AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE GROWTH OF NEW MEDIA ART WITHIN INDIAN VISUAL ART PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Artistic creativity has always evolved in response to cultural contexts and the intent of individual artists. In the contemporary digital age—often framed as a postmodern or even post-postmodern reality—visual art practices are undergoing profound transformations. Technological advancements are reshaping the way art is produced, disseminated, and experienced, and neither galleries nor museums are exempt from this shift. By the mid-1990s, a growing number of Indian artists began exploring installation art, site-specific works, and digital mediums, even as others continued to engage with conventional forms such as painting, sculpture, and printmaking.

Keywords: Media Art, Visual Art, Indian

1. INTRODUCTION

Artistic creativity has always evolved in response to cultural contexts and the intent of individual artists. In the contemporary digital age—often framed as a postmodern or even post-postmodern reality—visual art practices are undergoing profound transformations. Technological advancements are reshaping the way art is produced, disseminated, and experienced, and neither galleries nor museums are exempt from this shift. By the mid-1990s, a growing number of Indian artists began exploring **installation art**, **site-specific works**, and **digital mediums**, even as others continued to engage with conventional forms such as painting, sculpture, and printmaking.

This period also witnessed the rise of **pluralism** and **multiculturalism** as defining features of artistic practice. A confident, borderless borrowing from global cultures became increasingly common, resulting in frequent crossovers and interdisciplinary approaches. Artists such as **Ranbir Kaleka**, **Shilpa Gupta**, **Sheba Chhachhi**, **Thukral and Tagra**, and **Jitish Kallat** have been at the forefront of this movement, seamlessly integrating cutting-edge technology into their artistic vocabularies.

Historically, all art movements have reflected a synthesis of **individual genius** and **collective consciousness**. From prehistoric cave paintings that captured the mystery and magic of human survival to the serene metaphysical expressions of early Indian art, artists have long pursued the interplay of **aesthetics, intent, and meaning**. During the **Gupta dynasty**, for instance, Indian art reached its zenith, immortalizing the spiritual aura of the Buddha through masterful works such as those in the caves of **Ajanta and Ellora**.

Technological innovation has frequently intersected with artistic evolution. The invention of **photography** in the early 19th century (circa 1832–1840) initially posed a challenge to traditional modes of image-making, prompting fundamental questions about the purpose and relevance of art. Yet, rather than undermining art, photography catalyzed the **Impressionist movement**, which redefined artistic perception and representation.

Today, in the **information and digital age**, visual art again finds itself at a similar crossroads. Experimental artists are actively embracing **new media** to explore uncharted artistic terrain. This includes digital installations, virtual reality, algorithmic art, and other emerging technologies that not only expand the language of artistic expression but also **redefine the relationship between artwork and audience**. The convergence of digital tools and visual arts thus represents both a **continuation of historical artistic inquiry** and a **radical reimagining of contemporary art practice**.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **qualitative research methodology**, emphasizing the interpretation of primary and secondary sources to explore the expansion of new media art in Indian visual art practices. The research is grounded in firsthand insights and observational data to provide a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

2.1. PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

The core of the study involves the collection and interpretation of **primary data** through:

- **Interviews** conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders, including **academicians, journalists, contemporary artists, art historians, critics, curators**, and members of the **general public**.
- These interviews were conducted using **random data sampling** techniques to ensure broad representation across perspectives and sectors of the art world.

2.2. OBSERVATION AND SITE VISITS

In addition to interviews, **direct observation** played a vital role in data collection. The researcher engaged in **field visits** to:

- **Art galleries, exhibitions, art fairs**, and **libraries**, enabling firsthand engagement with artistic practices and curatorial strategies.
- These visits offered valuable contextual and experiential data, particularly regarding how new media art is displayed, interpreted, and received.

2.3. SECONDARY SOURCES AND LITERATURE

The research is further supported by **secondary data** from a wide range of sources, including:

- **Books, academic journals, art magazines, newsletters, exhibition catalogues**, and other relevant texts related to new media and contemporary Indian art.

A key reference text is *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media* by **Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook (2010)**. This seminal work explores the defining characteristics of **new media art**, such as its fluid relationship with time and space, and its overlap with other contemporary practices like **video art, conceptual art, performance art**, and **socially engaged art**. Drawing from their extensive experience as curators, the authors provide numerous examples of artworks and exhibitions to demonstrate how **curatorial roles and audience participation** are being redefined in light of the dynamic and participatory nature of new media art.

The book also outlines evolving models of **curation**, moving beyond traditional museum paradigms to **hybrid modes** that combine **online and offline platforms**—including digital publications, live broadcasts, art festivals, collaborative labs, and social networking. This literature contributes to the study by offering a framework for understanding how curators navigate the **complexities and potentials of new media art**, resisting platform-based hype and instead grounding their work in current artistic practice.

According to **Smuts (2009)**, interactive works of art hold significance as they represent the first truly *"creative"* form of **mass art**. He argues that even **mechanically reproduced artworks** can exhibit interactivity and, therefore, embody creativity—primarily due to technological advancements. Smuts defines *interactivity* as a form of **responsiveness** that is neither (a) fundamentally random nor (b) entirely controllable by the user. In this framework, an object or system is considered interactive when it engages with an individual in a way that involves **meaningful reaction**, yet **retains a degree of autonomy**, distinguishing it from both passive and fully predictable experiences. This nuanced understanding of interactivity positions new media art as a dynamic and participatory practice, challenging traditional hierarchies of creation and consumption.

In the study by **Rafi and Ahmad (2016)**, the authors explore how contemporary art addresses **social, political**, and other related issues by **blurring the boundaries between disciplines**. These **interdisciplinary art practices** have emerged as powerful tools for both **artists and audiences**, facilitating more nuanced engagement with complex themes. As interdisciplinary approaches in art continue to evolve, they also present distinct **challenges in terms of exhibition and preservation**. Many curators and institutions struggle with the **technical limitations** required to support artworks that incorporate **advanced digital technologies**, often lacking the necessary infrastructure to effectively display or maintain such innovative works.

