

A Jack of All Trades

By Fred Truck
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The “Jack of All Trades, Master of None” phrase is common in English. It has a long history, and is sometimes read positively, sometimes negatively. This rendering from 1721 restores the positive meaning:

"Jack of all trades, master of none,
Oftimes better than a master of one."

I was in the eighth grade when a teacher informed me I was a Jack of All Trades. I had no idea what she was talking about. I just wanted to be in the band, because I liked music, be in the chorus, because I liked to sing, run in track because I was athletic, and work on the newspaper because I liked to write.

Eventually, I saw teachers competing with each other to attract me to their extra-curricular activities. This situation caused me a lot of problems. I wasn't interested in pleasing my teachers. I just really wanted to do things—all of them.

In the end, I pleased none of them, and went on with my life, a little more perceptive from then on. This denouement is reflected in another version of the couplet above, in Lithuanian this time:

"When you have nine trades, then your tenth one is famine/starvation."

Fortunately, it wasn't so extreme for me.

Many people ask: Why is it that some people are expert in more than one field? How do you do it?

I think a more important question is—Why do you do it? As reflected in the Lithuanian aphorism, being a generalist or a polymath is not a road to economic well-being. These days, in particular, specialization is the accepted route to success due to division of labor.

Why do you do it? Here is the answer: You do it because you want to do it. You have no other option if you want to realize yourself as fully as you can. One of my favorite artists from the Italian Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti said: A man can do anything, if he would.

As for how it is done, probably there are many ways, but in my own case, my father-in-law once told me that people can work at something for about 4 hours. After that, they lose concentration and get tired. The way to get more done, and to revive yourself, is to change what you do. Work 4 hours at something meaningful to you, then work 4 more hours on something else. You can even work 4 more hours on another project and not get tired.

This strong central organization of my time has enabled me to work on a national and sometimes international level as a writer and maker of artist's books (*Camping Out B*, 1975 and *George Maciunas and the Face of Time*, 1984, and *Ten Year Sandwich*, 2008, an artbook of my prints and sculpture), a sculptor (*Mr. Milk Bottle Gets Into Advertizing*, neon sculpture in *Almost Warm and Fuzzy*, 1999-2001), a programmer (co-founder and systems engineer of the *Art Com Electronic Network*, 1986-1999), and most recently, as digital print maker and photographer (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Truck*, Shizuoka, Japan, 2007; and *FLICKr photostream*, 2009 to present). Finally, I showed a Contorted Japanese Flowering Apricot bonsai in the 3rd U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition in Rochester, NY, a juried exhibition that is the most important in the U.S.

There are a two other projects I've done that are worth noting. Though they haven't been seen by as many people as those listed above, they introduced a different way of seeing reality and rendering it.

In 2002, the Karolyn Sherwood Gallery in Des Moines, IA showed my sculpture *Analog Engine*. The Engine originally was a piece of software I wrote that took two images and made a new third image out of them. After I finished the software, I discovered that I could represent the logic circuits it embodied graphically. The sculpture is 7 feet tall, and is a 3-dimensional realization of these logic circuits.

In 2010, Steven Vail Fine Arts showed *Fred Truck: Anaglyphic and Stereographic Photographs*. Most of the pictures in this show were anaglyphs, requiring red/cyan glasses to see the 3-D. The stereographic prints can be seen without the glasses, but are an unusual rendering of reality. This show led directly to further work in 3-D image making.

This year, 2012, I invented a method for converting a single, 2-D photograph into a 3-dimensional image. I call this process **The Chromobinocular Method**, and have written about it here: www.fredtruck.com/articles/

Margaret S. Livingstone of the Harvard Medical School, and author of **Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing**, in a private communication, has called my process "anaglyphs for a single eye."

I have a few more surprises in different areas that, if they are successful, will be added to this list in the future.