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PAY ME

Re-evaluating
the value
of (digital) art

Daan Couzijn

INTRODUCTION

NOTES

1. Paul C,
Digital Art - 2015,
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2. Performing arts are a form of art in which artists use their voices, bodies or inanimate objects such as musical instruments to convey artistic expression. Performing arts include a range of disciplines which are performed in front of a live audience. This is different from visual arts, in which artists use materials to create physical or static art objects. Current usage of the term «visual arts» includes fine art as well as the applied, decorative arts and crafts. Performing Arts (n.d.), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, Retrieved January 18, 2019 , — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performing_arts#cite_note-1

3. Performance art is a discipline within the performing arts where a performance is presented to an audience within a fine art context, traditionally interdisciplinary. Performance art. (n.d.), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, Retrieved January 18, 2019, — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_art

4. Gere C,
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The digital era has brought forth a new, virtual dimension that has created a sea of endless possibilities. As a result, it was inevitable that artists would start exploring digital media as a way to convey artistic expression. More and more artists are working in different forms of media - from painting, drawing, and sculpture to photography and video – and are making use of digital technologies as a tool of creation for aspects of their art. But with the possibilities of digital media also come challenges. The collection (and therefore the sale) of digital art is a topic that has been hotly debated since digital art began to register on the art market's radar, since the traditional 'scarcity-equals-value' model doesn't necessarily apply to digital art.¹ This begs the question: how can the value of digital art be determined?

This essay will examine the challenges that digital art poses, looking into its current (economic) position in the contemporary art world and its possible future.

1

When I applied to art school to study for a master's degree in Fine Art & Design, I had an incredibly naive understanding of the revenue system for artists within the industry today. Naturally, I was well aware of the established, traditional commerce system in which the artist creates and sells an art object and in return, receives payment from the purchaser. But having studied music and theatre and therefore coming from a background of performing arts² - whereby a different type of system is in place since the art object in question is not a physical object - I was under the impression that a similar revenue system would apply to digital art.

Performing arts, not to be confused with performance art,³ is a form of art in which an ephemeral, immaterial piece of art is created. Whether it crystallizes in a musical, dramatic or dance-based performance (to name a few), it is both time-based and impalpable. The earnings of a performing artist are acquired through a system that hereinafter will be referred to as a 'booking system,' where the artist and their body of work is 'booked' by a client, an institution or an organization to perform a piece in front of a live audience. By means of a pre-agreed contract, the artist or their management sends an invoice to the client and receives (part of) a fee, either before or after the event, depending on the contract terms. Whether or not this current system functions both fairly and to the advantage of the contemporary artist is debatable. However, surprisingly, an artist in the field of visual arts often does not get paid for showing their work in an exhibition in the same way, for example, a musician would be paid to 'show' their work during a concert.

INTRODUCTION

The performing arts are an art form that dates back to the 6th century BC, which could explain why a relatively functioning revenue system for this elusive form of art is in place today. Thirty years ago, it would have been difficult to imagine the digital-centric culture of today, an era when the Internet was hardly used outside science departments. Interactive multimedia was just becoming possible, CDs were a novelty, mobile phones were unwieldy and considered a luxury item and the World Wide Web as it is known today did not exist. The social and cultural transformations made possible by these technologies have been immense. Nowadays most forms of mass media, including television, recorded music and film, are both produced and distributed digitally. In fact, different media channels are now increasingly being distributed via the Internet, producing a seamless digital landscape.⁴

While the majority of modern societies have adapted to and embraced the trend of ‘digital transformation’, art institutes have seemingly resisted engaging with digital artistic practices. Over the last twenty years, technology has begun entering almost every aspect of our lives. Galleries and museums are far from exempt from the effects of digital transformation, making it all the more surprising that the institutional art world has not done the same. To what extent does digital art differ from traditional art? Should digital media conform to the traditional economic model of traditional art world, or could the medium potentially inspire a new, adapted way of dealing with art, one that is much more fitting to the digital era of our time?

WHAT IS CONSIDERED DIGITAL ART?

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Before the current and potential future position of digital art is examined, it is first necessary to narrow down the definitions of digital media. In order to do so, this analysis will first explore the following question: what exactly is considered digital art?

In *Digital Art*, Christiane Paul contends :

“The medium made its official entry into the art world in the late 90s, when museums and galleries began increasingly to incorporate the art form into their shows, and dedicate entire exhibitions to it. But from the 90’s to the early 21st century, the digital medium has undergone technological developments of unprecedented speed, moving from the ‘digital revolution’ into the social media era. Even though the foundations of many digital technologies had been laid up to sixty years earlier, these technologies became seemingly ubiquitous during the last decade of the 20th century: hardware and software became more refined and affordable, and the advent of the World Wide Web in the mid-90’s added a layer of ‘global connectivity’.”⁵

The term digital art is defined by Wikipedia as follows :

*“Digital art is an artistic work or practice that uses digital technology as an essential part of the creative or presentation process. Since the 1970’s, various names have been used to describe the process, including computer art and multimedia art. Digital art is itself placed under the larger umbrella term new media art.”*⁶

While ‘New media art’ is defined as follows :

*“New media art refers to artworks created with new media technologies, including digital art, computer graphics, computer animation, virtual art, internet art, interactive art, video games, computer robotics, 3D printing, cyborg art and art as biotechnology. The term differentiates itself by its resulting cultural objects and social events, which can be seen in opposition to those deriving from old visual arts (i.e. traditional painting, sculpture, etc.). New media art often involves interaction between artist and observer or between observers and the artwork, which responds to them.”*⁷

In this essay, the term digital art is preferred over new media art for the simple reason that the word ‘digital’ is defined as ‘computerized technology composed of data’, which emphasizes the medium’s intangibility and elusive qualities.

There are certain basic characteristics exhibited by digital media and many forms that digital artwork can take. Among those forms are : installation, video, VR and networked art.

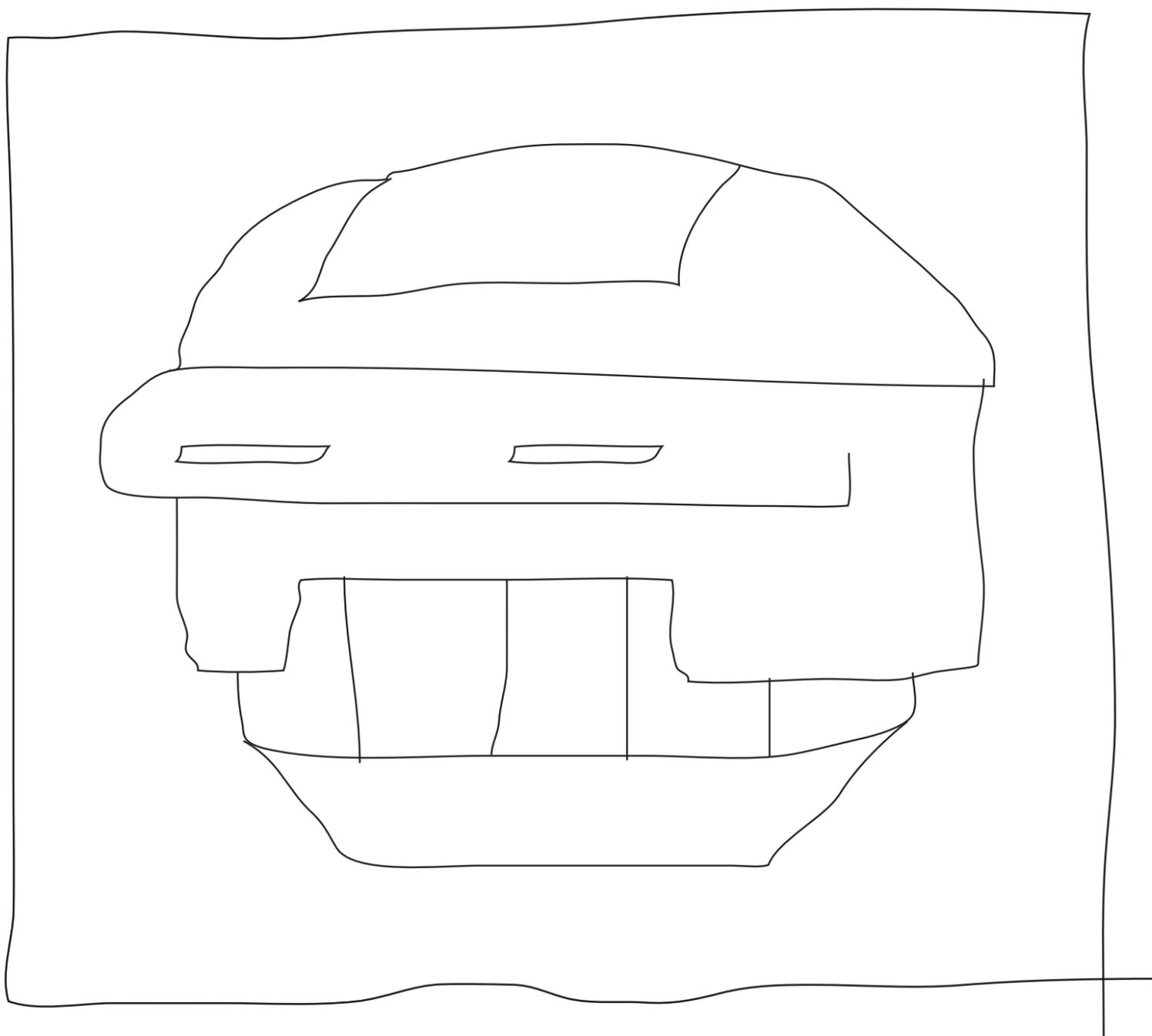
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WHAT IS CONSIDERED DIGITAL ART?

INSTALLATION

Digital art installations are pertinent to a broad field of media and come in many different forms. Some are reminiscent of large-scale video installations that include multiple projections, or of video works that incorporate the viewer in the imaginary through live video capture. Many are aimed at creating 'environments' where the viewer is subject to varying degrees of immersion, ranging from pieces that envelop the audience in a projected environment to those in which they are immersed in a virtual environment. Digital installations are often site-specific and scalable, existing in a physical space and establishing a connection to that space.⁸



VIDEO

Digital video works are often 3D computer-generated images created via the use of software, incorporating virtual objects, imagined environments and special effects. This technology can enable collaboration, lending itself to sharing and augmenting by a creative effort similar to the open source movement, and the creative commons in which users can collaborate in a project to create art. The concept of the digital moving image and 'digital cinema' has affected the moving image in various ways. Digital technologies offer multiple possibilities for an enhanced cinematic representation of reality. Animation has continuously merged disciplines and techniques and still exists at the border of the entertainment industry and the art world, though it is more and more incorporated in exhibitions.⁹

WHAT IS CONSIDERED DIGITAL ART?

VR/AR

The term 'virtual reality' is commonly used for any space created by or accessible through computers, ranging from the 3D world of a game to the Internet as an alternate 'virtual' reality constructed by a vast networked communication space. VR is the most radical form inserting the viewer into a virtual environment: putting a screen in front of the viewer's eyes through a headset or glasses, the user is immersed in an artificial world which eliminates or augments the physical one.

The primary value of augmented reality is that it brings components of the digital world into a person's perception of the real world, and does so not as a simple display of data, but through the integration of immersive sensations that are perceived as natural parts of an environment.¹⁰

INTERNET ART

The umbrella term ‘Internet art’ has existed since the inception of the early World Wide Web, referring to numerous forms of artistic articulation that often overlap. Networked art works often take form of digital artwork distributed via the Internet, however can still occur outside the technical structure of the Internet, for example, when artists use specific social or cultural Internet traditions in a project exogenous to the internet itself. Internet art is often—but not always—interactive, participatory, and multimedia-based.¹¹ Today’s networked art exists on various platforms and fluidly travels from the Internet to mobile devices.

Digital art has developed enormously since it emerged in the 90’s, and there is no doubt it is here to stay. The expansion of digital technologies and their impact on our lives and cultures will induce the creation of even more artworks that reflect and critically engage with this cultural phenomenon. However, whether digital art will find a permanent home in museums and art institutions or if it will exist in different contexts, remains to be seen. This is mostly due to the myriad challenges the medium poses.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED DIGITAL ART?

THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL ART

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Digital Art - 2015,
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13. Kholeif O,
Goodbye, world!
Looking at art in the digital age - 2018,
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14. A giclée is a copy of an original work.
Often a machine-made print, a reproduction
printed on fine paper or canvas with color
and clarity that can rival the original.
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Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,
Retrieved January 27, 2019,
— <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giclée>

Because of its characteristics, digital media pose a number of challenges to the traditional art world. Digital prints, photography, and sculpture are the kinds of object-oriented work for which museums are equipped, but time-based, interactive digital artworks raise numerous issues carrying their own particular challenges in terms of acquisition, curation and interpretation.

