

**The New Normal Acceleration and the future  
of the non-material mediums and art forms**

BFA Thesis

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In this essay, I will be looking at subjects such as art and design, focusing on its newest contemporary forms actively present in 2020. I mostly talk about art associated with the terms “digital”, “virtual”, “augmented” and “online”. The contemporary forms I examine fit into categories of visual, interactive, experimental, post, and multimedia arts. The text analyzes the wide context of technological and cultural developments, which I consider important to its development and recognition in the creative industry.

### **The COVID-19 Pandemic and Acceleration of New Non-Material Art.**

October 2020. I am sitting in the living room of my apartment in Amsterdam and looking outside the window. The Dutch government just introduced new measures for the second lockdown. Cafes and restaurants are now closed again, and the limits to in-person interactions include the prohibition of having more than three visitors in your house in twenty-four hours, as well as a limit to the groups of people who can meet outside to four people. After spending nearly a year in what became commonly known as “The New Normal”, people from all over the world came up with their own terminology related to the current times. This includes the concept of “Pre-Covid Life.”<sup>1</sup> According to the WHO, we’re likely to remain in the state of this new reality until the year 2022 – the “Covid-free” future that we all are waiting for. Meanwhile, we will have to adapt to this new world in more ways than just accepting and following the regulations and safety rituals.

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<sup>1</sup> (Renton et al. 2020)

Everyone in March : “Let’s just hope the pandemic won’t last long”

The pandemic :



IMAGE: A meme, posted on Reddit on October 15th, 2020.<sup>2</sup>

The adaptation to The New Normal becomes an interesting and challenging task for everyone - from individuals to businesses. We are now witnessing the ways in which we all approach this. In the Netherlands, the first lockdown brought devastation to the art and culture sector, when the Dutch Government did not supply it with appropriate financial support.<sup>3</sup> For months many cultural events were canceled. That encouraged an impulse to think about ways of presentation, other than a physical visit, which we all used to perceive as the standard. Museums, theaters, cinemas, galleries, and other cultural institutions were then able to reopen at the end of April 2020, obliged to follow strict guidelines, which are speculated to lead to the closure of 25% of Dutch museums by the end of 2020.<sup>4</sup>

Since the WHO qualified the COVID-19 outbreak as worldwide pandemic,<sup>5</sup> we all had to adapt individually, as well as globally. Similarly, cultural establishments that couldn't host events due to restrictive measures have now begun to take on new mediums.

<sup>2</sup> (PenTheDragon 2020)

<sup>3</sup> (Lupu 2020)

<sup>4</sup> (DutchNews 2020)

<sup>5</sup> (Ducharme 2020)

Let's look into the different aspects of change that have occurred in arts and design concerning The New Normal. According to a Nielsen global survey from 2019, consumers (who had access to VR) listed Augmented and Virtual Reality as the top technologies they're seeking to assist them in their daily lives. Just over half (51%) said they were willing to use this technology to assess products.<sup>6</sup>

According to Shopify, a subscription-based web service that provides a platform for designing websites, "Interactions with products having 3D or AR content showed a 94% higher conversion rate than for products without AR/3D."<sup>7</sup> This information also correlates with the analytics of the Adobe Digital Economy Index,<sup>8</sup> as online shopping purchase power increased 26% since 2014. These two studies together hint that even before the global pandemic, the shift to digital and online mediums was already well on the way.

According to Google Trends, which can act as an indicator of the popularity of a topic based on the frequency of it being searched for online, the term 'online art' has seen a rapid spike in interest during the pandemic, particularly in the summer of 2020.

In terms of innovation, it seems like the shift to the digital, online, and virtual started quite slowly, with small scale artists and designers experimenting with forms of online exhibitions. One of the first exhibitions of this kind that I noticed was from the Amsterdam gallery Upstream,<sup>9</sup> hosting a show of digital artworks on their website in the form of a scrolling feed. The gallery reflected on their exhibition with both sentimentality and forward-thinking in mind: "Net Art already exists since the mid-90s, but now is a great time to dive back into all the great works of art the internet has to offer. The urgency of this type of art becomes apparent in these times. The more because traditional works of art that are shown online have the disadvantage that they are reduced to pictures on your screen and that the work only really comes into its own when you are standing before it. These times demand something different and the art form that is undoubtedly best equipped for these conditions is Net Art, art made for the internet".<sup>10</sup>

But what about exhibitions? It seems that at the moment, most well-established institutions are taking their time to reflect on the situation, as many of their events are canceled.<sup>11</sup> However, small scale artists, especially those who have a background in coding and 3D design, have already created projects adapted to the new formats. For example, during the first lockdown, a young Dutch fashion designer, Iris Van Wees, made an Augmented Reality exhibition in the Vondelpark. The exhibition consisted of a few works made by various multimedia designers and its first edition is still on display. To get access to the show, visitors need to download an app on the App Store. The exhibition is free and followed the guidelines of The Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), at the time. There is no need for people to make an appointment, go to a crowded indoor space, or interact with other people. This format of a virtual exhibition in a public space seems to have increased in popularity.

