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About the Cover

Branching into Cosmic Unity

Gary Singh

Based in the Ukraine, Valeriy Grachov graduated from the Engineering and Construction Institute in Kiev in 1972. "I obtained an architectural degree, but had not been engaged in architecture that much," he said through a translator. "I was just performing casual orders from time to time. It was mainly dedicated to town planning and small architectural forms. I developed interiors and other design objects."

Because Grachov had been either drawing or painting since the age of five, he continued with those endeavors as well. He was giving painting lessons to one particular apprentice when the person brought in a computer and showed Grachov how to turn it on and off. Thus his foray into the digital world began.

"It is surprising, but almost all professional artists with whom I was acquainted behaved very negatively toward computer graphics during those years," he said. "Personally, I treated computers indifferently until a few artistic programs were installed onto my computer.

Then I started mastering it independently. After a certain time I understood that I now had a great tool for creative artistic work, which allowed me to do things I couldn't do with traditional pictorial techniques."

Gazing through tree branches

"In the cover image I wanted to reproduce the flickering of cobwebs, consisting of thin twigs, immersed in the sunset, when the sun is vast and takes up half the sky. Maybe Faberge drew his topics in the same place? This work turned out to be the most complicated I'd ever made. I had to drag it from Corel Painter to Adobe Photoshop and back many times. As a basis for the image, there is a time when you sit in the threshold of your house and from the darkness of a doorway or window opening, you gaze through thin tree branches and see the sun going down. And at this moment you feel cosmic unity with all existing things."

But that's about all the information he cares to relay about the image. "Unfortunately, I cannot minutely describe the techniques I used to make this work because I created it a quite long time ago and do not remember the stages I passed to finish it. Honestly, I never try to remember these things because new work needs new techniques, otherwise the artist starts reproducing his old ideas and gradually becomes degraded in his art."

Grachov does, however, state that he likes to work with Corel Painter version 6.1 because he's just plain used to it. "It is convenient to use gradients and patterns in this program," he explained. "I create a new library myself for each new work depending on the aims and finishes that I need. It is my great pleasure to work with this application. And, of course, I use Adobe Photoshop CS and a large number of its filters and plug-ins. I extensively use Alien Skin Software's Eye Candy 4000, Andromeda software plug-ins, Corel's KPT, and all incorporated filters. An ability to work with layers can also be very effective."

Abstract versus representation

Grachov creates representational paintings as well as abstract digital works and he says that with the representational work, the final image is almost always formed in his head before he even starts. With the abstract work, it's the other way around. "There is a special prefeeling, which is concerned with a certain color gamma," he said. "Sometimes I feel a mass of such spots, but the rest fully depends on spontaneity."



1 Unnamed image, Grachov simply numbers his work. This one is A05.

He describes his painting style as a synthesis of Russian romantic realism and Chinese medieval painting. His digital work explores the same East/West combination. "Working in the digital world gives the possibility of sinking into a universe of the smallest details and getting dissolved in a pleochroism of autumn leaves that tower around you like an Asian temple flickering with a polyphony of colors [see Figure 1] or lets you dive to the dark heart of the forest [see Figure 2] or suddenly lose your way among thin golden twigs [see the cover image]. However, it does not mean that I attach these compositions to any particular shapes—it's more important that everyone finds their own subjects, recollections, and nuances of feeling. Sometimes, it comes back from a childhood memory when during an excursion to a glass-blowing plant, you were enchanted with flowing bubbling glass [see Figure 3]. This particular work is not similar to the others; it pays tribute to the design industry and unlike the others it was created in [Pixologic's] Z-Brush nearly in full."

As with everything in the digital world, he believes faster is better, especially with professional work. "As opposed to digital work, in traditional painting it is difficult to make a work with a large number of details in a short amount of time," he said. "Therefore, when I get tired of realistic painting, I paint abstract miniatures or work in digital applications. When I get bored with the computer, I take a rest from the desktop."

Looking ahead

At the moment, Grachov says he positions himself as an artist working toward romantic realism based on mountain landscapes. "However, it has not always been like that," he explained. He says he grew up in the "stifling time of Breznev's government" and that the only art permitted was socialistic realism. Even though he steered clear of making bureaucratic art, he has never regarded himself as a dissident. "I simply tried to live and work freely and independently," he said. "And society paid me back by not admitting my paintings to any market and thus I fell into full oblivion. I managed to subsist by performing small architectural and design orders. I later had a few solo exhibitions that were almost fully abstract. Then, for five years I painted skies, airplane landscapes, where the point of view is so high and there is no Earth in the field of vision and there are only sky and clouds on the canvas."

Then he took to mountain landscapes. "When you look at the mountain range of Karakorum from a great height, the landscape falls to applicative colored pieces that look delicately like medieval goblins during the day and then stuns you with all colors of the rainbow during sunset. Generally, abstractionism is an angle or point in thinking and in material incarnation. All artists know that when a small fragment saturated with colors is taken from a representational painting and then enlarged to a size of 2 × 2 meters, an abstract painting appears." Which is perfect for the digital world. "One day to my great surprise, I found out that my favorite producer, Antonioni, who had been creating movies in the direction of new realism, opened an exhibition of abstract oil miniatures. Now I am not surprised any-



2 Image numbered A25.



3 Image numbered A12.

more—I think these are facets of the same creative process—sometimes it is nice to see the world as a whole and sometimes to penetrate deeply into its forms. It is a pleasure when a representational work has enough spontaneity to let its forms be admired, but also it is great when abstract work shows needed depth, which wakes up the audience's imagination and provokes new worlds." ■

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