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DIGITAL

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Photo © Douglas Dubler
Digital Consultant: Helene DeLillo
Model: Angele B., Stylist: Sylvia Pichler



Douglas Dubler Gets on the Digital Bus

The immediate feedback of digital quickly got this photographer into the creative loop.

Known worldwide for his fashion and beauty photography, New York-based Douglas Dubler has recently made the commitment to bring digital photography into his repertoire.

Dubler's reputation is built upon years of work for clients such as Coty, Max Factor and Revlon, as well as a Clio award and recognition from Communication Arts and the Art Director's Guild. He teaches at the International Center of Photography in New York and serves as a sought-after consultant for major film and camera manufacturers. While he does work on location, Dubler's preference is the studio environment, where he takes pride in his control over light, color, exposure and film. He has always been on the leading edge of light and styling.

When we heard that Dubler had begun to work in digital we were fascinated. . .and curious. Dubler is a self-described "control freak," and we wondered how he was making the transition, and translation into the digital realm. He had always worked extensively with mixed light,

reciprocity effects, push and pulled film and other in-camera techniques that stretched the borders of film-based photography.

Our first question was. . .why digi-

tal? "It's inevitable," he told us in his Upper East Side studio. "The fact is that it's here to stay, and that professional photographers have to get on the bus now or watch it pull away later. Marshall McLuhan once wrote about information moving around at the speed of light. Digital is the medium of the Millennium, and it's the new game. The Internet has also opened new doors for photographers

and there's a growing need for good photography there."

As with anything he does, Dubler thought long and hard about what digital can and cannot do for the professional. "There are technical issues that still must be resolved. And there are also questions about costs and how the investment pays for itself. Digital photography changes at such a rapid pace that you have to be able to recoup your investment in a much shorter time. You must think long and hard about the equipment and set-up you will use."

Part of Dubler's early experiments involved a consumer digital camera—the Olympus C2000 Zoom. "Working with this camera has shown me some of the potential of this medium. I have been working on a series



of flowers photographed in the Impressionist style. Right away I was struck by the immediate feedback. It got me right into the creative loop. I can play with white balance, slow shutter speeds, slow sync, rear curtain sync—and see the results right away. These are techniques I also use with film, but here I could see, save or delete as I worked. I think that anyone considering digital should get one of these cameras and play. It's similar to the thrill that everyone experienced when the Polaroid Land camera first came out."

Dubler's schedule and his need to quickly ascend the steep learning curve were the basis for his next move—he hired a consultant to lend a level of technical expertise that would meet his demands for critical control. "If a professional photographer has the time and disposition to learn all that's required that's fine. But I don't. I'll learn, but I wanted the best advice on equipment and the best teaching I could get.

When I'm shooting I want to get the work done. If a camera or light goes out I know what to do. . .but what happens if the computer crashes in the middle of a shoot? You need the backup and the help to get you up that steep learning curve." Dubler turned to Helene DeLillo of Dancing Icon in New York (see sidebar) who has been invaluable in his digital transition.



MORE CALL FOR DIGITAL

Dubler sees more and more work coming in that calls for the digital medium. "I recently did a job for Coty Cosmetics. . .140 products that

they were going to use for their web site. It would have been foolish to shoot it on film, as the images would have to be scanned anyway. At up to \$100 for a good scan that would

HELENE DeLILLO: Digital Diva

Helene DeLillo, digital artist and president of Dancing Icon Inc. works for high-profile clients including J. Walter Thompson, Ogilvy & Mather, and Warner Music Group. Her digital artwork appears in major photography magazines and she was recently commissioned to do a "Digital Painting" of the IMAC for the engineers at Apple Computer. She also lectures on digital imaging and digital photography across the country at Seybold Seminars, Photo Expo, PMA, MacWorld, National Association of Broadcasters, and Comdex.

She specializes in digital imaging technologies and photographic retouching. Her retouching portfolio is a masterpiece collection of the before and after shots of some of the most famous faces in the business. With the magic digital touch, she makes everyone look their best!

One of her passions & fortés is the ability to communicate to

the end-user the technology from her creative experience. Her teaching experience includes the following institutions: International Center of Photography, The School of Visual Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, and Parsons Schools of Design. She is also one of the featured artists at the prestigious "ThunderLizard Photoshop Conference" in Orlando, Florida, in October. Go to <http://www.thunderlizard.com> for registration information.

As someone who has been involved with digital imaging since its inception she has consulted for: Apple Computer, Adobe Systems, Iomega Corporation, Kodak, Nikon, Phase One, MetaCreations, Silicon Graphics, and VST Technologies.

