

## ART FAIRS IN THE CONTEXT OF VIRTUALIZATION

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### INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 21st century was marked by the active implementation of informatization and digitization in all spheres of human existence without exception. The phenomenon of virtualization, as one of the symbols of reality, is designed to satisfy the growing need of people for operational access to the existing huge array of data. By mediating the process of circulation of current information for the purpose of transferring social experience and knowledge, it also embodies a communicative function in this way. Therefore, the transformation of the Internet into a special communication environment contributed to the development of new socio-cultural processes and led to the emergence of innovative types of communications.

The mentioned processes did not bypass the modern art market either, having expanded the possibilities for the transformation of traditional forms of socio-cultural communication in the unique value-semantic space of the actualization of artistic works and practices. Active cooperation with highly competent specialists in the information field allows to change the space of art fairs, exhibitions of artworks, supplement it with virtual and mixed reality, use audio guides, virtual assistants, navigation, artificial intelligence technologies, and cloud technologies. The main task of these technologies is to help various subjects of the art market to identify, present and use works of art in the virtual space available both within the walls of a separate gallery, art fair, and outside them.

Orientation of the modern audience towards interactivity and personalized content changes, in one way or another, the cultural and aesthetic requests, emotions and impressions from the perception of works of art, the ways of their presentation. Doesn't the unique space of actualization of artworks lose its reality, becoming something conditional, unreal, but not disappearing completely?

*The theoretical base of scientific research* is founded on the works in the field of cultural studies, philosophy, art history, dedicated to various aspects of the functioning of the art market in the modern cultural and communicative space (O. Olenina, A. Kalashnikova); works that reflect different points of view on the phenomenon of virtualization in the cultural and artistic sphere (V. Volynets, V. Ryvlina, M. Kandzyuba, Yu. Trach,

Yu. Shevchuk) and others. A special place among studies of the functioning of the art market in the Internet space is occupied by the work of Markus Vickers. At the same time, there are currently no thorough cultural studies on the specifics of the art fairs' functioning as a special form of socio-cultural communication, in particular in the conditions of virtualization of reality.

*The purpose* of our research is to reveal the specifics of the functioning of art fairs as an embodiment of modern socio-cultural communication in the conditions of virtualization of reality. The essential understanding of art fairs as a value-semantic space for the actualization of artistic works and practices has become the leading *methodological basis* of the research. The phenomenological method was applied at the stage of concretization of the phenomenon of virtualization and its influence on the specificity of the art fairs' functioning. The axiological approach made it possible to clarify the role and significance of the art fair as an embodiment of modern socio-cultural communication.

### **1. Art fairs as a key event of the modern art market**

Broadcasting various cultural and artistic events and activities both offline and online gives organizers the opportunity to diversify the cultural interaction for visitors from different countries in a certain way. Cultural interaction is considered by specialists in the culture field as an inseparable component of the historical process of identity formation (by the way, one of the key aspects of the Cultural Studies methodology). Culturologist P. Herchanivska notes that the basic mechanism of cultural interaction is 'socio-cultural communication, which ensures the formation of connections, regulation of the cultural sphere of humanity, broadcasting of socio-cultural experience'<sup>37</sup>.

While analyzing the format of a modern art fair, it is worth considering two phenomena that it covers – an exhibition and a gallery. After all, in general, a modern art fair is a set of exhibitions during which the activities of galleries that support the work of artists are presented. Art market, in the conditions of modern globalizing culture, turned art exhibitions into platforms for international cultural exchange. In our opinion, art fairs should be considered not only in order to get acquainted with the latest works of world art, which gain the approval of critics and the opportunity to present the creative experiments of masters, but also as an attraction of visitors to the values and meanings of different national cultures. Therefore, the set of exhibitions within the framework of the art fair contributes to the

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<sup>37</sup> Gerchanivska P. (2021). Cultural identity as a resource for social development. *Kultura i suchasnist : almanakh*, 2, P. 7 [in Ukrainian].

formation of a unique communicative space. In this very space the cognition of the main values of other cultures, which are laid out in the artworks presented to the public, takes place.

Oksana Petriv emphasizes: 'Art strives for a global understanding of the world, a solution to global problems. Thanks to intuition, the artist can predict, visualize the future. Art is considered to be a kind of communication channel, as a sign system that carries information. Art is always a new reality, the artist only opens the way to this reality with his work'<sup>38</sup> In our opinion, this currently explains the increased interest of American and European collectors in fairs in Asia and, conversely, the interest of Asian art connoisseurs in blockbuster exhibitions at art fairs, for example, in Basel or Miami. Authoritative expert Claire McAndrew states: 'Fairs are an important tool for cultural communication: Asian collectors are becoming more interested in Western art, and Western collectors are becoming more interested in Asian artists'<sup>39</sup>.

