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DIGITALIZATION AS A CATALYST AND MEDIATOR OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ART MARKET

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Prior to mass digitalization, the art market was structured hierarchically, with dominant centers in New York, London, and Hong Kong. Cross-cultural communication followed a “center–periphery” model, where Western institutions acted as gatekeepers, determining which art was deemed relevant. The rise of the digital economy disrupted this paradigm, replacing it with a networked model. Online platforms such as Artsy and 1stDibs, together with social media, now provide artists worldwide with direct access to global audiences. This phenomenon has been described as the “death of distance” in art.

While artistic content often remains rooted in local contexts—through national symbols or regional issues—its modes of distribution have become global. Digitalization thus functions as a bridge, shifting emphasis from “cultural appropriation” to “cultural exchange,” allowing artists’ voices to be heard authentically without Western curatorial mediation.

Since 2022, the Ukrainian art market has emerged as a particularly innovative case of cross-cultural interaction. Initiatives such as the Meta History Museum of War and the Ukrainian Fund of Digitized Art (UFDA), which organized NFT auctions featuring works by Nikita Kadan, Zhanna Kadyrova, and Waone Interesni Kazki, not only attracted financial support in digital currencies but also projected Ukrainian cultural narratives onto the global stage.

A persistent barrier in cross-cultural communication is the limited ability to perceive contextual meaning. Digitalization addresses this through immersive technologies such as VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (Augmented Reality). Online viewing rooms (OVRs) are not merely digital galleries but spatially reconstructed environments that allow audiences to experience scale and presence remotely.

Such technologies foster empathy: for instance, a viewer entering a VR simulation of an artist's studio in Kyiv or Seoul establishes a new level of emotional connection. According to the Hiscox Online Art Trade Report, the proportion of buyers acquiring their first artwork online continues to rise. AI-driven recommendation systems further facilitate “non-random encounters” between cultures—for example, connecting a French collector interested in minimalism with a Vietnamese emerging artist. This transforms art acquisition from a financial transaction into an act of cultural participation.

Blockchain technology has revolutionized cross-cultural communication in art by addressing the issue of trust. Provenance is critical in the international art market, and blockchain provides a digital passport for artworks. This allows artists from regions with unstable legal frameworks, such as parts of the Global South or Eastern Europe, to guarantee authenticity to global collectors.

Smart contracts further ensure automatic royalty payments upon resale, strengthening local markets by maintaining artists' economic ties to their works even after they cross cultural and national boundaries.

Despite its advantages, digitalization introduces new challenges. The visibility of art in digital markets is often dictated by Big Data algorithms. Artists may feel compelled to adapt their styles to dominant visual trends on platforms such as Instagram or OpenSea, risking the emergence of “sterile” global art that sacrifices cultural specificity for mass appeal.

Moreover, regions with limited digital infrastructure remain excluded, perpetuating new forms of cultural inequality.

Digitalization functions not merely as a technical intermediary but as a fundamental catalyst accelerating the exchange of meanings. According to Art Basel, online art sales stabilized at \$11–13 billion in 2023–2024, underscoring the irreversibility of digital transformation.

The digital economy renders the art market more dynamic and inclusive, transforming art into a digital asset that, despite its immaterial form (NFTs, VR), carries profound sociocultural significance.

The future of cross-cultural communication lies in balancing global technological instruments with the preservation of unique local artistic identities. The art market has evolved from a closed elitist system into an open ecosystem, where:

- Blockchain ensures trust and transparency in cross-border transactions, integrating artists into the global financial space.
- Platform-based distribution erases geographical boundaries, fostering “glocalization”—the preservation of local identity alongside global reach.

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- Immersive technologies (VR/AR) open new channels of emotional and intellectual engagement, crucial for overcoming cultural barriers.

The sustainability of this transformation will depend on the ability of art market actors to reconcile algorithmic efficiency with the preservation of cultural diversity.

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