

by lorna gentry

## Redefining the print

10 years of pioneering digital mixed media processes collected in a new book

**A**rtists Karin Schminke, Dorothy Krause and Bonny Lhotka have been foot soldiers in digital imaging since its inception. More than 20 years ago they recognized the potential of cross-pollinating computers with traditional art. As technology has evolved, they've pioneered processes and techniques that have produced new genres.

Working separately and together as Digital Atelier, they have influenced the design and function of digital tools through an ongoing dialog with manufacturers. In exchange for their input, several imaging companies—among them Encad, Epson, Wacom and Adobe—have consistently supported their work over the past decade by supplying them with state-of-the-art hardware and software.

This arrangement afforded them a fertile, nearly boundless environment in which to create their art, a nonpareil aggregate knowledge of digital image making, and a perspective unique to both those who both lead the way and those who man the trenches.

Now it's payback time.

Earlier this year, Schminke, Krause and Lhotka published a book, "Digital Art Studio" (Watson-Guptill Publications), a how-to on techniques they've perfected over the years for combining inkjet printing with traditional art materials. Like its authors the book is trailblazing. No other book on the market offers this kind of fluid, guided tour of techniques for taking art further. The dimension these processes add to digital printing takes creativity to a new level. Think of the art as a diving board and the print as a sparkling pool of possibilities.

Prominent national experts Mary Ann Kearns, an independent curator; Joann Moser, senior curator of graphic arts at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.,



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where Digital Atelier has conducted a workshop; and George Fifield, founder and director of Boston Cyberarts, where the artists frequently exhibit, are so impressed with the authors that they wrote the book's foreword, preface and afterword, respectively. Kearns credits Digital Atelier with "redefining the

print," while Fifield calls "Digital Art Studio" a "how-to manual for understanding the future."

Readers are equally enthusiastic. In fact, a string of five-star reviews on Amazon.com tend to gush. "This book will become the bible of digital printing," one reviewer predicts. Says another,



"For those who enjoy pushing the envelope, this book is indispensable."

It just so happens that the publication of "Digital Art Studio" coincides with Digital Atelier's tenth anniversary and the poetry of that synchronicity isn't lost on them. The book, says Lhotka, is "like the kids going off to college. It's a milestone. This book documents what we've pioneered and summarizes our 10 years. I think that's important."

### Fear of technology

When the women started combining digital with traditional art, there wasn't even a name for what they and others were doing. Often they encountered academic and artistic resistance. "Before we got together," says Lhotka, "I tried to get the University of Colorado to bring in an inkjet printer so I could do a workshop for artists. The response from the educators was, 'No, we don't want to entice the students.' They felt it would make them want something they couldn't have. There was a lot of fear of technology and fine art in the early 1990s."

They found each other through a three-day workshop called "Beyond the Digital Print," which Krause arranged at the Massachusetts College of Art. Artists from all over the country attended, including Lhotka and Schminke. Up to that point, says Krause, "it had been a solo journey for me. I did the workshop because I wanted to find people to talk to. I was thirsty for anyone who was doing something similar to what I was doing."

By the end of the workshop, they had bonded and pledged to keep in touch (that became a lot easier with the advent of e-mail, which occurred soon after). Within a month, Lhotka had clinched a show of their work with a prestigious art gallery in Denver. Their show drew the largest attendance in the gallery's history up to that point. "People were clearly ready to explore new options," says Schminke.

"But at the same time," says Lhotka, "there were people there with such vehement anger. One man came into the crowded gallery and yelled at the top of his lungs that this was not art."

In the beginning, the learning curve



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was steep and the technology clunky. "In 1994, Dot and I did the first fine art printmaking on an Alphameric Vertical Phase Change printer," says Lhotka. "We first went to Tullis Studios, a paper-making studio in Santa Barbara, Calif., where we created these dimensional, heavy, thick pieces of paper. Then we hauled them down to Simi Valley to Alphameric's flatbed printer. Hot wax ink was sprayed onto the surface. Since that experience I have been waiting for something equivalent to become mainstream. Now the UV flatbed is probably the hottest topic in the industry.

