

FROM WASHES TO WINDOWS: HOW A TRADITIONAL WATERCOLORIST WORKS ON A COMPUTER

BY TERRY SULLIVAN

Hartsdale, New York, artist Denise Devenuti has discovered that the computer can virtually put every drawing and painting tool at her fingertips.



Italy, 1995, digital print, 9 x 6.
All artwork this article collection
the artist.



Imagine you're working on a meticulously detailed watercolor. In fact, you've labored for days perfecting the layers of color and subtle gradations. You're about to put on the finishing touches with a bright dash of cadmium red when the telephone rings. Your hand shakes and, much to your horror, your brush lets loose a blob of staining pigment in the middle of a delicate passage. Paper ruined. End of story.

For graphic and fine artist Denise Devenuti, however, this nightmare could never happen. All her paints, brushes, and other fine-art tools are stored in her computer, which, if she does make a mistake, has the ability to correct all her errors.

Traditionally trained in fine art, Devenuti believes the computer offers the versatility and flexibility she did not find with other mediums. "For me, the computer is just another tool," she says. "In a way, calling it 'computer art' is odd because you wouldn't call other types of art 'watercolor art' or 'acrylic art.' It's really how you use the tools you have that's important. For instance, just because you have the most expensive watercolor paints and brushes doesn't mean you're going to create a masterpiece. It's the same with creating art on a computer."

The two programs Devenuti most often uses to create artwork on her Macintosh Quadra 660 AV are Adobe Photoshop 3.0 and Fractal Design Painter 3.1. The latter program offers a wide variety of features, enabling the user to create any type of brushmark, choose a specific type of paper texture, and select from an assortment of tools: pencils, erasers, brushes, water (this tool smudges or "dilutes" strokes made by other tools), chalk, pens, crayons, airbrush, and many other effects. There's even a tool called "artist" that creates marks similar to Van Gogh's or Seurat's brushstrokes.

For organized artists, this setup might feel like having an art warehouse and studio sitting right on their desk—without the mess. "I love working on the computer because I'm really sort of a neatness freak," Devenuti says, laughing. "To experiment with different types of mediums in my apartment would probably mean ruining my walls and my clothes. Also, it becomes very expensive to buy all the different types of paints and tools just to experiment. Fractal Design Painter has everything I