CHAPTER-II

DIGITAL ART AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

Artists have always been inspired to introduce or adopt new media technologies and their expressions. This pushes the boundaries of traditional medium and creates an influential voice which clearly reflects the views of the society about social, political and other aspects of collective life. Everything revolves around our ever-changing world and what is deemed new today will be soon a part of history.

New media art has gained respect and understanding because it covers the historical movement of art and focuses on technologies especially conceptual strategies in the right direction. These technologies easily adopt and assimilate widespread changes in various art fields such as, video art, photographic skill, installation, graphics, and paintings. It has developed new thoughts that stimulate new idea within the society. This new media art has become integrated into our society firmly and its influence can be seen everywhere.¹

Undoubtedly, new media interventions are very useful to expand intellectual thoughts and it highlights social developments in order to provide an up-to-date interpretation of realities. The use of tools by the classical tribal and folk artists to paint caves and sculptures of rock and hill tops some centuries ago were hailed as a new medium in their times as but now we have got high technologies based alternatives such as computer-graphics, electronic games and other devices which attract consumers especially the youth of the era.

In this context, the generic term of new media art should be defined to include creative expressions used in mass media technologies, computer graphics, animation other digital and internet based electronic, telecommunication devices and tools of one form or the other. No wonder resultant creations and imaginative speculations are quite distinct from traditional drawing, painting or sculpture and other pieces of art. This transformation of novel ideas in artistic folds its creativity, production and presentation, where new media and digital technology may easily flourish and develop throughout the world, it also facilitates interaction between old and new schools and gives the artist a deeper voice, vision and vista.²
Actually, new media (digital art) is not much different from the old art. Only technological advancement has enhanced and sharpened its perception and coverage. When technologies and art interact with each other, they blend to give rise to a stronger, newer and in many ways a more challenging sphere of work.  

Changes in technology always affect different types of growth and development in every area. We should not ignore its utility in order to examine the historical importance of art. This will give students a clear picture of values of digital media, and enable them to explore their own creative potentials by using the computer as a novel artistic tool and effective medium of communication in their hands.

Naturally, with digital intervention skilled artists are able to expand, develop and retain the uniqueness and other properties of their work. Given its immense potential a large number of creative people are pursuing courses in multimedia, animation, mass media, applied art, web design, film, television and audio-visual media, the prevailing creative technologies which are getting integrated into the educational system. The digital revolution has been successful in bringing out new dimensions in contemporary art practices.

Now, we can easily define and realize the reality and usefulness of digital art. Digital art, like other styles of art, is created by applying different digital equipments. Art does not mean tools which are used to create it. It is about the vision, message, or emotion of the artist. Photography is also a medium by the mean of which artist may display his art. Similarly, a computer is also a medium through which an artist can express his/her vision of line, form, color, composition and rhythm.

In this respect, one should remember is the chameleon – like ability of digital art to simulate or improve appearance of a traditional genre or media. Some common beliefs, go different inherently from each other add to the confusion and hide, the actual scope or meaning of contemporary digital art practice. For instance, an idea based on digital imagery made almost a generation ago, displayed it was pixelated with sharp lines, and abundant colors filled it and the main form depended in infinite swirling repetitions.
This idea continues to flourish even today despite a clear cut assertion that digital art serves mainly to produce a flawless realistic environment and character which cannot be detected or brought under photographic realm. These views prevent the viewers to appreciate or admire the smooth and expressive potential of the digital medium. The tools used to create digital art serve many purposes both within and outside the visual arts.  

We have seen growth of art in prehistoric days in the form of sculpture, painting, and drawing commanding respect of people. In the same way computer has become popular since 1960 in India. Engineers and scientists are seen in the forefront of computer technologies. For a long time they were the only persons who had access and knowledge of mainframe computers. Algorithmic methods were used by them to create scientific artwork and that time, many common artists rejected new form of digital art, but soon accepted the practice of intertwining in art technologies.  

In 1965, for the first time digital or computerized exhibitions were organized by a group of artists in the ‘Fine art’ and ‘Fashion wise’ galleries in New York and Germany. Two artists Billy Kluver and Robert Roshanberg in 1967 formed an organization called ‘experiments in art technology’ (EAT). In 1968 another artist Jasia Reichardt organized a two-month-long exhibition called ‘Cybernetic serendipity’ at the institute of contemporary art in London.  

A New movement in Russian art in the early part of the 20th century provided a significant perspective to the arrival of new technology of art. An even earlier commencing point for the story of computer in art may be Lev Malevich’s essay on new system in art published in 1919. An essential step forward from Malevich’s ideas of system in art was accepted by the artists who adopted programming in the 1960s.  

