

SEVEN: a socially engaged digital media art installation

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Abstract—Seven is an Artefact that intends to explore the relationships between digital media art and social art. This paper aims to present the process and design of Artefact Seven. Seven uses varied techniques and materials, such as painting with acrylic and resin, LED strips, buzzers, motion sensors, printed and virtual text, augmented reality, 3D animation and an Arduino. Its ambition is to target the user's awareness by alerting him to various problems in the world and confronting him with his sins, and maybe this confrontation can make him contribute to these problems. Also, there is ludic content for younger participants to engage.

Keywords—Digital Media Art, Social Art, sin, social and cultural problems.

I. INTRODUCTION

Seven started closely observing Bosch's "The Seven Deadly Sins", Ca. 1500, and noticed how, somehow, it's still very pertinent. Some questions started to appear immediately: how to approach modern questions using the same basis, which languages /techniques /materials could be used to be more related to current times. After this initial approach, research was made about old and modern sins in art and interpretations by artists from different areas. Some initial finds took an important place in Seven were the Seven Modern Sins. They were relevant because they would bridge the social concern pursued by the author.

In the following chapter, the essential concepts of this article are discussed: DMA and Social Art. Succeeding, the artefact, the creation process, its components, and the interaction with the public are described. Lastly, final considerations are presented.

II. FRAMEWORK

A. Media Digital Art – brief considerations

Since the 1960s, we have witnessed an unprecedented development of media, from the digital revolution to the era of social media. The terminology for technological art forms is very diverse; Digital Media Art, Media Art, *Artemídia* (Brazil), New Media Art, Digital Art, Electronic Art (Austria), Computer Art, Multimedia Art and even Interactive Art are terms that started to be used from the sixties. Still, it was only in the nineties that they became more visible. The term adopted in this work is Digital Media Art because it is the closest to the Portuguese version (the author's native language) and is also a broad term. We can define DMA as encompassing.

[...] all forms of an aesthetic discourse that explores digital media and qualitative computational

means to build digital/computational artefacts that provide alternatives to the

communicational/informational phenomenon [1].

There are several movements – Dada, Pop Art, Fluxus, Kinetic Art, Minimalism, etc. – to which DMA owes its foundations. Just as Dadaism was, in part, a reaction to the industrialization of the weaponry of war and the mechanical reproduction of text and images, DMA can also be seen as a reaction to the information technology revolution and digitization [2]. Other concepts such as authorship, appropriation and even art were altered/introduced with Dadaism. For example, Duchamp's Fountain played an important role in scrutinizing these concepts. Appropriation practices used by Dadaists, from famous paintings such as the Mona Lisa to everyday objects [3] at DMA, are also quite common, perhaps due to the ease allowed by new technologies. This concept of appropriation is also common to Pop Art, and it can also be considered that, like Pop Art, many of DMA's works are related to commercial culture [2]. Many artists associated with Kinetic Art and Fluxus – such as Nam June Paik – were interested in exploring the relationships between media, society, and technology, often through installations and sculptures, involving audio-visual technologies, exploring, and contesting the power of the mass media. It is possible to recognize a continuation of this critical work in several DMA artists [4], mainly in the variants of Hacking, Tactical Media, and Cybernetic Art. The authors Tribe & Jana [2] also refer to Conceptual Art as a significant precursor of DMA, as it emphasized ideas and not the product, and conclude that DMA is by nature more conceptual. According to Chatzichristodoulou [5], Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook refer to the new media as more about the process than the object/product and the most relevant practices are less fixed, both in time and space as well as in terms of authorship. This implies that it is not primarily concerned with aesthetics, as other artistic practices might be, but with function.

Steve Dietz [5] identified three categories that characterize DMA: processes of interactivity, connectivity, and computability; Chatzichristodoulou [5] also adds participation. These processes prevail at DMA, not so much for the artistic or social intention, but the inherent potential of the media. The author thus suggests that DMA is not more concerned with the process than with the result, but with the process due to the media. Defending that the procedural quality of DMA is its potential for interaction, connectivity, and participation, which is particularly apt to invite various forms of user involvement actively. All these qualities can be used in designing a social work of art, as we will see in the next point.

B. Social Art and deceit

In its social (or relational) dimension, art intervenes with individuals, groups, or communities, at different symbolic and territorial scales in various spaces, in various forms of agency (awareness, participation, citizenship, sustainability), with the social objective of improving real situations of people, in contexts (political, economic, and cultural) of transgression, segregation, exclusion, ghettoization, stigmatization, discrimination, peripheralization, deprivation, degradation. [6]. Anne Pasternak [7] calls this art with social approaches of “relational aesthetics”, the art of social justice, social practice, happenings, interventions, or community art, also mentions that in recent years there has been an increase in the number of artists and artistic projects that intended to communicate with people. the public, engaging in a process that included “careful listening, thoughtful conversation, and community organizing”.

