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Artificial: A Study on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Art

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***Abstract*—In the past three to five years there have been significant improvements made in AI due to improvements in computing capacity, the collection and use of big data, and an increase in public interest and funding for research. Programs such as ChatGPT, DALL•E, and Midjourney have also gained tremendous popularity in a relatively short amount of time. This led me to this project in which I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of these art generator AI and where they fit into art as a whole. My goal was to give recommendations to museums and exhibits in Omaha on what role AI art should play in their experiences. To this end, I investigated the popular opinion of the use of AI in art through articles in conventional newspapers. I conducted my own research and experimentation into how these AI work and how to use them (specifically, I experimented with the Midjourney AI). In conjunction, I researched opinions and academic papers on how these AI should fit into the current art culture. Finally, I conducted interviews with local experts in the fields of AI and Art to determine the perspective of those who have worked in their respective fields and may understand the trends where things are going, and where they are coming from, more accurately. This paper summarizes this process and provides insights into what was learned as well as opinions on the topic.**

I. Introduction

TODAY, there are many AI programs available to the public, including autonomous vehicles, voice assistants, facial recognition, chat bots, and now art generators. All these technologies have come to prominence within the past 10 to 20 years. In the case of AI art generators, popularity has exploded in the past three years with DALL•E 1's release in 2021. Since then, art AI has improved even further; however, AI art originated much earlier than this. The pioneers of AI art have been working with it since the 1970s. One of the most influential of these pioneers was Harold Cohen, who worked on a project called AARON, which was a series of programs that would create drawings and eventually full pictures for Cohen. In [1], Cohen describes how AARON functions,

It was intended to identify the functional primitives and differentiations used in the building of mental images and, consequently, in the making of drawings and paintings. The program was able to differentiate, for example, between figure and ground and inside and outside, and to function in terms of similarity, division, and repetition.

Cohen attempted to replicate his own processes and styles of art. He did not give the program detailed instructions on how to draw specific objects, or other information regarding the physical world. Instead, he gave the program an internal model of the art and used rules to create. These rules included elements such as drawing closed shapes outlining four legged animals or people. Most of the drawings it created were similar to those Cohen drew himself. This is an interesting example of collaboration between man and machine where the artist has worked at every level to create the AI, which produces art, and then collaborated with it in the creation of the art itself. Early in the life of AARON, it could not draw with colors. This was a much more difficult implementation of an already simple program. At first, the robot would draw in black and white while leaving Cohen to edit the drawing and fill in colors himself. Later, as the project grew and changed, Cohen was able to add in the ability for the program to use colors. This is a particularly interesting period of AI art where man and machine worked very closely to create art.

From here, AI art breaks off into a multitude of directions as artists were experimenting with possibilities and finding small niches for their works. From the early 80s to the early 2000s, artists experimented with different ideas. There was a so-called AI winter during this time as AI could not advance very quickly due to hardware limitations. Funding and research in the field decreased and there wasn't one specific direction of focus for AI and art.

A real space for AI generated images and paintings didn't fully emerge until the mid-2000s and early 2010s. During this time, computing power increased at a fast pace and research into AI began to receive more funding. Around 2014, the first Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN) were created [2]. This was a type of AI program which can be used generally to train AI, but which has found the most success in art generation. As [3] explains in greater depth, the program is comprised of two parts. The first is called the generator, which learns to generate plausible data from a training data set. The second part is called the discriminator; it learns to distinguish the generator's fake data from real data. The generator attempts to maximize the probability of the discriminator making a mistake. The discriminator estimates the probability a sample came from the training data rather than the generator. These were mostly research projects until recently with the release of several of these AI to the public from 2021 on.

The newest technology is the diffusion model. [4] explains the theory, math, and practical application in great depth. The images are represented mathematically, then noise is iteratively added to them. On the images themselves, this is random, off-color pixels which give the appearance of a static on a TV connection. Then, the AI is taught to remove this noise and return to the original image.

Both programs are trained while including the image description as an input. Then, once training is complete, the program can generate an image from a prompt alone. This emphasizes the importance of the data used in training. If the AI is trained on images of cars that are described as trees, it will generate images of cars when given a prompt including trees.

When AI was first considered and used in art, it was a collaborative experience where the artist created AI, as can be seen with Cohen, who built AARON over the course of his life. He collaborated with AARON, at least in the beginning, to bring color to the black and white drawings AARON generated. Many also used AI to pose questions or provoke conversation about AI itself. As AI has become more advanced and independent, it has begun to produce art by itself with less human dependence. While a prompt is still required, many questions are arising as to how this art should be viewed and what we should do with it. This paper aims to review literature and theory on art and AI, dig into the popular opinion of this art along with what those within the world of art think, and give recommendations to museums and exhibits in Omaha on the role AI art should play.

II. Popular Opinion

One of the reasons for this project was an image generated by AI won the digital art category of the fine arts competition at the Colorado State Fair in September 2022. Up until this point, AI art had been treated as an interesting concept, but not much more than a novelty. This win, coupled with the release and subsequent boom of ChatGPT in the following November, caused AI to skyrocket in popularity. The reactions were almost as diverse and widespread as humanity itself. However, a large portion of these responses questioned these new technologies and their ethics. Many articles appeared only days afterwards with titles like:

AI-Generated Art Won a Prize. Artists Aren't Happy.
– By Kevin Roose (*New York Times*) [5]
AI won an art contest, and artists are furious
– By Rachel Metz (*CNN*) [6]
He used AI to win a fine-arts competition. Was it cheating?
– By Drew Harwell (*The Washington Post*) [7]

Overall, there seems to be an interested but negative attitude towards AI. A lot of these articles reporting on the boom in popularity quote public comments from social media criticizing these AI. The articles also provide commentary from artists. The sentiment ranges from criticizing a perceived lack of effort involved in using these AI to calling this the end of art itself.

Upon digging a little deeper into the AI and how they work, I was able to find more thoughtful articles, which, while explaining the technology, provide a commentary into some of the more positive usefulness of it. For example, AI can democratize art and give those who don't have some of the more technical skills a chance to create something. It can also be a useful tool for artists to prototype concepts or to generate ideas for art.

III. Experimentation

While working on this project, I was able to experiment with one of the AI myself and I found that it takes more skill than you may think to get an image to look like you want. That says nothing about the skill required to generate many of the more complex images that are shown online. It's important to understand how the AI works to see how they would attempt to create an image from a specific prompt. I entered "University of Nebraska Omaha" expecting to see one of the more prominent buildings on campus or maybe the logo or mascot. However, I got some nondescript and random buildings with nonsense written on them as can be seen in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Images generated from the prompt "University of Nebraska Omaha"

I had failed to consider how the AI was trained. The images that are used to train the AI are taken from a large set of images with descriptions written for them. When creating these training sets, instead of having images from many specific universities, there was probably a set of images that fell under the category of university. Perhaps there were some images from very popular universities, but I wouldn't expect many images of specific universities. The images that it was trained on probably showed images of buildings or maybe classrooms, and many of the buildings probably had some sort of name on them. However, the AI doesn't understand how to form words.

As I explained in the diffusion model, it is taught to remove noise from images. In doing this, it works with a probability that the pixels around each other will look a certain way. When working with text, it probably gets started with a letter, and then the probability that the pixels around it are part of the letter get assigned. So it attempts to generate something like a letter. But without understanding language, it can't create a word that makes sense and most of the time it can't even create a normal letter. Even if it may be able to learn to generate a full word, it probably would take even longer for that word to make sense in the context of the image.

A similar issue occurred when I attempted to use a reference image as shown in Fig. 2 and change its art style using Midjourney.

Fig. 2. Arts & Sciences Hall (ASH) Reference image, credit: Fox 42 KPTM [8].

I placed this image in and entered "in the style of Salvador Dali". I expected to see something representative of Dali's art style. However, what I got was Dali's head over the image as can be seen in Fig. 3.

Fig. 3. Images returned from Midjourney using the reference image in Fig. 2 and telling it to do it "in the style of Salvador Dali".

Again, this generation shows what the AI has been trained on and what it has understood. From the key words "Salvador Dali", it has most likely associated with images of the man himself and not so much his art style. Therefore, there was a high probability that his face was in the image somewhere. It attempted to keep the original image as well and it also was able to change the style as there was probably a sizable portion of the Salvador Dali images that were his artworks.

Upon realizing this, I decided to try to be more specific, narrowing it down to a single artwork to try to capture that style. *Scream* by Edvard Munch was chosen for its prominent style. Using the same reference image, Midjourney was told to generate it "in the style of *Scream*". Again, the central figure of the artwork was overlaid on the reference image as can be seen in Fig. 4.