In the closing year of 20th century, a remarkable growth was seen in technologies and art. Many methods for the development or innovation in art and technologies were tired. The emergence of a new media (digital art) on the Indian art scene came to light in the early 90s with the widespread use of computer.  

Digital art has almost now completed twenty-five years of existence in India. In fact, the most of the images we see every day through a variety of diverse media
are digital. The contemporary artists are using new tools to reform the commercial art, such as photography, television, music, film and many more.

Now, the term ‘digital art’ covers and displays many artistic endeavours, and it has become an art movement which is virtually transparent and extremely wide. The artists employing digital tools have made inroads into the world of fine art and their endeavors deserve consideration in the development of this art. Digital art has rich contributions in unfolding contemporary art and also provide endless and marvelous ways of artistic expression.12

Digital art is the modern term used for artworks that are created by using non-conventional methods or technology. Digital art is now considered a reputed art form which occupies a place of honor in modern culture. It is derived from concepts of traditional art forms, but is decorated and supported by constituents of new technology.

There are many museums that display different types of digital art in eye catching showcases and manifestations. Some of the well-known museums and galleries are Arario Art Gallery, Beijing, Bose Pacia Art Gallery, New York, Sakshi Art Gallery, Mumbai, Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai, Crimson Art Gallery, Bangalore, Radhika Art Initiative, Lado Sarai, New Delhi and Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.13

Nowadays, it is very easy for a visual artist, writer, designer or even musician to use devices to manipulate common material to produce a variety of artistic products through computer. Further, the essential processes like selecting, copying, pasting, running filters have become now common and simple. Besides, digital technology symbolizes not only a tool for mixing art of different forms but it also provides a new form of mass communication. In this way, the tools are a fundamental element of worldwide media environment where artists can put up the best both shows to off their inspiration and its physical expression.14

Digital arts gradually appeared side by side with the development and popularity of computer. Its unique visual language is also adopted into some artists’ artworks. Digital technique brings excitement and visual novelty to artists.15 Due to its infinite reproducible binary nature and the fact that some form of expression is
necessary to materialize the original in visible form, digital art is, at the same time, an original as well as applicable branch.

Imagery or handcrafted creativity of an artist is vague a lot in digital art, because it is in fact a contribution of both. Digital art represents an urge to artistic passions in a social environment where external manifestation is generally preferred to material truth.\textsuperscript{16}

Digital art and computer art are not the same because they take advantage of dissimilar aspects of computer technology. A better way to appreciate the role of computer play in computer art is to contrast it with the role they play with digital art. It included movies, images, music, stories, and other kinds of art which rely upon the computer’s ability to deal with them within a common digital code. It should be remembered that the common digital code is very important and encoding by a computer deserves great emphasis.

Here arises a leading question, “Was there any digitally coded art before the invention of an electronic computer?” The answer is in affirmative. Take Shakespeare’s masterpieces ‘A midsummer night’s dream’. It is digitally encoded because its standard musical notation is in digital code. Shakespeare’s plays cannot be example of digital art and he was not a digital artist but still its glimpses can be seen in his works.

Digital art is a combination of both digital code and light. A theory of digital art makes this explicit, and work of digital art only when (a) it is a piece of art (b) it is made to display by light certain common, digital code. This analysis of digital art is a filter which brings to light certain common points in a group of art works and distinguishes their characteristics on arts.\textsuperscript{17}

Artists have accepted various technologies of printmaking, photography, film and video in bringing out pieces of fine art. Digital art by employing current technology finds itself in a variety of thought and unchanging artistic beliefs. One is that art has to be different to be produced and the longer an artist’s works on a particular piece the more significant and beautiful it becomes. The existing technology is almost perfect in materializing the dream of removing errors and improves the artist’s hard work. Therefore, digital artists face the challenge of
creating art that viewers believe to be difficult and labor intensive. In this respect, technology has been designed and it tends to minimize labour. It leads to an extremely problematic relationship between art and technology to be found in digital art.\textsuperscript{18}

This sort of relationship between technology and art results in using technology only as a component of an art piece for example, Photoshop-like softwares. The conspicuous role of technology in art piece helps to indicate or recognize the emergence of new artistic form. All these creations using the new medium, find common acceptability across the world, and their blends are absorbed by the general description of the expression ‘art’.\textsuperscript{19}

