

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

How Virtual Technologies Are Changing the Art World

Dan Matthews · Wednesday, April 1st, 2020

The world we live in is increasingly enhanced by technology. Digital fingerprints are all over almost everything we do; from shopping to our politics. Should it be any surprise, then, that we are exploring ways to utilize advanced gadgetry in artistic fields?

For artists today, virtual technologies are more than simply exciting new [trends in gaming](#). They are unlocking new opportunities to create works and present projects. Artists are becoming involved with the development of platforms, and providing insights to technicians from a creative perspective. In an industry that is often defined by its traditional media, artists are throwing themselves into working with technology in a way that reflects the digital era in which they live.

So, just how important is virtual tech to the art world at large. How is it enhancing not just artists' ability to create works, but also run creative businesses?

Exhibition

[Virtual reality](#) (VR) is already being used by some artists in order to create work. When combined with the HTC Vive headset and controllers, [Google's Tilt brush](#) program allows artists to "paint" in three-dimensional space; creating artworks that can be virtually explored and interacted with. However, a key aspect of any arts-related project is exhibition. For many artists, a work isn't complete until it is experienced by an audience. Artists have often used emerging technologies in order to enhance the way in which their work is consumed, and virtual tech is showing some significant potential in this area.

Some gallery spaces have focused on utilizing VR to exhibit artists specializing in immersive artforms. The first fully VR-centered exhibition space, [Synthesis Gallery](#) in Berlin, blends the use of Oculus and Vive headsets with tangible artworks in order to showcase artists who are fully committed to providing interactive art experiences beyond the simple viewing of paintings and sculptures. Even the gallery website is optimized for VR viewing and designed for a 3D experience.

However, utilizing VR still presents a financial barrier, and is not yet affordable enough to be accessible to all. In this way, augmented reality (AR) is emerging as a far more powerful tool in giving audiences the opportunity to interact with virtually-enhanced exhibitions. Many [businesses have begun to embrace AR](#) as a tool for connecting on a more personal, visual level with customers, and artists are able to do the same. Almost regardless of the audience's income level, they are able to use their own smartphones and tablets to explore collections. From the Latvian

National Museum of Art's approach in providing virtual tour guides, to [ARTscapes](#) using the technology to include digital additions to physical paintings which can only be viewed through an app.

Education

We often look at the effect of technology on artists from a purely creative or commercial standpoint. In fact, arts education has the potential to affect students from a wide variety of backgrounds, who will then take their experiences into a wealth of industries. In the same way that virtual technology is proving to be advantageous in [simulation learning](#) for healthcare and therapy students, introducing them to techniques in a risk free environment, virtual spaces can be useful tools for arts education.

Many arts educators are beginning to embrace the concept of “mixed reality” in the classroom; the ability to fuse the tangible aspects of classroom education alongside VR and AR elements. Either using VR headsets, or smartphones coupled with viewers such as Google Cardboard, students can take virtual tours through the [Google Arts & Culture project](#). This provides arts students with valuable, in-person exploration experiences that go far beyond seeing a work on a powerpoint presentation or in a book.

It's not just the traditional visual arts classes that are being affected by this technology either. Theatrical arts and drama educators have been finding the technology to be important tools in encouraging students to explore digital performance ideas that will likely become an increasingly important part of the entertainment landscape. Students at the University of Worcester in the UK, for example, work with choreographers and digital artists to create immersive VR performances as part of their degree module. This approach can help students understand VR's value not simply as cold technology, but a key to collaborative projects.

Business

The digital age has been a boon for entrepreneurs. Access to advanced technology and markets across the globe have opened exciting opportunities. Artists have taken to building their careers not just as creators, but also taking control of capitalization of their work. Over the last couple of decades we have seen the rise of independent studios and creative agencies, headed by artists. Virtual technologies are not just making an impact in [tech startups](#), but also in arts businesses.

Virtual storefronts, such as Etsy, have proven valuable avenues to sell originals, prints, and merchandise created from various artworks. This more direct system of revenue, and immediate worldwide connection to an audience from across the globe in virtual spaces, means that artists aren't so reliant upon agents and the various other gatekeepers, giving them greater control over how their work is used and where the funds generated are applied to other projects.

Of course cyber crime continues to be a [risk for an arts business](#) conducted in virtual space. The problems aren't just terms of theft of funds, though. For example, many arts businesses are increasingly using subscription models, offering exclusive access to music and products; hacking by unscrupulous actors, and resulting piracy of the product can threaten to undermine the creator's efforts. Blockchain technology — the unalterable ledger-creating system used in cryptocurrencies — can and has been used to help artists protect themselves and their intellectual property against cybercrime. The musician [Imogen Heap used blockchain](#) to securely release an online single in 2015, ensuring it could not be intercepted and maintainING copyright protections. Virtual sales for

events such as exhibition openings and performances can also be protected by blockchain, creating a timestamped, unique “token” that can’t be replicated and used illicitly.

Conclusion

There is often the misconception that artists prefer traditional methods of creation, exhibition, and sales. In the modern arts world, this couldn’t be further from the truth. While many artists maintain traditional methods, these are often enhanced by virtual technologies. From VR exhibitions to blockchain-enhanced virtual sales, artists are crafting a new and exciting marketplace of ideas that are bolstered by tech.

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