The Impact of Using Software
on the Visual Artist's Creative Process

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Content

- This is a presentation on the impact of using software on the structure and process of the artist's creative process. The presentation focuses on the mindset a visual artist acquires through continued digital practice, and the nature of the experimentation s(he) is led to undertake.

- For me, the main characteristics of the digital creative process are rooted in the following insights and experiences:

  1. Single images are ephemeral: potentially drowned out by their variations and modifications
  2. 'No image is worthless': it can serve as a layer (without having to be visible)
  3. Images are endlessly transformable
  4. No image is ever the 'final' one until declared final
  5. Images are mere *potentials* since they are "seen" in terms of 'what may happen' or 'could happen' to them
  6. Every 'action' or 'operation' brought to bear on an image (every step of the creative process) either invites or requires reflection. This is especially true for 'undo' actions which lead to a comparison of one image and its modification.

- Reflections build 'intuitions' by sinking into the unconscious.

Part One
The Many Digital Faces of a Single Work

Digital Craft: Knowing Your Operation Modes

- In my software, called 'Studio Artist', I find **7 different *operation modes*** that I can use once or repeatedly, and in combination with other modes.

- Accordingly, what operation mode to follow up with another mode becomes a major decision point:
    - 1. Paint Synthesizer (which comprises 12 different 'pen modes' ranging from totally controlled by software or totally free from outside control)
    - 2. Image Operations (to perfect an image)
    - 3. Texture Synthesizer (to create new textures from an image)
    - 4. Vectorizer (to flatten and distort an image)
    - 5. Modular Synthesized Graphics (MSG) (to create color and texture variations)
    - 6. Segmentation (to select part of an image, transform it, and insert it into the original image)
    - 7. Paint Action Sequence (to apply a canned program or a 'history sequence' of steps used in a previous work to the new image)

- **As a consequence, creating images becomes a matter of knowing what operation mode to choose or, when staying in the same operation mode, what 'parameter' comprised by the mode to keep or alter, and when to switch to another operation mode altogether.**

- As a further consequence, one's attention is schooled in detecting, and deciding about, very subtle **changes from one image (or version of an image) to the next**

- For pedagogical reasons, in this presentation I do not combine operation modes; I only show the result of using a specific operation mode.

Prototype ('Deep Down')
Starting Point of Image Transformations that follow.
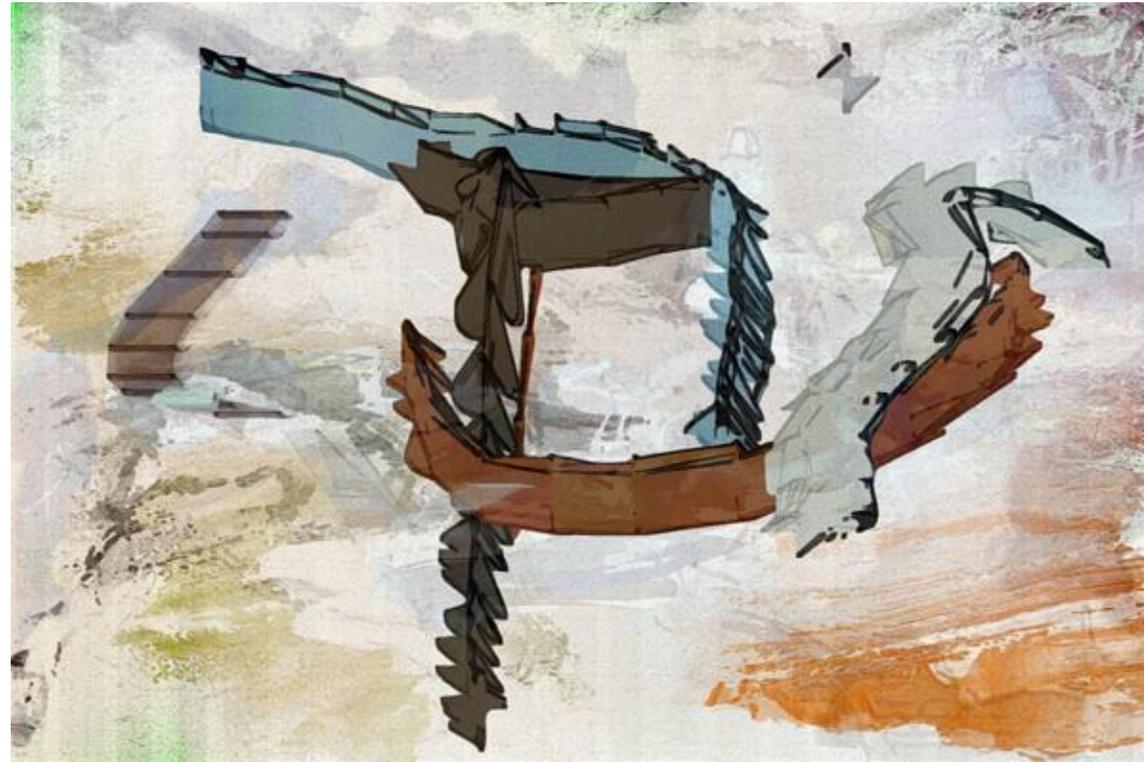
Creating two *totally programmed* transformations that have to do with the specific 'parameter settings within the operation mode applied

Superimposing 4 different consecutive 'presets' (algorithms) within a single operation mode
(painting) all of which follow the color scheme of the prototype.
Example on right: painting strokes freely added.

Programmed operations serve as 'mind openers'.

Drawing/painting into the prototype, using a particular brush along a particular [programmable] 'path', and as a result the texture and shape of the prototype.
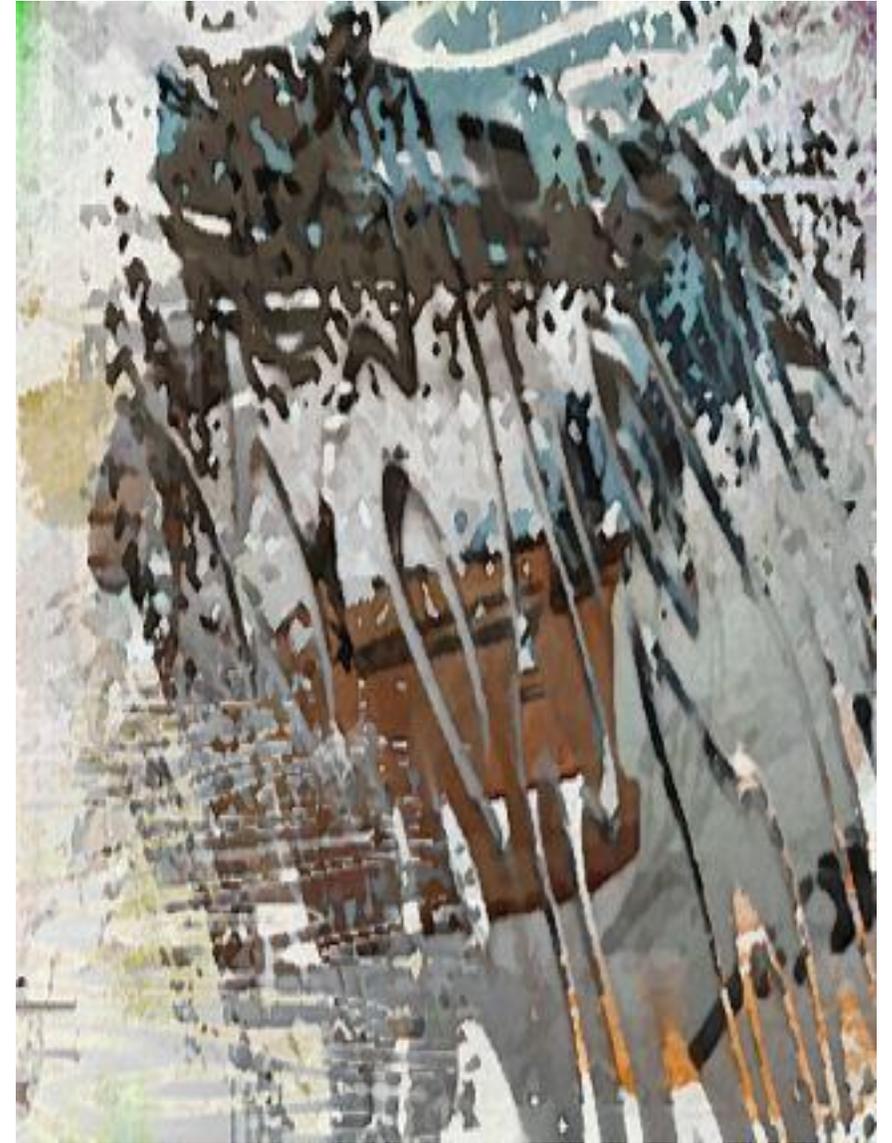
Drawing/painting into an empty canvas using colors derived from the prototype.

