

# An Online Educational Platform for New Media Art in Thailand

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## Abstract

In the global art scene New Media Art has become part of artistic practice since the 1950s. Global-ly it has been presented, accounted for, and widely applied. However in Thailand, education about New Media Art has been limited. There was no hub where either artists or the public could learn about New Media Art genre. This research article will discuss the methods and production of an online New Media Art instructional platform supporting an increased awareness and understanding to Thai artists and society. This online platform will take the form as a multimedia e-magazine emphasizing the immediate relationship between itself (online communication) and the subject matter (New Media Art).

**Keywords:** *Education, Online Art Education, e-Magazine, Multimedia Learning, Digital Communication, New Media Art, Thailand*

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## Introduction

New Media Art has been practiced among Thai artists for almost four decades, yet it has never been included in the curriculum of any fine art courses offered by Thai universities. There are over 20 Thai faculties teaching fine art at the higher education level. However, most of them have curriculums limited to painting, sculpture, printmaking, and photography with a few offering mixed-media. One may ask, what inspires generations and generations of Thai artists to produce diverse works of art? From interviews conducted by the author with Thai artists and curators, specifically Prof. Apinan Poshyananda (PhD), Chayanoot Silpasart (PhD), Pichaya Suphavanij, Atikon Muk-daparakorn, Arnont Nongyao, Kosit Juntaratip, and Witaya Junma in conjunction with other re-search, most Thai artists work in various mediums, but those working in New Media Art tend to be influenced by their own experiences abroad or by non-Thai artists. The author as an art educator in several universities has determined that most students lack exposure to the New Media Art genre due to its absence in the curriculum in Thai higher education.

Developed alongside and with internet technology, online education has been in common existence since the 1990s. The younger generation rely on the internet to obtain information on a diverse range of subjects and with deepening advancements informational access has never been easier. This paper will address and discuss issues regarding the lack of a Thai learning platform around contemporary art and in particular New Media Art by researching and developing an online educational resource on the subject.

## Research Objectives

1. To examine the understanding of the New Media Art scene both globally and in Thailand.
2. To transform this understanding and information of New Media Art into content accessible online.
3. To create an online educational platform on New Media Art for Thai art students and other-interested audiences.

## Methods

This study is qualitative research aiming to create contents about the field of New Media art with a simple presentation and in turn publish it online. The researcher began with two focus areas: 1) New Media Art itself and 2) learning about online platforms from conducting a literature review, personal interviews, and case studies. Then the outcome from reviewing online education is evaluated to determine the appropriate way(s) of learning about the field of New Media Art. From this point the researcher will produce online contents and develop effective ways to provide comprehensible access to it for Thai viewers.

## What is New Media Art?

The term 'New Media' is debatable owing to the fact that 'newness' is always in flux. To understand the New Media Art genre, one must consider its historical context. For example in general new media is commonly understood in terms of

communication technology i.e. “the Internet, mobile phones, and social networks sites” (Ilana and Bell 2013:259), but this is different from ‘new media’ discussed in the artistic context. Although art has developed alongside technology through-out history from the invention of pigments, photography, etc. and will continue to do so as technologies of today expand; Art “made by using and reflecting upon new media and new technology help us understand how our lives are being transformed by these very media and technology” (Gere 2008:25), hence the use of new media in art can be said to “not have a history,” and is a “not easily delineated” since this “history has not yet [been] written” (Rush 2014:9). Nevertheless, if one were to historically contextualize the development of New Media Art, the emergence of video art in the late 1950s is arguably when the term arose. Prior to video art, categorization in artistic practice was done in accordance with art movements and ideologies rather than mediums. New Media Art refers to art “using new technologies such as computers” and other mediums moved from analog to digital (Gere 2008:13). In Tribe & Jana’s book on New Media Art, they use the term New Media Art for “projects that make use of emerging media technologies and are concerned with cultural, political, and aesthetic possibilities of these tools.” This term also includes other “older categorical names like Digital Art, Computer Art, Multimedia Art, and Interactive Art” (Tribe and Jana 2006:6).

