



## About the Cover

### The Mind That Sees and Creates

Gary Singh

**D**igital art enveloped UK-based Nicola Hawkes in ways she never anticipated. A previously undiscovered source of creativity emerged. Even though she had always appreciated modern analog art, the subject never hit home in school because she was consistently forced to study certain types of art that didn't speak to her. Aggravation ensued.

"I wasn't naturally artistic with a paintbrush or pencil and found it frustrating when I couldn't transfer my mind onto paper," she recalls. "My love of art never died, though. The day I discovered digital art was the day my mind finally ran free. I could finally create the bold, colorful artwork I had always loved."

These days, she prefers Corel PaintShop Pro over Photoshop, primarily because the latter gives too much to the user. It's like having access to a thousand tool chests too many.

"I found with [Photoshop] I didn't have to use my imagination as much," she says. "It was all

too easy; the artwork was almost created for me, which took the challenge away."

What a concept. That's not how most people view Photoshop.

#### The Colors Have It

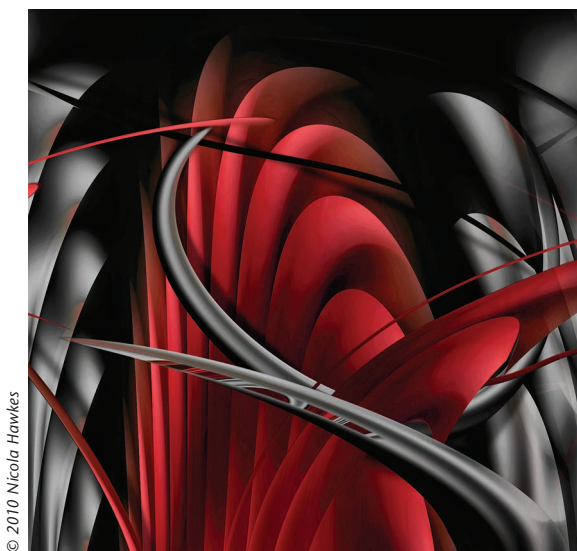
Hawkes says most of her final imagery tends to emerge through trial and error. Sometimes she spends hours manipulating an original photograph, only to axe the whole thing. In other scenarios, she discovers a theme or scheme after just a few seconds of tweaking the original idea.

She says *Twist*, the cover image, was one of the first to emerge after she purchased a relatively inexpensive digital camera and its accompanying photo-editing suite. She didn't even bother to read the instructions; she just dove in and started experimenting out of boredom. That is, the innate drive of creative experimentation took over. She'd never officially enrolled in art school, so it was all a lark at first. However, eventually she discovered layers and other techniques that broke the creativity box wide open.

"*Twist* was one of the first to bounce to life," she says. "The original image was yellow and red. I merely altered the colors to see how it would look."

Hawkes often begins with an original photograph, in many cases a macro shot of a flower, before subjecting the image to trial-and-error adjustments on screen, never knowing where the road will conclude. Various alterations, effects, filters, and image disfigurements play a role in her process.

"Normally my first step would be to completely change the colors, and then I'll apply some kind of effect or texture," Hawkes explains. "From there I'll use a variety of preinstalled distortions, twists, and warping effects until I see 'something' worth working with. I may opt to select an area and duplicate, move, mirror, and distort further or simply change the color to complement what is already there."



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Figure 1. *Underworld*. Several versions of this image exist in different color schemes, although Nicola Hawkes didn't create them as a series.

With some of her images, Hawkes discovers that simply changing the initial color scheme isn't enough to jar her imagination or isn't enough of a change in context for her creativity to explode in the right fashion. So, the original color scheme needs to remain. However, with *Underworld* (see Figure 1), this wasn't the case. Several versions of this image exist in different color schemes, although she didn't create them as a series.

"With *Underworld*, I can adjust the main color to anything anyone would wish, and it would still work and I love it," Hawkes declares. "I wouldn't say it's part of a series; it's just part of a huge color range, though the deep red really does seem to come up trumps with people. Because of the way I work, working in a series isn't something I really can do. Many of my abstracts could never be recreated to complement another due to the way I work. I am totally random. I just twist and distort, cut and paste until I think, 'Yes!' I don't ever make note of how I got to that point; it wouldn't be fun if I had to do that."