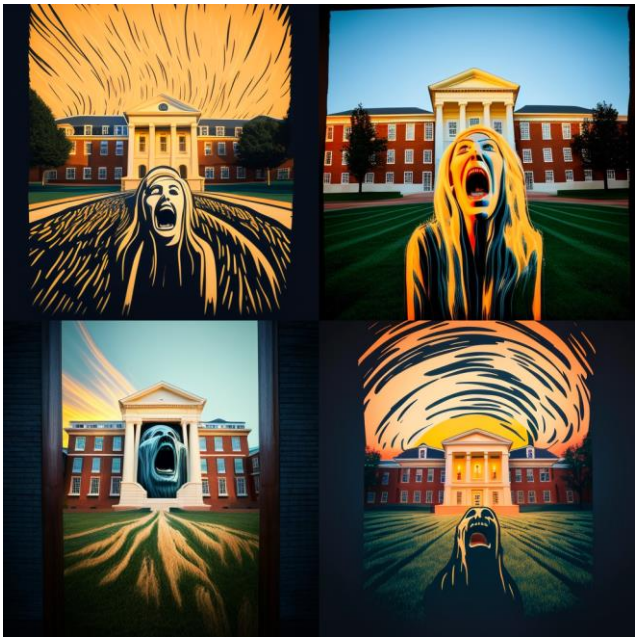

Fig. 4. Images returned from Midjourney using the reference image in Fig. 2 and telling it to do it "in the style of *Scream*".

There was more success in changing the style of the reference image. However, the keyword "*Scream*" was still greatly associated with the central figure of the painting, meaning Midjourney associated a high probability that this figure would be in the image.

Finally, a landscape painting was chosen so there would be no central figure. This time, Midjourney was told to do the image "in the style of *Wheatfields with Crows* by Van Gogh". This result was much better as can be seen in Fig. 5. This generation kept the building while changing the style and adding a wheatfield and crows to it.

Fig. 5. Upscaled image returned from Midjourney using the reference image in Fig. 2 and telling it to do it "in the style of *Wheatfields with Crows* by Van Gogh".

Another similar generation was created using the following reference image in Fig. 6.

Fig. 6. Clock tower Reference image, credit: University of Nebraska Omaha

This image was entered with the prompt "in the style of Van Gogh *Starry Night*". The images in Fig. 7 were returned.

Fig. 7. Images returned from Midjourney using the reference image in Fig. 6 and telling it to do it "in the style of Van Gogh *Starry Night*".

This again worked well to change the style of the image while keeping the clock tower as the main subject. These images generated from the reference images show that the AI often takes the most prominent parts of the prompt given to edit the reference. Salvador Dali was present in many images with his name as a descriptor. The main figure in *Scream* was the most present in training images with that descriptor. For *Wheatfields with Crows*, it was the crows and the wheatfields and, for *Starry Night.* it was the night sky. These are limitations that must be taken into account when generating content. Then there are the many settings and keywords that can also influence the way a generation comes out. All of this makes it an acquired skill to formulate quality prompts in order to receive the generation imagined. This also means there could be deeper meaning found in work with AI art generators.

IV. Research

The research done for this project focuses on understanding how AI fits into the culture of art. It was undertaken to incorporate the opinions of experts who have studied AI and art extensively and published on the matter.

Dejan Grba's work *Deep Else: A Critical Framework for AI Art* [9] provides just this. It first explores AI generated art from an artistic or poetic standpoint looking at how this art appeals to us. Then it discusses major issues on the topic, including both limitations of the programs as well as ethical, economic, and cultural problems. Finally, it presents prospects for the future of the technology, giving insight into how it may impact the way we look at art and creativity as well as how it may impact culture and commercialization of art. Overall, it provides a variety of views on the critical discourse surrounding AI art. It stresses keeping a somewhat open mind and thinking critically about the impacts.

The *New York Times* article in [5] provided a look at how people responded to a work made by the Midjouney AI winning the art competition in Colorado. The article included quotes from Twitter. One user said, "We're watching the death of artistry unfold right before our eyes", while another wrote, "This is so gross, I can see how AI art can be beneficial, but claiming you're an artist by generating one? Absolutely not." It appeared that there were many others who initially shared this sentiment. A lot of the criticism came from the idea that these AI are trained on current artists and is copying them while taking their jobs. The idea that the AI is copying other artists or stealing their work is a misconception as explained above. Instead, training is done to get the AI to associate descriptions with what the objects probably look like. They don't necessarily steal the ideas of other artists but attempt to "understand the world" through them. With this in mind, the training sets are probably not trying to find artworks specifically, but most likely include a broad range of more general images. While many criticized the technology, this article also highlighted those who defended it. These people argued that, as I found in my experimentation, there is still skill and creativity required to write quality prompts to get such a piece.

[10] gives more context into how AI are trained. It specifically explains the process behind diffusion models in a simpler way than [4]. It also explains that even though the training and image generation processes are known, the parameters and decisions done behind the scenes by the AI are not known. These are formed by the AI as it is trained and can be very complex. It is difficult to predict how well an AI will work or explain why it does work, meaning the outputs are the most effective way of judging one. This creates a somewhat complex perspective on the AI, giving them a mysterious quality. It also makes it more amazing that these AI work and draws attention to those working to build the AI. Interestingly the creation of a good AI seems almost like an art itself.

[11] is an article written on an interview done with the founder of Midjourney, David Holz. He provides many perspectives on AI, how it's used, and how it works. Holtz discussed the future of the technology; "But the human ramifications of that are so hard to imagine," he said. "There's something here that's at the intersection of humanity and

technology. In order to really figure out what this is and what it should be, we really need to do a lot of experiments." I found this particularly interesting as this aligns well with many of the other sources I've found. I disagreed with some of Holz's thoughts though. "The majority of people are just having fun," said Holz: "I think that's the biggest thing because it's not actually about art, it's about imagination." Through more of the research done, I've found that there can be more art there.

The article also discussed how people are using Midjouney. A lot of the users, about 30 percent, have been using it to help quickly develop concepts as part of their creative process. Finally, Holz explained a bit about the AI itself. He talked about challenges with the AI. "The challenge for anything like that right now is that it's not actually clear what is making the AI models work well," he said. "If I put a picture of a dog in there, how much does it actually help [the AI model] make dog pictures. It's not actually clear what parts of the data are actually giving [the model] what abilities." This confirmed some of the other information I've read about some of the difficulties with working with these AI and the art of making them. Holz also discussed the improvements made recently. "If you look at the v3 stuff, there's this huge improvement," he said. "It's mind-bogglingly better and we didn't actually put any more art into it. We just took the data about what images the users liked, and how they were using it. And that actually made it better." This again reinforced ideas I was formulating on the interactions between people and AI.

[12] details a decision made by the Copyright Review Board on the initial refusal to register a copyright claim to a work of art generated by a "computer algorithm". This decision was upheld due to the way the copyright law was written. The decision cited the wording on the law that stated works must be created by a human and cannot be created without any creative input or intervention by a human. I don't agree with this decision as there is normally input from a person on the works created, such as a prompt in the case of most generators. However, I do not know the exact program that was used to create the work. I would still argue that the program that created the work was built by a person and that person does have a claim on the works created by the program. This ruling displays how new the technology is and the adaptations that must be made to deal with it.

[13] is an article that asks if AI generated art should be considered real art. It's difficult to qualify what is real art and what matters in deciding this. Many agree that AI lacks emotions when it creates art. It is also accepted by some that AI art isn't original. I disagree here. I will give them the fact that there must be a prompt and it must have some knowledge of what it is trying to create. However, the AIs appear to work in a way that makes art not seen before. In the case of DALL•E and Midjourney, they create each piece separately. It's not as simple as pasting pieces of artwork in. In this case, it can also be said that humans aren't original. We have to have knowledge of what we want to do before we must do it. Still, do I think that an AI could make *The Persistence of Memory* without having been exposed to something similar? Probably not. So this is hard to quantify. Still, this development of the AI's art skills is something very human. The art can also inspire the viewer. Much of art is rooted in how the viewer will see the art and what emotions they may gain from it. So that seems to have some value. Overall, it seems as though people are having an initial reaction to the blow up in popularity the AI generated art has gained and there is still some time to see how we will settle.

[14] asks 10 main questions on generative computer art. The one that stood out to me was: can a machine originate anything? It has been shown in many cases that the AI programs in use become extremely complex, so that a person cannot predict what it will output. These programs are also self-modifying so as it works, it evolves. This allows the program to exceed their programmer's expectations on what they may produce. The more difficult thing is to originate something of artistic meaning. One argument against this that the paper proposes is that art exists only in human experience, and it requires this meaning behind it. A computer can only derive these results from taking from existing information. There's no reason to completely dismiss the possibility there could be a meaningful connection between a person and art generated by AI. One could also argue that people also draw on others for inspiration and creativity so AI art could require a similar context.

