

New Media Art in South Asia: Advancements, Challenges, and Impacts on Visual Representation

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Abstract

The impact of Western modernism on South Asian nations has been significant, with various influences affecting the visual arts. Despite gaining independence, these nations have faced challenges in practicing visual arts due to the existing structures, traditional inheritance, and the impact of national and international initiatives. Previous research exploring the influence of new media on visual arts in South Asia has not adequately addressed the parallel developments with the West. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate how advanced technologies are impacting visual arts in South Asian nations, such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The paper seeks to understand how new media impacts visual arts in South Asia, including its epistemology, and how artists use advanced technologies. It also presents South Asian artists in the diaspora who are related to presenting the chronological configuration of new media art in South Asia. The paper examines advancements in both moving and digital visuals and explores the works of different artists presenting new media art on screen and in digital form. It delves into the implementation of new technologies and how they have shaped visual representation, both in parallel to the traditional form of representation and as a challenge to existing structures. Moreover, the paper explores how modern and contemporary movements have influenced visual art in South Asia with respect to new media art. Through contextualizing the developments, processes, and events, this research provides an essential aspect of the constituent identity and history of new media art in South Asia. The paper's findings contribute to a better understanding of the role of new media in shaping the visual arts in South Asia and how artists have adapted and transformed their practice to engage with new technologies.

Keywords: South Asia; New Media; Advanced Technologies; Visual Arts; Visual Representation; Modern; Contemporary

Introduction

The visual arts in South Asia encompass a diverse range of artistic styles and mediums, including painting, sculpture, photography, video, installation, and performance art. In recent years, new media art that utilizes digital and technology-based media has become an increasingly important aspect of the South Asian contemporary art scene, with a growing number of artists and exhibitions dedicated to this genre.

With the rapid advancements in technology, new technologies are now impacting every aspect of our lives.¹ However, there is still a gap between the acquisition of technology and how it affects different regions and spaces. Technology has had a significant impact on visual arts, and artists are increasingly aware of its effects on society and how it is generating new mediums for creating art. The digital age has provided artists with a better platform for expressing their creativity through various technological developments, such as printing, computing, coding, algorithms, digital photography, video, screens, and data. As a result, new media art has emerged as a critical aspect of contemporary visual arts in South Asia.

In terms of image-making, painting dominated and often influenced the visual study institutions of the time. An important example of the interaction of media in the early development of visual technology can be seen in the work of artist Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906). Varma's innovative approach involved the mass production of images through mechanical reproduction, which had a significant impact on visual arts in Bombay as well as in India as a whole. As Geeta Kapur remarks, "Ravi Varma's piecemeal efforts to produce new forms and techniques is also precisely the point where classical subject matter, translating itself to satisfy bourgeois desire, further translates into images for mass consumption that are facilitated by the reproduction technology of the glossy oleograph".²

Visual arts in South Asia were traditionally dominated by sculpture and painting, often influenced by Western modernism. However, in the 1950s, there was a shift towards internationalism and a renewed interest in pre-modern models. This led to Indigenous art gaining momentum and criticism of reliance on Euro-American abstract modernism for perpetuating Western hegemony.³

The concept of modernism in South Asia involves the relationship between nationalism and artistic practices, as well as the institutionalization of art. While artists often migrated to Western countries, the idea of internationalism persisted. This gave rise to collective movements, particularly among artists who migrated to metropolitan areas.

Two notable examples of such collectives are the Progressive Artist Group (PAG) and the Lahore Art Circle (LAC).

In the early development of nations in South Asia, the establishment of institutions played a crucial role, with support from international organizations. These projects were also influenced by advancements in technology. One significant collaboration was with the international organization Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT). Another influential player was the Ford Foundation, which provided assistance and funding since its establishment in 1950. These roles were instrumental not only in relation to other institutions but also in shaping modern art in South Asia. Other institutions such as the India Foundation for Arts in Bangalore and the Sari CSDS in New Delhi were also impacted by these changes.

This important development primarily focused on visual arts and examined how they were influenced by artist migration. It explored the connection between these practices and the international art scene, leading to interventions involving complex practices and technology.

As a result, the development of new media art was limited during this period, with only a few minor advancements. However, in the late twentieth century, with the impact of globalization and economic liberalization artist in South Asia works with video, uses computers to create digital works, and manipulates video with their exciting practices. In the last two decades, there have been significant improvements in new media art, with individuals from information technology backgrounds leading the way. In recent decades, these individuals have played a critical role in the advancement of new media art in South Asia, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in this field.

Collective Movements: Progressive Artist Group and Lahore Art Circle

The main developments in the visual arts after the independence of India and Pakistan, the two collective groups which emerges from Lahore and Mumbai (Bombay). These artists and groups, their relation with the metropolis, where the traces relate to the colonial setup especially with the progressive artist group (PAG) founded in 1947, as many foreigners' art intellectuals provided support for the group before its establishment in 1947. The Lahore Art Circle (LAC) founded in 1952, doesn't have such kind of support and the main person for creating LAC was Shakir Ali.

Walter and Kathe Langhammer, Rudolf and Albrecht von Leyden, and Emanuel Schlesinger were essential in promoting an avant-garde art movement in Bombay: The

Progressive Artists' Group.⁴ In the mid-twentieth century group of artists in Mumbai, anticipated new practices of art where they reject the constructed syllabus of British education, and this was a group PAG. PAG and associates were at the forefront of the burgeoning movement toward Modernism.⁵ Art talk and film screening by Walter Langhammer in the Auditorium Hall of the Jehangir Art Gallery, 1952, helps us to understand how active the art scene in Mumbai was at that time (Fig.1), most importantly my main position is how the film screening became part at that time in artists talk.



