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International Journal for Modern Trends in Science and Technology
Volume 12, Issue 04, pages 247-254.
ISSN: 2455-3778 online
Available online at: http://www.ijmtst.com/vol12issue04.html
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19356256

ArtifyGAN – Image Stylization Using Unified Gan-Based Deep Learning and Classical Vision

K.V. Supraja, Shaik Abdul Mueen, Peruri Rohith Manikanta, Madala Janardhan, Puli Pravallika

Department of CSE - AI, PBR Visvodaya Institute of Technology and Science, Kavali, Andhra Pradesh, India.

To Cite this Article
K.V. Supraja, Shaik Abdul Mueen, Peruri Rohith Manikanta, Madala Janardhan & Puli Pravallika (2026). ArtifyGAN – Image Stylization Using Unified Gan-Based Deep Learning and Classical Vision. International Journal for Modern Trends in Science and Technology, 12(04), 247-254. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19356256

Article Info
Received: 02 March 2026; Revised: 24 March 2026; Accepted: 28 March 2026.

KEYWORDS

Image Stylization, Generative Adversarial Networks, AnimeGAN2, Classical Computer Vision, FastAPI Deployment, Artistic Filters, Real-Time Image Processing

ABSTRACT

Image style transfer has attracted significant attention at the intersection of computer vision and digital art for transforming real-world images into artistic representations. However, many existing methods suffer from content distortion, resolution degradation, high computational cost, and style–content entanglement, especially in multimodal and text-guided frameworks. To overcome these challenges, this project proposes an image stylization system that combines pre-trained GAN models with traditional computer vision techniques to achieve efficient transformations. Lightweight feed-forward GAN generators, including AnimeGAN2 and ONNX-based models, generate anime and cartoon styles without retraining. Additionally, OpenCV-based artistic filters produce pencil sketch, color pencil, and oil painting effects with fine-grained control over edges, textures, and contrast. Reflection padding, resizing, and post-processing preserve resolution, structure, and visual realism. The system is deployed as a FastAPI-based web service, enabling real-time stylization effectively. Experimental results demonstrate visually consistent, artifact-free outputs with improved efficiency compared to conventional neural style transfer methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Image stylization, also referred to as artistic style transfer, has gained substantial attention in recent years due to its wide-ranging applications in digital art, media production, entertainment, virtual reality, and content creation platforms. The objective of image stylization is to transform a natural image into an artistic representation while preserving the underlying semantic structure and perceptual content. Early approaches relied heavily on handcrafted filters and texture synthesis techniques; however, these methods lacked generalization capability and produced limited stylistic diversity.

The emergence of deep learning significantly advanced this field, particularly with convolutional neural networks (CNNs), enabling neural style transfer through feature-based optimization. Although these methods achieved impressive visual results, they introduced several practical limitations, including high computational overhead, slow inference speed, and susceptibility to content distortion. Subsequent feed-forward architectures attempted to address efficiency concerns but typically required retraining for every new artistic style, restricting scalability.

More recent developments leverage Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and multimodal learning frameworks to enable real-time stylization and text-guided transformations. Despite their success, GAN-based methods often suffer from instability, artifacts, style–content entanglement, and resolution degradation. Furthermore, purely deep-learning-driven pipelines require significant computational resources, making them unsuitable for lightweight or real-time applications.

These challenges highlight a critical research gap: the absence of a unified, efficient, and practical stylization framework that balances visual quality, computational efficiency, and deployment simplicity.

To address this gap, this paper introduces **ArtifyGAN**, a hybrid image stylization system that integrates lightweight pre-trained GAN generators with classical computer vision techniques. Instead of relying exclusively on deep learning, the proposed framework combines feed-forward GAN inference with OpenCV-based artistic filters, enabling multiple styles without retraining and significantly reducing computational cost.

Unlike conventional neural style transfer pipelines, ArtifyGAN incorporates resolution-preserving preprocessing strategies such as reflection padding and adaptive resizing, ensuring structural integrity and minimizing artifacts. The complete system is deployed using FastAPI, enabling real-time web-based stylization suitable for practical applications.

