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Entertainment & Life

Social-media project keeps Cape Cod digital-art class together

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Students in the **Digital Art Group (DAG) at the Cape Cod Art Center** in Barnstable are posting, sharing and building new artworks together online. The project, led by digital artist Barbara Braman, is a way to maintain their connections amid the sudden disruption.

The art group Braman founded has met for nearly three years at the center to share images via their iPads and phones — along with tips, techniques and apps they were using to manipulate or change the look of those images, sometimes in radical ways.

Taking, for instance, an online photo of a colorful vegetable marketplace, class members might consider: “Instead of a sidewalk here, what about a tidal wave?” followed by: “Now, how would we achieve that?”

Now that classes are suspended, the art group is continuing online via working groups on Facebook, creating a kind of “circulating” art class. The virtual classroom idea was dreamed up by Braman, who soon came up with last week’s first assignment: a “round robin” that would split members into two groups of seven each, for a one-week art-creation project with a “traveling” format.

Braman began by posting an image of a pair of empty jam jars. Participant number one in each group then had one day to add something to the picture, such as a color, background pattern or object, with a description of what they did, how they did it, and their inspiration for the change.

Then on to the next person, with each artist taking one day to post something new to the digital collage. Just as they would have in the classroom, group members jumped in with comments, suggestions and questions.

Braman plans to develop more such “remote” art projects for the participating artists. In one, she hopes to assign pairings of two students each, to work on a particular series of images. Another plan, she says, is “a variation on speed dating,” where each member “collaborates with a different artist every day for a week, using the same set of photos.”

The center’s description of the Digital Art Group says that “the digital artist uses pixels rather than paint ... captured with any camera from DSLRs to mobile phones.” Braman, who previously worked in watercolor and ink drawing, has taken to phone photography and digital manipulation as a new kind of creative expression.

With such imaging, she says, “You can imagine, ‘What if I did this to it?’” and then try it, taking the opportunity to alter an image you’ve just created.

“I’m not afraid of messing anything up anymore,” she says, referring back to the often exacting work involved in watercolor painting. Exploring and changing a photo opens up more possibilities, and “leads to more creative solutions.”

With the virtual classes she leads, she says, “It’s more than the artwork.” It’s “a way of getting to know other people,” including students with a variety of skill sets.

Braman calls her class “a very collaborative group,” adding that it’s “people being involved with each other,” engaging “through their artwork.” A virtual project, she says, can offer immediate online visibility through the internet and connections with other artists.

The Facebook group has collected about 180 followers, with 20 or so contributing images for consideration or posting comments. Fourteen regular participants work on the weekly collaborations.

Work created by the Digital Art Group is usually displayed year-round at the Nirvana Coffee Company in Barnstable village.

Responding to an increasing interest in digital art, the art center recently created a website called the National Association of Digital Artists (naDA), to function as a national bulletin board for digital artists to share their work.

