President's Letter

I would like to speak about communications within the IAAA and how important it is to maintain a steady flow of information and ideas between members. Pulsar is one process of keeping in touch with each other. Of course, direct communication by telephone or letter works very well for those members who already know each other. Few IAAA members know every other member, I certainly don't. However, I feel that I can stay in touch with the members whom I don't personally know by dropping a line in Pulsar every other issue or so. (An even easier mode of communication is e-mail, but more on that later.)

I feel that it is important for the membership at large to be aware of what individual members are doing. So much goes on in our professional lives that could be shared with the general membership. It could be anything, participation in a gallery show, a new series of paintings completed, a book jacket illustration published, a new painting technique developed, a new desert locale which looks like Mars, a trip planned for the solar eclipse this November in South America. The critical point is to communicate this information in a forum which is accessible to all members and in a timely manner. This must be a "two-way street" to work. We must hear from each of you out there. Even if you have a three sentence description of a project, send it in. If you have black & white prints of new work, please send them in to Pulsar with your note or article. We will print it in a members' update section.

For example, I just completed a mural for the Hayden Planetarium. It measures 8' x 24' and is the largest painting I have created. I learned new things about painting on a large surface and am immensely satisfied with painting on a large scale. It will be installed in the entrance foyer of the Hayden Planetarium this spring.

Digital communication is an amazingly quick and simple method for staying in touch with dozens of people. Most on-line services like Compuserve, America On-Line, or the Internet provide e-mail. My e-mail address if you are utilizing the Internet is DMDAVIDSON@AOL.COM (You don't need to put in the dot after com.) For someone who has CompServe they must use the Internet system to access America On-Line. For those of you already on America On-Line you can reach me by using DMDAVIDSON. Would all IAAA members who have e-mail address please e-mail me their address? I would like to include an e-mail address in the next IAAA directory of members.

In closing, I would like to encourage more communication between IAAA members. We are a community of artists from around the world, communication is the glue which binds us together.

Workshops

There has been interest expressed in the IAAA for more regional workshops. Two areas under consideration are: Craters of the Moon in northern California and the glacier field of the Olympic National Forest in Washington. Anyone interested in helping out please contact Pulsar.

Journey Through A Composer's Universe

by Mark Mercury

I thread the magnetic tape onto my multi-track recorder and start the large reels rewinding. Their destination: 6570 on the position indicator. I throw on the switches to my computer, mixing boards, and synthesizers. As I dim down the lights and close the doors to my studio, the outside noises disappear into the past. I sit down at my keyboard, glance over the stack of electronic gadgets, and survey the soft green and amber bulbs blinking back at me in calm readiness. 6700....6800....6750....I stop the tape. I am in the mood poised for the launch into my composer's universe: a musical journey of the imagination into space.

How I love creating art! There is nothing else I would rather do. My fellow composers, artists, poets, and the like are the people I most enjoy being around, the ones who understand me the best. That's especially true for one of my favorite breeds of creative souls: astrological and space artists. Because of the similar themes we express and what we are trying to accomplish with our creations, there is a special kinship between the melodies and harmonies in my composer’s universe and the paints and brushes and computers in your artist's universe.

Although I can't paint a planet with a piano, there is much I can do with our subject of space, accepting the reality that music will never be a representational art form. A composer's universe is by its very nature a "twisted" universe, since music by itself cannot communicate facts. For instance, I would find it impossible to clearly and accurately convey to you, in music, the concept of a comet streaking through Cassiopeia. I could write a song about it, or describe it to you on the back cover of a CD what I'm trying to depict, but using lyrics and clues you in you would be cheating! Perhaps Victor Hugo said it best: "Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent."

So in my composer's universe you won't find any facts, data, wavelengths of light, magnitudes of star brightness, or unfathomable distances reduced to thirty-digit numbers. What you will find is unlimited fantasy, dreams, and imagination... deep urges, longings, and futuristic excitement... all communicated through artful rendering of sound.

Yes, I'm a dreamer and a romantic. Each time I gaze out at the stars I am struck by one central thought: a keen sense of my spirituality in a universe of time and space. I don't ever get the feeling that I'm just a tiny speck of matter on an insignificant planet in a vast, uncaring universe. Space doesn't make me feel small, it makes me feel big, in a sense that I'm reaching out to encompass the whole of it. As a result I feel more alive, more in affinity with life, on Earth and elsewhere, wherever that may be.

Another part of that spirituality is my connection to an expansive, nearly boundless sense of time. I am often reminded of that classic American play, Our Town, by Thornton Wilder, in which one of the characters says near the end, "... We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth and it ain't even the stars... everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being."

When looking through a telescope at the universe I hear echoes of distant pasts I might have known; I catch glimpses of ancient visions of a different time and a different place. Drifting back to the present and marveling at the thousands of stars in the nighttime sky, I find my appreciation of the world, the cosmos, and the life I'm living now is intensified to an enormous degree. And like a prolific science fiction writer I am always dreaming of fantastic futures in space filled with adventure, excitement, and love.

If I am alive in 2094, a thousand years from now, it's quite possible that I'll still be writing music -- but what a different composer's universe I'll have! Sophisticated and ingenious musical instruments: a panorama of never-before-heard sounds for my musical palette; and a recording studio in my personal mini-ship as I voyage from planet to planet, galaxy to galaxy, jamming with alien musicians in galactic orchestras and discovering exotic musical lore from the far corners of the cosmos.
It is interesting to speculate as well on what the music of the future will actually sound like. What will Earth’s composers be doing a thousand years from now? What kind of music will extraterrestrials be playing? If we heard it today, would we recognize it as music, or merely as “noise”? What types of tones will compose their scale? One of the things I like to do as a composer is to come up with a concept of that futuristic music and then realize those imagined sounds and composition forms in my studio. It’s not easy, but the challenge is stimulating.

