

# DIGITAL ART IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART MARKET

Daniel Canogar,  
*Spin* (2010).

Whereas new media have largely invaded contemporary art manifestations, the nature of the digital artwork – the one that is primarily based on the play of a program and the automatic calculation of a computer – keeps on challenging the art market that necessitates the transaction of objects. Yet digital art – or at least if there is any practice that we would want to specify in such terms – isn't limited to software and computer screens. Far from being immaterial, this technology offers an incalculable number of supports, which can then be the recipients of the artist's imaginary and intention. Therefore, evaluating the place and integration of digital practices within the contemporary art market comes back to questioning for the umpteenth time the very essence of the digital artwork. De facto, on what supports is it the most often commercialized?



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*Contemporary art already knows the immaterial with video art and performance. The dichotomy between contemporary art and digital art is actually very French.* Antoine Schmitt, who recently showed at the very young Charlot gallery in Paris, observes that *the specificity of digital technology is related to the fact it acts both as a matrix and a program*: imagine an hourglass device that can uniformly format all types of data and then divert them into as many variations as there are supports to receive them. If the artist has made the (platonian) choice to commercialize on USB keys and with certificates of authenticity his programs, which are to him the very essence of his artworks, other formulas are possible. Thus, as the director of Charlot gallery Valérie Hasson-Benillouche remarks, if digital

art can be traded under the form of software packages, it can also be exchanged under the frozen (stopped in time) forms of video or photographic artworks: *it is possible to interrupt the flow of a program or the digital artwork consumption. Far from being an ontological betrayal, this quality of the digital artwork shows on the contrary its great adaptability to the market.*

Consequently, *with time digital artworks merge more and more with photography, painting, and sculpture*, the director of RX gallery in Paris Éric Dereumaux relevantly describes. It is within these stable or stabilized formats that digital art is best commercialized: *we sometimes sell the software but what still really matters to the collector remains the object.* The difficulty suffered by the trade of programs

