EVA London 2022: Keynote summaries

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper highlights summaries of invited keynote talks and backgrounds of the keynote speakers attending the EVA London 2022 Conference, as in the 2021 Conference (Bowen et al. 2021). EVA London takes place annually, originally starting in 1990 (Bowen 2020; Hemsley 2013). EVA London 2022 is a hybrid conference of online and in-person participation. The Conference is broadly based on digital culture with a special emphasis on digital art (Boiano et al. 2019; Borda & Bowen 2019; Giannini & Bowen 2019).

The keynote speakers have a diverse set of backgrounds, both in theory and practice, presenting on leading-edge themes and discourse in their talks.

This year’s keynote talks address topical intersections of digital art, curatorship, and digital cultural networks, including neurodiversity and inclusive design, social media and warfare in the Ukraine, curating digital art in China, the metaverse and non-fungible tokens (NFTs), among other compelling topics.

2. KEYNOTE SUMMARIES

NATASHA TROTMAN
Design Council Expert Specialist,
Artist in Residence, Somerset House, Studio 48, London

Hybrid ND imaginaries: Exploring the (un)official discourse across neurodiversity, equality and belonging

This discussion explores the official and unofficial neurodivergent (ND) discourse, offerings, and outputs, including neurodiversity, equality, belonging and the emerging multi-modal continuum of access and belonging based on two projects.

Project 1: Design and the Mind:
Design and The Mind (DIM). This project, a partnership between the Wellcome Trust and the Royal College of Arts Helen Hamlyn Centre, used an inclusive design approach that places visitors, their needs, requirements and lived experiences at the core of the Wellcome Hub. Inclusive Design takes into account a broad range of human diversity regarding ability, communication, culture, gender, age and other variances of human experiences and conditions.
The project investigated how this can have a positive impact on the Hub community ranging from the space to residents, visitors and the broader organisation through a cascade effect. This approach helps further the progress of integrating a neurodiversity paradigm and a barriers approach being introduced through Design and The Mind at the Hub. This helps to encourage social cohesion, co-design and new neurodiverse spaces for wider and new Wellcome Collection audiences with outcomes such as The Wellcome Hub Engagement Recipes and Companion, a co-programmed Neurodiversity 5-day Hub programme, and participatory Wellcome Collection Reading Room event Once more with Feeling with DiM’s Citizen Researchers. Also, Inclusive multi-modal Toolkits for the Wellcome Collection Hub and Wellcome Collection.

Figure 1–4: Wellcome Trust. Trotman, N. and The Institute of Imagination (2018). 5-day Programme: Our Brains and Us.

Project 2: Neuro-Mnemonic:

Neuro-Mnemonic (NM) is an umbrella project building on the learnings, insights and enduring questions that emerged from previous Inclusive multi-modal umbrella project Tangible Statistics Linguistics, NM explores how an Equalities Design approach that considers horizontal, vertical and diagonal needs across an x, y, and z-axis can positively impact those multiply marginalised using a rights-based approach through moving beyond and illuminating non-typical frames of reference. Neuro-Mnemonic illuminates unofficial discourse across neurodiversity and neurodivergence, interrogating systems through a kaleidoscope of multiply marginalised lenses’ spanning themes that emerged during the pandemic. The articulated output is a 360-degree interacting (abstract) immersive video of ND Polyvocality, aiming to illuminate unheard, overlooked voices and move towards hybrid rights-based futures and a more profound sense of belonging for the marginalised in a post-pandemic world. This work has been exhibited with organisations such as The National Gallery NGX, Art in Flux, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Art Week and Ars Electronica.

Figure 5: Trotman, N. Still/image (2021), Project, Neuro-Mnemonic, Ars Electronica.

Biography:

Natasha Trotman MA(RCA), MCSD, FRSA, FIEDP is an Equalities Designer and Researcher whose practice explores extending the frontiers of knowledge around mental difference, which includes non-typical bodyminds, ways of being and marginalised experiences, in addition to reframing normative notions of equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion. This is done via an intersectional design lens, spanning multi-modal interactions, place-shaping, investigative play, and policy design for varied audiences, participants, and organisations. A fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts, a member of the Chartered Society of Designers, and a fellow of the Institute of Equality, Diversity Practitioners. Natasha is currently a Design Expert Specialist for the Design Council and a consultant for Wellcome, one of the Developers for Wellcome Collections Social Justice Curriculum; she also sits on the WCIT Advisory panel and is an artist in residence at Somerset House studio 48 in London.

CHARLIE GERE
Lancaster University, UK

From 4Chan to Kyiv: Social Media, Politics War

The Guardian newspaper described the Russia-Ukraine conflict as the ‘first TikTok war’. At one level such a description appears trivialising in the context of the extreme suffering and devastation wrought by Putin’s troops on Ukraine. However, it also points to the degree to which this war is seen through and even determined by social media.

