

Overpowering New Media, Internet and Digital Art in Indian Contemporary Art Practice

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Abstract—It's important to understand that no one works harder than artist, a nonstop engagement with his own intuitive leaps, his own anxieties, attachments, detachments, accumulation of information, concentration and find new ideas through introspection and research in many fields beyond art, although the art of the past remains a profound resource and pushes artist to rewrite, rethink, re-execute. Before we proceed to understand the impact of new media art in 21st century it is important to look back and re-examine the history and to locate the roots of new media art and how the new media art is overpowering the contemporary art practice. New Media is a 21st Century general term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images, special effects, light and sound etc. In fact, the definition of new media changes daily, and will continue to do so. New media evolves and transforms continuously. What it will be tomorrow is virtually unpredictable for most of us, but we do know that it will continue to evolve in fast and furious ways.

The long privileged painting tradition of Western World was challenged by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso at the beginning of the 20th century to incorporate everyday materials in their paintings such as newspapers and rope etc. to extend the periphery of painting beyond paints and within few years it overturned many of the visual conventions that dominated western art since the Renaissance. This practice to incorporate everyday material laid the ground work for innovative art for later generation of artists. Later on the camaraderie of Dadaist and Surrealist, the Dadaist aim to destroy traditional values in art and to create a new art with the use of readymade to replace the old, the gradual shift to Pollock's work as action painter, Abstraction, Conceptualism, Kinetic Art,

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Minimalism all participated in a profound questioning of traditional painting. Another focus during the century was on “**Experimental Phenomena**” and its use in art making. Questioning on nature of art and breaking taboos and blurring the boundaries between sculpture, photography and painting. This experimental nature of art gave artist a new freedom of expression and to incorporate new materials into their work; Robert Rauschenberg’s “Combine Paintings” lie somewhere between painting and sculpture: some works hang on the wall but also rest on the ground; others give a feeling of real space such as eagle; or are subject to actual gravity, the hanging pillow. The material itself becomes a voice to artist for their ideas. It is conspicuous in the works of many artists such as Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Robert Smithson etc. during 60’s to 80’s.

The technological advancement and the concept of Globalization created a new world of experiences, electronically connected planet provided a bigger platform of discourse and debate, questioning about electronic medias as means of expression for artists, the use of unfamiliar material, the use of body itself as a material for expression, site specific concepts to installing objects at various private and public places. The 60’s witnessed a far-reaching reappraisal of what art could be. The practicing artists started creating videos, Installations and digitally manipulating works. The New Media artists moved into the direction of engaging themselves with the world around, using photography, film and video-technologies that record the actual physical world. People around not only became the subject for artists but an active participant in the making of an art work. We witness some of the practitioner at this juncture, “The Singing Sculptures” by Gilbert & George, Cindy Sherman’s “Film Stills” in which she uses herself as model in many roles, Tracey Emin’s autobiographical works, Nam June Paik renowned as a pioneer of video art, Damien Hirst’s, “For the Love of God” consists of a platinum skull, complete with real teeth, and adorned with over 8,000 diamonds and dead animals kept in formaldehyde solution.

On the other hand “**New Media**” in Indian art is relatively a new phenomenon. Its root lies during 50’s and 60’s in the experimental works of Krishen Khanna, where artist accidentally used wide-angle projector and photography as a tool to execute his works, another contemporary Akbar Padamsee executed a silent, black and white animation based work called “Syzygy” a word derived from Greek technical term meaning the coupling of two things that might be alike or opposed. Unfortunately these works could not receive critical recognition, but this experimentation somewhere reflects a new tendency in Indian artists to see beyond the traditional practice of painting and sculpture. The actual shift can be noticed during the 1990’s, when some western curators started projecting works of Indian

artists in a new paradigm and the idea of Globalization started dominating the Indian society and new digital technological development became conspicuous in everyday life. This swift change provided the Indian artists an exposure to the mainstream western art and simultaneously to various technological tools to experiment with their visual vocabulary beyond the conventional painting and sculpture tradition to communicate their ideas with the global audience. Early 1990's was the transitional phase for Indian artists with the opening of few private galleries with a vision to provide a venue for cutting edge art works with the use of new media as a tool for their expression. This developed a practice among artists to evolve a deep conceptual insight as they broadened the horizon for execution with new possibilities such as installation, the performance, and video art. Some of the prominent names are Nalini Malani, Vivan Sundaram, Sheba chhachhi, Navjot Altaf, Raqs Media Collective, Subodh Gupta, Bharti Kher, Ranbir Kaleka, Rummana Hussain, Anita Dube, Sonia Khurana, Shilpa Gupta, Sudarshan Shetty, Tejal Shah, Atul Dodiya, Jitish Kalat, Baiju Parthan, Pushpamala N, who came up with a use of variety of medias like text, sound, Video projection, Sculpture, Photography, Internet, Video projection on painting, Installation, Performance, Digitally manipulated works, Digital prints etc.

