

# New Media

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

Art can be created from many things. New media is a growing form of artistic expression that utilizes technologies that we now have available to us. In this lesson, you will learn:

1. [What Is New Media?](#)
2. [Expanding the Definition of New Media](#)

## 1. What Is New Media?

**New media** is usually defined as a genre of art that incorporates the use of technology, such as computers, robots, video, fax machines, or the internet. However, as this definition has existed for several decades, it has changed and become more inclusive. Some scholars argue that all artistic media was at some point new media. The first time someone made a cave painting, it was new media. Thinking about more recent developments, photography and printmaking are both art forms that have involved the use of technology and could be considered new media, especially during the time periods in which they developed.

In the past 10 years or so, scholars have developed a revised definition of new media, one that is more inclusive and emphasizes its opposition to more traditional ways of defining art. If we define art as a singular object produced by one person (remembering the lessons about defining the artist and the work of art), new media involves art that is more democratic, more available to a wider number of people. It may have been produced by a group of people and not take any physical form. It could consist of a computer program or NFT. Booklets produced using photocopiers, also known as 'zines, are also forms of new media. Older forms of new media might include video art, fax art, and computer printouts.

Below is a still, or photograph, taken from the video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* by Martha Rosler. This video is a parody of cooking shows and involves a woman demonstrating strange, violent, and useless actions for various kitchen utensils. It critiques the traditional connection of women with domesticity and work in the kitchen.



**Martha Rosler (1943 - )**

*Semiotics of the Kitchen, screenshot*

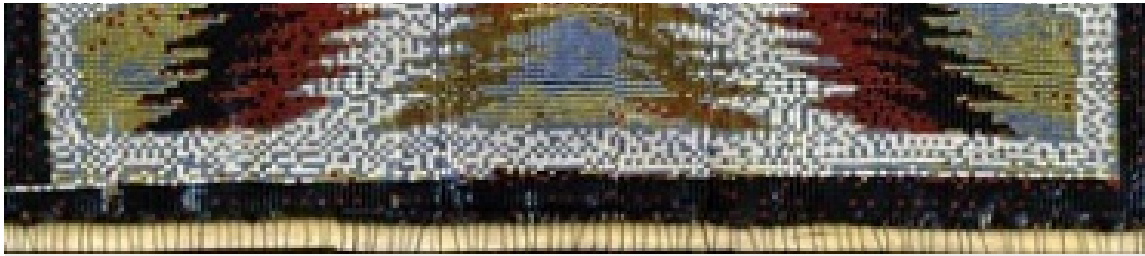
Washington, DC, USA

**1975**

Single-channel video, black and white, sound

Some examples of new media art combine traditional artistic media with more recent technology. Diné (Navajo) artist William Ray Wilson's work *eyeDazzler: Trans-customary Portal to Another Dimension* consists of a beadwork replica of a woven rug with QR codes embedded in the design. Scanning the codes, which Wilson refers to as portals to other dimensions, provides links to a short video of the artist's mother discussing how she made the original rug that was the inspiration for the work. This project involved the collaboration of many people who participated in different stages of production, working against the idea of the artist as a solitary genius.





William Ray Wilson (1969 - )

*eyeDazzler: Trans-customary Portal to Another Dimension*

Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

2011

Diné woven rug and QR code



William Ray Wilson (1969 - )

*Insurgent Hopi Maiden from the Talking Tintypes series in Wilson's Critical Indigenous Photography Exchange (CIPX) project*

Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

2015

In Wilson's *Talking Tintypes* series, the artist offers portraits of indigenous people that resemble the famous portraits of photographer Edward Curtis. Tintype was a photographic medium common during the 19th century

that involved producing a single image on a thin metal plate. In the past 10 years, it has become popular among photographers who want to produce images with more depth and complexity than digital photography. Viewers can download an augmented reality app that allows them to scan the images. When they do this, the images "talk" back to them, creating an exchange between the viewer, the subject, and the artist. This approach to photography counters the idea that the people depicted in photographs were passive recipients of the photographer's, and viewer's, intrusive gaze.



#### BIG IDEA

Older definitions of new media emphasized the use of technology, and in particular, digital technology. Newer definitions are more inclusive and view new media as a more democratic, interactive, technologically based approach that expands on and at times opposes more traditional ways of understanding art.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### New Media

Art that involves the use of technology, particularly digital technologies; also, art that critiques or opens up older, more traditional artistic media and definitions of art and the artist.

