

Through the Clouds—Looking Down from on Top of the World

One of my favorite things to do in this world is to travel. I've lived in a number of different places during my life from China to Canada to various parts of U.S., so moving around and experiencing new cultures has become a large part of my identity and, fortunately, something that I enjoy rather than resent. Therefore, I wanted my final project to focus on this theme of travel, an image that would vividly portray the thrill and wonder of entering and exploring a foreign place.

My first thoughts on this theme were of flying. Whenever I'm on a plane with not much to do, I like to take pictures of the sky through the window, which through the years has provided me with a large collection of photographs of various types of clouds. I decided to combine two of these pictures (shown below), one portraying nicely defined clouds and another with a nicely defined wing.



My next thought was to add myself into the picture—I thought that placing me onto the wing of the plane would be an effective way to show my love of flying as well as its sense of adventure. I had my suitemate take a picture of me sitting on a stool in my room (shown below), and even tried to make my hair blow with a fan as if it were windy, but this didn't work too well because the fan was too weak, so unfortunately it doesn't look like the plane I'm sitting on is moving too fast. To make my sitting on the plane wing seem more realistic, I added a shadow of myself on the wing.



Having created an image of myself sitting on an airplane wing soaring over the skies, my first inclination was to overlap this scene onto a skyline of all the places that I've lived in—Xi'an (China),

Iowa City, Austin (Texas), Edmonton (Canada), Calgary (Canada), Cleveland, and Chicago, but I soon realized these cities did not make for the most exciting collective skyline. I then thought of creating a skyline of my favorite cities that I've visited—Paris, Washington D.C., New York, Montreal, Berlin, Salzburg, etc., but this idea also soon proved unviable when I realized most of the pictures that I took in these cities were at home, and just the thought of asking my parents to scan them and send them to me was already too stressful. So I looked through the pictures I had on my computer, and found an interesting shot of the newly constructed Reichstag tower (inside the Parliament building) of Berlin, Germany. The glass tower extends through the interior of the building and is conveniently surrounded by a ramp leading up to the ceiling, so that one can get an amazing view of the tower from above, as shown in the picture below. This was one of my favorite pictures from my trip to Germany due to its unique perspective and the intricate reflections inside the glass, and I knew immediately that I wanted to use it for my project.



Overlapping the circular base of the tower with the clouds created some interesting shadows and shapes that resulted in a very fitting likeness to a globe, especially with the lines dividing the glass panels resembling longitude and latitude lines. I considered photoshopping out the people standing around the tower, but in the end decided that the small people accentuated the size of the tower, and furthermore their contrast in size to myself accentuated my presence and my distance above ground, that fact that I'm in the sky gliding over the world far below. I modified the color of the final image to make it warmer overall and to allow for a more complete color spectrum. I wanted the image to be complex enough to evoke a sense of wonder and awe but simple enough to avoid any confusion from too many things going on. My final image, shown below (larger copy included), though much evolved from my initial conceptions, is my best portrayal of all of these goals.

