Artists combine talent, computers

By Jay Cooper
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The world of art is being introduced to high technology through the program "Synergy of Change: Artists and Computers" being run by Mihai Nadin, Eminent Scholar in Art and Design Technology.

The program is intended to give well known artists the opportunity to come to Ohio State and work with the latest in computers, Nadin said. The visiting artists will work in the Cranston Center, 1501 Neil Ave.

Al Wunderlich, associate professor and head of the departments of painting and printmaking at Rhode Island School of Design, will be the first artist to participate in the program, here Feb. 1 through Feb. 9.

Wunderlich, who considers promoting knowledge about new technology important, is currently working on two projects which require use of the Space Shuttle.

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Mihai Nadin

The first, a painting, would be carried in the shuttle's cargo bay and tested for the effects of extreme light and temperature on its hundreds of layers of acrylic and phosphorescent paint.

His second undertaking, the Lightflight project, is an experiment to develop art in space. Artists on the ground would control a bank of lights connected to strobe lights in a canister, contained in the shuttle's payload. The artists would test optical communication between the two.

Two of the artists scheduled to participate in the program, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, are particularly eager to try computer art, Nadin said. Thomas and Johnston are two original animators for Walt Disney.

One goal of the program is to see how artists learn to create. Some of the artists have no knowledge of creating with a computer and it will be educational to see how they approach the medium, he said.

"I will not paint with a new brush," is an attitude a few artists are taking, Nadin said. Some artists do not like the idea of being limited to slides, film, and prints as their only end product, he said.

Nadin said the artists and computer program could stimulate research into finding better ways to pull what is created in the computer, out of the computer and onto a more traditional art product and in developing better laser printers.

David A. Svet, assistant professor of industrial design, said by using computers the outcome should be dynamic. "This type of project has not been tried before. It will be a tremendous help to the discipline of computer-generated art," he said.

Nadin said another important aspect of the program is giving students exposure to the artists. Students will meet the artists and see how they do their work.

"Ohio State is a huge place. Sometimes people don't have time for art, and you need the human quality of art," he added.

The five year program will cost approximately $1.5 million, and will be funded primarily by foundations, endowments, and private enterprise. The initial funding was provided by the Office of the Vice President for Communication and Development.