In his 2004 article, **Huhtamo** critiques the broad and often ambiguous use of the term *interactive art*, arguing that its extended definition—especially as interpreted by juries in digital art contexts—tends to generate more confusion than clarity. He suggests that the category of "interactive art" should be limited to works in which **user interaction plays a central and active role**. For works like *Listening Post*, which do not foreground user engagement in a traditional sense, Huhtamo proposes the creation of **new categorical frameworks**. These should not revert to earlier labels such as *cybernetic art* or *system art*, which carry historical and conceptual baggage. While terms like *intraactive art* appear too narrowly defined, Huhtamo identifies **"Database Aesthetics"** as a more promising and adaptable concept. This emerging framework could help circumvent the theoretical challenges posed by distinctions between **active user interaction**, **passive reception**, and **system-based responsiveness**, especially as **database-driven works** continue to evolve in both scope and significance.

The case study by **Seo (2015)** examines the **aesthetics of immersive experience** within the interactive environment *Light Strings*. One of the defining characteristics of interactive art, as highlighted in this study, is its ability to **immerse the viewer**, creating a sense of presence within a digitally constructed space. The concept of **immersiveness** is generally understood as the phenomenon in which a participant "forgets" the real world outside and instead feels **fully absorbed in a virtual or fantastical environment**, shaped by computer hardware and software. *Light Strings* exemplifies how interactive installations can blur the line between physical and virtual realities, allowing viewers not just to observe but to **actively participate** in shaping their own sensory and spatial experiences.

In her article, **Kayser (2017)** discusses the work of **Shilpa Gupta**, highlighting the artist's distinctive approach to exploring the **imaginative and perceptual boundaries of individuals**. Gupta expresses a particular interest in how narratives and materials unfold differently depending on the **context, histories, and scales**—sometimes "zooming in," other times "zooming out." While Gupta frequently incorporates **technology** into her work—such as **sensor-based installations**, **interactive video projections**, and **audio-visual elements**—she also intentionally uses **everyday materials** like **soap**, **cellophane tape**, or **scratched metal plates**, resisting the notion that "high-tech" equates to higher artistic value. In fact, she has stated her discomfort with the elevated status often assigned to new media art, emphasizing instead the **tactile, distributive, and participatory qualities** of the technologies and materials she uses.

One of her notable gestures includes offering viewers a **bar of soap engraved with the word "THREAT"**—an action that challenges conventional notions of art as static or untouchable and instead invites **physical engagement and critical reflection**. In a conversation with **Sasha Altaf**, documented in *Voices of Change* (ed. Gayatri Sinha), Gupta explains that for her, **form and content are inextricably linked**. The **sensation and emotion** embedded in her work guide both its **conceptual grounding** and its **aesthetic form**, which vary project to project, with **no fixed standard**. Her

practice exemplifies a **post-medium condition** in contemporary art, where material, medium, and message are determined by conceptual need rather than tradition or hierarchy.

According to **Dhar (2016)**, **Sudarshan Shetty's** *Shoonya Ghar* draws inspiration from a *doha* attributed to the 12th-century mystic **Gorakhnath**. The work blurs boundaries between film, architecture, and performance. The film's set, constructed by five traditional craftsmen over the course of the narrative, becomes a parallel storyline in itself. Uniquely, this **constructed set is reproduced within the gallery space**, transforming the act of viewing into an immersive and spatially disorienting experience. Viewers are invited to **move through the physical set** while simultaneously watching the film, effectively collapsing the boundaries between **spectator and spectacle**. In this way, the act of **stage-building** becomes both **a form of mediation and performance**.

Shoonya Ghar thus reflects a **tripartite composition**: the **physical construction of the set**, the **musical score**, and the **performed narrative**, each representing distinct yet interwoven processes. These elements collectively underscore Shetty's interest in temporality, spatiality, and the fragmented nature of narrative—key concerns within **new media and installation art** in India today.

In her study, **Merali (2011)** analyzes **Jitish Kallat's** critically acclaimed series *Public Notice*, through which the artist constructs an experiential and affective engagement with historical and political discourse. Across the series, Kallat creates a compelling **"typographic web"** that allows viewers to *read*, *move through*, and *feel* the **pulsation and urgency** embedded in politically charged words. In *Public Notice* (2003), Kallat **burns letters onto acrylic mirrors**, visually distorting reflections to evoke self-confrontation with the message. In *Public Notice 2* (2007), the **letters are cast in resin bones**, alluding to both **mortality and historical violence**, while in *Public Notice 3* (2010), Kallat uses **color-coded typography** based on the U.S. Homeland Security's **terror threat alert scale**, infusing visual design with ideological commentary.

These **typographic treatments—burning, casting, and coding—disrupt textual legibility**, thereby forcing viewers to engage with both form and content simultaneously. Kallat's works thus move beyond conventional modes of reading by **activating typography as a material form of resistance**, where **language itself becomes performative, sculptural, and politically charged**. The *Public Notice* series exemplifies how new media aesthetics intersect with **contemporary art's socio-political commitments**, particularly within the context of **postcolonial India**.

The art historian, critic, and curator **Geeta Kapur (2003)** highlights the significance of **Ranbir Kaleka's** video work, noting that his aesthetic practice is deeply rooted in the **principle of fiction**. Through the use of **digital media**, Kaleka constructs layered visual narratives that blur the lines between **presence and absence**, **reality and simulation**. Kapur emphasizes that Kaleka's characters—often male figures—appear **simultaneously embodied and spectral**, rendered with a **psychedelic transparency** that collapses them into a **pixelated ambiguity**. These figures become **simulacra**— copies of something that either never existed or only momentarily appears as a fleeting presence, prompting viewers to question the nature of **identity, memory, and perception**.

