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THE ART SCENE TURNING INTO AN INCREASINGLY TECH- AND ASSET-DRIVEN WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

Art and technology have consistently interacted at varying levels of presence throughout history. Every step of the way, technology has produced new mediums, tools, and themes to expand the creative expression of artists. However, it is often observed that in contemporary works of art that employ new technology, excessive praise for technical components given during the creation or presentation of the artwork risks overshadowing the discursive essence of the artwork. In addition, complete reliance on technological means poses a threat to preserving such works of art in the event of technological decline. This paper examines the potential issues that arise when we heavily rely on technology to produce art.

TECHNOLOGICAL ARTS

Technological arts is a genre of contemporary art that incorporates technology as a central element in its creation, presentation, or interpretation. This can include various technologies, such as digital media, computer software, virtual reality, robotics, and electronic or interactive installations. Technological arts gained more popularity in the 1960s and 1970s as artists began experimenting with new technologies and incorporating them into their work. Since then, the genre has grown and evolved, with artists exploring new technologies and pushing the boundaries of what is possible in art. Today, technological arts have become an integral part of contemporary art and are widely exhibited in galleries and museums worldwide.

Incorporating technology into art has been a growing trend in recent decades, and it has created new opportunities for artists to explore and express themselves in innovative ways. Technology has opened new possibilities for art to engage with contemporary social, cultural, and political issues. One defining characteristic of technological arts is the interactivity and participation it often involves. Many technological artworks require active engagement on the viewer's part, inviting them to interact with the work in various ways. This level of engagement can create a more immersive and impactful experience for the viewer, allowing them to become more deeply involved in the message or theme of the artwork.

The growing use of technology in art comes with advantages and difficulties, as with any significant change in the field of the arts. One way technology may help democratize access to art is by enabling people to view it online or through digital platforms. However, there is a chance that technology will supplant the fundamental components of art, such as the human experience, emotional resonance, and

aesthetic value. Additionally, institutions and groups that work to preserve technological artworks face difficulties due to the quick pace of technological advancement. It gets harder to maintain and display these works as hardware and software become dated due to technological advancements. However, it is possible to protect technological artworks with proper planning and resources for future generations.

Today, museums and galleries increasingly incorporate technological artworks into their collections and exhibitions. For example, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York has a dedicated department for media and performance art, and it regularly exhibits digital and technological artworks.¹ A growing number of museums have departments or teams devoted to collecting and preserving technological artworks. Depending on the institution, these groups may go by different names, such as the Media Arts Department, Digital Art Department, or New Media Department. Their primary duty is to actively participate in the world of technological art, locate essential works of art, and collect them for the museum's collection. In 2014, after receiving a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the library and archives at The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) decided to create a digital preservation policy encompassing all of the museum's collections: art, library, and archives.² The Matters in Media Art project, which includes the New Art Trust, Tate, MoMA, SFMoMA, and the Smithsonian's Time-based Media Art Working Group, has been working on developing standards to help people who collect and keep media artworks.³ These specialized teams are composed of professionals with expertise in various disciplines, including art history, curatorial studies, conservation, and technology. They possess a deep understanding of the specific challenges and considerations involved in acquiring and preserving technological artworks. They stay informed about current developments in the field, attend art and technology conferences, and engage with artists and experts to stay at the forefront of technological art practices.

IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING TECHNOLOGICAL ARTWORKS

Preserving technological artworks holds immense significance in the realm of contemporary art and cultural heritage. Technological artworks often embody the cultural and creative zeitgeist of their time, reflecting the rapid advancements and evolving socio-cultural landscapes of the digital age. Preserving these artworks becomes crucial for several reasons. Firstly, technological artworks capture a moment in history, documenting the artistic and technical practices of a particular era. They serve as valuable records of artistic experimentation and innovation, providing insights into the evolution of digital art forms and their impact on society.⁴ Secondly, technological artworks often incorporate ephemeral elements, such as software, hardware, or internet-based components, which can become obsolete or incompatible over time. Preserving these artworks ensures their longevity and accessibility for future generations, safeguarding their aesthetic, intellectual, and historical value.⁵ Additionally, technological artworks are interactive and participatory, inviting viewers to engage and actively experience the artwork. Preserving their interactivity allows this unique artistic dialogue to continue, promotes audience involvement, and fosters new interpretations and experiences.⁶ Finally, technological artworks challenge traditional notions of preservation, requiring interdisciplinary collaborations and specialized expertise to navigate the complexities of conserving digital media. By investing in preserving technological artworks, institutions and individuals demonstrate a commitment to the diverse and evolving nature of artistic expression, fostering cultural continuity and enabling future exploration and appreciation of these innovative creations.⁷ As technology continues to play an increasingly important role in contemporary art, it is crucial that efforts are made to preserve these works for future generations. This requires technical expertise and a deep understanding of these pieces' cultural and artistic significance.

CHALLENGES OF PRESERVING TECHNOLOGICAL ARTWORKS

Preserving technological artworks presents various challenges that differ from those encountered in traditional art conservation. One of the primary obstacles is the rapid obsolescence of hardware and software components. Technological artworks often rely on specific technologies, platforms, or programming languages that quickly become outdated, rendering the artwork inaccessible without proper preservation measures. Additionally, the complexity and interactivity of technological artworks necessitate the preservation of not only the artwork itself but also its interactive elements, interfaces, and user experiences. This requires comprehensive documentation and replication of the artwork's functionality, which can be technically demanding and resource intensive. Another significant challenge lies in the inherent fragility of digital media. Unlike physical artworks, technological artworks are susceptible to data corruption, hardware failures, and software glitches. Preserving digital files, databases, and code becomes essential to ensure the integrity and authenticity of the artwork over time.

Moreover, preserving technological artworks often requires interdisciplinary collaborations involving experts in art history, computer science, and conservation. Coordinating efforts between these diverse disciplines and navigating the complexities of preserving digital media can be logistically and institutionally challenging. Finally, copyright and intellectual property issues pose additional hurdles in preserving technological artworks.⁸ Digital artworks may incorporate third-party software or copyrighted materials, necessitating legal considerations and permissions for preservation and display. Despite these challenges, preserving technological artworks is imperative to safeguard their artistic, cultural, and historical value for future generations.

Depending on the particular exhibition space or the artist's intention, interactive artworks frequently allow for modifications and adaptations. Maintaining an interactive artwork's authenticity can be challenging while ensuring its reproducibility in various settings. Finding a good balance between staying true to the original idea and letting it be changed or reinterpreted takes a lot of thought. Interactive art, which requires people to participate, also blurs the lines between the artist, the art, and the audience. As it involves capturing the dynamic interactions between participants, the artwork, and the environment, maintaining the interactive aspect and the intended engagement can be difficult. As Paul states, one of the most significant difficulties in presenting new media art is holding the audience's attention long enough for a piece to reveal its content.⁹ This necessitates thinking about capturing and communicating the artwork's experiential elements.

In addition to the challenges mentioned earlier, preserving technological artworks also requires addressing issues related to documentation and metadata. Unlike physical artworks, which often have well-established methods of cataloging and archiving, technological artworks demand a comprehensive documentation process that includes not only visual documentation but also technical specifications, source code, hardware configurations, and installation instructions. This information is crucial for future preservation efforts, enabling accurate replication and interpretation of the artwork.

