



3D Art in the Digital Age

Swimming in the swirling skies of Vincent Van Gogh

by Mirrorcle Writer, Correspondent



Mirrorcle Writer is a professional artist, photographer, and mirror writer. She teaches art and Art History at the Elliot Historical Museum.

When was the last time a visitor to the Sistine Chapel was able to fly up to the far reaches of the vaulted ceiling to inspect in detail the masterpieces of Michelangelo? Only in the mind's eye could you meander through the quaint cozy town as depicted in Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night* painting—until now. Gifted artists in Second Life (SL) bring these amazing worlds into the virtual third dimension and enable us to experience art in a new interactive way.

One such talent is AM Radio, whose 3D art is based on the famous painting "The Death of Marat" by celebrated 19th century artist Jacques-Louis David. AM's work invokes an experience quite unlike a passive viewing of a painting on a wall. Every detail is painstakingly recreated in prims—the ghostly scene depicting the aftermath of the political assassination of well-known French revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat—who is found reclining, murdered in his bath tub. David's historical painting is mounted on the wall behind the scene of the installation. The vacant bathtub beacons your avatar to recline in the place of the fated victim mirroring the scene in the painting beyond. AM prefers "students to understand why the original is valid before showing them a 3D interpretation" but acknowledges the amazing influence of virtual tools to enhance education.

These creative tools were also mastered by Stan Frangible of Vassar College. Vassar College's 3D treatment enabled the Sistine Chapel to leap with gusto from the flat pages of the art history books onto an interactive virtual architecture that puts its marvelous grandeur into perspective. Unless you ventured in person to Vatican City and craned your neck in dizzying awe to take in Michelangelo's multitude of painted scenes, it's difficult to fathom how each painting is configured on the ceiling in relation to one another working in uni-



Mirrorcle as Marat at Chakryn Forest and treehouse in Second Life Dreamworld SE (29, 95, 29)

son to complete a mural of such grandeur. Entering Vassar College's Sistine Chapel's recreation is the icing on the cake of art historical education as it grants the third dimension that pieces together the brilliant complexity of the textbook puzzle.

The experience is greatly enhanced by the ability to fly. Flying makes it very convenient to inspect the ceiling close up and achieve previously unfathomable perspectives. Any attempt to take in the enormity of this genius's massive mural the experience is breathtaking, and it is no less so in the virtual world.

The Master's virtual work is in no danger of being slashed, mutilated, fondled or kissed. However, serious in-world security is wary of virtual vandals and has taken measures to protect its treasures. A Code of Conduct agreement is required to visit Vassar's Sistine Chapel. "Visiting the Sistine Chapel creates a deeply moving experience for many people for a variety of reasons, including religious, artistic and educational. To preserve this same experience for those visiting the Sistine Chapel in Second Life, we expect all visitors to

conduct themselves here as they would in real life: with respect for the environment as well as for those visiting the environment."

Stan Frangible states, "The purpose of this recreation, sponsored by Vassar College, is to explore the use of virtual reality for teaching and learning about art and architecture, by experiencing the context, the scale, and the social aspects of the original." Frangible's affiliate Brett Rydell elaborates, "We have re-created the Sistine Chapel as a proof-of-concept for how the technology of virtual worlds can augment or enhance a traditional liberal arts education."

Yet another project on the verge of completion—one that truly brings artwork alive—is Dutch company Tressis's virtual recreation of Vincent Van Gogh's *Virtual Starry Night*. Now under construction, the quaint Dutch town is nestled serenely below the swirling skies of Vincent's brush. Strolling passed looming flame-like cypress trees, passing by the cozy tiny chapel, you feel that you have literally stepped into the painting.

See **Art 40**



Visiting the Sistine Chapel in Second Life on Vassar Island, Vassar (167, 86, 24)

►Art

CONTINUED FROM 39

Sim hostess Liza Gibbs claims, "This is real education and we have students who come here to visit and teachers who come here to give interactive classes." These new 3D education tools enable digital-age students to experience great works of art on an entirely new level. Gibbs reports, "Reactions are great... people say they learn a lot more about Van Gogh, they understand him more" through the opportunity to interact and explore Van Gogh's painted environment.

It is hard to deny the intrinsically inviting quality of many of Van Gogh's works, which beaon the onlooker to

jump right in and swim in his thickly swirling paint. Now at last the fantasy of many art historians can be achieved... and we can blissfully join together swimming in the swirling skies of Vincent Van Gogh, flying to the far most reaches of the Sistine Chapel, and dying a noble martyr's death for freedom while reclining in a nice warm tub in host of masterpieces reborn.

Art has served throughout the ages as a provocative tool of expression and communication. Hapless paintings have suffered physical attacks by those provoked and those uncomfortably stirred. One most recent attack rendered a two inch hole in a priceless Monet painting in France's Musee D'Orsay. Perhaps under development is the real life technology of ejecting greifers out of museums

and into the far corners of outer space, but until such technology develops, security efforts are driving up the costs of protecting great works of art and such costs are passed on to the public. Art enthusiasts need not despair at rising costs as they now can enjoy the delight of many of the great Master Works reborn in the digital age. This new renaissance literally adds a new dimension to the history of art education. ☚

- "The Death of Marat" at Chakryn Forest and treehouse, Dreamworld SE (29, 95, 29)
- Sistine Chapel at Vassar Island, Vassar (167, 86, 24)
- Virtual Starry Night, Bridge in the Rain (47, 227, 66)