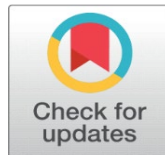
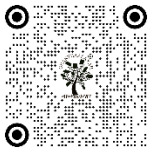


NEW MEDIA ART IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY OF TECHNOLOGY, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

New Media Art has emerged as a significant artistic practice in contemporary India, reflected rapid technological advancements alongside complex social and cultural transformations. This research paper critically examined the evolution of New Media Art in India, focused on the intersections of technology, society and culture within a pluralistic framework. By exploring New Media Art within the broader trajectory of Indian art history, the study highlighted how contemporary artists negotiate continuity and rupture between traditional artistic sensibilities and digital technologies through New Media Art practices.

The research paper adopted an interdisciplinary and qualitative research methodology, emphasised upon visual analysis, critical theory and selected case studies of prominent Indian New Media artists. It explored how issues of identity, urbanization, globalization, political discourse and social engagement are articulated through technologically mediated forms. The research paper specifically reflected attention to the ways in which New Media Art enables plural narratives by incorporated participatory modes, hybrid aesthetics and cross-cultural references, thereby challenged conventional boundaries of artistic execution and reception.

The research study furthermore examined the role of New Media Art in facilitating global dialogues, positioning Indian digital practices within international art networks while retaining localized cultural contexts. The analysis of the research paper revealed that New Media Art in India functioned not merely as a technological experiment but as a critical cultural discourse that addressed contemporary realities and redefined artistic authorship and spectatorship.

By critically engaging with the socio-cultural implications of digital technologies in art, this research paper contributed to a deeper understanding of New Media Art as a dynamic and transformative practice in contemporary India. It explored that New Media Art serves as a vital platform for articulating pluralism, sustaining cultural continuity and fostering global artistic exchange in the 21st century.

Keywords: New Media Art, Contemporary Indian Art, Digital Technology, Cultural Pluralism, Global Dialogues

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has profoundly reshaped artistic production worldwide. In India, New Media Art emerged within a socio-cultural environment marked by economic liberalization (post-1991), accelerated urbanization, the proliferation of the internet, and expanding global networks. Unlike conventional art forms confined to material media, New Media Art incorporates video, digital imaging, interactive installations, virtual reality, sound art, net art and algorithmic systems.

Indian contemporary artists have responded to technological transformations not merely as tools of innovation but as critical frameworks for interrogating identity, memory, power, and globalization. The integration of digital media into artistic practice marks both a rupture from and a continuation of India's visual traditions—ranging from miniature painting and temple sculpture to modernist experimentation. K et al. (2026)

This research study critically studies the evolution of New Media Art in India through the intersections of technology, society and culture, situating it within the broader continuum of contemporary Indian art.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF NEW MEDIA ART

The theoretical understanding of New Media Art draws upon media theory, postmodern aesthetics and cultural studies. Scholars such as Lev Manovich emphasize database logic and interface culture as defining characteristics of digital art, while Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics foreground participatory engagement.

In the Indian context, New Media Art reflects what Arjun Appadurai terms "global cultural flows," where local identities negotiate transnational exchanges. The digital medium becomes a site of hybridity—echoing Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural negotiation—allowing artists to explore fragmented narratives and contested identities.

Technology in New Media Art is not neutral; it operates as a socio-political agent. Michel Foucault's discourse theory enables understanding of how digital practices reveal structures of surveillance, power and resistance in contemporary India.

3. HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY: FROM MODERNISM TO DIGITAL PRACTICES IN INDIAN ART MODERNISM

Indian art modernism—represented by artists such as M. F. Husain and S. H. Raza—engaged with questions of identity and nationhood. By the late twentieth century, installation art and video practices expanded the boundaries of representation.

Artists like Vivan Sundaram pioneered multimedia installations integrating photography, archival material and digital projections. The shift from object-based art to time-based and interactive media reflects a broader epistemic transition—from static representation to dynamic experience.

