

TOP PHOTOGRAPHERS' FAVORITE ADIRONDACK SHOTS

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The Mixologist

Painter Anne Diggory's photo fusions

IN 2006, AFTER more than two decades of painting Adirondack landscapes, Anne Diggory suddenly added something new to her pictures: photography.

"It was an accident," says Diggory, who lives in Saratoga Springs. "On my computer I inserted a digital photo of a stream into another photo of a painting in progress to discover how I should paint the foreground. But instead of using it simply as a model, I kept the photo in, had the whole image printed and made adjustments by painting on it."

That chance decision initiated Diggory's "hybrids," a term she uses for "harnessing the interactive power of photography, digital manipulation and painting." Traditionally, artists created underpaintings, then layered their works on top in thin glazes of pigment to achieve brilliance and intensity. Diggory does something similar, but digitally.

She begins by making a preliminary painting, usually on site, and taking digital photographs of her subject. Back in her studio, Diggory photographs her painted sketch, which becomes her underpainting. Using her computer she experiments with the quality and density of landscape detail. She then introduces sections of her digital photographs, sometimes blending them seamlessly, sometimes leaving abrupt divisions between photographed and painted parts. Manipulating the digital layers enables her to play with depth of field, one of photography's major expressive tools. Diggory has

Two of Anne Diggory's Adirondack-inspired hybrids: *Making Waves*, top, and *Flat Out*, which depicts Buttermilk Falls, near Long Lake.



her digital image printed on large-format canvas, then completes the work by painting in acrylics directly on the printed image.

The results prove startling and disorienting, as well as beautiful. In *Making Waves*, the painted image of a small Adirondack lake blends into a photo showing three swimmers bobbing in the water. On a large rock a painted image of a rumpled towel modulates into a photo of that towel, a photo Diggory says initially inspired the piece. Photograph and paint appear almost the same medium, yet the photographed images burst with deeper, more saturated colors, while the painted areas, using a more muted palette, feel quieter, more meditative.

Just to the left of the towel, the photo of the large rock ends abruptly, with a right-angled border dividing it from the painted version of the rock. The photo appears to lie atop the painted surface, just as the towel lies upon the rock.

Diggory explains that she's calling attention to the way we actually see. "Our vision is very fragmented. We don't see everything at once; instead we look here, then there, then up at a cloud. We're drawn to look at a spot in a moment of time—for example, water dripping on a boulder at Buttermilk Falls, near Long Lake, in the hybrid I've called *Flat Out*. The camera creates such sharp, detailed textures that it draws you into that spot and isolates it from the rest of the world. Then you pull back and see it as part of that world."

This conflict between how we think of pictures and how we actually see the world has led Diggory to historical discoveries about Adirondack painter John Frederick Kensett. In an article for the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal*, she identifies the precise viewpoint from which Kensett made his 1869 painting *Lake George*. Kensett, she observes, heightened Black Mountain "by 30 to 50 percent," partly to achieve an effect of sublimity like that of his Hudson River paintings, and partly to address a problem all landscape artists share.

"How, on a two-dimensional surface,

do you convey the experience of light, emotion, and movement? You can't paint Black Mountain the way it actually appears, because it looks much smaller than we imagine. You can't duplicate distance and depth of field on a flat surface, so you make the mountain taller to compensate."

Diggory incorporated Kensett's image of Black Mountain into her Lake George hybrid, *Shoreline Retrospection*, where Kensett's glowing sky communes with her cold, coruscating water.

Diggory often experiments in shifting perspectives. *Coming and Going*, one of her many works depicting Buttermilk Falls, unfolds in a continuous image on two canvases, hung at right angles. "I always want people to think about the total experience of a particular Adirondack space—how it envelops them."

In addition to Buttermilk Falls, other Adirondack locations that have captured Diggory's imagination over the years include Lake George and the Northwest Bay Brook that feeds it; High Falls Gorge; and the Chapel Pond pull-off, where, she says, "you have the cliffs at Chapel Pond in one direction and the Nubble of Giant Mountain in the other." While canoeing at Lake Durant, another favorite, she often paints and photographs dramatic skies above a striking gap between two sections of the mainland.

Despite her term "hybrid" for these mysterious, absorbing blends—and juxtapositions—of acrylic painting and photography, she insists on the primacy of what she calls "the hand of the artist." She explains, "I'm a painter, so the camera for me becomes a unique 'brush' for detail, an ingredient in the stew. Photography offers a catalyst for more painting."

Diggory's hybrids will highlight a solo show, *Bi-ocular*, March 24–April 18, at New York City's Blue Mountain Gallery, and will figure in her August 21–September 28 exhibition at Lake Placid Center for the Arts. See more of her work at www.diggory.com.

Jay Rogoff is a poet whose most recent book is *Venera* (LSU Press, 2014). He lives in Saratoga Springs.