Fig.1, Art talk and film screening by Walter Langhammer in the Auditorium Hall of the Jehangir Art Gallery, 1952 (Margit Franz's digital collection, authorised by the late Kekoo Gandhi).

Artists from PAG in Bombay played a significant role in introducing the camera as a medium of representation. M.F. Hussain adapted to the new medium by creating his first film, "Through the Eyes of a Painter," (Fig.2) which won a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1967.⁶ The relationship between cameras and government support has also evolved, as seen in the earlier initiative "Know Our Country" commissioned by the Films Division during the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's nation-building campaign. The use of new media has changed over time, reflecting shifts in artistic practices and broader political and social contexts.⁷ In 1969, Tyeb Mehta created an experimental film titled "Koodal," which received the Filmfare Critics Award (Fig.3). Several other artists also ventured into filmmaking during that time, such as Dashrath Patel's "A Journey in India" (1967), Gieve Patel's "Chairs" (c. 1969-72), and Kumar Shahani's "Object" (1971). These films were produced by the Films Division of the Government of India.

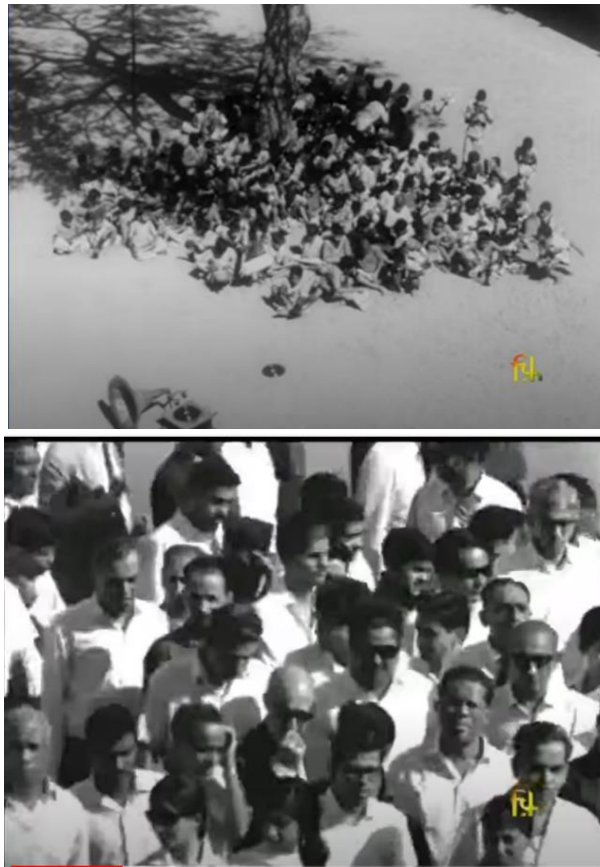


Fig.2, Scene from, M. F. Husain “Through the Eyes of a Painter”, 1967, 15 mins, archives Films Division.

Fig.3, Scene from, Tyeb Mehta, “Koodal”, 1969, 15:40 mins, archives Films Division.

The Vision Exchange Workshop (VIEW), located on Nappean Sea Road in Bombay, was an interdisciplinary studio established by Akbar Padamsee between 1969 and 1972. It was funded through his Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship grant and served as a groundbreaking platform for collaboration among various creative disciplines. The participants included painters, printmakers, filmmakers, cinematographers, animators, and even a psychoanalyst, fostering an environment conducive to experimentation.

Two notable female participants in the Vision Exchange Workshop were Nalini Malani and Nasreen Mohamedi. Akbar Padamsee himself created two abstract films called “Syzygy” (Fig.4) and “Events in a Cloud Chamber”. These films involved the animation of a series of geometric drawings. The workshop provided essential resources such as a 16mm camera, editing, and projection facilities, an etching press, a darkroom, as well as a collection of rare books and slides. These resources were highly valuable to artists during that period.⁸

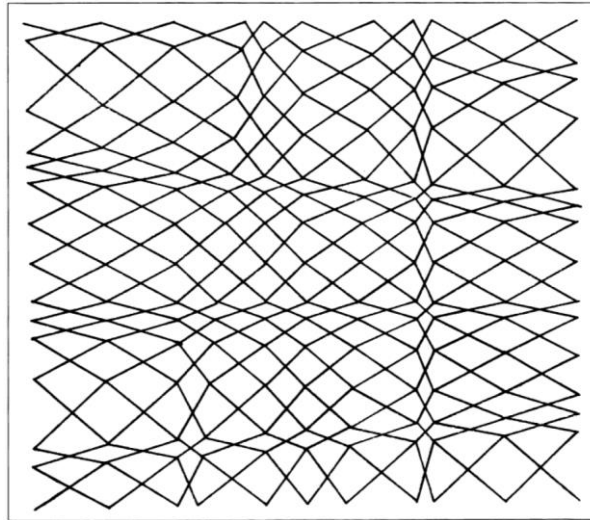


Fig.4, Akbar Padamsee, *Syzygy*, Programme for a Film, 1969-70, Screen print: 37x25 cm, Source: In *Art and Visual Culture in India 1857-2007*, by Gayatri Sinha, 16. Mumbai: Marg.