On the right, a different brush and color palette was used.

Exploding the prototype from the inside out so that its elements move (shrink or expand) and re-arrange themselves. This technique results in images further removed from the prototype but still showing an indirect relationship to it. (It is as if the image had been set in motion and allowed to re-arrange its constituent parts by creating new relationships.)

Creating new textures from a prototype, the first far
removed from, the second staying close to the prototype
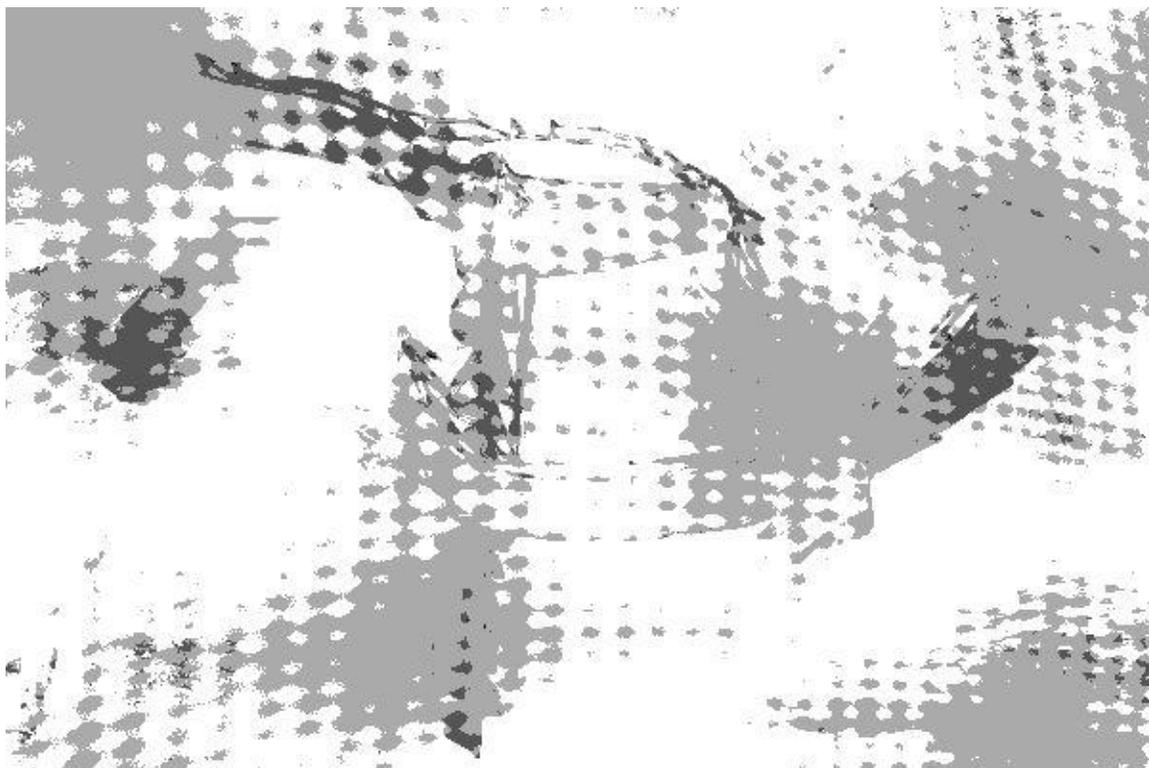
Producing color/texture variations of the prototype, guided by stylus or mouse ("MSG" modular synthesized graphics).
The first image stays close to the prototype, the second is far removed from it.
(When using these images as different layers, one can merge them with varying strength, and adjust their colors, background, and transparency.)

Converting the prototype from 'raster graphics' to 'vector graphics' (Vectorization).
(In this technique, an image does not have any structure but is treated as a collection of marks on paper, grains in film, or pixels in a bitmap. If the image is magnified enough (as on the right), its artifacts appear.)

Depending on how its parameters are defined, vectorization is more or less preservative of the prototype.
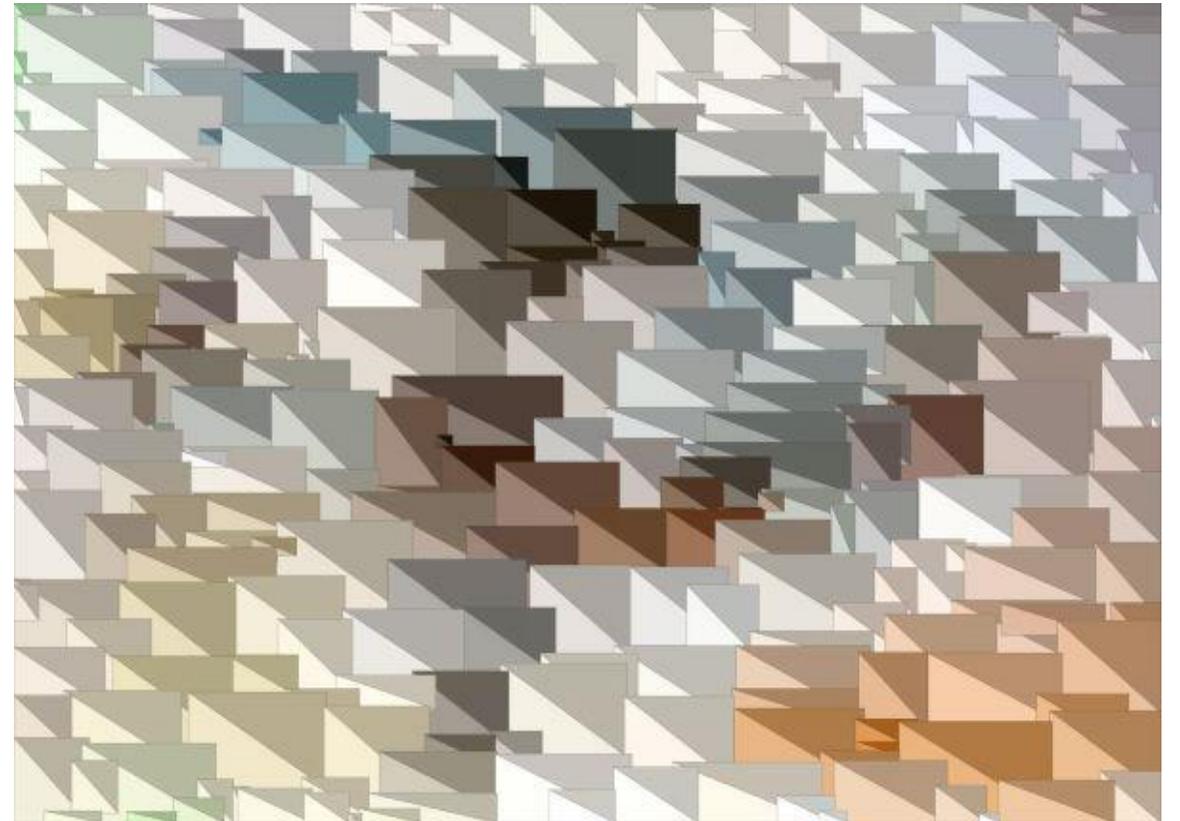
Applying to the prototype a pre-programmed set of steps ("action sequences").
The PAS can either be pre-defined in the software, or is created by the artist during
the work on a different image (as a 'history sequence'). This means that one
creative process (or part thereof) is imposed on another.