Another term - “socially involved art” - has also arisen, Frasz & Sidford [8] consider it is based on a belief in the responsibility of art and artists to affect social change or influence the world in some way, use tools and materials beyond those used in the studio and often operate outside of conventional commercial or non-profit presentation settings and formats. The socially engaged artist’s toolkit includes dialogue, community organizing, placemaking, facilitation, public awareness campaigns or policy development, as well as theatre games, art installations, music, participatory media, spoken word and other media; The creation process often involves artists working in collaboration with community members, other sectors, or other artists; the work may include subjects that address social, political, or economic issues, but are not mandatory.

C. DMA + Social Art

We can understand that DMA and Social Art share very important characteristics in their practices, such as participation and collaboration. In addition, some of DMA’s main characteristics can enhance participation and scope. Chatzichristodoulou [5] further explains that while DMA practices are not purposefully socially involved, many DMA practices offer:

[...] platforms for exchange and collaboration between users; bring communities together by facilitating networking and exchange; engage in political or activist practice through the use of the Internet, mobile and networking technologies and social media; provide media literacy and open software access and know-how, challenging capitalist platforms for ownership and ‘closed’ systems (e.g. open source artworks, art hacking workshops); or generate collaborative creativity through providing platforms for active collaboration and individual contributions (e.g. through community user-generated projects).

Although DMA is not properly socially involved, it is characterized by approaches and processes relevant to socially involved practices. Stuart Nolan [5] states that political participation and new media participation are closely related, while Carpenter [5] identifies several links between the terms “new media art” and “socially engaged art”.

III. THE SEVEN ARTEFACT

The artefact Seven explores the relationship between DMA and Social Art, using digital media art tools and transmitting a social message with interactivity. This social message aims to inform users of various current and global issues. The artefact is composed of different materials and techniques: the support used is acrylic for its transparency, thus allowing the material applied in the centre – the resin with pigment and acrylic paint – to look like it is fading, obtaining an ethereal atmosphere; around this support is a strip of LEDs responsible for giving colour to each of the panels – the seven visible colours of the solar spectrum; at the bottom of the support is a sensor allowing the activation of both the LEDs and the sound, this way, the LEDs and the sound are only triggered when the user is less than one meter from the panel. Also on the support part is an Arduino that guarantees this entire process of activating the LEDs and sound as well as its correct colour and musical note. Both the light from the LEDs and the sound contribute to a more immersive environment. The light from the LEDs also contributes to an ethereal atmosphere, and the sound is intended to cause some emotional discomfort. Underneath the painting is a label with the panel’s name – which is one of the original seven deadly sins. This label has a retro look antagonistic to most materials used. This type of antagonism or binomial is always present: good and evil, the new and the old, the traditional and the technological, the black and white of the painting and the colour of the LEDs; the circle and the rectangle, the organic and the inorganic, and so on. The user will have to install an application to view a short video in AR. Each video represents a mortal sin graphically; all videos were made in 3D animation and have a transparent background so that the panel is always present. In figure 1, you can see one of the panels and the label explaining how to install the application. At the end of each video appears the modern social sin equivalent to the old one.

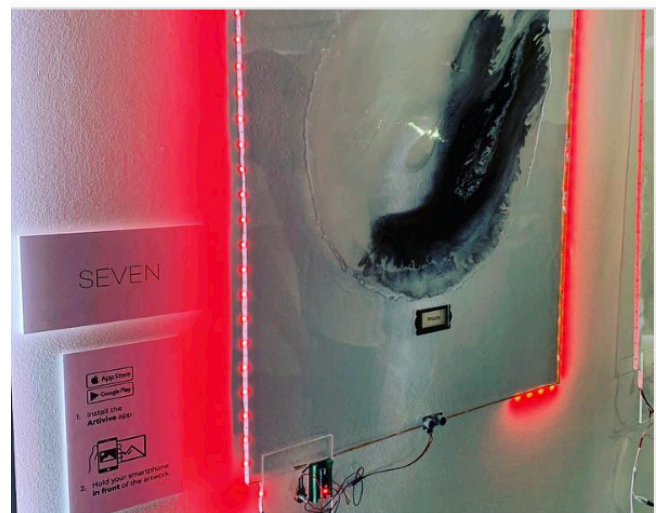


Fig. 1. Detail of a panel (exhibited at “Cartografias na cidade”, Quinta da Cruz, Viseu).

