

THE DIGITAL ARTISTIC CYCLE IN PERFORMANCE ART EDUCATION

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Abstract. *This research explores student performance art events in the current digital era. Public performance presentations by art students after the performance art course are intended to complete an artistic cycle. The artistic cycle in the digital era is divided into studio-based practice (when performance is planned, often in students' home studios) and presentation in the digital space. For audience members, the experience of the performance artwork is significantly different in live and digital spaces since there is no possibility of touching the performer or items in the digital space. As a result, audience feedback for students differs greatly depending on whether the performance works are experienced live or virtually. Therefore, the present study suggests a new term of digital artistic cycle, which was developed after analysing a performance art course at Vilnius Academy of Arts, Kaunas Faculty in 2021. The data collected are the author's notes from her observations and interviews with the facilitator of the performance art course. The data are analysed using keywords and categories. The results generated recommendations for performance art course facilitators regarding what tools should be used to complete a digital artistic cycle at universities and art academies.*

Keywords: *art academy education, digital artistic cycle, Lithuania, performance art, Vilnius Academy of Arts.*

Introduction

This study explores the impact of performance art events on education at an art academy and the shift to conducting these events digitally in line with COVID-19 restrictions. The case observed in this study is the performance art course at the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius Academy of Arts for fourth-year BA painting department students, facilitated by artist Vaida Tamoševičiūtė. The facilitator needed to quickly reshape the format of the course into the digital format. The course contained an introduction to performance media, as well as development and presentation of the individual works by the students. This impacted both the content of the student's artwork and the contact with the audience and the feedback received. Regarding performance art as live media, the shift to digital art had a significant impact, which is also reflected in the ways the performance was approached by the students. The research question answered by this study was as follows: How does the artistic cycle developed for this performance art course at the art academy—during this specific time of COVID-19—differ from earlier variants of the course?

The aim of this study is to uncover the components of the artistic cycle and specify them within the context of performance art education at the Vilnius Academy of Arts, Kaunas Faculty (considering the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic) by determining the main tools used within such a cycle, which differ from those used for the live course. This aim is achieved through the following objectives: (i) to conduct a thematic literature review regarding the main keywords ‘artistic cycle’ and ‘performance’ and specify these keywords in the context of digitality and art academy education; (ii) to analyse the interview with the facilitator of the performance art course (utilised as the case-study), along with the observation notes of the author in regards to the student performance art show as the result of the course; and (iii) to define and propose the meaning of the term *digital artistic cycle* based on the analysed literature and the collected data and describe the main tools within the cycle.

This article contains four parts. The first part is the thematic literature review, which presents an outline of the main terms within the researched area. The second part describes the method, including the research tools and the procedures for data collection and analysis. The third part presents the research results in the form of recommendations regarding which tools performance art course facilitators should utilise to complete the digital artistic cycle. The fourth part concludes the study.

Literature review

This term *artistic cycle* is defined by David Burton—an art critic and scholar working with the theme of art education—as the completion of the studio-based process and, during the presentation, the accumulation of ideas for new studio-based works (Burton, 2006). The artistic cycle has often been divided into two phases. Studio-based practice was the first phase; the showcasing of the artwork (with the specific aim of meeting with the audience) was the second phase. In this case the first phase was relegated to private homes and the second phase could not include direct meetings with the audience.

While developing an exhibition within the artistic cycle, the steps of preparation are similar whether the exhibition is presented in the digital space or a live exhibition space. In any event, the audience’s experience of the artwork is significantly different depending on whether the artwork is presented digitally or live—in the digital space, the spectators are bound to the two senses, as they can only see and hear the components of the artwork (Lepouras, Katifori, Vassilakis, & Charitos, 2004) while they are detached from their other senses, such as smell or touch. This leads to the remark that the feedback from viewers on the artwork may be quite different depending on whether a piece of art was encountered live or in the digital space. Therefore, the author suggests specifying a new narrower term of *artistic cycle*, namely the *digital artistic cycle*.

The artistic cycle is specified regarding the art academy education and performance in particular. Here, performance is explained as the art media containing the body, time, space, and audience (Schechner, 1977). Performance is described by Schechner (2013) as the restoration of behaviour, where each performance is unique and their differences emphasise the personal choices made by the performance artists, a variety of cultural patterns and pluralities of the perceptions. Therefore, performance artwork depends on the meeting point with the audience (Griniuk, 2021), as perception is the core carrier of performance artwork, which can also be interpreted as a performance loop (Fischer-Lichte, 2008) involving an artist and an audience.

