Fractal artist Terry Wright says the images on his Web site should be viewed in a dark and dimly lit room due to the nature of their textures. “Much of my art uses dark tones and has backlit qualities that do not show up well unless viewed in darkness or ambient light,” he explained. “Although Giclee prints of my work bring out textures well, the lighting in my images can best be seen on computer screens in poorly lit spaces.”

However, Wright has no art degrees. Instead, he has an MA in English and American literature and an MFA in creative writing. He has published five books of poetry but has no formal art training. He says he took a painting class as an undergraduate, but the professor told him he had no talent, so Wright dropped the class. “It was true that I had no feel for a brush and canvas, nor could I manipulate the tools to my satisfaction,” he explained. “Still, I had always longed to paint. Computers finally gave me the opportunity—and I found I could use them to replicate what I saw in my head.”

Wright says he first discovered fractals on Usenet in 1997 and started creating images. His earliest ones were pure fractals, but he soon found himself drawn to post-processed fractal images instead, so he began heavily manipulating them outside the fractal generator. This originally irked some of the more traditional fractal artists, who swear by the pure fractal itself. “I wasn’t afraid to shatter and obliterate the fractal forms—seen as blasphemy in some fractal circles,” he explained. “To me, the initial fractal was just the foundation to begin constructing a more complex digital image. Is my work actually fractal art? I’m not sure. However, like an onion, if you peel away all the stacked layers, you end up with the original fractal and can replicate its parameter file. Of course, often the starting point looks nothing like what is seen in the finished image.”

Sakti and more

Sakti (the cover image), sometimes spelled shakti, is a Hindu religious concept that translates as “power.” It is an aspect of Devi (divine mother) and represents the dynamic, active principles of feminine power, as Wright explains it. Inspired by browsing Gaskell’s Dictionary of All Scriptures and Myths (Gramercy, 1981), Wright began the image, like he always does, with a generated fractal and then heavily processed the image with photo-manipulation software.

“I primarily use software designed by Terry W. Gintz, especially Fractal Zplot, Fractal ViZion, and QuaSZ,” Wright explained. “I prefer Gintz’s software because the color palettes he uses are rich and flexible; they adjust to graphic manipulation well. I also use fractal generators made by Stephen C. Ferguson, notably SterlingWare, and XenoDream, which is made by the House of Sterling Thornton. After rendering a fractal, each image is run through a series of graphic programs—primarily [Adobe] Photoshop, and [Corel] Painter, Photo Paint, and Paint Shop Pro. A wide variety of plug-in filters are often applied to any given image.”

For Sakti, Wright generated the original image in FractalViZion and the applied Flaming Pear filters to obtain its look. He twisted it using flexify and color saturated it with aetherize and glare. “Andromeda’s Shadow and techtures filters were used as well, and surface embossing was done in Painter,” he said.

Dynamic Instability (see Figure 1), a term borrowed from chaos theory, is representative of the concept of a butterfly flapping its wings over Brazil causing a wind-storm over Alaska. The term refers to small inputs gener-
ating massive nonlinear outputs, growing exponentially. Wright generated the original image in Fractal Zplot, twisted it using Flaming Pear’s flexify, imported it into XenoDream, and ran the image through several lighting features that created the colorful lacquered surface. He also tweaked it with BuzzPro and Painter. He created The Leaves Turn (see Figure 2) with FractalViZion and Flaming Pear filters before running it through Photoshop and Painter. Penguin Rave (see Figure 3) is the least manipulated of the four images. Wright made it with Sterling-ware, collaged it with FM Tile Tools and enhanced it in Photo Paint.

“All of my images are heavily adjusted in many different programs until they have a look (composition, color, lighting/shadow, texture) that pleases me,” Wright said. “It’s not unusual for me to make 80 to 100 adjustments to any given fractal base image before finishing.”

The creative process

Wright has hundreds of images on his “Rooms With a View” Web site (http://www.eclectasy.com/cruelanimal/), including many combined with poems, reflecting his literary background. He has a keen knack for titling his images. A few examples include: First Glimpse of Cortez, Not So Nice Priest, Press Conference on the War, Yakuza Bath House, and Mount Sinai Off Ramp.

“I have been titling poems for many years, so titling images became an extension of that process,” he explained. “When I first started making fractals, many artists simply gave their images numerical or date-of-composition titles—and others titled images use nonsense or made-up phrases. From writing poetry, I learned that a good title could enhance meaning and sometimes steer readers or viewers into multiple interpretations. I always start with an image, and the titles follow later in the process.”

Wright added that sometimes a title pops out at him while tweaking the image, but usually it comes last in the process: “I merely study the image carefully until something jumps out at me. I enjoying coming up with titles, and sometimes use them to shape mood—whether for serious or comic effect.”

And he claims not to know that much about that mathematical side of the whole thing. “Many fractal artists I know, especially those who use a program like UltraFractal, deliberately maneuver the mathematics in their process. They add layers to their fractal by adjusting and enhancing formulae. I work in a different manner. The fractal is set once I render it.”

When it comes to the creative process, he says he works strictly by serendipity and his process is much like spelunking. “I crawl around the confined space of the fractal, sometimes contorting violently and thrashing about the image, until I find my way out of the cave when I finally see something that pleases me. Although I believe in the Muse, I don’t place much stock in inspiration—an unreliable intangible thing and far too hit and miss. I work regularly at both my art and writing. As Woody Allen once noted, ‘Eighty percent of success is showing up.’”

The future

When asked what lies down the road for Terry Wright, he said he really doesn’t know. “I’ll drift where my inclinations take me. Still, I would like to experiment more with incorporating text, especially my own writing, into the space of my images. I’d also like to obtain more powerful equipment to make images at bigger sizes and to work on a much larger scale.”