The Impact of AI on Professional Artists: the Good, the Bad, and the Artificial

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I. Introduction

Recently, I met a young visual artist and asked them about their profession. I was curious what it is like being a professional artist these days. They told me that, although trying to be a professional artist had always been a risky proposition, lately things had gotten a lot tougher. They relayed to me a story. They said that a few weeks ago they were contacted by a client hoping to commission a drawing for a business advertisement. The artist jumped at the opportunity and spent several weeks drawing up designs and putting together samples. They then sent off the samples to the client for their approval. When they got a reply email, what they read was both disappointing and disturbing. The client told them that they had used the Dall-E program on their computer and were able to generate an image that worked perfectly for their advertisement needs. The short of it was that the artist's help was no longer needed.

That sort of email isn't something that an artist from even ten years ago could have expected. And although this sort of story is new, it is no longer a rare one. In fact, it's a story that's becoming increasingly common. The creative work of artists is now being, in many cases, functionally replaced by AI. It's a worry for the future of art and for the future of art-makers, and I think we've reached a turning point that will be hard to come back from.

This paper explores recent advances in AI-art and the impact that this new technology might have on professional artists. It considers several potential negative effects of AI for practitioners of various artforms – visual arts, sculpture, and film – and offers some suggestions for how we might try to mitigate these effects and protect human artists.

II. The Rise of AI Art

In the 1950s, Alan Turing published an essay titled "Computing Machinery and Intelligence". In there, he argued that in roughly 50 years it might be possible for machines to achieve a level of intelligence nearly indistinguishable from humans (1950, p. 442). One of the possible objections Turing addressed in the paper was the idea that a computer would never be able to display *creativity*. He argued that machines might "surprise" us in this respect and seems to have intended his statement to apply to the creation of art generally (1950, pp. 450-451). Indeed, historically many philosophers have seen the creation of *any* kind of art as beyond the capabilities of computers. And yet, nowadays, most people you talk to, I wager, would say that the possibility of future computers creating all sorts of art is actually quite easy to imagine.

If we consider the products generated by DALL-E and other AI programs to be art, then it seems hard to deny that AI-art is already here. There are, of course, plausible arguments that the seeming artistic creations of computers at present are not *real* art (Kraatz & Xie, 2023; Hoel, 2022; Chiang, 2024a, 2024b; Nannicelli, 2025). Some might argue that these products are simply downstream creations of the computer's original engineer rather than the programs themselves (Cohen, 1995; Lopes, 2009; Boden, 2010). Others that AI art involves a level of "participation" or collaboration (Cross, 2025). Nevertheless, the original skeptical worry addressed by Turing no

longer seems as implausible as it once did. That art of some sort is being created by computers – even if we are loath to call it *real* art with a capital A – appears to be the new reality.

Most of the time when people think of AI-art, they think of paintings or drawings. But an interesting new case of AI-art comes from New York-based company Monumental Labs. Founded in 2022, Monumental labs focuses on stone carving. The company uses an AI-powered robotic fabrication platform to carve elaborate sculptures out of marble and other stone materials. They also create highly ornamented structures on a mass scale.

Monumental Labs has created statues for tech companies such as Stripe – for their annual Sessions event (Metz, 2024). They've recreated three sandstone balconies on the landmarked Villard Houses in midtown Manhattan (now part of the Lotte New York Palace); done stonework for the NYIT de Seversky Mansion; are working on a new replica pediment for Carnegie Hall; and recently replaced over 80 limestone corbels and 6 rosettes for the Frick mansion's restoration (Monumental Labs, n.d.-b).

Monumental Labs hopes to fill both the sculpture and architecture spaces, offering their services to both corporate and private clients. The company has received attention from *The New York Times, Bloomberg,* CBS, and other major news organizations. And they've received investments from several venture firms, including the likes of Seven Seven Six, founded by the famous venture capitalist Alexis Ohanian (Monumental Labs, n.d.-a).

Monumental Labs promises to create works of stone art in mere hours that previously would have taken a human artist months to create. The company promises to produce their works at roughly 10% of the cost – that is, 90% less than the cost to pay a human artist (Monumental Labs, n.d.-a). In advertisements and on the company's website, Monumental Labs claims that they hope to usher in a new stone art "renaissance" (Monumental Labs, n.d.-c).

