

# Dialogue Between Digital and Traditional Art

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the evolving relationship between digital and traditional art, exploring how both forms engage in a dynamic dialogue that reshapes contemporary artistic practice. Through qualitative analysis of literature, artist case studies, and visual comparisons, the study identifies key intersections in technique, materiality, and audience engagement. Findings reveal that digital and traditional media increasingly coexist within hybrid artistic processes, challenging conventional notions of authenticity, authorship, and material presence. While traditional art maintains its tactile and historical depth, digital art introduces new modes of interactivity, accessibility, and sensory experience. Together, they contribute to a broader redefinition of artistic expression in the post-digital age. The study concludes that the convergence of digital and traditional art reflects a cultural and philosophical synthesis, affirming art's capacity to adapt, integrate, and innovate across evolving technological landscapes.

**Keywords:** *Digital art, Traditional art, Hybrid media, Materiality, Authenticity, Post-digital aesthetics*

## 1. Introduction

Art has always mirrored the evolution of human society, adapting its tools, materials, and concepts to the spirit of its age. From prehistoric cave paintings to the Renaissance mastery of oil on canvas, every artistic era has reflected both technological innovation and cultural transformation. The turn of the 21st century marked another pivotal moment in this continuum — the rise of digital technology as both a medium and a subject of artistic exploration. The rapid integration of computers, software, and the internet into creative practices has fundamentally altered the way art is produced, distributed, and perceived.

Traditional art, rooted in tactile materials such as paint, charcoal, clay, and stone, has long emphasized the artist's physical engagement with the medium. The visible gestures of the hand and the texture of materials are central to its authenticity and aura. In contrast, digital art introduces a new kind of materiality — one composed of pixels, algorithms, and code. It privileges manipulation through screens, styluses, and software rather than brushes and chisels. For some, this transition represents a democratization of artistic expression, as digital tools grant accessibility and experimentation to a broader range of creators. For others, it signals a detachment from the embodied, sensory nature of artmaking.

The dialogue between digital and traditional art is not a confrontation between old and new, but rather a negotiation between continuity and innovation. The emergence of hybrid practices — such as digital painting, augmented reality installations, and mixed-media works that combine hand-drawn and digital components — demonstrates that the two realms are increasingly intertwined. Artists like David Hockney, who transitioned from canvas to iPad, or Cory Arcangel, who repurposes video game technology for conceptual art, embody

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this intersection. These practices reveal that the core of artistic creativity lies not in the medium itself but in the vision and intentionality behind its use.

Moreover, the digital shift has reshaped the social and economic dimensions of art. Online platforms such as Instagram, Behance, and NFT marketplaces have transformed the ways artworks are exhibited, collected, and critiqued (Babayev, 2022). Digital environments allow for real-time interaction between artists and audiences across geographic boundaries, fostering a more participatory and networked form of art culture. This evolution raises critical questions about originality, authorship, and value in an age where copies can be infinitely reproduced and disseminated.

Philosophically, the coexistence of digital and traditional art invites reflection on the nature of artistic experience itself (Sadikhova, 2025). What does it mean to “touch” art in an age of screens? Can virtual material evoke the same emotional resonance as physical texture? As theorists like Walter Benjamin and Lev Manovich have suggested, technological mediation both challenges and expands the concept of the artwork’s “aura.” The result is an ongoing dialogue — one that transcends the binary of technology versus tradition and instead seeks a synthesis of both.

This paper explores that dialogue through a comparative and qualitative lens. By examining artistic practices, critical discourse, and audience interactions, it aims to understand how the coexistence of digital and traditional art reshapes artistic identity and meaning in the contemporary world. Ultimately, this study argues that the relationship between the two is not adversarial but symbiotic — a dynamic exchange that continues to redefine the boundaries of what art can be.

