Forms of digital art in Greece: An avant garde art in dynamic development

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ABSTRACT

The connection of art with science and technology is a constant and inevitable phenomenon that is connected with the character and the very existence of organized societies, with the default interactions of people and their achievements and of course has to do with the need of artists to express themselves as fully as possible and with innovative actions. The image, whether static or moving, is subject to influences, sometimes catalytic, so that the artistic data constantly change. Contemporary art is developing fast in this field today, as it is influenced by digital technology and new media as an additional indication of postmodern perception. Suddenly, the image became more complex, the movement was combined with the statics of some of its elements, such as constructions and installations, virtuality became the main part of expression, combining space and time, characteristics of cyberspace, and enriching the senses with new experiences. Digital art quickly became interactive, multifaceted, animated, participatory and multisensory, embracing through its digital nature, the mediums of video, photography, sculpture, as well as other types and categories of artistic expression, often assisted by music, cinema and speech.

Greek artists from the 1980s onwards moved into this artistic landscape, with pioneering Greek artists living abroad and first coming into contact with the Art of the New Media. Entering the 21st century, this kind of art is constantly gaining ground as one of the main cognitive subjects of schools of fine arts and art workshops. On the other hand, the international shift to digitalism, gives the Art of New Media a cross-cultural aura and a greater proximity to globalization, which makes the interpretation of Digital Art multidimensional. The present study seeks to penetrate the aspects of Digital Art in Greece, from its first steps until today, to the pioneering artists who introduced it in Greece, the successors-representatives at the dawn of the 21st century, the art workshops that produce the Art of New Media and finally exhibitions-highlights, and events that have institutionalized Digital Art in the Greek art scene.

Keywords: *Digital art, multimedia, internet, technology and science, video, photography, multimedia, interaction, animation, cyberspace.*

INTRODUCTION

"Digital Art" (or "Art of New Media" and "Art of New Technologies" are terms often used in bibliography), with artists pouring their imagination into the computer. This art soon became a modern "artistic movement", which relies heavily on the dominance of technology, which was also the case with other art forms, that more often than not critics reluctantly pioneered. This spread of art has evolved rapidly and many artists abroad, as it is the case in Greece too, are systematically engaged in this genre, while many museums host their efforts. Soon, several discoveries in science and technology became attractive to artists to the extent that they improved artistic creation, and facilitated its dissemination (eg. in engraving, photography, video, etc.) [1].

But the real revolution came later, in the 1990s and beyond, when computers became part of people's daily lives. In addition, the internet provided artists and the public with the possibility of two-way communication, giving the user the ability to participate in the development of the project (Interaction). In this way the artists create dynamic works in which the audience acts as a co-creator. Therefore, the audience, from an ordinary spectator, acquires an active role and creatively completes the work [2]. The interface between the artist and the "spectator" is realized through points of the two systems, so the connection between them becomes in principle semantic, while the distinct boundaries between them are removed [3]. Interactivity is very much inherent in the "art of the Internet" and involves the element of communication and collectivity, something that generally characterizes the internet where the way of communication becomes non-hierarchical.

The spread of digital art has long been ready. The rise of the phenomenon takes place during the mature phase of postmodernism, and exhibitions in major museums of modern art in Europe and America are constantly increasing. A notable example internationally is the alpha 3.4 project of the "tsunamii.net" team, which was included in Documenta XI in Kassel, Germany in 2002, where visitors were asked to walk naturally and virtually from the exhibition space to Documenta's website [4].

In Greece, digital art came with some delay and with artists who had acquired experience abroad or had studied natural sciences. Initially the interest was focused on video production workshops and then evolved into digital art creation centers with the full use of new media and new technology. Among the most important contributions in this field

are the exhibitions at the Center for Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki, of which the most famous is the group exhibition entitled "Digital Art: Digital Art - Installations" (2007), but also the recent digital audiovisual installation "data flux [12 XGA version]", by the Japanese artist Ryoji Ikeda, at the House of Letters and Arts in Athens [5]. Some illustrative examples of digital art exhibitions in Greece can also be mentioned, such as the Athens Digital Arts Festival, which is Greece's representative in the international digital art scene. With 15 years in its assets, it is an institution of digital culture, embracing art, technology, and science [6].

As it was next, the techniques and media were adapted to the requirements of the online image and soon the gates of museums of modern and contemporary art opened, mainly in Athens and Thessaloniki [7].

