TWPC Resource Tutorial 1

Custom Photoshop brushes

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Using Custom Photoshop Brushes:

As well as providing a set of default brush sets for use with various tools within the application, Photoshop also provides the facility to import custom brush sets. This tutorial explains how to import and use custom brush sets, and has been written against Photoshop CS 6. Consequently whilst this tutorial will probably work against Photoshop CS 5 and the Cloud, some screen shots and/or specific details may differ.

It is not known whether Photoshop Elements provides the same facility or not.

What Are Custom Brush Sets?

Consider the following image…..

'Scatter By Lamplight' is a composite image consisting of a street scene as the background, a model throwing playing cards in to the air, and a number of swirling smoke strands that flow down the street and wrap themselves around various lampposts and the model's legs.
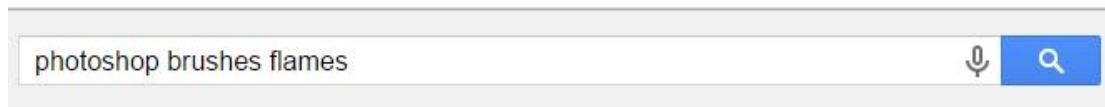
The smoke strands are created using a custom brush set, which was found after an Internet search. This, and many other brush sets may be obtained free of charge, and the remainder of this tutorial explains how to install and use custom brush sets.

However, in this particular case I am going to use a different brush set – flames rather than smoke.

Stage 1: Find a Brush Set.

For this tutorial I will be using flames rather than smoke, Since I don't (at the time of writing this document) have a set of flame brushes, I carried out a simple Internet search using 'Photoshop Brushes Flames' as the search criteria.

As it turned out, one of the first returned hits (as shown below) contains a set of 33 flame brushes that appear to suit my needs. The brushes are free, so I just suffered the attendant 'advert' as I downloaded the brush file.

Search: photoshop brushes flames

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About 142,000 results (0.27 seconds)

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30 **Fire & Flame Brushes** Included file formats: .abr (**Photoshop Brush** File) .jpg (30
Source Files, 2500×2500 Pixel, 300dpi) .pdf (Tutorial: How to colorize ...

33 Flames Brushes | Free Photoshop Brushes at Brusheezy!
www.**brush**eezy.com/**brushes**/43240-33-**flames**-**brushes** ▾
33 **fire brushes** and **flames brushes**. Download this **flame brush** pack and enjoy!
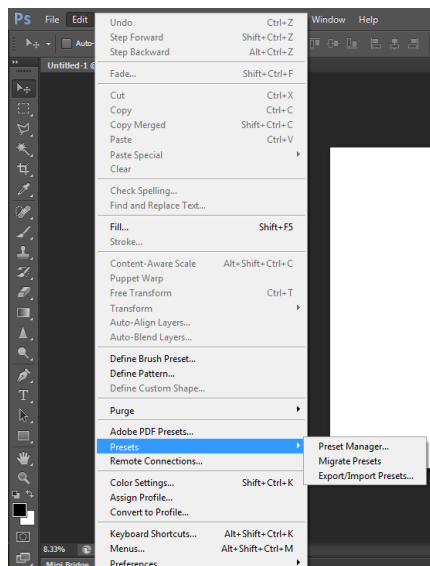
Fire Photoshop Brushes - Brusheezy
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Thoroughly heated and extremely volatile **Photoshop brushes** - **flames**, thermal
eddies, fire whips, explosions and combustion will be under your control as you ...

Security Warning: Not all files obtained from the Internet are secure. Always run your anti-virus software against any such download to make sure that it does not contain a virus.

