

Anna Weyant and Her Pictorial Production: The Influence of Digital Design Procedures on Painted Imagery

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ABSTRACT

The current influence of digital media has reshaped the final image, reflecting a new relationship between society and visual representation. As Anna Weyant asserts, social media and its imagery have become both the primary influence and the preconceived outcome in her conceptual framework and pictorial results. Therefore, this text provides an analysis of the impact of digital imagery and design, homogenised by interconnectivity, on the pictorial processes of painting. The research focuses on the inversion of visual comprehension by exploring how digital design manifests in the painting practice of Anna Weyant, a representative figure of her generation. Consequently, design theory will serve as the basis for the analysis of her first museum exhibition at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, providing a methodological framework composed of three essential concepts: a) Donald Norman's complexity and simplicity, b) Vilém Flusser's theory of gesture, and c) the layer system. Through these core concepts, the analysis demonstrates how Weyant's work balances handcrafted gesture with digital process, critiquing visual homogenisation and

simplicity, while reclaiming materiality and identity with surreal, layered compositions.

KEYWORDS:

Anna Weyant, Design, Gesture, Digital, Layers

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INTRODUCTION

Sociology and cultural studies have been deeply concerned with the minimal creative processes resulting from the amplification of information and the rapid pace of “datafication” (Van Dijck, 2014), which feed social media and the outcome of primary communication through digital platforms (Bauman, 2013). In this context, imagery—where pictures act and have assumed the role of being the language to share and interact—has adopted the cultural centre as its legitimised position (Bolter, 2019). This assumption was previously theorised by Baudrillard (1981) and his “hyperrealism,” wherein the simulation and hyperbolised reality of digital imagery appear more real than reality itself.

The relentless digital flow and the imposed rhythm of communication, driven by an overproduction of images, have prompted a reevaluation of imagery production and a philosophical ontology of pictures. Within this framework, “hypermodernity” and scholars (Lipovetsky, 2006; Han, 2022) have analysed the self-portrait as a means for individuals to assert their uniqueness within a digital community. Paradoxically, this exaltation of the self requires participation in a homogenised collective, blurring and diluting the cultural centre (Timberg, 2015) and, consequently, the artistic market and industry. As Bishop (2025) argues, this dominant collective trend has transformed both art and the way it is experienced, driven by the speed and multitasking demands of digital attention.

Nevertheless, the digital flow and the apparent disappearance of the cultural and artistic sphere do not necessarily have negative connotations, as some researchers have pointed out (Bauerlein, 2011). In this context, Shirky (2010) expounds the notion of “cognitive surplus.” He defines it as the free time, energy, creativity, and generosity that people have at their disposal, thanks to new technologies, which can now be channeled into collaborative and creative activities rather than passive consumption. Shirky argues that when this surplus is harnessed through digital tools, it enables the creation of social, cultural, and civic value, transforming consumers into active collaborators. Therefore, the assumption of digital images and art by social media to produce and communicate can lead to the amplification of creative processes between individuals and serve as the new source for pictorial artists.

As Anna Weyant herself declares, her work is where “Instagram meets old paintings” (Stutterheim, 2025). This encounter has been one of her aesthetic influences. “It’s also changed the content of the work itself: images must be flattened from a living, breathing piece of art into a collection of pixels to ensure they look good in the tiny real estate of a grid” (Dooley, 2025).

In this context, it is useful to recover the theory of aesthetics and remember that technification, as Adorno (2015) exposed, is not just the adaptation of the creative processes and art pieces resulting from the technical development, but the adaptation of constitutive experiences embodied and balanced in art pieces. Technification, therefore, influenced every product and industry, as media studies have analysed by comparing photography, television, and different devices through

their historical context (McLuhan, 1962; Silverstone & Williams, 2004; Turkle, 2011). Consequently, it is mandatory to focus on the balance of visual art and the construction of artistic pictures within new media and technification.

This text will focus on the balance and adaptation of Anna Weyant's artworks and pictorial practice, particularly as influenced by technification. Her trajectory—marked by her rapid rise to success and her explicit acknowledgment of the role of digital platforms in her work—serves as an exemplary case study; one that could be extrapolated to other pictorial artists. Her work reflects the shift in the cultural centre and the immediacy of a world deeply transformed by the democratisation of digital image creation and communication.