Digital art is often referred to as ephemeral and unstable. While bits and bytes are in fact more stable than paint, film or videotape, that which makes digital art unstable is rapid change in hardware and software platforms, from changes in operating systems to increasing screen resolution and upgrades of Web browsers. These challenges cause the medium to be very expensive to present to audiences as it would ideally be maintained continuously. Museum buildings are mostly based on the 'white cube' model rather than being equipped with flexible presentation systems. Arguably, the success of an exhibit and the audience's appreciation of the art is invariably dependent on the effort that an institution puts into the exhibition, both in technical and educational respects.

The presentation of art created for the Internet within a public physical space tends to complicate matters even more. Internet art has been created to be seen by anyone, anywhere, anytime (provided one has access to the Internet) and does not need a museum to be presented to the public. In the digital era, art housed in a physical gallery/museum does not hold as much precedence as a signifier of quality as has historically been the case. Galleries and museums are a traditional system of distributing art, however, since the advent of Internet, its efficiency in distributing art has allowed it to take precedence over art galleries when it comes to housing works of art. Museums are now viewed as an archaic form of that same kind of distribution system, often only recognizing a cultural value that has already been proven. The Internet and the digitization of society have together challenged the paradigm of the demonstration of art. However, physical art spaces could nonetheless play an important role when it comes to Internet art and digital art in general, in providing a context for the work, as well as expanding its audience. Various models for presenting Internet Art in an institutional context have been widely debated. Some people have argued that it should only be presented online and that it 'belongs on the Internet'.¹²

The relationship between copy and original is both a prominent feature and a major challenge of the digital medium. The Internet made re-contextualization through appropriation or collaging much easier. The Internet provided access to an endless database of documents and information. While appropriation and collaging - techniques originating with the Cubists, Dadaists, and Surrealists at the beginning of the twentieth century - have a long history in art, the digital medium has multiplied their applicability and taken them to new levels. Physical objects are easier to recall over copyright issues. Taking virtual appropriations offline, particularly if an appropriated work goes viral, is much more difficult.

THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL ART

The generosity of spirit associated with free circulation online has led to the re-addressing of the concept of image appropriation. Since the start of the debate on this issue, three camps have emerged. On one extreme the ‘image anarchist’ who believes that any image found online should be able to circulate and be used without having to attribute any credit to the original producer. On the other is the ‘image fundamentalist’ who demands that no image appropriation should be made without a formal agreement – often involving credit lines and remuneration, signed by the original producer. In between is the ‘image neoliberal’ who believes that images should be freely used however one sees fit as long as the original producer is properly attributed. As will be shown, in the field of art, a balance of the three is most often prevalent.¹³

Another challenge that comes to mind when discussing digital art, is the challenge of both its sale and collection, as its lack of physicality challenges the materialistic desire to own a physical object. Even when a digitally produced work does take physical form, some traditional artists and appraisers view the art work and its supposed lack of authenticity similar as to how many view giclées¹⁴. Giclées are often looked down upon as a gimmick for novice artists and neophyte collectors. How exactly do you value an object that is intangible and replicable?

13

14

THE MONETARY VALUE OF EPHEMERAL ART

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— <https://www.numero.com/en/art/anne-imhof-performance-art-biennale-venise-2017-choregraphy>
18. Paul C,
Digital Art - 2015,
Retrieved January 10, 2019

One of the first forms of digital art was video art in the 70s, often sold in the form of videotapes or CD-ROM's. However, when looking at current auction sales records, the difference in monetary value between traditional art and video art still differs enormously.

The most expensive artwork ever sold was a Leonardo da Vinci painting titled 'Salvator Mundi,' at \$450m USD. The most expensive sculpture ('L'homme au doigt' by Alberto Giacometti) is not far behind, sold in auction for \$141m USD. The most expensive video, however, pales in comparison. Bill Viola's 'Eternal return' was sold for a comparatively marginal \$833,000 USD.

Egbert Dommering, one of the most prominent video art collectors of The Netherlands and a professor of information law, postulates a model contract for the acquisition of video art. He describes which rights are transferred from artist to buyer during an acquisition, which, according to Dommering, is badly needed.

«From a world of objects - paintings and sculptures - the art trade has now also become a world of bits, from digital works of art that are easy to multiply. When transferring a memory stick, not only authentication with an official certificate signed by the artist is needed, but also a purchase contract with agreements. After all, you buy the right of display along with the video. May I as a buyer adapt the carrier to new technology? And where, and under what conditions, can I display the video? As a buyer, I want to know where I stand.»¹⁵

Due to the vagueness of Dommering's model, how this eventually works out legally at auctions remains to be seen. The behavior at auction houses suggests the value of art is still largely thought about in terms of rarity. Therefore, in the case of digital art, the value of a signed DVD, for example, remains higher than a DVD without signature. Could the digital medium escape this traditional model of value? In order to get a better understanding of the possibilities of an alternative economic model, the current model of another, more established, ephemeral medium will be analyzed.

THE MONETARY VALUE OF EPHEMERAL ART

PERFORMANCE ART

How do the economics of ephemeral art work exactly? Like digital art, and many forms of conceptual art, performance art is intangible and ephemeral. Is it possible to collect and in doing so, own a performance piece? Tobias Timm raised the same question when he interviewed Daniel Buchholz after having visited the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017.¹⁶

Buchholz is the acting gallery owner of multi-disciplinary artist Anne Imhof in Cologne, Berlin and New York. Imhof is a German visual artist, choreographer and performance artist. She is best known for her endurance art, although she cites painting as central to her practice.¹⁷ In addition to paintings, Imhof creates major works of art such as the performances ‘Faust’ and ‘Angst,’ the latter of which was performed in Basel and Berlin. Faust was a critically acclaimed and highly praised performance piece during the Venice Biennale of 2017 and one of the highlights of the entire biennale, according to many critics.

“The performance piece can be acquired.”, says Buchholz. “But before that can happen, one has to determine how to organize such an acquisition, together with the artist. It’s not about avarice”, he says, “but about the question of how to preserve such an effective work of art in the future.”

After all, Faust depends on its very own cast members, such as Eliza Douglas, Franziska Aigner and Mickey Mahar, with whom Imhof has been working for years. Could a revival of the performance take place without them? Or could it take place by replacing the performers? What happens when the artist is no longer able to perform?

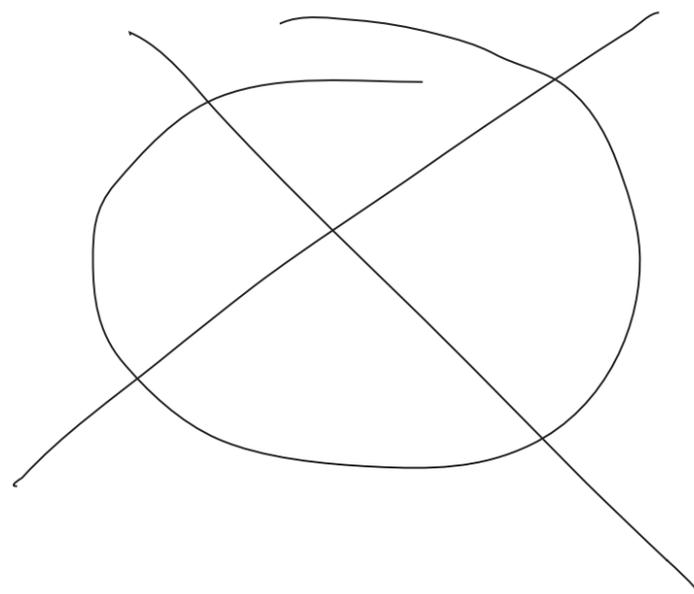
Customarily, in the case of acquired performances, the artist draws up a contract consisting of terms and agreements between the collector/institute and the artist regarding the work in question. Optionally, if and when the artist dies or is deemed unable to perform the piece, a contract could potentially allow the performance to be performed by another performer.

Another way of protecting the existence and legacy of the performance is by recording the performance. This last option has been met with skepticism by many artists and critics in the industry, arguing that experiencing the performance through a such means ultimately means the 'aura' of the piece, such as previously mentioned, will have disappeared. The performance piece will have morphed into a video piece, voiding it completely from the essentials that form the core of performance art.

The terms of the contract remain a point of discussion to this day since they are entirely dependent on the artist and/or the performance piece itself. This remains a point of discussion to this day. Naturally, there are many other questions that a performance such as Imhof's Faust raises: how would the sequences of events and musical compositions, which vary slightly from performance to performance, be passed on? How often should a buyer show this performance? Would he/she have to perform it regularly? And how expensive is a performance? How can its value be determined?

THE MONETARY VALUE OF EPHEMERAL ART

Other gallerists and artists have dealt with such questions in the past, such as Tino Sehgal, who - many years ago - had the museum guards of the German pavilion perform his piece titled 'This is so contemporary'. In advance of the performance, Sehgal developed a sophisticated system of selling his 'actions', as he called them himself. This system was in itself part of his artistic practice. Unlike Imhof, there couldn't be any material documentation of the works of Sehgal. No film-, audio-, nor photo registration. Not even written records were allowed. The work could only exist in memory and not in material resources. Instead, collectors and museum directors could buy the narrative of the performance, as imagined by Sehgal, through a notary appointment with a verbal contract. If Anne Imhof and her art dealers should decide on a similar procedure to sell the performance of Faust, collectors and museums should take several different costs into consideration.



In 2016, Tino Sehgal's retrospective at the Paris Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2016, during which he worked with hundreds of performers and other artists for more than two months, was as expensive for the museum as an entire exhibition season. The myriad people involved in the creation and execution of the performance that need to be paid are often not considered in determining the value of a performance piece.

In the case of Imhof's Faust, a twelve-part series of paintings had been created in preparation for the production of the performance. Monochrome white pictures depicting abstract lines and scratch marks made by Imhof herself were sold to selected sponsors for €20,000 each. This money was then used for the production and execution of Faust. The installation of the glass base and the building of dog kennels was not the only draw on the installations budget. The most expensive aspect was the performers themselves: their food, accommodation and a physiotherapist who makes sure the performers are physically fit again after each performance.