When Akbar Padamsee created “Events in a Cloud Chamber,” a meticulously crafted film centered around a painting, he was aware that there was no specific audience for his experimental work in the medium. After a few screenings, including one at Pundole, the artist lent the film to someone, but he cannot recall who it was, and unfortunately, he never received it back. As the film was a positive print, there were no duplicates available. This situation inspired filmmaker Ashim Ahluwalia to create a film both with and about Padamsee, titled “Events in a Cloud Chamber” (2016). Through this film, Ahluwalia aimed to not only establish a connection to the lost era of experimental filmmaking but also demonstrate his affinity for Padamsee’s artistic experiments. Jhaveri Contemporary Gallery, based in Mumbai, showcased Ahluwalia’s 23-minute film at the Dhaka Art Summit in February and more recently at Art Dubai, which concludes today. The gallery plans to exhibit the film in July or August, allowing a wider audience to experience it.⁹

During the 1950s, a group of five young artists and writers came together to establish “The Lahore Art Circle” (LAC) in Pakistan. This collective played a crucial role in shaping the modernist movement within the country. LAC not only introduced modern and progressive ideas but also facilitated connections between Pakistani modern art and the global modern art scene. In her research on LAC, Samina Iqbal delved into previously unpublished primary documents, unearthing valuable insights. These documents provide a framework to contextualize how the United States’ cultural diplomacy played somewhere a supportive role, offering strategic platforms for this emerging group of radical artists.¹⁰ The United States Information Center Murree

(USIC) provided support for various exhibitions, including those organized by the Lahore Art Circle (LAC), promoting their artistic endeavors. There were instances of collaboration between artists from both the Progressive Artist Group PAG and LAC. For example, Sheikh Safdar Ali, a member of LAC, and Maqbool Fida Husain, a member of PAG, were friends who worked together designing film sets in Bombay Talkies during their time in the city. They were also associated with the Muslim Club during that period. Additionally, Akbar Padamsee, a member of PAG, and Shakir Ali, a member of LAC, crossed paths while working at Andre Lhote's studio in Paris between 1950 and 1951.

In the 1970s, Maqbool Fida Husain and Frances Newton Souza made several visits to Karachi and held exhibitions at the Indus Gallery, which was owned by Syed Ali Imam. These interactions indicate that there must have been contact between them in earlier years.¹¹ The study conducted by Samina Iqbal on the Lahore Art Circle (LAC) does not present any specific examples of the group engaging in the film as a medium, unlike certain artists from the Progressive Artist Group (PAG) who were more involved, often due to state funding. It is worth noting that the United States Information Center (USIC) in Murree organized a range of activities at the center, including lectures, screenings of motion pictures, exhibitions, and student tours.

International collaborations: Ford Foundation and Experiments in Art and Technology

The National Institute of Design (NID) 1961, project in Ahmadabad reflects a strong emphasis on design, with the involvement of the Ford Foundation and a focus on establishing a landmark institution for national identity. The Ford Foundation's relationship with designing an institution in India is noteworthy, "One of the first suggestions that an Indian higher education institute might 'serve as a center for creative studies in design and fashion' came in 1954 in an earlier report funded by the Ford Foundation, intended to evaluate the potential of village and small industries in India".¹² Further, Claire Wintle writes how, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Ford Foundation had been involved in the development of the MoMA exhibition, Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India (1955), and a second exhibition, this time of European and US modern design, which toured India between 1959 and 1961. Festival of India in the United States 1985-86, which was a collaboration with MoMA, and its one part was, FILM-UTSAV INDIA, it features five special documentaries, four of which are portraits. Included are a comprehensive film about the life of Gandhi, a film about Nehru, documentaries on Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen, as well as a beautiful film about clay pottery.¹³

In 1968, the American art collective Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) was invited to India to collaborate on a project related to satellite and television technology with the support of various national and international foundations such as Nehru, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations. The Anand Project (1969-1971) aimed to develop an educational television network in rural India and featured the coordination of the SITE Television Satellite program by EAT (Fig. 5&6). The project demonstrated the potential of collaboration between artists and engineers, with a focus on impacting the masses and developing national programs. One of the significant collaborative projects in the realm of art, technology, media, and research is the Anand Project in India. EAT was established in 1967 with the aim of fostering collaborations between artists and engineers. Instead of imposing a formal process, the group focused on facilitating direct interactions between artists and engineers. This approach allowed for innovative connections between aesthetics and technology. Notably, the connection between EAT and other important areas like design and computation resulted in further advancements.

The collaboration between EAT and the elite classes led to various projects that merged technology and the development of national programs. While EAT primarily dealt with private projects, there were also national initiatives in progress. Another significant development was the association between EAT and NID. This collaboration introduced visual technology, with animation being a clear example. The connection between EAT and NID added complexity to their projects in India.

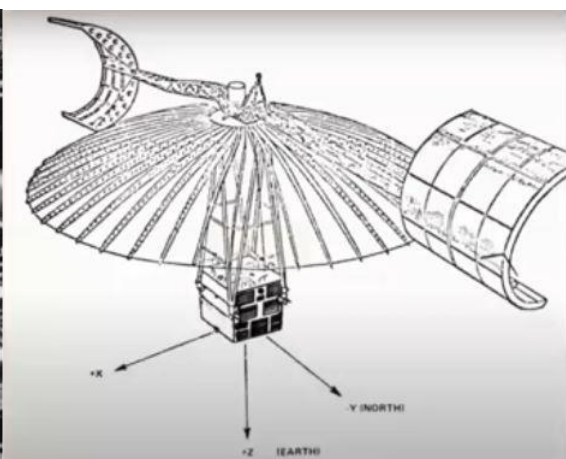


Fig. 5, Anand Dairy Cooperative (Boroda, India), Instructional Software for Television, 1969. Photo: Peter Poole, courtesy of Billy Kluver.

