

All Kinds of Time

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Tony De Varco at Marta Hewett Gallery, Sept. 21 – Nov. 24

by Fran Watson

Those attuned to area art events cannot help but notice the current photo-mania, which is probably one of the best combined publicity efforts for the arts in recent local history. Most of the galleries and museums in the Cincinnati area have combined to present a deluge of photography-as-fine-art exhibits in all of its varied and seemingly endless forms. Digital production has enabled the unheralded expansion of the medium, offering exotic and mind-boggling explorations, not always via exotic equipment, either.

Listening to native Cincinnati, Tony De Varco give a presentation on his digital prints currently displayed by Marta Hewett Gallery, was like experiencing a tour de force of creativity. The most interesting bottom line of which is the path he followed from one art form to another, and assuredly, to many more in the future. His photomontages presently exhibited at that gallery are just a small part of who he is and the art which he continuously pours forth in many guises.

De Varco's journey begins with his sculpture in a building a block away from Isamu Noguchi's studio and museum. He met abstract expressionist sculptor Mark di Suvero there and became di Suvero's assistant while working on his own art, and the design for the future park. There was a brief foray into performance art involving his sculpture, a stint at the College Conservatory of Music at U.C., during which he co-wrote and produced with Michael Burnham a theater piece entitled "Buckminster Fuller: In and Out of the Universe". Oh, and he also did the set designs for its production at the Ensemble Theater.

Moving right along, (and skipping a few other amazing accomplishments) he then became Executive Director of the Buckminster Fuller Institute (BFI), where he met and married his wife, Bonnie, who now works with him as his talents and abilities race on in both practical business fields and art. She has provided the text for the book of digital prints offered in conjunction with this exhibit, "Way of Time – Spinning the Threads of Kairos & Chronos". Kairos time would refer the time's perception in creativity, while Chronos is the literal measurement by which our lives are regimented, both of which apply equally to the prints seen here.

The current exhibition at Marta Hewett consists of photomontages. De Varco collages bits and pieces of life, environment, textures, and unrelated images into single rectangles designed to offer a feast of visible surfaces. Leaning vaguely toward surrealism, they charm the senses into believing the impossible. All of these images were produced through use of the common, completely non-exotic computer program, Power Point. De Varco decided to make his art with the means he had available and Power Point was it.

Japanese prints contributed to the Impressionist revolution with an influence still reverberating in today's art. De Varco has focused on a particular genre as his inspiration. It was the gold leaf backgrounds in the Momoyama period (1573 – 1615) which inspired his current work, and his method was to reproduce that shimmering background through computer capabilities.

Look for geodesic forms (referencing his time with BFI) popping up in unexpected places in the fantasy landscapes "Pas de Deux" and "Way of Time", metallic oceans filled with stars, impossible, intriguing dimensions, and crisply colored patterns confound perceptions throughout this display. Open your mind and accept the playful, beautiful concepts offered here. They would stun the senses no matter what the method of their formation.

Perhaps the most interesting background information about De Varco concerns three rocks traveling through Europe as part of his travel accessories. He carries around his own Zen garden; ordinary, unaltered rocks, small enough to hold in his hands and easily carry around to museums and points of interest. In the Louvre, as well as at other famous and plebeian sites, the rocks were with him to unleash a little non-conforming creativity in arrangements quickly photographed and quickly whisked out of sight again; a sculptor's plein air exercise along with a quirky moment of humor. Apparently, De Varco will sculpt anywhere, any time, anyhow.

The rise of computer art to take its legitimate place among the art media is due in large part to the invention of its archival condition in recent years. There are archival inks used on archival papers and printed in more and larger sizes than the office printer will produce. Computer limits are being constantly expanded and accepted even in sacrosanct great museums. Of special interest is the computer generated solo show by Wade Guyton currently being featured at the Whitney Museum in New York, and reaping big reviews in the process. An event I, for one, never expected.

As in all art, there is no easy way. Delving into the artist's mind and providing the tools to bring original vision into being will always be the same hard work that cave painting was to our ancestors. Photography has made a mark in art, and it cannot be ignored. Tony De Varco's appearance at Marta Hewett strongly underscores and highlights its progress.

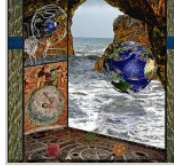




DeVarco "Unveiling
Hypatia"



DeVarco "Sythoesis"



DeVarco "Stanza 2
Philosphia"



DeVarco "Song of Saros"



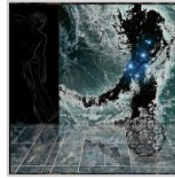
DeVarco "Somnia
Sybilline"



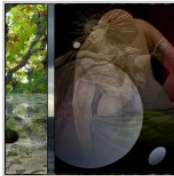
DeVarco "Precession"



DeVarco "Pause"



DeVarco "Pas de Deux"



DeVarco "Obliquity"



DeVarco "Megumi"

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