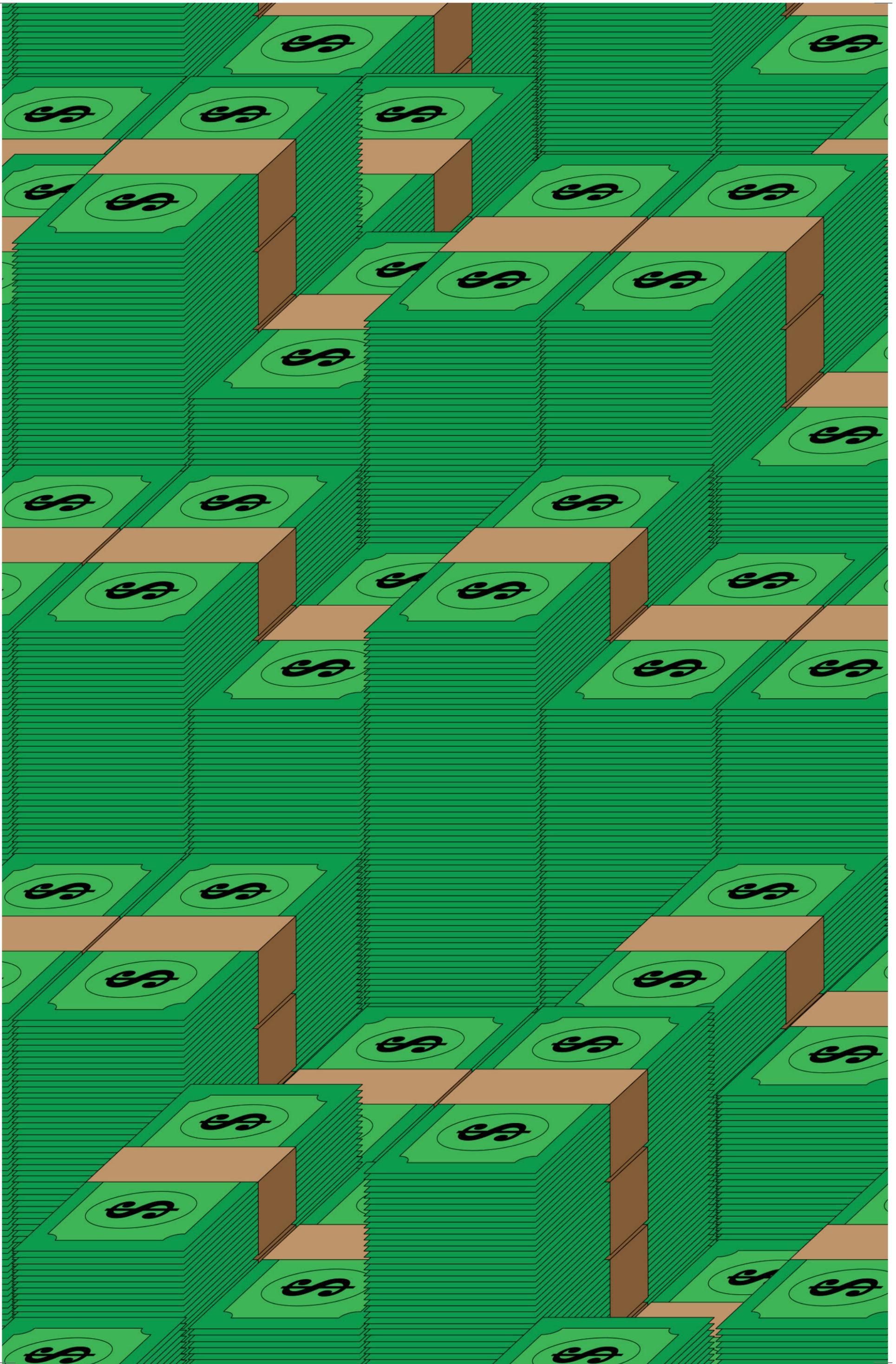
THE MONETARY VALUE OF EPHEMERAL ART

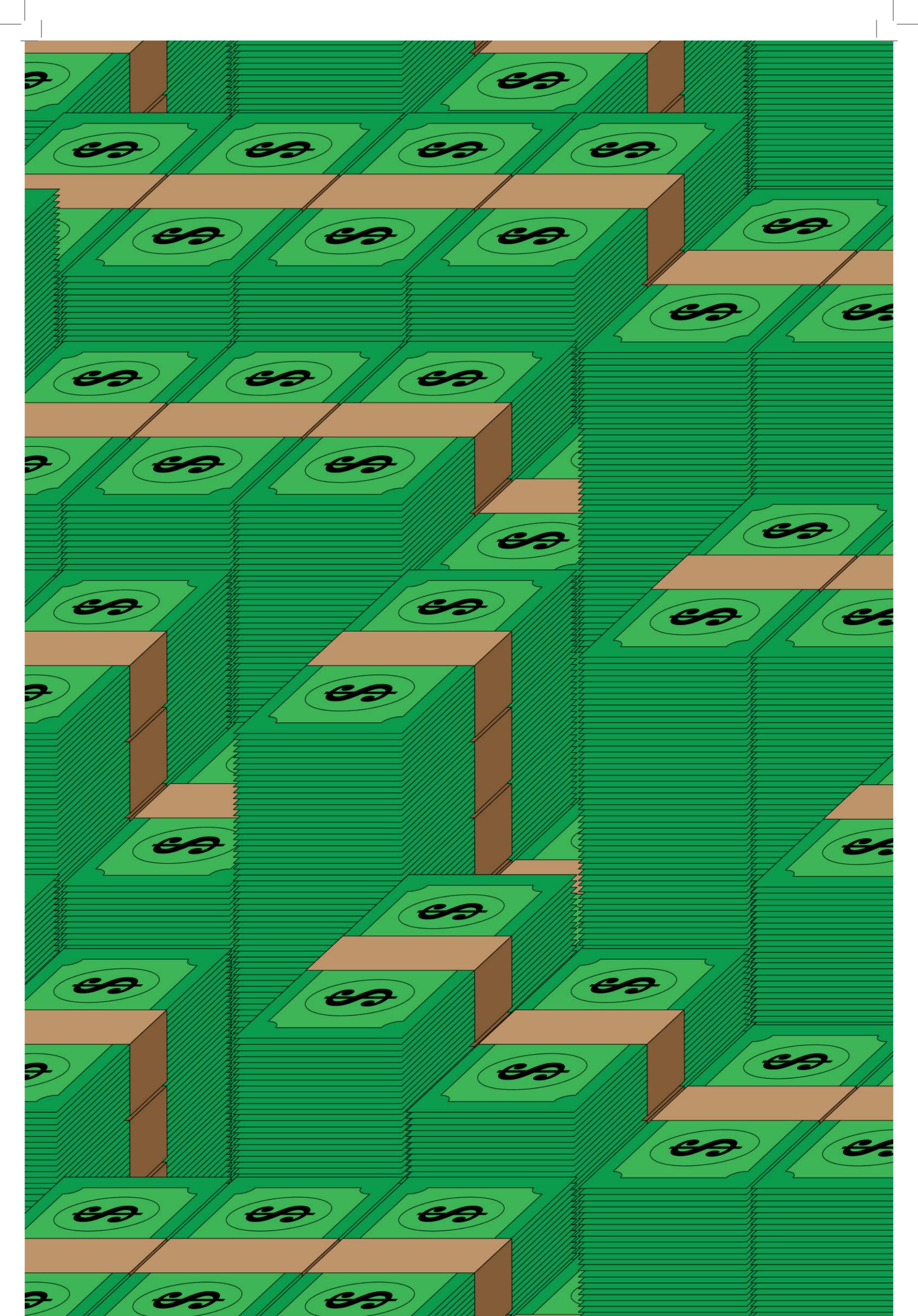
DIGITAL ART

While a similar approach could be applied to digital art, there is a crucial difference between performance and digital art: the notion of authenticity. A digital art work mostly relies on technology rather than a particular artist's so-called hand or presence in time and space (which is often the case in performance art). In today's world, representations of an original work can take on different forms – they can be cropped, filtered, recreated. But instead of the possibility of being reproduced, digital art can be replicated completely. Without an original, a copy has no point of reference. The rarity of a work of art is what gives it value, so an original will always be worth more than a reproduction. Original works are more likely to bring people to museums or galleries. In fact, museums and galleries have less of a clear purpose when they cannot display art exclusively. This is less problematic in the case of digital installations, which are typically either objects or software art (which sometimes comes with its own unique custom hardware).

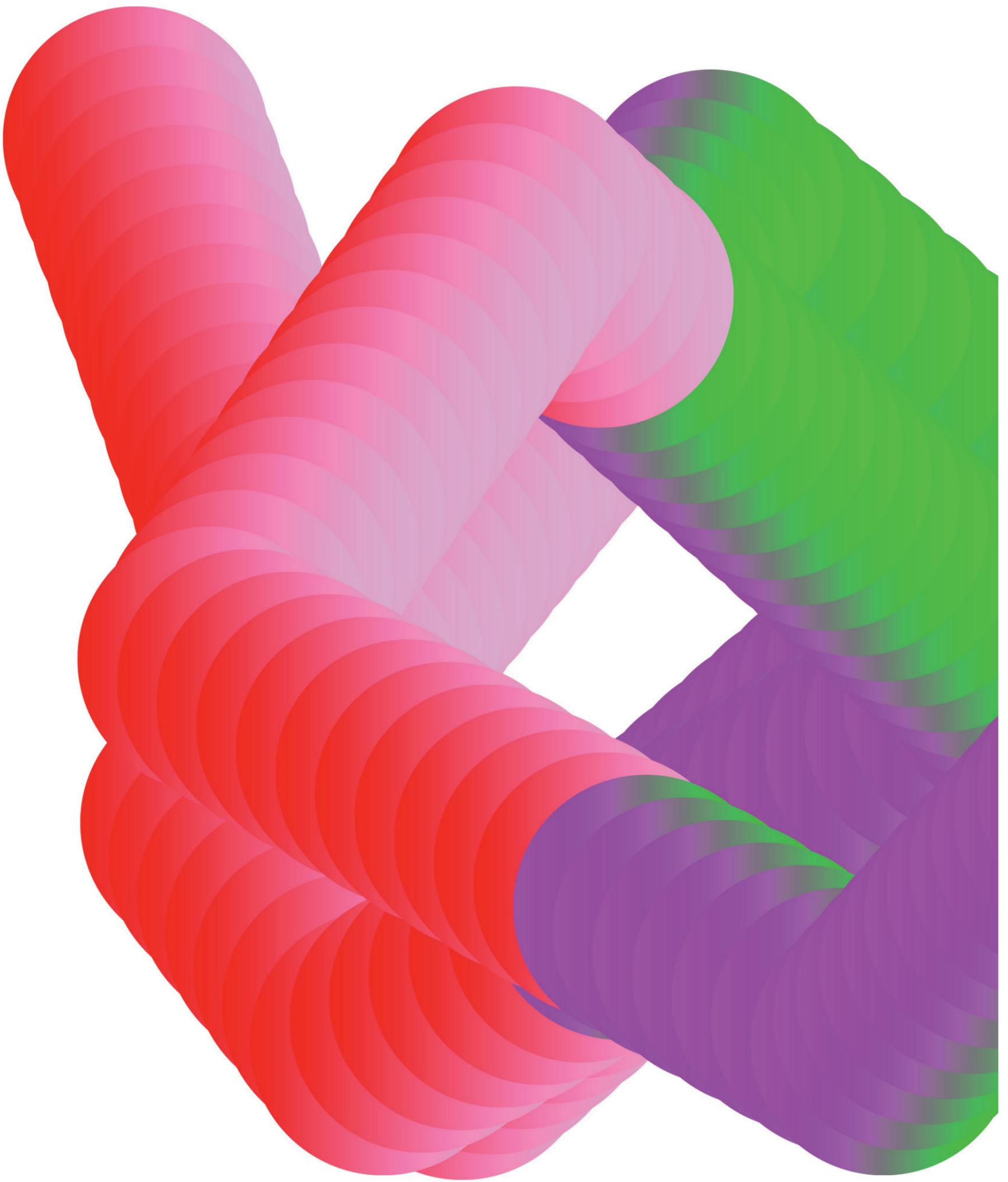
The model of limited editions established by photography has been adopted by some digital artists whose work consists mostly of software, and has allowed their art to enter the collections of major museums and galleries around the world. Since it is accessible to anyone with a network connection, Internet Art is the most problematic medium from the perspective of 'collecting' artworks. Nevertheless, net art is increasingly being commissioned and collected by museums and galleries, with the source code of the work being hosted locally on the servers of the museums and galleries in which it is displayed. A major difference between this and other holdings is that the work remains visible to audiences permanently and not only when the museum or gallery places it in exhibition.¹⁸

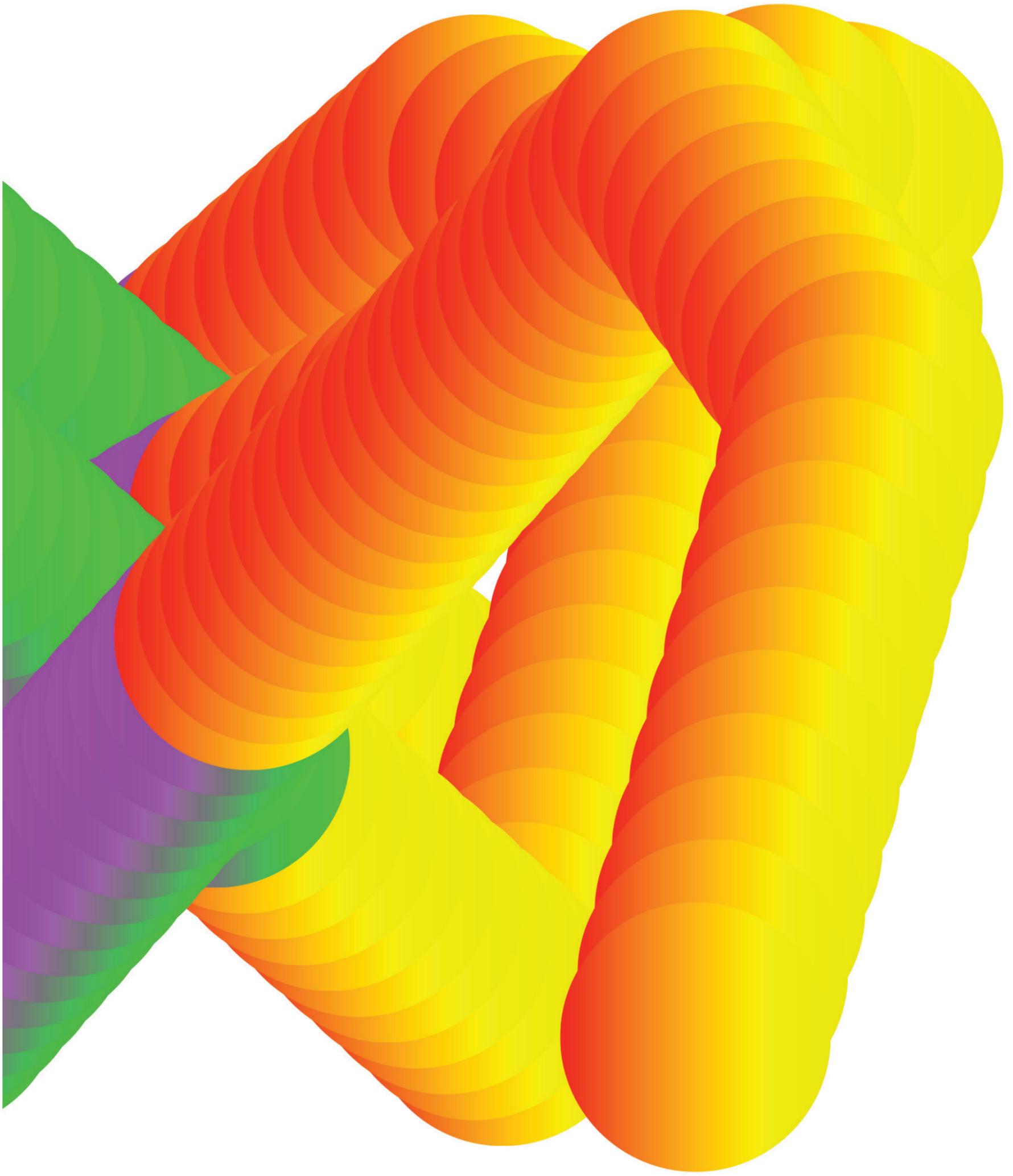
However, the model of limited editions established by photography has been adopted by some digital artists whose work consists mostly of software, and has allowed their art to enter the collections of major museums and galleries around the world.



