

The Use of AI Generated Imagery in Art Education

The use of artificial intelligence (A.I.) is becoming more common in everyday life at a rapid pace. The NAEA provides a position statement on their website which addresses what they believe are the potential benefits and challenges posed by introducing this technology to the art classroom (NAEA 2024). Some of the benefits listed within the statement include:

“AI software can assist students in generating initial concepts, ideation, enhancing digital design skills, and experimenting with different artistic elements” and

“AI can offer students a platform to explore their creativity, fostering innovation and critical thinking skills” (NAEA 2024)

Both of these statements seem to simultaneously be rooted in noble virtues, yet sound as though they undermine the very basic reasons we teach art in schools. For example, these statements sound extremely close to articles posted on Adobe’s own website.

Adobe is a software company which is best known for products like Photoshop and Illustrator. Both programs have been used for decades, but now incorporates elements of generative AI options for users. Adobe’s own website states:

“Generative AI is already changing our lives. As a virtual expert, generative AI may improve efficiency and productivity in many industries. As a brainstorming partner, generative AI can enhance our creativity.

The technology is evolving so quickly that tomorrow’s generative AI may look very different than today’s. If we explore the tools with curiosity and caution, we can enjoy their benefits — and avoid any pitfalls” (Adobe 2024)



Figure 1: an example of a written prompt editing generative AI imagery. (Adobe 2024)

Adobe is clearly invested in the use of A.I. for their own monetary gain but acknowledges the potential drawback including a further confusion among the public on topics such as authorship, public domain, and copyrights.

If we legitimize generative AI as a means for idea generation while the use of it becomes more common in everyday life, how can we as educators explain the benefits of incorporating art in education to the general public? Are we not self-sabotaging by participating in this practice?

Concerning the chief complaints of artists, illustrators, and animators, the concept of artist's consent is most in question. Is there a way to allow artists to prevent generative AI software from adding their work to the databases which the programs source information from. Groups such as the Content Authenticity Initiative are interested in creating a "Do Not Train" tag for creators to implement in an attempt to keep certain AI software from sourcing their images. (CAI 2024) (Adobe 2024) One could argue that instead of creating a means to opt out, artists should have to consciously opt in to having their images sourced. This would be an example of clear consent.

There is also a double-edged sword at work in regard to the prospect of utilizing generative AI for what Adobe refers to as art restoration. A specific instance was referenced in which Rembrandt's partially destroyed painting "The Night Watch" was restored in 2021 by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. (Adobe 2024)



Figure 2: A panel depicting the restored portion of "The night Watch" is installed by Rijksmuseum workers. (BBC 2021)

In contrast, an individual recently attempted to "complete" Keith Haring's Unfinished Painting. The AI version was executed by an individual in response to a question was posed on Twitter about works of art that continue to speak a powerful message. This prompted severe backlash from fans of Haring explaining that this was a cheapening of the artist's message about his own life being cut short by the aids epidemic, and all those who experienced a similar fate.

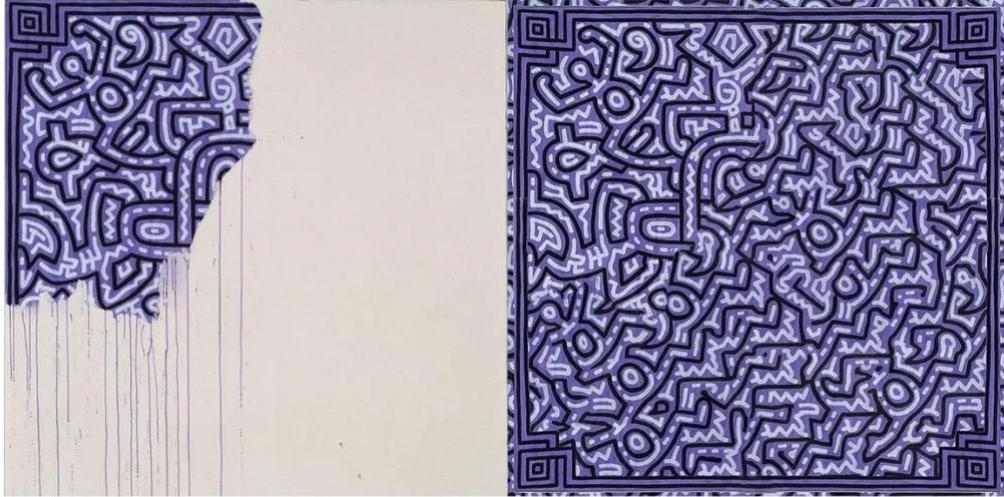


Figure 3: *Unfinished Painting* next to an AI generative attempt to “complete” it. (ZME Science 2021)

A.I. is going to be part of our lives going forward. As art educators, we will have to navigate new challenges to help our students truly decipher what is real and what is not in a world where fake images will become more prevalent but more difficult to spot. Our aim should always be to foster “Artistic Intelligence” and critical thinking.

References

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