

## **"Artistic" Techniques? ... My Confession of Inauthenticity**

I'll illustrate the following with a handful of images I've made, accompanied by explanations of how I made them. Those images are listed, but now shown, at the end of this writeup. The collection of images with details of how they were made is a little too large for comfortable distribution (about 2.7 MB).

### **Thoughts**

- Let's not discuss the question, "What Is Art?" Let's save that for the privacy of our own homes—e.g., by googling "what is art". For this meeting, "art" will remain an undefined term. I'll probably expose some of my own biases on the subject, but I get to do that because I prepared this session.
- "Artistic techniques" is not even a subject. Any technique we can use to deliver an artistic idea is an "artistic technique."
- I took on this topic because I have been mostly unsuccessful in creating what I've wanted to create—i.e., images that go beyond photos, especially collages. I thought preparing for a session on the subject would help me discover what to do. Maybe it helped me come face to face with the idea I've been trying to deny, namely that I was looking in the wrong place.
- Techniques don't create art; art comes from the imagination and builds on art that came before it—sometimes by modifying it, sometimes by going beyond it, sometimes by opposing it. Techniques help you deliver art, they do not create it.
- The key, and most difficult part, is getting and developing an idea. After that, it's craftsmanship.
- Start with an idea: what do you want to say? Then, techniques will help you say it.

### **Ideas on How to Hatch an Idea**

- Search others' work for ideas; expect to change and build on them.
- Look at lots of examples in the web sources below and in other places that you know of.
- Go to shows if you find any.
- Then go to sleep to let the ideas sink in.
- When an idea occurs to you that feels important, pay attention to it, nurture it.
- Scavenge: Collect images that you may be able to use one day (e.g., surfaces, forms, compositions). Take photos that don't necessarily stand on their own but that contain something you may want one day. For example, as I write this, there's an old computer network card on my desk. I intend to photograph it for use when I want a circuit board to use as part of a collage.
- Once you have an idea, look over your image library to see if you have suitable components on hand.
- If you lack some of the components you want, go out and find them, and photograph them.

- Now do the lab work needed to integrate them.

## Some Approaches

- A fine image, well-produced (Highest form?): A photo that needs nothing more than tonal and color adjustments to become "artistic"; for example, Ansel Adams's work.
- Compositing For example, collage
- Separation For example, separate luminosity and color for special effects.
- Surface editing (Lowest form?)<sup>1</sup> Use available Photoshop filters, purchased filters, or Actions obtained from the web.

## Techniques that Support these Approaches

- Cutting and pasting
- Layer masking
- Layer blending
- Simplification
- Separation and blending (color, texture)
- Edge extraction
- Recoloring (esp., use of indexed color)
- Using fancy brushes (esp., in Photoshop the “natural media” brushes)
- Prepackaged actions

## Useful Books

If you want to learn techniques from someone who really knows something about it, look at the following—especially Caponigro.

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|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. John Paul Caponigro, <i>Adobe Photoshop Master Class</i> (ISBN 0321030103) | Philosophy & technique—unique |
| 2. Gregory Georges, <i>50 Fast Photoshop Techniques</i> (ISBN 0764541749)     | Technique—a few sections      |

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<sup>1</sup> I once did a show at the Arts Walk and at Pegasus called “13 Variations on a Street in Montmartre.” The show consisted of 13 variations of exactly the same snapshot, a few of which were done with regular Photoshop filters, others done with combinations of filter and layer techniques. A woman who visited my show asked, “Well, isn’t that something that just anyone could do?” I was non-plused and probably muttered something incoherent; afterwards I wished I’d said, “Yes, the same as anyone could buy a brush, some oils, and a piece of canvas and make an oil painting. But I must admit, she *did* have a point.

3. John Lund & Pamela Pfiffner, Adobe Master Class: Photoshop Compositing with John Lund (ISBN 0321205456)      Technique—more techno-skills than art

### Useful Web Sites (for ideas):

1. PSA Electronic Imaging Division      <http://psa-eid.org/resource.html>
2. Digital Outback Fine Art Photography Handbook      <http://www.outbackphoto.com/handbook/DigitalOutbackPhotography.html>
3. Zone Zero      <http://zonezero.com/default.html>
4. Illustration, Photomontage, Collage      <http://www.laudator.com/>
5. Photo-I      <http://www.photo-i.co.uk/>
6. Adobe Web Photo Gallery      <http://www.adobeevangelists.com/gallery/di/index.htm>
7. Tao of Digital Photography      [http://www.ilachinski.com/digital\\_images\\_intro.htm](http://www.ilachinski.com/digital_images_intro.htm)
8. Digital Art Museum      <http://www.dam.org/>
9. DigitalArt.org      <http://digitalart.org/>
10. Digital Art Source      <http://www.digitalartsource.com/index2.shtml>
11. Art.net      <http://www.art.net/studios/digital.html>
12. Mike Finn Actions      <http://homepages.slingshot.co.nz/~mikefinn/action.html>
13. And just google “digital art”

### Beyond Photoshop

Use other programs to that apply techniques unavailable in Photoshop

- Corel Painter 8      Just bought it; very exciting. It used to cost \$350; now can be had for \$125 as an “upgrade” from Photoshop. But caution: you really need a graphics tablet (Wacom) to get the best mileage out of this program. And another caution: Are the results “photography” any more? Do you care? (See “Beyond Photography?,” below, for more on this.)  
<http://www.corel.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Corel2/Products/Home&pid=1047022702185>
- Andromeda Filters      <http://www.andromeda.com>

## Pieces I'll use for Illustration—and How I Made Them)

- Busted Multi-image, w/ indexed color
- End of the Line Cut/masked collage (Rene Magritte)
- Red Shutters Redux Cut/masked collage
- Easy Commute Cut/masked collage
- Vuitton Simplification, recoloring, packaged action
- Reconstruction from Memory Cut/masked collage
- Old Friends Painted

## Beyond Photography?

1. What would it mean to you to create an artistic image?—that is, what does that expression mean to you?
2. We belong to the Bainbridge Island Photo Club, which, by its name, seems to be about photography. What are the limits of photography?

For some others' ideas on this question, have a look at this interesting, if somewhat belabored, forum thread on the web:

<http://forums.dpreview.com/forums/read.asp?forum=1024&message=9712377>

## An Afterthought: Do As I Say, Not As I Do

I have too, too many images I don't know how I've made This is sometimes a source of regret—for example, when someone asks, or when I'd like to apply the technique again.

So: Document what you do, step by step. Save intermediate results. Record steps as actions. You never know when something you do will turn out well, and you might want to do it again or explain it to someone.

I probably won't do this. You probably won't either. But remember: *you read it here.*

David Warren  
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