The specs

Company
AKVIS

Additional specs
Photoshop and
Photoshop Elements
Windows XP or later
Mac OS X 10.4 or later
2GB RAM (minimum)

PREVIEW WINDOW
The interface includes a movable preview window to give you a quick peek at the results of the pastel effect.

EFFECT SLIDERS
Configure the pastel effect by adjusting specific attributes of the filter. The Stroke Length provides a useful way to set a minimum and maximum range.

Standout feature

Stroke Direction tool
One of the most standard features of AKVIS Pastel is the Stroke Direction tool. The idea behind the tool is that the filtering algorithm can't always know exactly where a stroke should appear. So the Stroke Direction tool lets you guide the strokes. That way the final effect will have a more natural appearance.

PLUG-IN

Price Approx £29/$49   **Web** www.akvis.com

AKVIS Pastel

A filter that doesn't look like a filter! Turn your photos into vibrant pastel artworks

Photoshop users have a kind of love-hate relationship with filters, especially with the filters that are supposed to produce a traditional artistic effect. This is because they never really appear convincing enough, and are therefore almost always used as part of a process to create a completely different effect. The problem is that filters can find it hard to make a clear distinction between features of the image. Details are just treated according to a particular formula. This can produce a very mechanical effect where a person's eyes have no more, or less, detail than the background area.

AKVIS has released a plug-in called Pastel, and it attempts to do what the native filters in Photoshop cannot – that is create a convincing hand-made effect. Pastel has been specifically programmed to detect edges and the changes in colour and contrast in an image. This, in turn, helps to create a more believable pastel effect. But it gets even more impressive when paired with the Stroke Direction tool, which provides you with direct input into way the strokes are applied.

The final effect is a much more life-like representation of a handcrafted pastel image than anything that came before it.

The verdict

8 Impressive pastel effects can be had, but some improvements are needed to the interface, such as a bigger preview and ways to adjust colour.