Okay, it’s not really a Critic’s Corner, it’s really an advertisement for the IAAA Critique Web Page. It’s a website where members can post artwork and have it critiqued by your fellow IAAA members. Check it out - better yet, post something to it! Come on! I DARE ya!

http://members.aol.com/IAAartist/index.html

CRITIC’S CORNER - Chaos and Creation
By James Wappel

The Official Newsletter of the International Association for Astronomical Arts

TOP O’ TH’ WORLD MA! Mt St Helens Workshop!!!
From Joel Hagen

WORLD TOUR UPDATE!!!

This is to officially announce the IAAA touring art show. We will be launching the tour in the spring of 1998, so get your best paintings ready for consideration. We will use 30 to 50 of the best works from the membership. Be aware, paintings may be gone for up to two years.

The theme is general; astronomical and planetary motifs. These may include traditional planetary landscapes, hardware, or more esoteric styles and subjects. Paintings related to recent events are encouraged. Digital prints may be considered if the original art is digital and the media are gallery quality. While the IAAA fully supports all artforms including music, sculpture and video, this touring show will be limited to 2-D artwork. Maximum framed size is 41x34 inches or 24x48 inches due to the size of our crates.

Each artist may submit up to three slides for consideration. The slides will be juried in January and artists will be informed as to which works are accepted for the tour. There is no fee for slide submission. There will be a $50 fee for each painting accepted for the touring show. This fee covers crating, framing where needed, and other costs related to launching the show.

Send slides to Dale Darby. After jurying, artists will ship paintings to Kim Poor in Arizona (those instructions will accompany announcement of your accepted pieces). Kim will crate the work and ship to the first venue. Each artist will bear the cost of shipping art to Kim. After that, IAAA or the hosting museums and galleries will pay shipping. The artwork will not be insured during shipping due to the cost, but our sturdy crates have always served us well.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SLIDE SUBMISSION: A maximum of three works per artist may be considered for the show. So send up to three slides of your work to Dale Darby at his address on the “contacts” page in this issue. Clearly print the title of the painting on the front but do not put your name on the slide. Dale will number the slides and maintain a data base of artists. The juror will not see names on the slides and Dale will not be a juror. Printouts of digital art may be submitted for jurying instead of slides. The deadline for Dale to receive slides is January 15th, 1998. Get your best work ready, this should be an excellent show!

IN THIS PULSAR...

Report on the Mt St Helens Workshop
By Joy Day

First Thoughts...
Hi Gang!
Welcome to my first issue as the editor of the Pulsar. First, I’d like to give hearty “thanks” to Dave Hardy (El Presidente and former editor), he gave lots of his time and effort to produce the Pulsar for three years and I think we all own him a big pat on the back. As for the “new” Pulsar, I hope you like what I’ve done with it. It’s still the same Pulsar you know, but with a couple of new features thrown in. If you like what you see, great! If you don’t like what you see - it was Dave’s idea!! ;-) Seriously, if anyone has an idea for an article or news in general, please send it in. I welcome all input and especially ALL feedback - good and bad, so feel free to contact me. My e-mail address is - ramerj@worldnet.att.net, my snail mail address is - Jon Ramer, 322 Sukoshi Drive, Panama City, FL, 32404, USA. I look forward to hearing from you. Keep painting!

Astronomical Feature of the Month - Gravitational Lensing
By Jon Ramer

Gravitational Lensing is a rare but beautiful and scientifically useful phenomena. The principle behind it is that a massive foreground object, like a galaxy or cluster of galaxies, generates a strong gravitational field that can actually bend or refract light from distant background objects. If a gravitational lens was at work, an observer on Earth would see not only the “real” distant object, but also an illusionary double or perhaps multiple false images, including ring or arc-like structures. Even though lenses were predicted by Albert Einstein early in the 20th century, the first example of a grav lens was not found until 1979. That turned out to be a visible galaxy that was distorting the image of a quasar along the same sight line. In April of 1995, the Hubble Space Telescope discovered a lens in Abell 2218 (see picture), showing the characteristic multiple “arcs” of a lensed quasar. An interesting note, if the gravity source was perfectly aligned between Earth and the distant object, the lensed view that we’d see would be a complete circle around the object. (Would that make for an interesting painting or what?) Recently, the HST has discovered a galaxy that is estimated to be over 13 billion light years from Earth, currently the farthest away known object. Too dim to be seen normally, the galaxy happens to lie directly on the sight line of a cluster of galaxies 5 billion light years away. This cluster lensed the light of the distant galaxy making it 5 to 10 times brighter than normal and thus visible to astronomers via the Hubble on Earth.

