

VOICES

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ENTERTAINMENT

Ankur Patar

Brisbane

He was tasked by Adobe to entirely recreate Rembrandt's missing 17th century magnum opus *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (right)

"A digital artist approaches art the same way a traditional artist does, but on a computer."



SHEKHAR YADAV

Ashok Ahuja

Delhi

An author and a filmmaker, Ahuja is the kind of artist who is comfortable in several mediums of expression

"Limitations force you to be creative."



Ashok Ahuja discovered the aesthetic possibilities of a personal computer in 1985 when the obsession with emails and websites was yet to catch on. The Delhi-based digital artist, who moved on to his first notebook in 1991, picked up a digital camera in 1998. Finally an A3 printer followed in 2002, after which he procured several other tools to chase his pixel passion. Today at 67, Ahuja believes digitisation is the most natural way to express himself. "Limitations force you to be creative. I am an artist. Improvising is my second nature," he smiles. New York-based artist Chitra Ganesh began to unlock the mysteries of art software by herself in 2001. Now at 43 years of age, she uses the computer to plot her art on both video and canvas. Inspired by the graffiti on the NYC subway and streets, large-scale figurative sculptures in and around temples and heritage monuments and hand-painted Bollywood posters of the 1980s, her practice now includes several rounds of storyboarding and editing while giving primary consideration to camera movement and angles on how to best integrate multiple visual vocabularies into one frame. The world of art has undergone a paradigm shift and digital art has got its place in the sun. Some time back, Puducherry hosted a month-long digital art exhibition. 'The Life Cycle of an Idea' was held by The Gentleman's Enterprise, a Chennai-based company owned by art connoisseur Bipin JG. How different is digital art from other kinds of art?

Bipin says, "Any art work that requires digital technology as a part of the creative process is digital art. It is vast and entails everything from animation, digital painting, 3D-printed sculptures, video art, digital photography to participatory art etc. It could even be a mixed-media masterpiece, made by combining various digital techniques."

What started in 1966 with an initiative named 'Experiments in Art and Technology' in New York that paired artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and Yvonne Rainer with engineers from Bell Laboratories, has evolved into a new genre—travelling from Andy Warhol and culminating with Banksy in India it came to the forefront with established painters such as Anjolie Ela Menon, who experimented with the medium long before the rest of the artists' community in the country caught up. Menon would print out her works and superimpose them on furniture or layer them with extra colours, thereby creating a Brave New Canvas altogether. Says the grande dame of art in India, "I did this at a time when computers were unheard of. People had no clue to what digital meant." Soon, Menon was followed by Kolkata's eccentric genius Suvaprasanna

and of course, the very versatile Atul Dodiya. The Mumbai-based Dodiya says, "I was never one to stick to a single style. I believe artists should allow themselves to create freely rather than be bound by a particular style." The journey that started in the 1990s in India with Menon has now surged ahead and boomed into a much-recognised and appreciated form.

The 11th edition of the annual India Art Fair saw 'The Art Projects', a tent with experimental large-scale projects and interactive experiences. Introduced last year, The Art Projects' space is still a work in progress, believes director of the fair, Jagdip Jagpal. "The stress is on interactive works and showcasing some of the art forms that don't often get as much attention, such as sound installation and video works," she says. One of the works is an immersive, sound installation titled 'Change Room' by Delhi-based visual artist Baaraan Ijal—a constellation of audio recordings of anonymous voices confessing intimate thoughts. The art fair also witnessed German photographer Thomas Ruff showing his brand new work created using photographic negatives. The Shalini Passi Art Foundation presented a dedicated video art booth on-site titled 'Conundrums: Video Art from India',



Chitra Ganesh

New York

Inspired by the graffiti on the NYC subway, large-scale figurative sculpture in and around heritage monuments, and the hand-painted Bollywood posters of the 1980s.

"Digital art is all about self-teaching."



# Art in the Pixel Age

Technology is changing the way artists experiment with different mediums. The increase in demand for digital art in India by galleries and collectors has spurred artists to pursue a different path.

