

# THIRST

BY PATRICK COYNE

**M**ANY DESIGNERS TALK ABOUT HOW the computer is just another tool, that their creative process hasn't really changed. Others talk about being slaves to computers. For Chicago-based Thirst, technology has been the catalyst for greater creative freedom.

Led by Rick Valicenti, who has a BFA from Bowling Green State University and both a BA and MFA in photography from the University of Iowa, Thirst is an office of seven.

## T O O L B O X

### COMPUTERS

*Quadra 950 140MB RAM, 1GB Internal Twin Array Drive*  
*Quadra 950 254MB RAM, 1GB Internal Twin Array Drive*  
*Quadra 650 64MB RAM, 1.2GB Hard Drive*  
 (3) *Mac IICI 16MB RAM, 250MB Hard Drive*

### MONITORS

*Radius 19", Super Mac Precision 19"*

### DRIVES

*MicroNet Tahiti 1GB removable optical*  
*88MB SyQuest*  
*Spirit portable CD*  
*Avid external 3MB Twin Array*

### SCANNERS

*XRS 6C Flatbed Color Scanner*

### PRINTERS

*Apple IIG Laser, H.P. 560 Ink Jet, Newgen Turbo PS/880 laser*

### MISCELLANEOUS

*Thunder Pro Cards*  
*AVID 32 bit Sound Cards*  
*JPEG Compression Cards*

### SOFTWARE

<i>Macromedia Director</i>	<i>Aldus FreeHand 3.1, 4.0</i>
<i>Adobe Premier</i>	<i>QuarkXPress 3.1, 3.2</i>
<i>Video Spigot</i>	<i>Altsys Fontographer</i>
<i>Cosa After Effects</i>	<i>Ray Dream Designer</i>
<i>Adobe Photoshop 2.5.1</i>	<i>Avid Media Suite Pro</i>
<i>Adobe Illustrator 5.0</i>	

*Editor's note: Except for the Color Center brochure and the Once Upon a Time film, all images were supplied as digital files on SyQuest cartridges, resized and output as final film.*

"In the past, I tended to function as what Wolfgang Weingart calls a design secretary," Valicenti said. "I would pick up the phone and call photographers, I would spec the type and send it off to the typesetter. Now we're getting this incredible thrill of making it all, whether we're a photography studio, or type designers, or makeup artists, or writers. I think our work is closer in practice to A.M. Cassandre, Man Ray, El Lissitzky, Milton Glaser or Lester Beall, where they conceived it, illustrated it, designed it, produced it and it was theirs. That's fantastic, and it's thrilling to work this way."

Although Thirst had Macintoshes in the office as early as 1986, the most dramatic change happened when Mark Rattin, who worked briefly for Thirst after receiving his MA in photography from Northern Illinois University, returned in 1992 to work on a course catalog for The Color Center, an electronic prepress education organization with training facilities across the country.

"At that time, Thirst was still using a lot of prepress houses," said Rattin. "I was experimenting with a hybrid photographic paint form on the computer by bringing photography into imaging programs like Photoshop and Photostyler, and painting onto the photographs. On the Color Center project we spent a lot more time and money than we wanted to, but we came up with something that was just awesome. Because once you have that kind of speed and power, you can explore and it really kicks open a doorway."

"When Mark came back we were able to learn from him and engage in image making where we used the technology as a medium, not simply as a tool," Valicenti said. "When that shifted in our consciousness, our next approach to image making became complete."

Unlike most design firms that begin the creative process by sketching concepts, Thirst's process begins verbally, not visually.

"We talk first," Valicenti said. "We sit down, and we talk about the project to get a point of reference. 'What is our take on what we're supposed to communicate?' It's like 'here's a word' or 'here's an idea.'"

Thirst, along with 39 other designers from around the world, was invited by Ogilvy & Mather/Argentina to create a poster for the 19th General Assembly of the IUCN, the World Conservation Union on World Ecology. Rick Valicenti/Mark Rattin, image designers; Rick Valicenti, writer; William Valicenti, photographer.