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have been a major expense. Digital bypassed all that expense and time. I will never stop shooting film, but there are times when digital just makes sense. If I need a wall-size

print I'll use film. But most of the work I do ends up as an 8.5 x 11-inch image in a magazine. Digital handles that just fine."

As we said, Dubler is fastidious in

THE IMAGE CREATION

Dubler's choice for equipment is the LightPhase back from Phase One mounted with a Mamiya adapter on his Mamiya RZ67 body. His main lenses for the photographs shown here are the Mamiya 140mm and 210mm APO. "I have been looking at different equipment for years and had felt that the quality was not quite there. The LightPhase was the first serious contender. They are committed to working with photographers and getting it right." The lighting used was Balcar Source 3200 digital strobes and Primalite light boxes, set up in a triangular fashion through which he shoots. The exciting hair and makeup on model Angele B. of Major Models was done by Sylvia Pichler. "Sylvia's airbrush technique is perfect for the edge and resolution capabilities of digital. She combines the high-tech control and creativity of the airbrush for the translucency of the skin to show through. It's the perfect combination for the feeling I'm developing for the new Millennium. We also worked together to create these 'utility' clothes, made from industrial mesh and tubing."

his work. Lighting, styling and technical execution are his hallmarks. How was he able to translate that approach to digital imaging? "It's always about photography," he said. "How you capture the image is almost irrelevant—it's the end use of the image that counts. I've found that it's no different than conventional photography—it requires good craft in both mediums."

That's not to say that Dubler's boarding of the digital bus was seamless—he has tackled some issues right away and is still dealing with others. "I'm very critical about color, and color management is a key issue. Helene DeLillo has been essential in getting my Apple monitor and capture system to work in perfect sync. Apple's Color Sync system was an important step towards resolving some of the major problems in color management. The Fuji Pictography printer is essential and supplies me with a match print that I can send along to the printer. Ron Ackerman from Fuji Photo Film Digital Imaging Division worked closely with me to create a color profile that precisely matches the screen image. Since I don't have an original transparency to match, I have to know that what I see on my screen is exactly what I will get on a print and in the digital file." He also chose the LightPhase digital back from Phase One. "The LightPhase speed rating was just right. I also chose the Phase One system because of the one-shot set-up, and the fact that I could work with it just like any conventional film back. But most important to me was the skin tone reproduction which I found to be the best in the digital market to date."

Another issue that challenged Dubler was image editing. "I'm still most comfortable with chromes on a light box. Film storage is easy. If you have 600 images from a shoot you can spread them out and look at them through a loupe. But digital image files take up a massive amount of space and I always have to consid-

er the capacity of the hard drive and other storage media like the Jaz drive by Iomega and the VST portable Fire Wire drives. With digital you have to make up your mind pretty quickly or you get jammed for space. With film you have somewhat more leisure to consider the best shots."

Dubler is also exploring the nature of the digital media and studying claims about chip speed, resolution and contrast capabilities. "It's essential that photographers test their equipment—just like film and lenses in conventional photography—and work out just what the contrast and

speed capabilities of digital are for them. You can't presume anything. You also have to test your lighting and find the equipment that works best for you. I've always worked with strobe—it gives the edge and presence that, for me, continuous lighting lacks. I also find that lens resolution is much more critical with digital, and testing is key. For that reason many of the lens manufacturers are producing new lines of lenses specifically for digital imaging."

Even with these issues Dubler remains convinced that digital is the way to go. "Film quality is the

Holy Grail but digital technology is moving so fast that we'll get there soon. I'm sure that the transition will occur faster than anyone imagines—that goes for commercial as well as portrait and wedding photography. Clients are also becoming more savvy. Now I get as many calls for digital capture as I do for film."

And why not, he adds. "With the new Photoshop 5.5 program, even with limited experience a photographer can do basic retouching and output a print before the shoot is over. Consider the advantages to that!"

"Digital has a way to go, but it's in its infancy and all the issues facing us now are surmountable. Each step has improved quality and opened up more creative possibilities. This is a powerful tool that everyone must pay attention to. I'd have to say that any professional photographer who doesn't get on the digital bus is brain dead. And you can quote me on that."



STUDIO HARDWARE & SOFTWARE

- Phase One Light Phase Camera Back
- Apple Blue G3
- Built-in Iomega Zip Drive
- 768MB RAM Kingston Memory
- 18GB Hard Drive
- Apple 21-inch Color Sync Monitor
- VST FireWire Drives
- Wacom Intous Tablet
- Epson PhotoEX & 1200 Printer
- Fuji Pictography 4000
- Adobe Photoshop 5.5
- Test Strip
- Kai's Power Tools
- Camera Bits Quantum Mechanic
- Ultimatte KnockOut Silhouetting Tools
- MetaCreations Painter 6.0
- Canto Cumulous

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