"Flatbed printing is everything I've been waiting for," Lhotka continues. "I can print on corrugated cardboard, textured surfaces, handmade papers and things of varying densities. You can print them individually and use them to build a collage. That means a piece of artwork doesn't have to be printed in one fell swoop. We're no longer limited by substrates and size is virtually unlimited. The printers we have in our studios are up to 60 inches wide. We can make museum-size work."

Of course, most artists don't have the kind of printers Digital Atelier works with, as they can cost more than a half million dollars. Which is why the women feel it's important to share their research.

"We had a 10-year head start," Krause

offers. And besides, educating is in their blood, says Schminke, adding, "We've established a role for ourselves as a bridge between artists and manufacturers and distributors of technology."

Every couple of years, Digital Atelier does a workshop, but logistically it's complex. First, they live in three different time zones (Schminke lives in Kenmore, Wash., Krause in Marshfield Hills, Mass., and Lhotka lives in Boulder, Colo.). Second, they don't exactly travel light. To do a workshop they need digital tools—computers, software, flatbed and inkjet printers, cameras, scanners, Wacom tablets—and art tools—an array of materials on which to print (from paper, canvas and fabric to wood and metal), brushes, paint, ink, pre- and post-coating materials, and glues—to name just a few necessities.

"That's one of the reasons we thought the book would be the best way to do our education," says Schminke.

#### Trade secrets

In 10 chapters, "Digital Art Studio" covers basic to advanced processes, with tutorials throughout. Among the techniques covered are under- and overprinting, wet transfers, layered printing, dry emulsion transfers, gelatin transfers, and fabric printing. The authors also discuss their

pioneering lenticular work, but the subject is too vast for a chapter and may be a book in itself one day.

All the photographs and art illustrating the book are theirs. It's written in a straightforward, engaging narrative peppered with tips on technology, techniques and materials, the kind of nuggets of wisdom that only experience can pan.

"We wanted the book to be inspirational, not formulaic," says Krause. "Even though it's step by step, there's a lot of room for interpretation. Like cooks in the kitchen; you start with the recipe and create from there. I think that's what artists will do."

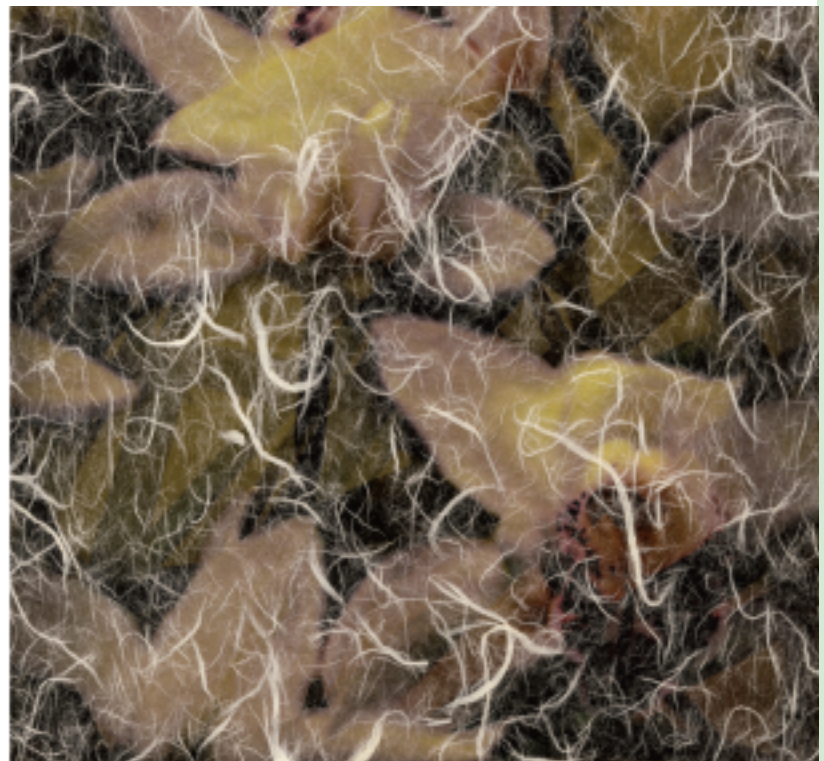
"I was surprised by an e-mail I got from someone who said, 'Wow! Talk about giving away trade secrets,'" says Lhotka. "But I never thought about it that way. My trade secret is my unique artwork, not the processes I use to create it."