Other interesting cases of AI-art come from the film industry. In an interview in 2024 with former Google CEO Eric Schmidt at Los Angeles's Berggruen Salon, the *That '70s Show* actor Ashton Kutcher talked up the benefits of Sora, OpenAI's new generative video tool. Sora is unique in that it takes text, image, and video inputs and produces a new video as an output. The technology is still being improved and at a rapid pace, but the current results are already impressive. During the Salon discussion Kutcher was quoted discussing his use of the new tool and what he sees as the future of tools like it in the film industry:

> "You can create good 10, 15-second videos that look very real. It still makes mistakes. It still doesn't quite understand physics. … But if you look at the generation of this that existed one year ago as compared to Sora, it's leaps and bounds. In fact, there's footage in it that I would say you could easily use in a major motion picture or a television show… Why would you go out and shoot an establishing shot of a house in a television show when you could just create the establishing shot for $100? To go out and shoot it would cost you thousands of dollars. Action scenes of me jumping off of this building, you don't have to have a stunt person go do it, you could just go do it [with AI]." (Travis, 2024).

Kutcher went on to predict that in the future, using such technology would allow movie-makers to "render a whole movie. You'll just come up with an idea for a movie, then it will write the script, then you'll input the script into the video generator, and it will generate the movie. Instead of watching some movie that somebody else came up with, I can just generate and then watch my own" (Travis, 2024).

Just this year, a new AI "actress" named Tilly Norwood debuted. The actress is the creation of Dutch comedian, writer, and actress Eline van der Velden through her new AI talent studio Xicoia. Like many real actresses, Tilly even has her own social media account. Reportedly Tilly is already in talks with major talent agencies. (Middleton, 2025).

According to van der Velden, she wants Tilly to be "the next Scarlett Johansson or Natalie Portman" (Middleton, 2025). Audiences, van der Velden says, "care about the story – not whether the star has a pulse… the age of synthetic actors isn't coming – it's here" (Barraclough, 2025).

Getting back to the case of the artist whose story I opened this essay with, visual arts such as drawing and painting have seen a rise in the use of AI as well.

Unlike in film, the history of AI in the traditional arts is a bit long depending on how we look at it. In the 1800s, Swiss mechanician Henri Maillardet created automata that could create drawings, including intricate renderings of people and sailing ships (Franklin Institute, n.d.). In

the 1960s, British artist Herald Cohen created AARON, a computer program capable of creating an infinite number of original artistic images. AARON was even exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and has had its works displayed in the Whitney Museum and the Tate Gallery. Some authors have even touted AARON as an artistic answer to the original Turing test (Anderson, 2001).

Nowadays, programs like AARON are old hat. And they hardly seem as impressive when compared to the outputs of programs like DALL-E and ChatGPT. Other recent models such as EleutherAI 's 2021 VQGAN-CLIP and German-based Black Forest Labs' 2025 Flux.1 Kontext are on a whole other level. They can create visual works that seem to rival paintings of the masters. Flux's landscape images in particular can sometimes look like a painting right out of the Hudson River School.

Of course, the visual and tactile art industries are not alone in their confrontations with the new AI kid on the block. The music industry is also now having to grapple with its introduction.

As with the visual arts, depending on how you look at it, AI has been around in the music industry for a while as well. There's some evidence that Ancient Greek inventor Hero of Alexandria or Ismail al-Jazari of Mesopotamia might have built automata capable of playing pre-programmed music (Hill, 1991; Crystall, 2007). The well-known player piano has been around since at least the late 1800s.

But in 1957, a new wave of AI music emerged. That year, the ILLIAC I (Illinois Automatic Computer) – a computer created by composer Leonard Isaacson and mathematician Lejaren Hiller – generated the song "Illiac Suite for String Quartet" (Hiller and Isaacson, 1959). In 1997, an artificial intelligence program named Experiments in Musical Intelligence (EMI) composed a piece of music imitating the style of Bach (Cope, 1996). EMI's successor program, a more sophisticated algorithm called "Emily Howell" would continue to make advancements in musical artificial intelligence, in 2009 publishing its first AI album *From Darkness, Light* (Krämer, 2015). AI-generated music since then has flourished perhaps more than any other AI-generated art forms.