The tradition of holding exhibitions has an ancient origin, therefore the art fair as a modern cultural phenomenon in the conditions of globalization processes, the formation of new leisure culture and the need for new ways of circulation of works of art, acquires a significant role. For example, having tried in the 70s of the XX century to present art in a new way on the territory of Europe, Art Basel as an art fair already in the 2000s became one of the most visible and influential events in the field of culture and arts. Already in the second decade of the 21st century, it was this art fair that became an example of a new model of actualization (introduction into circulation, art criticism and expert discussion, access to purchase and sale) of art and laid the foundations of a new model of the art market. If earlier experts singled out the gallery paradigm (a fundamental concept that is characteristic of a certain period of cultural development), now the fair paradigm of the art market prevails. Such a change is due to the fact that Art Basel began to unite the key participants of the art market – famous artists, leading galleries, influential collectors, authoritative experts, etc. It was the art fairs in Basel, and later in Miami and Hong Kong, that created a new communicative framework for the interaction of the main participants of the art market, thanks to which both the commercial and valuable components of artists' creativity are formed.

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<sup>38</sup> Petriv O. Art as a universal form of reflection of human existence: historical aspect. *Youth and market*. 2012. No. 8. P. 88. URL: [http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Mir\\_2012\\_8\\_21](http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Mir_2012_8_21)

<sup>39</sup> Fulton J. Economist Dr Clare McAndrew explains why the art market is rebounding [Electronic resource] / Jeni Fulton. URL: <https://www.artbasel.com/news/economist-dr-clare-mcandrew-explains-why-the-art-market-is-rebounding>.

The art fair creates successful conditions for familiarization with new pieces of art, evaluation by viewers and critics. That is, a work of art acquires its self-sufficiency only as a result of complex sensory and rational cognition, which is possible during the days of the art fair. Meaningful and valuable characteristics of works of art are maximally realized only with a certain system of interaction between the main participants of the art market, who gather in the space of the art fair.

The current state of social development requires people to actively immerse themselves in socio-cultural processes, in addition, such activity is now even considered a marker of successful self-realization of an individual. In this context, the art fair acquires the characteristics of a significant event that guarantees the opportunity for a person to gain cultural experience during interaction with the artistic practices of modern artists. Therefore, such events should be analyzed as a component of the unique communicative space of the art market, where the circulation of works of art takes place.

We analyze the art fair as an *event* in a philosophical and cultural sense, and not in the context of an ordinary event, due to an important feature: despite the short duration of the event, it has a long-term impact on the cultural sphere. For example, an artist's participation in an art fair in Basel has a positive effect on the provenance of the presented works of art, which in turn contributes to the growth of both value and price. Therefore, in our opinion, this aspect provides grounds for considering the art fair as a special technology of the modern cultural process.

## **2. Virtualization as a new technology in the field of culture and art**

The art fair belongs to spectacular events, but the situation with the spread of the coronavirus in 2020 brought meaningful and formal changes to this phenomenon. Especially in the context of informatization and digitalization of the art market.

The influence of virtual reality on the modern art market has caused certain changes in its ecosystem. From the cultural process management's point of view, the following innovations and transformations can be singled out:

- a creation of the largest base of collectors in the entire history of the art market, which contributes to better conditions for supporting artists' creativity;
- development of the latest tools for updating works of art;
- artists can act as sellers, actively presenting their own work through accounts on social networks and through official websites;

- data on auctions and dealer sales are publicly available and published on the Internet, thereby potential collectors have access to a database to fully understand the commercial component and artistic value of the offer;
- e-mail and messengers have become the usual, and in some cases, the main way of communication between art market participants;
- works of art created with the help of computer technologies have found their niche in the art market;
- cashless transactions on the Internet are becoming the most popular way of purchasing pieces of art;
- advertising of art fairs and art exhibitions, published on the Internet, attracts a considerable number of new participants in the art market.

Starting a cultural analysis of the features of the impact of virtualization of reality on the world art market's functioning, and in particular such a significant subject of it as an art fair, it is first of all worth clarifying the essence of the phenomenon of virtual reality.

The concept of 'virtualization' (from the Latin word *virtualis* – possible, potential; English *virtual* – actual, valid) means the replacement of real objects with simulations, 'virtual reality' denotes a specific environment, a special space-time continuum, created with the help of computer graphics that are fully realized in the psyche of the subject immersed in this environment<sup>40</sup>; an artificially created reality through the impact of a machine on human senses, which causes the effect of confidence in the existence of this reality<sup>41</sup>. Virtual reality is formed in the consciousness of physical reality, which passes through the prism of consciousness, subconsciousness and imagination, that is, virtual images are generated by the interaction of a person with some other reality external to them: with other people, a computer, in general, human activity, in general<sup>42</sup>. Researchers distinguish three types of virtual reality: passive, in which a person is in the role of an observer; research that allows autonomous movement; active – with the ability to transform virtual reality<sup>43</sup>. According to another classification, virtual reality is divided into simulation and interactive<sup>44</sup>. Thus, the virtual

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<sup>40</sup> Volynets V.O. Virtual reality in the socio-cultural space of modernity. *Culture of Ukraine*. 2016. Release 52. P. 120-128.

<sup>41</sup> Shevchuk Y.A. The phenomenon of virtual reality in modern cultural practices: philosophical aspect : autoref. thesis ... candidate Philos. Sciences : 26.00.01. Kyiv. National University named after Taras Shevchenko. Kyiv, 2019. 18 p.

