

# Digitisation in the Contemporary Art World

How is the digital being used by the contemporary artist and influenced by the art market to expand on what we understand a 'gallery space' to be?

by Rory Watson

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The integration of the digital with the art world has enabled the contemporary artist an opportunity to re-evaluate how their artworks can be presented. This essay explores the changes digitisation has put in motion concerning the relationship between artist and gallery. In doing so, discusses how artists are utilising the digital universe to promote themselves to a wider audience, and make use of virtual spaces which echo the ideologies of a physical gallery space. Furthermore, how the current trend in the art market suggests how the digitals inclusion within an artist's practice dictates their desire to exhibit on virtual platforms.

The digital is being used by the contemporary artist as a medium, however, with some artworks limited to consumption outside a physical space, this essay questions whether these virtual spaces can rival physical spaces in terms of exhibiting art. There is the argument for the need to be ontologically present with artworks, yet with the art market adapting to the digitisation of the art world, more and more sales are being made online. This therefore results in a form of credibility for online platforms, yet how does it compare to the benefits a physical exhibitional space awards artists? Furthermore, the digital has enabled artists to explore intangible artworks, contextually confined to virtual platforms such as social media. Through this, this essay explores whether it is possible to suggest these public network sites can function as a gallery space. To explore these topics, it's necessary to consider what the term 'gallery space' entails, and whether artists and organisations have successfully managed to expand on what we believe makes a 'gallery space' to encompass the digital platforms of viewing art.

The most recent Hiscox online art trade report states: "We are likely to see increasing convergence between online-only businesses and traditional art businesses in the coming years." (Hiscox, 2018, p.9) This suggests the digitisation of the art world is in progress, with technology becoming a more integral part of society and the art industry, causing traditional art businesses to conform with the trend of digitisation. However, self created platforms, such as 'The Widget Art Gallery' (Passa, 2018), suggest how artists can bypass the need to exhibit in a physical gallery altogether to reach their desired audience, and still earn the exhibiting artists the recognition of partaking in an exhibition of their work. Thus strengthening the argument that a 'gallery space' can be expanded to encompass the viewing platforms dwelling in the digital realm. On the other hand, artist Richard Prince appropriated other artist's posted work from the social media site Instagram. ('New Portraits', 2015) Through the act of reposting and sharing, Prince suggests the web is subject to a form of sampling which results in the artist's name being lost, thus providing an argument as to how digital platforms can differ to their physical counterparts.

The integration of the digital with the art world has provided artists with the opportunity to self promote themselves as artists, either by creating a platform or utilising an already established site able to reach millions of people globally. However the question remains as to whether artists are 'exposing' their work or 'exhibiting' online in this modern age.

## 1. Materiality: The Digital as a Medium

In order to unravel whether digital platforms can function as a gallery space, it's necessary to examine how contemporary artists have materialised the technologies available to us. Artworks viewed on a screen can arguably be transforming phones, tablets and computers into site-specific canvases, converting the world as we know it to function as one wall-less gallery space. Thus formulating the argument digital galleries cannot exist at all, as an artwork requires a level of physicality, with the screen acting as a material. It can also be suggested these screens function as the doorway of entry to the realm of digitised galleries, and therefore enabling a gallery space to exist within the virtual, and an artwork to possess no physicality. This consequently raises the question whether a materiality for the artist can exist with no physical presence, or if the screen in which a digital work is visualised on becomes part of the artwork itself? Furthermore, whether a material can simultaneously function as a platform for artworks. Thus answering whether artists who are materialising the digital are also successfully exhibiting their work in a digitised gallery space.

Firstly, can an artwork exist solely digitally, or are physical components a requirement for their existence? Du Preez suggests: "Through its materiality the art object exists physically in the world." (Du Preez, 2008, p.30) This implies for an art object to exist, the materiality directly relates to a physical form. She also draws a comparison between materiality and the mediums used; the "... 'stuff' that it is made of or created from such as the bronze sculpture, the oil painting or the woven basket." (Du Preez, 2008, p.30) Therefore suggesting that a materiality is the visible, tangible component, the mass and the structure of an art object. Thus implying the screen becomes a medium for the digital artist, and part of the artwork itself. When applying this theory to artworks visualised on social media, such as Cindy Sherman's made-public instagram feed, as seen in figure 1 ('cindysherman', 2017), it suggests the consumers technological object to view the artwork becomes part of the artwork itself. Thus as soon as it is accessed, the artwork is being exhibited in the physical space the viewer resides, be it outside in a park, or in a cafe.