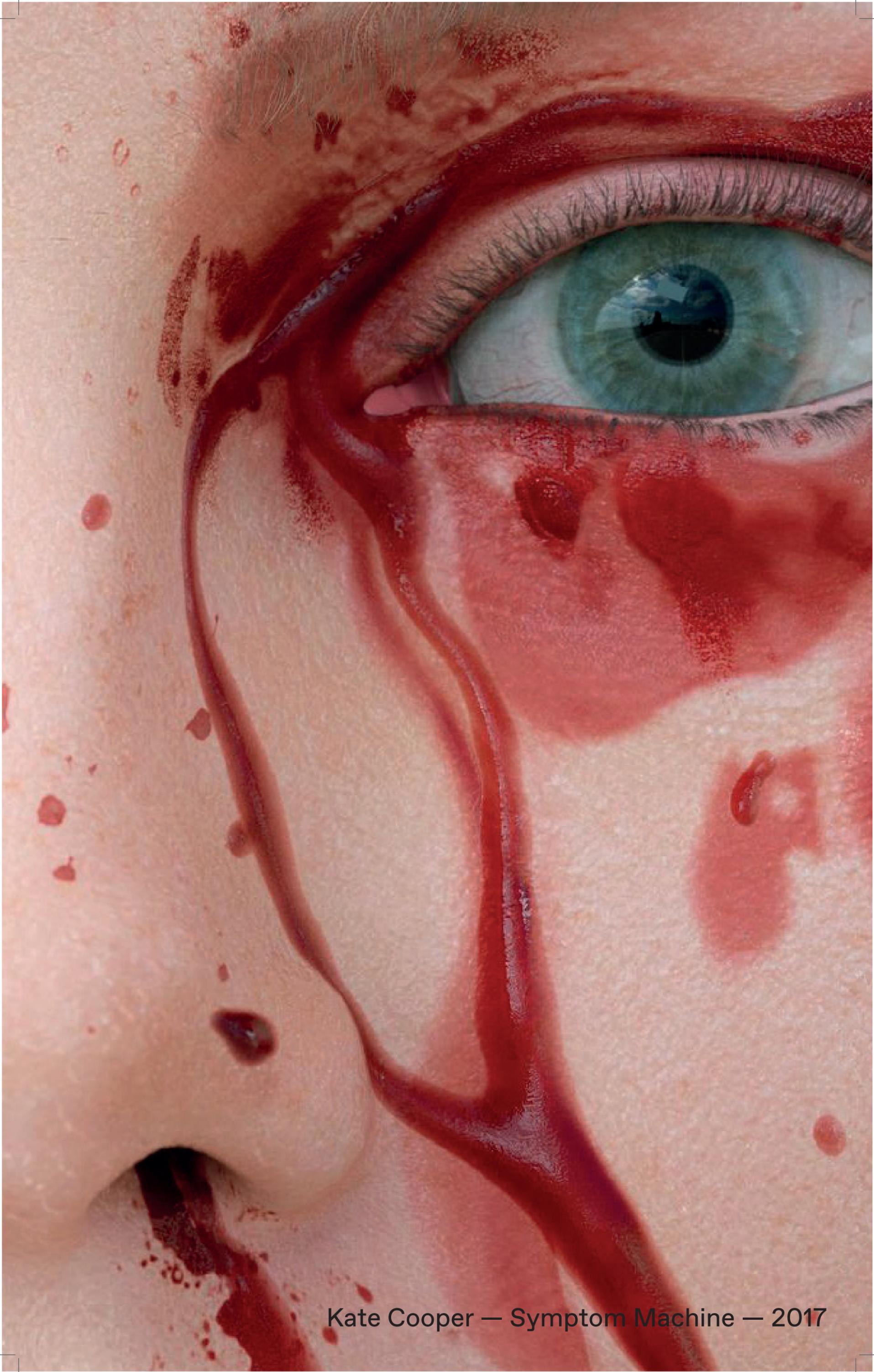


Rafaël Rozendaal — Stagnation means decline — 2002

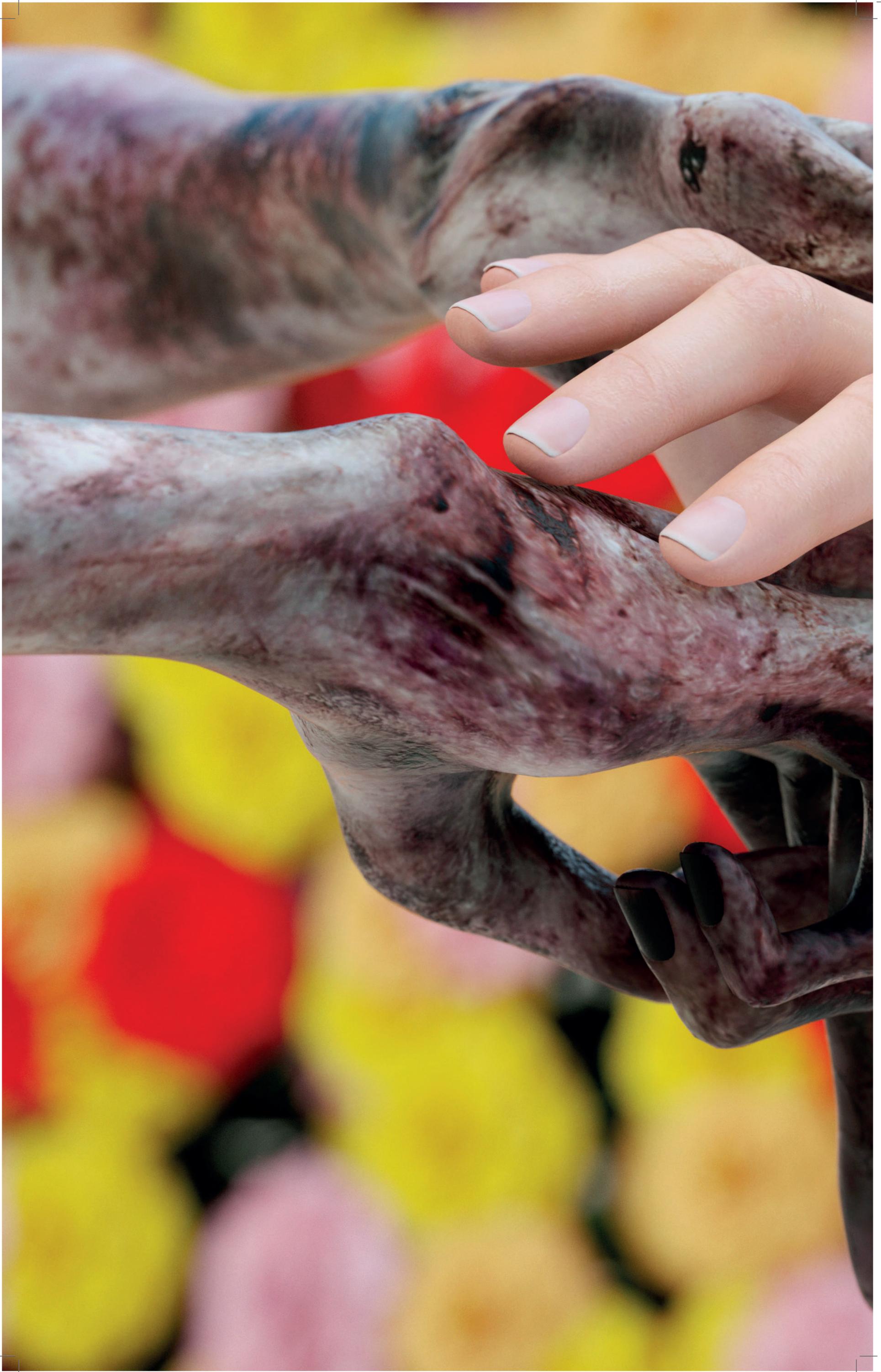








Kate Cooper — Symptom Machine — 2017







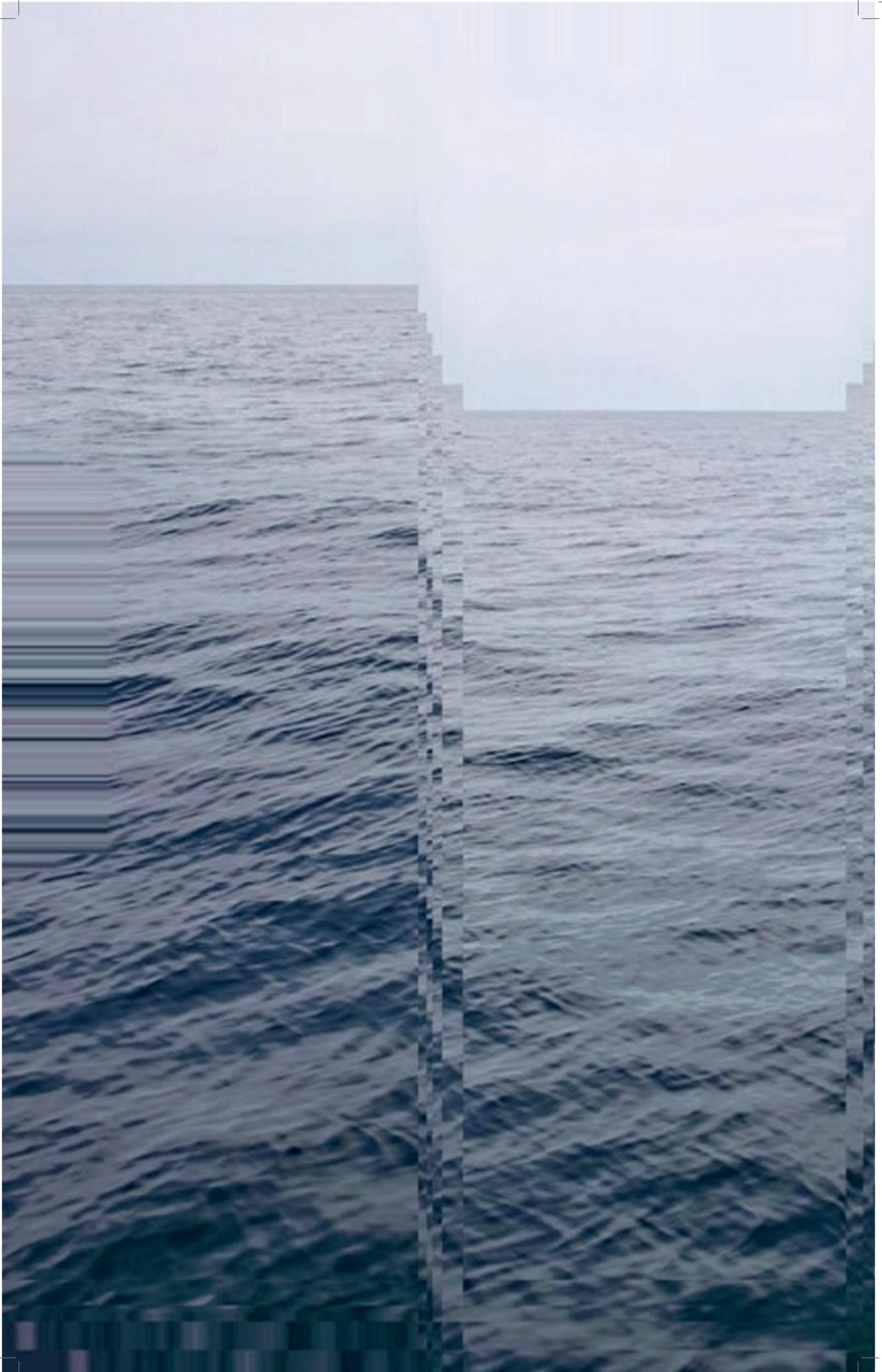


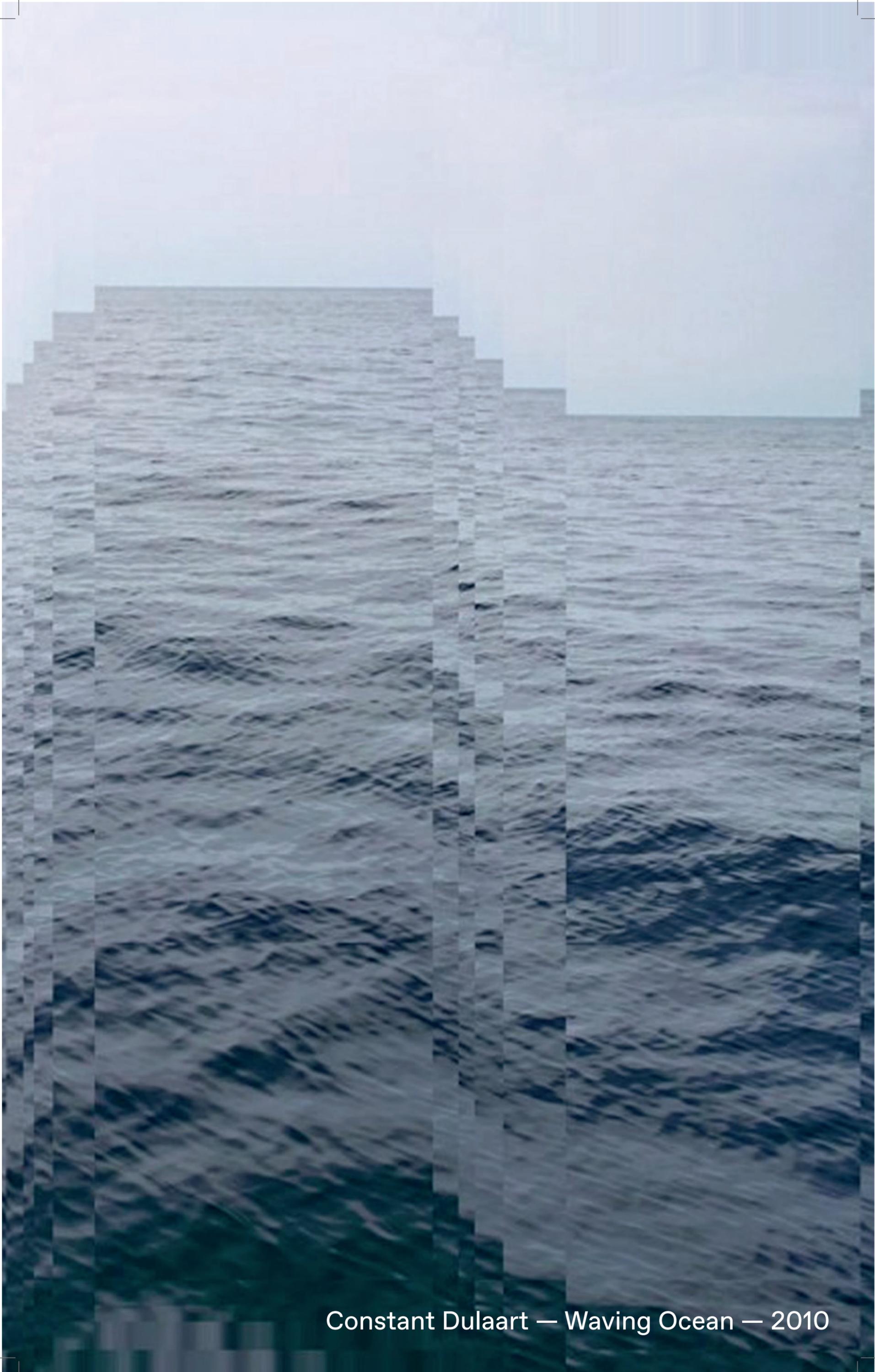
Kate Cooper — RIGGED — 2015



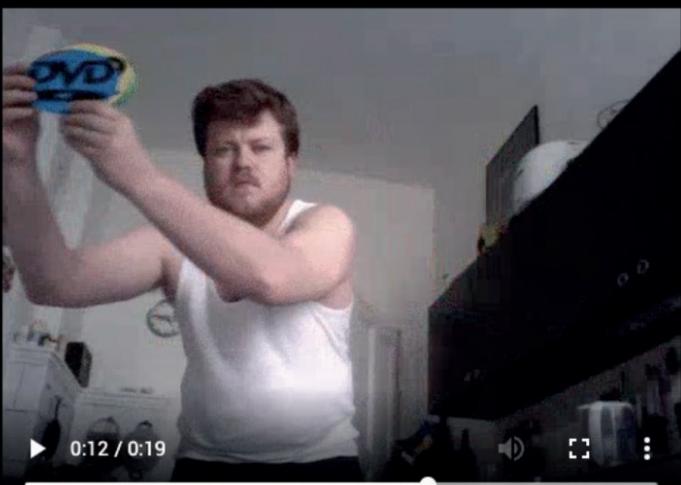
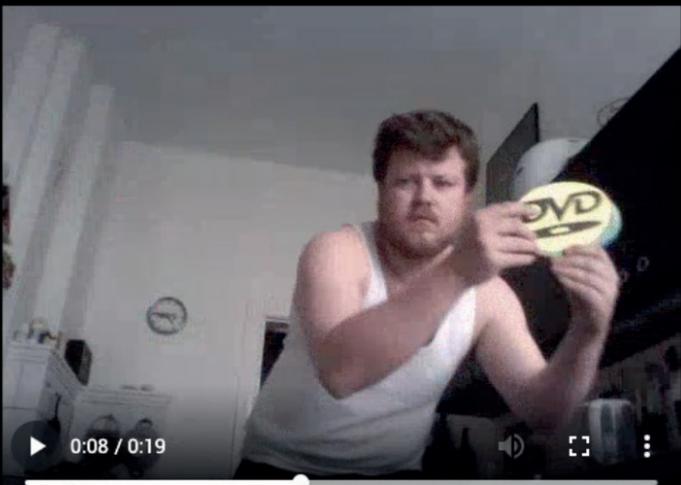


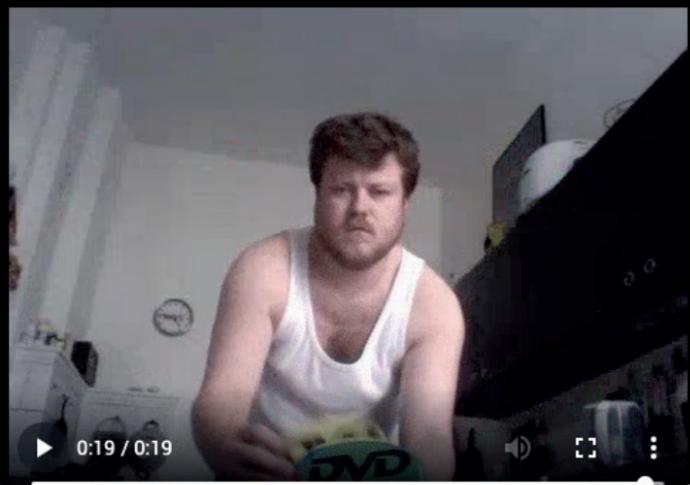
Constant Dulaart — Jennifer in paradise — 2014





Constant Dulaart — Waving Ocean — 2010





Constant Dullaart — Human Saver — 2011





anne Imhof — ANGST II — Photography by Nadine Fraczkowski — 2016





Anne Imhof — FAUST — Photography : Nadine Fraczkowski — 2017

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To further explore the topic at hand, I reached out to three established digital artists and conducted interviews questioning how these challenges are addressed in practice. The three artists, Rafaël Rozendaal, Kate Cooper and Constant Dullaart, all fall under the same category of 'digital' artists, however, the characteristics and methods of each are wildly different from one another.

RAFAËL ROZENDAAL

Rozendaal is a visual artist who creates digital, two-dimensional art works that exist solely on the internet. While he mostly uses the Internet as his canvas, he also creates installations, tapestries, lenticulars, haiku and lectures.

Rozendaal was one of the first artists to sell websites as art objects. His websites are sold to art collectors, via the sale of those websites' domain names. Both the artist and the collector sign a contract¹⁹ that the work has to remain publicly accessible. The name of the collector is placed in the source code and in the title of the webpage. Rozendaal created the Art Website Sales Contract, a public document that can be used by any artist or collector to help in the selling of public website art. In 2013, one of Rozendaal's websites was sold at an auction in New York for \$3,500 USD.²⁰

By selling websites as digital art objects, Rozendaal takes part in the traditional art distribution system. But what happens when an art institute wants to display such a piece of work? Will the institute facilitate an essential part of audience experience and let viewers interact with the artwork? The following text written by Marti Manen explains how the idea of a website as an artwork challenges the role of the institution:

“The website has no need for a mediator or an organized context for its presentation. The process from Marcel Duchamp to Joseph Kosuth gives us an historical perspective for an open and subjective definition of the artistic presence regarding the institutional. But suddenly we find an artwork that has the Internet as its ‘natural’ place, without a designated presentation space or preconfigured institutional behavior. Is it necessary to present websites from within the exhibition space? The websites by Rafaël Rozendaal plead for interaction, while the institution is established around the notion of observation. What makes these websites different when they are inside the exhibition? Are they different?”

PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARTIST

Though mostly creating works specifically for the Internet, Rozendaal has also spoken about the possibility of exhibiting work in a physical space. Displaying physical artworks in galleries and museums, he contends, still has a lot to offer to artists, not only in terms of exposure and recognition but also in terms of adding layers to the work in question.