From the information above, New Media Art will be characterized in this paper as follows:

1. Featuring digital elements/methods
2. Developed from mass communication
3. Experimentation with technology and different fields
4. Requires interaction

### **New Media Art in Thailand**

The first new media artwork exhibited in a Thai established institution was *How to Explain Art to Bangkok Cocks* (1985) by Apinan Poshyananda (now, Professor Apinan Poshyananda, PhD.) (Poshyananda, 2016) & (Silpasart, 2016). This was two decades after new media works by artists like Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik in the West. This delay was due to the Thai art community’s suspicions about the concept of postmodern art in the global context. From this point onwards, Thai artists who already explored non-traditional mediums started to publicly exhibit their works, while the art audiences’ general understanding of the concept and context of the artistic practice began to widen. The perception of the fine arts in Thailand was altered, expanding cross-disciplinary knowledge between art and other fields. Thai contemporary arts are catching up with technology and continues to grow parallel to it.

From interviews with artistic personnel mentioned in the introduction, an overview of New Media Arts in Thailand can be summarized as follows:

- Some artists use computers and other forms of technology, singularly or in combination, to document a project or situation.
- New Media Artworks are mostly analog rather than digital, due to the reduced availability and higher costs of technology and related materials.

- Most Thai New Media Artists have studied abroad, ie. been an artist-in-residence or has taken/integrated Western and East Asian artistic practices into account.
- New Media Art in Thailand exists and is practiced, but with limitations of budget and awareness.

### Learning Through an Online Platform

Online learning today can be seen as a connection to what is known as the ‘digital age’ as digital technology is well-understood and more accessible than in the past. Although new technology can be expensive (Ginsburge n.d.:3-4), utilizing the Internet allows for more explorative freedom. This research focuses on three ideas regarding online learning:

1. Critical thinking in online learning. (research the required criteria for online learning)
2. Use of digital media in art education. (research approaches utilizing digital media in art education)
3. Engaging multimedia as a learning tool. (research underlying education principles central to multimedia)

### Critical Thinking in Online Learning

Sweeney’s Critical Digital Pedagogy as expanded from Giroux’s three conditions of Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition can be summarized as follows:

- Art such as New Media Art complies with multiple foundations in fields of study and multimedia practices. Sweeney suggests a study of the connection between “artistic production and educational approaches” and fields like “computer programming, graphic design, performance art, and computer science” to be relevant.
- Sweeney mentioned in his summary of research on online learning that each social network supports the expression of individuals with digital media expression. A number of people tend to use online social media to discuss and exchange their ideas as links to learning new things.
- Multimedia separates high and popular culture and/or even other mass cultural productions. So, this brings us back to Modern Art that separates ‘high art’ and ‘low art’ (Sweeney 2013:130). However, this separation is debatable and will not be discussed in this paper.

This research has pedagogy paired with online communication and with its focus on an education-al platform Sweeney’s aspects per above need to be considered. Sweeney’s view simplified holds that technological media as pivotal in the educational realm. While it is true that critics were considered significant factors in art education, the context of critiques has change in the active environment of social media and its wider knowledge exchange. Consequently, learning in general has also adapted as the engagement between users and the creation of an accessible platform for dis-course and critiques comes to the fore.

From the review of Sweeney's Critical Digital Pedagogy it has a close connection to *21st Century Learning* by P21 (Partnership for 21st Century Learning) on information, media, and technology skills. The 21st Century Learning is a learning theory organization networking between education, business, community, and government with the objective for the learner to acknowledge and develop skills relevant to contemporary society. Information, media, and technology skills are based on the assumption this is a time where media influences and drives our surroundings. This is achieved through a range of processes including the ease of information access and self-learning under factors like the swift pace of technological change and interpersonal networking dynamics.

This study of creating an online platform for guiding and educating Thais on New Media Art needs to have the following characteristics: (1) Engaging and Integrated (2) Reliable and (3) Facilitates Interpersonal Connections.