Fig. 6, Site Television Satellite ATS, Experimental satellite communications for rural education. Image source youtube/ Julie Martin.

NID has contributed in many ways, especially in design, but we can relate it as contributed to emerging new media practices as well such example is the role of Dashrath Patel.¹⁴

There have been numerous instances of artistic exchanges and art exhibitions involving the United States. However, despite these efforts, the question arises as to why they didn't contribute to the promotion of new media art. A notable example is the presence of art critic Clement Greenberg in the exhibition titled 'Two Decades of American Painting' held in New Delhi in April 1967.¹⁵ It is important to consider Clement Greenberg's association with the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an organization funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and known for its anticommunist propaganda.¹⁶ Additionally, the Ford Foundation's involvement in funding the exhibition of American artists at the All Indian Fine Arts and Craft Society (A.I.F.C.S) during the Third International Contemporary Art Exhibition in India in 1957 is worth noting.¹⁷ While modernism was emerging in India, it is evident that the United States also played a significant role in the cultural diplomacy of the time, leaving a notable mark on the art history of India.

The Influence of Diaspora Artists

This multimedia performance signifies the important formation of the performance by the artist Rasheed Araeen and how he uses the technology for the projection of different photographs instantiated with his concept where he criticizes the structure and system, concerning different issues. This self-created role labeled him as a political artist and the intermingling of media, "Araeen's promotion of installation art, performance, text, and dematerialized painting and sculpture (Fig.7). During the 1970s these new media became his practice, along with his writing. All contributed to his project of art activism, a protracted battle for social change that began the day that he arrived in London as an artist and was remade into an immigrant".¹⁸

Rasheed Araeen provides his experience migrating to Europe in 1964, as refers to this artistic ambition, individualism, and alienation that brought them to the metropolis. The gates of the metropolis are well-guarded. And if some have managed to pass through, they can be lured into a multicultural spectacle.¹⁹ Rasheed Araeen was not a single artist who has moved from South Asia to Europe several artists both from PAG and LAC, have moved to the West many other artists during this period, but Rasheed Araeen has been both critic, activist, and artist who have to understand and reflect on the situation in Europe and how racism was developed in Europe. Providing his example

where he includes the idea of the metropolis and as an artist from a Third World country how he examines his migration and adaptation to the metropolis.

Sutapa Biswas is a conceptual artist who employs various mediums like performance, film, photography, installation, and video. One of her videos, *Kali*, 1984 (Fig.8), features a thirty-minute performance by Biswas, who plays the role of the Hindu goddess of time and change, Kali.²⁰



Fig. 7, Rasheed Araeen. *Paki Bastard (Portrait of the Artist as a Black Person)*, 1977, the image shows Araeen in front of a projection on the stage floor, performance. Courtesy Rasheed Araeen, Image available via researchgate.net.

Fig. 8, Sutapa Biswas, *Kali*, 1984 is a thirty-minute video that the artist made while a student at the University of Leeds.

The Changing Scene of New Media from the 1990s

The art critic Nancy Adajania proposes a shift from “non-context media” to “new context media” in India,²¹ where early works in new media were disregarded while the new media art today is acknowledged and celebrated. To understand the development of new media in India, Adajania suggests a different approach that considers the country’s history since 1947. Adajania also acknowledges the discourse of new media art in India, which was influenced by Western curators in the 1990s. In contrast to modernists’ approach to media, Adajania sees a need for improvisation and experimentation. About this argument, Ranjit Hoskote identifies four “distinctive experiential landscapes” that have emerged in Indian art, one of which is the expansion of human experience into virtual space through the Internet.²²

The discussion surrounding contemporary art from the 1990s onwards reflects the impact of new technologies and the introduction of Installation Art. While the time

frame for these developments may differ, the changing political and economic perspectives have greatly influenced the art scene in both India and Pakistan. Additionally, the impact of cultural diplomacy on the development of art academia in these countries cannot be ignored. Bangladesh, which formed in 1971 following the war between India and Pakistan, has also been influenced by the impact of war on art and new mediums of image representation have emerged.

The challenge for South Asian artists is to create work that can compete with the dominant Western discourse, both ideologically and economically. This requires the establishment of visual spaces and virtual education to perceive new forms of visual representation in the digital age. Exhibitions showcasing the advancements in screen technology and different mechanical and conceptual technologies can effectively contribute to the dialogue of visual history and the development of new spaces.

Contemporary art in South Asia has gained significance as a subfield since the 1990s. Despite the argument that art movements are transmitted from the West to the rest, the technical aspects and themes of a particular area remain relevant. The imposition of Western attitudes in post-colonial regions has resulted in diplomatic exchanges that transfer modern techniques to South Asian regions. However, globalization, cultural transformations, increased global mobility of artworks and artists, the rise of new media, reconfiguration of older aesthetic imperatives, and changes in the role of the artist and audience have emerged as organizing themes for studies on contemporary art and aesthetics.

