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AI Art: Artists' Best Friend or Mortal Enemy?

Using chatbots, making deep fakes, and creating art has been getting easier as artificial intelligence (AI) advances. AI makes everyday life more efficient in countless ways. Due to this, many people are questioning the ethical implications of these technologies: Is AI saving us time, or are there greater consequences to using AI? This is especially thought-provoking for people whose jobs have been disrupted by AI. When AI first became mainstream, the public assumed it would only replace manual labor and creativity would be protected for years to come. However, as AI develops, it appears the opposite is the case. In Colorado's 2022 State Fair, Jason M. Allen won the highest prize using AI that transforms text to a hyper-realistic piece of art (Roose). After this result, controversy surrounding AI art grew; even today, many people believe that AI will make human artists redundant. With that said, others argue AI art is no different from photoshop, a technological tool to enhance art. Hutson and Harper-Nichols claim AI art is a tool to push past the limits of what is possible. In this essay, I will argue Hutson and Harper-Nichols's approach to AI art is dangerous to society because of how art generative softwares are trained and the importance of art in society.

Part 1 - Hutson and Harper-Nichols's Argument:

Hutson and Harper-Nichols begin their argument by acknowledging some of the controversies surrounding AI art; more specifically, the controversies surrounding "copyright malfeasance" (55). The U.S. Copyright Office got rid of copyright protections for certain works

created using Midjourney, a generative art software. This new protocol is a milestone in how generative art can be regulated, but it causes problems relating to how we understand AI art. Even before this ruling, professional artists and those in the academic world were hasty to dismiss the potential of AI Art. This was an emotional response; there is a lot of fear surrounding AI art because of concerns of plagiarism. Few people have tried to conduct research and studies into the implications of the potential tool. While AI has existed for the past few decades, its potential has grown tremendously in recent years. It is neglectful to dismiss AI art without even taking into consideration the different ways artists may use it. Art is inherently creative, so the idea of what art itself is should encourage us to learn how to use AI as a tool. Hutson and Harper-Nichols go into different ways AI art can help artists: “From suggesting new color palettes, compositions, arrangements, and spatial understanding to a new inspirational and iterative formative process, AI is a watershed moment for the fine arts” (55). There is a lot more that goes into art than the final product; the process is just as important. AI can be an effective aide to make the creative process easier and to amplify what artists can do by themselves.

What we consider to be art is always changing. Depending on who is asked, it may even be up to personal interpretation. There are two primary definitions that Hutson and Harper-Nichols note that often dictate an individual's perspective on the ethical nature of AI art. Art is either an expression of technique or a display of sentiment (Hutson and Harper-Nichols 55). In other words, art is either used to demonstrate an artist's technical ability or to the shared emotions and experiences of humanity. Those who primarily think art is more technical, often think the AI art is a completely legitimate form of art and should be classified as such. On the other hand, those who think art is a form of expression would likely be against AI art entirely. If art is a display of sentiment, then art can tell us what it means to be human. It is worth

mentioning that these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive or representative of the complete range of definitions people have for art. Whichever way someone leans towards – technical or emotional – connects to their opinion on whether technology can create art or not.

Then Hutson and Harper-Nichols compare the use of AI to improve art to other technological arts like photography. These non-traditional ways of art have changed the way we think of art entirely: “The emergence of generative artificial intelligence tools has revolutionized the field of art and design, offering artists and designers new and innovative ways to express their creativity” (60). The more pathways we have as artists to express ourselves, the more original and creative we can be. Hutson and Harper-Nichols believe that AI art is simply a tool to let the artist create more effectively. They then echo the word of Coeckelbergh by saying that we need to move towards a more collaborative way of creating art (Hutson and Harper-Nichols 56, Coeckelbergh). In this way, humans and AI can work together to create what would otherwise be impossible. Then they show us what they believe would be a collaborative process between human and AI, what they call an “AI generative art development pipeline” (Hutson and Harper-Nichols 56). Hutson and Harper-Nichols recommend uploading your own artwork and then using it to create similar art pieces based off of your original works (58-59). Using this method, the artist and AI have collaborated to create more with less time and energy. It is important to note that Hutson and Harper-Nichols condemn the use of others’ works in this method, and add, “the real potential of this technology lies in breaking out of the current social media framework and pulling from the artist's own sketchbook” (60). For example, just like how sketching someone else's art and claiming it to be your own is plagiarism, using someone else’s art in this collaborative process should also be plagiarism.

