

From Painter to Interaction Designer: The Evolution of Visual Art Things

Danzhu Li¹ and Gerrit C. van der Veer²

¹ University Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands

² LuXun Academy of Fine Arts, Liaoning, 69121 China
lidanzhu@icloud.com, gerrit@acm.org

Abstract. This paper focuses on the application of interactive technology in contemporary visual art, showing that current development has traces in history. We sketch an evolution, from the creation of primitive visual art to interaction design and wearable art. We will discuss how the artist communicates through his creation with the intended audience, and how new technology enables the art work to interact autonomously.

Keywords: Interaction Design, Wearables, Stakeholders, Visual Art, Co-creation of Artistic Experiences.

1 Introduction

Goal of our research is to attract attention from different stakeholders in visual arts, so that they discover their changing roles and appreciate the potential for unknown mutual collaboration and cooperation. In this way, we may achieve an ecological art environment that supports survival, co-creation, and development. The current paper focuses on the application of interactive technology in contemporary visual art, showing that current development has traces in history. We sketch an evolution, from the creation of primitive visual art to interaction design and wearable art. In section 2, we will show how visual art has always resulted in an artifact (a “thing”) to communicate and to trigger understanding, experiences and behavior in an audience. In section 3, we will discover how in the new world this “thing” can be created to interact: Visual art is getting a true life of its own.

2 A Short Account of a Long History

Inter Interactive technology is developing rapidly. The Internet of things promotes interaction design for diverse audiences and many platforms, more practical, more interesting and more approachable than ever before. As Weiser points: “*The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it.*” [1].

Early visual art works were intended to present images (drawings, sculptures) of important entities: gods, people, hunting. Such is prehistoric art: It is a mixed state of aesthetic and non-aesthetic factors; it does not only serve practical purposes but also shows aesthetic consciousness. Prehistoric art with its simple form and immature techniques attracts modern audiences and artists, partly because the content does not show too many ideas and values, which is also the goal of some streams in modern art [2].

2.1 Ancient Visitors of the Caves Understood and Experienced their Art

Prehistoric cave- or rock paintings represent the earliest forms of painting that survived, traced back to 40 thousand years ago. We experience a hint of the spiritual life of our ancestors, and we may imagine the intended audience (members of the same tribe, gods), who were supposed to (actively) interpret and understand the message as depicted. Figure 1 shows how the artist triggers his audience to see a depicted hand, where “she” (According to archaeologists, these are feminine handprints.) in fact, paints the space around the (invisible) hand – the audience will “fill in” the invisible. The deer in Figure 2 may well represent something related to hunt, and tribal relatives of the artist will have known much more about the values, activities, and emotions related to the scene than modern viewers will ever be able to understand.



Figure 1 and 2.Lascaux Cave Paintings, France, Lascaux, ca 17000 BC[3]

2.2 How our Ancestors Understood Hierarchy and Holiness

Many early historic paintings refer to religious belief, to the existence of a soul. and to prayers: after death people hope to go to heaven or be reborn.



Figure 3 and 4. Egyptian mural. ca. 1100 B.C. [4]; Painting of the ode of the River Goddess, Gu Kaizhi, A.D. 348 – 409 [5].

Ancient Egyptian murals are characterized by realism combined with deformation and decoration; hieroglyphs and images are used together, and the artist always maintains the readability (Figure 3). The picture composition is arranged with characters in a line, with different sizes according to the status hierarchy and carefully represented distances to get the image size in order. Other than this, there is a stylized regularity and unity in the form of expression, and some artistic techniques have been used continuously over many centuries to form a unique style of Egyptian art. The intended audience, whether human or god, will have understood the emotional intentions and the esthetics in relation to their interpretation of the meaning.

Chinese early paintings, like early Egyptian art, use exaggeration to highlight the main characters, to distinguish their status hierarchy. For example, Lo River map (Figure 4). In early Christian religious painting, the halo is used to distinguish between saint and man (Figure 5). The same technique can be found in Buddhist paintings (Figure 6) where the Buddha

has a head halo and a back halo, which represents the highest level of this god. Some gods only feature a head light, indicating the difference in rank. This style shows many expressive techniques in painting and sculpture, representing the meaning as well as the specific style and workmanship, which is related to a specific period. These characteristics often are used as the basis for dating.