Discovery! continued...

up as congratulations started pouring in. I learned the very first professional telescope to be turned toward the star was none other than my favorite, the 200 inch Hale Reflector at Mt. Palomar. During the next twenty four hours no less than one hundred e-mails and telegrams were received by the IAU announcing independent discoveries of the supernova. Later I learned that every major observatory on Earth began observing the supernova in various wavelengths. Hubble was called to work on it, as was the Very Large Array in New Mexico. Astronomers programs were delayed in order to take advantage of this transit phenomena.

The supernova itself actually exploded thirty five million years ago. We had discovered it approximately ten days before maximum light, it was a relatively rare type of supernova.

In closing, we did finally go back to the telescope that night after we sent the e-mail off. I still had one target left and that was the periodic comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 which would in just four short months crash into Jupiter. When the image of Shoemaker-Levy 9 came upon the screen, there was the tell tale trail of an UNKNOWN ASTEROID, but that is another story!
On the 1st of April, 1994, Tim Puckett and I were observing comets with a 16-inch newtonian reflector and a CCD camera. Earlier in the day I had prepared finder charts for the fourteen or so comets that we expected to image that night. As I was preparing the charts, I noticed that we would have about a one hour gap between two of the comets that were on the list. We decided that we could take advantage of this gap and shoot some “fun” objects. I show slides of fun objects in local schools because children like to see them.

We finished up an exposure of periodic comet Tempel 1, then the next object was the ill fated periodic comet Shoemaker-Levy 9. SL9 was over an hour away from becoming high enough in the sky to image, so we went ahead with the fun objects. Little did I realize how my night was about to change.

We chose as our fun object perhaps the most often “looked at” galaxy in the entire sky, known as The Whirlpool Galaxy or M 51. Almost immediately Tim and I both noticed a bright star very near the center of the galaxy. I have observed M 51 numerous times in the past and could not recall seeing the star before. Once a possible discovery is made, there are procedures that must be done before notifying the appropriate authorities. If one does not follow these procedures and the announcement turns out to be false, you are forever held in poor judgment by the International Astronomical Union. So verification is most important.

There are several effects that can mimic a supernova on a CCD image. One of the ever present cosmic rays, which can produce false stellar images. These can usually be suspected immediately by the very hard squarish appearance. The method to eliminate a cosmic ray strike is to take another image. During the acquisition phase of imaging, an exposure is made approximately every ten seconds. All we had to do is watch the screen, ten seconds later - the image of the suspected supernova was still there. Once a cosmic ray strike was eliminated, the possibility of an interloping asteroid had to be dealt with. By extending the exposure to five minutes we could detect motion if it was an asteroid. No motion was detected and this possibility was also eliminated. Next, was this a variable star unknown to us but listed in the catalogs? We had an extensive computer catalog of all known variable stars. The closest variable star was in the outermost reaches of M 51 and is in fact a foreground star belonging to our own system. Lastly was the possibility that the star has been there all along and we had just failed to notice it.

The power of a CCD camera is enormous, a normally faint insignificant star is at times brought to prominence, especially if the location is unusual. As anyone who has used a CCD camera has found out, they have an extended infra-red sensitivity. However remote, there was still the chance that we were picking up an infra-red star. These are notorious for being invisible visually, but very bright when seen through a CCD.

We began searching for another picture of M 51 to compare our view against. After ten very hectic minutes I remembered the cover of the new magazine called CCD Astronomy had an excellent CCD image of M 51. The core was resolved with all sorts of details like knots and swirls, with dark nebulae interspersed. And most important - NO STAR in the position of the suspected supernova!

We made a hurried phone call to the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams, followed by an e-mail. At ten the next morning I called CBAT. Brian Marsden, the person who decides who gets credit for any discovery, answered the phone himself. After identifying myself, Brian stated that yes, Tim and I were indeed the first to recognize it as a supernova and that congratulations were in order. He also informed me that the Berkley Supernova Search Team was just 40 minutes behind us.

I was elated to say the least. At home e-mail began to pile in...
Workshop ’97 continued
clearly evident in the way the trees were patterned away from the dome. They formed lines pointing directly away from the caldera.

Huge trees were completely uprooted or simply broken off at ground level and burned clean by the amazing power that day. It was an awe-inspiring sight. Some sat and sketched it or took photos, some liked to get closer to the lava dome. Everyone was moved by the sight of aftermath of the explosion. Oh! The sunset! Too late. One more day to try. That evening, we lay in the parking lot watching meteors and discussing a myriad of topics as we looked up at an incredibly dark and beautiful sky.

