

RESOLVING THE 2D DILEMMA: REPURPOSING YOUR 2D ART

EMERGING ART PRACTICES

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In this presentation, I want to propose a recontextualization of 2D digital art, and open the question of how digital still images can be removed from the confines of easel painting and taken out into the streets to seek a wider audience.

It's a commonplace of critiques of 2D digital art, that 2D images are irrelevant. What's usually implied in this analysis, is that interactive or moving images represent the new ground, and still images-regardless of content or intent-do not. This view was reiterated at a recent SIGGRAPH Panel, "Museums Without Walls", in which the moderator, after giving a capsule review of visual imagery and spatial engagement beginning with the cave paintings, ended with an image by a famous artist which he referred to as "still just a painting." It's come to the point that some interactive and multimedia artists don't even want their work hung next to 2D art, and there's also always the struggle over the lights-on or lights-off installation.

This is a narrow and dismissive perspective, and one which is weakened by the lack of a substantial critique of interactive and media art. Yet it is true that the time is long past for very disparate work to be shown together simply because it's all 2D and digital. There are too many divergent approaches and processes. The result does often appear chaotic and unformed. The common origins of digital art are not enough of a factor to mitigate significant differences of context and content. Work seen under these conditions represents neither the individual artists nor the domain of 2D art very well. So what's a 2D artist to do?

For those of us who respond to still images, there are some possible directions. Looking at the work itself (as opposed to the curatorial issues of theme shows or exhibition installation), several approaches emerge: to extend still images into an environmental context through wall art, sited pieces and public commissions; to use the "publishing" metaphor of broadsides and artists books; and to develop a more "active" still image through group collaborations and installation. I'd like to focus primarily on the first of these approaches, that of extending still images into the environment.

As an artist making still images among other work, I've been moved to reexamine the context for my work, and to look at the special factors that context entails. I've long been con-

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cerned that exhibitions of 2D digital art are still sited in the easel painting mode, limited by scale, methods of printing, and presentation within the very traditional languages of framing and hanging. Images shown in this way don't usually engage the space or interact with each other, nor do they reach a wide or diverse audience. I have tried to resolve some of these questions in my own work, by making very large prints, and by exhibiting grouped (and unframed) pieces, but questions of context and audience remain.

Over the past seven years, I have been working with a visual vocabulary of architectural forms, developing images which create an immersive constructed environment within the picture plane. Recently I've become interested in sited work and public projects as a means of placing my work in a wider environment. As a finalist for three public art projects, I've begun to look at some of the issues this involved, and have examined some of the ways still images become part of our visual environment.

In "Learning from Las Vegas," Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown talk about learning from the existing landscape as a way of questioning how we look at things. While their comments were directed at architects, their methodology and study of the vernacular in images, signs, and symbols is of wider interest. As I considered a means of moving beyond the easel painting framework of 2D imagery, and began to think about making a connection with a wider audience, I started to examine images in my immediate landscape, that of lower and mid-Manhattan. There were some interesting models. There is a surprising amount of still image integration in both commercial and non-commercial sites (wall paintings, billboards, bus posters) and "non-official" sites (anonymous images, posters and handbills). While many of the wall images I am showing (DKNY, Wear A Glove I, Bond St. Jazz, Stolni, Crunch, Calvin Klein) are commercial images, their prevalence is an issue of financing and opportunity and not of function. Public commissions provide another alternative for siting work in public spaces as the MTA Arts for Transit program demonstrates, with projects ranging from permanent installations to temporary light boxes and billboards. Some exhibition curators, notably at venues like the summer art festival in Atlanta, solicit proposals for billboard works. There is also the realm of guerrilla sites, the unofficial handbills and posters that appear, become part of the landscape, and then are papered over.

Interestingly, the technology of digital imaging facilitates this proliferation of images. The Calvin Klein billboards on Times Square use digital printing to create images that are produced on short turnaround and can be changed frequently; the accessibility of digital printing is also an important factor for the anonymous or unofficial art sites as well.

In his introduction to the essays in "Variations on a Theme Park," Michael Sorkin describes the emergence of the ageographical city, which he says "eradicates genuine particularity in favor of a continuous urban field." Digital technology plays a part in this process, promoting the mechanisms of simulation and the theme-parking of urban life, and creates what Sorkin calls Cyurbia. Yet the intervention of art, solicited or uninvited, can break the spell of suburban boredom or add a humanizing touch to urban dissonance. Sanctioned, or unsanctioned, high tech or lo-res, images integrated into the environment have a resonance and make contact in a way that confronts and redefines public space.

For much of contemporary art history, fine art images have been segregated from daily life and cloistered in special spaces, while the flow of mass media has captured the public sphere. A resiting of digital 2D images from galleryspace to the realspace can not only liberate 2D work from the constraints of easel painting, but offers the promise of diminishing the distance between these two spheres, and restoring the connection with a more diverse public.

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