"The reason why I came back and stayed was because of Rick's idea to create an atmosphere that would allow everyone to explore creatively," Rattin said. "I think that the initial verbal discussion allows a mental engagement between all parties, so a designer doesn't really hold the exclusive rights to come up with the initial concept. Every member of Thirst is an artist and they bring that intensity and passion for exploration into what we do.

"The greatest thing about this approach is the fact that we're not just sitting down in front of a computer trying to generate what someone has in their mind," Rattin continued. "We're exploring the medium, and finding a point between what we had originally discussed in a verbal situation and what our perception allows us to achieve in a digital situation."

"I've never experienced a collaboration that's this creative," Valicenti said. "The bad part about it is we have to tend to business. If we take the time to freely explore for a week or two, pretty soon we're working for McDonald's wages and we've pissed the budget away or we're late or we get lost. It's sort of like walking through the woods and you find yourself studying the bark of a tree. You forget you're on the path. You even forget where the path is. So we do have to stay focused."

When discussing how some designers complain about the negative impact computer technology has had on the profession, Valicenti is quite emphatic. "I think they're missing it," he said. "They're the ones on the therapist couches in the AIGA journals and they're also the ones who are saying, 'I've learned enough. I don't need this new upgrade of this program.' They fail to realize that we're not done with the paradigm, we're just starting the paradigm. Today's Macs are going to be like old toasters in a flea market some day. And we're going to go, 'Oh, remember when it was black and white?'"

Mark Rattin agrees that computer technology, as a medium, has only begun to be explored. "The mediums of persuasion are changing. This is a terrible thing to say, but the book just doesn't seem to have the power that it used to. We're persuaded more easily and much more powerfully by a series of moving images empowered with sound and

visual imagery. I think it's the fact that we've been so hyper stimulated by the visual media: we have to understand that these new media are there and plug in."

Despite the high costs of acquiring and maintaining all the hardware and software needed to create their design projects, both Valicenti and Rattin agree that the technology

has created more freedom from budgetary constraints. "Nothing has to be compromised," Rattin said. "The computer really empowers you. I mean, you can do anything."

Valicenti added, "There was a time for myself and for many I'm sure, where you had to narrow what you could produce. Now you can conceive anything, and make it happen. But you know, there are still times where I'll go, 'Boy, what this really needs is a pen stroke.' And I'll make a pen stroke."

When asked about the future Valicenti cites the *Once Upon a Time* film created for Gilbert Paper as an example of adding the dimensions of sound and motion to Thirst visuals. The office is currently working on three interactive projects but hasn't seen many inquiries for that type of work yet. In talking with Valicenti and Rattin, both express a great deal of enthusiasm about the future of design in the digital age.

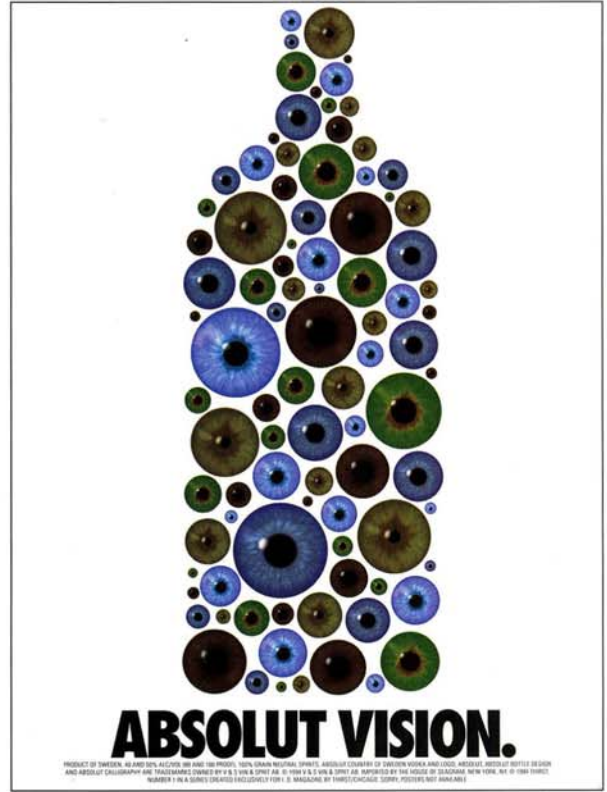
"I can't imagine the Bauhaus years being more exciting than this," Valicenti concludes. "This has to be the most exciting time to be a designer. I would probably wrap it up by saying, 'Born at the right time.'"