It is also important to intervene into the gallery circuit and other body which were formed with an aim to provide platform for new media practicing artists because only with such platform this practice got momentum and exposure to international art arena. During 1997 one of the important figure Peter Nagy American artists who turned as a curator in India and established a gallery "Nature Morte" in Delhi, promoted innovative gallery practice with the display of photography, installation, video art along with paintings. Another important figure Pooja Sood Art Manager and Curator came up with "Khoj International Artists Workshop" Khirkee village in Delhi the same year and had its first international exchange programme in Modinagar. This vision really took art to the public sphere out of the white cube gallery space and provided a dialogue between artist and the local people. These two directorial giants curated several activities and shows based on New Media Practice including cultural exchange with international artists in residence programmes. One of the memorable events in 2008 was "Public Art Festival", 48 degree celcius Public. Art. Ecology, a combined initiative of Goethe Institut/ Max Mueller Bhavan and GTZ, an experiment set within the capital metropolitan city of Delhi. The ambition of this project was to cross-examine the teetering ecology of the city through the prism of contemporary art and Pooja Sood was one of the team members to conceptualize the event. She is also a curator of the Apeejay Media Gallery, the first space in the country for New Media works in early 2000. Beside gallerist and art curators, the art collectors also showed great interest in New

Media Art and inspired to establish private museums in the country and raised a debate on the role of museums and their acquisitions. One of the first private museums set up by Lekha and Anupam Poddar named “The Devi Art Foundation”. They consistently supported the cutting-edge art forms and established a new philosophy of museums and questioned the role and position of a museum in social framework. In recent times “Kiran Nadar Museum of Art” is another private museum in the country opened in January 2011 focus not merely on collecting art rather providing a platform for cutting-edge art forms and their recent acquisition a work by Subodh Gupta titled “Line of Control” a monumental sculptural installation, visually the giant mushroom cloud composed of steel utensils displayed in a public mall culture. Since 2008 Art Fair in the country augmented the pace for art activities with a global vision and such Fair provided a bigger platform not only for conventional art approaches but brought forward the practice of New Media Art across the globe. In 2012 the Fourth Edition of India Art Fair which was earlier known as India Art Summit successfully concluded in New Delhi. India art fair is the country’s premier platform for modern and contemporary art across the globe. This edition featured most of the international and national galleries and leading artists to witness their original works, India Art Fair provide even a larger canvas of art engagements with featuring curated walks, video lounge, speaker’s forum, art projects, book launches and other collateral events. Such art fairs across the country providing art students, artists, curators, art historians, gallerist, art educationist a wider platform for art and cultural dialogue and debate and rewrite the definition of Contemporary Art. This coherence of Art Fairs, gallery, private museums, collectors and curators provide an existing condition for artists to look into diverse mode of expression and somewhere suggest the root of New Media is firmly grounded in India at the end of the first decade of 21st century.

Shilpa Gupta as New Media, Internet and Digital Artist

Shilpa Gupta (born 1976) is a contemporary Indian Artist, who lives and works in Mumbai. She studied sculpture at the Sir J.J.School of Fine Art from 1992 to 1997. Shilpa is an interdisciplinary artist who uses sound, video, photography and performance to capture and explore themes such as desire, religion and security issues which are prevalent in society (nations, borders, militarism and identity) becomes her areas of engagement. Her installation, site specific works and interactive engagement of viewer becomes an important part of her works. Shilpa Gupta’s work blurs the boundary between the artist, the viewer and the artwork, and this shared responsibility alters the perception of the work. For her, the artwork is not what the artist creates and thinks but something that facilitates an

interaction between the audience and the artist. The viewer is not passive; instead becomes an active agent in the process of creating meaning. In *100 Hand-drawn Maps of India*, 2007–2008, Gupta asked volunteers to sketch outlines of the country from memory and displayed the incongruous results, thus underscoring the crowd sourced nature of her works. Shilpa Gupta confronted the customers at a bookstore offering them kidneys made of sugar and gelatine allowing them to choose the colour, size and the trade route of the kidney they wish to purchase as part of her interactive installation *Your Kidney Supermarket*, 2002-03.



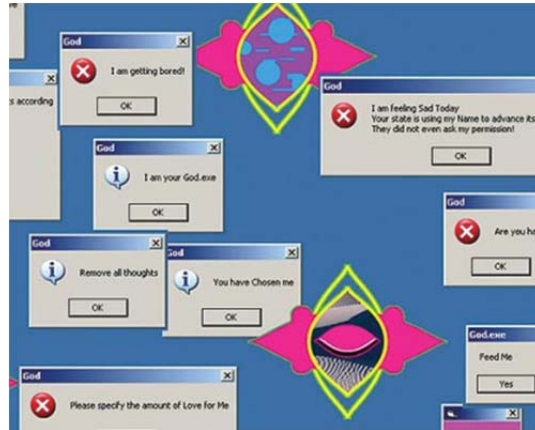
Shilpa Gupta, *100 Hand drawn Maps of India*, 2007-08, still from a single channel video projection, 3 minutes 42 seconds video loop, 22.2 x 17”.



