



INTERVIEW WITH

# THEO PRINS

Theo Prins is a fascinating digital artist living in Washington USA. He's spent periods of his life in a variety of different and diverse locations around the world, which have clearly influenced his art, and he's also a pioneer of Stereoscopic painting. Sound interesting? Read on to find out more!

## How to view the Stereoscopic paintings

While looking at the center of the stereoscopic pair, place your finger about halfway between you and the screen. If you converge your eyes to focus on your finger you will notice the images on the screen begin to overlap.

Adjust your finger's position until the images completely overlap. Because you are still focusing on your finger, the images on the screen will be blurred.

The trick is to remove your finger and allow yourself to focus on the screen without uncrossing your eyes. Done correctly, you will see three images on the screen. The center image will have depth and the two outer images will not.

Your brain translates the disparity between the images that have overlapped into the experience of depth.

**"I spend a lot of time biking around with my laptop, sitting in different places and painting"**



## Interview with Theo Prins

Hi Theo, it's great to meet you and thanks for agreeing to be interviewed by 2DArtist. We usually start with an obvious one to get the ball rolling. Can you tell us a little about yourself? How did you end up in the digital art industry? For most of my life I've been creating imaginary environments with pen/pencil, paint, clay and sometimes cardboard. I've always been focused on places. Among other things, flight has always fascinated me. I used to draw lots of airplanes. In my early teens I decided to pursue a pilot license and earned money by drawing airplane portraits for pilots at the local airport. This ended abruptly when I was shown a graphics tablet in high school. From there on out I painted digitally and became quite inspired by the sci-fi realms of concept artists. I ended up creating a Deviantart profile and posted frequently on the Sijun forums. Through this I got my first job at CCP games in Iceland.

I can tell by some of your paintings that you must be well travelled. Which parts of the world would you say have influenced you the most and is there anywhere that you would like to go that you think will be inspirational?

I've lived in small, quiet places by the water for most of my life, in the US and in Holland. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, I wound up with a fascination for dirty sprawling cities. So over the past three years I've fed this habit in my art by traveling to those sorts of places. Several years ago I had the wonderful experience of living in Seoul, South Korea, working for Reloaded Studios. In early 2009 I spent three months in Vietnam and Thailand traveling with my laptop, sketching and working on my stereoscopic paintings. It's definitely the lively density and the visual chaos that I love about cities in Asia. Sadly, many of these places are being scraped away to make room for new apartment buildings. I'm on a mission to see the old world before it disappears.







This is the question I have been looking forward to asking: where did you get the idea to create stereoscopic paintings and how do they work? After taking many wobbly stereoscopic photos some years back, I became curious about the possibilities of mimicking stereoscopic depth in paintings. It all comes down to creating two slightly different perspectives of a scene and presenting these two perspectives to each eye separately so that they overlap in our vision.

Typically I start off by cutting a painting into hundreds of pieces in Photoshop. I label all these pieces by their location on the canvas and briefly describe what they are. I then duplicate the painting and set it next to the original. Either by crossing my eyes or using a viewer, I merge the two images in my visual field and shift each little piece in the duplicate painting to create a second slightly different perspective. Depending on which direction I move objects in the painting

they will appear to move farther away or closer. It feels a lot like sculpting, actually. There's definitely the feeling that I'm manipulating something physical in 3D space.

It's also fun to exaggerate the distance between the two perspectives, simply by shifting each piece farther. This creates the illusion of a miniature world, or that we, as viewers, have eyes very far apart like some giant creature. I





highly recommend shooting two photos a few seconds apart from an airplane. Viewing the two photos as a stereoscopic pair will create this miniature world effect because the plane has moved a substantial distance by the time one snaps the second photo.

**“Sometimes, an image will flash to mind when I’m exploring, say, a city.”**

Can you tell us a little about the process you use to create an image? And how does this need to change if you are creating a stereoscopic painting?

