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by paul slaughter

# The Visual Artistry of Maura Dutra



*It is always fascinating to learn about the different paths that lead one to a photographic profession.*

*Maura Dutra's path began in Hollywood, California, where she grew up. She enjoyed drawing and painting, and aspired to be an animator. Her early foundation in the arts began with a Saturday morning figure drawing class at the Art Center*



*College of Design in Pasadena. Later, at the University of California, Santa Barbara, she was a fine arts major and received a BFA in illustration from California State University, Long Beach. Maura explains, in a humorous way, her steps from fine art training to animation in the film world. "I did fall out a second story window when I was a baby," she jokes, "and I did land on my head. That might actually explain it all."*



Maura is a self-taught digital-imaging artist and photographer who intuitively draws upon her traditional fine art education. In Hollywood, she spent 20 years on the cutting edge of imaging for film and video. Maura says, “My timing couldn’t have been better. When I started in this discipline, it was an analog world, in which I created the transporter effect for the first Star Trek movie using traditional animation processes of flopping art cels. By the time I left, the effects industry had transformed itself into an advanced world of 3D dinosaurs running amok via digital technologies! Each day, our culture is moving full steam ahead with technological advances. I think it’s important to explore the newest image-making tools, not only to stay in the game, but also to avail myself of wonderful new imaging possibilities. Self-taught is the only way to go when it comes to the latest and greatest technologies, it seems. Heck, we may even be part of a new art movement. How exciting!”

### Early Influences

Maura has had many artistic influences. First is Wayne Thiebaud, an American contemporary painter known for his expressive brushwork and vibrant color palettes.

Another is painter John Singer Sargent, for his unique interpretation of the French Impressionist style and his portraiture compositions. Raymond Booth is a botanical illustrator whose work Maura finds absolutely stunning. She also cites Picasso, for his exceptional insight into the creative process, and photographer David LaChapelle, for his richly layered figurative images, which create elaborate storytelling experiences for viewers to interpret. Maura says, “When I look at LaChapelle’s images, I am excited to see how influences from the early Renaissance Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens can reach into our contemporary world.”

### Digital Imaging

Maura began working in Adobe Photoshop and Corel Painter with their early introductions to the imaging market. She was immediately fascinated with the options that digital imaging offered the artist. Her visual-effects career and raising two daughters (Carly and Chelsea, now grown and on their own) kept her very busy during their early years, so much so that she could not find the time or place to drag out her oil paints and easel. She welcomed the new-fangled digital imaging programs as an accessible way to advance and explore imag-

ing and painting techniques. She found that digital painting/digital imaging has become yet another artistic medium for creative expression, just like watercolor, pastels or oils. Maura and her husband, Bruce Dorn, have named their signature painterly style Photo Impressionism®.

### Assignments

From their base in Prescott, Arizona, Maura and Bruce take on commercial and personal projects that are completely independent of each other’s efforts. At times, they do collaborate on creative tasks that are simply too ambitious to be undertaken without the other’s assistance. Both have their own strengths, and larger commercial projects benefit from their combined efforts. Their digital painting approaches share similarities, but each paints independently and has developed a distinct and recognized style. Maura often produces on many of Bruce’s projects while lending her stylistic vision where needed. Their professional relationship is older than their personal one. Maura says, “Bruce was a film director when we met. He became one of my clients as an effects supervisor and producer. We developed a mutual respect for each other’s expertise and found common,

beneficial ground. We're really just two very independent but supportive artists who are working to live, love and create under one very cozy roof. We collaborate when it's fun or just plain necessary. We paint to let our individual spirits soar."

### Creativity

Maura says, "Our long careers in Hollywood were made possible by a combination of learned and intuitive skills in the art of

### Botanical Images

Maura has always been intrigued by the beautiful colors and organic forms found in the natural world. She says, "The history of the floral art form is long and quite fascinating. When we lived in L.A., I made a lovely little English pocket garden and began nurturing old-world roses, lavender, and sweet peas in my spare time. As I researched roses, I rediscovered the beautiful French botanical collections of the past. Using these clas-

cal images has been distributed around the world through an interior décor company, and individual images appear on all sorts of licensed products."

