

INSPIRATION BEYOND TIME AND SPACE: THE EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS IMAGERY AT THE INTERSECTION OF TRADITIONAL FINE ARTS AND DIGITAL MEDIA ART

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Abstract: This analysis explored the convergence of traditional and digital elements in religious artworks, revealing a fascinating interplay that both reinterprets established themes and fosters new avenues for artistic expression. The case studies examined diverse media, from Bill Viola's video art manipulations to Sougwen Chung's integration of calligraphy with 3D animation. A prominent theme across these works is the concept of transformation and reinterpretation. Digital tools empower artists to manipulate and reimagine traditional elements, leading to fresh perspectives on religious themes and iconography. For instance, Laurie Lehtinen's "Mary in the Machine" utilizes algorithmic manipulation to challenge the traditional depiction of the Virgin Mary, prompting viewers to contemplate the role of faith in the digital age. Similarly, Bill Viola's video editing techniques in "Martyrs" transform a physical performance into a meditation on suffering and transcendence, blurring the lines between physical and spiritual realms. The impact on religious expression also emerged as a significant area of exploration. Digital media can expand the expressive potential of religious art, allowing artists to explore a wider range of emotions, concepts, and experiences. Another key theme is the hybridization of traditional and digital elements. This blending creates immersive environments that push the boundaries between physical and virtual spaces, impacting how viewers experience the religious aspects of the artwork. Sougwen Chung's "Bodhisattva in Data Stream" exemplifies this by merging traditional calligraphy, a practice imbued with spiritual significance, with 3D modelling and animation.

Keywords: Traditional Arts, Digital Arts, Religious Artworks, Bill Viola, Sougwen Chung's, and Laurie Lehtinen's "Mary in the Machine".

1. INTRODUCTION

The human experience has been deeply intertwined with both art and religion since the dawn of civilization (Carter, 1976). These two pillars of culture have served as potent expressions of human creativity and spirituality, with no civilization lacking in both artistic endeavours and religious beliefs or rituals. In the contemporary world, renewed interest in both these spheres is evident. Artistic expression flourishes with a multitude of styles, ranging from the easily interpretable realism to the more enigmatic realm of conceptual art with its minimalist and potentially challenging imagery. Religion too, exists in a spectrum of diverse forms, attracting growing public attention. One particularly significant avenue for collaboration between art and religion lies in their potential to foster mutual respect and understanding among different faiths (Carter, 1976). Overcoming the divisive barriers of ignorance, disrespect, and a lack of appreciation for the values held by other religions is crucial to fostering collaboration in pursuit of shared goals. Art can play a pivotal role in this process by offering a common language – an "artistic-religious vocabulary" – that allows different religions to bridge the gaps that separate them. This vocabulary of shared symbols would naturally draw upon the insights of both art and religion. Art cannot impose its own symbolism arbitrarily upon religion; rather, it must serve as a medium to illuminate the existing connections. While some artworks do manage to transcend specific religious boundaries, their effectiveness is often hampered by interpretations based on outdated or inadequate understandings of the relationship between art and religion. The term "spirituality" is often used loosely, encompassing a general approach to life focused on finding meaning (Arya, 2016). Before examining its articulation in various cultural contexts, it's crucial to establish its different forms. One key distinction lies in the realm of historical religions, which encompass diverse spiritual traditions operating within the framework of religious discourse. However, spiritual expression extends beyond these established structures. Alternative, non-doctrinal religions and new religious movements (NRMs) offer additional pathways for spiritual exploration. Significantly, spirituality can also exist outside the confines of theology or religious practice. In this secular context, it becomes intertwined with ethical questions surrounding identity, selfhood, and our interactions within the world. While secular perspectives may exclude the supernatural aspects often found in religious traditions, it's important to recognize the shared concerns that bridge the divide between religious and secular spirituality, even if their origins differ. The focus on religious art is evident in the advancements of Western art before the 17th century. The development of linear perspective, a key