The next morning, which again came after too little sleep, we headed out for a full day of basalt cliffs, lava flows and river canyons. The canyon had been covered over with lava flows then forest. When the mudflows swept through, they scoured out the riverbed to reveal a stunning canyon that was there all the time. We hiked down to the river, climbing around the boulders and peeking over the edges of basalt cliffs with the raging river tumbling into gorgeous waterfalls next to us, and rainbows appearing at the bottom of the canyons. We hiked, sketched, photographed, and soaked up the beauty, and became great friends.

Then there was the Bridge!! A wonderful suspension bridge straight out of Indiana Jones movies spanned the canyon. It was only a few feet wide, and several hundred feet up in the air. You could easily see between the slats to the water crashing on the rocks below. And boy could that thing swing!! I had a fabulous time getting the whole bridge to sway and roll. Great fun!! We couldn’t quite decide if it should be called the “Indiana Jon Bridge” (for Jon Ramer), or the “Indiana Johnson Bridge” (for B.J. Johnson). Since I’m writing the report, I get to choose and I personally prefer the “Indiana Joy Bridge.”

Oh! The sunset! After much hoo-hah getting everyone back to the cabin and having some dinner, we finally made it to see the sunset on the peak of the mountain. What an amazing sight - the whole volcano lit with a tender rosy light. That evening again, we lay out in the parking lot, with pads and sleeping bags, yakking and telling hideously awful jokes and puns until the wee hours of the morning.

The following morning was a sad one indeed as we packed everything back into the cars and headed off in our respective ways, ending an exciting and invigorating workshop and saying goodbye to the artists that we’d become incredibly close friends with up on that volcano.

We were all inspired by the scenery we saw, the friendships that so quickly grew. It was quite a workshop, and one I’m glad I didn’t miss! See you at the next one!

Addendum: After everyone was gone, B.J. and I headed back up the mountain to check out and clean the cabin up. We decided to charter a helicopter to fly into the caldera and around the lava dome. It’s a good thing we had time to wait - it took two days before a window of opportunity came up that the helicopter flight would be possible. We flew into the caldera and around the back of the lava dome. It was majestic, impressive, frightening, and not 100 feet away from us. Needless to say, we’ll have a lot of those photos up on the website as well!
Profile: Dana Berry

Let us start with the beginning: I was born at 22th of September 1964 in Moers, Germany. In the early 70s TV broadcasts of the Apollo missions aroused my interest in space flight in general and fantasy in particular. I was so impressed to see the astronauts in their bulky spacesuits to hover around on the lunar surface. It seems to be pure fun. One day I shocked my parents and my sister as I climbed up on the roof of the garage and tried to fly like an “Apollo Man”.

Books and films of the science-fiction genre led me to painting because I wanted to own pictures of spacecraft and aliens myself. “Star Trek” and the sleeves of such magazines as “Perry Rhodan” and others became my source of inspiration. At first I painted on the back of old wallpaper making use of Poster color called Plaka, a sort of tempera. After I had seen “Star Wars” I turned to multiply wood panels using acrylic paint. More than a dozen of these paintings sized at 90*140 cm (roughly 30” x 45”) came into being. I tried to paint the perspective of the alien landscapes in such a manner that it would literally allow me to step into the picture in order to arrive at an entirely different place in an entirely different time.

In 1988, when I spent my holidays in the Alps, I discovered my interest in astronomy. Soon I obtained a telescope, a 4 Inch Newtonian reflector, and my hobby started to have a serious influence on my paintings. I began to paint more astronomical correct motifs. Consequently a local astronomy club gave me in 1992 the opportunity to present my paintings to a wider public. Soon after that a series of small exhibitions followed. At that time I had my first contact to the German Science-Fiction Fandom and I started to draw illustrations for several Fanzines. In 1995 I designed the cover painting for the CD “Trascensessence” by Lambert Ringlage and Stephen Parsick. I had met the latter during one of my exhibitions and he was immediately struck by the atmosphere of some of my paintings. Apart from that the musicians of the group “Rainbow Serpent” asked me to provide them with slides of my paintings for one of their concerts. In 1996 there was an exhibition of my space art paintings at Bochum planetarium; also, I was invited by the Dutch foundation of KLEM to show my pictures at their annual KLEM electronic music festival of 1996. Until 14th of September 1997 my paintings can be seen at Stuttgart planetarium. Since June I receive invitations to participate on other exhibitions. One will take place in a small restaurant (!) and another in the house of a golf club. Alan Shepard played golf on the moon. So, Space Art and golf fits together.