Video as a medium came from a workshop organized by Goethe-Institut_Max Mueller Bhavan. In New Delhi in 1991. Among the participants were Rameshwar Broota and Vasundhara Tiwari Who collaborated on a work by Shabash Bete. Broota though had begun to work with video technology as early as 1985 and he made some experimental video art films that were shown at Shridharani Gallery (New Delhi) in 1987 (Fig.9&10).²³



Fig.9, Rameshwar Broota, *The Body*, 1985, video. Photo courtesy of the Artist.

Fig.10, Rameshwar Broota, *Shabash Bete*, 1991, video. Photo courtesy of the Artist.

The exchange of artworks and exhibitions highlights the significance of regional and national aspects. International organizations supporting contemporary art and the support that connects South Asian artists. The South Asian Triangle Network and its workshops and programs help produce contemporary art. The Triangle Network workshops were founded in 1983 by artist Anthony Caro and collector Robert Loder and expanded first in Africa, then to the Middle East, South Asia, the Americas, and the rest of Europe. South Asian partnerships began in 1997, including Khoj Workshop in India, Vasl in Pakistan, Britto in Bangladesh, Sutra in Nepal, and Theertha in Sri Lanka. Vasl added a branch in Lahore, and two other Indian workshops, 1 Shanthi Road Studio in Bangalore and CONA in Mumbai, joined the network.²⁴

Contemporary art practitioners in India work with various mediums. Artists like Nalani Malani (Fig.11), Vivan Sundaram (Fig.12), Navjot Altaf, Sheba Chhachhi, Ranbir Kaleka, Raqs Media Collective, CAMP, Shilpa Gupta, Jatish Kallat, Sonia Khurana, Subodh Gupta, Harshit Agarwal, Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, Raghava KK, etc. reflect the impact of new technologies and the obsolescence of traditional screens with dynamic screens (screen-based media).²⁵ Art and research spaces that have formed from the 1990s onwards, with a great impact on Indian art related to experimental and dimensionality in art projects, mostly focus on newer generations. The Indian Foundation for Arts (IFA), Sarai CSDS (Center for the Study of Development Societies) Delhi, Khoj International Artist's Association, Delhi, and the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, Bangalore, are some spaces of importance. Spaces that focus on science and emerging technologies, such as EyeMyth, Mumbai, Science Gallery, Bangalore, and Memesys culture lab, Goa, are also important.



Fig.11, Nalini Malani, *City of Desires*, Single-channel U-matic tape transferred to digital video (color, sound), 1992, 17 min. 46 sec. Photo courtesy of the Artist.

Fig.12, Vivan Sundaram, *Couples: Photo Album*, Vancouver, 1994, 20 minutes. A Western Front Production, Photo courtesy of the Artist.

Raqs Media Collective's cultural practices, approach to art-making and interactive opportunities hold great significance. As a collective, they have ventured into various domains, including documentary filmmaking, theoretical discourse, and curation. Their engagement as a curatorial team, along with their writings in articles and books, showcases their diverse expertise. In 2001, they initiated the renowned SARAI program at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi. Additionally, they produce films and contribute to teaching at art schools.²⁶ The collective's art practice exhibits a rich diversity, incorporating their utilization of advanced technologies (Fig.13). At times, they employ a deliberate exaggeration of colonial technological advancements, reinterpreting them in their own distinctive language. Jeebesh Bagchi describes the trio as "self-taught individuals who have cultivated extensive relationships across various disciplines." Their critical distance from these disciplines, including contemporary art, serves as a driving force for their continued growth. Consequently, Raqs Media Collective's primary medium is dialogue and discourse—a continuous flow of words and ideas, shaping a vast intertextual and cross-disciplinary conversation.²⁷



Fig. 13, Raqs Media Collective, *The K.D.Vyas Correspondence, Vol.1* | 2006 18 screens, 9 soundscapes, and architecture. Architectural Collaborators: Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Mueller.

Fig. 14, Shilpa Gupta, *Untitled*, 2004-2005, Interactive video projection and sound, 8min interaction loop. Photo courtesy of the Artist.

Despite the challenges posed by limited access to technology and funding, there is a vibrant community of new media artists in Pakistan who are pushing the boundaries of what is possible in this field. The growth of New Media Art in Pakistan is expected to continue as artists and institutions increasingly embrace the potential offered by digital technologies. Some artists who are working with new technologies like Rashid Rana, Shahzia Sikander, Bani Abidi (Fig.15), Hamra Abbas, Farida Batool, Aisha Abid Hussain, Huma Mulji, Basir Mahmood (Fig.16), etc.



Fig.15, Bani Abidi, *Mangoes*, 1999, Video, Single Channel, 3:24 sec. Courtesy of the Artist.

Fig.16, Basir Mahmood, *Thank You for Coming*, 2013, video still. Courtesy of the Artist.

Rashid Rana is a South Asian artist known for his use of ironic juxtapositions to address political and social issues. He creates composite images from thousands of miniaturized photos that vacillate between the micro and macro, often depicting scenes of life in Lahore. Rana’s work cleverly references the history of art in Pakistan, despite his use of new media and digital photography. Despite deviating from traditional painting techniques taught at the National Collage of Arts, Lahore, Rana manages to preserve the idea of the miniature in his work through his mosaic-like use of tiny photographs in constructing his mural-sized images (Fig.17).²⁸ Advanced technologies play a vital role in the representation of art using digital media. Shazia Sikander’s artwork “Parallax” (Fig.18), is an example of how the representation of image-making deals with colors, transformation, movement, speed, and forms in the digital realm. The artwork presents a complex narrative open to interpretation, which hints at the dark side while also allowing the viewer to relish the seductiveness of the artwork.²⁹ Shazia Sikander started experimenting with animation in 2001 as an International Artist in Residence at Artpace.³⁰



Fig. 17, Rashid Rana. *My sight stands in the way of your memory*. 2013-2015. Single channel projection and nine-channel video on nine monitors. Photo by Mark Blower. Courtesy of the Artist.