### Present Project

Maura says, "Bruce and I are currently working on our own equestrian series. We each love to photograph and paint horses and riders. I've started a series of Flying Chaps for the gals. Bruce has been concentr-

ating on cowboys and their trusty steeds." The pair runs an annual autumn photographic workshop in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. There will be no digital painting in this year's workshop—when the air is crisp, they prefer being outdoors shooting rather than working with a Wacom tablet. This year's program offers multiple digital photography capture sessions with a resident herd of horses and cowboys in front of the majestic Grand Teton Mountains.

### Textures and Actions Imaging Software

The first collection of "Mama Maura's Textures with Actions" imaging software offers beautiful, high-resolution original art elements that can be easily applied to digital images with

Photoshop actions. Maura found that some of her print-enhancing techniques, such as aging and distressing print surfaces, were of interest to other visual artists and photographers. And so, she proceeded to create her first collection of digital software. The textures add rich visual interest to any digital surface or photograph, and can be applied in endless combinations, allowing users to create their own unique look. The Photo-

free-associative thinking and brainstorming. Providing creative thinking on demand is what we were trained to do and how we have earned our way in the world. We start with observation as we endeavor to discover the essence of a project. Finally, we distill this essence into a unique visual impression that we can share with others through technical applications. Creativity is about believing that one can spin flax into gold."

As a springboard, I began to create my own images. Flatbed scans of actual blossoms were the basis of my digital paintings, which I hand-embellished with calligraphy brushes and festooned with custom-made curator's stamps. One thing led to another, and I found my work featured in *American Rose Magazine* and published in a lovely calendar that had a sold-out production run. A collection of these botani-



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shop actions will automatically set up the texture with a layer mask to allow users to knock back areas where they do not want as much of the effect. The disc also includes seven retouching and colorizing actions,

ally shooting in RAW format. Files are processed in Phase One Capture One, utilizing Adobe Photoshop and Corel Painter for enhancement and painterly effects. For color consistency, Apple Cinema Display

long and interesting careers for our studio.”

