

# Chapter 10

## Discovering Art using Technology: The Selfie Project

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### ABSTRACT

*The Selfie project was not only inspired by the long history of the self-portrait, but also intended to create a genealogy between the self-portraits of masters from the Modern art era and the selfie. The project, designed as a walkthrough experience, consisted of three major engagement areas. On entering the space, children were directed into a 'transformation' area – a typical theatrical wardrobe, where they could dress up in a variety of costumes, including hats and wigs. Once garbed, children were given smart phones and led to the area where they could take a selfie with a celebrity such as Gauguin, Cézanne, Monet, Van Gogh, Modigliani and Munch. Finally, they could manipulate the selfie using gesture-based technology and post it online. The attraction proved to be extremely popular and the children who participated were extremely satisfied with the experience.*

### INTRODUCTION

We are living in a day and age where the word selfie is an integral part of a young person's vocabulary (Senft, 2015). A selfie can be described as a photograph that a person takes of oneself, typically using a mobile device and which is shared via social media. On the other hand, famous personalities such as Van Gogh, Monet, Cezanne, Munch, etc and their contribution towards art is rather unknown to these

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people. Inspired by the numerous self-portraits in the Modern Art period (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997), the Selfie project is a walkthrough where children are exposed to the works of famous artists, they can take selfies with them, edit them and eventually post them online.

The Selfie project was created for ŽiguŽajg<sup>1</sup> 2014. ŽiguŽajg is the annual International Arts Festival for children and young adults in Malta, which has as its vision, that of positioning the creative arts for children and young people at the core of Malta's creative ecology. It has established itself as the most influential and important festival of the arts in its category and this has been achieved through its vision, which sees a demographic normally assumed to be disassociated and detached from art taking center stage in a variety of artistic happenings.

The Selfie Project was one of the most popular attractions hosting an average of 120 visitors per day during the whole duration of the festival. Each visitor had to go through a process that lasted around 30 minutes and was divided, into the following phases.

The first phase was the Transformation phase. Visitors were provided with various props (these included costumes, makeup, wigs, etc.) and they were free to use them. Essentially, the visitors could transform themselves into whatever they wanted in order to express their emotions or to pass on a message.

With this transformation, the visitor could proceed to the second phase where they could take a selfie together with a self-portrait of a celebrity (Figure 1). The celebrities available were cutouts of the following six artists; Vincent Van Gogh, Claude Monet, Paul Cezanne, Edvard Munch, Paul Gauguin and Amedeo Modigliani. A small bio, underneath each artist, was provided to introduce the visitors with their story. Since they were cutouts, the artists could be moved around and the visitors had all the liberty to take the picture in any pose they wanted. Some of them hugged the artist whilst others made funny

*Figure 1. Example Selfies taken with the six paintings, which were provided as backdrop. In some cases, the artist also features in the photo.*



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