Now, not only can song lyrics be generated by programs such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, but entire songs – lyrics, melody, instrumental accompaniment, and all – can be produced with, or by, artificial intelligence. Recently, AI-created artist Xania Monet signed a multi-million dollar contract after the Billboard chart success of the AI-generated song "Let Go, Let God." (Billboard Pro, 2025). The song "Country Girls Make Do", which in 2025 went viral on TikTok, was created by the anonymous AI artist Beats by AI. Currently, Beats by AI has almost half a million monthly listeners on Spotify (Beats by AI, n.d.). Several AI music generators are also now on the scene. Perhaps the most well-known are Spike AI by record producer Spike Stent and Riffusion designed by Seth Forsgren and Hayk Martiros.

All these recent developments in AI and the arts raise a new set of worries. Echoing Dr. Ian Malcolm from *Jurassic Park*, computer engineers seem to have been so preoccupied with whether or not they *can* build AI that creates art, that they haven't really stopped to ask

themselves whether they *should* build it. Of course, the cat is out of the bag now. AI-generated art is all around us, and it appears this will only increase. But that it is here makes it all the more pressing for us to ask some important ethical questions: “Is AI-art a good thing for society?”, “What will the effect of AI-art be on professional artists?”, and “How might we push back on AI artistic creations?”

III. Implications for Professional Artists

Some artists are already incorporating AI into their artworks and see the integration or presence of AI in the art profession as a *good* thing.

American visual artist Ian Cheng, perhaps most famous for his “visual ecosystems,” is one such artist. In 2018, Cheng revealed his work BOB (Bag of Beliefs) at the Serpentine Galleries in London. BOB is an AI-generated creature – if we can use that word – who appears on screen and whose body, personality, and responses evolve across exhibitions in what Cheng calls “art with a nervous system” (Cheng, 2018). According to Cheng, BOB is “composed of a congress of motivating "demons" and an inductive engine capable of learning rule-based beliefs from sensory experiences” (Cheng, 2020). Viewers are able to “interact” with BOB via a smartphone app called the BOB Shrine, allowing users to alter BOB’s beliefs and so also his future behavior. Bob has now been displayed at multiple art galleries. Clearly, the work has been a boon for Cheng’s art career. What’s more, it’s introduced to the world a whole new form of interactive art.

French artist Pierre Huyghe is another example of a visual artist who has embraced AI. In 2024, Huyghe premiered “Idioms,” a series featuring AI-powered masks that visitors can wear which use AI and learning to analyzing environmental data – including sound, facial recognition, and other sensory input – to generate a unique, non-human language (Huyghe, 2024a). Huyghe’s 2024 “Liminal,” an exhibition at the Pinault Collection’s Punta della Dogana, has as its centerpiece *Liminal*, a huge video screen on which a faceless nude female figure moves in response to inputs from various sensors, changing her behavior via learning accomplished through “synthetic neural circuits” (Huyghe, 2024b).

The visual world is not the only artistic realm in which AI has been warningly embraced. In the music scene, no less than former member of the Fab Four, Paul McCartney, used AI in 2023 to help isolate his former bandmate John Lennon’s voice from old demos. The result was a new Beatles song called “Now and Then.” The same year, David Guetta, the DJ and producer famous for the song “Somebody That I Used to Know,” used AI to replicate rapper Eminem's voice for a track he played live, an experiment he referred to as "Emin-AI-em" (Fu, 2023). Guetta does not intend to release the song commercially, but he has stated that he sees AI as one more tool to “democratise music.” However, he also qualified that claim by saying that “if you have terrible taste, your music is still gonna be terrible, even with AI” (Roche, 2023). Even Oasis singer Liam Gallagher has reacted positively to an AI-created Oasis album called *AISIS*, declaring that the album was "Mad as f--k" (Scarlett, 2023).

And yet, not all artists have been so happy with AI’s expansion into the artistic realm. In fact, many artists and creators have been downright *critical* and *pessimistic*.

