Abstract
DIY for the digital artist must be thoughtfully considered. The unknown printing-tech at an online store is vastly different than the artist's substrate preparation and pulling a print. Art utilizing "newness" (and its ease) alone is no substitute for art historical knowledge, reflection and time-honored, maker-engaged technique. I specifically explore that of book and needlework artists in my work. Much of the value in the computer art object rests in its connection to art's roots.

Keywords
Digital Art, Art History, DIY, Printmaking, Inkjet Paper, Aura, Lace, Textiles

Introduction
DIY is an activity in which the creative consumer either produces, transforms and/or reconstructs material objects, typically seeking customization, product "specialization" or uniqueness. Applying Walter Benjamin's renowned argument, digital art has historically had barriers to overcome in terms of its aura or uniqueness. [1] The DIY culture, although it has roots in The Arts and Crafts Movement of the last turn-of-the-century, might end up devaluing high quality individual works or limited editions, if it disrupts the hands-on innovations electronic artists have recently achieved.

Computer-using art-makers are lately enamored by mass produced inkjet papers and substrates. These are their DIY raw materials for making art, either with their own printer, or via the commercially printed product (of their picture)... DIY for the would-be artist. Not only does this begin to dismantle a centuries-old evolving standard of professional art and design, it renders the process almost effortless. There is no need to understand art, its history, handheld tools and materials. Just push a button. But by giving new digital life to our visual heritage we achieve far more than by networking a creative user to a commercial printer. An aim of my work is to interrupt our culture's "NEW-is-what-matters" attitude(s), and to instead evolve and liven our consideration of the objects (art and artisanal products) of the past. The pieces referenced in my work create new connections and meanings when seen with a contemporary perspective. These should reflect a conflation of tradition with modernity; such material forms generated by employing new technologies – with a nod towards old technology – can extend our critical reflection.

It is so timely to look at the personalized ornamentation of the old world, as we now arrive at a new chapter in the bespoke and DIY fashion and product design timeline – custom made specialty items "printed-on-demand" and short-run (personal yardage) fabric, canvas and vinyl digital printing of all kinds. Anyone with a computer and the budget can design their personal art and accessories – even their raw goods (for furnishings and garments), either choosing from the huge libraries of imagery, or uploading their own, or both. The emphasis on de-industrializing so lauded by the Arts and Crafts Movement gets lost in the translation. The old, time-honored, human-touched (not machine-driven) way of making things that mattered most to William Morris and his followers is missing in this DIY.

The Line and the Ancestor
Line to define form and surface, the knotted, twisted and looped lines depicted by threads, wires and cord drives my historical research. While often viewing works in thread by Ghada Amer and Elaine Reichek, I found the need to focus on line used by textile artisans to enrich and personalize surfaces going way back. Months of study of ecclesiastical and ritual textiles have helped inform my work. My densely-layered prints [see below] are highly derivative of...
old world textiles. My primary focus is now historic lace, reconstructing this "mined" imagery through digital drawing, then experimenting with new interpretations of its relief surface.

Out of a desire to honor the old world needlework artists, I coax the image off of the monitor onto either sheer/filmy or soft/velvety intuitively-chosen substrates. Each image is the subject of experimentation, and necessary failure, in its digital printmaking phase. I print on translucent grounds, all sorts of plasticized surfaces, the wrong side of films and transparencies, and create my own polymer skins. Also hoping to print on actual skins like suede and vellum, my future "digital lace" may contrast or even defy its very support material. This process of tactile hyper-awareness and selection sets up very engaging technical challenges.

Although I find great value in collaborating with living colleagues, it is as if there were an ancestor inside of my head, beckoning me back. I often see this phenomenon, as well, in many of my most serious, and successful, students. We are told by New York Times art critic Roberta Smith that “especially in the digital era, culture exists in a state of simultaneity, where all of history is equally available for use.” [2] In today’s participatory culture of making, we posit that the greatest aesthetic growth is attained by knitting people/culture(s) together over time.

**“Hands-On” Printmaking**

I work with college students, teachers and retirees. Both young and old creative types are mainly interested in mass-produced inkjet substrates, and in easily making a digital print or ordering one commercially – “one touch printing.” This is their DIY; yet this quite paradoxically frustrates the very goals of the heritage of the digital art-maker that I know. The would-be artist is simply backing out of the connection to the final and tangible work.