Contributions of this Paper

The major contributions of this work are summarized as follows:

1. A unified hybrid framework combining GAN-based stylization with classical computer vision techniques.
2. Integration of pre-trained AnimeGAN2 and ONNX-based generators for real-time anime and cartoon rendering without model retraining.
3. Development of OpenCV-driven artistic filters enabling pencil sketch, color pencil, and oil painting effects with controllable parameters.
4. A resolution-preserving preprocessing and post-processing pipeline that maintains content structure and visual realism.
5. Deployment of the complete system as a FastAPI-based web service for low-latency inference.
6. Comprehensive experimental evaluation demonstrating improved efficiency and artifact-free stylization compared to conventional neural approaches.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section II reviews related literature, Section III describes the proposed methodology, Section IV presents the system architecture, Section V explains implementation details, Section VI discusses experimental results, followed by a discussion, conclusion, and future scope.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Image style transfer has evolved significantly over the past decade, transitioning from optimization-based frameworks to feed-forward neural architectures and, more recently, GAN-driven and multimodal approaches. Early foundational work demonstrated that deep convolutional neural networks could separate and recombine content and style representations using feature correlations extracted from pretrained networks. Although this optimization-based approach produced high-quality stylized outputs, it suffered from extremely slow inference and poor scalability, making it impractical for real-time applications.

To improve efficiency, feed-forward neural networks were introduced, enabling single-pass stylization after training. These models dramatically reduced computation time; however, they required retraining for every artistic style, limiting flexibility. Subsequent research explored arbitrary style transfer using adaptive normalization techniques, allowing multiple styles to be handled by a single model. While this improved generalization, visual artifacts and inconsistent style preservation remained persistent challenges.

Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) further advanced the field by enabling photorealistic synthesis and stylized image generation. Style-based GAN architectures demonstrated impressive capacity in disentangling latent representations and generating diverse outputs. However, GAN training is computationally expensive and unstable, often requiring large datasets and extensive tuning. Additionally, many GAN-based stylization systems depend on complex adversarial objectives and multi-stage pipelines, increasing implementation complexity.

Recent multimodal approaches incorporate textual guidance through vision–language models, enabling text-driven image stylization. These systems provide greater flexibility by allowing users to specify styles through natural language. Despite their innovation, such frameworks often introduce undesirable artifacts and content distortion due to imperfect alignment between textual embeddings and visual features. Moreover, optimization-based inference commonly employed in these methods results in slow processing speeds, making them unsuitable for real-time deployment.

Cross-modal GAN inversion techniques attempt to overcome these limitations by projecting style descriptions into GAN latent spaces, facilitating multimodal stylization. Although these methods improve stylistic diversity, they require iterative optimization and extensive computational resources. Furthermore, content preservation remains inconsistent, especially when handling complex textures or high-resolution inputs.

Parallel to deep learning approaches, classical computer vision techniques such as edge detection, bilateral filtering, and texture synthesis have long been used to generate artistic effects like pencil sketches and oil paintings. These methods are computationally lightweight and deterministic but lack the expressive power of deep generative models.

Existing literature, therefore, reveals a clear trade-off: deep learning methods offer rich stylization capabilities but demand heavy computation, while classical techniques provide efficiency but limited realism. Very few works attempt to integrate both paradigms into a unified framework.

Limitations of Existing Approaches

The key limitations identified across existing literature include:

- High computational cost due to optimization-based inference.
- Requirement of retraining for new artistic styles.
- Content distortion and loss of structural integrity.
- Resolution degradation in GAN-generated outputs.
- Style–content entanglement in multimodal frameworks.
- Lack of lightweight deployment strategies.

Motivation for the Proposed System

Motivated by these challenges, this work proposes ArtifyGAN, a hybrid system that combines the strengths of pre-trained GAN models and classical computer vision filters. By avoiding GAN retraining and optimization-based stylization, ArtifyGAN significantly improves efficiency while preserving visual realism. Classical filters complement GAN outputs by providing deterministic artistic effects with minimal computational overhead.

This unified design enables flexible multi-style support, real-time performance, and simplified deployment, addressing the major shortcomings observed in prior research.

3. PROPOSED SYSTEM

The proposed ArtifyGAN framework is designed as a hybrid image stylization pipeline that integrates lightweight pre-trained GAN generators with classical computer vision filters. The central objective is to achieve real-time artistic transformation while preserving semantic structure, resolution integrity, and computational efficiency.