Fig. 18, Shazia Sikander, *“Parallax”*, 2013. Three-channel HD video animation, Audio Surround 5.1, music by Du Yun. Courtesy of the Linda Pace Foundation.

In Bangladesh, new media artists are experimenting with various forms of digital technology to create works that are thought-provoking and socially relevant. They are using technology to tackle social and political issues, as well as to explore new and innovative forms of expression. Artists like Mahbubur Rahman (Fig.19), Naeem Mohaiemen (Fig.20), Tayeba Begum Lipi, Sayed Asif Mahmud, etc.



Fig.19, Mahbubur Rahman, *Transformation*, ongoing performance since 2004, video, Courtesy of the Artist.

Fig.20, Nameem Mohaiemen, *Two Meetings and a Funeral*, 2017, three-channel digital video installation, photo Michael Nast. Courtesy of the Artist.

Advanced Technologies and Artists' Implementation

In the late 20th century, new technologies brought significant changes to art production, affecting its aesthetics and technical aspects. Lev Manovich highlights the importance of software societies and how all disciplines, from architecture to media studies, need to consider the role of software in their investigations.³¹

Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based art has emerged as a new form of visual manipulation, challenging traditional definitions of art. India's Nature Morte art gallery hosted India's first AI-generated art exhibition, Gradient/Descent in 2018, which featured artists from different countries who used AI to create new images based on existing ones. The exhibition co-curator, Karthik Kalyanaraman, acknowledged the philosophical and practical questions raised by this new form of art.³² One artist, Memo Akten, programmed a machine to "imagine" new images based on core concepts of human existence (Fig.21), resulting in a stunning display of machine-generated landscapes, objects, and ideas.³³

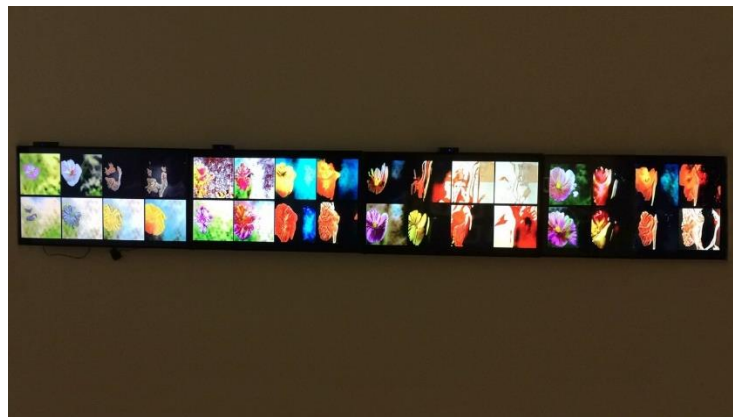


Fig.21, Memo Akten, Deep Meditations, Multi-channel video, and sound installation, 2018. Photo courtesy of the Artist, photograph by the author.

The digital age has brought about a new era of image-making and manipulation through advanced technologies, which has affected all aspects of life. Artistic images created through digital means have their unique code and are circulated through various human engagements, scientific investigations, and social media platforms. The process of image-making has become more innovative, creating new stories and meanings, and providing a medium for artists to create and recreate. In South Asia, science education and research have deeply impacted the way images are examined and understood. The influence of history, economics, and technology has shaped the way images are

distributed and consumed. The emergence of digital technology has transformed the way artists express themselves, from conventional forms to new forms such as net art, digital installation art, and virtual reality. Digital screening and representation have changed the way we perceive visual manifestations, and the creative industries of entertainment and advertising have made extensive use of digital technologies for artistic purposes.

AI is a rapidly evolving technology that is expected to have a significant impact on every aspect of our lives, particularly in the fields of data and visual information processing. AI is capable of processing vast amounts of digital information and constructing large-scale projects through its advanced hardware. This technology is already transforming various services and research fields, and its importance is only growing.

There are many current technologies where AI plays a vital role, and artists are beginning to explore the possibilities and challenges of using AI to create works of art that integrate both visual, audio, and literal elements through AI programming. For example, artist Harshit Agarwal collaborated with Google on two AI art projects in 2018 and 2021 (Fig.22), showcasing the creative potential of AI in the arts. Harshit uses machines and algorithms and often creates them as an essential part of his art process, embracing becoming the cyborg artist. As AI continues to advance, we can expect to see more innovative uses of this technology in various fields, including the arts.



Fig. 22, Harshit Agarwal, Tandem- Art with an AI, 2016. Photo courtesy of the Artist.

Fig. 23, Harshit Agrawal, g(u)arden of Digital Delights, 2023, Edition 1/3, 78x78x78 inch LED Cube. Photo courtesy of the Artist. Photograph by the Author.

