

## Digital Art and Crowd Creation in Iran (Case Study: Tehran Annual Digital Art Exhibition)

Azam Ravadrad  
Masoomeh Taghizadegan\*

(Received 29 August 2017; accepted 03 June 2018)

### Abstract

This paper aims to show the status of digital art in Iran and explain how the meaning of an artist has transformed in the digital age. The primary assumption of this paper is that the experience of digital art has again revived the collective experience in creating arts. Although, interactivity is considered to be the most important quality of digital art, their collective, collaborative and progressive qualities should as well be emphasized. These qualities have transformed all aspects of art. The present study focuses on the audience's part in the foundation of producing art in new media art or digital art. Using Howard Becker's idea of 'the sociology of art' we can show the process of change, that the notion of crowd production of art has undergone and almost reached its exact meaning. The current study is applying a qualitative approach using participation and interview techniques. The research was carried out during the Tehran Annual Digital Arts Exhibition (TADAX). The research data were obtained based on interviews with artists and participators in the four TADAX exhibitions from 2013 to 2016.

**Keywords:** audience, crowd creation Tehran annual of digital arts exhibition, digital art, digital technologies, new media art.

**Azam Ravadrad:** Professor, Department of Social Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran- Email: ravadrad@ut.ac.ir

**Masoomeh Taghizadegan:** (Corresponding author) PhD, Department of Social Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran- Email: taghizadegan@ut.ac.ir

## Introduction

This paper aims to show the status of digital art in Iran and to explain how the definition of artist has changed in the digital age. Through centuries, a romantic myth has dominated the history of art. It considers artists to be sacred and isolated geniuses, and art works to be the products of the artists' mental state and individuality. However, before the renaissance, art was a collective work. Art was pursued either as an industry in group or union workshops or as folk art and without a specific maker. In a sense, art had a collective character. The preliminary assumption of this paper is that the experience of digital media arts has revived the collective experience of creating art. Although interactivity is considered the most important quality of digital media arts, their collective, collaborative and progressive qualities should also be emphasized. These qualities have indeed changed all aspects of art.

Digital art is a general term for a range of techniques used by the artists who use digital technology as the major part of the process of creation and representation (Paul, 2006). Specifically, digital technology refers to the application of computers as media and partners for the artists in creating art work. However, digital industry is often a vague term and does not clearly define the final form of the art work. In his book, *Art of The Digital Age, Wands* (2006) has categorized digital art based on their final form to digital prints, sculpture, installations and virtual reality, performance, music and art of sounds, video and animation, software, databank, and the art of gaming. He says although many digital arts including digital picture and sculpture are rooted in types of traditional art, software art, databanks and games were made on a digital basis. Examples of software arts and games are interactive drawing and music software, algorithmic and generative works, net art, artistic games, etc. It is obvious that we can add to the list newly emerging types of digital art, the ones that have expanded creative expression.

More importantly are the changes that have taken place in the field of digital art and the artists that create it. Nowadays, in the process of creating artwork, the artist uses the help of those who used to be the audience of the artwork. This cooperation and involvement from the audience in the artwork is a new phenomenon that leads to indetermination. When there is no scheme between the artist and the audience about the outcome of the work, then the result is unclear. Digital media arts, especially touch smartphone and software arts, give the user an adventurous experience where they can practice different colors and patterns.

An example is a new trend in literature and poetry where the poet shares a part of a poem on cyberspace and asks others to complete it.

After the text is written and re-written a few times by creative users it becomes the final piece. A similar thing has been happening in music. A musician plays a solo and asks others to join the creation. Others play and share their work. The final production is in the form of a band or orchestra music. The final product may be arranged or managed by an individual, but in this case the artwork is not a monologue. These are new experiences in art in which the artwork are like an open text and the creation process takes place during a live performance. Artworks as open digital works have provided new technical possibilities for the creation processes to be collective and collaborative.

The technical possibility of open-source design for websites, computer games and animations has led to a vast trend in digital media arts. Open-source refers to programs that make their source code accessible to the public. This enables creative uses and programmers to amend the text and reconstruct and complete it. In the FLOSS (Free/Liber/ Open Source Software) movement by sharing the codes, the programmers enable progress in the field and other fields such as art<sup>1</sup>. In 2014, the Pixar Company made the drawing codes of its animations available to all designers so that designers from around the world could develop Pixar animations and make new animations or games based on the characters of the animations created by Pixar.

