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Dynamic Force, Motion, and Life in Digital Design.

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Dynamic Force, Motion, and Life in Digital Design

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Art and Design

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts

by

James Michael Livingston

May 2006

M. Wayne Dyer, Chair

David B. Dixon

Catherine A. Murray

ABSTRACT

Dynamic Force, Motion, and Life in Digital Design

by

James Michael Livingston

The purpose of this paper is to explore specific works that I have created as it relates to digital art and design. My works include abstract, organic objects that exist within surrealistic environments. First, I explain the dynamics of the imagery that has emerged from my career in broadcast television, my coursework in the Department of Art and Design at East Tennessee State University, and the works of fantasy, surreal, and abstract artists. In conclusion, the images discussed impose an idea of abstraction and surrealism with a sense of force, motion, life, and dynamic action.

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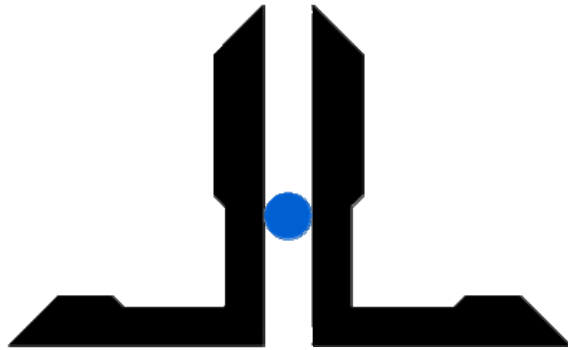
LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"I never decided at all to be an artist; being an artist seems to have

happened to me" (Truitt, 2005, p.1). This quote by minimalist sculptor Anne Truitt

is the short story behind my life as an artist. I happened upon a job that led me to

create digital art for television that led me to experiment with digital art in courses

at East Tennessee State University. Somewhere along these paths, being an

artist happened. In the experimentation and working with digital media, a style

emerged within my artwork.

The images discussed in this support paper are created to show force,

motion, life, and mystery. Each image represents a living form existing within its

environment, while removing the structure from the real world. My work falls

between the canvases of organic, known worlds and distinct, intense sur-reality

where living abstract objects exist within mysterious ecosystems. As philosopher

and cultural critic Turner (2005) suggests, people seek out patterns within the

abstract in which they can relate to natural representations. "Our eyes and visual

cortex are designed to pick out shapes and hints of half-hidden presences, and

to recognize the colors, textures, and fine details of natural objects," (Turner,

p.1). Although representational art may contradict the ideology of abstraction,

each of my images has a central being that represents a forceful, living form. Art

writer and critic Kaufman (1995) proposes that abstraction is most difficult to

define but a basic definition could be that "Abstract art intentionally departs from

natural appearances" (p. 1). Kaufman further explains abstract art as expressions

that can not be explained realistically. "The term encompasses a vast range of

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styles, from Expressionism and Fauvism to Cubism and Futurism, from Suprematism and DeStijl to Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. In between lie endless gradations, each an attempt to express something that by realist means might be incommunicable" (Kaufman, p.1). I consider my works to be abstract in that I intentionally created environments and objects that are not within the realm of human reality but exist on another plane of understanding.

My designs are snapshots of powerful, elegant objects within fantastic biological environments. Each image is a realistic depiction of living form existent within the surrealistic environment created. "Surrealism can be best described as an abstraction of reality. A diverged interpretation of what you see with eyes both open and closed. It is the stuff of dreams, nightmares, illusions, mystery delusions and fantasy" (Cline, 2005, p. 1). In the end, the works within this thesis are a cross between abstract and surreal with a sense of force, motion, life, and dynamic action.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

I started at WJHL-TV in 1989, working in production. After two years, I moved into commercial videography, which involved shooting and editing local commercials, corporate videos, station specials, and an array of odd production jobs. By 1991, computer based video editing was becoming popular in the broadcast industry. It was not long after I got into commercial videography that we were editing productions on a computer. This new turn in production techniques forced me to learn computer technology and associated software. Developers were releasing graphic design and animation software to complement non-linear editing programs when my interests in computer-based design flourished. I was becoming fascinated with this new medium and its vast array of design possibilities.

In spring 2000, I enrolled in my first graphic design course at East Tennessee State University. Through this experience, art became a personal interest beyond my occupation. Not only did my professors give me the direction to explore different avenues in digital design, but I found inspiration from other students as well.

My digital creations come from my fascination with fantasy artists and surreal painters. In August 2001, I attended a science fiction and art convention and was captivated by Dorian Clevenger's paintings. His images express sexually charged situations in the fantasy realm. Another artist that I found interesting at the convention was Dan Henderson. Henderson is an artist of the

fantastic. His images of monochromatic old horror film style represent emotion and psychological states of the surreal.

