

Artificial intelligence and public trust in the reinterpretation of art: An examination of human and AI-generated art

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Dates:

Received: 2025-08-06

Accepted: 2026-07-29

Published: 2026-09-16

Published by



Original research
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The impact of AI on art and design

ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) has profoundly influenced numerous sectors, with its impact on the arts being both transformative and contentious. AI-generated art is disrupting notions of creativity, authorship, and artistic value, prompting debates about public trust and artistic authenticity. AI tools can produce intricate, stylistically diverse artwork that resembles human creativity, raising fundamental questions about art and the artist's role in the digital age. This article explores AI's influence on traditional art practices, focusing on public trust, perceptions, and engagement. We examined the convergence and divergence between human-created and AI-generated artwork to assess audience interpretation and value, while investigating the challenges and opportunities AI artwork presents for originality and authenticity. In order to do this, we conducted a qualitative study involving ten art enthusiasts and two traditional art practitioners. We analysed the data using thematic analysis to uncover patterns and perceptions shaping contemporary discussions of trust in the age of AI. This article provides preliminary data on interpretations of AI-generated art and contributes to the broader conversation about the future of creativity by providing critical insights into the ethical, cultural, and aesthetic implications of AI in art, which inform debates about the authenticity of machine-generated content in a digital world.

Keywords: AI-generated art, artistic authenticity, digital creativity, human-machine collaboration, public trust, creative algorithms.

Introduction

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) as a medium of creativity and aesthetics in contemporary art has sparked both admiration and scepticism, blurring the line between machine autonomy and human ingenuity. As advances in technology enhance the simulation, generation, and interpretation of artistic forms, traditional definitions of creativity, authorship, and authenticity in the art world are being questioned. Art has historically been considered the greatest human endeavour, enshrined in emotion, intention, cultural experience, and individual expression. However, the development of sophisticated AI models, such as generative adversarial networks, diffusion models, and deep-learning algorithms, has now made it possible for machines to produce aesthetically compelling artistic work. They rival, or even surpass, artwork created by human artists in complexity and originality (Elgammal *et al* 2017; McCormack *et al* 2019). This development not only challenges the ontology of art but also sparks significant debates about the legitimacy and trustworthiness of machine-produced creative work.

Public trust in art, originally based on perceptions of the artist's sincerity, intention, and skill, is undergoing significant transformations due to technological advancements. Although some individuals and institutions regard AI-generated art as an innovative

expression of creative possibilities, others question its value, origin, and integrity. Boden (2016) argues that the crux of this scepticism lies in unease about the philosophy of culture: whether machines that lack consciousness or emotional depth can create art in a meaningful sense. Additionally, the growing prevalence of AI-generated artwork in galleries, online platforms, and commercial spaces has raised questions about artistic authorship, originality, and the erosion of human-centred artistic traditions. The lack of transparency in many AI processes, such as algorithmic decision-making and data training sets, worsens this concern (Chaudhary 2024). This could affect the originality and intentionality that fuel an artwork, shaping how the public receives and interprets it.

In this article, we seek to address the core problem of the increasing divide between technological innovation and human-centred artistic values, especially as it relates to public trust. Although AI is praised for its efficiency, innovation, and potential to demystify the production of artistic content, it also poses challenges for traditional artists and art institutions. Many of them must deal with the implications of machine co-authorship and the potential displacement of human creativity.

Consequently, we were guided by the following research questions:

1. How do audiences differentiate between human-made and AI-generated art?
2. To what extent do trust and authenticity factor into the reception of AI-generated art?
3. How are artists navigating this evolving landscape of human-machine collaboration?

These questions are pertinent because they not only help us understand the cultural legitimacy of AI in terms of creativity but also help us anticipate how the art world may evolve in response to emerging technologies. We aimed to explore these dynamics through a detailed examination of the reinterpretation of art in the AI era, with a particular focus on public trust. We investigated how audiences interpret and value artwork created by humans versus that generated by AI, the responses of traditional artists and institutions to the opportunities presented by AI in the field of art, and how AI disrupts art production.