The most important aspect of digital art is that a vast number of artists working with these new tools remain outside the scope of the fine art. These artists admit to design first their products on a computer then copy it to canvas and paint. Thus artists are able to make a new innovation by adopting more efficient and accurate production techniques.\textsuperscript{20}

The significant changes in this art form - expressing the new innovations are reflected in multimedia art of Ranbir Kaleka, Gogi Saroj Pal, Ananda Moy Benerji, Shovin Bhattchariya, Ved Nayar, Pushpamala, Sonia Khurana, and many others. These artists are creating an amazing variety of new media artwork in a meticulously planned artist’s style. One can see an admirable mixture of old and new drawings, paintings, sculptures, photography, collage, everyday-objects, film, video, graphics, animation, robotics and pieces of other electronic art with their text, performance and installation.\textsuperscript{21}

Finally, digital art is a burning example of the artists' passions reanimated within and achieved by the devices that lots of people feared would finish the notions of art and self expression. To what extent it succeeds within the Indian context and conditions is a matter for conjecture.\textsuperscript{22}

Art is an experience that goes beyond painted canvas, sculpture and etchings, it includes video, installations, ceramics and more things. Artists are not confined to a single media. Nowadays, painters and potters are experimenting with printmaking and have extended their gamut over textile fabric. Apart from this the intellectual
boundaries that separate art from design are diminishing. But at the same time this wide spectrum is also spreading confusion and frequently raising the question of its identity and existence. Many debates are held about using computers to create art and people go on asking such question ‘Is digital art a real art’? These questions have often led to some heated discussions.

Art is a manifestation of human response to the environment which continuously affect the society. The role of an artist has been changed in each decade and is continually re-defining its criteria. It is the fact that art cannot be confined to some boundaries and it continues to move steadily to develop form and idea.

The art history is partly a history of technological advances. Oil paint, lithography, photography, acrylics and countless other technical advances mark turning point.

Technology has enabled to present a point of view without the rigour of drawing and painting, then tackling perspective and presentation of a verifiable, physical reality. With the digital camera and video becoming reality everything can be recorded and established with ease. However, the key factor of this ‘art’ is how the artist has located himself, emotionally and intellectually.

Some critics have also dismissed the digital genre because originality does not exist. Actually the artist does not create a particular unique object that can be hung on a wall or displayed in a gallery. This criticism would be an eye-opener to the so called European artists like Rembrandt, Daumier, and many others, who propagated loudly that their etchings and lithographs were genuine works of art. In fact the entire branch of art called graphic arts is devoted to creating art that spread in multiple copies but none of them can considered as unique or original. It is an art which is produced by artists, and here it matters what tools and materials an artist uses. A painting can be created in oil or in other materials, even if one may call it in the artist’s own choice.

Thus, it does matter whether digital art falls into the category of art or not. But it is really important to understand this art clearly. It should be accepted as an original art form because it requires human hands. It is interesting to see the development of this art and its evolution since its beginning. A thing is certainly created in an environment and we have to develop a relationship with it as it exists around us.
On the other hand, simply using a tool or any other medium doesn’t automatically mean that a work of art is created. This mistake is made by many young computer artists. One can paint but simply this much doesn’t make it a work of art. By this logic every artist can create works of art with the help of the computer just as he can create works of art with an airbrush or a sharpened bamboo stick or even by their own figure or a jackhammer. All these works cannot find a place automatically in a work of art. What makes the difference in both cases in the relation between the mind behind the keyboard planning and mouse acting on it? If it is done with an artist’s imagination then what is being created is called art irrespective of the fact that the artist is manipulating pixels or paint.

Engineers and architects since long time are developing programme to help them in technical drawings or designs. No one has ever claimed that a computer itself can design a skyscraper or an aeroplane. Similarly, it cannot be suggested that a building or aeroplane is not up the mark or less viable because its architect or engineer has used a computer programme to create its design.

A computer left all alone in a room is not going to do anything until rather it will go to standby mode. It’s not going to suddenly blink with inspiration and start writing books and create artwork. It needs an artist to do that. So perhaps we should simply stop using the phrase ‘computer-generated art’ and calling it by its right name; computer aided art.31

This is a new art but aesthetic, moral and spiritual laws valid for conventional art are equally applicable here along with similar principles. The truth is that the essence of every branch of art is same, only the tools may be different. The only point we should remember is that the new art differs with the traditional one in respect of power of effect on the human consciousness.32

Artists continued to push the boundaries of art by moving the images beyond the paper and canvas on fabrics, floors, with digital printings. Art has become an essential part in every aspect of life, such as commercial and domestic. Technological rouse will continue to develop its strength in the entire process of creation.33