By MEDHA DUTTA YADAV & DOLLY RAJ

showcasing significant video work of eight Southeast Asian artists such as Anita Dube's 'Kissa-e-Noor Mohammed', Jitish Kallat's 'Forensic Trail of the Grand Banquet', Mithu Sen's 'Icarus', Pushpamala N's 'Rashtriya Kheer & Desiy Salad', Ranbir Kaleka's 'Man with Cockerel-2', Rags Media Collective's 'Strikes at Time', Sonia Khurana's 'Head-hand' and Surekha's 'Line of Control'. That is not all. With its second appearance at the India Art Fair Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) is also seeking to create fresh ways of looking at art and hopes to interact with a younger audience. It aims to look at how digital technologies enhance the experience of a museum visit, says associate director Nathaniel Gaskell.

Google is known to partner with cultural institutions to help digitise their collections. Simon Rein, Programme Manager at Google Arts & Culture, says, "As technology becomes more and more ingrained into everyday life, it also seems to become a more natural part of the creation of art. But digitisation is only the first step. You also need to think about how you bring what has been digitised to people in a way that is fast, engaging and insightful." Google interestingly has a mobile app that helps selfie lovers take an 'Art Selfie'. "You take a picture of yourself, and the app matches your features with the portraits from various museum collections. You can share the results with your friends, but more importantly you can also learn more about the portraits," Rein says, and adds, "Or think about Augmented Reality. There are only 36 paintings by Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, and they have never been brought together in one place. The app presents a virtual museum in Augmented Reality that brings these 36 masterpieces together for the very first time."

At the ongoing Kochi-Muziris Biennale, artist Michelle Poonawalla opened her multi-media installation titled 'Introspection'. The installation takes the audience through a sensory journey that starts with sound, using fragments of audio clips from the news combined with ambient sounds, which transition into a dramatic 360-degree

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Baiju Parthan

Mumbai

One of the few Indian artists who uses lenticular printing extensively in his creations. It involves using lenticular lenses to produce printed images with an illusion of depth, so that they appear different when they are viewed from diverse angles.

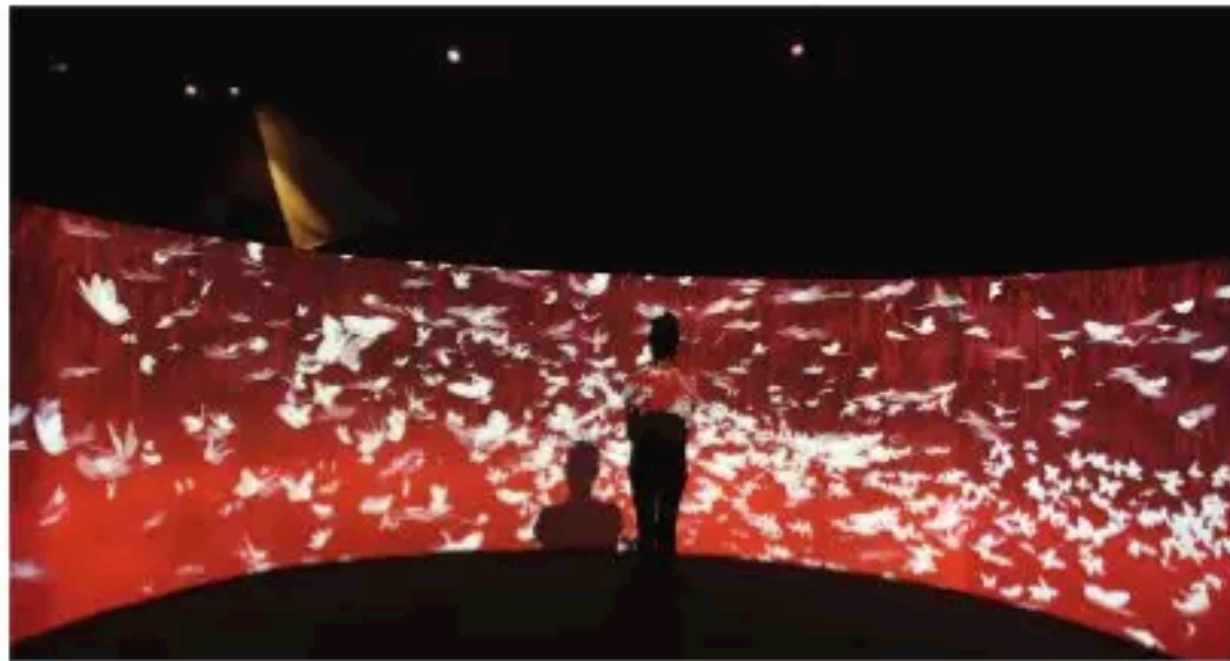
"Technology is just a tool like any other."