The issue of authenticity and integrity is another critical challenge in preserving technological artworks. Digital media is easily reproducible and manipulable, raising questions about the originality and authenticity of a work. Establishing and maintaining the integrity of the artwork's digital files, including metadata and checksums, is essential to ensure its trustworthiness and prevent unauthorized alterations.¹⁰

CONFRONTING THE DUALITY BETWEEN MATERIALITY AND DISCURSIVITY IN THE ART SCENE

The duality between materiality and discursivity in the art scene is a complex and multifaceted topic encompassing various theoretical and practical considerations. It involves the tension and interplay between the physicality of artworks and the discursive frameworks surrounding them, such as art criticism, art history, and curatorial practices. Materiality in art refers to the tangible aspects of an artwork—the medium, texture, color, form, and the sensory experience it elicits. It encompasses the physical properties of the materials, techniques, and overall aesthetic qualities. Materiality is often associated with traditional art forms like painting, sculpture, and ceramics, where the physical presence of the artwork is a central aspect of its reception. Discursivity, on the other hand, pertains to the realm of language, ideas, interpretation, and contextual frameworks that shape our understanding of art. It involves the critical discourse that surrounds artworks, including art theory, art criticism, art history, and curatorial practices. Discursivity encompasses art's intellectual, conceptual, and contextual aspects, emphasizing interpretation, meaning-making, and artistic production's social, cultural, and historical dimensions.

Contemporary artists often engage with the duality between materiality and discursivity by blurring the boundaries between different art forms and incorporating elements of performance, installation, digital media, and conceptual approaches. They challenge the traditional notions of the art object as a static, physical entity and instead emphasize artmaking's experiential, temporal, and process-oriented aspects. This approach allows for a more inclusive and diverse understanding of art, as it encourages collaboration and experimentation across different disciplines and perspectives.

Curators and art institutions also play a crucial role in navigating the duality between materiality and discursivity. They curate exhibitions and create spaces that allow for a holistic experience of artworks, considering their material qualities and the discursive frameworks surrounding them. They facilitate dialogue and critical engagement, encouraging viewers to consider the interplay between the materiality of the artworks and the discursive contexts in which they exist. This approach to exhibition design recognizes that artworks are not isolated objects but rather are situated within broader social, cultural, and historical contexts. By creating spaces that encourage viewers to engage with these contexts, exhibition designers can help foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the artworks on display. Additionally, this approach can help to challenge traditional power dynamics within the art world by foregrounding diverse perspectives and voices.

Ultimately, the duality between materiality and discursivity in the art scene is not a binary opposition but rather a dynamic and evolving relationship. It is a site of exploration, negotiation, and creative tension that enriches our understanding and appreciation of art. By embracing both the material and discursive aspects of art, we can engage in a more holistic and nuanced dialogue about artistic practice, interpretation, and the ways in which art shapes our world. Nevertheless, it is possible that excessive praise for technical components can overshadow the discursive essence of an artwork. When the technical aspects of the artwork are emphasized too much, it can detract from the conceptual or intellectual content of the work. For example, if a digital artwork is praised solely for its technical sophistication or complexity, the viewer may overlook the meaning or message of the piece. This can result in the work being perceived as merely a technical accomplishment rather than as a meaningful work of art.

However, it's also important to note that technical components can be integral to an artwork's discursive essence. In some cases, the technical aspects of an artwork may be essential to its meaning or concept. In such cases, discussing the technical components of the work can help viewers better understand and appreciate the artwork's discursive essence. Artists need to consider both their work's technical aspects and conceptual meaning to create a truly impactful piece. By striking a balance

between these two elements, artists can create work that showcases their technical skills and communicates a powerful message or emotion to the viewer.

While the radical obsolescence of various technologies raises essential questions regarding how to prevent the fragile memories of contemporary technocultures from fading into oblivion, there is also an ongoing debate regarding what should be preserved. Today, museums are becoming more comfortable with purchasing technology-based artworks, but before making any purchases, it's essential to define the technical, functional, and conceptual components of an artwork. Nonetheless, it is essential to remember that the essence of a work of art is not limited to its technical components but can also be found in its discursive content. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the artist's intention and the cultural and social factors that influenced their work to fully appreciate and fully understand the artwork's significance fully¹¹. Moreover, analyzing the historical context and the audience's reception of the artwork can provide valuable insights into its meaning and impact. By taking a multidimensional approach to art analysis, we can better understand the artwork's cultural and artistic value.

