concepts

Welcome to Concepts!

Few things in life satisfy like creating with your hands. Concepts is a power tool for your quickest and most intricate ideas. It's natural, flexible and portable, and it helps you to get things done. This is your instruction manual.

Like any idea, Concepts for Windows 10 is a work in progress. In the next year, we hope it will rival and complement its original counterpart for iOS. We update every 4-6 weeks, adding new features and improvements based largely on your feedback. If you have suggestions, let us know.

Help Doesn't End Here

While this manual has detailed information on specific features, we write and publish how-tos and interviews with industry experts almost weekly on Medium. If you're a visual learner, you might appreciate our video tutorials and workflow videos on YouTube. If you still can't find what you're after, find us on your favorite social channel, email us at concepts@tophatch.com, or tap *Ask Us Anything* in app for some lovely, direct conversation.
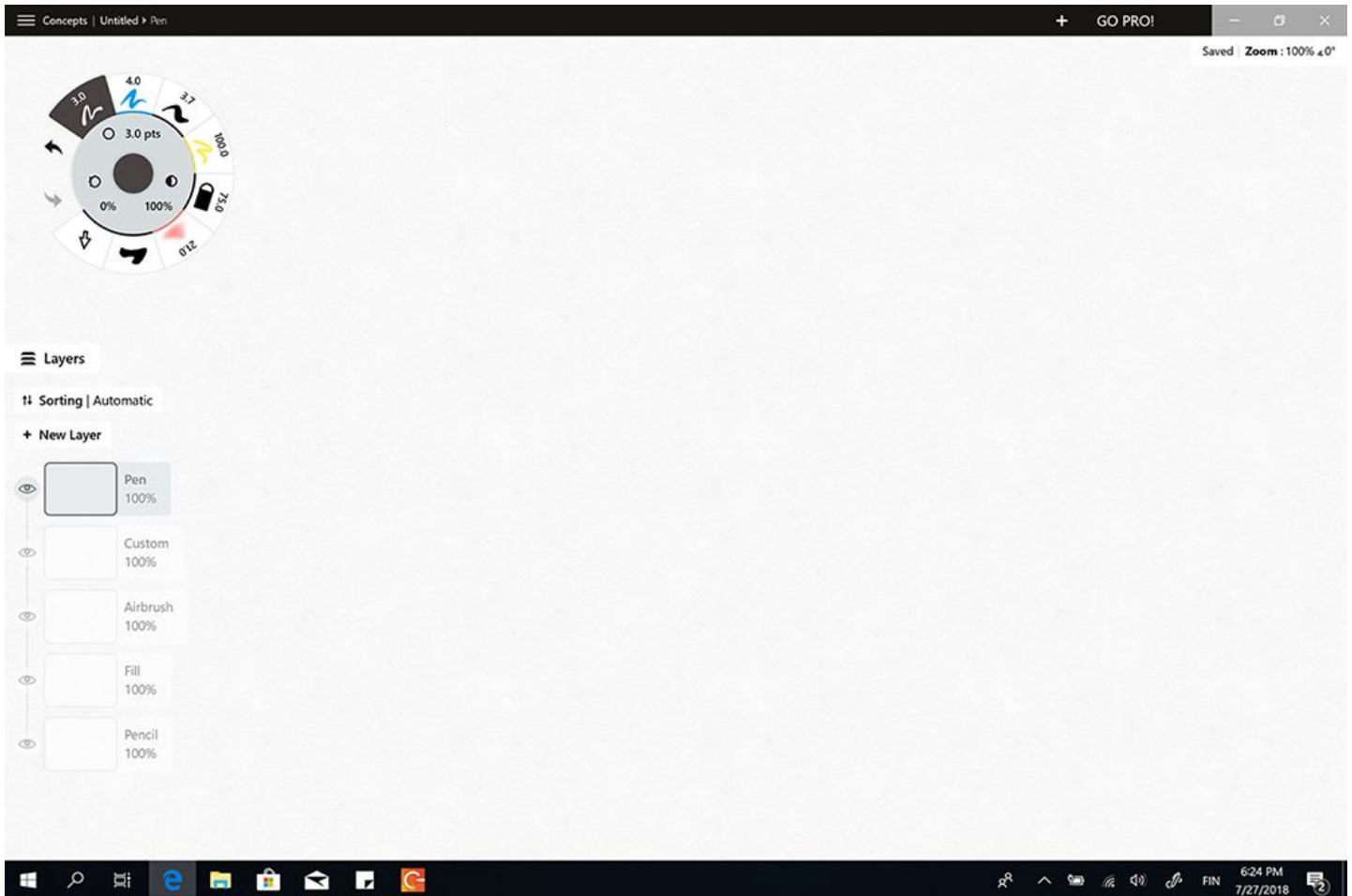
Your fans,

The Concepts Team @ TopHatch

Your Workspace

The first time you open Concepts, you'll be taken to a new drawing. Any time afterward, you'll open the drawing you're currently working in.

The Status Bar

Up at the top, you'll see a black Status Bar. From left to right on the bar, you'll find:

1. Drop-down Menu. This handy menu allows you to save your work and open a **New** drawing, **Open** an existing drawing, **Save** your work, **Export** a drawing, manage your **Settings**, learn about Concepts, purchase in-app features, find 24-hr "Ask Us Anything" support, and exit the app.

2. Breadcrumbs. You're using the Concepts app, currently in this "Untitled" drawing, working in "Layer A".

3. Start a New Drawing, aka +. Save your current drawing and start a new drawing by tapping or clicking on the +.
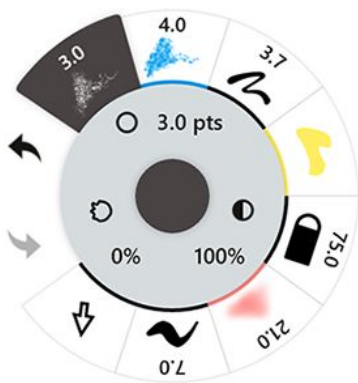
4. Pro Shop. Show your status, find cool tools and libraries to make your life easier, and support us!

5. Minimize. Send the app to wait patiently in your dock.

6. Full Screen vs. Window Mode. Shrink your canvas and show your workspace, or expand to a full display.

7. Quit. Touch the X to quit the app instead of finding treasure.

The Tool Wheel

Below the status bar is your Tool Wheel, including eight of your favorite tools (each configurable), and an [Undo and Redo](#) button.

The wheel is movable. If you tap+hold+drag (or click+drag) on the wheel, you'll find you can drag the wheel about and put it anywhere you'd like on the canvas. Pass the center line and the wheel will switch to left-handed mode.

Some people prefer their buttons larger or smaller to fit their fingers. You can scale the tool wheel by pinching or expanding your fingers on it, and find the size that is most comfortable for you. If you're on a desktop, hover the mouse over it and scroll up or down.

Tap a tool on the *outer ring* to activate it and start drawing. Tap it again (or double-tap an inactive tool) to enter the Brushes menu, where you can choose from many different tools and find your flair. More about this in [Brushes](#).

On the *inner ring* of the tool wheel are three settings you can use to configure your current brush.

> **1. Size.** Use the size slider to determine the size of your brush. Choose one of the four presets at the top, and set those for fast toggling between favorite brush sizes.
>
> **2. Opacity.** Use the opacity slider and presets to set the opacity for your brush. 100% is fully opaque, 0% is fully transparent.
>
> **3. Smoothing.** Use the smoothing slider and presets to set how much "smart" smoothing you'd like your line to have. Smoothing happens after you draw, not during - live smoothing is coming soon.
>
> 0% smoothing gives you the raw stroke straight from your hand input, 50% smoothing takes many of the bumps out for a more polished stroke, and 100% smooths the stroke into a perfectly straight line between start and end points, no matter how wriggly it started.

At the *center* of the tool wheel, you'll see the current color and opacity of your brush. Tap this circle to reveal the COPIC color wheel, Too Corporation's beautiful design and illustration spectrum. Tap a color to select it. Read more on [Colors](#) below.

The Infinite Canvas
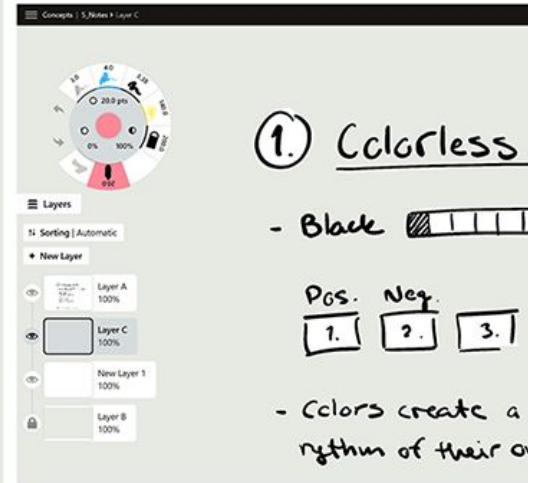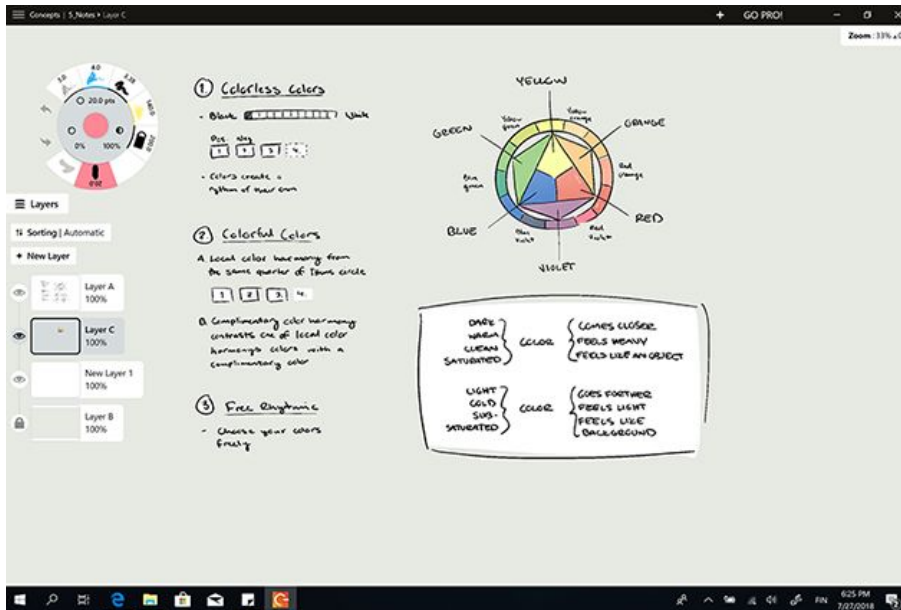
Work on the bigger picture or zoom in to focus on the details. With the infinite canvas, there are no boundaries unless you set them yourself.

Concepts is equipped with an infinite canvas, which is our way of saying you can extend your paper in any direction you need it, as far as you need it to go. Pan around using two fingers normally, or one finger while using the Selection tool. If you're using a Surface Pen, you can set your Finger Action to pan around as well, which makes navigating while drawing more convenient.

To zoom in and out, or to rotate the canvas, use a two finger pinch / spread gesture. Lines stay sharp no matter how far you go - one of the many benefits of a vector-based platform. You'll notice there are "zoom steps" at 10% increments which help you find standard sizes and rotations by feel.

You can also set your zoom level manually by tapping on the zoom value at the top right corner of the canvas and entering it in.

If you get lost on your canvas (infinite is very big), you can double-tap the zoom value field and you'll be brought back to the center of the canvas.

Undo / Redo

In case you need to take a step back and change something, you can always use the undo and redo buttons on the tool wheel. But you may use them less than you think.

With a two-finger tap on the canvas, you can undo your strokes in workflow. It's popular to the point we've heard our designers wail about not having two-finger undo on a normal piece of paper.