Kapur cites works such as *Man Threading Needle* (1998–99) and *Man with Cockerel* (2001) as emblematic of Kaleka's style, where **time-based video projections** are layered over painted canvases, merging **traditional media** with **new technological forms**. These works demonstrate Kaleka's **cinematic and painterly sensibility**, in which the **slow, meditative pacing** and **poetic visual construction** allow for a **contemplative experience of fragmented identity**. His practice marks a critical intervention in Indian contemporary art, one that explores the **psychic landscapes of masculinity, alienation, and historical residue** through a uniquely hybrid medium.

In a conversation with Roy (2003), **Ranbir Kaleka** reflects on his transition to **new media**, asserting that his **artistic concerns have remained consistent**, regardless of medium. He emphasizes that **the use of technology does not alter the core of his inquiry**, which is fundamentally rooted in **psychological spaces and narrative ambiguity**. Kaleka recounts that his early works were largely composed of **interior scenes**, and that his eventual move toward landscapes was not a shift in theme but an **expansion of his conceptual terrain**. For Kaleka, the **landscape itself becomes an interior**—a **closed, eventful space** saturated with **psychological resonance**.

He further elaborates that the **true event in art** often unfolds **outside the physical frame of the painting**. While visual elements such as **gestures, eye trajectories, and spatial cues** direct the viewer's attention across the work, the **actual moment of artistic revelation** occurs within the **mind of the viewer**—it is **felt rather than seen**. Kaleka describes this as a **triggered event**, one that requires the viewer to **close their eyes and activate the imaginative faculty**, blurring the line between **perception and introspection**. This emphasis on **the psychological over the**

representational, and on **viewer engagement as an active, inner process**, reveals how Kaleka's use of new media remains **anchored in experiential depth**, rather than technological novelty.

In her study, **Roussou (2001)** explores the integration of **state-of-the-art interactive virtual environments** within **cultural public spaces**, emphasizing their potential as tools for **informal education and engagement**. Focusing on the initiatives of the **Foundation of the Hellenic World (FHW)** in Athens—a prominent institution dedicated to **cultural heritage and public learning**—Roussou highlights how **virtual environments** can be made accessible to **learners of all ages**. Through immersive and interactive technologies, institutions like **museums, cultural centers, and recreational facilities** are shown to possess the capacity not only to **preserve cultural memory** but also to **redefine public education** and **recreational engagement**. These technologies allow for the creation of **experiential learning environments** that go beyond passive observation, encouraging **active participation** and **multisensory exploration**. As such, virtual reality is positioned not merely as a display tool, but as a **transformative medium** capable of reshaping how cultural narratives are **communicated, experienced, and understood** by diverse audiences.

3. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN ART

The relationship between **art, science, and technology** is intricate and historically layered. While often treated as distinct domains in the modern age, their origins and early development reveal a deep **interconnectedness**. **Technology predates formal science**, emerging as a pragmatic human endeavor aimed at reshaping and responding to the physical environment. Defined as the act of creating, designing, and problem-solving, technology has historically maintained a closer affinity with human life than the theoretical frameworks of science.

Art, too, can be understood as an act of **imaginative creation**—a practice of aesthetic innovation that often integrates available **technological means**. From the earliest periods, artists have drawn upon emerging technologies with a **creative, even mystical sensibility**, transforming raw materials into objects of beauty and cultural significance. Prehistoric cave paintings, for instance, stand as **early examples of the fusion of imagination, ritual, and rudimentary technological insight**. These nonverbal expressions not only documented material realities but also embodied symbolic and emotional dimensions of human experience, illustrating the **inseparability of art, science, and technology** in early human societies.

This **unity of disciplines**, driven by curiosity and a quest for meaning, produced outcomes both tangible and intangible—blurring the lines between practical utility, aesthetic contemplation, and spiritual inquiry. However, the **Industrial Revolution** marked a turning point: as technology became increasingly refined, it began to lean more heavily on scientific principles. By the **20th century**, scientific research had become a dominant force driving technological advancement, shifting the balance of power and framing technology primarily as an extension of science.

In contemporary contexts, however, the dynamic **reciprocity between science and technology** has begun to reengage with artistic practices. New media art, virtual reality, and algorithmic aesthetics reflect a renewed convergence of these domains, wherein **artists utilize scientific tools and technological platforms not just as mediums but as conceptual collaborators**. This ongoing dialogue not only expands the scope of artistic expression but also reasserts the **fundamental entanglement of art, science, and technology** in shaping human culture.

3.1. THE DIGITAL AGE AND THE CONVERGENCE OF ART, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

With the advent of the digital age, we are once again witnessing a profound **convergence of diverse disciplines**—art, science, and technology. This convergence is not merely conceptual or theoretical, but is occurring **at both the physical and virtual levels**, mediated through digital codes, algorithms, and interactive systems. Digital technology has created a platform that **blends, connects, and redefines** the relationships between culture, science, and aesthetics. It offers a **new language of synthesis**, enabling **transformation, meta-narratives, and cross-disciplinary synergy**.

In this new paradigm, digital media act as **catalysts for creative and scientific experimentation**, pushing the boundaries of what is considered possible in artistic, technological, and cultural expression. Importantly, digital tools facilitate **cross-cultural collaboration**, providing platforms where diverse cultural communities can engage with a **shared foundation of creation and communication**. This techno-cultural fluidity encourages new dialogues and hybrid practices that were previously inconceivable.

However, this convergence has also created **a crisis of identity for traditional art forms**, which now face the challenge of maintaining their **historical lineage, cultural location, and aesthetic integrity** in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. The digital age, often associated with **postmodernity**, has not only disrupted conventional modes of creation and reception but also left behind **the theoretical residues of postmodern critique**—deconstruction, relativism, and the rejection of grand narratives.

Yet, as postmodernism approaches its twilight and no longer provides a sufficient framework for understanding current cultural and artistic practices, **new media art** has emerged as a potent alternative. It fills the **theoretical vacuum** with its inclusive, expansive, and adaptable nature—defined by the convergence of **all existing and conceivable media**, not merely limited to the Internet or multimedia formats.