Stage 2: Importing the Brush Set:

In this particular case the brush set comes as a .zip file (33vlammen_abr.zip) and will need unzipping before it can be used. In this particular case the unzipped file is called '33vlammen.abr'. Once that has been done, the next step is to import the brush set into Photoshop.
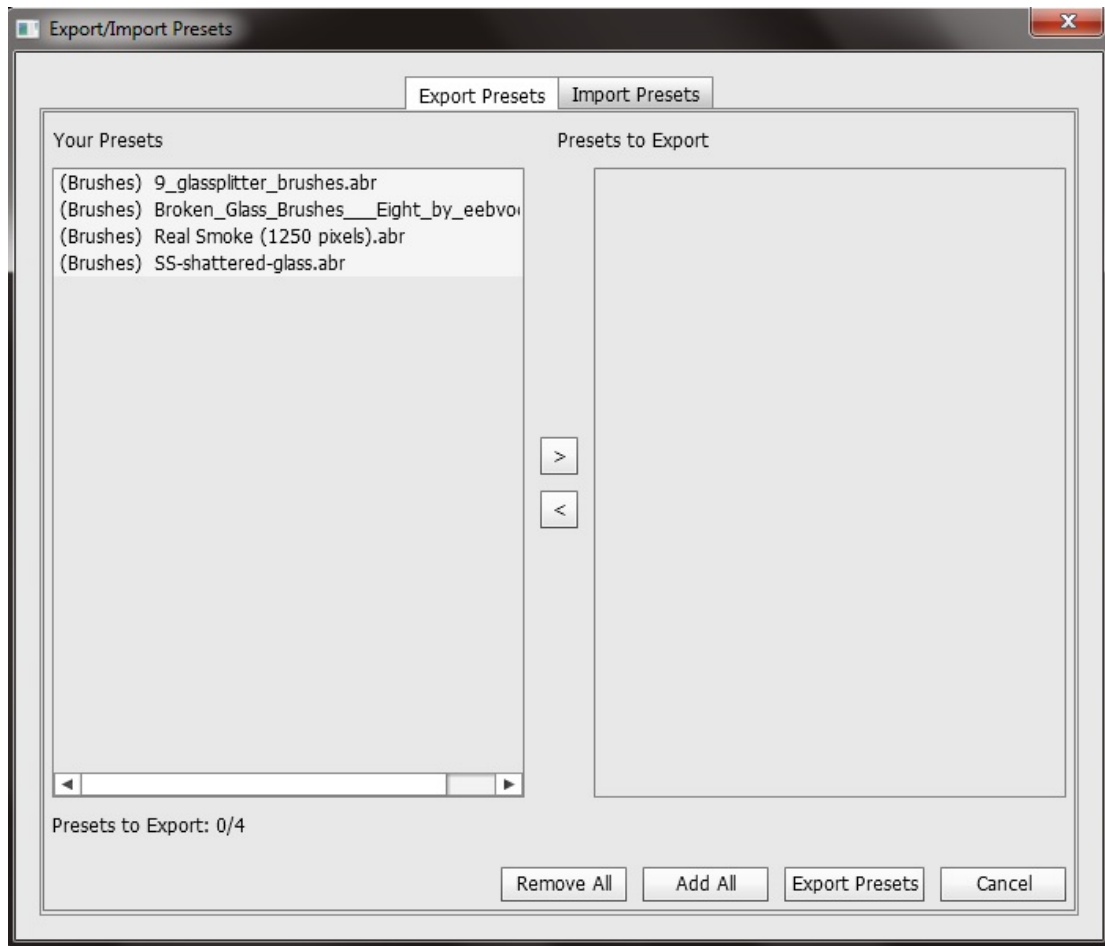
Start Photoshop without opening an existing image or .psd file.

Select <Edit> from the menus at the top of the screen.

Select <Presets>.
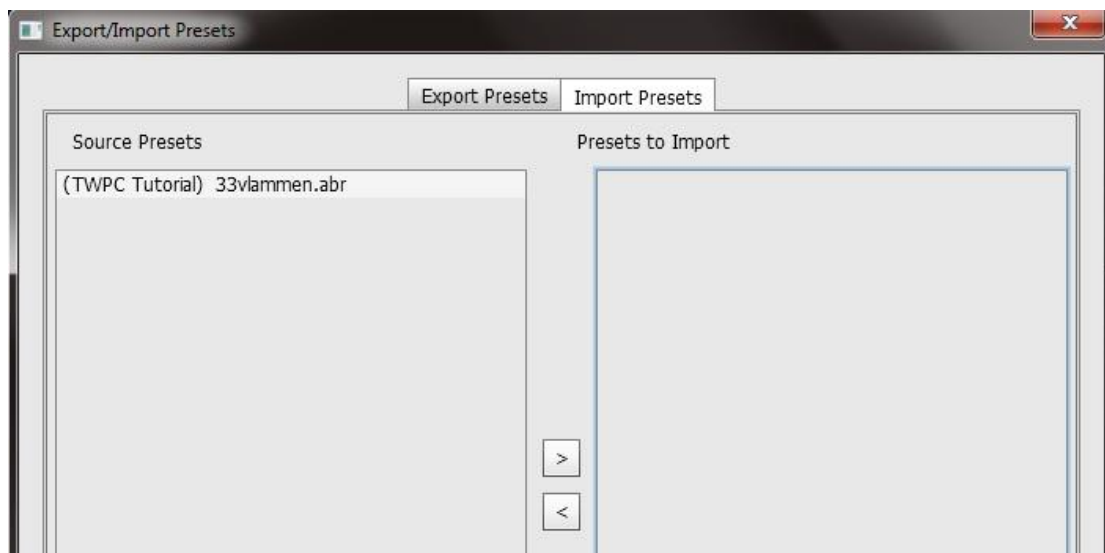
Select <Export/Import Presets>