New applications enable users to create new pictures and make a creative mixture of sounds and images. In an article called "Art in Your Pocket", Jonah Brucker-Cohen (2010) introduces applications and the artists of mobile and tablet art such as Memo Atken who is one of the leading mobile artists that show the close link between a traditional artist and media users. Jackson Pollack's application is a multitask application that allows its users to choose colors and drops on the screen that resembles the drops in the painting of Jackson Pollack. These beautiful drops are also in Theo Watson's application. A different work called Blendid, by David Kousemaker, was a large screen that people touched using their hands or even all their bodies to create a visual effect. This was a fantasy and an adventurous experience for the audience but it called on numerous people to collaborate and interact<sup>2</sup>. In fact, these types of work are new experiences that decentralize the artist and make the art a collaborative work of a number of participants and the artist.

Several studies have been conducted on digital arts since the 1990s that provide important resources and improve our understating of

<sup>1</sup> Open-source applications are not to be mistaken with free applications. Open-source refers the possibility of changing and redistribution of the applications. Free applications can be downloaded and used without a payment but they may not allow user changes.

<sup>2</sup> Another point in these types of work is making collection for various works of the users. Media and art applications can collect the works of the users and put on a show. This is like a large museum of media artworks.

digital art and media art. These studies can be categorized into two groups: The studies that addressed the aesthetics of media and digital arts and consider them to be the continuation and improvement of conceptual arts (such as video art and installation). Studies by artists such as Michael Rush (1999), Green (2004), Tribe and Jana (2006) and Wands (2006) are in this group. The second group includes studies that conduct cultural analyses of media arts and consider them to have originated from digital culture. They believe these art forms shape multicultural experiences and cultural cooperation. This approach has wellknown researchers such as Manovich (2001; 2013; 2014; 2016), Grau (2002), Erkki Huhtamo (1995; 2005; 2008; 2009) and Lunenfeld (2000). Besides, historical and aesthetic study of digital art, these researchers attempted had a socio-cultural approach to this form of art.

However, in Iran, there is little research and literature on digital art. It has been more than 15 years since the first exhibition of modern art was held in Iran. The exhibition was held at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art where new experiences in the field of installation, video, photographs, environmental art, audio art, computer art and process art were presented.

Holding this exhibition in 2001 indicated that some Iranians were working in the field of digital-based arts and it was the beginning to new experiences. In 2001, digital media art was still trivial and only supported by very few art groups and galleries such as the projects by Water Organization of Tehran. Parkingallery was the first gallery to exhibit digital art in Iran. The organization was a venue for reviewing contemporary art. Even some tourists visiting Iran attended their meetings and helped in their development. The founders of Parkingallery website said that they aimed to show the hidden aspects of Iran's art and design. They were concerned that these aspects may be lost, while other forms of art were encouraged by the government or galleries that focused on their financial interests. Parkingallery held exhibitions of contemporary art with a focus on new media, performance, the art of sounds, photography and video with the help of different galleries such as Bahman, Tehran, Azad Art Gallery, Atbin Art Gallery, Mohsen and Boomerang. This art group founded New Media Society in 2014 as one of the organized groups, active in the field of new media art.

Ahmad Nadalian, a leading person in the field of internet and network art in Iran, in Iran's first new art exhibition (in 2001) presented a work called 01. It was a white screen (3.45\*2.45 m) covered in numbers of one and zero in a black room using a projector on a screen. When people approached to see the work their shadows would cover parts of

the screen with the numbers on the shadows. A camera would capture and send the pictures to the artist's page on the internet. For Nadalian, this was a symbol of "the internet, digitalization, and numerification of today's human". He said in some days of the exhibition textual interaction in the form of textual questions by an absent viewer was possible, using Yahoo messenger. As one of the most active artists in the field, Nadalian presented other works such as *seeking life*, *nuclear energy* and *Haftsin*.

Other artists delivered their own work in the field of media art. People like Bavand Behpoor<sup>1</sup> with works such as *Infograph* (2005)<sup>2</sup>, *Out of Homage to Duchamp*<sup>3</sup>, a poem called *Twin* (2012) and the *Conversation Project* (2012).<sup>4</sup> Nima Dehghani, with his group project called *Netformance* (2012)<sup>5</sup>, where people could participate and suggest a journey, search for photos for the virtual journey and create stories for the photos. They could also upload music and video and talk about the journey. That was how a virtual trip was shape. The Night of Shamloo was one of *Netformance* projects that were designed to honor Shamloo (A famous Iranian contemporary poet and writer).