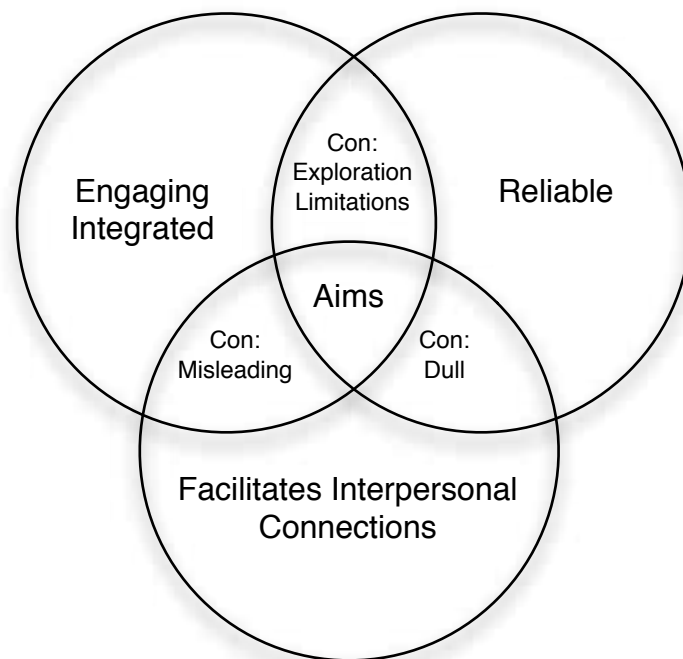


Figure 1. Considerations on critical thinking in online learning adapted from Sweeney's Critical Digital Pedagogy in combination with 21st Century Learning by P21.

### Using Digital Media in Art Education

From the literature review, two studies were selected that embodied the commonality of covering four approaches using digital media in art education. They are the Four Approaches to Implementing Digital Media in Art Education by Marner & Örtengren (2013) and the Four Approaches to New Media Art Education by Freire & McCarthy (2014). Both studies can be simplified and represented as follows:

| Approach | Marner & Örtegren | Freire & McCarthy |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1st      | Resistance        | Collaboration     |
| 2nd      | Addition          | Appropriation     |
| 3rd      | Embedding         | Programming       |
| 4th      | Dominating        | Intervention      |

Figure 2. Table comparing the Four Approaches to Implementing Digital Media in Art Education by Marner & Örtegren (2013) and the Four Approaches to New Media Art Education by Freire & McCarthy (2014).

While Marner & Örtegren's four approaches were designed for the classroom context, Freire & McCarthy's were created for education outside of school. Due to limited equipment in the class-room, Marner & Örtegren begins with 'Resistance' as their first approach, then 'Adding' digital usage as *a special activity*, following with 'Embedding' digital media into any processes of learning, and ending with having digital media 'Dominating' the classroom, for example, using a soft-ware program to create artwork. Since Freire & McCarthy's approach is aimed at art education outside school, Marner & Örtegren's first approach does not apply. For Freire & McCarthy's approach it begins with 'Collaboration' or users interaction over social media to create a sense of community, then the 'Appropriation' of materials available digitally by mixing and matching them so they can later be 'Programmed' as a digital tool(s) for experimentation. Subsequently, students of the Freire & McCarthy's approach are expect to be able to 'Intervene' or participate by sharing their ideas and practices to a wider audience via an online platform.

Drawing from the comparisons between the two previous studies, this research proposes the following set of four approaches for an self-learning, online platform to enhance the understanding of the New Media Art genre and its practices. The four approaches are 'Curiosity & Initiating,' 'Exploration,' 'Understanding,' and 'Being Critical.'

- Curiosity and Initiating – As raised in the beginning of this paper, art education in Thailand's higher education system is limited in its range of mediums and knowledge sets used in artistic practice. Some students and users might be already comfortable with the practice they have been developing, which is positive, but one is rewarded by remaining curious to make the most from an online platform. They should initiate their own research beforehand to gain a basic understanding of the practice of art and its history. Since this platform publishes information on the New Media Art genre and related philosophies, precepts and thoughts, an artistic awareness and its related notions are essential to get the most out of a self-learning site.
- Exploration – This online platform also introduces experienced artists and experts in New Media Art. It is a self-learning tool for users to explore their

interest. This website acts as a guide to expand their creativity and comprehension. Those who are interested in practicing or learning about New Media Art, whether it is producing artwork, curating an exhibition, or engaging with the subject in any way are able to explore the availability of digital media and technology resources in Thailand.

- Understanding – When browsing the proposed website, users are able to select and view the materials from the issues of e-magazines related to their existing knowledge level of New Media Art and other subjects of interest. This online platform will provide both formative and insightful perceptions on New Media Art. It will provide users selectable contents suitable to their needs.
- Being Critical – As the availability in terms of tools and experienced personnel are quite limited in the Thai region, Freire & McCarthy and Marner & Örtengren's fourth approaches (dominating and intervening) are not viable. In spite of this, users will still be able to integrate the basics gained from engaging with this website into their own artistic practice.

