

ARTS

The influence of social media in art

How is the internet changing art? What about social media? A museum in the eastern German city of Leipzig explores the issue in an exhibition with a title that refers to a typical Instagram phrase — "Link in Bio."



Using social media has long become part of many artists' everyday lives, says curator Anika Meier at the Leipzig Fine Arts Museum. Social media have actually been part of their working lives for quite some time now — as is proven by the approximately 50 video installations, sculptures, photographs and paintings by 35 predominantly young artists at the Leipzig exhibition "Link in Bio."

What distinguishes all these works is that the visual art is in a place where the audience already frequent: primarily on Instagram. Using the good old website seems to have become a thing of the past.

Is it necessary to print out digital art to show visitors what young, online-influenced artists are up to? "We didn't do that," says Meier, pointing out that this wouldn't have been necessary because the works exhibited are as vivid as they are unusual.

The show kicks off with an internet-age exhibit that has already become obsolete by now: an original row of seats from a Berlin Internet caf



Oli Epp, Big Croc

The history of online art

Images flicker across a handful of screens, recalling the "speed shows" created by Aram Bartholl. The Berlin-based concept artist converted actual Internet cafés into galleries by using the computers for short-term exhibitions.

Bartholl's room installation reflects the history of net art, which existed even long before the internet became accessible to a mass audience.

The rise of social media, however, has dramatically boosted the number of viewers of digital art — not least thanks to the fact that nowadays everyone seems to own a smartphone with internet access.

Challenging the meaning behind symbols

The symbols of the internet age along with its modern consumer world counterparts provide a focus for Tom Galle's work. The Belgian artist bent the blue Facebook "F" into a crowbar, and added finger holes to McDonald's golden arches. Now the logo looks like brass knuckles.

Other artists examine the effects that the tendency that staging events in



Arvida Byström, Upskirt

social media has on users. Andy Picci from Paris, for instance, placed his smartphone on a pedestal, and whoever approaches it gets to see the artist on the display, dressed in black in a white room.

"I wanted to put my digital self in its own cage on my smartphone," Picci says.

He is one of a new generation of net artists embarking on a search for identity in the digital age. Some of them use augmented reality or artificial intelligence to test beauty ideals and challenge gender norm

Putting the 'art' in 'artificial intelligence'



Andy Kassier, Just Swinging

Thomas Webb is an artist who works with artificial intelligence to explore the boundaries of AI. He programmed computers to move smiley-faces with neutral expressions across a mirrored surface on the wall, and let them imitate viewers' facial expressions. The result, Webb says, is not a reflection of the viewers' emotions, but the superficial image created through AI - much like an emoji used in a message is not a reflection of the sender's true feelings. Not everything comes in a digital package at the Leipzig exhibition, however. Chris Drange from Hamburg took digital era motifs and approached them from a more visual arts-angle: he enlarged selfies from female members of the Kardashian clan, combined them with elements of classical painting, and had these images produced as oil paintings in China. Meanwhile Kristina Schuldt, a graduate of Neo Rauch's Leipzig master class, alludes to the Old Masters in her works — except for the fact that they're all holding smartphones in their hands.

The exhibition "Link in Bio" at the Museum of Fine Arts runs through March 15, 2020.

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