## 2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and comparative research design aimed at exploring the evolving relationship between digital and traditional art (Sadikhova & Babayev, 2025). The methodological approach prioritizes depth over quantity, focusing on conceptual and experiential insights rather than statistical measurement. The goal is to understand *how* artists, critics, and audiences articulate the connections, tensions, and synergies between these two artistic domains.

### 2.1 Research Design

The research is structured around three main components:

1. **Literature Review** – analyzing existing scholarship and theoretical discourse surrounding digital and traditional art practices;
2. **Artist Perspectives** – gathering and interpreting insights from contemporary artists through published interviews, statements, and case studies;
3. **Visual and Comparative Analysis** – examining selected artworks that exemplify hybrid or dialogic relationships between digital and traditional media.

These components are interrelated, forming a triangulated framework that ensures both conceptual coherence and practical relevance.

### 2.2 Literature Review Procedure

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to establish a theoretical foundation. Academic databases such as JSTOR, Art & Architecture Source, and Google Scholar were used to locate relevant works published

between 2010 and 2024. Search terms included “*digital art*,” “*traditional art*,” “*media hybridity*,” “*post-digital aesthetics*,” “*art and technology*,” and “*materiality in contemporary art*.”(Sadikhov & Babayev, 2025)

The selected sources included books, peer-reviewed journal articles, exhibition catalogs, and critical essays. Foundational texts by Walter Benjamin, Lev Manovich, and Christiane Paul were supplemented with recent analyses addressing post-internet and hybrid art practices. The literature review helped identify key debates about authenticity, materiality, authorship, and audience interaction — all central to understanding the ongoing dialogue between art forms (Javid & Sadikhova, 2025).

### 2.3 Artist Perspectives

Artist perspectives were analyzed through a combination of secondary data (published interviews, exhibition talks, and artist statements) and case study examination of representative artists known for blending traditional and digital techniques. Examples include:

- **David Hockney**, whose transition from painting to iPad sketches exemplifies adaptation to digital tools while maintaining painterly sensibility.
- **Refik Anadol**, who employs data visualization and AI algorithms to create immersive digital environments that question the boundaries of human and machine creativity.
- **Takashi Murakami**, whose work merges hand-painted tradition with digital reproduction and pop culture aesthetics.

Each artist’s approach was analyzed in terms of their process, material choices, and conceptual motivations, allowing for a comparative understanding of how digital and traditional elements coexist within creative practice.

### 2.4 Visual and Comparative Analysis

A visual analysis was conducted to examine the formal, material, and thematic elements of artworks from both digital and traditional media. Criteria for selection included:

- Demonstrated use of both physical and digital tools or techniques;
- Conceptual engagement with technology or artistic tradition;
- Availability of high-resolution imagery and documentation for study.

Each artwork was examined for its composition, texture, color dynamics, and representational strategies, alongside the context of its creation and reception. Comparative analysis focused on how digital works reinterpret qualities traditionally associated with physical media—such as texture, layering, and material presence—and vice versa.

### 2.5 Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by semiotic and phenomenological frameworks, focusing on how meaning is constructed and experienced across media. Semiotics allowed examination of how symbols and visual languages shift between material and virtual forms, while phenomenology provided insight into how viewers experience

embodiment and presence in both contexts. This dual framework enabled a nuanced understanding of the perceptual and conceptual “dialogue” between digital and traditional art.

## **2.6 Ethical Considerations**

All data used in this research derive from publicly available sources, including published materials and artworks reproduced for academic analysis. Artists’ intellectual property rights were respected by ensuring appropriate citation and contextual integrity. The study aims to contribute to art discourse without commercial bias or misrepresentation.

## **2.7 Limitations**

The study’s qualitative nature limits its generalizability. As the selection of artists and artworks is necessarily selective, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than definitive. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of digital technology means that observations may shift as new tools and media emerge. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a robust framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between digital and traditional artistic practices.