Distorting the prototype by controlled warping.
The first example remains close to the original colors of the prototype but completely reshapes its outline; the second examples dissolves the contours of the prototype.
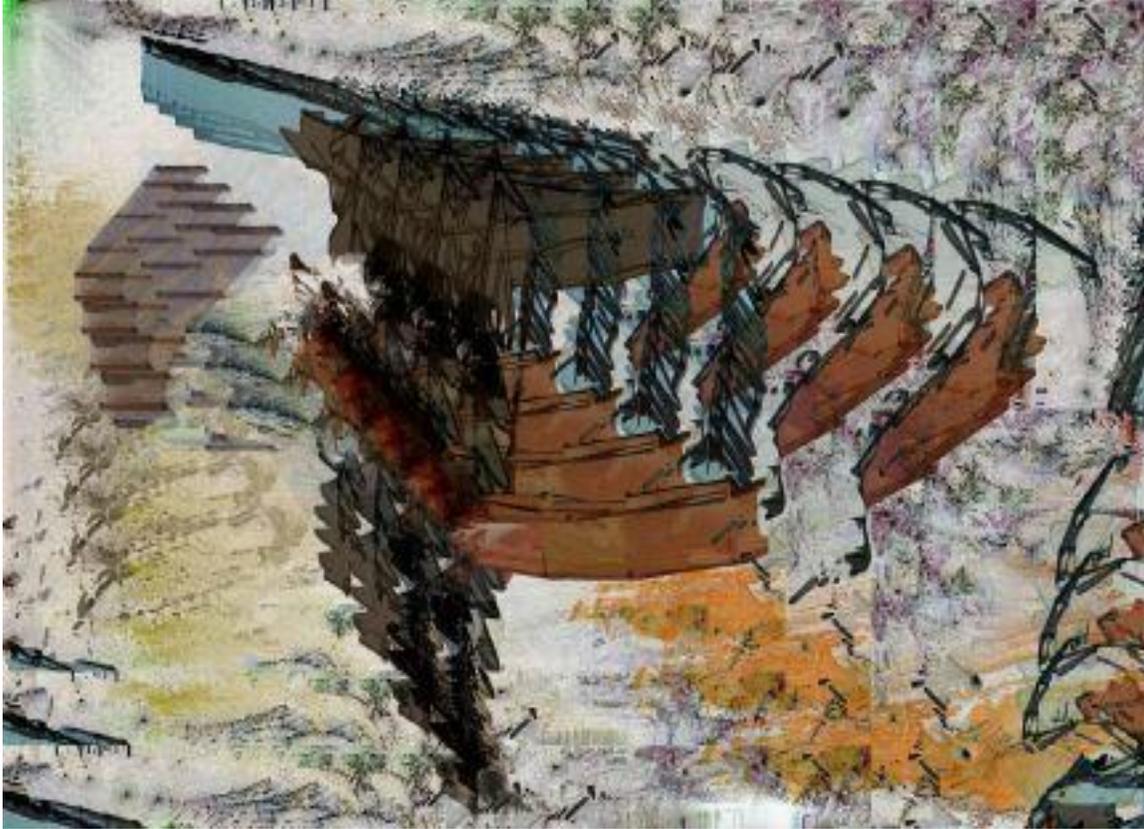
PART 2: NEW WORK
[low resolution]

How I work

- **In light of the many modes of operation available to me, I do not start out with an 'intention', at least not a conscious one.**

- Rather, I trust in the creativity of my 'mind' and 'hand' (stylus), brought about by movement on the tablet or screen.

- I 'believe in' the movement of my hand more than my intellectual designs and conscious intentions.

- **In this way, I subvert the notion that work with computers is 'logical', 'rational', 'top-down', and what all the other clichés may say.**

- **'Craft', for me, has come to mean "to know what operation mode to enter at what step in the creative process, at least experimentally, and when to stop working in that mode before switching into another one, -- and of course, when to stop".**

- All of my work titles therefore do not describe an intention or serial theme, but what I see in the finished work, often long after I made it.

- Precise descriptions of my work I make when uploading to SaatchiArt (where I act as a neutral onlooker) have often entirely changed my mind about what an image is like or about) …

Examples of Recent Work

1. Animation Stills (1 & 2)
2. Integration of Photography into Painting
3. Use of History Sequences
4. Drawing-Dominated Painting
5. Integration of Drawing into Painting
6. Integration of Vectorization into Painting
7. Cultivation of New 'Brush Cultures' (1 & 2)
8. Improvisation
9. Digital Portraiture