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MAGAZINE

LEAD



Michelle Poonawalla

Pune  
Her strength lies in blending the technique of the masters with digital advancement.

"By incorporating technology into my practice, a new dimension of possibilities has opened up."



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projection of tormented blood-rain—a symbolic representation of the violence and trauma. As the viewer walks through the projection space, strategically placed motion sensors trigger a dramatic cacophony of butterflies, signifying the final liberation of the soul, that wash over the surface of the screen, creating a visceral, cathartic experience for the viewer. Granddaughter of iconic artist, Jehangir Mehta, Poonawalla's strength lies in blending the technique of the masters with digital advancements in the field. The artist says, "I began my journey with projection mapping in 2011 when I was working on my show 'What if You Fly', which opened at V&A 's gallery New Delhi, in early 2012. The curator of the show pushed me to explore the possibility of including technology in my art practice. I didn't find simple projections to be dynamic enough and so I started exploring digital mapping. This technology really

Atul Dodia

Mumbai  
Passionate about art history, he blends the East and the West with contemporary style.

"Artists should allow themselves to create freely."



caught my interest and I began to look at my work through an entirely new prism. Their response was great. By incorporating technology into my practice, an entirely new dimension of possibilities has opened up. This has become an integral part of my artistic process and technique." Poonawalla believes that India is slowly accepting the marriage of technology and art. Technology allows the artist to create experiential art, encouraging viewer interaction. It also allows for a static piece to come to life, the possibilities of communicating ideas and experiences become endless with technology she says.

Delhi-based Nilanjan Das ventured into digital art in 2006. It was anything but easy, he says. The canvases had to be arranged from Austria, and demanded a waiting period of three months. The ink was imported from France. Das remembers how his first exhibition in 2006 was a huge flop. "People didn't understand digital art and weren't receptive to this new technological medium. Some even called it a photocopy. They termed my efforts redundant," he remembers. In 2014, when he showcased his exhibition—



'Dreams'—the narrative had changed. All the 11 works on display received a phenomenal welcome and we sold out. India had begun to open up. People had acquired more exposure to the medium given the technological advancements. "Now, digital is everywhere—filmmaking, photography and graphics. It's become an integral part of the creative process and is dynamic and futuristic," Das adds. The 46-year-old artist's last digital work was inspired by the 15th-century mural by Leonardo da Vinci—*The Last Supper*. Das used images of pizza, fried chicken, doughnuts, burgers and hot dogs while giving shape to Jesus and his apostles.

Keeping the digital definition in mind, the art of photography is the most ubiquitous form of digital art. Instagram, selfie, citizen reportage—in the age of social media, photography reflects the fast-forward momentum of the hyper-digital age and also drives and shapes it. The new technology available to photographers has changed the way photographs are presented. Instagram might not agree, but almost anyone carrying a

smartphone is a photographer in today's world. Bipin says, "While digital art through photography has been an established concept internationally, it is only slowly growing in India, courtesy social media. The provision of collaborative projects such as music videos, album covers, and posters etc, both within the country and outside, has provided quite a boost. With the growing relevance of social media, quite a few works are making their way via crossover even into mainstream mass media."