“Showing works in a physical exhibition space makes me see certain aspects of the work better and also provides me with new, creative input because there are more, or rather different kinds of possibilities in terms of display. On top of that, I always see the Internet as a waterfall, an endless stream of ideas, and the exhibition space is an aquarium, with carefully selected works that are fixed in one space. It forces you to curate a selection of works and connect the works together. I believe that virtual exhibition spaces and physical exhibition spaces can co-exist, when keeping in mind that they require different approaches and result in different outcomes.”

KATE COOPER

Kate Cooper is a digital artist from Liverpool. Her work centers on the body as a contested space for communication and representation. Through the use of computer-generated imagery, Cooper's characters function both as objects and as infrastructure. These fictional liminal bodies are presented as forms of weaponry with which contemporary modes of exploitative labor are unpicked and rejected. Cooper produces heavily manipulated images of women to question the representation of femininity in the current age, one defined by consumption and digital technology. Her approach is informed by both Feminism and an interest in forms of labor and collaboration. These CG figures, with their ability to withdraw and hijack representation, are positioned as tools to negotiate our own understanding of the bodily effects of Capitalism. She feeds this latter interest into her work as co-director of the artist-run collaborative: Auto Italia South East.²¹

PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARTIST

Immediately at the start of our interview, Cooper brought to light a political aspect to this discourse that hasn't been discussed in this essay yet. Cooper articulates how nobody in the art world really talks about how they earn their living.

“I find it odd that there is still this taboo on this topic. Many young artists from my generation don't like to talk about this aspect of the art world because it is seen as ‘not part of their practice’. But at the same time, many artists might not even feel the need to talk about this because they don't have the same financial worry as digital artists. I'm fairly interested in the concept of labor, especially in the art world. Together with other artists, I run a creative space in London (Auto Italia South East) and a big part of why it's successful is this constant questioning of how do we manage to fundraise so that we can pay the artists and ourselves for that matter because people need to be paid, it's as simple as that. These politics are really imbedded in the organization of an artist-run space like ours and it teaches us a lot about how to function in such a political climate. At the same time, as an autonomous digital artist, I'm also still trying to figure out how to make it work and it remains a bit of a struggle.”

In most art schools, but also in post-graduate residencies like the Rijksacademie, young artists are not being prepared for the specific economic climate of the art world today, mainly because it is simply not seen as part of an artist's daily practice. We are encouraged to believe that an artist should only be focused on creating art, alluding to the romantic notion that artists don't make art to make money. Money is not simply a marginal issue in the art world, and creatives are by no means excluded from money management. Artists simply need money to order to create art and to be able to support themselves, making it an inevitable part of their practice. So why are art students and young artists not taught how to function in this financial system?