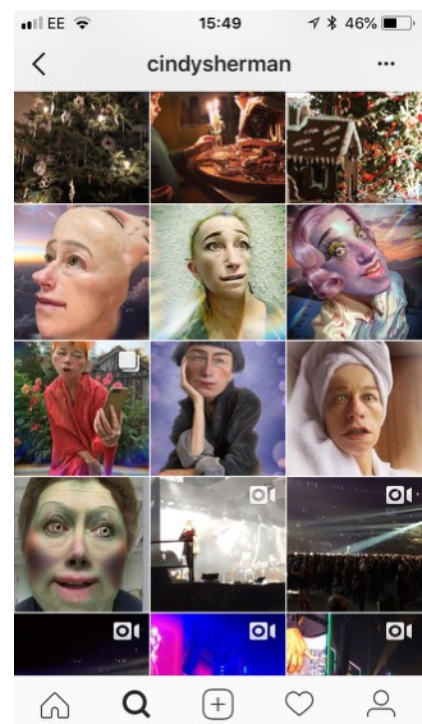


Figure 1. Exhibition view. 'cindysherman' by Cindy Sherman. Instagram. (2017)

On the other hand, it can be argued a material for an artwork doesn't have to possess any physical form. This can be seen through analysing Jacob Kassay's burnished mirror paintings such as 'Untitled' made in 2009, pictured in figure 2 (Kassay, 2009). His paintings reference the existence of the digital world through the representations of reality a mirror exudes. The digital world is an extension of the real, it reflects our world as a constructed reality. In conversation with Kassay, art historian Alex Bacon describes the kind of aesthetics these paintings possess as: "somewhere between the "real" world that is reflected, and the particular aesthetic world a painting inhabits." (Kassay, 2013, para.6) This suggests that the paintings represent a paintings role within the art world as a window into a created reality. However, they also represent reality as we know it; reflecting our 'real' world back into view - therefore comparable to a digital screen. Bacon also states the



Figure 2. 'Untitled' by Jacob Kassay (2009)

paintings are a suggestion which "relates to our forging of identity through the endless stream of images we seamlessly upload and download." (Bacon, 2016, para.44) Avatars conjured through the use of social media portray alternate personas to their creators. Here Bacon is suggesting that the paintings act as a platform to reference the created reality of forged identities through the blurred reflections in the paintings, as well as the real world which is still, yet out of focus, perceivable. Thus, the paintings are raising awareness into how the digital is effecting reality as a constructed extension of what is 'real.' With this in mind, Kassay's mirrors are directly informed from the existence of the digital world, intractable through a physical form using no digital components, yet utilising the digital as a material. Therefore it's possible to argue, in contrast to Du Preez, that a materiality for an artist doesn't require a physical identity. Thus suggesting works visualised online can exist in their virtual form as an artwork, meaning the screens used to visualise these works act as a doorway to the digitised gallery space where they reside.

Therefore, returning to Shermans Instagram posts ('cindysherman', 2017), the artworks can exist with no physical material, which in turn enables the social media site (Instagram) to be interpreted as the platform for which they are viewed, functioning as an exhibitional space. However, does Sherman successfully adopt Instagram as a gallery space, or just a platform for which her work is able to be viewed?

## 2. Social Media: Instagram as a Gallery Space

In a discussion of Sherman's Instagram posts, the acclaimed artist and freelance writer, Becker, states: "The work seems to be made specifically for Instagram, and not as a physical work for a future show in a gallery." (Becker, 2017, para.3) This quote suggests that her intentions were to 'exhibit' her works through posting them online with 'followers' acting as a worldwide audience. This provides an argument depicting a similarity between a gallery and social media. Furthermore, asks: how could the 'selfies' have been revealed in their desired medium and location, exhibited, without having been visualised in a physical gallery space? This requires an exploration into why Sherman shared her artworks on Instagram, and how it's crucial they remained un-exhibited in a physical gallery - for if they were, her point to raise awareness of how artists can be seen to be using Instagram, becomes nullified. This would then render her 'artworks' as just another form of 'Image Spam' (Steyerl, 2012) (A term coined by Steyerl describing the false representations humanity portrays of themselves through uploads to social media, which in turn affect how the current generation will be imagined in the future.)

"Instagram is not art but a digital dumping ground" (Becker, 2017, para.9) This statement suggests that artworks cannot be exhibited on Instagram as they would be embedded within a platform full of images that documents people's lives with no relation to the label of 'art' - unlike a gallery where artworks are selected. However, what if the irrelevant posts were made relevant to the context of the 'exhibited' art? Sherman relies on other people's uploaded imagery to make her posted 'selfies' considered art, she relies on the 'rubbish' in the 'dumping ground' to contextualise her 'selfies'. The artworks exaggerate the constructed reality of digital uploads, making us wonder what is 'real' and what isn't. This is due to them being surrounded by the 'Image Spam' (Steyerl, 2012) flooding the digital world, crucially accessible in the same format and on the same platform (Instagram). Therefore Sherman is suggesting that if her works can be recognised as 'art', then Instagram can act as a gallery. Ergo, suggesting that the term 'gallery space' can be expanded to encompass artworks exposed on social media platforms.

