

Media Art: An introduction to GAMA

by Antoni Mercader

All the artistic production related to communication media could be considered media art. The latter is, above all, an artistic expression but also a methodology of the 20th century and the new millennium.

We consider 'media art' to be treating information and documentation in a similar way to media processes. In a broad sense we can say it is the artistic phenomena of harmonization between media communication and artistic practice. An expressive challenge derived from an experimental attitude in the conception, work methodologies, production methods and the use of audiovisual and/or multimedia communication technologies for artistic creation. When we rule out the idea that art follows a fixed path, and accept that changes are not limited by formal aspects alone it becomes evident that the central concept of modern art - that of the avant-garde - was almost automatically linked to the progress of industrial society. Contrary to this, today we must establish the correspondence of artistic production within post-modernism, in favour of eclecticism and the heterogeneous; acknowledging concepts like 'artistic project', 'production of sense'; and using prefixes like pluri-, inter-, hyper-, un-, etc. The first media art manifestations take place in Europe during the "Interbellum". Their origin coincides with experimental cinema, the so-called 'artist films', between 1917 and 1924. After World War II media art is revived thanks to interaction between people on both sides of the Atlantic, between East and West. On the one hand there are the emigrated artistic groups, and on the other, people who continued experimenting with cinema; most of them have their origins in Dadaism and Surrealism. The first signs appear in the 1960s, a period of research into performed art and a critical approach to television. There is a second wave during the seventies when research on how to expand art experiences a significant advance. Media art has not stopped evolving since. The persistence of authors, producers, distributors, curators and historians, the emergence of specific activity such as exhibitions, festivals, contests etc., but also the significant consequences for the 'economy of art' that came with the rise of the collecting market testifies to more than fifty years' work. The internet - the network of networks - providing an effective means of production and dissemination available to the masses has served to very much broadened the dimension and weight of media art in our knowledge society. If we now look at current trends we can say that today we an expanded variant of media art is already within sight, something we might name new media art or neomedia.

In the current digital media landscape, both online and offline media art constitutes a heterogeneous cluster of disciplines, attitudes and behaviours. A complex artistic typology does not seek to define itself by the simple use of specific technical options, but by the creation of the following:

- Communication architectures: with a conventional spatio-temporal basis, narrative generators and mono- and multi-channel work and projects, productions, installations, performances, etc., which are all organized in a vertical scheme of emission / reception and where the interface based on the structural component (hardware) is prioritised.
- Conversational geographies: in the virtual space and time of the network, virtual mediation productions where the interface responds to a root-like network and is not arranged in a hierarchy characterized by the domination of a procedural or tool-oriented component (software).

Video art and computer art belong to the first category. Net art/web art belongs to the second one. All of these, and others that emerge everyday, are considered to be forms of media.

Since the seventies, archives and institutions have been created and developed with the aim to disseminate, distribute and preserve media art. Initially, these archives and institutions grew around film libraries and film departments in museums. Later on, they started emerging in the fields of video activism and video art and played an important role in conceptual art practices. During the nineties media art was disseminated and distributed by mediatheques and the new media departments of contemporary art museums that burst upon the scene. They were always alert to the audiovisual and multimedia evolution that actively transformed art into heritage. Today we are experiencing a huge leap from OFF to ON. Roles are becoming hybrid, everything is more open, more complex. We wonder if network agents who 'channel' and 'store' may inevitably be taking us to a universal memory of media art. GAMA seeks to contribute to this process.