

## The Digital 'Weaving' of Artist Jean Dahlgren



From our U.S. correspondents James and Maria Huntley



St. Pauls, Jean Dahlgren

Working as a digital artist and professor, **Jean Dahlgren** saw Photoshop burst upon the scene in the 1990s and has honed her own vision with digital means even since. We recently caught up with her and she answered the following questions.

**In your viewpoint, what is the current reaction to digital art in the contemporary art world?**

I feel we're finally getting past this question. In the last twenty years I've seen a profound change in and acceptance of digitally manipulated art forms. Just as **Marinetti** called for in the **Futurist Manifesto in 1909**, the art world is realizing that museums cannot be 'mausoleums' of old paintings, that we must consider many more forms in order to truly capture what is contemporary art. The **Metropolitan Museum** of Art in NY just recently held two exhibitions considering contemporary photography, one featuring manipulated work before Photoshop and the second exhibit featuring manipulated photographs after photoshop. Fantastic!

**How do fellow professors in fine arts academia view digital art?**

I can't speak for all, but I do know that for years we 'digital people' were viewed suspiciously. It's ridiculous! Every movement in the history of art and design has viewed new forms warily. The interesting thing is I started out in fine arts, first as a printmaker, then as a painter, graphic designer and now digital artist. I truly hate labels and boundaries, and don't really subscribe to any in my own work. I experiment with lots of different forms and media, but presently am very happy with the results I'm getting with my newest series of works, which are manipulated digital photographs.

**How do you see digital software impacting contemporary art in the next 5-10 years?**

I don't think it will be the software necessarily but the users/makers who will continue to demand a place at the table. Hopefully the notion of division between those who use paint and those who use pixels will evaporate.

**How would you describe your own work? Who are some digital artists that we should all know about (or any flying under the radar)?**

My work explores the artistic possibilities made possible by digital devices. In the Digital Age, we sometimes take for granted the staggering number of images we see transmitted to us daily on a plethora of devices. The transitory nature and quality of these

images and our ability to discern and comprehend what we're seeing happens in milliseconds. My work represents an attempt to capture and reconsider those images. I weave bits of transmitted image pieces together in order to overtly proclaim and exploit their digital nature and the qualities inherent in transmitted light sources. Patterns repeat to imply connections and create possible narratives between the images.

As for digital artists, there's so many doing tremendous contemporary work. I'm partial to the work of **Jeffrey Shaw**, **Thomas Prinz**, **Joan Fontcuberta**, **Jason Salavon** and **Juan Juarez**.

**You are from a graphic design background. What drew you initially to the medium of digital?**



Jean Dahlgren, Urban Forest Project

I started teaching Photoshop in 1990 and was instantly hooked. In those days there were no layers and the software had many limitations, but as a watercolorist I loved the ability to create, then manipulate, the quality of transparency. I still am hooked and am truly amazed by the limitless nature of edits afforded to me by choosing to work digitally.

**Could you tell us more about recent exhibits you have participated in?**

This year I've had five exhibits of my work: a solo show at the college where I teach (**Sage College of Albany** in Albany NY), an invitational group exhibit at the **University of Utah**, the **Hudson-Mohawk Regional Exhibit** curated by **Dan Cameron**, a juried exhibit in **Yonkers, NY** entitled **Focus on Film** and then a group faculty exhibition in January, 2014 for which I've created some new work.

**Is there a difference in the mark-making with traditional means vs. digital?**

Yes, there can be but I find you can make it very difficult for people to discern in some cases. Certainly the impasto quality of paint is hard to mimic digitally but I would challenge anyone to tell the difference between one of my traditional watercolors and one I had created digitally.

For more information:

<http://www.sage.edu/academics/art-design/faculty/dahlgren/>

<http://www.jdahlgren.com/>