### Using Digital Media in Art Education

*Research-based Principles for Multimedia Learning* by Mayer (2014) is a lecture broadcasted on Harvard University's Youtube channel that pertains to this paper. Mayer argues in his lecture that the most important technology of learning is the "human mind," so tools or medium created for education needs to account for its psychological aspects and capabilities. An example of such is multimedia. Felton argues that "multimedia learning," which is "learning from words (e.g. printed or spoken text) and pictures (e.g. animation, video, illustration, or photos)," is suitable for presentations in a "visual screen-based world" (Felton 2008:60). This hypothesis can support Mayer's tests for 'retention and 'transfer' objectives.

In his lecture, Mayer discussed applying psychology to learning in education, such as using graphic and words focusing on the learning objectives of 'concepts.' He points out the 'three top-level goals for the design of multimedia instruction,' namely to (1) reduce extraneous processing (2) manage essential processing (3) foster generative processing. This research applies these Mayer's goals with considerations of the New Media Art subject matter and the Thai audience (Thai students and other interested parties). However, instead of seeing them as goals, they were utilized as core directions for creating the multimedia educational materials.

### Realizing Research Methodology

New Media Art requires platforms of exchange - between artwork and audience or the public space of a gallery and the public space of a network, for example. Practical challenges include the need for continuous maintenance and a flexible and technologically equipped exhibition environment, which museum buildings (traditionally based on the "white cube" model) cannot always provide, as well as conceptual issues and a continuing need to organise educational programmes for audiences to make them more familiar with this still emerging art form. (Paul, 2008)

The quotation above confirms some of the general issues with New Media Art, but most importantly for this research is the subject's need to be presented educationally. As an educational support for this subject and an appropriation of the three studies mentioned earlier, the proposed methodology supports the creation of an online platform for New Media Art education in Thailand. This methodology is summarized in the table below:

Topics Summaries

| Topics         | Summaries   |
|----------------|---|
| Considerations | 1) Engaging & Integrated (2) Reliable (3) Networking - facilitating interpersonal connections     |
| Approaches     | (1) Curiosity & Initiating (2) Exploration (3) Understanding (4) Being Critical                   |
| Directions     | (1) Reduce Extraneous Processing (2) Manage Essential Processing (3) Foster Generative Processing |

Figure 3. A table of the Considerations, Approaches & Directions for the online platform's methodology.

To create and manage the contents for this website as theorized by the above table the below methods are outlined:

1. Gather information on New Media Art artists and principals as archival materials in order to build a database of their points of view and experiences, as well as supporting the platform's credibility and reliability.
2. Research theories and histories related to the New Media Art genre in both the global and regional (Thailand) contexts, comparing and contrasting them to get suppositions on the subject for the presenting the Thai context.
3. Analyze other fields of study such as psychology, anthropology etc. to provide a related and wider perspectives on New Media Art.
4. Manage and organize sets of knowledge, categorizing and grouping necessities and then select the multimedia suitable for inclusion.
5. Plan and produce content according to the first 'consideration' and 'directions' for publishing online for the users.
6. Get feedback and make improvements to the platform accordingly, encouraging users to comprehend the 'Four Approaches.'

This online educational platform is a website containing issues of multimedia e-magazines. The use of the multimedia e-magazines format was selected from the research of the use of digital media in art education in conjunction with the utilization of multimedia as a learning tool. This presentation method fulfills two objectives. The first is to introduce the reader to the New Media Art genre.

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The contents of each issue are curated under that issue's main theme. The first issue focuses on conveying a primary understanding of New Media Art in Thailand.





Figure 4. The first issue of Teleaesthetics (2018).

All e-magazines published on this platform utilizes multimedia tools namely infographics, motion-graphics, and video clips, together with written works. This first issue contains the same medium selections and each one is selected to depict a particular form of content. To reiterate Mayer's argument earlier, learning through multimedia assists the learner's topical understanding. Images and sound help with process of learning and remembering (Mayer, 2014).

| Type of Medium | Definitions  | Contents  |
|----------------|--|---|
| Infographic    | Written information and passages with images/graphics    | Timeline paralleling art and technology         |
| Motion-graphic | Spoken descriptions and animated moving images           | Understanding New Media Art in Thailand         |
| Video clip     | Recorded images and sounds from real artists and people. | Interviews and exhibition reviews               |
| Text           | Essays with supported images/graphics                    | In-depth academic writings with images/graphics |

Figure 5. A table describing the first issue's multimedia and linked content.

