Transforming Fractals

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Where most fractal artists conclude their process, Rod Seeley begins. In his procedure, equations, coefficients, and fractal software are the source materials. From there, the vibrant pixel poetry commences via a series of unrepeatable transformations. To create what he calls “stylized fractal art,” Seeley says he uses at least half a dozen freeware fractal programs that function, for him, like a child’s kaleidoscope. This initial milieu forms the base from which he then articulates a process of “metamorphosis,” usually in Photoshop. Using filters, plug-ins, and other transformations, he eventually arrives at a final product, which he never anticipates or visualizes ahead of time.

Seeley often works in series, with a single-source fractal image eventually leading to several final incarnations. He then prints the works on high-gloss aluminum, often in custom shadow boxes, allowing for still another visual element. All in all, his process appears to be unique. Those tenured academics who for years accused Benoit Mandelbrot of promulgating “vague nonsense for poets and children” are probably rolling their eyes from the world beyond.

Fractals as Source Material

Seeley originally attended Santa Barbara City College in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before and after a four-year period of Navy service. He was a business major, minoring in art. He eventually left to open an advertising agency that won dozens of creative awards in the 1970s.

However, it wasn’t until 2010 that Seeley started experimenting with paint software. For him, it was an exploratory process. He implemented various techniques in ArtRage Studio Pro, TwistedBrush Pro Studio, and Corel Painter to create abstract works and then giclee prints on canvas. He says it was only a matter of time before he forayed into fractal dimensions.

“To be honest, at the time I had no idea what a fractal was,” Seeley recalls. “But I quickly decided to download the software and start experimenting. I liked the way that images looked but wanted to make the artwork more vibrant and less computer-generated-looking. I wanted a unique look and style, and that was the starting point for creating stylized digital fractal art.”

After even more experimenting, Seeley chose to exhibit the images on high-gloss aluminum, in custom aluminum shadow boxes. He says no one has really used this technique to display fractal-based imagery or digital art in general. He also started exhibiting in juried online competitions. Infiltrating both the virtual and the physical gallery circuits proved a sufficient one-two punch, and Seeley started winning awards.

Seeley cites a laundry list of fractal software he uses to create his source images—Fractal Explorer, ChaosPro, Fractal Studio, Apophysis, Xiao5, and Sterling2, to rattle off but a few. But, he says, with all due respect to mathematics, he has no use for...
just the equations in and of themselves. Instead, the resulting imagery forms a springboard from which the muse starts to dance.

“Most people are satisfied with the images created by those programs,” Seeley says. “[But] this is where my creative process begins. The base photographic program I use is Photoshop, and many programs I use plug into it.”

That is, he never uses stock Photoshop filters and plug-ins. Once his assortment of fractal software generates the source imagery, Seeley uses such programs as Filter Forge Pro, AKVIS Enhancer, Topaz Adjust 5, Color Efex Pro 4, and PhotoZoom Pro 5.

“I never know what the finished piece will look like until it gets there,” Seeley admits. “That’s the part of creative process that I enjoy. I like vibrant colors and unusual shapes, and I use dozens of filters combined to accomplish the look I want.”

A Palette of Software

The cover image, Blue Tunnel Escape, was one of Seeley’s earlier images. He used Fractal Explorer for the source graphic.

“Since I have no visual concept in mind when I start, I attempt to create strong and vibrant images knowing that colors may change,” Seeley explains. “In this case the colors were so strong, and I wanted to soften them artistically a little by applying a digital paintbrush technique using AKVIS ArtWork.”

With Blue Tunnel Escape, the final product does indeed closely resemble the source image, but that’s not the case with Red Smile (see Figure 1). What we see in the final creation looks nothing like what Seeley started with. In this instance, he transmogrified a ChaosPro-generated image of vibrant, borderline-phosphorescent yellows and maroons into the metallic red sandwich-like specimen you see in the image. AKVIS Enhancer, Topaz Adjust 5, and Filter Forge Pro supplied the transformations.

“Fractal art is ever changing, and I try to make most of my artwork not look like fractal art,” Seeley says. “Here I used several custom filters to greatly modify the visual look.”

For Amber Wilderness (see Figure 2), Seeley used Fractal Explorer to generate the original image, a relatively bland but vibrant purple and pink Fibonacci-looking orb you can see replicated in the final result. The image now boasts a variety of textures that seem to fuse the biological with the mechanical, thanks to Topaz Adjust 5 and at least four filters from Filter Forge.

Likewise, to create Yellow Dreamer (see Figure 3), Seeley used Fractal Studio for the base image and then transformed it with Filter Forge filters, Topaz Adjust 5, and AKVIS Enhancer. Obviously, it helps to see the original image, but Seeley says that isn’t always necessary.

“When I create artwork, I do what I feel looks ‘cool,’ and that’s when I stop,” Seeley explains. “It doesn’t matter to me if the person viewing the artwork knows the process, but I have found that people appreciate the artwork more when they know the creative process. Most are amazed by it.”

Figure 2. Amber Wilderness. Seeley used Fractal Explorer to generate the original image, a relatively bland but vibrant purple and pink Fibonacci-looking orb you can see replicated in the final result.

Figure 3. Yellow Dreamer. Seeley used Fractal Studio for the base image and then transformed it with Filter Forge filters, Topaz Adjust 5, and AKVIS Enhancer.