



Blacksburg artist Leslye Bloom won a top prize for her digital work.

Blending art and technology

by **TONIA MOXLEY**

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If you've never heard of "thermal wax transfers," "encaustics" or "computage," You're not alone. Neither have many of Leslye Bloom's peers. But that didn't stop the Blacksburg artist from winning a top prize at Abingdon's Virginia Highlands Festival Juried Fine Arts Exhibition in July.

Her piece titled "And Then We Were One" was the first digital work to ever win an award of excellence at the festival.

Bloom discovered computers in 1967 while desperately looking for a way money. The only graduate school funding she could find was in computer graphics, so she took it.

She hated it. In its infancy, computer technology was downright nasty to work with, Bloom said. But the advent of Macintosh computers in the 1980's brought her back into the digital fold.

Today she calls her art form "computage." To the language and art purists who have conniption fits about the homegrown term, Bloom says: "Montage is a collection of

photos. Assemblage is a collection of objects. Collage is a collection of paper. Why not computage?"

The process is best described to the novice as mixed media on steroids. Bloom uses graphics software, special color printers, and a process called encaustics - which uses wax, pigment and heat to bond colors to paper - to create her images. Then she sizes, mounts, tears reworks the piece into its final form.

For "And Then We Were One," Bloom used the complex method to transform digital images of New York City into an impressionistic memorial to the World Trade Center.

After years of struggling to bring digital artwork into the mainstream,

Bloom thinks she has succeeded. "It's reached its maturity," she said. "This time no one said 'computer art' to me. They talked to me about the art."

"And Then We We're One" will remain on display at Abingdon's Art Depot until Aug. 10.

On the Web: www.leslyebloom.com



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