This was the case with the artist that I met at the bus stop. For him the use of AI-generated art by a potential client meant the loss of a commission. This case might seem somewhat trivial to outside observers, but for small-time artists like my acquaintance, that sort of business loss, especially when multiplied many times over, begins to add up and fast. If this trend continues, the end result for many artists, it appears, will be the loss of their ability to keep themselves afloat by selling their artistic productions. In effect, artists will either have to rely more and more on the all-too-common day job for their survival – and hope that such a job will still afford them enough time for art on the side – or they will eventually have to leave the art profession altogether.

This is not just a theoretical worry. Jiang et al. (2023) note that representatives of some AI companies have openly stated that they expect generative AI systems will replace many creative professionals. In 2022, Sam Altman of OpenAI tweeted: "Soon, AI tools will do what only very talented humans can do today. (I expect this to go mostly in the counter-intuitive order--creative fields first, cognitive labor next, and physical labor last.) Great for society; not always great for individual jobs" (Altman, 2022). A study by Goldberg and Lam (2025) looks at what happened when an online marketplace allowed AI-generated art to compete with works made by humans. They found 78% more images per month arriving on the platform after the introduction of generative AI than in markets without AI images. They also saw a 23% drop in non-AI artists. They claim consumers ended up having a taste for AI-generated images and that the result seemed to be that GenAI is likely "crowding out" non-GenAI image production. And a

recent survey by the Society of Authors (2024) found that A quarter of illustrators (26%) and over a third of translators (36%) have already lost work due to generative AI.

Not all of the empirical evidence suggests the same story. Makridis (2026) looks at the effect of AI on earnings and employment outcomes of US-based artists from 2017 through 2024. That study suggests there is scant evidence of a negative effect due to AI on short-run earnings and employment. In some ways, this seems to go against the picture I am presenting here. But it's worth noting that the data considered in that study only ran through 2023. This was before the introduction of tools like Sora and the debut of AI actors like Tilly Norwood. Results like these from the early days of AI, though interesting, aren't really strong evidence against the direction all this is appears to be *heading*.

Worries about the effect of AI on the art profession have been expressed by many artists in many of the various art scenes.[1]

Go back to the case of Monumental Labs. They, too, have been the focus of criticism. As noted above, Monumental labs promises to create works of stone art in mere hours that previously would have taken a human months to create. And the company promises to produce their works at roughly 85% of the normal cost – again, the cost to pay a living artist.

[1] For a recent case study focusing on interviews with musical professionals, see Herington et al. (2025).

As noted, Monumental Labs hopes to create a "renaissance" of stone art. But it's worth wondering who exactly this renaissance will benefit. Companies like Monumental Labs, if successful in their ventures, will be effectively replacing real artists in much of their artistic domains. A statue in a public square that could have been hand-crafted by a commissioned sculptor for a price that would have helped that artist sustain their ability to work in the craft and support themselves (and in some cases their families) will now be made for much cheaper and made much faster by a manufacturing company that uses AI. The result is that the commission for that work now goes mostly to the CEOs of and investors in a tech company. In effect, this sort of shift is a redistribution of not just artistic labor but also of artistic *wealth* – from the hands and mouths of artists (and their families) to the hands and mouths of tech industry leaders and venture capitalists. It's a sort of John Henry vs. the machine story. And given these options, it's not clear how a city or other potential client cannot be incentivized to choose paying less for a similar but AI-produced product over a more expensive human-made one. It's also not clear how even the best artists can compete in such an environment.[2]

On Twitter, Micah Springut, the CEO of Monumental Labs, has defended his company against such criticisms:

[2] One might worry that this criticism simply states the familiar reaction that artists would lose immediate employment and income. However, familiar or intuitive as it might be it is not one that has been covered yet in depth in the academic literature. See Jiang et al. (2023) an early articulation of this sort of worry for the case of visual arts.

> “Artists can now do more work in stone, more complex work in stone, and make more money doing it. Or they can sell their work at lower price points to a wider audience (not just billionaires).” (Springut, 2024a).

> “We're also reviving a craft that had largely disappeared in the United States. I can almost list off the top of my head the number of practicing stone sculptors in the country today. It was a functionally dead industry.” (Springut, 2024b).

> “Every robot we spin up to produce sculpture supports the jobs of 1-2 digital artists, a digital fabricator, and 3 stone carvers. (the stone carvers do the finishing work that the robot is incapable of doing).” (Springut, 2024c).

