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Articles by Chris A. Paschke, CPF GCF, April 2026

"Paintography"

Subhead: Computer generated digital art and accepted mounting techniques.

Paintography is the combining of analog or digital photography with traditional painting techniques all accomplished by using digital technology to re-create or convert photographs into paintings. There are many ways to achieve this from layering other recolored, transparentized layers onto a base image as an abstraction, to maintaining the original photo then creating a background eliminating the abstraction of unwanted imagery. As with all mediums paintography continues to evolve with image manipulation tools, software and apps improving all the time. For artists of this genre, it allows for the creation of compelling images with the soul of a painting, through evocative, richly textured, imaginary imagery that begin with a photograph.



Creation

The computer becomes a tool--like a brush, dip pen, or stick of pastel--for creating and blending color, form and texture. During the late 19th century, professional artists were upset with the invention of the camera which produced a far more realistic image in less time. As a result modern art was born out of artists reimagining their voice. Objections remain a constant, even today, with purists of photography and pigment painting often denying digital creations as real art, just as photography and calligraphy were never embraced as fine arts for generations.



One of the most popular forms of modern pigment fine art is impressionism. While there are many interpretations of impressionism, this style focuses on brush strokes that speak through color and movement, giving an impression of the artist's image of the subject, rather than realism. And today digital technology continues that vision in impressionist-styled paintography, as part photo/part creative image.

Layered Photographic Painting

Paintography may be created by layering photo images. These may begin with single photo, or many. A good photo program can remove, layer, draw, or paint, to alter an original. Photo 1 used three photos and numerous textured layers to create this final image, but is not really considered paintography, because there is no painting manipulation. **(photo 1, Nancy Freeman Studio)**

Virtual Painting

Decades ago when art was created and only existed within the computer was known as Computer Generated Art. Today there is an entire category of imagery created in a computer that has been re-categorized as Digital Art or Digitally Generated Art. Virtual paintings are digital works done with a paint simulation program. Digital oil is especially well developed, and watercolor, ink and charcoal are getting quite good. The artist starts with a blank canvas--screen or tablet--chooses the brush size and shape, thickness of paint, color, and actually draws the stroke, just like real paint paper or canvas. Many programs may also simulate pressure sensitivity, fast or slow strokes, reacting much like traditional mediums. **(Photo 2, Nancy Freeman Studio)**



Paintography

Anita Jesse takes digital photographs and adds multiple layers of color, texture, shapes, and lines to correct horse ears that are not facing forward and adding a sparkle to their eyes. "I blur the lines of reality and free my subject from the

boundaries of a real place and a real event until the image more clearly reflects my feelings about what I have seen," says Anita Jesse, Paintographer. Jesse is a photographer and master of reinventing backgrounds by digitally taking a simple photograph and transforming it into a painterly masterpiece featuring only the subject, in her case animals and birds, but mostly horses. **(Photo 3)**

She combines composition, lighting, and focus; with a taste for the dramatic; and transforms the boundaries of a photographic image depicting the cold, unyielding reality of what she saw as a horse in the field surrounded by a barn, fences and other animals into an imaginary masterpiece. She adds multiple layers of color, texture, shapes and lines from what was photographed into what she really saw in her mind...just as Picasso saw his subjects as he would paint them and not as they really were. No longer are her final images limited to what the camera sensor recorded, but rather imaginings of her dreams, memories, impressions, and feelings. **(Photo 4)**



Mounting Paintography

Computer generated images may be printed to any digital substrate including fine art paper, high gloss photo paper, canvas, aluminum, and acrylic. As far as handling these images there is nothing drastically different other than the basic analog film photograph vs digital photo sensitivities when dry mounting. Digital photos must be kept below 150°F--with 130°F being the preferred temperature--so as not to heat damage them during a hot vacuum press draw time.

The ongoing debate over invasive mounting--meaning any technique that would leave adhesive residue if removed--or preservation practices when framing a digital go back to the original giclée days. Giclées were often highly priced, and sometimes numbered--a marketing tool to increase their inherent value, which worked. But keep in mind these are not originals, and replacements and future printing allows the print to look exactly the same every time...they are digital, our current 21st century version of a poster. So a fine art giclée print may be treated like any digital print, as it is the image and artist that makes it more valuable, not the way it is handled after the fact and framed.

