

The Context in the Production and the Consumption of Digital Art

Assoc. Prof. **Elena ABRUDAN**, Ph.D.

Department of Journalism
Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
E-mail: abrudanelena@yahoo.com

Abstract: *In this article my intention was to configure challenging profile of Digital Art as a mean of expression. We tried to identify the main changes in modern art works, that can be recognized in a digital art work, the instruments of digital and multimedia technology; also we discussed the digital art approach as a medium and as a tool, we tried to find out how it does trigger and influence media consumption and what is the role of the artist and audience in interpretation and creating new meanings for a digital art work. Finally, we presented a few statements of young Romanian artists on the digital artist's condition, the way they share their work, the difficulties to gain money from their work and the necessity to have a formal education in the field. The questionnaire applied to the journalism students revealed the importance of interactivity when interpreting, creating meanings and producing digital artworks.*

Keywords: *digital art, author, medium, tool, audience, media consumption.*

What is digital art?

The topic of my paper originates in a discussion with my students. One of them asked me if I consider Jackson Pollock's *Action Painting* to be a work of art. The answer I gave him emphasized the changes that took place in modern art due to the standardization of material culture in modern society. The increasing number of objects produced using industrial robots determined loss of the consubstantial uniqueness and manufactured character of the objects.

Serial production permitted the existence of only one model and of many copies of the same prototype (Jean Baudrillard, 1968), and consequently a loss of creator's idea, emotion, and gesture energy in mass produced objects. Later, *Action Painting* tried to retrieve them and to reinvest art work with artist's creative ability and passion towards his work.

Usually the changes in art reflected the changes within society and material culture. Our reflection on this challenging period in the history of culture indicates that people tried to adapt themselves to this radical situation, to explain and to order in a way the new elements that emerged in their lives. They tried to understand and reveal the mechanisms of the objects, techniques, behaviors, and social structures they had to adapt to. Even more, modern artists tried to replace the old way of thinking with innovative concepts and methods of creation, in order to reflect the new way of life and reordering the discreet objects that populate the modern world. They tried to offer a more comprehensible image of the culture they lived in.

What innovation brought the modern/postmodern art?

One of the purposes of modern art can consist in a simple but innovative idea: what was before hidden is now visible.

„Before, the creation of material images was the primary goal of visual art, and the immaterial code that guided the process was regarded as secondary. Now, the creation of the code – more broadly, the concept – becomes the primary creative act. The image exists only to make the invisible code visible, whatever the material medium“.
(Donald Kuspit, *The Matrix of Sensations*).

Basically, the structure and the function of the object are now displayed on canvas:

- *Cubism* was a way to show geometrical figures as hidden structures of the human body or of an object; the combination of this elements was different from that was considered to be usual, normal one, following other rules, thus becoming a new aesthetic code.
- *Fauvism* was a way to display on canvas vibrant colors as an expression of emotions, rationality, or other impulses configuring the human being personality or the tensions and symbolic expressiveness of the objects.
- *Surrealism* was a way to blend real objects, possibly modified, distorted with representations of memory, dreams, fantasy in order to reflect the deepest feelings, emotions that obviously were important for the artist.
- *Futurism* represented objects and human beings in movement, thus suggesting orientation towards future, but also fast and frequency changes in material world and its influence on material artifacts and on human life.
- *Action painting* used colors, lines, shapes and points blended on the canvas in an energetic manner, having the purpose to retrieve the energy stored

in artist's gestures and in object's structure representing an art work produced as a manufactured object. The artist wanted to transmit through the work of art the value of human energy, including messages, feelings, and emotions, embedded in manufactured objects.

- *Pop art* introduces ordinary objects and daily life routines as subjects of a work of art, which was unusual at that time. More than that, repeating the same faces with different colors they suggest the possibility of eluding the uniqueness of a human being and his personality, which can be represented as an ordinary consumption object.
- Marcel Duchamp proposed as art works functional objects that until then were hidden from the public eye.
- In postmodern digital art the status and significance of the image changes: the image becomes a secondary manifestation of the abstract code, which becomes the primary vehicle of creativity.

Digital art can be a way to approach from the creative inspiration of modern man. It is an opening, a form of expression; the transition from image creativity to code creativity is far from complete. We need a closer, more detailed look on the situation.

