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SP.747 Creative Imaging
Final Project

The Infinite Bridge

My final project was inspired by the work of photographer Scott Mutter, who is famous for his creation of “Surrational Images,” which blend two or more photographs together that somehow make sense, despite violating critical fundamentals such as the laws of physics.

The photograph that most inspired my project is “Untitled (Church Aisle),” shown on the right. Of this photograph, Scott Mutter said, "...This translocation of imagery emphasizes the extreme degree to which we are operating in a geometric, linear, rectangular pattern of existence in the systems and environment we've built around us. What else is there or could there be?" (Source: http://www.photography-museum.com/mutter/aisle.html)

This photograph and quote made me think about the different environments that I have been surrounded by these past four years—Boston, and of course, MIT. I thought about a way that I could incorporate the two environments into one “surrational” photograph, and decided to use a photograph of the Harvard Bridge, since it is what connects the students of MIT to the city of Boston.

A small copy of my final project is shown below. It features a view of the Boston skyline while one is walking on the Harvard Bridge, but rather than seeing elements such as joggers, bikers and pedestrians on the bridge, we see a view of Lobby 10, complete with the three recycling bins, chandelier, wooden benches, activities booths and students at these booths. The goal of this photograph is that, at first glance, one sees a view of Boston’s two most famous skyscrapers as well as the “Harvard Bridge,” but only when one starts looking at the photograph in more detail does one notice that the bridge has actually become Lobby 10.

I decided to do my project digitally, since it involved a fusion of at least two photographs which showed the same vanishing point, as in the featured photograph by Scott Mutter. I used a 5.0 Megapixel Canon Powershot SD400. The first thing I did was experiment with taking photographs of the Boston skyline from the Harvard Bridge at many different angles, such as in the photographs shown below.

The next and more difficult step was to take photos within the Infinite Corridor. I used the same approach of taking photos from different angles—ones that hopefully matched those of the photographs taken on the Harvard Bridge—but found this task extremely difficult, due to lighting conditions. Taking a photograph with flash inside the Infinite affected the lighting too drastically, as can be seen below. However, taking the photograph without flash was also a challenge, since students at MIT plow through the Infinite on their way to class, and hence do not walk at the leisurely pace required for the camera to not capture their motion as a blur.

My original idea was to use the Infinite Corridor to replace the Harvard Bridge, but after such unsuccessful attempts, I decided to use Lobby 10. This actually ended up working really well, since Lobby 10 is much more distinctive than any specific segment of the Infinite, and I was able to take acceptable photographs since the windows in Lobby 10 provided good lighting.

I took about 100 photographs total of the view from the Harvard Bridge and of the Infinite and Lobby 10. The next step was to find a set of photographs that featured the same vanishing

point. Since I did not have a specific angle in mind when I took both sets of photographs, weeding through and finding ones that matched took a considerable amount of time, but I was able to match the following:

They do not appear to have the same vanishing point with these sizes, but when the photograph on the right was scaled down to fit into the left photograph, the lines of the bridge railings and Infinite that disappear towards the vanishing point do in fact coincide. I fused the two photos by fitting the Infinite within the Harvard Bridge, then carefully erasing the walls of the Infinite, as well as extraneous elements such as the free and windows.

For my next step, I wanted to add a distinctive element of the Harvard Bridge onto the "floor" of the Infinite Corridor. I tried the "200 SMOOTS" and "HALFWAY TO HELL" markings and set those at 50% opacity so they do not stand out too much, but rather blend into the floor. I also juxtaposed an element from the Infinite onto the bridge—the chandeliers in Lobby 10 are quite unique, so I "hung" a chandelier from one of the streetlights of the bridge.

Since there actually is not much of the Boston skyline in the photo I chose, I needed to fuse one more photo together, taken of the John Hancock Tower and the lesser known buildings of the skyline across the Charles River. For all my photos, I changed the mode to "Grayscale," then selected "Auto Levels" to change the contrast. This meant that all three of my photographs were different shades of gray, black and white, which I adjusted for by using the "Curves" function. The next step after matching the shades as closely as possible was to fuse the photographs.

I did this with a lot of cloning and manipulation. Cloning was required because the water levels were different textures and shades. By manipulation, I meant digital extension of the bridge railing. Addition of the above photograph meant that the railing of the Harvard Bridge in the left photograph (of the original matched set) was not long enough to extend “off the page,” as shown in the final copy. I extended the railing by copying a segment, transforming it to match the thickness of the main railing and then burning/dodging the photo as necessary to match the shade of the railing. After finding the desired three photographs to fuse, most of what I did to produce the final project was editing in Photoshop.

The editing was quite tedious, but I hope the end result gives the viewer a feel of being in Boston and at MIT at the same time. Students at MIT either feel like they are at MIT or in Boston, and very rarely within both environments, so here is their chance, with a walk across the Infinite Bridge.