Evidence reveals that the situation of artistic production in the part related to digital media has changed so much it does not resemble the traditional way at all. But this cannot be confirmed without research and study. Therefore, the question arises of whether the emergence of technology has changed the artistic production conditions in Iran. Have the artists active in digital art in Iran have gone beyond the notion of talented artist? In other words, have they moved away from the notion of the individual artist towards the notion of collective artist? These questions aim to systematically analyze the changes prompted by technology affecting artistic production in Iran. The place of collaborative culture that may have come in due to these technological changes have also been assessed.

## Theoretical Framework

The main purpose of this article is to introduce Iranian digital art, its place in the society and the characteristics of the artists. Therefore, it seems the general approach of recent art sociology, with an emphasis on Howard Becker, provides a reasonable framework for the explanation of the findings. Becker (1987) believes producing art is generally a collective act. He has even talked about producing arts, such as painting and poetry that

<sup>1</sup> His works are available at [www.behpoor.com](http://www.behpoor.com)

<sup>2</sup> <http://intrograph.behpoor.com>

<sup>3</sup> <http://fa.behpoor.com/?cat=41>

<sup>4</sup> <http://dialogue.behpoor.com>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Netformance>

are considered personal in nature. But what Becker has in mind, and has been mentioned in Janet Wolff's *The Social Production of Art* and Victoria Alexander's *The Sociology of Arts*, is completely different from the notion of "crowd creation" as put forward in this article. The reason behind this difference goes back to the changes that occurred in the conditions of producing art that happened in the new society. To understand the change, first the previous definition needs to be explained.

Becker (1387) says producing art is a collective act and the creator of that piece of art is not the only person who has a role in this process. Many people play a part in realizing the artistic idea in the mind of the artist. Of them, some are artists, and some are not. Becker himself takes his example from cinema, which is clearly a collective art (Ramin, 1387: 366). Janet Wolff, however, extends the notion of the social production of art to the art of writing, which looks very personal. Wolff (1367: 43) says:

The idea of crowd creation of art is applicable to those arts that look very personal in nature. Even authors need the material and the knowledge of arts and need to know different artistic styles and conventions. ... They need to have access to publishers and printers. Besides, the book market affects them and so do the art critics (probably). The simple idea that a mused person puts down the idea on the paper ... and then the work of art is ready for reception and consumption of the hearer and the reader is a notion that is gradually turning into a myth.

Of course, Wolff elaborates on the trend using the notion of technology, social institutions and economic elements (Wolff, 1367:44). But the point in Becker and Wolff's idea of collectiveness emphasizes the role of other social elements rather than that of the audience. This is while the present study has focused on the audience's part in the concrete process of producing art in new media arts or digital arts. Using Howard Becker's idea of the sociology of art we can show the process of change the notion of crowd production of art has undergone and has neared its exact meaning.

### **Methodology**

The current study is based on a qualitative approach using participation and interview techniques. The research was conducted at Tehran's Annual Digital Arts Exhibition (TADAX). TADAX represents the continuous trend of Iran's digital arts and has been held each year since



2011. We have obtained our findings based on interviews with artists and participation in the four TADAX exhibitions from 2013 to 2016 (from the third until the sixth edition of the event).

The interviews were conducted in different forms and kinds widely using qualitative researches. The aim of the interviews was to find out more about the relations of the artists and the practitioners in digital arts and to finally understand the atmosphere in which these people work. Given the innovative subject and the limited number of interviewees an approach was selected that is mostly used in ethnographic studies and is not structured. The ethnographic approach benefits from unstructured and conversational interviews conducted with people active in a certain field (Rose, 2016: 371). Therefore, the study used the method of free and exploring interview.

The questions of the interviews were completed and strengthened based on the experience of some of the participants during TADAX exhibitions. In some cases, a single artist or digital practitioner was interviewed more than three times. Some of the interviews were done during the TADAX event and some at other times. Each interview has taken about one to two hours. The interviewees were given the possibility to share their idea and understanding of the atmosphere of digital art in Iran. The interview questions were designed to analyze the condition of digital art practitioners and their relations in Iran. The main questions asked are given below:

In your opinion, is idea more important than technical skills or vice versa? Do you prefer to work individually or in a team? How much is the art society receptive to works of digital art? How do you categorize the works presented in TADAX and what is their conspicuous characteristics do you think?

The interviews conducted during TADAX could be called dialogues; dialogue represents the flow of meaning among a group of people. The process gives birth to a new understanding that did not exist at the beginning. therefore "in dialogue, we do not know much from the onset; we do not use directive techniques when talking to people, the relation between the researcher and the interviewee is that of subject-subject; the aim is to create sensitive concepts and we seldom use absolute ideas; dialogue is a kind of process, a process in which meaning is born with the help of the participants" (Paya, 1381: 67).