[15] attempts to define AI art from three different viewpoints. The first part explains that "AI arts" could refer to humans programming computers to create with a significant degree of autonomy new artifacts or experiences that professional members of the art world recognize as belonging to "contemporary art." It goes on to say that a sort of Turing test on AI arts could be if art historians mistake objects a computer creates after training for the original artifacts from some period, and if these objects are not simply slightly modified copies of existing artifacts, then such a computer passed "Turing AI arts" test. But this approach ignores how art has developed, which has been by pushing the boundaries of what is considered art. An understanding of this can't be programmed into a computer yet. Looking at the art created by AI, it seems to be imitations of the styles and abilities of artists from the past. Using this definition, AI art just seems to be simulations of art already done.

This second point discusses the element of human control in AI arts. This ranges from the training pieces used to the prompts used to create the art. With some AI there are even more inputs used in generating art. Due to these inputs, the author doesn't consider the artwork to be truly of the AI.

I tend to disagree with this notion that just because humans had a lot of control on what the AI paints, the result is not art. I think that there is some merit and beauty in this interaction.

The third view is interesting. It goes into how AI are trained to find patterns in art, whether that is one artist or art around the whole world. But the outputs are reflections of the inputs used for training. The author finds this repetitive and perhaps wasteful. They ask: are we really using the AI to its full capacity just by teaching it to create like us? What if we were to try to get it to create in ways we can't or ways we've never even imagined?

This makes a lot of sense to me; it also seems to be very difficult to do. It might also be the way forwards. Perhaps the museums should stay away from AI art unless it can do things that humans can't?

V. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with those in fields involving art or AI. It is important to get the perspective of those who are close to the work that is being done and have seen the current trends about the topic.

A. Methodology

I asked ten common questions to each interviewee on art, art history, and AI. Then follow up questions and explanations followed. I will also mention that it is important to keep in mind that these discussions revolve around opinions and information which is subject to change. Taking in new information and reviewing is important for learning, and this paper and its conclusions are time limited. The interviews were conducted and recorded over Zoom. A transcript was then created using the Descript app; while the transcriptions are not perfect, they worked well enough for my purposes. Full interview transcripts are available in the appendix, and the interviewees were all associated with the University of Nebraska at Omaha:

Dr. Deepak Khazanchi, Professor of Information Systems and Quantitative Analysis
Dr. Dario Ghersi, Professor of Interdisciplinary Informatics
Dr. Todd Richardson, Goodrich Professor, English
Alexandra Cardon, Gallery Manager and Assistant Curator, Samuel Bak Museum: The Learning Center
Dr. Adrian Duran, Professor of Art and Art History

The common questions asked were as follows:
1. Can you give me a definition of what art is to you?
2. Where do you find meaning in art? In your interpretation and connection to a work? Is it directed by the artist? A combination of both?
3. Is there value in the effort put in to create art? Does putting more time in increase the value?
4. Is understanding the history of art, where art is today and how it got there, important when creating new art?
5. Is pushing the boundaries of art important when creating it?
6. Have you ever heard of AI generated art? If so, what are your thoughts about it?
7. What do you see as strengths and weaknesses or opportunities and threats of AI art?
8. How do you see this technology being used in the future?
9. Does the ability to use AI to make many works from many different styles endanger individualism in art? Does it devalue individual human creations? Or make them more valuable?
10. Does human knowledge and/or creativity limit AI?

The first five questions were asked as a baseline for the interviewee's perspective on art and how this may also influence their perspective on art created by AI. It aimed to discover if they held a more rigid perspective on the quality of art, as in ideas such as "art for art's sake" or placing art into categories such as high art and low art. Then the questions shift towards AI by first establishing a baseline of what they knew about it and introducing it to them. I then wanted to ask some open-ended questions on what they thought about the possibilities of the technology by asking for the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, which some may recognize as a SWOT analysis, a common analysis tool in business. One of the main concerns I saw from the popular opinions I had read was a perceived danger to individualism in art. Question 9 directly addresses this. The final question is based on an opinion that the way we are trying to use AI is constrained to our abilities as humans. It criticizes our tendency to create AI which copy ourselves and proposes trying to create AI that can do something different from what we can.

B. Insights

First, I am happy to report after talking with those who have experience in AI, that computers will not be taking over the world any time soon. Deepak Khazanchi explained it well, "I build AI systems and I know that they're fundamentally flawed." He continued, "So, so, so I think that, you know, I think the hoopla and the news media and all the stuff that you see is a little exaggerated, right? You know, AI will replace this. AI will replace that. I mean, Or, I mean, I get it. I get it. I mean, I think there is a little bit of concern, but that used to happen even in the industrial revolution." He said "In revolution and the information age revolution. We always talked about this. Oh my gosh. You know, but the thing, what, the amazing thing about this is that this is created by human beings and the machine. Uh, is just a way of automating our thinking as far as it can take it. Right? It's ultimately fundamentally mathematical and it's based on patterns." My own experience with some of the art generators confirms this as well. This is a relief.

Secondly, I found out very quickly that art is a very broad subject, which makes it difficult to define. Almost everyone I talked to agreed that we shouldn't put restrictions on what is art and what isn't or what is good or not. When I asked Adrian Duran if he could give me a definition of what art is to him, he said, "No… I don't believe that art has a definition and I don't believe that any one of us has the right to put a fence around it." He continued to say, "I think that art is what an artist intends to do with their creative energies. And I don't think any of us have approval rights." There is a place for many different types of art from pieces that are just meant as a simple entertainment, to those which are carefully crafted by the creator to have many meanings and interpretations. Perhaps rather than finding one type more important than the rest, it is important we have each—that there's a place for everyone.

On the side of AI, many agreed that machines on their own cannot be "creative". They learn to follow patterns, so they can mimic creativity, but they aren't really creative on their own. So it's really quite important to have people there to provide the creativity of the prompt for the AI.

There were some who were worried about the copyright of images used in training the AI; however, others who were more familiar with AI argued that we as humans also gain our own inspiration from each other and past works. Dr. Duran was very familiar with this: "I'm teaching a class on Baroque art right now. And one of the first things we had to talk about was this idea of copying because our idea of copying in 2023 is not the idea of copying in 1590."

The main threat from these AI seems to be their ability to create very convincing fake images, voices, and even videos very quickly. However, I was also reminded that even while AI are being developed that can be used to create incredible fakes, others are also being developed that can detect AI created content. Dr. Khazanchi told me: “there was this grad student in New York who produced this, uh, algorithm that actually tells you 93% of 95% of that text is actually produced by automation.”

Several also welcomed the idea that we should watch closely for art that is a collaboration between people and AI and that the process for creating art can also be an important part of the art. Dr. Khazanchi was one to jump on this straight away: “What it does is that it offers two avenues, I think. One is this collaboration between the human being and the machine could develop something new, something out there.”

Finally, there were many times during the interviews where the fact that this is a very new technology was brought up. We are right on the front of this new technology so it can be difficult to predict where it will go or where we will take it. This could become very big, but it could also be a short-lived trend.

VI. Conclusions

AI is a rapidly changing technology, an important fact to keep in mind when examining its implications. We must try to keep up with the pace at which the field will change. After analyzing all the information returned in the process of this project, I came to the conclusion that most art exhibits should refrain from collecting artwork generated by AI for now. It isn’t that the art isn’t good or creative. It can be very good. However, sometimes the process is more art than the final product. I feel this is the case with current art generators. The images that the AI can currently produce are mimics of what can be made by people. While there may be a place for this type of art, it isn’t suited for display in an exhibit. However, I believe that an interactive exhibit where people are allowed to use an AI to generate artwork while they are taught about AI art or how the AI works could be a useful introduction to using AI and computers in art. I would also encourage exhibits to keep an open mind and look out for other artworks that incorporate AI or computers, as this is an expanding field. Perhaps engineering and art are such different and distinct fields.

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Appendix

Interview with Dr. Deepak Khazanchi

[00:00:00] All

Hayden Ernst: right. Um, and could you just give me like a short introduction of yourself? Um, maybe what you do and everything.

Deepak Khazanchi: I'm a professor in information system at quantitative analysis at U N L, and, uh, I've been here 23 years. Uh, this, um, I do research in, uh, multiple areas of it, but, uh, one of them is in AI and machine learning.

And how it is applied. I'm also interested in the philosophy of, uh, computing. So I look at, you know, what are the challenges from a fair fairness perspective of machine learning and similar technology. I guess that's just two of my areas.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Um, alright, so I have a couple of questions here on. And then we'll sort of get into, uh, more of the ai, uh, questions as well.

[00:01:00] So, um, I guess first off, could you give me a definition of what art is to you?

Deepak Khazanchi: So are we talking about visual art, uh, or other types of art?

Hayden Ernst: Um, any kind of art would, uh, work

Deepak Khazanchi: well, I, I think it's just any creative work, uh, that.