When speaking of Science Fiction it actually has nothing to do with “Star Trek” and “Star Wars” - this is fantasy. Arthur C. Clarke, author of “2001 - A Space Odyssey” and thus writer of one of the most important SF novels ever, strongly emphasizes on the distinction between these two terms. Clarke’s novels are utopian, yet they never contradict the laws of physics. In my paintings I also try to distinguish between these terms, but it is very difficult.

I never visited an art school. I trained myself on how to paint by trial and error. Books about the old masters, their intentions and painting techniques were very helpful. The work of artists like Ludek Pesek, Chris Foss, Michael Wehnal, David Hardy, Jim Burns and Don Dixon put me in the right direction.

Today my flying objects are supposed to look as if computer-designed, the spectator must guess that there is a large amount of complicated machinery behind their shapes. The landscapes must be arranged in a way as if they were seen from a landing module. To achieve such a high extend of credibility several preconditions must be fulfilled. Firstly, there is my attempt to improve technique itself when using airbrush; secondly, there has to be a motif the contents of which must appear realistically while the context itself remains a futuristic one. The way I arrange objects in the context, the design of perspective and finally the surface structures of alien planetary landscapes themselves must allow the spectator to plunge into these utopian worlds. One very important aspect when creating a painting is to make use of different tools and methods to illustrate different surfaces. The airbrush itself is no universal tool and going beyond its actual purpose may lead to disappointing results rather quickly.
Don Davis had this to say to the group:

First of all, it might be a bit premature to read a trend from a few issues of Astronomy. The importance of paying clients to any field of art is obvious, but I still find the best paintings are done as a labor of love and not for money. Just do your absolute best with every job and they'll likely come back for more. The exotic realities we can share with our insights and skills will always have a place to be seen.

Our fearless leader (Dave Hardy) reminded all of us that there is still plenty of wonder left in the Solar system:

How can anyone say that Mars, with its canyons, river beds and volcanoes, or Io, or Europa (with its possibility of life under the ice), or Miranda, or Triton, or Titan . . . are just lifeless rocks!!! They may be DIFFERENT from the SF and Bonestellian visions, but they are sure as hell exciting. I for one still want to go there! Since I can't, I still paint them.

A discussion over venues, public interest in space art in general, and the use of new techniques emerged from the “Space art Dying/Undying” thread.

This from Arthur Wood:

The “mainstream” art world does not consider space art - in its most popular manifestation - to be a particularly serious art form. I believe there is a lot of territory out there ripe and ready for your message - but I don’t think what most of us do is appropriate for that territory. Though most of us thrive on technology and the subjects of our artworks are futuristic - our general approach to art making is actually pretty conservative and lacks innovation when compared to what is going on in the broad art world today. Maybe there are some advantages to maintaining a "space art niche" that some members are so proud of - but we should face up to the realities of competition - be it Hollywood, Hubble, Bryce or the opportunistic artist in NYC recycling CNN images at the Whitney.

Kim Poor responded with his own observations of gallery vs. planetariums/museums:

There also seems to be real differences in galleries (in particular) between the Old World and New. In America, 90% of galleries go out of business the first year. 90% of the remaining 10% go out of business the second year. Most are Mom and Pop businesses like ours. They seem to be somewhat more stable and upper crust in Europe, if I hear right. Here, there are a few of what I would call "New York" type galleries around that cater to the goatee and beret set, and that is what I picture European galleries to be like. People in those galleries buy art rather than admit they don't understand it. I've never sold an item for $8000. Most American galleries are glorified poster shops.

Finally, several project ideas were suggested by members to regenerate interest in space art. Some of the proposed items were: a color IAAA magazine, a color Pulsar newsletter, and even a children's book. Most of the projects were deemed either too expensive or difficult to sell. The children's book may still be undertaken, with IAAA members submitting the writing and artwork.

Joel Hagen added this:

I agree with MC and others on the value of children's books. Most of my favorite books on Space Travel are children's books. Certainly in the 50's they had a corner on the best illustrations and visualizations about what the universe and the future held in store for us. With the wealth of talent in the group, a children's book of that talent would be a rewarding project. Such a project probably needs an author or an editor from within the group to initiate it as an individual.

On September 25th, Joan Lee posted one of the final messages on the Space Art Dying/Undying theme. It was very appropriate, as it seemed to echo the sentiments of many IAAA members:

I don't believe Space Art is dying, anymore than public interest in Astronomy (e.g., considerable interest in Comet Hale-Bopp, following news coverage). It's more a need to improve people's awareness and appeal to a wider audience.

Well, I hope this captured the spirit of the debate. I think all IAAA members believe that space 'art', in whatever form it may take, will continue long into the future.