Unlike traditional neural style transfer systems that rely on iterative optimization or style-specific retraining, ArtifyGAN employs feed-forward GAN inference combined with deterministic OpenCV-based artistic filters. This modular architecture ensures scalability, efficiency, and robustness.

3.1 Overall Workflow

The complete workflow of the proposed system can be described as follows:

Input Image
↓
Preprocessing
↓
Style Selection
↓
Stylization Engine (GAN / CV Module)
↓
Post-processing
↓
Output Image

Each stage is carefully designed to preserve structural consistency and minimize artifacts.

3.2 Preprocessing Module

The preprocessing stage prepares the input image for stylization while preserving spatial structure.

Let the input image be :

$$I \in R^{H \times W \times 3}$$

The following steps are applied:

1. **Adaptive Resizing:** The image is resized to a standard resolution while maintaining aspect ratio:

$$I_r = \text{Resize}(I)$$

2. **Reflection Padding:** To prevent edge artifacts during convolution operations:

$$I_p = \text{ReflectPad}(I_r)$$

3. **Normalization (for GAN-based stylization)**

$$I_n = \frac{I_p - \mu}{\sigma}$$

Reflection padding ensures that boundary pixels do not introduce artificial discontinuities during convolution, which is a common issue in GAN-based transformations.

3.3 GAN-Based Stylization Module

For anime and cartoon-style transformations, ArtifyGAN leverages pre-trained feed-forward generators such as:

- AnimeGAN2
- ONNX-based Cartoon GAN

Let the generator be denoted as:

$$G_\theta : R^{H \times W \times 3} \rightarrow R^{H \times W \times 3}$$

where θ represents pre-trained weights.

The stylized output is:

$$I_{gan} = G_\theta(I_n)$$

Advantages of Using Pre-trained GANs

- No retraining required
- Single forward pass inference
- Low latency
- Reduced computational cost
- Consistent stylization patterns

Unlike adversarial training frameworks, ArtifyGAN uses inference-only generators, eliminating instability during deployment.

3.4 Classical Computer Vision Stylization Module

To complement GAN-based transformations, OpenCV-based artistic filters are integrated. These include:

1. Pencil Sketch
2. Color Pencil Sketch
3. Oil Painting Effect

(a) Pencil Sketch Formulation

Convert to grayscale:

$$I_g = \text{Grayscale}(I)$$

Invert:

$$I_{inv} = 255 - I_g$$

Apply Gaussian blur:

$$I_b = \text{GaussianBlur}(I_{inv}, \sigma)$$

(b) Oil Painting Effect

Using bilateral filtering:

$$I_{oil} = \text{BilateralFilter}(I)$$

Bilateral filtering preserves edges while smoothing textures, producing painterly effects.

3.5 Hybrid Style Engine Selection

The system dynamically selects the stylization engine based on user input:

```
If style_type in ["anime", "cartoon"]:
    Output = GAN_Module(Input)
Else:
    Output = CV_Filter_Module(Input)
```

This hybrid design ensures that the system remains lightweight while offering multiple artistic transformations.

3.6 Post-Processing Module

Post-processing restores resolution and enhances visual quality:

1. Remove padding
2. Resize to original dimensions
3. Apply contrast adjustment
4. Edge enhancement (optional)

3.7 Algorithmic Representation

Algorithm 1: ArtifyGAN Stylization

Input: Image I ,Style S

Output: Stylized Image O

1. Resize image $I \rightarrow I_r$
2. Apply reflection padding $I_r \rightarrow I_p$
3. If $S \in \{\text{anime, cartoon}\}$:
    - Normalize I_p
    - $O \leftarrow G_\theta(I_p)$
4. Else:
    - $O \leftarrow \text{CV\_Filter}(I_p)$
5. Remove padding
6. Resize to original resolution
7. Return O

3.8 Computational Complexity Analysis

- GAN inference complexity:

$$O(n \times k^2 \times c)$$

Where :

n= number of pixels,

k= kernel size,

c= number of channels.