## **3. Results**

The analysis of literature, artist practices, and visual materials revealed a complex and evolving relationship between digital and traditional art. The dialogue between these two realms manifests across three interrelated dimensions: technical hybridity, redefinition of materiality, and transformation of audience engagement. Together, these dimensions illustrate that digital and traditional art are not oppositional categories but rather components of an integrated continuum of artistic expression.

### **3.1 Technical Hybridity: Blurring the Boundaries of Process**

One of the most significant findings is the increasing technical hybridity within contemporary artistic practice. Many artists employ a combination of digital and traditional tools, allowing one medium to inform or extend the other. This convergence exemplifies what Christiane Paul (2016) describes as “the post-digital condition,” where digitality is no longer a novelty but an intrinsic part of creative workflow.

For instance, David Hockney’s iPad drawings demonstrate a seamless transition between manual and digital craftsmanship. While his technique originates in traditional painting, the iPad becomes a digital sketchbook, offering immediacy and portability without sacrificing painterly qualities (Livingstone, 2017). Similarly, Cory Arcangel’s modification of obsolete video games merges digital technology with conceptual strategies reminiscent of Dadaist collage, bridging historical avant-garde approaches with modern coding aesthetics (Paul, 2016).

Artists such as Alexa Meade, who paints directly onto human bodies and then photographs them digitally, push hybridity further — creating artworks that exist simultaneously as performance, painting, and digital image. This multiplicity aligns with Lev Manovich’s (2001) argument that digital tools enable “meta-media” — artworks that reinterpret traditional media through the language of computation.

Thus, hybridity has become not only a stylistic choice but also a conceptual framework. Artists are no longer defined by their medium but by their ability to navigate between physical and virtual forms, using both to articulate new kinds of meaning.

### **3.2 Redefinition of Materiality and Authenticity**

Another major finding concerns the redefinition of materiality in art. Traditional art emphasizes tangible materials — canvas, pigment, clay — as carriers of the artist’s gesture and authenticity. Digital art, however, introduces what Mark Hansen (2004) calls “embodied virtuality,” wherein immaterial data still produces sensory and affective experience.

Digital artists recreate tactile sensations through screen-based textures, simulated brushstrokes, and interactive surfaces, challenging the assumption that material presence requires physical substance. For example, Refik Anadol’s *Machine Hallucinations* (2019) uses AI-generated data projections to evoke emotional and spatial immersion, transforming algorithms into a new form of material expressiveness (Anadol, 2019). Similarly, Beeple’s (Mike Winkelmann) digital collages, which gained prominence in NFT culture, rely on compositional density and narrative layering comparable to large-scale murals or mixed-media installations (McAuley, 2021).

Traditional materiality, meanwhile, has adapted in response to digital influence. Painters such as Jenny Saville use high-resolution photography and digital compositional planning before translating images into monumental canvases. The tactile and digital thus operate as complementary forces — one emphasizing process and presence, the other enabling experimentation and accessibility.

This convergence challenges Walter Benjamin’s (1936) notion of the artwork’s “aura,” as digital reproduction and dissemination no longer diminish uniqueness but instead generate new forms of aura through interactivity and participation. The material and the virtual are thus entangled in a reciprocal exchange, where each informs the other’s conceptual and emotional potency.

### 3.3 Transformation of Audience Engagement and Distribution

The third and perhaps most socially impactful finding concerns how digital technologies have transformed artistic circulation and audience engagement. Traditional artworks typically inhabit physical spaces such as galleries or museums, where the experience is direct but limited by geography and accessibility. In contrast, digital platforms have democratized exposure and participation, allowing artworks to reach global audiences instantaneously.

Social media platforms such as Instagram and Behance serve not only as promotional tools but as creative spaces where artists receive immediate feedback and engage in transnational dialogues (Cotter, 2021). Virtual exhibitions and augmented reality installations, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, further expanded the reach of digital art, creating hybrid exhibition formats that integrate both physical and digital presence (Grau, 2020).