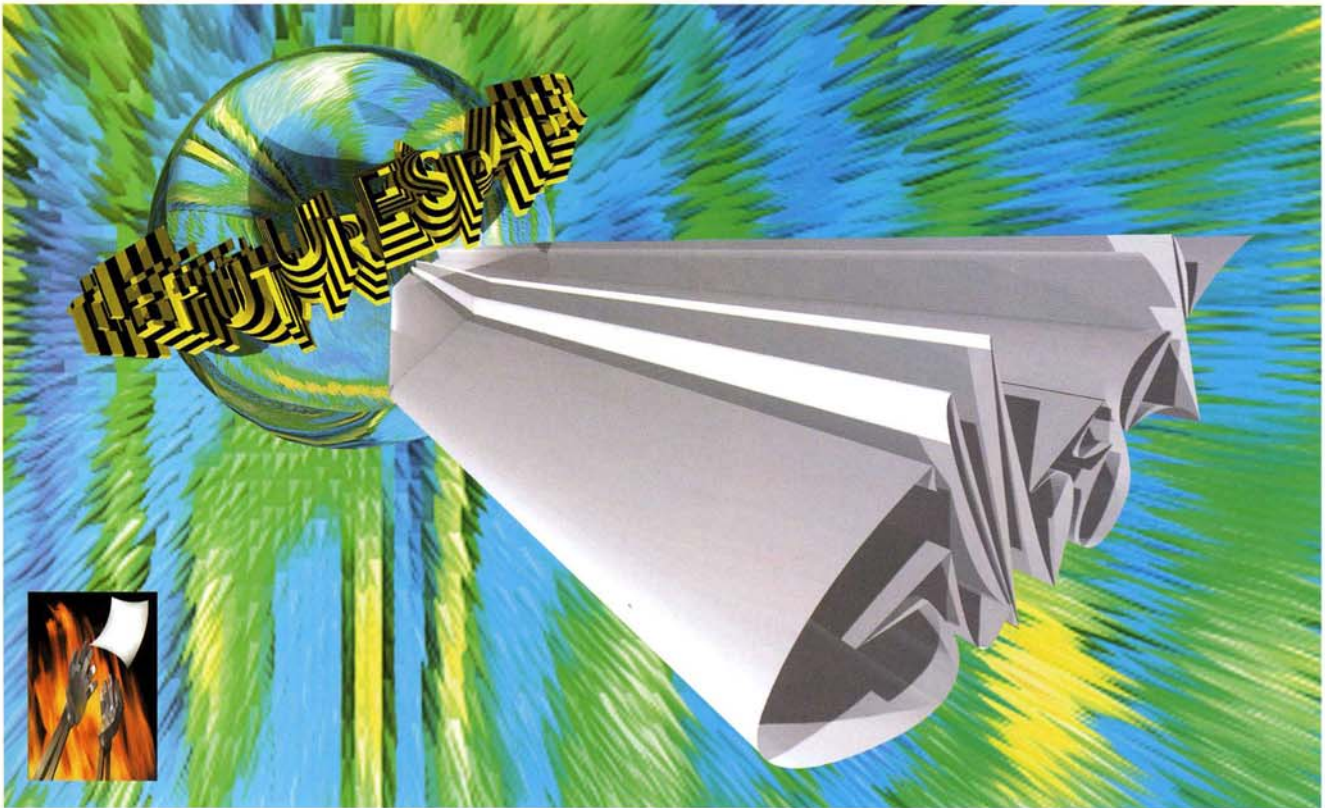


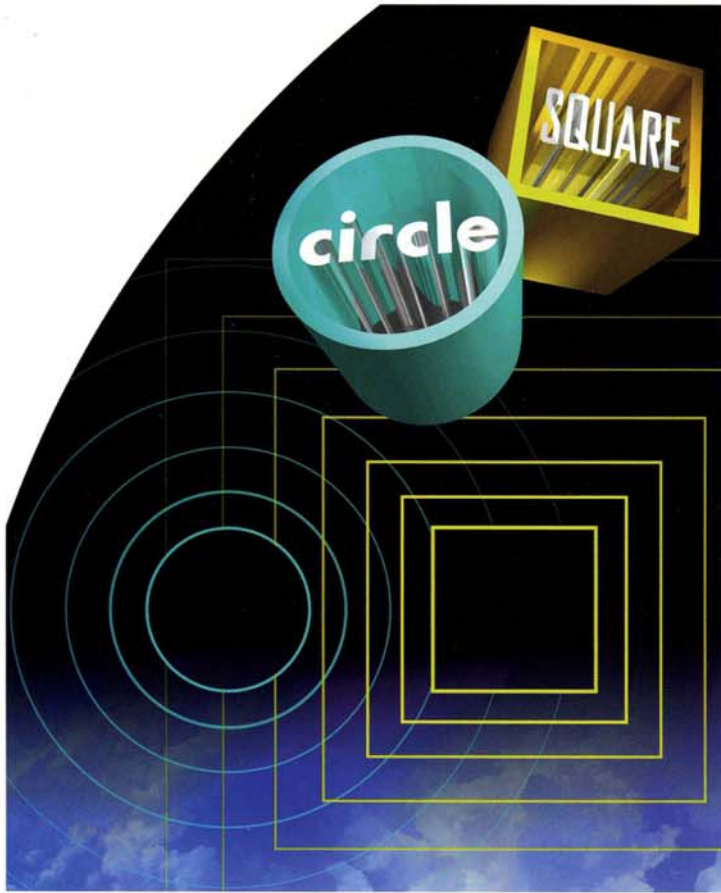
This page: Image created as part of a Carqueville/TCR Graphics Printing advertising campaign, "The 50s go 90s." Rick Valicenti/Mark Rattin, image designers; Corinne Pfister/Michael Pappas, photographers.

Right: Two from a series of seven Absolut Vodka ads that ran exclusively in *ID* magazine. "Absolut Vision" is shown with the headline and text. The other image is titled "Absolut Attitude." Rick Valicenti/Mark Rattin/Tony Klassen, image designers/writers.

One of two billboards created for West, a popular brand of cigarettes in Germany. Rick Valicenti/Mark Rattin, image designers; William Valicenti, photographer; Scholz & Friends (Hamburg, Germany), agency.