Raghava KK, work traverses traditional forms of painting, installation, and performance, while his practice embraces forms that are barely recognized as media of art (artificial intelligence, neuro-feedback, board, video games, cryptocurrencies, etc.).³⁴ Raghava

says that AI is a revolutionary remixing of aesthetics and is being opposed by society because of a fear of change. He believes the fear to emerge from a feeling of loss and liberation, as well as the possibility of the mysteries this new technology poses for art and life. Fears around plagiarism and intellectual property in AI art are secondary, he says, adding that the only way forward is to “ride the wave, not fight it.”³⁵ In February 2023, Raghava held a solo show in New Delhi, which was hosted by the Gujral Foundation and served as a collateral event of Indian Art. The show, titled ‘The Impossible Bouquet,’ featured images that were created through Raghava’s encounter with AI and aimed to conceptualize the essence of Dutch still-life paintings. The exhibition highlighted the vibrant colors that digital tools and machines can accurately reproduce (Fig.25). It showcased a significant collection of paintings created using AI and various artistic manipulations. Additionally, interactive installations and video pieces were included to enhance the visitor experience. The exhibition served as a compelling example of how advanced technologies can transform visual representation and provide new possibilities in our interaction with AI.



Fig. 24, Raghava KK, *Guernica 2.0*, 2015, NFT with Digital Print on Canvas, 91.5 x 207 cm (36 x 81.5 inches).
 Fig. 25, Raghava KK, *The King Wishes to Marry a*, 2023, Digital print. Photo courtesy of the Artist. Photograph by the Author.

New media arts in South Asia possess distinctive characteristics that set them apart from those of developed countries. These artistic expressions often serve as reflections of cultural identity and are deeply influenced by the socio-political context of the region. It’s important to note that the technological infrastructure in South Asia is not as advanced as that of developed nations. As a result, new media artists in the region frequently employ low-cost and simple technologies, creatively repurposing them to suit their artistic vision.

The visual arts in South Asia are undergoing a transformative phase, with an increasing emphasis on implementing and experimenting with technology. This evolving landscape encompasses a wide range of subjects and demands thorough study, possibly requiring an extensive book to compile its diverse aspects. While the contemporary art

scene in South Asia still looks to the West for inspiration and the adoption of techniques and technology, individual nations within the region are independently exploring new trends and techniques in visual arts. Despite these advancements, there is still much work to be done to bolster the infrastructure of visual arts in South Asia as a whole. This paper delves into the impact of advanced technologies on the visual arts of South Asian nations like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It explores how these technologies have influenced visual representation, posing new challenges in curation and presentation. Additionally, while there are numerous diaspora artists, this paper focuses on two artists as an example, highlighting their contributions to the earlier development and engagement with advanced technology.

The artistic endeavors of these diverse artists demonstrate how they are reshaping visual representation through a variety of mediums, including video, digital prints, video projections, multi-video installations, interactive installations, computational art, and internet art. While these are just a few examples, it's important to note that new technologies encompass a wide range of other artistic branches as well. By exploring new media arts in South Asia, we gain valuable insights into concepts such as modernism, contemporaneity, internationalism, and national identity. This allows us to observe the evolving developments influenced by the ever-changing advancements in technology over time.

Conclusion

The influence of visual arts in South Asia differs from that of the West, as the modern and contemporary identity is shaped by diverse interactions of ideas and thoughts through cultural exchange, national diplomacy, globalization, trade, and migration. However, the practices of national dialogue in visual arts remain limited in terms of techniques. While technological developments have a significant impact on national development at large, their effects on visual arts in South Asia are relatively less explored. Nevertheless, artists have made valuable contributions by engaging with new techniques and media, and this paper aims to provide an overview of the chronological configuration of technological effects on the practices of artists in South Asia.

The notion of South Asia as a construction is ambiguous, but its significance can be traced back to the aftermath of the Second World War. The progress of visual arts in South Asia is closely linked to the West, but this progression is often delineated along national lines. In the contemporary period, collaborative events and projects among art communities, art entrepreneurs, and international foundations have led to new developments in visual arts and its various elements in South Asia. In these gatherings,

questions about the representation of South Asia and how new technologies are transforming visual arts have become important debates.

One significant change in visual representation occurred with the advent of video cameras, which transformed exhibition strategies in galleries and led to the emergence of video art and projections. The dimension of visual arts in South Asia has witnessed renowned exhibitions that combine different artworks, video projections, and new media artworks, alongside traditional paintings, and sculptures. The digital capture of the exhibition's finale, shared on various platforms, adds to the changing visual representation of South Asian art. In parallel, numerous events and exhibitions exemplify how artists are dealing with technological implications, both digital and electronic, in their works.

New Media Art in South Asia has been rapidly advancing in recent years, presenting advancements, challenges, and opportunities for visual representation. With the increasing use of digital technologies and new media platforms, artists in South Asia have been exploring new modes of expression and pushing the boundaries of traditional art forms. Advancements in new media art have been driven by the increasing use of technology in society, particularly in the areas of communication and information sharing.

Endnotes

¹ New technology, any set of productive techniques which offers a significant improvement over the established technology for a given process in a specific historical context. See, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social-reform/sociology-general-terms-and-concepts/new-o>

² Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on the Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (Tulika Books, 2000) 167.

³ Parul Dave Mukherji, et al, *Visual Arts in South Asia* (In the Modernist World, 2015) 147.

⁴ Franz, Margit, *From Dinner Parties to Galleries: The Langhammer-Leyden-Schlesinger Circle in Bombay – 1940s through the 1950s*. In *Arrival Cities*, edited by Mareike Hetschold, Laura Karp Lugo, Rachel Lee, HeleneRoth Burcu Dogramaci (Leuven University Press, 2020) 75.

⁵ Yashodara Dalaima, *The rise of Modern Art and Progressive*. In "The Progressive Revolution: Modern art for a New India", by Zehra Jumabhoy, Boon Hui Tan, (Asia Society Museum, 2018) 29.

