

**ACEVEDO IN CONTEXT:
ANALOG MEDIA 1977–1987 •
DIGITAL MEDIA 1983–2020**

by Peter Frank, Charlotte Frost, Thomas Miller, Michael J. Masucci, and Victor Acevedo. Acevedo Media, Los Angeles, CA, U.S.A., 2021. 400 pp., illus. Trade. ISBN: 978-1-73-527110-1.

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https://doi.org/10.1162/leon_r_02416

ACEVEDO in Context offers a striking introduction to the groundbreaking career of Victor Acevedo. The narrative, supplemented with color

plates, helps the reader position his pioneering work. Four essays by Peter Frank, Charlotte Frost, Thomas Miller, and Michael J. Masucci further enhance our understanding of his art, as do quotations and notes by the artist himself. The book also includes transcriptions from previously unpublished writings and interviews with art historian Patric Prince and scientist-crystallographer Arthur L. Loeb. One particularly compelling aspect of the survey is how Acevedo developed his unique voice in conversation with other artists. These forays demonstrate Acevedo's talent for incorporating different schools of art as he developed his unique style. The influences of M.C. Escher, Salvador Dalí's surrealism, and R. Buckminster Fuller stand out. Cubism and Futurism are also woven into his work from his earliest days.

Escher passed away in 1972, and seven years later Acevedo was fortunate enough to gain access to the M.C. Escher Foundation in the Hague, Netherlands. There he got special permission to make hand transcriptions of Escher's personal tessellation study notebooks over a weeks' time, years before they were published publicly. This gave him insight into how they were built up on graph paper and allowed Acevedo to unlock the techniques of the zomorphic tessellations. This exciting opportunity, particularly for an artist at the beginning of his career, is visually documented by a photograph in the book showing the young artist at the M.C. Escher Foundation holding one of the wood blocks for the Escher print *Smaller and Smaller*.

Another photograph, a head shot of Salvador Dalí, is equally awe inspiring, once again making one think about how the young artist must have felt at the time of this encounter. From the text we learn that they shook hands in Figueres, Spain, in 1977. Acevedo took that moment to show Dalí one of his recent student drawings.

ACEVEDO in Context also includes a photograph with R. Buckminster Fuller, taken while the two of them were chatting backstage at Fuller's

Integrity Day lecture at the Los Angeles Convention Center, 26 February 1983. Acevedo spent a good deal of time with Fuller during the last six months of Fuller's life. The artist saw this as life changing.

The 1998 interview with Dutch scientist and crystallographer Arthur L. Loeb is quite illuminating in terms of both the M.C. Escher connection and in terms of how Acevedo's work builds on the geometry of Buckminster Fuller's *Synergetics*. This interview mentions Fuller's book called *Synergetics: Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking*. A book that later inspired many of Acevedo's various geometrical structures. The Fuller geometry seemed complicated to me and I, admittedly, was unable to follow all the details. Those interested in Fuller's work will want to look at appendices section at the end of this volume. One of the three included presents the artist's 2006–2016 collaboration with geometer Thomas Miller and details how they have further developed Fuller's ideas. We also learn that Acevedo saw Fuller's geometry as a metaphor for ideas such as the void and the void matrix that he became interested in after reading Fritjof Capra's book *The Tao of Physics* in 1979.

The Tao of Physics exposed Acevedo to parallels between modern physics and "Eastern mysticism." Capra depicts the void as a domain that is totally empty yet simultaneously full and brimming over with the potentiality of being. After his having read the book, Capra's ideas began to take form in the artist's imagery. Acevedo conceptualized it in terms of both periodic geometrical structure and as a device he could use metaphorically for his figurative subjects.