But the biggest reason you might not use undo so much is that we're vector-based, which means you can [Select](#) and adjust the offending line, or delete it entirely *whenever you want*. This is a selective way to alter your sketch (no pun intended) without being limited to a brute force undo that loses all of your latest work. We think you'll prefer it.

Layers

Finally on the main canvas, you'll see the Layers menu. This is also movable. Just tap+drag the Layers button to anywhere on the canvas you'd like it. Read more about [Layers](#) below.

Using a Stylus

Concepts is at its best with a stylus, though it works with a mouse on PCs with Windows 10 installed. Currently Concepts is optimized for working with the Surface Pen, a pressure and tilt-sensitive stylus for the Surface, Pro and Dial. We do not have official support for other styli or touchscreens, but you may find that they work regardless. If you have devices you'd like us to optimize for, please [let us know](#).

Brushes and Tools

Brush Gestures

To use a tool, just *tap* on it and start sketching. Tilt and pressure are supported with the Surface Pen, and with many of the brushes (each is a bit different), and will happen naturally as you tilt or press on the screen. Try them out and see which you like best.

As mentioned in the [Tool Wheel](#) section, the middle ring allows you to adjust the active brush's **size** (how big it is), **opacity** (how transparent it is), and **smoothing** (how bumpy or smooth you want your line to appear once it's drawn). *Tap* on one of these options to bring up your presets.

To access the Brushes menu, *tap* again on an active tool, or *double-tap* on an inactive tool.

Brushes Menu
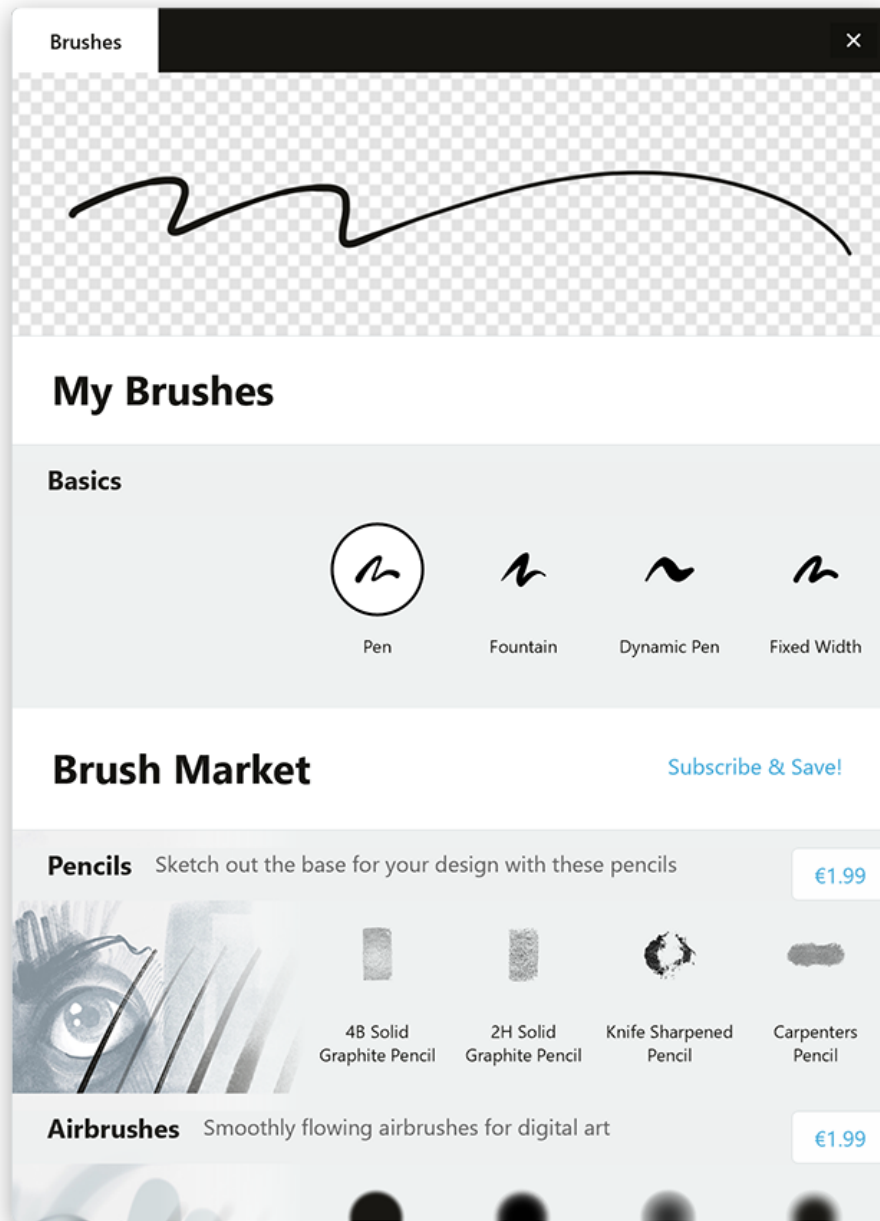
In the Brushes menu, you can select a tool from the basic set of sketching tools or from the brush market.

Up at the top of the menu is your brush viewer, which changes to preview the brush you choose.

Below the viewer you can find your basic tools, where you can select from a variety of organic or engineering brushes.

Scroll down further and you'll find the Brush Market, with different types of artistic brush libraries that you can unlock a-la-carte, or enjoy open access to if you've subscribed.

Basic Brushes and Tools
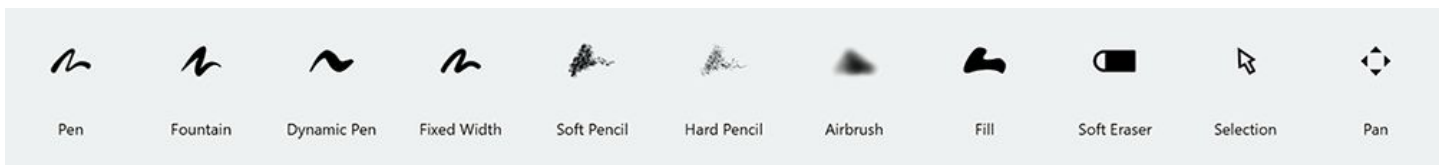
Pens

Pens are most widely used in sketching when you want to make a statement or reflect permanence. Our **Pen** and **Fountain Pen** tools react to *velocity* to vary their line width - draw fast to get a thicker stroke. Our **Dynamic Pen** reacts to pressure. The **Fixed Width Pen** does what it says on the tin - it maintains a constant width from cap to cap.

Soft & Hard Pencils

Slightly different in texture and feel, these traditional sketching tools are modeled on real pencils. They react naturally to tilt, pressure and velocity with a supported active stylus like Apple Pencil. For great shading, tilt your stylus like you would a real pencil.

Airbrush

The airbrush flows onto the screen with subtle texture and soft edges like the real medium. Popular with sketchnoters, for highlights and for painting, give your design some sheen.

Filled Stroke

Not to be confused with Bucket Fill (which we're currently working on - lots of definitional bits to think about with the interactive parameters of vector strokes), the Filled Stroke tool is a brush unique to Concepts. It allows you to draw any type of shape - simple, wriggly, complex - with a stylus or finger, and fill the positive space inside.

"Positive space" refers to any area inside your drawn line between start and end point that is original to the stroke - as in, the area hasn't been drawn over a second time during the same stroke. This crossing over of filled area causes it to become "negative space" and remain empty. Of course, if you draw over the area a third time within the same stroke, it becomes positive again and is filled.

Your resulting fill is a smooth, clean finish, customizable with opacity. Excellent for shadows, light, and complex figures, we think you'll appreciate the possibilities this brush offers your design + art toolkit.

Troubleshooting. Since Fill takes into account the start and end points of your line, *make sure Line Smoothing is set below 100%.* Otherwise your shape will disappear into a line or a point as though the rest of the stroke never happened. Also check that your transparency is above 0%, or like all strokes it may disappear, only to be found when Selecting in the area.

Soft Eraser

In a traditional pixel-based world, erasers delete things permanently. But vectors aren't pixels, they behave and remember data differently, and if you're comfortable with programs like Adobe Photoshop or Autodesk Sketchbook Pro, it may be easier to think of the Concepts eraser as a *masking tool*. It visually removes anything underneath it like a lovely soft eraser, but the data isn't actually gone. You can still retrieve old strokes later, or adjust your mask as your drawings progress.

If you want to remove strokes completely, try selecting them with a *tap+hold* and then use Delete.

The eraser stays the same size regardless of your zoom level. This means the further you zoom inward, the smaller its effects will be - very useful for working with the details. You can also change the size of the eraser using the Size slider, and its effects will scale the same way.
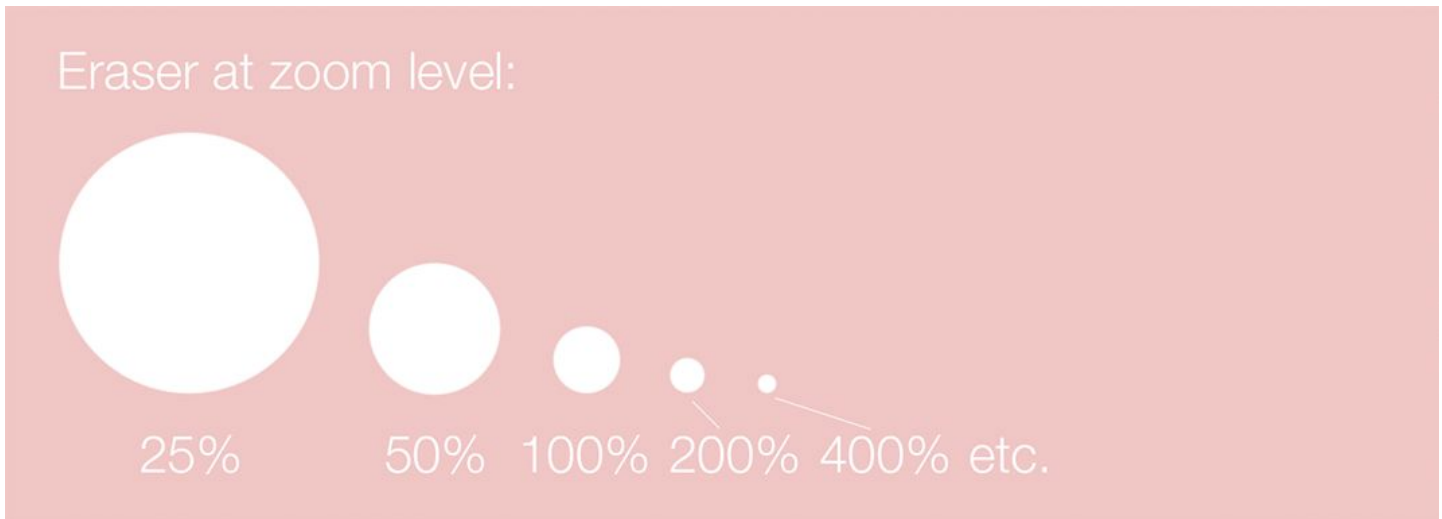

Selection

The Selection tool can be added to any of your tool slots and has two modes: a single-select *Item Picker* and a multi-select *Lasso.* Toggle between these two options using the popup at the bottom of your canvas, or put a second finger down anywhere to temporarily toggle the mode.

The Selection tool can also be activated via *tap+hold* anywhere on the canvas - helpful for when you're in sketching flow and don't want to change tools. It can also be assigned as your finger gesture in [Stylus settings](). To learn more more about this tool, see [Selection]().

Pan

Whether you want to showcase your work to your client or just pan through your infinite canvas, you can use the Pan tool. It allows you to pan and zoom without accidentally selecting or changing anything in your drawing.