However, the relationship between digital media and Weyant's work has not evolved in a straightforward manner. Design has expanded its scope beyond daily objects to encompass cultures, nations, landscapes, and even art (Latour, 2008). As a result, digital media shape artistic production through what digital materialism terms "experiences" (Gram, 2025). Digital procedures thus establish a new creative trajectory, driven by the dynamics of online platforms.

To explore this relationship, this study will analyse how digital media and its processes integrate into Weyant's pictorial practice, focusing on how digital procedures inherent to graphic design are incorporated into her style. This analysis will use design theory as a framework, drawing specifically on the work of researchers such as Donald Norman's concepts of "complexity" and "simplicity" (2016), Vilém Flusser's theory of gesture (2014), and the "layer system" (García-Ergüín Maza & Fragua Valdivieso, 2025). Her first museum exhibition at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in 2025 will serve as the case study to interrogate the relationship between these key themes.

ANNA WEYANT AND HER SHIFT FROM DESIGN INTO THE DIGITAL REALM

Weyant's Context

Weyant has emerged as a prominent figure within the contemporary art scene. In 2022, she first attracted significant attention in connection with the Blum & Poe gallery and her exhibition in Tokyo. That same year, her work *Falling Woman* (2020) was sold for \$1.62 million at Sotheby's, and she was subsequently represented by the Gagosian Gallery. Since then, both her artistic persona and the media's portrayal of her public figure have contributed to her growing prominence.

Her rapid rise, both in the general media and within the art market, has been further validated by institutional recognition beyond commercial galleries. This is exemplified by her temporary exhibition at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid (2025). The exhibition serves as compelling evidence of Weyant's swift ascent within the artistic landscape, supported not only by widespread media attention and the influence of the art market, but also by a preeminent cultural institution. The selection of paintings, curated by the museum itself—the first international museum institution

to host the artist's work—serves as a filter of rigour and artistic prestige¹. These pieces thus legitimise the composition of the subject of study for the text to be analysed.

This study examines the implications of mediatization and its processes within her pictorial framework and artistic gesture, which has transitioned from media to a cultural institution. It presents and discusses how the visual language of contemporary society, based on digital imagery, has been employed to claim the attention of her pictorial style, and, consequently, what aspects of digital imagery conception—based on graphic design and digital design—are responsible for her pictorial procedures and individuality. Furthermore, the limited academic research on her work underscores the need for an interdisciplinary analysis. This should integrate image and aesthetic theory, not only from the perspective of art history but also from media studies and digital design, which are more closely connected to contemporary imagery.

Historically, the imagery conception process began in the artist's atelier to be exposed in the resulting physical picture. Today, however, the dynamic has shifted, broadening the final image, which translates and re-encodes digital concepts into data (Flusser, 2011). Screens and connectivity have transformed our relationship with art (Colson, 2007; Han, 2021). As a result, artwork now exists in two distinct forms: the original physical piece—demanding interpretation from consumers—and a secondary digital iteration, specifically adapted for consumption on screens and digital platforms, which paradoxically provides safety and comfort to passive viewers (Berry & Dieter, 2015).

This dynamic has evolved even further. The creative process itself increasingly begins within digital studios, where ideas are developed on computer screens and other devices, only to be disseminated and consumed through those same digital interfaces (Strauss, 2020). **Thus, digital and social media have upended this dynamic, creating an inversion in which the public sphere of the interconnected internet and digital imagery influence the creative process** (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2016) and Weyant's work before the physical pieces are created in her studio. This depicts different contexts that influence what artists "sanction" (Irvin, 2005)² in their own self-expression, shifting from traditional pictorial techniques under digital influences.

This inversion is a primary target for analysing her artistic process. By contrast, art critics and media coverage have frequently emphasized her social relationships (Crow, 2022) and cultural position among the elite (Schneck, 2025). However, her age—or, more precisely, her generation's immersion in digitalisation—most effectively explains her pictorial style, particularly in light of the subsequent digital encoding of her works.

1 Curated by Guillermo Solana, the exhibition brings together 26 works, including oil paintings and works on paper, alongside pieces from the Thyssen Museum's permanent collection by Magritte, Balthus, and Preti: <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/exhibitions/anna-weyant>

2 Irvin exposes the concept of "sanctions," which are related to an artist's "intentions" but extend beyond the artist's intentional actions, concerned not with the content of interpretation but with the work's features, which are the object (not the outcome) of interpretation.

