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Where am I going?

The role of an artist in the 21st century has been thrown into question with the advancement of technology. Where once an artist was relied upon to capture moments, ideas and emotions, advanced intelligence (AI) has developed to replicate this. When AI can create artwork within seconds and is rapidly improving its ability to do so on a daily basis, is an artist still needed within society? Every creative profession is now vulnerable to an AI takeover. However, the value of AI art should also be questioned against the principles of what 'art' actually is and if it would be fair to classify AI generated content as 'art' at all. Finally, this essay will explore the possibility that AI is not as detrimental to artists as it initially seems. By comparing the 'AI revolution' to the industrial revolution, comparisons can be made on the worries of AI replacing creative jobs. The environmental strain will be considered to gauge whether AI growth is sustainable enough to continue to grow as it has been projected to do so and the unique position that this places artists within.

Over the last few years, AI has developed the power to generate images that effectively steal artwork. Through machine learning, AI interprets thousands of images to learn what an image looks like (Bausenhardt, 2023), whether it is an artistic style and medium, or object and theme. These are often ripped from across the internet and taken from social media accounts (Meta, 2025). The algorithm pieces together the data to recreate an image to increasingly impressive degrees of accuracy. The fast, inexpensive power of AI is completely transforming the creative industry, replacing jobs (Merchant, 2025) and removing human authenticity from art. This is affecting all levels of art, from entry level, where an AI image won the Colorado State Fair Arts Competition in the emerging artist category (Metz, 2022), to higher level artist commissions (Merchant, 2025). The rapid advancement of AI technology and encroachment into the illustrative field is terrifying to watch as an artist, knowing that the already limited and competitive art industry has been infiltrated by the ultra-fast, ultra-efficient and completely unstoppable AI competitor.



Algorithm King, by Ai-da. (Ai-da, 2025)

The 'Algorithm King' is a portrait of King Charles III, created by the artist 'Ai-da'. Not only is the art visually striking, but it is also AI-generated. What makes this piece particularly impressive, however, is that it was also physically painted by a machine (Ai-da, 2025), effectively making it art completely without the input of a human. The implications of this are huge, demonstrating that AI is no longer bound to the online realm creating digital art. If AI is provided with a corporeal body, AI can create physical art. This is commercially successful too, selling one art piece for \$1.1 million (Ai-da, 2025). This threatens more than illustrators; it threatens every artist, including my own area of study of glass and ceramics.

Mechanical tools are easing the capability of AI to enter ceramic art. Within an article of Ceramic Review (Howard, 2025), methods of “3D printing, digital design and computational tools” at the forefront of innovation are explored, demonstrating how AI has the power to soon create ceramic artwork independently to humanity. Artists such as Brian Peters, Megumi Naitoh and Jay Jenson are all implementing methods of using digital tools to create artwork (Howard, 2025), paving the way for AI to enter the role as a ceramic artist. In this considered scenario, my future as an artist appears redundant if anything I could do, AI could replicate faster and cheaper. However, replacing the artist with machine-learning algorithm poses significant ethical and sustainable questions.

With the rise of AI, the philosophy of what constitutes as ‘art’ has come into question. As defined by the Oxford dictionary (2025), art is “the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination”. The focus on “human” draws into question whether AI, no matter how great it may imitate the creativity of a human, is ever capable of producing anything that constitutes art. This definition is expanded upon by multiple philosophers. Leo Tolstoy, in his essay “What Is Art?” (1897), describes it as the “union among [people], joining them together in the same feelings”, suggesting that art conveys a deep emotional base in which the human experience is shared amongst both the artist and its viewer. An AI, incapable of thinking and feeling beyond what it was coded to do and create art that can only imitate what it can see (Bausenhardt, 2025) would therefore be incapable of authentically conveying the unifying emotion that a human artist could. For an artist, every choice is deliberate (Taylor, 2024), following the theory of colour or semiotics. Charles Sanders Peirce describes a triadic model of semiosis, an idea that meaning can be interpreted three ways: as the representamen (physical form), the object and the interpretant, the effect the sign produced (Hoopes, 1991). John Berger, in the Ways of Seeing (1972), expands on this further stating how people view art with learnt assumptions of art and that “an image could outlast what it represented”. The limitation of AI means that it cannot understand the meaning of the data it ingests and as a result would only interpret the object in its recreation; lacking the interpretant leaves AI feeling shallow and misunderstanding what messages art may be trying to get across and by extension the meaning of art.