innovation of the Renaissance, is demonstrably showcased in iconic works such as Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (1495-1498) and Masaccio's *The Holy Trinity* (c. 1427). The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a significant shift in the relationship between art and religion. Gone was the veiled religiosity of Romanticism. Realism, with its focus on the tangible realities of the here and now, dominated the artistic landscape. However, exceptions emerged. Artists like Vincent van Gogh, through their depictions of the natural world, explored the profound depths of materiality, hinting at a deeper reality beyond the physical (Rosenblum, 1975). The rise of modernism further strained the connection between art and religion. Formalist critics like Clement Greenberg championed the values of artistic purity and autonomy, advocating for artworks devoid of external references (Jones, 2005). Meaning, according to this view, resided solely within the formal relationships and self-referential structures of the artwork itself, not in its connection to the external world. Abstraction, a dominant form of modernism, exemplified this approach. Many artists sought to create a visual language that transcended specificities and aimed for universal expression. However, despite the emphasis on pure aesthetics in modernism, some artists defied this trend. Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Barnett Newman, and Ad Reinhardt all utilized formal elements as a means to express their own spiritual perspectives. Their art serves as a reminder that the quest for the spiritual in artistic expression continued to persist, even within the seemingly secular framework of modernism. The relationship between religion and visual arts, a topic extensively explored for centuries, has undergone a significant evolution with the rise of digital media in the 1990s (Zhang & Qian, 2024). Digital platforms have provided new avenues for religious expression, expanding the ways in which religion interacts with visual media. This expansion has not only diversified the forms and practices involved but has also enriched the analytical tools available to scholars. Morgan emphasizes the crucial role of media in shaping religious beliefs (Morgan, 2005), arguing that the emergence of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the dynamics between religion, visual arts, and media. This transformation necessitates a reevaluation of their interconnected history and the ongoing synergy between these spheres. However, a segment of religious studies scholars views the exploration of visual art and religion's connection as a peripheral concern, particularly those who favour textual and discursive methodologies. They often consider visual elements to be supplementary, enriching but not essential for a comprehensive analysis of religious phenomena (Uehlinger, 2015). Engler and Stausberg further highlight that visual media has not had a profound impact on the academic study of religion, leaving the

field under-researched and lacking in theoretical development regarding the role of visual culture (Engler & Stausberg, 2021).

- *Rationale and Objective*

Religious imagery has served as a powerful source of artistic inspiration for centuries, transcending temporal and spatial boundaries. However, the emergence of digital media art has introduced a new dimension to artistic expression. This study investigates the intersection of traditional fine arts and digital media art in the creation of religious imagery. Our primary objective is to explore how these distinct artistic mediums are being utilized to express and communicate religious themes in the contemporary world.

2. METHODS

- *Research Design*

Our study adopted a mixed methods design, employing case studies to investigate the merging of traditional and digital media in religious expression. This was complemented by textual analysis of critical reception, content analysis of a broad range of artworks, and surveys to gather data on artistic practices and audience perspectives.

- *Data Collection*

Our study administered a standardized survey consisting of 15 questions, designed to be completed in approximately 20-25 minutes. This survey targeted artists/religious communities and aimed to gather data on the use of digital media in religious art, including preferred techniques and perceived impact on artistic expression and audience engagement. Our case studies explored three prominent artists known for their innovative integration of traditional and digital media in religious expression. The first examined Bill Viola and his work *Martyrs*, which merges traditional video performance with video editing and effects to create a visually striking representation of suffering and transcendence. The second case study focused on Laurie Lehtinen and her *Mary in the Machine*, where painting is combined with algorithmic manipulation to depict the Virgin Mary in the Digital Age. Finally, we analyzed Sougwen Chung's *Bodhisattva in Data Stream*, a piece that utilizes calligraphy alongside 3D modeling and animation to explore the concept of compassion in the digital world. These case studies provided a

foundation for understanding the diverse approaches artists are taking to combine traditional and digital media in contemporary religious art. Our research employed a combined textual and content analysis approach. We examined a large corpus of religious artworks that incorporate digital media. This analysis aimed to reveal trends and patterns in how traditional and digital elements are combined. Through coding, we identified specific themes, symbols, and techniques employed by the artists, allowing us to understand the evolving dialogue between these mediums in the expression of religious ideas.

• *Data Analysis*

Our data analysis involved thematic analysis and coding to identify patterns within the data. Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and frequencies were also calculated to summarize the information. All data visualizations were created using GraphPad Prism version 10.2.0.