A screen similar to the following will be displayed.

Note that the entries listed on the left above are brush sets that I have already imported, this list may differ or be totally non-existent in your version of Photoshop.

Click on the <Import Presets> tab at the top of the screen.

Click the <Select Import Folder> button. This will display a screen to select the import folder from. Navigate to the folder where the flame brush 33vlammen.abr file has been unzipped to, and select it. The 33vlammen.abr file will now appear on the 'Export/Import Presets' screen ready to be imported.
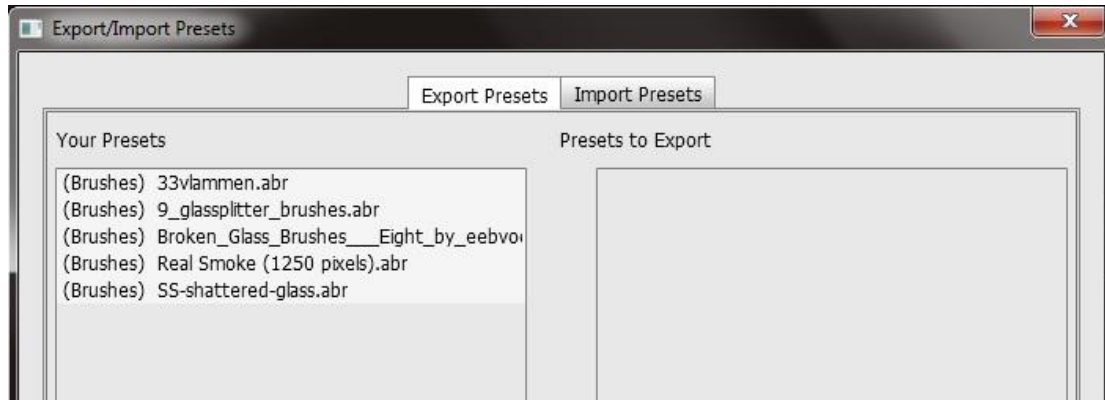

Note that the (TWPC Tutorial) bit is the name of the folder that the .abr file is in on my computer).

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Click on the '33vlammen.abr entry to highlight it and then click on the '>' button to transfer the entry to the right hand side of the screen. Then click on the <Import Presets> button at the bottom of the screen.

An 'Importing Presets' message will appear for a moment and then disappear.