"Many artists are inspired by new techniques," says Schminke. "They get excited when they think about how it relates to their work. It can spin you into a new realm of thinking. In that way I think the book will be inspirational." □

*To learn more about Digital Atelier, visit [www.digitalatelier.com](http://www.digitalatelier.com).*

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## Demonstration: Digital Print Over Watercolor

**W**atercolor makes a beautiful base for a digital image, and it's not subject to the color-gamut limitations inherent in digital printing. For example, you can use metallic watercolors in conjunction with a digital overprint to create luminous imagery not otherwise achievable by digital printing alone. Commercially precoated inkjet watercolor papers do not work well with conventional watercolor paints, as their surface is not as absorbent as traditional watercolor paper. So for this process, we'll use traditional watercolor paper. Plan your color values ahead to apply your lightest values first, as in creating a traditional watercolor. The digital photo, to be printed last, should add the darkest elements. Or, you may plan to fit the photo into

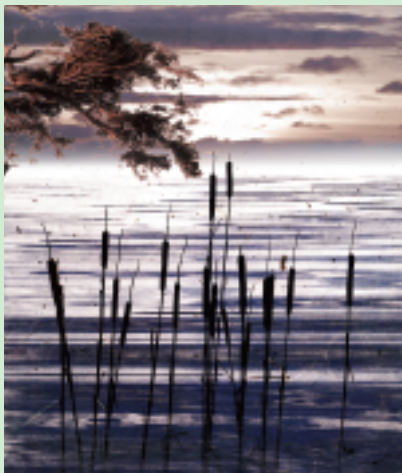
an area of your painting left free of darker elements. (For future explorations of this process, note that watercolor, acrylics,

graphite, or any other medium compatible with watercolor paper may be substituted in the base layer.)

### Materials:

- protective gloves
- newspaper or plastic sheet to protect work surface
- digital photograph
- watercolor paints
- watercolor brushes
- hot-pressed watercolor paper (Arches Aquarelle or similar); 90 lb for desktop printers; up to 140 lb for large-format printers
- inkAID semi-gloss or rabbitskin glue precoat
- sponge brush
- masking tape

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Step 1: Choose the digital image to be used as the overprint.



Step 2: Create a watercolor image or simply a wash on the weight of watercolor paper suited to your printer. Reference your digital image as you paint, considering its colors, values, and shapes. When your painting is dry, brush on precoat using a sponge brush; when dry enough not to run, hang the paper to dry. If it isn't flat after drying, "Digital Art Studio" gives instructions for flattening.



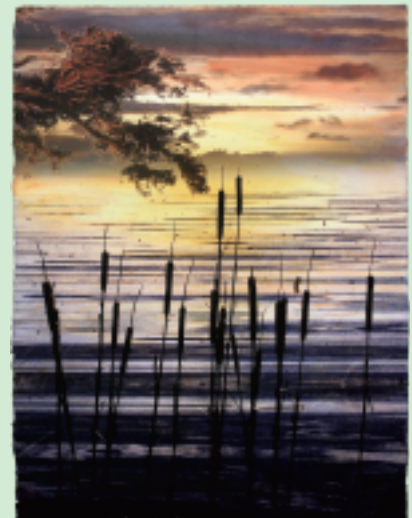
Step 3: If you choose to print over the deckle edges of watercolor paper, "Digital Art Studio" gives instructions for taping the edges.



Step 4: Print your digital overprint on the surface of your watercolor.



Step 5: Since the ink on the tape's edges will still be wet and may smear onto your print, remove tape carefully to reveal the deckle edge on your finished art.



The finished watercolor overprint.

Taken from "Digital Art Studio: Techniques for Combining Inkjet Printing with Traditional Art Materials," by Karin Schminke, Dorothy Simpson Krause, and Bonny Pierce Lhotka. ©2004 LSK LLC. Published by Watson-Guption Publications. Reprinted with permission from the publisher.