Whereas Sherman's work seems to produce an example of how the contemporary artist is able to utilise the virtual as a gallery space, Richard Prince's works from the 'New Portraits' exhibition at the Gagosian argue otherwise, portrayed in figure 3 ('New Portraits', 2015). Through appropriating artist's work from sources that have reposted the work themselves, a copyright-nightmare case was created.

A reporter suggests 'New Portraits' discusses

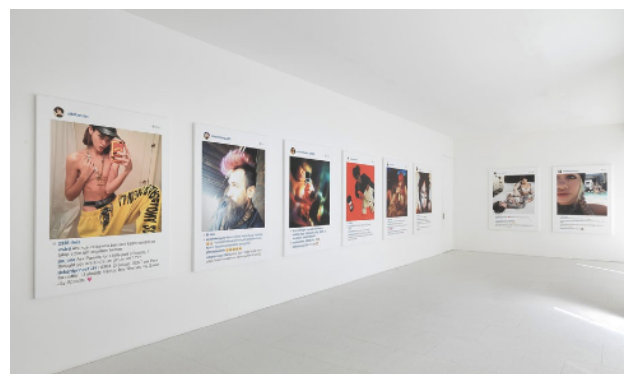


Figure 3. Exhibition view. 'New Portraits' by Richard Prince. Gagosian. (2015)

how “The notion of authorship is disappearing, particularly with images, because anyone can post any photo to Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, or Instagram. No one asks who took the photo.” (Ferro, 2015, para.13) In terms of whether exhibiting on social media platforms is accessible to artists, this quote suggests how Prince’s exhibition demonstrates an opposing argument. It provides insight into how online art is allowing the appropriation of an artist’s work, which in turn, allows the artist’s credit to be stolen. Prince’s screenshots discuss how the digital is having an effect on the contemporary art world through lack of authorship. Ferro states: “Fixing this might be as easy as platforms requiring authorship information in order to post images. But no one asks for that information. So we don't give it.” (Ferro, 2015, para.16) Here Ferro highlights a fundamental difference between a digital platform and an established physical gallery; the gallery requires ‘authorship information’ which enables recognition of an exhibition taking place, whereas images on social media are easily plagiarised, being ‘reposted’ or ‘shared’ by other users who are under no obligation to credit the original author. This describes how Prince’s screenshots represent the negative aspects of digitally exhibited art, arguing how they exist as un-exhibited artworks, exposed for consumption and appropriation.

Digitised exhibitions on social media can allow self promotion, costing nothing yet reaching a world audience, however, they are subject to potential theft which comes hand in hand with this benefit. Thus suggesting, platforms like Instagram provide an access into the world of being an artist, however, they can also subject your artwork to appropriation, with your name as an artist being lost and unrecognised. Therefore, social media cannot be labelled as an extension to what we understand a gallery space to be, as it doesn’t reward the artist the same recognition of an exhibition a physical gallery space does.

Therefore we have opposing interpretations from two successful contemporary artists on whether social media can function as a gallery space; Sherman’s Instagram account suggests that given the correct context Instagram can act as an exhibitional platform. However, Prince’s ‘New Portraits’ suggest that social media cannot act as an exhibition through the allowance of image theft, which separates a gallery from a digital space, meaning it can only function as a platform to gain exposure with work posted remaining un-exhibited. Regardless of what my analysis of Prince’s ‘New Portraits’ exhibition suggests, Sherman has gained recognition from her Instagram page causing a debate whether the uploads are exhibited or not - an example being Becker referencing the page as an ‘exhibition’ on his online analyses. (Becker, 2017, para.9) However, our contemporary world is yet to recognise this, for example, the Harvard reference system struggles to successfully reference Sherman’s page as an exhibition, with no foreseen end date, an unconfirmed start date, and no location available other than the virtual server (which also acts as the gallery name). Furthermore, the fact an online discussion is taking place, proves the controversy Sherman has instigated. It can be argued that Sherman has furthered the discussion into whether social media can function as a gallery space, and with the recognition she has received, perhaps successfully begun the movement to recognise this expansion of the term.



However, having been a successful and established artist beforehand, is it possible for all artists to exhibit on social media?

“Cindy Sherman has demonstrated a level of art that few can claim online or offline, without the aid of technological innovation.” (Becker, 2017, para.12) Here Becker suggests Sherman’s success of using Instagram as a gallery is relative to her being an established artist prior to her Instagram account going public. Therefore it can be argued that, without the recognition she earned within the art world through exhibiting in physical gallery spaces, the debate she has raised over Instagram’s stance as a gallery would not have been acknowledged. Social media may currently be competing for recognition as a gallery space by the artists who have adopted its offered attributes, but at this moment in time, during the exponential growth of digitisation, it cannot fully function as one. Instagram possesses its own filter system based on an artist’s accomplishments in the physical world, with unknown and start up artists unable to reap the rewards of exhibition recognition Sherman has managed. However, seeming as this discussion is now in motion, a future prospect may include social media as a recognisable exhibitional space.