RESEARCH METHOD
Digital art in Greece
Undoubtedly, the obsession with ideas and concepts, left behind the preoccupation with the objects themselves, leading the artistic expression outside the established contexts. Conceptual art as one of the basic constants of postmodernism allowed the association with "images" from the digital world. "Ideas about art, including a wide range of information, topics and concerns, which are not easily expressed by a single object, could be better conveyed with written phrases, photographs, documents, maps, diagrams, films, videos, with the body of the artist and, above all with the language itself' [8].

And as Evi Sampanikou writes [9] "[.] Since art is an integral part of society, its institutions and structures, it is natural for the term 'art' to evolve in parallel with the context of a wider cultural interaction. Therefore, scientists and technology carry with them the transformations of art in their evolution, influencing it on various levels in a way similar to that which influences and changes social relations and structures. [.] ", With information technology playing from the second half of the 20th century onwards "a dominant role in the mutations of the social edifice and of the internal functions and structures", without "the example of art escaping from this rule. [.]".

The removal of artists from traditional means of expression and the use of new media and all kinds of techniques in their art, were the main reasons for the evolution of artistic creation. "New analog and digital media have allowed artists to experiment", embracing the animation they found in cinema, television and video, but also in electronic games and virtual environments, in a combination of static images, old shots, live image, dynamic effects, natural and synthetic sound with the possibility of interactive control of their combination, allows the creation of works of art where the user participates in the action and undergoes through a unique experience each time "[10].

Greek art shifted towards a direction baring an emphasis on technological data (computers, cameras, photography, neon, etc.) and on techniques based on the free use of materials, was at the center of developments in science and technology from the 90s onwards. Video art and digital art in many versions of both genres made their dynamic appearance on the Greek art scene, changing the data in this field. The direction of domestic art from the electrical world to the digital one had already been predestined.

A pioneer in this field was Manthos Santorineos (b.1954) with studies in fine arts and cinema. He is the first artist to deal with the genre professionally and researched and pioneered it in all phases of its development, from video art to multimedia art (**Error! Reference source not found.**).
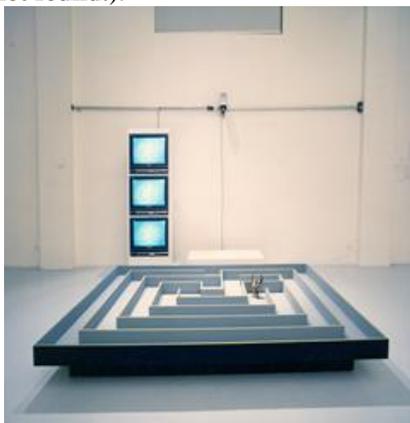

Figure 1 M: Santorinaios, Daedalus, video installation and robotics, was presented at the Ileana Tounta Center for Contemporary Art and at the 4th International Festival of Patras, Athens, Patras 1990

From the older generation of artists with an important tenure in the art of video stood out the artists Marianna Strapatsaki (1947), Lida Papakonstantinou (1945), Aris Prodromidis (1947), Maria Papadimitriou (1957), Miltos Manetas (1964), the couple Thanasis Hondros (1953) / Alexandra Katsiani (1954) and others.

Strapatsaki has served the art of video and digital media consistently and professionally at the Ionian University, where she works to promote the artistic dimension of new technologies with the main axes of painting and sculpture in the formation of video actions and audiovisual techno-forms, where she played a leading role (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 2 M: Strapatsaki, The Ghosts of the Mediterranean or the Reflections of the Past, 1990, Video installation 2.00 x 7.00 x 5.00 m, Bastion of Agios Georgios, Municipal Gallery of Rhodes

Lida Papakonstantinou and Aris Prodromidis have both given a pioneering tone to the art of video, utilizing new technological possibilities for the benefit of an art with a "holistic" character and with obvious artistic perspectives in this field, so that they are considered to have played a leading role. (**Error! Reference source not found.**, **Error! Reference source not found.**).

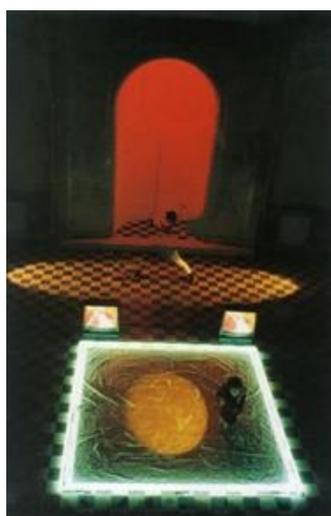Figure 3 L. Papakonstantinou, Genet's Toaster, 1998, Video Art (snapshot)

