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WRIT 150

2/3/2023

<u>What is art?</u>

I scroll through social media, enjoying the updates from my favorite digital artists, but as I want to comment in support, I find a comment criticizing the art work and its process as unskilled. I read on to see how they were criticizing the digital nature and said that the art program did all the work. As an artist that dabbles in various mediums, including digital, I was infuriated with the claim. Criticizing digital art for "not being real art" fails to recognize the impact and influence of technology on the evolution of the art form along with the skill required for it, and just like any other piece, it serves as a form of self expression. Art is constantly evolving, and thus demands conversations on "what is art"?

Art involves many different types of mediums, from ancient charcoal on stone to marble carving to anything that could be used to create something visually interesting. Digital painting programs like Procreate, Ibispaint, Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint, and more, are just like any other artistic medium. Digital painting programs may make creating art simpler and more convenient, but art mediums also evolve to be more easily accessible. Just like how the invention of oil paint tubes revolutionized art. Previously, oil paint had to be mixed in large quantities and was not a very portable medium, but once paint tubes were introduced, then there were many artists that were able to take their art on the go and paint in various different locations. Did this mean that painters who did not painstakingly mix their own paints are not as much of an artist as ones who did? New inventions of art do not make newer art mediums less important than traditional forms. It allows novel advancements in the field of art, making more complicated and intriguing pieces to add to the variety of artworks in the world.

Unfortunately, there is always criticism on what is art or not, even beyond digital art. Personally, I feel that anyone can be an artist. But various artworks will always be criticized by various people for not being art. Initially when impressionists were introduced, there was a lot of backlash within the fine arts community due to the style not being realistic. The swift, dynamic paint strokes were seen as messy and sacreligious to art. Yet Monet, Cassat, Degas, and other artists that defined the Impressionist movement are renown artists in the current era. I personally adore the impressionist era. It deviated from the standard of realism, and it stretched the definition of art. The visible brushstrokes that were discouraged from the previous neoclassical era shined in the impressionist era.

Adding on, the artist Rothko, who is most well known for his abstract expressionist paintings of large blocks of color was criticized for his art requiring no skill at all. But his way of painting was very difficult to imitate due to his unnoticeable paint strokes in his paintings. He was also a painter in the post World War II era, and sought to seek novel ways to express tragedy, which landed him in the style he is most known for. He experimented with trying to encapsulate human emotions with rudimentary blocks of color. Yet people shame him for the "lack of skill/thought" behind his pieces. A lot of people criticize him without knowing the full story behind the artist, and that could apply to a lot of critiques that spew negativity shallowly.

These surface level critiques often pains me because one of the most beautiful things about art is knowing more about the artist behind the piece. What influenced their work? Was it their environment when they grew up? What values did they have? It is so fun to see what influenced them to generate such a unique style. For example, DaVinci was a scientist and mathematician, and he was able to use his understanding of proportions to map out linear perspectives that changed art forever. The sense of depth and perspective was due to his other skills, which culminated into this revolutionary principle. Another example I've seen where certain stylistic choices of an artist revealed their influences are fans of the anime Jojo's Bizarre Adventure. Though I've never seen the animated show, I've always been able to pick out instagram artists

who have made fanart of the show before due to their unique style of human proportions, posing, and shading of the figure. In addition, seeing the progression of art through an artist's social media is always fun to look through.

In the current era, when digital art started getting traction, there were comments and criticism about the medium "not being real art" despite those "critics" not knowing anything about the process nor skill behind such artworks. But digital painting programs still require a solid foundation of the art principles to achieve a visually appealing piece. There is a learning curve to how to use these programs, and it takes time to master this medium. Sure, there are effects you can make through the digital program that would be impossible on physical paper, but that only elevates the art that could be created. The digitization of art also has made it more accessible. iPads have the program called Procreate, and it has been seen as the same level and created pieces that rival the industry standard applications. It has become more portable too due to the convenient nature of the iPad.

Even industry professionals who used to use traditional mediums have expressed their support of digital mediums. I've had the privilege of attending an animation workshop with Aaron Blaise, who famously worked on animations like Beauty and the Beast, Mulan, more, and co-directed Brother Bear, and he was teaching us and recommending the animation tools on Procreate. He expressed his joy and support for the program due to its convenience and allowing more users to get into animation.

Digital art, just like any other art, is a form of self expression. Just like any other creative field. But it is much less direct than literary works, evoking various emotions through visual hints. I've never been good at finding the best words to express myself, but as an artist I find solace in the visual medium. Each person has different interpretations of various visuals. The same facial expression could come off differently depending on the person who views it, same with visual art. That is what makes art so great,

with the richness of meaning that can evolve from a piece. Though some pieces of art may simply be something that is just nice to look at, some could feel relatable and touch people's hearts.

If digital art is art, then how does graphic design come in the conversation? I find graphic design as another form of art. It tells information and also requires an eye for art to create. Thorough understanding of artistic and design trends, with color theory, and various principles of art are necessary to be a graphic designer. The thought process behind graphic designs intrigues me, and the process is just like any artistic process behind fine arts.

Art creates community, and digital art has certainly checked that requirement with its strong social media presence. Social media has allowed artists of various art forms shine and reach audiences across the world, but it has benefitted digital artists the most. The compatibility of the digital medium and the internet has created large communities of digital artists and designers to connect and create new media and stories to tell through art. There have been various art conventions that were hosted due to the large culture that came out of digital art, such as Lightbox expo, Comic Con, and more. I thoroughly enjoyed going to these conventions and meeting the people behind the amazing artwork I view online. The busy conventions and long lines say enough about the massive amount of people who are a part of the digital art community.

Although there are many forms of digital art I find compelling, one medium that does not meet this criteria is AI. Art is constantly evolving, but so far, AI lacks the crucial part of self expression in the creation of art . AI art is indeed very powerful and much cheaper than having real artists. It's becoming a tool that could replace artists in the job industry. Also, a lot of my favorite digital artists are getting their art fed into these bots to train them in different styles. Though the art may be visually appealing, it feels empty, and there's no community of artists to be built with robots. Artists are getting their art used to train AI without their permission and without any monetary compensation. Due to AI art being such a new

technology that is entering the mainstream, there is not much regulation, and I currently find AI generated art not deserving of being called art in the current ways it is being used. Though AI is another technology that makes art easier, it does not require any skill other than finding adjectives to describe an image. The beauty of open interpretation is lost with the way the "art" is generated. AI art takes away the self expression and creativity needed to make an art work, leaving a beautiful, but soulless piece. With this, I personally am unable to classify AI artwork as art.

So, what is art? Art is a vessel for self expression and creativity. The conversation on what is art is still ongoing, but it does not matter what form of medium is used to create it as long as it abides by those core principles.