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6 (Tavolieri 2020)

7 (Shopify 2020)

8 (Adobe et al. 2020)

9 (Upstream Gallery 2020)

10 (Upstream Gallery 2020)

11 (Lawrence 2020)

Another similar event, called Demo Festival, was organized by Studio Dumbar in November 2019. It featured works of digital, multimedia artists and graphic designers from around the world. The format of the festival was also virtual - the works were exhibited on various digital screens at The Amsterdam Central Station<sup>12</sup>. Another example of the application of new virtual technology is a recent one - a project, called Digital Art Month, launched in the city of New York on October 1st 2020<sup>13</sup>. It is an exhibition of contemporary digital art in the realm of public space. The works are located in various neighborhoods, and utilize QR-codes as a way to link visitors to the digital works on Instagram and Snapchat.

### **The Need for an Online Art Platform**

I think we need online platforms where art could be shown by many creators and seen by everybody. How can we create those? How can non-creators benefit from viewing art online?

A significant number of online platforms that we currently use are relatively new, most of them are less than 20 years old, yet they are well-established and now considered a part of everyday life. Facebook – 2004; Google – 1998; Instagram – 2010; Snapchat – 2011; Netflix – 1997; TikTok – 2006; Wikipedia – 2001; YouTube – 2005; Amazon – 1994; Twitter – 2006; Zoom – 2011; Reddit – 2005; Considering that these platforms are so new, we can speculate that their current appearance is only the prelude to what is to come in the field of interconnectivity, connecting hosting and goods distribution.

Thinking about the place for digital art in the world, where technology is rapidly advancing, I keep wondering why we still don't have established platforms for digital forms of art. Perhaps the time for bigger platforms has not yet arrived, it seems that in terms of technological accessibility we still need more time to make the art more widely accessible. According to emarketer,<sup>14</sup> 52,1 million people will use Virtual Reality and 83.1 million will use Augmented Reality in 2021. In the first case, that is 15,9% of the US population, and 25,3% for AR, which makes both technologies incredibly niche, compared to 33.3% owning iPhones, 41% using Instagram<sup>15</sup> and 85,8% using the Internet in 2020.<sup>16</sup>

Virtual augmented reality, and digital space seems to be the technologies that can change the interaction between artists and audience: the virtual and augmented realms allow direct interaction between people across great physical distances. Objects and environments created natively for digital and virtual spaces can exist in non-physical mediums designed for their representation. An example of those interactions can be observed in online multiplayer gaming. Players experience interaction with characters, objects, as well as other players in a designated space, a.k.a. a medium.

Digital art *also* has to be hosted on a medium, connecting viewers to the content. Several different mediums can serve that function. Many of them interconnect with each other and exist as complex ecosystems: from websites to multi-platform apps with AR and VR

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<sup>12</sup> (Demo Festival 2019)

<sup>13</sup> (Digital Art Month 2020)

<sup>14</sup> (Petrock 2020)

<sup>15</sup> (NapoleonCat.com 2020)

<sup>16</sup> (Clement 2020)

extensions.

As software and online learning for those tools become more available each year, it seems likely that in the near future a significant amount of makers and consumers will have access to the technologies and knowledge needed to create those mediums. Currently, they are only accessible to a limited number of people due to their complex interfaces, lack of integration with popular devices, and expensive licensing.<sup>17</sup>

### **How can non-creators benefit from new platforms?**

The experience of art, natively designed to exist in a virtual/digital form, is incomplete in the physical space without adding 3-dimensional layers to it. There are examples of the installations that successfully implemented the connection between screens and physical space. For instance, a collaboratively created interactive project, from dutch company Naivi and Berlin-based Random Studio – “Volez, Voguez, Voyagez”. This is an immersive game-like installation, commissioned by Louis Vuitton. It features a virtual plane, controlled by a visitor's movements in the physical space.<sup>18</sup> Another example is a recently launched Nxt Museum, a space for a new kind of art, and the first museum in The Netherlands dedicated to new media art.

This nature of projects could be largely implemented in augmented and virtual reality experiences, which, in my opinion, could create stronger experiences. The perception and interaction within those mediums still have technical drawbacks, for instance, high optimization of content, hardware limitations, as well as the bulkiness of the headsets, etc. The important factor is that these technical limitations, as we have already observed for years, are only temporary. To be able to see a broader picture of the future, we need to keep in mind that these restrictions will slowly disappear.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> (Format Team 2019)

<sup>18</sup> (Navi and Random Studio 2020)

<sup>19</sup> (Shiotsu 2020)



IMAGE: “Distortion in Space” exhibition by a London collective Marshmallow Laser Feast (MLF). Picture from the Nxt Museum’s website.



IMAGE: Volez, Voguez, Voyagez. Louis Vuitton / Random Studio, Picture from the Naivi’s website.



