

# Art In The Digital Age: Using Computer As An Expressive Tool

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## Abstract

I use digital technology to visualize the theory that we experience any one moment in a "constant state of collage". I literally "scan" the moment, scanning objects such as rocks or paper, energy, and ideas into the computer to convert them to a new common language of binary numbers. After scanning, I work with digital tools to create generation, replication, and integration. These three attributes of the computer are used throughout my work. In this way the computer is used as an expressive tool to visualize the subconscious layering and relayering that occurs as the mind processes "experience" -that moment when the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual come together as one. I call this my "assemblage of the mind" with all that surrounds it. To illustrate this concept, I use software such as High Rez QFX or Photoshop to manipulate images of photographs drawings and paintings. I am exploring what happens to the gestural quality of the line or brushstroke when it has been manipulated with these digital tools. The manipulation of photography, drawings, paintings and found objects expresses a new reality that reflects this digital age. Digital imaging intensifies this reality because you have the potential for infinite replications of the same image within one artwork. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. Using the generative tools, this plurality is taken a step further because it actually mimics our existence. Looking at Kasimir Malevich's painting, "basic Suprematist Element" inspired me to paint a brushstroke and transcend a photo of a landscape into it. By using transparency tools to integrate objects and photos with paintings, I want to convey that the objective consciousness of an object is just as important as the subjective inner state of consciousness in experiencing reality. The irony is that my theory directly opposes Malevich's theories on Suprematism, yet it was Malevich who inspired me.

**Generation, Replication, and Integration:** To create this assemblage of the mind, I use the computer not merely as a digital tool, but as an expressive extension of the mind. Conceptually, the computer mirrors the mind, working in a "continuous flux": scanning, storing, retrieving, layering, relayering, generating, regenerating....all with no sense of before or after. The only constant is constant change.

I begin by literally "scanning" the stimuli of the moment. I digitally scan in three-dimensional objects such as rocks, paper, pens and dishes. I often add two-dimensional images such as drawings and paintings of objects, still-lives, photographs of landscapes, objects, or people. The computer can now convert objects and ideas to a new common language of digital bits. The bit, as the "microscopic" digital element of energy, can reflect the "microscopic" or subatomic energy of every image scanned. These scanned images, now new "textures", become my palate, and with my own creative consciousness, I layer and relayer these images. I can explore the possibilities and opportunities that can occur in a single moment by integrating these digital existences of both human and object consciousnesses or energies just as the mind might. The computer allows me to move backwards and

forwards in time, without destruction or disintegration of the original-in fact, *there is no original*. I create an infinite amount of new images made from the same DNA of information without altering or losing the preceding image.

After scanning, I use the copy paste tools to replicate the image. Sometimes I use masks to copy selected parts of the image. I use a cut tool to scale, rotate and translate parts of the same image. I load up my screen with these new generations of the image, which vary in size, shape and transparency and I begin to move back and forth, combining these different variations of the same image. Before I paste the selection, I have the option of enlarging, reducing, stretching, compressing, or rotating it. As they layer over one another I see new spatial relationships taking form. Moving around these elements are an important part of my process. As I move and reposition the elements, the composition takes on a tempo which reflects the nature of working with digital tools. It is interesting to take the fluid motion of a scanned brushstroke and copy a section and then paste it. By selecting a portion, it gets squared off abruptly. There is a contrast between the fluid brushstroke made outside the computer with paint and brush and the influence of the digital tool, which makes the brushstroke look fractured. I am comparing and contrasting the ideas of analog versus digital. By analog, I mean continuous, and by digital, I mean composed of a finite number of minute parts. The world we experience is a very analog place. From a macroscopic point of view, it is not digital at all but continuous. Nothing goes on suddenly or off, turns from black to white, or changes from one state to another without going through a transition. This may not be true at microscopic level, where things that we interact with such as electrons in a wire or photons in our eye, are discrete.<sup>1</sup> There are so many of them that we approximate them as continuous. By manipulating the brushstroke, the microscopic nature of the image is revealed. The digital manipulation shows that in reality the brushstroke is made up of segments or atoms that are connected by energy. Where selected areas of the brush stroke are replicated, and generated, reflects the nature of both the computer and the mind in how they replicate, generate, integrate and abruptly make changes from one topic to the next.

**A Multitude Of Reproductions Introduces A New Kind Of Existence:** It substitutes a plurality of copies of an object taken out of context for a unique existence of one object in its natural state. This plurality is magnified by creating generations or replications within the same image. Using a photo of the back of a truck for the background of a drawing, or combining a photograph with a brushstroke contributes to the contemporary "decay of the aura." Walter Benjamin defines "the decay of the aura" as what happens when a photo or a film when it captures an object or scene. "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unaided eye. Uniqueness and permanence have been replaced with transitoriness and reproducibility. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence."<sup>2</sup> Manipulating with digital tools produces multiple fragments within the same image which further describes reality with a microscopic or digital viewpoint. In contrast to painting, filming, photography, in digital imaging I manipulate the picture plain and many replicas or generations are made in the same image. Walter Benjamin compares the artists relationship to reality when the mediums of paint and photography are used. He states "The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under new law. Thus, for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the

permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art." 3 In other words, digital imaging creates a hyper-reality because it enables the creation, generation and replication within a single image as opposed to creating multiple reproductions of one image.

In the early twentieth century, desperately attempting to free art from the burden of the object, Malevich with his essays on Non-Objectivity and Suprematism, (defined as the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art) wrote "To the suprematist, the visual phenomena of the objective world are, in themselves, meaningless; the significant thing is feeling, as such, quite apart from the environment in which it is called forth."4 I integrate a photograph with a brushstroke, or the back of a truck with a line drawing, to explore the idea that both the pure subjective feeling and the physical objects of our objective world are equally important in experiencing reality. We tend to perceive objects in our world in an obvious, "macroscopic" manner, as simply stagnant things occupying space; for example, a rock, a dish, a chair. But when we can allow our minds to superfocus to the less apparent, to the "microscopic" or subatomic energy of an object, we can more intimately appreciate that objects, that things, do not just occupy space, they *occur* in space-they literally *exist* in our space. By scanning subjective paintings or drawings and integrating them with visual phenomena of the objective world such as actual rocks or photographs I am attempting to communicate both the pure subjective feeling and the objective world are equally important in experiencing reality. Fragments of the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual layer and relay to visualize this superintegrated, collective consciousness.

## **Bibliography**

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