

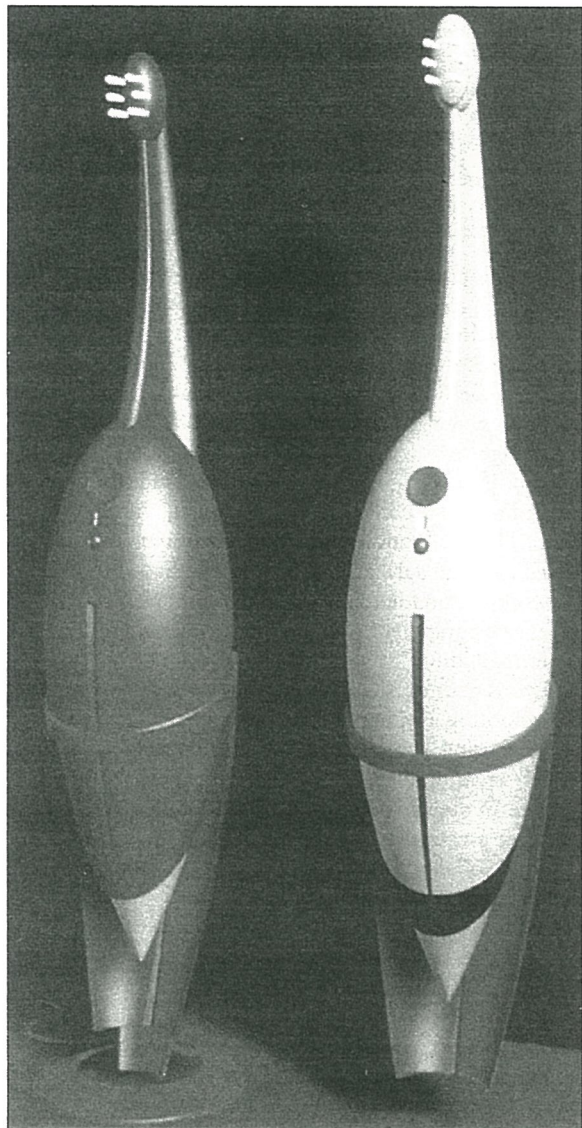
Art EDUCATION

"One of the interesting things that's happened," she continued, is that the computer "has broken down a lot of the crisp divisions that we've traditionally maintained between the illustrator, the photographer and the fine artist. All of a sudden, there's this whole new way of making images, and people are all doing very similar kind of work through digital imagery. Where do we go with this? We still love hand skills."

Of course, artists as diverse as Picasso, Tatlin, Duchamp, Rauschenberg and Cage, to name only a few, have suggested that one of the most crucial issues in twentieth century artistic discourse is the relationship between art and technology. But even those artists could never have envisioned the horizon that lies before us now. Only the future will tell us if our academic institutions are just keeping pace with the changing times, or if the present technological revolution will transform art, its history as we construct it, and its educational curriculum as we envision and teach it.

Collette Chattopadhyay is a contributing editor to *Artweek* as well as *Asian Art News* and *Asia Pacific Sculpture News*.

Computer-generated image by Claude Meyers, student at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena.



Computer-generated image by Jeff Hilbers, student at Otis College of Art & Design, Los Angeles.

A conversation with Ella King Torrey, president, San Francisco Art Institute

By Meredith Tromble

Ella King Torrey became the president of the San Francisco Art Institute in 1995, just in time to oversee the school's 125th anniversary celebration. She came to SFAI from Philadelphia, where she was Director of The Pew Fellowships in the Arts. She holds an MA degree from the University of Mississippi with a concentration in contemporary American folk art.

Artweek *As you formulate a new direction for the Art Institute, what questions are you asking?*

Ella King Torrey We have to reexamine the notions of modernism and romanticism on which most art education today is based. Those are nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas. The image of the crazed artist in the garret does not reflect the reality of most artists today, yet it is a mindset that has been incorporated in a good deal of our training. If there is a credo for us at this moment, it is to get artists out of the garret and into the polis.

AW *What will it mean to be a professional artist in the twenty-first century?*

EKT There are many different paths that an artist can take. One leads directly to gray-carpeted spaces with white walls. But the gallery system also is changing very rapidly, and that career track needs to be reexamined. There are many different ways to be an artist, just as there are many ways to be creative. We're developing a curriculum to deal with art as a component of social change. We want to help students understand how their art can be used as a tool for empowerment and enrichment, not only of themselves but of broader communities, in some cases very disenfranchised communities. It's not a path that every artist will want to take or should take. But it's a path that needs to be available.