I guess relates to, uh, you know, the human enterprise, I guess, you know, it could be music, it could be painting, it could be visual art, graphic art. I mean, there's lots of possibilities. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Okay. So, uh, where do you find, um, your meaning in art? Do you find it in your interpretation of art or? Um, and your connection to a work or is it really directed by what the artist wants you to think? Or is it maybe like some sort [00:02:00] of combination of the both?

Deepak Khazanchi: Yeah, I'd say I look at it from what, uh, you know, what perspective of what the artist wants to convey and what I think of it.

Hayden Ernst: Um, right. So is there, uh, value in the effort put into creating art or, um, is something that someone put more time into, more valuable than something someone put Not very much time into, no.

Deepak Khazanchi: Well, I mean, I think, you know, this is, I guess it's a pretty complex question. I mean, in the sense that, you know, creativity is not just a straightforward.

I guess it's directly correlated with effort only, right? There are people who are creative and can do instantaneous, I mean, rapid, uh, creative things, I guess what I would call, uh, [00:03:00] and there are, who spend years and years to build sculptures and art and so on. So I mean, there are. I, I, I think it all depends on what is the unique characteristics of the art.

And, uh, I mean, I'm, I'm not always. You know, thrill about the fact that it's all about consumption, right? So mm-hmm. , the fact that, you know, you, you develop something, uh, artistically and whether it's a music or musical theater or painting or sculpture, and, and you essentially have to depend on people who consume it to decide whether it's, uh, valuable, right?

Uh, I, I think. is it? So I guess, you know, depends on the complexity of what is being produced. Uh, and um, so the effort would be probably proportional to that, uh, more than anything else. And, and you know, of course there's talent which is [00:04:00] inherent and implicit in human beings, and I think that that's something that, you know, some people have it naturally and some people develop it with effort.

So I'd say that, you know, all of. our part of what we as human beings, uh, have. And, you know, that's unique to us. Mm-hmm. .

Hayden Ernst: Right. So it's pretty, it's pretty nuanced there, huh? Yes. All right. Uh, so do you think that understanding the history of art, um, where art is today and how it got there is important when, uh, creating art, um, sort of, do you have to build upon what the, what your predecessors in art were?

or can you make really meaningful art without, you know, really looking at, uh, what your peers are doing or what your predecessors did and sort of building on that?

Deepak Khazanchi: Well, I mean, to me, uh, in general terms, I think the historical [00:05:00] context is extremely important. Mm-hmm. , you know, also I think, you know, there's, I mean, I guess the best example I always. Talk about with my IT students is, you know, in people, people philosophically who believe that they're relativists, uh, you know, don't believe in objective truths.

I mean, they tend to even argue that, well, in the context of the Holocaust, it was fine, right? I mean, no, that's Oracle relativism. But, uh, I think that applies to arts too, because, you know, I think. History is important to be in about, for anything in any field, uh, and to understand and inform how, uh, how a field develops and grows and what is unique about the new things that are happening.

So I think that, you know, I, I worry that, you know, [00:06:00] uh, people kinda misconstrue. , what you see in that context as the truth, I guess, you know, you've gotta understand what the context is and the context can only be understood, um, by understanding history and, uh, our place in it, right?

Hayden Ernst: Yeah, I, uh, I sort of agree with that.

You know, it's, you can look at art and see something in it, but then when you look at the context, um, you can kind of get a whole different view on it, right? Uh, all right. So do you think that pushing the boundaries of art and looking at more like avant garde art is important, um, when creating it? Um, do you think that we need to be pushing the boundaries of art all the time?

Deepak Khazanchi: Um, yes. I mean, I think, you know, that this is, this is, I mean, I guess I, I can't separate the, [00:07:00] um, We can't separate the unique nature of human intelligence from anything else. Right. So, you know, I think pushing the envelope on, uh, Avan largest just innovation and exploration is uniquely human. And I think, you know, uh, it's important and I think, yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. All right. Um, so moving on to sort of, and AI generated art. I, uh, know you've probably heard about it, so, uh, what are some of your thoughts on it?

Deepak Khazanchi: Um, It depends on what you wanna know, I guess. Um, I mean, I think, I guess, you know, the way to think about it is that, you know, AI is just too, in my mind, it's not a replacement for him and underwear.

Uh, I mean, I build AI systems and I know that they're fundamentally flawed. So, so, so I think that, you know, [00:08:00] I think the hoopla and the news media and all the stuff that you see is a little exaggerated, right? You know, AI will replace this. AI will replace that. I mean, Or or, I mean, I get it. I get it. I mean, I think there is a little bit of concern, but that used to happen even in the industrial revolution and mm-hmm.

in revolution and the information age revolution. We always talked about this. Oh my gosh. You know, but the thing, what, the amazing thing about this is that this is created by human beings and the machine. Uh, is just a way of automating our thinking as far as it can take it. Right? It's ultimately fundamentally mathematical and it's based on patterns, so, so absolutely.

Uh, I would say that [00:09:00] automation is, Automation is not going away, I guess in some ways, and intelligent automation is not going away. Uh, but we have to figure out a way to, uh, find our place as in this endeavor, because the machine is not gonna ever, at least in my mind, uh, replace the human mind. Uh, I mean the, the machine is.

Designed to mimic human intelligence, not. Right. Neither it can mimic emotion maybe, but it cannot be emotional. Uh, it can mimic creativity, but it cannot be creative. Uh, so in my mind, you know, it's, it's, it's this fundamental proposition that. You know, we can make, uh, intelligent machines that look like the ones we see in movies that have, you know, that have bonding with you and [00:10:00] learn in a way that is fundamentally human.

I think doesn't, that is not in the real possibility the next 30 years. I mean, I don't think, uh, so I, I, that's, that's generally speaking about automation. Uh, but I think particularly with creative fields, uh, you know, I think, um, what is happening, i, I, I feel is that it is, Uh, you know, look, automation is going to

change the way we perceive art, I guess, you know, in some ways.
Uh, so if you're talking about paintings or music, you know, I can, I can have a machine look at the history of all the stuff that exists and try to develop new things. After those, right? Um, that is, but that is because we have powerful computers that can manipulate millions and millions of pixels to come up with, [00:11:00] which, which exceeds the capacity of the human mind.
Right? Yeah. But, but on the other hand, you. What it does is that it offers two avenues, I think. One is this collaboration between the human being and the machine could develop something new, something out. I mean, maybe. So this, you know, rather than saying that's the machine and we are, you know, I think this collaboration with computers and I mean, this is how you, you know, the modern day.
Painter who uses a, uses a computer to generate our, you know, it's, it's, um, so that that, that collaboration with intelligent machines may actually result in some new things. Um, but I, you know, I think it, we fool ourselves a thing that it'll replace, um, kind of unique thing that human beings have that fina you. I take a simple example and you, [00:12:00] you. When you are a human, uh, no. When you are as a human being, when you are creative, you basically start with something. You stop. You can change reaction, you can, you can adjust. Well, machines can't, they just look at a pattern and then try to replicate that pattern in different ways.
So it's like a saying that I give you a set of Lego pieces and the machine just quickly. Combines them in different shapes and forms. But you know, don't forget the fundamental nature of Lego is designed by human beings. , so, so I think creativity is the same,
may different but inherent have this human and that that would be very hard to replicate. That. Of course, it'll be harder for the average. Artists to compete [00:13:00] in the machine. I guess the talent, the people who are, you know, the renoirs and the, the, those famous, you know, the famous monk. You know, Edward Mon, when these people, I mean, so you know, Leonard Bernstein, I mean, so you cannot, uh, I think you could probably replicate the patterns by which they build the thing, but you cannot replicate the thinking.
Hayden Ernst: Right? Right. Um, so if you heard of, uh, Harold, uh, Cohen and his, um, ai Aaron, um, so the way that that worked. Not like the ones of today. He, uh, made this AI back in the seventies and he continued to work on it, um, up until he died, when he died in like the early two thousands, early to mid two thousands. And, um, instead of it really [00:14:00] requiring a prompt, is he more, uh, hand coded in, uh, this style of, um, of painting or drawing and creating these pattern.
and then he, um, at first, you know, he did it all in black and white because that was a simpler, um, computing process. And then he would actually go in and then paint, um, paint all the colors in afterwards. Um, and so I was just thinking that was an interesting, uh, contrast to sort of the AI of today where you can just go in and give it a prompt and then it will do everything for you.
So do you think that is a. , interesting collaboration between the human and the ai when the artist is the one, you know, creating the AI itself. Yeah, I mean,