Shilpa Gupta, *Your Kidney Supermarket*, 2002-03, video and interactive installation.

The Le Laboratoire experience gave Gupta a chance to be in direct conversation with a psychologist (Mahazarin Banaji), a philosopher and linguist (Noam Chomsky) about prejudice and fear and how much of this functions subconsciously. This intensive encounter informed Shilpa Gupta’s works like *Untitled*, 2008-09, flapboard, and the audio for *Singing Cloud*, 2008-09. Project Aar Par was born during a Khoj residency where Gupta met Pakistani artist Huma Mulji, and created a dialogue between visual artists of the two countries. *Blame*, 2002-04, was started as a poster under this project which later turned into Gupta

As an artist, Shilpa Gupta is interested in showing work in spaces where there is an audience besides the one coming to a private art gallery. In order to reach out to a larger audience, she deliberately uses visual codes and interface which the audience is familiar and at ease with. Gupta believes that media work is more accessible and democratic- they can be mass produced, are easily transportable and can be seen and shared by several people. By doing so, Gupta inevitably challenges the capitalist structure of the art world that emphasises uniqueness and not-shared nature of the art work.



Shilpa gupta, *Blessed-Bandwidth.net*, 2003, Internet, commission by Tate Online

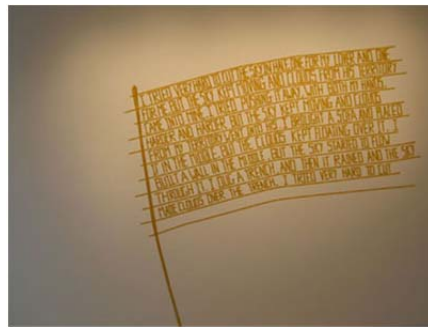
Gupta's works engages with the political and cultural world around her thereby taking upon the role of an art activist of sorts. In the aftermath of the Gujarat pogrom, the artist distributed bottles of blood on crowded local trains asking people to separate blood by religion or race. Cloth strips with menstrual blood was mounted against a wall as a part of a 2001 installation by the artist countering taboos against woman's body.

Several of her works are concerned with issue of borders, security and surveillance. In an untitled work from 2005–06, the artist made a flag of yellow police tape reading: "There is no border here", addressing the impossibility of creating geographical differences in the face of deep cultural or human links. In *Half Widows*, 2008, Gupta addresses the emotional and social ruptures of war whereby women of Kashmir whose husbands have gone missing are not culturally authorized to even weep or mourn for they live in oblivion about their spouse's condition. In *Turner Road*, 2008, a series of photographs of security guards with

their faces blurred has a sound chip inserted into them which plays the mundane everyday noise encountered on the street.



Shilpa Gupta, *Untitled*, 2001, instruction manual in vitrine, cloth pieces stained with menstrual blood, 2 videos on monitors, process based.
Still from a colour video.



Shilpa Gupta, *Untitled (There is No Border Here)*, 2005-06, wall drawing with self adhesive tapes, 118 x 118”.



Shilpa Gupta, *Half Widows*, 2008, diasec mounted photograph, 43.5 x 98”.



Shilpa Gupta, *Turner Road*, 2008, photographs with sound, 11.8 x 9.2 x 1.5”.

Some of the important Links for New Media Art in India and Reference:

- [1] Khoj International Artists Workshop, Khirkee Extension, New Delhi.
- [2] Apeejay Media Gallery, Delhi, a premier forum committed to showcasing high quality, experimental work in new media and emerging technologies from India and abroad.
- [3] Raqs Media Collective, New Delhi was founded in 1992 by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta, they play plurality of roles, often as artists, curators, philosophical agents, film makers, writers, computer programmers, etc. and have left deep impact on contemporary culture in India.
- [4] Camp was founded in 2007 by Shaina Anand, Sanjay Bhangar and Ashok Sukumaran. CAMP is not an “artists collective” but a space, in which ideas and energies gather, and become interests and forms. In this process, they try to move beyond binaries of commodity markets vs. “free culture”, or individual vs. institutional will, to think and to build what is possible, what is equitable, and what is interesting, for the future.
- [5] Centre for Experimental Media Arts (CEMA), Bangalore.
- [6] Srishti School of Art, Design & Technology, Bangalore.
- [7] Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon, Haryana.
- [8] Shaina Anand founded Chitrakarkhana – image workshop or picture factory, a fully independent, small scale unit for experimental media in Bombay.
- [9] SARAI a space for research, practice and conversation about the contemporary media and urban constellations founded in 2000 in Delhi.
- [10] The School of Culture and Creative Expression, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Delhi.
- [11] Religare Art Initiative Limited, New Delhi.
- [12] Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, DLF South Court Mall, New Delhi.
- [13] Goethe-Institut Max Mueller Bhavan New Delhi
- [14] Art 21, art in the twenty first century.
- [15] The Definitive visual guide by Andrew Graham-Dixon
- [16] Gallery Nature Morte, New Delhi.