

Diana Meredith: merging painting and digital art

Diana Meredith sits comfortably in a wicker chair, in her sparsely furnished studio on Gerrard Street. We sip smoky Gongfu (Hunan Black Tea) surrounded by techno-gadgets and inky line drawings tacked to her walls. Two computers, various peripherals on shelves, a photographer's "seamless" and a couch, make up the stuff of her studio space, which looks out over a secluded, winter-adorned courtyard. This Cabbagetown complex of studios has housed many a well known artist over the years and has an interesting socio-political history in and of itself. Diana begins our interview by describing her way along the circuitous path she has taken artistically and the evolution of her partnership with digital art-making.

"I started off in the craft world in the 70's. I made clay sculpture and then worked as a potter in that era's framework of, 'back to the land' and 'do things by hand.' In that process I woke up to art."

Meredith feels her creative endeavors strengthened her character and smiles when she says that those artistic experiences were not so rewarding financially. She left the art world temporarily to make a better living in social

work and education.

"Then I got involved in Women's Alternative Theatre, writing and acting. I was in that scene for a while and came back to the visual art world after a brief stint learning about music."

Meredith re-entered the art world with an intense desire to make digital art. "I was doing a lot of photography and I'd seen a book about digital techniques. I was interested in photographs and family history; I wanted to mix the generations digitally and that is how I came to meet Photoshop."

In order to realise her concepts, Diana felt she needed a better understanding of light.

"I took a painting course with Tom Campbell, a superb Instructor at The Toronto School of Art."

Meredith asked Campbell if she could paint using her laptop instead of oil paints or acrylics. This concept was relatively unexplored at the time and although there are "paintbrushes" in Photoshop (mostly used for photographic colour correction), very few artists at that time were digitally painting from a fine art perspective, using an electronic stylus as a brush.

"I know I was one of

the early ones, I just fell in love with digital painting! I wasn't interested in straight realism, what really moved me, is expressionism and the place where photography and painting meet. After photography came along, painting was allowed to change as its job was no longer to record the way the world looked. Photography has gone off in all directions but in digital work, photography and painting come back together. I'm interested in how they overlap and how they differ - a pixel that began as an electronic blip in a photograph and a pixel that began as a



little blob of red on a digital canvas, are not so different once they're inside a computer."

Pixels, short for picture elements are single points displayed on a computer monitor. They are seen as squares of contiguous tone. Pixels in a colour image are comprised of red, green and blue in various and almost unlimited combinations. One of the



tasks of a digital painter is to produce an image in fine enough resolution, to have those elements understood by the viewer, possibly manipulating several layers of vary-

ing opacity, onto one image. At "output" or printing time, printing devices translate those RGB values onto the printed page using the four-colour printing process. The technical skill and knowledge required are substantial and students may take years to master digital photography, digital publishing, printing and painting applications in all their depth.



Digital Art Diva: Diana Meredith and one of her pieces, titled "Not Enough Confidence."

Meredith is a Professor of Visual and Digital Art at Humber College and also teaches at Henry's, the camera store. "Henry's keeps me in touch with the digital photography end of things. After teaching various groups over the years, it is marvelous to work with younger students at Humber.

The program is two years, the first: Analog, teaching drawing and painting and the second: Analog and Digital. "It's curious for me as I don't own a TV and haven't been into Gaming, Manga or Animation, yet here am I, assisting young people who are going into animation and production. We influence each other and I'm learning to see what they see. I made my first Manga-like image last week!"

Born in Ireland, Mer-

edith came to Canada in 1969 from Bucks County, PA to go to an alternative school, The Everdale Place. "At Everdale we were part of a movement of education that helped me to see myself as an instrument of change in the world. What I like most is being totally engaged in something. It's a lovely feeling but I couldn't fly away like a kite creatively, if I didn't have a loving relationship at home. The home my husband Peter and I have created is the centre that roots me to the ground."

Diana is well traveled and has documented her journeys. Her digital painting and some of her photographs of Vietnam and Europe can be seen at her website <http://www.dianameredith.com> and her blog at <http://dianameredith.blogspot.com/>