

Valerie Amend

DISCARDING 'DIGITAL':

On the Specificities of Computer-based Art

Valerie Amend is an independent researcher and curator, working as curatorial assistant at TRANSFER. Amend is also a Curatorial Fellow at the School of Visual Arts in New York, earning her master's in Curatorial Practice. Recent projects include the Young Curators Workshop for the 9th Berlin Biennale, and curatorial research at Dia Art Foundation.

When TRANSFER opened in March of 2013, “digital art” was still seen by many as a burgeoning field tethered to the economic structure of contemporary art. The gallery set out to present computer-based work in physical space with a fearless exploration of new formats, which was essential to championing the presence of new mediums. A few months prior to the gallery’s opening in September of 2012, Claire Bishop wrote the infamous article *Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media*, published in Artforum’s 50th Anniversary issue. Within this article, Bishop mused on the effects of new media, “the digital revolution opens up a new dematerialized, deauthored, and unmarketable reality of collective culture; at its worst, it signals the impending obsolescence of visual art itself.”

A reaction first penned by Lauren Cornell and Brian Droitcour, then responded to by Bishop was later published in Artforum’s January 2013 issue. This article, titled *Technical Difficulties*, presented Cornell’s and Droitcour’s argument that Bishop was unaware and uninterested in researching the achievements of art and networked technology. Bishop replied, explaining that her essay was an attempt to present the rejection of digital media in the “mainstream” art world. Years later, Bishop’s sentiments are still represented by the categorization of technology-inspired artwork as “digital” art. This categorization has led to the isolation of computer-based artwork from the larger discourse of contemporary art. Broadly speaking, digital art is defined by the methods used to create it. Work produced using digital technologies such as computers, cameras, applications, or algorithms (to name a few) fall into this category. The wide-reaching moniker of digital art simplifies process-based practices, camouflaging the intricacies of contemporary artists and isolating their work from the art world.

Kelani Nichole, TRANSFER director, explains how she sees her artists firstly as contemporary artists. Furthermore, her gallery acts as an exhibition space to explore the friction between computer-based studio practice and its physical instantiation. Nichole uses procedural and conceptual attributes to describe TRANSFER’s exhibitions: time-based media, generative software, looped moving image, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) are just a few examples that detail the diversity of practices seen in the gallery.

Take the work of American artist Claudia Hart. Hart often works within 3D imagery and animation to examine the role of technology in relation to nature and identity. Her AR decor, from the series *The Flower Matrix* (2017), was most recently exhibited at this year's Moving Image Fair. Her installation included vinyl wallpaper covering two archways and a series of delicate ceramic plates, both featuring QR-like image tags. Viewers can interact with this work through their smart phones, using the application Layar. For Hart, this app acts as a looking glass for her animations. When viewed through the app, ornate, emoji-petaled flowers bloom and flourish over backgrounds of abstracted colors and QR codes. With this series, Hart transforms the banalities of quotidian domestic settings into livable computer-coded landscapes. Her work invites AR into the home—removing the barrier between lived and virtual experience.

Although this piece is digitally born, quantifying it as solely digital art does a grave disservice to her innovation. In place of digital, one could refer to works from *The Flower Matrix* as theater, installation, augmented reality, interior design, or immersive experience. Categorizing this artwork as digital art limits its reach into the larger sphere of contemporary art. In a similar manner to painters or sculptors working today, Hart uses the tools and experiences of the contemporary moment to create beautiful interactive experiences.

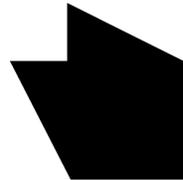




Big Screen is the current exhibition on view at TRANSFER by Berlin-based, Israeli artist Alma Alloro. In her second solo exhibition at the gallery, the artist stitched a progression of expertly crafted patterns that culminate in a

stunning tableau of six geometric quilts and two videos. Alloro scanned in each pattern variation of her quilts to make frames for wonderfully abstract stop animation films. The absence of networked technology in Alloro's work creates a unique narrative—she taught herself how to quilt especially for this body of work. Though this exhibition is not inspired by digital practice, it still employs looped moving image and scans. Alloro that finds the combination of traditional craft and animation allow her a distinctive voice that resists categorization. She writes, “I am interested in moments in the history of media where a medium is still new and unexplored. The decision to connect quilt and animation comes from a desire to create a unique framework.”

Stop-motion, augmented reality, installation, animation, moving image, and craft are a variety of terms that can be used to describe the work of Hart and Alloro. By using specific and procedural descriptions, TRANSFER aims to situate their artists as contemporary artists, first and foremost.



TRANSFER explores the friction between distributed studio practice and its physical instantiation. The gallery supports artists working with computer-based practices to realize aggressive installation projects within our walls, and exhibits internationally to engage the growing market for media-based artworks.

TRANSFER Gallery :: 1030 Metropolitan Ave Brooklyn, NY 11211

More info: <http://TRANSFER.gallery>