The emergence of art institutions, biennales and digital festivals in cities like Kochi, Mumbai and Delhi further facilitated experimental practices. The integration of global networks positioned Indian New Media Art within transnational discourses while retaining region-specific concerns.

4. CASE STUDIES OF PROMINENT ARTISTS IN NEW MEDIA ART OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA 4.1. NEW MEDIA ART OF NALINI MALANI

Nalini Malani's video-shadow installations combine mythology, feminist discourse and digital animation. Works such as *In Search of Vanished Blood* employ rotating cylinders and projected imagery to critique violence and patriarchal narratives. Technology here functions as a medium of memory and political testimony.

In Search of Vanished Blood (2012–20)

Regarding the work Nalini Malani's expression —"People come up to me and say 'your work is political'; I reply, 'the water you drink is political'"—encapsulates the deeply socio-political consciousness that defined her artistic practice. This statement positions Malani's oeuvre within a framework where politics is not external to lived experience but embedded within everyday existence. Her monumental installation *In Search of Vanished Blood* exemplified this philosophy by transforming an immersive environment into a site of political memory, violence and resistance.

In Search of Vanished Blood occupied an entire room, creating an enveloping sensory experience centered around five slowly rotating cylinders. Around these structures move fragmented silhouettes of humans and animals, projected in looping sequences that generate an atmosphere simultaneously playful, haunting and enigmatic. The installation's visual complexity emerged through Malani's distinctive artistic language, which she terms "video/shadow play," a hybrid practice that merges animated and static forms, painting and film, object and projection (Thomas, 2024). Through this

synthesis, Malani constructs a multilayered narrative space where viewers are physically surrounded by shifting histories and contested realities.

The “video/shadow play” is produced through six synchronized film projections cast onto cylinders made from Mylar, a polyester material known for its reflective and conductive properties. Malani’s use of Mylar is conceptually significant: its transparency, flexibility and luminous surface allow painted imagery to become dynamic through projection and motion. By exploiting the material’s physical characteristics, Malani transforms painting into a kinetic medium, where images glow, dissolve and overlap in spectral formations (Thomas, 2024). The rotating cylinders, moving at four revolutions per minute, continuously filter projected imagery through one another, producing an unstable visual field suggestive of fractured memory and historical repetition.

Malani employed an adapted form of reverse painting on Mylar, drawing from a Byzantine technique later popularized by nineteenth-century Indian court painters. Traditionally used to depict mythological scenes, royal portraiture and ornamental compositions, reverse painting involved tracing drawings onto glass, embellishing them with metallic foil and pigments and then viewing them from the opposite side. Malani contemporized this historical method by replacing glass with Mylar and using acrylic paint, thereby preserving the layered luminosity of the technique while introducing movement and flexibility. This reappropriation of traditional visual culture into contemporary installation art reflected her broader engagement with historical continuity and transformation.

The title *In Search of Vanished Blood* derived from Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s Urdu poem *Lahu ka Surag*, translated into English by Agha Shahid Ali. The poem’s haunting search for traces of erased violence—“I’ve searched everywhere, there’s no sign of blood”—resonates profoundly within the installation’s exploration of disappearance, repression and political brutality. Malani incorporated these poetic dimensions into a broader iconography of violence, projecting verses onto the figure of a veiled woman subjected to waterboarding while juxtaposing them with references to Francisco Goya’s *The Disasters of War* (1810–1820), Taliban militancy and Maoist insurgency. By linking historical and contemporary forms of violence, Malani universalizes the politics of suffering across geographies and eras. The concluding projection of American Sign Language urgently spelling “democracy” served as a poignant commentary on the precariousness and contested meaning of democratic ideals in the face of systemic violence (Thomas, 2024).

Through *In Search of Vanished Blood*, Nalini Malani created an interdisciplinary, politically charged visual language that merges poetry, history, mythology and new media. Her work challenged viewers to confront the invisibility of violence and the pervasive political structures shaping everyday life, affirming her position as a critical voice in contemporary global art discourse.