The instruments of digital and multimedia technology

Contemporary art is characterized by an increase in the use of technological media, such as videos, television and computers. Through the evolution of technology new forms of expression began to grow. In an expanded sense, "digital art" is a term applied to contemporary art that uses the methods of mass production or digital media.

Following innovative ideas about representation and the free use of materials in Cubism, Futurism and Surrealism – particularly in the work of Duchamp – contemporary artists abandoned strict adherence to traditional media and embraced any means, including technology, which best served their purposes. The impact of digital technology has transformed activities such as painting, drawing, sculpture and music/sound art, while new forms, such as net art, digital installation art, and virtual reality, have become recognized artistic practices. The traditional painting, drawing, graphics or sculpture were replaced in various digital art by programs like Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, Corel, Freehand or programs exclusively dedicated to graphics and 3D modeling, such as Studio Max, Maya or 3D Max. Thus, images that once seemed impossible have become possible in a physical format using digital techniques.

"*Digital Art* is widely used in commercials and movies, to achieve special effects, but also in various scientific projects on digital and interactive space. For example, MIT Media Lab projects that propose opening theme of communication

and knowledge through digital networks, aiming to expand the idea to design action plans, emotional and biological interfaces, for use in an expressive, as art." (Christiane Paul, 2003, pp 7–8).

Open canvas provide similar means of classical artists: virtual canvas, brushes, color palettes stirring. "Matte Painting" (in 3D), often used in film (especially in science fiction movies), is to paint a scene, leave the spaces in which images can be incorporated. There is thus the possibility of creating a myriad of backgrounds (Kuspit,2006)."

Ideas about time and duration have reinstated narrative in art, via *film-making* and *video*, the theatricality of *happenings*, *performance* and *installation art*, digitally manipulated *photography* and virtual reality.

We can say as a conclusion of all issues mentioned above that works of digital art need a context defined by software and hardware, by special abilities to use various programs. The instruments of digital and multimedia technology require specific art efforts. Also, to be digital art, a piece of work uses visual language specific for new media devices and presents the metacharacteristics of this medium. For this kind of art names like Computer art, Multimedia art, Interactive art or New Media art are used interchangeably. These terms are used to describe projects that make use of emerging media technologies and are concerned with the cultural and aesthetic possibilities of these tools. But, in order to be a piece of art, digital art must be valuable from an aesthetical point of view and as content. Not every image processed in Photoshop is called digital art, but only those which involve imagination, aesthetic sense, complex and creative spirit. Digital art products involve ingenuity and originality, when images not only provide a copy of reality, but be filled with a message challenging the receiver.

Art is now multi-layered and open-ended

The increasing presence of digital media appliances in museums changes the viewing habits of visitors as well as researchers. Many refuse to recognize the existence of digital art, citing, as an argument, the absence of „object" handmade by artistic creator. The standard complaint against digital representation is that it loses the tactile quality of painted representation, thus making it less organic and intimate. But other researchers think that most important in digital art is the optical quality of the image. „The intensification of optical quality that digitalization brings with it more than compensates for the loss of the tactile dimension, all the more so because the digitalized sensation is in constant optical motion, generating an intimacy and vividness all its own". (Donald Kuspit,).

Related to this idea, Christiane Paul, curator at Whitney Museum of American Art stated that digital technology interfere with art in two ways: the art approach as *medium* and as a *tool*. (Christiane Paul, 2003). The art approach as medium uses

specific concepts: interactivity, immersion in virtual space; there is no hard boundary between ourselves and our surroundings. Consequently, the art requires not only interpretation, but also immediate engagement. One doesn't simply react, but interacts in order to make sense, to configure the significance of the image. It makes the observer a collaborator more over than in traditional art. There is no final sense to an interactive artwork, no way to exhaust its meanings. The viewer's interaction with visual text means interpreting, creating significance, even modifying, producing a new digital art work.

It is well known the fact that in postmodernism everything can be commented, criticized, interpreted according to the personal consumer's background. The viewer claims to know everything, and have the right to divide, to analyze, and to be ironic in the frame of society we live in. The author's autonomy has a point of intersection with the viewers of visual texts, which have the possibility to suggest significances; I mean it must face with every individual's freedom to have an opinion, to configure their own significances based on the author's intention.

The digital art approach as tool uses digital processing with purpose to produce art on traditional support: prints, sculptures, photos. But producing an art work using digital technology does not involve physical artist intervention as in modern work of art. It is a difference between using handling brush, chisel, knife and handling mouse. In this situation, the main artist contribution is not the nature of the support, or the tool, but the concept and the ability to choose and to handle specialized programs and virtual tools.

