



Artists' Lessons to Thrive! 3.1 Laurence Gartel: When an Inner Drive Becomes a Driving Force

Big Idea: Inner Drive

Computer technology drives daily life with its high-speed access and vast online images. It can be difficult to imagine the challenges that pioneering digital artist Laurence Gartel experienced to produce some of the very first digital artworks. Gartel says that the obstacles were enormous." In the late 1970s and early 1980s gaining access to high-performance, multimillion-dollar Cray computers for his art was nearly impossible. Gartel knew of only three such computers that were available outside of government research laboratories. He also had the daunting task of convincing the art world that digital art was a true art form.

Early on, Gartel had an ability to create what seemed to be the impossible using complex analogue computer systems. In 1980, artists could not save digital images on transferrable memory storage devices. Therefore, Gartel reproduced his digital works by photographing their images on his computer monitor, as seen in *Triumph Car* (Figure 3.1.1). Such photographs capture the linear



FIGURE 3.1.1 Laurence Gartel, *Triumph Car*, 1980.

Source: © Laurence Gartel 2018. All rights reserved.

moiré patterns that run throughout a design displayed on a computer screen. Normally, they would be considered an undesired byproduct. However, the moiré patterns in *Triumph Car*'s add meaning to the work because the linear patterns mimic an animated racecar with speeding lines that indicate movement.

Gartel's inner drive led him to prominence as a digital artist because he overcame the challenges associated with computer technology and helped change perceptions about digital art as a valid art form. His determination to conquer obstacles led him to receive many accolades and commissions for his work. In 1989, the Joan Whitney Payson Museum replaced Vincent van Gogh's *Irises* with Gartel's *Nuvo Japonica* series. Two years later Gartel designed a popular Absolut® advertisement that ran for ten years and adorned more than 100 million magazines. Gartel explained that this significant work "changed the face of advertising art" with its groundbreaking digital art focus. Additionally, Gartel served as an artistic advisor in the writing of the National Core Arts Standards for Digital Media and was the official artist of the 57th Annual Grammy Awards. Since producing *Triumph Car*, Gartel has received commissions to create unique art cars, including *Mercedes Benz Globus SLK 320 Art Car* (Figure 3.1.2). He attached printed glossy papers, metallic papers, and tape to the vehicle's exterior to produce a playful automotive design. Reflecting on his career, Gartel acknowledged how his childhood collection of ceramic cars inspired his artistic creations and his *Roget's Thesaurus* helped him acquire new vocabulary, make sense of the world, and describe his artistic vision. Gartel continues to promote the validity of digital art and to create art cars. His inner drive has made him a leading force in shaping digital art media.



FIGURE 3.1.2 Laurence Gartel, *Mercedes Benz Globus SLK 320 Art Car*, 2014.

Source: © Laurence Gartel 2018. All rights reserved.

Essential/Guiding Questions

1. How did Gartel's inner drive make him a pioneer in the digital art movement? Which obstacles did he overcome to become a successful artist?
2. Why would Gartel choose to photograph *Triumph Car* and *Mercedes Benz Globus SLK 320 Art Car*? Would you prefer to see *Triumph Car* on its original computer monitor and *Mercedes Benz Globus SLK 320 Art Car* from behind the wheel? How do artists' presentations and displays of their work shape their meanings and functions in society?

Preparation

Using the big idea of inner drive, students will identify a time when they overcame an obstacle. They will write and sketch about this moment in their journals.

Daily Learning Targets

I can create an artwork focusing on my inner drive.

- I can connect research on how artists such as Gartel have applied their inner drive to produce art, and select the media of my choice to communicate my ideas.
- I can create a unified design to produce a quality composition.
- I can select the best format/location to present my artwork and share my story.

National Core Arts Anchor Standards 1, 6, 8, and 11

www.nationalartsstandards.org

Quoted artists' statements not listed in the reference section result from personal communications with the author (personal communications, 2014–2018).

