

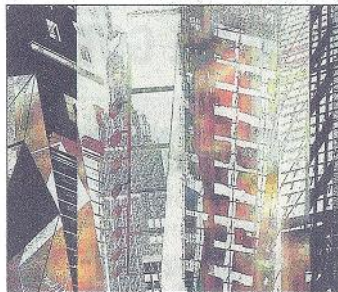
They transform their photos into new works of art

By SACHI FUJIMORI
STAFF WRITER

Jane Sklar and Max Cartagena went to high school together, Stuyvesant class of 1974. They were mere acquaintances as teens, but Cartagena does remember one detail about Sklar: She often had a camera on her. In 2009, the pair re-met at a high school reunion and began a long-distance friendship, connecting over a love of art and music.

A Fort Lee resident, Sklar had always been involved in art — designing jewelry and working in the textile industry — while also raising a family. She loved taking photos, too. Sklar started sharing these photos over e-mail with Cartagena, based in California. Rather than responding with feedback, Cartagena did something unexpected with Sklar's digital images.

"I'd say, 'This is great, but it needs something,'" Cartagena said recently by phone, sharing the line with Sklar at her Fort Lee home (he's back in New Jersey for the exhibit). He took her photos — from a trip to Dublin, New York City street scenes, fire-



"NYC," by Jane Sklar, combines photos of several skyscrapers, including the Empire State Building.

works — used various photo editing tools to create an entirely new work of art, then sent them back.

"I saw unbelievably great images," Sklar recalled. That could have been enough, merely to admire her friend's modern riff on her originals. But it didn't stop there. Cartagena became her mentor, teaching Sklar what he does: a digital process of "splicing, massag-

ing and manipulating" images into a complex, multi-layered collage.

They don't use PhotoShop, and Sklar emphasizes that the process of creating these pieces involves hours, sometimes days. "It's not just hit a button and you're done," Sklar said. "It takes an enormous amount of work and vision to do. They've become our oil paintings, so to speak — it's not so different from taking a palette and canvas and sitting outside."

Once she mastered the technical skills, Sklar branched out on her own, developing her own style. "I never know what I'm going to do when I sit down at the computer," she said. "It's a journey for me."

Sometimes the friends collaborate on projects. Cartagena combined a series of images Sklar shot of the George Washington Bridge and transformed them into a single, cubic work, like a shimmering, aqua mirage of the famous overpass on a hot day.

Sklar's piece "NYC," which Cartagena says is "one of her best," combines several photos of angular skyscrapers, including the Empire State Building, to create a jazz-like image projecting the energy of the city.

Displaying their work at the Hoboken Arts and Music Festival this spring, the artists were approached by the director of the Hines Gallery in Suffern, N.Y., to bring their work to the new exhibition space. "It's something original and I hadn't seen it before," said Tim Richardi, the gallery's owner.

WHAT: Digital photography by Jane Sklar and Max Cartagena.

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays until July 31.

WHERE: Hines Gallery, 82 Lafayette St., Suffern, N.Y.; hinesgallery.weebly.com.

HOW MUCH: \$5 for open mike admission, includes food and drink.

ALSO: After July 31, their works will be on display at Blowout Hair Studio, 1635 Lemoine Ave., Fort Lee; 201-482-8520. Works for sale available at cafepress.com/sklarcartagena.

"The process is quite vivid and daring."

Miles Davis played over the speakers on a recent afternoon at Sklar's house while she and Cartagena sat at their respective computer stations, digitally "painting." "Sometimes we ask each other, 'Is it done yet?' and one of us will say, 'Just leave it alone,'" said Sklar. "It's a continually amazing process."

E-mail: fujimori@northjersey.com

■ Bill Evrolino is off today; his column will return Aug. 7.