Art forms that are not entirely digital are already becoming a new standard form of immersive content. I think it is highly unlikely that they will replace or make physical art irrelevant. I believe that, if anything, the rise of digital art could act to increase the value of material art. Amusingly enough, the tendency for art digitalization seems to partially devalue virtual form and empower the material form. The derogatory comparisons like: ‘Physical art is the real art, unlike the digital and virtual forms’ became a cliché way of devaluing non-physical art. In my mind, this argument relates to the idea used for centuries to deny scientific progress and complex topics like climate change. ‘If you don’t see, it if you don’t feel it – it’s not real’. Ironically, it is in a way true. In its way of immaterial reality, it is not a part of the material-object existence, yet it is quite real - you can feel it, and you can experience it.



IMAGE: Infected Culture - Open Edition: DAY #4728 of BEEPLE'S EVERYDAY PROJECT (4.10.20) on the Niftygateway, a web marketplace for digital art.<sup>20</sup>

The quest for the acceptance of virtual art is an ongoing one. In December 2020 it was reported that digital artist Beeple sold \$582,000 worth of artworks in five minutes on the Niftygateway, a marketplace platform for digital art.<sup>21</sup> Niftygateway has a unique way of verifying ownership: it includes a physical package of authenticity with a hair sample from

<sup>20</sup> (Beeple 2020)

<sup>21</sup> (Gottsegen 2020)

the artist, a certificate of the ownership and a QR-code for the artist's website which displays additional collector's information. Currently, a unified way of authenticating art does not yet exist, which allows artists and platforms to create their systems. Interestingly enough, in the case of Niftygateway, the work is both the digital file and the framed piece. As the artist himself describes it, separating the virtual authentication (NFT's),<sup>22</sup> a unique token that an artist can generate. This token can be attached to a piece of data to serve as a proof of ownership, but as it is digital it could be separated from the physical work, which in the eyes of artist Beeple will make it worthless: "They are meant to augment each other and to me, it's like cutting a baseball card in half and trying to sell the pieces. Nobody can stop you from doing it, but it kinda makes both pieces worthless."<sup>23</sup>

Using blockchain to authenticate physical and digital works became a common and secure way to create and transfer the ownership of the work in recent years. Several platforms are offering unique ways to buy, invest, and trade artworks using blockchain and cryptocurrencies. The technology used to transfer the ownership implies a specific way of transitioning the ownership: A unique token created by the artist is transferred to the owner. The ledgers of the transactions and ownership are stored and encrypted by all the users of the blockchain, verifying both the transaction and the ownership. This decentralized system implies that a middleman is not needed to guarantee authorship or authenticity, because all the transaction and ownership data are publicly available. The ownership in the context of blockchain means possession of a cryptographically generated private key, attached to a unique signature of the data.

### **How digital platforms might develop:**

In this section, I will discuss three factors in how digital platforms might develop in the future, both with evidence and examples as well as speculation.

#### 1. New forms for viewer-artist interaction.

The corporate Virtual/Augmented platforms (Instagram/Snapchat) and the DIY platforms designed by individual creatives or studios can potentially become an alternative for institutions such as museums or galleries. Examples mentioned previously, such as the DigiGo platform and Demo festival and Digital Art Month, expanded and appropriated space that was not explicitly designated for exhibitions or meant to host art. There is always a chance that these platforms will become institutionalized, despite their self-initiated nature. The pandemic accelerated a shift to digitalization, forcing bigger and more established culture mediums to make a transition to formats previously ignored. This shift can be seen in The Dutch Design Week of 2020<sup>24</sup>. This year's event is completely virtual.

#### 2. Virtual Shape as a new standard form.

Virtual works and platforms are free from having physical form as a core of the work. This makes them much more flexible in comparison to the physical exhibitions with material based pieces that need real-world space. For example, "Digital Earth", a virtual art platform,

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<sup>22</sup> (Garner 2018)

<sup>23</sup> (Beeple 2020)

<sup>24</sup> (Dutch Design Week 2020)

recently launched by Winzavod Contemporary Art Center and Re: Store, is an online gallery space, where the artworks exist in a dedicated virtual space. In the case of this platform, the artworks are more flexible as they are uploaded to the platform online and can be changed or adjusted in real-time. By comparison, if those digital artworks were exhibited in the physical space, they would be bound by the limitations of modification in the material space as well as by technical specifics of the hardware used for their exposition. For instance, in-person presence at the space of the exposition is required to make adjustments to the work; It takes longer to make changes to the work as hardware changes have to be made. This usually implies temporarily removing work from the exposition. In less problematic in the format of the virtual exhibition. When the new version is uploaded, it takes effect quickly, minimizing the delay in its inaccessibility. The online existence of digital art also puts it outside of the jurisdiction of the complex laws related to physical space. There is much speculation already as to how the non-physical art and design could be managed, and which laws they should follow. In time, we will probably see more regulation in the field of virtual space. Governments and companies will probably start claiming the ownership and defining its division. For the moment the virtual sphere still enjoys the privilege of being a gray area, with min universal laws or regulations.

### 3. Increased availability and accessibility to consume and create content on such platforms.

At the current level of technological development, devices with enough processing power are widely available to the mainstream audience. In essence, this allows complex workflows for modern-day creatives, as well as virtual and digital platforms' existence.

