

Kurt Weston's Transmog Project

My art education encompasses a BA from Columbia College, Chicago (1985) and an MFA from California State University, Fullerton (2008), combined with 20 years of exhibition experience. In 1996 I became legally blind due to an AIDS related condition, Cytomegalovirus retinitis. My limited visual acuity - total blindness in my left eye and limited peripheral vision with no central vision in my right eye – permits me to see a transmogrified view of the world. My current existential self-portraits represent distorted, somewhat distressed and sometimes humorous, semi-mystical figurative work.

An important influence in my artmaking is the Chicago Imagists - a group of representational artists associated with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago who exhibited at the Hyde Park Art Center in the late 1960s, their work was known for grotesquerie and surrealism. From this group I am most attracted to the work of artist Ed Paschke (June 22, 1939 – November 25, 2004). Like Paschke I avidly collect photographs, visual media from books, magazines, film, television, video and the web. I consider the ways these media transform and stylize the experience of reality, which in turn has an impact on my consideration of formal and philosophical questions concerning invention in my art process.

I have also incorporated scanography into my work. Using scanner as camera helps me to create the dramatic shallow depth of field and stark black backgrounds achieved when scanning 3-dimensional objects. The scanner also provides a wonderful method of capturing an image of an object for use in a more complex digital collage. The distinctive scanner illumination ties scanography to a more recent generative systems art movement spearheaded in the 1970s and early '80s by Sonia Landy Sheridan at the Art Institute of Chicago. Sheridan, worked in various media and used various 3M copiers, both black & white and color, to create imagery. Today's flatbed scanners create a hybrid copier effect, which when enhanced by image editing software produces intriguing visual results.

The influence of these artists and their techniques have led me to a conjunction between art, science, and technology. My new work entitled the "Transmog Project." Is my exploration into the art genre known as Steampunk. Steampunk is a subgenre of science fiction or science fantasy that incorporates technology and aesthetic designs inspired by 19th-century industrial machinery. Since I rely on various low vision magnification devices to compensate for my vision loss, I have purposely incorporated them into my new work. The magnifiers represent anachronistic technologies or retro-futuristic inventions as people in the 19th century might have envisioned them. Although the work illustrates retro-futuristic devices the messages in the work are decidedly focused in post real America. In images such as "Everything Comes Down to This" commenting on gun violence; the image "Affected" commenting on climate change and the image "I Could Learn to Be a Man Like You" drawing attention to racial discrimination and the attitude of white superiority - these works are rooted in contemporary issues.