Brush Market Tools
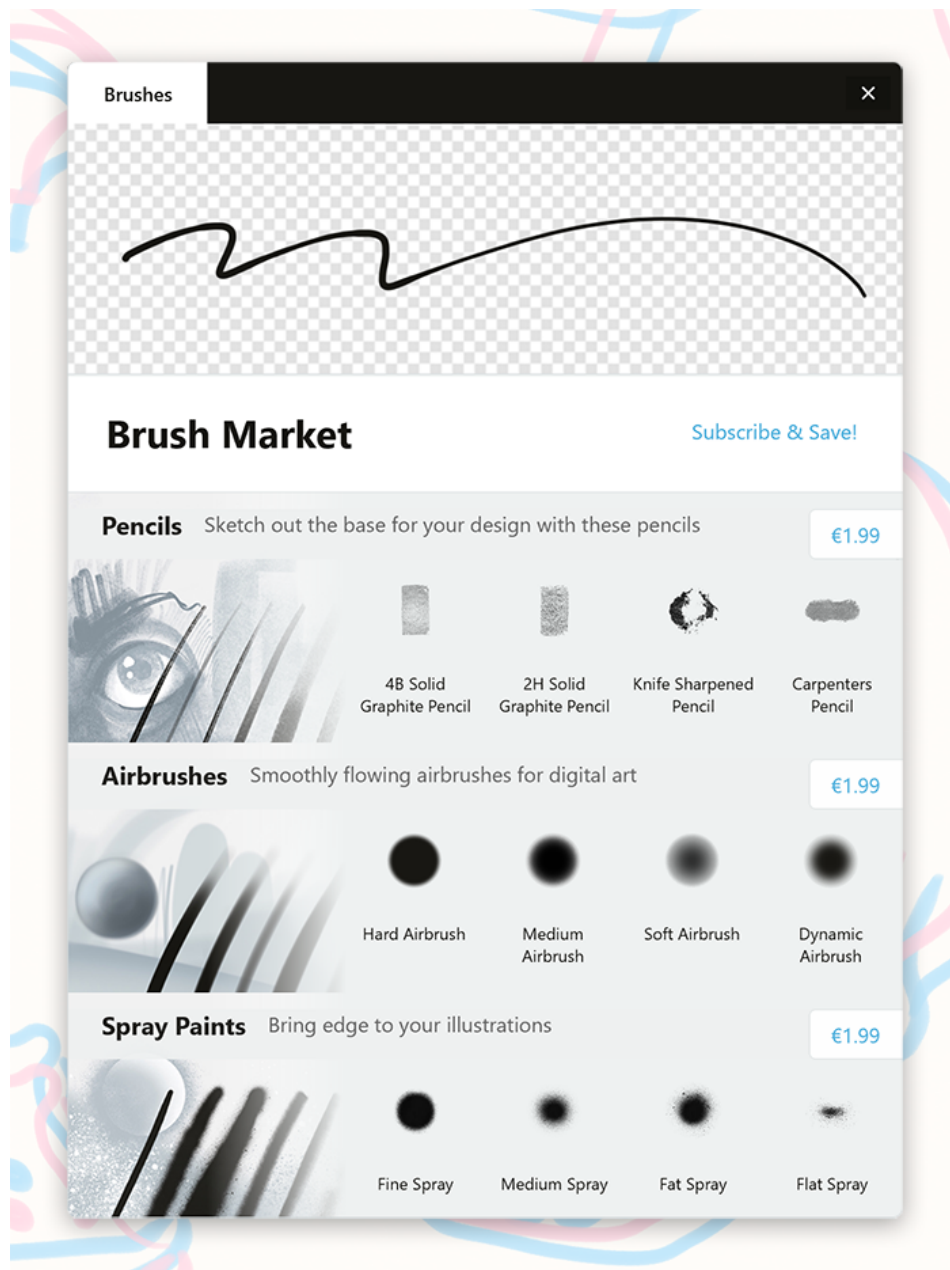
The texture-rich, artistic tools in the brush market are made from image-based stamps created from their actual physical counterparts. Strokes made with these brushes (as well as the Dynamic Pen) are movable and adjustable like all of our other vector-based tools, but they are limited when it comes to zoom. As they are made from pixel-based images, they will pixellate if you zoom in too far, depending on the brush. Try them out and see which ones you like best, or try changing the look of existing drawings by selecting your strokes and switching to a new tool.

Colors

The COPIC Color Wheel
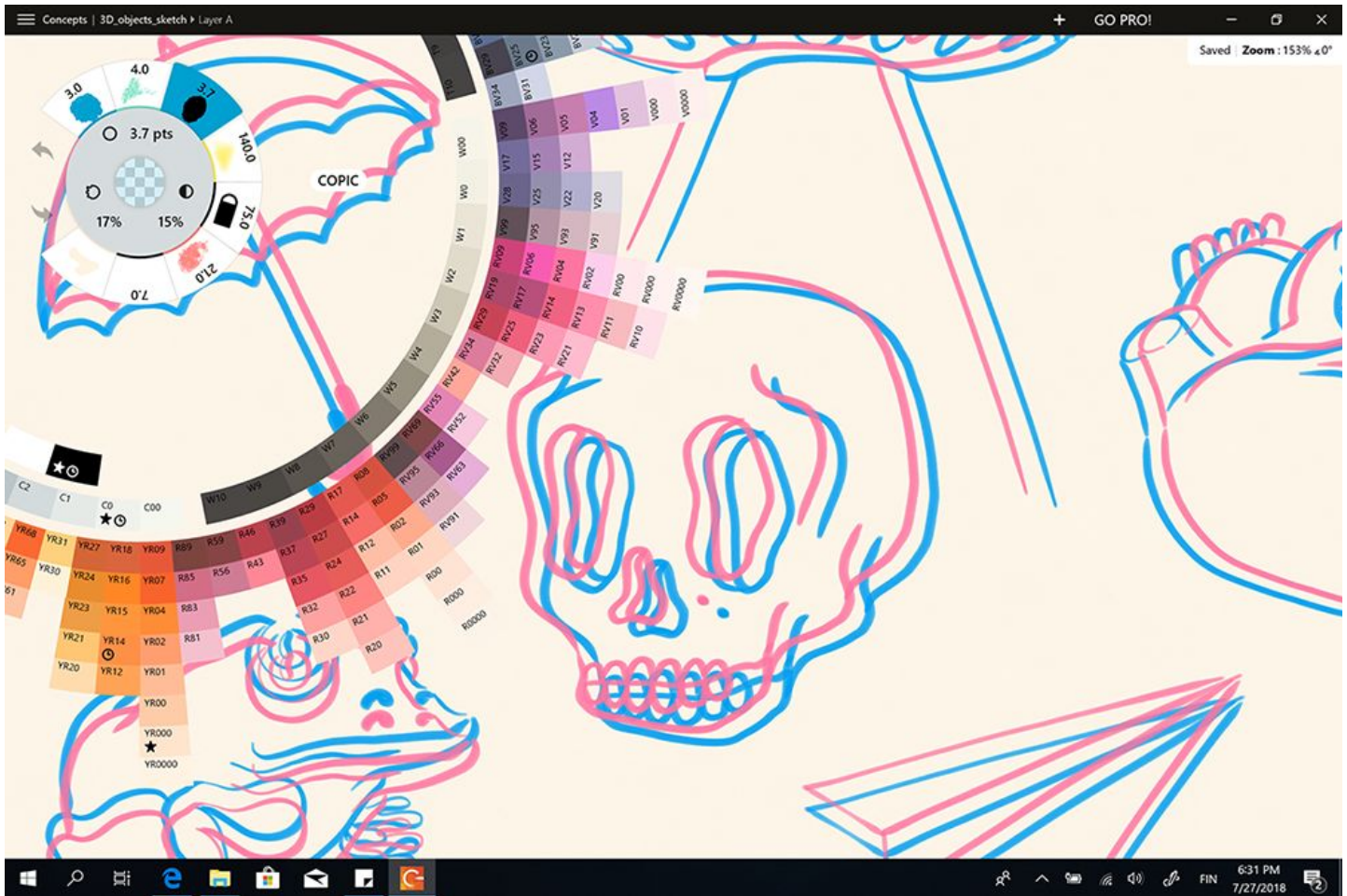
At the center of your tool wheel is a circle representing the current color and opacity of your current tool.

Tap the circle to bring up the COPIC color wheel. This wheel is a spectrum of colors hand-picked by *Too Corporation* to help artists and designers add consistency and beauty to their work while simplifying the matching process. These colors are mathematically sorted by pigment and saturation, and are represented on the wheel by a letter+number code. Visit here to learn more

about Copic color theory. The values in Concepts are as similar as they can get to their real-life marker complements.

The color wheel is spinnable. *Drag* your finger up or down to turn the wheel.

From the inside of the wheel outward, you'll see a tonal value spectrum along with true black and white, then a ring of your cool, warm, neutral and tonal grays, and finally the colors in their particular blending gradients. *Tap* on a color to set it to your active brush.

Selection

Concepts is a vector-based app, which gives you the powerful freedom to pick up and move, tweak or change any stroke at any time after it's drawn. It allows you to make changes to your designs with minimal effort - instead of redrawing an entire project, you can just select what needs to be adjusted and change it. Perfect for design iterations, reorganizing mind-maps, or preparing materials for clients after feedback, Selection frees you to accomplish more.

There are four ways to Select (aka pick up) a stroke or multiple strokes in your sketch.

1. Use the Selection tool. In the Brushes menu, you can choose the Selection tool (the arrow) and set it as a separate tool on your tool wheel or bar. Touch the screen to use it like you use any tool.

2. *Tap+hold* anywhere on canvas to activate Selection. This is a really nice shortcut so you don't have to interrupt your drawing flow by changing tools.

3. If you're using a Surface Pen, configure your Finger Action to *Select* (Settings →
    Workspace → Surface Pen). Your finger will work as the Selection tool while the Surface
    Pen follows your selected preset in the tool wheel.
4. If you want to select all strokes on a single layer, you can tap on the active layer to open
    the [Layer Selection](#) pop-up. Tapping the *cursor icon* will select everything on that layer.