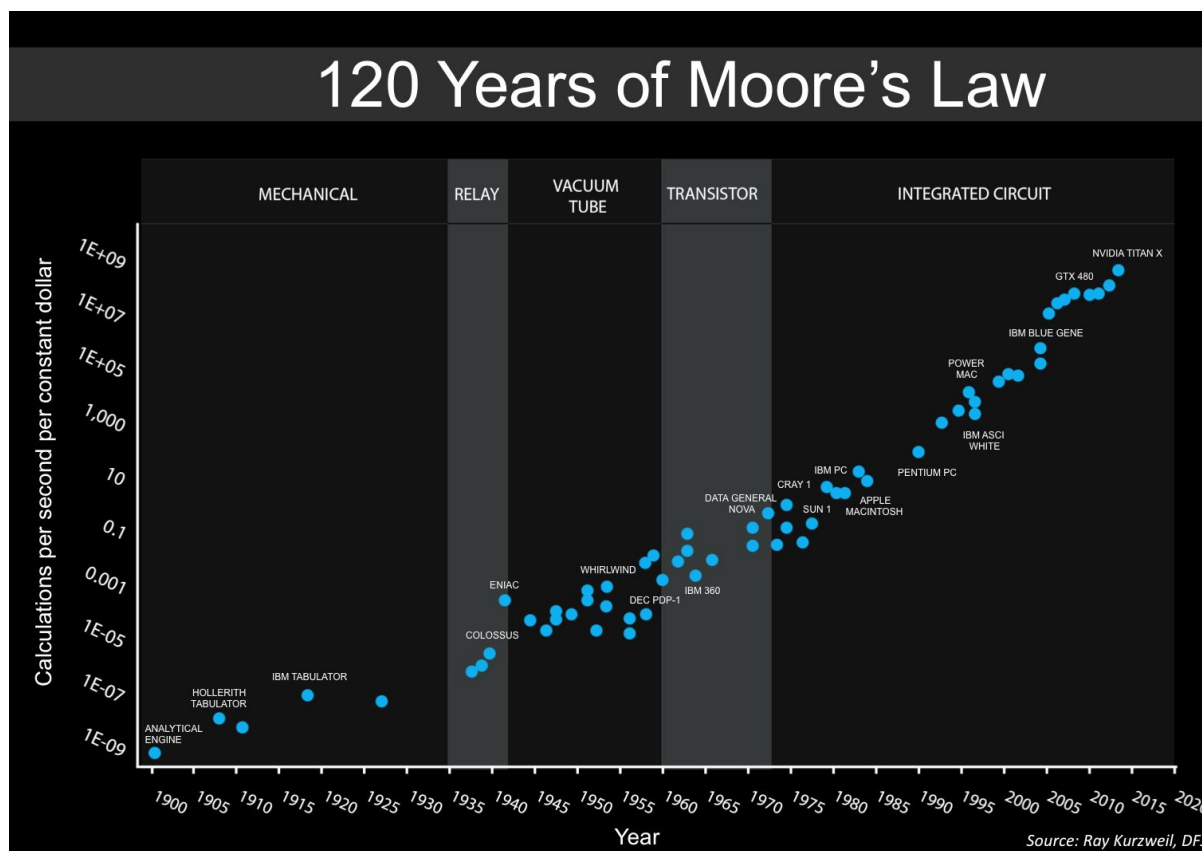


IMAGE: An updated version of Moore's law over 120 Years (based on Kurzweil's graph). The 7 most recent data points are all NVIDIA GPUs.<sup>25</sup>

Ray Kurzweil predicts that the exponential growth in the capabilities of this technology will continue and in a few decades the computing power of all computers will exceed that of ("unenhanced") human brains, with superhuman artificial intelligence appearing around the same time.<sup>26</sup>

Looking at the articles of the Artnet's Annual Report of 2020, I begin to think that the art world has not yet adapted to the need for digitalization during the pandemic. Where is that magical transition that I observed online, with new, experimental platforms and artists?

The art dealers fail to understand the unsustainability of the physical forms of exhibiting during the pandemic. Making Shanghai Art Week 2020 (November 19th-22nd) a physical event seems almost reactionary. It is so, especially considering the excessive 28 days of isolation, that everyone visiting the 4-day event had to sacrifice,<sup>27</sup> as most of the countries impose new measures in the battle with rising cases of COVID-19. S "We are still committed to participating in key fairs around the world as this in-person interaction is a critical part of our business model,"- says Laura Zhou, Asia director at White Cube.

On the other hand, "The big innovation" that the Artnet features is highly apparent to the Director for online sales of *David Zwirner* - Elena Soboleva. As she is interviewed by Artnet, she explains her vision for the future of art: "*Ultimately, the power of museums, galleries,*

<sup>25</sup> (Jurvetson 2016)

<sup>26</sup> (Caughill 2017)

<sup>27</sup> (Kinsella and Freeman 2020)

*and the physical object of art will be stronger than ever. As the rest of the world moves further into a virtual frontier, we will crave the sensory, material presence of artworks which the digital world cannot replicate.”<sup>28</sup>*

Contrary to my speculations, her opinion predicts institutional prospects, confirming their grip on the art market. Perhaps that’s the way things will turn out in the future. Since cultural institutions play a large role in establishing innovative and experimental forms of art. In general, it seems that many of them are not entirely prepared and willing to embrace new technologies, making them a part of their business model.