Digital realm and de-materialised imagery

It should be noted that this text focuses on the transposition of graphic and digital design into pictorial art, rather than on digital art itself. The historical development and designation of digital art have been closely tied to technological evolution and experimentation with the resulting aesthetics (Paul, 2023). Furthermore, media studies contribute to art history by offering a perspective in which technology is far from replacing visual and physical art (Bolter, Engberg & MacIntyre, 2021). Technology participates in the process of remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), defined as “the process of mutual competition and cooperation among all media at any given cultural moment” (p. 16). This raises the question of how and when remediation influences art and its creative processes.

One of the basic but crucial distinctions made here is between art that uses digital technologies as a tool for the creation of more traditional art objects—such as a photograph, print, or sculpture—and digital-born, computable art that is created, stored and distributed via digital technologies and employs their features as its very own medium. (Paul, 2023, p. 8)

Categories related to remediation could be limited regarding digital art and art history³. However, the term “post-digital” has absorbed the balance between digital and diverse media. In this sense, post-digital resulted in artworks rupturing, as Hope and Ryan (2014) note, “the conventional linkages between artwork’s identity and its medium (e.g., a sculpture in stone, a painting on canvas, or a novel on paper” (p. 9). As Manovich (2001) argues, post-media art depends less on the materiality of the work and more on how the audience engages with the space (Hope & Ryan, 2014). Technology thus presents a distinct way of experiencing art (Grau, 2004). Furthermore, the assimilation and convergence of diverse media (Jenkins, 2006), alongside the mandatory engagement with the digital, have transformed artistic practices. These now span from those focused on immediate technological innovation—rooted in virtuality—to those grounded in historical and cultural materiality.

The tension between materiality and dematerialised (virtual) products in the digital realm, meanwhile, develops reactions in both directions, with varying degrees of success. Consequently, artists combine different forms of media. However, in some cases, “it is hard to determine whether the art has been created by means of digital or analogue processes” (Paul, 2023, p. 8). In this context, Anna Weyant deliberately embraces materialisation through traditional media, positioning her work in opposition to digital dematerialisation. Her paintings challenge the mainstream dominance imposed in recent years by technological novelties and digital innovations.

While the approach to combining tools and media has become conventional in Weyant’s generation—rooted in sharing through connectivity (John, 2017)—this is not the case in her work. Her practice is undeniably pictorial, leaving no ambiguity about her commitment to traditional techniques. However, the most outstanding aspect of her style is not the craft process of her paintings but rather how digital and graphic design processes influence her creative activity and final picto-

³ New Media Art, Electronic Art, Computer Art, Internet Art, Telematic Art, Virtual Art, etc.

rial result, far removed from the practices of any post-digital artist. This influence stems from her identity as a digital-native consumer of imagery, which imposes a new distribution of art through digital connectivity (Ritchin, 2009). Consequently, one might ask whether there is a translation of graphic and digital design into her individual pictorial gesture, even when avoiding digital tools.

This analysis will examine the digital traces in Anna Weyant's exhibition at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, as the institution's selection of works legitimises them as objects of study. The assimilation of graphic design into her approach will be explored through the lens of design theory. The equilibrium between physical, materialised artworks and the virtual is particularly relevant, as the digital media environment influences Weyant's definition of her final materialised work.

In this context, Milgram and Kishino's (1995) *virtuality continuum*, which positions "the real environment (the physical world) at one extreme and the fully virtual environment (VR) at the other" (Bolter et al., 2021, p. 16), provides a useful framework for understanding remediation and the creative interplay between opposing media. Thus, the remediation unfolding through socialisation and contemporary culture against digital imagery serves as the logical starting point for understanding Weyant's pictorial gesture and style, rather than beginning from art history and traditional pictorial processes.

To understand the design conception in Anna Weyant's work, her Madrid exhibition must be analysed through key elements of design theory: Norman's (2016) concepts of "simplicity" and "complexity;" Flusser's theory (2014), which explores the gesture of painting and the interplay between human bodies, tools, and media; and the "layer system" (García-Ergüín Maza & Fragua Valdivieso, 2025), which clarifies how blending digital images into a final composition manifests in her work⁴. This analysis will examine the traces of these digital layers in her pictorial process, with Sections 3, 4, and 5 dedicated to exploring these three elements using Weyant's selected works from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum exhibition as examples.