> “it’s the same as artists having studio carvers or hiring the Piccirillis to carve their piece.” (Springut, 2024d).

And yet, these responses miss the mark. Even if artists can now use Monumental Labs to create their own sculptures and now produce more of them faster and sell them for cheaper, that now means artists who create stonework the “old school way” will have to compete with this new process. This effectively incentivizes a drive away from art made solely with traditional skill and likely pushing artists who wish to maintain traditional methods out of the art game. Even if Monumental Labs employs stone carvers as “finishers” one might wonder if in the future those who take those jobs will do so because Monumental Labs, through its new business model, has reduced or eliminated the ability of those artists to compete. This is somewhat similar to when

large farming corporations drive out family farmers from the competition who then end up having to rely on the corporation for employment to feed themselves and their families.

The analogy to the Piccirilli Brothers sculpture shop is interesting. The Piccirilli Bros, famous for creating the sculpture of Lincoln in the Lincoln Monument, used a team of sculptors to produce large artworks (New York Public Library, n.d.). However, the company was still employing sculptors for each task, not replacing them with machines – or at least not as many. With Monumental Labs around, it's hard to see how even a company like Piccirilli Bros would financially compete. They'd need to change their business model to be just as cost effective as Monumental Labs, otherwise they'd likely go out of business and their sculptors end up working as finishers for their competition.

Perhaps, even more concerning, Monumental Labs has not committed to not accepting monument or statue designs that were AI-generated. So, it is plausible even statue designers, and not just sculptors, might lose out on business. What's more, with rapid advances in AI and robots being made every day, one might wonder if a company like Monumental Labs wouldn't simply eliminate all artists from its workforce if doing so became possible and turned out to be more cost-effective. It is, after all, at the end of the day a business.

Similar worries about the use of AI have been expressed by members of the film and television industry.

Go back to Kutcher's comments about the use of Sora. Caitie Delaney, a former writer for the show *Rick and Morty* has criticized Kutcher's comments. She accused Kutcher of "cannibalizing your own industry." She commented further, "When you take ANY humans off of a collaborative and creative pursuit you literally lose the humanity." (Delaney, 2024).

Screenwriter J. Filiatraut in response to Kutcher's remarks writes, "Imagine being Ashton Kutcher stepping onto a film set now, after coming out and advocating for all those crew people to lose their jobs…" (Sharman, 2024).

As Cole (2023) details, even Netflix Japan has stepped into the mud of this sort of issue already, creating an anime using AI ostensibly due to a "labor shortage". This is despite there being many animators eagerly looking for jobs.

Recently debuted AI actress Tilly Norwood adds a further layer to the film industry's potential worries. Xicoia hopes to create a series of AI actors and actresses who they can contract out to the film industry. As noted earlier, Tilly is already in talks with major talent agencies competing to represent her.

Whereas Sora and programs like it might mean the loss of job opportunities for cinematographers, directors, and others working behind the scenes, Tilly – and perhaps some future AI Tyler – might mean the loss of jobs for actors directly.

This sort of sentiment has been expressed by a number of actresses and other film industry players. In response to the debut of Tilly, Italian filmmaker Luca Guadagnin posted on social media: "This is literally the mark of the end of the industry as we know it… say goodbye to actors. no one should be supporting this." (Guadagnino, 2025). On a recent *Variety* podcast, British actress Emily Blunt commented, "Does it disappoint me? I don't know how to quite answer it, other than to say how terrifying this is." After being shown an image of Tilly, she stated further, "Good Lord, we're screwed. This is really, really scary. Come on, agencies, don't do that. Please stop…" (Davis, 2025). *Matilda* actress Mara Wilson commented, "And what about the hundreds of living young women whose faces were composited together to make her? You couldn't hire any of them?" (Heritage, 2025).

Of course, actors also create an ecosystem of jobs around them: makeup artists, PR agents, acting coaches. And so, AI actors plausibly make those position vulnerable as well.