It might feel risky to them, since including virtual innovation might be harmful, clashing with the idea of physical authenticity. I suppose to make the digital and virtual mediums an established form of art, it would have to become much more profitable and monetizable than it is now. In the case of the blockchain, for example, their role will be superficial. Those institutions would not be directly included in the transfer of ownership.

Art Auctions, like Sotheby’s and Christie’s, at present are closely tied to the physicality and authenticity of the art they operate. For them, the owner has exclusive rights and control over the property of the work. However, looking at their online legal documents, they also talk about ownership of their digital platforms. Their platforms are, of course, not exhibition spaces (at the present moment, as of December 2020), but online archives of the works and objects that they sell." It is conceivable that one day these auction houses may deal with digital art, but at present it does not seem to be their priority. The kind of ownership that auctions usually deal with is physical. The buyers know they will have work that they buy in material possession. In the case of the physical artworks, there is of course more materiality, emphasized by the format of the work. This value is much clearer to understand in the case of the material object, compared to “vague” ownership of the work that does not fully exist physically.

When watching the sales at the Sotheby’s auction, it is difficult to imagine how the digital art would fit in this avant-garde and almost surreal world of bids, zeroes, tens, the fifties, and hundreds of thousands, seemingly coming out of the thin air.<sup>29</sup> However, it could very well be the next step of this performative money-making process. Especially in 2020, as their sales had to be set up as a mix of physical and online. This format comes very close to crypto art sales. The next step could certainly be a crypto art auction.

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<sup>28</sup> (Rothstein 2020)

<sup>29</sup> (Galenson 2013)

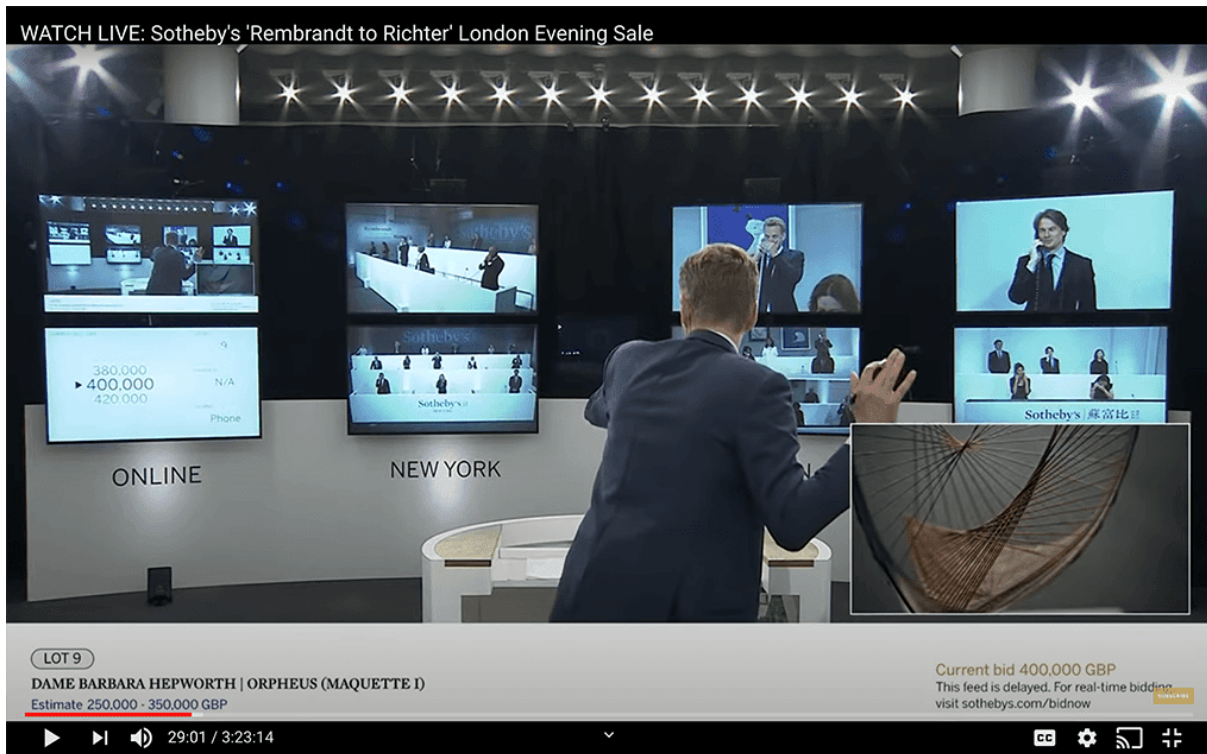


IMAGE: Sotheby's 'Rembrandt to Richter' London Evening Sale, July 2020<sup>30</sup>

On the Sotheby's 'Rembrandt to Richter' London Evening Sale in July 2020, the bids were made online and by phone. It looked like the greatest money-making performance of this year – a small group of financially driven people in a white cube. Some of them on their cellphones, covering their mouths from the cameras - presumably to prevent lip-reading. In front of them – eight big monitors. The auctioneer shouts out loudly: “Yes, no. Twelve million six. Brook? Has to go now. At twelve million six hundred thousand pounds. This wonderful object. With you, Chris.”