Method

The research method here is arts-based research (ABR), as the performance art course dealt with performance art production and artefacts in the form of videos in the digital space for the students' performances. ABR takes a qualitative approach (Eisner, 1997), as data collection is centred around artistic production (Leavy, 2018). In this case the data contains the photo material of the images from the exhibition, the researcher's notes, and an interview with the facilitator of the performance art course. The analysis method is general inductive analysis, where the keywords, concepts and themes were identified from the photo and video material, the researcher's notes and the interview with the facilitator. "Inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher." (Thomas, 2006, p.238). The following procedure was used for the data analysis: grouping the raw data into the two categories: text and narrative based data and visual data; extracting keywords and concepts from the text-based data and from the visual data, guided by the objectives of the research; analysing the keywords and developing a summary based on them. The research is conducted according to ethical research regulations. The images of the performances are included with the written permission of the authors.

Case

The case of this study is a performance art course developed by Vaida Tamoševičiūtė at the Vilnius Academy of Arts, Kaunas Faculty, (painting department). In fall 2020, the course started with theoretical introduction and exercises within performance art, which could be conducted live; however, the COVID-19 pandemic caused restrictions. Therefore, in November 2020, the course was moved completely online, where the students' performances, presentations, and evaluations happened completely digitally. The course

facilitator commented that it was important that the first part of the course was still possible to realise in a live space, as enrolment in the field of performance art depends on the dynamics of the group participants in a physical environment. Thus, if everything had been completely digital, it would have posed a greater challenge, both for the facilitator and the students.

“I have been preparing for each lecture specifically,” Vaida Tamoševičiūtė said, addressing how she prepared the material, although the course has been taught for the last five years in the painting department. This seems to have made it easier for the facilitator to shift to a digital teaching space, as, over the last several years, the facilitator had learned the routine of reshaping and adapting the lecture material to align it with the circumstances and interests of the group. Further, Tamoševičiūtė explains that in the digital environment, it was challenging to have all students have their cameras turned on due to a variety of technical and personal issues. Therefore, in these cases, the senses within the teaching and learning environment were restricted to listening and speaking only. The results of the course were defined by the facilitator to be in the video format.

The fourth-year BA students—the participants of the course—developed their individual works, which were filmed and delivered for evaluation as video- and sound-recorded performances. After the students’ performances were evaluated by the facilitator, they were presented at Gallery Meno Parkas in Kaunas, Lithuania, on 19-21 March, as a part of the large-scale event “Happiness=Creativity/The Day of Happiness 2021” (translated into English from Lithuanian), where the performances were showcased on TV screens mounted on the windows of the gallery. This made it possible for passers-by to encounter the students’ digital performance artworks. In the students’ event concept description, it is stated that the performances by the students were created without thinking about the viewer in the physical space but rather the viewer on the other side of the screen¹.

Tamoševičiūtė underlined that there was a noticeable difference in how the performances were developed compared to her previous years with other groups of students within the course. In the development of performances for the viewer through the screen, the domestic environment and items seemed to be dominant, even though the thematic scope of the works was broad. Also, the number of viewers was significantly larger than it had been in the live performance spaces, although it is impossible to know exactly how many viewers there were. The performances on the screens in the Gallery Meno Parkas windows exhibited during the three days were an encounter for invited viewers as well as random viewers who passed by without knowing the event was happening. The feedback from the viewers to the students was not immediately available; instead, the

¹ Description of the exhibition (<https://stayhappening.com/e/laim%C4%97--k%C5%ABryba-%7C-laim%C4%97s-diena-2021-E2ISTIBK56J>)

students would receive feedback on a durational basis from viewers via, for example, social media.

The examples of the students' artworks are as follows: the performance by Ieva Bartuškaitė "ART IS A DIRTY JOB..." (see Fig. 1 and 2), where she thematically comments on her relationship with the media of painting, which had been her artistic expression for the last fourteen years. She addresses how the movement, the way paint is applied, and the surface are of great importance, as they make the profession of the painter as an artist and the painter as a construction worker similar. Her choice of applying the colour pink during the performance communicates the condition of joy. The action takes place in a basement room, which she changes the mood of by applying the pink colour to comment on the current lockdown situation and the action of painting as a tool for generating happiness.

