

Collaborating on *Global Fusion*

by Lyn Bishop

I often find myself leaving the comfort and quiet of my studio for the creative chaos of cultural exploration and collaboration in exotic locales. I've spent the past decade sharing my experiences with a global audience through my online journals and the artwork contained within them.

The physical journey is integral to the inspiration that propels my art. Traveling throughout the world, I look for the simple, unsophisticated and organic details that define the beauty of that culture. I am always intrigued by the human elements and visual stimulation that I encounter. To that end, I make use of technology to both capture and reassemble these pieces into new works of art. I find the juxtaposition between the organic and the technical allows me access into two completely different worlds.

In my most recent project, *Global Fusion*, I collaborate with journalist Taro Tsuzuki, embarking upon a multi-faceted art and culture project aimed at forming a personal relationship with the world in which we live. The project began taking shape after 9/11, as I continued work on my 911 Prayer Flag which I knew that I wanted to install in Tibet. After spending months culling images and quotes from all sides of this horrible tragedy, printing and sewing them into a prayer flag the length of a football field, I became depressed, anxious, yet intensely curious about the other people and cultures across our planet. The negative stereotypes of non-American cultures broadcast by the US mass media spurred me to action, to investigate on my own, and to form my own opinions about societies across the planet — based on direct experience instead of sound bytes. In total, we spent 20 months traveling across Europe, Russia, China, India, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Japan and the U.S. We published a *Global Fusion* weekly blog and bimonthly electronic journal in both English and Japanese and I created physical artwork both alone and in collaboration.



Lyn Bishop, 911 Prayer Flag
Created September 11 2001- January 19, 2002. Printed flags and fabric prayers, pigment on cotton fabric, gossamer ribbon, thread, arranged on ten individual strings, each 8"x10 yards. Installed August 2004 and left to the winds at Namtso Lake, Tibet.

As a collaborator, I seek out opportunities to engage with other creatives around the globe. Throughout our journey, I had arranged several collaborations with artists from the local regions. This opened up rich and diverse opportunities for deeper discussion, better understanding, and differing creative processes. Collaborations have allowed me to work side-by-side with artists in Europe, Asia, and India, producing prints, digital images and 3D physical environments.

The first of which was with Jacques Lecoultre, a photographer and printmaker located in Buchs, Switzerland. Jacques deep love for the countryside where he grew up and my awareness of the deep respect the Swiss have for their natural environment were the seeds of the inspiration for the collaboration. For Jacques, the mountains that surround his hometown hold deep personal meaning. He shared these pristine places with us — after we finished working in the print studio, when he would drive us through the emerald green pastures and into the snow capped Alps for daily hikes in his favorite places.



*Lyn Bishop with Jacques LeCoultre, **They Know**, 2004, Color screenprint on paper, 30x24", variant edition.*

Taro added his hand to the work by writing his impressions of Swiss culture: "Love. Protect. Preserve. Maintain. Educate. Be Proud. They Know."

The imagery of this print speaks to a keen awareness and appreciation of life and is composed of four main elements, the solid Schafberg mountain, blooming flowers, water — the source of life, and the decay of drying seed pods. The work started in the computer as a digital composition made from four photographs taken by Jacques and myself. After making a successful inkjet print of the image, we reproduced it several times on an old copy machine to introduce random artifacts into the work. Using these less-than-perfect copies as the template, transparency film was printed, and then used to burn screens for printing. During the

short four-day session, we created a variant edition featuring a changing color palette which allowed us to achieve a soft, woodcut-like appearance in the work.

Three months into the journey, Taro and I arrived on the campus of Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA) in Beijing, China. It had been six years since my first visit to the city and I could hardly recognize the skyline with all the new construction. At CAFA, I was surprised to find a modern, well-equipped, digital lab on campus and eager students to work with. Our mission was to collaborate with resident artists in attendance in the Guerilla Studio at the annual SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group Graphics) Conference back in the United States.

Each day we would communicate half way around the world with the artists in Los Angeles using simple consumer technologies; webcam (video camera), internet connection, ftp (file transfer protocol). It was during this project that I fully realized the power of video chat as a viable and visual method of remote communication and collaboration. It was not without it's challenges, however, as the video feed would repeatedly drop and we would be forced to revert to audio only, or at really bad times, text chat.