### 3. Self-Made Digital Platforms

With the advance of technology, so comes the change of what is considered art. Omar Kholeif, writer, curator and author, writes in his book: ‘Goodbye, World! Looking at Art in the Digital Age’ that “as technology advances, so must we constantly reexamine our notions of art, which now exist in a state of digital flux.” (Kholeif, 2018, p.174) Here he implies that our belief of what art should include must be modernised, due to the creation of the digital and its ability to coexist within our predetermined ideas of what reality consists of. The digital movement has given birth to an influx of digital artworks which require the constructed reality to exist in the ‘real’. To expand on this; the digital has been able to act as an extension of the tangible, becoming a realm of visible reality expanding the world as we once knew it, yet embodying the same physical space. It



Figure 4. Exhibition view. ‘Coordinates’ by Nancy Baker Cahill. The 4th Wall App. (2018),

is this thought which invites the discussion of the ‘Coordinates’ feature of the 4th Wall app created by artist Nancy Baker Cahill as seen in figure 4 (‘Coordinates’, 2018). The app, similarly to Instagram, exhibits in a space accessed through a screen, but incorporates the technology of augmented reality (AR): using the camera feature of phones to situate objects and animations in realistic scenarios.

They are linked to a real physical space through the Global Positioning System (GPS), yet deprived of possessing any mass, unable to be physically touched. Therefore the platform requires a real, accessible space to exist, however, remains visibly solely digitally. Currently the feature exhibits six artist's work across the USA and Egypt. Appropriate credentials are given with master access controlling the exhibited work. Therefore, unlike social media, who's critique involved the lack of author information (Ferro, 2015) and effortless image appropriation, the 4th Wall acts as a self created platform hosting an exhibition.

Another example of a digitised exhibition can be seen through Chiarra Passa's Widget Art Gallery (Passa, 2018). The virtual room features a photograph of a real, physical room represented digitally to host digital art. With a door visible, a sense of scale is granted giving the room a heightened sense of realism. By Passa herself labelling the app as a functioning gallery, it displays a subjective opinion on the discussion of whether virtual galleries merit the recognition a physical gallery's exhibition grants. Whereas the room acts as a digital copy of a real space, the exhibited artworks are site specifically created for this virtual representation, therefore tailored for digital viewing, and not physically. The room, therefore, no longer acts as a copy, and has been restructured to create a new visible space. Similarly to The 4th Wall, both apps have used the real to exist in virtual, yet embody a unique form, portraying exhibitions that could not exist in the physical alone. This grants them the freedom of being labelled as digitised representations of something physical, giving them credibility as a legitimised exhibitional space. Unlike social media, the work is carefully selected similarly to the process of exhibiting in a physical gallery space, with applications required.

The work inside the 'room' of The Widget Art Gallery changes monthly featuring a range of artists work exhibited in a Graphic Interchange Format (GIF - A file format acting as a digital flip-book to portray movement) The current exhibition can be seen in Figure 5 ('Social Fever', 2019). Kholeif suggests Gifs have become part of a cultural movement for the millennials (Kholeif, 2018, p.106) and states: "...platforms must play catch-up to the lexicon and utility this "born digital" generation has been able to create" (Kholeif, 2018, p.114). This can be applied to the notion of modernising what characterises a gallery. By claiming 'platforms must play catch up', this can be interpreted to suggest a redefining of the term gallery space is needed, due to the advent of the digital age. Therefore, implying apps such as: The Widget Art Gallery and The 4th Wall should exist in parallel to physical galleries, with the same credentials.

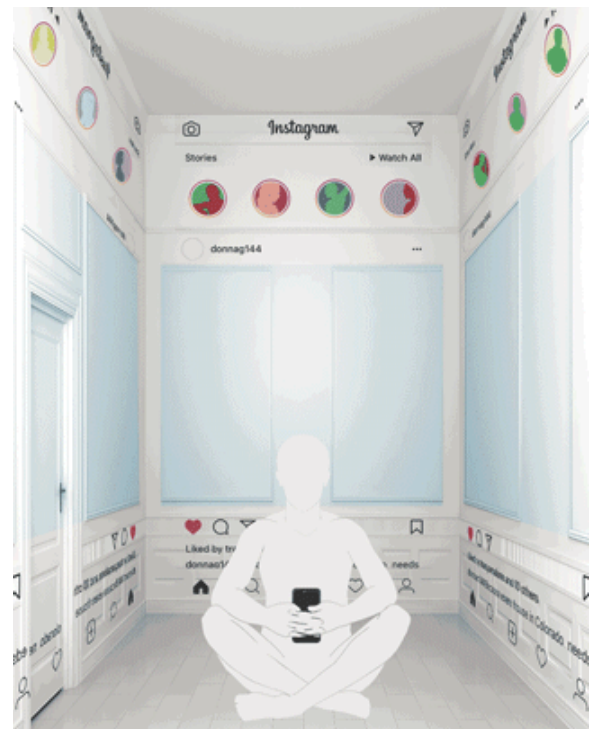


Figure 5. Exhibition view. 'Social fever' by Miriam Pelagalli. The Widget Art Gallery.

