# Digital Image—Digital Photography

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The SIGGRAPH 1990 Art Show Committee decided to sponsor an exhibition of works that concentrate on the interaction of photographic imagery and computer technology [1]. This exhibition came about because of one interesting aspect of computer-mediated artworks that has been developing over the last several years. As the curator of this exhibition, I chose to put together a group of works that investigate not only the technical combination of these media but also the conceptual basis for choosing such tools of investigation, collaboration and production.

The integration of the traditional photographic image with computer technology seems, at first, to be antithetical. The veracity of the photographic image is undermined immediately and completely by our awareness of the computer's capability to fictionalize seamlessly even the most official documentary photographic data. In some cases the computer is utilized to call this very issue into question, as in the work of Esther Parada. Her piece *Define/Defy the Frame* (Fig. 1) consists of a fold-around portfolio which opens to reveal an accordion-pleated poster. In a statement integrated into the piece, Parada writes: "The intent of *Define/Defy the Frame* is to encourage an expansion of the viewer's perspective beyond the parameters of attention established by the U.S. government, and reported—whether in meticulous detail or skimpy sound byte—by the media" [2]. She refers to her work as the ongoing process of challenging received information. Enlarged pixels obliterate color photographs of a Salvadoran mother with silhouettes of soldiers, many soldiers. Parada absconds with the media images and points out the fiction in some, drawing our attention to what they tell us . . . and to what they don't.

In the work of some of the other artists in this exhibition, photographic material is used because it is simply the most direct reference to the social, cultural or political framework that the artist wishes to invoke as context for his or her ideas. Artists such as Paul Berger utilize the photographic image for its contextual references. "To appropriate coded messages from the information environment, to recombine them with overlaid significations suggests that this culture is laden with tremendously potential raw material. Paul Berger has, since the late 1970s, explored this type of information, refunctioning data and recontextualizing its effects" [3]. In the lushly colored large inkjet prints by Berger (Fig. 2), the television weatherperson proclaims his/her forecasts for our futures, and perhaps the future of humankind. By appropriating that familiar and generic personality, Berger has fused into the work a reference that we all know, one to which we pay attention.

In some works exhibited in the art show, it is insignificant who made the original photograph that is portrayed in the work; in others it may be conceptually important that the artist did *not* make the original photograph. It is the postmodern version of photographic material that most of these artists integrate into their statements. MANUAL (the col-



**Fig. 1. Esther Parada, *Define/Defy the Frame* (detail), Macintosh II computer using Digital Darkroom and QuarkXpress software, plus a 35-mm slide manipulated on a Canon Color Laser Copier 500, 1990.**



**Fig. 2. Paul Berger, *World2AA* from the *CARDS* series, inkjet print produced using IBM PC with Targa 16, and TIPS and RIO software, 24 × 30 in, 1989.**

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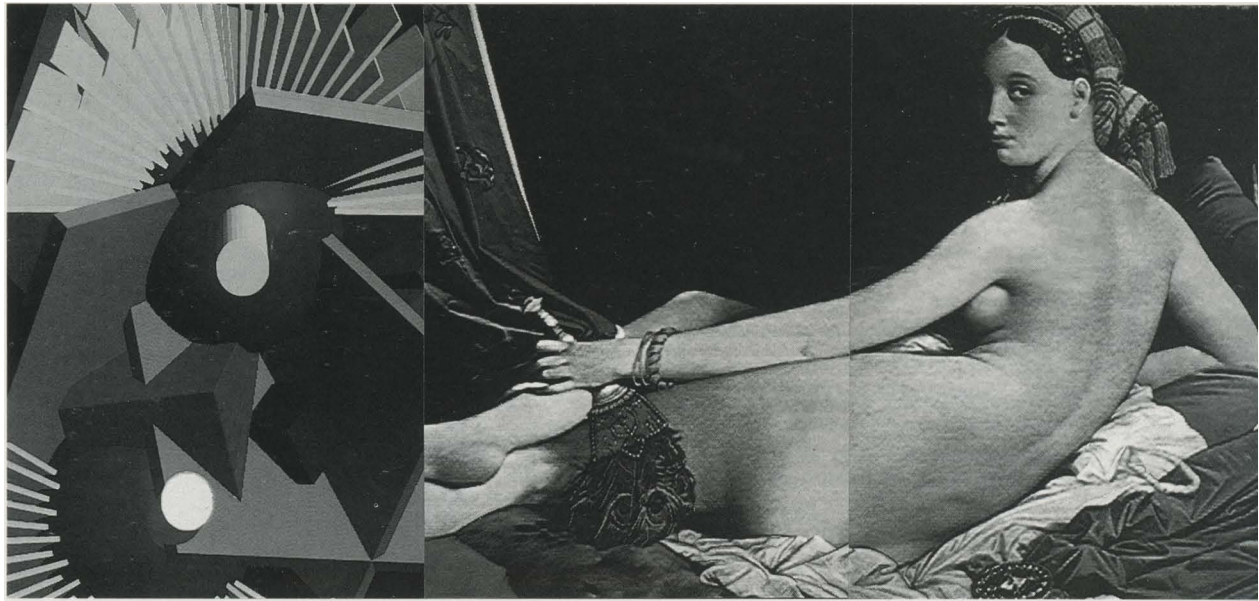
**Fig. 3. MANUAL (Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom),** *Perfect World*, **Ektacolor triptych produced using IBM PC with Targa 16 and TIPS software, 96 × 30 in, 1990.**

laborative team of Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill) appropriates images from the public domain, usually advertising. "The image appropriations are more embezzlements than simple thefts. They seize not just images but systems of belief, and subject them to doubt: traditions of art, their use by advertising, the codes of television . . . these currencies are assailed in these works" [4]. Working collaboratively for about 16 years, MANUAL finds that the computer allows for interactivity between the artists and the machine during the evolution of the idea/image (Fig. 3).

This exhibition attempts to go beyond the technological, beyond the for-

mal, and into the ideas that are instigated by these works. "Artists have contact by brain with all parts of the world in today's computer mediated culture. And to simply say that 'the art work speaks for itself' is to ignore the whole from which the work evolves" [5]. The computer's role in the generation of this artwork is varied. At the most basic level the computer functions as the perfect collage tool, ascribing a visual parity to images from disparate sources, putting them into visual context with each other. However, at another level it is capable of transcending the role of 'tool' to become a creative partner, a conceptual collaborator,

interactively lending its unique contribution to the final work.

### References

**1.** "Digital Image—Digital Photography", 26 June through 3 September 1990, J. Erik Jonsson Central Library Gallery, Dallas, TX.

**2.** E. Parada, quote from the artwork *Define/Defy The Frame*, an 'unfolding exhibition', published by the University Art Museum, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1990.

**3.** T. Druckery, "L'Amour Faux", *Digital Photography*, (1988) p. 9.

**4.** Druckery [3].

**5.** D. Cox, "The Tao of Postmodernism: Computer Art, Scientific Visualization and Other Paradoxes" *Leonardo* Supplemental Issue *Computer Art in Context* (1989) p. 11.