

Tech remodeling the art gallery scene

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What may seem at first glance to be black scribbles amidst white backgrounds are actually displays of varying black particles moving in calculated mathematical parameters shown via LCD screens and projectors.

The ambience resembling a combination of the movies "2001: A Space Odyssey" and "Pi" is the latest art show at Conner Contemporary Art in Washington, entrenching onlookers with digital art made by conceptual math and synthesized digital sound all created by David Morse.

Welcome to today's modern contemporary art gallery.

While the move towards digital may be transforming our experience of the traditional art gallery into something more hi-tech, it's providing a world of different challenges to today's curators and artists.

This scene is nothing new for Conner gallery owner, M. Leigh Conner, who opened the space seven years ago for new and innovative young artists.

"It's like Thai Chi -- visual Thai Chi," says Conner on Morse's pieces. "Digital art is just a new way of painting things."

Many of her artists are in fact those who use the computer and other technological mediums to make and showcase their artworks, a movement evolving since the 70s.

For Conner, the current state of contemporary art in the digital realm is cutting edge, not shocking, but rather amazing, beautiful, and lyrical, as she describes it.

"It's evolving as artists and people who interact with art changes, like the same way we use the Internet," she said.

And as digital technology has become a basic way of input for her artists, she's had to deal with newer challenges as a curator.

Many of her artists are using DVDs, digital cameras, scanners, and Power Macs G5s, she said.

"Digital media is reinventing the way they handle their craft," Conner mentions, and that means she too has to find the capabilities to show their works, something that has prompted her to find a new venue.

With a larger venue that will perhaps have more LCD screens, projectors, and space, she's hoping to have a sleeker venue where the cables, wires, and plugs are already incorporated within the room.

And as digital art has become a hot commodity for some in the booming art scene as Conner suggests, then the digital art movement into the personal arena is inevitable.

One of the newest and evolving technologies in this arena, accommodating digital art -- the photograph -- is the digital picture frame.

Indeed, the frame could be the catalyst for the gallery if not tech-based home lifestyle, sure to technonize the home decorating arena.

To cope with the endless number of photos and less work and funds

when it comes to developing and printing film, the digital picture frame offers consumers the 24 hour revolving slide show.

Parrot and EDGE Tech Corp. are just two companies who have all introduced digital frames to consumers.

Parrot showcased its Bluetooth-equipped, 7-inch digital frames that show up 100 images including those from mobile phones and automatically resizes images according to the frame.

Meanwhile, EDGE introduced 7-inch screen sizes for their Digital Picture Frame product, which plays unlimited pictures, video and mp3s.

"It's a real improvement from static photos," says Stacey Roger, marketing director for EDGE, who noted that she uses the product to show her children aging throughout the years.

"We've seen a huge market for it with grandparents and graduates who want show precious moments of their life."

And even Samsung has announced plans for digital frame products where photos can be uploaded to the frame straight from a mobile phone.

Meanwhile, the Digital Photo Receiver from CEIVA enables users to send photos to a frame plugged into a phone, which dials a local number each night to pick up new photos sent to the receiver with no additional charge to the line.

It does beg to question, whether or not something like the critical acclaimed Nixon Brown's traveling exhibit "The Brown Sisters," a chronological picture taken of the photography's wife and three sisters each year exploring the phenomenon of family bonding and aging, would

be any different if it were shown digitally with an LCD screen.

Could bigger LCD screens, electronic picture frames, and more artists turning to the new art form change the entire landscape of art particularly in the photography world?

The digital movement is changing the landscape, says Texas gallery owner Ben Breard.

Breard is the owner of Afterimage -- one of the oldest photography galleries in the nation located in Dallas -- which is in its 35th year of operation.

The gallery shows wide range of works, prints and digital prints.

"It's a time of transition for photographers," he said. "And it's a painful time for some; many of them have been doing the same thing for decades, or even the last three to four years."

According to Breard, several changes are taking place, especially when the move towards digital means that production of certain films and papers are no longer made.

Change includes higher expenses for darkroom chemicals and equipment, budget decisions, and some universities choosing to teach new techniques over old ones.

"It's a pretty tough time for transition," he resonates. "A lot of people say making digital prints are easy, but some say it's just as difficult as in the darkroom."

Collectors and galleries are also adapting with the new times, as Breard questions how collective is digital art, but he does acknowledge that the

gallery scene will shift too.

"We're not at that point where we'll have pictures changing in its frames like Bill Gates, but it may be coming," he said about his gallery.

And sometimes technology is frustrating for Breard, who says it's constantly changing.

"There is a new digital way of showing things that becomes antique in the next five to six years," he said.

But, Breard says where traditional prints might be a thing of the past; they will soon become "precious" and because of this the traditional print gallery will continue to run.

"There will probably be Holograms or 3-D images, everything is changing so fast," he said. "It's hard to predict what galleries are going to look like in the next 20 years."

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