3. RESULTS

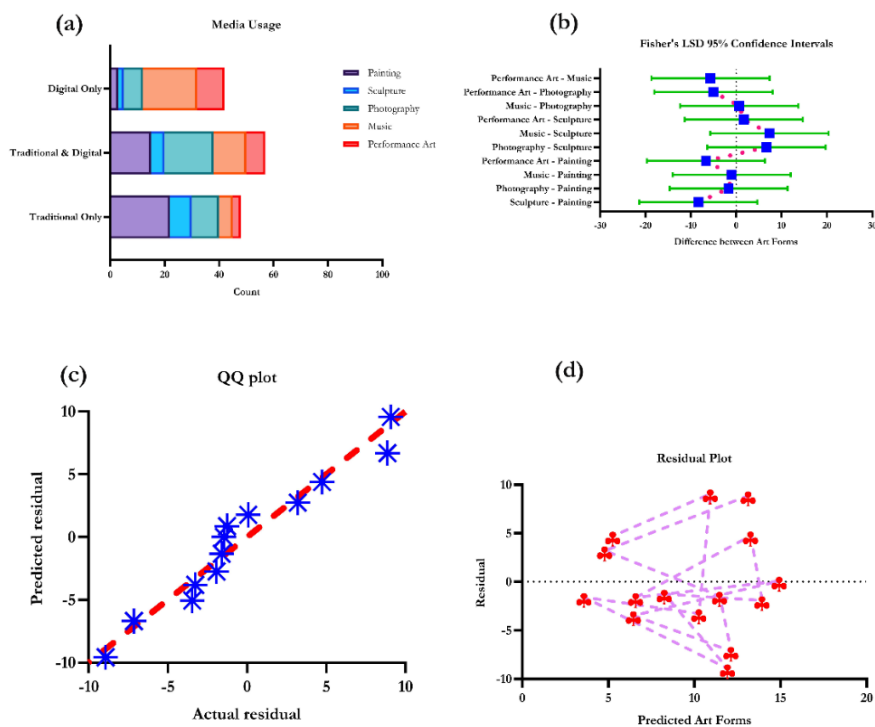


Figure 1: Media Usage (a), Mul. comp. CI Plot: 2way ANOVA of Media Usage (b), QQ Plot: 2way ANOVA of Media Usage (c), and Residual Plot: 2way ANOVA of Media Usage (d).

In Figure 1, A 2-way ANOVA ($F(4, 8) = 0.87, p = 0.52$) revealed no significant effect of Media Usage (Column Factor) on the outcome variable. Media Usage explained only 29.06% ($\eta^2 = 0.29$) of the total variance, suggesting a weak or non-existent relationship. Similarly, Row Factors had a negligible effect ($F(2, 8) = 0.24, p = 0.79$), explaining less than 4% ($\eta^2 = 0.04$) of the variance. These high p-values indicate the observed effects are likely due to chance, not a true association between Media Usage and the outcome variable. An analysis of media usage reveals a diverse landscape. Traditional media like painting (22 observations) is most common alone, followed by combinations of traditional and digital (ranging from 3 in photography to 18 in music). Digital-only usage is present across all art forms (2-20 observations), suggesting its growing integration. Music and performance art see the highest digital use (20 and 10 observations respectively), while sculpture leans more heavily on traditional methods (8 observations).

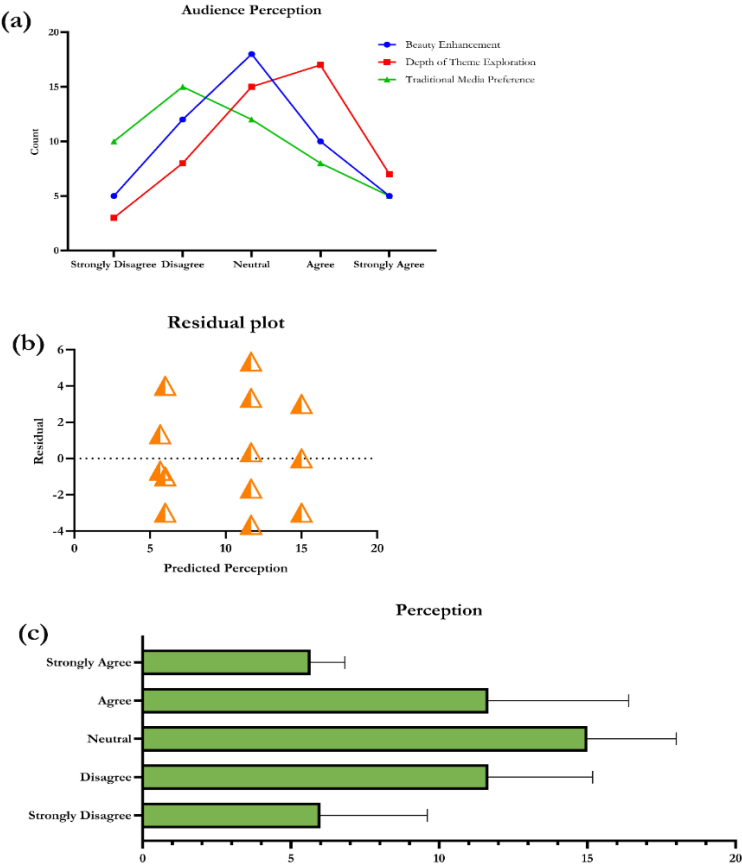


Figure 2: Audience Perception (a), Residual plot: 2way ANOVA of Audience Perception (b) and Row Statistics of Audience Perception (c).