**Modifying animation stills to focus on color and shape**
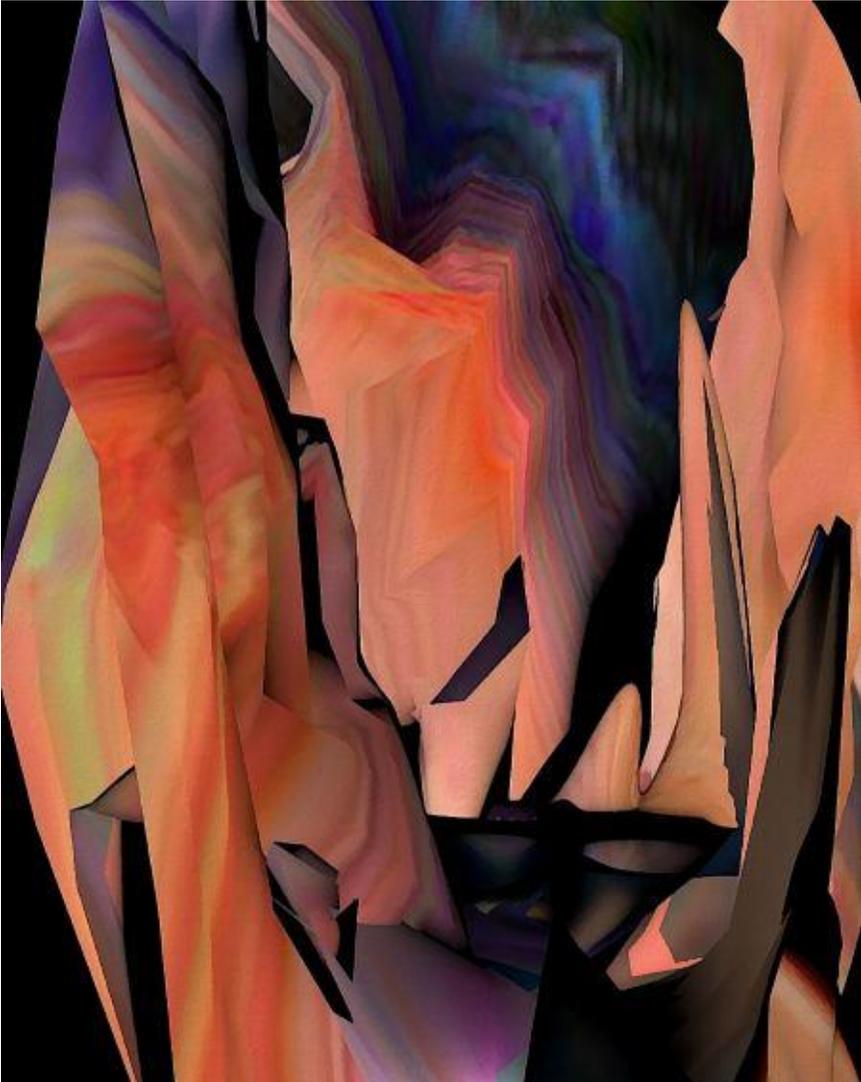
Modifying animation stills, emphasizing contrast and texture
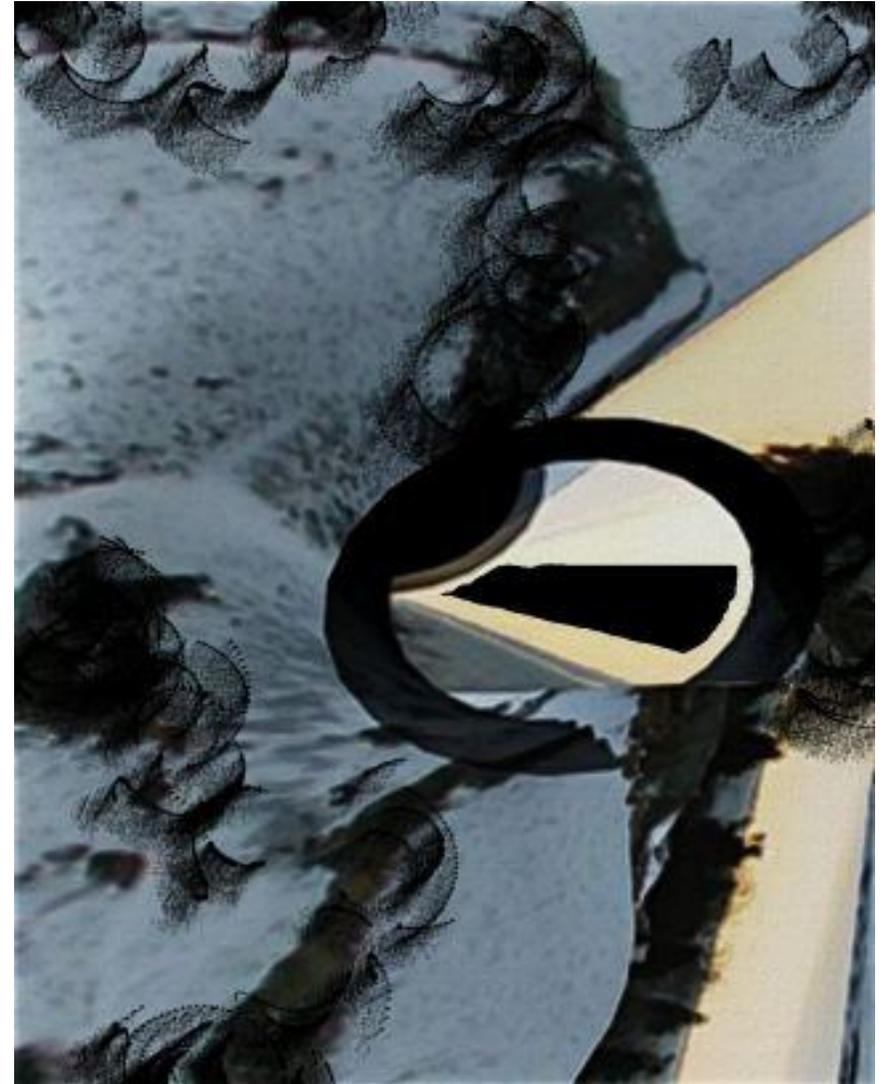
Integrating photography into painting
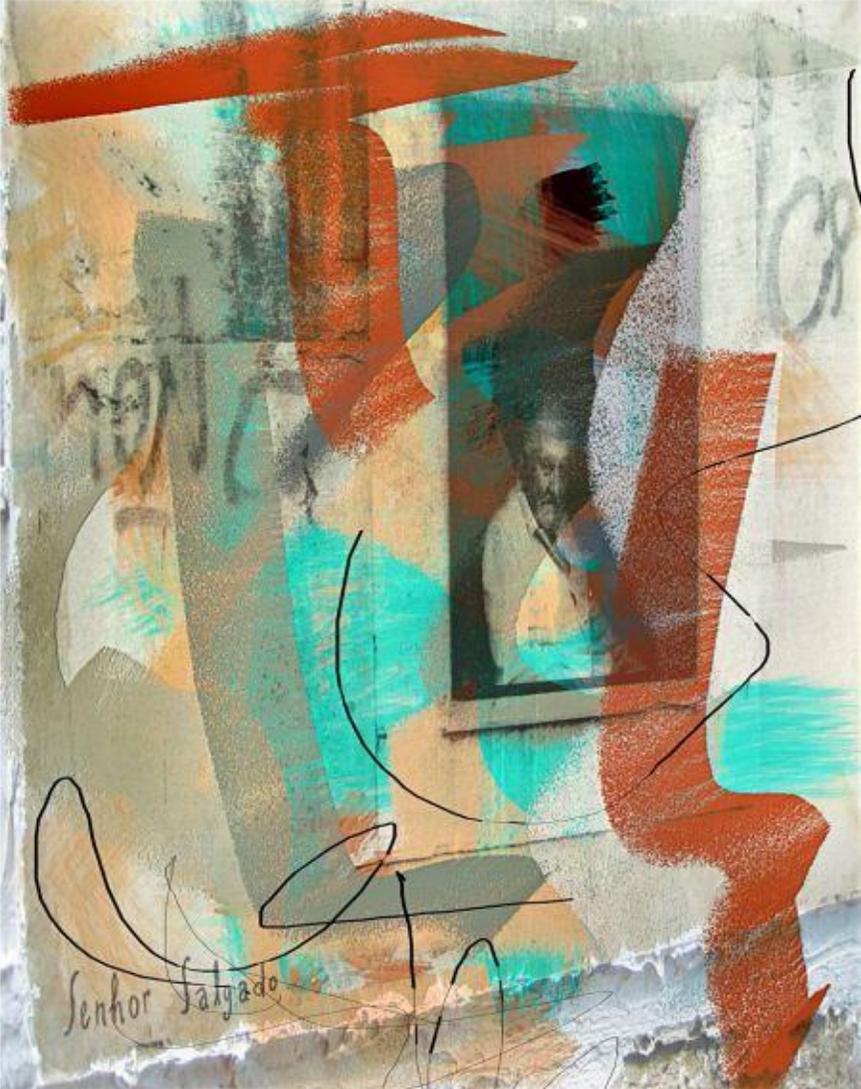
Using two different process templates ('history sequences' taken from previous work)
**on the same prototype**
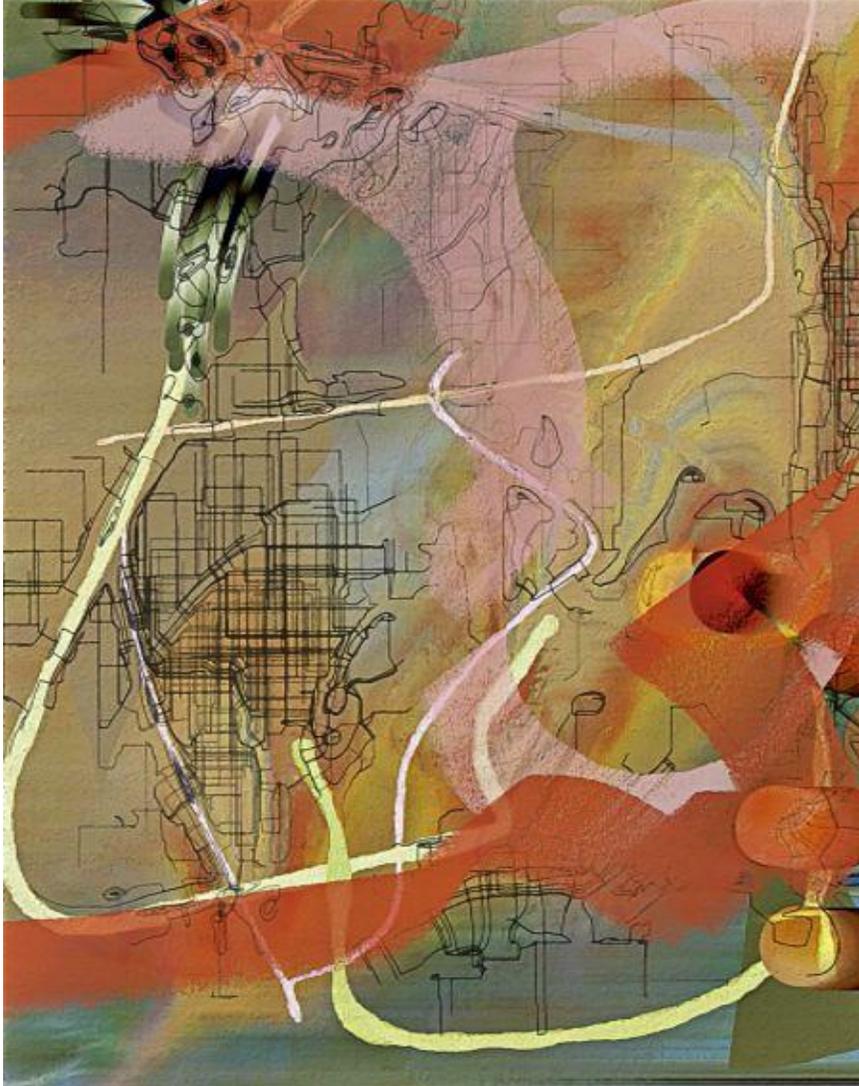
**Using drawing to shape paintings**