According to the article by Elena Zavelev, the founder and CEO of CADAF (the Contemporary and Digital Art Fair), digital art would be more fitting in the sharing economy.<sup>31</sup> This feels right, considering that the newly emerged platforms for digital content found a different way to capitalize - in many instances creators use a subscription-basis for their creations.

As of 2020, digital art still needs physical space to reach a larger audience. Will this still be the case in 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, etc...? If we look back at the evolution of the current technology, 10 years ago in 2010, things that are possible now, like me being able to have a computer that supports VR glasses and a personal independent VR headset, seemed far away and quite unreachable (Did VR headsets even exist back then?). All of this is just a prelude to the thought that in 10 years from now, in 2030, things might take a more interesting turn. Neuralink? Biotechnology? Nanocomputers? Private AI bots? XR (a form of “mixed reality environment that comes from the fusion (union) of ... ubiquitous sensor/actuator networks and shared online virtual worlds),<sup>32</sup> glasses the size of the actual

<sup>30</sup> (Sotheby's 2020)

<sup>31</sup> (Zavelev 2015)

<sup>32</sup> (Wikipedia 2017)

glasses, or even XR lenses? I wonder if any of these ideas will come true, or prove to be irrelevant as we will find other mediums and establish new platforms. If I cannot be certain what the future brings in terms of technological development and popularization, how can I be sure what will happen to digital art? There is space for analyzing these trends though. Digital art has become more accessible and has thrived since the early 2000s, with the appearance of social media platforms.

Representation of art in the museums and art galleries is important to consider. Even with the development of technology, there is no reason to believe that the need for institutions as cultural spaces will disappear. I believe that we will see new types of institutions, built and designed to accommodate the new forms of art. I think some form of space, be it virtual or material will need to represent art and exhibitions. The concepts for museums and galleries for new art might be different from the way we currently imagine them. Their core functions, however, are likely to continue existing and adopting as they had for centuries.

### **What are the economical realms and mediums for digital art?**

One of the most powerful advantages of digital art forms is that they are highly adaptable. Though the biggest challenge at the moment is the number of platforms made to host digital art is limited. However, some existing platforms have the potential to expand to integrate it in their structure, if only they wished to do so. In her article Elena Zavelev gives an example of large digital business platforms such as Netflix and Hulu, explaining how their business models can be applied to the market of digital art. By “renting” the rights to exhibit the artworks to companies or individuals, a platform of that sort can monetize digital art.

At the moment there are a few platforms that provide digital artists with an opportunity to sell, rent, and exhibit, depending on the medium of the work. These platforms offer subscriptions just like BlackDove, which delivers selected and curated digital art to individuals and commercial spaces,<sup>33</sup> A similar platform is called Snark Art. It also functions as a digital gallery and provides space for the trade of digital art. It is a lot more accessible, less curated, and more transparent for the general body of artists and buyers.<sup>34</sup>

These platforms, nevertheless, are not widely known and popular among the general public. In recent years, Facebook and Snapchat decided to bring artistic and design expression into their platforms. It came in a form of Augmented Reality filters that at first were developed and deployed by their internal teams. However, it all changed in 2017,<sup>35</sup> with the release of software for creating custom Snapchat and Instagram filters. Those companies paved the way for a new community of digital creators by providing them with the tools and platforms to share their art engagingly. At first, those platforms were available to a selected community of individuals, who had to apply for permission to use the software and publish the filters. That soon changed, when both companies opened their programs to everyone. It is interesting to notice that neither Facebook nor Snapchat at the present attempt to monetize the filters directly, with an exception of a few collaborations made directly with the teams<sup>36</sup>. They did, however, create a market for filters, opening up opportunities for digital creators

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33 (Billings 2020)

34 (Recycle Group 2020)

35 (The Lens Studio Team 2018)

36 (Tech Facebook 2019)

across the world to sell their work indirectly. The prices for those filters start from \$0 and reported going as high as more than \$25000.<sup>37</sup> I consider the medium of AR filters an intriguing part-form of art/design, as in many cases they are made not solely for advertising or a simple beauty element, but as a form of art expression. Jessica Harrington, an artist, writer, and virtual designer described her view on the differences between Augmented Reality Art compared to more traditional forms: *“The most traditional way to consume art is through passive observation. Offline we stand in galleries and sit in concerts, and online we allow creative works to slowly and carefully infiltrate our consciousness. The passive experience permits us to think deeply and consider what we are seeing, but it also hinders our ability to actively engage, explore, and create, and build onto existing works as a creative collaboration. With many art forms, there is a distinct divide between the artwork and the viewer.”*<sup>38</sup> While artistic filters, designed to be appealing, exist side by side with commercial or beauty filters, designed to go viral, this does not mean that AR filters cannot become an established art form. Exhibitions of filters as art have already happened in recent years. Cibelle Cavalli Bastos<sup>39</sup>, a non-binary artist working between London, Berlin, and São Paulo, exhibited their art filter in an exhibition IN≠BODY: EXO/REAL(I)T.Y #aevtardeprogram in Science Gallery (London) in February 2020.

