

Macworld reader poll

What's best about the new iMac

- Everything's in the display
- G5 processor
- It looks cool
- Price
- SuperDrive
- Screen sizes
- Graphics card
- iLife apps
- Preferred the last iMac
- Preferred the first iMac

view results

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Macworld Features

San Francisco-based artist John Kraft talks about combining the easel with the PowerBook and Apple's Featured Artist Programme.

By Nick Spence

I have a postcard at home, a painting of San Francisco's Lombard Street, whose houses look good enough to eat. The artist John Kraft is the man responsible for this lush panorama.

While cool and calming enough to hang on any wall John's work also has an emotional depth. His landscapes, interiors and still-life paintings bring the out the best in people. Strong on colour and line, rich with paint and texture, testimonials on his Web site praise the uplifting nature of his work. One friend rightly commented that John's paintings had the rare ability to provoke evocative memories of places they had never visited.



John's artwork has gained a respectable following thanks in part to the Internet, his Web site and the fact his work was highlighted recently by Apple's Featured Artist Program, which provides an in-depth look at a body of work by an established or emerging artist. The scheme allows users to send and receive the popular iCards, with a varied choice of decorative images, personalized across the Internet. Although traditional in his working methods the Mac plays a pivotal role in the creative process.

Artistically, what are your influences?

My main influences include Keith Haring and Andy Warhol, but each of these artists has influenced me in different ways. Artistically, I'm influenced by Haring's use of vibrant colours and strong line. Warhol's influence has more to do with his development of and marketing of his work rather than with the actual art he and his team created.

Tell us about your set-up.

My studio is located in my loft in San Francisco's South of Market area. The studio is a combination of traditional painting space with easel, acrylics and pastels and my digital production space, which consists primarily of my PowerBook.

At what point does the Mac get involved in the creative process?

First I conceive of a new painting using my PowerBook and Adobe Illustrator. This allows me to experiment with various compositional elements, line width and colour. Then from this digital 'sketch' I create an actual full size painting using traditional methods, with brushes, acrylics and pastels - on canvas or wood panel. My original paintings are typically 30-x-40 inches.

Once the painting is completed, I collaborate with an art partner to create a high-resolution digital asset that can be used to produce Giclées. The painting is photographed with a FujiFilm FinePix S2 Pro digital SLR camera at high resolution mode, creating images that are 4,256-x-2,848 pixels. The Giclées can be quite large, so the painting is photographed in quadrants, ranging between four and eight photos. Surprisingly, the best lighting method for my art is in direct sunlight, with a sharp angle relative to the sun. The paint texture of my work is enhanced by this method, in conjunction with a flash. It gives the Giclées a very textural appearance. The resulting quadrant images are stitched together in Photoshop to create a single high-resolution master image.

The master digital asset is created for optimal output on an Epson Stylus Pro 9600 Giclée printer. The Epson 9600 works best when the source image is 300 dpi. At that resolution, the FinePix S2 Pro camera produces images that are 14-x-9.5 inches - impressive, but not high resolution enough for up to 30-x-40 output.

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That's where the stitching helps. Multiple detail shots, when stitched together, create a very high-resolution digital asset. They average at around 9,000-x-12,000 pixels – 108 megapixels – that is ample resolution for printing large Giclees.

I often travel with my fiancée, who is a singer with the San Francisco Opera. One of the great things about the Mac in conjunction with broadband access – which is practically everywhere now – is that I can run my art business from most places in Europe and America. My art partner and I frequently establish a file-sharing network to exchange images and work orders. He handles my digitization, printing and shipping requirements. I handle client management, marketing, sales, and, of course, creating more art!

My Mac connected to the Internet does much more than allow me to create a lot of art by myself. It also allows me the freedom to work where I want by keeping my operation seamlessly integrated with my partner in California. That's very important, because it makes my business possible, which allows me to be creative. Without the Mac, I couldn't as easily conceive and plan my paintings. Without the Mac and the Internet, I couldn't operate a clicks-and-mortar gallery that relies on a creative partner who assists with the preparation and delivery of physical merchandise.

The real power of the Mac is that it allows me more creative options as an artist and as an entrepreneur.

Can you tell something about the Giclée print production?

The French word "giclée" is a noun that means a spray or a spurt of liquid. The word may have been derived from the French verb "gicler" meaning "to squirt". Images are generated from high-resolution digital photos of my original paintings and then printed with archival quality inks onto fine art paper. The Giclée printing process provides better colour accuracy than other means of reproduction. As for quality, the Giclée print now rivals many traditional silver-halide and gelatin printing processes and is commonly found in museums, art galleries, and photographic galleries.

Do Macs lead to creativity?

Creative people are naturally drawn to the Mac because the Mac not only empowers the artist, it gets out of the way. One is not focused on or impeded by the technology, and in many ways the Mac is a creative partner. I should add that as an artist, I use my Mac for everything from the creation of my Web site to the use of Final Cut Pro in development of my TV commercials to the development of all my marketing and promotional materials. Everything I do as an artist is made better and easier because of my Mac.

There appears to be some conflict between traditional hands on artists and those working digitally. Where do you stand as a digital artist producing fairly traditional looking artwork?

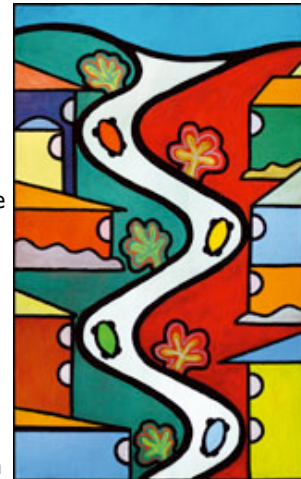
Well going back to the process I outlined above, I create traditional paintings as artists have done since the beginning of time. The difference is that I'm using my Mac to enhance the creative process and to amplify my ability to share the finished work as digitally produced Giclée prints.

How has the Internet helped you promote and sell your work?

The Internet has been instrumental to my success as an artist. I make use of both Google's Adwords Select Program and Overture to guarantee top search engine positioning. I use Topica's email Marketing Automation products to develop and market to my database of current and potential clients, and I use PR Newswire's online service to create and distribute press releases related to my work. I also have an ecommerce enabled Web site, johnkraft.com, which allows me to sell my work directly to clients worldwide without the intermediate gallery relationships relied upon by many artists.

What do you think Apple saw in your work to lead to your prestigious Apple's Featured Artist Programme nomination?

I think the main thing they saw was colourful, vibrant and uplifting work that translated well and that would be well received by the Apple community and beyond.



What are your plans?

My goal is to continue to refine and enhance my creative process, which will undoubtedly include continued use of my Mac.

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