As far as the market size in India is concerned, a lot of high-end buyers are slowly showing interest towards such art today. Colabent artist Rishi Dhamal, who is a painter, sculptor, ceramicist and a printmaker says, "I have been able to include in various media with ease as I am simply because every medium has its own language." But the digital art commerce at present is scattered and not regulated. However, Poonawalla is optimistic. "The digital art market is certainly growing and it's being supported by an increasingly aware audience, who understand technology-driven art, both for

residential and commercial spaces. Commercial spaces, in particular, realise that immersive, experiential digital art makes them attractive to the next generation. At Kochi, I found that the younger audience was more responsive to my work." She adds that art schools, galleries and collectors need to support younger artists who want to experiment with technology but may not have the means. Providing infrastructure and moral support is the need of the hour and she believes corporates can also support artists by commissioning interactive work, which will raise the bar across the board. Today a work of digital art, according to the Delhi gallery, could be priced between ₹1.5 lakh to over ₹20 lakh.

Bajaj Parth, known for marrying the virtual and real in his work, which includes 3D graphics, agrees. "The earlier misgivings about art produced using computers as something that is made instantaneously with the push of a button have more or less vanished today. It has become evident to art lovers that digital technology

is just a tool like any other, and requires quite a lot of focused work and time spent to produce art worthy of attention. And it has also become clear to the viewer that what the artist says or does is more important than the medium used." Art has become a gateway for new experiments. It is more than what we academically divided as drawing, painting, sculpture or photography. Today's artist studios have become a laboratory. There is a link between science and art. Parth, who produces works containing references from both virtual and real domains to make the message come through, says when he started producing art using digital technology in 1999 in the time of dial-up internet and land phones, there was a fair amount of teasing and scepticism. "With the burgeoning of phones and internet usage in the country, the audience has grown comfortable with the fact that digital technology is very much a part of everyday life and also art-making," he says, and continues, "In terms of the evolution of digital art, today there is a significant number of younger artists who have grown up in an environment of computers, producing interesting art that got showcased mostly on internet forums."

Listed among the top 30 digital artists, Brisbane-based Amber Patil believes digital art approaches art in a new way a traditional artist does. Just as traditional painters are acknowledged as creators of colours and brushes, a digital artist follows the same process; but on a computer. Back in 2006, some thieves broke into the Guggenheim Museum and stole 11 masterpieces, and one of them was the 19th-century masterpiece *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* by Rembrandt Van Rijn. Infamous as one of the biggest art thefts in history, the case still remains unsolved. In an attempt to bring back the long-lost works of art, Patil was tasked by Adobe to digitally recreate Rembrandt's missing painting. The future looks brighter for artists who have immersed themselves in this futuristic quest of melding the lines between art and technology. For those who have had intense training in art to those who boast of no formal training, this genre is letting amateurs and experts explore different sides of their creativity. And with these venturesome explorations, it's the audience that stands to gain—a million pixels at a time.

(Reports by Koushik Somayaji and Aysha Singh)

## The Digital Worldview



The Louvre grabbed a lot of eye balls, when it announced the introduction of Nintendo 3DS, handheld videogame console, replacing the age-old traditional aud guides. Apart from that the Louvre has set up interactive digital media installations in the museum—the Egyptian Antiquities Department recorded a vast interactive touchscreen display system that acquaints visitors with the art of Pharaonic Egypt. Besides, an all-in-one touchscreen device has also been installed, which helps interpret the hieroglyphs of the ancient Egyptian civilization.



to the painting, making this classic artwork into a highly immersive experience. This 3D-rendered digital tribute gives us a peek into the artist's mind and an almost hypnotic bar into Vincent van Gogh's colourful world of *The Night Café*.

Japan recently launched the world's first dedicated digital art museum in Tokyo. The museum officially known as the Mori Building Digital Art Museum is an endeavour by Japanese art collective, teamLab. This first of its kind, bold and modern digital museum has 50 of its technicolour digital masterpieces spread across five zones.

Many scientists are using artificial intelligence (AI) to add art history and find curious links and parallels between different styles of art. This brand new system known as the generative adversarial network (GAN) comprises a pair of neural networks. One of the AI neural is a generator that produces images and the other one is the discriminator that scrutinises the paintings. GAN does this with the knowledge of different art styles (Baroque, Impressionism and Modernism). Add it all up, this AI neural network also uses at least 85,500 example paintings.

Nilanjan Das

Delhi  
His latest digital work was inspired by the 15th-century mural by Leonardo da Vinci—*The Last Supper*.

"It's been one special part of the creative process and is dynamic and futuristic."