Perhaps you feel these imaginary futures are too distant to have any importance in our creative lives. I submit that some of them have the potential of coming upon us sooner than we think. Here is an example of something happening right now that could develop into a futuristic nightmare within the next fifty to one hundred years. Consider the following scenario:

As you might know, there is a school in the eastern United States where one can go and learn how to speak the Klingon language. What if this Klingon school were to continually increase in size, enrolling larger and larger numbers of students, and begin teaching not only Klingon speech, but Klingon culture and behavior as well, including the various forms of Klingon combat. And what if the humans who are most attracted to this school are those who are most “Klingon-like”? In other words, those with the shortest and vilest tempers, the strongest physiques, and the most extreme sense of “honor” — perhaps the more wacko among us, of which there are more than a few. A sort of subculture would eventually form, with communities of “Klingons” pursuing their own interests and taking themselves more and more seriously as time goes by.

Meanwhile, what if genetic engineers, who today are on the verge of pulling off some incredible capers, eventually advance to the point where they possess the know-how of altering a person’s physical attributes, to the point that these new attributes can pass on to a person’s offspring. Put the students together with the genetiarchs and voila, a race of Klingsons is born! And if in those same hundred years we attain a substantial, new level of space travel, look out! (I suggest we start stockpiling our photon torpedoes just in case.)

Computer Graphics and Space Art

There is interest in the IAA in organizing an exhibit which focuses on space art which uses the computer as a means of creating or filtering space imagery. Beth Avary has found that many museums are now interested in exhibits which present interactive multimedia programs in conjunction with static space art paintings. Since much of our source material depends upon computer filtered imagery, space art could be an ideal subject to explore these new digital tools. Anyone interested in participating or managing this project please contact either Beth Avary or Dennis Davidson.

The Impact of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 on the Art Market

by Michael Carroll

As many of you already know, the impact of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 has great potential as an artistic subject. I spoke with David Levy in July and he said that paintings of the comet are appreciated by the science community. He called them “inspiring” and encouraged the space art community to keep painting this historic event. Several magazines have slated specific articles relating to the comet and many plan to use space art. I have already had paintings in Aviation Week & Space Technology, The Planetary Report, and Astronomy, so it is definitely a hot topic for us space artists.

Although at this printing, it is quite late in many publishing schedules, textbooks and original art will make comet art a going thing for years to come. Subjects being portrayed include the comet exploding among the clouds of Jupiter (from viewpoints within, under and above the clouds), the impact viewed from various Galilean satellites, the view from the comet before, during, and after-break up in July of 1992, etc. The variations are nearly limitless. For example, some research indicated that one or more wayward fragments of the Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 nuclei may strike the surface of one or more of the Galilean Satellites, so I did a painting of a small cometary chunk impacting the southern hemisphere of Ganymede. In the distance, Jupiter glows with the explosion of a large nucleus fragment. (The reason for this supposition is that chains of craters of nearly identical size have been found on Ganymede and Callisto. Until the discovery of Shoemaker-Levy 9 and its “string of pearls” arrangement, there were no adequate theories to explain these chains.) Kim Poor, Bob Eggleston, Pat Rawlings, Bill Hartman and others all have comet paintings in their works.

Because of the plethora of comet paintings, originality will be of utmost importance. Some facts and predictions which might be worth considering: several of the explosions in Jupiter's atmosphere may be as powerful as 250,000 megatons of TNT; many of the fragments will explode in a fireball below the cloudtops of Jupiter; but his incandescent sphere will rise above the cloudtops as a reddening globe about a minute after impact; short-lived disturbances, perhaps similar in appearance to the Great Red Spot, may result from the impacts; charged particles from the twenty-some nuclei may become trapped in Jupiter’s magnetosphere and rings, creating stunning visual effects, increased auroral activity is expected.

For more information, see the set of news notes in Astronomy (Sept. ’93 through the present issue), a fine article by Beatty and Levy in the Jan. ’94 issue of Sky and Telescope, the February Popular Science and the January 24th issue of Aviation Week and Space Technology. See also recent issues of The Planetary Report and Ad Astra. Happy Painting!

Mural Project

Steve Mercer has been selected to prepare a mural for a science exhibit entitled “Electric Space: Exploring Our Plasma Universe.” The exhibit project will be done in two parts: Part I is a 700 sq. Ft. Prototype which will open at the Maryland Science Center in April of this year. Part II will be a 3,000 square foot traveling version which will open in the summer of 1995 and be displayed at many of the major museums and science centers in the US and possibly in Europe. The exhibit project will serve as the centerpiece for a major education outreach program designed to acquaint science students and the general public with concepts involving Solar-Terrestrial environment, including the different phases of the Sun, the Earth’s Magnetosphere and how they interact. Be sure to check it out when it comes to town.

Announcement

Lisa Grze of Grolier, Inc. is interested in reviewing space art for inclusion in up-coming encyclopaedias. Please send tear sheets, color prints, or color xerographs of slides for their files. Do not send slides. Also, whatever you send, do not expect it to be returned. Grolier prefers to keep files on artists that they can refer to when they need astronomical subjects. Send your info to Lisa Grze, Grolier, Inc., P.O. Box 96, Hawleyville, CT 06440. Tel. 203.797.3217