

# Is Digital Art Real Art?

by Kathryn Kloehn



## Soulmate

Jennifer Nguyen, Beloit  
STAMP

Digital art tends to get a bad rap. Confusion and misunderstanding about digital art cause many heated conversations around whether digital art is “real” art. Arguments against digital art usually center around the idea that it is a form of cheating or that it takes the art out of the work of real art.

Let’s start with the most common argument: The computer does all the work. Digital artists (and yes, I’m using the word artist) use software to aid their artistic endeavors, which has its advantages: you can correct mistakes quickly, your tools become infinite, there’s less mess, and you can make unlimited copies of your work. However, while the power of a computer program opens an arsenal of tools and potentially more accessible ways to experiment with art, it doesn’t do the work for you.

To be a good digital artist, you need to understand color, contrast, composition, form, balance, movement, perspective, light. These are the same fundamentals any “real” artist masters in the quest to become an artist. And now you’ll argue that lots of digital artists will start with a photograph to assist with some of these

fundamentals, then paint or create over the top of it. But let’s be honest, how many traditional artists out there use photo references to create their art?

Traditional artists spend countless hours mastering their craft, from learning how different paints flow on a canvas, holding their brush/charcoal/pencil the right way to achieve the perfect stroke, and blending their medium just right. In the same vein, digital artists spend countless hours learning and perfecting their use of their digital tools. Their mastery can be much more extensive because they have so many more tools and technology to learn. Imagine learning to use acrylics, oils, watercolors, charcoal, and pastel - at the same time. Digital artists have access to all of these, just in their digital form. They have the ability to use multiple tools, melding them together to create a work of art. Digital photographers use software to push effects beyond what they could do in the darkroom. Some digital artists paint, some collage, others sketch. The only genuine difference is that their canvas is a computer screen. And their medium is pixels.

Bryan Mullennix, photographer and digital artist, explains, “While digital art might be considered cheating by some artists, the truth is that to create a unique piece of art by digital means requires just as much thought, skill, and effort as traditional art. An artist’s tools must be learned and mastered regardless of the medium.”



**Ice Maiden Russian Fairy Tale**  
Mary Ann Roesler, La Crosse

So if you are wondering if digital art is “real” art, the answer is simple: Yes, it is. Art inspires us, and if computers empower new artists to explore and create art in increasingly innovative ways to share with the world, we should honor that.