In Figure 2, A two-way ANOVA ($F(2, 8) = 0.00, p > 0.99$) revealed no significant effect of the Column Factor on audience perception. This means the specific type of media used (Traditional Only, Traditional & Digital, Digital Only) had essentially no impact on audience perception. However, Row Factors (perception categories like Beauty Enhancement, Depth of Theme Exploration, Traditional Media Preference) did show a marginally significant effect ($F(4, 8) = 3.38, p = 0.0671$). While not definitively significant, this suggests there may be differences in how audiences perceive art based on the specific aspect being evaluated (beauty, theme depth, media preference).

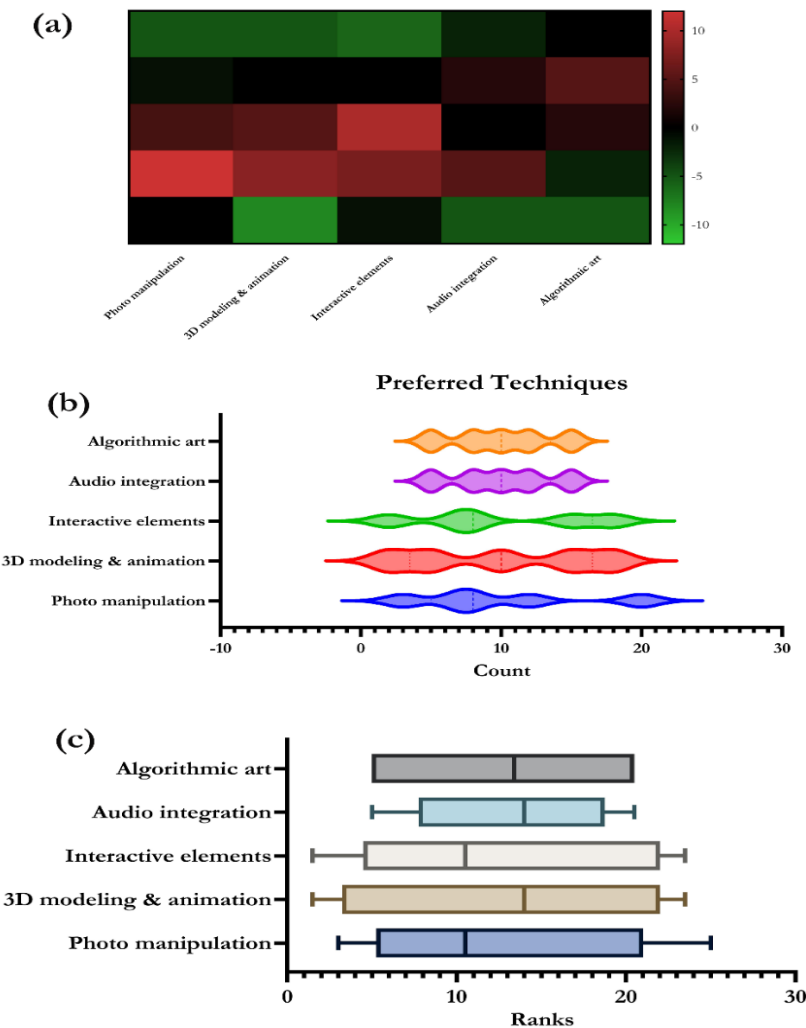


Figure 3: Heat Map Plot: Kruskal-Wallis's Test of Preferred Techniques (a), and Preferred Techniques (b), Ranks Plot: Kruskal-Wallis's Test of Preferred Techniques (c).

In Figure 3, A Kruskal-Wallis H test ($\chi^2(4) = 0.05427, p = 0.9996$) revealed no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) in audience preference across the five digital techniques (Photo manipulation, 3D modeling & animation, Interactive elements, Audio integration, Algorithmic art). The data suggests that audiences may not have a strong preference for one specific technique over another, with medians for each category being very similar.