Figure 4 A. Prodromidis, Medea, 1998, Multimedia Performance, Thessaloniki

Younger artists such as Maria Papadimitriou and Miltos Manetas are two artists who developed their own techniques and appear in the 90's with works more self-referential and personal, made during the period of absolute domination of conceptual art (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 5 M. Papadimitriou, Untitled (T.A.M.A.), 2002, Video Art, 14th Documenta, installation ΑΝΤΙΔΩΡΟΝ, The Collection of The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Fridericianum, Kasel

The couple in art and life of two teachers Thanasis Hondros and Alexandra Katsiani have an impressive career in experimental and pioneering art forms, founding the "Civil Service Penthouse" (and later the "Other City") in the 80's, an "attitude" for social criticism and artistic reflection, introducing music to their art repertoire (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 6 Th. Hondros & A. Katsiani, Performance-Video Art (snapshot), 1996, Thessaloniki

The development of digital art in Greece has been rapid, especially with the development of technology that facilitated its dissemination and made accessible to the general public access via the Internet, and at the same time created favorable conditions for communication and utilization of artistic production. Digital works of art were included in the major art events held at the dawn of the 21st century [11][1].

From photography to multimedia
Younger artists use much more complex means of digital technology as they combine multiple ways to achieve more impressive results, ie video, photography or film, even texts and sounds as if they were works of "holistic" perception in the modern sense. They also seem to be more familiar with the modern means of technology and the internet is recognized as an important source of information, offering new ideas and enriching their imagination with "images", which without a doubt were not provided by the objective world in which they live. In the face of the "invasion" of new media and digital image, new approaches and categorizations are now required "according to an ever-changing field of new materials and technologies", as "new possibilities for the review of projects and practices" open up [12].

Our museums are now enriched with works of this type, while large and official art exhibitions, such as biennials and the Documenta, followed by a host of other exhibitions around the world, outside Greece, which they include in their repertoire artists who use in the production of art, technological means in any imaginative way required to complete their efforts. The owners of the galleries still have relevant reservations, due to the observed small number of exhibitions of

[1] For Example Biennale of Thessalonki and Athens, 2007-2019, Documenta Athens/Kasel, 2017 etc.

this kind that are hosted in their galleries, expecting "better days" in terms of the purchase of digital works of art. In this regard, markets for purely digital works began to be launched, and in fact by international auction houses, which in some cases find an extremely large response from the international public [13].

The younger generation made the most of the technological development of digital media, creating multi-layered and multifaceted works in which they collaborate smoothly and with successful expressive results. It is not accidental that they were chosen by well-known curators to participate in international art festivals that take place, not only in Greece but also abroad. An interesting fact is that these new artistic groups include cinematographers, such as photographers and actors or in combination with music, poetry, dance and theater whose work has an undeniable artistic dimension, expanding the already known boundaries of art history and digital aspects of it. Undoubtedly, the evolution of technology has played a role in the ease of carrying out similar works, which brings the art forms and the public closer and causes surprises to the scholars [14].

DISCUSSION
Contemporary aspects of digital art, workshops and artists
The 21st century is the century of information technology and high (digital) technology. It is the century of artificial intelligence and the 4th Industrial Revolution, which means that everything is based on digitalism and algorithms. Without a doubt, the younger generation of our artists moves more comfortably and safely in the digital world, regardless of their choices, which, however, have largely accepted its influences, incorporating in their work corresponding achievements.

The Manthos Santorineos, mentioned above, is one of the first Greek artists to experiment, professionally and consistently, with a kind of art that is increasingly spreading to young artists. Santorineos, who believed in the importance of electronic and digital media in the creation of new art forms, founded various fields of digital media with the doctrine that "the computer is the substrate of memory", reducing its importance to the initial level of first-creation, as originally considered writing. One of his first actions in this field was the establishment of the Department of Art and Technology at the Ileana Tounta Center for Contemporary Art in 1987 with the aim of promoting digital art and the promotion of young artists [15].

However, the most interesting move of Santorinaios in the field of digital production was the establishment of the Center for Digital Culture "Fournos" in 1992, which provides to date specialized knowledge for the design and production of various digital technology projects both for itself and for other artists [16].

Another artist who has taken similar initiatives is Nikos Giannopoulos, who studied architecture and cinema, and is recognized as a director with successful films to his credit, but also with a significant involvement with the art of video and digital media. From the 80's he presented his works exclusively through video (see *Illusion* or *Shortly before 1984*), the video made by Babel (1984), and other works, while he also participated in an international video-art festival (**Error! Reference source not found.**). He founded the company "Narcissus" (1985), but also the "European Meeting for Art / New Technologies" (ESTET, 1990). He has also participated in many training seminars on Audiovisual Media, but also Video Art [17].

