

Digital Technology Relevance in Archival and Digitising Practices in the Republic of South Africa

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Abstract : By means of definition, digital artworks encompass an array of artistic productions that are expressed in a technological form as an essential part of a creative process. Examples include illustrations, photos, videos, sculptures, and installations. Within the context of the visual arts, the process of repatriation involves the return of once-appropriated goods. Archiving denotes the preservation of a commodity for storage purposes in order to nurture its continuity. The aforementioned definitions form the foundation of the academic framework and premise of the argument, which is outlined in this paper. This paper aims to define, discuss and decipher the complexities involved in digitising artworks, whilst explaining the benefits of the process, particularly within the South African context, which is rich in tangible and intangible traditional cultural material, objects, and performances. With the internet having been introduced to the African Continent in the early 1990s, this new form of technology, in its own right, initiated a high degree of efficiency, which also resulted in the progressive transformation of computer-generated visual output. Subsequently, this caused a revolutionary influence on the manner in which technological software was developed and utilised in art-making. Digital technology and the digitisation of creative processes then opened up new avenues of collating and recording information. One of the first visual artists to make use of digital technology software in his creative productions was United States-based artist John Whitney. His inventive work contributed greatly to the onset and development of digital animation. Comparable by technique and originality, South African contemporary visual artists who make digital artworks, both locally and internationally, include David Goldblatt, Katherine Bull, Fritha Langerman, David Masoga, Zinhle Sethebe, Alicia Mcfadzean, Ivan Van Der Walt, Siobhan Twomey, and Fhatuwani Mukheli. In conclusion, the main objective of this paper is to address the following questions: In which ways has the South African art community of visual artists made use of and benefited from technology, in its digital form, as a means to further advance creativity? What are the positive changes that have resulted in art production in South Africa since the onset and use of digital technological software? How has digitisation changed the manner in which we record, interpret, and archive both written and visual information? What is the role of South African art institutions in the development of digital technology and its use in the field of visual art. What role does digitisation play in the process of the repatriation of artworks and artefacts. The methodology in terms of the research process of this paper takes on a multifaceted form, inclusive of data analysis of information attained by means of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Keywords : digital art, digitisation, technology, archiving, transformation and repatriation

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