From an artist and art-lover's point of view this all seems to indicate an industry moving in a troubling direction. In terms of these professions, it very plausibly means fewer artists, and for the consumer less human-made art.[3]

IV. Protecting Professional Artists

If we care about human-made art, and if we care about keeping artists employed, providing them with the opportunity to hone their craft and to produce great works, how are we to handle these

[3] See Haskins (2025) for a recent argument that while GAI is *not* per se an existential threat to human music, certain human uses of musical AI can undermine or degrade human musical *practice,* especially in terms of human agency, aesthetic experience, and learning.

recent AI developments? The problem is, of course, complicated by the fact that the emergence of AI will differentially affect artists and producers, who of course are not uniformly impacted by these technologies.[4] It's a very difficult question. But looking at the issue broadly, there are at least a few ways we might try to save the human-made art scene.

One somewhat dramatic option would be to put a *ban* on AI-art – or at least a ban on some forms of it. In many ways, that seems like the simplest move. But it is one that will be heavily resisted, not just by artists who incorporate AI into their artworks but by businesses and investors hoping to make a profit off AI-art. As a result, such policies will likely be difficult to get passed in a place like the US Congress.

Perhaps such policies might stand a better chance in the form of agreements made by institutions like art museums, galleries, and industry organizations. One successful example of this is the 2023 Minimum Basic Agreement (MBA) between the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and film and TV studios. This agreement, among other things, prevents AI from being treated as a writer, prevents AI-generated writing as being used as source material, states that the use of AI must be voluntary and disclosed, and reserves WGA the right to challenge the use of writers' materials (scripts, treatments, etc.) for training AI models. Many commentators have seen this as a historic precedent because it's among the first collective bargaining agreements in

[4] See (Woronkowicz, Noonan, & Skaggs, 2026) who present the first empirical assessment of this issue. Working with a 2025 survey of arts and designers, they find that generative AI is being adopted unevenly across occupations. An even more thorough analysis would take into consideration gendered, racialized, national, regional and other differences.

the United States to explicitly regulate the use of generative AI in a creative industry.[5] For our purposes, it's important because it shows that the implementation of various policies of this sort is at least possible – and that artistic communities are already moving in this direction.

Similar initiatives have emerged at the grassroots level. In December 2025, the Vault artists collective in Belfast banned AI-generated art from their annual Christmas market. Co-organizer Jonathan Brennan declared "We have to take a stand," explaining that visitors "come here to appreciate unique gifts, handmade things, that you won't find anywhere else" (AFP, 2025). The language the organizers used echoes the economic concerns raised in Section III: they described AI as "cannibalizing" the work of low-paid creatives. A comparable case occurred in Canada, when the Town of York Historical Society issued a public apology after a vendor was found selling AI-generated art at their Snowy Paper Fair, stating "We did not fully understand the negative impact that generated art has on the creative community" and pledging to support human-designed art going forward (Barrie Today, 2025). What these cases suggest is that voluntary norms against AI-art are already starting to take hold within artistic communities – and norms set not by governments, but by artists and consumers themselves.

And yet, even if some form of policy is set in place – by a part of government or by a private institution – it also seems like an option that might be difficult to enforce as AI

[5] It's worth noting that the 2023 agreement does not ban AI use entirely. Writers can still use AI tools, with consent and disclosure. Some might fear this may eventually lead to a two-tier system: human-only writers and writers using AI tools (which may increase output). Enforcement also remains to be tested. The provisions depend heavily on transparency and disclosure by studios. If studios circumvent disclosure, or if enforcement is lax, the protections could be undermined.

technology develops. Can we reliably identify AI-art? Sometimes whether something was created by AI seems obvious, but other times it's difficult to tell. Perhaps new software might be developed to look out for such creations. Inevitably there will be a sort of arms race. Still, AI is sometimes identifiable, and many times artists are honest about whether they've used AI, or we can find out thanks to journalists or other reporters. The effort isn't impossible, and that we can identify some cases, that we can at least make some headway in mitigating the problem, seems to make the effort worthwhile.

Another hurdle for a proposal like this, at least in the States, might be that such policies could in some way run up against the First Amendment and its protection of free speech, especially if those policies are instituted by some part of government rather than voluntarily agreed to by members of some artistic community. This isn't the case for all countries, but the US – one of the largest producers of art – does seem to have this potential issue standing in the way. Perhaps it's not insurmountable but it is something that would require more in-depth legal analysis and that would have to be navigated carefully.

