

THE ART OF AI: PERSPECTIVES ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

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Abstract: *The application of artificial intelligence (AI) into photography has given rise to a controversial discussion over image perception, originality, and authenticity. Though AI presents artists with new tools and opportunities, worries over the degradation of artistic integrity and emotional depth continue. This paper investigates the complex ramifications of artificial intelligence (AI)-generated art, looking at how it affects the artistic process, public opinion, and the changing field of visual expression. Drawing on insights from recent controversies in the film industry and diverse perspectives from artists, the present essay delves into the complexities of AI-generated art.*

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Authenticity; AI-generated art; Technology; Photography*

1. Introduction

Photography has now become a highly contested medium of expression. We have a totally absurd situation. Some people are putting genuine works of art under scrutiny, trying to detract from their value by pointing out that they were created with the help of artificial intelligence. This can only be a compliment to the artist, but it can also cause additional stress when it comes to handling visuals. There is an endless series of photographs (improperly so-called) that were obviously made with the help of artificial intelligence, but they pass the critical radar of the viewer as genuine photographs. This is a frustrating aspect for any creator of art and makes you ask rhetorically: What is the role of the image in contemporary era? One thought that came to mind is that the purpose of some AI (artificial intelligence)-made “photographs” is not to convince the public of their veracity. Rather, the purpose is to cast doubt on the truth. How can we believe the veracity of an image if we constantly have the threat of AI in mind? We can suggest that the purpose of the disinformation producers is not to make people believe in the phony. They aim to make every image from now on be viewed with skepticism. It is fascinating to me to learn how old attempts to create art with artificial intelligence are. From Frieder Nake's attempt and Harold Cohen's lifelong work. Their work laid the foundation for art created with AI. Frieder's work is particularly important. In 1967, he produced algorithmic art using random numbers, and it is possible to automate part of the process. Frieder Nake (2010) has a very relevant statement for the future of A.I. art, which deserves to be reproduced in extenso:

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“Algorithmic art denies the concept of a masterpiece. This is to say that in algorithmic art, there cannot be a masterpiece anymore in the traditional sense of the word. Each and every individual piece of algorithmic art is no more than one instance of the potentially infinite amount of works in the class of works defined by the algorithm. The tragedy is that the algorithm itself does not often show visual qualities. Its qualities include the potential to generate visual works. But each of its visual products is a shadow only of the algorithm.” (Nake, 2010, 57).

When only a few people were able to produce art with a computer, public interest was different and genuine. Now, out of a Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), everyone is able and willing to do it. Art has become trivial. This, of course, is where a new debate comes in: what about processing software like Photoshop when these software programs also abound in AI? There is still a huge difference between writing a prompt and working on a concept, looking for a model and putting the vision into practice. There are GPTs (from the OpenAI series) specifically trained to write text prompts that are then entered into Midjourney or Dall-E. The word of the year 2023 is "hallucinate", which is put in the context of artificial intelligence and disinformation. The entire definition is as follows: "(of artificial intelligence) to produce false information contrary to the intent of the user and present it as if true and factual" (hallucinate, n.d.). This refers to ChatGPT, which is often misused as a search engine. Most people use the free version, which clearly states that it is not up-to-date with information. Users themselves are guilty of these hallucinations, because they rely on that information without filtering the information they receive.

To exemplify this kind of hallucination, we explored in a preprint how Google Gemini manages to interpret whether an image is generated with artificial intelligence or not; the results were disastrous. This is simply because Gemini could not interpret an image, but was forced to offer explanations that could be classified as hallucinations, according to the dictionary definition: The model suggests that the memes generated (a slice of pizza with eyes and a burrito is heated in a particle accelerator) are not generated by artificial intelligence. Arguments include, “The eyes are evenly spaced and centered on the slice of pizza. This suggests that they were added manually, rather than being generated by an AI algorithm.” (Gross, 2024, p. 7). These explanations sound absurd to any reader, but they are offered by Gemini because he is forced to respond in a certain way, even if he does not know the subject and context very well.

2. Is the Creative Industry Slowly Accepting AI?

One of the most reputable fashion retoucher in the photo industry, Pratik Naik, has embraced AI processes in his work as transparently as possible. Asked in an interview how he manages to approach artificial intelligence fearlessly and where he sees it going in the next three years, he gives some answers that describe a certain lightness towards this current. He believes that generative AI is revolutionary for the creative industry and that it gives artists new tools to help generate new ideas, make creative enhancements, and automate tasks. His prediction for the next three years is that generative AI will reform the role of the artist. In the future, they will use most of these tools in a way that complements their vision to accelerate the creative process and achieve their artistic goal. However, he also mentions that the barriers to artistic creation are being lowered, but it will be hard to come up with unique ideas, plus there are other ethical issues to consider. In addition, it will require adaptability to the labor market and learning new technical skills for a collaborative effort between human vision and AI. The transition to this type

of creation will be different from the transition from photographic film to digital (Baker, 2024). Another photographer, Ella Uzan, who worked for big brands and shot magazine covers, has embraced artificial intelligence in her work. In an interview, when asked what prompted her to make the leap to artificial intelligence, she replied that a deeper search led her to artificial intelligence.