Review of related literature and concepts

The introduction of AI into the arts has sparked numerous inquiries across aesthetics, technology, psychology, philosophy, and cultural studies. Creativity is one of the basic concepts characterising this discourse related to art and AI, as the term traditionally pertains to human cognition, emotion, and intentionality. Boden (2004) categorises types

of creativity as combinational, exploratory, and transformational, while emphasising that AI systems – especially those based on machine learning – have shown an increased capacity to demonstrate combinational and exploratory creativity by recombining existing elements or exploring predefined conceptual spaces. However, transformational creativity, which involves redefining or inventing entirely new frameworks, is considered particularly restricted to humans because it requires consciousness, lived experience, and self-reflection. Nonetheless, Boden (2016) observes that scholars are being compelled to reconsider the classification of transformational creativity as possible for AI because artwork generated by AI can currently provoke human aesthetic judgment and emotional responses. Therefore, technological evolution could enable AI to fully develop human-like creativity.

The emergence of generative adversarial and neural networks has revolutionised art production. The concept of generative adversarial networks was pioneered by Goodfellow *et al* (2014). It involves a generator and a discriminator in a feedback loop, allowing machines to produce outputs that increasingly resemble authentic artistic pieces. Generative adversarial networks are being applied in the art world to create portraits, abstract paintings, and stylistic transformations. This is clearly illustrated by the auction of *Portrait of Edmond de Belamy*, created by the Paris-based collective Obvious, which Christie's sold for \$432,500 in 2018 (De Chiara 2021). According to Barrat (2013), this landmark event marked a significant turning point in how the public and institutions perceive AI-generated art, shifting it from a mere technical innovation to a legitimate medium with both aesthetic and monetary value. However, the issue of authorship has arisen in this context because the artwork was produced using an algorithm previously developed by another coder. This raises concerns about intellectual property, creative credit, and the role of the artist in AI-assisted productions (McCormack *et al* 2019).

Authorship in AI art challenges longstanding philosophical and legal assumptions. In the history of traditional western art, the *auteur*, or solitary genius, is often romanticised, with much value placed on the artist's intentionality, biography, and originality. AI art, on the other hand, makes this more complicated by decentralising authorship and introducing collaboration between humans and machines. Some scholars propose a model of distributed creativity, in which the final outcome is a product of the contributions of the artist, the algorithm, the data source, and even the training environment (Gunkel 2020).

This perspective aligns with postmodernist theories. Barthes (1977) argues in *Death of the author* that meaning is constructed by audiences and cultural contexts rather than being solely embedded in the creator's intent. In this regard, AI-generated art introduces a new epistemology of interpretation, where value is derived not only from process and

intention but also from reception and impact. Public trust is another factor that affects how AI-generated art is received, as trust in art is traditionally built on authenticity, provenance, and emotional resonance. When these factors are perceived as mediated by algorithms rather than human intention, audience engagement can shift, often accompanied by suspicion or ambivalence. Chamberlain *et al* (2018) suggest that people are more likely to value an artwork if they believe it was created by a human, even when its aesthetic quality is the same. This phenomenon, known as algorithm aversion bias, demonstrates a psychological resistance to attributing creative capacity to machines, even when they consistently produce high-quality results (Dietvorst *et al* 2015). Additionally, because many AI systems operate as black boxes, there is growing concern regarding the transparency and explainability of AI processes. Consequently, their decision-making logic is unclear to the average viewer, which undermines the trust that typically accompanies artistic interpretation (Chaudhary 2024).

From an institutional perspective, integrating AI-generated art into collections and exhibitions represents a significant step by art museums and galleries in addressing complex developments. The curatorial challenge lies not only in displaying this artwork but also in framing it in ways that inform and engage the public without alienating traditionalists. Institutions such as the Barbican Centre in London and the Ars Electronica Festival in Austria have begun to feature AI in their programmes, indicating that machine creativity is increasingly being accepted in elite art spaces (Chan 2020). However, introducing AI into the art world raises significant economic and ethical concerns. Critics argue that AI threatens the commodification of creativity by reducing it to algorithmic efficiency and data optimisation. This marginalises artists whose work cannot easily be digitised or replicated by algorithms (Cetinic & She 2022; So 2023).

The aesthetics of machine-generated art is another key concept to consider when thinking about public trust in art. Unlike traditional aesthetics, which rely on perceptual harmony, emotional expression, and cultural symbolism, the aesthetics of AI art often invoke ideas of the uncanny, the sublime, and the posthuman. Manovich (2019) argues that AI art reflects the logic of data culture, where beauty emerges from recognising patterns, complexity, and algorithmic abstraction rather than from emotional authenticity. This shift affects how audiences understand and engage with art, especially in digital environments where social media and online platforms mediate much of the interaction with artistic content.