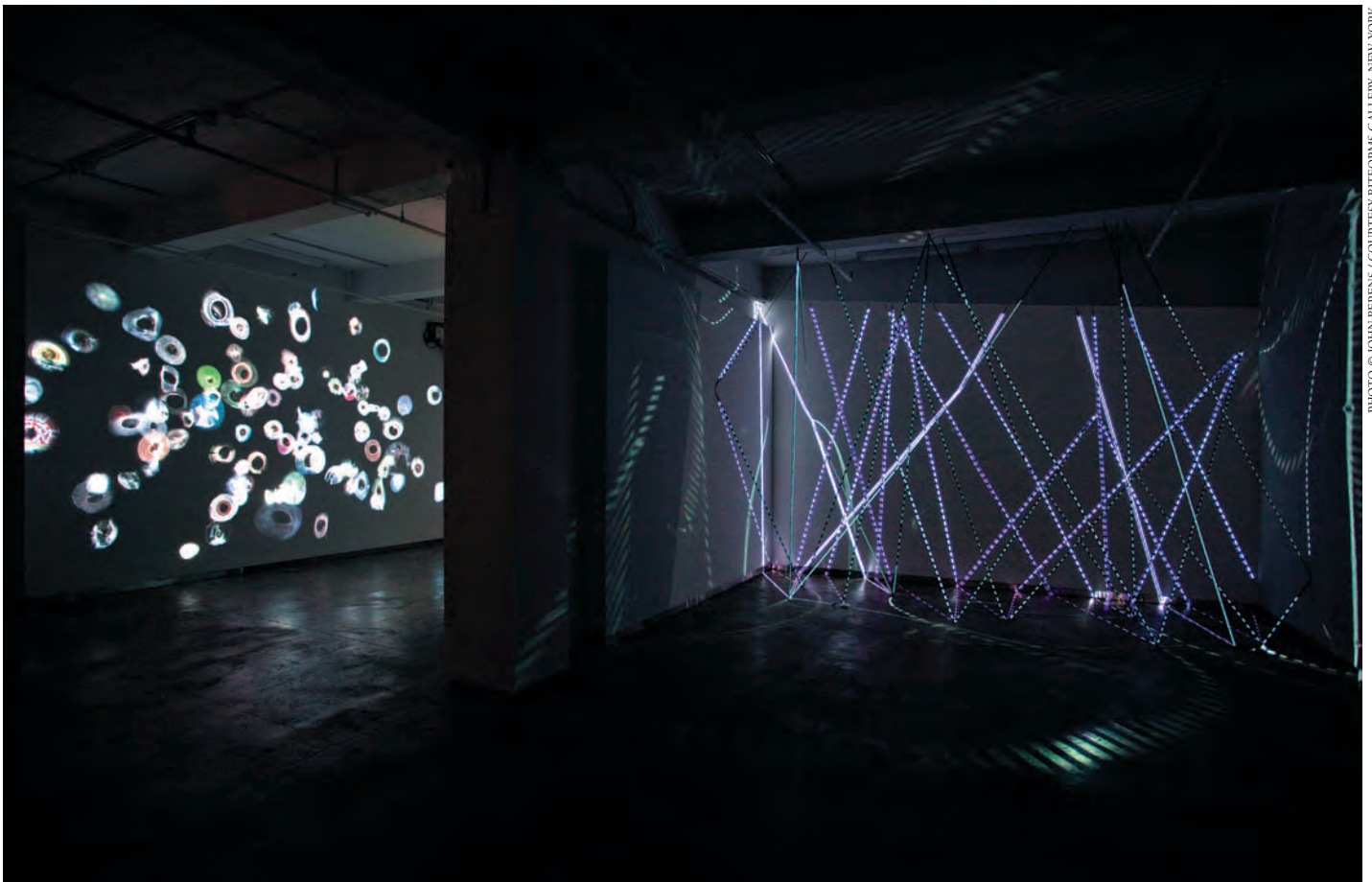


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within the contemporary art market may still to this day originate from a groundless mistrust towards the technological abstraction, or more precisely *the demonstration material of the digital artwork, its longevity, though it is a question that is largely taken care of by the galleries and institutions.* Chinese artist Du Zhenjun, who showed a series of photographs and a monumental interactive installation last month at RX gallery (*La Tour de Babel*), distinguishes two types of collectors: *there are the ambitious ones, still rare, who aren't afraid of the conceptual nor the technical, and purchase interactive installations, whilst little and average collectors, rather conservative, are more interested in photographs.*

In France, this mistrust towards the status of the digital object manifests itself in the effect of a specification that is rather depreciative. In fact, for the most part digital art happens in festivals rather than exhibitions. In Du Zhenjun's experience, *there is absolutely no separation between contemporary art and digital art in China. This compartmentalization is very French and causes in curatorial and critical terms a rather drastic isolation of the young digital artists from the rest of the*

*art world.* Therefore we are entitled to interrogate and criticize the motivations of the digital specification, which remains in France deeply anchored to – it seems – a modernist tradition: *even though the term digital doesn't bother me as such, since it does indeed inform my work, I consider myself a contemporary artist. It is not the technique that matters, but what's in the artist's imagination!* Actually, this clear isolation of digital art in France is even less justified that, as Wolf Lieser the director of the galleries DAM based in Berlin and Cologne remarks: *digital art is completely part of contemporary art since its technology is not only a medium beside others, it also touches and informs our every day life and our contemporary culture.*

Like the German gallery owner, according to Steven Sacks, the director of Bitforms gallery in New York, there is no need or duty to defend in a peculiar (or exclusive) way digital art and new media in general for their commercialization, since they are contemporary arts by excellence: *the public is fascinated and eager to learn and experience all types of media art. I never need to use arguments for great work. It sells itself.* Over the past few years, Wolf Lieser and Steven Sacks

have witnessed on both sides of the Atlantic a progressive and decisive integration of new media into Fine Arts. Although digital art relies on technological needs that may be higher or more complex than those of the still image traditional practices, the question of preservation of artworks is in no way specific to new media and therefore cannot constitute as such a limit to their growth within the art market, which is grounded on scarcity, we shall not forget.

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#### FURTHER INFORMATION:

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 Galerie CharLot, Valérie Hasson-Benilouche (director), 47 rue CharLot, 75003 Paris.  
 <[www.galeriecharlot.com](http://www.galeriecharlot.com)>  
 Du Zhenjun <[www.duzhenjun.com](http://www.duzhenjun.com)>  
 Galerie RH, Éric Dereumaux (co-director), 6 avenue Delcassé, 75008 Paris.  
 <[www.galerierh.com](http://www.galerierh.com)>  
 Galeries DAM, Wolf Lieser (director).  
 Tucholskystr. 37 10117 Berlin, Allemagne.  
 Volksgartenstr. 10 50677 Köln, Allemagne.  
 <[www.dam-berlin.de](http://www.dam-berlin.de)> <[www.dam-cologne.de](http://www.dam-cologne.de)>  
 BitForms Gallery, Steven Sacks (director), 529 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, New York NY 10011, USA.  
 <[www.bitforms.com](http://www.bitforms.com)>

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*Dial M For Murder*  
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