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Imaging

Chromaxion™

The Newsletter of Interesting Imaging Stuff

Unerasing the Erased de Kooning

In 2000 while working at Better Light, I had the good fortune to be asked if it was possible to make an erased pencil drawing visible again. This is just the sort of oddball question that piques my interest, so I immediately bought a set of varying hardness pencils, some art paper, several large erasers and went to work.

After making many pencil drawings with varying pressure, erasing them, then imaging in the near infrared with a Better Light scanning camera, I found it was possible to make the original drawing reappear. It seems that even lots of erasers and elbow grease cannot completely remove all the graphite particles from a paper matrix.

Then I was told the reason for the project, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) had an artwork called the *Erased de Kooning* which was created by Robert Rauschenberg by erasing a Willem de Kooning drawing. It seems that Rauschenberg had an idea to create an artwork by erasure and he approached de Kooning to supply the drawing. Aided by a bottle of whiskey, de Kooning was persuaded to donate one of his drawings to the project. After a month of erasing Rauschenberg completed the project. Since there was no record of the original drawing, all anyone had seen was a smudgy paper. SFMOMA wanted to know what image was erased.

Only 15 minutes was provided to image the artwork, but due to the prior experimentation this was sufficient to get an image of the original drawing. Everyone was pleased and the imaging was considered a success. We thought that all the image had been recovered.

Fast forward 10 years to 2010. By then the Better Light scanning camera had an improved sensor, the control software was much more advanced, and SFMOMA was interested in finding out if there was more to the erased image that could be teased from the artwork.

Armed with improved techniques and these updated tools, The *Erased de Kooning* was again digitally photographed in the near infrared. It was exciting to discover some extra figures and details that were not visible in the original infrared digital image. To make these features more apparent, several image processing techniques were applied in Photoshop with the result that I feel confident that the whole original image has now been restored.

In fact, it may be that some of these details may have been erased by de Kooning when he created the original drawing. This is something art scholars will have to debate.

Now it is three years later and what happened to all these images? Can the public see them?

I am pleased to announce, that in cooperation with the Getty Foundation and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, SFMOMA has just released the online [Rauschenberg Research Project](#).

This is a large collection of images, research and documentation of many Rauschenberg artworks. Included in this project are images of the *Erased de Kooning*, the infrared reconstruction, the enhanced infrared image and a detailed [PDF report](#) of the enhancement processes involved.

This was a fascinating project and I invite everyone to browse the website. Until SFMOMA completes its renovations and reopens, this will be as close as you can come to seeing the *Erased de Kooning* (and the unerased version).

In this issue:

Unerasing the Erased de Kooning	Pg. 1
RM Imaging Needs You!	Pg. 2
Question for Photographers	Pg. 2
Search Engine Recommendation	Pg. 2

RM Imaging Needs You!

Development of SpectraShop 5 is now underway. We need information about your usage of the current SpectraShop 4, what tools you need or want, and any ideas (sane or crazy) you have to guide us in this development.

We have received many interesting suggestions for new features, or enhancements to existing features. Here are a few ideas we are considering that need your comments.

1. New import/export formats. What formats do you want? Do you need the CxF format? Or do you need the Argyll format? What others?
2. More instruments supported. Which manufacturers and models do you want supported?
3. Specimen report export. Other than the metadata, spectral data and colorimetric values, what information do you want on your reports? For example, do you need a company logo?
4. More graphs. What types of graphs do you want? In which tools do you want the graphs?
5. Multiple user preference files for Inspector settings. Do you need one file for the entire program or individual preference files for each tool's inspector?
6. Support for other chart formats. Which ones?
7. More tutorials. [Tutorials are available](#) for basic measurements, what other ones are needed?

Send an email to robin@rmimaging.com with your comments on any of these questions, or any other topics that come to mind.

Remember, the squeaky wheel gets greased.

Not commenting may bring to you the same fate as Mort. He did not answer a previous survey. He awakened one morning to find his new car had been targeted by a passing flock of incontinent geese. Wanting to wash off the indignity he then found his garden hose had holes chewed in it by a pack of mischievous raccoons. Then driving to work he found himself behind a contractor's truck leaving behind a trail of tire shredding nails. Do not let this happen to you! Comment today and comment often.

Question for Photographers

Here in our triple-X secret research laboratory, so secret we often have trouble finding it, we are always on the hunt for new product ideas. One of these projects needs the help of our photographic user community.

What are the object colors that you have trouble capturing? Everyone knows about cobalt blue objects turning purple, but what other objects drive you nuts trying to get them imaged properly?

Send a description of the object with enough detail so we can get a copy locally, or if you have a spectral measurement from the object, send that to us. The email address is robin@rmimaging.com.

Your answers will not cure baldness, but they may help stop people from pulling out the hair they do have.

Search Engine Recommendation

Many of you may know that most search engines either monitor your browsing habits or enable other companies to do so.

If you would prefer to keep your privacy, use duckduckgo.com for your Internet searches.

This search engine does not monitor your searches or install any tracking software. When you launch DuckDuckGo it uses an encrypted communication method to keep your information private.

Here is a [link](#) to its statement on user privacy.

In this age of users being turned into products by unscrupulous companies, it is reassuring to find one with ethics and morals.

RM Imaging is not involved with DuckDuckgo in any way. We just like our privacy.

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