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**THE DIGITAL WORKS OF SHEILA ELIAS**



Hundreds of years from now, when historians study and contextualize the current epoch, it will undoubtedly be said that our age represents a particularly liminal moment for the art world. Evolutions in medium and style that once took decades, centuries, even millennia, have been occurring at a whirlwind pace. The advent of technology and its subsequent overlap with the art world has been met with widely polarized opinions, though its impact has been undeniable — and irrevocable. Some have embraced the broad potential for a new way of working; some traditionalists have shunned the idea of marrying technology with art, dismissing its usage as niche at best.

Perhaps the most interesting contingent of artists working within this sphere are those who honed their craft before the digital age. Their skillsets were born of a more hands-on time, and yet their willingness to adapt and explore has allowed for unique perspectives, resulting in work that dances between the worlds of tradition and postmodernity.

Sheila Elias is one such artist. Born in Chicago, she graduated from the city's prestigious Art Institute and began exhibiting in the early 1980s. Working in photography, sculpture, and paintings, the artist operated in the blurred line between fine art and activism. Her work has often been a reflection of her environments, both physically and socially. "My work is about the layers of life and art history, seeking in it a connection between art aesthetics and social consciousness," she explains in her artist statement. "American sensibilities have influenced my life, the hues of my country found in the colours of my art. I like to bring an awareness of new directions and individual inventiveness."

Currently based in Miami, Elias describes her city as one in which a rich multicultural history often clashes with the future. Her work explores the contradictions therein — the urban tension and the beauty, the vulnerability of the human spirit and the harsh realities of a harsh world.

Perhaps it's this constant appreciation for dichotomies and change (Elias is also an art historian, which no doubt lends plenty of

perspective on the bigger picture) that led the artist to embrace technological tools so seamlessly.

"The evolution of technology has always paralleled my work throughout its development," she continues. "From the original copy machine to today's iPad, the influence of electronics permeates my process. Through life experience, I incorporate visual, emotional, and psychological impressions and feed them into my art."

According to press materials for her most recent exhibition, Elias turned to the digital sphere for practical reasons; tired of transporting her abundance of art supplies between Miami and New York, she purchased her first iPad in 2010 and began using it as a temporary sketch pad. However, she quickly realized the untapped potential the digital world held for her.

Delving into the artist's earliest paintings in the late 1960s-1970s, long before the days of iPads and iPhones, one can see how her eye might lend itself well to a more digital format. In one of her earliest collections, "Supermarket Circus," colour blocks and basic geometric shapes prevail. Her style throughout the years evolved greatly, with hints of expressionism and pop art. By 1987, the year her work was featured at the Louvre as part of an exhibit on the Statue of Liberty, her paintings seemingly veered into the world of cubism. Her digital art, then, feels like a return to early form.

Flash forward to 2018, when Elias' most recent exhibition was shown at the Lowe Art Museum in Coral Gables, Florida. Titled "Painted Pixels," the works were painted entirely on an iPad and printed on aluminum, a material which emulates the reflective qualities of a digital screen. Bold, abstract, waving forms in dramatic colours endowed the gallery walls with a sense of movement, as though the images might begin to move, animated, just as they may be manipulated to do on a device.

To view more of the artist's work, visit her website. [www.sheilaelias.com](http://www.sheilaelias.com)

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