A second important reason to look at *ACEVEDO in Context* is that Acevedo's biographical narrative serves as a reminder that many of the media pioneers worked with analog tools before technological art was ubiquitous. Books like this one document the roots of media arts and connect it with the work of participants who forged the revolution. In this case, the volume helps us see how Acevedo, as an innovative pioneer, transformed predigital

aims into art created with electronic tools. His early analog work shows his interest in geometries and overlaid patterning, and these two themes remained throughout his career. The imagery is conceptually reformulated as his practice evolves through experiments with new ways of working. *Leonardo* readers will no doubt appreciate the shot of Acevedo's image titled *Skull v2* on the cover of the journal (Volume 34, Number 4, 2001). His *4D Memory Cluster* was reproduced on the back cover of the same issue.

The three main periods that define Acevedo's evolution are presented chronologically in the volume. From 1977 to 1987, his analog period, he used traditional media, painting, drawing, and film. The digital period extends from 1983 through 2007. Because this work was mathematical and included a focus on symmetrical operations, it gave him a perfect foundation for the digital environment. Indeed, his work dramatically demonstrates an artmaking approach that was a particularly good fit since his style meshed conceptually with the supporting language of digital tools—regardless of whether his goals were two- or three-dimensional. The new technologies additionally aided him in creating visually overlapping sequences or merging coexisting levels of reality, two of his recurring themes. Also emblematic of his vision is imagery that has a metaphysical bent, sometimes expressed with geometrical abstraction and sometimes with figuration.

In 2007 Acevedo shifted into an Electronic Visual Music (EVM) period, a term he coined in 2013. These pieces include a synesthetic element as well as computer animation. The synesthesia discussion of the EVM period reminded me that the recent focus on genetic synesthesia has made it easy to lose sight of artwork that aims to compel audiences to engage on multiple sensory levels. Acevedo deals with synesthesia phenomenologically, integrating real-time video-mix workflows into his audio-visual studio practice.

Of the four essays, I found art critic Peter Frank's the most informa-

tive, succinctly capturing Acevedo's evolution from a pioneer of desktop computer art in the early 1980s to his music videos period. According to Frank, Acevedo sets computer-generated structures and manipulated images in motion, one morphing into the next in response to sound composed by and large by collaborators. This insight points to the one downside of this book: electronic jazz collaborations resist printed publication.

Since Acevedo began as an analog artist, I was particularly fascinated by the way his digital video and digital print work resonate with his roots in painting, which appears to remain at the core of his practice conceptually. Since his career began, he has shown his work in over 135 group and solo art exhibitions in the U.S. and internationally. He also has fruitfully collaborated over the years. Now his practice is to issue still images sourced from his video works, in the form of signed limited edition prints and sometimes as NFTs.

To summarize, Victor Acevedo's overall *oeuvre* reveals that the worlds he creates are both fragmented and unified. They are examples of the kinds of thoughtful paradoxes visual art can successfully present conceptually. In Acevedo's case, he effectively blends infinite repetition with variations in patterns and arrangements that mesh form with figurative and abstract elements. The end results are tantalizing because they do not feel designed despite his geometrical and mathematical prowess. It does not seem that he sets out to illustrate a particular idea so much as to intuitively compose it as he brings a dynamic resonance and harmony to the final compositions. Within this, as this book conveys, we find an experimental spirit that creates echoes of both the mundane and the otherworldly.

In closing, I highly recommend this volume to those interested in the new media pioneers as well as to art and geometry enthusiasts. Given the breadth of Acevedo's work, it is also a book for library shelves. It not only offers a compelling introduction to this artist's exceptional and complex

artistic repertoire but also probes the career of a unique artistic voice. We learn about how Acevedo's early experimentation with art and geometry using analog media provided a good foundation for his embrace of the digital tools that began to enter the culture at the end of the twentieth century. *ACEVEDO in Context* is available at www.acevedoedia.com/books, and for a limited time each copy will be personally signed by the author. An eBook edition will also be issued.

While it may eventually become available on commercial sites like Amazon, the kind of limited approach Acevedo is using as he rolls out this volume suggests that artists frequently choose to initially limit editions as they make their work available.