Finally, the idea of human-machine collaboration offers a more positive foundation for understanding the use of AI in the art world. Instead of viewing AI as a threat to the integrity of the artistic field, some practitioners and theorists see it as a tool for augmenting human creativity. In this regard, AI functions as a co-creator, expanding the range of

artistic possibilities and enabling new forms of expression that would be impossible without computational assistance. Yang *et al* (2020) demonstrate that many artists use AI not to replace their creative instincts but to challenge them. This can prompt unexpected outcomes and expand the scope of traditional techniques.

Theoretical framework

This research is underpinned by two theories, technological determinism and reception theory. These theories offer a significant lens for examining the intersection of AI, art, and public trust. Reception theory helps us understand how audiences interpret and respond to various media, including artwork, while technological determinism interrogates the intersection of AI-generated and human-created artworks. Technological determinism, introduced by McLuhan in 1962, holds that technological advancement is the principal driver of cultural change (Shahzad *et al* 2023). The theory holds that technology shapes human behaviour, institutions, and values. In fact, scholars posit that technology influences and determines the conditions of cultural production and reception with minimal regard for human agency (Ogunjobi & Ogundeyi 2022; Fanni *et al* 2023).

AI in artwork is often regarded as a transformative agent that redefines the meaning and value of art, in addition to serving as a tool for artistic production (Gjorgjieski 2024). With AI's growing role in creative work, technological determinism provides a framework for understanding how artists perceive these developments and lays the foundation for comparing AI-generated and human-created artwork. It can be argued that technological innovation is an inevitable progression in modern times (Skidelsky 2022). The theory of technological determinism holds that new technologies alter how people engage their senses and, therefore, their entire lives (Hallström 2022). For instance, the mindset that positions AI as an inevitable successor and even superior to human creative capability tends to trust AI-generated artwork based on faith in technology, while those with a mindset of technological resistance argue that AI undermines the authenticity and emotional resonance traditionally associated with human artistic production. This reaction may reflect broader cultural beliefs about technology's role in society. While technological determinism offers significant insights, it tends to underemphasise the audience's interpretative agency and the contingent nature of trust. Therefore, reception theory should be integrated to strengthen the theoretical lens guiding this study.

Reception theory, as propounded by Hall (1973), emphasises that audience responses to communications may vary considerably based on several factors, such as tradition, cultural background, context, and modes of communication. Encoding and decoding

are fundamental principles of reception theory. The sender encodes the message, and the receiver decodes it. Hall (1973) categorises how audiences decode and interpret messages into dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings. The dominant audience understands the message and receives it as presented, while the negotiated audience can accept or reject it based on the clear rationale behind it. In contrast, the oppositional audience has a predisposed mindset that rejects a message, especially when it fails to align with their ideological beliefs. The audience in reception theory is not passive; rather, they actively decipher messages, playing a crucial role in producing meaning for each message they receive (Davis 2004; Martin 2007; Kjeldsen 2017; Dziak 2024).

The significance of artwork is determined not by the creator, but by the audience during the act of receiving or viewing (Bennett 1988; Jozwiak 2014). Consequently, viewers may arrive with preconceived notions about the originality and value of human-created versus machine-generated artwork. For instance, AI-generated artwork may seem innovative and genuine to one audience, while another may regard it as derivative and devoid of emotional resonance. This submission illustrates the importance of audience perceptions in assessing trust and authenticity in AI-generated art.

Reception theory has been criticised because understanding individual cognitive perceptions is significantly more complex (Staiger 2005). A single individual may exhibit a composite response throughout the message reception process; sometimes as a dominant audience member, other times as an oppositional one, and even as a negotiated audience member (Staiger 2005). Despite this critique, reception theory complements technological determinism in this study by offering ways to analyse how public trust is constructed in the current era of technological engagement in artistic expression. It grants the audience interpretive agency by emphasising multiple reactions to AI-generated art, underscoring the need to understand both AI outputs and the human viewpoints that ascribe value to them.