Deepak Khazanchi: I think it's not only the creation of the automation, but also the fact that, you know, the collaboration that happens with, like Howard thing. I was just looking him up.
[00:15:00] I, I know about this, but, uh, you know, I think that collaboration that he developed, okay, he had to, he built ai, but in general time, I. You know, what he tried to do in terms of, you know, hiding the colors or whatever. I mean, I think again, the vision is his right. Mm-hmm. and using the computer as a tool. And I think that's where, um, even the cha ga or right, these tools will be, I mean, they're not ever gonna, yeah, sure.
They can just randomly generate, you know, a painting that looks like, uh, you know, some other artist and that's. That's a problem for the people who have to deal with the fixed stuff. I think that is a problem cause existed even before machines. Right? But it's just gonna be more surface sophisticated.
Right? People say, you know, so that's, I think that's just gonna [00:16:00] be there regardless because human beings are. Being evil sometimes so, so. But on the other hand, I think what Harold seems to have done is really exemplifies what I was saying when I was saying, you know, well there has to be a collaboration.
Mm-hmm. collaboration may produce more in innovation. And that's fine. Or a new art form or new, new forms of art, you know? So in both, both ways. And I think that's ok. I mean, that's progress in many ways, but it's controlled by the intelligence and creativity of the human being. Right. Interesting.
Hayden Ernst: Right. Um,
So we kind of, we kind of answered three questions in one there. I had one that was, uh, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses or opportunities and threats of AI art? Mm-hmm. . Um, and we sort of answered that saying that, um, we really see the opportunities as a [00:17:00] collaboration between the human and the ai.
Um,
Deepak Khazanchi: I think the, and the biggest challenge is gonna be the fake, you know, the. I mean, it's no different than conspiracy theories in social media or it's gonna be a problem for, uh, all of us as, uh, those who appreciate art will have distinguish between art. That's a forgery and art, uh, you know, that is original.
I mean, At the end of the day, the average person who looks at art, you know, um, I mean that's the thing that is kinda interesting and probably hard, you know, as an average art, average viewer of art, consumer of me, I mean, I'm nots by any means. You know, even, even listening to music. I mean, I sometimes don't know if this is like, what's the big deal about it?
And lots of young people like you may be liking it, right? Uh, so it's the same thing [00:18:00] with art, right? I mean, you, sorry, one sec. Hey, what's up?[00:19:00]
Sorry, sorry. Uh, but I, I, I lost the train of thought. So .
Hayden Ernst: Um, okay. So, uh, let's, let's just go to our next question here. I had, how, uh, do you see this, uh, AI sort of art generation, image generation technology being used in the future? Um, I know we sort of said that it'll be more of a collaboration between, as a tool, uh, for artists.[00:20:00]
Deepak Khazanchi: Yeah. I mean, I think that that's, you know, I, I think that we'll have to accept, I mean, at least the

people in the creative arts will have to accept that automation will even get better, right? Mm-hmm. . Yeah. Cause the machines, you know, the, the advantage that a machine has is. You can manipulate thousands of things, right?

And I can combine different artists together and do all these patterns. Mm-hmm. . So that's, uh, you know, that's gonna be even getting more sophisticated. These models are essentially learning from, uh, the data that you're providing them. I explain this. So, so I think, you know, uh, you know, fu the, the op, I guess the best way to think about the future is to think about it in terms of, okay, there'll be people who work with the computer [00:21:00] nation to.

Develop unique, innovative, kinda interesting pieces. Uh, and again, ultimately the judge of those is the average consumer, right? So I mean, like right. At the end of the day, you know, Picasso, you go see a Picasso painting. I mean, so I look at it, I'm like, I don't get it until someone explains to me, oh, this is what he's trying.

Cause the context is so important. Right, right. And that's, that's really, I think the contextual embeddedness of the future of our, I mean, I think becomes even more important. And I think that that's, Uh, you know, the human in, the human, human, uh, enterprise will have to kinda leverage the, leverage the platform to to, to make it interesting for the consumer.

But on the other hand, you know, the fundamental creativity of what we [00:22:00] do as human beings is gonna still be the same. I think actually there'll be more creative jobs in the future right than ever before because, Uh, you know, because the fact is that, oh, we'll have, you know, all the jobs will be taken to automation, but that is true.

Uh, all the routine, Hmm. , but not the non-routine stuff where, you know, we, we kind of have this capability as human beings to kind of, you. Multiple ideas in this kinda creates something interesting that no one actually thought of before, so that the machine wouldn't have thought of it either. Uh, because it's mathematically oriented, right?

Yeah. It can make some predictive thing. So I think that the opportunity in the future is this, you know, there is this group of people who are gonna do that, but I think also those who will try to uniquely be. [00:23:00] Doing creative work that is produced by human beings, that is unique to us. Right, right. I'd rather always converge.

I doubt it. That's, I don't think that's, uh, at least in my mind, I don't think so.

Hayden Ernst: Right. Okay. So, um, , do you think like this ability to use AI to make, um, many different works from many different styles, even combining styles, using them together in different ways? Um, endangers, endangers a lot of the individual individualism of art.

Um, and do you think that makes it more valuable? I know you said, um, that there's gonna be more creativity jobs out there in the future, so you think that this, uh, makes the creativeness of humans more.

Deepak Khazanchi: Yeah, exactly. I think that's, you know, see humans are smart people. I mean, look at, uh, cha, I said Look at Chad.

Right. You know, it took [00:24:00] like four hours and there was this gradual in New York who produced this, uh, algorithm called Hugging Face, that actually tells you 93% of 95% of that text is actually produced by automation. And it's true with Dali too, by the way, the graphic, you know, there's, I dunno if you've heard of this one.

Services, um, this image does not exist. Dot com. I mean, . Oh yeah. Some guy has just done that. You know, uh, he's already, uh, figured out, you know, how to, so anything that is automated can actually be also, you know, easily evaluated and it's all ultimately, um, machine trying this, right? Mm-hmm. . But you, uh, sorry.

Ask your question again.

Hayden Ernst: Um, so do you think that it will, that this, uh, ability of AI to kind of copy all these works and use different styles to create even new works will make it, [00:25:00] will make individualism, um, more

Deepak Khazanchi: valuable? Yeah. Yeah. I think that's, uh, to me this, uh, yeah, the. Ability of, uh, human beings to reflect and, uh, brow out, uh, things that, uh, machines cannot do that is so important.

I mean, and I think that'll continue to be even more interesting. And I also think that, you know, I mean, at the end of the day, the machine is. I mean, it can only do replication, uh, in some ways. Mm-hmm. , and I think, and people also are, some people argue that, well, okay, the machines can also create some new ideas.

Right. But foundation of those ideas is fundamentally the history of, you know, what it's been fed. Yeah. Right. Uh, so, or what the model has been trained [00:26:00] with, uh, and. I think that, you know, unless we are gonna give it everything that people are thinking about maybe one day, , uh, I don't think we are, we're getting close to that.

And you know, that's, I absolutely agree that. The ability of, uh, individual creativity to produce new ideas and new things. Um, artifacts is just uniquely human. Yeah. And otherwise, chimpanzees would be artists too. They're mammals, right? So, uh, and.

Yeah, they also produce art if you teach them how to do it. And Jane Goodall did it, right. She

communicate, I guess, in a very basic way. And I think machines are the same except that, uh, [00:27:00] they just process more information and can model that information in a way that's uniquely machine. Yeah, so I'd say, I would say that, yeah, I mean, I think the individual. Uh, uniqueness of, but it, it'll make our, make the creative art, uh, or the effort by creative arts a lot more.

Uh, I guess it'll make it a lot more competitive, if you wanna say

Hayden Ernst: that. Yeah. So do you think that there will be sort of a, uh, reactionary period, at least in the short term, where artists are trying to do, um, more different things, more creative things? To set themselves apart from the AR or even make something that the AI cannot copy, if that's possible.

Deepak Khazanchi: Yeah, I mean I, you know, that's the thing. There's a lot of handing going on by artists and by even by, you know, people in routine jobs [00:28:00] and so on. And I think that's where we should be really. as human beings, we, we are smart sellers and say, you know, we are unique and we're gonna do it our way and do it. I don't think you have to, I, I, I really don't think we should spend so much effort on comparing ourselves to machines output, is what I'm trying to say.

I think that's also a bad idea. Mm-hmm. , I think we should, we should do what Human beings are good. And not worry about,

you know, and you have to be, to be successful as an artist, it has to be unique. I mean, regardless. And it has to be perceived to be unique, right. In some way. Mm-hmm. . And so I, I don't think that we should even have that comparison with what AI does.

And I think that's a good point. I think it's more about what you're able to create that is consumable by others. that other people can [00:29:00] enjoy and look at. Right. Or listen or look at, I guess. Yes.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Um, so do you think that, um, human knowledge and our own, um, let, let me reword this. Um, do you think that AI could, uh, Show us, or the collaboration between AI and humans could show us something and help us bring out creativity that we didn't know that we had.