After that, I became more in tuned to imagery that combined abstraction with mysterious environments. For example, the works of Joseph Cusimano comprise objects within worlds that are unknown to us but the imagery creates a presence in which we can relate. "The art thus created, far removed from everyday life, as if stolen from an unknown world, acquired an unreal almost supernatural presence which appealed to the subconscious mind and stimulated the imagination of the viewer who witnesses the denudation of nature and not its idealization" (Cusimano, 1997, p. 1).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The compositions that I have created are solely digital. The computer and various design programs are my canvas and brushes. Working with computer software allows me the luxury of changing my ideas and forming creations in a nonlinear fashion. Although I have an idea that sparks my initial concept of a work, the final product tends to unfold on its own. Compared to the sculptor or painter, the digital designer has the ability to easily undo what has been done and move in another direction.

Within my works, I have gained much insight of what graphic applications such as Photoshop® have to offer. It is through years of digital imaging experience coupled with my education in graphic design that I better understand the creative process of digital imagery. I remember one of my professors critiquing an early project. He said, "Through this piece, you taught yourself to draw," D. Dixon (personal communication, December 5, 2001). I found this ironic in that I can barely hand draw a stick figure. However, I adapted more control and precision using the tools in the program than I could by freehand drawing. Within the computer and software, I have found my tools and my way as an artist.

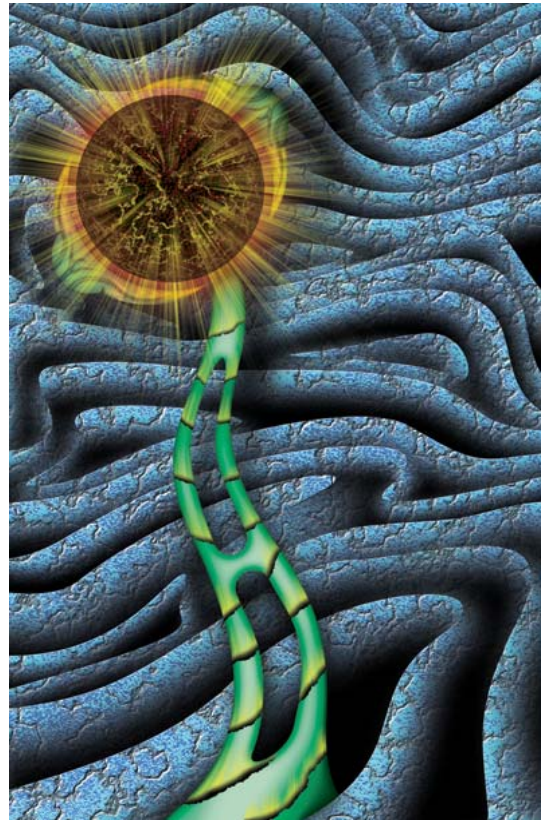> *Having accepted the computer and its limitations the artist can begin to find a comfort level with it. Accepting the tool for what it is will go a long way towards removing the distraction of frustration and open one to the possibilities available. This can take some time but once achieved the*

moment of balance in ones (sic) work is more easily recognized,

seized upon and managed when it occurs (Holloway, 2005, p.1).

CHAPTER 4

WORKS

The collective images within this thesis are conceptual designs that
represent real, organic compositions. In

"Sunflower" (Figure 1) I used curvilinear

shapes to accent the feeling of organic

structuring. In doing so the composition

brings on a natural look through the

crusted lava-like flow in the background

that supports the flowering structure. I

explored the application of bold colors to

accentuate the beauty of nature. The

spherical flower denotes an extreme life

force that emerges from an unknown

Figure 1. Sunflower.

world. The objects within this piece are
crisp and distinct. This is not new to
abstraction. For example, "Incese of a New Church" by Charles Demuth has
curvilinear, distinct patterns that exist within an unknown environment. One of
Demuth's most famous paintings, "The Figure 5 in Gold," was said to "scream
like bold and brassy fire trucks" (Herberholz, 2002, p. 48). His works were bold,
diverse, and powerful with intense motion.

The use of bold color and natural shapes with a surreal background was
pushed to the extreme in "Torque" (figure 2). This image's main focus is the

twisted like structure that represents control and harmony within a chaotic environment. It is within this composition that I created a sense of excitement and power while capitalizing upon the usage of intense, fire-like elements. The image began with creating the focal structure of the twisted horn-like element. I left it as a gray scale image and began creating the background. After the creation of the striking Armageddon brimstone storm started to take shape, I realized what the main twisted structure needed for its skin.


Figure 2. Torque.