The Selection Menu
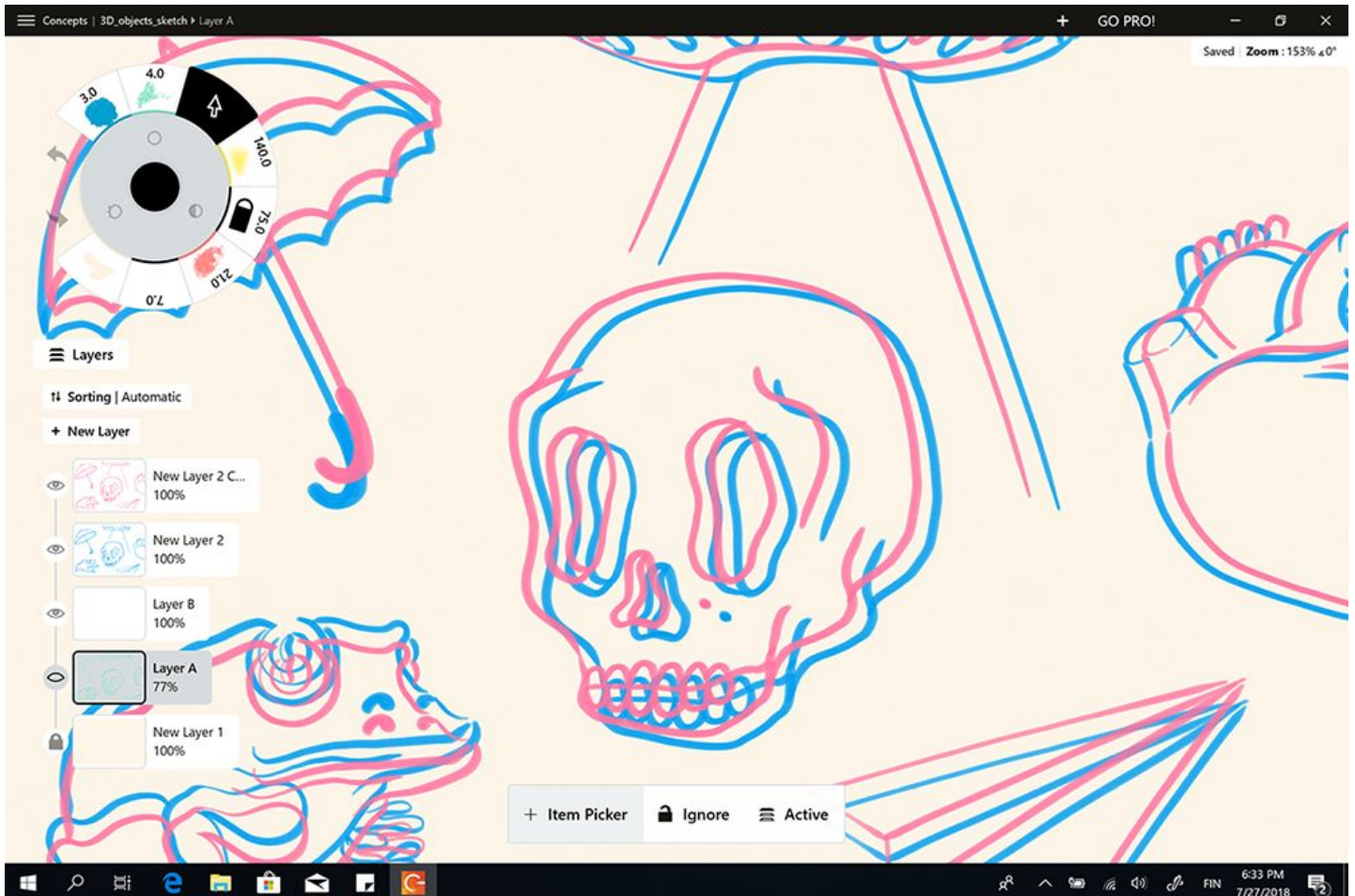
Once you've activated selection by any of the above options, you'll find a popup at the bottom of the screen. This is your Selection menu. The Selection menu helps you to filter the strokes you'd like to select from, so whenever you select something, this menu will hang around.

- When using the *Selection tool* from your tool wheel, the menu will remain on screen as long as the brush is active.
- When Selecting via the *tap+hold*, the menu will remain for as long as your finger rests on screen. With a second finger, you can toggle the menu buttons to set your filters (we'll talk about those below).
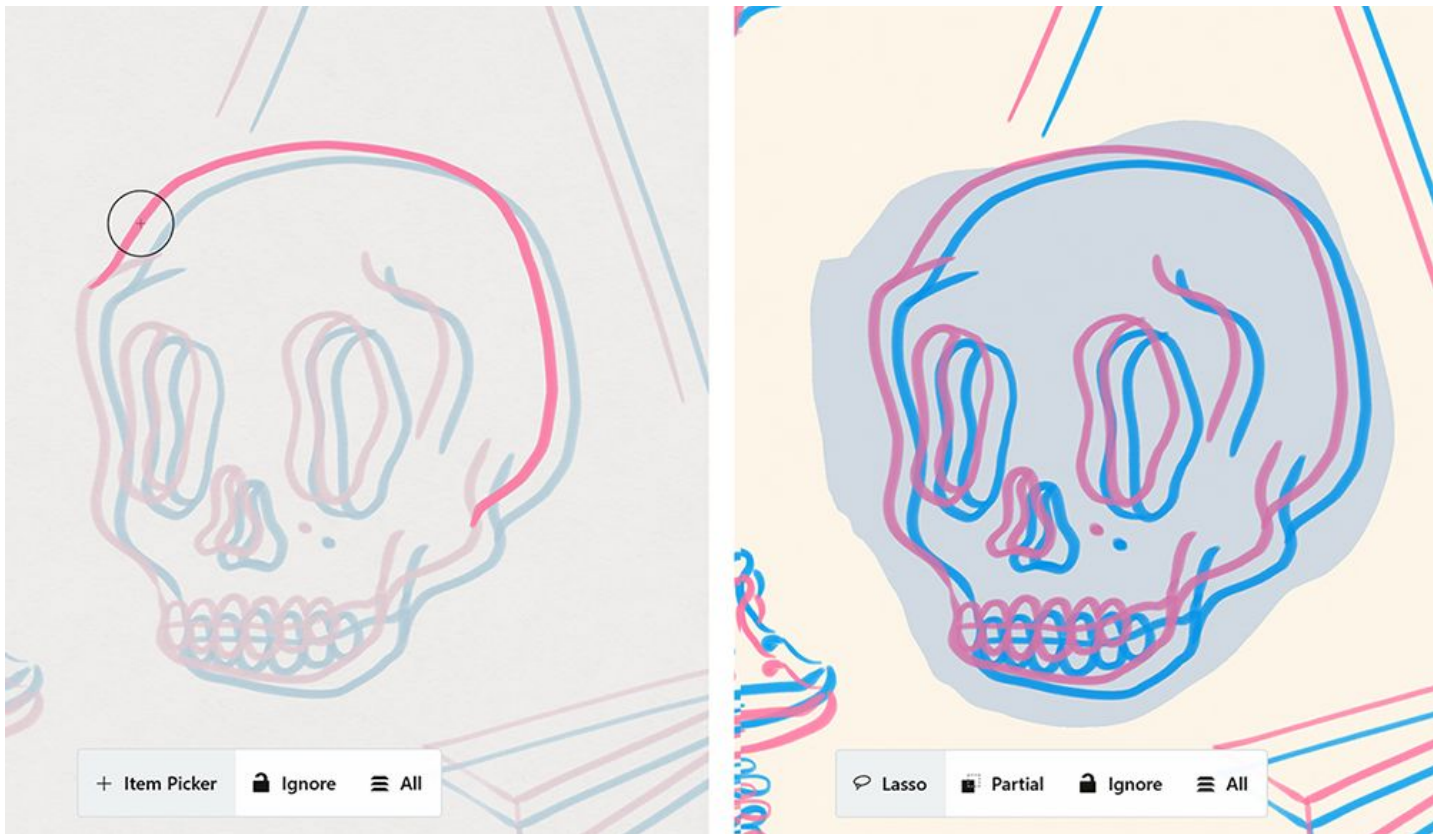
Item Picker and Lasso with their respective popups.

In the Selection menu, depending on which toggle you have active, you'll find from left to right:

1. A *Selection Type* toggle, for which selection method you'd like active. Tap it to toggle between Item Picker (single item selection, with the ability to add or subtract strokes individually), and Lasso (multi-select using drag to lasso your strokes).
2. A *Stroke Type* toggle, allowing you to choose whether you'd like to select Partial or Complete strokes inside your selection.
3. A *Lock* toggle, which includes or ignores any strokes you may have locked while drawing.
4. A *Layers* toggle, so you can choose whether to select inside your *Active* layer only, or inside *All* layers at once.

Item Picker

On the left-hand of the selection toggle is your Item Picker. This is a single item selection mechanism, which allows you to add and subtract individual strokes to your selection.
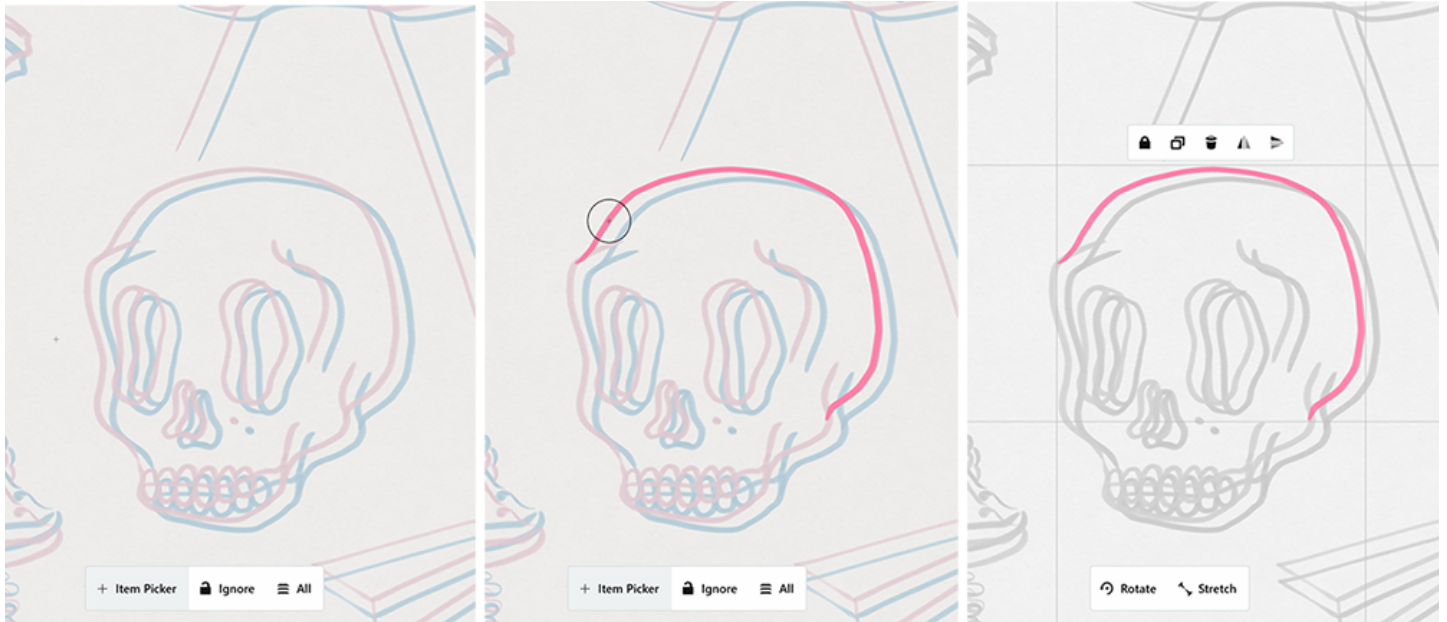

Drag the crosshairs over a stroke. For a single selection, let go. To multi-select, tap the screen with another finger to select the stroke, then move to another stroke and repeat.

To use Item Picker, set your finger or stylus on the screen. A small crosshairs or plus (+) will appear above your finger, or at the tip of your stylus.

When you touch the crosshairs to a stroke, a circle will appear, telling you it has located a stroke. Tap the screen to validate the stroke, and let go of the screen. The stroke will be selected.

