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Mariano Gonzales' piece "New America" hangs near a printout of the artist's statement and assembly instructions. The work is part of Softcopy, a show in the Kimura gallery on the second floor of the Fine Arts Building. The show opened March 20 and runs through April 16. The Kimura gallery is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Technology enables cutting-edge curating for 'Softcopy'

By Meaghan Howard

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"The liberation of Kuwait has begun."

That was the announcement from White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater Jan.17, 1991, as the United States began its air strike on Iraq during Operation Desert Storm. The same day, across the planet in Anchorage, Softcopy opened at the UAA campus.The first Softcopy exhibit coincided unintentionally not only with the dawn of a foreign war, but also with the new spectacle of seeing most of it via 24-hour newscasts. "Unfortunately the technology of war displayed on video was infinitely more compelling, so the exhibition got little notice," said its curator, UAA professor Mariano Gonzales.

Today, the U.S. fights another Iraq war, and Softcopy is back, reincarnated as Softcopy International I.

The new show runs through April 16 in the Kimura Gallery, located on the second floor of the Fine Arts Building. The show features artwork submitted digitally from around the world. The artists responded to Gonzales' call for entries on www.ArtShow.com. Several of the artists hail from Eastern Europe, as well as from across the U.S. and Anchorage. Gonzales reconstituted the pieces after their electronic arrival.

“The technology now is radically improved and accessible,” Gonzales said. “So the call for entries was only on the Web and open for about a week.”

Artists e-mailed their 2-D submissions to Gonzales, along with instructions on how to exhibit them. Gonzales hung each piece with its corresponding display directions. The information provided by the artists is as varied as their projects; ranging from long artist statements to concise, one- or two-sentence directions on size and format.

Gonzales said the submission process for the recent show was much easier than it was in 1991.

“The Net was not what it is now,” Gonzales said, “so all entries arrived by mail on floppy disks. Most of the files were Mac or MS-DOS and were not compatible, so all cross-platform translations were done with an Amiga computer. Printing technology was primitive, lo-res and expensive so the work was displayed in the gallery on video monitors.”

The new show includes only one piece displayed on a monitor – a video about the progression of rock music displayed on a Mac. The rest of the show is printed on various sizes and types of paper. The works are displayed in a minimalist style, with each piece affixed to the walls without frames or backing. The show features a broad mix of digital photography, scanning electron microscope images and bold textual images.

Cristian Orfescu, whose medium is scanning electron microscope images, calls his artform “NanoArt.” Softcopy exhibits two of his works, both brilliant, jewel-colored pieces printed on 8 1/2’’ by 11’’ paper. They feature vivid tone-on-tone color schemes that vibrate with life. Orfescu pointed out the unique quality of his images compared to other photography — his do not require light.

“Since there is no light involved in the image creation,” Orfescu said, “NanoArt is different than photography where the images are generated by particles of light (photons). The scanning electron microscope images are generated by electrons which penetrate deeper in the structure, creating images with more depth, more natural 3-D look than the photographic images.”

In a series of three images by Sandra Camomile, the famous Venus of Willendorf is positioned among various scenes from pop culture. The iconic goddess figure treads water with synchronized swimmers in “Sync or Swim.jpg.”

In an e-mail to Gonzales, Camomile wrote, “I deconstruct images of women as a vehicle to critique traditional female roles and cultural myths.”

Gonzales' piece in the show, "New America," featured a scanned copy of the Bill of Rights with a stylized American flag punched from the middle, the stars and bars littering the floor beneath.

Gonzales also had a fall 2005 solo exhibit at Out North gallery in Anchorage – a self-christened "anti-propaganda" show called "it's all over but the RAPTURE."

Will Anchorage see Softcopy International II in the future?

"There were 14 years between the first Softcopy and the current Softcopy," Gonzales said. "Who knows when the next Softcopy will be?"