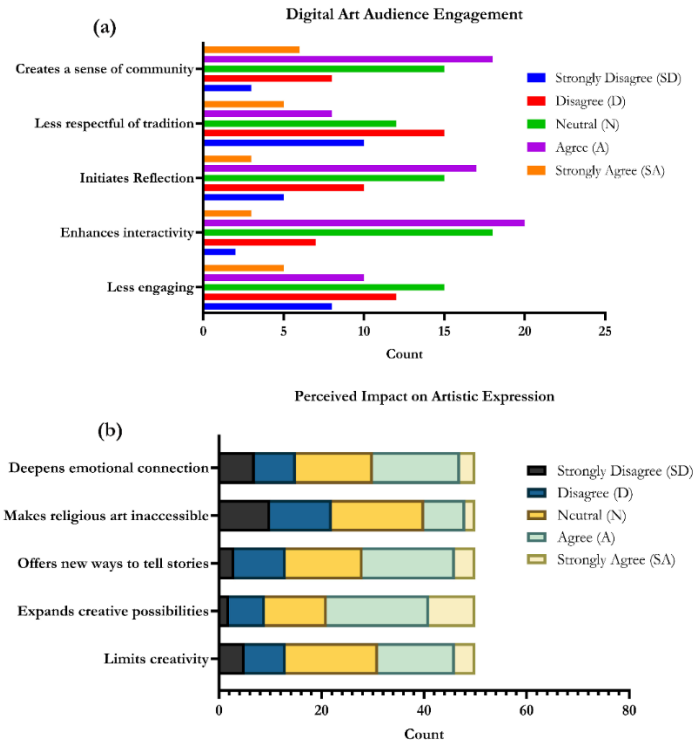


Figure 4: Perceived Impact on Artistic Expression (a) and Audience Engagement (b).

In Figure 4, Analysis of audience perception reveals mixed views on digital art's impact. While 18 found digital media limits creativity (SD/D/N/A/SA), a larger group (20/9) saw it expanding creative possibilities. Similarly, 18 agreed digital art offers new storytelling methods (SD/D/N/A/SA), but some (10/12/18) worried it might make religious art inaccessible. The emotional connection aspect received the most agreement (7/8/15/17/3), suggesting digital art may enhance audience engagement. Moreover, Analysis shows audiences have mixed feelings about digital art's engagement (SD/D/N/A/SA for "less engaging"). While some (20/3) see it enhancing interactivity and sparking deeper reflection (5/10/15/17/3), others (10/15/12/8/5) worry it's disrespectful of tradition. However, a majority (18/6) agree digital art fosters a sense of community.

Table 1: Case Study Analysis of Bill Viola - Martyrs

Theme	Traditional Element	Digital Element	Effect on Religious Expression
Suffering & Transcendence	Physical performance (artist's body as vessel of suffering)	Video editing & effects (slow motion, layering of sound and visuals)	Intensifies the emotional impact of the performance. Slow motion stretches time, allowing viewers to experience the physicality and intensity of suffering in a heightened way. Layering of sounds and visuals creates a sense of immersion and transcendence, blurring the lines between physical reality and a spiritual realm.
Body & Spirit Duality	Human form as a canvas for expressing the internal struggle between physical suffering and spiritual yearning	Manipulation of time and space through video editing (slow motion, cyclical edits)	Emphasizes the perseverance of the human spirit despite physical suffering. The cyclical nature of the edits can create a sense of timelessness, further emphasizing the spiritual dimension. Viewers witness the body endure physical suffering, hinting at the potential for spiritual transformation.
Universality of Religious Experience	Non-specific religious iconography	Absence of specific religious imagery allows viewers from diverse backgrounds to connect with the themes.	Evokes empathy and contemplation, transcending specific religious context. The universality of the human form allows viewers to project their own understanding of suffering onto the performance, fostering a deeper emotional connection.

In Table 1, The analysed case study explores themes in Bill Viola's "Martyrs." "Suffering & Transcendence" is achieved through the physical performance (suffering vessel) combined with video editing effects (slow motion, layered visuals). "Body & Spirit Duality" is expressed by the human form and manipulated time/space (slow motion, cycles) representing the struggle between physical and spiritual. "Universality of Religious Experience" is fostered by the absence of specific religious imagery, allowing viewers of diverse backgrounds to connect with the themes.