There were two important factors for choosing the interviewees. First, the person had to be active in digital arts. Since digital arts have a limited sphere of activity in Iran, most audiences are themselves practicing artists in this field. Moreover the audience of the art from its

artists cannot be separated, since the audience and the artists overlap on many occasions. Therefore, in practice the questions were asked from both the artists and the audiences of digital arts. The second factor is related to the duration of each artist's career, in a way that it was tried to interview those who had spent a longer time in this sphere.

The sampling method of this study is based on theoretical sampling. In this method, the interview goes on until the samples reach theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 2006: 158). Samples are not taken randomly in this method; rather, they are picked by selection and on purpose (Patton, 2002). The electric bullet method was used to find those who had more experience and expertise in digital arts and the process of holding TADAX.

The study discovers the potential suitable data and attracts them applying the theoretical sampling method. Of course this makes the research prone to bias but that can be compensated when the analytical concepts are adjusted with realities. Theoretical sampling is a method used to fill in the blanks in the process of a research. That happens when the data is reviewed. The current research could not have lots of interviewees because not too many people are active in this field. The following people were selected for interview based on the previously given factors:

1. Soroush Gharebaghi, Computer Engineer, Software Designer; born 1989
2. Ali Panahi, Civil Engineer, Designer and Director of Multimedia; born 1986
3. Soheil Soheili, B.A. in English Language, Composer and Instrumentalist, born 1986
4. Sina Shoae, B.A. in Interior Designing, Artist and Artistic Software Instructor; born 1986
5. Amin Davaee, Diploma Holder, Photographer and Art Manager; born 1986
6. Amir Bastan, B.A. in Painting; born 1985.

These artists had taken part in the digital art exhibition of Tehran. Two other artists we also interviewed who had a critical view of the expo.

7. Zarvan Rouhbakhshan, Artist and Media Activist; born 1978
8. Behnam Kamrani, Painter and Faculty Member of the Art University of Tehran; born 1969.

### **Tehran Annual Digital Art Exhibition and Crowd Creation**

TADAX is the first original and continuous movement in the field of digital arts in Iran that kicked off in the beginning of the current decade. TADAX provides an opportunity for digital art artists to connect and



understand the sphere of digital arts in Iran better. The data of this section are derived from interviews and the researcher's participation during four editions of TADAX.

The result is presented in three categories: "The conflict between art and technology", "Generation conflict between artists" and "The conflict between official and informal art."

### **The Conflict between Art and Technology**

A brief look at the record of the artists taking part in TADAX reveals that the number of participants with engineering majors increased in every edition of the expo. On the other hand, the number of artists who took part in the first edition of TADAX with works of video art kept declining. Nowadays, Artists who have presented the highest number of works at TADAX are engineering graduates. This change has struck the organizers of TADAX as well. The organizers of the first three editions of TADAX were digital art practitioners, but the team organizing the last three events was made of engineering graduates.

The reason for these changes can be explained due to the characteristics of the new media art. An idea requires complicated technical knowledge; therefore, at least two people are needed to accomplish a project and artist and a software engineer. Mehdi Moghimnejad during a discussion session for TADAX says: Digital art has a vast perspective. The point is that this type of art is intermingled with technology and for that very reason is a team work. Partly, knowing technology is a pre-requisite of this art.<sup>1</sup> But most of the Iranian artists prefer individual work. Artists usually argue over who the owner of the idea is. This is what is in contradiction with new media art. "The core is the idea, I benefit from engineering graduates for some ideas, but idea is the most important part"<sup>2</sup> (Amin Davae, 35 year-old, Art Director).

On the other hand, the spirit of team work is found among engineering students more than others:

Engineering students are more willing to work in teams. But a painter, who paints in their personal studio, in a personal atmosphere cannot be expected to gather with another painter and present a joint work. (Ali Panahi, 30 year-, Designer and Multimedia Director)

This issue is one of the reasons for more success among programmers and engineers compared to others when it comes to media art.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13900929000902>

<sup>2</sup> The same person has mentioned his aides' names separately in a TADAX catalogue.