Integrating drawing into painting
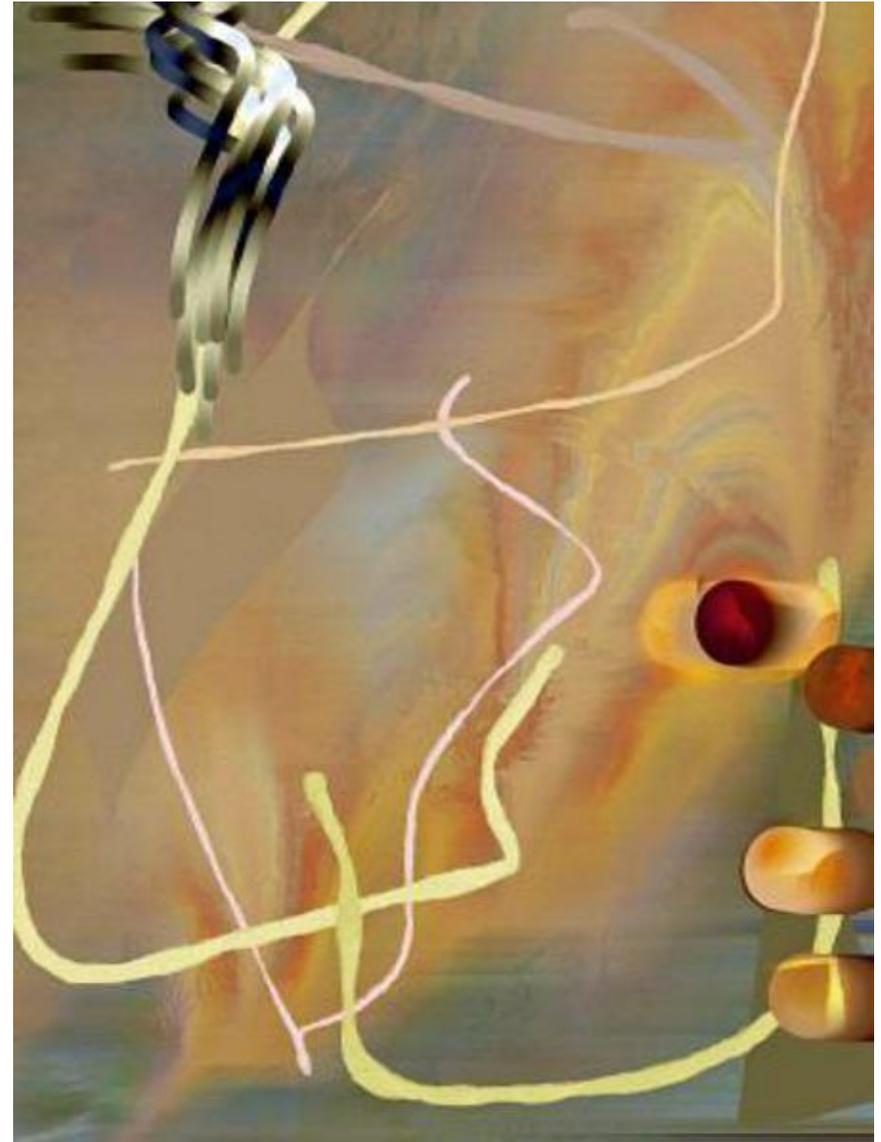
Flattening an image to create to create a distinct 'background' for the center of the image.
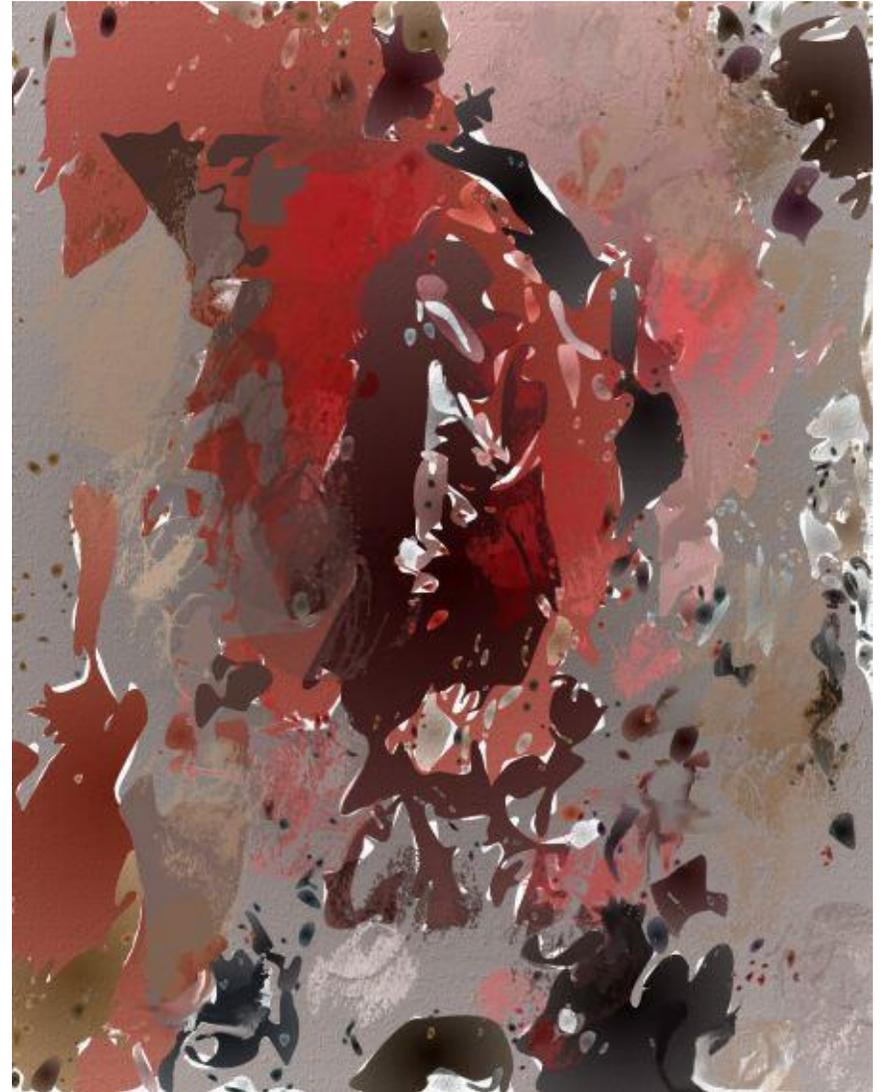
Cultivating new 'Brush Cultures' [no. 1]: new types of brushes can be created by putting together different 'presets' available in the program in a semi-random way.
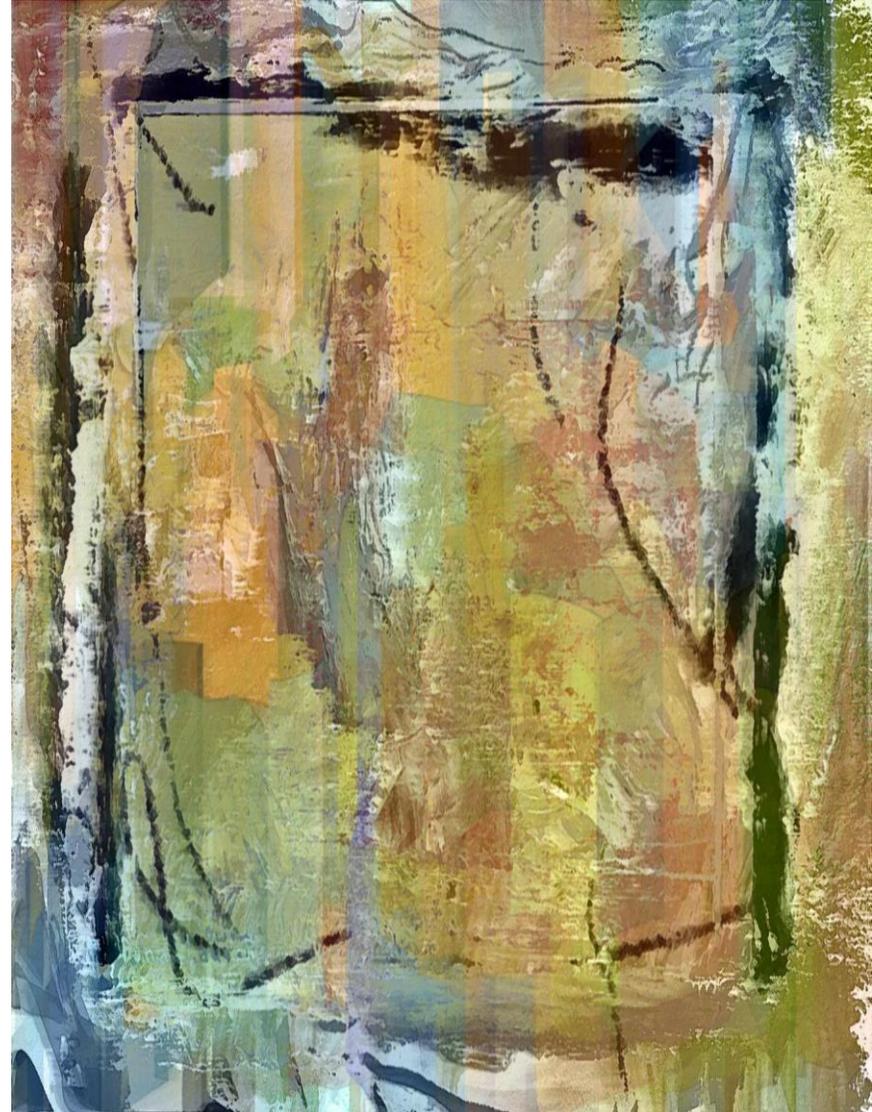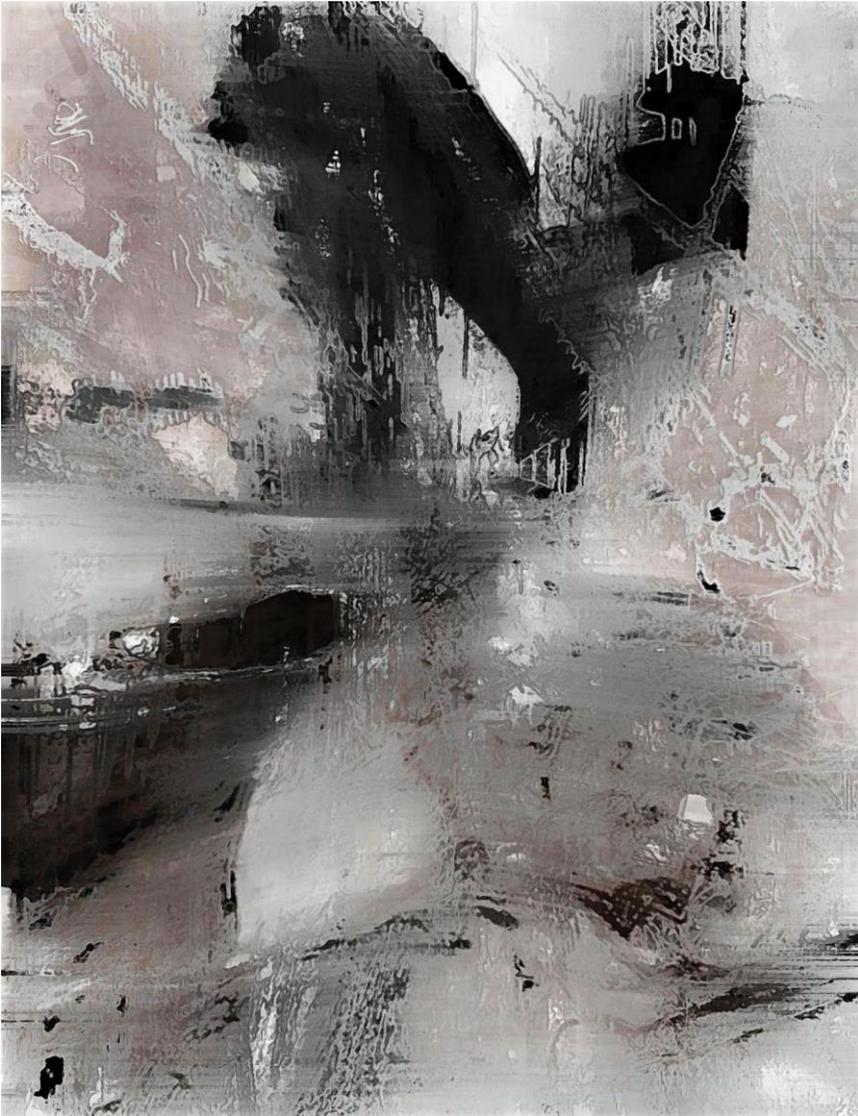