We're also moving into new technologies. We're starting a Center for Digital Media, a program that will involve all the different departments of the school. It will allow students to experiment with new technologies exclusively as an artistic medium, as another kind of paintbrush.

AW *So you're making a significant commitment to the new technologies?*

EKT It's a question of artists having power over and knowing how to participate in systems that a lot of other people are participating in. There's a certain amount of controversy in the arts community about whether it's appropriate to use new technologies. One of the opposing perspectives is that hand-eye coordination, which is so much of the artistic prospect, is somehow undermined by using digital toys. I take issue with that. Different types of intelligence and coordination are required by electronic media, and the challenge for an artist is to understand what those unique qualities are, not to replicate drawing or painting or printmaking but to explore the special qualities of digital art-making.

Of course, a program like this is a black hole of money. Our commitment is to make available the basic paintbrushes. We are also beginning to develop some exciting collaborations with colleagues who have the toys available, and with industry. For one model, you can go back to the period when Polaroid was first developing the instant camera. Ansel Adams worked out a deal with the company so that every student got a camera, and every month a case of film arrived from Polaroid. The students took the pictures and sent them to Polaroid, as part of their research and development program.

AW *Does every student still need traditional skills, like drawing?*

EKT You don't get in here without a high level of technical proficiency. That's taken for granted.

AW *You don't see that requirement shifting to a high level of proficiency in mouse-handling, say, or photo-scanning?*

EKT It may. It depends on the nature of the pursuit that the artist wants to undertake. We have an unusual student body, in that it's older. The average age of an undergraduate is twenty-seven. Most of our students have studied elsewhere, and many already have degrees. This is a place that you come when you want to be a serious artist.

AW *What tools will be basic for a serious artist?*

EKT Flexibility and a kind of resourcefulness, an understanding of how to solve problems for oneself.

AW *How, then, will the school help students develop those qualities?*

EKT It comes in large part from the example of the faculty. We are very much committed, for example, to rebuilding the visiting artist program, which for years was one of the great strengths of the institution and has been rather diminished over the last decade or so. It's unrealistic to think that artists could give up a year or even five months to live and work in San Francisco. But people may be able to come for a week or two. Our dean has been creating a modular format for our visiting artist opportunities, starting with the summer session. Ann Hamilton, Fred Wilson, Alexis Smith and Joyce Scott have all agreed to work with us in this new system. These are artists who are extremely adept at working in multiple environments and communicating effectively with multiple audiences.

AW Do students enter the school with the expectation that they are going to come out as painters or sculptors?

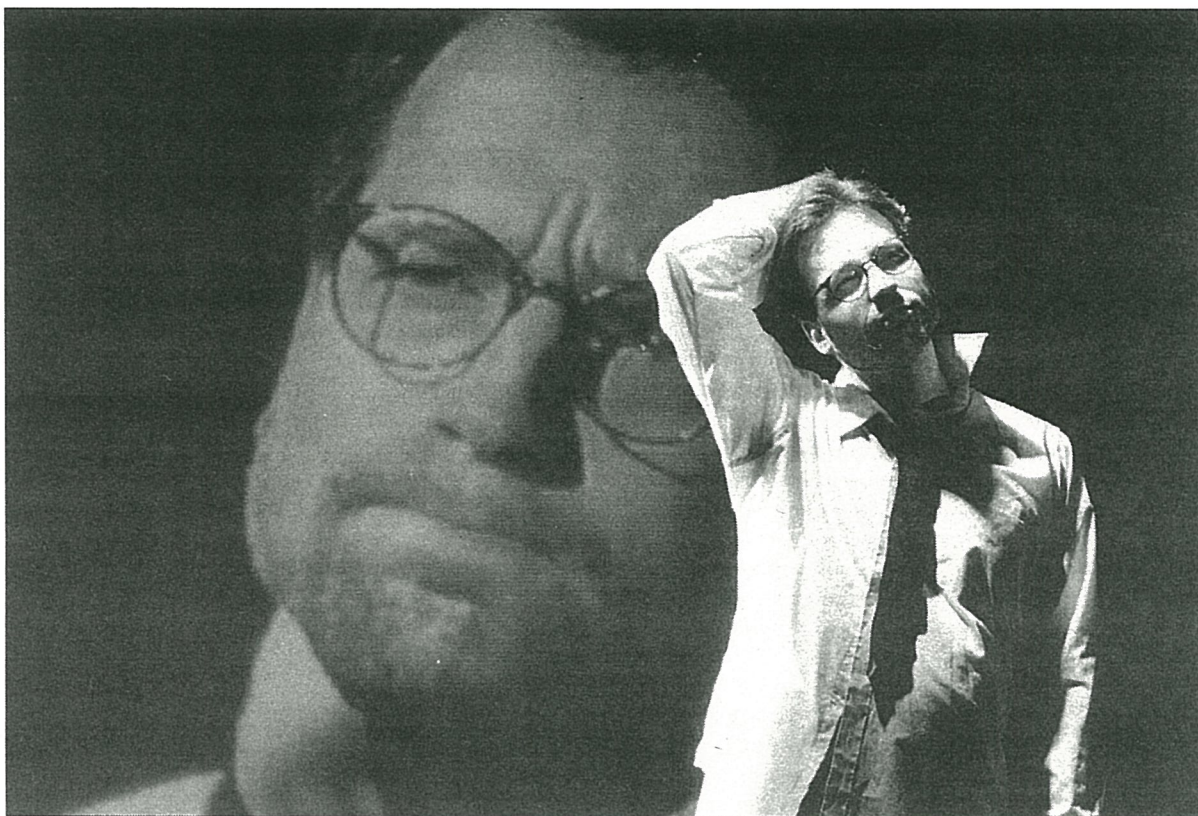
EKT Much less so than they used to. Fully a third of our current student body is registered as interdisciplinary. We have to adjust the curriculum, recognizing that the important thing is what are you trying to say and saying it effectively, regardless of the medium. I saw Carrie Mae Weems not long ago, a very well-known photographer. Her most recent show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York was sculpture and painting. She said they happened to be the most effective media for the particular ideas that she was pursuing. I see that same tendency in the students here.