The other performance is Lilija Gotautaitė's "Life's a drag" (see Fig. 3), where she stresses the theme of LGBTQ+ and bodily expression through different colours. The performance embraces several key points, such as courage and the emotional state of comfort in being true to oneself. The domestic environment of the performance takes the key role and for the viewer unfolds the narrative, created by the performer, embodying the action of applying make-up. The site of this performance, containing a lamp and a sofa, together with the mild warm light in the room, comments on the comfortable space.

These two performances exemplify the connectedness of the students to the thematic frame of colours as signifiers of the statements expressed by their artwork. The tools and materials that they used were available at their homes. These two examples were chosen due to the reason that Tamoševičiūtė emphasised them as examples in the interview. This gave an opportunity for a brief discussion about these two artworks. Further, the author contacted Bartuškaitė and Gotautaitė with follow-up questions about their performances and a request for permission to use their images in the article.



Figure 1 and 2 Ieva Bartuškaitė's "ART IS A DIRTY JOB...". Photo 1. Photo by Vaida Tamoševičiūtė; Photo 2. Still image from the video by Ieva Bartuškaitė

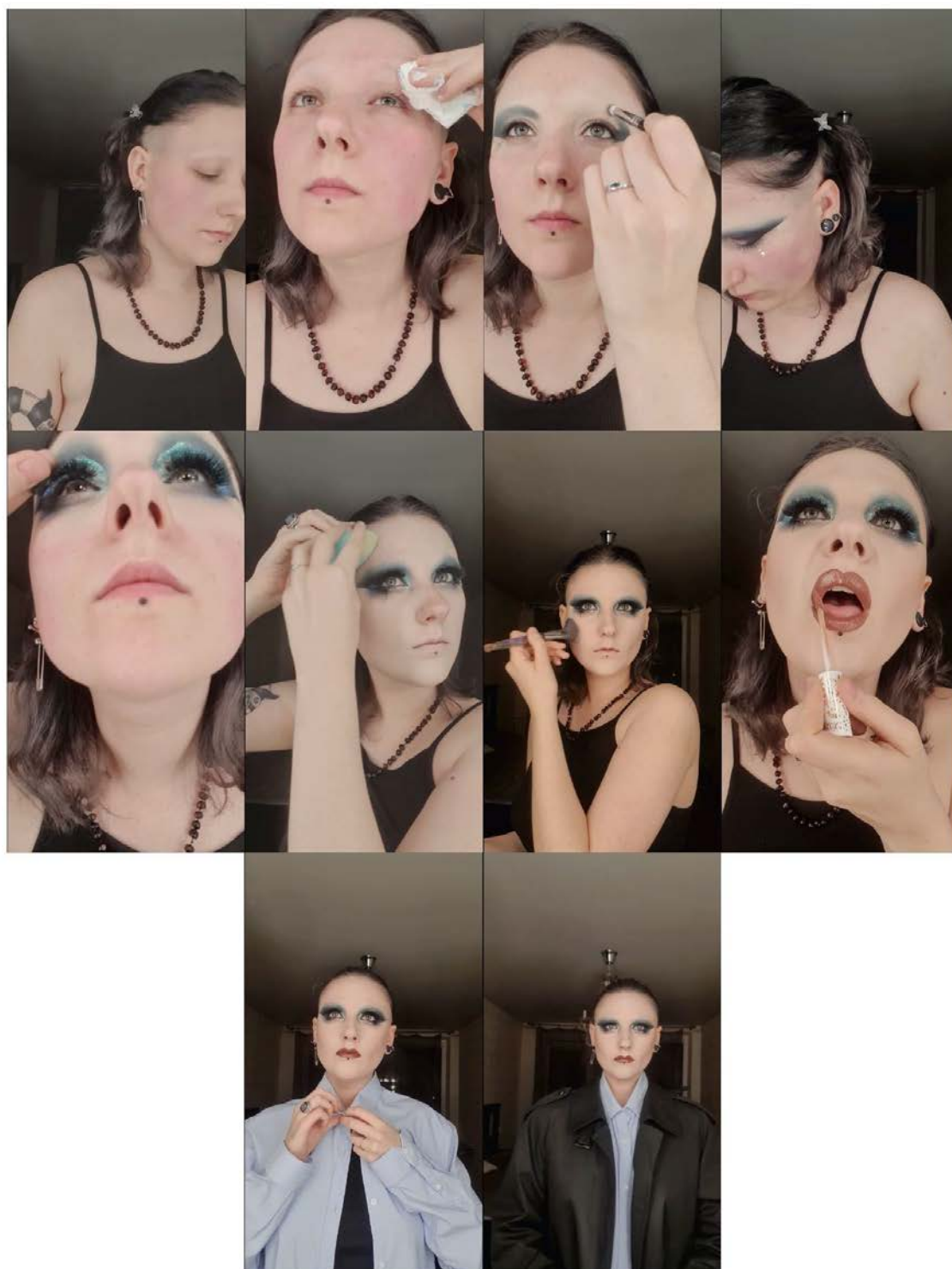


Image 3. Liliya Gotautaitė's "Life's a drag". Still images from the video by Liliya Gotautaitė