To illustrate the table above, this infographic is semi-interactive and has links to external websites, information for networking as well as additional exploration. It depicts a 'Timeline Paralleling Art and Technology' as this infographic allows users to navigate the linear narrative for an overview, or choose a selected time period for deeper investigation. The procedure for creating this timeline requires one to find connections between artistic mediums and technology relevant to a specific time period, ranging from a date in history till the present. The idea behind this interactive infographic is the relationship between artistic practice, technology, and aesthetic perception.

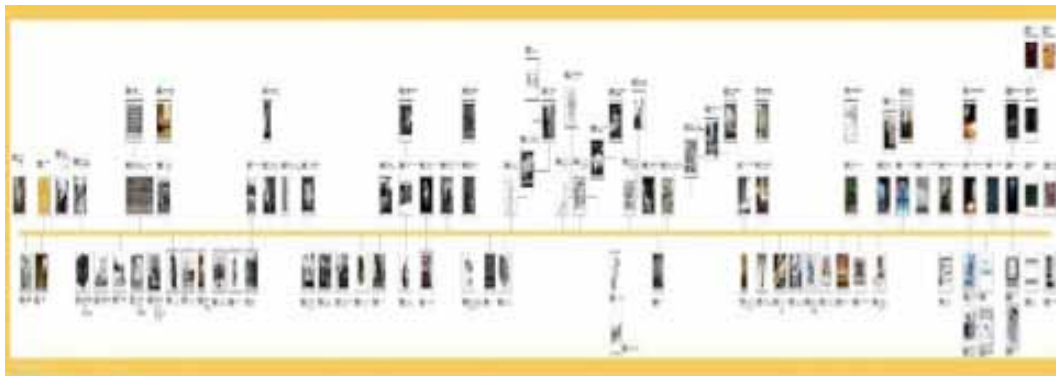


Figure 6. A timeline paralleling art and technology.

Motion-graphics is a medium suitable for achieving a brief overview, thus in the first issue's *Learning Technology and Art: Art Meets Technology in the 21st Century* is created with this medium. This motion-graphic conveys the ideology of New Media Art in the global context together with a general understanding that links it to the Thai context and issues in question.



Figure 7. Screenshot from the motion-graphic *Learning Technology and Art: Art Meets Technology in the 21st Century*.

Video clips are used for reviews and interviews. In addition to all the graphics, having real people providing their opinions offers content variety and reinforces the credibility of the website. The interviewees are individuals whose that has

specialized in New Media Art. For example, inter-views are with curators, artists, researchers, and independent art space owners/managers. New Media Art exhibitions are reviewed and are offered by individuals with different backgrounds in New Media Art, including those who are familiar with the genre as well as people who have just started to take interest in this topic.



Figure 8. Screenshot of an interview with Prof. Dr. Apinan Poshyananda on New Media Art.



Figure 9. Screenshot of an interview with Witaya Junma on New Media Art.



Figure 10. Screenshot of a LAB/ART Interactive Installation Exhibition tour by the artist.

Essays are not typically multimedia, but they are included in this e-magazine to provide more extensive background on New Media Art. All essays are written by an invited scholar who are working not just in art but also in other fields of study.



## Conclusion

Within the scope of the context of Thai New Media Art, this paper illustrates the ways in which an online platform offering multimedia e-magazines can be used as a tool for New Media Art education in the region. Furthermore, this research arrived at a methodology comprised of theories and hypotheses mainly on digital communication, multimedia communication, and pedagogy. Samples from the first issue of this e-magazine is a practical and solid testament to the pedagogical ideas behind this research. From surveys conducted with users from the fields of art and culture they reported this online platform and its presentation to be reliable and engaging. Additionally, they supported the view that this website could be used as a teaching tool. They also suggested it can be improved with the addition of gamification elements and other more interactive features. This paper demonstrates how an online platform can provide a supportive learning platform for Thai audiences to gain an understanding of New Media Art practices both locally and abroad.

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