

## Digital Dilemma? Not

Carmen Hathaway

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**Carmen Hathaway's** visual arts practice has evolved through experiences of exhibition, teaching, and creating works in acrylic painting, art glass, clay, digital media, and more. The recipient of several Manitoba Arts Council grants, she has participated in group shows since the late '90s. Her solo exhibitions *Carte Blanche*, (Abenaki Museum, Odanak, Québec), and *Self-Similarity*, (Portage Arts Centre, Portage la Prairie, Manitoba) were presented in 2011. A member of the Abenaki First Nation, Odanak, Québec, the artist has resided in Manitoba since the '70s.



# Carmen Hathaway

## *Digital Dilemma?* *Not*

### Who am I as an Artist?

**M**y artistic goal is to excite, provoke and entice. The foundation of the digital virtual realities I create is based in traditional media.

Iteration, kinesis and surrealism are key elements in my art.

The skills I've developed—working with graphite, oil, acrylic and watercolor paint, art glass, wood, leather, beads, clay, and more—transfer seamlessly to digital art.

To date, any resistance I've encountered in this realm has been, if not futile, let's say "defused". I'm all about moving forward, paying homage to tradition with eyes and mind on the future.

Imagine having the opportunity to embark on a journey of new, fascinating destinations that can be revisited time and again with no loss of intrigue and adventure. If someone had told me when I was a child what wonders lay in store, the anticipation would have been almost too much to bear.

I said "almost". I dreamed of being a magician, and now I can be.

I don't censor myself. Leaving inhibition aside, spontaneity fuels every piece I create.

Creative chaos is one of my interests—going into a process of composition with no

preconceived notions other than the materials at hand and the desire to explore and innovate.

### My Digital Revolution

I studied audio and video arts at Red River College, Winnipeg in the late '70s.

After I graduated, I found employment in various media. The skills I put to use then, as a television script/copywriter and radio announcer/producer have come in handy in regard to my current pursuits.


The technology at the time didn't appeal to me: it had promise, but seemed primitive. I sensed so much more was ahead.

That became reality in the late '90s when I purchased my first computer.

Fellow artist Ken Botan provided invaluable assistance in determining the type of system best suited for my plans. He was teaching computer art in a Winnipeg school division at the time, and also taught me basic web design. A traditional artist specializing in architectural graphite and ink renderings, he was familiar with my traditional work and championed me in delving into digital art.

The unlimited potential of computer art—audio and visual editing process in one workstation—is exhilarating.

I learn new things every day—the learning curves are sensational and I'm now very fluid in



my production capabilities. Fluidity in process comes with practice—in applying technical skill, in traditional and digital mode. I liken this to playing a musical instrument: with practice, eventually you don't have to concentrate on the technical aspect, as it's firmly entrenched and you can get on with the creative aspect of the art.

I studied music in my youth and have a great appreciation for composition, cadence and the code of music. Today I use a digital keyboard and various audio software programs to create original compositions.

### Kinesis and Animation

I dreamed of getting my art to move. There's a distinct element of kinesis in my static traditional and digital works. Contemporary video editing methods allow me to do just that.

I use a variety of editing methods and styles, for example, "old school" frame-by-frame animation in combination with contemporary techniques such as shockwave flash/swf.

A very edgy digital piece I created in 2006, portraying opportunity in resolving the dilemma of identity, was purchased as cover art for *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2007. Release was a watershed for me, as I'd come to accept a mentor's advice to stop editing myself and go with the flow. I was pleasantly surprised at the publisher's choice. He'd seen the piece at my retail gallery in Portage la Prairie (Abenaki Artworks, 1999-2007).

Curator Kegan McFadden's visit to my studio in 2007 catapulted my digital art process



exponentially. On seeing several sets of my artist-grandmother's handpainted Tarot cards, he asked: "Can you do Flash?"

My response, "What's Flash?" was the beginning of my immersion into digital video editing methods.

He subsequently commissioned me to create a video bio-drama of my grandmother's life. Arcana debuted at Winnipeg's Platform Centre for photographic + digital arts in May 2010 with a physical interactive computer installation and video projection in the gallery. It was then hosted on the Platform website for one year as a web-based interactive presentation.

In the summer of 2008, I was invited to Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi as guest instructor of a five-day digital arts workshop. *Digital Dreams: How Do I Get There From Here* was very well received and I was invited back in 2010 to present *More Digital Dreams: The Layers*.

The Manitoba Arts Council is very generous in support of my digital projects. I was awarded my first project grant in 2004.

In 2010, I was commissioned by VANOC to create two digital art originals for exhibition at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympics' Winter Games Venues' Aboriginal Arts Program.

On May 6, 2011, I attended the opening of my solo exhibition, *Carte Blanche*, at the Abenaki Museum (Musée des Abénakis), Odanak First Nation, Québec.

Invited by then Museum Director Michelle Bélanger, liaising to plan the installation over a 2,500 km distance was seamless. The instantaneous nature of the digital "highway" made emailing gallery layout plans and protocols a breeze.

This multimedia twenty-five-year (1986-2011) retrospective of traditional and digital works, scheduled for display May 6<sup>th</sup> to October 31, 2011, was extended to January of 2012.

In September 2011, my other solo exhibit, *Self-Similarity* (Sept 7-Oct 29) opened at the Portage & District Art Centre, in my hometown, Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

I explored the phenomena of pattern repetition—iteration in varying scale and form with two and three dimensional pieces in fused art glass, acrylic painting, digital stills and videos, with iterated design elements bridging all the works.

Myriad connections and transitions of our experience—spiralling ellipses of earth-bound structures and galaxies beyond, fractal

geometry and more—were integral components in *Self-Similarity*.

Doug Halmarson, President of the Board of Directors of the Portage and District Arts Centre remarked at the opening that: "It's obvious from looking around the room that this is a brave new direction both for Carmen and the PDAC as we attempt to extend the boundaries of artistic expression. As a former high school math teacher, I'm excited about seeing someone who can take the mathematical concepts of iterations and fractals and translate them, those equations, into something that can be seen and appreciated by all."

### X-Ray Style

I'm currently exploring one of my favourite modes: outlining shapes.

The indigenous "x-ray style" is inherent in my art. I've always been drawn to this form—I created my first drawings in this style.

As a child, I enjoyed sitting beside my dad as he worked on his drafting blueprints. I eventually took a short course at a Winnipeg college in basic drafting principles, as I decided that perspective was something I needed to better understand in creating my drawings and paintings. Those same principles I learned then, using traditional drafting tools, I now practice with digital software.

I've accepted an invitation from Ashukan Cultural Space, Montreal, Québec to present a solo exhibit in their gallery, August 3<sup>rd</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

In *From Smoke To Cyber Signals*, curated by Ashukan owner Nadine St-Louis—a member of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective—I'll continue to develop a new body of work inspired by visual and audio codes such as digital binary, DNA, music notation, braille, smoke signals, and more.

A synthesis of diverse concepts—my interpretations reflect the idiosyncrasies of various codes' characters and symbols.

Reminiscence is integral to the narrative of my project. I was raised in Québec and am a member of the Abenaki First Nation of Odanak, Québec.

I lived in Montreal for several years prior to coming to Manitoba. Memories of the various locales in and around the city, and my First Nations cultural experiences, will be reflected in this work.

The digital dream continues... [TOC](#)

*Dream On, œuvre numérique, 2016.*