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Brushes to Bytes: Rethinking Tradition in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The integration of technology into fine arts has altered the process and expression of creativity. This study uses a mixed-media approach that includes a literature review and a survey of 37 participants in Pune city to examine how the relationship between digital art and traditional art has changed over time. It demonstrates that participants favour traditional art as a medium due to its emotional resonance and cultural richness. Some, however, are receptive to hybrid and digital approaches. The results demonstrate that both digital and traditional art coexist, enhance one another, and will continue to complement one another in the future, defying the idea that digital art would eventually replace traditional forms. The results point to the significance of adaptive innovation in discussions of modern art.

Key words: Traditional Art, Digital Art, Contemporary Artists, Visual Culture, Technology, Innovation, Artistic Identity, Mixed Media.

Introduction

In the modern era, fine art has undergone a dramatic transformation, where traditional art evolves alongside technological advancement. Traditional art preserves the tactile, ritualistic, and cultural elements of human expression while digital art has grown to be a potent force that is altering how art is created, shared, and appreciated. The shift invites critical reflection in the role of materials and processes and what the true meanings of artistic worth, inventiveness, and authenticity are. This article examines the traits, tools, and cultural significance of both traditional and digital art to explore how they reflect broader conversations about innovation and heritage in contemporary art. Through a review of relevant literature and a survey of practicing artists and art enthusiasts, it investigates how these forms are perceived today and whether their future lies in coexistence, convergence, or competition.

Literature Review

Traditional Art

Time-honoured artistic methods, refined through generations, have formed the foundation of human ingenuity and the preservation of cultural heritage. Scholars contend that the broad category of traditional art, which includes drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, and other mediums, cultivates a profound comprehension of artistic principles and skill. (Asare et al, 2023). Traditional techniques and materials that have been handed down through the ages are the source of these shapes. The artwork was created using a variety of physical media, including paint, clay, charcoal, and pencil. These artistic endeavours not only hone technical abilities but also foster historical narratives, passing along values and cultural heritage. (Aniagyei, 2023).

Traditional art is ingrained in civilization's cultural fabric. Throughout history, the exquisite



carvings on megaliths and the colourful brushstrokes on canvases have both had functions beyond their visual attractiveness. They have served as recordings of cultural memory that has been passed down through the centuries, as well as means for communication and tradition-honouring. Traditional art's tactile quality strengthens a sense of authenticity and individual expression by creating a special bond between the artist and the medium ((Asare et al, 2023). As Romanyshyn aptly observed, "The canvas records not only the style of the painter but also the style of the world in which he or she lives and paints." As a result, traditional artwork offers a timeless glimpse into the diverse fabric of life. (Bakreski, 2022).

Digital Art

On the other hand, digital art signifies a paradigm shift in the conception, creation, and consumption of art; it is not merely a continuation of traditional art forms. It includes a wide range of artistic outputs, including interactive works, virtual reality animation, digital painting, and 3D painting modelling. It serves as a tool and a medium, giving artists hitherto, unheard-of chances to experiment, develop, and push the boundaries of artistic expression. (Wei, 2024). As demonstrated by the work of AI art pioneer Mario Klingemann, who uses machine algorithms to create intricate, dynamic artworks that subvert conventional ideas of creativity and creation, the integration of technology has challenged long-standing notions of authorship, originality, and the material of art, encouraging artists and viewers to rethink the nature of traditional art in the digital age. In addition to creating new aesthetic possibilities, technological advancements such as the transition from 2D to 3D art and the rise of the internet, AI, NFTs, Block chain, AR, and VR have also altered the ways in which art is produced, viewed, owned, and experienced (Bansal, 2022). The field has evolved since its initial designation as computer art or multimedia art, and the term "digital art" is now commonly used to describe these technologically driven artistic endeavours within the more general framework of new media art (Zahreddine, n.d.-b). These internet platforms have caused a fundamental shift in the visual economy, making digital art a vital and dynamic component of contemporary artistic culture.