Table 2(a): Case Study Analysis of Laurie Lehtinen - Mary in the Machine

Theme	Traditional Element	Digital Element	Effect on Religious Expression
Reimagining the Virgin Mary	Virgin Mary as a recurring motif in Western art	Algorithmic manipulation challenges traditional representations.	Invites viewers to consider the role of the Virgin Mary in a contemporary context. By using a familiar figure but altering her form, Lehtinen prompts reflection on the ongoing relevance of this religious icon in a technologically mediated world.
Humanity & Technology	Juxtaposition of the human figure and digital manipulation	Raises questions about the role of technology in the sacred and the human condition.	The distorted yet recognizable figure of the Virgin Mary evokes questions about the impact of technology on faith and the human experience of the sacred. The artwork challenges viewers to consider how technology might influence our relationship with the divine.

Table 2(b): Case Study Analysis of Laurie Lehtinen - Mary in the Machine

Theme	Traditional Element	Digital Element	Effect on Religious Expression
The Digital Age and Faith	The Virgin Mary as a symbol of hope and compassion	Presents the Virgin Mary in a digital context	Creates a contemporary icon relevant to a technologically mediated world. By presenting a familiar symbol of hope and compassion in a digital format, Lehtinen suggests that faith remains relevant in the digital age. The artwork offers a bridge between traditional religious imagery and contemporary experience.

In Table 1, this analysis examines themes in Laurie Lehtinen's "Mary in the Machine." "Reimagining the Virgin Mary" utilizes the familiar figure but challenges traditional representations through algorithmic manipulation. "Humanity & Technology" is explored by juxtaposing the human form with digital manipulation, raising questions about technology's impact on faith and humanity. Finally, "The Digital Age and Faith" presents the Virgin Mary, a symbol of hope and compassion, in a digital context, suggesting faith's continued relevance in the digital age.

Table 3: Case Study Analysis of Sougwen Chung - Bodhisattva in Data Stream

Theme	Traditional Element	Digital Element	Effect on Religious Expression
Compassion in the Digital World	Calligraphy as a spiritual practice	3D modelling and animation create a dynamic, immersive environment.	Reimagines the concept of compassion for a digital age. The flowing calligraphy, traditionally associated with mindfulness, is integrated into a dynamic digital environment, suggesting that compassion can be practiced and experienced in the digital realm as well.
Data and Spirituality	Calligraphic text as a symbolic representation of wisdom and compassion	Data stream symbolizes the vastness and interconnectedness of the digital world.	Blurs boundaries between physical and digital, suggests potential for spiritual connection in the digital realm. The juxtaposition of the symbolic calligraphy with the data stream suggests that spiritual values can be present even within the seemingly impersonal world of data. The artwork encourages viewers to consider the potential for finding meaning and connection in the digital world.
Interconnectedness and Universality of Compassion	Emphasis on movement and transformation	The artwork's dynamic nature, with flowing calligraphy and a constantly changing data stream, emphasizes movement and transformation.	Reinforces the theme of interconnectedness and the universality of compassion. The continuous movement suggests that compassion is a dynamic force that can transcend physical boundaries and exist even in the digital realm.

In Table 3, examining themes in Sougwen Chung's "Bodhisattva in Data Stream," "Compassion in the Digital World" merges traditional calligraphy, a spiritual practice, with 3D animation to create a dynamic, immersive environment for experiencing compassion. "Data and Spirituality" juxtapose the symbolic calligraphy with a data stream, suggesting spiritual values can exist even within the vast, interconnected digital world. Finally, "Interconnectedness and Universality of Compassion" are emphasized by the artwork's constant movement, showcasing the transformative and universal nature of compassion.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis of Trends in Combining Traditional and Digital Elements

Theme	Description	Examples
Transformation and Reinterpretation	Traditional elements are manipulated or reimagined using digital tools, creating new interpretations of religious themes and iconography.	- Laurie Lehtinen's "Mary in the Machine" uses algorithmic manipulation to distort the Virgin Mary figure, prompting a reexamination of her role in a digital age. - Bill Viola's "Martyrs" employs video editing to manipulate time and space, transforming the physical performance into a meditation on suffering and transcendence.
Hybridity and Merging Boundaries	Traditional art forms are blended with digital elements, blurring the lines between physical and virtual spaces and religious experience.	- Sougwen Chung's "Bodhisattva in Data Stream" merges traditional calligraphy with 3D modeling and animation, creating a hybrid environment that explores compassion in the digital world. - Digital installations incorporating traditional religious imagery can create immersive experiences that bridge the gap between physical and virtual spaces for viewers.

In Table 4, two key themes emerge in how traditional and digital elements are combined: "Transformation and Reinterpretation" utilizes digital tools to manipulate and reimagine traditional elements, fostering new interpretations of religious themes and iconography. Additionally, "Hybridity and Merging Boundaries" blends traditional art forms with digital elements, blurring the lines between physical and virtual spaces, impacting how viewers experience the religious aspects of the artwork.

