
lmoline@csd.vwm.edu

Lane Hall & Lisa Moline (.us)

WHAT'S SO HARD ABOUT HARDCOPY

or" The works of man, the denizens
of the compost heap"

In the last ten years, we have focussed much of our energy into making art which integrates digital technology with our existing interest in the natural world, and our expressive experiences as gardeners and printmakers experiences which are both physical and messy. Combining the "denizens of the compost heap" with the "works of man" - the computer - has proved quite challenging.

Unheard of not so many years ago, the "1 wire frame," Fractal Geometry, seamless digital collages, and 3-D rendering have all become a part of a new visual vocabulary. Much of the contemporary digital experience seems headed towards the virtual. We ourselves are not interested in creating hyper-real images, which seem driven by the paradigms of commerce and the entertainment industry. Just as a garden is cultivated, our digital prints must be built with a physical and tactile involvement, as well as exploiting the new technology and new visual vocabulary available to us.

To illustrate this challenge, here are some examples our other collaborative art work with a more pungent physical manifestation than one associates with computer art. This piece, "Citrus Tattoo," is comprised of hand-tattooed grapefruits. As the piece began to decompose, that random process began to change the piece in unexpected ways. All the tattooed words were (if equal importance at first. As Nature intervened, "Memory" was the first to go, but "Cynicism" remained intact to the end

Another piece, "Blood Potato," made from gold-leafed potatoes in honor of the 150th anniversary of the potato famine, actually and unexpectedly began to bleed as the potatoes first sprouted and then rotted in the warm museum air. The full-bandwidth experience of scale, image, touch, and in this case, smell, is hard to replicate with computers. Computers are just counting machines; how could we inject some of the liveliness of nature into the "cold" medium of computer art?

One way we have found to infuse our digital art with this liveliness of nature was to approach our computer with an attitude of openness. We are not interested in simply replicating the image created and displayed on the monitor. Let machines do what machines do best. We are much more interested in constructing a print.

To this end, we have developed ways to approach digital hardcopy which remain inventive and physical, based on our experience as printmakers. This large piece, "Madonna of the Swarm," is printed on many long scrolls, and combines computer images and printing, with woodcut and other media. The large falling figure was digitized, printed and then projected onto the scrolls. Its silhouette was painstakingly reproduced with a swarm of rubber stamps,

This next piece uses stencilling to create large areas of printed digital material. This method makes virtues of the limitations of affordable or out-moded technology - a dot-matrix printer won't print a wide sheet of paper, but it can print an infinitely long one, and will allow a layering of paper that makes stencilling possible

This series of slides illustrates the stencilling process as well as a pastel transfer process. This transfer process uses the impact of the printer head to imbed the paper with bright modulated colors instead of black ink from a ribbon.

Another method of inventive output is this laser-print transfer, which allows one to roll ink on a laser print and then print it on just about any other surface. This transforms tightly-controlled laser-printed hardcopy with the exciting random acts of process which we love so much.

Another process we have developed which takes advantage of laser technology is what we call "toner drawing." We discovered this process as a result of a delightful year spent on a teaching exchange in Maastricht. We lived in a dormitory setting, with no studio but access to a scanner, computer, laser printer and photocopy machine. The images are a combination of scanned and manipulated material printed on a laser printer and then photocopied on larger paper. Each sheet of paper was photocopied many times, and after each copying, we developed the image by scratching away or "drawing in reverse" at areas of toner. The final prints are a composite of many layerings and much removal of toner. The images are combinations of whatever was immediately at hand: our baby's bottom, daffodil and tulip bulbs, stuffed toys and illustrations from various books.

A promising area of exploration that we have been working with recently is the use of different colored toner in our laser printer. We often begin with "found" paper, such as sheets from old books. This series of slides shows the progression of the layering, first with scanned images and typography, laser-printed in black and blue toner over the text and illustrations from an old astronomy text book. The pages are then printed in bright colors using lithography. In this particular piece, "Joyce Astronomia," we combine the accidental information from the textbook with Stephen Dedalus' journal-entry epiphanies from the last paragraphs of "Portrait of the Artist," along with our own scanned images and drawings. This combines a scientific view of the universe with artistic reflections

on cosmology and spirituality.

As with our scrolls, we often combine the small separate sheets of paper to form larger artworks. At close viewings they reveal interesting layers of images and printing techniques. The detail of the astronomer illustrates the way in which the digital images lithographic printing combine in compelling and tactile ways.

This detail from "Welcome, O life" also illustrates our open attitude about digital input. We are inspired by the 3-dimensional forms created within the computer, and want to combine that with information from 3-dimensional forms created outside the computer. This little character was created by digitizing and manipulating a battered and much-loved toy Lane had as a child.

We have also begun to build our own 3-dimensional models to digitize, inspired by the delightful organic discoveries in our compost heap. Some are made directly from our garden materials, such as this grape-vine cage and chicken wire trap. Others are fabricated from more traditional, yet humble art materials, such as carved wood, and this ball of rope, duct tape and wire. The digitization and printing processes transform these humble materials into mysterious objects. They have a great deal of personality and character. Neither the objects themselves nor computer-generated forms have this sort of individuality.

You can see the documentation of this transformative process, first with this grapevine cage, which has been digitized and manipulated in various ways for printing. You can see this as well in the progression of an asparagus root.,

Each of the prints in our "Woodland Goiter Series" is individually cultivated, crafted in the way one builds a garden. The computer is one of the many tools we use. We view art as a process of transformation. Ideas and materials are changed as they come in contact with each other. The computer helps inform our ideas and transform our materials., It is not itself the art.

Just as we have sought ways to get interesting images out of the computer, we have begun to think about keeping those interesting images inside the computer, too. The Web offers exciting possibilities for the dissemination of artwork to a mass audience.

The challenge, in our view, is to get a sense of the physical into the experience: a sense of place, of object, of context. Many of our hardcopy experiments have found their way back to life, on screen, in the "Gallery of Decay."

As our presentation comes to an end, we want to step back from the focussed discussion of our work. As we have become more and more involved in technology, other challenges present themselves. This image of a satellite-tv hut in Central Africa sums up for us some of these issues. Technology is an active part of a daily intrusion in our lives. We choose to integrate it into our art. We have the privilege of pushing the limits of out-moded machines, and of aspiring to experiment with new expensive devices. But how does the intrusion of technology effect people with less easy and available access? What impact does it have on the "web of life," the connection between us and our planet?