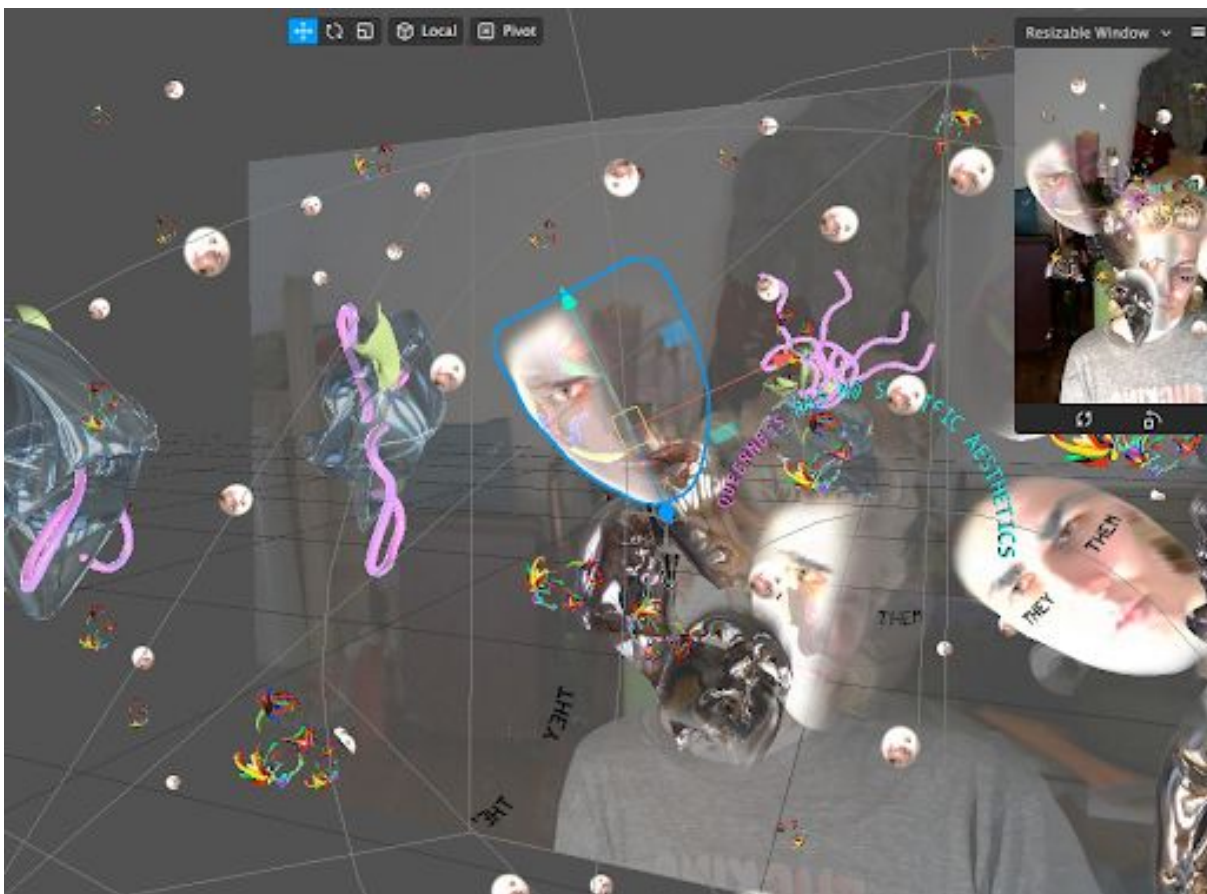


IMAGE: IN≠BODY:EXO/REAL(I)T.Y #aevtardeprogram by Cibelle Cavalli Bastos, the image of the work from a Facebook Post.<sup>40</sup>

37 (Marino 2020)

38 (Herrinton 2019)

39 (Bastos 2020)

40 (Bastos 2020)