A burned and charred effect complements the raining background and the lava-covered raging planetary object serves as the foundation. The idea was extreme heat coupled with a destructive quality, and an organism surviving within this
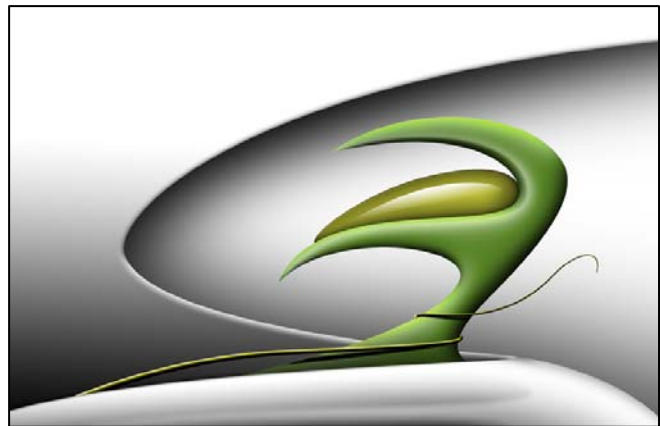

Figure 3. Accelerate.

setting. There is no sense of space provided in the horizon, but it appears to be a picture of intensity.

After creating "Sunflower" and "Torque", I felt I needed to get back to rudimentary design concepts. The images "Accelerate" (Figure 3), "Decelerate" (Figure 4) and "Navigate" (Figure 5) are three of
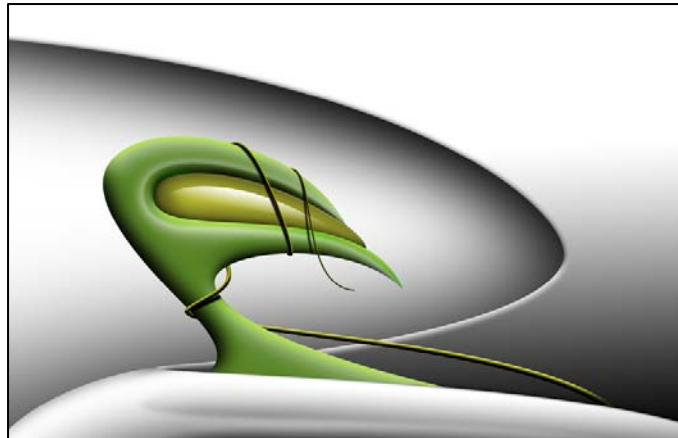
Figure 4. Decelerate.

a seven designs called "The Alien Series". I started these projects with something new in mind in that I wanted to get away from heavily textured imagery while using curvilinear design to accent life. All of the images are basically an array of clear shapes and plain, limited colors. Although these images are different from what I had been doing, they still derive from the same principles of the earlier works, dynamic objects that take on living form. Highlights and shadings were used to create the sense of depth. Even with the
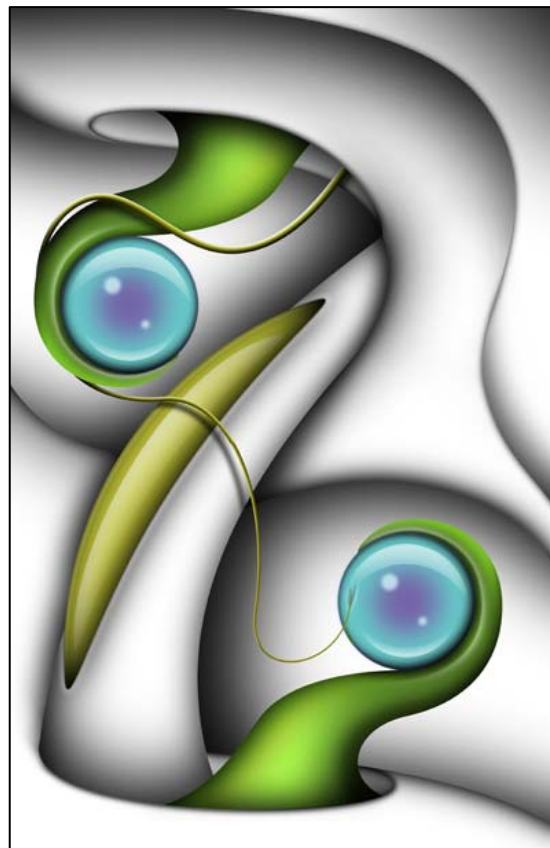
Figure 5. Navigate.

basic nature of the "The Alien Series," the designs were exciting and detailed. The tendril that is present in each of these pieces is meant to explore the mystery of the beings. With the presence of the tendril, there is a sense of intense motion.

