

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

THE ADVOCATE

Simon Goes Digital To Create His Ever-Changing Images



Sometimes John F. Simon Jr. thinks about the idea of a thought while drawing, how the thought starts out small, then swirls into something consuming. And then it fades. It's sort of like a storm, not unlike former Hurricane Isaac, which is now dumping rain on Simon's home in New York. It's the kind of rain that caused flooding last week in South Louisiana, and it's more rain than usual in New York. But Simon is used to it. He experienced his share of hurricanes while growing up in Alexandria; he knows what a real storm can do. So, he doesn't stress over the rain hitting his studio windows while he draws. In fact, the rain adds to his drawing experience. It makes him think of the hurricane, which turns his focus to the idea of a thought.

His digital painting, "ChipCycle," is a reminder of this idea. It starts out small, then swirls into something bigger and consumes the entire screen before suddenly shrinking into insignificance. "A thought will often come out of nowhere," Simon said. He spoke by phone from his studio. "A person will start thinking about something, and that thought will build," he continued. "Then he'll start getting riled about it, and after awhile, it will disappear and he'll move on to something else."

How? Why? It's just one of those things viewers can think about while visiting Digital Paintings: John F. Simon Jr. at the Louisiana Art & Science Museum.

Miller, Robin. "Simon Goes Digital To Create His Ever-Changing Images." *The Advocate*, September 8, 2012.

730 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK NY 10019
TEL 646 336 7183
FAX 646 336 7185
WWW.GERINGLOPEZ.COM

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

The show runs through Sunday, Sept. 23, and incorporates examples from different stages of Simon's artwork.

Simon calls the show a survey, which provides an overview. And this overview marks the first exhibit of Simon's work in Baton Rouge. He made a trip to the capital city in August to walk visitors through his exhibit. He laughs now, because a big chunk of his audience was made up of relatives from Alexandria, Lafayette, Baton Rouge and New Orleans. His parents still live in Alexandria. Lots of cousins live in the other cities. And they were clearly excited to see Simon's work hanging throughout the museum's main galleries.

The museum is equally happy. "We're excited to be able to show John's work here," Elizabeth Weinstein said. She's the museum's curator, and she was in charge of the installation of this exhibit. "His work is amazing," she continued. "You can stand in front of his digital pieces and never see the same thing twice."

This is why photographs don't really tell the story of Simon's work. Not that his pieces don't photograph well, they do. But photos can't depict the movement within the pieces. "And you really can't get it from video, either," Simon said. "You have to be there to really see it." This is the whole point of an art exhibit, right? It's a chance to experience art, as well as the artist's world. And it's a way for that world to become a piece of your own. Because each person sees art differently, Simon's work makes this more than possible. "Sometimes the term 'digital painting' makes some people nervous," Weinstein said. "They don't know what to expect. The term may conjure images of something computer generated. Well, not exactly. "What they don't think about is that the artist creates the program for the computer," Simon said. It's the philosophy that has driven his work as he replaced canvas with a computer screen, using technology to create dynamic visual experiences in art historical tradition.

Simon has been at the international forefront of this art form known as new media since the 1990s. His work is inspired by the paintings and theories of such European Modernists as Joseph Albers, Paul Klee and Piet Mondrian. Look closely, and these influences are clear. But Simon dares to go a step further by creating imagery that constantly evolves yet doesn't repeat. Simon's computer codes are based on simple rules and are activated and displayed on a screen that produces more images than a person will see in his lifetime. The process began with a grid-like screen, then evolved to images projected on the wall. Simon's most recent pieces are sculptures that incorporate LED screens, each telling its own story about life.

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

Take the piece, “The Secret of the Golden Flower,” for instance. It’s Simon’s latest piece, and it would resemble a type of Asian temple if it were set upright.

But it’s designed to hang on the wall, its layers projecting outward toward the viewer, who must look inside the sculpture to see the screen, which faces an inner mirror. Emphasis here is on the inner spirit. The mirror reflects who we are, but a person must look within to gain true self-knowledge. “This is the first piece where he’s obscured the screen,” Weinstein said. “This is a new turn for him.” Screens in other pieces are clearly in view, moving within sculptures. They spin and swirl. And each began with a drawing on paper. It’s the first thing Simon does when entering the studio, puts pen to paper. He has no preconceived notions; he simply draws. “It’s like something writers call journaling,” Simon said. “They say that they have to write to see what they’re thinking. I have to draw to see what I’m thinking.” And honestly, Simon never stops drawing. It’s a continuous process from early morning to late at night, and from thousands of pictures produced during the year, between eight and 10 will evolve into the sculptures.

The museum features a short video of Simon’s work process. This is where visitors will get a full understanding of the art behind the computer programs. “Technology is changing so fast,” Simon said. “Think of computers and how they started out as big boxes on our desks. They can fit in our pockets now, and almost every artist has a computer these days.” But that wasn’t always the case. Computers once were thought of more as office tools. Then artists realized they could use these machines to make their art. “Artists will use the stylus tool on a computer to draw lines,” Simon said. “While you’re drawing the line, the computer is drawing another. I wanted to show that process.”

So, he ventured into the world of new media. His artwork can now be found in prominent museum collections, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Collezione Maramotti in Reggio Emilia, Italy. And now it can be seen in Baton Rouge, where thoughts swirl like hurricanes on screens and no two images are ever the same.