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A mix master: Jeremy Blake's blend of genres is attracting notice.

By Jessica Hundley, Special to The Times

Jeremy Blake's digital art is painting made animate, color and pattern transformed from stagnant image into slow, liquid, meditative motion. Working initially with ink and gouache drawings (and at times sketching directly onto the computer), Blake manipulates his work into dreamlike DVD animations. Using a combination of traditional mediums and technological know-how, he creates a fascinating cross-pollination of painting and film, visual exploration imbued with a subtle cinematic narrative that most recently served as visual interpretations of experience and emotion in the film "Punch-Drunk Love."

"I'm trying to use the same philosophies as painting," says Blake, who will participate in a panel discussion, "Neither There nor Here," on the shifting definitions of film and art, Tuesday night at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, "but allowing for that sensibility to migrate to other places."

After attending the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Blake moved to California in 1993 to attend the MFA program at the California Institute of the Arts. At CalArts, his focus first shifted away from traditional English figure painting as he became seduced by the aesthetics of experimental film and video.

"I was fascinated with film's ability to tell a story over time," Blake says. "I thought that would be a new and interesting route for abstraction, trying to bring to film the 2-D logic of painting. The core of the work is in drawing and the spatial logic is from painting. But then there's this sense of traveling through space without ever moving."

It was this aesthetic that first attracted filmmaker Paul Thomas Anderson, who saw Blake's work two years ago in a San Francisco museum. "He had been messing around with the idea of some color changes to demonstrate what the character was experiencing in the film he was working on, 'Punch-Drunk Love,' and when he saw my stuff, he called me up," says Blake.

The result of their work can be seen in graceful interstitial animations throughout the film, moments of visual abstraction that link the linear narrative, lending mood and emotion through color and movement.

Blake's work outside the traditional artistic establishment has also included a recent collaboration with the musician Beck, who enlisted the artist to add his distinctive imagery to the four covers of his newest album, "Sea Change." Beck is also using edited versions of Blake's DVD work as a visual accompaniment to his live shows.

Despite his success as a visual artist (Blake's work has appeared in numerous galleries and museums throughout the world, including the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and at the Whitney Museum's Biennial), Blake is unapologetically pleased by what he does within more commercial mediums.

"There's this idea that you've sold out somehow by working outside the traditional establishment," says Blake, "but any time you face a little adversity, it probably means you're doing something right. I think Beck and Paul came to me because they felt I could communicate something they had in their heads."

"All three of us have something in common, which is that as artists we're all looking at previous generations and kind of rifling through the files of history, trying to find something that matches how we feel."

"But at the same time as we're inspired by our sources, we're still trying to do something totally new."

Blake's work can be seen locally at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego (through Nov. 27) and at the Santa Monica Museum of Art.