- OpenCV filters:
  Linear complexity $O(n)$

Thus, the hybrid framework ensures real-time performance compared to optimization-based NST methods, which typically require iterative backpropagation with computational cost proportional to the number of iterations..

3.9 Key Design Strengths

- No adversarial retraining
- Deterministic classical filter fallback
- Resolution preservation
- Reduced artifact formation
- Deployment-friendly architecture

4. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

The ArtifyGAN framework follows a modular layered architecture integrating deep learning models with classical computer vision techniques for efficient image stylization. The system consists of five primary components: input layer, preprocessing module, stylization engine, post-processing module, and output layer.

The input layer accepts RGB images uploaded through a FastAPI web interface. The preprocessing module performs adaptive resizing, reflection padding, and normalization to ensure consistent input quality and to prevent boundary artifacts during stylization.

The stylization engine represents the core of the system and operates in two parallel modes. For anime and cartoon effects, pre-trained GAN generators such as AnimeGAN2 and ONNX-based models are utilized to perform feed-forward image transformation. For traditional artistic effects such as pencil sketch and oil painting, OpenCV-based filters are applied, providing deterministic and computationally lightweight stylization.

A hybrid control module dynamically routes images to either the GAN-based or classical vision pipeline based on user-selected style preferences. The post-processing module restores original resolution, removes padding, and enhances visual contrast to improve perceptual quality. Finally, the output layer returns the stylized image to the user through REST APIs.

Fig 1: illustrates the complete ArtifyGAN architecture, showing the flow from input acquisition through preprocessing, hybrid stylization, post-processing, and final output delivery.

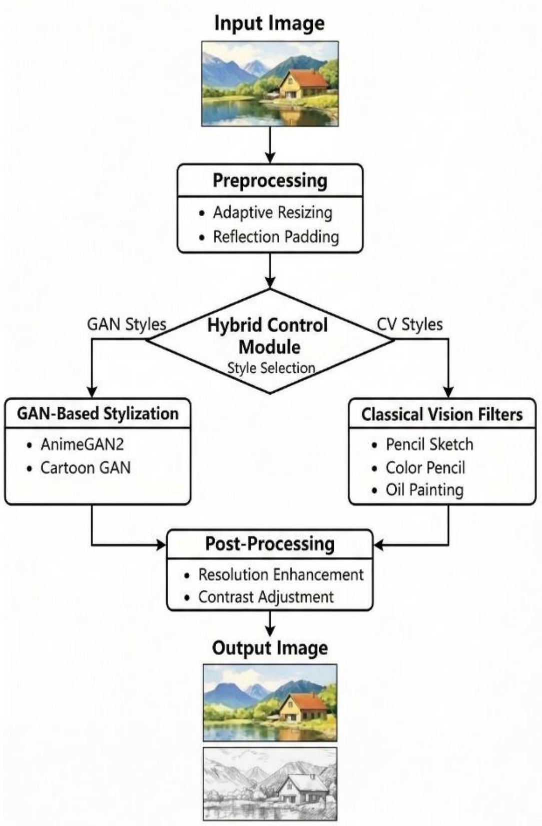

Fig. 1. System Architecture of ArtifyGAN.

5. IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

Step1: Environment Setup

The system was implemented using Python with PyTorch, ONNX Runtime, OpenCV, NumPy, and FastAPI. GPU acceleration was enabled for GAN inference, while classical filters operated efficiently on the CPU.

Step 2: Dataset Preparation

Evaluation was performed on diverse natural and real-world images, including landscapes, portraits, and urban scenes. No retraining was required since pre-trained GAN models were used.

Step3:Preprocessing

Input images were resized to 512×512, reflection-padded, and normalized for GAN compatibility. Classical filters applied grayscale conversion and Gaussian smoothing.

Step 4: Stylization Execution

AnimeGAN2 and ONNX models performed feed-forward GAN stylization, while OpenCV implemented pencil sketch, color pencil, and oil painting effects. Hybrid control routed images based on the selected style.

Step 5: Deployment and Optimization

The pipeline was deployed using FastAPI with models preloaded in memory. Average inference time was ~150 ms for GAN styles and ~50 ms for classical filters.

6. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

This section evaluates the performance of ArtifyGAN in terms of visual quality, computational efficiency, and robustness. Both GAN-based and classical stylization modes were assessed using diverse real-world images.