Cultivating new 'Brush Cultures' [no. 2]: there is a subtle relationship between the nature of a brush and what the brush 'thematizes'
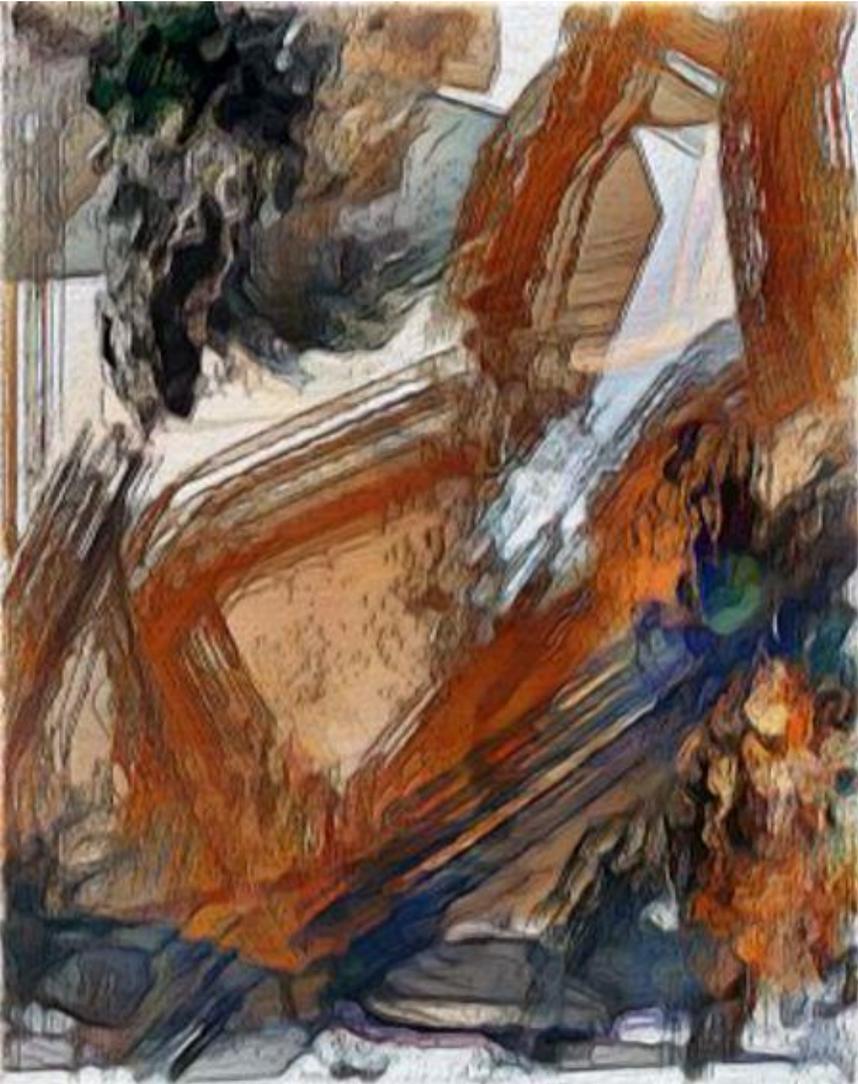
Improvisation: I am fascinated by drawing and painting associated with a lot of *negative space*; and by how a single beginning stroke *changes its meaning* by every subsequent one added.
I am also fascinated by how diverse strokes *form a totality*, and what needs to be 'left out' in order to create a convincing form.