The associations between modern and ancient sins, colours and sounds can be consulted in table 1. And figure 2 demonstrates these associations with the visual composition present in the support center.

TABLE I. SYNS ASSOCIATIONS

Sin	Musical note	Colour	Modern sin
Wrath	DO	Red	Drug trafficking
Gluttony	RE	Orange	Violation of the fundamental rights of human nature
Greed	MI	Yellow	Creating poverty
Envy	FA	Green	Obscene wealth
Lust	SO	Blue	Immoral scientific experimentation
Sloth	LA	Indigo	Destroying the environment
Pride	TI	Violet	Genetic manipulation

Table 1 - Associations between modern and ancient sins, colours and sounds.



Fig. 2. Visual representation of the associations is described in table 1.

The user must complete the route in the order shown in table 1 and figure 2. Finally, after seeing all the panels, the last thing you will see will be a sentence – WHAT WAS YOUR SIN TODAY? – this sentence (in Figure 3) intends to end the journey by making the user analyse his conscience. A final period of reflection, where all your senses recover from the enormous stimulation they have been subjected to so far. This sentence should be seen in an empty, white area with low light and no noise. This calming of the senses will allow this moment of reflection. The English language is used so that the work can reach users of different nationalities. This search for a certain universality is present in other components, such as light and sound, as different users can access different aspects. It is not important that they capture them all. For example, a more visual user will probably direct their attention to paint and colour, while a user with a more trained ear will perceive different sounds. This feature also allows the artefact to be more accessible.

IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Seven seeks to convey a social message, but not only does it point the finger at the user, we are all part of this planet, and we are all to blame, but we can also change to contribute with small gestures. It is intended that the user thinks about his own mistakes and that, when thinking about them, he gains the will to act. Initially, the English language was used so that the work could reach a larger group of users. That language has been used in the two exhibitions held so far. However, it is considered the inclusion of two languages in the future, keeping to the English language for its scope, but the language of the country where the exhibition is held. This proposal is made because younger users, especially children, who were very curious when interacting with the exhibition, needed the support of an adult. This way, they will be more autonomous in visiting the artefact.

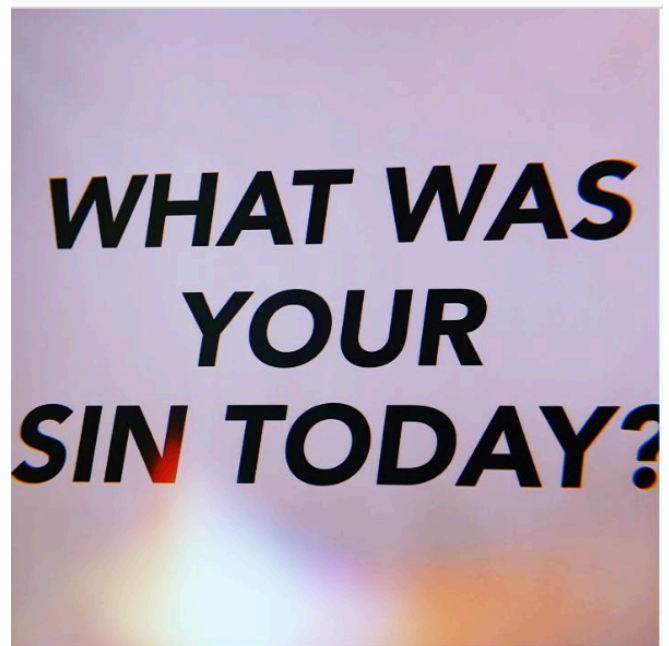


Fig. 3. Photograph of the final part of the exhibition “Cartografias na Cidade”, Quinta da Cruz, Viseu.

It is also necessary to improve the exhibition spaces, as adequate lighting conditions were not achieved in both exhibitions, which raised some problems viewing the videos through augmented reality. As far as space is concerned, it was also not possible to find a separate area for the final part – the reading of the sentence followed by the moment of reflection – it was only possible, in the second exhibition, that this final part was little distanced from the panels, not being able to avoid the lights and sounds of the same. A sufficient distance between panels was also not achieved, as seen in Figure 4. The space size does not allow each panel to have the necessary space to be engaged individually.

Fig. 4. Visitors at the exhibition “Cartografias na Cidade”, Quinta da Cruz, Viseu.



Finally, the need to install an application breaks the moment of enjoyment. It was possible to notice that many visitors chose not to do so for different reasons, some because they did not have adequate cell phones, others did not want to install it on their cell phone, sometimes the internet in the exhibition spaces had a slow connection, and the visitor did not want to wait. Other issues may arise, and one of the possibilities to mitigate these and other possible constraints would be the availability of tablets with the app already installed.

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