Chapter VI
Reconfiguring the Rose:
An Exploration of the Use of Virtual Space by Artists Collaboratively Creating Digital Stained Glass

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses artists’ use of virtual space to collaboratively create a digital stained-glass rose window. It explores the use of virtual space to provide a working environment for artists, the Wombrose workspace, using the design metaphor provided by the rose window to create a collaborative space. This space focused at supporting practice-based artists in a democratic and effective negotiation process with the aim of developing a potentially monumental artwork to be installed as a digital projection in a real architectural space.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary stained-glass artists have embraced the net, although more for promotion (British Society of Master Glass Painters, 2007), networking (Gateway to Glass, 2007; H-Stained-glass Network, 2007), and archival (Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi (CVMA), 2007) purposes than creation of work. However, virtual space and the use of computing technology offer considerable potential for stained-glass artists. Screen-based technology is particularly suited to the development of stained glass, resulting in on-screen images more closely reminiscent of glass than any other medium can allow. With the relative lack of potential opportunities for stained-glass
artists to create real installations, technology offers artists an alternative approach to displaying their art. Thus, rather than the installation of actual glass, it provides the possibility to create large-scale projections, provided as digital images or acetates (for external spaces) projected onto real-world architectural or physical surfaces (see Figure 11).

Rose windows, such as those of Chartres, were created by large teams of stained-glass artists, involved in both design and production (Cowen, 1979; Favier, 1990). Attempting to produce contemporary artworks of similar scale also requires a team-based approach. However, few artists are geographically colocated. Even in academic establishments and studios, where groups of glass artists do congregate, there are rarely sufficient artists for the creation of a window as sophisticated as those produced in medieval times. The net offers considerable potential to provide a workspace for stained-glass artists to collaboratively work together to create a significant stained-glass installation.

This chapter discusses the design and development of a digital rose window, “In the Womb of the Rose,” see Figure 1. This was developed for full-scale digital projection, as in Figure 11, and both the artwork and its individual components are also displayed as virtual designs online. “In the Womb of the Rose” was developed in the Wombrose project, which explored whether a collective of artists working independently, over distance, and communicating and collaborating in virtual space, could create a significant monumental artwork. The project investigated whether such collaboration could result in a successful, online, artistic community with a shared commitment to a designated goal.

Section 2 places the Wombrose project in context and practice, outlining the interconnected disciplines that underpin the project. Section 3 outlines the artists’ virtual working space. Section 4 discusses participants’ experiences of creating a collaborative rose window using the Wombrose workspace. Section 5 discusses the feedback received from viewers of the artwork. Finally, we discuss key findings and briefly outline our future intentions for the Wombrose project.

**PLACING THE WOMBROSE IN CONTEXT AND PRACTICE**

Our aims in reconfiguring the rose were to create a monumental artwork, designed and developed collaboratively by artists working in a virtual workspace. The Wombrose project aimed to benefit artists, stained-glass practitioners, researchers, and other interested parties by connecting art, knowledge, and practice, as outlined in Figure 2.

“In the Womb of the Rose” is a feminist artwork, as reflected in both its content and production, focusing on women artists involved in craft-based practice to create female images. Feminist historians have identified that traditional crafts provided expressive creative territory for women, with such skills being thought to enhance the value of their feminine worth for the home (Chadwick, 1990). Since the 1960s and 1970s, there has not...
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