Deepak Khazanchi: Yeah, I mean, I think that's an interesting proposition, I think, right? It's just like, I guess the analogy I would take is with machines, uh, in, uh, you know, in medicine, right? Um, in medicine, uh, we are already discovering new things, not discovering as much as discovering new patterns that help us do a better [00:30:00] job of being physicians, right?

Uh, so I mean, there are things where, you know, we see something and can't really appreciate it until the automation can actually provide us some alternative understanding of the same data. Right. Right. And that's absolutely the case with. Art, art too. And I think that that's where I think that idea that there should be a collaboration, uh, in the mindset rather than, uh, this mindset of replace everything I do is not, is discipline, is gonna morph it.

Yeah. Okay.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Cuz I know you said, um, really AI can only. , um, it only knows what we give it. So, um, do you think that there will be a time

[00:31:00] when we could sort of, so let me think about this, uh, how to word this for a second. Um,

so it all sort of depends on how we, uh, how we create this. and what we give it. Um, and then I guess the, the real insights you think should be, um,

sort of how we collaborate, how we can collaborate with it better.

Deepak Khazanchi: Yeah. Hmm. Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, look, the machine, I mean the automation automatic models are gonna get even better. And um, so we need to, um, you know, I think not everyone doesn't have to do this, [00:32:00] but some people will work with. With the technology to see if they can be more innovative or more creative, or even use it as a starting point for being created like Harold.

Right, right. Um, or even at the end, you know? So I think it's not like there's a single way to consider this. I think, you know, Really, it depends on the creative potential of the artists in some days on how they leverage the technology there to do interesting things. I mean, have you,

in Omaha, we have the Japanese, uh, Bonar.[00:33:00]

Right. June KACO's artwork. I dunno if you've seen that right? I haven't. Very futuristic. You should go see Theo exhibit downtown. It's very futuristic. He's using some computer. Um, you know, computers to kinda inform the public about the artwork produces mostly sculptures. But, you know, people are already kinda thinking about these kinda things, not, not particularly with ai, but, you know, I think that's absolutely true, that that's possible and, you know, we should, we should expect it, I guess in

Hayden Ernst: some ways, right.

Um, yeah, I bring that up because I read, there's this paper that I read, um, that sort of said that a lot of what, um, d i I is doing right now is, um, [00:34:00] sort of copying what humans can already do. Um, and I, I mean, I wanna stay realistic about what we can do with AI and what AI can actually do. Um, but the point that they brought up is that, um, We should be using it to, um, go past our limits and go past the limits that we've placed on it.

Really. Um, and I don't really know how possible that would be, you know, in the, you know, future in our lifetimes. Right. So I was just kind of wondering about that.

Deepak Khazanchi: You think? Well, I mean, I think you have to have guardrails though. I mean, so I think the ethics of, uh, AI is, you know, and, uh, the other aspect that like I have a patient who's working on the whole notion of fairness.

You know, not just fairness of the machine itself, but fairness of how we perceive the output, [00:35:00] uh, from so, so I think ethics and fairness are important, critical issues in. In automate AI in general, which we, we have to consider and think about. Uh, and also I think the whole idea that, you know, are there certain guards and the professional disciplines that constitute art, right?

I mean, I think are there guards that you want to have, you know, and you compete, uh, with a purely computer generator, AI in, uh, in the marketplace of artwork. Right? I mean, so I think there has to be some professional ethics, which we have in every profession, including in computer science. So, mm-hmm. , like, uh, you know, we, and we all struggle with this question of.

It's a philosophical question. It's a metaphysical question in some ways of, you know, what is right and what is wrong, and uh, you know, [00:36:00] where, where do we draw the line, right? So I think the ethical challenges. Uh, are more at the professional level, at the discipline level than at the individual level, right?

You'll always have used our salesman who are gonna sell us, uh, you know, uh, a fraud, right? , right? Same thing is true with art. And so, and there's more likely with machines that this will be. So it's also behooves the technologists who are building AI systems to, you know, build solutions. Uh, and that's what's happening already.

You know, there are people who are building ethical solutions on at least trying to distinguish, uh, products of machines. Right? Right. So I think those are part of the whole evolution of ai, you know, mentioned and in any field,[00:37:00]

Well, uh,

Hayden Ernst: thank you. Um, that's all I really have for questions right now, so, um, that was awesome. Uh, you answered a lot of them and gave me a lot of new ideas too. Um, good. And for help. Yeah. I will, uh, keep in touch with you about the paper. and, um, I'll let you know maybe when I'm finished and you can come and see the Honor Symposium too. I'll have a, uh, poster there too, so that'll be awesome. Okay,

Deepak Khazanchi: excellent. And I look forward to it. I'd love to hear, hear what you have to say at the end of this. . Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Um,

Deepak Khazanchi: and if you have any other questions or things that come up after you listen to the recording, you know, just send me an email.
Hayden Ernst: Okay. Of course, of course.
Yeah. Um, and just to explain my, uh, paper a little bit, I'm sort of [00:38:00] looking into what, um, art galleries or museums in the Omaha area should, uh, do regarding this AI art. And, um, that's kind of what I was looking at for. , an exhibit would be, you know, something collaborative where people can come in and learn about the AI and, you know, sort of make their own art there.
Um, So that's what, at least what I'm looking at initially, and maybe while I'm writing my paper, I will, uh, change my opinion.
Deepak Khazanchi: But no, I think that's a great idea. I mean, maybe there is a section on AI art, like Joslyn, you know, you have right these different sections. Well, you may have a special section on AI art and have people play with it and so on.
You know, create your own Renoir, uh, or. I mean, the fact is that that's, that's the way to leverage, I think, rather than just kind of say, oh, oh, what do we do ? You can't be handing, this is good. This, the bus has left the [00:39:00] station and it's, it's way far ahead of us.
Alright, Hayden, thank you so much for your time.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah, no, thank you so much. This was a great talk. I loved having it. Um, have a good day. Have a good, um, spring. You too.
Deepak Khazanchi: Enjoy some. Please enjoy some of the days. Those favorite, yeah.
Hayden Ernst: Ill, ill have a couple set of talk to you. Yeah, great. Uh, bye.
Deepak Khazanchi: Bye.

Interview with Dr. Dario Ghersi

Dario Ghersi: [00:00:00] Um,
Hayden Ernst: okay, great. Uh, so I have a couple of questions here. Um, we're gonna start off with a little bit of, um, stuff on art mm-hmm. Uh, before then going into more of the AI questions. Okay. Um, but could you first, uh, maybe give a short introduction of yourself?
Dario Ghersi: Yeah, yeah. I'm Daniel Garcia. I'm an associate professor of biomedical informatics in the college of ISNT at UNO.
Um, I've been at U N O for about 10 years. My background is actually in medicine. Early on I was trained as an md, um, got my PhD in in bioinformatics, um, from NYU and moved to Princeton University. Did a fairly long stint as a postdoctoral fellow. They are working on cancer informatics and bioinformatics.
In a computer science, uh, department. I mean, we are a computer science professor, and then I moved to u now about 10 years ago, and I'm, uh, currently a, a faculty. So my, um, my research interests are primarily in, in the world of [00:01:00] bioinformatics. And so we do a lot of, um, computer science applied to, um, biomedical data.
Uh, so that's sort of the background I, I, I come with. Um, but, but of course I have several interests and, uh, I'm, you know, very passionate about music. I'm. Can consider myself a sort of an intermediate slash advanced guitar player. I've, you know, played for almost most of my life. Uh, and, um, yeah, I've, in, you know, it's been about three years since I started teaching this, uh, honors course, which I.
Deals with complexity in general. And one of the topics that we talk about is also, um, um, digital art and the contribution of, uh, technology and in particular computational approaches in, in developing things that could be considered art. So that's, I guess, what I might bring to the conversation, not the medical part necessarily.
Maybe that too as well, I dunno.
Hayden Ernst: Right. Uh, great. Um, [00:02:00] so. Guess we'll just jump into the questions here. Mm-hmm. First off, could you gimme a definition of, uh, what art is to you?
Dario Ghersi: Well, I have to say, you promised you send me some questions on Friday. I received them, so I'm just going to improvise. Do like, I guess improvise a little bit.
I mean, it's a very tough question. I think the, the word art means different things to different people and also in different. Periods of our history as, you know, human species, I guess, um, in, I, I would say, you know, I, I was also classically trained, like I went to, uh, the equivalent of grammar school, what would be grammar school in, in England.
But, um, so I studied, you know, Latin and Greek for many, many years. And their idea of art, I think had a lot to do with beauty. Proportions, harmony. Um, and uh, and, and I think that's, that's certainly one way to look at it. Um, I think in modern days we, we sort of included other definitions that are definitely more [00:03:00] porous, um, and.
An artist might want to just shake, uh, the public consciousness about particular issues and may, they may do it in a way that has really little to do with beauty. Um, so I think we, it really depends who, who you are asking and also what historical period you're looking at. I think today. Art is definitely not just about beauty.
And that I think is very related to, um, you know, machine learning and all that stuff that we can do with, with art because a lot of it is trying to really replicate, uh, certain concepts that are actually older than, than modern day art, I would say. But maybe we are getting ahead of ourselves.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Intro.
Interesting. Um, Yeah, I decided to, uh, surprise you a little bit with the questions, so I haven't been, uh, sending them to anybody yet. Um, so jumping off of that, where do you find, um, meaning in art? Do you sort of find it in, uh, your interpretation or your [00:04:00] connection to, uh, work? Or is it more directed by, uh, the artist and what they want to, uh, sort of bring to it?
Dario Ghersi: Well, I think, you know, it very much depends on the medium. I would say. Um, my, my passion is music, so I come with that strong interest. So I definitely, the type of art that resonates the most with me is music. I certainly like visual arts as well. I'm definitely not as knowledgeable as I am in music for music, you know.
It really depends on the, on the period again. But when I think about modern, uh, art form is really the emotional connection. Uh, to me that is a primary, um, component. So it has to appeal to a certain, you know, emotional, uh, Uh, well, in a sense it is in, in humans, I think. Um, but, um, and so for example, when

