

Dedication of the Digital Media Lab

The University of Texas at Dallas
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The Digital Attitude

Intro:

I am trained as an architect, and I practice architecture with the firm, FM Associates here in Dallas. Architecture as a three-dimensional event offers tremendous reward and personal gratification. But for me, the need to explore human sensitivities and emotions has always led me to paint and to sculpt. I thought sculpture would satisfy my need to explore the meaning of form. In Boston, I was commissioned to create a sculpture for a 150-year-old company that would somehow embrace the transition of their 76 wharf buildings toward the 21st century. My work was purchased for \$16,000 and is bolted to the wall in the main lobby of their finest turn of the century building, on Summer Street. I found that the efforts did not equal the personal reward I was searching for. I spent several years painting, watercolor mostly, in pursuit of spatial feeling. My paintings were constantly on my mind. I explored photography and soon found myself owner for three years of an architectural photography studio, working for various architect clients, the City of Boston, and even for the firm of I.M PEI Associates, in New York. But my creative need was never satisfied. I was usually capturing images of other people's work, which I didn't always agree with.

Having used the computer since the early 1980's, it was a tool I took for granted in the production of my architecture. First it revealed itself as a wonderful administrative assistant. Then it evolved into a superior means of producing architectural drawings. And then, as the computer became more powerful, and software moved further into "gooey" (graphical user interface) and "wysiwg" (what you see is what you get), I started experimenting with artistic expression in digital form.

Today is an exciting day for me. It's an exciting day for The University of Texas at Dallas. What the future brings reveals itself one day at a time. Today the University dedicates its new Digital Media Lab. The future of digital creativity will begin here for many students. The University of Texas at Dallas offers the future for all that attends. It takes intellect to study Humanities, Computer Science and Technology, Nuclear Physics. It takes creativity to use the information learned from that study.

This Digital Media Lab offers everyone the creative outlet to explore his or her growing knowledge base through visual and audible means.

The fact that this Lab is equipped with Macintosh computers, in my view, is a powerful and positive testimony to the strong decision making process of the University. Those concerned with statistics should consider this: if you eliminate all the PC's that are used at the supermarket checkout lanes, ATM machines, on the countertops at Macdonald's, etc. The user ratio between PC and Mac is much more equal. In the graphics industry, the ratio is over 50% Macintosh. It is the platform of choice. Independent filmmakers and major Hollywood studios use the Mac. Jerry Seinfeld always had a Mac sitting on his desk. Toy Story was developed on the Macintosh.

The IT Director at our firm, FM Associates, came to us from NASA where he was in charge of 40 engineers working on the Space Shuttle program. 36 of those engineers use Mac. In 1994, the Macintosh, running a program called Tech Tool Pro flew on board the Space Shuttle, as it provided the most stable platform for comparison between computer function at ground level, and the weightlessness of space.

So be it to suffice that this Digital Media Lab is equipped with excellent tools for the exploration of the creative digital journey.

Digital Art as an abstract art form

Digital art can be compared to music as one of the most abstract forms of art, in that it exists truly only as it is viewed through digital means. Music exists only at the moment at which it is being performed. Musical scores are merely sets of complex instructions for generating music. Recordings are facsimiles of the moment of performance. As music progresses from beginning to end, the beginning moves from being real to being implied. When the musical performance is completed, music no longer exists. The art of the entire composition is transferred to our memory. It never exists as a complete whole at one time.

Digital art in theory exists as an electronic code in its purest form. The code is read from beginning to end, and the actual moment of performance is the moment of duration between elements of the code running through a microprocessor chip. The digital image is the result of reading the code, and once the code is read, the

“memory” projected on the phosphorous cells of the cathode ray tube is all that remains. What we see is the result of the code. Output, regardless of how sophisticated, is simply a facsimile, unlike most other tangible forms of descriptive art.

A painting created through whatever means is a physical whole. The color, the technique, the texture and the image are developed into a completed whole, which exists as a complete expression. Even stored away in the attic, the painting continues to exist, only waiting for our eyes to behold it.

Sculpture, too, is begun as a cumulative progression toward a conclusive physical end. Buried in the ground, sculpture is still a complete work. Sculpture and painting can exist as continuously expressive and emotional statements for the foreseeable eternity.

Digital art ideally is viewed on the digital device that was used to create it. It can not be like painting, sculpture and other physical art forms in its brief moment of life, and this has real effect on its value.

Value of Digital Art

Digital Art holds the great prospect of communication equal to all the established arts. Its value as a vehicle for expression is unlimited. Digital art is a natural artistic progression within this age of electronic technology and communication. It speaks about our society’s immersion into anything and everything electronic. Our lives are now dependent upon the microprocessor. By the time we leave the house in the morning, we have used as many as ten to fifteen microprocessors, from our programmable coffee maker, the microwave, to the remote controlled TV, to the more obvious checking of our e-mail. Our cars are regulated, monitored and controlled by such devices. Our shopping, our banking, our dining out depend upon the digital processing of bits of information. That beautiful bottle of French wine has a bar code on the back. Curling up by the fire with a wonderful book on a rainy day is no longer an escape. The firewood came from controlled growth forests of engineered trees designed to reach maturity within twenty years as the result of genetic computer modeling. The book, produced on the author’s word processor, was electronically printed on paper from the controlled growth forests, and was probably bought through the Internet at Amazon.com. And the rain? Well, you knew it was going to rain because the local Doppler radar signal was graphically presented through electronic simulation on the TV last night.

Digital Art is here as a product of our social evolution in the digital age. I think it is equal in significance to our ancestor's move from found object medium such as earth, animal fat and charcoal to prepared dyes and paints.

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What I attempt in the Digital medium is the emotional exploration of spatial digital form. Digital form is open-ended and undefined. It can be anything. It is completely pure. The code is made up of ones and zero's, on-off switches, which look amazingly like line segments and arcs – the purest geometric forms. I follow some basic rules which I have come to believe are true for me. I avoid making “paintings” that emulate the brush on the canvas, which are much better and more convincingly produced through traditional mediums. The computer with currently available software does have the ability to approach such mockery. It is a moral trap and it is the wrong path to take on the journey.

I avoid photo-realism. Having been a photographer, if I need to be realistic, I still have my cameras.

I avoid the urge to make graphics. I represent my own ideas in digital art, and I am not selling anything through representation. If I do sell a digital work, its because somebody likes it for what it is.

My work is usually still life composition, but I have begun to introduce the human form, generated using software like Fractal Poser. My people are never real. They are purely digital. I can work at the speed of my brain, which has always been faster than the paintbrush or welding torch allowed. I can begin a project, change my mind, get frustrated and file it away on my hard drive. I can come back later and completely change my intent without having to start over. I can merge several projects together, or split one apart, taking only the best piece.

I have only been on this journey for about four years, but the digital path seems endless. I have found my vehicle for communication within the arts, and regardless of whether anyone else likes it or not, it is purely mine.

I congratulate The University of Texas at Dallas on such a forward thinking addition to its student's educational process. People don't have to leave here as digital

artists or digital musicians or film makers, but the exposure offered here will most certainly transfer to whatever field they pursue.

Thank you.