We are alien to team work. It is a big problem which is social indeed. Another issue is that we think by making a monopoly we can be more successful in this small market. (Sina Shoaee, 33 year-old, Artist and Artistic Software Instructor)

As a result, some engineering graduates have turned into artists of new media arts after working on a couple of projects in cooperation with arts graduates. For instance, a software designer says: "I participated in Amin Davaae's project in the second edition of TADAX and entered the profession after that" (Soroush Gharebaghi, 26 year-old, Software Designer). Another art activist says: "Lots of engineering students first entered the job to help artists, but are now working better than their employers. Soheil Soheili, for example, first entered this field as an assistant" (Zarvan Roohbakhsh, 38 year-old, Artist and Media Activist).

Artists argue that many of the engineering graduates owe their exposure to digital art to their cooperation with artists. They say engineering graduates are more good technicians [than artists]. In addition to the conflict between technical and artistic disciplines in the field of digital art, which have led to the lack of artistic presence in this field, the conflict between the new generation and the old generation of artists also influences this field.

### **The Generation Gap between Artists**

Digital art was interesting to a group of artists. They have tried to get closer to the atmosphere of the art and the generation which is active in this field. Many artists have not developed in this field due to lack of skills. Thus, the gap between the old and the new generations grows wider. The resistance a huge part of the artistic society against digital media art is quite apparent. The resistance is sometimes in the form of doubt and at times in the form of negation. An exhibition was held in the 2001 in the *Museum of Contemporary Arts in Tehran*. Back then, lots of critics described the expo as one of the most inexpressive exhibits, showing concern that the trend could penetrate scientific and academic circles.<sup>1</sup> Behnam Kamrani was a video art participant in the first round of TADAX. He believes "the first round was more artistic. ... But the recent rounds have changed direction moving toward technology while drifting away from art" (Behnam Kamrani, 55 year-old, Faculty Member and Painter).

Part of the issue goes back to the use of certain software in creating the works of art which casts doubt and question over the credibility of

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/Magazine/View/3814/3820/23098>

digital art. This looks like the initial criticism towards photographers. New generation artists do not see video art as innovative or media-oriented art, just as the older generation artists do not give credibility to new digital art. Behnam Kamrani in a TADAX discussion session says: "Iranians do not normally welcome new phenomena. Yet, they're inclined toward technique. We came to understand modernism first by its tools and then presided over its meaning. In the same way, we very much welcome digital art techniques."<sup>1</sup>

Right now lots of critics in Iran's artistic society who write about the history and theory of art see art installations as media art and are not willing to accept it as new form of art. A workshop called *Experience in New Media*, held in Shen Gallery during summer 2016 displayed video art, art installations and performance art all under the title of new media art. It was interesting that the video art, itself, had gone through a similar battle in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, digital art has managed to strengthen its foothold among other new media arts as time went by in the past decade.

The battle is over as far as the definition of media art and artists are concerned with in this field. Although the battle is not a new one in the history of art. We can refer to the competition between photography and painting in the nineteenth and the twentieth century as similar struggles. Some of photographers of that time loved to be called artists in comparison to painters. But some others called themselves social historians or even scientists. Their internal disagreements stemmed from the material and the infrastructure of their official media and the nature of social reforms photography could make (Bolter & Grusin, 1381: 88). Photographers proved victorious in this battle and photography is now accepted as an art. This comparison and argument have shown themselves in the different editions of TADAX as well.

### **The Conflict between Official and Informal Art**

On the other hand, digital media art are also in conflict with official forms of art. Digital art is not only at war with dominant artists, but also with official forms of art as well. The art has been limited to the private sector, falling short of enjoying government support.

The limitation of digital art to the private sector is a translation of the battle between official and unofficial or governmental and non-governmental approved form of art in Iran. State policies want art to organize the reality and unify the differences and contradictions. But artists see a piece of art as a personal outlook to the world which is

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13900929000902>

not necessarily in compliance with the state view. This causes a gap between authority expectations and the work of an artist. This manifests in meanings such as official and unofficial art.

The governmental perspective was accompanied by cultural engineering policies that were very defensive against the process of globalization especially in the early 2000s. That widened the distance between official and unofficial art. That was when the internet came, exacerbating the gap. Those works that failed to obtain the required certifications from the government were published on the internet. Widespread access and easy download were new mechanisms through which books, music, photos, paintings and films that did not get official certifications were published. The mainstream discourse calls these works underground art. But artists prefer to be called independent art. The word underground has been used to show the illegality of the works of art. In that decade artists, in several fields, evaded control and bypassed official sources of production and publishing. Underground music, underground theatre (or apartment theatre), underground galleries (or exclusive exhibits), underground cinema (or unofficial cinema), underground literature (or electronic publishing) all fall under this category. But the illegality of these works did not limit access to them; these works of art were spread on the internet, sent to festivals overseas abroad, etc. The success of these works of art strengthened the independent, non-governmental and unofficial movement of art in Iran.