<sup>42</sup> Suler J. *Psychology of the digital age: Humans become electric*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Usanova L.A., Usanov I.V. Ontological status of virtual reality. *Gilea. Scientific journal*. Release 29. Kyiv, 2009. P. 176–182.

<sup>44</sup> Suler J. *Psychology of the digital age: Humans become electric*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. 2016. P. 12.

environment may differ in the level and nature of human interaction with the virtual environment.

The most promising and successful development of virtual reality takes place in the context of the development of computer graphics, which is the basis for the assumption: that the identification of virtual reality and a graphic display image is not much different from the possible identification of an artistic canvas and its content. The difference, at the same time, is only in the media of the image.

On the other hand, a logical question arises: is the content of an artistic canvas a virtual reality? In the second option, it is assumed that when considering virtual reality, it is worth taking into account: a) the very fact of interaction between a person and a computer machine b) human physiology and psychology, peculiarities of its perception. The latter shifts attention to the so-called 'immersion' technologies, which make it possible to enhance the effect of 'authenticity' of sensations experienced in virtual reality due to the use of certain material support: various computer systems of the 'window to the world' type, immersion systems, telepresence systems and mixed reality systems.

The phenomenon of virtuality makes it possible to give meaning to the created images of future real objects through the actualization and recognition of the meaning of phenomena already existing in reality with the help of the virtualization process<sup>45</sup>. The process of virtualization, immersing a person in some space free from physical laws, on the one hand, gives a feeling of social weightlessness, allows one to move away from harsh reality into the ideal world of virtuality, and on the other hand, allows one to veil the true meaning of real phenomena and objects, thus endow reality with an illusory content, perceived by the majority as desirable, and perhaps the only true one.

Thus, virtual reality is an imaginary reality created by human intelligence with the help of computer systems, which allows a person to immerse themselves in an illusory world and directly act in it.

The implementation of virtualization in the spheres of human life (economy, education, culture, medicine, etc.) was first noticed and understood by artists, then it was adopted as a creative weapon by cultural institutions and only recently found its embodiment in the art market. Let's consider these stages of the spread of virtualization.

Works of art are often associated with historical events, scientific discoveries and technological progress, which allows artists to express the

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<sup>45</sup> Volynets V.O. Virtualization of culture in the age of Internet technologies: abstract of the dissertation. ... k. cult. : 26.00.01; Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts. Kyiv, 2019. P. 14.

trends of the time as accurately as possible. Adapting to new socio-cultural conditions, male and female artists attempt to expand their world-view and artistic means of self-expression using the latest methods of creating and presenting pieces of art. So, we can say that in the 21st century, virtualization has opened up new opportunities in the field of art, having become a new toolkit for artists. Let's put it this way: brushes and paint are replaced by a keyboard and a computer mouse. Despite the radical technologization of work tools, the idea of virtualization contributed to the realization of the idea of humanity in the world of technology and helped to reveal the creative and artistic potential of a person from a new perspective.

Michael Bird in the art bestseller '100 ideas that changed art' notes that the latest digital technologies are used by artists in different ways. Artist and art theorist Joseph Nechvatal is mentioned as an inspiration, who created what he calls viractual art ('virtual-real art') – it is a combination of physical processes and a virtual world created from digitized information in pictures drawn by a computer on canvas<sup>46</sup>. The origins of the author's theoretical concept of Viractualism date lead back to 1999, when Joseph Nechvatal used this concept in his dissertation. The artist's website states: 'The concept of virtuality began with Nechvatal's realization that each new technology destroys previous habits of human art and consciousness'.

The novelty of the author's idea is that the computer technology of virtual production contributes to the combination of the virtual and the real, and this very fusion the author calls virtual. 'For Nechvatal, viractual is an important artistic concept that both motivates and explains his preference for creating digital artificial animations of life that inform his computer-robotic paintings on canvas; a painting technique based on conceptual art, which Nechvatal has been using since 1986'<sup>47</sup>.

The artist began using computers and robotics to create post-conceptual paintings, and later began artistic experiments with the creation of computer viruses and their animation. In 1987, the artist presented computer-robotic paintings at the modern art exhibition of Document 8. In the exhibition catalogue, we can find the rationale for the new direction presented by Nechvatal: 'The computer-robotic paintings symbolize a society that has freed itself from total rational utilitarianism through the symbolism of poetry in technology; and by linking the primordial horrors to the technology

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<sup>46</sup> Bird M. 100 ideas that changed art. ArtHuss, 2019. P. 197.

<sup>47</sup> Nechvatal J. Viractualism [Electronic resource] / Joseph Nechvatal URL: <https://josephnechvatal.wordpress.com/2019/12/12/viractualism/>.

of today. They are in great measure a reaction against the organizational harness of post-industrial society, the technocratic mind view<sup>48</sup>.