According to her, AI gives her the unbounded freedom and tools to examine a world without any limitations of budget, staff, or geographic area. Ella Uzan defines artificial intelligence as follows: "Artificial intelligence is a tool that can exhibit significant unpredictability. Engaging with it effectively is much like mastering a new language." (Tirosch, 2024). Asked about the future of photography, the artist believes that there will be room for every form of expression, only that various professions will fade away. She believes that fashion photographers will have to work in tandem with artificial intelligence, but what cannot be replaced remains their personal aesthetic and artistic imprint (Tirosch, 2024). Moreover, one of the world's most famous photographers, Annie Leibovitz, has said that she is not worried about artificial intelligence, saying at the same time that photography itself is not real. This suggests that AI-generated photos have the same value as classic photographs (Growcoat, 2024). These issues are, of course, only part of the debate, because it is very difficult to consider only the optimistic view that artificial intelligence works as a tool for artists to guide artistic creation.

As Susan Sontag argues in her essay *Notes from Camp*, "Art does not progress, in the sense that science and technology do" (Sontag, 2018, 37). This notion reflects on the relationship between creativity, technology, and human artistic expression. In Sontag's view, technological and scientific developments do not necessarily apply directly to art. In the context of AI-generated art, these statements raise questions about the authenticity and depth of machine-made artistic creations. Artistic progress is more than technological progress and requires a deep understanding of human emotion; in this context, AI-generated art can be seen as lacking these complex nuances. These criticisms also stem from the following cases that suggest a reluctance on the part of people when it comes to consuming generated art:

A24 is a non-conformist film studio that has distinguished itself by offering artists almost absolute creativity in filmmaking. According to an article on Vox, A24, which initially handled film distribution, has become a leading contender for century-old studios like Universal and Paramount in just a decade (Vega, 2023). As critic Nate Jones (2022) explains, A24's success is a remarkable one for an independent production house that has managed to garner a cult-like fan base thanks to its aesthetic. But fans have voiced their displeasure after their latest promotion of a film that is not to everyone's liking. In promotional material for Alex Garland's film *Civil War*, A24 used artificial intelligence to create some images as promotional posters.

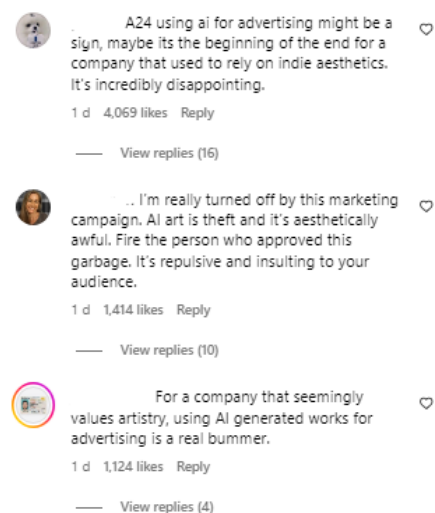


Fig. 1. A24 fans commenting negatively on the carousel post on Instagram

As seen in Figure 1, comments are critical of the decision to use AI in image generation. Many say that the fact that A24, a company that relied on indie aesthetics, represents the end of that vision that solidified this solid base of fans, described by Nate Jones as “cult-like”. Other reviews consider AI art theft and see this as outrageous. The comments brought harsh criticism from fans and sparked various reactions in the press as well. According to an article in the *Hollywood Reporter*, none of the scenes shown in the promotional posters were actually in the film but were used to lure people into the cinema. In addition, there are many errors in the images generated, citing some of them: “For instance, the two Marina Towers buildings in Chicago are on the same side of the river in reality but are on opposite sides in the art. Meanwhile, a shot of wreckage in Miami shows a car with three doors. Some believe the giant swan in a Los Angeles lake is likewise an AI fail, but that’s probably meant to be a paddle boat” (Hibberd, 2024).