The western definition's emphasis is more on the fact that this kind of art stands outside the conventional norms of the world of art, especially at the beginning of its creation. Digital media art in Iran is more in compliance with the western definition of underground art. Artists active in this art do not enjoy government support and cannot sell their works of art. Yet, they prefer this condition and are not willing to make their work conventional. This inclination can be discovered in what Ali Panahi had to say about his own works of art. He is one of the organizers of the last three editions of TADAX:

I have arranged my audio installation in the format of an album. I want to sell it via Instagram and then organize a band camp. This does not mean that I cannot obtain certification. It is easy to do so for my work because it is instrumental. But I want to release it in limited numbers; I want to prepare fifty individually designed covers so that the fifty people who buy the work become special audience. And I never think of

having a concert at the Milad Tower (Ali Panahi, 30 year-old, Designer and Multimedia Director).

In this context, Iranian digital art practitioners have developed strategies such as self-study and the development of multicultural interactions to continue their work.

**Self-Study.** Digital art practitioners in Iran use self-study and workshops due to the lack of an academic position for digital arts in Iran.

“Most of the guys were personally interested to learn. There was no university. Digital arts schools such as *Inverse* were founded. We can access foreign workshops held in Iran via the internet. Alborz Sarkhabi, for example is one of the programmers and developers of *Touch Designer*<sup>1</sup>. Most of artists like him who were in Iran, have self-educated themselves and then immigrated”(Sina Shoae, 33 year-old, Artist and Artistic Software Instructor).

The main feature of TADAX artists is their self-education in art and software. Here is an example of a person who learned based on self-education and his own knowledge:

In the end, this is all gained from access to the internet, watching video tutorials and the things that happen online inject knowledge. Most of the people learn by searching Google. Nobody ever taught me programming and I learnt it by myself. All the material you need are available in a market in central Tehran. The rest depend on your diligence and perseverance. [Entering] University is not the solution. Right now we're trying to organize a series of classes in cooperation with Austria's Litz University or an Institute of Higher Education or a university in Tehran (Ali Panahi, 30 year-old, Designer and Director of Multimedia).

Workshops are the most important parts of TADAX. These workshops have now spread beyond the event. The workshops provide the ground for expanding knowledge of digital arts. The instructor of VVVV<sup>2</sup> workshop during the fifth TADAX is a painting graduate who is active in the field of media arts. He says:

---

<sup>1</sup> Touch Designer is one of the main websites selling software and lots of people active in digital-based arts in Iran are familiar with it. The site has peripheral parts such as a forum.

<sup>2</sup> VVVV has been formed in order to facilitate the establishment and the maintenance of huge media environments with physical cords, motion graphics and sound production facilities that can connect several users at the same time. The workshop is held in English. Participants learn the basic principles of the language of visual programming. They gain experience in creating simple codes for productive and cooperative designs in a simultaneous atmosphere. The software's multiple usages have turned it into a simple environment for initial modeling and its development.

I had taken part in the two previous exhibitions. Given my level of work I was invited as a trainer for the fifth TADAX exhibition (Amir Bastan, 31 year-old, Digital Art Practitioner).

The need for learning and self-educating has led to the formation of collective training movements among those active in digital arts. One example is the formation of the *New Media Society*. The society has focused on video art, audio art and new media. It tries to provide the grounds to practice and experience art, science and technology common fields. The website of the society reads:

The New Media Society archives and facilitates new media arts projects and acts as a center for and a coordinator of new experimental fields at national and international levels. There is not enough space for experiencing New Media Art despite progress in this field and the need for expansion and investment in this field is evident. This organization has put its aim to produce knowledge, archive it and at the same time maintain and protect the new treasury of this field.

**International Relations.** Iranian digital art artists have made good and strong relationships with their counterparts outside the country. The connection was made possible via the internet and different social networks. The annual TADAX exhibition provides time for face-to-face contact between Iranian artists and their foreign counterparts. Mohsen Gallery has pursued the interactional approach and has founded a “Residence Palace” as part of this project.

