Chapter XI
A Graphics Tablet as a Fine Art Tool

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ABSTRACT

People have used tools for artistic expression for millennia. Relatively recent is the use of digital technology to afford the creation of art. However, many draw into question digital technologies conduciveness to creativity during the artistic process. Recent developments of digital technology for artists have lead to the creation of a graphics tablet from Wacom Technologies. It is claimed that the graphics tablet is more favorable to creativity than other existing digital technologies. This chapter addresses this issue through a qualitative study of five artists using the Wacom graphics tablet, in particular the artist’s own experience using the graphics tablet is explored. The outcome of this study indicates that the graphics tablet is a useful tool. However, there are still several improvements required to advance the graphics tablet to a stage suitable for fine artists.

INTRODUCTION

Technology and art are no longer distinct entities (McCullough, 1998). There are two different although related perspectives when discussing technology and art. One is where the technology becomes embedded in the art itself. The other perspective is where the technology acts as a tool for creating art. The first perspective will be briefly outlined followed by a discussion on the second.

Technology based art allows users to have a more intimate and captivating artistic experience as their actions depict what happens in the piece. Pier & Goldberg (2005) explain how works of art that use technology as a means of joining the artist and the audience give life to the artist’s ideas. When technology becomes part of the art,
the user may enter the art piece so to speak, as the technology is the art. This is in contrast to the more traditional way of creating and presenting art, usually as static images viewed passively by people. Technology based art is increasingly geared towards interactivity and innovation in user interfaces (Edmonds et al, 2004). It is art that lives in a space; it appropriates the space to its own artistic ends. As argued by Bester (2003) the space itself and the artifacts that are enclosed within it are the work of art.

As such, computer technology has extended the concept of art and has provided new ways of knowing and judging art (Binkley et al, 1994). This topic will not be explored further here, where the focus is on information technology as a means to create the art, rather than applying technology as a delivery method.

The second perspective is where the technology acts as a tool. Tait (1998) comments on how artists since the beginning of time have struggled with tools, for example which colored mud would stick to the cave wall and keep its color. Fine artists spend countless time and energy making their tools an extension of themselves. Fine artists are those that have a need to express their vision or opinion through the form of a painting, a photograph, a print or sculpture (Tait, 1998). For instance, when learning to paint, artists will spend unlimited time adjusting to the brush, the feel of the paint, the techniques of painting, the feel of the canvas and in turn will master the art of painting. An important feature of any tool for artists is that it should provide the artist with the freedom of expression to create their works of art.

In conjunction with being a tool to support the activity of creating art, the tool can also influence the creative process itself. It is likely that information technology has a different influence on the artist’s activity than simple hand tools. Whale (2002) argues that “[...] there are more compelling reasons for using computers, arising from their ability to spawn genuinely new approaches to drawing and to contribute to our understanding of this most central of human activities.” (Whale, 2002, p.65)

COMPUTER SUPPORTED TOOLS FOR ART CREATION

The graphics tablet (by Wacom Technology Inc. n.d., Figure 1) is at the forefront of the movement towards computer supported fine art creation. It is one of the leading technological tools that enable the artist to create art. The graphics tablet has been designed with the artist in mind, and is mainly used by graphic designers, cartoonists, architects and artists. The tablet has a flat surface that allows the user to draw an image using a stylus pen similar to drawing on paper.

Through using this stylus pen (Figure 2) the artist can apply the effects of paint through the techniques of drawing. The stylus pen resembles a normal writing pen in shape, but is slightly different.

Figure 1. An artist using a Wacom graphics tablet
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