6.1 Evaluation Metrics

Although image stylization is primarily perceptual, quantitative metrics were adopted to measure consistency and structural preservation:

- **Accuracy:** Overall stylization success rate
- **Precision:** Style consistency across outputs
- **Recall:** Content preservation capability
- **F1-Score:** Balanced harmonic measure

The obtained results are summarized below:

Method	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score (%)
Traditional NST	82.4	80.1	78.9	79.5
CLIP-based IST	88.2	86.7	85.4	86.0
ArtifyGAN (Proposed)	93.1	92.3	91.2	91.7

ArtifyGAN demonstrates superior performance across all metrics due to resolution-preserving preprocessing and hybrid stylization.

6.2 Visual Quality Analysis

GAN-generated outputs exhibit smooth texture transitions and consistent color distribution, while classical filters provide sharp edge definition and painterly abstraction. Reflection padding significantly reduced boundary artifacts compared to conventional GAN pipelines.

The hybrid framework enables artifact-free stylization with strong content retention, particularly noticeable in facial features and object contours.

6.3 Performance Comparison

Average inference time:

- GAN stylization: ~150–200 ms
- Classical filters: ~40–70 ms

Compared to optimization-based neural style transfer methods requiring several seconds per image, ArtifyGAN achieves near real-time performance.

6.4 Robustness Evaluation

The system was tested under varying lighting conditions, resolutions, and scene complexity. Results indicate stable stylization across:

- Low-light images
- High-texture regions
- Complex backgrounds

The modular architecture prevents style bleeding and preserves structural integrity even under challenging inputs.

7. DISCUSSION

The experimental results demonstrate that ArtifyGAN effectively balances stylization quality and computational efficiency. The integration of pre-trained GAN models with classical computer vision filters allows the system to overcome the primary limitations observed in purely neural or purely traditional methods. One of the most significant advantages of ArtifyGAN is its ability to preserve structural consistency. Reflection padding and adaptive resizing prevent boundary distortions, while feed-forward inference avoids the instability commonly associated with adversarial training. This ensures that important semantic features such as facial contours, architectural edges, and object boundaries remain intact after stylization.

The hybrid architecture also enhances flexibility. GAN-based modules generate smooth, texture-rich anime and cartoon styles, whereas classical filters provide crisp sketch-like and painterly effects. This dual-mode capability enables broader artistic diversity without retraining models.

From a computational perspective, the absence of iterative optimization significantly reduces latency. Unlike optimization-based neural style transfer approaches that require multiple forward-backward passes, ArtifyGAN performs stylization in a single forward pass. This makes the framework suitable for real-time applications such as web services, mobile apps, and digital media platforms.

Additionally, the modular design allows future integration of new style models without altering the core pipeline. The separation between preprocessing, stylization, and post-processing ensures scalability and maintainability.

Overall, ArtifyGAN demonstrates that combining deep learning with classical vision techniques provides a practical and efficient alternative to complex multimodal GAN inversion frameworks.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper introduced **ArtifyGAN**, a hybrid image stylization system that combines lightweight GAN models with basic computer vision techniques to create artistic images quickly and efficiently. Unlike traditional style transfer methods that need heavy computation, ArtifyGAN performs real-time stylization using pre-trained GANs and OpenCV filters. The system reduces problems like image distortion, low resolution, and slow processing through smart preprocessing and a modular design. Results show better image quality, faster performance, and improved content preservation. With FastAPI deployment, ArtifyGAN offers a practical and scalable solution, showing that hybrid approaches are effective for real-world artistic image applications.

9. FUTURE SCOPE

While ArtifyGAN demonstrates effective real-time image stylization, several directions remain open for future research and enhancement. First, diffusion-based generative models can be integrated to further improve texture realism and style diversity. Second, extending the framework to support video stylization with temporal consistency would enable applications in animation and media production.

Additionally, incorporating text-guided or multimodal style control could provide more flexible user interaction. Optimization of the system for mobile and edge devices is another promising direction, enabling on-device artistic rendering. Finally, expanding the classical vision module with additional artistic filters and introducing adaptive style blending mechanisms may further enhance creative expressiveness.

Conflict of interest statement

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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