

**Reaction to the Chris Spollen Lecture
July 21, 2009**

West Hartford Session
UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD
Limited Residency MFA in Illustration



Chris Spollen & Steaming Away on the Evening Tide, 2009

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“The DOING is satisfying.”

- Chris Spollen, July 21, 2009

Chris Spollen (b. August 12, 1952) has been doing things his own way from a very young age. His work ethic stems from his ability to envision the end product and a heavy reliance on blue collar ingenuity. Spollen is able to focus his energies in a concentrated direction to fulfill his goals.

Spollen’s Staten Island, NY upbringing was not stereotypically urban. He was a Boy Scout, and holds the rank of Eagle Scout - reflecting a person with the abilities search for a “work around” to get through a problem.

Spollen had an early arts focus, graduating from the High School for the Performing Arts in NY in 1971, and attending Parsons School of Design, a division of the New School in Greenwich Village graduating in 1974. His method of work during college and early professional efforts was a very controlled and frenetic etching technique.

To attain the finish and workflow he desires,



American Pop, 2003
Chris Spollen
Digital



Steam Flying Machine, 1974
Chris Spollen,
Etching

Spollen’s fastidious etchings from his first professional portfolio show the controlled energy present in his working methods. The textures are crisply laid in with areas of mottled tone placed between the hatched regions.. The result are broadly designed shape fields containing restful or excited visual information.

Carrying a cast iron behemoth for tens of city blocks show's a driven inventor. Spollen still combs the shores near his home for useful objects to incorporate into his studio work and sculpture.

Chris will fashion many of the items needed for the work's execution. From his salvage and modification of a cast iron sheet press (mangler) into a printing press, to his fashioning of a home-built Stat camera for processing his own work, Spollen exhibits a renaissance sensibility towards his studio operation. His ingenious sidestepping of daunting obstacles is commendable.



Antique Sheet Press (Mangler) turned Printing Press "The Moonlight Press" adapted by Chris Spollen - early 1970s Cast Iron and Steel

From humble operating budgets, Spollen was able to overcome the perception of a single small businessman to that of a full fledged design firm by the most simple phone mannerisms; replying as a collective "we" to dressing in a shirt and tie when going into the studio. He fashioned what he couldn't readily find or afford, but wouldn't skimp on cutting edge technology when it's purchase proved to be warranted.



Commerce and Technology, 2001
Chris Spollen,
Digital

Spollen was able to apply various technologies to achieve his final illustrations; silkscreen, Xerography, Lectrachrome, etc., but found much of his energy was still being burned by travel and face-to-face client meetings. He

then adopted an early version of the Fax machine, called ZapMail to harness profitable hours in the studio instead of traveling to and from the client's office.

In order to streamline his process further, Spollen became an early adopter of the computer to attain crisp line work within his finished

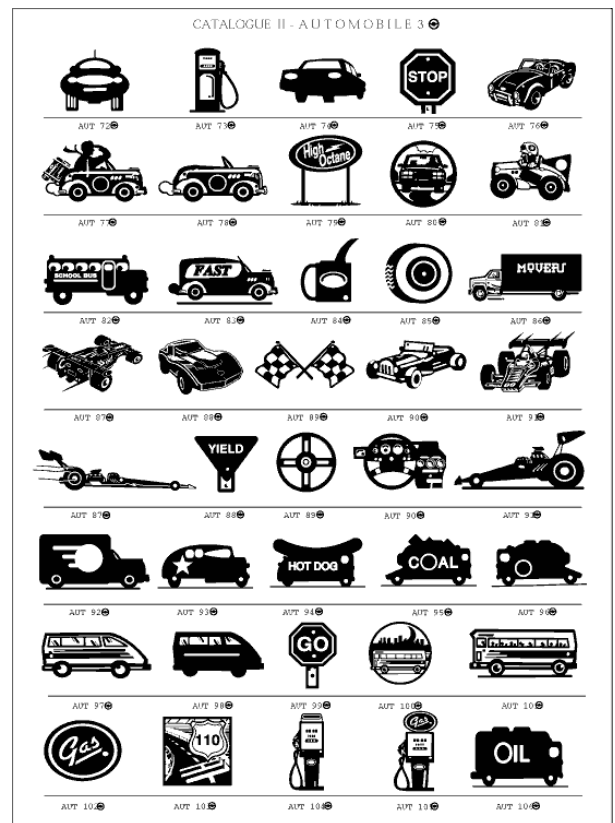


Rocket Command, 1999
Chris Spollen
Digital

Spollen's leap to use his previous work as spot and clip illustration, bundled into groups opened a previously untapped revenue stream. He is able to control his work and its resale via sales and licensing on his own terms.