Plate 1

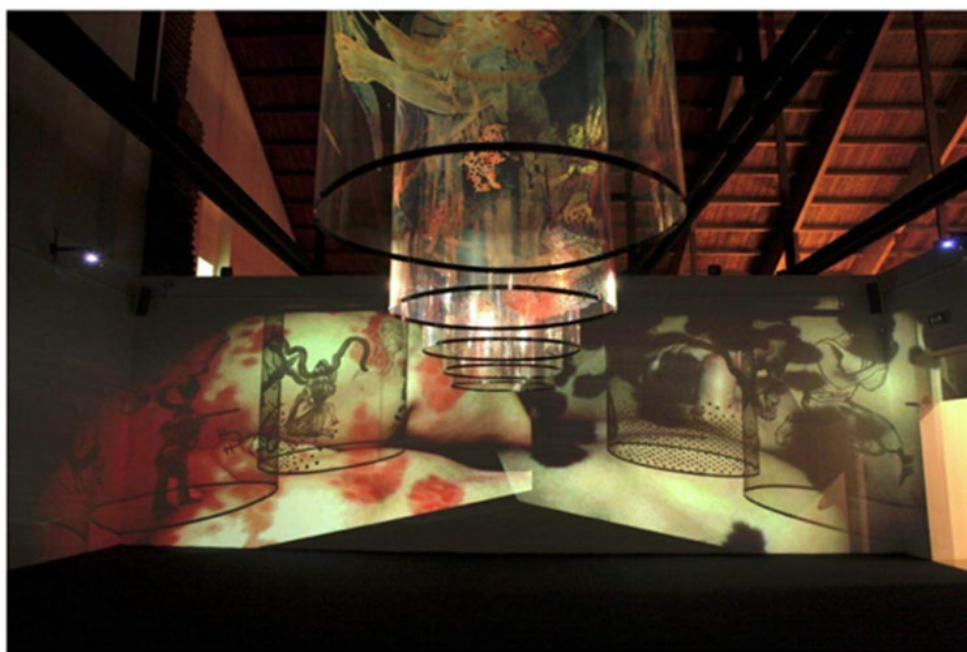


Plate 1 Nalini Malani. (2012–20). *In Search of Vanished Blood*.

Image Courtesy: Tate (Matt Greenwood)

4.2. NEW MEDIA ART OF RANBIR KALEKA

Ranbir Kaleka merges painting with digital projection, creating hybrid surfaces where static imagery interacts with moving visuals. His installations blur boundaries between cinematic temporality and painterly tradition, reflecting urban alienation and existential concerns.

Ripped Base and the Insuperable Span, 2021

Single-Channel: Projection on Two Digital-Collage Panels and the Back Wall

Duration 5' 36"

Dimension: height 75.5 inches x width 132 inches, depth 18 inches.

Ranbir Kaleka's *Ripped Base and the Insuperable Span* (2021) explored as a compelling meditation on erasure, displacement, fractured identity and the emotional consequences of socio-political division in the contemporary world. Conceived as a single-channel video installation projected across two digital-collage panels and the back wall, the work integrates painting, moving image and spatial narrative to construct a deeply affective exploration of memory, separation and the politics of presence. With a duration of 5 minutes and 36 seconds and dimensions measuring 75.5 inches in height, 132 inches in width and 18 inches in depth, the installation exemplified Kaleka's interdisciplinary approach, where painterly surfaces merged with cinematic temporality to produce immersive experiences.

As articulated in curatorial interpretations, *Ripped Base and the Insuperable Span* addressed the systematic erasure of identity within contemporary social and mass media landscapes, where discriminatory structures based on caste, colour, religion, gender and sexuality continue to shape visual and cultural narratives (Kaleka, 2021). Kaleka conceptualized erasure not merely as deletion but as a layered process embedded within both historical memory and contemporary political strategies. In this framework, identity is repeatedly reconstructed and manipulated through acts of selective remembering and forgetting, mirroring broader mechanisms of power that control collective consciousness by obscuring trauma and loss. Such historical and psychological erasures function as tools of social numbness, disrupting the capacity of communities to remember violence, injustice and dispossession.