Figure 7 N. Giannopoulos, Just before 1984 or Illusions, 1983, Videoperformance, Poliplano Gallery, Athens

One of the most active digital art groups with significant activity in this area is the "Video Art Miden" group, with group exhibitions of Greek and international interest, video art festivals and with many thematic sections, lectures, conferences and many other activities in the assets. In fact, it is characteristic that 245 artists, from all over the world, participated in the Video Art Festival Miden, which took place in the city of Kalamata in 2009 (indicatively) for the 5th consecutive year (at the Historic Center). This group was founded in 2005 and the artistic director is Gioula Papadopoulou.

Through this multifaceted activity, young artists stood out, such as Nikos Iliopoulos, Dimitris Gakis, Maria Pesli, Ioanna Myrka, Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, Andromachi Iliopoulou, Nikos Giavropoulos, Periklis Pravitas, Konstantinos Tiligadis and many others. The artists' research extends to personal experiences, the problem created by social isolation due to Covid 19, gender identity, environmental protection and much more. (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 8 Video Art Miden, Videoperformance, 2020, snapshot

However, there have been other small groups with a similar orientation either collaborating under a specific program or exhibiting at various multicultural venues (eg. Lab2Art) or participating in a festival (for example at Festivart), such as this group made up of artists Makis Faros, Zoi Pyrini, Takis Zervadas, Giasemi Rapti, Gioula Hatzigeorgiou and others we have seen before (**Error! Reference source not found.**).
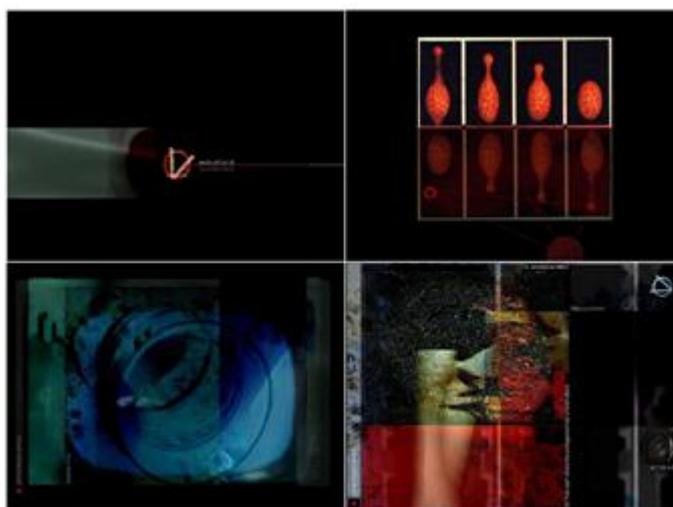

Figure 9 M. Faros, Minefield, Inderactive Shockwave, Festival [R]-[R]-[F], Internet

As it is now obvious, it is not enough just the talent, which is still valid as an inherent "value", or the creative imagination that will undoubtedly be the one that will give the artistic product an artistic identity, but also the ability to exploit the data it generously provides, once again technology, to artists. Art seems to be facing new surprises and challenges.

Undoubtedly, the younger generation of our artists moves more comfortably and safely in the digital world, regardless of their choices, which, however, have largely accepted its influences, incorporating in their work corresponding achievements.

CONCLUSION

It is a fact that the electronic culture to which the object of the present research belongs, connects technology with culture, that is, material techniques with symbolic forms. These are the two sides of the coin, where the "ideas" should be sought in the transmitters of these ideas. For researchers, human history has followed a cyclical course, now characterized by electronic networks and "cyberculture" [18]. Thus, cyberspace, as a dominant and powerful

anthropological field, creates new market conditions, fueling development, where the visual discourse claims its own share.

Digital art in Greece came with a delay (late 80's), but today it is showing a significant development. Special "Art and Technology" departments were created in the Schools of Fine Arts, so that young artists indulge in the new genre with considerable success. Especially after the knowledge gained by the new digital world that appeared before them at the dawn of the new millennium. The development of digital art today is geometrically advanced and the term "digital art" has been expanded to include everything digitally produced, ie images from video, camera and film, music sound, creating works of art, whether animated or static, in the case of sculptural constructions and installations. However, what prevails is the visual freedom that the young Greek artists serve consistently. This is shown by the numerous Digital Art workshops (public, collective and private) that have started to emerge in Athens and elsewhere in Greece.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
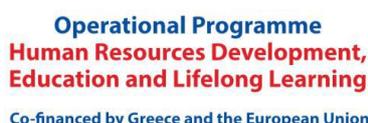
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