Methodology

Adopting a qualitative research approach, we used in-depth interviews to investigate the impact of AI on traditional art practices, with a specific focus on public trust, perception, and engagement. We utilised purposive sampling to select two traditional art practitioners as key informants, each with at least five years of experience as practising artists. Additionally, we interviewed ten art lovers as an audience to explore their perceptions of AI-generated artwork compared to human-created artwork. We selected the audience participants based on their knowledge of and engagement with both human-created and AI-generated artworks. Consequently, we collected data through

in-depth interviews with 12 participants. All interviews were conducted virtually and lasted no longer than 60 minutes each. They explored participants’ perceptions of AI’s influence on traditional art practices, the extent of public acceptance of AI-generated art, and how trust and engagement with AI artwork differ from those with conventional, human-created artwork that relies on human creativity and ingenuity. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees.

The study’s inclusion criteria required participants to be between the ages of 20 and 50 and to be either audience members or creators of artwork. Tables 1 and 2 provide detailed participant characteristics. We transcribed the recorded interview data and used the six-step thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Therefore, themes relevant to the study’s objectives were coded and grouped into categories based on the interaction patterns addressed in the study before the final analysis.

Table 1 presents the detailed characteristics of the study participants. These include their location, age, gender, education, race, level of experience with art and AI (advanced, average, or beginner), art practice (professional or amateur), and profession.

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Race	Level of experience with art and AI	Art practice	Profession
A	32	Female		White	Advanced	Professional	Script writer
B	30	Male	BA Hons in Film and TV	Black	Advanced	Professional	Video editor, film director, TV presenter and actor
C	24	Male	Diploma in Audio Technology	Black	Average	Professional	Technical producer and broadcast engineer
D	27	Female	BA Digital Arts	Black	Advanced	Professional	Media expert in advertising
E	21	Male	BA Communication and Media	Black	Average	Amateur	Student assistant, radio presenter
F	27	Female	Digital Artist	Black	Advanced	Professional	Animator and fine artist
G	26	Female	Digital Artist	Black	Advanced	Professional	Animator and VR specialist
H	26	Female	Digital Artist	Coloured	Advanced	Professional	Animator and model
I	34	Female	Fine Art	Coloured	Advanced	Professional	Content creator
J	50	Female	BA Communication	Black	Advanced	Professional	Broadcast engineer

TABLE

Nº 1

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Detailed characteristics of the study participants

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the art practitioners who participated in the study.

Art practitioner	Age	Gender	Race	No. of years in the industry
A	47	Male	Black	15
B	45	Female	White	14

TABLE **Nº 2** <

Details of the art practitioners

We approached the study from an academic and creative arts background, drawing on our exposure to discussions about cultural production and the influence of emerging technologies such as AI. Despite our limited knowledge of AI, we do not professionally produce AI-generated artwork. However, our knowledge of AI tools has helped us better understand their technical capabilities and limitations. This understanding may have influenced how we interpreted participants’ expressions of trust in AI-generated artworks.

Therefore, we adopted a systematic thematic analysis approach for the various stages of the analysis. This approach allowed us to revisit the data repeatedly, ensuring that our preconceived expectations did not overshadow the themes emerging from participants’ narratives. In addition, we included artwork professionals and audience members to balance production-based and reception-based perspectives. We also used open-ended questions to allow participants to express their views in their own words, rather than steering them toward predefined conclusions. To maintain anonymity, we excluded participants’ identifying information, such as their names. Moreover, all data collected for the study were kept confidential and used solely for this report.

Results and discussion

By examining how people perceive authenticity, inventiveness, and value in both human-created and AI-generated artwork, we investigated the evolving relationship between AI and public trust in the context of art reinterpretation. The results indicate that public trust remains more firmly anchored in the human component of artistic expression, despite the curiosity and awe that AI-generated art can evoke. We discuss the findings under four themes presented below.

Audience perception: Human-created vs AI-generated art

The data revealed that most participants preferred art created by humans, as it is often associated with emotion, expression, and vulnerability. When describing AI-generated art, they responded, ‘There’s no emotion behind the artwork’. The participants also connected authenticity, life conditions, and experiences to the emotions evoked by human-created art. They recognised human-created art as a form of storytelling. This highlights the idea that human experience is fundamental to artistic authenticity. A respondent noted,

I’m shocked, and then I think it’s a beautiful piece. But sometimes it does take away the meaning behind the artwork (Art Enthusiast H).

Technique and originality were also connected to an emotional appreciation of human-created art. The respondents asserted that AI-generated art lacks ‘intentionality and context’, qualities they associate with authenticity. They also emphasised the difference in how people with artistic knowledge view art compared to those without formal training. While evaluating AI-generated artwork, a respondent remarked,

Authenticity for me would be about intentionality and context. What inspired that work? Who is behind it? And then creativity would involve vulnerability, risk and storytelling. While AI can mimic these qualities, it lacks the lived experience, so machine-made art can appear creative, especially when guided by a human. But its authenticity still feels performative, it feels incomplete (Art Enthusiast B).

