

When life imitates art, and art's for art's sake, where art thou?

I think I'm an artist, therefore I am.

No, you're not, you say. Just thinking that you're an artist doesn't make you one.

But I'm a digital artist. All I need is software and hardware and I can make any kind of art I want.

No, you can't, you say. It takes more than a computer and Photoshop to make an artist. It takes training, and knowledge, and perseverance, and inspiration, and most of all, talent.

But I have inspiration and perseverance, and I might even have talent. Did all the great artists throughout history have training and knowledge?

No, you say, but they knew they were artists, and they lived and breathed their art—many even sacrificed material riches to follow their hearts.

But we live in a different time and space, where technology can give me whatever I'm missing, and where personal sacrifice isn't a prerequisite any more for producing real art. I have sophisticated tools at my fingertips that can turn my wildest concepts into any kind of art I choose. Just read what Bob Connolly says on page 51 about the new Mac G4s.

Ah, yes, you say, but wild concepts and a personal computer do not in themselves make genuine fine art. New technologies may open more opportunities, but art still comes from the soul, and no machine can give you that.

Maybe not, but who's to say what digital tools may offer me? After all, the whole history of digital art barely covers a couple of decades. Alvy Ray Smith only invented the first 24-bit color paint program in 1977. Digital art has hardly begun to make an



impression on the world of fine art. Who knows what computer art will be in twenty years? I'm sure Ivan Sutherland never guessed what would happen when he wrote Sketchpad back in 1963.

Turn to page 12 and read *A New Medium in Traditional Fine Art Graphics* by Zenon Burdy and Lidka Schuch, you reply, then ask yourself that question again.

But you don't seem to realize that I understand what's good and what's bad. I understand color and form and composition and how to communicate ideas with pictures. I can feel what images do and say.

And I have the Internet to teach me what I don't know.

Oh, really? you answer. Do you really know how people respond to color and images and shapes and different media anywhere and everywhere in the world? Have you immersed yourself in so many different cultures and environments that you understand what distinguishes one from another? Have you reached out to find the common visual language that joins all these disparate communities together or explored universal artistic techniques that cross every line? What do you know about Oriental graphics, for instance?

Does that matter? Did Michelangelo ever visit the Orient?

You're no Michelangelo, Dan. But if you want to get a taste of how things change once you set foot in a foreign land, turn to page 28 and read *A Foot in Two Worlds*, Steve Long's description of how graphics work in Japan.

Well, I may be no Michelangelo but I do know that the Japanese are trying to

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adopt the benefits of Western culture as fast as they can say "McDonald's". We live in a global village, and in a few generations it won't matter where you are or where you came from. Art will become homogenized for the masses.

You mean like advertising?

Yeah—well, no. Advertising distorts the truth to sell products. I'm a real artist. I have integrity. I would never do that.

You mean you'd never use your digital tools to create art that wasn't a true reflection of the world around you? You'd never use Photoshop except to produce realistic images that were exactly what we see in real life?

I don't recall Hieronymous Bosch ever worrying about that.

But, Dan, he never owned a computer either. And those digital tools you're so enthralled with are being used every day to create images that, at their best, entertain and amuse us, and at their worst—deceive and manipulate.

Now you're going to tell me to read Shane Steinman's short essay on page 25 called *Looking at Art*, aren't you.

That's right, Dan.

But aren't you forgetting something? I have a computer with software that can help develop my serious artistic ability, and even if I can't always create my own original art, I have instant access to millions of images that I can download and manipulate to make any image I want.

Before you get too excited about all the potential of on-line stock photography, there are quite a few new developments in that area that you may not know about. Have you read *Art from Turmoil* by Nick Shinn on page 18?

Well, no, not yet. But I don't understand what that has to do with developing my artist's soul. If my work is good, what difference does it make what I used to make it or how it was assembled? People will see my artistic ability for what it is, no matter how I made it—and in the end I'll get the recognition I deserve.

You mean, one day you'll see your art published in the GRAPHIC EXCHANGE *Digital Art Awards* issue, just like the talented artists who are featured on pages 40 to 47?

Exactly. Or better still, my art will be launched into space and travel to faraway galaxies where eons from now sentient beings on other planets will be able to appreciate my creativity and dedication to producing great digital masterpieces.

Um, before you start planning your first extraterrestrial gallery showing, I think you better take a look at José Chung's cosmic exposé on page 34. *Color Space* may or may not be all it's cracked up to be.

That's okay. I'll start simple, just like Kai Krause and Louis Fishauf did. Every artist has to start somewhere.

In that case, Dan, you might want to start by learning Corel-Draw. Steve Aykroyd says it's very good and very easy. Just check page 60—he's written a full review of Graphics Suite 11.

And then I'll be a fine artist?

No, but you might think you're one. 