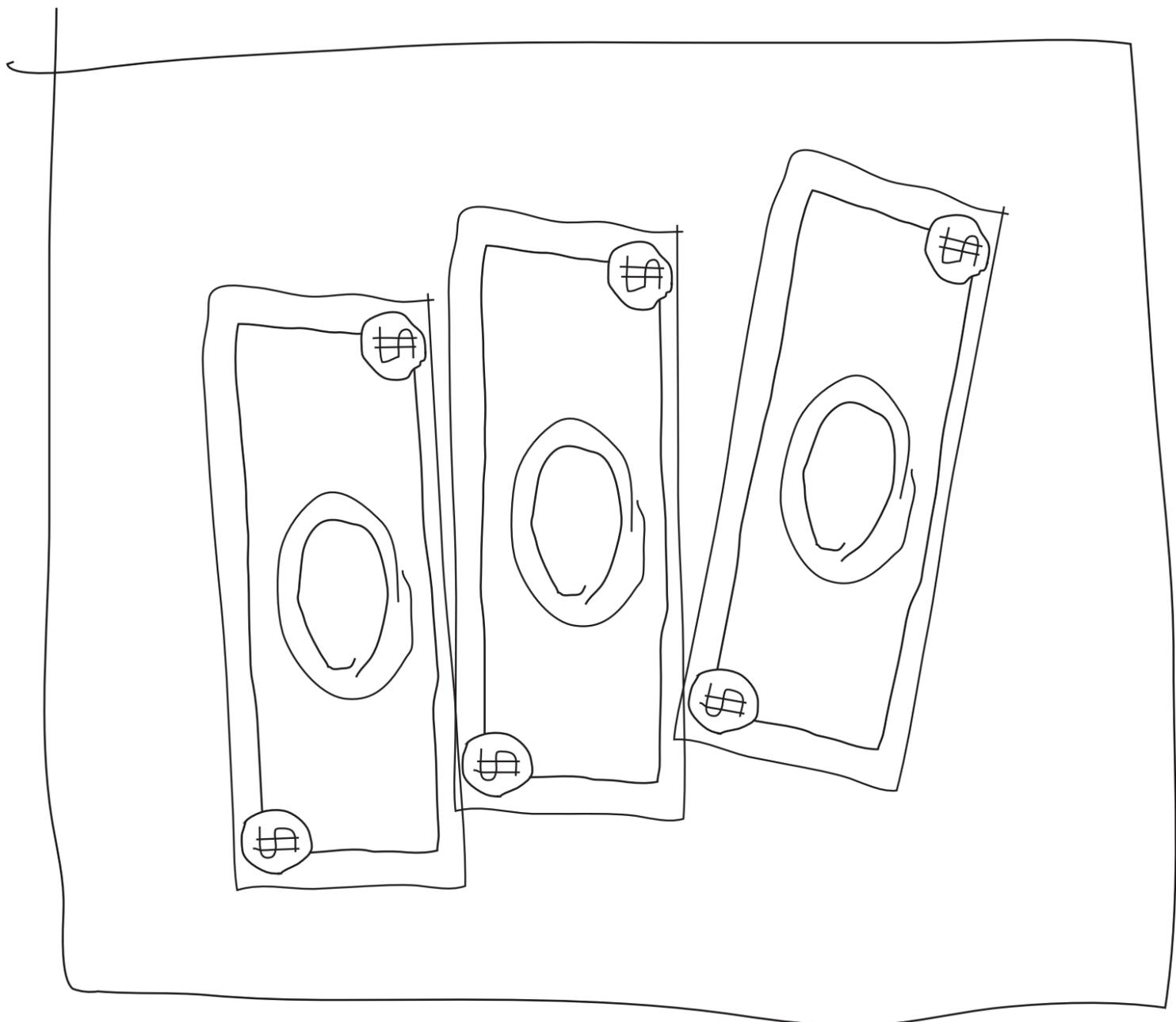
Cooper realized quite early on in her career that the financial aspect of being an artist is indeed highly political. The political aspect of this discourse begs the question, who is allowed to be creative and to become an artist?

“For example, to be able to work as an artist, one has to go to art school. And in particular in the UK, to be able to go to art school is an extremely massive financial burden. So, if people don’t want to talk about this, even though it’s quite necessary, I’m often wondering if this could be a system of privilege that many people don’t want to deconstruct. And you can see that particularly in the UK; the people that are able to go to art school are already in a financially secure position and because of this they are completely divorced of any financial worry. Which could explain why nobody’s talking about this.”

PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARTIST

The current climate also happens to be extremely different than the climate of earlier generations. In the past, there was significantly more government funding for education, especially art education, Cooper explains.

“Some of the established artists of today, that I spoke to, went to art school because they didn’t really know what they wanted to do in life and it was an easy and attractive option because of going to art school, in that time in the UK, would mean they would get paid to go to art school. You would get a monthly subsidy and sometimes even free housing. So, it was kind of a luxurious option to have some time to figure out what you wanted to do. Nowadays, because of many budget cuts, today’s youth have the pressure of having to choose the right education from the start because they can only afford to do one study. The student subsidies have become loans and rental prices have gone through the roof.”



The situation for today's art students has changed dramatically compared to the situation 20 years ago, which is why it's rather odd that the art world still appears to function in much the same way.

"But there is a positive side to that as well", Cooper explains.

"Because art students nowadays are really forced to consider their choices by asking themselves; do I want to take this risk? Do I really want to invest my money and time in this? And it creates more of a tight community based on collaboration since there are more possibilities when people work together."

When using a search engine to find information about Cooper or to find images of her work, it becomes evident that she chooses not to have much exposure on the Internet. Cooper doesn't have a website nor profile where her contact details can be found, only a few interviews online and a limited selection of images. Compared to other digital artists, who seem to be more exposed, this is quite striking. When asked if this is conscious choice, Cooper answered quite jokingly, saying that she's too lazy to maintain an online presence.

"It's not a strategy of mine. It rather seems like quite a lot of work for which you need to put a lot of time aside and I often wonder why I would put energy in that. I've noticed that if people want to reach me, they'll find me anyway, regardless of what is online. If I would make a website, it would just be for information. It wouldn't be part of my art practice."

PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARTIST

Cooper shares Rozendaal's belief in the relevance of exhibiting in a physical space.

“How other artists conceptually use the Internet as a medium is very interesting to me but it's not part of my practice in the same way. In terms of uploading an online portfolio, I personally like the potential performativity of a work, in terms of a physical experience with bodies collectively interacting in a space. It's important to me that the work offers a physical experience. Watching a video on your laptop screen in the comfort of your own home creates a different kind of experience which, though depending on the work, is often not the experience I'm aiming for.”

Cooper's elusive presence on the Internet, although not a conscious strategy, does seem to have its benefits, considering her success as an artist. One could argue that the more mysterious the artist and the more difficult it is to find his/her materials online, the more willing audiences will be to go and view and experience the artist's work first-hand.

Cooper is currently taking part in a group exhibition entitled 'Freedom of Movement' at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, in which she contributes a singular video work titled 'Infection Drivers.' Typically, artists don't get paid for exhibiting in museums, so how does Cooper, as a digital artist, profit from her art practice?

"I don't sell a lot of works, but I did get paid for the group exhibition at The Stedelijk but that is because the Stedelijk receive's funding from the Mondriaan Fund, which in turn comes with the condition that the artists participating in the project get paid to a certain pay scale for their work. I'm actually positively surprised at how good the Netherlands are at structures like these compared to the UK. I often participated in exhibitions in the UK where people like the curator, the space designer, the graphic designer and the photographer would get paid. But I as an artist, wouldn't get paid, even though I created the entire concept for the exhibition."

Because of the Mondriaan Fund's support the Stedelijk Museum received, Cooper was able to receive €1,700 euros for the 'Freedom of movement' project.

CONSTANT DULLAART

Like the work of his digital native peers, Constant Dullaart's often conceptual work manifests itself both online and off. Within his practice, he reflects on the broad cultural and social effects of communication and image processing technologies while critically engaging with the power structures of the mega corporations that dramatically influence worldviews via their presence on the internet. He examines the boundaries of manipulating Google, Facebook and Instagram and recently founded technology company Dulltech.

He is known for his work series *Jennifer in Paradise*, which seeks to expose the technological structures that inform modern visual culture. Dullaart's most recent work consists of an online narrative in which he recounts his experience of buying 2.5 million Instagram followers and distributing them amongst a personal selection of active art-world Instagram accounts, resulting in a body of physical works that referred to this narrative. He was awarded the Prix Net Art in late 2015. Dullaart's work stays firmly yet defiantly within the realm of contemporary art, but from a position profoundly informed by the conditions of new media networks—technical cultural, social, economic, political, etc. Dullaart strives for an honest, respectful, yet unembellished approach to the materials and conditions of the network. At the same time his work is full of humor, wit, and critical commentary.²²

What is interesting about Dullaart's approach to the art world's traditional distribution system is his apparent lack of interest in fighting or changing it, choosing instead to play with the current system.

“You can rebel against the traditional distribution system or you can use it, respectfully. I create something, and then I add it to a gallery system and then the gallery system creates this ‘value’ to it. Once I place a work in this system, I won’t make it available online. Because you only create one, there’s this ‘fake’ kind of, artificial scarcity implemented to an art work within this gallery system and as an artist you can use that. Though, it would be great if established art institutes like museums would show works that are culturally valued through views on online platforms such as 9GAG, Reddit or YouTube. It’s tragic that online platforms like this do, most definitely, add a social and cultural value to an online work of art but they’re not recognized as such by institutes.”

Creating a narrative by making a gesture online and then referring to it by creating a physical manifestation of that work, is something that Dullaart particularly enjoys within his own practice.

Though this approach is very inventive and intelligently implemented throughout his work, it feels more like Dullaart wishes to trick the system, rather than conform to it or effectively challenge it. The question still remains if this particular way of using the traditional distribution system is the ideal way of distributing digital art.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARTIST

PERSPECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTE

NOTES

23. LIMA preserves, distributes and researches media art (n.d.), Retrieved January 23, 2019, — <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/about>

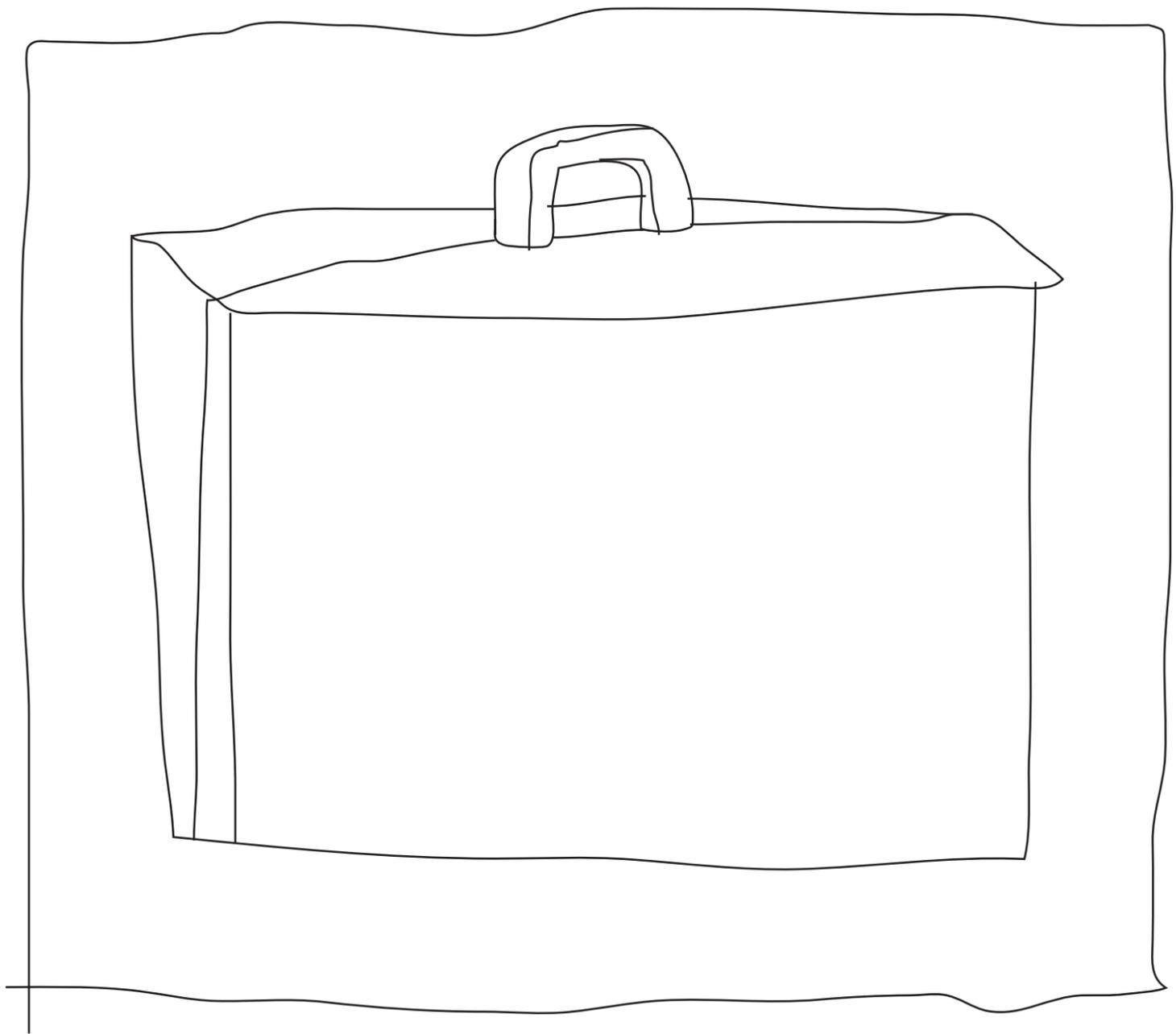
24. Fluxus was an international, interdisciplinary community of artists during the 60's and 70's who engaged in experimental art practices that emphasized the artistic process over the finished product. They believed that art should be fully grasped by all peoples - not only critics, dilettantes and professionals within the art world. Fluxus (n.d.), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, Retrieved January 23, 2019, — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fluxus#Event_score

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27. Contemporary art gallery (n.d.), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, Retrieved January 23, 2019, — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contemporary_art_gallery

28. Lethem J, The ecstasy of influence - 2012, Retrieved January 17, 2019, — <https://harpers.org/archive/2007/02/the-ecstasy-of-influence/6/>



To learn more about an institutional perspective in this discourse, I reached out to two established art institutes that deal specifically in digital art, LIMA and Upstream Gallery, with whom I discussed business models, their motivation to represent digital artists, the current position of digital art in the contemporary art world and its future potential.