The artistic concept of Nechvatal arose in the 1980s, and already in the 1990s it took shape into a theoretical concept. It was the time of the appearance of the latest technologies, which were not so widespread in Ukraine. Analyzing the use of virtual and augmented reality in the works of Ukrainian artists of the last three decades, T. Myronova, for obvious reasons, pays more attention to modern art projects. The author writes that 'The world of art in the online space has become extremely interesting, diverse and no less active than 'offline' over the last thirty years'<sup>49</sup>. And if earlier artists even tried to resist this, encouraging viewers to 'take their eyes off' the screens of gadgets, the current situation has shown how necessary the possibilities of digital technologies are becoming for public communication in this unpredictable time, in particular in the cultural sphere.' Serhiy Shaulis, Petro Gronskyi, Mykola Malyshko, Mykyta Kadan, Artem Volokitin are mentioned among the modern Ukrainian artists who are actively working in the new technology.

To complete the review of the Nechvatal's conception with the idea of experience, which, according to the theorist and practitioner, is an indispensable characteristic of virtual reality, since VR involves immersion. 'A fundamental change in aesthetic perception, generated by immersion, a perception that is related to the ideal of complete immersion in virtual space, determines certain shifts in ontology, which are related to a better understanding of man' – writes the theoretician and artist<sup>50</sup>. We note that experience is an important cultural concept, because culture is considered as the experience of generations (e.g., P. Herchanivska), in addition, the concept of acquiring cultural experience through the cultural understanding of the production and consumption of a cultural product (the concept of Cultural Studies) is currently developing. 'Cultural experiences are opportunities for leisure, entertainment, learning and sharing experiences

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<sup>48</sup> Nechvatal J. Theoretical Statement Concerning Computer-Robotic Paintings [Electronic resource]. Documenta VIII catalogue. 1987. URL: <https://josephnechvatal.wordpress.com/2014/01/24/documenta-viii-text-1987-by-joseph-nechvatal/>.

<sup>49</sup> Mironova, T. V. (2021) Virtual and augmented reality in the works of Ukrainian artists. *Art and design*. 2(14). P. 141.

<sup>50</sup> Nechvatal J. Immersive ideals / critical distances : study of the affinity between artistic ideologies in virtual Reality and previous immersive idioms [Electronic resource]. Berlin: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing AG & Co KG. 2010. URL: <https://philpapers.org/rec/NECII>.

with others. Museums, theaters, exhibitions, concerts, cinema – all this unites people’<sup>51</sup>

The next stage of the spread of virtualization in the field of culture was the reaction of cultural institutions (museums and galleries), since there was a need to present the latest creative works of artists. Therefore, the representatives of these traditional institutions also had to understand and master new technologies. Virtualization of museums and galleries was carried out in two stages: creation of virtual copies of artifacts (for example, creation of 3D objects) and direct virtualization of the space of the cultural and artistic institution.

Cultural expert V. Volynets, while considering the new content and potential of museums, draws two important opinions regarding the role of art in digital form and the polysemantic phenomenon of modern museums. The researcher claims that art in the virtual space acquires not only the value of the exhibition, but also turns into an interactive segment. ‘These perspectives are marked by an important shift in museum work – a shift to a deeper understanding of the artworks’ place in virtual space and the achievement of the goal of promoting social contact with the audience’<sup>52</sup>. The second important component is the essence of museum work in the context of digitalization of society, therefore the author emphasizes that the museum ‘is a powerful cultural resource in the digital environment’<sup>53</sup>.

While considering the history of museum and gallery work and the research of cultural scientists, we can notice the influence of various factors on the development of museums and galleries, however, the virtualization of these institutions becomes a powerful toolkit that helps the presentation of the latest works of artists who are searching for answers to the most pressing questions of today.

Virtualization has an additional positive effect for museum and gallery activities, because the presentation of exhibits and space to the general public becomes an effective way of attraction and further visit of the institution. In 2004, Italian scientists conducted a study, the result of which was the statement that the behavior of virtual visitors was identified as similar to the behavior of real visitors in a real museum environment.<sup>54</sup> It is worth mentioning that since then virtualization has become even more

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<sup>51</sup> Why does the country need culture? [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://artefact.live/navishcho-kraini-potribna-kultura/>.

<sup>52</sup> Volynets V. (2020). The new content and potential of the virtual museum. *Digital platform: information technologies in the socio-cultural sphere*, 3(2), P. 128.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Chittaro, L., & Ieronutti, L. (2004). A visual tool for tracing users’ behavior in Virtual Environments. Proceedings of the Working Conference on Advanced Visual Interfaces - AVI ’04. doi: 10.1145/989863.989868

qualitative and detailed, which makes it possible to create a cultural experience that is as close to reality as possible. For example, the online tour presented in 2019, before the celebration of the centenary of the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenki National Museum of Art, allows you to view the expositions and interior of the museum on the first and second floors in high quality.

Studying the possibilities and methods of acquiring cultural experience becomes a tool for learning about the modern socio-cultural situation. T. Myronova writes 'The technological possibilities of combining artistic creativity and the potential of digital technologies in modern art create an intellectual environment of its existence'<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, if artists and cultural and artistic institutions have been boldly using new technological opportunities for some time, then in the art market sphere they began to gain a foothold only as a result of the spread of the global pandemic in 2020. 'Today, when the whole world is disconnected due to the pandemic, digital technologies create the opportunity to feel free, to overcome borders, to be at any artistic event, even in the most remote corners of the world'<sup>56</sup>.