“Residence Palace” is the name of a form of artistic interaction in which artists from different countries come and stay at a certain location to be able to interact with each other. “The Residence Palace Prize” was designed as an initiative to support artists and boost morale. The program grants participants time to explore and experience. It lasts for one month and is held annually at the palace. The workshop allows artists to distance themselves from everyday life and start to work under the influence of the new place they are in. Artists will become familiar with the artistic and cultural atmosphere of the city they are residing in. They can make lots of professional connections as well. At times, joint workshops are organized for enthusiasts to share what the residents have achieved. The artwork of the artists shaped during their residence are usually experimental in nature. These works of art are the result of the artists encounter with a new atmosphere and

their interaction with each other. They could also impact the artists' future works.

There is a conspicuous interest towards international interaction among New Media Society artists. The group invites international artists, researchers, and instructors to hold workshops in Iran. TADAX is also an opportunity for forming such ties through workshops:

Lots of foreign artists invited to TADAX are already my friends on Facebook or Twitter and I follow them and their work. Kuwaiti artist Zahed Soltan took part in the fifth TADAX exhibition. He thought of holding a similar exhibition in Kuwait. He invited the participants of Today's Art festival in Tehran to a festival in Kuwait. Most of the guests in the Kuwaiti festival were those who had participated in TADAX (Ali Panahi, 30 year-old, Designer and Multimedia director).

## **Conclusion**

Special attention must be given digital art and its artist's situation in Iran. A better understanding of this art is required to make up for its shortcomings and weaknesses in the country. The reality is that the creation of a work of art is a chance to display personal capabilities. Those who are active in digital media art have a limited arena to maneuver on their work and earn money. Therefore, digital art has changed into a recreational art with tough competition at times.

The findings in response to the first question considering the situation of creating digital art in Iran reveals the artists active in this are mostly young in their twenties and thirties. They are generally engineering graduates. Having limited access to academic and systematic training these artists choose self-education and take part in workshops to gain knowledge. Shortage of academic training and limited opportunity for displaying their work have caused not having prolific artists in this field. At best, artists produce one or two works of art per year.

The spirit of co-working cannot be seen in producing a work of digital art. This situation has limited crowd creation in Iran's digital art. The transition from artist-genius to artist-engineer is needed for the artistic society to enter crowd creation. But evidence shows that the transition is limited to TADAX exhibitions. Although engineering graduates have an increasing presence in this area, there are limited places to display their work and digital arts. The idea of artist-genius and the notion has influenced the artists active in this field a lot. The incomplete transition from artist-genius to artist-engineers is noticeable in TADAX. Galleries



are not the only place to display the works of digital art. In other countries, places like media labs are used for this purpose.

Our next question was whether these artists have passed from the idea of an artist-genius working in solitude? In other words, have conditions of digital art that are based on team work materialized among artists in Iran? Have they moved from the notion of artist as an individual to the idea of artists as a person in cooperation with others? The findings show new experiences of artist/engineer are taking place. The historical gap between art and skill or art and industry is once again filled in digital arts and crowd creation is taking place. Of course, it should be mentioned that these are the engineers who are interested in elaborating on the technological aspects of their works. Most artists still prefer not to use devices and tools in their work and do not like to allow technology in their art. The field study of TADAX proves this finding as well.

A theoretical conclusion must refer to works of Howard Becker and Janet Wolff. The conditions of producing a work of art have changed a lot compared with the traditional approach. The meaning of artist has also changed in a way that we cannot talk of a talented artist who dominates the rules of art. In today's world the artist has to work with others, or at least with one other person, regardless of their extent of knowledge, and familiarity with art. The other person should know computer software very well. That person can be an artist, engineer or the audience. The talented artist also needs an audience who takes part in the active work of art and help modify the work. The final version of the work may not be a definite one and we may see works that change repeatedly. This new art form represents the ever changing world. Understanding digital art could show a better understanding of the world.

The findings also show digital art as an outcast in the country's policies and cultural programs. Artists are not interested to work with cultural and artistic institutes. In fact, these artists do not require certification for creating and publishing their work. Therefore, they cannot be called underground artists. The point is that these artists do not like to cooperate with official programs.

When it comes to the artistic society, digital media arts are not considered part of fine arts. On the other hand, academic institutes do not pay much attention to this lively art. The necessity of having technical knowledge prevents many artists from entering this field. That is why digital media arts stand out from Iran's art society.

This art is in line with the conditions of today's world. It can reflect the changing characteristics of today's world in real to real-virtual format. Given that if new cultural policies and programming take this

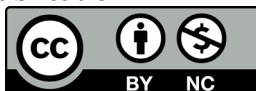
into consideration, the potentials of this new art could be discovered. These arts deliver new capacities for multi-cultural experiences. The artists in this field are able to produce hybrid and bricolage artistic experiences out of Iranian and universal art. They are the users of the digital world who can take part in team art projects and produce a work of art with new cultural interactional experiences.