Figure 5 and 6. Halos of Christian gods (Giotto di Bondone: Ognissanti Madonna. Italy. c. 1310) and Buddhist gods (Dunhuang Mural. China. ca. 538 AD). [6][7]

2.3 From Painting to Writing – New Understanding Needed from the Audience

In a next stage of civilizations, series of images were used to represent spoken language, where the individual images were supposed to be named and the string of names was supposed to (actively) be interpreted by the audience as a spoken sentence. E.g., Mayan texts (Figure 7), Egyptian hieroglyphics (see right bottom corner of Figure 3), and Sumerian cuneiform script. In each case, this type of script was used extensively for several centuries.



Figure 7 and 8. Mayan text, Around the Christian era. [8] and Examples of transformation of Chinese characters “Horse” over time [9]

However, in due time, the images lost pictorial details and developed into new type of “abstract” art styles, like Chinese calligraphy. Chinese characters are the only words in the oldest text that are still in use today. Figure 8 provides an impression of the development over time. Chinese calligraphy has independent aesthetic value, so it can be appreciated as a visual art. It is a technique which people learn by copying and creating their own style. The

audience is supposed to appreciate the non-figural artistic qualities in relation to the meaning of the language.

2.4 Artists Challenge the Audience to be Active

New developments in artistic techniques allowed, and triggered, active behavior of the audience: horizontal Chinese scrolls require the viewer to walk the painting from the start of a story to the end. (Figure 9).



Figure 9 and 10. Han Xizai Evening Banquet, China, 937-975 AD [10]; John Gipkin, Bishop King Preaching at Paul's Cross before King James I. (1616) [13].

A different type of activity is triggered by the technique of panorama painting, displayed at a 360-degree angle, so that the audience can walk around and feel immersed in the visual representation of space. Like the Panorama Mesdag of Netherlands[11].

The development of perspective drawing provided the suggestion of 3D images as rendered on a 2D surface, an early type of virtual reality, that was originally sometimes considered to be what we now would label photorealistic. For example, (Figure 4) the perspective and composition of Chinese paintings are free and flexible. [12] Artists use this to break the limitation of time and space, aiming at a virtual reality in the viewer's mind. Later, artists took the liberty to play around and leave the interpretation of the suggested 3D work to the viewer. In due time, the photorealistic rendering was sometimes labeled “trompe-l’oeil” – showing that the intended interpretation of “normal” painting was already beyond photo realistic, and in this way the trompe-l’oeil requires the viewer to appreciate that this is not just a precise rendering but a successful attempt to confuse the experience of reality. (Figure10) This shows that appreciation and interpretation develops and changes with the development of (art) history. From early 3D glasses to

virtual reality, augmented reality, and so on, the audience of visual art changes in understanding, experience, and active participation.

3 Modern Times

In addition to the evolution of painting style and techniques, there is the development of color, material and composition. Developments are the result of artists applying new techniques, and of artists triggering their audience to give meaning and be active viewers to appreciate new types of experiences.

3.1 Visual Art Becomes an Acting Agent

Today, people can interact, talk, and touch art works in real space or by wearing equipment. Information and communication technology allows visual artists to develop active pieces of art. The art work can, in principle, be provided with sensors to be aware of the presence, the movements, the facial emotion features, and even the identity of individuals or groups of spectators. The art work could be programmed to react to spectator behavior or to trigger spectator behavior.

Experiences in the different contexts. From our analysis of museums, galleries, and international conferences we detect an amazing jump in the impact of technology on art. We will discuss some examples from the art exhibition at CHI 2016, San Jose: 'Breaking Andy Wall' (Figure11) is an interactive installation. When participants smash the canvas with the hammer, they can gradually break down the art piece. Through the playful destruction and reconfiguration of iconic art pieces, this installation reconfigures relations between art objects and their audiences [14].



Figure 11. Breaking Andy Wall, Interactive Art, Leo Kang

Pace Beijing Gallery is exhibiting works of Team lab from Japan: *Living Digital Forest: Lost, Immersed and Reborn* (May 20 - Oct 10, 2017), e.g., Sketch Town (Figure12), a town that grows and evolves according the pictures drawn by children. The "town" in this work will be developed by all participants. After the 2-D drawings of the cars, buildings, UFOs, and spaceships are completed, they are scanned, become 3-D and enter a virtual 3-D townscape. Every component of the town has a role to play; for example, the fire trucks and cranes serve to protect the town. Children can interact with the final townscape by touching individual components to alter their behavior [15].