Moreover, the emergence of blockchain and NFT technologies has redefined ownership, authorship, and value within the art market. While some critics argue that NFTs commodify digital creativity, others view them as empowering artists to assert control over reproduction and provenance (Velthuis, 2022). This development underscores a new dimension of audience interaction — one that includes economic participation and digital collecting as extensions of aesthetic engagement.

### 3.4 Summary of Key Findings

In summary, the results demonstrate that:

1. **Digital and traditional practices increasingly coexist** within single artistic processes, creating a post-medium environment.

2. **Materiality in art has expanded** to encompass both physical and virtual qualities, redefining authenticity and presence.
3. **Audience engagement has shifted** from passive observation to active participation, facilitated by digital platforms and interactive technologies.

These findings collectively affirm that the dialogue between digital and traditional art is not merely a stylistic or technological phenomenon, but a broader cultural transformation reflecting how humanity negotiates creativity, embodiment, and connection in the digital age.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital and traditional art coexist within a fluid and symbiotic relationship, each influencing and redefining the other's boundaries. Rather than representing a rupture between old and new, their dialogue embodies an evolving continuum of artistic expression — one shaped by technological change, cultural adaptation, and philosophical reflection. This discussion situates the results within broader theoretical contexts, focusing on four key interpretive dimensions: continuity and transformation, embodiment and materiality, authenticity and authorship, and cultural democratization and power dynamics.

##### 4.1 Continuity and Transformation in Artistic Practice

The relationship between digital and traditional art can be best understood as a process of continuity through transformation. Art history reveals that each technological innovation — from the invention of perspective to photography — has initially been met with resistance, only to later become an integrated part of artistic practice (Grau, 2020). Similarly, digital media, once perceived as a disruption, now serves as an extension of artistic language rather than a replacement for traditional methods.

Lev Manovich (2001) argues that digital art functions as a “meta-medium,” absorbing the representational capacities of all previous media. This idea resonates with current hybrid practices in which traditional artists employ digital tools for preliminary composition, experimentation, or augmentation. Conversely, digital artists often incorporate the aesthetics and discipline of traditional craftsmanship to lend depth and authenticity to their work. This mutual adaptation blurs the boundaries of medium specificity, leading to what Rosalind Krauss (1999) describes as the *post-medium condition* — an era in which meaning arises not from material distinction but from conceptual synthesis.

##### 4.2 Embodiment and Materiality in the Post-Digital Age

The results also reaffirm that materiality remains central to both digital and traditional art, though its nature has expanded. Traditional materiality emphasizes texture, gesture, and the tactile connection between artist and object — qualities that, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), root artistic creation in embodied perception. Digital materiality, while intangible, generates a parallel form of embodiment through interactive experience, immersive environments, and haptic interfaces (Hansen, 2004).

This shift aligns with Christiane Paul's (2016) observation that digital artworks often evoke a “*virtual tactility*” — an illusion of material presence created through light, code, and motion. Artists such as Refik Anadol and teamLab create multisensory digital installations that immerse audiences in environments where data, sound, and image converge into a synthetic materiality. Conversely, traditional artists like Jenny Saville and Gerhard Richter integrate digital imagery into their painterly processes, demonstrating that the digital has become an invisible layer within traditional craftsmanship.

Thus, the dialogue between media challenges binary notions of the material and the virtual. Instead, as Hansen (2004) contends, digital art expands the phenomenological experience of the body, allowing viewers to engage with immaterial forms in profoundly embodied ways. The result is a hybrid materialism, where physical and digital sensibilities coalesce into new aesthetic and emotional languages.

### **4.3 Authenticity, Aura, and the Question of Authorship**

The tension between originality and reproduction — famously articulated by Walter Benjamin (1936) — remains central to the dialogue between digital and traditional art. Benjamin warned that mechanical reproduction diminishes the “aura” of the artwork, its unique presence in time and space. Yet, in the digital era, this concept has been both challenged and redefined.