LIMA

After the closing of the Netherlands Media Art Institute (NIMk), its experts founded LIMA as its successor. LIMA is an independent, international art platform dedicated to sustainability of media and digital art. The integrity of its equipment and files are regularly maintained, ensuring that digitized and stored media in their electronic depot or e-depot remains available and accessible for future generations. In addition, thanks to their storage and digitization services, they are also able to provide support to museums, galleries and individual artists. In collaboration with artists, museums and universities, LIMA conducts research on the preservation and accessibility of this segment of our cultural heritage.²³ Both Rafaël Rozendaal and Constant Dullaart make use of the services of LIMA.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTE

According to their website, LIMA stores data files on hard disks and LTO for €0.15 per minute of material. They charge €30 a year to store tapes and a one-time charge of €50 to run a technical check and to format the server for both display and archive. If an art institute would like to show works that are stored at LIMA, the administrative cost for loans, screenings and exhibitions are €25 per work (exclusive of costs to migrate the data to other formats). Furthermore, when exhibiting works, LIMA implements a business model in which the artist gets 60% of the fee.

Speaking to the director of the organization, Gaby Weijers, it becomes very clear that LIMA is not only concerned with storing and preserving its collections, but also the institute's passion for promoting and sharing both its knowledge and its collections with a wider audience. In addition to annual workshops and symposiums, in which discuss the results of their research and the challenges they face are discussed, the institute also hosts around 500 presentations each year, showcasing work from all over the world. They work together with organizations such as the International Film Festival of Rotterdam to host screenings and premiere new film works.

According to Weijers, *“Rapid advances in technology make it unrealistic to expect that each individual artist, museum and art academy constantly develop a sustainability plan for every new medium. It would be a shame if all this cultural heritage would get lost over time. That’s what LIMA wants to prevent.”*

The development of a sustainability plan can be outsourced to LIMA as well as documentation and the taking care of the modification or rewriting of source material in order to maintain and run the original work on a new platform.

When discussing the position of digital art, Weijers explained that she does notice a its disfavored position within the art world, however, also emphasizes the importance of the distinction between digital art and video art. Though video art is in fact digital, Weijers claims that there is currently quite the market for video art, particularly for video works from the 70’s and 80’s that, at that time, were not fully recognized. It is often the case that when a new technology triumphs, it allows the technology it rendered obsolete to become an art form. It therefore makes sense that a new found interest in analogue video works from the 70’s and 80’s has emerged in the art world today, as this medium is no longer embedded in the daily life of modern society. This simultaneously explains why digital art is considered an ‘unpopular’ form of art in the art world today. One could argue that the digitalization of society has made all interactions with digital technology common; too common, in fact, to have the medium be considered a legitimate form of art.

As Weijers explains: *“The institutional problem with digital art could potentially be that its essence is similar to a way of thinking that dates back to Fluxus²⁴. This mentality is based on removing the art work from the institute, such as the museum, and rather manifesting itself in public spheres, like the internet, which would render the museum obsolete.”*

PERSPECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTE

The fact that many digital art works involve public interaction remains a threshold for many museums to exhibit such works.

“Many institutions are clueless as to how to deal with this public interaction. This results in a lot of net-art works, for example, being shown behind glass plates, preventing the spectator from interacting with the art work which is completely contradictory considering the essence of most net-art is interaction with its audience.”

Weijers also points out that *“in museums, there’s often no experienced technical team staffed hired purposely for the maintenance of digital art.”*

Digital works are often very expensive to show and ideally require constant maintenance. As a result, Internet art is difficult and expensive for museums and galleries to display, while most simply lack the equipment needed to host collections. This is where LIMA comes in.

Weijers believes that in terms of net art, there are other models of presenting the works that don’t necessarily require an institute like a museum or a gallery, and that relate more to exposure than to exclusivity. An example of one of these models can be found in the work of Petra Cortright. Cortright works in video, painting and digital media. She is well known for her video works presented on YouTube. Her videos playfully explore formal properties of video software and the representation of physical bodies in digital spaces.

While the quality of a work of art cannot objectively be measured, views and likes on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube do indicate, to a certain degree, the popularity of individual artists. Cortright set up a video catalog which algorithmically determined the price of video works based on YouTube view counts. She considered this to be a way of deriving value from her detractors, making views and comments as much a part of the piece as Cortright's video.²⁵ When asked if this was intended as a sinister way of artificially increasing the price of her work, Cortright answered by saying :

“There are no rules in the art market so I do not pretend to have prices that follow the rules.”²⁶

Can public works, such as this, be acquired? Since LIMA primarily focuses on the storage, preservation and distribution of digital art works and rarely deals with the selling process, I spoke with Upstream Gallery to get a deeper understanding of the trading system involving digital art.

UPSTREAM GALLERY

Upstream gallery is one of the most prominent galleries representing digital artists in the Netherlands. The gallery was established by Nieck de Bruijn in 2003 and, according to its website, quickly gained a credible international reputation among collectors, art institutions, and critics. The gallery is based in Amsterdam and is renowned for its contribution to contemporary art. The gallery mostly focuses on radical, engaged, conceptual and post-internet art. The website of Upstream Gallery reveals that the gallery represents a variety of new media/digital artists, including Rafael Rozendaal, Constant Dullaart, Dennis Rudolph and JODI, as well as performance artist Alicia Framis and time-based artist Marinus Boezem. Upstream Gallery implements a business model that is common in the art dealing business. The gallery is for-profit, meaning they take a percentage of the art that is sold there. In the case of the Upstream Gallery (as well as most art galleries in the Netherlands) the commission rate is 50%. In return, the institute gives the artists it represents a chance to show work regularly, promote their shows, and help them network with cultivating collectors, press contacts and critics.²⁷

It was a conscious choice for the Upstream Gallery to start focusing on digital artists, for the simple reason that, inevitably, the art world has been greatly influenced and transformed by the increasingly growing digital era and the expanding possibilities of the internet.

First and foremost during the selection process, the Upstream Gallery looks for a body of work that triggers a (subjective) reaction. They also search for works which demonstrate a connection between conceptualism and digital art. The choice to work digitally is preferably built upon a conceptual foundation, one that, ideally, creates a perspective that is radically innovative. This is where artists coincide with the gallery itself, supporting its reputation for hosting cutting-edge and forward-thinking works of art. According to Martijn Dijkstra, one of the co-owners of the gallery, an open attitude toward innovation was the key to success for artists such as Boezem in the 80's, and why, for the same reason, artist duo JODI sparked their interest in the 90s. That being said, the gallery emphasizes that it does not merely represent digital artists, aiming instead for a balance between traditional and digital artists.

One of the reasons Upstream chose to represent a variety of digital artists was the simple fact that galleries had not done so before. Most galleries were and remain to this day, hesitant to accept digital art as a legitimate form of art, primarily because gallery owners and art dealers are scared the medium will be met with skepticism and will result in poor ticket sales. However, according to Dijkstra, the contrary appears to be true.

“A lot of disciplines within but also outside of the art world seem more and more interested in an artistic approach to technology.”

This is interesting given, as stated above, the digital medium is one of the least-sold mediums in the contemporary art world. When asked if he thinks galleries displaying digital art have assumed something of an underdog position within the art world, Dijkstra responded:

“to this day, Upstream Gallery remains more or less the only gallery in The Netherlands specifically representing most of the spectrum of the digital medium.”

PERSPECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTE

He compared the concerns that many institutions have regarding digital art to the concerns they had during the rise of photography as an art form in the 80's. When a certain technology is relatively new to the art world, many art dealers are hesitant because, according to Dijkstra. Because of these hesitations, Dijkstra contends, many art institutions neglect to regard the historical aspect of earlier new-found technologies. In addition, they neglect to take into consideration that when a new technology emerges in science, sooner or later, this technology will manifest itself within the art world as well. Finally, they also fail to recognize the potential for revolution a new medium can bring to the art world.

“The concerns institutions experience are simply unnecessary. History has proven again and again that whatever challenges a new medium brings when it presents itself as a form of art, simultaneously, a solution will present itself, mostly through continuing advancing technologies.”

While Dijkstra implores institutions to anticipate change, he also claims that it does seem that recently the support for digital art from institutes has been slowly growing.

“It's only been two years ago that the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam started showing an interest in the digital artists represented by the gallery (and arguably, showing interest in digital art in general) by acquiring works through the gallery.”

One could argue that this interest has arrived relatively late, since the digital medium has been making waves in the art world for already at least one or two decades. The budget the Stedelijk Museum currently maintains for digital art is still relatively small compared to traditional media. However, five years ago, that same budget for digital art was non-existent. It's safe to say the interest of established institutes in digital art is slowly but surely growing. Nonetheless, to this day, traditional paintings remain the highest selling art objects in the current art market. When asked to what extent digital art will evolve, Dijkstra answered:

“Mostly because of the inevitable influence of rapid technological developments in our everyday life, I predict that digital art will become a prominent form of art that might even surpass performance art and even sculptural art, because of its many advantages.”

The advantages Dijkstra mentions are essential, as many of them form the reason artists choose to work in digital media. One such reason is storage, since storing digital art is very inexpensive compared to sculptural art. Another one is accessibility, given anyone with access to a computer can make digital art and that digital artists do not necessarily need a physical workspace. These advantages allow a lower threshold for aspiring artists to take their first steps in experimenting with art.

The previously-discussed concept of selling physical objects in addition to intangible works – such as the paintings of Anne Imhof for the production of *Faust* – is a concept that Dijkstra recommends to digital artists:

“Often - in the process of selling works - the digital (and time-based) artists who are most successful, create physical works in addition to their ephemeral and/or digital work, in order to sell.”

A physical object remains easier to sell. It seems that, no matter the possibilities of the digital medium – such as the invitation it offers to think outside of the box and question this materialistic limitation – the traditional idea of a physical object that supposedly consists of an ‘aura’ of which often only one ‘authentic’ copy exists, remains valuable and highly desirable for many collectors and institutions.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTE

This desire for materialism is by no means a new and unique phenomenon, deeply embedded in consumerist culture. I often find myself unable to understand that, given the emergence of digital art - and with it an exciting new 'dimension' that offers an endless stream of new possibilities to explore - this traditional, materialistic notion of owning authentic objects remains dominant in determining the value of art. One would hope that since the advent of the Internet and the concomitant open-source revolution, we would perhaps finally be able to escape the appeal of proprietary. In an ideal world, the art world would function around a model where sharing, experiencing and interacting with art defines the cultural and monetary value of the work.

When discussing the value of digital art, whether the accessibility of digital art on the Internet influences the value of the work often comes into question. It was previously mentioned that the value of an art work is often based on its rarity. On the Internet, 'source-hypocrisy'²⁸ ceases to exist more and more. Anyone with a computer and access to the Internet can duplicate and share anything available on the World Wide Web. As a result, the concept of a singular, original, authentic copy is harder to maintain. Therefore, when a digital art work existing on the internet remains accessible on the internet after it is sold, how does one address the notion of ownership? Could it be that everyone interacting with the website is the owner of it? "No.", Dijkstra firmly claims.