From an **Indian aesthetic perspective**, the idea of media convergence resonates deeply. Indian art has historically emphasized the **interdependence and synthesis** of various art forms, where music, dance, poetry, sculpture, and ritual were **not compartmentalized**, but experienced as unified expressions of **transcendental beauty (rasa)**. In this sense, **new media does not entirely disrupt Indian artistic sensibilities**; rather, it can be viewed as a **contemporary articulation** of age-old principles—**integration, collective authorship, and spiritual connectivity**.

Thus, the digital age offers not only technological innovation but also the possibility of a **reimagined cultural continuity**, in which **new media becomes both a repository and a reinvention** of tradition. In reconciling the modern with the ancient, and the local with the global, it enables a **pluralistic yet rooted engagement with the arts**—affirming that even amidst change, the essence of artistic experience endures.

Convergence and Aesthetic Possibilities in New Media Art

The contemporary art world is uniquely positioned to leverage media technology in exploring the **diversity, fluidity, and global interconnectivity** made possible by the digital age. Through this dynamic interface, artists can engage with emerging **structures, architectural paradigms, and evolving cultural significances**, facilitating the development of **new orders of aesthetic expression and representation**. In this unfolding context, the digital medium does not merely serve as a tool but becomes a **cultural idiom in itself**—one that offers novel frameworks for both creation and perception.

The central themes of **convergence, computation, and the calculus of aesthetics** form the intellectual and creative bedrock for new-age artistic practices. These themes allow artists to probe into **timeless metaphors and hidden structures** embedded within space and time. Digital art practices—especially those employing algorithmic design, generative programming, and data aesthetics—create immersive experiences that transcend the boundaries of **sensation and emotion**, aiming instead for an encounter with **intellectual beauty and deeper truths**.

This process aligns with the **Vedantic conception of aesthetic experience (rasa)**, wherein the highest form of beauty is not merely sensual, but **cognitive and transcendental**. The creative act in digital art, involving the formulation of algorithms and abstract constructs, often mirrors the meditative and intuitive depth of Indian metaphysical aesthetics. When artists integrate computational logic with refined aesthetic sensibilities, they do not just produce visual outputs; they construct **alternative realities**—sublime, coherent, and experientially rich.

Importantly, the **creative journey itself**, independent of its final manifestation, becomes a site of aesthetic fulfillment. This process-driven aesthetic not only reflects the internal beauty of the code and structure but also invites the audience to partake in the **shared aesthetic consciousness** enabled by new media.

As art increasingly situates itself at the **intersection of science, technology, and culture**, a **new pedagogical paradigm** is emerging. This shift anticipates the need for educational models that nurture transdisciplinary fluency, enabling future artists to operate across domains. While this pedagogical landscape is still in its formative stage, the signs are promising: cross-institutional collaborations, hybrid art-science residencies, and global digital art festivals are paving the way for an **integrated and imaginative future of art education**.

3.2. EVOLVING PEDAGOGIES AND ARTISTIC PRACTICES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The **emergent pedagogy of art** in the digital era is marked by a conscious integration of **intuition and analytical reasoning**. With the influence of digital media and the convergence of multiple platforms—ranging from computation to immersive technologies—contemporary artistic expression is increasingly moving beyond the sensory to embrace **more cerebral, conceptual, and cognitive manifestations**. This shift is not a detachment from the emotive dimensions

of art but an **evolution in expressive strategies**, where **intellectual engagement and abstract synthesis** often take precedence over purely visual or sensory impact.

As society transitions into the **information ecology and knowledge economy**, the **expectations and sensibilities of both artists and audiences** have evolved. Today's creators must navigate a landscape shaped by **media saturation, aesthetic pluralism, and global connectivity**. The intelligentsia, art communities, and cultural consumers alike have developed a **heightened awareness of intertextuality, symbolism, and critical inquiry**, prompting artists to recalibrate their approaches. Artists who respond to these signals with nuanced and innovative practices are being increasingly recognized and celebrated—a **promising sign** for the trajectory of contemporary visual culture.

In parallel with **globalization**, rapid and often disorienting socio-political transformations have compelled artists to become more **reflexive and participatory** in their practice. Rather than assuming the stance of isolated creators, many artists today operate as **active respondents to globalized, multicultural, and transnational experiences**. Their work often interrogates complex issues such as **multiple identities, cultural hybridity, systemic inequalities, the binaries of local versus global**, and **the implications of technological advancement** on society and selfhood.

These themes are not addressed monolithically. Instead, they are **interpreted through personal narratives or informed by broader humanitarian perspectives**. Whether through critique or celebration, these expressions constitute a **dialogue with the global condition**, reflecting the artist's role as both observer and participant in the cultural dynamics of our time.

The **conceptual evolution** of art is also mirrored in its **spatial and material transformations**. While outdoor exhibitions and public installations are not new phenomena, what distinguishes contemporary practices is the **site-specificity, ephemerality, and immersive nature** of such works. Artists are now crafting **multi-sensory experiences**, simulating environments, manipulating perception, and **using real-world spaces as integral components** of their artistic narrative. These innovations have been made possible by **technological permeation**—tools that enable the visualization of abstract concepts and interaction across media.

This technological expansion, initially prominent in the **technologically advanced West**, has led many artists to draw from not only artistic traditions but also from **disciplines like computer science, robotics, biotechnology, and engineering**. While this has propelled art into new realms of inquiry and visibility, it has also inadvertently created a **divide between traditional and new media practitioners**. Those who continue to work in painting, sculpture, or drawing are sometimes unjustly marginalized or seen as obsolete—a mischaracterization that disregards the **timeless relevance of traditional techniques**, even within digitally driven contexts.

3.3. RETHINKING MEDIA HIERARCHIES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Contemporary art today encompasses a broad spectrum of **media and modalities**, including computer programming, animation, internet-based interaction, video, performance, and other technologically mediated forms. This diversity, while enriching, has also led to an **unhelpful dichotomy**—one that draws **rigid distinctions between 'new media' artists and practitioners of so-called 'traditional' art forms**. New media is often heralded as the most modern, dynamic, and intellectually progressive trend, whereas traditional media is dismissed as outdated, static, or even obsolete. Such a binary view, however, is not only reductive but also **flawed in its extremism**.

