

The Issue of Computer/ Digital Art
By Wes & Rachelle Siegrist c. early 2001

Attn: Contemporary Art Committee
C/O: MASF (Miniature Art Society of Florida)

We both feel the issue of digital/ computer art should take the following into consideration:

Although we feel that digital art is a viable art form and may also be an accepted “media” for the creation of miniatures we would hesitate at adding it into the MASF Exhibition for the following reasons:

1. **Software Limitations** – In the traditional mediums the materials used in creation of miniatures vary only slightly in their ability to enhance an artist’s work. An artist with a better quality brush and surface will produce a somewhat “better” miniature than one with poorer materials (assuming the artists are of equal caliber). To upgrade one’s materials is easily within reach of the average artist financially. This creative “edge” is vast in the world of digital/ computer art. We feel that an unfair advantage would be given to the artist with access to the high end “paint” programs. There is no comparison between standard package software and the quality photo/ paint programs available on the market today. A huge expensive gap restricts the “poorer” artist from his/ her ability to “create” competitively which we feel would limit participation, and exploration, of this digital media to all but a select few.
2. **Accidents/ Mistakes** – In all the accepted mediums the risk of accidentally ruining one’s work exists all the way until completion. We have no way to “backup/ save” a copy of our work as we progress nor do we have the ability to “return” to a prior stage in our work after we discover we goofed on that last color choice. As we paint/ sculpt we “forget” the previous stage(s) and concentrate on the here and now. Other than years of experience at our media we have no way to compare changes in our progressing works. The “undo buffer” in most software would give a definite edge to the digital artist not available to the rest of us.
3. **Existing Image Manipulation** – In all the traditional mediums we must start at nothing to achieve something. Sure we may rework an older image but we are limited in just how much manipulation can be achieved. A digital artist could start with any image and vastly manipulate the colors, contrast and composition with only a few clicks here and there. One click and they’ve flipped the image 180 degrees! How can we determine if they are using someone else’s image as the basis for their work? (i.e. enhancing/ over painting a photograph)
4. **Lack of “Miniaturized” Skill** – In all the traditional mediums considerable practice and skill is needed to work so tiny and detailed. No such skill is required in the digital arena. Here an artist can create an image enlarged (pixel by pixel) and simply reduce the finished product. Yes, it’s a time consuming process but no real skill is involved. Even using magnifying glasses requires a steady hand and a precision instrument. If the digital artist was working actual size this would be a mute point but what Jury wants to “trust” all the digital artists?
5. **(specific response to Denver Boyer’s note in Small Talk)...** We would again point out that the primary “difference” between the realist and the digital artists is that a programmer has already “taught” the software and “enabled” it to perform a myriad of functions that anyone with the owner’s manual and a bit of practice can master vs. the other artist working with a stick tipped with hairs. Even traditional printmaking involves skill in etching the plates and pulling the run.
6. **Tradition Vs. Innovation** – We would recommend that the Committee evaluate the further direction of the world of miniaturism. We are both relatively young mini painters (30 & 35) and both of us are acquainted with computers. We both feel as if we’re new kids carrying on the traditions of those

respected miniaturists before us. We cannot help but sense an urgency in many of the older members to pass on the tradition of “Fine Art in Little” and the traditional techniques of creating such works. To maintain the old ways and teach them to the young is a daunting task compared to the choice of letting the young and innovative “teach” the new tricks and “establish” the new ways. The digital and computer production methods are easy compared to the historic painstaking techniques involved in miniature creation. We fear that allowing this new art form into the shows as a means to include the younger artists may eventually completely change the field of miniature art. We both feel that we are part of a *revival* of an existing art form and not the establishment of a new one.

For these reasons we would recommend not allowing digital art into the MASF show...or if allowed...excluding it from direct award competition at the show.

Sincerely,
Wes & Rachelle Siegrist

Follow-up Comments: The MASF based on member feedback opted not to allow digital art in their shows. Wes also took part in a similar debate in 2004 at the 3rd World Exhibition of Fine Art in Washington, DC during the WFM business meeting where he argued many of the above points. General artist consensus agreed and in the end it was revealed that the entire issue stemmed from one artist in Australia wanting to submit digital works. Photography and digital art were considered two exclusions in the accepted media for miniature art.