This reinforces the idea that AI struggles to replicate originality and emotional depth, while those with artistic skills tend to be more critical and analytical when engaging with AI-generated art.

However, not all participants were opposed to the use of AI in art. Several participants expressed intrigue and recognised the convenience of using AI to generate artwork, especially given time and resource constraints. Some acknowledged the beauty of AI-generated artwork, saying,

If it tells a story for me, it has creativity. If I look at something and I get any type of feeling that I interpret that art by. AI can be, because it uses data that was captured from human experiences (Art Enthusiast G).

Some noted that AI-generated art evokes human emotions because AI is merely a tool in human hands. One respondent highlighted this by stating,

The emotions, the intent behind why the artwork was created or how it was created. AI can’t have zero emotional depth because it is prompted by a human (Art Enthusiast B).

These comments suggest that although AI-generated artwork may lack certain human

depth, it is praised for its aesthetic value and time efficiency. These views position AI as a creative tool or aid rather than as an artistic replacement.

Audiences strongly preferred human-made artwork because of its emotional resonance, perceived intentionality, and authenticity. The participants consistently associated human-made art with emotional expressiveness, vulnerability, and personal storytelling. This finding aligns with earlier scholars who consider storytelling and lived experience central to creative authenticity (Chatterjee 2022; Garcia 2024). Although some consider AI-generated art visually beautiful, it is often described as emotionally shallow and lacking significant context. This distinction highlights varied perceptions of beauty and suggests that proficiency improves understanding of artistic goals and emotional depth. According to participants, AI-generated art lacks the conceptual depth and emotional foundation of human-created art, despite AI's ability to create inventive settings. This finding is consistent with those of Chen and Ibrahim (2023) and Huo and Choi (2024).

Acknowledging that humans direct AI tools, several participants viewed gadget-generated art as an extension of human creativity rather than a replacement. This indicates an emerging mindset of co-creativity, in which AI facilitates the creative process (Davis *et al* 2025). Ultimately, although human experience continues to play a significant role in determining artistic worth, AI is increasingly being recognised as a useful, albeit emotionally restrained, innovative partner.

Trust and authenticity in the reception of art

Authenticity emerged as a key factor in how participants evaluated and responded to art. Most participants described authenticity as being rooted in emotion, artistic process, and intent, which they felt AI fundamentally lacks. Some participants noted that the artistic process, including brushstrokes and physical interaction with the medium, is essential for achieving authenticity. One respondent remarked,

The actual paint and the actual brush strokes, the thoughts, the ideas, the process behind it. With AI art, you can't really see the brush strokes. You can't really see it like you do when you go to a museum. With AI, it's just too perfect (Art Enthusiast H).

Another respondent noted,

Something that's out-of-the-box that's not as normal & what society would deem as odd. Something with error. AI would struggle to comprehend how to make human error, it emphasises perfection (Art Enthusiast E).

This recurring association with perfection was perceived as a flaw in AI-generated

artwork. Several participants questioned whether AI can truly be considered authentic if it relies on existing datasets, mimics other work and is prompted.

The responses highlighted that trust in AI-generated art is often contingent on various factors. Participants said they would be more likely to trust the artwork if the creation process were transparent, if they knew who prompted the AI, and if it was used ethically. This highlights broader concerns regarding authorship and transparency in the use of AI. Some participants expressed concerns about AI-generated art mimicking other artists' styles without crediting or referring to them. One respondent explained,

It depends on the purpose and sense of and sensitivity. If it's done respectfully and it adds a new layer of meaning/innovation, I'll be open to that, but when AI starts to alter sacred or cultural significant work without community involvement, it feels like digital colonisation (Art Enthusiast A).

Authenticity was frequently mentioned as a key factor in participants' evaluations of artwork, especially when comparing the relative merits of AI-generated versus human-created artwork. Participants almost always connected concerns about authenticity to issues of meaning, emotional depth, and the core of the creative process (Bellaiche et al 2023). In the past, it was considered normal for an artist to produce artwork with visible imperfections and/or indications of the creative process. This was seen as evidence of the artist's presence and emotional commitment, consistent with Rodrigues's (2024) findings. A respondent noted,

Authenticity in arts is a mixture of things like storytelling, emotion, thoughts, technique. AI can make it, it can definitely tell a story, but it might fail to convey emotions (Artist A).