This **polarization of media practice** results in the marginalization of certain artists and approaches. On one end, there exists an **uncritical celebration of technological art** as inherently avant-garde. On the other, some critics reject new media as a **superficial import or mimicry of Western aesthetics**, questioning its authenticity within non-Western contexts. Both positions fail to account for the **hybrid, transnational, and pluralistic nature of contemporary artistic production**, particularly in a globalized cultural landscape where boundaries are both blurred and redefined.

Globalism, rather than enforcing divisions, encourages a **fluid exchange of ideas, techniques, and philosophies** across geographies and disciplines. This has opened up **new pathways for artistic expression**, where **assimilation from varied sources** is not only possible but often central to the creative process. In this context, it becomes essential to re-evaluate how we define and validate new media art—not as a rupture from the past, but as a **continuation and evolution** of artistic traditions adapted to changing cultural and technological realities.

This **shift in artistic practice** is mirrored in the **transformation of exhibition spaces**. The traditional "white cube" gallery, once seen as a neutral and authoritative space for art display, is increasingly being replaced or reconfigured into **flexible, adaptive environments**. These new spaces accommodate the unique demands of media art—whether in scale,

interactivity, temporality, or multi-sensory immersion. The adaptability of such spaces reflects the **inherent flexibility of new media**, which resists static framing and instead invites engagement, participation, and recontextualization.

At this critical juncture, several **urgent questions** arise:

Does the celebration of new media implicitly imply the **death of painting** or the obsolescence of traditional forms?

Is new media art given undue legitimacy or primacy simply because of its **association with Western technological advancement**?

Are we, perhaps unconsciously, reinforcing a **hegemonic binary** of the "innovative West" and the "imitative East"?

Such questions challenge us to interrogate not only the **structural hierarchies within the global art world**, but also our own assumptions about **authenticity, innovation, and legitimacy**. It is imperative to move beyond simplistic dichotomies and recognize that both new and traditional media can coexist, influence, and enrich each other. In doing so, we acknowledge that artistic value lies not in the medium alone, but in the **conceptual integrity, critical engagement, and cultural resonance** of the work itself.

3.4. NEW MEDIA ART IN INDIA: REDEFINING THE "NEW" IN CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

In the context of contemporary Indian visual art, **new media** challenges our very understanding of what constitutes "newness." As artistic practices evolve in tandem with technological innovation, we must ask: *What is truly "new" in new media?* With artists working across diverse terrains—including zero-gravity simulations, military interfaces, and immersive installations—it becomes clear that today's innovations can quickly become tomorrow's obsolescence. This constant flux necessitates a **critical reassessment** of the term "new media," urging us to reconsider it not merely as a category of tools or platforms, but as an **attitudinal shift** in art-making.

Rather than reinforcing binary oppositions between traditional and digital, or painting and technology, the current moment calls for **integrated practices** that **bridge conceptual and material divides**. In India, several contemporary artists are leading this convergence by maintaining a **strong allegiance to painting**, while simultaneously **engaging with the aesthetics, language, and politics of new media**. Their work demonstrates a **hybrid sensibility**—not rejecting one medium in favor of another, but rather using technological tools to **extend the conceptual and formal possibilities** of painting.

This reconciliatory and exploratory spirit is evident in the practices of artists such as **Sudhir Patwardhan, Jitish Kallat, Subodh Gupta**, and **Prajakta Palav**, whose works reflect the lived experiences of **locality within globalized frameworks**. Their art captures the **tensions, transformations, and dislocations** of the contemporary Indian socio-cultural landscape, offering **visual narratives grounded in personal and communal memory**.

Conversely, artists like **T.V. Santhosh, Baiju Parthan**, and **Ranbir Kaleka** interrogate the **anxieties, abstractions, and consequences** of globalism on a more **universal and decontextualized plane**. These artists engage with themes such as **media saturation, war, ecological crisis, and virtuality**, pushing the expressive potential of painting and multimedia forms to **uncover new conceptual terrains**. Despite their differing focal points, both groups of artists exhibit a **commitment to painting as a conceptual practice**, while **transgressing its traditional boundaries** when the medium demands it.

Together, these artists represent a **spectrum of hybrid practices**—where new media is not defined by novelty alone but by its **capacity to reflect and respond to contemporary realities**. This approach refuses separatism and instead embraces **pluralism, adaptability, and conceptual integrity**, signaling a **mature phase in Indian contemporary art** where the "new" is constantly being **reimagined rather than merely adopted**.

Interpreting the "Local" in Contemporary Urban Art: Sudhir Patwardhan and Prajakta Palav

As previously discussed, artists engaging with local concerns often draw upon the **enduring socio-cultural dynamics of their environment**, using the concept of the "local" as both **a site of investigation and a medium of critique**. For **Sudhir Patwardhan** and **Prajakta Palav**, the **urban landscape—particularly that of Mumbai—serves as a canvas** that encapsulates transformation, erasure, and socio-economic disparity.

Patwardhan's works offer a **multi-layered perspective on Mumbai**, portraying it not as a static metropolis but as a city **in perpetual flux**. For him, the consequences of globalization are not abstract but **deeply inscribed in the material transformations of the city**. The proliferation of **elevated highways, glass-and-steel corporate towers, and sea links** symbolize a form of **progress that is simultaneously erasing the city's industrial and cultural**

memory. The once-thriving mill districts—emblems of a working-class identity—have been **replaced by upscale shopping malls and commercial complexes**, rendering **the cityscape a palimpsest of historical erasure and neoliberal reconstruction**. Patwardhan views the city as a **fluid archive**, where **boundaries are redrawn**, and identities redefined. His urban narrative also highlights **sharpening socio-spatial inequalities**, with the influx of migrants into "the land of opportunity" resulting in **expanding slums and informal settlements**, in stark contrast to the elite enclaves of South Mumbai and the gated luxury of new suburban high-rises. This **fragmentation of urban identity** destabilizes the idealized vision of a cosmopolitan "megapolis" (Kapur & Rajadhyaksha), exposing **deep-rooted class and spatial divisions**.

