

Roz Dimon – Information Alchemist

by Paul Trachtman
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Painter Roz Dimon works with a palette of electrons, a digital canvas, and the eye of an information alchemist. In a hi-tech studio on Shelter Island, NY, that looks out on a secluded wildlife refuge, she makes her paintings out of pixels rather than pigments, working in the glow of a computer screen. She uses a mouse to click on a menu of “brushes” and painterly effects, and draws with a stylus on an electronic pad to sketch in images. Sometimes she incorporates photographs and documents scanned into a digital file, or even captures instants recorded from the fleeting imagery of television news. When they are finished, her paintings are usually displayed as large translucent prints hung on a wall in a light box. “I knew my love was the pixel from the beginning,” she says. “I lived in an information world in New York, and I was responding to all that data. It’s in our hearts—you keep in touch by telephone and say I love you by fax. Now we live in a web of email and cell phones. That had to come in. It’s part of today.”

As an art student in the 1980s Dimon found herself painting pixel-like squares of color into her oil paintings, making her canvases look like a computer screen, and eventually she just traded the paint brush for a computer. She has been immersed in the digital world ever since, both as an artist and as a cutting-edge designer for corporate clients. In fact, the usual divide between fine art and commerce has sometimes seemed to blur in the course of her career. Among the earliest and most prominent collectors of her digital paintings are AT&T, with eight of them in its private collection, and Pfizer, which has three. And Dimon has, from time to time, plunged directly into the corporate world, serving as Art Director for the Wall Street Journal Online, and as a New Media Marketing Director for the consulting firm, Deloitte. At the same time, the fine artist in her produced a personal website with animated light and sound paintings that spoofed ads for popular commercial products from deodorant to soft drinks.

Few painters have been as intimately engaged with evolving digital technology, and this experience has given Dimon a kind of mastery that is taking her painting far beyond paint, into a new medium. Her most recent work has been a series of richly layered portraits in which the person portrayed emerges from the imagery of his or her life, mixing Dimon’s drawing and painting with snapshots, souvenirs and other memorabilia to create collages that give portraiture a new meaning. She calls these pieces “Dimonscapes™,” and she is using a patent-pending technology to erase traditional distinctions between painting and photography, between image and animation, between words and images, and even between the artist and the viewer. Seen on the web, such a portrait can be assembled and taken apart by the viewer, in much the same way the artist worked on it’s construction. “In the interactive pieces on the web,” Dimon says, “I’m trying to touch people. I don’t think the work loses any mystery if people can touch it and feel it and be part of the process.

“This kind of collage is an animated recording of the artist’s motion. I have a record in Photoshop of how I created this work, layer by layer. It’s stopping animation, slowing it down to a moment, but allowing me to go back and see what made that

moment. And then I can let a viewer in and they can be almost like me as I made the piece. It's as if the viewer becomes the artist."

Dimon senses that she is in uncharted territory for a painter. She was recently invited to join some artist friends in a weekly session of drawing from a nude model. "At first I said, 'Oh, I'm working with the computer. I've got all the media I need.' But then I thought it sounded like fun.

"When I first went to this group, I brought my bag of drawing tools along with the laptop and a Wacom tablet (a digital drawing pad). I figured I'd start with a pen, and then see if I could go to the Wacom. I got in there and I plugged in the laptop, and never looked at the bag again. Now I don't even take it. I have no interest."

Watching Dimon draw with her electronic stylus and tablet, the image emerging on a laptop screen, while her friends bend over pads with their pens, water colors and pencils, seems almost like an episode of Star Trek. And for Dimon, it almost feels like that. "It's such a fast medium," she says. "Everything is different, and yet everything is the same. The drawings are going places that are not places I've been before. You have so many tools in your hand—pencils, brushes, washes, patterns, all at the click of the mouse-- that you feel like you're drawing with your senses. The computer is like your brain on the table in front of you, but you're still looking at the model, you're still observing life.

As Dimon draws the figure before her, her gestures seem as easy and natural as those of the artists using brushes and pencils. "I'm choosing a hard pencil from the menu," she tells me, "but even the pencil has electronic nuance as I push up and down, and I'm still making gestures with my wrist, finger, elbow, shoulder, pressing, flicking, still using all that gestural nuance. There's a huge excitement about it. It's like lighting a fuse."

One of her digital drawings of this model was later auctioned at a NYC fundraiser for The Center Against Domestic Violence, going for the highest bid of the evening. It was purchased by Kathryn Chenault, collector and wife of the CEO of American Express. And Dimon has stirred excitement well beyond the ranks of corporate America. One enthusiast is Walter Liedtke, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and an expert on Rembrandt. After seeing her digital paintings he wrote, "I've seen the future, and it's better than previously assumed."

There's a new freedom in art, Dimon says: "I'm taking many more risks in this medium because if I do like something I can click save, and it's saved. So I'm taking that drawing and pushing it further, maybe messing it up until it gets really interesting." Dimon realizes she's using different parts of her brain compared with making a pencil drawing, and there's something less physical about it. "I'm not actually picking up a different pencil, mixing a wash, or reaching for a stick of charcoal," she says. "With the computer it's all right here. I'm hardly moving. I sometimes wonder if in hundreds of years we're all going to end up as little blobs in space, just information nodules!"

For now, though, Dimon feels an electronic energy making her more human. "Working in this medium, it's not just analyzing the image with your eye, or your mind, it feels like it's all about touch. Drawing the model, I feel I'm right with her, almost in

her body. The distance seems shorter. I feel my heart is right on her elbow. I'm putting the medium between us, but it's actually connecting us."

Although her studio in Long Island is a state-of-the-art digital environment, she still works in oils once in a while, and her last canvas was a large portrait of a yellow lead pencil. I ask Dimon if pencils seem a thing of the past. "Yes," she says. "They're not of *now*."

Roz Dimon's new drawings were exhibited in a show titled: "Wacom: Drawing/Painting in the Information Age," February 16-March 30, 2008 at the Applied Arts Gallery in East Hampton, Long Island. A solo show of her digital paintings opens in September at the Grace Institute in New York Cit, August 11-Sept. 26. Her Dimonscapes™ can be seen on the web at: www.Dimonscapes.com

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