To check that the brush set has been imported, redisplay the 'Export/Import Presets' screen. The 33vlammen.abr entry will now be listed on the left…
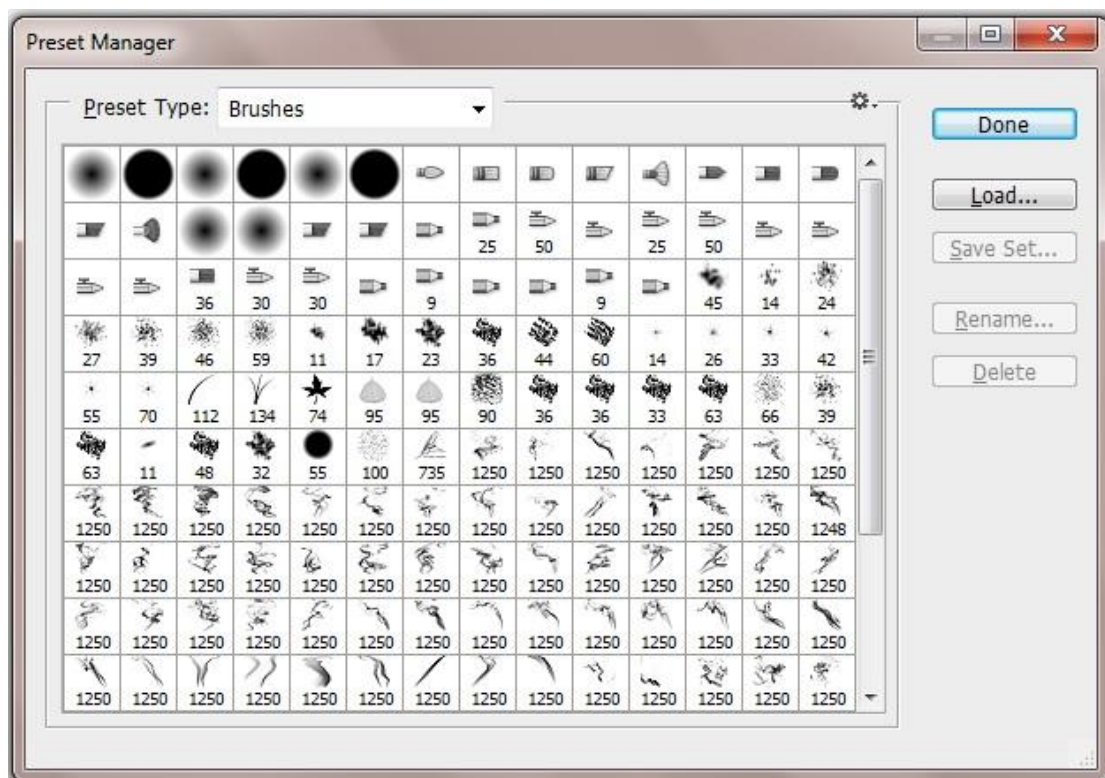

Note that to export (IE unload) a custom brush set from Photoshop just select the entry from the above list, click on the '>' button to transfer the entry to the right hand side and then click on the <Export Presets> button at the bottom of the screen.

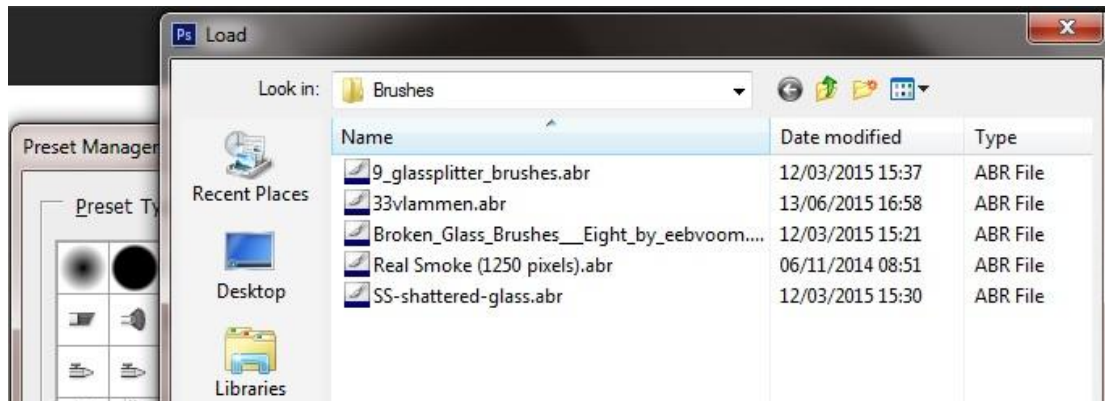**Stage 3: Load the Custom Brush Set:**

Now that the custom brush set has been imported, it must be loaded ready to be used by the various brush tools.