CONCLUSION

The challenges of preserving technological artworks encompass obsolescence, fragility, documentation, emulation, migration, authenticity, financial resources, institutional support, and ethical considerations. Addressing these challenges requires interdisciplinary collaboration, technical expertise, robust documentation practices, and sustained investment to ensure the preservation and accessibility of these unique and significant artworks for future generations. Ultimately, the key is to strike a balance between acknowledging the technical components of an artwork and recognizing its discursive essence. This requires careful consideration of the work's conceptual and technical aspects and an understanding of the artist's intentions and the context in which the work was created. It is important to recognize that an artwork's meaning and significance can evolve over time and may be interpreted differently by different viewers. Therefore, a nuanced approach that considers an artwork's objective and subjective elements is necessary for a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of it.

The asset-based art scene, on the other hand, brings with it various problems with the validation of a commodity. Due to the uncertainty observed in art, it is no longer easy to classify works as works of art. Thus, when a work of art relies heavily on its physical qualities that contribute to its appearance rather than its discursive content, the inevitable desire to seek an artist's talent in making a work of art becomes a vague concern. This is especially true for contemporary art, where the boundaries between art and non-art are constantly being questioned and redefined. Therefore, the emphasis on the artist's skill and craftsmanship has shifted towards conceptual ideas and his ability to evoke thought and emotion in the viewer. In addition, the dilemma of what to protect and what not to protect becomes a critical point of examination when the issue of the protection of technological works of art is discussed. This is because technological works of art often involve complex and rapidly changing technologies, making it difficult to determine what aspects of the work should be preserved and how to preserve them. Therefore, there is a need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between artists, conservators, and technologists to ensure that these works are adequately protected and maintained for future generations.

NOTES

- ¹ Vivian Van Saaze, Glenn Wharton, and Leah Reisman, "Adaptive Institutional Change: Managing Digital Works at the Museum of Modern Art," *Museum and Society* 16, no. 2 (2018): 220-239.
- ² Emily Rafferty and Becca Pad, "Better Together: A Holistic Approach to Creating a Digital Preservation Policy in an Art Museum," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 36, no. 1 (2017): 149-162.
- ³ Frances Lloyd-Baynes. "Preserving Digital Art: The Innovation Adoption Lifecycle - Museum-ID." Museum, accessed February 7, 2020. <https://museum-id.com/preserving-digital-art-the-innovation-adoption-lifecycle/>.
- ⁴ Selçuk Artut, Osman Serhat Karaman, and Cemal Yilmaz, eds., *Technological Arts Preservation* (Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum, 2021).
- ⁵ Colin Post, "Preservation Practices of New Media Artists: Challenges, Strategies, and Attitudes in the Personal Management of Artworks," *Journal of Documentation* (2017).
- ⁶ "Artistic Futures: Digital Interactive Installations," *AMT Lab* (October 2021), <https://amt-lab.org/blog/2021/10/artistic-futures-digital-interactive-installations>.
- ⁷ "Technology Ensures Conservation of Art, Old and New," *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, accessed February 16, 2019. <https://www.aaas.org/news/technology-ensures-conservation-art-old-and-new>
- ⁸ "Copyright and Museums in the Digital Age," *WIPO Magazine*, accessed February 16, 2019, https://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2016/03/article_0005.html.
- ⁹ Christiane Paul, *Challenges for a Ubiquitous Museum: Presenting and Preserving New Media* (2004), 2.
- ¹⁰ Simon Stokes, "Art and Copyright: Some Current Issues," *Journal of Intellectual Property Law & Practice* 1, no. 4 (March 1, 2006): 272–82, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jiplp/jpl004>.
- ¹¹ Vivian Van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

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