Figure 12. Sketch Town,Co-Creation Art, Team lab, Japan, 2017[15]

Chinese artists Play with their Audience. The work "Life · Hair" (Figure13) was created by students at China Central Academy of Fine Arts. The main material is embroidered women's hair on silk. Artist uses technology (the principle of static electricity) to let the audience feel the delicate emotion of women through their touch. For technical solutions, the artist collaborated with students majoring in nuclear physics at the Tsinghua University. So, the artist calls it a cross-border art.

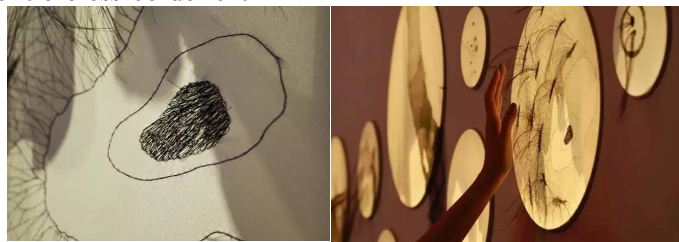


Figure 13. Life · Hair, Interactive Art, Chen Yu, Beijing, 2016[16]

The authors of work "Source" are Jiang Xiaoyan and Liu Hanlu, the Digital Media Art Institute, Shanghai Conservatory of Music (Figure14). In the picture, objects on the wall (simulated umbrella surface) can move with the music of the GuZheng. When the audience strikes the strings, the points on the umbrella surface are gradually converging into lines, and then covering the three sides of the umbrella, demonstrating that music can be relaxing.

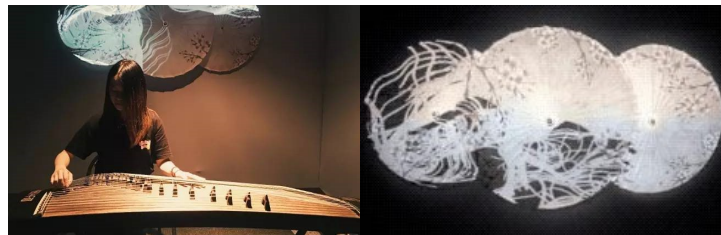


Figure 14. Source, Co-Creation Art, Jiang Xiaoyan and Liu Hanlu, Shanghai, 2017[17]

Interactive Textiles - Wearable Art. Wearable devices are not just a hardware device supported through software, data exchange, and online interaction [18]. Wearable devices may have powerful effect on our perception of life. Smart fabric in wearable devices is a very representative case. The trend is to make core computing modules smaller (to nanoscale units), and they are increasingly being used by artists. Philips Design gave (in 2007!) a glimpse of how will fashion look in 2020(Figure15): The Bubelle Dress changes its look instantaneously according to wearer emotional state. It is made up of two layers, the inner layer contains biometric sensors that pick up a person's emotions and projects them in colors on the second layer, the outer textile, though limited to the sensor module and bulky looks [19].



Figure 15 and 16. Bubelle Emotion Sensing Dress. Design group at Royal Philips Electronics. Netherlands. 2007 [19]; Fabric Strain Sensor, AdvanPro. Hong Kong [20]

In fact, both artists and scientists are aiming at a substance between visible and invisible. Sensors are become smaller, and smart fabric applications become more flexible and comfortable. The SOFTCEPTOR technology of fabric sensors is currently the world's softest smart sensor being developed by the Hong Kong Polytech University team. It's a piece of washable fabric as well as a strain gauge (Figure16) [20]. In contact with human skin it senses physiological information and activity signals. Artists can develop more creative channels allowing the audience and different stakeholders to work together to co-create [21].

4 New Techniques and Art Styles need Understanding from All

We followed examples of historical steps in visual art to interaction design. From ancient times to the present, technology and science have played a fundamental role, and people's understanding and application has been closely followed.

Artists and their works will be more diverse and the number of participants will increase. Stakeholders of current and future visual art should understand their new roles. Technology is still an alien domain for most artists. They should develop insight and learning ability for new techniques and paradigms, and consider blended creative patterns. It also requires stakeholders to study and develop components that are smaller, flexible and easy to use, so that more people will accept them. Universities should understand the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. Galleries should be tolerant and encourage

artists to innovate and experiment. Audiences should improve their understanding of contemporary art and become happy to co-create.

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