Another argument to further this suggestion can be seen in Hito Steyerl's essay; 'Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?' (Steyerl, 2013) where she suggests the internet is dying, if not dead already. She argues that the integration we have formed, reliant, embedded and dependant on its existence has forced the internet into expansion by 'moving offline' (Steyerl, 2013, para.3) This implies an entwined integration between the digital and the physical, where the boundaries are no longer determinable by contemporary humanity. Thus, suggesting the digital world is as real as the physical space that contains it. Therefore, a virtual and physical exhibition should share the same credibility as they are both as 'real' as each other. It's interesting to consider this theory when examining The 4th Wall 'coordinates' feature and The Widget Art Gallery. Both apps represent how the virtual and the physical have become entangled to create the visible spaces, proposing how the two, previously thought to be separated, worlds have become stitched together. Therefore, Steyerl's theory suggests discriminating between the physical and digital, in terms of what defines a gallery space, is now impossible, thus implying both apps can be considered 'real' galleries.

It's interesting to consider how the two apps can be interpreted as statement artworks, which could annihilate their recognition as a gallery space altogether. It can be argued that they represent un-exhibited artworks to imply the need for the term 'gallery space' to be expanded, therefore if we consider them as galleries, this argument loses its context. Similarly to Sherman's Instagram page, they require avoidance from physical gallery spaces to raise awareness into the expansion of digitised galleries existence within the contemporary art world. However, can artworks that include their platform of which they are viewed on in their context, still be considered exhibited?

This leads to a discussion as to how Kassay has utilised the physical gallery space within his burnished mirror works. An exhibition of his can be seen in Figure 6 ('Art: Concept', 2010) The use of a reflective surface enables the paintings to alter their appearance depending on what lies in front of them and where they are situated. Kassay states: "the paintings are never fully optical; they're never fully material." (Kassay, 2013, para.12) This implies that the paintings themselves do not possess a raw material state, but include other factors which influence their appearance. The acrylic and silver deposit produce a platform on how the paintings are seen; light and the presence of the viewer alter the aesthetics of the painting. It can consequently be argued that the materialities that create Kassay's silver paintings include mediums such as paint and the digital through

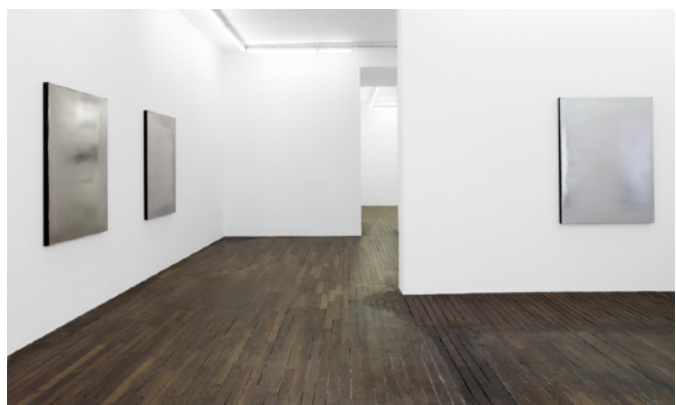


Figure 6. Exhibition view. 'Art: Concept' by Jacob Kassay, Paris, (2010)



representation, however, they also include what the painting is seeing from its reflective surface. With this in mind, the location in which the paintings are situated function as a material and part of the context of the artworks themselves.

Kassay compares the blurring of his mirror-like paintings to the auto focus of a digital camera. He states when he attempts to document the work the camera is "unable to separate the painting's present surroundings from the object itself." (Kassay, 2013, para.7) Thus, the 'present surroundings' have become inclusive in the artwork. Kassay's paintings decontextualise the idea of a gallery and recontextualise the space as part of the the work itself. The gallery has enabled the creation of Kassay's work, and gives the necessary environment to allow the interaction needed to convey its context - an element that could not be present through documentation and digitally exhibiting. In summary, for Kassay's silver paintings, the gallery is essential to the work, so much it becomes part of it, yet the works are still considered to have been exhibited in a gallery.

Cahill and Passa use the digital in the same way Kassay uses a gallery space: a platform for the work to be seen that also acts as a contributor to the concept of the work. Ergo, if Kassay's paintings are 'exhibited' in a space that is contextually part of the work, the virtual artworks in the apps are also exhibited using the apps in the same way. Thus, the digital can be used as a contemporary way to exhibit art which in turn realises how The Widget Art Gallery and The 4th Wall successfully function as gallery spaces.

For a gallery to truly function as a gallery, it needs to be recognised as one. As a digital exhibition can currently be interpreted as an artwork that instigates the debate on whether digital galleries can exist, a unanimous decision is required in the art world to determine the status of their function. Without this they could never rival a physical gallery's reputation within the art world. This provides as argument as to how physical gallery spaces are still currently a necessity for the contemporary artist to exhibit their artwork.

