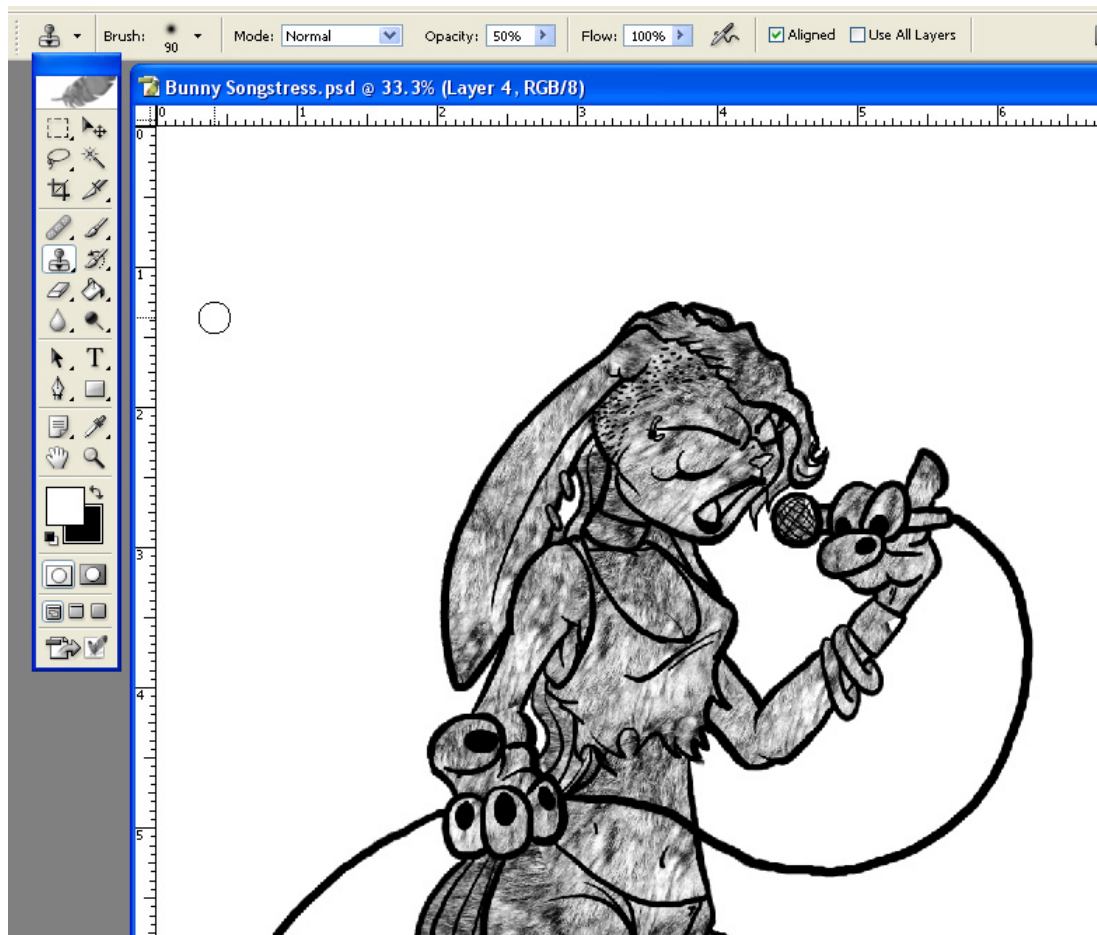
The second biggest problem I see with stuff like this: direction of growth. Hair grows down, mostly and away from the body. Either way, it grows from the center of the body, outward, running down arms, legs, tail, neck, etc... Use multiple swatches if you need (ctrl-j is your friend) to cover the body with appropriately sized and oriented texture samples. When finished, merge any separate layers with fur on them so you have one layer with all your texture swatches on it.



The last step to this part is trimming everything that is outside of where you're trying to color. This isn't 100% necessary, but it makes things a little more manageable. Feel free to leave it if you can handle all the visual clutter.

I know, I know. It looks like crap. That's okay. We're far from done.

Once the last step is done, if you inspect your work a little more closely (keeping in mind that I work at 300-600 dpi) you can see seams where the swatches fit together. This can be easily fixed by selecting the clone stamp tool (S) and while holding alt, clicking on an area that doesn't look bad. Set the opacity of the tool to 50% and brush over the edges. The best brush is a soft edge. This gives you nicely blended edges. Select new swatches when the look or angle isn't working well with the seam.



The next step is to hide your rough texturing, and color the pic. The colors should be on a different layer than the lines and textures. Go to it. Use whatever method you do for coloring, while keeping the layering convention in your mind (from top layer down): Line, Fur, Shadow, Color, background. You don't have to name them this, but the content has to reflect this scheme for this technique.



Now things will start to pull together. Make the fur layer visible. Set its blending mode to Multiply. Make a layer between the shadow layer and the fur layer. This is going to be the clipping mask for the fur layer. I'll name the layer Fur Shadow (because I'm really imaginative.) and then hold alt and click the line between the fur layer and fur shadow layers.



If you did it correctly, you should see something like this.

I really only ever used clipping masks in Photoshop CS and later, so you might have some research on your hands if you have an older version than that. Once the clipping mask is made, set both, the fur shadow layer and fur layer, to a blending mode of Multiply. The fur is now invisible.

I can hear you thinking now, "But Pyro, why do I have two shadow layers?" That's an excellent question. The shadow layer is for shadows on everything that doesn't have fur on it. The fur shadow layer gets shaded wherever you want fur to show up.

Now we're ready to get impressed with ourselves.

On your color layer, select a section (or all if you're feeling ambitious) of the area that you want to look furred, using the wand tool (W).

Using the fill tool set to 100% opacity, fill in the fur shadow layer. Pick a color appropriate to the desired fur color, obviously.



You should have something that looks similar to this.

Now, using the eraser tool set to either a dry media brush or a soft edged brush set to 10-30% opacity, erase these shadows according to markings. You want to do this gradually to maintain the furred effect. You might want to lock all other layers. It's easy, at this point, to start erasing other important things.

When finished, it should look something like this.





Now you're free to do regular shading and such; general finish work.



My next fur tutorial will cover a bit about custom brush making and how to apply them to make a furry edge.