Research results

I suggest that the performance course was developed within the digital artistic cycle, during which the students developed their artistic ideas, realised the performances and provided them for evaluation by the course facilitator and later by the audience; all of these processes occurred online. Before the digital artistic cycle began, the students had live sessions where they did some performance exercises in a group. It is interpreted that the development of the individual works started after the students had completed the group exercises. Therefore, all the processes, from generating ideas to their realisation and feedback on the works, are discussed here as completed digitally. Within the digital artistic cycle, three main tools were extracted: connectedness of learning to the milieu, widening the audience, and the durational feedback loop.

The connectedness of learning to the milieu: Learning is bound to the milieu and the circumstances of the study situation (Falk & Dierking, 2000). As such, the students learned to dive into their domestic environment as a source of inspiration and as the site for their performances, which further expanded into the collaborative preparation for the exhibition and completion of the artistic cycle within the performance course. It is exemplified by each student's approach, through the individually chosen theme and the surroundings of the students' performances, that students were bound to their home-studios environments, which limited what materials and sites they could use. Also, performing for the viewer on the other side of the screen stresses how to present this site, body, and involved materials. So the aspect of presentation and framing becomes of great importance. The video of the performance can be interpreted as the story of the story, the translation of the media into another media, a video of the performance that is presented as a performance. So, the learning, bound to the circumstances, revolves around the perfection of the tools used to frame the live action as performed for the camera into the video.

Widening the audience: The previous performance art course, including a live event as the result of the student's work, happened over one day during which visitors were invited to the gallery space. This restricted the number of viewers, most of whom were likely familiar with the students' work. In the digital artistic cycle facilitated by Tamoševičiūtė, along with the course evaluation procedure containing a limited number of viewers, the performance artwork became part of the exhibition at the Gallery Meno Parkas, which expanded the number of (incidental) viewers significantly, as the artwork was available to all who passed by the gallery windows during the three days of the event.

Durational feedback loop: When the digital artistic cycle combines performance art students and the digital space, the performance loop gains a rather specific context, as feedback is gained over a long period during which the audience encounters the performance artwork, presented as a video. This feedback

cannot impact the performance in real time (as could happen in the live space) because the artwork itself is completed and presented digitally. This situation can impact only future performances by the students. Therefore, feedback in the digital artistic cycle is more segmented and oriented towards further artistic work.

These three main points make the digital artistic cycle different from the artistic cycle in the live version of the performance art course facilitated by Tamoševičiūtė. These points might also be interpreted as beneficial to the learning process, as the site and tools of performance artwork were restricted by the circumstances, thus enhancing the scope of students' creative takes on the themes they chose. Moreover, the encounter with a larger audience might generate broader feedback to the students, especially if the platform for such feedback can be incorporated into the exhibition—for example, in the format of an online questionnaire, digital interactions or a dialogue-based game—that the viewer could engage in using a link after seeing a performance. Although feedback from the audience cannot in the present case directly impact the current work, it can give students new ideas and perspectives for upcoming projects. In the digital artistic cycle, feedback is bound to the experience of the viewer; one cannot know how a similar live performance would have been experienced.

Conclusions

This study explored the key differences between the term *artistic cycle* and the proposed new term (*digital artistic cycle*) among BA students in the course of performance art at the Kaunas Faculty of Vilnius Academy of Arts by artist Vaida Tamoševičiūtė. The three main tools that relate specifically to the digital artistic cycle within the performance art course that served as the case for this study and that can be interpreted as beneficial to the learning outcomes are as follows: connectedness of learning to the milieu, widening the audience and the durational feedback loop. Students' learning outcomes are bound to the experience in the digital format of the performance production and presentation; the feedback given to students by the audience would have differed in a live performance context. The digital artistic cycle and the tools within it could be considered in further investigations and in the development of performance art courses in universities and art academies. The digital artistic cycle could also be applied to professional art, where the studio-based practice, be it digital art or physical art objects, are showcased virtually. Digital artistic cycle could be examined/researched with regards to the prevalence of video documentation in performance and mediatization theory.

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