Exhibited at Vadehra Art Gallery, the installation reflected Kaleka's sustained engagement with present-day anxieties while remaining haunted by the persistent afterimages of fear, hatred and violence. The work unfolded through projections of initially indistinct painterly images: a man and a young girl occupy separate visual fields, divided by an empty urban street that appears transitional and liminal. This spatial arrangement evoked the fleeting perspective of movement, akin to viewing fragmented realities from a passing train. Gradually, the figures emerged with greater clarity, acquiring spectral presence as embodiments of longing, absence and interrupted relationality.

The narrative structure of the installation is profoundly poetic. The young girl steps out from her painted frame into the intermediary space, becoming animated yet translucent as she traversed toward the man. Her attempt to embrace him culminates in his disappearance, suggesting the fragility of reunion and the painful instability of memory. In a subsequent cinematic shift, the man appeared in motion, crossing the same liminal divide toward the girl, only for her to vanish upon contact. This cyclical choreography of failed connection transforms the installation into a metaphor for unattainable intimacy, where physical proximity is persistently undermined by absence.

Kaleka's work resonated strongly with the global experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which social distancing, isolation and the deprivation of bodily touch became defining conditions of human life. Simultaneously, the piece extended beyond pandemic realities to address broader experiences of migration, displacement and enforced familial separation, particularly those affecting parents and children. The recurring inability of the figures to sustain physical connection reflected the emotional toll of migration and socio-economic instability, where distance becomes both literal and symbolic. Their ghost-like, trace-based forms signify not only absence but also the persistence of desire—the longing for connection that remains despite structural barriers.

Through *Ripped Base and the Insuperable Span*, Kaleka employed digital collage, projection and painterly aesthetics to interrogate contemporary experiences of fragmentation and alienation. The looping passage of time within the installation underscores a world that moves relentlessly forward, often indifferent to personal grief and invisible suffering. In this way, the work becomes a poignant reflection on the erasures—social, political, emotional and historical—that define modern existence, positioning Kaleka's practice within critical contemporary discourses on identity, migration and mediated memory.

Plate 2



Plate 2 Ranbir Kaleka. (2021). Ripped Base and the Insuperable Span.

Image Courtesy: <https://rkaleka.com/video-works/ripped-base-and-the-insuperable-span-767/>

4.3. NEW MEDIA ART OF SHILPA GUPTA

Shilpa Gupta's interactive installations interrogate borders, surveillance and identity politics. By employing sound recordings, digital text and participatory mechanisms, she challenges notions of nationalism and freedom of expression in contemporary society.

I Live Under Your Sky Too, 2022

Shilpa Gupta's *I Live Under Your Sky Too* (2022) emerged as a profound public art intervention that foregrounds themes of coexistence, linguistic plurality, migration and shared humanity within increasingly divided socio-political landscapes. Installed at MIA Park as a luminous text-based artwork, the installation served both as an aesthetic statement and a political proposition, affirming the possibility of collective belonging across national, religious and cultural boundaries. Through its poetic simplicity and conceptual depth, Gupta's work articulated a vision of inclusivity that challenges exclusionary ideologies and reimagines public space as a site of dialogue and shared presence.

Born in Mumbai in 1976, Shilpa Gupta's interdisciplinary practice consistently interrogates the mechanisms through which identities are shaped, regulated and contested by geopolitical borders, systems of classification and structures of censorship. Her work examined how individuals are positioned within broader frameworks of nationhood, migration and surveillance, often exposing the subtle and overt forms of limitation imposed by political and cultural institutions. Gupta's international recognition, with exhibitions at institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, Tate Modern and the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, underscored the global relevance of her critical engagement with contemporary issues of mobility, belonging and state power.