above Icon Welcome to the Robot,
below: Icon Digital Pallet, 1998
Chris Spollen
digital



Stock Illustration Catalog Group, 1996
Chris Spollen,
Film and Digital

work. He jumped in with both boots, sinking a small fortune on scanners, printers, monitors and CPU's... all with very little promise of success. He struggled through the learning curve, but began to offer clients a slick and new style of graphic illustration. Rather than French curves and brushed in fills, Spollen was able to achieve the same action with simple Bezier curves and color fills - composing his final artwork with the same care, but within the new digital medium.

New opportunities arose as the 1990s saw a boom in computer use, interest and ownership. Spollen's computer based illustrations allowed him to ride the wave, while looking for new opportunities of sales and expansion. He began gathering past computerized illustration together into "Clip Art" and "Spot" illustration packages for sale to the greater public. His grasp of the medium also allowed him to exploit the gallery scene and online sales of Giclee prints of his work.

Spollen has continued to reinvigorate his work by infusing his many life interests into his daily artistic vision. His love of the mechanical, science fiction and nautical themes has merged with his



Dot Com, 2000
Chris Spollen
Digital



The Lakester, 2007
Chris Spollen
Found Objects

The way that Chris switches his creative energy from medium to medium, from fantasy to utilitarian underscores much of my own upbringing and early creative life. If we didn't have it, we cobbled it together from salvaged pieces in the local dump or fashioned something in the woodshop. My parents were raising seven kids on a single brick layer's income.... we had to make what we couldn't afford - often gaining practical experience in the time spent creating.

desire to sculpt with his hands. He currently fuses tin-can creations of boats, ray-guns and rocket ships into digital photo montage illustrations and fine art prints. His work is highly eclectic, but deeply personal and finely crafted. He explores ideas as series, wringing the last creative drops from them, often culminating in self-published folios, which are sent to clients - generating more work and sales.

Spollen's desire to fully explore his interests and tinkerer's methodology to attain the finish reflects much of the same methods displayed by my own father's shop and studio. The American "can-do" work ethic applied to achieving an end product was never halted by the lack of the correct tools, products or knowledge. Books were checked out from the library, phone calls were placed to experts and night-school



Donna's Five Speed - Tiki Island Series , 2008
Chris Spollen
Digital

classes were exploited for their machine shop usage; boats were built, grandfather clocks were fashioned and paintings were executed.

The lack of innate knowledge on a subject was never the end of the thought.

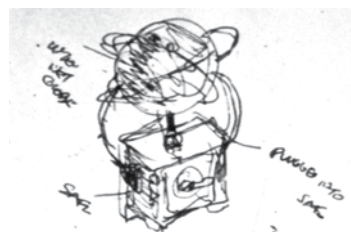


Spollen with fellow Bicycle builder John Tetz, 1999
Photograph: Chris Spollen

“What one fool can do, another can too!” - the one quote I cherish most from my father’s tutelage.

Spollen expresses this same life lesson. His fashioning of mono-cock bicycles are works of art and science, stemming from a germ of interest. He seeks out experts to gain the knowledge needed to craft his bikes. He practices welding, mold-making and engineering to reach the goal of a personalized Human Powered Vehicle (HPV). These same skills overflow back into his art, which is currently fashioned from found objects from beach combing, welded, animated, photographed and digitally manipulated.

Chris Spollen’s art reflects the man; ingenious amalgamations crafted from humble beginnings.



Sketchbook Page, 1998
Chris Spollen
Pencil on Paper