Sometimes an image will flash to mind when I’m exploring, say, a city. The experience of the image can be very vivid and it usually causes me to drop everything I’m doing and race back to my work station, or pull out a sketch pad and jot down as much of the composition and color

relationships as I can. I like grabbing all the opportunities I can to paint.

Other times, I’ll start a painting with the goal of creating a complete mess so I can find a composition within that mess. I’ll deliberately set myself up for happy accidents. Surprising compositions can come along that might not have been imagined beforehand.





When I clean up a painting I define certain key shapes just enough for the mind to take off and fill in the rest. I think our brains are very powerful when it comes to filling in details that are only loosely suggested, or that the artist didn't even intend. This can be good or bad depending on the purpose of the image. There are of course times when I want to be more deliberate with what is communicated in the image, particularly with freelance work. However, in my own work I like the "it can be a dog or a car" approach.

**"It's challenging to carry through the looseness of a 2D painting when it's converted to stereo."**

My stereoscopic painting process has actually infiltrated my regular 2D process quite a bit. There can be emptiness in the 3D space if I convert just any 2D composition to stereo. More so than a 2D composition, I feel a stereoscopic composition requires each little object in the

painting to be more independent and interesting in itself. This is because each object can be viewed at its own depth plane, just as we view the real world. Objects in a 2D painting sometimes rely on being viewed flat and compressed with everything else in the painting to convey the fullness and complexity of the real world. Additionally, because I have stereoscopic depth at my disposal, I almost subconsciously place less importance on conventional depth cues like atmospheric perspective.





When combined with my tendency to make each object a potential point of focus, my stereoscopic paintings can appear a bit cluttered when viewed in 2D. All in all, it's challenging to carry through the looseness of a 2D painting when it's converted to stereo.

As a freelance concept artist you must have worked on various different projects. What would you say has been your favorite project to date? And are there any projects you would like

to work on in the future?

I haven't really worked on a large variety of different commercial projects at this point, but within the projects that I have worked on there's been much variety. Currently I'm really enjoying the work I'm doing for Reloaded Studios. I've been with their project from an early stage so it's been a great experience to see the concepts evolve, plus the art direction gives me freedom as an artist. As for the future, I don't know what's out there and I'm open to surprises. In

the realm of personal projects, I want to keep developing my stereoscopic paintings and see where they take me.

I have always thought that where you live and the environment that surrounds you will influence your art and that is certainly clear in your case. But beyond that, would you say that there is a specific artist or style of art that has influenced you?

When I first started working digitally I was













definitely influenced by the whole speed painting movement and Craig Mullins's work in particular. Then, for quite some time, I pulled myself away from the internet. I was spending too much time on the computer and it wasn't healthy.

**“The physical reality of working behind a computer for hours on end results in a kind of sluggishness that really doesn't support the creative process.”**

Something that I have realized over a period of time is that a lot of artists we interview started down one career path and later turned their back on it to take up a career in digital art. Is there any advice that you would give to someone who was thinking of taking that step? And do you ever think about where you would be now if you had pursued a career as a pilot? The physical reality of working behind a computer for hours on end results in a kind of sluggishness that really doesn't support the creative process. As a balance, I'm finding it

helpful to continually work in different locations. I spend a lot of time biking around with my laptop, sitting in different places and painting. New ideas come along and I've become more flexible in the way that I work. And after years of working purely digitally, I'm also working with pen and pencil again. This has been very refreshing.

I don't often think of where I'd be if I had become a commercial pilot. The idea seems quite alien to me now. The idea became alien to





me back then, and that's what made it okay to quit. Although I do think that occasionally flying for pleasure would still be very fun.

I understand there is an exhibition in America that displays a lot of your stereoscopic paintings. How did that come about? Do you think that having a traditional exhibition of digital art improves people's general impression of the subject and raises its profile?