Authoritative art market expert Claire McAndrew notes that 'the growth of online sales has become one of the most important developments in the art market in the last two years'<sup>57</sup>. The growth dynamics of online sales remains positive: 2021 – 13.3 billion dollars, 2020 – 12.4 billion dollars, and in 'the year before covid' 2019 – 6 billion dollars. We note that the doubling of the indicator in 2020 took place on the background of a significant reduction in the volume of sales on the global art market. The expert explains these changes as the following: 'Traditional galleries and auction companies have expanded their involvement in digital sales and marketing, and collectors have begun to use e-commerce in a more massive approach. Art fair online viewing rooms (OVRs) and various third-party platforms have also expanded the range of digital opportunities for selling in the art market'<sup>58</sup>.

In the concept of the above-mentioned artist and theoretician Nechvatal, an important opinion is indicated: 'The potential impact of computer technology as an integrator of art and science is well known. Yet if we contrast the computer's compulsion for order with the primal retentions in the social unconscious, a dreamier, more subjective use of the computer

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<sup>55</sup> Mironova, T. V. (2021) Virtual and augmented reality in the works of Ukrainian artists. *Art and design*. 2(14). P. 143.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Dr. Clare McAndrew. The Art Market 2022 [Electronic resource]. An Art Basel & UBS Report. 2022. URL: <https://www.artbasel.com/about/initiatives/the-art-market>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

revolution becomes obviously needed’<sup>59</sup>. This computer revolution, which was later embodied in the phenomenon of virtualization, plays a significant role both in the development and creation of modern cultural space. Virtuality is currently being actively introduced into the sphere of modern artistic and aesthetic culture, and the concept of ‘virtual reality’ is increasingly used in artistic practices, in particular in psychological-aesthetic, technical-aesthetic and aesthetic areas<sup>60</sup>. Thus, within the psychological-aesthetic direction, researchers based on the theoretical provisions of virtual psychology study the processes of perception of works of art created with the help of computer programs, the emotional states and feelings of viewers when immersed in hyper-technicality, etc. The technical and aesthetic direction involves the creation of certain effects and special effects of aesthetic content. To be more precise, the program appears as a virtual player or a virtual gallery. Within the aesthetic direction, the work itself, created with the help of virtual reality technologies, is studied. For example, we can talk about pictures created in the graphic editor *Adobe Photoshop* or other graphic editors<sup>61</sup>.

‘Now the visual is moving along completely different trajectories, and although its essence has remained the same, the density, coverage and relevance of visual culture have changed’<sup>62</sup>.

### **3. A new method of acquiring cultural experience**

It is worth recognizing that the influence of the phenomenon of virtualization on the development of the art market contributes to the production of a completely different, separate from the traditional, cultural and artistic experience of modern people. By reaching new artificial worlds, a person transforms the valuable content of his consciousness. His/Her world-view creates a new aesthetic reality. In this sense, the trends in the development of the modern art market in the conditions of virtualization of reality are associated with the following two aspects: 1) the emergence of works of art that can technically exist only in virtual reality; 2) transferring ‘ordinary’ works of art into virtual reality.

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<sup>59</sup> Nechvatal J. Theoretical Statement Concerning Computer-Robotic Paintings [Electronic resource]. Documenta VIII catalogue. 1987. URL: <https://josephnechvatal.wordpress.com/2014/01/24/documenta-viii-text-1987-by-joseph-nechvatal/>.

<sup>60</sup> V.M. Ryvlyna Mediatization of art: communication aspects: diss. Ph.D. of social communication sciences: 27.00.01. Dnipro National University named after Oles Honchar. Dnipro, 2021. P. 45.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup> Boylen L. Visual culture. Translated by Hanna Leliv. Kyiv : ‘ArtHuss’. 2021. P. 107.

It is worth noting that the catalyst for the introduction of virtualization to the modern art market was the COVID-19 pandemic, due to which, in 2020, it became physically impossible to hold any specialized cultural and artistic events and activities. It also affected such an influential subject of the contemporary art market as international art fairs.

According to the information from the influential international newspaper 'The Art Newspaper', at least 254 such events were planned to be held in 2020 in different countries worldwide. However, one by one, the organizers cancelled all the spring art fairs of 2020 – Art Basel Hong Kong, Miart in Milan, Frieze in New York, Kyiv Art Fair and others. It seemed that the coronavirus pandemic forced to limit socio-cultural communication between the world art community and the general audience to a minimum and also stopped the transmission of ideas, thoughts, emotions – everything that gives art the oxygen it needs to push for development. To prevent this, a forced step was the transfer of art fairs to online mode using digital tools, which made it possible to open virtual exhibitions and allowed all participants of the art market to join the works of art.

