Computer art, video, ecology and kids

By Patrick McCartney
Staff Writer

DEL MAR — Computer artist Meredythe Winter sat at Channel 37's editing console, fine tuning a music video with a message.

Singing in the video were 20 grade school children from different ethnic backgrounds, extolling the virtues of recycling trash.

Wearing T-shirts they painted themselves, and waving bottles, cans and newspapers they held up high, the children sang:

"Don't just trash it!

"C'mon and cash it!

"Help clean up the world ... "

The video, "Recycle Rock," is one of three that Winter, a 28-year-old Encinitas artist, is producing with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Also aiding her effort to teach children environmental awareness through fine art is COVA (Combined Organizations for Visual Arts), COMBO (Combined Arts and Education Council of San Diego County), the San Diego Unified School District and Commodore Business Machines.

The videos and five public service announcements she produced last year are aimed at teaching art and sensitivity to the environment at the same time. "We're teaching the children to be environmentally aware using computers," Winter said. "Maybe one of them will make a contribution to the environment — find a way to prevent oil spills, or save the ozone layer."

Winter works with Lester Rottsolk, a video instructor at MiraCosta College, and her musician husband Freddy Winter on the video projects. But the drive to work with television is all her own.

"I wanted to be a movie star from the age of 3," Winter admitted. "I wanted to be on the Merv Griffin show — not exactly the height of environmental awareness."

But after some writing, editing and art work in Hollywood, Winter found her interest headed in another direction. "There was a point a few years back when I thought, 'Why make one more toothpaste commercial?' "

Meredythe and Freddy Winter began bouncing ideas off each other, she recalled. Freddy, a native of West Germany, played music in the group Rainbow Warriors, which sometimes performed in benefits for the Solana Recyclers.

Meredythe found herself thinking of ecological issues more often. In the end, she felt that "a higher force wants me to do this," and approached the schools to interest them in using art to teach environmental ethics.

"Most people don't think of aerosol sprays and the atmosphere," Winter said. "But they become more aware through the process of making a video."

Children have no fear of computers either, Winter said, and are eager to use it to make gaily colored posters advertising recycling. Said an approving Winter, "Kids should make art on computers, not play war games."

A 1977 graduate of San Dieguito High, Winter earned a bachelor's degree in visual arts from the University of California, San Diego and a master's degree in creative arts from San Francisco State University.

Thanks to the grant, she is currrently teaching computer art and video at the Franklin and Central elementary schools and the St. Vincent de Paul-Joan Kroc Center for the Homeless.

Winter also hopes to expand her duties to Encinitas schools.

Meanwhile, Winter said, some of the children have begun rehearsing the trio of recycling songs — Recycle Rock, Recycle Reggae and Recycle Rap. They will perform them at noon on April 22 at the Young at Art Parade in Balboa Park. The parade will kick off the International Children's Week, and be followed by the Children's Festival in the park from April 26 to 30.

On the editing machine, Winter played one of the five public service announcements, one performed by Vietnamese children. Four kids peered out the portholes of a cardboard boat they made from recycled bicycle cartons, and gleefully sang: "You don't get peanuts! You get cash!"

Staff Photo / Barbara Bowen

Computer artist Meredythe Winter uses her talents to help kids develop a sensitivity to the environment and an interest in ecology.