

## Mary Ross

The oft repeated theme in the work of Mary Ross is "People: Real and Abstract," with a subtheme of dance photographs. Her images, often abstracted, always contain certain recognizable elements. "I use the video process to appeal to the imagination," said Mary. "I use color in an expressionistic manner to create a mood, to suggest a psychological state of being." Because of the electronic colors, many of her photographs have a decorative quality as objects, while her black and white images are so abstracted as to become a kind of calligraphy, as in her Ballet Series.

Mary Ross likes to create a sense of movement, texture and visual excitement by using video characteristics such as distortion, super-imposition, multiple mixing, layering, keying and system "noise." Being a photographer, she uses her darkroom to further manipulate, define and refine her images to correspond to her vision. "I enjoy the creative freedom the video processing system offers me to reconstruct, isolate and recreate an image from 'real time.'" She works a great deal with the Paik/Abe video synthesizer containing positive-negative, keying and mixing functions.

After processing an image, Mary Ross photographs it directly from the monitor screen, either accepting the image as is, or manipulating it further in her darkroom. "My work depends as much on the use of creative camera and darkroom techniques as it does on my knowledge and use of video technology." Her "Self Portrait" was colorized at ETC through a combination of the Jones 4-channel colorizer and keyers and the ELF computer, which triggered the changes in the image. The artist chose the particular image for its retrospective and mask-like qualities.

"Runaway, Las Vegas" is a result of one of Mary's favorite techniques: slide montage, or "sandwiching." The pensive woman's face was photographed on slide film from a black and white videotape, the light from the tv screen and lack of resolution giving it a pale, artificial, impersonal quality. Mary then juxtaposed the face with her slide of the Las Vegas strip at night taken through a prism.

Her "Danse Macabre" is an interpretation of a traditional theme in art. Using color film balanced for daylight, Mary Ross made a slide of a skull from a black and white videotape. Unfiltered, a bluish cast resulted. During the exposure, Mary deliberately held down the still mode of the videotape recorder, creating the white "noise" going through the image. Secondly, she

placed an enlarged Kodalith high-contrast negative of the dancers on the front of the monitor screen. She rewound a blank videotape, creating the "noise" to be seen through the clear areas of the Kodalith. She then photographed the results on Tri-X film and "sandwiched" the resulting negative with the color slide of the skull for the final image. (In reproduction, the skull could barely be seen.)

Mary Ross also produces video-generated sequential photographs. "The Cardinals' Dilemma," of which two of the eight sequences are reproduced in this issue, are a series of synthesized images from a single color slide taken in Vatican City. The feeling of movement was created by focusing several video cameras on different parts of the scene, mixing and colorizing the images, then reassembling them into a procession-like sequence. I found Mary Ross' imaginative Dance Series most successful in carrying out her intentions of conveying reality with semi-abstract imagery.

We are reminded by Mary Ross that careful evaluation is necessary to determine whether a photograph is valid as a video still. "The electronic system generates so much information that one must be selective and retain only the best from the vast amount of possible variations. Not every effort in processing is going to create a meaningful work. Many hours of careful preparation, experimentation, balancing of systems and further darkroom work go into the production of my prints."

Mary Ross' background is mostly photographic, consisting of teaching, exhibiting and doing free-lance work in the Binghamton, New York area. Five years ago she received the Dr. Robert Zappert Award for her color photography, presented by GAF Corporation, and last year she was the recipient of a New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) co-production grant through ETC. Mary is now working extensively at creating video-generated still photographs and continues to use closed-circuit live video and pre-recorded process video in multi-media performances with her composer-husband Eric.

At ETC, Mary tells the designer-technician what she has in mind. He sets up the hardware, then it's up to her to use it creatively. "It's a collaborative effort up to a point, then I must take over since they are my ideas, my images. In the process, I'm forced to learn the technology as well."

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# Videography