Essentially, Pixel art is a form of art that can create a larger image from smaller details. The art form was born in the 1970s, which was when computers and digital art started to gain a large prevalence in the media, and as the name suggests, it is based on pixels. For people knowledgeable with the term, but unfamiliar with characteristics, a pixel is essentially a cell in a living organism - it is the smallest and least complex part of a digital image, hence the name of pixel, picture + element. As modern technology is more common amongst the general public, pixel art lost its large fanbase, mostly due to the rise of consoles and gaming. However, contrary to popular belief, it did not “die out”. Before we explore its presence in the world today, let’s go back in time to take a look at the exciting evolution of pixel art through one of its largest representations. Video games.

In the technical world, the action of creating or modifying a pixel art character or object for a video game is usually referred to as spriting. The term arose from the hobbyist community. The term most likely was created from the word “sprite”, which is a term that is used in computer graphics and gaming to describe a 2D image that is used in unison with other images to create a bigger scene.The phrase “pixel art” was coined by Adele Goldberg and Robert Flegal in 1982. They both worked at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center. The actual concept of pixel art goes back about 11 years before the coining of the name. For example in Richard Shoup's SuperPaint system in 1972, which was also created at Xerox PARC.

Pixel art is a type of art that can be created digitally through the use of software which allows the editing of images on the pixel level. The aesthetic of this style of graphic comes from old 8 and 16 bit devices. In most pixel art creations, the colour palette that is used is extremely limited in size, with some pixel art creations using only two colors. This is usually due to the limited colour spaces that these 8 and 16 bit devices could handle. Some of the earliest counterparts of contemporary pixel art can be found in the electronic displays of New York City during the early 20th century. These advertising displays are made of simple monochromatic light bulb matrix displays which were created from around the time period of 1937. Pixel art as it is known today largely originates from old video games such as Space Invaders and Pac-Man, as well as 8-bit consoles such as Nintendo’s Entertainment Systems.

Some more traditional art forms, such as counted-thread embroidery such as cross stitch and some kinds of mosaic are very similar to pixel art. These art forms create pictures out of a small amount of coloured units which is similar to the pixels of modern digital computing. A similar concept on a much bigger scale can be seen in the North Korean Arirang Festival. Early video games were in a lower resolution than what we are used to in the modern days. Not the “UHD” you could find on your television. It was impossible to hide the tiny rectangles that ultimately formed the worlds of the games you would play, so pixel art arose, since it really was needed.. The artists making video games in the 1970s and 1980s had to innovate and compress their images down to their essence. A few red pixels would have to suggest Mario’s hat, and a few more would have to be understood as his hands or face.

In the 16-bit era, known to us as the 1990s, pixel art became much more detailed but the

idea remained the same. Artists had a bigger canvas to work with, but they were still working with small, individual pixels — each and every single one of them playing an important role in creating the overall image. Even in music, pixelation plays an essential part. Quebec based band “Les Colocs” and Michel Gondry used pixelation in many of their music videos. Additionally, "Leave Me Alone" by Michael Jackson uses a large variety of this technique by slowing down the frame rate of video (which is how many individual pictures are shown to the eye per second), and overlapping objects to achieve the distinctive pixilation look to great effect.