Scepticism about AI's capacity to produce work that could be considered authentic was a recurrent issue. According to participants, AI systems perform activities and use styles that closely resemble human behaviour, yet never deviate significantly from the fonts and formulas on which they are built. They also rely largely on pre-existing data.

While AI is viewed as an intriguing technological advancement, it is ultimately perceived as a dull creative collaborator in the absence of the essential components of personhood that would lend authenticity to its output. The participants' concerns align with the findings of Khare *et al* (2024), who argue that although AI may mimic style and structure, it lacks the internal subjectivity and autobiographical background that give true human-created art its value.

Human identity and narrative were strongly linked to trust and authenticity. Participants suggested that emotional investment and the artist's personal contribution are essential components of meaningful art, underscoring the significance of understanding the

background and intentions of the person who created the AI prompt. Many participants concluded that AI-generated artefacts lack the characteristics necessary for trustworthiness or usefulness because they lack a compelling narrative or emotional depth. A respondent stated,

It doesn't make too much of a difference for me. Other than I think knowing that it has a lack of substance and a lack of hard work that and heart I guess that the artists put into their work (Artist B).

This demonstrates a broader aesthetic perspective, which holds that art encompasses human experience and expression alongside form and beauty (Pizzolante *et al* 2024). Studies indicate that for most viewers, trustworthy and genuine art remains inextricably linked to human identity, reference, and emotional resonance (Bramah *et al* 2023; Pescarin *et al* 2024).

Artists and the human-machine collaboration

Artists are navigating the evolving landscape of human-machine collaborations with a blend of strategic adaptation, curiosity, caution, and a strong emphasis on preserving the cultural and emotional integrity of their work. The participants expressed appreciation for the technical capabilities and visual aesthetics of AI-generated art. Regardless, they are clear that authentic art is rooted in emotional depth, storytelling, and a personal artistic touch, attributes that they believe AI-generated art lacks. Rather than seeing AI as a replacement, artists using it position it as a tool or creative assistant. These views suggest that AI has value in efficiency and its utilitarian uses, particularly 'the fact that it can create things that [they] physically can't create'. Nonetheless, participants emphasised the importance of AI being guided by human intentionality. A respondent noted that:

Context matters – knowing that a human being created something under certain life conditions adds an emotional and cultural weight. When it's AI, I'm more analytic, I try to think about the algorithm, the data sources or the bias. The creator's identity always shapes not just the value of that project, but the background and history (Art Enthusiast A).

From the viewpoint of artists:

Very risky. AI changing the meaning of culturally important artworks can be disrespectful to the cultures. AI doesn't understand the history behind the works, and it can be bias [sic] biased. It can be prejudice [sic] prejudiced (Artist A).

The risks of cultural misrepresentation, appropriation, and historical distortion were recurring themes when AI is used without critical reflection. Because of a lack of mindfulness and context, artists are concerned that AI systems may disregard cultural heritage by misinterpreting significant histories and symbols. However, they are also willing to use AI responsibly to ‘reimagine the past’, ‘preserve historical art’, or enhance creative processes. The viewpoint emphasised by the artists interviewed is that when AI is used to assist or support, rather than replace human artists, it can be embraced as part of an evolving artistic toolkit. Ultimately, artists are negotiating in this space, defending human creativity and ethics as the foundation of their collaboration with machines.

The results of this study indicate that artists use a combination of critical reflection and strategic openness to navigate the emerging field of human–machine collaboration. Respondents emphasised the technical mastery and artistic potential of AI-generated art, but insisted that true creative authenticity remains rooted in narrative complexity, emotional resonance, and a distinctively human connection. These answers support Scarantino’s (2022) contention that art expresses emotional and experiential truths rather than focusing on superficial aesthetic qualities. For these artists, AI is not seen as a creative substitute but a practical tool that can enhance workflows or produce intricate images. However, it ultimately depends on human guidance and intent to make a meaningful difference. Artists interviewed expressed significant concerns about cultural misrepresentation and ethical failings in AI-generated artwork. An artist expressed,

AI doesn’t have a conscience, and it doesn’t work like humans, so it can misrepresent culture or remove meaning that is important (Artist A).