Table 5(a): Thematic Analysis of Patterns in Effects on Religious Expression

Theme	Description	Examples
Expanding the Expressive Potential	Digital media broadens the range of emotions, concepts, and experiences explored in religious art.	- Video art allows artists like Bill Viola to create a heightened emotional impact through slow motion and layered soundscapes, intensifying the portrayal of religious themes. - Interactive digital installations can foster a more participatory and personal experience of religious art compared to traditional static forms.
Raising Questions about Faith and Technology	The integration of digital media prompts viewers to consider the relationship between technology and the sacred in the contemporary world.	- Laurie Lehtinen's distorted digital representation of the Virgin Mary raises questions about the impact of technology on faith and traditional religious iconography. - Digital art can explore themes of artificial intelligence and the future of religion, prompting viewers to contemplate the role of technology in shaping religious beliefs and practices.

Table 5(b): Thematic Analysis of Patterns in Effects on Religious Expression

Theme	Description	Examples
Enhancing Accessibility and Engagement	Digital media can potentially make religious art more accessible and engaging for a wider audience.	- Digital archives and online exhibitions can make a vast collection of religious art readily available to a global audience. - Interactive digital installations can create a more engaging and participatory experience for viewers compared to traditional static forms of religious art.

In Table 5, Two key themes emerge in how traditional and digital elements are combined: "Transformation and Reinterpretation" utilizes digital tools to manipulate and reimagine traditional elements, fostering new interpretations of religious themes and iconography. Additionally, "Hybridity and Merging Boundaries" blends traditional art forms with digital elements, blurring the lines between physical and virtual spaces, impacting how viewers experience the religious aspects of the artwork.

4. DISCUSSION

The case studies examined diverse media, from Bill Viola's video art manipulations to Sougwen Chung's integration of calligraphy with 3D animation. A prominent theme across these works is the concept of transformation and reinterpretation. Digital tools empower artists to manipulate and reimagine traditional elements, leading to fresh perspectives on religious themes and iconography. For instance, Laurie Lehtinen's "Mary in the Machine" utilizes algorithmic manipulation to challenge the traditional depiction of the Virgin Mary, prompting viewers to contemplate the role of faith in the digital age. Similarly, Bill Viola's video editing techniques in "Martyrs" transform a physical performance into a meditation on suffering and transcendence, blurring the lines between physical and spiritual realms. Another key theme is the hybridization of traditional and digital elements. This blending creates immersive environments that push the boundaries between physical and virtual spaces, impacting how viewers experience the religious aspects of the artwork. Sougwen Chung's "Bodhisattva in Data Stream" exemplifies this by merging traditional calligraphy, a practice imbued with spiritual significance, with 3D modeling and animation. This creates a dynamic environment that reimagines the concept of compassion for a digital age, suggesting its potential to exist even within the vast and interconnected digital world. The impact on religious expression also emerged as a significant area of exploration. Digital media can expand the expressive potential of religious art, allowing artists to explore a wider range of emotions, concepts, and experiences. Bill Viola's use of slow motion and layered soundscapes in "Martyrs" intensifies the emotional impact of the religious themes, while interactive digital installations can create a more

participatory and personal experience compared to traditional static forms. However, the analysis also revealed concerns about the potential impact of technology on religious tradition. Laurie Lehtinen's distorted digital representation of the Virgin Mary raises questions about the influence of technology on faith and traditional religious iconography. The field of religion and visual arts has witnessed a surge in interdisciplinary collaboration in recent years. This fruitful exchange is enriched by a "visual culture" approach, fostering partnerships between experts in imagery and religious studies (Hosseini, 2008). Such collaborations delve into a range of areas, including religious texts, rituals, mythology, and material culture. Visual communication studies have shed light on the emergence of new forms of religion through visual arts, highlighting the potential for art to influence faith itself (Arca, 2019). Researchers have even explored the integration of artistic perception and cognition into the analysis of Islamic religious art (Shaw, 2019). The scholarship extends beyond these core areas. Studies have examined the impact of the digital age on religious art (Ahyyar, 2019), investigated the complexities of artistic authenticity in religious live-streaming (Golan & Martini, 2019) and explored the potential of the metaverse for religious visual communication (Narin, 2021). Furthermore, scholars have delved into the dynamic intersection of religion, art, and popular culture, alongside the influence of media economics on religious practice (Günzel & Mersch, 2014; Molster, 2013). In contemporary culture, the conversation surrounding art and religion is being reframed through the lens of art and spirituality. This broader term encompasses religion while also acknowledging a more global and inclusive perspective. This shift is evident in the 2010 issue of *Frieze* magazine, which focused on "Religion and Spirituality" (Fox, 2010). Art critic Dan Fox highlights the resistance to the term "religious" in contemporary art circles, where terms like "spiritual," "transcendent," "meditative," and "sublime" are often favored. This, Fox argues, creates a false dichotomy – it's acceptable for art to be vaguely "spiritual," but not explicitly "religious," as if the former is somehow free from ideological influence (Fox, 2010). This renewed interest in the relationship between art and spirituality is reflected in a series of internationally renowned exhibitions (Arya, 2016). Examples include Maurice Tuchman's groundbreaking touring exhibition "The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985" (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986), "Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives" (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1996), and "Traces du Sacré" (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2008). The role of art in the modern world has been explored by various thinkers, highlighting its potential to fill a void left by traditional religion. In 1910, Max Weber argued that art could provide an alternative form of "this-worldly salvation" (*diesseitsgerichteten Erlösung*), offering an escape from the routine and pressures of modern life, particularly those associated with rationalization (Symonds, 2019). The contemporary art world offers