To add strokes to your selection, just drag the crosshairs to your next stroke and tap the screen to select it. It doesn't matter whether you have lifted your finger from the screen or not, you can select as many strokes as you'd like.
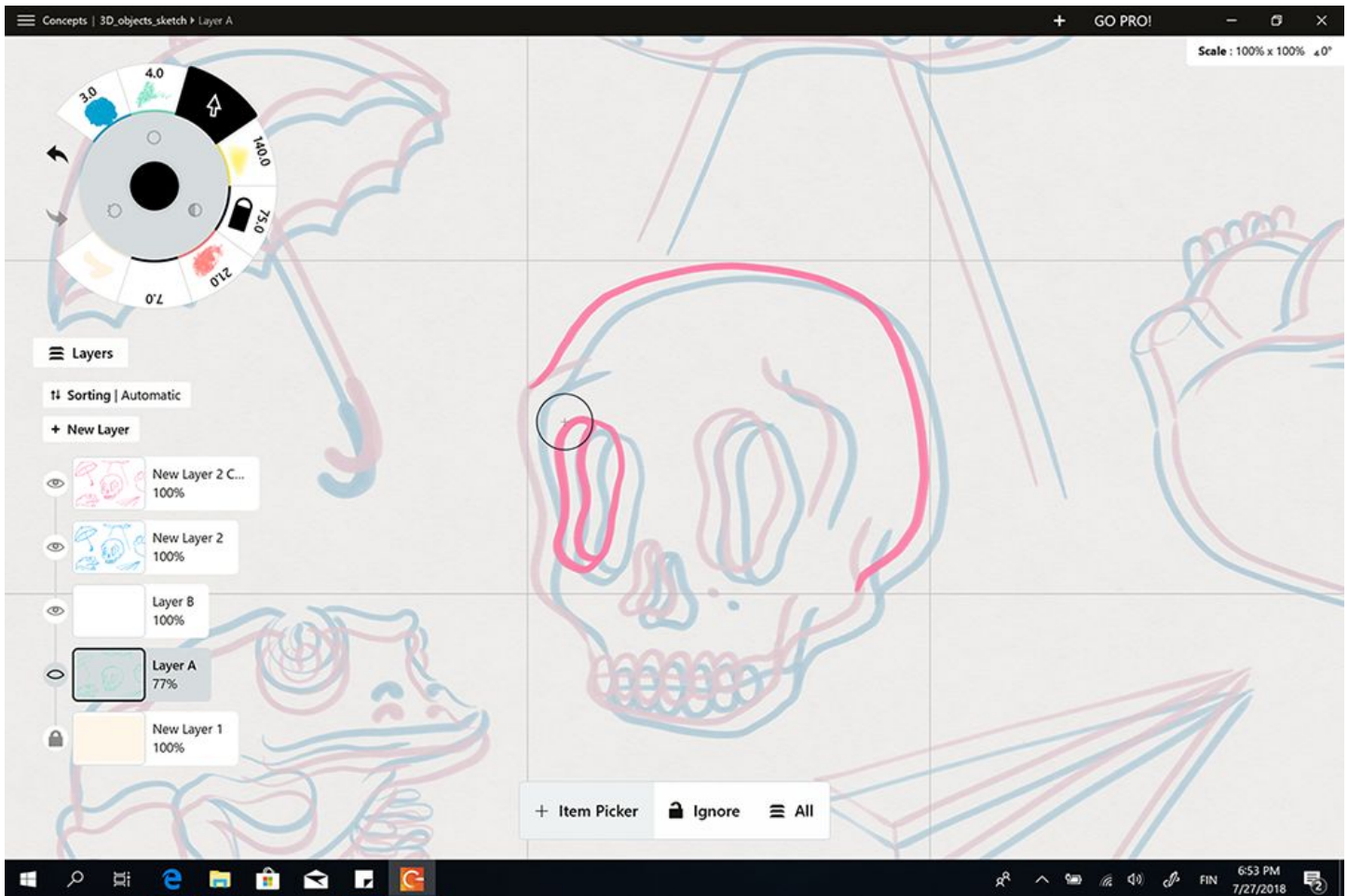
To subtract a stroke from your selection, drag the crosshairs to an already selected stroke. You'll see the plus turn to a minus. Tap the screen to accept it.
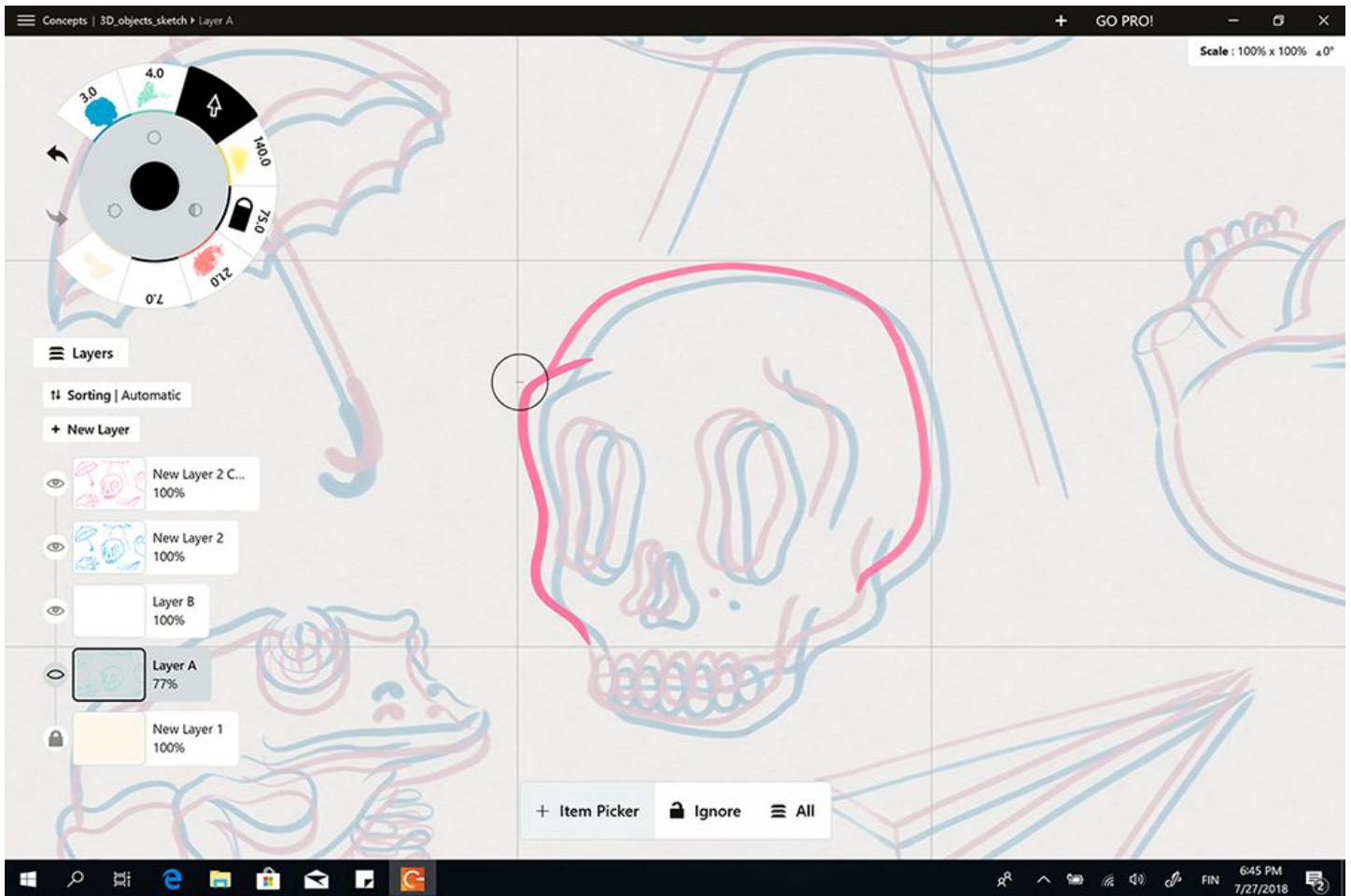
Lasso