Based on the gaps that exist in Iran's digital media art solutions can be proposed to facilitate experiences in this field. One way is to revise the dichotomy of art and technology. Another solution is the establishment of media labs could expand shared experiences between artists and scientists. These labs allow the artists and the technicians, whose cooperation is key to the production of digital art, work together and take part in the crowd production of art while expanding Iran's art society. Such a laboratory is not available in Iran right now. If developing art could be translated into the cultural development of the society and the job of ministries such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is to help the cultural development of the society, then supporting digital art and providing the means for its growth could be another way of supporting cultural and artistic development in the society.

## References

- Becker, H. (1387 [2008 A.D]). *Jāmeā'e-ye honari va faā'āliyat-hay moshtarak* [in Persian: Art as collective action]. In Ali Ramin (ed.). *Mabani-ye- jāmeā'e šenāsi-ye honar* [in Persian: Fundamental of Sociology of Art], Tehran: Ney Publication.
- Bolter, J.D. & Grusin, R. (1381 [2002 A.D]). *Manteq-e tahavol-e resāneh hā* [in Persian: The Logic of Media Transformation/ Remediation: Understanding New Media]. Translated by Rahim Ghāsemiān, Tehran: Mehr Niyusha.
- Brucker-Cohen, J. (2010). Art in your pocket 2 : Media art for the iPhone and iPod touch graduates to the next level. Accessed. 25 July 2018. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54617fbbe4b0e09964383d07/t/547d369ae4b01e59d39de32a/1417492122979/201005Rhizome.pdf>.
- Grau, O. (2002) *Integrating media art into our culture: Art history as image science*. access in: <http://www.mediaarthistory.org/refresh/Programmatic%20key%20texts/pdfs/Grau.pdf>.
- Greene, R. (2004). *Internet art*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Huhtamo, E. (2009). Resurrecting the technological past: An introduction to the archeology of media art. In Edward A. Shanken (ed.), *Art and Electronic Media*. London: Phaidon, 2009: 199-201.

- Huhtamo, E. (2008). Tactile temptations: About contemporary art, exhibitions and tactility. In Christa Sommerer, Laurent Mignonneau and Dorothee King (ed.), . *Interface Cultures. Artistic Aspects of Interaction*, Bielefeld: Transcript Publishers, 2008: 129-139.
- Huhtamo, E. (2005). Twin-touch-test-redux: Media archaeological approach to art, interactivity and tactility. In Oliver Grau (ed.), *Media Art Histories*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2006: 71-101.
- Huhtamo, E. (1995). Seeking deeper contact. Interactive art as metacommentary. *Convergence*. 1(2): 81-104.
- Lunenfeld, P. (2000). *Snap to grid: A user's guide to digital arts, media and culture*. USA: MIT Press.
- Manovich, L. (2016). *Instagram and contemporary image*. Three chapters have already been published.
- Manovich, L. (2014). *The illusions: A BIT of the language of new media*. The MIT Press.
- Manovich, L. (2013). *Software takes command*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Manovich, L. (2001). *The language of new media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: MIT press.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3th Edition, California: Sage Publication.
- Paul, Ch. (2006). *Digital art*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Paya, A. (1381 [2002 A.D]). Goftogu dar jahān-e vāqeā'i. [in Persian: Dialogue in Real World], Tehran: Tarhe-no.
- Ramin, A. (1387 [2008 A.D]). Mabāni-ye jāmeā'e šenasi-ye honar [in Persian: Fundamental of Sociology of Art]. Tehran: Nashr-e Ney.
- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies with visual materials*. London: Sage.
- Rush, M. (1999). *New media in late 20th-century art*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J.M. (1385 [2006 A.D]). Osul-e Raveš tahqigh-e keyfi (Nazariyeh mabnāei: Raviye-hā va ravešhā) [in Persian: Principles of Qualitative Research Method (Basic Theory, Procedures and Practices)]. Translated by Rahmatollah Rahmatpour. Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies.
- Tribe, M. & Jana, R. (2006). *New media art*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Wands, B. (2006). *Art of the digital age*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Wolff, J. (1367 [1988 A.D]). Tolid-e ejtemāā'i-ye honar [in Persian: The Social Production of Art]. Translated by Nayereh Tavakkoli, Tehran: Markaz Publication.



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (CC BY NC), which permits distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.