About the Cover

The Poetry of Colors

Gary Singh

Bruce Thacker never took an art class. He never even took a computer class. His degree is in geology, and he first bought a computer in 1990 to track stock investments. Somewhere in the convoluted melange of his linear history, he owned a contemporary art gallery, invested in stocks and real estate, owned a custom photo lab, and was a professional photographer.

“Other things that I’ve never had a class in include business, photography, art business, art history, art media and methods, or stock investing,” Thacker says. “But I strongly believe that self-taught and self-directed education is better learned. Schools always teach you first what you can’t do. Most innovation is made by breaking those rules. Two of my heroes spring to mind: Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock.”

When it comes to abstract digital imagery, Thacker claims he sneaked in through the back door. Soon after purchasing his first computer 24 years ago, he realized the disruptive nature of digital photography and how the computer would inevitably become an extension of the camera. Then came Photoshop and fractal software, and away he went.

“Along the way I learned that colors alone were often enough,” Thacker recalls. “Sometimes the content got in the way and colors themselves could be the creative starting point. Most recently I have been using colors only, moving them about until I achieve that moment of poetry which cannot be ignored.”

The Butterfly Effect

Butterfly, the cover image, takes its name from the butterfly effect, referring to how nonlinear dynamic systems are often highly sensitive to initial conditions. Thacker sees that metaphor as a dramatic one, more than adequate for the changes computers bring to the process and aesthetic of art making. Butterfly images have crept into his work many times over the years, including a recent self-published book, The Wind from a Butterfly’s Wings.

Thacker’s work tends to emphasize color above all else. For him, choosing colors is easy, but explaining why or how those colors emerge can be rather complicated, he says.

“In creating my images, I generally start with a group or palette of colors, brought together by me on a blank page in Photoshop,” he explains. “They are then formed and manipulated using Photoshop, GIMP [GNU Image Manipulation Program], Paint.NET, and Picasa. I often jump from one to the other, most often a multitude of times, back and forth, and perhaps this goes on over many days or weeks. I am not a computer expert. I work only with those four programs, and what I know I taught myself by continual experimentation.”

That isn’t how most people use Photoshop, and Thacker’s images don’t look like the stock results of those four programs. So, Thacker is probably onto something. You could say Badlands (see Figure 1) looks like a painting or Mountains of the Moon (see Figure 2) looks like a quilt, but that would be pointless. Ride on the Wind (see Figure 3) is another example. Maybe it’s photo manipulation; maybe it’s pixel manipulation. In either case, would saying so be any different than claiming painters are pigment manipulators? Thacker says we live in an era when many artists are still working to figure out what computer imagery should or shouldn’t resemble.
“I don’t know what computer art should look like,” Thacker says. “I do know that good visual art is like poetry without words, and music for the eyes, containing rhythm and motion like a dance, and it seems to fulfill some deep human psychic need.” Amen.

**Logic and Intuition**

Computers are supposed to be rational, logical machines, with bits either on or off. Intuitive, wild, visceral, and psychic they are not. Thacker is of the ilk who claim computers don’t make art in and of themselves. The machines are just the tools, no different than a pen, pencil, paintbrush, camera, or sculptor’s chisel.

“Artistic creation is not defined by the tools used to make art,” Thacker declares. “True artistic creation is defined by the imagination of the artist. I would say the computer is the perfect tool for making abstract images limited only by the imagination. The goal of any artist should be to know his artistic tools so well that he can ignore them.”

A dancer, musician, welder, cartoonist, architect, or fashion designer could easily have uttered a similar statement. Computer artists are no different. The process can be just as intuitive. In Thacker’s case, when he works on an image, jumping back and forth between programs, he doesn’t keep track of the process. He has no final product in mind.

“I do not plan my steps or remember them when it is over,” Thacker explains. “I do not start with a plan or outcome in mind. One thing seems to lead to another, and perhaps the hardest part is knowing when to stop.”

So when brick-and-mortar gallery curators rail against the digital world, mistaking prints for reproductions or claiming the computer did all the work, they’re missing the point. Thacker says the computer merely offers a different type of palette, one with 16.7 million colors, depending on the graphics card and monitor, of course. Software likewise provides scores of patterns, textures, lines, and forms and the means of manipulating them in seemingly infinite ways. To Thacker, it’s all about the imagery. In the end, if you can create an image that makes people look at it, you’ve achieved a degree of success.

And computers, all in all, provide a much better theater of operations than any equivalent in the analog art world, Thacker claims. The advantages include more complexity, faster speeds, more rapid distribution of the final product, easier storage, lower color material costs, easier and cheaper printing, plus a degree of ubiquity impossible in traditional fine art communities.

“I once did sculptures of steel and concrete, but I won’t go there again,” Thacker says. “Too much heavy lifting. Fortunately, computer art has no heavy lifting, but the sedentary lifestyle is not good for you either. Conceptual art leaves me cold; I prefer mine visceral and immediate. So, I suppose I will continue to explore the possibilities of digital art. I’m certain I have many things to learn.”

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![Figure 2. Mountains of the Moon. To create images, Thacker uses Photoshop, GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program), Paint .NET, and Picasa.](image1)

![Figure 3. Ride on the Wind. Thacker believes that “the computer is the perfect tool for making abstract images limited only by the imagination.”](image2)