too perfect to be natural  
paintings and computer generated forms

kevin todd  
www.toddartist.com 

generation #C2 

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September 10 - October 20, 2010

Ruth S. Harley University Center Gallery  
Adelphi University, Garden City, New York

Reception: Thursday, September 23 at 6:00pm
Mathematics and particularly geometry is one of the oldest forms of human concern/expression evident in art, religion, philosophy and science. Our contemporary understanding and interaction with the world (and ourselves) is often mediated through science/technology with a reliance on mathematics and logic and sometimes we can mistake technical progress as a break with the past.

Historically there has been an association in different cultures between geometry, perfection and God. For example, Aristotle (b.384BC) conceived of God as Perfection and Thomas Aquinas (b.1225) listed the order and purpose in the universe as one of his proofs for God’s existence. As Descartes (b.1596) stated in his Discourse on Method: “It is at least as certain that God, who is the perfect being, is or exists, as any demonstration of geometry can possibly be.”

Religious art in many cultures often utilizes an underlying geometry to generate form, resulting in images that are ordered, rational, and ideal; images that seek perfection. The geometry provides the structure to build the form and possibly this process rather than the eventual aesthetic gives these images their presence and authority.

This quest for an underlying perfection is also evident in digital technology with its mathematical precision. The virtual world is ideal. However, these geometric structures have the capacity to generate a variety of forms including those which are “imperfect.” Indeed, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (b.1711) questioned whether God was also responsible for disorder in the world.

The artworks in this exhibition use the same basic geometric structure to generate computer images and paintings, suggesting a world where imperfection is equally a part of nature/creation; where digital images are positioned in the context of an attitude to nature and a longer quest for perfection! Like religious art, the underlying geometry unifies (links) seemingly disparate media, connecting the traditional aesthetic of the oil paintings with the coolness of the digital prints on aluminum.

At another level art also seeks to transcend reason and although the works are technical they are sensual and invite contemplation. Karen Armstrong addresses the transcendent quality of art when discussing Hindu religion in her book A History of God;

“The experience of Brahman or Atman cannot be explained rationally any more than a piece of music or a poem. Intelligence is necessary for the making of such a work of art and its appreciation but it offers an experience that goes beyond the purely logical or cerebral faculty.”

These works also have value in terms of process; the activity of creating them, which is possibly an often overlooked value of art. The geometric structure allowed me to engage in a process where pictorial content was not a concern and where the experience of making the work went beyond logic. As such I have included instructions on creating the underlying geometric form for the images as a means of encouraging the viewer to actively engage with the process and to make their own works. A compass, ruler, pencils and some time are all that is needed along with the realization that perfection only exists as an idea. Enjoy!

Kevin Todd

construct the form with a compass and ruler by drawing
the red lines at each step. (blue lines aid construction only)

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