From Ancestral Beginnings to Futuristic Aesthetics: An overview of Artistic Evolution

Traditional art forms have been around since the beginning of time and have been practiced by many different cultures and eras. The history of art is frequently presented as a chronology of masterpieces produced during each civilization (Bakreski, 2022). From the prehistoric cave paintings to the 14th through 16th centuries saw a revolutionary change during the Renaissance. While Abstract Expressionism, Impressionism, and Modernism were among the art styles that placed more emphasis on emotion and individual experience than on realistic portraiture. Digital imaging provides a fresh angle on the topic of the "aura" of the one-of-a-kind piece of art, as Walter Benjamin memorably described (Bentkowska-Kafel, Cashen, Gardiner, Hazel, 2005).

The development of digital art driven by the combination of creativity and technology, New Media Art represents a pivotal moment in the ongoing story of artistic expression. (Ratn, 2023). In the realm of digital art, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) have become revolutionary instruments that are changing the artist's function as well as the creative process. (Wei, 2024).



Juxtaposition of Classical Roots and Contemporary Forms: Insights from Contemporary Artists on Traditional and Digital Art

The argument between digital art and traditional art is more about the uniqueness of each form of expression than it is about competition. Traditional art can be created using a variety of media, including oil, acrylic, and water painting, and can be created on various surfaces, such as canvas, paper, or wood, with the artist physically present. However, digital art can be created using a variety of techniques and applications. There are many artists who are promoting traditional art in the digital age, such as oil painter David Kassan, who finds significance in his paintings through physical and emotional connections. His work demands a great deal of patience, practice, and accuracy (Kassan, 2020). The well-known digital artist Eric Johnson, on the other hand, asserts that "I create moments, not capture them." (Dodho Magazine, n.d.) He advocates digital media that may unleash the artist's creativity, and his work demonstrates that physical limitations cannot be a barrier to creating art.

While some artists may be dubious about conventional art, Hayao Miyazaki, the co-founder of Ghibli Art, is a passionate opponent of digital art, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), claiming that AI-generated animation is an "insult to life itself." He expressed the view that digital creativity is emotionally shallow (The Statesman, 2025). According to the material, even well-known philosophers like Paul Virilio, Villem Flusser, and Jean Baudrillard show some nostalgia for pre-digital forms of art and life and wonder if technology improves or degrades humanity. This viewpoint reflects a wider tension between aesthetics and development: new technologies can disrupt artistic traditions. Philosophers like Wolfgang Schirmacher have expressed similar sentiments. (Ratn & Deeba, 2023).

Artists' creativity and expression are greatly expanded by digital creation. Lewis and Luciana define "work with a net" as what digital artists do (Bakreski, 2022). The contemporary artistic establishment such as the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) in Mumbai, which celebrates India's artistic heritage and contemporary innovation, is a hybrid centre for fostering culture and embracing modern practices where tradition and innovation can coexist in a meaningful way (Artistry editorial, 2023). While innovation breathes new life into the creative lineage, tradition provides the structured and continuous pedigree of ancient periods, guaranteeing that the evolution of art will not change (Zahreddine, 2023).

Research tools and materials

This study uses mixed media approach includes literature review and a survey. To explore the perceptions on traditional art and digital art, a descriptive design was adopted. Purposive samplings of 37 participants who are artists, students or hobbyists from Pune were selected. In order to participate in the study, participants had to be at least eighteen years old and willing. The questionnaire included open and close ended questions addressing the experiences and preferences in both the art forms and their views on the coexistence of art in future. Data was collected via a structured Google Form questionnaire administered to 37 purposively selected respondents. Descriptive statistics and thematic interpretation were used for analysing the responses.



Results and Discussions:

Artistic Preferences, Practices, and Future Outlook

The survey results highlights that traditional art continues to play a meaningful role in emotional aspect and cultural significance. A majority of participants (64.9%) indicated that traditional art played a fundamental role in their growth since childhood. When faced with everyday stress, 32.4% of people turn to traditional art as a form of therapy. There were only 2.7% expressed that they had no interest in traditional art. This indicates that the majority of those surveyed believe traditional art to be an important and meaningful discipline.