Standard digital prints use regular printers with the basic CMYK color set of cyan, magenta, yellow, and black; have light fugitive dye-based inks; are possibly lower resolution with less accurate color representation; and are likely to be more affordable as a result. Giclées should only be identified as such when they are a better quality print using high-end inkjet printers with 12-color pigment-based printing system; making colors are more accurate with a wider color gamut and considered lightfast lasting to up to 85 years; are printed to high-quality acid neutral archival-grade (see below) paper or canvas; and have a higher resolution for reproductive accuracy. Yes, they are better quality, but are still simply a digital print.

Archival and Acid-Free

As in the days of Ansel Adams pushing for all photographs of his era to be dry mounted to best protect a darkroom developed photo print, dry mounting is the technique recommended when framing giclée prints to keep them flat and the edges protected. Technology today also allows for an HA board to mount at much lower temperatures, which is best, and permanent adhesives are not an issue. Removable, reversible, and archival should not even be part of the discussion for adhesives. The word archival (meaning "forever") was deemed obsolete in ISO 18902:2007 (International Standards Organization) recommending use of the phrase "long-term" or "extended-term" instead. In addition, enclosure framing materials should not be classified as archival but rather "as meeting the specifications of ISO 18902 and ISO 18916 (PAT-Photo Activity Test). Acid-free is also a marketing term that has become distorted. The term that should be used is neutral pH and/or "naturally acid and lignin free" which would have been created from 100% cotton throughout. Whereas products that are noted as conservation level are wood pulp base that have been chemically treated for neutral stability.

Digital canvases may be stretched like any other canvas, mounted to MountCor Canvas a permanent 130°F HA board, or with Beva 371 Film, the last two allowing them to be framed in a shallower rabbet. The substrate selected for any digital image--giclée or not--will vary from HA foamboard to Dibond aluminum. Acrylics and metal prints on aluminum already have a substrate, but loose unmounted digital prints on paper, photo paper, and canvas may also be mounted to Dibond, Gatorboard, or some other rigid substrate.

Digital Sensitivities

All digitally printed pieces should be mounted at 130°F-140°F since many have heat sensitivities that will react to 150°F if left in a heat press longer than 15 seconds. There have been products for many years designed to be used with digitals but whose temperatures (generally 180°F-190°F) are actually too high for ALL digitals and not just the most common giclées. Though the heat sensitive ones are dominantly electrophotographic color toners, the protective clear coats could also react to higher temperatures. It is true that some sensitive prints may tolerate 150°F for 15 seconds, but if left under heat for 30 seconds or longer--as in a vacuum press requiring draw time--they will damage. A heat damaged Roland VersaCAMM solvent inkjet photo was damaged at 185°F during mounting. Fortunately it was then laminated for final protection which covered the appearance of the mottled damage. **(Photo 5)**



Final Print

As with all digital photography, works of paintography are digital art where the original exists only within the computer and requires printing to a substrate of fine art paper, digital photo paper, canvas, metal, acrylic, or other to become a tangible piece of collectible art. Then it may be mounted, laminated, stretched, and treated as any other fine digital.

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Photo 1 – Nancy Freeman used three photos and numerous textured layers to create this Layered Photo Image.

Photo 2 – Nancy Freeman Studio, a virtual oil painting digitally created with the paint simulation program Art Rage, not originating from a photo and not paintography.

Photo 3 –Anita Jesse has altered the background through digital paintography for this 20x24" MetalPrint.

Photo 4 – (L-R) Two gallery wrapped canvases and two floated aluminum MetalPrints in a gallery show.
Courtesy of Anita Jesse, Tehachapi CA.

Photo 5 – A heat damaged Roland VersaCAMM solvent inkjet 54" printer photo damaged at 185°F during mounting.

Resources & Additional Reading

Crescent Brands, *Matboard 101: Beyond Acid-Free—Understanding True Conservation*,

<https://www.crescentbrands.com/blogs/blog/matboard-101-beyond-acid-free-understanding-true-conservation>

David Porter, *The Birth of Paintography*, <https://www.theroamingboomers.com/the-birth-of-paintography/>

ME Robertson, *What Is Paintography*,

<https://digitalstillspartography.wordpress.com/2014/12/16/what-is-paintography/>

Paintography, http://paintography.me/?page_id=40

Nancy Freeman, *Paintography and Layered Photographic Painting*,

<https://www.nancyfreemanstudio.com/paintography.html>