

Karin Schminke

Interview conducted by Eileen Fritsch, a freelance journalist and former magazine editor who has been reporting on the adoption of digital imaging by artists, photographers, designers and printing companies since 1994.

Karin Schminke, **Five Danaidea**, 1996. Color digital print, acrylics and photo emulsion exposed with inkjet-printed acetate negatives, on paper, 44 x 30.5".

Original print for subscribers:

Karin Schminke, **Trio**, 2009. Color pigment ink digital print from hand drawn and painted elements, 7 x 5.6". Printed by the artist.

* Special thanks to Legion Paper for the donation of Moenkopi Unryu, a traditional Japanese washi of mulberry and hemp fibers, pre-coated for inkjet printing.

Karin Schminke is an internationally known artist whose work can be found in hundreds of corporate and museum collections, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum. She grew up on a farm in Iowa, received her MFA from the University of Iowa in 1979, and was an associate professor of art at several colleges and universities, including the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire and California State University Northridge. In 1994, she moved to the Pacific Northwest and retired from teaching to focus full-time on creating art. That same year, she attended a workshop where she met two fellow artists who would greatly affect her career: Dorothy Simpson Krause of Marshfield Hills, Massachusetts and Bonny Pierce Lhotka of Boulder, Colorado. Together they formed the **Digital Atelier** and started experimenting with ways to combine traditional studio and media techniques with emerging digital imaging technologies. As a member of the **Digital Atelier**, Karin Schminke has influenced the development and acceptance of digital printmaking methods by leading countless demonstrations, presentations and workshops at galleries and conferences and providing consultations to global manufacturers of digital printing equipment.



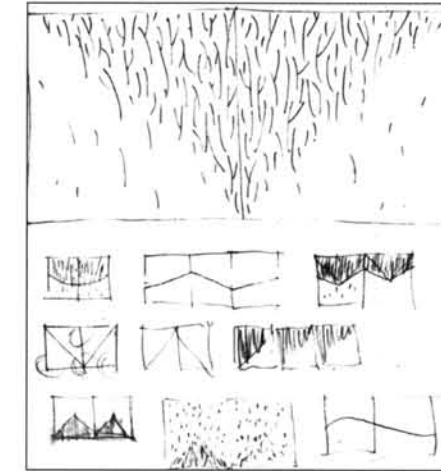
On the surface, my art suggests common themes of harmony with nature and a reverence for natural beauty. But I also hope to draw the viewer beyond the role of passive observer into an experience that echoes aspects of our relationship with nature. Time spent in contemplation of natural textures, forms and colors connects us to something beyond ourselves. I strive to capture that experience in my art. I hope the art I create helps people connect to the spiritual and meditative aspects of the natural world.

In 1997, the **Digital Atelier** and fellow artists Judith Moncrief and Helen Golden introduced digital printmaking to American museums as artists-in-residence at the Smithsonian American Art Museum; their "Digital Atelier: A Printmaking Studio for the 21st Century" received a Smithsonian /Computerworld Technology in the Arts Award.

The next year, the artists traveled to Michigan for a residency at Herman Miller, Inc., and to North Carolina where they introduced digital transfers to Harvey Littleton Studios. In 2001, they demonstrated digital printmaking techniques at the Brooklyn Museum of Art's 27th Print National, **Digital: Printmaking Now**. In 2004, the artists collaborated on a book, **Digital Art Studio: Techniques for Combining Inkjet Printing with Traditional Art Materials**. Since 2004, the American Print Alliance has circulated an exhibition of work related to the book.

Sometimes work begins with a small study sketch and develops in an orderly fashion to the finished artwork, as for *Valley Veil*. But just as often it is created out of a number of my source materials, more like working on a collage. The source materials consist of my own drawings, monoprints, photographs and found objects that are scanned and organized into a digital database. Working this way frees me to devote days to drawing and printmaking without much regard to a final result. I find those days to be creatively very liberating.

Whatever the inspiration, I always work digitally to compose my final images from the source materials. I usually combine various traditional and digital techniques to produce the work, making this a fairly complex and lengthy part of the process. Before I consider any artwork finished, it has to have what I call "magic" — a rather undefined quality that would be the equivalent of a person having "soul."



Walk us through the steps involved in the development of a typical piece.

Karin Schminke, **Sketch studies for Valley Veil**, 2005. Graphite on paper, 6 x 6". See the completed print on page 5.

Yes, I am aware of the irony of using modern digital technologies to express timeless responses to the natural world. But artists always reflect their era in both ideas and techniques. Digital technology is a powerful tool in many fields and can be used for many ends, both for good and bad purpose. The best course of action for me is to use the most advanced tools to stimulate an enhanced appreciation for nature.

More than 20 years ago, I recognized that digital printing technologies were going to be very powerful and enable artists to do things that could never have been done before. Because of my early enthusiasm about the possibilities of utilizing digital tools with traditional art materials and methods, and the research done as part of the Digital Atelier, I was able to get access to new technologies as they were being developed.

Being among the first to have access to these tools has been exciting. It required bringing a spirit of adventure to the task and doing lots of experimentation. And of course there were many unexpected results and failures of technique. That helped me become more of a risk-taker in my work.

Access to wide-format printing has encouraged me to explore a wider range of sizes in my work. Additionally, working digitally has been a great way to expand my understanding of color theory and develop more sophisticated color palettes.

Other influences are more incremental. For example, for the past year I have been working with a CO₂ laser from Universal Laser Systems. The possibilities for integrating it into my studio seem endless. Yet I think the art created by integrating laser cutting or engraving is not significantly different than work produced without those techniques. I see this tool as giving me more options to achieve the same ends, rather than pushing my art in a substantially different direction. This is especially true as I use a rich mix of media to produce each piece.

Do you see any irony in the fact that you use high-tech tools to explore the primal elements of nature?

How has your art been influenced by the consulting work you have done for digital-printing equipment manufacturers?

Throughout this remarkable, trailblazing journey on the frontiers of digital printmaking, Karin Schminke has remained true to her artistic vision. Her art reflects the richness of her diverse life experiences. View her galleries at www.schminke.com.