Who is a digital artist?

An artist is a person who participates intentionally with understanding in the making of a work of art. The term *digital artist* is used to describe an artist who makes use of digital technologies in the production of art. The media art work requires elaborating a plan, having a concept in order to transmit a message. The author must have the ability to conceptualize complex ideas and make them reality; He must have the power to persuade people and to provoke them. The digital artists' lives are always changing, always evolving and always learning. They are young visual artists, computer science specialists (programmers) graphic designers, photographers, designers, architects, and other young undergraduate students. They have the intention to arouse reactions, to create the illusion of another space near work of art, using sound, installations, projections of images, text, messages, and giving viewer's ability to participate in the artistic project. So, the viewer not buys works of art, but rather experiences. But this situation is common for all visual texts.

The choice the author makes considering shapes, color, structure, composition, angles can suggest the presence of the viewer, contributing to the production of

meaning. The selection of pictorial elements by the author of the image can be considered the basis for interpretation. This means that the intention to give the viewer the opportunity to produce the meaning of the work exists, coded in the visual text. This point of view is similar to the opinion that the literary text exists independently of its author and its consumer, and it is updated because of the interaction between reader and text. So, the visual text is constituted in a certain context. It is created by an interactive experience with the phenomenon (Tompkins 1988). In any visual text meaning is something that is constructed, that does not exist outside the interaction with the text.

When we talk about new media art, the difference consist in the possibility to create a virtual space, a reality that fully immerse its users in a three-dimensional world generated by a computer and allowed them an interaction with the virtual objects that comprise that world. In fact, only one author of a text does not exist. The very first reader of a visual text becomes co-author of the text he just read. Participating in the creation of a new meaning through commenting image it means modifying, fragmenting, addition of a new element, and changing the place of the given text. Usually, the result of these modifications is only a comment used by consumers to express their attitude or to correct the author's intended meaning, in a similar manner they say like or dislike related to an image posted on various sites, on socializing networks. Also, the result can be a variation on the same topic, but with a consciousness intention to send a new message, choosing a way of expression. The postmodern individual does accept multiple images and meanings, he want to be able to change the reality according to his needs. Sometimes the fragment explains the hole of the work, the hidden before structure of a work of art is now displayed facilitating fragmentation in subsequent pieces and multiplicity.

Who is the target; who is the audience? Media consumption habits

The art world is a dynamic social institution with its own agenda, consisting of established practices, historical values, and the exercise of critical judgment, signification, and aesthetic value.

Interactive art is firmly rooted in the aesthetic upheavals of the 20th century. The questioning of the role of the artist, the work, the audience, the market and the relationship between art and society, the Dadaists, the constructivists, the surrealists and others prepared the ground. In the 1960's *Fluxus*, *happenings* and "participation art" (Frank Popper), cybernetic art, the *Art & technology movement*, *environmental art* and *video art* already provided many of the ingredients of interactive art.

We live in the period of speed, an age dominated by technological innovations. Everything is computerized and digital. The first thing we do in the morning when we wake up is to check the mail and only after we drink the coffee. We do no longer buy the newspaper from the corner stand but read it online. We have no time

or financial possibilities to visit museums, so we are using internet to enter in online museums and art digital galleries. *Now is opened the way to online consumption of art.* Having the ability to use new technologies, young people visit online sites of new media art and digital artists sites, or online pages of the magazines displaying and commenting news, photos, modern art, street art, digital art; often they use such information for educational purposes, or try to use various programs in order to copy, blend or modify images and also in order to create new digital art works.