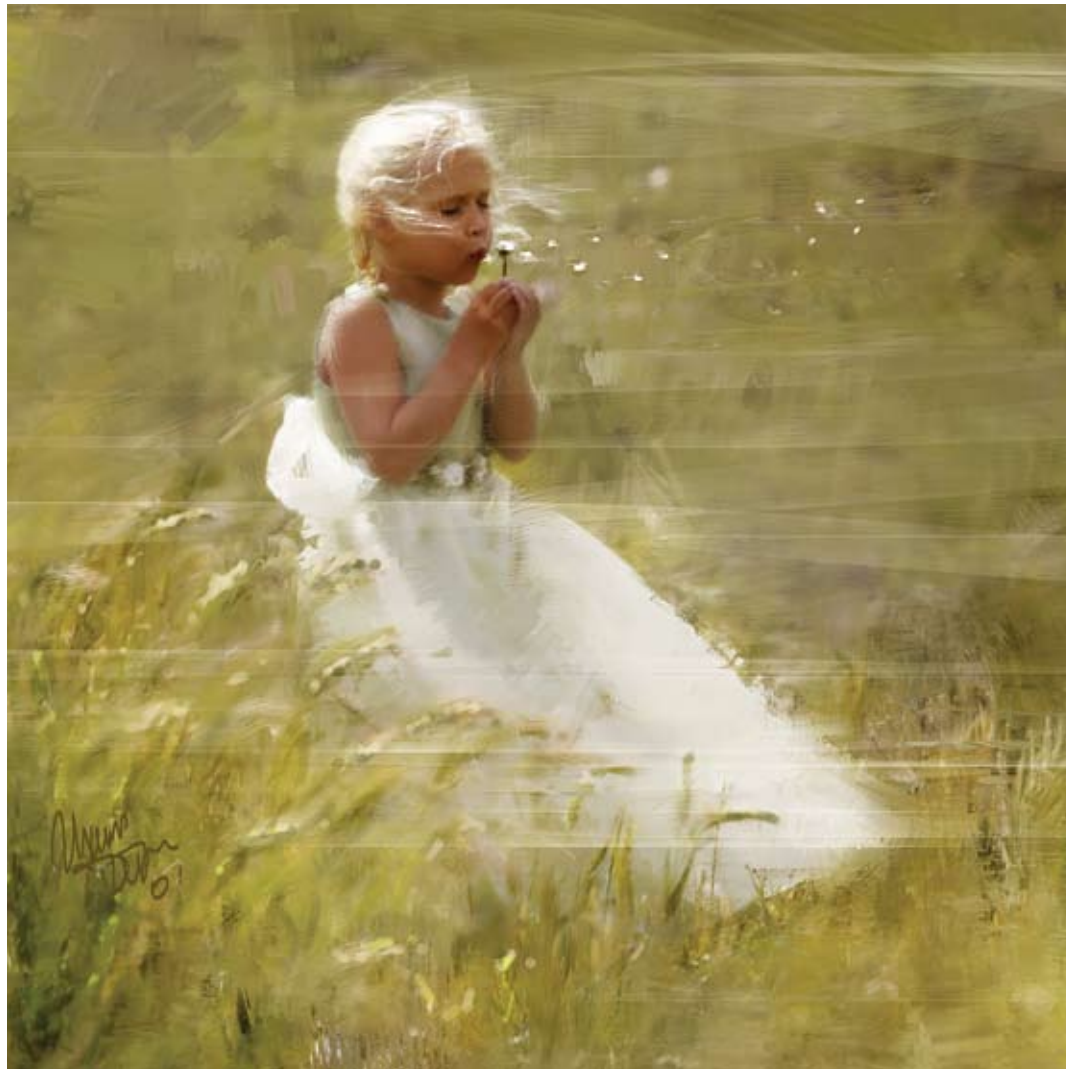
### Mission Statement

“The revolutionary changes within the industry indicate that digital imaging is an emerging art form,” Maura says. “Bruce and I want to help shape its future by blurring the boundaries between the classical arts and digital technology. We’re living and working at the dawn of a new medium; why not try to help shape it? On the other hand, maybe we should just try swimming with the current for a change; all the other fish seem so relaxed.”

Maura sums up her creative lifestyle in this quote by Pablo Picasso. “I am always doing things I can’t do, that is how I get to do them.”

### Awards and Clients

Maura has received numerous awards, including a Design Award from *Communications Arts*, Kodak’s Professional Innovator’s Award, the Seybold Juries Digital Imaging Show Award, and a Clio Art Director’s Award for Animation and Visual Effects. Her clients include Avis, Cadillac, Levis, Panasonic, Steven Spielberg, Wells Fargo and CBS’s *60 Minutes*. Maura is a member of both WPPI and PPA and is a Corel Painter Master.



which work in conjunction with the textures to give artists a complete workflow and enhance their imagery from start to finish.

### Photographic Equipment and Workflow

Maura has used an assortment of cameras over the years. Today she prefers the Canon EOS 5D, which she finds is not too heavy, and the 12.8 million effective pixels give her beautiful files. The contents of her camera bag depend on whether she is doing a commercial, wedding or self-motivated project. She works with Canon’s 24–105mm f/4 and 70–200mm f/2.8 IS lenses. Her equestrian work demands some reach, so she often uses the 100–400mm IS. Today she is a 100% digital shooter, nor-

monitors are calibrated with Gretag Macbeth One Match. Studio printers are Canon’s Pixma 9500, iPF5000 and the iPF9000 for large prints. Hannemühle Photo Rag paper is her preference.

### Marketing

Maura says, “Our marketing effort is an ongoing process. As our work evolves, so does our marketing strategy. What reaches the private collector may be inappropriate for the corporate client, and we certainly serve both. As a creative boutique that serves several sectors, our marketing effort resembles a broadly cast net.”

She adds, “The embrace of change and an ongoing pursuit of reinvention seems to have been an important key to maintaining

Please visit the iDC Photography website, [www.idcphotography.com](http://www.idcphotography.com), to see the imaginative and creative photographs of Maura Dutra as well as information about her Textures and Actions and other imaging software tools. In addition, iDC Workshops will present “Cowboys and the American Horse: A Digital Photography Adventure” in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, September 25–29, 2007. CC

*Paul Slaughter is a world-traveled photographer and writer, and ASMP member residing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Paul specializes in location, stock, and fine art photography. A special love of his is jazz. He has an extensive photographic collection of the legends of jazz. See the profile on Paul in the December 2004 issue of Rangefinder magazine. View portfolios of his work at [www.slaughterphoto.com](http://www.slaughterphoto.com).*