It's important to consider how the potential for a digital gallery's recognition still exists, evermore so due to the fact this essay concerns the matter, and there is a exponential progression of the digital's integration with humanity and the art world. Therefore, it's necessary to evaluate the possibility of galleries becoming digitised in the near future. Thus providing an argument as to how a shortcut for the contemporary artist to exhibit through self created digital platforms may come to fruition. In a discussion about The Widget Art Gallery, Passa states it was "born with the intent to bypass the art system and arrive more easily to the public by eliminating the so-called intermediaries." (Lucking, 2012, para.18) By clearly explaining a reason for its creation was to 'bypass the art system' suggests it is within a contemporary artist's motive to act as gallerist and artist simultaneously. She also states that another contributing factor relates to the economic crisis; explaining how it is expensive to pay rent for physical spaces. (Lucking, 2012, para.3) Therefore, by managing a self-invented virtual gallery, she was able to expose her art and gain further reputation as an artist, before welcoming the introduction of other artist's work to her

homemade space. Thus, The Widget Art Gallery alongside The 4th Wall can serve as examples to how AR and GIF's have been used to digitally exhibit artworks. However, with the analyses of Kassay's work, it's key to state that physical spaces will always be a requirement within the art world. There is no possible binary suggesting digitised galleries will take over, but the term 'gallery space' is being expanded by digital artists to encompass the virtual spaces they exhibit their works in.

#### 4. Digitised Gallery Platforms

Other than artists delving into the virtual to exhibit their work, there are institutions which have jumped at the opportunity to take advantage of the advancement of the digital within the art world. Whereas, "the majority of existing art buyers see the online art market as an alternative channel for acquiring art rather than a substitute", (Hiscox, 2016, p.5) the rise in art sales online is a factor which contributes to the potential success of digital platforms functioning as successful galleries. With the future of the online art market guaranteed (Hiscox, 2018, p.1) digital platforms look promising to juxtapose physical gallery spaces. Lift Art Gallery provides one example of how digital galleries are able to rival their physical counterparts. Research from their website suggests nine out of ten art purchases start with internet research, and last year alone saw online sales increase by fifteen percent. (Lift Art Gallery, 2018) This could be because the digital market allows art buyers to scout artworks globally, without stepping foot into a gallery to enquire about prices and artist information, but receiving all the relevant information at the click of a button.

Large institutions such as Google have also impacted the art market, making art more accessible through digitally portraying high resolution representations of artworks. (Google Cultural Institute, 2018) The Google Arts and Culture program enables a virtual experience to a consumer, to learn about and evaluate art collections from all over the world, whilst enjoying the comfort of their own home. The fact that the art market is being impacted from the advent of the internet suggests a transitional period where the digitisation of consuming art is in movement. This therefore theorises the desire for artists to have their work visually displayed online, which in turn contributes to this movement, accelerating the digitals integration with the art world and the necessity for online galleries, and validating Passa's motives for wanting to 'bypass the art system.' (Lucking, 2012, para.18)

Lift Art Gallery visualises a space that only exists in a digital format, however artworks can be uploaded to their walls giving them a sense of scale as seen in Figure 7 ('Mathieu Laca', 2019). The website allows you to virtually walk around the space generating a sense of engagement with the exhibited works. The Lift Art Gallery website describes how "the art industry is digitalizing rapidly" and how "artists can now become global overnight through online presence." (Lift Art Gallery, 2017) This demonstrates how work visualised digitally is becoming a necessity for the contemporary artist, even if it detracts from visualising the aesthetic qualities they possess. With

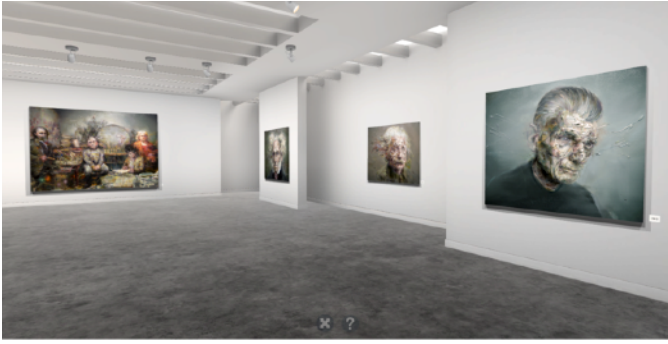


Figure 7. Exhibition view. 'Mathieu Laca' by Mathieu Laca. Lift Art Gallery. (2019)

this in mind, the digital is allowing platforms which exhibit art online to compete with galleries to exhibit artist's works. With the digital growing in involvement within the art market, Lift Art Gallery provides an example of how the primary gallery form may shift from physical to virtual in the near future. This represents a reason as to why work tailored for digital consumption is becoming increasingly common. However, what effect is this having on artist's practices that are un-

tailored for digital representations, such as Kassay's silver painting discussed earlier? (Kassay, 2009) As Kassay's paintings require physical interaction through reflection, a digital representation of them being exhibited in the Lift Art Gallery would decontextualise them, destroying their function as art. "To engage fully with a painting, we need to see its space... in its space. If we forsake opportunities to absorb ourselves in art in this way, we will surely erode one of the more remarkable abilities of our species." (Williams and Riviere, 2015, para.7) This suggests that the art of painting will 'erode' or disappear due to the poor representation a digital form can display. Therefore arguing that physical gallery spaces will always be a necessity within the art world, existing as an adversary to their digital counterparts. However, they are not a requirement for all contemporary artists.