I listen to, you know, I, I love the blues and, [00:05:00] um, blues guitar, you know, and, and mm-hmm.
It's not overly complicated stuff. It's not overly technical. I mean, it can be technical, but most of the times, you know, you can do a lot with a minor pentatonic scale. Something that is pretty basic, but you know, The way that the tone, the emotional content of even a single note, um, is, is enough for me.
That that is art, you know, and it's more primal form. But at the same time, I also like baroque music, you know, like the music of for example. And there is a lot of technical stuff going on, and at the same time, There is the element of surprise. So the music of back and composers of his time, I think lives at the edge between highly structured, uh, order.
Uh, and at the same time you have the element of surprise and sometimes bordering on, on, I wouldn't say, um, randomness because there is certainly not a lot of randomness in that music, but it's certainly the element that takes you by surprise because if we, if you can predict everything, [00:06:00] uh, I, I don't think you can.
Necessarily call that. Interesting. Right. So, so I think I, I resonate a lot with the emotional content of a piece and also with the, the intellectual, but at the same time, with a surprise, with a twist. And I think that's where real art lives, you know, at the, the, you know, the tension between predictability and complete randomness, right?
That's music. I mean, in visual arts it really very much depends, uh, on, on again, the period that.
Okay.
Hayden Ernst: Um, so then going off of that, um, is understanding of like the history of art, where art is today and how it got there, um, important in creating new art. Um, should you really have to build upon what your predecessors and peers are doing, or could you make like, meaningful art without any background knowledge at all of what, um, sort of came before.
Dario Ghersi: Well, I mean, [00:07:00] I, I think, um, historically it's always been the case. Mostly, most of the time at least, it's always been the case that, uh, people were sort of, were very aware of the conventions of their predecessors. Now, whether they decided to build on them or shatter them, Um, sometimes they did both. Um, but they, they, they were still very aware.
Uh, and I think there is something to be said about that. I mean, it happened in music, you know, if you think about Arnold Schaumberg, you know, um, uh, and, and the innovations of the 20th century music and that really does away with. The ideas of, of a, of a tonal center, of a piece and things like that. The, these musicians were very aware of how to write, you know, in, in a more traditional fashion using harmony and counterpoint and all of that, and they just decided to take a different route.
So I think there is, it's very important to, to be aware of the. Of the conventions and, and what came before us, in a sense, the language of, of the discipline and then bend it in [00:08:00] new ways and, and twist it and maybe even completely replace it. Uh, you, it's hard to replace something if you don't know it at all.
Um, but, you know, I think there are plan. I mean, you could probably find a lot of exceptions of, of artists that were not necessarily aware. Of what came before them. And they were not formally trained or anything like that, and yet they were able to, to produce, um, pretty amazing things. Um, so I, I don't think it's, it's necessary.
I just think that it, it was very common in the past, certainly for the sesh forms of art. Um, but I don't think it's, it's necessary.
Hayden Ernst: Okay. Okay. Uh, son, do you think that, uh, pushing the boundaries of art is important when creating it?
Dario Ghersi: Mm-hmm. I think so. I mean, I, I think, um, sometimes, you know, it, it's not always overtly pushing the boundaries, you know, it can be very subtle.
Um, but, but at the same time, I think it's very important that artists have their own voice. You know, nobody wants to [00:09:00] music. Especially, you know, we, these days with YouTube and Instagram, you know, you have all kinds of these bed, you know, bedroom players that are excellent that just. Playing just like X, y, z, you know, replace your favorite musician and they're incredibly talented.
But, but at the same time, you know, you go back the real thing if you want that particular version of the music, right? I, I think it's important to, to have our own voice, um, in music, in, in digital, in, in visual arts, in any form of art. Uh, just parroting what, who came before us is not. To me, particularly interesting, although that requires also a lot of talent and skills. But I wouldn't say that's the most exciting thing in art, so,
Hayden Ernst: right. So maybe not as much pushing the boundaries and doing something crazy, you're just finding your own niche, finding your own place. Yeah. Uh, great. Um, so looking at, uh, AI generated art, um, what do you know about it [00:10:00] and, uh, kind of what are your thoughts on it?
Dario Ghersi: Yeah, it's a, you know, a very interesting topic. I, I don't think it's a new topic. I mean, I think you can find, uh, artists that were experimenting with the ideas even in the late fifties or early sixties. So, as most of AI is not new. Mm-hmm. Uh, the concept is not new. Some of the techniques, maybe obviously more recent, but, um, I know that, that there has been several approaches to it.
Uh, I, we can talk a little bit about visual arts and then maybe, um, Discuss what, what, what happened in music. But, uh, I think for, for visual arts, again, there is the traditional approach, which is the pro, the pro the approach of a computer scientist In computer science, you know, we tend to like to solve problems. We have problems to solve, right? We want to optimize the function, maximize it, minimize it. So we treat a lot of things as a, as a problem to be solved. And machine learning, which is obviously a subset of ai, uh, is. Just designed to solve problems. And so that's, that was [00:11:00] one way that people took say, okay, I want to.
Train a machine to produce art just like Vangogh or, uh, Rembrandt or, you know, whoever your, your favorite paint painter is. Uh, and so they went about the problem that way, right? So you can either use a training set or, or you can use generative adversarial networks when you, you are trying to produce a work of art that another network is unable to tell from the real thing, right?
And you have these two networks that compete with each other. One is producing. Something. And the other is trying to, to tell it, uh, from, from, you know, fake versus real. Um, and you can get, you know, pretty cool things done that way. But again, we are back in the mold of imitating what went before. So is that really something new?

Uh, I think more recently people have taken different approaches. They just explored the process as opposed to the product. Uh, so using artificial intelligence or, or machine learning more specifically. Uh, and looking at what it say, a neural network that is, will train for other purposes, can actually [00:12:00] do and look at the process as, as it's learning and use that as art.

You know, that I think is very cool because it's, it's something that we haven't seen before necessarily. How does a machine learn? Is that cons? Could that be considered an art form? Well, perhaps. Right? If you, if you show it in a certain way. I think it can produce very interesting things. And so we are not concerned about the final product being like a painting that we know, but we are really going outside the traditional and, and, and I think that's where most of the interesting stuff is taking place really in looking at the process versus the final product.

Um, so that is obviously, um, Interesting in the word of music. I mean, again, going back to the parroting stuff, there is something called deep back, uh, deep neural network that is pretty impressive. I mean, you can play with it. Um, you can, you know, easily go to the GitHub repo and have it up and running in a few minutes, you know, on a, on any Unix space machine.

And [00:13:00] you can produce, you know, four bars of, um, music that really sound a little bit like, have written, uh, corals, for example, corals, um, and stuff like that. A little. I mean, it's fascinating. I find it very interesting. But I, again, I'm less interested in that because it's just showing us, yes, we can replicate some of the, the things, the patterns that were there.

But, eh, I, I don't, I wouldn't necessarily call it art. Um, In the word of music, there has been other things that I think are interesting, um, in which is not maybe a bit, little bit more niche in the field of artificial intelligence, but, uh, pattern based stuff like the word of cellular, automata, um, uh, that have generated a lot of interesting visuals, uh, and music as well.

So you can use it for more naturally for visuals because cellular automata usually represented as, you know, um, things happening on a grid, on a lettuce as they update right? Um, and then in music you can also [00:14:00] encode certain pitches and produce music with them. I think those are very interesting because they're completely unsupervised, you know, and you are just as a, as someone who is appreciating it.