For the first time in self-isolation conditions, the largest international art fair of contemporary art, Art Basel 2020, held an online event for the public. As you know, for many galleries in the world, Art Basel, founded in 1970, is the most prestigious in terms of selling works of art. The most significant players of the art market gather here: the leading galleries and the most influential collectors, for whom Art Basel is like the New York Stock Exchange: it is here that the prices of the prominent artists are set. The price of a conditional Andy Warhol at Art Basel is a reference point, such as a stock exchange rate, adjusted for which everyone makes decisions. Currently, the Art Basel art fair – the flagship event of the art market, 'the place where tradition and the avant-garde meet' – plays the most visible cultural role because it is here that the valuable component of modern art is formed thanks to the interaction between the main participants of the art market, leading trends are determined its development<sup>63</sup>.

Without tying it in any way to its usual schedule, this landmark event in the cultural and artistic sense was held from September 23 to 26, 2020, on the Online Viewing Rooms platform. Art Basel 2020 included presentations by 235 galleries and more than 2,000 works, attracting more than 250,000 visitors worldwide. The online platform has enabled galleries to meet and interact with new collectors and reconnect with existing clients.

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<sup>63</sup> Rusakov S.S. Art fairs in the context of the modern stage of the development of the art market. *Cultural thought*. 2021. No. 19. P. 155–164.

The art fair program also included a live broadcast of more than 100 talks and various digital events organized by the galleries<sup>64</sup>.

In the Art Basel 2020 Online Viewing Rooms, created by the founders of Art Basel 2020, it was possible to filter through all galleries and curatorial projects, as well as select works of art by type (painting, sculpture, video), artist name, gallery name, year of 'release' and expected value. All photos of the works, their full description and provenance are posted here. It was also often offered to take part in a curatorial tour, to get advice on the exhibits that interested them, or to see how the work would look in the interior. Generally, an individual approach and full disclosure of information about each work and author.

At the same time, it should be noted that the virtual exhibition space of the *viewing rooms* looks quite simple – the visitor chooses the gallery he intends to see and finds himself in a virtual 'room' with a white wall and a bench, which, most likely, was placed to understand the scale of the work. Then you can simply 'flip' the works, which often turn out to be too small to consider without magnification, but the first impression, of course, is spoiled. The need to press 'plus' and wait for the picture to come closer, for example, loses its charm in the work of Wolfgang Tillmans from the Paris gallery Chantal Crousel. By the way, all the information about the work and its price is indicated on the right. But to change the gallery, you must first leave the room and re-enter another gallery. Not everyone has the patience to see all the galleries in this mode.

However, on the very first day of Art Basel 2020 in the online format, when the *viewing rooms* opened, the site 'hanged' from a large number of people wanting to see the new format. In a way, it resembled the queues and the stuffing, just like at a real art fair. In addition, the online format of Art Basel 2020 had certain technical shortcomings. Yes, in the virtual format, it was impossible to understand that Ai Weiwei's colossal work 'Illumination' was made of Lego, even if you zoomed in on it. Stalkers could find out about this in the description or see more detailed photos in the newsletter from the gallery. The sculptures of the art fair were presented in elementary photos, on which there was not even a 'bench' to compare their sizes. Undoubtedly, the mentioned shortcomings need significant improvement.

In this regard, Markus Vickers notes: 'The peculiarity of the virtual exhibition is that the viewer (aka the user) visits it on his computer, communicates with other participants of the art event one-on-one, personally establishes personal relationships with them, immerses into a new reality,

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<sup>64</sup> ART BASEL. HISTORY [Electronic resource] – Resource access mode: [https://d2u3kfw92fzu7.cloudfront.net/asset/factfigures/Art\\_Basel\\_1\\_History\\_1\\_2021.pdf](https://d2u3kfw92fzu7.cloudfront.net/asset/factfigures/Art_Basel_1_History_1_2021.pdf).

which he himself recreates in his own consciousness. The issue of perception of art objects in the virtual environment remains debatable'<sup>65</sup>.

In general, the idea of creating the world's first virtual art gallery appeared back in 2011 with the German curator Manuel Rossner. He was inspired by the Belgian Museum of Modern Art, which existed on the seashore for exactly one night, and was destroyed by the first surf in the morning. The peculiarity of the CERMA digital gallery founded by M. Rossner was that pixel spaces were presented instead of the usual halls, where visitors could view art objects in 3D format<sup>66</sup>.

In an interview for the online publication about the trends of modern visual culture 'Bird In Flight', Manuel Rossner talked about the sources of inspiration from the real world and the specifics of holding exhibitions on the Internet: 'We sent an invitation to the event through Facebook. Instead of coming to the gallery at the appointed time, viewers went online and joined the video chat. They watched the exhibition while sitting at home and chatted and got to know each other in the chat – it somehow resembled a party of students from different countries. There was also a DJ playing atmospheric music in the chat room. Even people who are not related to art can perceive virtual exhibitions as part of their everyday online life – for example, computer games'<sup>67</sup>.