The codifications of the intended significances produces emphasize the author's engagement in a creative strategy or another, within the new compositional structure of visual text. So, the issue is no longer the content of the art work, but the form. The artist is aware of the technical limitations when using networked technology. Thus, at different levels, all are producing work that ,consciously' incorporate relational contexts; it is not necessarily to be part of a movement, to engage in a group of artist or professionals; the new technologies give them the opportunity to be more or less known by the audience; they can choose to display their work online, or in galleries, producing art works on traditional support (prints, sculptures, photos). In this case the digital art work is moved from a PC screen on other support, and this action is changing the lightening of artist's work. Taking into consideration that a monitor screen radiates light, the digital work elaborated on a screen has a better quality of light, but printing the work and display it on a wall is changing the lightening; in a gallery works are illuminated from an outside source of light. If viewer sees digital work on a website emanating light and its printing variant displayed on a wall, the object can be different. So it is a challenge to keep the same light intensity in order does not change the work concept and do not alter creation process which assure the authenticity. Many are aware that technology and digital culture has changed the world we live in, and appreciate its immediate effects on our everyday behaviors and situations. We must try to be aware of how it determines the way in which we think, and in which we conceive of the world. Nowadays, the audience is much more diverse, but it can be known thanks to the information posted on different sites. In the online medium, it is a way to access the consumers' preferences and to generate the consumers' profiles including for digital art ones. The reader of this kind of digital text has the opportunity to express his own opinion or to integrate himself in a community of meaning, a space to share with other members of the community the recognized meanings or the new configured ones.

Digital Art in Romania

In Romanian digital landscape, we can mention Kinema Ikon group founded in 1970, in Arad; they were interested in experimental movie, mixed media, hypermedia and interactive installations. Later, in 90s another group of artists was formed

around International Centre for Contemporary Art (Centrului Internațional pentru Artă Contemporană), and they were synchronized with similar international orientation.

First digital art gallery in Eastern Europe is *Gallery 115*, located in Bucharest, on Mihai Eminescu Street, no.115. Here are frequently exposed works created with digital techniques and printed on canvas. In 25-27 of May 2007 Romanian artists Anca Benera and Ciprian Dicu have exhibited their works at *Galeria White Night* (Noaptea albă a galeriilor); young curators Ciprian Dicu, Ștefan Tiron, Cosmin Moldovan organized *Kollector*, another gallery which brings a fresh air in domestic illustration trying to find the way to make art design. The first digital art festival here, *Print Art Fest*, took place in 2010, according to a local news blog, as Romanians continue to get more involved in the digital art movement. Young artists say that the digital art world has afforded them the freedom to express themselves and share their work, which has helped them grow as artists.

There are few foundations that are supporting young visual artists (*Portfolios*, *Trilld*); they organize online contests and festivals were invited to participate in main online communities. In Romania the industry using digital art is growing; there are few digital game studios; the artists participate in exhibitions or workshops and post their creations online, on Forum *Visualart.ro* and in contemporary art galleries.

What does digital art mean for the young artists?

Young Romanian artists are using new technologies to break down traditional barriers when it comes to creating and marketing their work. But when it comes to making a living from art, they face the same old obstacles. Are passion and talent enough to succeed in the world of art? The Romanian young artist's opinions are eloquent when refers to the digital artist condition, to the new means of expression offered by digital art, or their place on the art market. Young artists who have gone digital say they blend old theories and techniques with new technology. The artists say they consider digital art to be a mixture of traditional art and special effects. Far from abandoning traditional techniques and theories, they say that digital art is rather a mix of old and new. Artists say that technology has overcome traditional barriers, as discrimination based on gender, age and race hasn't segregated the digital world.

The young artists say they struggle to earn enough to make a living through art. This wider and more accepting market online has enabled the young artists to sell their work, art doesn't generate enough money, so she can't advance her career beyond being an amateur artist. Economic pressures force artists to find alternative jobs, sometimes ones they enjoy less. The digital art world offers them the freedom to share their work and express themselves. As opportunities in galleries are rare

for young artists in traditional galleries, the digital art world offers a promising space for them to display and market their work. Private galleries do promote young artists who have the best selling potential on the market. Creating online galleries in the digital art world has become an appealing alternative. The ease of publishing work online raises the debate of standards in digital art, and whether an art degree is necessary to be considered an artist. Some of the young artists say they are still fascinated by the dream of studying art at a university. They consider art education is essential.

What does Digital art mean for students?

We can verify a part of the digital artist's statements analyzing the answers given by the students from UBB Journalism Department. I choose them because they are not studying Fine Arts, but they are familiar with graphic design and other issues related to new technologies because of the compulsory or optional courses from the Journalism curriculum (Visual Communication, Online Journalism, Graphic Design, Photojournalism). They were hundred students, and have to respond at ten questions. The questionnaire allows them to recognize digital art, tools, the place this kind of art is displayed, the advantages/disadvantages of this kind of work art and also students' consumption habits. The answers revealed that degree of recognizing new media art depends on the number of related courses they already studied.