COMPLEXITY AND SIMPLICITY

Norman (2016) distinguishes the terms "complexity" and "complicated." For him, "complexity" describes "a state of the world" (p. 2) and is related to "simplicity." "Good design can help tame the complexity, not by making things less complex—for the complexity is required—but managing the complexity" (p. 4). To address this concept of complexity and simplicity, which is the basis of his argument, there are two key aspects: the design of the object itself, which determines its own understanding by users/viewers, and the skills and previous abilities of people before confronting the designed piece (Norman, 2016).

⁴ The layer system refers to the process by which an image is produced through the interaction of multiple layers (sub-images), each contributing to the composition of the whole, with the artist's creative individuality expressed in the balance between these layers.

Norman's conception regarding design and its two aspects is relevant, as they configure a new social context for art related to overcoming images and the current excess of production. Through her art and pictorial works, Weyant attempts to tame the creative process of art history and the excessive technological use of pictures during the digital shift. Thus, she comprehends and starts with the second key aspect of Norman's—as a direct consequence of her socialisation and the contemporary interconnected integration—and rethinks her painting by confronting social media, the internet feed, and the digital aesthetics. Nonetheless, it is these digital tools, as part of her natural context based on imagery, that define her future art pieces.

The representation of flowers is a clear example of Anna Weyant's incorporation of the second key aspect mentioned by Norman. Therefore, these flowers could expose that first concept related to the piece itself, as well as the prior knowledge of viewers, upon which this conception depends. In both *This is a Life?* (2023) and *It's a Heartache* (2023), there are depictions of daisies. However, the focus of the text here is not on their symbolic interpretation but on their visual configuration or design. These daisies retain a clear natural reference and are identifiable as such, yet the arrangement of their petals prevents them from appearing naturalistic or realistic. The petals are mathematically harmonious and their posture is far from reality. They bend as if they were false or plastic daisies. That is, recreations of the real through artificial form and representations.

In both works, the petals of each flower fold in union, unidirectionally. In *It's a Heartache*, the oil finish reveals the texture and brushstroke direction in various orientations, evoking a search for a polished, flat whiteness (Han, 2017). The impact of Weyant's two aforementioned works endures through the predisposition and skills of viewers, who socially recognise both natural and artificial representations of daisies. Beyond their evocative and symbolic power, the effect of these works relies on a visual design that employs paint and oil to subtly manipulate what, in digital form, would be challenging to master. Using its resemblance to photographs, the digital medium would strive to produce natural-looking flowers, not artificial or stiff daisies. Consequently, Weyant's pictorial work anchors its impact on the subtlety of traditional media, which question the image and the final representations in a more balanced manner than the predominantly popular consumption of images on social media and the internet.

How her work represents reality in contrast to photography and the digital is an inherent aspect of Anna Weyant's oeuvre. Her pieces achieve a balance between objects and other elements, whose confrontation interrogates the established duality between the hyperreal and the popularly constructed. This is evident in the naturalistic roses juxtaposed with the daisies in *It's a Heartache*, or the lilies that serve as decorative motifs on the vase in *Lily* (2021), which also contains white lilies. Nevertheless, the most striking example of this representational confrontation is the work titled *A Disaster, Such a Catastrophe* (2022), where two different portraits engage in a dialogue between cartoonish and figurative styles.

Returning to Norman's two key aspects (2016), after examining how she addresses the second in her work, it is important to note that Weyant addresses the first key aspect in the final objects themselves, or the final paintings resulting from the second key aspect. The finish of her paintings

is a result of her design thinking, which engages with the pre-existing skills of her viewers and followers, who develop their interest and artistic socialisation through digital connectivity. This is why her brushstrokes and oil treatment rely on a polished glaze, through which the physical paintings are rendered as pure as pixels, flat and devoid of the natural expression of brushstrokes and their marks.

In this context, her preliminary sketches, executed in pencil on paper, confront the final paintings in a manner in which the texture, the canvas, and tools are more visible and physical. This earlier work contrasts with the final paintings in terms of finish. Brushstrokes, lines, and paper are visible, and they can be appreciated as part of her individual technique and craftsmanship. Weyant's paintings, however, try to communicate her technique and individuality as an image and not as a handcrafted object.