To do this click on the <Edit> menu item as before, then click on <Presets> and then click on <Preset Manager>. The following screen will be displayed…

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Again, this screen may not show exactly the same thumbnails in your version of Photoshop because I already have some custom brush sets loaded.
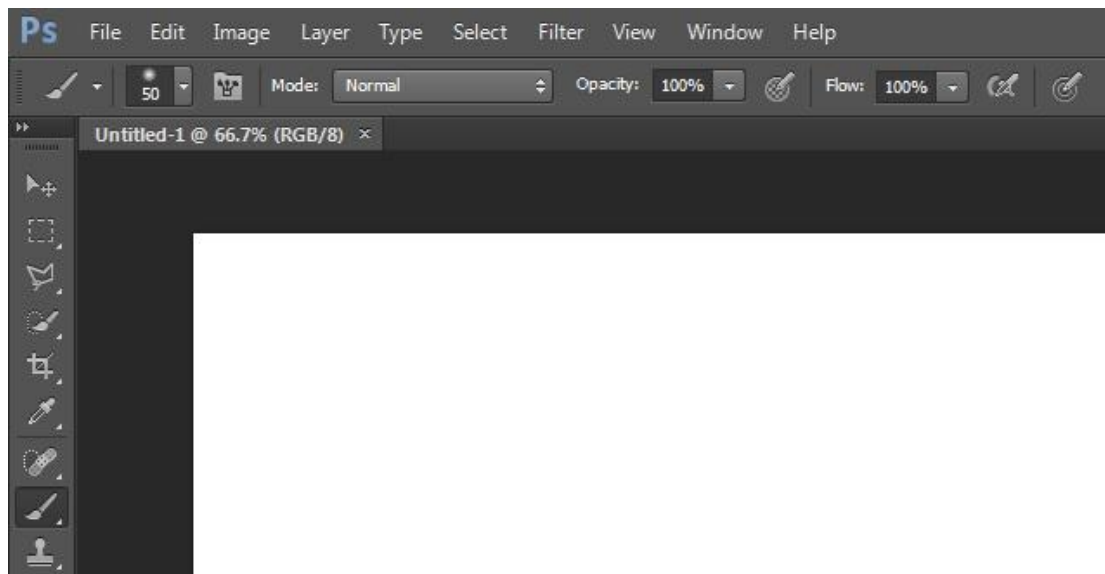
Click on the <Load> button. The following screen will be displayed.

Click on the '33vlammen.abr entry to highlight it, then click on the <Load> button at the bottom of the screen. The 'Preset Manager' screen will now be redisplayed. Scroll down to the bottom of the screen and note that a number of new thumbnails will have been added. Click on <Done> to close the screen.
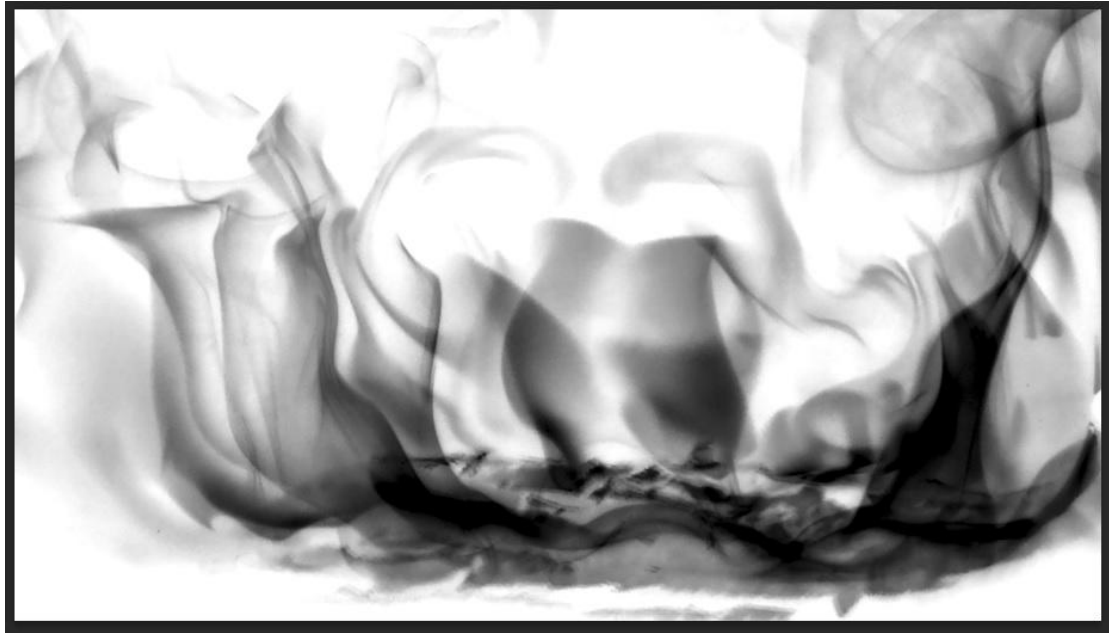
Stage 4: Using the Custom Brushes:

Click on the <Brush Tool> icon in Photoshop to change the tool settings to that of the general purpose brush. At the top of the Photoshop screen the following tool settings are shown…
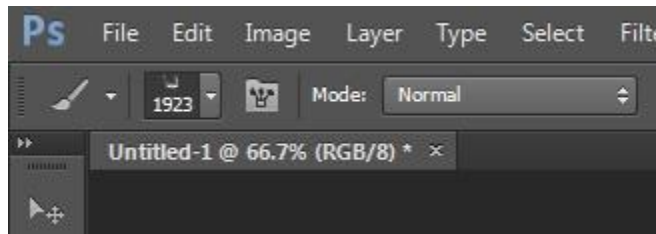

Click on the down arrow next to the 'size' dropdown list (in this particular case it's the one next to the '50' number). The following screen is displayed (*note that I have resized it for clarity*).

Scroll down to the bottom of the display to find the thumbnails relating to the custom brush set that has just been loaded – in this case the 'flame' brush set. Click on one of the thumbnails to select it….

In this particular example I have selected the thumbnail with the blue box around it. 1923 isn't the name of the thumbnail, it's the thumbnail's initial size in pixels – which is far too big for what I want to use it for, as shown below….

This single brush completely fills the width and height of the open document and needs to be resized and re-orientated. At the top of the screen the Brush tools should now look something like this.

Click on the icon to the left of 'modes' – the one that looks like a pot with three brushes sticking out the top.

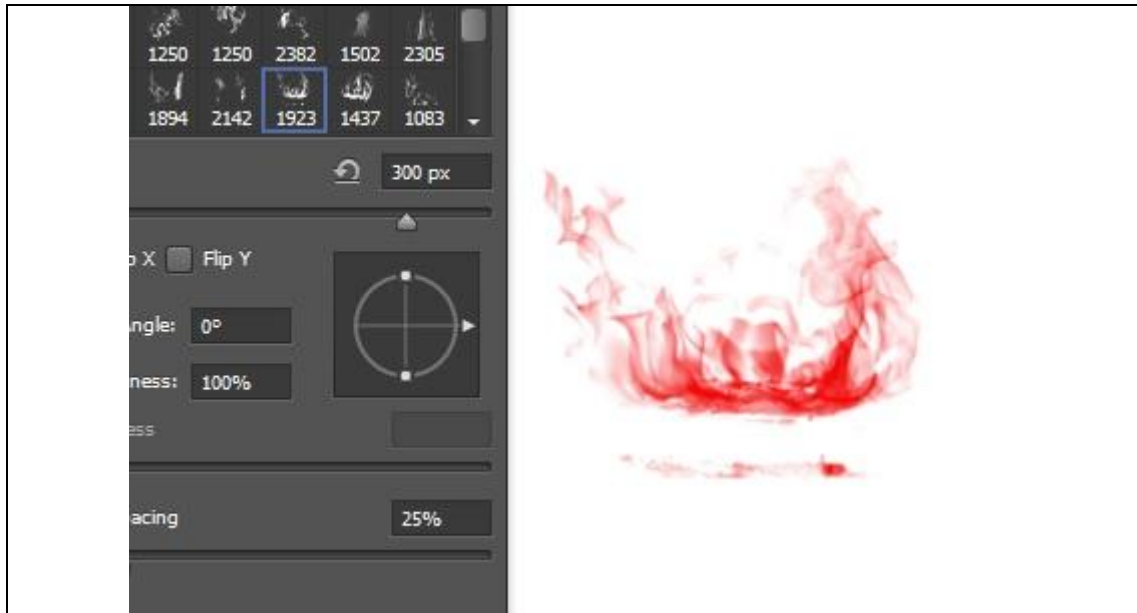The following screen will be displayed…

This is the Brush Preset control panel, and can be used to adjust the size of the currently selected brush, but more importantly for what we are doing here, it can also be used to change the pitch and yaw of the brush as well.