I start with Walter Benjamin’s observation in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
that ‘The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society’. Over the last twenty years or so we have been trying to understand the massive social and cultural changes wrought by our new digital networking technologies, in particular the simultaneous development of the smartphone and social media. As events such as Brexit and Trump have shown these developments have had profound and destabilising effects on society and politics. The use of social media as a means of achieving this destabilisation is part of the Russian concept of hybrid warfare, the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine, and as such can be seen as successful. However, one aspect of the invasion of Ukraine has been the considerable brilliance with which President Volodymyr Zelinsky has used Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram. In my presentation I examine the relation between politics and social media from 4Chan to Kyiv.

Biography:

Charlie Gere is Professor of Media Theory and History at Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts at Lancaster University and previously, director of research at the Institute for Cultural Research at The University of Lancaster. Previously, Professor Gere was lecturer in digital art history in the School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media at Birkbeck College for seven years, where he ran the MA Digital Art History. He chairs the group Computers and the History of Art (CHArt) and is director of the AHRB-funded Computer Arts, Contexts, Histories etc. project at Birkbeck. He is author of several books and articles on new media art, art and technology, continental philosophy and technology. His main research interest is in the cultural effects and meanings of technology and media, particularly in relation to post-conceptual art and philosophy.

BIRGITTA HOSEA
University for the Creative Arts, UK

Fission: Curating Digital Art

In this presentation, Birgitta Hosea presents documentation from the Fission exhibition that she co-curated with Zhang Xiaotao and Li Fei and outlines the curatorial process. Commissioned for Guizhou Municipal Museum, the exhibition features the work of 46 artists from around the world working with digital media and is spread across 2200 m² of exhibition space. Bringing together this range of artists raises the problematic linking of very different artworks with very different approaches and thought processes through their common usage of a particular medium.

The central metaphor of the exhibition is the process of fission. In biology, fission is a natural way for algae, bacteria and other single celled organisms to reproduce. The tightly coiled DNA in the cell first elongates before splitting into two. The cell then itself splits forming two identical daughter cells. Nuclear fission, on the other hand, rarely happens in nature. It is a primarily unnatural, human procedure driven by technology. In this case, the splitting of atoms is induced by bombarding the unstable nucleus of a uranium cell with neutrons, which ‘excites’ it until it bursts emitting non-identical particles and large amounts of energy. This is a form of transmutation as the resulting fragments are not the same element as the parent atom. These fragments can trigger a chain reaction in nearby particles.

Fission, the exhibition, compares this nuclear chain reaction with the proliferation of multiple forms of digital art. Just as bombarding a uranium cell with neutrons causes an explosion of different particles and the release of energy, digital art can be seen as an unstable concept that has exploded into many different forms since the invention of digital technology and re-animated art itself. As it takes so many different forms, in the 2020s how can we even begin to conceptualise ‘digital art’?

Figure 6: Fission exhibition poster.
**Biography:**

**Birgitta Hosea** is Professor of Moving Image at the University for the Creative Arts. She is an artist, animator and curator working with expanded animation and performance drawing. Professor Hosea has previously taught in Azerbaijan, USA, Romania, Austria, Sweden and China, where she is a Visiting Professor at Chengdu University. She was previously Head of Animation at the Royal College of Art (2016-8), Course Director of MA Character Animation (2000-15) and Research Leader in Performance (2011-4) at Central Saint Martins. In 2017 she co-curated Boundary Crossings, an artists' residency and exhibition of animated installation art, with artist Rose Bond at PNCA, Portland, Oregon, USA. As part of her teaching practice, she has worked on public engagement projects with major museums and archives such as the National Gallery, ENO, London Transport Museum, National Theatre Archives, RSC, the Wellcome Digital Collection and the V&A, which involved using animation to reinterpret and recontextualise artefacts from the collections in order to make them accessible to different audiences.

**ANASTASIIA GLIEBOVA**

CEO and co-founder of V-Art

Co-author: Olga Simson, CSO and co-founder of V-Art

**Digitalization of art: current state and future prospects**

During 2021 the world faced the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic, and in 2022 it built a new reality in which humanity has become more dependent on digital communications. Just in the first three months of the pandemic, the business was forced to make a leap to digitalization that would otherwise take about five years (Mckinsey 2020). So in 2022, technological development has become even more rapid. As entrepreneur and futurist Peter Diamandis says, the next ten years will be more significant in terms of scientific progress than a whole previous century (Corbyn 2020):

> In the next 10 years, we’re going to reinvent every industry. And that’s getting even faster because the number of people with access to technology is increasing. First of all, it can be expected that the world will move into virtuality at a faster pace (Peter Diamandis interview, The Guardian, 25 January 2020)

In October 2021, the Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, announced that he plans to focus on creating the “Metaverse”, a hypothetical model of the Internet that supports 3D virtual environments and can be accessed using virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) headsets. Such elements of the metaverse as digital assets, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), digital homes and virtual persons, that is, avatars, have appeared in the world. In less than one year, more than $400 million has been invested in NFTs and, according to Forbes’ estimates, they continue to invest $40 million every month. Sales of both art and collectibles as NFTs have risen from $4.6 million in 2019 to $11.1 billion in 2021. The AR market is projected to grow to $77.0 billion in 2025, with an annual growth rate of 38.1%. The VR market will reach $20.9 billion in 2025, with a compound annual growth rate of 27.9% (Markets & Markets 2020).

