

thoughts about digital images

By Mamta B. Herland

Mamta@MamtaArt.com, www.MamtaArt.com

I have recently worked with the concept of broadening painting and the limits that painters, curators and the art world in general have imposed upon us. During my BA(Hons) studies at Winchester School of Art in England, I wrote a dissertation "The Impact of Giclée- A shift towards digital print in future art.", and it was written based on several direct responses from artists, museums and other relevant sources. It discusses the adaptation of digital technology by artists that challenges conventional conceptions and assumptions about work of art, re-questions the qualities of art, the concept of originality and acceptance in the art world. Digitised images can now be 'synthesised' with other works created by use of traditional methods, like a painting, print or photography. As in my own practice the technology has offered enormous possibilities to reuse my works previously made in different medium and thus bringing it into another newer dimension.

The computer tools and techniques significantly speeded up the process of moving an image from the artist's mind to presentation. Digital technology offers another form of reality, the opportunity to manipulate, control and re-digitise for further creative development. Digital images have the potential to become 'indefinite images' open to revision, evolution, collaborative manipulation and cross-disciplinary utilisation via the Internet. The content can be broadened by 'synthesising', hybridisation and global collaboration between artists. The viewers might be involved in an artistic dialogue and even contributing to the image by being an active part in the creation process. The form of the image can be altered by new printing possibilities and substrates, and the context widened by the use of global electronic media.

Use of digital technology to create art also influence the artist's ideas, attitude and perception, resulting in possibilities for a change of the content, form and context of the artwork, but also demands new skills and knowledge on the part of the artist. The challenge now is to move on from the legacy of traditional art to a broader definition of its possibilities, creating a synergy between old and new processes, opening new areas of freedom and diversity. Instead of replacing traditional media, it seems that digital technologies are giving some of these media new life and encourages new process routes.

Digital paintings have few limits and are the ultimate 'reproducible art' since it does not truly even begin to exist until it has been 'reproduced'. Reproducible art can be energised by wide distribution and affordable prices.

Based on the increasing use of computers, Internet and the World Wide Web, art is now closer to the people than ever before. Artists and art works have the possibility to come into people's home, either electronically on a PC or Television screen or on digital frames, or as more traditional printed art on canvas or watercolour paper. In the future we might have the possibility to rent art for a certain time, or specific art for a certain occasion. I would therefore state that we are now on the threshold of real democratised art. The potential for large numbers of people to appreciate and collect artwork created with a computer and distributed by the net, cannot be overlooked as a significant breakthrough for artists and art loving people.

Just as Andy Warhol and screen-printing became an accepted art medium in the 1960s, so too is digital painting and ink jet entering the mainstream of art. Digital technology will not replace the old media but encourage new ways of thinking and working, creating a synergy and 'synthesis' between old and new processes, opening up new areas of freedom and diversity. The challenge is to move on from the legacy of traditional process-led art to concept-led digital art creation with a broader definition of its possibilities.

In addition to be presented electronically, digital images can be printed on both water colour paper and canvas, as well as other substrates. The terminology is not yet quite clear. An image originally made by use of another technique and then afterwards digitised and printed is commonly called a Giclée. If the image is a digital original, however, there does not seem to be any agreement on what to call the final printed result. Some argue that it is a print, since the image is *printed*, and therefore label the work 'digital print' and 'digital print on canvas'. Others argue that digital prints are not 'fine art prints' since it is unlimited, and they lack the 'human hand' in the production process. A digital image printed on canvas is, by some, regarded as a painting, just like some regard Andy Warhol's screen-prints as paintings. Another side of the debate is arguing that it does not matter what it is called as long as it is interesting art. Anyhow, to make communication easier, there should be a unique label, and since digital technology is a new image making technology with tremendous new possibilities, why label it as any of the traditional methods? A suggestion might simply be 'digital image', on either paper or canvas.

As an artist from painting background, my work intend to unite the practice of the painting with other fine art practices taking the concept of painting into another dimension. My works are about paintings, and should be referred to as paintings, questioning the traditional language and reality of painting with a new synthesis with other artforms. The digital paintings explores the boundaries and limits by further digitising and reusing hand made paintings, applying digital paints and combining with elements from other artforms like printmaking and photography. As a result my work references "painting" in term of a synthesised artform. In my view digital painting and ink jet have had, and will continue to have a significant impact on Fine Art.