Part 3: Digital Portraiture

Self Portrait, Original
(Lisboa, Portugal, 2009)

Self Portrait as Ontological Thinker

Self Portrait With Attempted Smile

Self Portrait, Maniacal

Self Portrait, Inscrutable
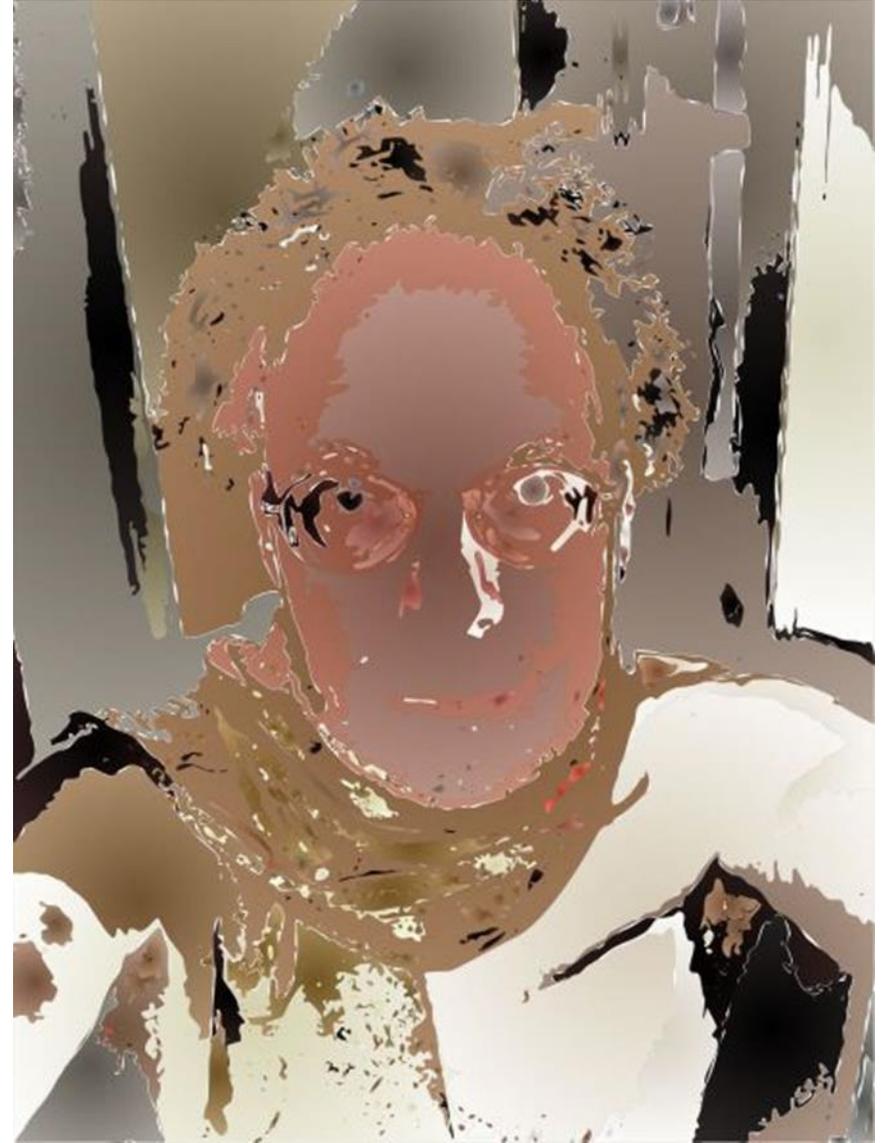
Self Portrait, Slightly Menacing
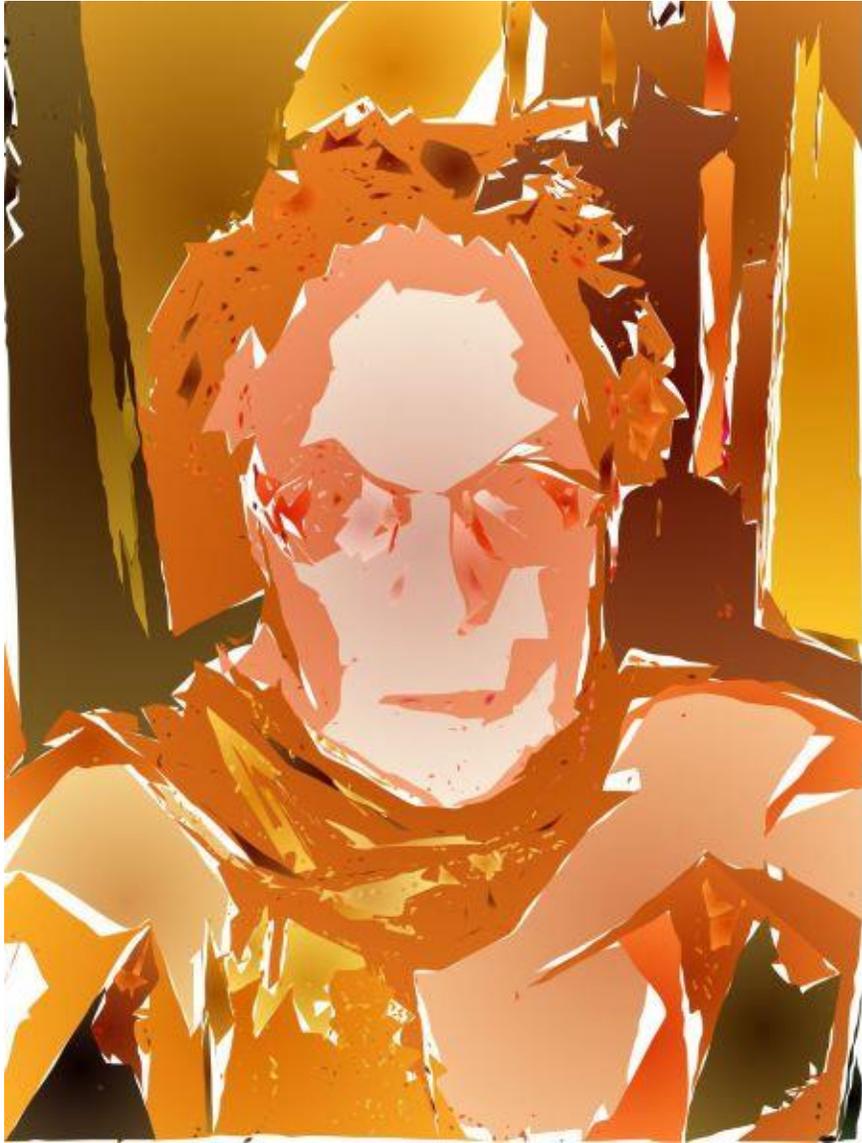
Self Portrait, Vanishing
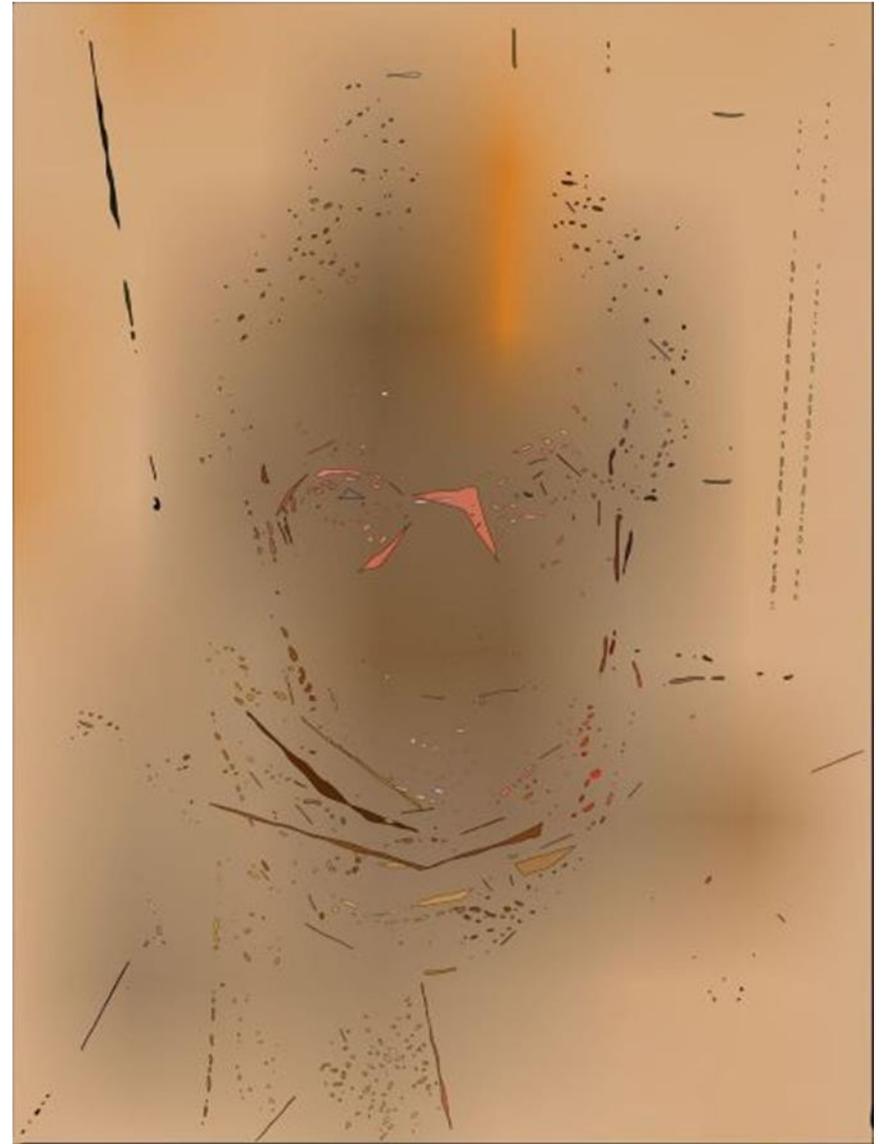
Self Portrait as Christian Saint, Lisboa Church, Portugal
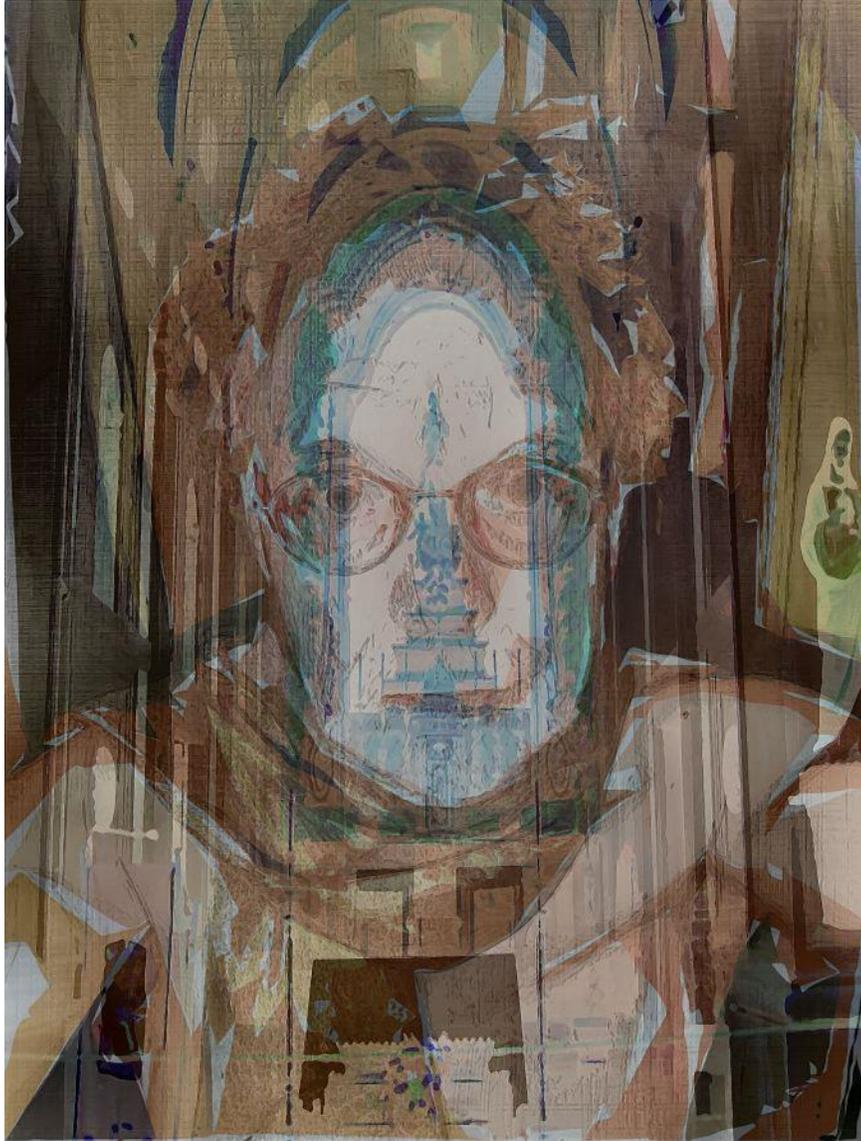
Self Portrait With Outlook to Tagus River, Lisboa, Portugal

Why Use Software?

Why I Use Software to Make Visual Art

- **Software sets free my creative alter ego** more than any physical and chemical media (which I find encumbering …).

- **Software focuses on the variability of one and the same 'image' and reflects the myriad interpretations it can have or be given (ambiguity).**

- **Software allows me to build a 'task environment'** (without having to rent a barn) that brings together otherwise separate techniques and media, and that develops with my own developmental history.

- **Software helps me subvert commercial uses of digital media** by showing that there is a difference between new media and their uses, and thus permits me to make 'political' statements.

- **Software helps me avoid imitating older work by others ('tradition') or myself**, but allows me to reshape and re-use older work of my own by way of improvisation.

- *As you can see, I am prejudiced in favor of software ….*

Thank You For Your Attention