India has a long tradition of art and culture which existed since ancient times.34 Artistic genius has always been exploring the possibilities of formal patterns
of imagination. Since the past technology has a close relation to art and played an important role in all artistic activities. Artists were delighted to use the emerging technology of their times with the magical innovative touch that made it meaningful.35

Drawing, in its simplest form, is a sketch of an idea that can be made with paper and pencil. A sketch provides an opportunity to associate and understand a concept until it is developed and takes a final shape, it has numerous applications in a visual way of thinking and showing concepts. Further, this act of drawing can recall a memory in a right perspective within a real environment. Artists admitted that they consciously change their drawing techniques after knowing about digital drawing. They used proportion and form in the same way as they would do in traditional drawing.

Most artists have given positive comments on the time factor and its potentiality to make correction in the mistakes easily. Artists could handle tools more accurately in the software program.36 Therefore, new media art has brought an innovative approach of creating and presenting art and it leads to a dynamic flow.37

Before the comparison, it is necessary to know what traditional and digital art. Traditional art is an art form such as drawing, painting, sculpture and many more which is created by hands without using any type of digital equipments.38

Traditional painting is basically a blend of lines, forms, color tones, texture and space. This art form has brought a lot international recognition from several decades to the artists. Visual art is a beautiful combination of traditional as well as modern art. Indian visual art depicts life through its creative means. Indian style of painting differs from area to area.39

The Indian paintings speak a universal language which represents the celebration of life through civilizations which flourished from the ancient time that are expressed through art. Almost every painting’s style has developed itself into a complete school of art, maintaining the individual characteristics.40

The evolution of painting since ancient times is an illustrative certification of man’s beliefs, and experiences. It has been demonstrated in the caves like Elora and Ajanta. The development of professional crafts and craftsman took place in the most
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of the early civilization of the world. Much later, in India, classes of craftsman emerged and flourished in Pre-Buddha period. Gradually, various art and crafts were established without any opposition from traditional circles. This led to the interrelation and interdependence among various art forms.

Traditional art has many different forms and they depict deep socio economic growth. Various traditional styles of schools, contemporary regional norms, and moods of life are preserved in traditional arts.

On the other hand, the digital art is a technique produced with the help of computer and capable of receiving and manipulating countless images.

The impact of digital technology has changed the artistic performances of conventional art and it has created new artistry in several art forms such as digital installation, video art, computer graphic and digital animations. The word digital art is used to exemplify an artist who makes use of digital mechanization in the making of art. Hence, this has provided innovations and wider space for an artist to contemplate and experiment with new ideas.

Now, it is easy to differentiate both traditional as well as digital art forms. The main difference between digital and traditional painting is the non-linear process. That is, an artist can often arrange their painting in layers that can be edited independently. Further, the ability to undo and redo strokes frees the artist from a linear process.

Digital artists have numerous tools that customary artist doesn’t possess. Some of these are a virtual palette consisting of millions of colors, almost of any size of canvas or medium and the ability to correct mistakes, as well as erasers, pencils, spray cans, brushes and a variety of 2D and 3D effect tools. Instead of a canvas or sketchbook, digital artists would use a mouse or tablet to display strokes.

Both traditional and digital art forms are having great and high values with their techniques and skills which make them more precious and popular.

In digital art many works are done by computer programming in which human and its creativity are the most important ingredients and therefore, one who uses the computer program cannot be called as an artist. This practice saves artist to buy costly
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materials like paint-brush, canvas, colour by spending a huge sum of money. The only requirement is to control the mouse and tablet and to draw on the ‘digital canvases’ using human creativity and potentials. The artist does not have to wait for drying, cleaning the brushes, mixing the paint. Another advantage of these devices especially in Photoshop is the layers of function by using these functions an artist can divide his painting in different part and different layers in which several changes can be possibly made of single layer without affecting the other parts. Further, computer applications give chance to the creators to endeavour different styles without employing much more time and labour.47

Almost every digital artist has undergone an amazing artistic journey and has carved a niche for himself. 48 They are experimenting with new materials and indigenous elements for innovations in special combinations and unusual treatment has been gaining popularity all around the globe at present.49

Digital artists should not try to reproduce a traditional painting by copying its originality instead they should express a unique vision of creativity. Digital art is a new art form and should retain its new independent character.50

Although, a traditional medium has a long history and it will continue to be popular in the future. It may, therefore, be concluded that digital artist is far more lineated and free to explore. This new kind of creativity will continue to explore in its own unique ways.
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