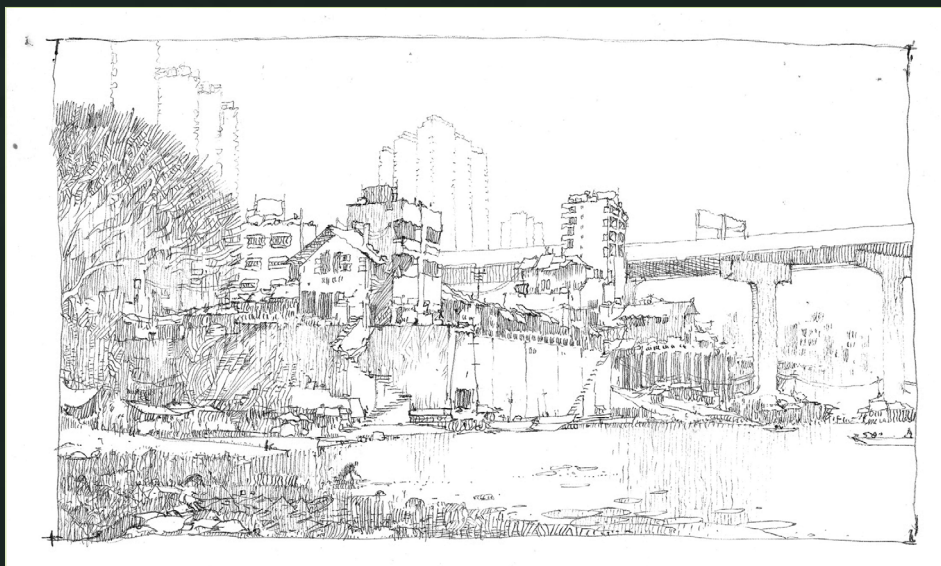
Yes, the exhibitions in the 3D Center of Art and Photography in Portland, Oregon, USA. It's a cozy museum and gallery showcasing antique and contemporary stereoscopic imagery. I made good friends with someone in South Korea who was coincidentally very much into everything stereoscopic. He pointed me towards the 3D Center as an outlet for stereoscopic art.

I've had a few digital art shows over the years and people have been very supportive and curious about the medium. So, from my experience, I'd say having a traditional show has improved at least someone's impression. Digital art is just new, and people I've spoken to often times don't know it's possible to "draw" and "paint" on the computer.

One thing that I really enjoy when I am looking through your portfolio is your ability to come up with unique ideas. Your overall style of painting is really quite different and recognizable and the stereoscopic paintings are obviously unique.

How important do you think it is to stand out and be able to come up with original ideas and styles?

In my personal work, I don't place so much value on uniqueness by itself. I think purposefully trying to be unique can get in the way of the creative process. To me, it implies that one would be spending time carefully avoiding a whole array of already existing styles and ideas just to find that elusive original one. If uniqueness is to be the result of any kind of artistic process it's probably by surprise and without much deliberation.



I'm drawing what inspires me by following mysterious compulsions to draw certain things in a certain way. I'm not too controlling and the results are often surprising. I don't let any preconceived visions I might have of a painting limit the end result. Occasionally something unique might result, but it's not my goal.

I often find that although artists can be very quiet and humble about their ambitions, they are, in general, very ambitious. You seem to have achieved a lot in a short space of time, so what would you say is your greatest

achievement to date and do you have any goals artistic or otherwise?

I'm very happy to have kept drawing and painting since childhood. There were numerous times when I could have let go of this habit. When I first moved back to the US from the Netherlands at age 13, it took me several years to get back into drawing. I became very passionate about flying and I was slowly forgetting about my art. Eventually I came around to digital art and that's what really brought back my creative drive.





As for my goals, an illustrated book and an animation have been brewing in my head for years. Every now and then I have intense two week sessions where lots of pieces slide into place. This has been happening more frequently as of late. Developing this project is becoming my goal.

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed by 2DArtist. You really are a fascinating artist and the team and I have really enjoyed looking at your stereoscopic paintings. I hope to see a lot more from you in the future.

You're welcome. I've known about 3DTotal for a long time, so I'm happy to have taken part. Thank you!

## Theo Prins

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