To close off their argument, Hutson and Harper-Nichols highlight that it is up to the artist to pave a pathway to understand the uses of AI art and to shape what the human and AI collaboration of art looks like (60). AI art is a tool that enables artists to create more interesting, complex works that have more depth than they would without the tool (60). We need to continue to explore how AI art functions in order to unlock its full potential, ultimately shifting our perspective on what art is and how creativity can be expressed.

Part 2 - My Argument:

While Hutson and Harper-Nichols make several good points, there is more to the story than what they share. More specifically, how generative art softwares were trained and programmed. Avijit Ghosh and Genoveva Fossas demonstrate how AI art uses artists' original work without their permission in order to train their systems: "The DALL.E-2, Imagen, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion models use a newer, bigger dataset called LAION-5B" (3). The LAION-5B dataset suffers from blatant, problematic stereotypes regarding sex, gender, race, or ethnicity (Ghosh and Fossas 3). In addition, these softwares also learned to ignore the copyrights and watermarks original creators put on before uploading their work (Ghosh and Fossas 3). This is a massive problem. The datasets these softwares were trained off of directly lead to how the software functions now. In order to get rid of this problem, AI generative softwares must be retrained completely. Almost all systems that create AI art today were built upon the works of human artists without consent. In early versions of Midjourney, the program would try to recreate watermarks because a significant portion of the art sampled had them (Ghosh and Fossas 4). In newer versions, the program has been trained to get rid of watermarks. Ghosh and Fossas go on to note, "Artists have rightfully started to take note and raise complaints that their work is effectively stolen when model trainers train their commercial products on the artists' original

work without permission” (3). While there are many artworks posted or published online, this does not justify the fact that AI uses copyrighted or watermarked art to train their systems. The reason artists have these protections in the first place is to prevent people from stealing their artwork. Now, with AI, their artwork is getting copied without any credit or permission from the original creator.

As outlined in Hutson and Harper-Nichols’s argument, they give two primary definitions of art: either art expresses technique or sentiment. However, I argue that both must always be true when defining art. While the level of skill differs from person to person, there needs to be some amount of technique for something to be art. When we think about nature, it is possible for someone to get sentiment from seeing the natural world beauties. However, there is no technique within it, so nature is not art. On the other hand, sentiment is highly personal and different from person to person. Sentiment is the story the artist is trying to convey and the creative decisions they make to tell it. When an artist tries to make two drawings exactly the same, there will still be minute differences between them. That’s what makes art feel real. If something is sentimental, but there is no technique being displayed, then it is just a simple emotion, not art. Experiencing art is experiencing technical skill that evokes emotions. Both technique and sentiment are necessary for something to be art, otherwise it is akin to nature or an emotion.

Next I will discuss plagiarism in art. Paul Todorov, a professor of Data Science at Aivancity, points out that the art world almost universally agrees that plagiarism is a poorly defined term in the arts (Todorov 1). This makes it notably difficult to recognize when AI art is committing plagiarism, especially considering the line defining human plagiarism is already blurred. However, Amnuay Kleebayoon and Viroj Wiwanitkit claim there are three parts that must be present for something to be considered plagiarism: “(a) stealing for a part or whole, (b)

with or without intent, and (c) an attempt to disguise and declare that it is a creative work of a plagiarist” (Kleebayoon and Wiwanitkit). This is the definition of plagiarism that will be used in this essay going forward. In order to decide if AI art is plagiarism, we must first decide if AI can declare that art it created is its own creative work? In order to answer that question, we must ask who the artist is: the AI itself, the one who created the software, or the one who uses the software?

We will start with asking if AI itself is the artist. The artists of any work are the primary contributors to a piece. For AI to be the primary contributor, or the artist, it would have to be autonomous. In other words, it cannot be controlled by something else. If AI relies on someone or something else in order for it to create art, then it cannot be the artist. Hutson and Harper-Nichols distinguish what autonomous AI art would look like: “An AI system must be able to both independently apply and independently change the standards it uses” (56-57). To put it differently, in order for AI to be autonomous, it needs to be able to make contributions towards the art on its own. That is the exact opposite of what AI art does. The point of AI is to create the most accurate interpretation of the information that is filtered into it. Generative softwares were explicitly programmed to do this. Because of this, AI is not autonomously creating art. Thus, AI art is not the primary contributor which means AI is not the artist.

