



About the Cover

Into the Abstract

Gary Singh

John Best toils by day as an architect's assistant for Fisher and Dean, a small housing developer near Bristol, England. In contrast to the concreteness of his daily work, however, he also has a strong affinity for abstract art. In recent years he has increasingly followed his passion for graphic art, creating vibrantly colored digital images on the side. He is, in fact, at a point where he can launch an e-commerce Web site to sell his work (<http://www.john.best.btinternet.co.uk>). This includes three galleries of digital paintings using filters and plug-ins, abstract geometric shapes, and solid color-shaped works.

Background and influences

Born in Maidstone, Kent, England in 1973, Best eventually went to high school in Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset, where he studied graphic design and art history. There he discovered the Cubists and the Impressionists—Picasso's work, in particular, inspired him for life. He also studied architecture at Brunnel College in Bristol.

Several things influence Best's work, but interestingly enough, he noted, "There are no architectural influences in my art. I like to keep both disciplines separate." Instead, his digital art draws influence from the abstract world around him, whether it's techno music, storms, or near-death experiences. "My approach to art," he explained, "tries to evoke the viewers' feelings and imagination, so they can bring their own perspective into the art they see."

Best first got involved in computer graphic art in 1988. At that time, a friend lent him an Amiga 500 to play games on, and while he was searching for a game to play, he came across Dpaint by Electronic Arts. After that, he was hooked.

Boom!

Boom! (the cover image) was inspired by techno and house anthems from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Best wanted to express the feelings he got when listening to certain tracks. "The image interprets a rip-roaring rage of desire to make an explosive impression on the dance floor," he explained. "These feelings are expressed in this exploding speaker—hence the title, *Boom!*"

Working on a 1-GHz Athlon machine with 768 Mbytes of RAM, Best produced *Boom!* from an old test graphic that he created in Adobe Illustrator using Corel Vector Effects 1.5 (VE). It's made up of three separate images:

- a small spiked explosion created with the shatter filter and the shadow spiral effect in VE;
- a 3D ribbon shape also created in VE; and
- an image made from a larger spiked explosion and the 3D ribbon shape with a spiral shadow land filter used to give the main detail.

After creating these three images, Best imported the Illustrator file into Adobe Photoshop to combine the three images. Using eight layers, he doubled up a few of the images and then made layer option changes such as difference and overlay. He duplicated the main spiral image, inverted it, and with the layer option set to difference, he made sure it was above the original blue image in the layer sequence. Best repeated this process for the other two images. He created the background using an enlarged version of the finished piece with a color overlay.

Eye of the Storm and Holes

Primarily an abstract artist, Best works with a number of techniques including photo manipulation. He created *Eye of the Storm* (Figure 1) in 1997 by combining Photoshop with Kia's Powertools (KPT) through Metacreations, a plug-in for Photoshop (now owned by Corel). He used KPT's vortex tiling and lightning effects to mangle a photo of Gerry Hallowell (Ginger Spice) from the Spice Girls.

Best duplicated the image three times, inverting one of the duplications, changing the hue and saturation of the second one, and leaving the third one intact. He then used Photoshop's mask tool to erase the areas he didn't need, so each image showed a different part of itself through the picture. He created the background with an inverted, motion-blurred, and flattened version of the third layer. Best rendered the top lighting effect on top of a flattened version of the three main layers and then masked off to finish. When discussing how he came up with the idea, Best noted, "I just wanted to make an atmospheric storm image with a humorous play on words and pictures."

Holes (Figure 2), also from 1997, began as two photographs: one a stretched photo of an unknown female actress warped with vortex tiling in KPT with translucent effects, and the other as an imagined sea-creature. The image's tunneling effect was influenced by stories of



Figure 1. In *Eye of the Storm*, Best duplicated and then altered the image three times to create the final effect.



Figure 2. The mercurial allure and tunneling effect apparent in *Holes*. The image was influenced by stories of near-death experiences.

near-death experiences in which people felt like they're traveling down a tunnel. Best mused, "I thought that if I traveled down this tunnel, I would find my dream woman."

Fire and the future

Fireworks (Figure 3) is an example of what Best described as his "digitally painted geometric abstracts." As he explained, "*Fireworks* came to being when I awoke one morning and found myself staring at a framed piece of mine (titled *Cracked*) that I had on my bedroom wall. Because I needed glasses to see it, the picture looked blurred. This went on for a few days, and then it suddenly came to me that it looked more like fireworks." Best then took the original *Cracked* image and used Procreate's Painter 6 to add a few swirls, Catherine wheels, and sparks.

"I've always been fascinated with fire," he said. "So much that when I was a very young boy, I was a bit of a pyromaniac. I plan to explore fire as a theme in the future and I have a few ideas on paper at the moment, but nothing final yet."

Best's first gallery show was in February 2002 at Harrows Arts London, where 96 of his pieces were shown to 5,000 visitors in one month. He sold some pieces during this show and is currently doing market research on selling his work through his Web site. He plans to have his work set up for e-commerce and to start taking orders by Spring 2003. However, he's erring on the side of caution and isn't quitting his day job just yet. "If it turns out to be profitable enough to give up my newly found career in architecture, then I'll do it. But



Figure 3. Using Procreate's Painter 6, Best created *Fireworks* as an abstract revision to his previous work (*Cracked*).

not yet." In the meantime, the fires of creativity will keep fueling his abstract dreams. ■