It can be assumed that due to the significant interest in experimenting with virtual reality in the artistic sphere, such important features of a modern art fair as eventfulness, spectacularity and festive nature are beginning to lose their significance<sup>68</sup>. Yes, many collectors really go to study, look and buy, succumbing to the urge, they also go for parties, champagne, and the atmosphere of the holiday. They go to make new acquaintances or to maintain existing contacts, to communicate. In addition to the fair itself and parties, they visit museums, and galleries, visit private collectors and see their collections. All this gives fairs a unique charm. However, in the conditions of online holding of international art fairs, collectors, journalists, critics, and spectators, locked in self-isolation, look at works against the

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<sup>65</sup> Vickers M. Marketing and Buying Fine Art Online [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://archive.org/details/marketingbuyingf00vick>.

<sup>66</sup> Garienchick Anya. Access to the Net: how a virtual gallery works. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://birdinflight.com/en/plitka/access-to-net-how-virtual-gallery-works.html>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Rusakov S.S. Art fairs in the context of the modern stage of the development of the art market. Cultural thought. 2021. No. 19. P. 155–164.

background of a white wall and a bench, the event of online sales no longer causes triumph<sup>69</sup>.

The question arises: does the modern viewer not lose important and necessary aesthetic emotions due to the gradual transfer of art fairs to the online format? After all, by their very nature, virtual forms of communication do not provide for the possibility of initial 'personal' contact with a work of art. Obviously, even a very high-quality reproduction or 3D model cannot convey the artistic specificity of the work. After the 'technical reproducibility' analyzed by V. Benjamin, virtualization became the next step toward destroying the 'aura' of the work of art<sup>70</sup>. In other words, the argument about the artistic value of a work is no longer considered decisive for an investment collection. Instead, the issues of authenticity of this or that work of art, presented at the art fair in an online format, are brought up to date.

It would seem those modern technologies and the knowledge of art critics make it possible to attribute the work quite accurately. As a result, the painting is attributed, for example, to the work of the young Michelangelo, or it is doubted that it was painted by Leonardo himself. However, the categories of authenticity and originality of art become the subject of cultural reflections. Throughout history, these concepts have been interpreted in different ways. After the nameless artists of the Middle Ages, who were considered instruments in the hands of God, there appeared the bright masters of the anthropocentric Renaissance, and later the romantics, who believed in talent and beauty. However, in the 20th century, the question of the very limits of the artist became relevant, and therefore, the former principles of authenticity already began to lose their original meaning. The method of postmodernism is copies and pastiche, originality turns into a dynamic category, and literally, anything can be art. In the world of reproductions and digital images, the concept of the original becomes ephemeral.

Separately, it is worth focusing attention on artistic innovations and experiments that constitute digital art, which can only exist in the virtual space of the art fair. VR art is currently represented by static digital images (photos, paintings, sculptures); temporary media (slides, audio, films, videos); interactive digital installations; MR / AR / VR / XR; game art; generative art; network, or web art, etc. Digital art appears as a new level of human capabilities, which, completely separating from the surrounding

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<sup>69</sup> A. Blonar Art Basel online [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://theblueprint.ru/culture/art/art-basel-hong-kong>.

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin V. A work of art in the age of its technical reproducibility. selected Lviv : Litopys, 2002. P. 77–78.

reality, provides an opportunity to construct new artificial worlds that are limited only by the creator's imagination (for example, the work of the most famous street artist Banksy). Among the new things in digital art are an emphasis on interactivity, technologization of man and humanization of technology, and philosophical analysis of virtual reality and its multisensory essence. As Y. Tkach rightly points out, 'the achievements of digital art contribute to the formation of future trajectories of techno-artistic hybridization, which turns into an important principle of modern art, which seeks to master and use the potential of the latest technologies'<sup>71</sup>.

Artists of hybrid art combine the latest scientific achievements (in particular, in physics, biology and robotics) and ultra-new technologies in their own works, which sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish an artistic project from scientific and technical research. The viewer can feel and understand the works of hybrid art that are addressed emotions, thus acquiring aesthetic values. We are talking about a wide range of different installations and works ('The Riddle of Life' and 'Microvenus' by J. Davis, the project 'Being' by E. Katz). The understanding of techno-art hybrids takes place in the discourse of various variations of post-classical aesthetics: algorithmic (works of art and the creative process are considered with the use of computer technologies, methods of cybernetics and applied mathematics) and fractal (based on the visual 'potential of limitless construction in an endless process')<sup>72</sup>.

By the way, in May 2022, the centre of modern art M17 (Kyiv) and the V-Art platform (Kharkiv) initiated the first European digital art fair – the European Digital Art Fair, which took place in a hybrid format. Contemporary digital art was presented simultaneously by artists from 43 European countries. The simultaneous use of virtual and physical spaces enabled a versatile experience of the perception of digital art, which is essentially the embodiment of the polymodality of modern reality.

So, today, a virtual art fair is a resource that exhibits a collection of objects, works, materials, etc., in an equitable space located exclusively on the Internet. Such were Art Basel 2020, Kyiv Art Fair 2020, European Digital Art Fair and many others. Thanks to the Internet, works of digital art are available to every network user. The interactivity property of digital works turns them into open structures and allows each consumer to become a co-author.