In other instances, as with *Rocket Man* (see Figure 2), Hawkes says the initial color scheme has a psychological effect on how she interprets the abstractions. If that occurs, she knows the juices are flowing.

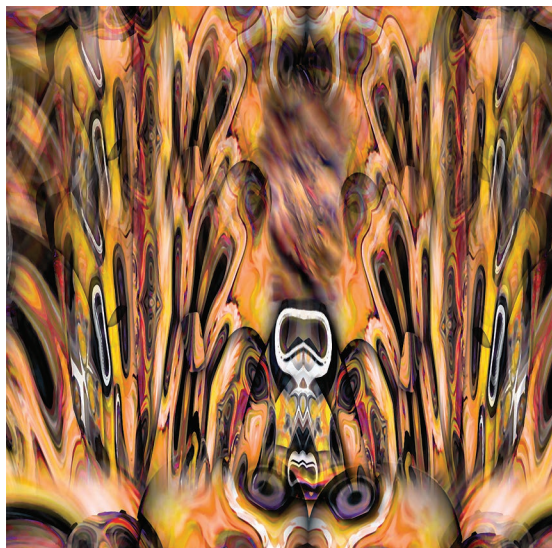
"Whilst playing with this image, I remember seeing part of a little helmet and what appeared to be a rocket ship blasting through space with flames and such like," she recalls. "To get the final image, I had to copy and mirror various parts to complete the little spaceman. He really makes me smile. If I had been working with this as a different color, I doubt I'd have ended up with the same result; I may not have seen the flames in the same way."

Stemming from Hawkes' admiration for architecture and Cubism, *Cityscape* (see Figure 3) is another beast entirely. It's also one of few images that still retain any semblance of the original photograph.

"The modern shapes of buildings make me gasp in much the same way as bold, bright artwork does," she confesses. "It is very rare that any of my photos remain recognizable after they've been manipulated. So this is by far the simplest of all my work, and my favorite."

## First the Desktop, Next the World

With all the debate these days about terms such as "computer generated," Hawkes claims to have been turned away by art groups over the years, primarily because they don't consider digital art to be art. Hawkes adamantly disagrees.



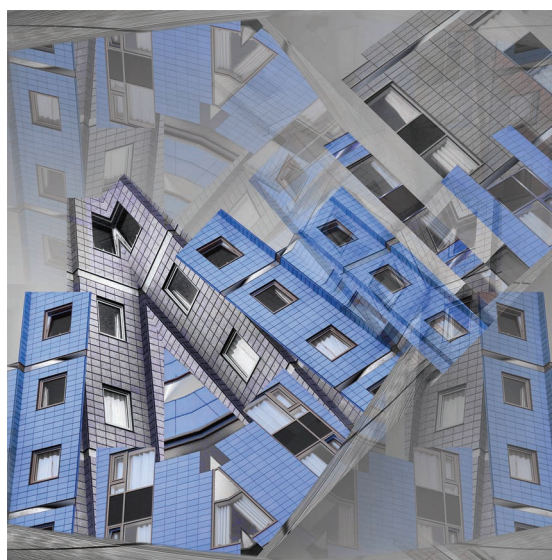
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**Figure 2. *Rocket Man*.** The original color scheme influenced how Hawkes interpreted and worked with the image.

"Behind art, whether it be an oil painting, charcoal drawing, or digital art piece, there has to be the mind/eye that sees and creates," she says. "It's the same as photography. A person can take a photograph, but this in no way makes them a 'photographer.' ... Yes, like many other people, I use digital software, but not everyone can turn that color on the screen into an image that gets people talking."

Hawkes says she eventually wants to sell her work as corporate art, with another dream being to reach Eyestorm, an online gallery based in London. ■

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**Figure 3. *Cityscape*.** Unlike most of Hawkes' images, this one bears some resemblance to the original photograph.