If you tap the Selection Type toggle again, you'll find the Lasso. This allows you to select multiple items by dragging your finger across or around your strokes. Whatever the blue lasso touches will be part of your selection. Lasso again to subtract from the selection.
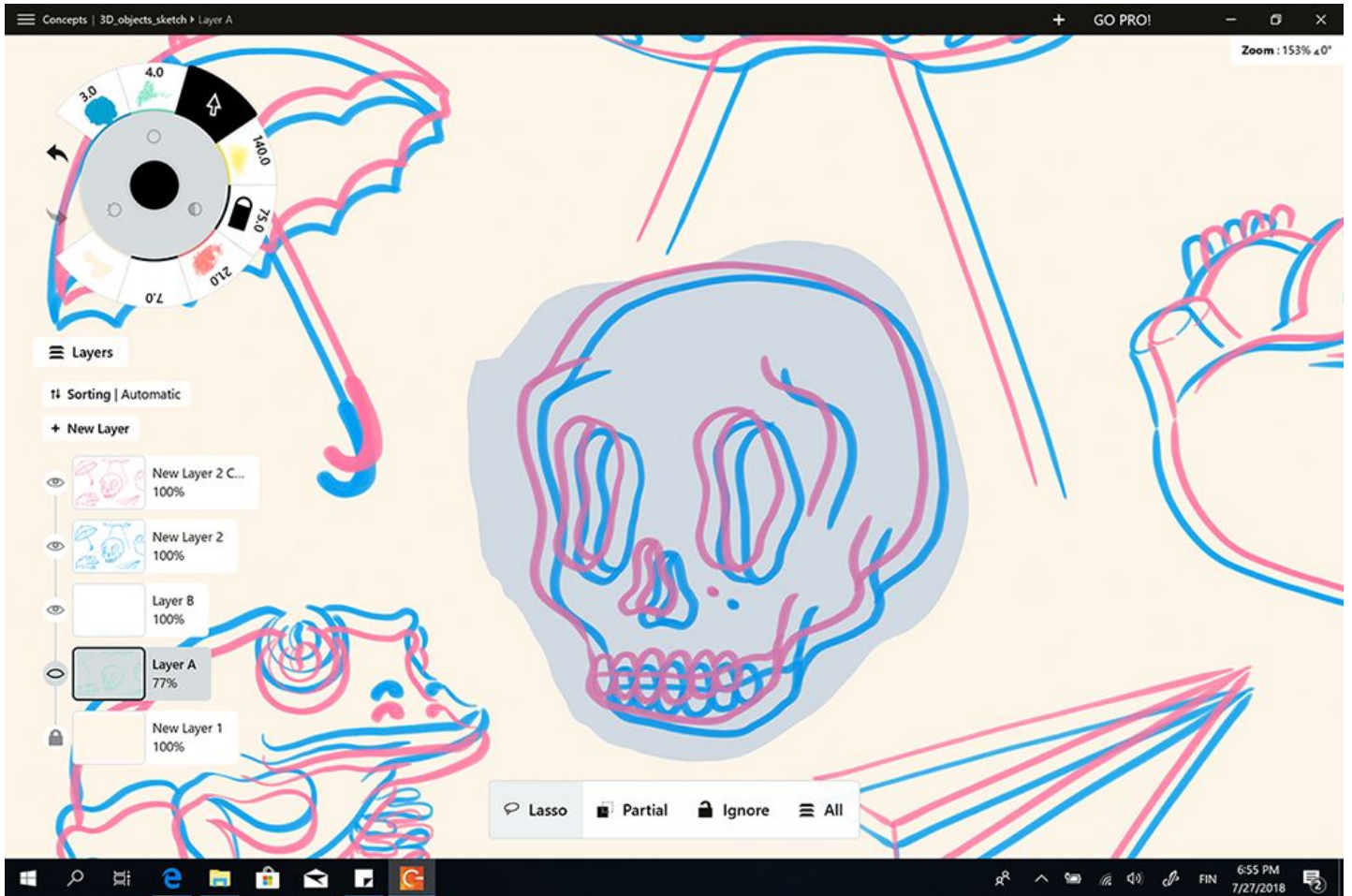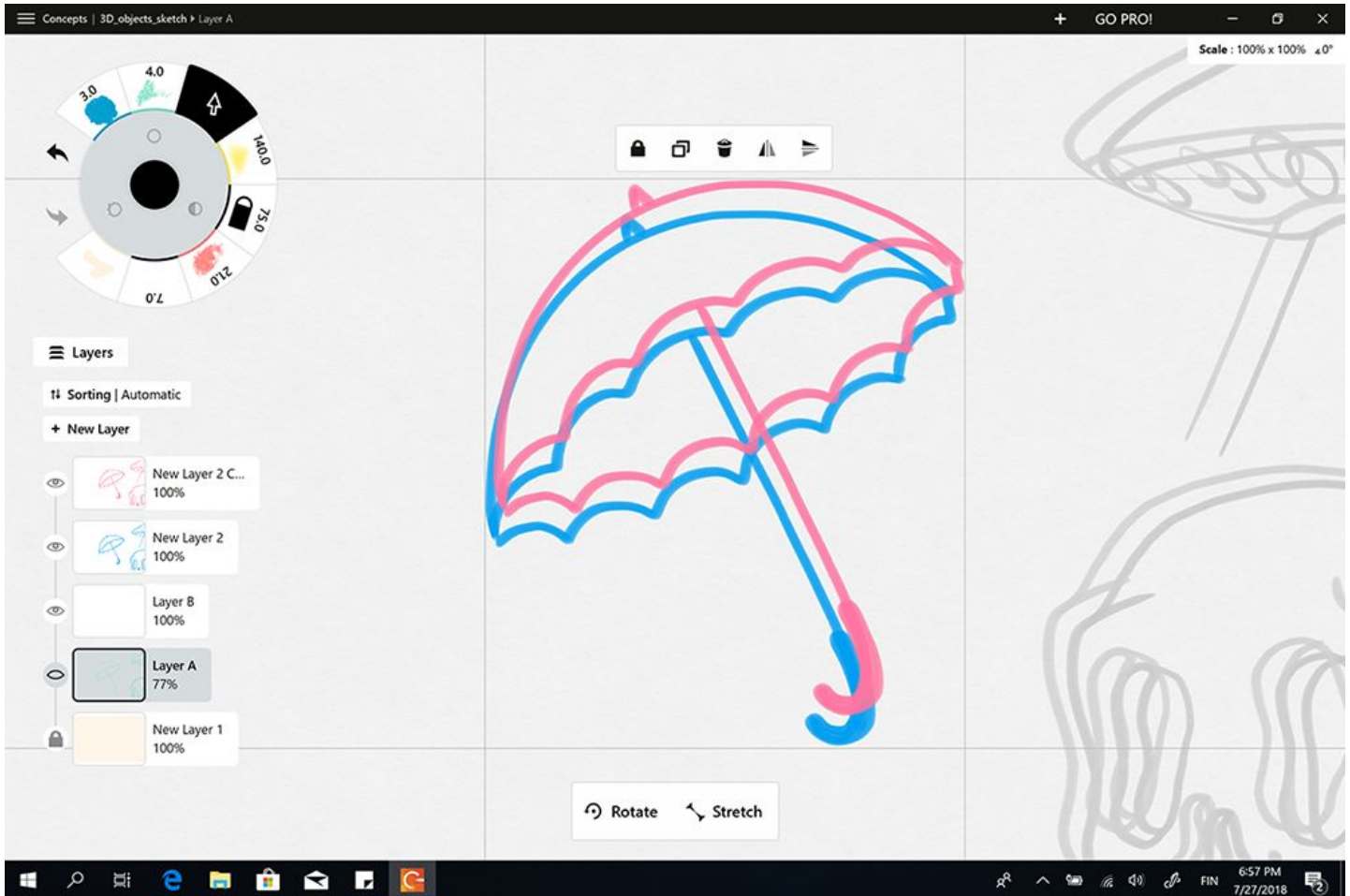
If you lasso a selection and decide you want to add further individual strokes, toggle the button back to Item Picker via the Filters toggle, and continue making your selections.
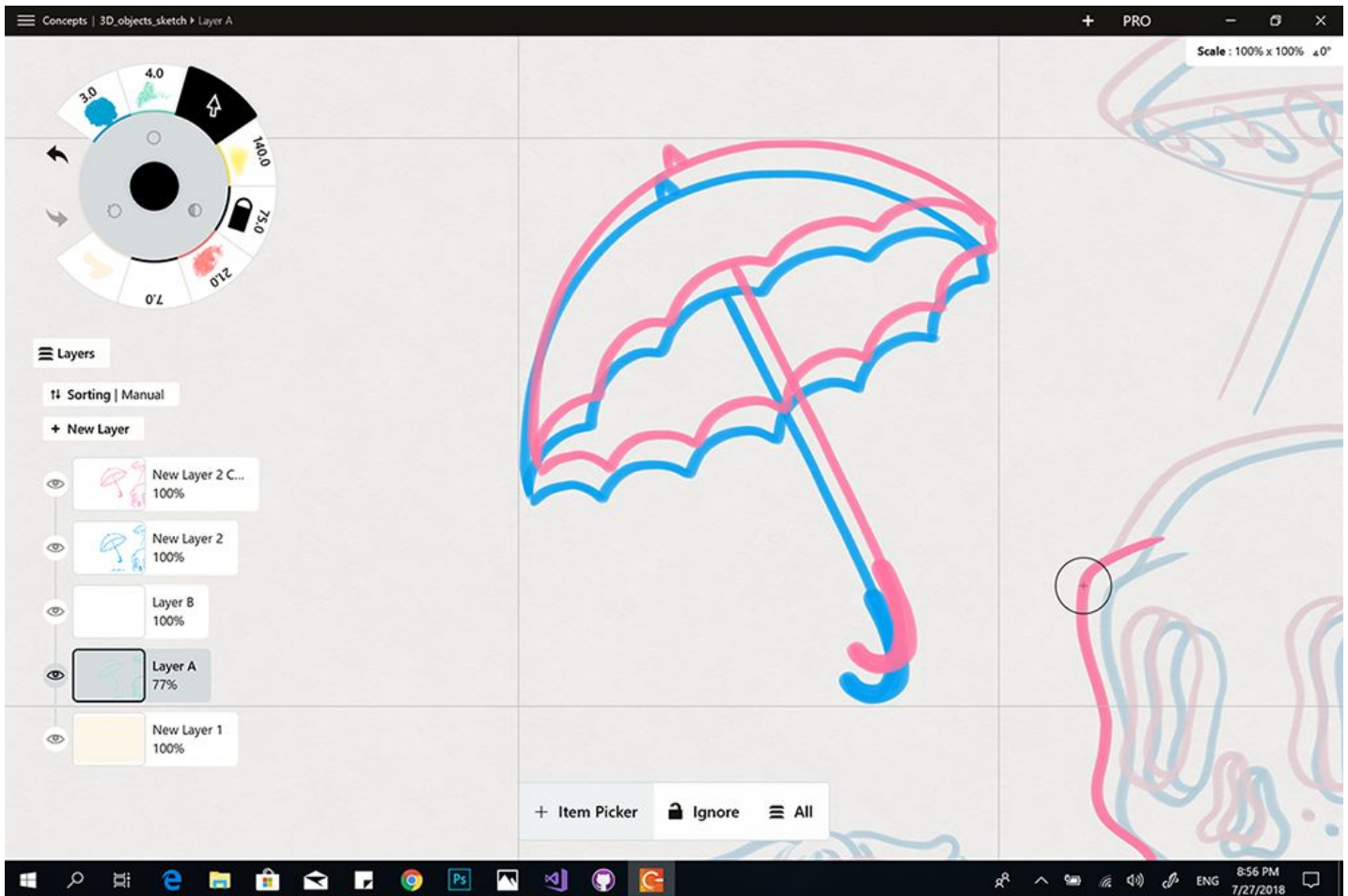
Adjusting a Selection

Once you've selected a stroke or group of strokes, you'll notice the Selection menu at the bottom of the screen has shifted to give you a few more helpful toggles.

- **Rotate.** Allows you to rotate your selection. Tap it on or tap it off.
- **Scale / Stretch / Off.** Toggle between these to scale strokes (grow the whole selection bigger or smaller, with a locked aspect ratio), stretch strokes (stretch strokes longer or shorter, keeps the same tool size), or lock your strokes from scaling or stretching.

To scale and rotate the selection, use a two finger gesture *away* from the bounding box of the selection.

The Selection Popup

Above the selection box is a Selection popup. This has many useful features you might use to work with your strokes.
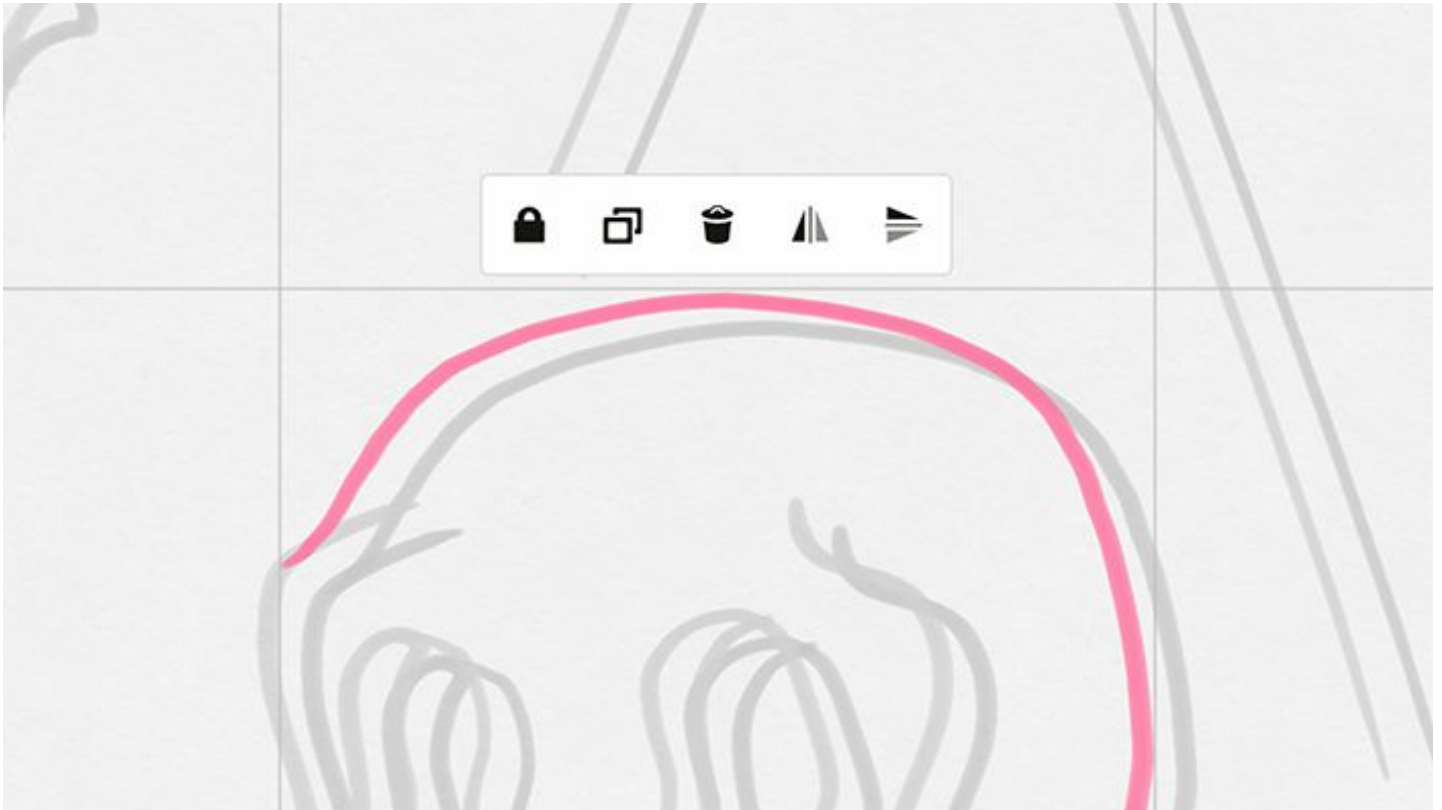
Lock. The Lock button locks your selection from all other selections and adjustments you might make in the future. You can access it again by selecting and unlocking it, or by changing the Lock filter on the Selection menu.

Duplicate. Anything you select, you can also copy, as many times as you'd like. Just touch Duplicate and it will create an exact match for fast iterations. Drag the duplicate to a new layer to keep or hide your old selection, and iterate on the new.

Delete. The best way to erase a vector stroke is to delete it. At this point, our erasers work as movable layer masks, so if you truly dislike a stroke and want to banish it to the far nethers, just delete it from your life and drawing. Of course, you can Undo.

Flip and Mirror. The final two buttons allow you to flip your selection from side to side, or to mirror it vertically. Great for creating reflections and shadows, as well.