AW The Art Institute has been dedicated to providing a fine art education. Do you see that stance continuing into the era of digital technology?

EKT This is a place where one trains to be an artist first and foremost. I don't dismiss the creativity in applied art, but that's not what we're doing here. I was talking with a colleague who runs an institution which emphasizes commercial art, and I told him, "You train people for careers in the arts, we train people for lives in the arts." The focus of our mission is very strong. We are about a certain kind of creative process with no false promise at the end. I must say, I find it somewhat dishonest when someone says, study here and you'll get a job in the arts. There are no guarantees. The training we offer in digital technology will be an extension of our mission.

Meredith Tromble, a contributing editor to *Artweek*, is a painter who also hosts "West Coast Live," an internationally syndicated public radio program.

Ella King Torrey, president, San Francisco Art Institute.
(Photo: Todd Pickering.)



Volker Schachenmayr in Laura Farabough's *Real Original Thinker*, performed in conjunction with SATI's first exhibition.

Just like Dürer: the Stanford Art and Technology Initiative

By Reena Jana

In a state of perfect symbiosis, dissimilar organisms live together in intimate association, creating a close union for their mutual benefit. Can the same sort of mutualism exist between art and technology in an academic arena—and beyond? With the current flowering of major high-tech and multimedia workshops for technicians and artists in both extension and degree programs at Bay Area schools such as San Francisco State University, California College of Arts and Crafts, Academy of Art College and City College of San Francisco, it seems that a trend in contemporary education has been established. With a specific agenda to foster a symbiotic relationship between the arts and technology, the Stanford Art and Technology Initiative (SATI) is another ready example of this unusual—and timely—wedding of academic pursuits.

Early in the fall semester in 1994, Charles R. Lyons, Margery Bailey Professor of English and Dramatic Literature at Stanford University, coordinated talks between members of the Stanford faculty and the scientific community in order to establish an interdisciplinary consortium to encourage technologically concentrated experimental art within the university. While the idea seemed quite logical to the science and technology departments, given Stanford's location within the geographical and conceptual radius of Silicon Valley, Lyons felt that he would face a challenge from artists.

"At Stanford," Lyons stated via an e-mail interview, "there is a great deal of energy going toward innovative uses of technology in teaching. There is a momentum that is irresistible, in a sense, in terms of appeal and in terms of the flow of energy. The uses of technology in experimental art, however, are more difficult to encourage ..."

"For good reason, artists are tied to traditional uses of media even if content isn't traditional," he continued. "The celebration of the hand-wrought and the actual material substance of the media shaped by hand-eye coordination dominates. Also, the availability of expensive equipment or the lack of availability inhibits experimentation."

Lyons defines SATI's existence primarily as a means of promoting a wide range of experimental aesthetic projects using a variety of new technologies—not merely creating digitally produced images—with the long-term objective of placing artists and scientists together creatively as a way of enabling technology through collaboration. With the blessing of John Etchemendy, Associate Dean of Stanford's School of Humanities and Sciences (which has funded SATI thus far on a one-time limited budget), Lyons and the prototype SATI group sent out a meeting notice via e-mail. They hoped that interest in SATI would reflect the flourishing of another art and technology hybrid at Stanford, the Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA). SATI group membership