## 2. Expanding the Definition of New Media

New media is a genre of art that has been notoriously difficult to define. It involves the idea of producing art through the use of technology.

- But how should we define this technology, and how far back should we push this definition?
- A computer program might be easily understood as new media, but what about an example of fax art?
- If we define new media strictly according to the use of technology, then wouldn't prints also be considered new media, even though printmaking technology is close to 1,000 years old?

These questions have caused scholars and new media artists to expand the definition of new media.

#### IN CONTEXT

**Fluxus** was an international movement that took place during the 1960s and 1970s. It involved the creation of games, instructions, and other objects that initiated interaction with the viewer that was often nonsensical. One project included in the *Flux Year Box 2* asked viewers to recognize different colors printed on sheets of paper by touching them and not looking at them. Fluxus incorporated elements of mail art, which created artistic networks before the internet existed, and video art.

The work below is the *Flux Year Box 2*. It consists of a wooden box, designed by artist George Maciunas and filled with smaller objects that viewers can interact with. Different artists created these objects, which were then assembled in the box. They include Fluxfilms (loose strips of film and a crank used to view them), seeds that one can use to grow flowers and make a bouquet, Flux Medicine, a book of matches that one can use to "destroy all art," postcards, and small sheets of paper with different colors printed on them. These were not meant to just be viewed, but also interacted with.



The idea of art resided not in the object, but rather in the action that the object caused to happen.

Fluxus was an international artistic movement that included artists from Japan, South Korea, multiple countries in Europe, and the United States. It was an important precursor to new media because the ideas of opposing traditional artistic media and using art to create networks (in the decades prior to the popularization of the internet) were of central importance.

- Would you consider this Flux Box an example of new media?
- Why or why not?



Various artists, designed and edited by George Maciunas (1931–1978)

*Flux Year Box 2*

## North America, USA

Assembled c. 1966

## Multimedia

## IN CONTEXT

**Afrofuturism** is an aesthetic that links the cultures of the African diaspora (people of African descent living outside of Africa) to science and technology. Musicians Missy Elliott, FKA Twigs, and Herbie

Hancock are examples of Afrofuturism, as is the movie and comic *Black Panther*. The artist Nick Cave produces soundsuits that incorporate materials, including found objects, that make sounds when the wearer moves in them. These suits have been documented through video art, performance, and photography.

Black Quantum Futurism is an Afrofuturist collaborative project organized by the artists Camae Ayewa and Rasheedah Phillips. It involves the creation of multidisciplinary and multimedia projects in marginalized neighborhoods that explore consciousness, time and space, quantum physics, and many other themes with the goal of helping these communities heal and imagine new, improved futures. The project FUTURES LAB.COMMUNITY was a pop-up space in the neighborhood of Sharswood in 2017 where people could record oral histories, view 'zines and other resources, create time capsules, and display and create works of art and futures. This project addressed gentrification, redevelopment, and poverty in North Philly. The idea was not to create artists, but rather a space where people could work together to develop new solutions to old problems.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Fluxus

A movement that took place during the 1960s and 1970s and involved the use of instructions, games, and other objects to activate participation in the viewer.

##### Afrofuturism

An aesthetic that links the cultures of the African diaspora (people of African descent living outside of Africa) to science and technology.



#### SUMMARY

**What is new media?** In this lesson you learned that new media is a growing form of artistic expression that involves the use of technology. It has only been around for about a decade, but it is fast becoming a dominant form of art. Computer art that includes video games and biotechnology, as well as video art which uses moving images, are types of new media that **expand the definition of new media**.

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY IAN MCCONNELL AND ERIN ALDANA FOR SOPHIA LEARNING. PLEASE SEE OUR [TERMS OF USE](#).



#### ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Semiotics of the Kitchen screenshot](#) | Author: Martha Rosler | License: Fair use





## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Computer Art**

Any type of art in which computers play a role in creation or display.

### **New Media**

Art that involves the use of technology, particularly that which uses digital technologies.

### **Video Art**

A type of art that uses moving images. Video art could involve the use of a wide variety of technologies, from Super-8 to VHS to digital video, and is often shown in museums and galleries in the form of a video installation.