There are many other things that can be done via this screen, but I am not covering them in this document.
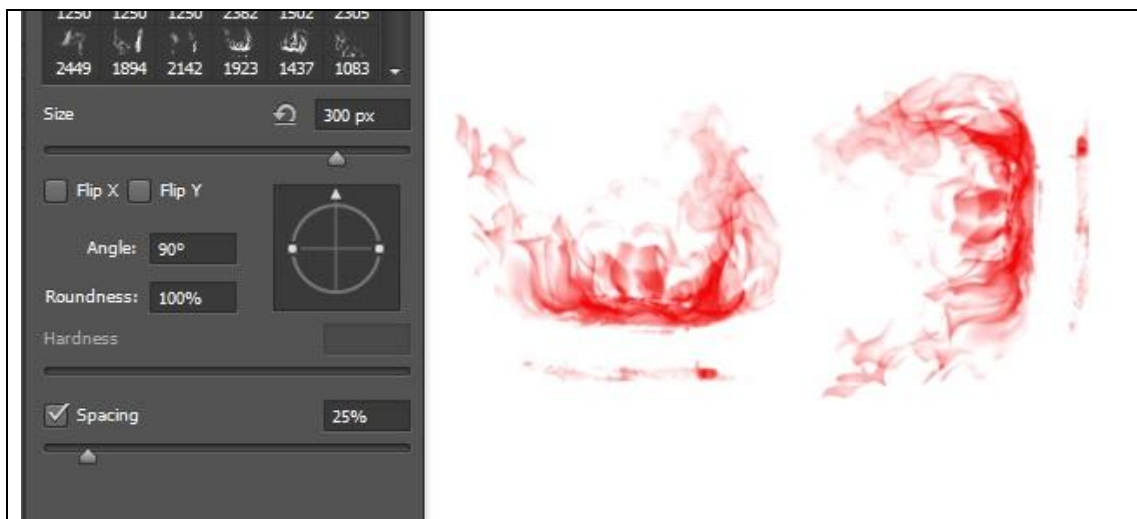
Firstly click in to the input field that contains (in this example) '1923 px' and change the size down to something more manageable – for example '300 px'.

Then click in to the Photoshop document once to place a single instance of the selected brush, as shown below.
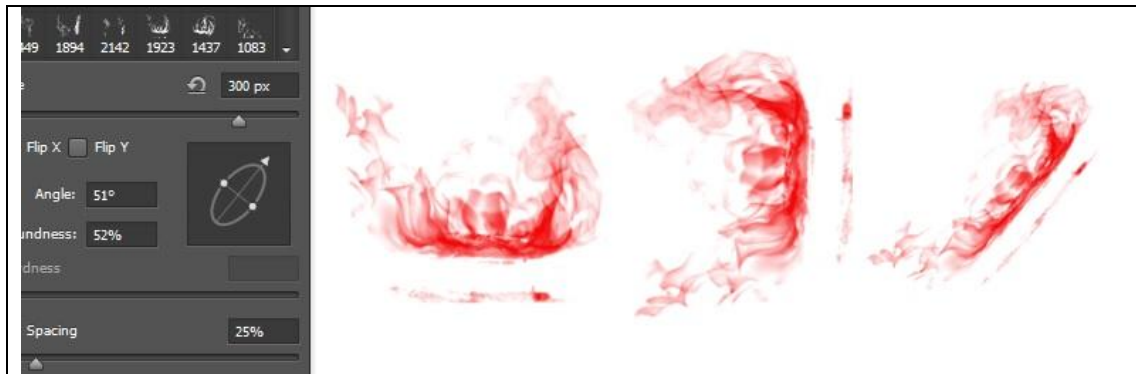
Change the colour to red rather than black for a more flame like colour.