Another controversial case features Netflix, which is accused of using AI mimics in a true-crime documentary. In an interview included in the documentary, her high school friend Nam Nguyen describes Pan as “cheerful, happy, confident, and very genuine.” Nguyen’s words are accompanied by a series of photos showing Pan posing while holding her hands in the peace sign position and sticking her tongue out at the camera. However, upon closer inspection of the images, Pan’s left hand appears to have only two fingers, missing a thumb, ring finger, and pinky finger. On the other hand, he appears to be missing another little finger (Tangermann, 2024). There is a complex discussion around the use of artificial intelligence in artistic creativity. While some advocates emphasize the technology’s potential as a tool for artists, others express worries about authenticity and human feelings. The incorporation of artificial intelligence into the creative process requires careful evaluation of its implications for authenticity, emotional depth, and the integrity of artistic expression, even while it presents novel opportunities for artistic production and narrative. It is crucial that critics, audiences, and artists all participate in critical discussion and introspection regarding the changing field of AI-generated art and how it affects the larger conversation about art as technology develops.

3. Do people actually like AI-generated images?

The increasing use of artificial intelligence-generated images has created the promise of effortless works of art, conveying to the average user the idea that human imagination is limitless. There is no doubt AI can produce aesthetically pleasing images, but how do humans perceive these works of art? Another important perspective to mention is that sometimes people are not aware that they are looking at artwork generated by AI. According to a study conducted by Grassini & Koivisto (2024) that aimed to understand a possible negative bias towards AI-generated art, they first revealed that participants preferred AI-generated images more than the authors’ selection of human-made images. They experienced more positive emotions with AI-generated images (considering the actual sources of the images). This reveals that AI-generated art has reached a sophisticated level of realism and shows technological development and the ability to communicate emotions. Yet participants rated AI-generated artworks more positively compared to human-made artworks but rated artworks they subjectively perceived as AI-generated more negatively, effectively determining the presence of a negative bias in the evaluation of artworks considered to be AI-generated.

Although AI-generated artworks were preferred more and evoked more positive emotions

compared to the selection of human-made artworks, the opposite trend emerged when participants' subjective evaluations were taken into account. When participants perceived the images as AI-generated, they tended to rate them as lower quality and elicit lower levels of positive emotions (Grassini & Koivisto, 2024). Other relevant results on people's perceptions of AI-generated art are provided by Gangadharbatla's (2021) study. According to the results, participants reacted differently depending on the type of artwork and their prior knowledge of its creator. Abstract artworks, correctly attributed to computers, were rated more favourably and were more likely to be bought, while representational artworks correctly attributed to computers, was rated less favourably. This suggests that individual associations between artwork type and creator influence how they are perceived.

4. Conclusion

The incorporation of artificial intelligence into photography has ushered in a new era of creative possibilities, yet it also presents profound challenges for artists, audiences, and the integrity of the artistic process. While AI offers tools for innovation and efficiency, concerns about authenticity and emotional depth persist. The evolving relationship between technology and art necessitates ongoing critical discourse and introspection to navigate the complexities of AI-generated imagery responsibly. As the boundaries between human and machine creativity blur, it is essential to preserve the essence of artistic expression while embracing the transformative potential of AI. In the context of the rapid technological advances, it is vital to engage in continual critical conversation and introspection in order to negotiate the complexity of AI-generated art ethically. The dynamic link between technology and artistic expression requires a comprehensive grasp of the ramifications for creativity, authenticity, and the larger landscape of visual culture. Finding a balance between embracing AI's transformative potential and preserving the core of artistic expression remains a major problem for artists, fans, and industry stakeholders alike.

Limitations, and further research

This research essay acknowledges certain limitations, including the evolving nature of technology and its impact on the creative industries. Additionally, the scope of this study may not encompass all perspectives or developments within the field of AI-generated art. Further research is needed to explore emerging trends, ethical considerations, and the long-term implications of artificial intelligence on photography and visual culture. Future research endeavors could delve deeper into the ethical implications of AI-generated art, including issues of attribution, ownership, and cultural representation. Additionally, comparative studies examining the reception of AI-generated versus human-made art across different cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into the evolving relationship between technology and creativity. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of AI technologies and their impact on the creative process could offer valuable perspectives on the trajectory of the industry.

The limitation of this study is that the analysis is largely based on observations, secondary sources and cases identified in social media and the press. While these sources provide a broad

perspective on public opinion and critical discourse on AI-generated art, this insight requires empirical validation through randomized controlled trials (RCTs). RCTs could provide more robust and generalizable data on how people perceive and react to AI-generated art in a controlled and reproducible setting. These experiments could examine both participants' emotional reactions to different types of AI-generated art and how attribution influences their evaluations. By using rigorous experimental methods such as RCTs, this limitation could be overcome, giving research greater confidence in its findings and allowing extrapolation of results to a wider range of contexts and populations. Thus, it is crucial to include empirical studies in future research to validate and strengthen the perceptions and findings presented in this study.

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