Another issue for this proposal is that it in many ways also goes against the spirit of the arts – the view that art is whatever we make it and that artists should be free to experiment and innovate. Here we run into a deeper philosophical, rather than practical, issue. Even if we can implement the sort of policy suggested here, is it one that denies art its own growth and creative expansion? This, I find more difficult to answer. And I wonder if perhaps this is a debate that will have to be decided by the art community. As I've already shown, many artists seem to be wary of AI-art and lean in the direction of supporting something like this first proposal, others

not so much. Whether AI-art really goes against the spirit of the arts is a weighty topic that deserves its own individual focus much like the First Amendment question.

A less exclusionary proposal might be to *support* AI-forgoing artists through things like taxes and grants. We could fund artists by putting our countries' bank accounts behind them or by subsidizing their work much like many countries already subsidize businesses. To some extent this seems like a good suggestion. Artist grants already exist and have good results. But one problem is that such grants, at present, are often rather limited and hard to obtain. Such opportunities would need to drastically increased, which could be done. Still, this wouldn't solve the problem of getting cities, states, and private clients to *purchase* human-made artworks rather than AI products. That would require an additional effort. That's not impossible, but it shows that this proposal needs other ones to walk hand-in-hand with it for it to have the strongest desired effect. Another potential wrinkle is the instability of politics in places like the US. It's not clear that this is an option that would be well-enough insulated from things like later funding cuts or – equally troubling – conservative censorship. It seems possible, for example, that with Republicans in control of Congress and the White House, grants in that country might be approved only for artists who create works in line with conservative values or even the aesthetic preferences of the President. That would be a real problem for the hope of maintaining the full range of artistic freedom and creativity and would seem to turn artistic creation and surviving as a professional artist into something that depends inappropriately on one's personal politics. Perhaps laws could be put in place to help protect against such partisan abuses, and such a policy might fare better in other countries.

The tax side of the suggestion would also face hurdles given that so many members of Congress are swayed by lobbyists, and AI-art companies and producers will likely resist a tax on AI-art. But, again, as with the previous proposal, it still seems worth trying, even though the road ahead might be a bumpy, difficult, or politically insecure one.

A better version of this proposal might be to have art museums and other institutions be the ones responsible for administering such grants. But, of course, such grants will also need funding sources – private donors or governments. And we all know how even non-profits can be influenced by worries about how potential donors or funders might react to their policies and actions. So, even this sort of option isn't completely isolated of outside influence.

A third proposal might be to turn to the *free-market*. Compared to countries like North Korea or China, in the US, films and shows on television or streaming services, for example, are relatively less affected by undue government influence. Of course, the recent suspensions of Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel shows that at present there are some serious limits to this option. But generally, films and television shows depend for the most part on things like their ability to generate advertisement revenue or profits from ticket sales. This is partly why Jimmy Kimmel was able to have his suspension eventually lifted – the economic blowback of so many cancelled subscriptions was apparently considerable.

In some respects, this aspect of film and television helps artists gain a bit more freedom from political pressure. But it is a double-edged sword: we all know that many films and works on television still face unfair pressure from their advertisers and depend for their releases and

continued existence on viewer engagement. What's more, it is difficult to imagine that if a company like Netflix or some film or television studio could create an AI product that would replace the cost of real writers and actors and still attract audiences, that they wouldn't just do so.

So, what is left? How, then, might we try to support human-made art and living artists in a world increasingly saturated with AI production?

A fourth proposal returns us to *individual choice* and consumer behavior. When a government or private client chooses to pay the higher cost for a work of art created by a human artist rather than a cheaper AI-generated product, they in effect choose to support living artists rather than contribute to the economic forces displacing them. The same holds at the level of ordinary consumers. We can choose to pay for a movie created by humans, or a movie created by AI; we can choose to pay for a drawing made by a person, or a drawing made by an AI; we can choose to listen to a song created by a human, or a song created by an AI. This is the familiar notion of "voting with one's dollar."

The nice thing about the vote-with-your-dollar strategy is that it works even if private companies are otherwise financially incentivized to use AI. The film industry might try to make AI movies, might see that making such works rather than human ones will drastically cut their costs, but if no one buys tickets to those films, then the overall incentive disappears. This goes for other works of art as well. If no one buys AI-generated songs, then record companies will have less incentive to keep producing them. If no one pays anymore for AI statues, then eventually those sorts of works will lose traction.