Despite their openness to AI-assisted creativity, AI systems are seen as dangerous without human sensibility and context, as they can misuse sacred symbols or misrepresent old stories. According to Ghaith (2024), who emphasises that human monitoring is crucial to preserving cultural integrity, this aligns with the growing scholarly debate on ethical obligations in algorithmic design and cultural data use. However, the results also imply that AI can make significant contributions, such as reimagining documents or preserving lost creative traditions within the virtual bureaucracy, provided an ethical purpose guides it.

The artists involved in the study highlighted AI’s capacity for purposeful and responsible collaboration. They viewed machine intelligence as an advanced toolkit for artists rather than a threat to human creativity. They noted that AI can help artists realise ideas or produce tangible artworks that they could not accomplish on their own. This is supported by Lundman and Nordström (2023), who observe that artists who use AI often view it as a space with endless possibilities. It was emphasised that AI must not replace human

emotion, writing, or cultural leadership – tasks that artists believe are unique to people and require depth and authenticity.

In a changing creative environment where AI is rapidly being incorporated into artistic production, artists interact from their respective locations. They firmly believe that emotional expression, moral responsibility, and cultural knowledge are necessary for creating significant work, even though they are receptive to learning about AI's advantages, particularly in efficiency and data preservation. According to Raza (2023), arts education fosters a profound understanding of the cultural and emotional aspects of creative expression. Their research ultimately emphasises that human morality, emotion, and creative control should be the foundation for artists' collaboration with AI.

Generational and ethical tensions

Significant moral and generational tensions have arisen from the emergence of AI-generated art, particularly regarding how people of different ages perceive and react to it. Younger participants seem more open and enthusiastic (Haywood *et al* 2025). The younger generation views AI as a logical extension of creative tools, having grown up amid rapid technological advancements. A combination of scepticism, interest, and soreness has been used to describe older participants in evaluations, or those considering the viewpoints of older generations. A respondent explained,

Younger people embrace AI art with curiosity and excitement. You know, it makes things more simplified, and then it makes things seem as if they're achievable. The older generation, for instance, had their dictionary, we have artificial intelligence (Art Enthusiast A).

An artist also noted that:

The younger generation is very open to AI, almost too open. They're almost naive in their adoption and approach of AI. The older generations are very hesitant towards AI. However, they seem to have really embraced it (Artist B).

The age gap highlights a larger cultural shift in how innovation and creative legitimacy are viewed. This gap widened due to ethical concerns, particularly regarding AI's relationship with African cultural narratives. The inability of AI to accurately depict the subtleties of African histories, studies, and trauma alarmed participants, raising concerns about cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. The idea that AI, devoid of moral awareness and lived experience, could control or commercialise hallowed cultural components, thus 'changing the motive' or 'stealing' from them, has caused considerable unease (Supriadi 2025). Participants expressed concern that AI would exploit rather than

commemorate minority histories, highlighting a moral conflict between technological advancement and cultural restoration. The responses highlight a crucial ethical conundrum: whether AI-generated art is a tool for amplification or a threat to the integrity of cultural memory (Tiribelli *et al* 2024).

Conclusion

This study suggests that, in increasingly AI-mediated creative environments, future research should examine how viewers determine and preserve the value of human-made art. The results indicate that people continue to favour works of art that are purposefully created, emotionally genuine, and grounded in real-life human experiences. Storytelling, vulnerability, and an obvious human presence – qualities often seen as deficient or absent in AI-generated outputs – were repeatedly cited by participants as essential components of artistic validity. AI-generated art is frequently criticised for perceived lack of conceptual depth and emotional richness, even though it is occasionally praised for its aesthetic value and practical effectiveness. Trust in AI-generated art remains contingent on several factors, including authorship disclosure, transparency in the creative process, and ethical considerations, particularly when the artworks address culturally significant subjects. Artists and viewers are beginning to take a more balanced stance, viewing AI as an additional tool in the creative process rather than as a substitute for human ingenuity. According to this developing human-machine co-creative viewpoint, when AI is used in accordance with human aims, narrative purposes, and ethical duties, it can effectively improve artistic practice. The development of ethical frameworks, design principles, and assessment criteria that support emotional resonance, cultural sensitivity, and narrative depth in AI-assisted art should therefore be a focus of future research. In an era of increasing algorithmic innovation, such initiatives are essential to preserving public confidence and guaranteeing creative legitimacy.

Notes

1. Ethical clearance (H25/02/21) was obtained from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand.

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