In our initial brainstorming together, the students expressed an interested in working with the Chinese Goddess Guan Yin, the bodhisattva of compassion as venerated by East Asian Buddhists. We in Beijing set off on a research and gathering mission, while the artists in California embarked on their own interpretations to share with us.

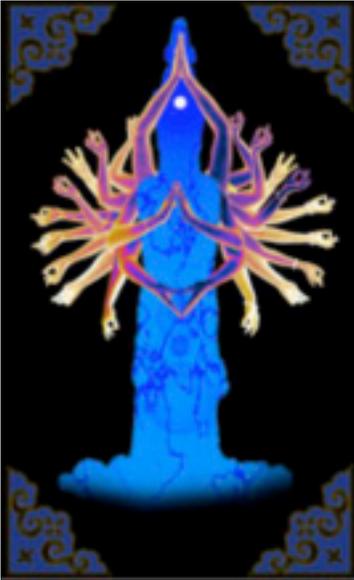
Over the course of the week, collaborators on two continents on opposite sides of the globe created shared artwork, pushing electronic files back and forth between locations. At CAFA, we headed into the photo studio and began to photograph each other with different arm positions. In the final artwork, our bodies were removed and only our arms were recombined together to represent the many compassionate arms of Guan Yin. Prints were crafted on digital fine art paper using archival inks in the Guerilla Studio and then shipped back to the participants in China.

Sharing the excitement of emerging technology is a big part of the Guerilla Studio at SIGGRAPH and in 2004 there was a bitmap sand printer. Those of us at CAFA were amazed that this prototype printer could use sand instead of ink. We found this interpretation of our photo shoot relevant and important, especially when considered in the context of China - Tibet relations and the sacred practice of Tibetan Buddhist Monks, who painstakingly create highly detailed and colorful sand paintings. While this new technology allowed for automated placement of the sand, as opposed to the detailed handiwork of the Monks, both shared a fundamental commonality in their innate impermanence.



CAFA Team in the Photo Studio, August 2004

CAFA Photo printed at SIGGRAPH on the prototype Sand Printer, August 2004



Lyn Bishop with students from CAFA, Beijing, **Spirit**, 2004.
Color inkjet pigment on paper 19 x 12", open edition.

The prints that I create are the result of digital imaging using archival ink and paper combined with traditional printmaking, collage, painting and photography. What interests me most is finding methods and processes that bring the hand into contemporary digital printmaking. I look for ways to manipulate the viewing surface with qualities of depth, reflection, and motion, so as to ask the viewer to dance with the work rather than simply gaze upon it. I choose to create prints because it allows me to merge the processes I enjoy best.

Six months and several collaborations later we arrived on the campus of National Institute of Design in Ahmadabad, India where I was to teach an intensive workshop on alternative digital printmaking. It was an exciting course, where students and faculty were introduced to the many methods of creating digital fine art prints. The use of digital fine art paper and archival ink sets, and demonstrations of new techniques such as digital transfers and preparing alternative surfaces for digital printmaking, were ground breaking in India.

During the month on campus, I was also able to work in a studio environment again. After being on the road for six months, I appreciated every moment of being in one place for an extended period of time. With access to ink, paper and printer, I began several new images that spoke to the cultural chaos and wonder I witnessed in India.

In Krishna, the work evolved from direct experiences and imagery I had collected while in Rajasthan, India. Specifically, the area of Parsurampura is filled with ancient Haveli (private residences erected to show status and wealth) decorated in finely embellished frescoes covering the walls. My image represents the bhakti or devotion that is practiced daily by many Hindus. It is constructed from several photographs I made in the region and then combined into a new composition. Elements include wall art of Lord Krishna, Radha and the Gopis; the blessing hand that adorns the entryway of many homes; and the auspicious marks often found inside private residences. The work is printed on handmade mulberry paper from Laos, modified with moulding paste to create a fresco-like surface, and further prepared for inkjet printing.

