

The roots of inspiration, the risk of the unknown, and the seeds of change

In my office hangs a picture that I bought in New York more than thirty-five years ago, a limited edition hand-colored lithograph entitled "The Scribe", by an artist named Tully Filmus.

It depicts a bearded middle-aged Hasidic Jew writing with a stylus, only his head, arms and hands visible as he sits working. His attention is clearly and completely focused on whatever he is writing; his brow is slightly furrowed, his expression serious but controlled. He is writing something very important, and it is obvious that he is deeply immersed in his work.

I sometimes stare at this unnamed writer when I find inspiration wanting. He exudes a certain blend of dedication and attention to detail from which I can often extract enough motivation to compel myself to shake off whatever feelings of lethargy or frustration might be consuming me at that given moment and resume the job of completing the task at hand.

I suppose at one time or another we all need to fall back on a source of inspiration to steer us back on course. It may be family or friends. It may be our dreams or goals. It may simply be the spirit of refusal to believe that a challenge can't be met.

I sometimes wonder what inspires great artists or writers or musicians to create their works. Surely it can't be simply money or material possessions. We know that it can be feelings of love or hope—or tragedy, or grave disappointment. Sometimes it can even be religion or politics.

Perhaps one common thread is the lure of trying something different, whether this is a force that pulls us into a new venture, or circumstances which push us towards

the unknown. In every case, there is an element of risk—a chance of failure. For some, this may be the thrill in itself.

The field of digital technologies is ripe with risk. We need look no farther than the dot-com rollercoaster to see examples of risk-takers who had to confront the downside of venturing into the unknown.



The world of graphics is one which demands daily inspiration. For designers, artists, photographers—and yes, even publishers—the challenge is to maintain the highest level of creativity while working against time, budgets, client demands—and, in today's environment, software and hardware.

I applaud all of you who must face this constant uphill battle to be creative day in and day out. We all know that it isn't easy to find inspiration as part of one's daily routine.

But for reasons that only you know yourself, you continue to seek that challenge, and meet those deadlines, and satisfy those demands. And for accomplishing these goals on a regular basis, you should feel a great sense of satisfaction, even if appreciation for your efforts may be rare.

Creative graphics is a world populated by independent spirits; digital technology pioneers tend to be cut from the same cloth. So it is that the combination of graphics and digital technologies produces a unique breed of individual. Those of us who constitute this sliver of society must make an effort to reinforce each other at every opportunity.

Part of that reinforcement is found in the sharing of knowledge, something that those in the vanguard of the desktop revolution learned very quickly.

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A DIM SUM COVER

The combination of Chinese New Year (we're now in the Year of the Snake) and a sudden inexplicable fascination with those corny, weirdly lit Chinese movie posters and off-the-wall comic books made us want to see if we could put together a reasonable facsimile for the cover of this issue.

So, after a quick trip to Chinatown and a pit stop at Malabar's costume rental, we somehow managed to gather most of the Graphic Exchange crew together one night for a photo shoot (and ordered in Chinese food, naturally).

The key to getting the look and feel we wanted was in the lighting—that, and convincing the players that they had to find their characters from somewhere outside the norm. We didn't want it to be a Kung Fu exercise, but we needed to develop the general idea of a Chinese theme that suggested the sort of outlandish plots and characters that one finds in so many low budget Oriental movies.

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers? Too much of a cliché. And too many parts. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon? Too current, and probably too well-known.

And too good for what we had in mind.

So what's the story line here? We don't know—you figure it out. We gave you the spectre of evil hanging over the heads of our motley crew as a starting point. After that, it's whatever works for you.

All we know is, it was fun to do, and with luck (Chinese luck?) fun to look at.

Happy New Year. May the Snake be with you.

It may now be necessary to try to instill that spirit of cooperation in those who are immersed in related fields of endeavour. The challenge of the unknown is not a universally understood phenomenon.

Printing could be considered one such area. Up until recently printing had seen very little in the way of dramatic change to compare with the turbulence of computer-based disciplines. However the tide of technology has been sweeping through the graphic arts industry for the past five years or more at an unprecedented rate. Now, with the development of new open standards and automated workflow models, together with the impact of the Internet, this industry is experiencing a period of tremendous upheaval. A discussion of some of these changes and their impact is the subject of an article in this issue called *What Printers Need to Learn About Working with "Creatives"* (page 22).

An example of changes-in-progress within the printing industry is the evolution towards PDF-based workflows. There are many variations on this theme, but in *The Homebrew PDF Workflow* on page 18, Lerrick Starr explores a minimalist approach to experimenting with this relatively new technology.

Digital video is also a new technological area which is seeing change almost daily. Now, with Apple's introduction of DVD-equipped Macs, the stage is set for an explosion of implementation. Bob Connolly walks us through the potential impact of this recent news in his special report on page 28, *Affordable DVD-R, at long last!* As well, in *Be Here is Back with Better VR* (page 34), he summarizes the details of a rather unique new product offering which enables web-based "Virtual Video".

And as computer hardware and Internet infrastructure grows more powerful, software developers are keeping pace. This issue a quartet of recent software updates falls under scrutiny, ranging from Kirby Ferguson's reviews of *CorelDraw 10 Graphics Suite* (page 38) and *Jasc Paint Shop Pro 7* (page 45), to Peter Dudar's comprehensive examination of *Macromedia Dreamweaver 4 Fireworks 4* on page 40, to Lidka Schuch's *Illustrator 9 Tips, Tricks and Workarounds*, page 14.

Even pure graphic design is not immune to neo-revolutionary concepts, as Nick Shinn discusses in *Extra Light Type* (page 10).

I look up at my office wall and wonder what The Scribe would think of all this technology. Is it enhancing our capacity for inspired productivity, or diluting our ability to achieve it?

I have to smile to myself at the thought of showing him the story on page 48 called *Is Good Penmanship the Secret to Easy Surfing?* The very idea of the Internet itself would probably be a difficult concept for him to grasp, let alone the notion that a pen in his pocket could bring the Internet right to him.

Somehow I imagine him slowly turning that pen over and over in his hands, studying it closely, examining every minute detail with thought and care.

Then, returning it to me without a word, he would pick up his trusty old stylus once again and go back to his writing. 🐍