In contrast, **Prajakta Palav's work engages the urban landscape through a personal and ironic lens**, exploring the **hierarchical tensions between city and suburb**. Rather than framing them as binary opposites, she treats these spaces as **interlinked, coexisting contradictions**. Drawing on **photographic references**, her paintings exhibit **photo-realistic precision**, yet are imbued with **satirical undertones**. In her visual lexicon, a **Hockney-esque clear water vortex** is juxtaposed against **leaking sewer pipes**, while the **claustrophobic interiors of middle-class homes resemble militarized barracks**. In her **"Kakura" series**, she presents hyper-realistic renditions of **urban waste and garbage dumps**, elevating them to **gallery-worthy artifacts**. This deliberate aestheticization serves to **ironize the invisibility of these "unpleasant" urban zones**, arguing against their erasure by the glossy surfaces of modernity. Palav's work critiques the selective visibility of urban spaces—**what the city chooses to showcase versus what it seeks to hide**—and asserts that even the most neglected corners possess a form of resistant presence.

Both artists, in their distinct yet overlapping approaches, **interrogate the visual and ideological contradictions of urban transformation** in post-liberalization India. Their works act as **critical counter-narratives to the sanitized, celebratory images of urban growth**, highlighting instead the **invisible labor, displacement, and social stratification** embedded within the contemporary Indian city.

Locating Identity and the "Local" in the Works of Jitish Kallat and Subodh Gupta

Contemporary Indian artists such as **Jitish Kallat** and **Subodh Gupta** engage critically with notions of **identity, marginality, and locality** in the context of a globalizing world. While both artists explore the tensions between the local and the global, they do so through distinct conceptual and aesthetic strategies.

Jitish Kallat offers a deeply **personal and ethical interpretation of urban life**, drawing attention to the **invisible and marginalized figures who inhabit the peripheries of the cityscape**. His visual narratives foreground everyday encounters with street vendors—such as those selling books, flowers, or toys at traffic signals—as well as with beggars, whom he frames not as objects of pity or social failure, but as **emblems of survival and resilience**. Kallat deliberately **reclaims these figures from their socially stigmatized positions**, reimagining them as **"heroic survivors"** of urban chaos. Through this lens, the city becomes a **moral terrain**, where questions of visibility, agency, and dignity are continually negotiated. His work elevates the mundane and the overlooked, emphasizing how **urban marginality reflects deeper fractures within the social fabric**.

In contrast, **Subodh Gupta** takes a **broader view of identity**, moving beyond the confines of urban marginality to engage with **transnational and diasporic subjectivities**. His interest lies in the **fluid and layered construction of the "local"**, which, in his practice, is never fixed but rather **continuously shaped by global flows, migration, and displacement**. For Gupta, the term "local" does not point to a static geography, but rather to a **relational concept**—a constellation of shifting identities and hybrid affiliations. His artworks such as *Bihari* and *Saat Samundar Paar* delve into the **tensions between insider/outsider statuses**, exploring how individuals from peripheral regions navigate their identities across regional and global contexts.

Gupta's fascination with **everyday objects—steel utensils, tiffin carriers, suitcases, or baggage**—infuses his art with a **symbolic vocabulary of migration, domesticity, and cultural memory**. The act of **packing and carrying**, repeatedly referenced in his sculptural installations, becomes a **metaphor for the migrant's identity**, caught between departure and arrival, home and elsewhere. In his work, even utilitarian items become **semiotic carriers of tradition, labor, and rootedness**. His frequent evocation of **airports and transit zones** serves as a powerful metaphor for **the fluid terrain of global identity**, highlighting spaces where **individual and cultural selfhood is crystallized, challenged, or redefined**.

Together, Kallat and Gupta chart **different but intersecting cartographies of identity**—one grounded in the moral immediacy of the urban street, the other in the symbolic, often ambivalent landscapes of global mobility. Both artists

offer **nuanced critiques of post-liberalization India**, revealing how identity is continually forged at the intersection of **local histories, global economies, and lived experience**.

Global Sensitivity, Media, and the Reconfiguration of Identity in New Media Art: T. V. Santhosh and Baiju Parthan

One of the defining aspects of globalization is the **deepening impact of global sensitivity at the individual level**, wherein personal experiences and identity formations are increasingly shaped by transnational narratives, media representations, and global economic structures. This **emerging universality**—however fragmented or tentative—has created **a sense of psychological and cultural cohesion** across geographical boundaries. Contemporary Indian artists such as **T. V. Santhosh** and **Baiju Parthan** have critically examined these developments, interrogating how global phenomena—ranging from terrorism to consumer capitalism—are constructed, perceived, and internalized in the public psyche.

T. V. Santhosh focuses on the **nature of mediated violence**, particularly terrorism, and how it is **represented and consumed through global news media**. His work derives its visual language from **press images and televised broadcasts**, which he renders in a **partially developed photographic negative format**. This aesthetic technique not only introduces **visual ambiguity and distortion**, but also functions as a metaphor for the **uncertainty and manipulation inherent in media narratives**. Santhosh challenges the viewer to consider the **constructed nature of "truth"** in the digital era: "Can these images truly identify terrorists?" he asks. "Do the faces of terrorism differ from country to country? Do explosions trigger different emotional responses depending on geographic or cultural context?"

Through his altered images of violence, Santhosh **disrupts the visceral, immediate reaction typically evoked by scenes of suffering**. By aestheticizing trauma and rendering it unfamiliar, he **forces the viewer to linger, to analyze**, and ultimately to **question the reliability of representation**. In this sense, Santhosh **moves from a contextual depiction of events to a generalized, decontextualized inquiry** into how violence is visualized and understood across borders. His practice underscores the **fragility of perception** in a hyper-mediated world, where **the spectacle of suffering risks becoming normalized or even commodified**.