Next, can we call the programmers of generative art softwares the artists? If this were the case, AI would be similar to photography or paint: a tool or medium artists use to tell their story. There are many different ways tools can be used to create art. There are many different considerations that the artist has to make with how to use their tool. With photography, in addition to deciding what to picture, the photographer also needs to take into consideration the composition as a whole. This includes lighting, layout, posings, and many other factors. Other

artists also have to do the same regardless of the tool they are using. The decisions artists make is a necessity in creating art. These decisions make art unique from artist to artist. The designers of generative art softwares are not making these decisions. The generative softwares are simply copying the creativity of the artists it was trained on. The programmers creative decision making only extends to choosing databases and artworks the softwares it was trained on. Besides that, it is fairly limited. The AI learns over time through how to best create art for certain prompts. Additionally, the programmers do not make specific decisions over each specific work of art. The AI is making these decisions. Taking all these reasons into consideration, the programmers are not the artists.

Lastly, we will look and see if the person who uses the program is the artist. Before answering this, we will refer back to the definition of art. Art is a display of both relative skill and emotion. Starting with the former, art requires skills. When using AI to create art, the person who uses the program has no technical influence over the final product. What skill is there when creating the perfect input in order to get the result you want? Unless you are deeply familiar with how the software works, there is a significant level of luck involved in the process. The decision-making process of deciding what prompt to put into the AI software is a matter of trial and error until the user gets the result they want. This is unlike human art where the decisions artists make directly affect the composition through the technical ability. The AI is simply copying the technical ability of the artists it was trained on. This proves that there is no technical side to the one who uses the software. This same line of reasoning can also disprove that the person using the software has an emotional involvement in it. There is some level of intentionality required when trying to elicit an emotional response for your audience. When an artist creates, the decisions they make tell a story. That story is what evokes a sentimental

response. AI cannot make those decisions. Because AI is currently incapable of displaying consciousness, the sentiment displayed in art is unique to humans. When AI generates art, it is taking an inherently human trait from someone else's work. These reasons show that the user of the software cannot be identified as the artist.

In summary, we identified that the AI, the software programmer, and the person who uses the program are all not the authors of generative art. The question remains: who is the artist? As outlined above, AI is trained off of the works of human artists. Going further, it uses these arts and directly copies them when creating new art. The actual artist is all of the artists of each work the AI samples from. The final product is a collaboration or collective collage of all of their art. The AI puts all of these art pieces together and tries to disguise it as its own. To put it simply, AI plagiarizes. The designers are not creating the art. The original artist's creative decisions, technique, and sentimental expression are still present within the work AI art softwares creates.

Finally, I will discuss the importance of art in today's society and detail how AI art is dangerous to the idea of art as a whole. Art is a massive part of human history, and an even greater part of our identity as a species (Sherman and Morrissey). It represents our cultures and our organic development as the world advances (Sherman and Morrissey). Artists have progressively more difficult experiences justifying their place in the world. Throughout recent history, artists have to defend and advocate for the expansion of arts in today's society. Now, with AI starting to catch up to what humans can do, it puts the arts in a dangerous place because it will demotivate future artists. AI art will soon surpass what humans can do, and it will be able to create more accurate visuals of what the person using the software wants. When this happens, AI could completely eliminate the skillful human artists. While people can create art recreationally, AI will turn aspiring artists away because it will always be able to create what appears to be art

more efficiently. It takes time for an artist to develop their skills, so there will be less to gain from their work if they have to compete with AI. Why would someone spend all the hours it takes to become a skilled artist when AI can do it quicker and better? AI takes what is the rightful work of others and masks it into something many people claim to be more valuable, something more valuable than the thousands of hours of work many artists have taken without their permission. If we deem this art more valuable, what does it mean for the future of human created art? The answer is clear: people will be desensitized to becoming artists.

We need future artists because Art has intrinsic value that cannot be replaced. We risk losing the beauty of human created art because of AI art. This is why AI art is dangerous to the art world. Even though Hutson and Harper-Nichols's collaborative approach encourages people to put in their own works rather than stealing from others, their approach indirectly uses the work of unconsenting artists. There is no changing that because that is how AI was trained. If generative software programs become the primary mode of creating art, we will lose an essential part of our culture. We will lose something that has been inherently human for all of human existence. Art is more than a pretty picture, it defines each generation of humanity. Every minute, as people use these programs, they become more effective at hiding their plagiarism. What we need to do now is recognize that using and supporting AI art devalues the work artists have spent getting to where they are today, the work artists have spent in order to make these softwares successful, the same softwares that are replacing them. We need to stop using AI art.

