

Left: *Horse I* from *The Carousel Project* 2000. Digital print, 560 x 762 mm.

Right: *Donkey I* from *The Carousel Project* 2000. Digital print, 762 x 560 mm.



The making of Little Wars

Debra Swack describes the origin and development of her multimedia artwork

After being selected by Thomas Krens, director of the Guggenheim Foundation, and Walter Hopps, of the Menil Collection, Texas (both USA), to study silicone intaglio at the Contemporary Artists Center in North Adams, Massachusetts, I began to use this and other technology-based media, to create installations, videos, CD-Roms, paintings, prints and artist's books.

Little Wars: the Carousel Project is based on the history of carousels ('little war' in Italian), the fair rides which developed out of medieval jousting tournaments. In addition to horses, they often include a menagerie of animals which represent the characteristics desirable for battle. All my photographs were taken of rides on the upper west side of New York, including a historical carousel at Central Park West and 65th Street (Stein and Goldstein, 1908).

This multimedia installation utilizes digital photography and printmaking, animation, kinetic sculpture, light and original music by my father, composer Dr. Irwin Swack (*Four Burlesques for Flute and Bb Clarinet*). Two editions are available; in digital print format (560 x 760 mm on rag paper using archival ink) and in video format (VHS, DVD or CD-Rom).

Digital Prints

After I first showed my 760 x 1020 mm digital carousel prints at the PS 122 Gallery in New York, I decided that using the Epson 7500 wide-format printer would be better than making small, four colour silicone intaglio prints on my press. For the installation part, I was going to print carousel animals on large transparencies and tile them into a revolving ten to 20

foot long cylinder illuminated from within. Outside the cylinder would be a fabric-covered armature, upon which the images could be viewed (light would project the transparencies onto it).

When several galleries from across the country contacted me about exhibiting the work, I began to think about ways of making it so that it would be easier to ship. A lightweight motorized cylindrical metal armature (ten to 20 feet wide by about 6 feet high) either suspended from the ceiling or hovering above the floor seemed like a good idea. It could easily be taken apart, using removable fabric attached with velcro. I could then project the carousel animals onto the fabric from the outside with projectors hooked up to VCRs, computers, or DVD players.

Large digital prints would be displayed on the walls, with the installation in the centre of the gallery. Separating the prints from the sculpture made them both a document of it and interesting in their own right. I prepared the images so that they could be outputted in a variety of ways (print, tape, CD-ROM, or DVD). I scanned my 35mm negatives at the highest resolution with an Imacon Flextight Precision II scanner, adjusting the sharpness and colour relationships through the scanner software, making minor corrections in Adobe Photoshop software and then saving them as uncompressed TIFF files.

Animation and beyond

I began to think about making moving images, rather than just projections, and so made diagrams of movements. I also wanted to add my father's music *Four*

Burlesques to the video. The music was reminiscent of a medieval masque play and jousting tournaments were theatrical enactments of battle (in fact, jousts often wore 'Pageantry Armor', designed for decoration, not protection). I wrote my Director 8 Quicktime movie to a CD and took it to a video editor. We outputted it in different formats so that it could be run on computers, VCRs or DVD players and be projected with compatible projectors onto the sculptural support.

Debra Swack was awarded a Banff Center for the Arts co-sponsorship to complete *Little Wars; the Carousel Project* in Alberta, Canada, in July 2002.

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Digital art source

The Digital Art Museum (www.dam.org), launched with a physical exhibition at London, UK's Guildhall University in December, has already become the place for information on digital art, say its founders. Supported by significant grants from the Arts & Humanities Research Board and The Guildhall University, phase one of the site will cover the period 1956-1986 and the work of 25 artists. Phases two (1987-1995) and three (1996-2006) will be online soon.

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