It's interesting to analyse Mathieu Laca's exhibition in the Lift Art Gallery as seen in Figure 7 ('Mathieu Laca', 2019). As a painter who incorporates textured paint in his works and has exhibited them digitally, it suggests the desire for exposure and the potential disregard of the 'aura' gained from being ontologically present with an artwork. Walter Benjamin's essay: The Work of art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction (Benjamin, 1935) discusses the 'aura' of the original being the integral aspect which cannot be reciprocated through a mechanical reproduction. He argues that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: Its presence in time and space" (Benjamin, 1935, p.3) This conveys the idea that a copy is lacking the supernatural, the capacity to truly see the work. Therefore implying that a copy will never be able to act on the behalf of an original, providing the physicality of being ontologically present with an artwork essential to experiencing its entirety. With this in mind, physical galleries will never be considered redundant as digital exhibitions cannot exhibit the 'aura' of which he speaks. However, in terms of proving value within the art market, Kholeif suggests "A reproduction then becomes a form of marketing, driving traffic to the original." (Kholeif, 2018, p.102) This may suggest a reason for Laca to have an exhibition in Lift Art Gallery; for exposure as an artist 'driving traffic' to physical exhibitions his work can be viewed in. Furthermore, this contributes a desire for institutions which possess a physical space to exhibit representations as a form of advertisement. An example of this can be seen in the organisation ArtBelow. Whilst at the year of writing, the London Art Below exhibited their originals within a gallery space in Mayfair ('Art Below', 2018),

reproductions plastered the walls of Regents Park underground station, were shared on their Instagram account, and were uploaded online to their webpage. This is because the digital enables promotion on a vast scale, assisting the profits through applications and sales.

It can therefore be suggested that digital platforms will never be able to acquire the accolade of a physical space, nor replace them, or even function as a gallery for painters. However, as Benjamin's essay was written in an age where the technology of today was hardly even imaginable, it invites the evaluation of the transition the concept of art has taken since then. Artworks designed to be exhibited on a digital platform exist, which begs the question if their 'aura' can be noticed from the likes of a screen. Furthermore, is it possible to be ontologically present with an artwork which exists in the intangible digital realm?

Artworks residing solely in the digital, such as Sherman's selfies, exist as originals with no physical counterpart having ever existed. Through Benjamin's evaluation, these images would therefore convey the 'aura' he made reference to. (Benjamin, 1935) But how is it possible to have an original if the image can be seen on multiple screens simultaneously? The screen acts as a lens into the digital world, allowing multiple lenses to translate the same code to formulate an image based on the machine's specifications. Therefore, multiple copies actually translate to exact replicas, meaning the original exists through whatever screen you are visualising the image through. Thus, to be ontologically present with a digital image is to envisage it whilst it exists in the digital realm. This gives digitised artworks authenticity, and digitised exhibitions credibility as gallery spaces.

Touch formulates a proof of existence and the idea of 'being with', or ontological. As the digital can host three-dimensional sculptures which appear flat to touch, the evolution as humans in terms of how we interact with the screen through touch can be noticed. When concerning the digital; "The human hand has had to develop a different set of commands to engage with it, such as swipes, taps and clicks." (Kholeif, 2018, p.133) This suggests the invention of the digital and the advancement of technology, has forced humanity to experience a form of engagement with the digital. These commands becoming second-nature, and comparable to how we would engage with a 'real' three-dimensional object. Thus suggesting the digital doesn't portray intangibility, but solidarities that we have had to learn a new sense of engagement to 'feel' their reality.

To contextualise the idea of how touching and seeing the digital explores digital gallery spaces in comparison to physical gallery spaces, the realisation that the digital world isn't comparable on the same level to the physical is vital. We are having to evolve to understand the technologies we are creating, discovering new methods of interpretation, rather than recycling terminologies we use for the physical. Thus suggesting a digital gallery may exist to exhibit work in a different way than a physical gallery. Furthermore, both digital and physical gallery spaces are a requirement for contemporary artists to explore when considering how to exhibit their artworks successfully.