Beyond these two key aspects explained, Norman also introduced the concept of "affordance" in his 2013 publication, *The Design of Everyday Things*. Affordance refers to the properties or qualities of an object that indicate how it can be used. In other words, what actions it affords or suggests to the user based on its design, physical characteristics, or context. However, this concept generated significant confusion among scholars, prompting Norman to clarify it in *Living with Complexity* (2016). He expanded the concept by introducing a more precise term derived from the properties and uses of objects: "social signifiers." These are signifiers that are not inherently perceivable or intentionally designed but instead emerge unintentionally, carrying social and cultural meanings. Thus, Norman refined the definition of affordances to include "social signifiers"—cues derived from the object itself (whether intended or not). Depending on their design, these can be either physical or non-physical, but what matters most is that they mediate the relationship between the object and the user.

In the physical world, social signifiers are themselves physical, but not in the virtual world of electronic interaction and communities. Nonetheless, the traces of activity in the virtual world are just as powerful as those in the physical, as the large number of "recommender" systems on Web sites, social networks, and location- and theme-based message systems testify. (Norman, 2016, p. 92)

As discussed above, Weyant reverses the relevance of Norman's two key aspects due to the prominence of the virtual world. This shift reinforces digital and virtual social signifiers over physical ones, resulting in a prevalence of digital imagery over physical images. Consequently, Anna Weyant's physical paintings are subjected to the influence of digital imagery and the virtual world. This imposes virtual affordances or social signifiers, where the social skills of interconnectivity prevail over the final physical result of the paintings. In this sense, the final affordance of Weyant's work depends on her virtual social signifiers and the affordances of digital imagery, specifically, the relationship between the piece of art and the viewers.

Nonetheless, the communication system alters affordances by the remediation of the digital flow and the virtuality of digital imagery, which converts final paintings into pictures for connectivity. This means that art adopts the "principles for managing complexity: one for design, one for coping" (Norman, 2016, p. 224). However, copying is not about replicating the same finish or Wey-

ant's style. Instead, it is about reproducing through technology and new media. The "cult value" and singularity, as theorised by Benjamin (2010), persist not only in Weyant's paintings but also in the digital interconnectivity designed for reproducibility. Like other media, this interconnectivity provides society with new technological possibilities. This influences the finish of Weyant's paintings by diluting the natural and traditional aspects of painting techniques—elements that are not visible in digital images. As a result, her style is refined into a polished aesthetic better suited to photographic and digital formats, which disseminate her artwork across the internet.

PICTORIAL GESTURE THROUGH IMAGES

Regarding the material finish of Weyant's work, it is important to emphasize that the focus extends beyond brushstrokes and their visual qualities. Instead, the materiality of the whole painting, and more specifically, the materiality of those objects represented in her art (flowers, vases, pearl necklaces, food, animals, etc.) takes centre stage. These objects serve as the foundation for a series of artistic decisions that allow Anna Weyant to redefine the concept of contemporary painting. They highlight Weyant's interest in still life as a genre of painting, which traditionally served to study technique as a prelude to more ambitious pieces.

There is a deliberate design and intention behind the transformation of objects into still lifes, but Weyant employs them to evoke deeper meanings. Her work exemplifies what Norman (2007) terms "emotional design," embedding this principle not only in the objects themselves but also within the historical context of still-life tradition. In other words, the objects represented are more than mere objects and expose an already vanished process of painting, which had degraded still life and its function. Therefore, objects claim their characterisation and objectivity when traditionally they were conditioned by painting techniques. Thus, objects question art history, challenge traditional functions in paintings, and reclaim themselves as designed objects.

As Sennett (2008) points out, "handcraft" is a process in which the hand gains independence from the eyes. It is the result of a different learning method, where the eye sets what hands should keep on learning to master the form. In Weyant's work, however, the eye and the lens of digital images dictate the process of the hands for creating a final painting, in which the hands cannot rid themselves of the influence of digital imagery. Instead, their intention is to release painting images for social media and the digital network through still life. Consequently, there is no independence in Weyant's artwork. This dynamic could serve as a starting point for examining the dominance of the retina and the immediacy of image consumption in contemporary culture, but it also triggers a subsequent relationship between objects and forms derived from the society of information (Flusser, 1999).