Part 3 - Objections

The Inspiration Argument: *What is the difference between plagiarism and getting inspired when it comes to art? What if AI is simply inspired by the pieces of art that are fed into it, how is it plagiarism?*

To respond, we need to identify the differences between inspiration and plagiarism. As stated at the beginning of the paper, plagiarism is a poorly defined term in the art world. Because of this, if someone is directly influenced by a specific piece of art, it enters a gray area. However, even in this gray area, there are still differences between human inspiration and AI inspiration. In human art, even if someone is inspired by something, they are still using their own skills and experiences to create a new piece of art. While it may be similar, they are still creating something new. On the other hand, AI art does not have the personal skills or experiences in order to create new art. Everything generative art programs create is imitated from human created art.

This can be compared to Searle's Chinese Room Argument. His argument set out to argue against the Turing Test which tries to prove AI consciousness by saying if an AI is indistinguishable from humans when created outputs, then the AI has consciousness (Cole). The Chinese Room Argument pushed against this test by showing how AI outputs can look like human outputs without being conscious. In this argument, a non-Chinese speaking person is in an enclosed room with a database of how to respond to every sequence of Chinese characters. When a piece of text goes into the box, the person knows exactly how to respond using this database, so the person can respond adequately. Even though from the outside it appears that the box understands Chinese, the reality is it is only imitating Chinese and does not understand a thing that it is doing (Cole). AI generative programs are creating nothing new, it is just finding trends that fit a prompt from a massive database of human created artwork. From the outside it may look like it is creating something new, but in reality it is just splicing already created art works from non-consenting artists. In other words, the AI is not being inspired from other artists even though it may look like it. AI art is plagiarism.

The Quality Argument: *If skill is important when defining art, then is poorly created human art still defined as art? Why would 'bad' art be considered art and not AI art?*

There are several different ways we quantify the quality of art. From how expensive it is, to how much time it took, to who created it, to the media it was created with, and so on. It goes without saying that some artists are more skilled than others. Even though there is a wide spectrum of artists' technical ability, there is always a level of technique present in their art. AI cannot be on this spectrum since it does not have skill or technical ability. AI simply copies the skills of humans and produces something new out of it. AI is not adding anything new to the art. Even if a child creates art that is relatively bad, it is an accurate representation of skill for that child. Let's consider the opposite scenario. If an extremely talented artist does not try, then is what they create still art? According to the definition of art used in this essay, it would not be considered art. Skill is relative, especially when it comes to art. The only exception of this is if the lack of skill is an intentional technique in order to evoke a specific emotion. As stated earlier, intentionality is an integral part of the creative process. If the talented artist is not being intentional with the skill they have, then it is not art. In a similar fashion, AI does not have skill or intentionality, so the works it creates are not art. However, a novice artist is using their skills to the best of their ability. That makes it art.

The Pessimist's Argument: *AI art is faster and cheaper than working with a professional artist. Why should we stop using AI art if it is inevitable?*

Even if AI may create 'better' art, it does not mean we should do nothing about it. There are many terrible things that are here to stay, but we should not give up combating them. From the climate, poverty, to global conflicts, there are countless problems that may never be solved. However, that fact is not justification to do nothing about it. We can take small steps as a society

to combat them with hopes that humanity could flourish further into the future. We should treat generative art the same way. The first step is to stop using AI art.

Ultimately, AI art is dangerous to the art world because of how art generative softwares are trained. When referencing other art works, humans use them as inspiration while AI uses them as samples. Without references, humans can still visualize ideas, but AI cannot. Both humans and AI benefit from references, but AI depends on them. AI does not learn from art, it manipulates art beyond recognition to create something that appears new. Art is an integral part of humanity. AI art is dangerous because of the potential cultural impact it can have in the art world. It will demotivate future artists from honing their craft, changing how society views art. Art is important to humanity because it is a defining part of each generation. As art has evolved throughout history, it reflects the developing skills of artists during that time. Furthermore, as what it means to be human changes with each generation, new artists express sentiment through their art. Art has the ability to tell us about the human experience. This can all be taken away by AI. AI art is dangerous to the art world.

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