artists unprecedented freedom in exploring spirituality (Shah, 2023). Unlike the pre-modern era, where artistic expression was often constrained by specific iconography, designated settings, and even religious service, the present allows for a much wider range of possibilities. Today's artists can freely combine genres, materials, and forms, tackling subjects that span the globe. These themes can be pointedly relevant, addressing societal issues like the War on Terror, consumerism, or human rights. Alternatively, they can be more universal and timeless, exploring themes like the fragility of the human body. The expression of spiritual ideas is no longer confined to established religious or mythological symbols. Some artists draw explicitly from these traditions, while others embrace a more eclectic approach, incorporating elements from diverse sources, including personal beliefs, into a cohesive whole. Significantly, the most profound spiritual reflections are not always found in overtly religious art. Contemporary artists often find inspiration in the seemingly mundane – everyday objects, motifs, symbols, and metaphors. However, through artistic intervention, these ordinary elements are transformed. Video artist Bill Viola, for instance, frequently features everyday people, including himself, in installations and performances that transcend the commonplace, transporting viewers to realms beyond the ordinary. This exemplifies the power of art to evoke extraordinary experiences. Art historian Graham Howes underscores the non-specific, "amorphous and generic" nature of spirituality in contemporary art (Arya, 2017). Similarly, Rina Arya, in her work "Contemplating the Spiritual in the Visual Arts" (2011), highlights two crucial considerations in mapping the spiritual in art: context and receptivity (Arya, 2017). The placement and environment of an artwork significantly impact our interpretation. Lighting, spatial relationships, and the viewer's role all play a part in meaning-making. A shift in context can even alter our understanding of a work entirely. Receptivity, on the other hand, refers to the viewer's openness to emotional and other forms of engagement with the artwork. This often entails a willingness to invest time, focus, and a sense of allowing the artwork to unfold its meaning. A closed mind, both towards the specific piece and towards art in general, hinders the potential for spiritual experiences to arise. The study of religious visual art has undergone a significant transformation. Initially, the focus was on analyzing individual images, building a foundation for understanding their religious significance (Wuthnow, 2012). The rise of mass media and digital technologies further underscored the power of visual art in comprehending religious traditions, cultures, and discourses, both historically and in contemporary contexts (Silva, 2006). Hoover and Lundby exploration of how digital media shapes culture and religion paved the way for interdisciplinary research in religious studies (Hoover & Lundby, 1997). This shift led to a contemporary focus on the communicative aspects of religious visual art. Moving beyond simple image analysis, scholars now examine the messages conveyed and the processes of

communication between creators and viewers. This approach fosters a richer understanding of religious content by considering the cultural patterns created by visual media and the resulting connections between people and religious art forms. Unlike traditional art critique methods, this modern approach incorporates insights from anthropology, sociology, media studies, and communication studies (Morgan, 2020). This interdisciplinary perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between religion, visual art, and culture in the digital age.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, this analysis highlights the dynamic relationship between traditional and digital elements in religious art. Digital tools offer artists new avenues for interpreting and expressing religious themes, while also blurring the lines between physical and virtual experiences. While some concerns exist regarding the impact on tradition, the overall effect seems to be an expansion of expressive potential and audience engagement. Further research could delve deeper into audience perceptions of these works and explore the specific ways in which digital art can enrich and evolve religious expression in the contemporary world.

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