In parallel, **Baiju Parthan** explores the **technological and economic dimensions of globalization**, with a particular emphasis on **consumerism, simulation, and the commodification of culture**. His work critiques the **hyperreal landscapes of the globalized market economy**, which he sees as driving an **insatiable consumption of cultural symbols and digital aesthetics**. Parthan employs **irony and layered symbolism** to examine how **perfection is engineered for mass appeal**, often at the cost of authenticity or meaning. His series on **"engineered fruits"** highlights the artificial idealization of products designed solely for consumption, becoming a metaphor for **cultural homogenization and aesthetic manipulation**.

Parthan's visual strategy is rooted in **interdisciplinary media**: he often integrates **digital code, altered graphics, mythological symbols, and virtual imagery** into his painted surfaces. His canvases are less about static representation and more about **dynamic interactions between the technological and the transcendental**. By combining **programmed codes with hand-painted visuals**, Parthan creates **hybrid works that oscillate between the virtual and the real**. In contrast to overt regionalism or ideological critique, Parthan adopts the stance of an **engaged participant in a post-global world**, producing work that is both **analytically charged and visually immersive**.

Together, T. V. Santhosh and Baiju Parthan offer **complementary critiques of global culture**: where Santhosh **scrutinizes the ethics of media imagery and emotional desensitization**, Parthan **interrogates the psychological and aesthetic consequences of a hyper-consumerist, digitized world**. Both artists position themselves not merely as observers but as **critical interlocutors**, prompting audiences to **rethink their relationship with information, technology, and the visual environment** in the digital age.

Ranbir Kaleka: Between Canvas and Screen – A Mediation of Painting and New Media

While many contemporary Indian artists have responded to globalism by adopting **new media as an autonomous, self-sufficient mode of artistic production**, **Ranbir Kaleka** occupies a distinctive space in this discourse. Kaleka's work is **rooted in the tradition of painting**, yet it **seamlessly transitions into moving image**, creating an **oscillating aesthetic** that blurs the binary between stillness and motion, tradition and innovation, the tangible and the ephemeral.

Unlike artists who treat new media as an isolated or exclusively technological practice, Kaleka approaches it as an **extension of the painter's sensibility**. His process often begins with a **pictorial imagination**, which then evolves into time-based media. In works like *Man Threading a Needle* and *He Was a Good Man*, Kaleka demonstrates his hallmark

style: video projections layered over painted surfaces, creating a **dreamlike fusion of light, color, and motion**. These works **resist easy categorization**, appearing at first as paintings, but revealing themselves—over time—as living images. The viewer becomes gradually aware of the subtle movement, which emerges not as cinematic drama but as a **poetic unfolding of time**.

Kaleka has often stated that he **treats video light as a painter would treat pigment**, manipulating it not for narrative propulsion but for **atmospheric and emotional resonance**. This approach reconfigures the very idea of temporality in art. While traditional paintings suggest a suspended moment and videos evoke linear progression, Kaleka's hybrid works **create a looped temporality**, inviting **sensory immersion** rather than passive observation. His work challenges the viewer to **slow down**, to dwell within the liminal space between the image and its motion, between perception and recognition.

In doing so, Kaleka effectively **dismantles the constructed dichotomy between painting and new media**. Rather than framing new media as a rupture from tradition, he presents it as a **logical extension**, a **deepening of the painterly mode** through the absorption of technological tools. In the context of globalization—where art practices often risk becoming dislocated imitations of Western digital trends—Kaleka offers a **reflective and culturally grounded model of innovation**. His work suggests that the task is not merely to define or reinforce the gap between media forms, but to **forge a new practice through thoughtful synthesis**.

Ultimately, Ranbir Kaleka's oeuvre exemplifies how contemporary artists can **navigate globalism without surrendering to aesthetic homogenization**, using **new media as a bridge between historical consciousness and future possibilities**.

Shilpa Gupta: Surveillance, Camouflage, and the Poetics of Resistance

Shilpa Gupta's artistic practice is profoundly **trans-cultural in scope**, even as it remains **anchored in local specificities**. She deftly navigates the terrains of **video, photography, found objects, sound, and performance**, using these media to probe contemporary anxieties—**desire, belief, fear, and the precariousness of identity**—especially within contexts shaped by **surveillance, militarization, and digital interconnectedness**. Like many of her contemporaries, Gupta recognizes the **internet as a central node of modern life**, not only as a communication tool but as a **space of power, control, and potential subversion**. Consequently, her work often **embraces cutting-edge technology** as both medium and message, creating experiences that challenge viewers to rethink the familiar.

One of Gupta's most striking video installations features a **recurrent female figure**, projected in various attires—each costume suggesting a different role, yet all **rooted in a singular, consistent presence** that implicates the artist herself. These transformations do not indicate a change in identity but rather an **exploration of how identity is mediated through appearances and external forces**. The use of **camouflage uniform** is particularly significant. Initially evocative of military discipline and power, in Gupta's work, it becomes a **fluid signifier**: oscillating between **a symbol of authoritarian control and a commodified fashion trend**. This interplay reflects Gupta's critical engagement with how militarized aesthetics have seeped into everyday life, often without resistance.

The **camouflage**, then, serves multiple purposes. It signifies not only the **blurring of boundaries between civilian and militarized spaces**, but also gestures towards a **quiet resistance**—a commentary on how **Western hegemonies** co-opt and normalize symbols of control through consumer culture. Furthermore, the **interactive element** of the work, where the viewer can **control the movement of seven female avatars** through programmed commands, adds another layer of meaning. These automated instructions and declarations—projected on the floor in front of the figures—evoke the **mechanization of voice and agency** in contemporary life. The illusion of choice and freedom is subverted by the **pre-programmed nature of their responses**, suggesting a critique of how individuality is often absorbed into the algorithmic logic of modern systems.

Gupta's work ultimately challenges the viewer to confront the **intersection of aesthetics, control, and resistance**. Her installations are not merely visual experiences, but **conceptual terrains** that interrogate the very frameworks—political, cultural, and technological—that shape human interaction in the digital age.