Now, suppose we want to use the same brush again, but want to change the aspect of the flames from horizontal to vertical – IE change the above set of flames through 90 degrees. To do that look at the circular wheel in the above screen shot. It has four spokes with squares at the top and bottom and a triangular arrow on the right. If you hover the cursor over the arrow then left click and hold the cursor down, you can then drag the position of the arrow either up or down to any angle you want. In the following example I have dragged the arrow 90 degrees upwards. If you now click the brush in to the Photoshop document you will find that the aspect of the brush has changed as shown…

Now click the cursor on to either of the squares on the spokes and drag the cursor towards the middle of the wheel. This makes the wheel smaller in the middle – effectively squeezing it in. This results in the height of the brush being reduced. I have also (in the following example) changed the angle again (to 51 degrees), resulting in the third set of flames.
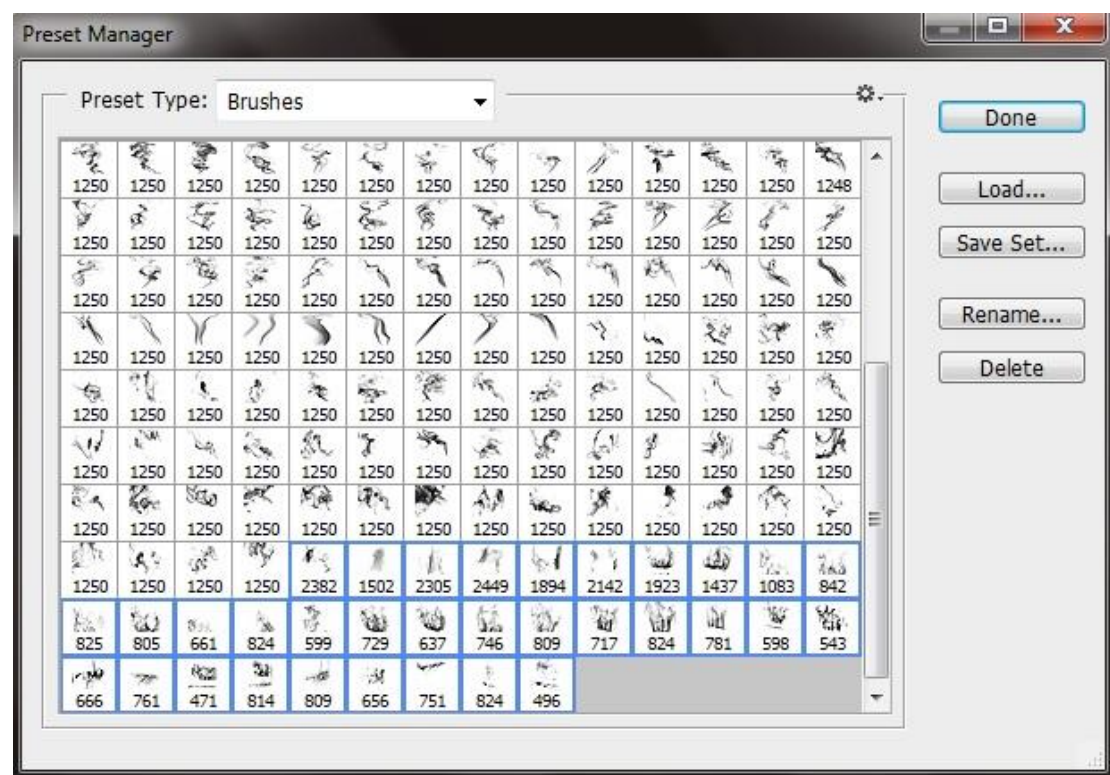
Obviously this behaviour isn't apparent if you are using a round brush, but for any other brush by changing the size and the pitch and yaw values and selecting a new brush at frequent intervals, complex patterns in shape and size can be rapidly built up.

Don't forget to change the pitch and yaw values back to their defaults when you have finished.

(Optional) Stage 5 Deleting the Brushes:

Finally, if you want to get rid of the custom brushes (because you have a lot loaded for example), go back in to the 'Preset Manager' screen, and select each of the brushes in the set that you want to remove.

As soon as you have selected at least one, the <Delete> button will be enabled. Click on the <Delete> button to remove the custom brushes. Note though that the custom brush set is still loaded into Photoshop, so if you want to use them again, just follow the instructions at Stage 3 above.

To completely remove the custom brush set, use the 'Export/Import Presets' functionality to unload the set from Photoshop.