Michael Eichhorn says he uses a simple attractor equation for his digital art: patience plus vision plus persistence equals results. “For any Fractal artist,” he says, “patience is required here as endless streams of light dance before your eyes, it’s like seeing the blitz of infinity every time. Endless patterns, sometimes repeating—forever. For every picture you are staring at the screen, and wondering, am I going to save this or not? Am I going to use this?”

It’s almost like his creative process is representative of the self-similarity of fractals themselves. You can’t explain the procedure solely as improv or ad lib. “Vision … is more or less what I intend to discover, perhaps a concept, repeating patterns, or just something wild and wacky to start with,” he explained. “An open mind in this case always helps, if I like the image I will save the parameters and the picture. … Then I take these pictures and take them even further using different coloring algorithms and tweaking and adjusting the parameters. Of course, anything I like, I save.”

These days he has a huge assortment of fractal images and he’s not stopping there. “I persist and keep going at it,” he affirmed. “Now I have about 300 fractal pictures, several of which are of outstanding quality, the others I usually go back to and start again by changing parameters and colors.”

Ice cream and more

Eichhorn says that the cover image, Ice Cream Swirl, is what he wanted to eat but didn’t have: “Chocolate ice cream with luscious swirls of fudge, vanilla, strawberry, blueberry, banana, and wild berries.” Hive Mind (see Figure 1) and Red Crack (see Figure 2) are from the same general fractal. “Hive Mind … brings order to chaos, which is what all fractal artists do,” Eichhorn related. Red Crack is an “interdimensional rift in time and space,” he said. “And each time a parameter is tweaked, the picture can change altogether,” he added. “One moment a nice picture of organized chaos then the next one has a billion spirals. I persist and keep this process going until I have at least five or six decent pictures as a reference or a starting point.”

Sonic Blaster (see Figure 3) is what Eichhorn calls, “seeing what you might hear if you played the game Half Life.” This brings to mind his technique. “I am a self-taught artist,” he said. “I was inspired by fractals since Fra386 then Fractint and
Winfract, and now I use [Frederik Slijkerman’s] Ultrafractal. I use Apophysis for creating my flame fractals as in Sonic Blaster.”

So what does the digital world allow him to do that the analog world doesn’t? “Most of the fractals I render are pure single layer fractals,” he explained. “I also tried watercolors and oil paintings, but I preferred a cleaner method and returned to fractals and digital media.”

He currently prefers the Ultrafractal program because of its compatibility. “One of the features of Ultrafractal that I like is its server program. With it installed on the slower computers you have connected through your network, the rendering times are reduced. For example, a render job might take 8 hours on one computer, but using this method, it can be reduced to 3 or 4 hours. What I use mainly is my AMD 64 3400+ with 2 Gbytes of RAM. To speed up the rendering times, sometimes I add my AMD 2200+ and my laptop AMD 2000+.”

Like many fractal artists, he turns to the natural world for inspiration: “Nature inspires me, from flowers to mountains to sunsets,” he said. “I also create digital art [of] sunsets over the water, on a mountain top, or through the clouds as the sky is ablaze in all its glory. Now bold and vivid has become my style. I find that my digital art inspires and influences my fractal art and vice versa.”

The fractal future

When it comes to fractals, every artist working with computer-generated imagery has his or her own reasons for jumping into the fray, but, simultaneously, universal truths always manage to come to the surface. “Fueled by infinity, fractal art already is a fine art,” Eichhorn says. “It’s bold, beautiful, and unique. From the dawn of creation to where we are now, in everything we see. Fractal shapes and forms are everywhere and we are part of it. What’s it going to take until the people realize this and not just appreciate it at face value? This is more advanced than grabbing your digital camera and taking a picture of something and printing it out.”

And Eichhorn boldly predicts the future blitz of infinity: “Maybe a Hollywood movie called The Fractal Code or the Fractal Factor. (And if it does become so, remember where you got this idea from.) I would really like to see fractal arts displayed on commercial products. Some of it can be used for logos. Real attention getters and used in the right context, fractal art can be used in advertising for just about anything.”

Contact author Gary Singh at gsingh@metronews.com.