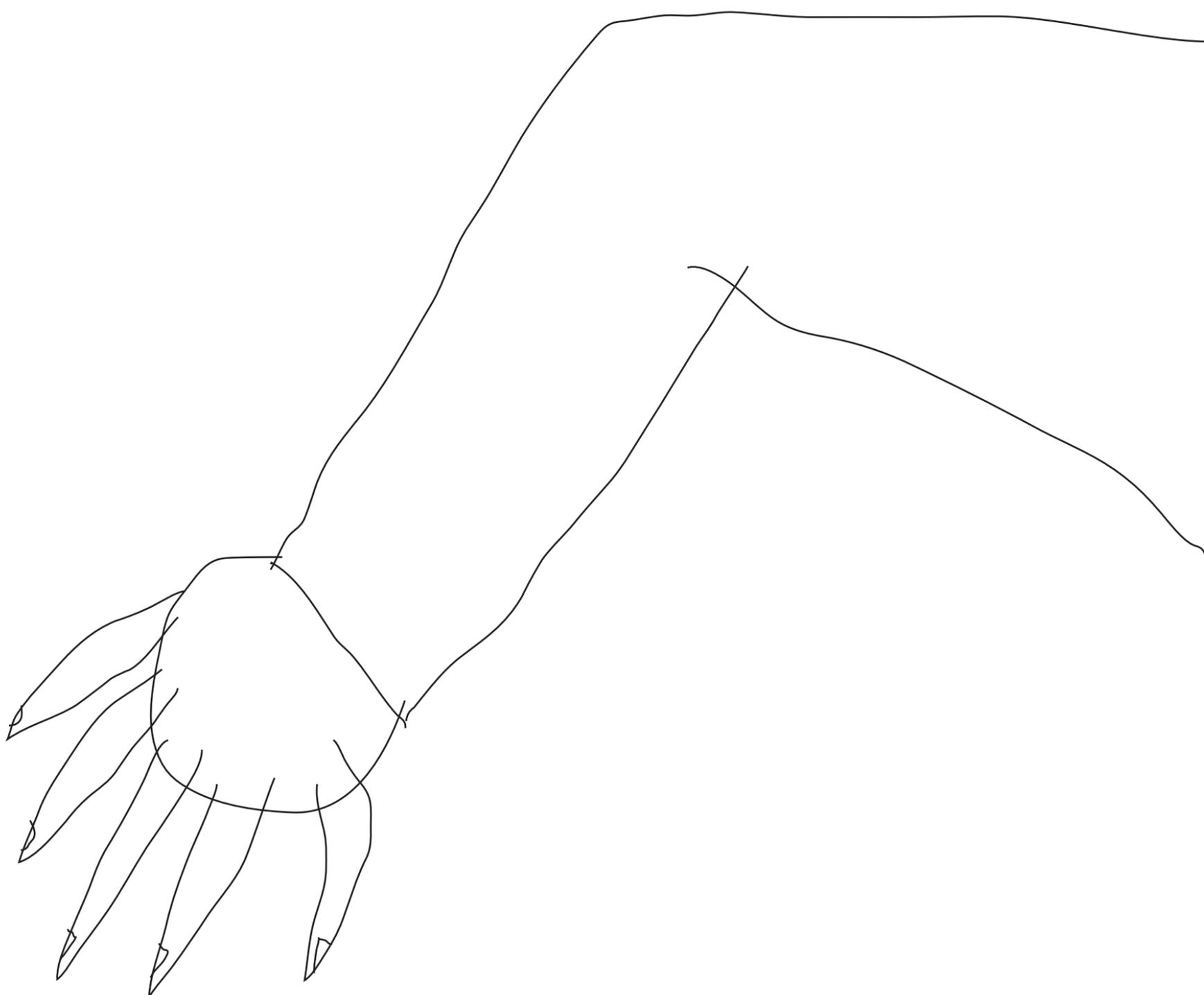
"Everyone is able to view and interact but there is only one owner. Similar to when a painting is exhibited in a museum. Everyone can view and admire it, but there's only one person who effectively owns it."

Examining this notion of material ownership and scarcity-equals-value is key to understanding the practice of collecting art. A question that dealers of digital art often receive is :

"if one can view the website on the internet for free, why would one buy it?"

To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the practice of collecting.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE COLLECTOR



While humans are materialistic by nature, we have a peculiar relationship with the things we own. According to psychodynamic theory, the desire to own is a reflection of the primitive ego. To own is not only to possess, but to incorporate the object into one's psyche. When we possess something, it becomes part of our identity. It functions as an extension of ourselves, boosting our sense of control. It confirms who we are or who we want to be. We therefore choose our possessions based on the image we wish to be associated with. A critical part of consumer culture is the use of objects to gain and indicate status. When we have better or newer things than others, we feel superior. This boosts our sense of identity, especially when others admire our possessions.

From the perspective of psychodynamic theory, the motivations of individual art collectors is elucidated. Besides having a passion for art, collectors use their owned works of art to reflect their status and to project a certain image of themselves. Another triggering aspect of collecting could be the unpredictable economic process an art work goes through over the years. Pieces of art tend to increase in value over time. As a result, collectors exploit this process by acquiring works of an artist whose cultural value the collector believes to soon rise in significance.

However, according to private art collector Frank van Akkerveeken, the belief that most art collectors acquire art to indicate status is a common misconception.

FRANK VAN AKKERVEEKEN

Frank van Akkerveen is an insurance broker and a passionate private art collector. Mostly motivated by the ability of art to emotionally move the spectator, he started collecting at the age of 20. In the last 5 years van Akkerveen became particularly interested in digital art. Besides the visual aesthetic and the attraction to technological advances, the socially engaging power that digital artists have to reflect on everyday life is another aspect that particularly interests van Akkerveen.

“I often experience that digital works, function as a mirror for me. It keeps me aware of the world and what’s happening around me. It keeps me aware of the transformation our society is going through and how it changes us and our behavior. It truly is a black mirror.”

The importance of digital art is undervalued, according to van Akkerveen.

“It is essential that we create art works that are distinctive of our present times. Art is often a representation of society. And so digital art is a representation of the digitalization of today’s society. The representation of this transformation allows us to place the digital art medium into the art historical canon and perhaps allows us to understand ourselves and each other better. That’s why digital art – as every kind of art – is important. It has social and cultural value, above material value, in its capacity to engage with. And in the case of digital art it adds another layer by offering us a reflection upon our current technological condition.”

PERSPECTIVE OF THE COLLECTOR

To make sure these values are recognized by art institutes, Van Akkerveeken financially supports several national museums and fairs, such as museum De Pont in Tilburg and Art Rotterdam, and frequently visits international art fairs and biennales such as Art Basel, Art Cologne, Frieze, and the Venice Biennale. Another of Van Akkerveeken's motivations for collecting art is his belief that art is made to be seen and shared. He acquires art to support the artists in whom he sees potential, ensuring that their work gets the platform he feels they deserve. By giving the artists a platform, Van Akkerveeken also assures that artwork is not locked away in the private collection of an institute or a collector.

Van Akkerveeken's point of view offers an optimistic prospect for the future of digital artists. In a world where an original Basquiat painting from the 80's is sold for \$100m USD, only for it to be locked up in a private vault just for the sake of the art work being in someone's possession, Van Akkerveeken believes in initiatives that benefit not only the artist and collector, but also the public, through a system based on exposure.

"I don't believe in the current system, wherein valuable art works stay within this golden cage of an elitist community. I think art has to be seen. Like a book needs to be read. What's the point of having a great art collection if it's only to be put it in storage behind locked doors? That's not what art is made for."

This makes digital media an ideal solution. Digital media breaks out of the current system by making it much easier to share art with the general public by making access as easy as pressing a button on a smartphone. Van Akkerveeken has acquired several digital works, including works that remained available on the Internet after acquisition and he doesn't believe the accessibility of a work existing online should influence the value. He believes the work should remain online after acquisition, if that's what the artist intended.

“I wouldn't want to have it any other way. I believe the value of an art work should be determined through its capability of emotional and social, cultural engagement, not through the rarity of the art work itself. The monetary value doesn't interest me. I don't view collecting art as a financial investment. If the value increases because of a growing number of views online, even after acquisition, a percentage of that monetary value should go to the artist not just the acquirer. We should initiate an economic 'sharing' system that's based on exposure and one that implements a shared income between acquirer and artist and maybe even other people involved. Much like how it works in the music industry with streaming services such as Spotify. But on the condition that the artist profits more fairly from it than currently the case in terms of profits through streaming services.”

The concept of digital art existing on a streaming service is not a brand-new concept within the digital art world. Naturally, streaming music, films and series has become a core component of consumerist society and has widely become considered as 'low culture', while fine art has been considered part of 'high culture'. Streaming art digitally would herald the total transformation of the art world as we know it. But is this transformation necessarily negative? Or could it be considered a transformation that is inevitable and perhaps even necessary in order for the traditional art world to finally be able to keep up with the needs of today's highly-digitalized society?

PERSPECTIVE OF THE COLLECTOR

CONCLUSION

NOTES

29. Kholeif O,
Goodbye, world!
Looking at art in the digital age - 2018,
Retrieved January 26, 2019

30. Real Flow (n.d.) - 2015,
Retrieved January 11, 2019,
— <http://diannbauer.net/real-flow/>

In the past, experiencing art took part from within the boundaries of a highly elitist business. Now, thanks to a shift in cultural expectations and technological developments, experiencing art has become more accessible and mainstream attraction. Cultural institutions such as the Louvre no longer exclusively appeal to high-minded patrons, nor do the classical 'high arts' of the Renaissance or the pre-Modernist masters. The new millennium has given birth to entirely new breeds of artists who come from all kinds of backgrounds and myriad identities. With this change has come a thoroughfare of the mega-museum, biennial and art salon, reclaimed from elites and rearticulated as a funfair, a tourist attraction and a public commodity.²⁹ As has been discussed above, this transformation is an entirely positive one.

The art-fair boom highlighted by mega fairs, such as Frieze and Art Basel, are not simply spaces where dealers showcase works to a parochial group of elite collectors; now, the art scene has been opened up to the general public. Nowadays, dealers showcase artists on the basis of media attention and public consumption, curating their booths like mini-museum exhibitions. Fair organizers now also commission special projects, stage extensive talks programs, hire pop-up stores and restaurants to service attendees, and build temporary sculpture gardens for visitors to meet up and wander around. A whole new temporary social environment is being constructed. The doors are open to the public and anyone has the right to ask about the price of a piece or to inquire about the inspiration and process behind a specific work. As a result, if the price is right, a member of the general public is now able to own a work of art.

This shift from 'high culture' to 'low culture' opens up a realm of possibilities in terms of how contemporary art can be viewed, experienced and consumed. The ivory tower of the elitist art community of art dealers is being deconstructed, allowing a dialogue between artists, art dealers and art enthusiasts to slowly take shape. As Van Akkerveeken contends, art is to be seen and to be experienced. The value of art is measured in social and cultural value. In order to protect this sentiment, it is our responsibility to try and implement distribution structures that execute this notion while at the same time, offering a fair profit system for both artist, institute and collector that ensures artists are able to continue creating art, regardless of the medium in which they create their work.

CONCLUSION

Many attempts at implementing such structures have already taken place. In 2015, the Digital Museum of Digital Art opened its virtual doors, seeking to collect, preserve, interpret and exhibit the work of living digital artists and contemporary digital art, while the platform Artsy, a website and app designed by its founder Carter Cleveland in 2010, has sought to be the art world's answer to Amazon. However, it is questionable whether these platforms have actually contributed to the bettering of the art world beyond a commercial context. Artsy, like DiMoDA, could be viewed as a simple platform for elite clientele to window-shop and for galleries to boost awareness of works in the lead up to art fairs.

In terms of potential streaming services such as those mentioned by van Akkerveeken, curator and multidisciplinary artist Elsemarijn Bruijs is currently developing such a service that celebrates digital art, titled idiotbox.com. This streaming platform will be subscription-based and offers users access to a database of digital art works uploaded either by artists themselves or the institutions that represent them. Giving in to a consumerist culture, these art works can be viewed and purchased by subscribers. The project is currently still in development. Bruijs applied to the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts (AFK), which is a metropolitan cultural fund financially supported by the municipality of Amsterdam, but was ultimately denied the fund she applied for, indicating that perhaps, for whatever reasons, the government might indeed fear for its art institutes to lose their status of signifier within the art world.

But there are other promising initiatives, such as Real Flow, initiated by Suhail Malik, Diann Bauer, Victoria Ivanova and Christopher Kulendran-Thomas. Real Flow offers tailor-made financial solutions for contemporary art by crossing the now wholly permeable and artificially-maintained barriers between different art markets and markets in general. The flexible and porous semantics of art can therefore help to reconstitute its future existence and open up new vistas through and beyond capital.³⁰ One of these solutions is the so-called ‘renting system’ in which Real Flow draws up a tailor-made contract during the acquisition of the digital or physical art work. The art work remains in possession of the artist, even after acquisition by an institute or collector. The institute or individual who acquired the work owns it via contract but is not in legal possession of the physical art work. If an art institute wishes to exhibit the work, the contract allows the art work to be ‘rented’ for a period of time, with 80% of profits going to the artist and the remaining 20% going to Real Flow. The owner of the piece will have financially invested in the work of art and only profits when the art work is sold after it has increased in value.

As been examined in this essay, there are many possible solutions to the challenges of the distribution of digital art. Depending on the artist and their body of work, many solutions are available. Initiatives such as Real Flow demonstrate considerable promise, since it emphasizes the importance of sharing art as well as the importance of a fairer profit system for the artist, while also refraining from surrendering to consumerist culture. It is the most similar solution to the ‘booking system’ implemented in performance art. Crucially, the revenue system of Real Flow does not separate digital art from other mediums.

It’s not the medium that needs to adapt, it’s the distribution system. Whether initiatives like this will catch on in the art world, only time will tell.

CONCLUSION

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