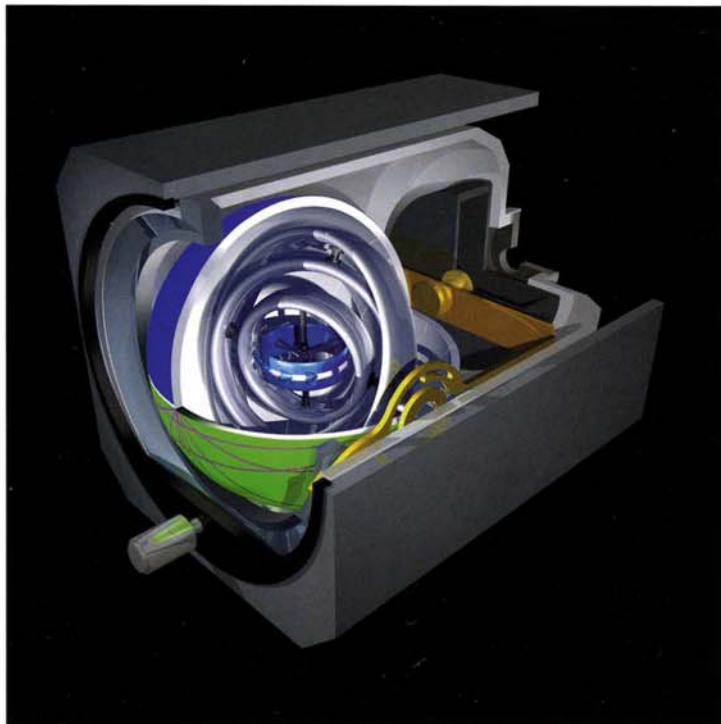


**Technology**

**THIRST**

Left: Two ads for Gilbert Paper's Neutech premium laser paper directed towards *Wired* magazine's "paperless community" audience. Rick Valicenti/Mark Rattin, image designers; Rick Valicenti, writer; William Valicenti, photographer.

This page: Two of several information diagrams from "Take Flight," an exhibit on a suspended United Airlines 727 at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. The diagrams wrap the fuselage walls like oversized backlit arcade games. The top diagram explains aerodynamic characteristics of different shapes and the bottom is a cross-section of the gyroscope inside the artificial horizon dial. Rick Valicenti/Ed Schweitzer, image designers.



**5120** Ever wonder how you actually go about making the corrections you often request, like pushing whites whiter, increasing contrast, and making colors pop? In this course, you will correct images on the desktop for actual output to film. You'll learn hands-on, how to scan, correct, manipulate and proof using desktop tools. You will develop a sense of the appropriate pre-scan decisions, how to recognize color problems in an original and/or scan, and an understanding of the best steps to take to correct these deficiencies. Finally, you will see first-hand what problem you may encounter on press and what steps to take to avoid them.

**5126** You've seen all the great special effects that win awards and are published in the magazines — this course teaches you how to create them. In a hands-on environment, you will learn how to create a range of special effects from scanned imagery using the thousands of filter, effect, and plug-in combinations available in desktop programs. This can help you be on the edge, expand the services you offer, and win more new business!

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 creating masks and silhouettes  
 adding images into type outlines  
 knocking type out of images  
 multi-channel effects  
 blends  
 cloning  
 combining images and different effects  
 distortions  
 digitalization  
 plug-in filters (Adobe Photoshop™ special effects and Adobe® Gateway™ Effects)  
 required hardware/software

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 managing memory  
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 the aesthetics of color correction  
 understanding and using gradient curves  
 setting brightness and contrast  
 working with histograms  
 working in CMYK  
 relating pixels to dots  
 legal and output grayscale management  
 color and gray balance  
 using hue, saturation and value settings  
 quality factors: resolution, sampling, and resolution  
 sharpening and anti-aliasing  
 understanding and setting dot gain, undercolor removal, and gray component replacement  
 scanner and monitor calibration demonstration  
 inpaint color channels to identify problems with colorbars and proofs

**5120** Desktop color is here and it works. The systems are affordable, and with the right skills, you can bring quality color to your desktop design environment. This full-day seminar will provide creative and production professionals with a complete overview of desktop color software, hardware, and systems and the exciting role these solutions play in creative excellence. Desktop color is here. For designers, it offers unprecedented creativity. For printers and separators, it offers you the chance to grow in an otherwise tough, competitive market. Desktop Color Today will provide you with a strong overview of these issues and opportunities.

**5126** Traditionally, the salespeople of printing and separating organizations have known more than their customers about color, approving proofs, and overall press considerations. The desktop revolution requires an additional set of skills salespeople must develop to stay competitive. This seminar will teach you new technology and trends and review the terminology to make you fluent in your customers' new language. The seminar is evenly divided between lecture-oriented information, including terminology, workflows and customer concerns, and actual demonstrations of the features of popular desktop software programs to help you visualize its potential.