Layers
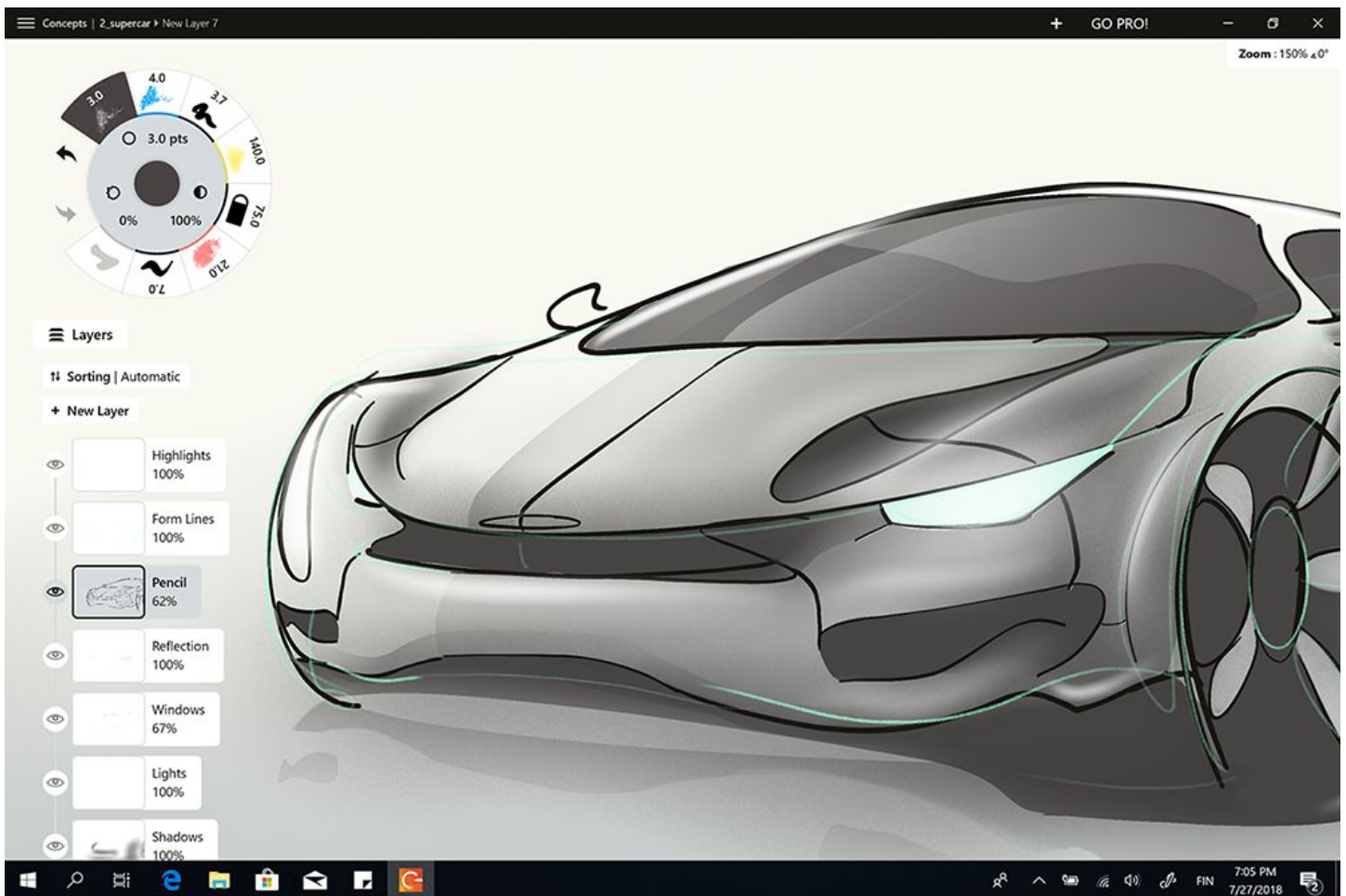
Concepts comes equipped with a fully adjustable set of layers to help you design as flexibly as you need. Enjoy five layers if you're a free user or infinite layers as a Pro. Some of our architects have over a hundred layers in a drawing as they create iterations for clients, and many of our illustrators are a close match.

Each layer comes equipped with its own set of controls:

- *Tap* on a layer to activate it for drawing.
- *Tap* **+ New Layer** to create a new layer. It will always appear directly above your current layer. You can also select strokes from the canvas and drag them to this button, where they will create a new layer just for themselves.
- Likewise, you can make a selection from your drawing and *drag* it to any layer, where they will nestle into their new home.
- *Tap+hold* a layer to rearrange layers into your preferred order.
- *Tap* the **eye** to the left to switch on / off the layer's visibility. It's still there, it just doesn't show up when off.
- *Tapping* an active layer brings up the layer's **selection** popup. From here you can *select everything* on the layer, *lock* the layer, *duplicate* it, *delete* it, *merge* it down into the layer beneath it, and *rename* it. You can also adjust the full layer's *opacity* level by dragging your finger along the slider.
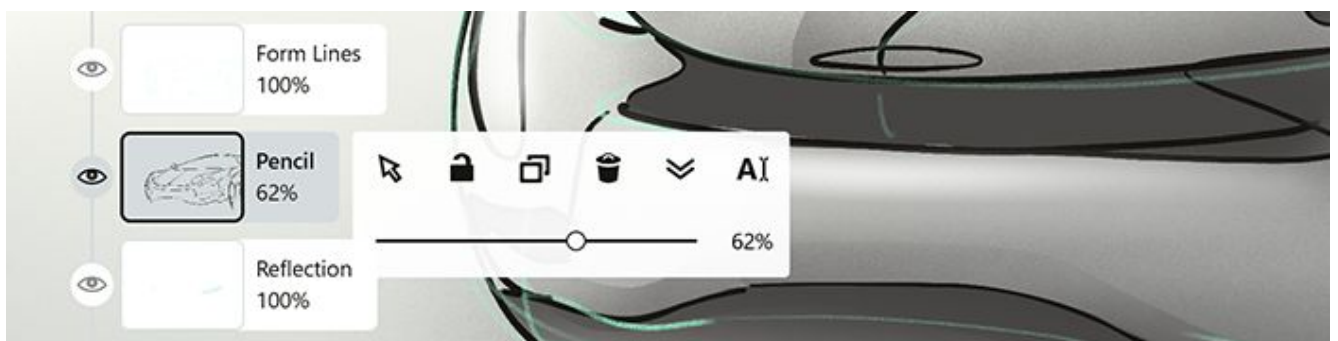
Export
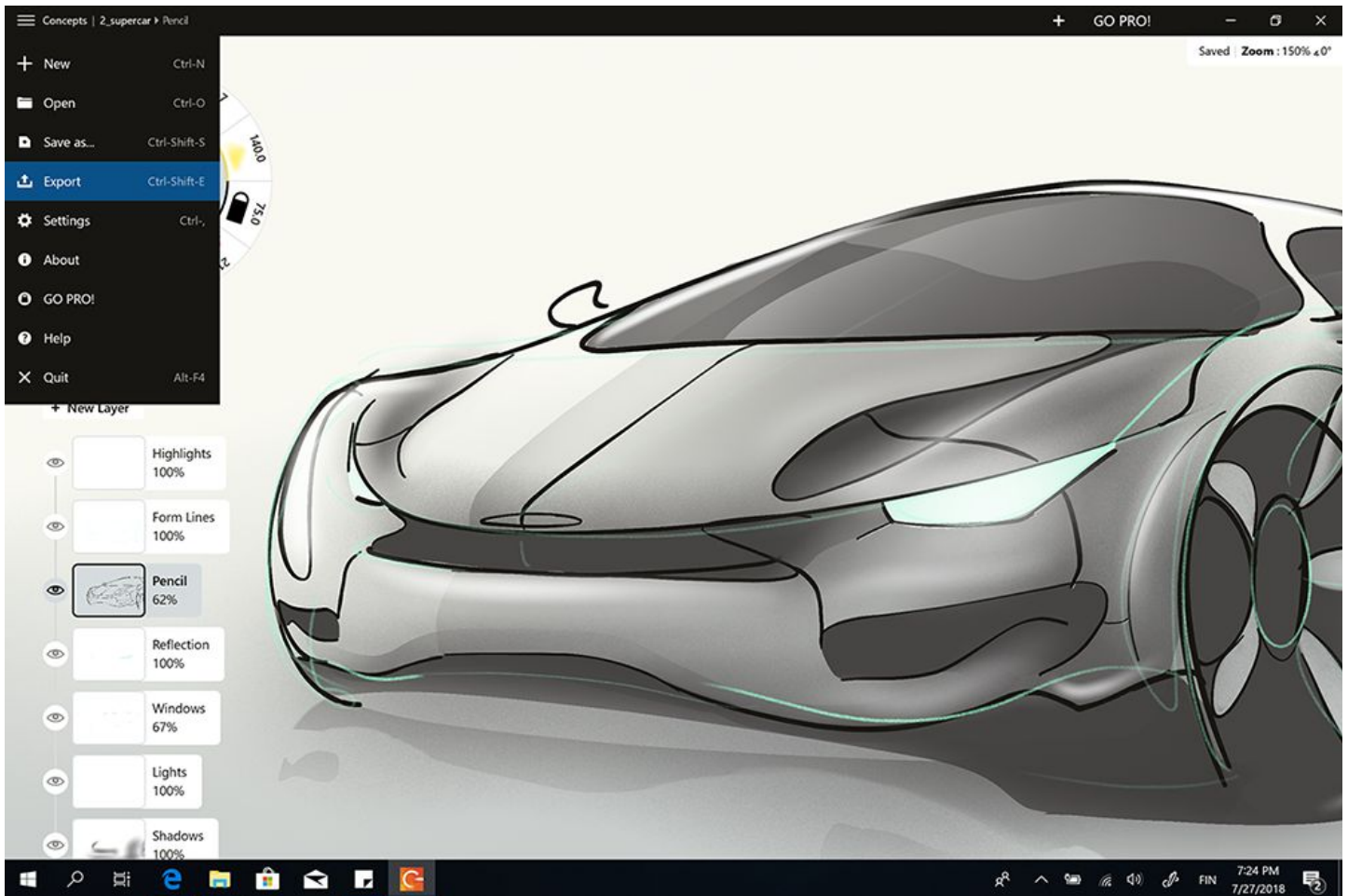
Once your sketch is ready to go, tap the menu button in the upper left corner of the status bar and touch **Save As** for a working *.concepts* file type, or **Export** for outside file types. Here you can name your file, choose where to save it, and choose a file type.

At this point in time, you can choose to export to JPG or PNG, we hope to have more file types and export options soon. Concepts will frame your export according to what you currently have showing on the canvas.

.concepts

Select **Save As** to save the drawing as a native *.concepts* file type, to be opened and continued later, or shared with other Concepts for Windows users. At this point, *.concepts* files created in Windows cannot be opened on iOS or vice versa.