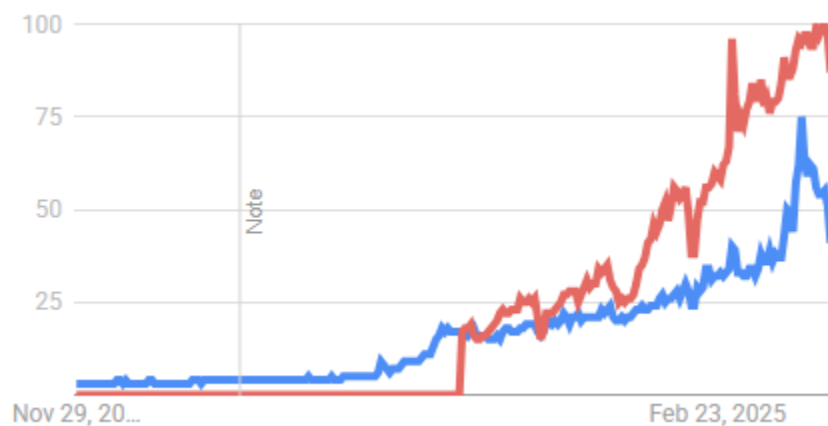
Great consideration on what art is also conclude that it is more than just an end-product; that AI art can create images rapidly without the process of thinking and contemplating can be seen as a cheat to the craft. Charles Eames describes art to “reside in the quality of doing” and Andre Gide wrote “No human masterpiece has ever been created without great labor.” (1947) The idea that sacrifice is an inherent aspect of art, whether through time or effort, cannot be applied to AI alternatives, considering minimal input is required and the results are almost instantaneous. Additionally, Eames suggests that art is more for the

enjoyment of the craft rather than the finished piece at the end. AI has been developed and adopted largely for economic gain (Merchant, 2025), cutting out artist commissions and generating revenue. By replacing artists, who create art as this is their passion, with AI that does so to capitalise on the creative market, is not only detrimental to the future of an independently thinking human race but is also frowned upon by many philosophers and artists alike. Hugh MacLeod describes art to “suffer the moment other people start paying for it” (2009), perfectly encapsulating the decline of creativity when monetary incentives infiltrate the creative process.

When discussing AI, it can be easy to picture it as the career-ending technology of the creative sector. Whilst there is truth to this statement, there is a parallel between the AI revolution and the industrial revolution, a time when technological progress began replacing traditional roles for mechanical innovations. Conflict arising from advancements in technology is not new to AI. The Luddites were an infamous group of textile workers that, at the dawn of the industrial age, opposed mechanisation. Like artists of the modern age, they saw new machines threatening to take their years of training for highly-skilled jobs replaceable and devalue the products they manufactured (Morton, Tate, 1979). Unfortunately, as the Luddites saw, technology cannot be stopped and the world moves on. Despite mass adoption of the automated mills, traditionally made clothing from artisans still exist even in the modern age and the same will no doubt occur for artists too. Whilst AI has the potential to make artwork for everyone at a passable level (Merchant, 2025), there will always still be the demand for high-quality handmade artwork.

It is also possible that AI may not advance much further than what it already has. Despite the rapid advancement in AI technology over the last few years, increasing concerns on the environmental impact of AI is repeatedly brought up. In September 2024, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) conducted a comprehensive review of the full environmental impact that AI is having on the environment. Whilst comprehensive research has yet to be conducted, it is already clear that the impact is detrimental, especially as AI is being widely adopted and used casually with little regard for the consequences. To fuel this growth, vast data centres are needing to be constructed of increasing magnitude, leading to expanded rare-earth mineral mining which results in pollution, environmental destruction and more emissions (United Nations Environment Programme, 2024). The consumption rate of resources is also significantly higher for AI than traditional internet searches, with each AI search consuming ten times more energy and a constant increased stream of water consumption to cool the centres down. Global AI use has almost exceeded six times the total water consumption of Denmark (United Nations Environment Programme, 2024) and AI expansion is still projected to expand, particularly given the continuing acceptance of the general public of AI, visible by the

constant increase in searches for AI in Google Trends (Google, 2025). Considering the move of the planet to net-zero and the focus on carbon-neutral solutions, it is clear that the expansion of AI is neither sustainable nor fitting with the modern alignment of a climate-conscious world. AI cannot afford to continue to grow the way it has done, and a limit must be put in place at some point before it outpaces the energy production and water supply available. Through recognising the lack of an environmentally conscious solution to art, it is possible that human-made art takes up the role of the environmentally responsible product, further adding to its value in a potentially depreciated market. Through embracing the forward thinking ideals of a net-zero world, the role of the maker would be at the forefront of sustainability, proving that art would not only be authentic, but also ethical.



Interest over time of Google searches of AI (blue) and ChatGPT (red). (Google, 2025)

AI has the power to completely transform the art world, especially as it is developed to become more advanced and integrated into the real world. Already, robotics and AI are merging together to create real pieces of art that threaten the livelihoods of almost all artists of every medium. If AI can pick up a brush, it will not be long before AI will learn how to engage in glass and ceramics. These fields are already under threat as development of 3D printing and laser cutting machinery alongside increasingly impressive generative AI could theoretically go hand in hand together. Regardless of the implications of the power of AI, the artistic products that it may create can be argued to not truly qualify as art at all.

Historical philosophical views put great emphasis on both the human aspect of art, from semiotics to human connection, and the process of art rather than the end product, in which AI excels. This leaves AI art feeling meaningless and ungenuine, defeating the purpose of art to begin with. The apparent take-over of AI may also not be as detrimental as

it initially appears to be; as the luddites found during the industrial revolution, innovation does not completely wipe out the real craftsmanship of quality artistic products which will always have demand. The sustainable implications upon the environment also shape AI to be unaligned with goals of humanity and the future of Earth in addition to rapidly growing faster than the existing infrastructure can support. By positioning artists to be aligned with modern sustainability goals, human art can become the 'organic' and 'eco-friendly' alternative to AI art. Artists will always have a place to create art in the world and no amount of machine-learning can recreate the complex emotional meaning that a human can.

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