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It seems that this tendril is the controlling factor behind the major focus of the images. Therefore, even with minimalistic elements, force, motion, and an organic feel were achieved.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

When I began working in television, I did not consider that I would emerge an artist. Working with non-linear editing software led me to the Department of Art and Design at East Tennessee State University which opened my mind to more possibilities. It is difficult for me to pinpoint a particular style that I can claim as my own. The closest that I can come to identifying with a style is to say that my works are a compilation of abstract objects in surreal environments, and the worlds created are conducive to the entities that exist there. I claim surrealism as a part of my works because they are the worlds imagined with my eyes open and shut, existing within my dreams and imaginations. The works are abstract in that the objects created are not real objects; however, there is an organic, realistic feel.

Each composition represents living objects from nature through the use of curvilinear design. Force and motion are evident in the dynamic structures. The subconscious ideologies have emerged within my works as objects of life surviving within their environment or circumstance. Within this idea of creating new worlds and images, I relate the words of Alberto Giacometti, "The object of art is not to reproduce reality, but to create a reality of the same intensity" (The painter's keys, n.d., p.1). Each of my works exists in an intense reality released through my computer.

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VITA

JAMES MICHAEL LIVINGSTON

Education:

Bachelor of Science
Major: Mass Communications
Minor: Art
December 2001

East Tennessee State University
Master of Fine Arts
Concentration: Studio Art
May 2006

Military:

United States Navy
Aircrew Survival Equipmentman Third Class
Honorable Discharge
1983-1986

Employment:

March 1989 to Present
WJHL-TV, 338 E. Main St., Johnson City, TN 37601

Commercial Videographer/Producer, *March 1989 to January 1996*
Responsibilities included:
- Organizing on-location and studio videography
- Managing the pre-production and post production of commercials
- Designing PSAs, promos, sales presentations, corporate presentations, and 30/60 minute programs

Production Manager, *January 1996 to October 1997*
Responsibilities included:
- Managing production
- Developing newscasts
- Organizing and managing a budget
- Supervising personnel

Graphic Designer, October *1997 to present*
Responsibilities include:
- Creating and maintaining daily graphic designs for broadcast news, production, marketing, sales and internet media

- Designing 2D and 3D animations
- Creating logo designs
- Composing small- and large-scale print designs
- Creating the graphical communication and representation of specialized graphics for affiliate and non-affiliate company organizations
- Instructing affiliate stations' employees in the use of relevant software
- Overseeing and instructing interns

January 1992 to December 1996
Distance Education, East Tennessee State University
Evening Production Supervisor
Responsibilities included production and broadcast of evening classes from East Tennessee State University to on-campus sites and other sites in the Northeast Tennessee area.

1992 to Present
Freelance Videographer
Jobs have included videography for ESPN and Jefferson Pilot Sports for various events such as drag racing, motocross, ATV racing, and NASCAR.

Spring Semester 2005
East Tennessee State University
Instructor 2D Design 1110

Professional Skills:
   Extensive knowledge of:
- Adobe After Effects
- Photoshop
- Illustrator
- Premiere Pro
- Strata 3D Pro animation software
- Chyron Liberty 32 Paint and Animation system
- AVID Media Composer non-linear editing system
- Pinnacle Type Deko
- Macintosh, PC, and Unix operating systems
- Macromedia Freehand
- Linear editing
- EFP and studio cameras
- Video switchers, audio mixers, portable light kits, studio lighting, and other technical equipment.

Awards:

       Peabody Award Nomination, 2000
       Co-Director of Photography for *American Dreamers*, a documentary of
       American workers and success stories throughout the United States.
       Archived at University of Georgia library.

       Addy Certificate of Excellence
       Silver Certificate Winner – 1991
       Silver Certificate Winner – 1992
       Silver Certificate Winner – 1993 (two awards)
       Silver Certificate Winner – 1994
       Silver Certificate Winner – 2005
       Addy Award
       Gold Certificate Winner – 1994

Accomplishments:

       Producer of "Horizon Film Showcase", 2-day film showcase that was
       dedicated to giving local filmmakers an opportunity to display their works
       before a live audience (November 2003). The showcase is scheduled to
       premier again in November 2005.
       Responsibilities included:
- Soliciting sponsors
- Coordinating the event, display booths and receptions
- Promoting in order to obtain short films and an audience
- Viewing and selecting films to show
- Creating a format to display films
- Emceeing the showcase
- Designing logo and promotion material (banners, flyers, invitations, posters)

Producer and Director of short films
       "Fozphaze"
       "Recycle"
       "Lost Inside"
       "Mort and Bent"

Producer of "Omni Magazine", an entertainment based PBS broadcast program
       (Fall 1990, ETSU).