⁶ See, Deccan herald, *M.F. Husain, Through the Eyes of a Painter: A chronology*, (Deccan herald, New Delhi, 2011), online, Internet, Jan 2021. Available: <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/167512/mf-husain-through-eyes-painter.html>

⁷ Citron, Beth. *M.F. Husain "Through the Eyes of a Painter."*, Artforum, 2012.

⁸ Gauri Vij, *Akbar Padamsee: colossus of the art world*, (The Hindu, 2020), online, Internet, May 2023. Available: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/akbar-padamsee-colossus-of-the-art-world/article30507813.ece>

⁹ Dhamini Ratnam, *Revisiting an experiment*, (Mint, 2016) online, Internet, Jan 2022. Available: <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/9kb4p44jvLGsYK52x2ELpL/Revisiting-an-experiment.html>

¹⁰ Samina Iqbal. "Modern Art of Pakistan: Lahore Art Circle 1947-1957." *diss*, Virginia, 2016: 179.

¹¹ Samina Iqbal, 154.

¹² Claire Wintle, *Diplomacy, and the Design School: The Ford Foundation and India's National Institute of Design*, (Design and Culture, 2017) 208.

¹³ See, The Museum of Modern Art. *The Museum of Modern Art Celebrates Indian Culture*. (MoMA, 1985).

¹⁴ See, Nancy Adajania. "Dashrath Patel's non-aligned alignments. 2014.

¹⁵ Nancy Adajania, *The Decades and the Seminar' by Gieve Patel*, (Take Art Magazine, 2010) online, Internet, Jan 2022. Available: <https://takeonartmagazine.com/essays/nancy-adajania-on-the-decades-and-the-seminar-by-gieve-patel/>

¹⁶ *Hidden Hands – A Different History of Modernism – episode 1: Art and the CIA*, Planetjanet, 20 Feb, 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5YSikO6JRM>

¹⁷ Ford Foundation, *The Ford Foundation, Annual Report (1957)*.

¹⁸ Martin, Courtney J. Rasheed Araeen, Live Art, and Radical Politics in Britain, (Getty Research Journal, 2010) 119.

¹⁹ Rasheed Araeen, *How I discovered my oriental soul in the wilderness of the west*, (Third Text, 1992) 89.

²⁰ Tate, *Sutapa Biswas, Kali, 1983-1984*, Presented by the artist 2012, online, Internet, July 2021. Available: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/biswas-kali-t14278>

²¹ Nancy Adajania, *New Media Overtures Before New Media Practice in India*. In *Art and Visual Culture in India 1857-2007*, by Gayatri Sinha, *Marg* (Mumbai 2009): 270.

²² Ranjit Hoskote, *Indian Art: Influences and Impulses in the 1980s and 1990s*. In *Indian Art An Overview*, by Gayatri Sinha, (Rupa, New Delhi, 2003): 207.

²³ Shukla Sawant, *New Media Art, and its Obsolete Present*. (The India Habitat Centre's Art Journal, Volume 9, April 2008 - March 2009), Editor: Dr. Alka Pande, Prof. Dr. Nils Röller."

²⁴ Zitzewitz, Karin. *Infrastructure as Form: Cross-Border Networks and the Materialities of 'South Asia' in Contemporary Art*, (Third Text, 2017).

²⁵ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*. "Massachusetts London, England: (The MIT press Cambridge, 2001) 96.

²⁶ Leonhard Emmerling, *Raqs Media Collective*, (Researchgate, 2019) 2. online, Internet, July 2022. Available: <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333747828>>.

²⁷ H G Masters, *Raqs Media Collective: Talking Cure*. (Artasiapacific, 2016) 93.

²⁸ Peter Nagy, Veronica Collins, *The audience and the eavesdropper: new art from India & Pakistan*, (Phillips de Pury, 2008).

²⁹ Yashodhara Dalmia, Salima Hashmi, *Memory, metaphor, mutation contemporary Art of India and Pakistan*, (Oxford University Press, 2007) 80.

³⁰ Dan Goddard, *Shattering the Illusion: Shazia Sikander's Parallax at Linda Pace Foundation's Space*, (Arts and culture, 2014), online, Internet, Jan 2020. Available: <http://artsandculturetx.com/shattering-the-illusion/>

³¹ Manovich, Lev. *Software Takes Command*, (Bloomsbury, 2013).

³² Manik Sharma, *India's first exhibition of art created by Artificial Intelligence raises questions about human conscience*, Firstpost, (August, 29/2018), online, Internet, Jan 2019. Available: <https://www.firstpost.com/living/indias-first-exhibition-of-art-created-by-artificial-intelligence-raises-questions-about-human-conscience-5068561.html>

³³ Memo Akten. AI artist.org, <https://aiartists.org/memo-akten>. See, Divya Bhavani, *Gradient Descent: when Artificial Intelligence meets art*, (The Hindu, 2018), online, Internet, 2022. Available: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/gradient-descent-when-artificial-intelligence-meets-art-641/article24677618.ece>

³⁴ The Gujral Foundation. *The Impossible Bouquet: The Cyborg Dreams of Love*, (Exhibition Catalog, 2023).

³⁵ Udbhav Seth. *Ride the AI wave, don't fight it': Multimedia artist Raghava KK*, (Indian express, February 19, 2023). online, Internet, April 2023. Available: <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/ride-the-ai-wave-dont-fight-it-multimedia-artist-raghava-kk-8454897>

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