

Mainframe masterpieces

Local artists craft their works with a click of a mouse

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In 1914 Monet probably started painting his famous *Water Lilies* with a blank canvas and oil paint. Fast-forward to the 21st century when artists have the option to create their art pieces with a computer screen and a mouse instead.

Lampo Leong, a local artist and MU art professor, uses computers to improve the aesthetic appeal of his art. With the continuing rise in technology, artists and students are using computer software to enhance, create and manipulate their art.

Some MU art professors, such as Leong, see digital technology as a tool to achieve the goal of creating fine art. "The aim is not to recreate the effects of traditional art with new media," Leong says. "Rather, it is to use the new media to create an art that grows out of a profound understanding of a spiritual inheritance."

The use of software such as Adobe Photoshop brings new possibilities and standards to art and makes it easier to work with large dimensions.

Leong has been using software to create abstract works of art for almost 10 years. He goes through a multi-step process to "create expressions."

First, he writes cursive calligraphy on rice paper with Chinese ink. He then splits the rice paper, and makes a collage on canvas. He scans and digitizes them in Photoshop then incorporates photographs from nature. Using an inkjet plotter, Leong prints them onto a large canvas.

After the printing, the piece is not quite complete. Leong paints layers of acrylic and oil paint over the printed prototype to create an abstract oil painting. "This provides the viewer with a complex final product that shows technology coexisting with the humanizing touch of painted brush strokes," Leong says.

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[\[see full size image\]](#) MU art professor and artist Lampo Leong's creation *Shimmering Cirrus* attempts to capture the power of nature and its forces. In this painting, he depicts the cloud formations merging with the waves of the sea. Leong used Photoshop to manipulate this painting. (Courtesy of Lampo Leong)

Going Beyond Photoshop

A new array of techniques, digitizing tools and computer languages are available for artists, such as fashion designers and sculptors.

Real models not needed

Fashion designers use software, specifically animation and design software, to make models come to life. Instead of live runway shows, buyers and fashion companies can buy clothing by checking out the computer animated models on their computer screens. The designers begin by using Photoshop to select the color and dimensions of the clothing. Then using Virtual Reality Modeling Language, (VRML or Verml as techies call it) these models can be made to walk the runway. The animated figures look like they are wearing the clothes. VRML is the software used as a platform to bring 3-D scenes to life and also allows designers to incorporate music and text.

Sculpture takes a new form

Using 3-D digitizing a sculptor can create images directly on the computer. The designers first use laser scanners to digitize objects and people — including whole body scans to get correct dimensions. This digitized information is then fed into machines. These sculpting machines can reproduce human forms or structures in wax, foam or plaster of paris. Recently, this method has been used by architects, construction companies and professional sculptors.

Students at MU's School of Fine Arts are also using computers to enhance their art. They are part of this growing trend. "Most of my work deals with layering time, place and space, so I find that working with Photoshop is helpful to manipulate the scanned images and paintings that I work with," says MU graduate student Nick Pena.

Most art students use software to create collage effects and as a sketching tool. Curtis Erlinger, a graduate student in art and Leong's student, also uses computers to create his work. He says that in the future computers are going to be used more in the creation process.

"Art is like any other process of communication and computers are inherently intertwined with communication," Erlinger says. "They can only become more and more a part of each other."

Pena believes this is a permanent evolution. "I don't think there is a possibility of it going away," he says. "Art is about advancing ideas and trying to visually represent new ways of looking at images. As long as society is advancing, I believe artists will take advantage of the advancements."

For Leong, the artistic vision and ideas that go into a work or art is most important. "I believe that it is the painting that should stand out, not the technique," says Leong. He also believes that it is not really essential for the viewer to know the art is computer-generated. "The benefit of my process is the synthesis that goes on between the two different parts of the piece," he adds. "It allows me to reach a bigger audience and to create something totally new and different."

Other artists seem to acknowledge this trend of using computers to create abstracts. Local artist Lawrence Rugolo does not use computers in his work but thinks that it would be wrong to not use the computer to lend itself to the creative process. "Artists use computers to enhance their vision," Rugolo says. "Artists have always used whatever tools are available to them. Today we have computers."

Another local artist, Robert Bussabarger, believes that it is fine to use computers to create art but not at the expense of sacrificing basic artistic skill. "This medium is popular among students because it utilizes computer skills and because that's what the job market requires," Bussabargar says. "Either way, basic painting and drawing must be learned."

Keeping with the changing times, artists like Leong continue to use technology to create. But they say at the same time that their philosophy and perception remains important. "New technologies are always exciting," Leong says. "But none of what I have described would make a real difference in artistic terms if they did not grow out of my own philosophical and spiritual awareness."

— Margaret Costa