

Paul Crowther, *Geneses of Postmodern Art: Technology as Iconology*

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Excerpt, pp. 146-47

...It has a distinctive uncanniness because it as though the computer's imaging power has been *reborn* through the creation of autonomous pictorial organisms. Technology and the spirit of nature are blended, inseparably.

This is true in a different way of Amy Ellingson's abstract work. As early as 1990, she began using computers to design features of her paintings. She describes her approach very lucidly as follows.

My work exaggerates the dichotomy between lightning-fast digital rendering processes and traditional oil and encaustic painting techniques. All of my imagery, whether geometrically intact or abstracted and chaotic, comprises a vocabulary of very simple forms that are digitally manipulated. The paintings consist of many interrelated layers of repeating geometric forms — straight lines and arcs, primarily — that I compose on the computer. I replicate these basic elements into an increasingly complex field that I then render in discreet layers of oil and encaustic paint. Using ephemeral, computer-generated images exclusively as my source material, I create paintings that physically assert themselves through the materiality and permanence of historical painting media. The translation from the evanescent (virtual) to the concrete (real) is paramount.

These remarks make clear that, instead of existing within the sphere of technology, Ellingson is actively absorbing it back into traditional idioms. Of course, the digital image can be printed out — and in that way made independent of the computer. But what the artist does here is to bring composition and technology into a fruitful dialectic wherein the digital image is not simply preserved in an enduring form, but also transformed.

Consider, for example, *Variation: purple (dawn)*, of 2016 (Plate 15). This, like many of Ellingson's recent works has much affinity with the 'all over' painting of Jackson Pollock. But equally — in the way that individual colored motifs seem to float over one another optically speaking — it suggests also late Monet water lilies. However, the work is more than the sum of these influences. For one thing, these forms do not dwell placidly alongside or atop of one another. There is an insistent sense of them being both moved and stretched by some visual current — extending both horizontally and towards the viewer. This sets up a complex nexus of associations encompassing both nature and the products of technology. On the one hand, for example, the forms may suggest some wild variation on close-ups of the iridescent sheen found in petrol on water; or, on the other hand, of organisms generating at a microscopic or cellular level. Equally, there is the suggestion of the visual noise arising when a computer screen malfunctions.

Ellingson's achievement is in the way these different associational levels are held together by an elegant compositional strategy. Nature and digital forms are made complementary through the economy and distribution of the digitally derived elements. The upshot is a sumptuous visual drift, an aesthetic space where the technological origins of the motifs are gathered up and *renaturalized*.