In *I Live Under Your Sky Too*, Gupta transformed language into a visual and spatial medium of resistance. The installation takes the form of an animated handwritten sentence that appeared to flow beyond the ruled boundaries of a notebook page, symbolically transcending imposed lines and restrictions. Rendered in three interwoven languages—English, Arabic, and Malayalam—the phrase “*I Live Under Your Sky Too*” becomes a multilingual assertion of shared existence. The use of these languages is particularly significant: English functions as a global communicative medium, while Arabic and Malayalam evoke specific cultural, regional, and migratory histories. By intertwining national and migrant languages, Gupta underscores the interconnectedness of diverse communities while simultaneously challenging rigid notions of linguistic, national or cultural purity.

The ruled notebook lines from which the text spills outward function metaphorically as structures of order, regulation and classification. Gupta's handwritten script, however, resists containment, suggesting the inadequacy of political and social boundaries in defining human existence. This visual strategy reflected her broader critique of systems

that seek to categorize individuals by nationality, religion, or ethnicity, often reducing complex identities into exclusionary binaries. Instead, the installation emphasized the universality of the sky as a shared space—an expansive, borderless metaphor for coexistence that transcends terrestrial divisions.

At its core, *I Live Under Your Sky Too* engaged deeply with contemporary social and political tensions, particularly those shaped by migration, displacement, religious polarization and national borders. Gupta's work reflected on the constructed nature of division while proposing an ethics of empathy and mutual recognition. The installation becomes especially resonant in a global context marked by increasing xenophobia, refugee crises and ideological fragmentation. By situating this message within a public environment, Gupta ensures that the work operates not only within institutional art discourse but also as a civic statement accessible to broader audiences.

Through this light installation, Gupta extends her long-standing exploration of the relationships that connect and separate people, drawing attention to the fragile yet persistent possibility of solidarity. *I Live Under Your Sky Too* is both a celebration of diversity and a subtle act of political resistance, reminding viewers that despite borders, censorship, and systems of exclusion, human existence unfolds beneath a common sky. In doing so, Gupta contributes a vital voice to contemporary art practices that interrogate identity and power while envisioning more inclusive futures.

Plate 3



Plate 3 Shilpa Gupta. (2022). *I Live Under Your Sky Too*.

Image Courtesy: Shaikha Ahmed Ali, Courtesy of Qatar Museums ©2025

4.4. NEW MEDIA ART OF VIVAN SUNDARAM

In the vast landscape of contemporary Indian art, Vivan Sundaram stood as a pioneering figure. His work defied the boundaries of medium, material, and tradition. Long before installation art gained traction in India, Sundaram had already begun experimenting with sculpture, photography, video, performance, and found objects. Often referred to as India's first installation artist, his contributions transformed the visual language of Indian art and deepened its engagement with politics, memory, and social critique (Wong, 2022).

Through multimedia assemblages, Vivan Sundaram addresses memory, archive and historiography. His digital collages reconstruct fragmented histories, emphasizing the dialogic potential of technological mediation.

His installations invite the viewer to confront responsibility, loss, and emotional truth. A defining feature of Vivan Sundaram's mature approach is his deep use of mixed media, especially photography and archival material.

Born in 1943 into a family of artists and intellectuals, Vivan Sundaram was nephew to the iconic Amrita Sher-Gil. After studying at MS University, Baroda and the Slade School of Art in London, he returned to a politically tense India in the 1970s. The Emergency period, grassroots activism, and global protest movements shaped his early work. Although he began as a painter, Vivan Sundaram soon abandoned traditional styles to experiment with installation and conceptual practice, seeking a more immersive way to communicate the complexities of his time.

Vivan Sundaram's installations are not just objects to view. They are environments that invite participation. His seminal 1991 work *Memorial* responded to the death of a young boy in Delhi's communal riots. Combining constructed space, found materials, and text, it evoked collective mourning and national introspection. This work marked an important moment in Indian art history. Vivan Sundaram demonstrated that an artwork could be a spatial experience, and the spectator could be transformed into an active participant. His installations invite the viewer to confront responsibility, loss, and emotional truth.