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<sup>71</sup> Y. V. Trach Digital technologies in the culture of modern society: trends and prospects: autoref. thesis for obtaining sciences. degree of doctor of cultural studies. Spec. 26.00.01 'Theory and history of culture'; Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. KNUKiM. Kyiv, 2021. P. 12.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

Thus, the virtualization of modern art fairs is a combination of high-tech capabilities of the Internet, artificial intelligence, and neural networks – on the one hand and works of modern art exhibited at art fairs – on the other. To date, this practice has been successfully mastered by the world’s largest art fairs, allowing virtual visitors to immerse themselves in the boundless art world as much as possible.

However, after the coronavirus break, the Art Basel art fair was again held in Basel, Switzerland, in 2021 and 2022. For the second year in a row, the fair featured the works of more than 4,000 artists from different countries. 289 contemporary art galleries from 40 countries took part in Art Basel 2022 – 17 more galleries than in 2021. Of these, 19 galleries from Western and Eastern Europe, the USA, Latin America and Africa participated for the first time.

The general public could not only see current art objects but also take part in the new ‘hybrid’ format of the fair. Art Basel in 2021-2022 was held in two formats: classic and digital. Thanks to online presentations, broadcasts on social networks and virtual tours, the viewer could join the beauty from anywhere on the globe.

As the director of Art Basel, Mark Spiegler, noted: ‘It is important to hold our exhibition again in a classic format, while also drawing on the digital innovations of the past year, to attract as many viewers as possible from all over the world’ [14]. Art Basel also introduces new models and approaches to participation. For example, shared and virtual stands, enabling participants who cannot be physically present in Basel to present their own small exhibition. Galleries selling digital works in the NFT (non-fungible token) crypto-art format are also actively represented. According to Artnet, on the day of the opening, the work of the artist Olive Allen in the NFT format ‘Post-death or The Null Address’ / ‘Post-death or The Null Address’ was sold for eight cryptocurrency units of ethereum, equal to 25 thousand euros<sup>73</sup>.

Digital technologies are forcing gallerists to argue about what the world of art fairs will look like tomorrow. In Basel, they try to combine the present and the future, but after the pandemic, there are more and more supporters of total immersion in the virtual art world. From the report of the Swiss financial holding UBS Group and Art Basel, it follows that among the visitors, there has been a significant increase in young people. It is millennial collectors who are becoming the primary buyers of works of art via the Internet and are ready to spend more considerable sums on them than the older generation.

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<sup>73</sup> ART BASEL. HISTORY [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://d2u3kfw92fzu7.cloudfront.net/asset/factfigures/Art\\_Basel\\_1\\_History\\_1\\_2021.pdf](https://d2u3kfw92fzu7.cloudfront.net/asset/factfigures/Art_Basel_1_History_1_2021.pdf).

On the sidelines of Art Basel 2022, it was said that both collectors and gallerists do not feel as if they are in transit time when everything around them is changing rapidly. 'How to catch a wave and ride it into the future?' – this was probably the central question of participants and visitors.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Thus, art fairs, as an embodiment of modern socio-cultural communication under the influence of virtualization of reality, acquire features of interactivity and personalized character, while preserving such defining features as eventfulness, spectacle and lively character. The top trend in the development of modern art fairs can be called mutual cooperation and the coexistence of two functioning formats: along with the actual art space, they form a virtual space that immerses the recipients in the reality of the expositions based on the principle of immersion. At the same time, the transformation of the modern art market with the help of Internet technologies can lead to revolutionary changes in the understanding and perception of works of art. Virtualization changes the landscape not only of the modern art fair as an influential subject of the art market but also of the entire art world. New opportunities for interaction between all participants of the art market make the unique communication space between them more open and transparent, which leads to increased interest from a wide range of people who want to join the art world.

## **SUMMARY**

The tendency of holding art fairs in the context of virtualization and prospects for the development of the modern art market is analyzed in the article. It is shown that the pandemic challenges in 2020-2021 contributed to the integration of online technologies in the organization and holding of art exhibitions, the presentation of creative works, communication between artists, gallerists and collectors, the purchase and sale of art works, etc. The given data testifies that the transition of art market participants to the possibilities of virtualization and digitalization took place extremely slowly and reluctantly. The authors believe that only due to the impossibility of conducting live events due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, this trend has finally found its effective embodiment in the cultural and artistic sphere. The article considers art exhibitions as the main events of the art market, which form a unique communicative environment. Providing an opportunity to exchange the ideas, present art projects, and attract a wide range of theorists and practitioners, art fairs are turning into one of the leading public formats for the actualization of works of art. The virtualization of art fairs develops this potential, effectively realizing its

prospect in the conditions of digital transformation of the cultural sphere. The authors use cultural and axiological approaches, as well as the phenomenological method. The published materials can become a theoretical basis for the training of students in the fields of “Cultural Studies”, “Art Studies”, “Management of Socio-Cultural Activities”, etc. The generalization and conclusions of the authors will contribute to the understanding of the prospects for the introduction of the latest technologies in the modern cultural and artistic sphere, where one of the leading roles is occupied by the art market.

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