

performance

interactive

online

sound art

site-specific

reality

multimedia

Introduction

The arts in Australia are enjoying a rich and sustained period of experimentation and innovation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the excitement surrounding new media art as it realises the creative potential of digital technologies and brings together traditionally discrete artforms in new permutations. Digital and cross-artform practices intersect to produce intriguing hybrids, for example when live performers thousands of kilometres apart interact in a virtual space featuring text and animation. The result of this exploration is a body of groundbreaking, mature work and the potential for much more.

As well as bringing together artforms, cultures and media, Australia's new media artists are enjoying fruitful collaborations with industry, science and technology. They also provide some of the most potent commentary on the seductive delights, risks and ambiguities of the new technologies, particularly with regard to identity, surveillance and the environment.

For convenience, this guide treats the two principal dimensions of new media art separately, although there are inevitable overlaps. The term 'new media art' (sometimes called 'electronic' or, as in the essays in this guide, 'digital art') includes work that is often, though not always, screen-based and is experienced via computer, on CD-ROM or online, in galleries on screens and in installations, and is increasingly interactive.

Hybrid art (sometimes called multi-platform) combines artforms, most prominently in installation and in performance. The open-endedness of the visual arts installation has allowed sound art and video to generate new forms in galleries and public spaces. Performance variously brings together theatre, dance and opera, often in an amalgam of movement, installation, sound design and projection. Hybrid art is not contingent on digital technology but its multimedia inclinations have been greatly facilitated by it and some of the most interesting hybrid art in Australia tests and stretches its capacities.

The term 'new media art' thus encompasses digital art and hybrid art, a considerable range of works, forms and experiences. What unites them and keeps the word 'new' curiously current is a sense of adventure, of unfolding possibilities, both for artists and audiences. Art is now more ubiquitous than ever in Australia. There is a growing and pronounced continuum between the home computer and the art gallery, between the hybrids of popular culture and those of the world of art, and, given the accessibility of new media tools, between audience and artist. Australian artists, producers, curators, their supporters and audiences have embraced this shared adventure.

The works described in these pages are only a part of the story—the website address at the top of each page is the door to many more, readily available for international touring, exhibition and collaboration. This guide and the accompanying website entries celebrate the courage and inventiveness of the many Australian artists whose vision is taking them into new worlds. Join them on the journey.

Jennifer Bott
Chief Executive Officer
Australia Council