A defining feature of Vivan Sundaram's mature approach is his deep use of mixed media, especially photography and archival material. His 2001 series *Re-take of Amrita* digitally reinterprets family photographs. By reimagining historical images and adding new spatial contexts, Sundaram creates fictional narratives that spark questions about identity, memory, and cultural inheritance. Other works, such as *History Project* (1998) or *Trash* (2008), use video, sculpture, and photography to reflect on urban decay, human labour, and environmental crises. Found objects like discarded plastic or rusted metal become tools of historical testimony. Vivan Sundaram suggests that even forgotten objects can reveal social and political history when transformed by an artist (Wong, 2022).

In addition to his studio practice, Vivan Sundaram is an important activist. He played a major role in the founding of SAHMAT (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust) in 1989, following the murder of theater activist Safdar Hashmi. Through SAHMAT, Sundaram brought artists, writers, and performers together in defense of free expression and secular values. His practice is rooted in a belief that art must respond to its times. Sundaram's installations become spaces of public memory, mourning, and resistance.

5. TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL PLURALISM IN NEW MEDIA ART'S HYBRID AESTHETICS

India's pluralistic social structure—marked by linguistic, religious and regional diversity—finds expression in New Media Art's hybrid aesthetics. Digital platforms enable artists to incorporate folk motifs, mythological narratives and vernacular imagery within global technological frameworks.

The internet democratizes authorship, allowing collaborative and participatory models. Online exhibitions, digital archives and virtual performances extend the reach of Indian art beyond physical galleries. Thus, New Media Art becomes a platform for plural voices and decentralized narratives.

6. URBANIZATION, GLOBALIZATION AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN POST-LIBERALIZATION URBAN INDIA THROUGH NEW MEDIA ART

Post-liberalization urban India has witnessed rapid infrastructural transformation, migration and socio-economic disparity. New Media artists respond to these realities through immersive installations reflecting metropolitan chaos, consumer culture and digital surveillance.

Interactive works addressing border politics, censorship and social justice illustrate how technology mediates political critique. The digital interface allows spectators to become participants, redefining traditional hierarchies between artist and audience.

7. GLOBAL DIALOGUES AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS BY INDIAN NEW MEDIA ARTISTS THROUGH PARTICIPATES IN GLOBAL BIENNALES AND EXHIBITIONS

Indian New Media artists actively participate in global biennales and exhibitions, contributing to cross-cultural dialogues. International collaborations situate Indian digital practices within broader technological art movements while preserving localized narratives.

The global circulation of digital works through online platforms reinforces India's position within international art networks. However, the retention of cultural specificity prevents homogenization, maintaining a distinct socio-cultural identity.

8. REDEFINING AUTHORSHIP AND SPECTATORSHIP IN NEW MEDIA ART

Unlike conventional art forms, New Media Art emphasizes process over product and interaction over contemplation. The viewer becomes co-creator, navigating digital interfaces and influencing outcomes. This participatory dimension redefines authorship and democratizes artistic engagement.

Furthermore, the ephemeral and reproducible nature of digital art challenges traditional notions of originality and ownership, raising questions about archival preservation and technological obsolescence.

9. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NEW MEDIA ART IN INDIA

The study reveals that New Media Art in India operates as both aesthetic experimentation and socio-political commentary. Technology serves not merely as a tool but as a conceptual framework enabling artists to interrogate memory, identity and globalization.

The integration of traditional motifs within digital frameworks reflects continuity rather than rupture. Simultaneously, the adoption of immersive technologies disrupts established art hierarchies, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration between art, science and technology.

Nevertheless, challenges persist—limited institutional support, technological infrastructure constraints and issues of digital preservation remain critical concerns.

10. CONCLUSION

New Media Art in contemporary India represents a transformative artistic paradigm that integrates technology with socio-cultural critique. It articulates plural narratives, negotiates global-local tensions and redefines artistic authorship and spectatorship. Far from being a mere technological experiment, New Media Art functions as a critical cultural discourse reflecting the complexities of 21st-century India.

By situating Indian digital practices within global dialogues while sustaining localized contexts, New Media Art emerges as a vital platform for cultural continuity and innovation. As technological landscapes continue to evolve, the trajectory of New Media Art in India promises further expansion, reinforcing its significance within contemporary art history.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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