

# Digital Painting

By Tina Sauerlaender

Painting is almost as old as mankind itself. The cave paintings of La Pasiega in northern Spain or Lascaux in France are records of our existence, likely painted on stone walls in the light of fire. The Allegory of the Cave by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato tells us that the world as we know it is only an illusionary reality like a shadow on a wall. The same applies to painting, a medium which artists use to create illusionistic spaces on two-dimensional surfaces.

In the digital age, painting enters three-dimensional space. By utilizing virtual reality glasses and controllers, it is possible to paint in virtual space with the help of applications such as Google Tilt Brush, Masterpiece VR or Colory VR. This is how it works: Your virtual self stands in the middle of an empty room with the VR glasses covering your eyes, and move the controllers around your body. Through your movements you draw spatial brushstrokes. Digital painting therefore takes place in space and not on a surface. All kinds of brushes, colors, surfaces, and animations are available for use. For example, a waterfall can be created with a single brushstroke. The dimensions of the painted shapes can be easily scaled, by making them larger or smaller. Viewers can experience these works in several ways. For example, they can immerse themselves through the use of VR glasses or view them from the outside via three-dimensional tracking shots on a large screen.

Polish-American artist Olek uses this type of three-dimensional painting to recreate reality with crochet textures. Before discovering virtual reality as an artistic medium, they covered people and objects with crochet. They used items such as bicycles, trains, construction cranes, as well as the *Charging Bull* sculpture on New York's Wall Street. Using VR glasses and controllers, they later began mimicking crochet movements and transferring their stitch structures from the physical environment to the virtual one. They virtual crochet structures then transform into abstract sculptural landscapes. In this way, Olek links physical and virtual environments, sending viewers on a journey through their crocheted worlds.

The artist's digital painting is not about mimicking traditional techniques used in oil or watercolor painting and transferring them to virtual reality. Instead, their work is about the execution and representation of the act of painting itself. The trace of movement, which goes beyond the purely gestural, allows painting to become a physical-performative act. With their concept, Olek joins an international VR art scene that creates painterly works in the virtual environment. This includes Munich-based artist Tamiko Thiel or Israeli artist Ora Ruven, who, like Olek, work with Google Tilt Brush.

In the digital age, painting has once again evolved, as it has done so many times in its history. During the Renaissance, the invention of central perspective helped paintings become more accurate and illusionary because architecture could be rendered with the appropriate foreshortening of perspective. In the 19th century, the invention of tube paints was responsible for the fact that painters no longer worked in the studio, but outside in nature. This development is considered the birth of Impressionism. Thanks to virtual reality, artists today are able to paint their pictures not on the canvas, but *in* it. They no longer create a two-dimensional illusion on a surface, but a new space, a virtual reality. With regard to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, the question arises again as to which reality is the truly real one. Is it the one which is illuminated by the sun or the one in the light of the VR glasses? For our perception, it is probably both. The digital and the physical worlds are becoming more and more interwoven, just like the meshes in Olek's artworks.