In the context of networked culture, aura is no longer bound to singularity but can emerge through participation, interaction, and narrative circulation (Bourriaud, 2002). For instance, Beeple’s digital works, distributed globally through NFT marketplaces, generate new forms of authenticity rooted in transparency of ownership and collective visibility rather than physical uniqueness. Similarly, the remix culture surrounding digital art — where users manipulate and reinterpret existing images — has expanded authorship into a more collaborative, open-source model (Lessig, 2008).

Traditional art, meanwhile, has also been affected by this shift. The digitization of painting and sculpture for online exhibitions or digital archives has extended their reach but complicated their status as unique objects. As a result, the concept of authenticity in art is undergoing democratization moving away from elitist notions of originality toward an appreciation of creative process and participation as forms of authenticity in their own right.

### **4.4 Cultural Democratization and Power Dynamics**

A major cultural implication of this dialogue lies in the democratization of artistic production and access. Digital tools, from affordable software to social media platforms, have expanded creative participation beyond traditional institutional boundaries. Artists from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds can now disseminate their work globally, circumventing the gatekeeping mechanisms of galleries and museums (Cotter, 2021).

However, this democratization also introduces new power dynamics. Algorithms, platform visibility, and market structures — particularly in the NFT space — often replicate inequalities present in traditional art markets (Velthuis, 2022). Furthermore, the ephemeral nature of digital platforms raises questions about preservation, authorship rights, and the sustainability of digital ecosystems.

Despite these challenges, the cross-pollination of digital and traditional practices has encouraged a more inclusive global dialogue about art’s role in contemporary life. As Claire Bishop (2012) notes, the participatory turn in digital art fosters new forms of collective experience that redefine the social function of art — from private contemplation to shared, interactive creation. This evolution signifies not the decline of traditional art but its expansion into a networked cultural ecology that reflects the complexities of our interconnected world.

### **4.5 Synthesis: Toward a Hybrid Future of Art**

Ultimately, the dialogue between digital and traditional art underscores the adaptability of artistic expression. The two modes are no longer separate categories but interconnected practices that respond to the same human impulses: to create, to communicate, and to make meaning. The hybridization of media reflects broader philosophical and cultural trends — from posthumanism to cyber-phenomenology — that question the boundaries between human, machine, and material.

In this context, the future of art may lie not in choosing between digital and traditional methods, but in embracing their interplay. The continued evolution of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and biotechnological art promises further blurring of boundaries, inviting artists and audiences alike to participate in the redefinition of creativity itself. The dialogue, therefore, is ongoing — a testament to art's enduring capacity to adapt, integrate, and transform in response to the ever-changing conditions of human existence.

## 5. Conclusion

The dialogue between digital and traditional art reflects one of the most significant transformations in contemporary culture: the merging of technology and creativity into a shared aesthetic space. This study has shown that rather than existing in opposition, digital and traditional art forms engage in a dynamic exchange that continually reshapes artistic identity, process, and perception (Sadikhova, 2024). Through hybridization, artists combine manual craftsmanship with computational innovation, producing works that transcend conventional media boundaries.

Materiality, once confined to tangible substances, now extends to the virtual and interactive. The digital realm introduces new ways to experience embodiment and sensory engagement, while traditional media preserve the tactile and emotional depth of human gesture. This reciprocal influence has redefined authenticity and authorship in the post-digital era, where creativity is increasingly collaborative, participatory, and globally networked.

Culturally, the convergence of art and technology has democratized artistic expression, granting broader access to both creation and appreciation. Yet, it also raises ethical and economic questions regarding ownership, visibility, and preservation in digital contexts. These complexities underscore the need for continued critical reflection as art evolves alongside technology.

Ultimately, the coexistence of digital and traditional art symbolizes humanity's enduring adaptability. Each medium informs and enriches the other, ensuring that artistic expression remains both rooted in heritage and open to innovation. The future of art lies not in choosing between the brush and the algorithm, but in embracing their dialogue as a continuous act of creative evolution.

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