**5130** What will you get out of it? A solid overview of the desktop color world, from a marketing viewpoint. (Lecture only course)

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**5200** What will you get out of it? A solid overview of the desktop color world, from a marketing viewpoint. (Lecture only course)

CHOOSE COLORS & TITLES											
A	REPRODUCTION PREPRESS	8	\$8,120	\$1,000	2	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
B	BUILDING COLOR TABLES	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
C	HOW TO SCAN & CORRECT COLORS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
D	SPECIAL EFFECTS CREATING ART WITH GRAPHICS ON THE DESKTOP	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
E	PREPARATION, SETUP AND TROUBLESHOOTING OF DESKTOP COLOR TABLES	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
F	UNDERSTANDING QUALITY FACTORS WITH PROOFING (IMAGESHOP)	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
G	DESKTOP COLOR FOR THE PRODUCTION MANAGER AND CUSTOMER SERVICE REP	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
H	BLACK & WHITE IMAGE QUALITY REPRODUCTION ON THE DESKTOP	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
I	TRAINING AND IMPROVING SOFTWARE AND TRAINING THE REEF SEPARATORS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L1	DESKTOP COLOR TODAY	1	\$1,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L2	BUILDING GRAPHIC TABLES SERVICES IN THE DEPT.	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L3	BUILDING COLOR TABLES IN QUADRETES	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L4	UNDERSTANDING GRAPHIC TABLES SOLUTIONS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L5	THE ALICE COLOR PRODUCTION: ALICE PRODUCTIONS, ALICE PRODUCTIONS AND ALICE PRODUCTIONS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L6	SCANNING AND CORRECTING COLORS IN Adobe Photoshop	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L7	MANAGING DESKTOP FILE NETWORK QUALITY	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L8	COLOR CORRECTION AND SPECIAL EFFECTS IN Adobe Photoshop	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L9	UNDERSTANDING GRAPHIC TABLES SOLUTIONS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L10	ADVANCED DESIGN TOOLS: VECTOR REFINEMENT AND PAGE LAYOUT	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L11	CREATING ELECTRONIC PUBLICATIONS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L12	ADD-ON SERVICES	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L13	LEAD FOOT AND FILE MANAGEMENT	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L14	UNDERSTANDING FILE FORMATS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L15	UNDERSTANDING MACINTOSH COMPUTERS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L16	UNDERSTANDING WINDOWS OPERATING SYSTEMS, PROGRAMS, & HARDWARES	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L17	BUILDING COLOR TABLES WITH MULTIPLE PRODUCTIONS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L18	VECTOR, GRAPHICS, MULTIMEDIA, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND SPECIAL EFFECTS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L19	ADVANCED COLOR FOR HIGH END COLOR MANAGEMENT	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L20	LEAD FOOT & FILE MANAGEMENT IN WINDOWS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1
L21	CREATING ELECTRONIC PUBLICATIONS: ALICE PRODUCTIONS	2	\$4,120	\$1,000	1	\$21	\$4,000	\$16	\$12	\$4	\$1



## Technology

### THIRST



Left: Two spreads from a direct mail catalog for The Color Center, a joint education venture between Scitex and Thomas Munroe, Inc. Rick Valicenti/Linda Valicenti, concept; Rick Valicenti, designer; Rick Valicenti/Mark Rattin/Tony Klassen, image designers; Richard Weaver/Tracy Taylor, typographers.

This page: Gilbert Paper commissioned Thirst to create *Once Upon a Time*, a short film for large screen presentations to introduce their product in New Zealand. "The film readapted and combined just about every fairy tale cliché to express the desperate desire of the passionate creative soul to make contact with an audience," Valicenti said. Rick Valicenti/Linda Valicenti, writers; Kazu Okutomi, cinematographer; Barbara Valicenti, Thirst, producer; Stephen R. Morrison, Editel/Chicago, editor; Brando Triantafillou, composer.

Image created as part of the invitation/poster program for the 1994 opening of the *International Sculpture, Objects and Functional Art Exhibition*, benefiting pediatric AIDS research and care at Chicago's Children's Memorial Hospital. Rick Valicenti/Tracy Taylor, image designers; Tracy Taylor, illustrator; Lisa Hughes, photographer.