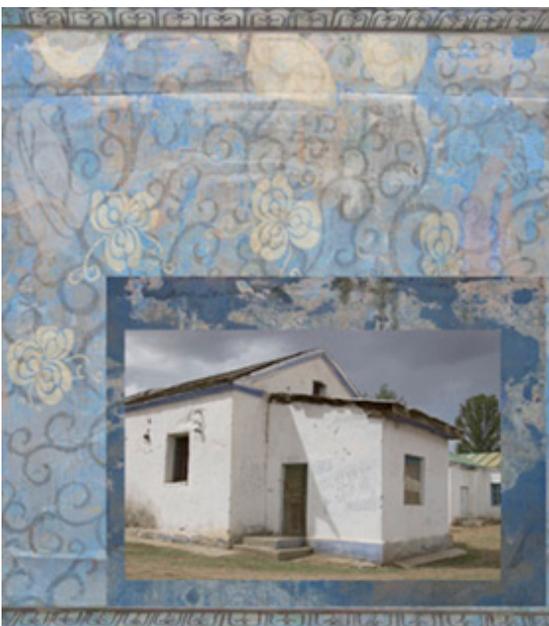


Lyn Bishop, **Krishna**, 2005.
Color inkjet pigment print on modified handmade Lao paper, 18x24", variant edition.

Yesterday I received shipment from Japan of the handmade paper. Ohhh, it's lovely, soft, without sizing, and a natural tan color, full deckles and 13x58" dimensions. Yummy. They will make amazing "traditional hanging scrolls." I'm off to finalize the screenprint pattern for them this morning. I can't wait to mount the luminescent prints onto the scrolls. I can see it in my mind's eye, and now I will make it a reality. — an email exchange with the editor, Carol Pulin.

In my personal work, my artistic journey begins with a feeling or thought that I play with until the work takes on its own personality. Discovering unexpected relationships between imagery and cultural similarities or differences is what drives me in this process. I continue to explore the diversity of each element, letting my muse take me further on the creative journey.

Now that I am home again, actually while writing this article, I am creating the prints for my next exhibition. Based on the Global Fusion journey, *Mundane Space : Far Away Places* will be shown at the Honen-in Temple, Shishigatani, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, Japan, November 9-25, 2007. My average, everyday encounters around the world provide the inspirations for these works. The series of images is derived from photographs made, drawings rendered, and objects collected on-the-road across Eurasia, Indonesia and Japan between 2004 and 2006. Through personal observations, new truths emerged about the people and places experienced. I continued to ask myself questions about cultural stereotypes shaped by popular mass media — lately, it seems, much of it focused on fear and cultural misunderstanding. In this series, the viewer is invited into these everyday spaces, devoid of people. The landscape floats over, or pierces through (like a window into another world), a motif of cultural wallpaper that contains clues to its origin. These “luminescent” hybrid prints combine both traditional screen printing practices with digital printmaking techniques.



Lyn Bishop, *Private (Berlin, Germany)* 2007

Lyn Bishop, *21st Century Living (Beijing, China)*, 2007

Lyn Bishop, *Free Top Style (Bulgan Region, Mongolia)*, 2007

All three: Luminescent print (traditional screenprint and digital ink-jet print combined), 10.75x9.5", on prepared paper, variant edition.

A “luminescent print” exhibits a shimmery quality to the image. This effect is caused by undercoating pearlescent acrylic paint on the surface of the paper before printing. The printed image appears on top of the luminescent base, creating qualities of light and reflection in the work.

Taking advantage of both modern digital tools and my visceral, primitive love of art making, I strive to reach across borders, time zones, cultures, and generations to express my artistic voice and vision and to share them with a global community.

I believe that as we race towards economic and technological advancement in our quest for globalization, we run the risk of sacrificing cultural diversity. My art reflects my desire to preserve the gentle balance between honoring cultural traditions and embracing the future. By combining art, culture, and technology, I weave images and experiences into new work that speaks to the diversity in the world. I believe that art (both making art and viewing it) grants access to worlds that may be sacred, forbidden, enchanting, even threatening. It allows us to see worlds that we may never fully engage in otherwise.

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