In this sense, the Information Age, emerging from postmodernity, introduced variations in the relationship between hands and eyes, where design and image reduce the chaos of the void. Painters established their personal balance in this context (Deleuze & Lapoujade, 2023). This chaos

represents a pre-painting moment, preceding the gestures and strokes on the canvas. In Weyant's work, this chaos stems from her engagement with digital imagery and the Post-Internet era. As Paul (2023) notes, "Post-Internet labels describe a new aesthetic era in which objects, from art to design, are shaped by digital technologies" (p. 187). Thus, chaos now arises not from the confrontation with the canvas, but from digital pixels and imagery, with oil and canvas serving as mere conductors.

Weyant's represented objects through her conductors are related to the concept of "model" in Flusser's theory. Flusser (1999) asserts that "no design exists that could be called 'material:' it is always in-forming" (p. 26). In the 1990s, he debated the idea of an "in-formation" society—rather than an "information" society—arguing that matter "is the way in which forms appear" (p. 26). For Flusser, form and the formal establish a design approach rooted in a specific kind of perception: the form as it appears.

However, this appearance and the questioning of form arise from the immaterial world inherent to digital imagery and connectivity. This explains why Weyant's still lifes are suited to depicting forms through a subjective and surrealistic lens, evoking objects while blurring their natural representation. This approach stems from the immateriality of digital interconnectivity, which she acknowledges as a prior influence.

Nonetheless, one of the most relevant concerns in Flusser's theory is the concept of "gestures" (2014), which he theorised from the balance of human bodies with media. Gestures—whether mediated by tools, technologies, or traditional practices—are central to understanding how human beings balance their actions within society and its cultural products. This is not something related to brushstrokes and the act of confronting Deleuze's chaos before the canvas but rather to the effect of media and digital devices on human actions and, consequently, the act of painting.

Flusser develops a glossary in which he presents several examples of gestures performed through different media (the gesture of writing, filming, telephoning, etc.). One of which is the gesture of painting. "In starting to decipher the gesture, to solve its enigma, it will become clear that there are various levels from which it is 'legible'" (2014, p. 65). In the gesture of painting, the most obvious level is the brushstroke, followed by composition, and so forth.

The richer the interpretation of these levels, the deeper the meaning of the gesture becomes. However, levels are not meant to be analysed as a consequence of causal decisions. The gesture of painting "is not itself a gesture that comes from outside, that is directed toward that of painting" (p. 65). Levels provide a balance and a relationship between them that originates from the inside. Furthermore, the gesture may be shaped by diverse media and digital technologies—as seen in Weyant's work—making it essential to attend to the interplay between these levels.

To study the interior balance between media in Weyant's paintings, it is useful to draw on Manuel DeLanda's "assemblage theory" (2016). This framework allows an examination of how digital images construct their own visual language by mixing them with other forms of media, such as paintings. Based on the assemblage framework, the "layer system" (García-Ergüín Maza & Fragua Valdivieso, 2025) offers a methodological tool to describe this equilibrium, designed to extract the individual character and artistic personality of creators engaged in digital practices.

THE LAYER SYSTEM

DeLanda's (2016) assemblage theory is rooted in Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome (1980). This theory positions itself as a method for assimilating contemporary images through networked systems. Within these networks, digital imagery circulates in a surplus of interconnected production and expansion, reaching a point where images are no longer exclusively created by humans. In this context, images generated by AI or digital software configure their creative processes towards homogenisation, and it does not occur in a singular or linear manner; rather, it is structured through sub-images or layers that collectively construct the final picture. This specific configuration is referred to as the "layer system."

The layer system is the process by which every image is produced through the interaction of multiple layers, each contributing to the composition of the whole. This procedure establishes a direct relationship between creative practice and the levels of interpretation discussed by Flusser (2014). Within this framework, the pictorial gesture—or the artist's creative individuality—resides in the balance of layers or sub-images composing the final picture (García-Ergüín Maza & Fragua Valdivieso, 2025). Flusser refers to this balance between layers as "levels." This dynamic is particularly evident in entirely digital or AI-generated creations, where the final image is constructed from layers belonging to the same medium: the digital. However, any creative individual can **also** develop and balance layers from diverse origins and media, such as drawing, photography, or painting. Even when these varied procedures are later integrated using digital tools, the artist must make deliberate decisions to balance the hierarchy among them. This process yields individual and distinct results, diverging from the computerised homogeneity that characterises much of digital production. It is precisely in this act of balancing that the artist's unique character emerges.