Sheba Chhachhi: Layered Narratives and Feminist Interventions in New Media

Sheba Chhachhi—a photographer, women's rights activist, writer, filmmaker, and installation artist—has emerged as a significant figure in contemporary Indian art, especially for her **deeply reflective engagement with gender, urban transformation, memory, and cultural histories**. While her early practice was closely linked to **grassroots activism and feminist photojournalism**, over time Chhachhi's aesthetic evolved into one that **balances political urgency with**

contemplative, multi-sensory experiences. Her trajectory reflects a shift from direct activist visuality to an art practice that is **layered, elliptical, and immersive**, drawing upon the slow unfolding of meaning through **multimedia installation**.

Her new media work, *Winged Pilgrims: A Chronicle from Asia*, exemplifies this synthesis of **aesthetic complexity and political critique**. Spanning three floors of the gallery space, this large-scale, multi-part installation employs **sculpture, light boxes, recorded soundscapes, and video** to construct a rich sensory environment. Using **iconographic motifs** such as birds, flowing robes, and shifting landscapes, Chhachhi meditates on themes of **migration, displacement, spiritual searching, and the transformations wrought by globalization**. The work does not merely depict these realities; it **invites viewers to inhabit the layered experiences of mobility, memory, and loss** that define contemporary cultural dislocation across Asia.

Rather than presenting globalization as a monolithic or homogenizing force, Chhachhi constructs a **parabolic narrative** that traces connections between **ancient pilgrimage routes and contemporary migratory movements**. In doing so, she offers a counter-narrative to dominant discourses on mobility—one that foregrounds **resilience, hybridity, and spiritual continuity**. Her practice resists the linear, fast-paced rhythm of conventional digital media, choosing instead a **deliberate slowness and spatial layering** that echoes **ritual, contemplation, and embodied memory**.

Crucially, **Chhachhi's integration of new media technologies**—from animated photography to ambient sound and projection mapping—does not serve spectacle but becomes a **means of expanding the narrative possibilities of feminist and postcolonial discourse**. Her installations function as **palimpsests**, where temporalities overlap and where technology acts as a conduit for storytelling, memory-work, and critical reflection.

In *Winged Pilgrims*, as in her broader oeuvre, Sheba Chhachhi enacts a powerful **feminist reimagining of space, time, and identity** within the global context. By fusing traditional iconographies with digital technologies, she **reclaims the terrain of new media art for nuanced storytelling and socio-political engagement**, carving out a space that is at once spiritual, political, and profoundly human.

Thukral & Tagra: Immersive Interventions and Hybrid Identities in New Media Art

Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra, known collectively as **Thukral & Tagra**, represent a dynamic force in contemporary Indian art, renowned for their **multidisciplinary approach** that spans **painting, sculpture, video, interactive installations, gaming, performance, and design**. Their collaborative practice disrupts conventional boundaries between art forms, forging **a multimodal, participatory environment** that redefines the relationship between the artwork and the viewer.

From the outset, their work has been **deeply engaged with themes of migration, globalization, and consumerism**, particularly as they pertain to **aspirational middle-class India**. Their early installations—marked by pop aesthetics, glossy surfaces, and stylized iconography—offered critical reflections on **diasporic dreams**, especially the **Punjabi male fantasy of emigration to the West**, often encapsulated in the metaphor of the "airport" or "visa queue." These works deftly **satirized global consumer culture** while interrogating the construction of **Indian identity** in a world increasingly shaped by **media, mobility, and material desire**.

What distinguishes Thukral & Tagra's practice is their commitment to **public engagement and participatory art**. Moving beyond gallery confines, they create **immersive environments** that incorporate **augmented reality, gaming mechanics, and audience interaction**, thereby **blurring the lines between play and politics, art and activism**. In projects like *Walk of Life* and *Pollinator*, they have employed interactive formats—such as board games or responsive interfaces—to engage audiences in **issues of social justice, environmental ethics, and public health**.

Their work seeks to **challenge the disciplinary boundaries of contemporary art**, not only by integrating multiple media but also by **redefining the function of the artist as a facilitator of dialogue and co-creation**. Their installations function as **laboratories of perception**, where **users become co-producers**, and where **aesthetic experience is inseparable from critical reflection**.

Thukral & Tagra's hybrid visual language—drawing equally from **vernacular culture, digital interfaces, traditional Indian motifs, and global design trends**—embodies a **post-postmodern sensibility**. It is simultaneously playful and political, immersive and ironic. Through this eclectic, collaborative, and often experimental practice, they have carved a niche that not only **represents India's globalizing urban culture** but also **pushes the boundaries of what contemporary new media art can be**.

4. CONCLUSION

Art has always maintained a deep and dynamic relationship with the socio-political and technological developments of its time. The emergence of the digital era has profoundly reshaped the very definition and scope of "art." Today, **digital language functions as a catalyst** for interdisciplinary exploration and transformation, fostering new interactions across the domains of **art, science, technology, and culture**.

Contemporary artists like **Ranbir Kaleka**, **Shilpa Gupta**, **Sheba Chhachhi**, **Thukral & Tagra**, and **Jitish Kallat**, among others, are at the forefront of this transformation. Their practices challenge traditional artistic boundaries by embracing **interdisciplinary, multimedia, and technologically-integrated approaches**, creating works that resist confinement within a single genre. These practices reflect a **hybrid sensibility**, where media convergence, interactivity, and critical engagement redefine the experience of art in the 21st century.

As the theoretical structures of **postmodernism** and **deconstruction** wane, **new media art offers a promising framework** for rearticulating the role and relevance of contemporary art. Rather than being a mere substitute, **new media serves as an evolving paradigm**—one that fosters innovation, interactivity, and a pluralistic view of artistic production. In this evolving context, art must establish its own critical stance, responding to the demands and possibilities of the **emerging digital culture**.

Thus, the **intersection of technology and creative expression** not only expands the tools available to artists but also invites a rethinking of aesthetics, authorship, and audience participation. As artists continue to blur the lines between disciplines and platforms, new media art will play a central role in shaping the future of artistic inquiry and cultural production.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS
None

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