Virtualization and digitalization have begun to play an important role on the art scene, but since NFT platforms run on the Web3 decentralised blockchain, sellers are not required to pass any Know Your Customer (KYC) verifications or other audits before they start selling. Many NFT platforms allow you to mint new NFTs for free with a series of simple steps and without any restrictions. Potentially, on many platforms, anyone, even a bot, can create an NFT, even if they don’t have the rights to the original content, put it up for sale without having to prove ownership of the original image. While platforms are subject to copyright law, specifically the WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT) of 1996 and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998, intellectual property infringements may be difficult to detect, and the fight against this phenomenon will be complicated due to relative anonymity, as well as the ability to use different wallets and pseudonyms.

Due to the misuse of free minting of NFTs, one of the largest NFT platforms, OpenSea (http://opensea.io) temporarily imposed limits on the number of NFTs that could be minted in 2021 (to five collections and 50 items per collection). The reason for this was that more than 80% of the minted images were plagiarised works, fake collections, and spam, which clearly demonstrated the significant scale of this problem on large platforms.

In order to monitor and detect such infringements on behalf of artists and collectors, DeviantArt (http://www.deviantart.com), one of the largest international content platforms for artists, launched DeviantArt Protect in 2021, a new image recognition software that scans public blockchains and third-party marketplaces for potential art infringements in the form of minted NFTs. These measures made it possible to detect infringements on their own platform of around 70 million registered users. Since launching their software in September 2021 to the end of January 2022, they had sent 120,000 infringement alerts to their users, and the number of infringement alerts grew by 30% from September to October, by November to December the monthly growth rate was over 300%, indicating serious problems for the long-term stability of this market.
Even the work of renowned NFT artist, Mike Winkelmann (Beeple), whose collage *Every days: the first 5000 days* sold at Christie’s in March for $69.3 million, has been hit by scammers. In April 2001, the hacker Monsieur Personne created copies of Winklemann’s work, with fake NFTs referring to the same data as the original token, and the configuration of their components, identifier, and transaction history also resembled the genuine one, so the fake NFT looked genuine. Thus, Monsieur Personne showed that the uniqueness of the NFT is conditional, and technically nothing prevents the creator of the token or hackers from making copies of it an unlimited number of times. A digital artist known as Mushu Person has also made several identical NFTs from Beeple’s artworks and posted them on NFT platforms selling himself as Winkelmann.

If a self-regulating system of blockchain platforms and digital assets is not able to prevent such negative practices, the NFT market will be the focus of attention of state regulation and anti-fraud rules.

**Biographies:**

**Anastasiia Gliebova** is CEO and co-founder of the V-Art platform [http://v-art.digital](http://v-art.digital) for digital art assets, founded by Ukrainian ArtTech entrepreneurs, and coordinator of the Digital Art Observatory artist-research residency [http://tatchers.art/dao](http://tatchers.art/dao) with Electric Artefacts [http://www.electricartefacts.art](http://www.electricartefacts.art), and Digital Art therapy Studio projects. Anastasia is also an Art Digitalization consultant and creative manager with a legal and economic background. She is Partner and Head of Research at the Institute of Law, Technology and Innovation (Kharkiv). Prior to founding V-Art, Anastasia has been working in the field of creative management for 5 years with over 30 projects in her portfolio. She is a speaker at events and conferences on technology in the field of art.

**Olga Simson** is CSO and co-founder of V-Art. She is a Doctor of Law, associate professor of civil law at the Yaroslav the Wise National Law University and CEO & co-founder of the Institute of Law, Technology and Innovation. Olga has led and consulted over 50 international projects in art and creative industries, published over 120 scientific works. Her clients include European gallerists, artists and collectors. Olga is also an expert for the USAID, EU, EBRD projects on innovation and investment, public-private partnerships, and clusters. In recent years, she has been leading the Creative Law Studios project, launched the School of IT Law and Creative Law at ILTI-School, specializing in the areas of Art Law, Fashion Law, IT Law and Media Law.

**3. CONCLUSION**

The four EVA London 2022 keynote talks were delivered on each day of the conference from 5–8 July 2022. Further information about the keynotes is available at:

http://www.eva-london.org/eva-london-2022/keynotes/

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