Of course, it would be naïve to think that individual choice alone can defeat the economic incentives pushing institutions toward AI-art. Companies – especially the large ones – will likely keep seeking out cheaper alternatives. The same is probably true of a lot of everyday consumers as well – convenience and saving money tend to win out. And as AI technology keeps improving, it is almost certain that it will only get more difficult to tell human-made art from AI-generated ones. These are real hurdles, and we shouldn't pretend otherwise. But none of that means individual choice is morally or politically irrelevant here. Our purchasing behavior is still one of the few forms of real agency we consumers have in a market-based economy. We can't defeat these incentives on our own. But consumption practices, enacted collectively, can still exert real influence – sometimes a surprisingly strong one, as when collective consumer pressure helped bring Jimmy Kimmel's show back.

Consumers sometimes choose, for moral reasons, to buy fair-trade goods or support local businesses, even at the cost of some inconvenience or a higher price tag. There is no reason consumers could not do the same thing with art – choosing human-created work over AI-generated alternatives. When a consumer does this, they are in effect expressing a commitment to the value of human art. Artistic goods differ, of course, in important ways from a bag of coffee or a pair of shoes. But in either case, our choices express – and reinforce – our moral and cultural commitments. A single person's choice will not, of course, on its own, solve the problem. But each person's choice does matters. Each choice helps maintain (or fail to maintain, even degrade) the norms that support human artists. That can't happen without our choices.

None of this is meant to suggest that consumer choice is a solution all on its own. The more realistic and defensible approach, I believe, is to combine multiple strategies at once: (1) institutional policies and norms against AI-art, (2) expanded grant systems and funding for public arts, (3) taxation or labeling requirements for AI-generated works, and (4) individual consumer responsibility. No single one of these strategies, on its own, can protect human-made art. But taken together, they might offer a more robust response – one that helps protect the social, cultural, and economic conditions under which human artistry, and human artists, can continue to flourish.

To be clear, none of this is meant to argue that AI-art is not sometimes impressive, or that it could not somehow play a valuable role in future creative work. The concern is a narrower one – namely, that, left unchecked, the proliferation of AI-art risks eroding the very social and economic conditions that let human artists make a living and keep practicing their craft in the first place. Human-made art carries a distinctive kind of value. To let it be steadily replaced – or, worst case, to watch it largely disappear – would be a real loss to our way of life.

Conclusion.

The recent emergence of AI-art across all these artistic disciplines makes clear that we are approaching a crossroads. What once seemed like science fiction is now a living reality. And it is a genuinely double-edged development – fascinating in one sense, unsettling in another. On the one hand, AI offers new forms of creative possibility, something many people will rightly find valuable and worth embracing. On the other hand, it poses a serious threat to the livelihoods of professional artists, and to the art they create and that we, in turn, get to enjoy.

If we think human art should remain more than a mere curiosity – something we visit like an ancient bust in a museum – or that it should not be relegated to a rare pursuit reserved for the privileged few, then the challenge ahead of us is clear. Governments, cultural institutions, and private companies all need to explore ways to protect human artists. And each of us, as consumers and citizens, needs to do our part too. We have a choice: support human art and human artists, or do not. We can choose the movie, the painting, the song made by a person – even when the AI-generated version is cheaper or more convenient. Multiply that choice across enough art-consumers, and it can radically shift the economic pressures working against human art. The loss of human art is not some foregone conclusion we have to accept. And protecting it is not some lofty, unachievable ideal either.

The key question before us now is not whether AI will keep making art – it undoubtedly will, and it seems there will be no stopping that. Instead, it is whether we will do our part to make sure human artists can still have a chance to thrive and shape our cultural world. If we value the human voice and the human vision, then making sure they survive rather than get replaced by artificial ones is a responsibility that falls on all of us.

If we care about real art and real artists – as I assumed many of us do – then we need to see the rise of AI-art for the urgent and serious problem that it is, and we need to make a concerted and collective effort to address it. If we don't, we face a future in which human-made art and human artists may be largely pushed aside. In his song about John Henry, Johnny Cash

famously asks whether “machines ought to take the place of living?” Like Cash, I think the answer is no, and I think we’ll be much better off if we don’t let it happen.

* * *

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