## **The problem of value and ownership in digital art/design.**

The vast majority of digitized art does not have any monetary value in and of itself, or loses its value due to its accessibility. This in part is the result of the format in which the works exist. Comparing a digital work to a physical one is complicated by the fact that you could consider virtual formats, like .PSD or .JPG, the original work, and an exhibited version as a reproduction of the work. The fact that work, in the context of modern technology, could be reproduced or copied so easily makes its ownership a difficult concept. The authorship, rather than mere possession, becomes highly relevant. Physical and virtual possession of “the original” file, that carries the metadata – information inside a file, if extracted, could tell a lot about its creator and the work itself. That information can be used to identify the authenticity of the work as well. Along with it, various techniques of digital signatures are practiced to deal with the issue of authenticity. The technologies behind those signatures allow attaching verification of the ownership, encryption of the file, or the use of blockchain to ensure the authenticity and ownership of the work.<sup>41 42</sup> The ownership of the file data is, therefore, similar to the ownership of physical work. There are important differences, however. A physical and digital transfer of the original work can be prevented both technologically and materially, but it does not guarantee that parts of the work or earlier versions cannot exist in other places at the same time. If you owned a painting of Banksy, you could physically destroy or damage it, and most likely it will not be possible to restore it. With digital data, it is more intricate. You can damage the code of the work, even corrupt it. However, unless the carrier of the work is irreversibly physically damaged or destroyed, there is always a possibility of restoring the work by algorithms, ai, or data professionals. That points to a certain quality of all immaterial works, as noticed by Lucy L. Rippard in her essay “Six Years” where she writes: “Even the most immaterial artworks have a material dimension. One need only think of handwritten instructions on scraps of paper or the still widespread practice of issuing certificates—both perfectly marketable formats”. This is still true, even though Rippard was writing her essay about the state of conceptual art in 1966 – 1972.<sup>43</sup> Even in 2020, the existence of a non-material work is still somewhat material in nature and exposition, even though its essence might appear immaterial. To display work we need a power source, a device with some kind of output, physical space, hardware, and data centers that store the content of the internet. Not to mention the electricity required to power the storage, and for the viewers – a screen to observe artwork at home.

## **Celebrity Culture and the Value of digital art.**

According to Isabelle Graw’s “High Value”, the contemporary art scene since 1990 has shifted from equal popularity to success. She even states that in many cases, the economical value of work became a signifier of its cultural value, citing the director of the Contemporary Art Department at Sotheby’s, who said in an interview that “*the most expensive art is the best art.*”<sup>44</sup> Today this also applies to augmented reality art created in the context of platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat in a form of augmented reality filters. In the attention economy of these platforms, the mainstream perception of the “best” filters is

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41 (CISA 2009)

42 (Acronis 2016)

43 (Lippard 1997, #5)

44 (Graw 2009, #45)

measured by their popularity amongst users. It might be troubling that platforms like these celebrate and select based on the popularity and attention these filters get, but it is the reason for their existence and their hidden revenue generation model.

Among the designers and artists making AR filters, the filter popularity is highly respected, similar to the concept of “The religion of success”, that Graw describes.<sup>45</sup> Just like with material art, popularity does not necessarily make the content better or more important from a critical point of view. Nevertheless, for the mainstream audience, it symbolizes the quality of the work in the context of the attention economy.

The existence of Facebook and Snapchat is tied to their commercial success, which makes active and engaged users their priority. If we consider the virtual space of those platforms a new form for representation of art, it’s reasonable to argue that it functions similarly to the contemporary art market.

An important distinction should be made in the terminology regarding Augmented Reality filters on these platforms. Those filters can be created for different purposes and intentions, ranging from entertainment to highly experimental technological models and artworks. The intriguing fact is that all of them exist in the same medium, not clearly separated by sections on the platforms. The art filters do not necessarily compete with the entertainment filters in a quest for recognition, but the very structure of the platform implies that popularity is the favorable outcome.

The potential of an art creator to go “viral”, making their work popular, influences the speculation on the symbolic and market value of the work. This dynamic function of the digitized perception further confirms that work in the model of Instagram and Snapchat does not initially have value, but acquires it in the process of exposure to the public. This is the kind of celebrity culture that Graw describes: “After all, it is a system in which individuals are rewarded for success fully marketing their lives or what the media take for their lives. There is no life as and bio-imperative life is always highly mediated. I also note that celebrity culture tends toward a personalization of everything and everyone—a personalization currently manifesting itself on the art market in the form of artworks mutating into subjects.”<sup>46</sup> These platforms may be one new installation for experimental art in active development. With such a big presence in contemporary culture, they have many possibilities to influence and actively intervene in our experiences for interacting with art, even on a daily level. I imagine mediatech corporations in the future accommodating the digital artforms, commercializing our experience of new artforms.

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45 (Graw 2009, #56)

46 (Graw 2009, #12)

**Conclusion.**

After looking into the recent transition to new media forms, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, I conclude that the shift to the popularisation of the digital arts and design is well underway. In general, many opportunities were made available for new mediums and digital art, facilitated by the restrictions established due to the virus. Exploring the subject of new platforms, I looked into their benefits, examining the recent instances of their application along with the associated technologies. Investigating their possible developments, I analyzed the various trends, including mass accessibility of the hardware and software for the creation of digital art and new platforms; possibilities for their adaptation by institutions, and scenarios for profitability. I then examined the issues around certain assumptions made with digital work's existence, ownership, and authenticity, considering the accessibility that new media platforms provide. Overall, all of the explored aspects give an insight into the pathways in which new mediums and art forms are currently developing. Despite the current unpopularity and hardships associated with the existence of the experimental forms of mediums, their mass recognition and potential universality is already foreseeable.

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