In this case, Anna Weyant is a pictorial artist. Her activity, however, is rooted in influences from both art history and digital imagery, with its degree of homogeneity in the final result. This duality makes it particularly relevant to compare the levels that configure the pictorial gesture with the layers that structure the digital image. By examining the shared aspects of both pictorial and digital media, it is possible to discern the relative influence of each in Weyant's work. In other words, this comparative analysis allows us to appreciate how traditional painting techniques and digital processes intersect, shaping the final outcome of her artistic practice.

Format, composition, figure, background, colour, and shadows are the pictorial levels that also manifest in digital layers. In this sense, unlike the horizontal dominance of the canvas in still lifes, Weyant intentionally adopts a format reduced to the standard aspect ratio of digital images and social media, as platform design imposes its own scale and visual conventions (Jurgenson, 2019). This is entirely connected to the point of view, which is focused on details and fragmented objects and human bodies, where the pictorial technique is suitable for showing and impressing on its own.

On social media, framing conventions tend to favour tighter compositions and reduced contextual depth compared to traditional photography. Platforms impose technical constraints (such

as the square format), leading to visual homogenisation, where images often adhere to predictable patterns to maximise engagement. In this way, the precise detail or framing of fragmented objects or bodies is presented as a selection from a larger whole (Hand, 2009). Framing on social media does more than simply crop a scene; it actively curates which aspects of reality are highlighted and which are omitted. This dynamic is particularly evident in the work of Anna Weyant, where female bodies are often depicted through strategic cropping and fragmentary selection. Works such as *Emma* (2022) and *That's All Folks* (2024) exemplify this approach.

Nonetheless, Anna Weyant's paintings often depict female figures in unconventional poses that subvert traditional expectations. A striking example is *Wit of the Staircase* (2020), which presents a female portrait in an upside-down gesture, deliberately contradicting realistic conventions. In any case, the performativity and poses of female bodies, even when adopting more natural and realistic gestures, transcend mannerism and the expression of exaggerated dynamism with human bodies.

Weyant's selective framing of body parts initially avoids direct engagement with questions of sex and gender—as seen in *That's All Folks* (2024)—while simultaneously interrogating sexuality through a perspective that oscillates between abstraction—*Head* (2020) and *Feted* (2020)—and humour and ambiguity of the naturalistic representation of twisted figures. This interplay of surrealistic aesthetics, humour, and exaggerated poses creates an atmosphere reminiscent of the carnivalesque. A concept that Bakhtin (1984) associates with the temporary dissolution of hierarchies and social roles. In this festive carnival, individuals adopt identities that defy their everyday selves, mirroring Weyant's subversion of conventional female representation.

Once Weyant's decisions regarding format, composition, and figuration have been depicted, the analysis must turn to background, colour, and shadows. These elements are deeply interdependent, particularly in how they configure a neutral backdrop, often rendered in black. This aesthetic choice has been linked to the Baroque style and the tenebrism of the 17th century in Italy and Spain, where paintings were defined by the intensity and expanse of their dark areas (Rzepińska & Malcharek, 1986). This historical influence in her work has been noted by critics (Dozier, 2022) and even by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum (2025): "Weyant's works display a wealth of artistic references spanning from the Baroque to the first half of the 1900s." However, unlike the atmospheric depth of Baroque tenebrism, Weyant's use of black does not serve to evoke a dramatic interplay of light and shadow. Instead, her figures are deliberately isolated, neither engulfed by darkness nor emerging from twilight. They are sharply contoured, akin to the expositive clarity of photography and catalogues, where bodies are presented with precise definition.

Weyant's lighting is more concerned with photography and digital techniques than with Baroque paintings, as she uses neutral backdrops in black—typically white in photography—to delimit and showcase female bodies. Therefore, her painting results are assimilated into the white cube of the art gallery (O'Doherty, 2000). A decontextualised place where time and space cease to exist. This concept resonates with the spatial conception of e-commerce photography and the

presentation of social media imagery, where the “platform seeks to eliminate any contextual and temporary condition” (De Las Heras Romano & García-Ergüín Maza, 2024, p.155).

The conceptualisation of black and backdrops in Anna Weyant’s work acquires a more complex dimension in relation to the paleness of female bodies. These figures question the darkness and their own constitution of black colours in backdrops in a photographic sense. For instance, in *Feted* (2020), there is a consistent layer of colour that influences the black of the background and even the shadowed parts of the figure and the objects close to the viewer. In this sense, a golden colouration acts as a filter before the layers behind, resembling digital filters on social media and platforms like Instagram. These platforms adopted this approach from Polaroid colour systems and other photographic cameras (Chester, 2018).