When asked upon digital art will completely replace the traditional art, almost half of the respondents (45.9%) disagreed demonstrating the resilience of conventional art techniques. 37.8% were skeptical but receptive to the idea. Merely 16.2% concurred that digital art will eventually supplant traditional art. This indicates that the two art genres will probably coexist rather than be replaced.

In terms of preferences, digital art demonstrated a moderate level of liking, the majority of respondents (43.2%) selected a preference level of 3. Digital art was heavily preferred by those with preferences of 4 and 5, which combined accounted for 32.4% of the total. However, there was still skepticism regarding digital media, as 24.3% of participants gave it a low preference rating of 1 or 2. Digital art was viewed as a generally optimistic and well-rounded perspective.

On the contrary, traditional art had strong support of majority of respondents (59.5%) as highest preference. No one chose level 2, and only one person (2.7%) gave it the lowest rating. These results reinforce particularly for its tactile quality, emotional resonance, and cultural depth and a clear preference for traditional practices.

The majority of participants (43.2%) indicated a significant readiness to merge traditional and digital creative forms. At the same time, 40.5% expressed a "maybe" interest in the concept. The notion was rejected by only 16.2%. According to these findings, most participants are open to hybrid learning, which is a growing viewpoint that welcomes the combination of canvas and code.

When asked about creativity, an equal proportion of respondents (48.6%) believed that traditional art fosters greater creative potential, while the same percentage viewed both forms as equally creative. Only one participant (2.7%) considered digital art more creatively expressive. These views suggest that while traditional methods remain highly valued for their creative richness, digital tools are increasingly being accepted as legitimate means of artistic exploration and innovation.

Thematic Insights

About 54% of respondents said they accepted it.

According to the majority of participants, digital art is a viable and evolving medium. Using analogies to the earlier shifts in art mediums, they emphasized that while the medium may change, creativity and skills are still required. *"Digital art is simply a new medium, like oil paint once was."*, *"The tools may have changed, but the creativity remains the same."*

Approximately 27% of respondents expressed mixed acceptance: some thought traditional art was more authentic and had greater emotional depth, while others saw digital art as a benefit. While



digital technologies may be useful, conventional methods and face-to-face connection were absent. *"It is art, but not enough to replace traditional forms."*, *"Digital tools are complementary, but not equivalent."*

Approximately 19% expressed skepticism or rejection.

A small percentage of respondents questioned the authenticity of digital art since it relies on technology and lacks manual labour. They also questioned the sincerity and emotional impact of the art. *"AI churns it out in seconds — that doesn't feel like real art."*, *"Digital art doesn't match the definition of art I learned growing up."*

Attitudes toward Digital Art and Its Future Role

The answers demonstrate that opinions on digital art can vary depending on the generation and emotion.

- Approximately 65% of the respondents responded favourably, stating that they thought digital art would play a significant part in the future of the arts.
- About 27% voiced skepticism, highlighting a lack of connection to traditional paintings' tactile qualities and cultural significance.
- Only a small portion of responses were neutral or unsure, indicating that although digital art might be significant in the future, it is unlikely to completely replace artistic practice.

The qualitative data indicates that while the growing desire for digital art in today's society may be significant for the future, traditional roots cannot be overlooked because they continue to evoke deep cultural and emotional bonds.

Conclusion

The shift from canvas to code in the twenty-first century re-evaluates artistic identity, practice, and experience in addition to being a technological advancement. This study concludes that traditional and digital art are becoming more mutually beneficial rather than antagonistic. Traditional art continues to embody heritage and individuality; it has long been distinguished by its uniqueness, legacy, and emotional, cultural, and tactile value. It also links its presence to ritual and community. On the other hand, digital art based on global trends is evolving rapidly, it reveals how creativity can be standardized and how authorship can be reimagined through the use of tools like Photoshop, AI, and 3D modelling. Survey findings support this view: which show that despite the speed and versatility of digital tools, many participants still prefer the richness and authenticity of traditional art. The well-known Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre is a hybrid institution that preserves its traditional roots while exhibiting the modern world. In summary, this study affirms that digital art is a development rather than a replacement. Tradition is a foundation for the creation of new artistic languages rather than being eclipsed. In the digital age, the brushes and bytes collaborate rather than compete.

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