So, students from freshman year are not so familiar to this domain, only half of them recognized the different types of digital art and its interactivity, accessibility and the easy distribution as advantages of this kind of art. Last year students know almost everything about digital art, including, tools and the way they are used what confirm the necessity to have a certain level of education related to wide domain of new media art. Interesting is that only third part of the students tried to produce a digital art work, but two thirds are willing to try it.

This survey allowed to conclude that digital art is a matter of content as well as it is the matter of the author's techniques, and an issue of the ability to use specialized programs. Also we concluded that media consumption habits determine the digital art consumption from the online sites or forums.

Consumption of news, information and entertainment has radically changed. The internet is now the third most-popular news platform, behind local and national television news and ahead of national print newspapers, local print newspapers and radio. Getting news from the online medium fits into a broad pattern of the Romanian young people's news consumption. The overwhelming majority of Romanian young people use multiple platforms to get their daily news. The internet and mobile technologies are at the center of the story of how people's relationship to news is changing. In today's new multi-platform media environment, *news*

is becoming portable – they access news on their cell phones, *personalized* - a part of internet users have customized their home page to include news from sources and on topics that particularly interest them., *and participatory* - a part of internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites like Face book or Twitter.

In addition, people use their social networks and social networking technology to filter, assess, and react to news. And they use traditional email and other tools to swap stories and comment on them. Among those who get news online, a majority gets news forwarded through email or posts on social networking sites and half of them share links to news with others via those means. They consider the possibility to read digital art on the computer screens as any other text being a huge advantage, useful, cheap and on hand. In fact, the students indicated the artist's sites and the modern art sites the place they find digital art.

Digital art consumption is very similar to media consumption mentioned above. Reading a visual text that represents a digital art work involves interactivity because it means to interpret and build a significance of the text, but also to comment.

When we see an image we like or dislike it. If we like it, it means we understood the author's intentions and the content, the esthetic form of the image fit in our esthetic background, all the things we are interested in, and provoke some feeling, emotions.

Next step is to share with others our opinions by sending image and commenting on it. Often there is an intellectual and emotional involvement in the message we receive and we remember other images with a similar topic or capable to provoke the same feelings. So we share similar images with our friends or with members of our professional networks and maybe identify new ideas or traces to follow.

A new idea, a new concept is only the input in creating a digital art work. It followed by a process of selection (fragments of images, photos, colors or the most useful tool to design our work) and putting together, painting, combining, modifying, altering images, shapes, and forms in order to elaborate a new work of art compatible to our concept.

The way we use internet, the information we need, the images we like, our comments and preferences, the contents we share with others, differentiates us; thus producing digital art is one of the means to express our authenticity, uniqueness, difference to the others, but also there is a possibility of an inclusion in a larger community of meaning.

For the audience to determine the shape of the message, it has to correspond to the expectations of the audience based on a cultural experience. The messages addressed to the audience show the patterns regarding the feelings, the values of a culture, which re-enter the culture that gave birth to them and continues to grow

them. Different audiences can apply varied interpretation strategies to the same media text; only certain interpretation strategies may overlap with those of other groups; in other situations, the strategies applied by an individual or a group can be contradictory if they come from different contexts or represent directions of different social formations that may be in conflict.

The web is part of a broader set of developments that apparently concern relationally, but actually emphasize the individual and autonomous subject of modernity, as well as promoting spectacular forms of presentation and relation. The problem is that one alternative to this individualization is a kind of identification with the mass; in the form of fusion that negates the individual. A solution maybe to engage with the idea of the other in terms of difference, as both relational and separate, and yet also that which we depend on for our identity in a process of differentiation;

Unlike the step by step method, where one word follows the previous, the new media show a fragmented world, whose pieces are arranged according to a new pattern of significance. The holistic logic represents an alternative to linear thinking; it is presented as a mosaic of different elements. The image or spatial media is a holistic compound. For example, new media mix film, screens, and advertisements as a mosaic, using the MTV model of editing. This type of complex view has been first used in modern art by cubists, surrealists, abstract impressionists and pop art. The term *complexity editing* describes this mode of organizing reality. As in the case of modern art, it takes a good knowledge of the code for the audience to be able to interpret the message and to produce a meaning that concurs to the meaning intended by the author, still leaving open the possibility for other interpretations. The new work of art, digital one, is an opened, multilayered visual text. The author's intention and creativity can be completed with the reader's experience and creativity.

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