Editor-in-Chief of *Art in Print*, Susan Tallman, writes that “living in a world awash with reproductions, artists of all media have turned their attention to questions of replication and repetition... and the provocative gap between the material thing in front of you and the distant event to which it points,” also inferring that these reproductions are overly-glossy standardized/mechanized inkjet prints. [3] Digital printmakers must define what materiality and the print mean in the 21st century. And if we are defining it, then why have a chemist, coder, or the print technician randomly found online, have the ultimate say?

Do artists/printmakers have an interest in this cleaned-up, homogenized, computer-printing aesthetic? An artist, I find it to be much more interesting when I have to discover the right surface or make my own substrate, even if it is full of imperfections. The creator is much more engaged in technique and new printing technology when one is challenged and tested by the materials. But this new sort of "automatic art" disrupts that sense of quality art, that definition of an artwork achieving merit because of the struggle, passion or "inner work" it required. Now anyone can DIY a stretched (wrapped) canvas landscape. "Amateur or evolving painters can use popular software or plug-ins for turning their digital photographs into paintings automatically, with a single mouse click,” state William Jack and Jesse Leak in *Artblend.* [4] And when the tangible art object (say, the print) is also a one-click creation, what does this do to our notion of authentic computer arts?

**Case(s) in Point: In My Studio**

In a book-art series, created in my studio, we used paper embossed with looped, and crocheted strings, then printed with a pale lace design, and finally superimposed with a curvaceous statement about the murderous suffering of Jewish garment workers in WWII. Another suite features book-boards covered with collages of historic scenes blended with time-appropos fabrics (virtual or actual swatches). They are layered among translucent prints depicting a metamorphosis of sketchy lines into lace-tattooed vehicles, [see below] which are used here to symbolize escape.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Figure 2: Examples of using lace marks; Pushing the Envelope: Flap (l) collection of Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, Vilnius Lithuania; Hiding (r); Copyright the author/artist*

Other recent examples include tatted structures printed on metallic (InkAid-treated) substrates, lace-drawn images on pearlized vintage vinyl, and inkjet transfer prints of my "digital yarn" that disrupts an existing printed toile pattern. [see above right] In kindred work, artist Claudia Tait imprints hair-paintings. She writes “the original designs were created using 3D software (Maya) "hair" and "fiber" tools. The Maya files were converted using JacqCAD software and woven on a Jacquard loom,” [5] using natural and beautiful damask fibers. It is especially intriguing to print fibers on actual, string-like fiber substrates and the imagery of metalwork onto metal; this inspires the next round of work in my studio.

**Legacy of 20th and 21st Century Digital Art**

Disrupting this DIY trajectory, with its inherent issues – hence reframing the entire digital art and printmaking process – may indeed become imperative. Material/image/concept/craft (or *artistry*) all should come together aesthetically – so that the "product" is a barometer of culture, and does not devolve into the cliche print-on-demand stuff glutting the world. A well-studied and well-executed small-edition, or unique print, perhaps on handmade paper, has far more soul; the physicality and
aura of the well made digital art object can be our legacy – as opposed to commercial lowbrow/tacky, yet costly-looking, printouts. And electronically reconstructing/re-thinking past art can be most effective. The computer art object rooted in our analog heritage, in an understanding of both its tools and products, yet sensitively and thoughtfully developed through digital process(es), will further the critical rhetoric on 21st century digital artforms. It is a challenge to clear away the cobwebs of meaningless mechanization and reproduction, yet keep the good parts of new technology. Through applying such lessons of the Arts and Crafts Movement, aesthetically commendable computer art-making can be in our future.

Figure 3. Example of metallic and handmade substrates; shadow/light and lace patterns digitally manipulated; Nordic Kachina (detail - 4 pages of the artist's book); copyright the author/artist

References

Bibliography

Author Biography
Leslie Nobler is a digital artist creating prints, artist’s books, and surface design. She exhibits and publishes internationally and has work in the collections of Sheffield International Artists Books at Bank Street Arts, England; University of Wisconsin at Green Bay; Academy of Jewish Museum Berlin – Library, among others. Shown in SIGGRAPH & Digital Salon (NY). Art Professor at William Paterson University (NJ) and curator/lecturer for cultural centers and museums. Recent work reinvents artifacts using alternative digital printing, earning awards from the Surface Design Association and Puffin Foundation. BFA, University of Michigan, School of Art; MA, New York Institute of Technology; MFA, City University of New York - Hunter College