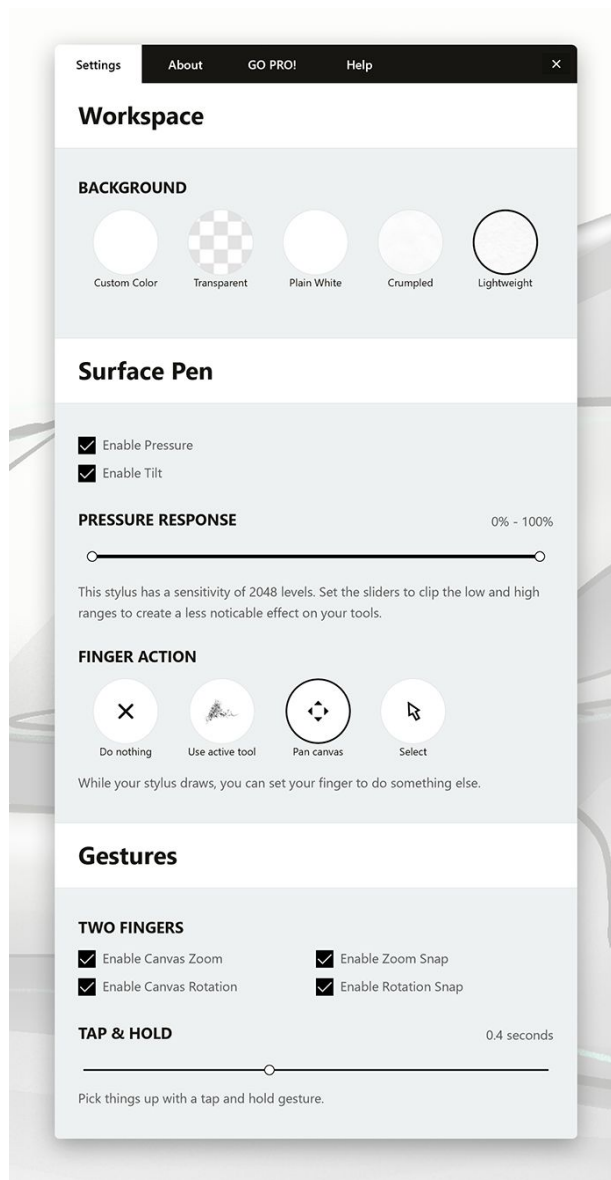## JPG

Standard, low-resolution 72 dpi export that's best for quick emails or low-res screenshots.
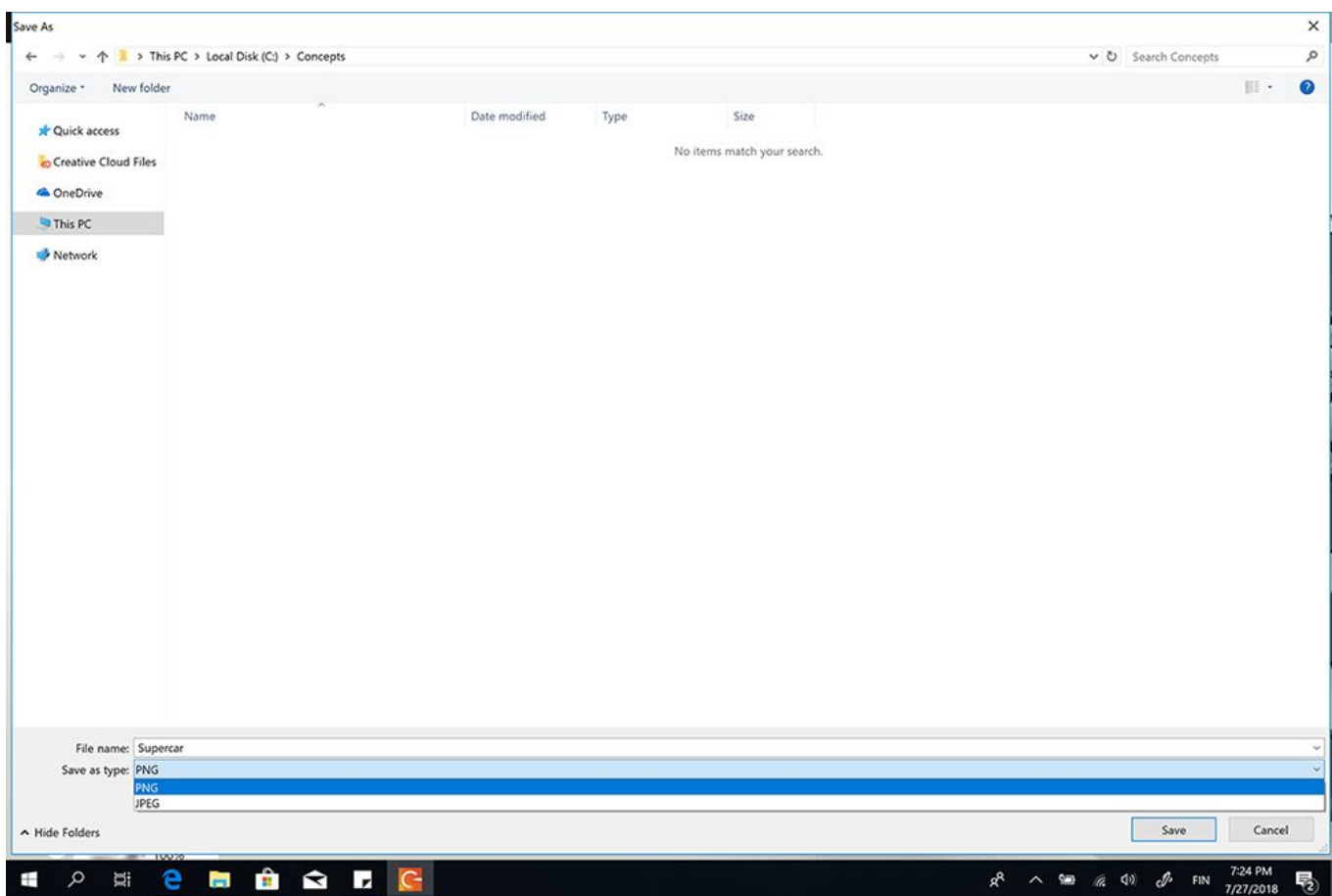
PNG

Standard, higher-resolution 300 dpi export for pixel-perfect images that are viewable on nearly any device.

Settings

In the Settings menu, you'll see abilities to configure your Background, Surface Pen and Gestures.

Background: You can scroll through these options and find many basic paper types with subtle textures, as well as plain white, transparent, blueprint and darkprint. We also give you the option to create a custom color background from the COPIC color wheel.

Surface Pen: The Surface Pen can be configured for pressure and tilt, and if you'd like to smooth out the pressure response a bit, you can use the slider to clip the percentage range down on each end. Also, when using the Pen, you can set your finger action to something different like panning the canvas or selection (or to use the active tool or do nothing), so that your workflow is that much faster.

Gestures: At this point in time we have a two-finger gesture available for moving (drag two fingers) and zooming (pinch or expand two fingers) about on the canvas. You can configure that here. Beneath the two-finger action is a slider that allows you to set your timing for how long you tap+hold to select objects. Some like it fast, others prefer it slow, choose a timing that works well for you.

The other tabs in the Settings menu allow you to learn more about Concepts, visit the Pro Shop, and find help. Besides helpful links to our videos, FAQ, articles, website and manual, you'll see a link to Ask Us Anything, which sends us a direct message about your troubles. You can expect to receive a reply in-app within 24 hours.

The Pro Shop
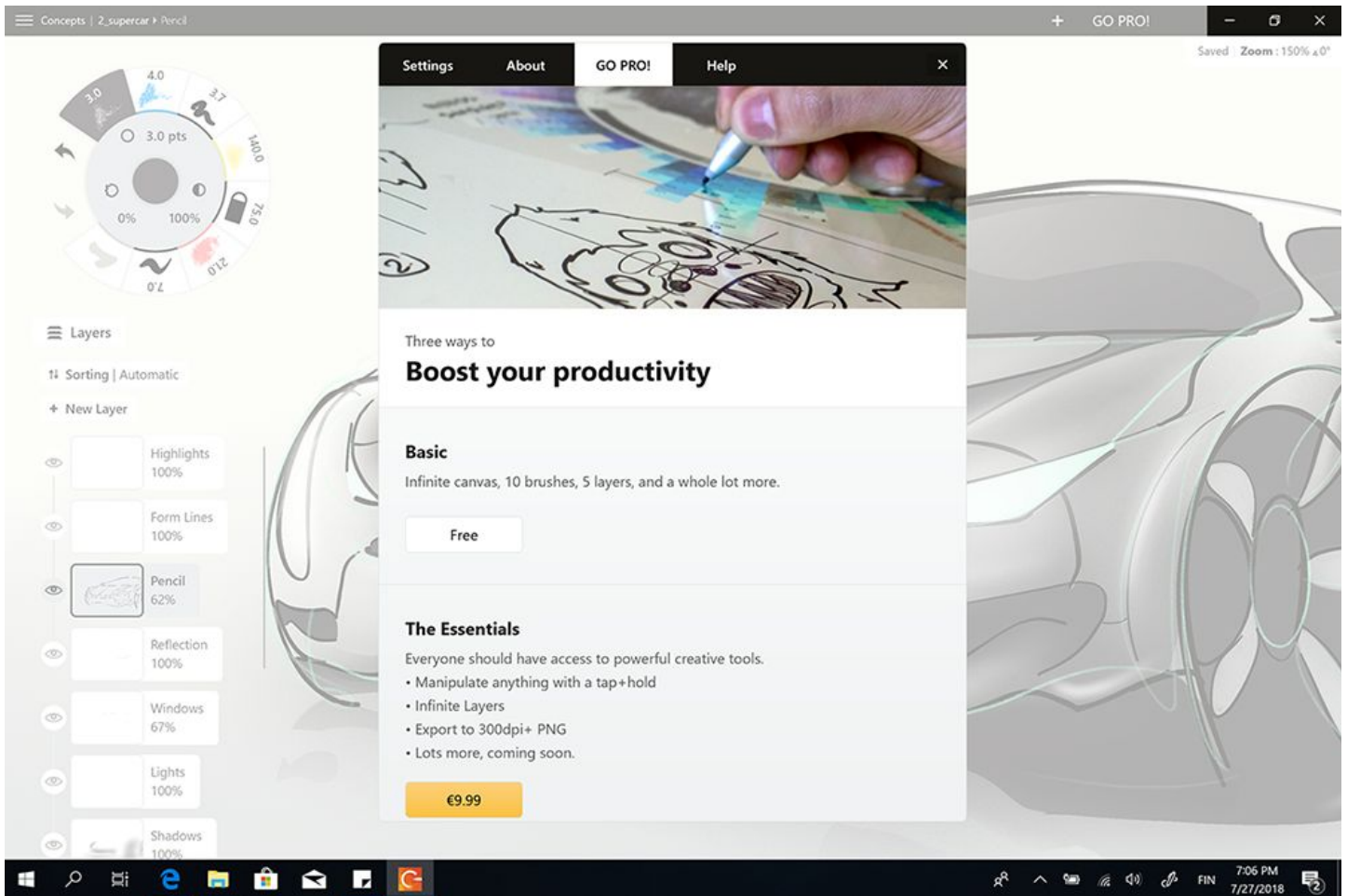
Basic

Concepts comes as a free, solid sketching app when you download it from the Microsoft Store. You can enjoy it this way for as long as you'd like. We feel like everyone deserves a solid sketching app whether they can buy one or not, so enjoy our basic tools, responsive feel, colors, customizable layout, infinite canvas and JPG export with this free package.

The Essentials

Upgrade to the Essentials and become a Pro user. A one-time only purchase, it gives you the powerful ability to select, move and adjust your vectors. It also gives you high-resolution PNG export. Other features like brush editing, object libraries and further export types will be added to this package soon.

A-la-Carte

In the Brush Market, we've crafted some beautiful brushes that add artistic elements to your drawings - brushes like pastels, chalk, paint and other dynamic pens and pencils. Purchase these brush packs straight from the Brush Market in the Brushes menu.

Subscription Gives You Everything Plus Sharing

Subscription gives you everything at once, going forward. This includes every feature, brush and export, including all of the many abilities that will be added as we develop Concepts for Windows over the next year and beyond. Subscribing opens up the ultimate in design capabilities both for you and for us — you get great tools, and we get to keep building them.

Thanks for all the support. You make a world of difference to us - in fact, you are our entire world. We appreciate you.

Best of successes to you,

The Concepts Team @ TopHatch

Again, Help Doesn't End Here

While this manual has detailed information on specific features, we write and publish how-tos and interviews with industry experts almost weekly on Medium. If you're a visual learner, you might appreciate our video tutorials and workflow videos on YouTube. If you still can't find what you're after, find us on your favorite social channel, email us at concepts@tophatch.com, or tap *Ask Us Anything* in app for some lovely, direct conversation.