



PHOTOCRYLICS® part 1

OLD DOG LEARNS LIFE-CHANGING LESSON FROM WINSTON CHURCHILL

By Kat Silvergate

“I CAN’T PAINT,” proclaimed the skeptical photographer as she longingly eyed the digital print turned fine art painting.

“Me neither,” I responded playfully.

The woman’s lack of reaction to my proclamation made me realize instantly that she had no clue we were looking at *my* original work. In the pregnant pause that followed, I watched as she scanned the “painting” with her eyes, touched the texture with her fingers and performed a virtual autopsy with her mind, trying to get her brain around the process that had produced the art before her.

No longer the creator of this work, but a co-spectator brutally deconstructing it, I found myself in a world that artists and photographers rarely visit—the world Stephen King describes in his autobiographical book about discovering his own art form, the art of writing. As King describes it, art has two lives. The first is the life that the art gives the artist. A writer must write. A painter must

paint. A photographer must shoot and edit and print. That life has an end in and of itself. It gives life to the artist.

But once that life is over, the artist gives the work a second life by giving it to the world. In the hands of the world or a client or spectator, the rules change drastically. What the artist intended the work to be, how the artist intended it to be received, and what the artist hoped to convey are no longer relevant. In this world, this second world, the art belongs to the spectator and becomes what he or she thinks it is and what she or he sees, feels, likes or dislikes. For one short moment, I was an accidental tourist in this strange new world.

Almost as if talking to herself, but loud enough so that I could weigh in with my opinion, she questioned, “What is it? It’s not really a photograph because you can feel the texture of the paint. And it’s not really a painting either because you can see photographic elements. But what is it?” Not wanting to blow

1. “What’s On Your White Fence” was created from this image with Lexjet’s Universal Photo Matte Canvas, the only canvas I’ve found that requires no spray fixative before painting with Golden Acrylic paints and Gloss Gel Medium. The final five-foot painting was my giveaway at WPPI in April 2006.
2. While editing created the painterly feeling in these “Impressionistic Tulips,” acrylic paint on the final piece sets the image apart from a simple digital print.
3. Part of the Florida Supreme Court Freedom Exhibit, this American Indian totem

- made a perfect subject for a clear acrylic overlay. The final piece measured 42x 33 inches and is now on display in a private shop in Sparta, North Carolina.
4. This image received clear and opaque acrylic and a 2-inch gallery wrap, exposing the image on all sides as the spectator approaches the piece. It is part of the “In This Boat Together” collection on permanent display at the offices of Higer, Lichter & Givner in Aventura, Florida.
5. Also part of the Freedom Exhibit, “Life over Death” is an image from Arlington National Cemetery.



This Bahamian image was printed for a private artist. The top image shows the original print on canvas. The bottom shows work in progress with traditional oils. Image by Kat Silvergate, painting by Maria Todisco.

PHOTOCRYLICS

my cover, I held my breath and continued to stare at the piece in solidarity with her curiosity.

Finally, she took a long deep breath of resignation and surrendered with words which I seem to hear with shocking regularity, “I’d love to be able to do something like that with my photographs, but after so many years as a traditional photographer, I guess I’m just too old and set in my ways to start from scratch and learn something like that.”

My heart sank. Not just because she seemed to give up so easily but because my two art worlds clearly did not meet. I wanted this second world to be like my first, a world where digital technology made me feel, for the first time, that it was possible for an untrained, middle-aged nobody like me to turn photographs into more artistic works. My first world, of creating the original art, where I seem to have found life for myself, has been all about deconstructing myths and finding freedom through digital technology. Practicing law for more than a decade while longing to do something more artistically creative, I held strong to the myth that producing art of any sort took the fearlessness of youth, the natural raw ability of Dali, years of training and loads of time.

The truth is that fine art digital printing has opened a huge artistic door for people like me, who have no formal art training but have the audacity to believe that they may just be able to create something artistic if they could only have a little leg up in the process. Printing a picture on canvas and then painting over it is just the leg up I needed to go from dreaming about painting to actually painting on a canvas. Sound crazy? Listen to this.