By increasing the final filter layer that homogenises the background and objects, Weyant develops an understanding of black similar to that of digital cameras and their dynamic range⁵. Consequently, she amplifies the brightness in *She Drives Me Crazy* (2022) to physically present a neutral background composed of a black cloth. She literally uses the camera operation system, imposing brightness on the entire composition to make the dark background legible and visible, even though the painting process does not require it. This is her intention in *Emma* (2022), when she uses the dynamic range to blur some part of the painting and intentionally makes it invisible.

In *Emma* (2022), Anna Weyant presents two women in black against a black backdrop, evoking the exposure challenges of digital photography. While digital sensors often obscure dark details, traditional painting allows for balanced darkness across layers. Weyant, however, rejects this balance, instead mimicking digital limitations: she merges the background figure’s gown with the backdrop and employs a lighter black for the foreground figure. This reflects how digital devices and imagery influence her treatment of colour levels, as revealed by her layering technique. While Norman (2007) describes digital software as a realm of cognition where ideas exist without physical form, Weyant gives these digital concepts a tangible presence through her paintings. Thus, her work gives physical form to otherwise intangible digital concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

Media studies and design theory (complexity, gestures, and the layer system) frame a complex conversation between traditional painting and the digital age in Anna Weyant’s Madrid exhibition. Her work reflects how digital imagery transforms artistic practice and perception by navigating the tension between complexity and simplicity, as well as between the physical and the virtual, through gestural decisions that reflect the influence of digital imagery. The layering of her compositions further negotiates the relationship between the historical and the contemporary.

⁵ A camera’s dynamic range is a technical concept in photography and post-production that describes how effectively the sensor captures both bright and dark details in an image without compromising quality. It enables the preservation of a broad spectrum of tonal values, ensuring that information is not lost to overexposure or underexposure.

Weyant's approach aligns with Norman's theory by managing their complexity through the viewer's pre-existing visual knowledge. Her paintings, for instance, depict flowers that are neither fully naturalistic nor abstract, achieving a balance that challenges the hyperrealistic result of the homogenised digital imagery. The deliberate visual treatment of petals in flowers, repeated and modular, reflects a design-thinking process based on mathematical aesthetics: virtual, computerised, and digital. Weyant's work thus tames complexity by integrating the affordances of polished digital media into the physical realm.

Flusser's theory of gestures clarifies the understanding of Weyant's practice, as her painting act is not only physical but also an equilibrated balance between hand expression, digital tools, and the cultural context of media. Her still lifes reveal a balance between traditional techniques and the homogenising influence of digital platforms. The expression of her brushstrokes is mediated by the logic of social media, where framing and selecting the point of view are based on social media visual standards. Besides, Weyant's use of neutral black backgrounds defines an artistic intention rooted both in art history and in the aesthetics of digital consumption. Thus, the layer system and the digital understanding provide a critical lens for comprehending Weyant's method. Her paintings are not merely compositions but assemblages of digital and physical layers, each contributing to the final image's meaning. Consequently, fragmented bodies reflect the decontextualised framing of social media. This illustrates how the interplay of layers similar to digital proceedings creates a hybrid visual language that questions the boundaries between original and reproduction, physical and virtual.

Finally, Weyant's work questions how the materiality of paint is used to replicate the immateriality of digital images. Her polished surfaces mimic the flatness of polished screens, while the physicality of oil and canvas asserts the presence of the artist's hand. This result is evident in her treatment of light and shadows, where the dynamic range of digital photography determines her use of black backgrounds and selective exposure. By incorporating camera and filter functionality, Weyant critiques the uniformity of visual culture, instead emphasizing the distinctiveness of the objects depicted. Moreover, Weyant's surrealistic humour and exaggerated poses challenge conventional representations of gender and reality. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of the carnival, her work dissolves hierarchies, allowing for a playful, ambiguous engagement with identity. This festive subversion is not merely aesthetic but a sample of the fluidity of meaning in the digital age, where images are endlessly remediated and re-contextualised. By integrating design theory, her work transcends the binary of digital and physical, offering a layered experience that deals with the complexities of contemporary visual culture.

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