

Photoshop Tennis: A Collaborative Digital Art Project

featuring works by Leslye Bloom, Craig Shaffer, Sally Shaffer, and Kathy Cudlin

What happens when a computer artist who works in computage and wax encaustic becomes friends with two digital photographers and a maskmaker in another town? Instant rapport! And what happens when, despite the distance between their locations, the three digital artists are able to share their work through the immediacy of the Internet? In this case, they begin an ongoing game of Photoshop "tennis" culminating in a collaborative show, a BRAA exhibition at The Montgomery County Government Center's Poor Mountain Gallery, beginning October 15 and running through January 2005.

Leslye Bloom, award-winning Blacksburg artist and former teacher at Virginia Tech, describes her art as evolving through and beyond the computer. She coined the term "computage" to describe her fusion of computer imaging and collage. Her complex process involves digital images, computer work, collage, and, finally, an ancient medium, wax encaustic, to produce the final piece.

Bloom first met Craig and Sally Shaffer and Kathy Cudlin when she was invited to speak at the Blue Ridge Photographic Arts Society (BRPAS) in Lynchburg, Virginia. Both Craig Shaffer and Cudlin are digital photographers who have an interest in the manipulation of images through the powerful computer program, Adobe Photoshop. Both describe their work as photography, and their images are displayed as digital photographic prints.

Craig Shaffer is Marketing Director for Progress Printing in Lynchburg. An avid photographer, his intense color images push the envelope of reality with imaginative Photoshop work. Cudlin is the Art Director for Lovern Advertising in Lynchburg. Her own photography is often traditional in nature, but she relies on creative Photoshop skills for her advertising work.

Sally Shaffer, Craig's wife, creates fine arts sculpture in the form of beautiful, and often whimsical papier maché masks. She is a nurse who finds time to create and to exhibit her masks in juried shows and one-woman venues. Photographs of her masks became starting points for some of the most imaginative work by the digital artists. The show will include a number of the masks, as well as some original "straight" photos that were sources for the various Photoshop constructs.

Bloom suggested the collaboration and the various ways to approach the project. The BRPAS website became the "court" for the tennis game, and "volleys" of images were sent back and forth for the better part of a year. One artist would post a photo on the site, another would download it and begin to think beyond the obvious content of the photograph. Once the newly manipulated photo was posted back on the site, it could be appropriated and incorporated into yet another altered image.

Because the images posted on the website could not be high resolution files, many of the images show the pixilation inherent in computer-generated imagery. Some images have only subtle changes between the various artists' versions, others have been manipulated towards a complete metamorphosis. One of the joys of the project was surprising one another with the latest additions to an idea in progress—or taking the idea in a whole new direction.

If computage is the fusion of computer imaging and collage, then Photoshop tennis played simultaneously by three different artists, incorporating the imaginative work of a fourth artist, is the fusion of four sets of eyes, four sensibilities, and four imaginations into a computer meld of creative thinking in which the individual artist has left his own ego behind and immersed himself in the collective process. The result is as fresh and exciting as the amazing technical advances that facilitate it.