Winston Churchill, who painted his very first picture at the age of 40, wrote an entire book about the emotionally liberating experience of daring to paint a canvas at middle age without any formal art training. For Churchill, breaking into something new was all about attitude.

The first quality necessary is audacity. There really is not time for the deliberate approach. Two years of drawing lessons, three years of copying wood-cuts, five years of plaster casts—these activities are for the young. We must not be too ambitious. We cannot aspire

toward masterpieces. We may content ourselves with a joyride in a paint box. And for this, audacity is the only ticket.

Had Churchill been born a few decades later, he could easily have been describing the attitude needed to dive into the fast moving, ever changing world of digital technology at any age or experience level (see *Painting as a Pastime*, by Winston Churchill, Levenson Press). This attitude has forever changed my middle-aged life.

So, in an effort to bring my worlds together, I finally blew my cover and confessed to this woman, “It’s a Photocrylics® painting. A digital photograph printed on canvas and painted with acrylic paint. And no, you’re not too old. I was almost 40 when I did my first one, never had a painting lesson and nobody taught me how. If I can do this, lady, you can too!” Suddenly, this weary traditionalist was ablaze with excitement and lots of questions. Only at that moment did my two worlds finally come together.

Why This Series of Articles?

After publishing my first article about Photocrylics in 2004, the flood of responses made me realize that so many like me who



For whatever reason, Winston gave me the courage to realize that the rapidly spinning merry-go-round was probably not going to slow down any time soon, and I either had to jump and do my best at giving it a go, or I forever stand on the sidelines waiting for the perfect moment to try.

My goal in writing Part I in this series, like the goal of *AfterCapture* magazine, is to inspire others to glimpse and celebrate the seemingly limitless world of fixes and finishes one can give a digital image after it is captured by your camera. While I'm still using technology that I bought in 2002 when I took my freefall—a 42-inch HP Designjet 5000 PS UV—technology has certainly passed me at least 100 times! And while I still haven't taken a painting lesson, the joyride in the paint box Winston inspired this middle-aged woman to take has been the ride of my life!

Whether you join me in the pages that will follow for Part II of this series—*Photocrylics Part II: Walking the Journey Step by Step*—or you stop here, thanks for being a part of this brave new world and for sharing whatever you may have learned on your spin on the *AfterCapture* ride. Who knows—perhaps your story will inspire others to take a joyride on the digital merry-go-round. I guess you'll never know unless you have the audacity to jump!

CC

PHOTOCRYLICS

"Opportunity"; The office of Hicks and Kneale, P.A., in Miami, Florida, is home to a private collection of more than 20 Bahamian images turned Photocrylics. Simple images like the ones shown here made it easier for a non-painter to experiment with clear acrylic paint.

are swimming in this riptide-paced digital ocean view digital technology as a brave new artistic world. But many are hesitant to jump in because few are lighting the way on how to translate that hopeful excitement into something tangible. Not because they don't have the skill. Indeed! Rarely does one walk these digital halls with less skill than I. No, skill does not seem to be the impediment to taking the free fall into the world of possibilities digital capture offers. Velocity seems to be the stumbling block.

Digital technology, both print and capture, is changing and advancing at a pace too rapid to even glimpse. "Like taking a sip from a fire hydrant," a friend of mine aptly describes the emotion we all feel as we walk the trade show floor at photography conferences like WPPI. "As I stood on the abyss looking into the digital world, I felt like the merry-go-round was spinning so fast that by the time I bought the equipment and software and learned something new, the technology would have already passed me 100 more times and I'd have to start again from scratch!"

Kat Silverglate is a private commission artist, photographer, writer and speaker. After almost 15 years as a civil trial lawyer, Kat followed her dream and took the plunge into the digital world. She is passionate about helping artists and photographers follow their dreams and encouraging them to grow by sharing information. Kat has spoken at WPPI, served on the Knowledge College for the Professional Digital Imaging Association and written for Great Output magazine. To learn more about Kat, visit her website at www.photosbykat.net.



ALL PHOTOS COPYRIGHT © KAT SILVERGLATE