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**Artistic intersections**

Where digital technology meets fine art

By Lisa Di Pietro

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A video/animation loop titled "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times: binary loop: in sugar free kool-aid" by Jessica Westbrook.

The streets of downtown Flagstaff thrive with traditional art forms: from water color paintings to jewelry, these beautiful artistic contributions enhance the lives of gallery visitors and passers-by on a daily basis. But in a world where technology increases faster than handmade earrings or landscape paintings are created, many artists across the country are beginning to experiment with what is quite possibly the new frontier of artistic expression. Digitally created masterpieces, including both audio and visual art, are starting to edge their way into the Flagstaff art community in hopes of exposing residents to a new, non-traditional form of artistic expression.

The Northern Arizona University School of Communication is currently hosting the Arizona Digital Media Investigations exhibit, a show intended to stimulate conversation in the small, but growing, digital artists community.

"This artistic field is not very defined as of yet," says William Culpepper, curator of the exhibit and professor of communication at NAU. "There are so many things you can do with technology. This exhibit is a source for people to learn about a very diverse field."

The exhibit includes artists from all over the country, namely higher education and university faculty.

Faculty members' areas of expertise range from graphic design and visual and performing art to studio art. The exhibit combines all these digital mediums in order to enhance traditional mediums and explore new areas of creation.

"It's an uncharted territory, which boasts so many tools and resources for artists to access," Culpepper says. "With so many resources, artists actually have to conceptualize further to integrate technology and know exactly what type of project they intend on producing."

Artist Christine Dehne, assistant professor of studio art and the director of the communication studies program at Manhattanville College in Purchase, N.Y., contributed an

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audio/visual piece to the exhibit. Dehne's piece includes clips of conversation taken from strangers roaming the busy streets of New York City, complemented by unique visual shots of the city.

"This project touches on many timely ideas about cell phone use in public places, such as the idea of a 'big brother' that may be watching/recording us, and other privacy concerns," Dehne says.

Dehne's project focuses on bits of conversation from people unaware of their immediate surroundings and the present; people who "would rather be speaking with someone who isn't there than experiencing what is happening right in front of them," as Dehne writes in her project proposal synopsis. Dehne manipulates these separate sentences and phrases to create entirely new conversations taking place between people who probably never gave each other a second glance while hurrying off to their respective destinations.

"I have been recording cell phone conversations in public places in NYC," Dehne says. "I record the half of the conversation that I can hear, edit it down to what is most audible or interesting, and save these snippets to use. I then edit these clips of conversations from around the city together in an attempt to build an ongoing conversation, bringing elements heard from around the city together into one."

Visually, Dehne utilizes artistic aspects such as composition and focus to alter the mood of the scene in accordance to specific conversations. Dehne also creates the illusion of a crowded, claustrophobic street in which the viewer becomes absorbed into the piece as an anonymous member of the crowd. If received well, she has plans to expand the project by turning it into a series of audio and audio/visual pieces.

As far as the rest of the projects featured in the exhibit, Dehne commends them and hopes the exhibit will have a positive impact on the public.

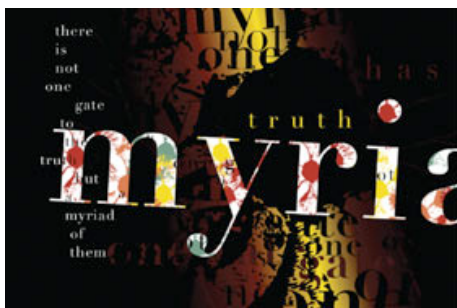
"I'm guessing that we'll see a large variety of approaches to digital media," Dehne says. "Some may feel a bit more traditional and comfortable for a 'fine art' audience and some may challenge what these phrases (fine art and audience) mean. And it is so wonderful that this dialogue between art and artists is happening on a college campus, where the students can witness and participate in it."

Other artists featured in the show include Harrison Higgs (Washington State University), Soo Hostetler (University of Northern Iowa), Joel Jonientz (University of North Dakota), Samantha Krukowski (University of Texas at Austin), Joseph Labate (University of Arizona), Lauren McCrea (Yavapai College), Mike Richison (Monmouth University in New Jersey), and Jessica Westbrook (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga). Each artist is a faculty member experienced in digital technology and artwork.

"I wanted the community of Flagstaff and NAU to experience digital media in a gallery setting," Culpepper says. "The goal is to create an area where artists and the community can discuss and try to understand all the facets of digital media, with everyone given an equal chance to participate and contribute."

The Arizona Digital Media Investigations exhibit is on display until Oct. 8 at NAU's School of Communication, Knowles Drive, building 16. For more information, call 523-2232 or visit [www.arizonadigitalmedia.org](http://www.arizonadigitalmedia.org).

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A typographic animation loop by Soo Hostetler, titled "Floral Doors" is influenced by the truth of life through Buddhism.

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