The advent of the digital has seen the action of painting applied to a digital form. The terminology traditionally associated with paints and a paintbrush can now involve the touch of a finger on an iPad, or the click of a mouse, 'brushing' across the screen. An example of this can be seen when Hockney produced a series of digital works exploring the possibilities of image-making on apple products referring to them as 'drawings' and 'paintings.' ('A Bigger Picture', 2012) An example can be seen in Figure 8. Furthermore Microsoft labelled their digital arts software 'Paint,' with the first version released in 1985. This suggests how long the acceptance of digitisation within the art world is taking, highlighted with the fact there is still a discussion whether digital galleries can be given the same recognition as physical ones. However, with technology integrating progressively within its consumers lives, the ability to curate a digital exhibition which could be viewed by the masses hasn't been possible until more recently. But now, "the commercialization of the art world has also enabled a steady rise of online platforms that seek to service it." (Kholeif, 2018, p.116) This draws the art world closer to the virtual world, commanding change in the consumer's demands of the art they wish to purchase. In turn, factoring an argument which suggests artworks tailored for online consumption will increase in number, enabling digital exhibitions to coexist with physical spaces by reaching a larger market, and therefore suggesting the term 'gallery space' should be expanded to encompass virtual viewings.

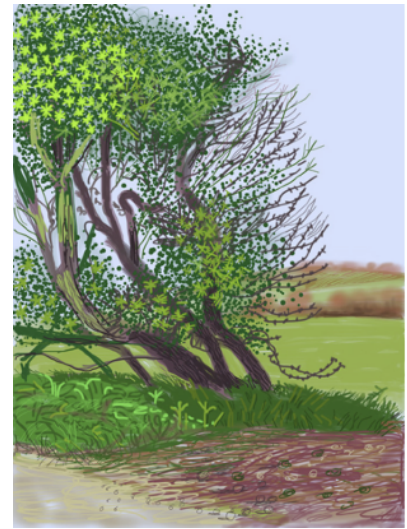


Figure 8. The Arrival of Spring 'Untitled' by David Hockney. (2011)

## Conclusion

This essay has examined social media, self-made virtual platforms, and digitised galleries as an extension to what is understood as a gallery space in the contemporary art world. Through analysing physical and virtual exhibitions and artworks, it's possible to conclude the digital age has welcomed the idea of expanding what is understood by 'gallery space'. Artworks tailored for digital consumption prove un-exhibitable in physical spaces, as such, artworks that require physical interaction remain eternally isolated from virtual gallery spaces. Thus, suggesting the virtual and physical are both to coexist in exhibiting artworks.

With examples like Laca's exhibition at the Lift Art Gallery ('Mathieu Laca', 2019), there is a required ability to differentiate an exhibition and the exposure of an artist's work, suggesting not all virtual spaces to view art can be realised as 'gallery spaces'. This complexity of effects the integration of the digital with the art world is producing, has caused debate whether the digital versions that we are deciding to classify as a potential additions to the umbrella terminology of 'gallery space' will succeed as functioning galleries. For it depends on the recognition they can grant an artist in exhibiting their work. However, with the sheer amount of online activity, and audience available, digital platforms are inevitably going to succeed in exposing art. This can be



seen through Instagram's necessity for the contemporary artist and market: "With close to 1 billion users, there is no doubt that it is becoming a very important tool for the art industry in reaching consumers beyond the existing art market." (Hiscox, 2018, p.2) Yet, for them to be recognised as exhibitions requires the platforms to be recognised at galleries. Thus, whereas not all forms of digitally viewed artworks are considered exhibited, virtual gallery spaces are growing in recognition of being realised as successfully exhibiting artworks.

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## Image List

### Figure 1.

'cindysherman', 2017 - present day. [Exhibition] Instagram. [Image source: <https://www.instagram.com/cindysherman/?hl=en>]

### Figure 2.

Kassay, J. (2009) '*Untitled*'. [Painting] [Image source: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/jacob-kassay/untitled-2009-3>]

### Figure 3.

'*New Portraits*', 12 June, 2015 - 1 August, 2015. [Exhibition] Gagosian London. [Image source: <https://gagosian.com/exhibitions/2015/richard-prince-new-portraits/>]

### Figure 4.

'*Coordinates*'. 2018 - Present day. [Exhibition] 4th Wall App. [Image source: <https://nancybakercahill.com/coordinates>]

### Figure 5.

'*Social Fever*', November 7, 2018 - January 8, 2019. [Exhibition] The Widget Art Gallery. [Image source: <http://www.chiarapassa.it/thewidgetartgallery.html>]

### Figure 6.

'*Art: Concept*', May 8, 2010 - June 5, 2010 [Exhibition] Paris. [Image Source: <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2016/may/24/surface-image-reception-painting-in-a-digital-age/>]

### Figure 7.

'*Mathieu Laca*', 2019 [Exhibition] Lift Art Gallery. [Image source: <http://www.exhibitionatlift.com/mathieu-laca/>]

### Figure 8.

Hockney, D. (2011) *The Arrival of Spring (Untitled)* [iPad drawing printed on paper] [Image source: <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/david-hockney-ra-bigger-picture>]