You're sort of selecting what you like, uh, and what you resonate with. Um, but, and that I think is the exciting part because it's a machine producing something in a completely unsupervised way with minimal human supervision, and we respond to it. I think that is where the excitement is really not so much in trying to replicate.

Oh yeah. The machine can actually paint just like vangogh or compose almost like ba eh, interesting. But technically interesting. I wouldn't call that art.

Hayden Ernst: Right, right. Um, so you're talking about the process and um, some of the artists or some of the people working in ai mm-hmm. Um, in the past, I was wondering if you've heard of, uh, Harold Cohen.

Yes. Think I did Aaron,

Dario Ghersi: I was reading Yeah. Was [00:15:00] mentioned. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. And so he, uh, he actually programmed this entire AI himself and he worked on it throughout his, uh, life. And then he worked in collaboration with it a lot too. Um, so I was just wondering what do, what do you think about that?

Dario Ghersi: I think, yeah, I think I'm, I was reading a book called, um, art in the Age of Machine Learning, I believe, which came out last year in m i t press.

And they were talking about that, um, that how long it took him to, uh, to do this. Um, what was the, um, it was not, it was good old fashioned ai. What was the, the, the medium that he was working with? I kind of forget right now. I'm, I'm, I'm not exactly sure. Yeah, I don't remember exactly. I remember I was impressed by the fact that this person had been working on, you know, on this for such a long time.

Right. I can't remember exactly what medium.[00:16:00]

Hayden Ernst: Um, alright, so what do you see as like some of the strengths and weaknesses or opportunities and threats of AI art? Uh,

Dario Ghersi: well, I mean, I think the threats are pretty apparent. Um, it, it's just very difficult these days to, um, I mean there are, for example, journals. I was re uh, I have, you know, friends that are writers and, um, they were telling me that some journals actually had to shut down cause of submissions.

You know, they were overwhelmed by submissions that were of stuff that was generated by, um, Ai. So I think there is, there is a problem of, of, um, of this deluge, of, of information or, or artifacts that are very easy to produce, you know, so almost mass produce and noise and, you know, noise can be a problem, um, especially for, for this kind of art form where it's, it can be, it can take [00:17:00] time to tell things apart and at the, and at some point it really.

The boundaries are very, very porous, again between human creativity and machine aid stuff. And so I think there are some dangers in terms of, um, just we are not quite ready yet. Um, we don't know what to do with it. We don't know what to call it. Um, right. There is a real danger for artists, you know, that are making a living sometimes not maybe, uh, getting rich or anything, but trying to, to survive with their work and.

So I think, um, that could be a new, certainly I can see that as an issue. Um, in terms of the excitement, I think there is new opportunity for having a new tool. Uh, photography was the same thing. You know, it was considered, you know, dangerous to painters and that was. Who prompted the impressionists, you know, to do something different.

Say, okay, well you can do a very good job at capturing reality as it is. Let me do something different. Let me tell you about how I see it. And [00:18:00] uh, and so then you have all these impressionists that came along after photography in a sense, sort of prompted maybe some would argue, uh, by that. So, and that was great.

Of course. So I, I think there is a lot of opportunities whenever a new medium or a new approach comes into play. This might be a little bit different though. Um. Because of human intervention, the amount of human intervention that is needed, photography is still needed to point your camera, right?

Something particular time of day. The, you know, you had a lot of control and some of these things that we are seeing now could potentially just be, press a button or you don't even need to press a button. So there is a level of automation in all this that is, um, quite different from all the tools that have come along, you know, in the history of the human pieces.

So, Okay. It's hard to tell whether it's good or bad. I think it's a, it's a mix,

Hayden Ernst: right? Um, so like, do you think that this ability of the a of AI to make [00:19:00] many works, um, for many different styles and even combined styles and do all this, uh, does that endanger the individualism in art? Um, does it devalue individual human creations or does it make.

Than more valuable. And do you see that, see people, uh, sort of creating a reactionary form of art, um, more different and more out there to ai maybe something that AI can't even copy?

Dario Ghersi: Uh, I, I find it hard to imagine something that AI could not possibly copy. Right? I mean, yeah, it seems like given enough examples, we might be able to pretty much copy everything and that is potentially the problem.

But, um, Individualism. I think that there is always the per as as we were discussing when, uh, in, you know, when people were trying to discern, you know, of, of all the cellular automata, which ones, which of the patterns look nice or be, or pretty or even beautiful, uh, or, or meaningful in some sense. Um, I think [00:20:00] the individual is still there.

The one that is perceiving and, and processing, uh, and consuming the art. I think that is still there. It's still us, right? Um, now the role of the artist is different. But the individual response, I think is going to be there. Um, so the individual appreciation of art, I think is still going to be there. Um, the role of the artist might change, of course, and, and yes, it might, it might be harder to discern than the individual.

Um, but I think, you know, not necessarily, I mean, it doesn't have to be like that. It doesn't necessarily, I think, you know, individuals always have a way to, I mean, artists always have a way to, to put their signature on things. I would imagine they will keep doing it even with more standard tools. Even if you get some tools that are widely used by people, you can still, um, you can still have your own voice.

Going back to that, having your own voice, I think you can still do that. It might be a little harder, but I don't think it's impossible. [00:21:00]

Hayden Ernst: So you think that people will still be able to find individual meaning in, um, all this art that can be created by

Dario Ghersi: ai? I hope so. I mean, the, the, the problem is, um, I mean it's a more societal, I mean, a big societal issue in terms of how are we going to educate ourselves, you know, and how are we, how are we going to use our time, you know?

Um, there are some things that, I mean, some art forms that are, um, fairly immediate. I mean, you could. You could argue that people in the middle Ages might not have been all of them, you know, extremely knowledgeable about Arba. When they saw a painting, you know, in a church or something, they, they could immediately see this was, you know, masterpiece.

And, and, but they could probably tell, uh, painters were not so great from, from the, the, the geniuses in a sense of their time. But, you know, as we move closer to our times, I think, um, Art has become, in some sense, a little bit more difficult to appreciate immediately. Right. I mean, I can give you the example of jazz music.

I used to [00:22:00] not being able to understand it really. Um, like bbo or, or stuff that was a little bit more technical and, and harmonically adventurous than, you know, new Orleans Jazz. That is definitely, you know, more immediate. Uh, and yet, you know, with, with like, you know, gave it a try and. You know, went to to, to gigs and, and and shows.

And I lived in New York for many years, so I, I had access to all kinds of amazing stuff. And, and after a while, I mean, I, I, I couldn't get enough of it. So I, it became an acquired taste in a way. It wasn't something that I immediately responded to. So the, the reason why I mentioning this is the way we are using our time will also affect the way we will, uh, Appreciate art, right?

I mean, it's, some things are appre appreciated immediately. Some things require a little bit of education, not traditional education necessarily, but some kind of education that involves time and patience and, you know, willingness to listen or, or [00:23:00] look at things or observe. So I think AI is not happening in a vacuum, right?

There is a, I mean, digital art and all that is not happening in a vacuum. There is this constant. Bombardment of, you know, information and sensory, uh, overload, whatever you wanna call it. And so I'm wondering what that will do to us and our ability to appreciate art. So it, it's a much more complicated problem than just having a new type of medium or, or tool coming along, but also major changes, um, in our brain and our, you know, the way we just.

Use our time. So I think that would be interesting to see. I don't know if anybody can, can predict, you know, in any accuracy right now.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. So with just so much, um, available art that can be produced by AI that just looks, you know, good. You think that, um, will sort of move away from a more nuanced approach, a [00:24:00] more acquired taste approach to art.

Dario Ghersi: Yeah, I mean the, the, I, I think the cherishing of, of something that is hard to get and hard to find is also part of the, of the pick of the problem. Uh, not problem, but of the issue. Um, I mean, going back to the, the, the, to music, you know, I old enough to remember, you know, um, the times where we didn't have any availability of music, right?

And we just had to go to our collection. Some had, some people had a lot of records, some people had very few. And some people are none. And, but no matter what, I mean, nobody had what we have today, right? So how do, did we discover new music through friends, right? And through relatives or acquaintances. And so it was a very personal thing, uh, as opposed to just a playlist and suggested recommendations from YouTube or Spotify or what have you.

Um, and that, that I think makes a difference. I mean, I think listening. Um, to a playlist, like little [00:25:00] snippets of songs versus whole record makes a huge difference in the way we appreciate, uh, sustained attention, you know, all of that. And I think the same goes for, for Digi, for visual arts. I mean, we have access to almost everything now.

We can go to the louver, you can go to the, you know, national Gallery, you know, click of a mouse and you can see all these masterpieces. Not the same thing as being there, but I mean, if you have a TV or something, high definition, it's, it's pretty good. So is it desensitizing us? I don't know. But I think there is something to be said for, for stuff that is more cherished because it's hard to get,

Hayden Ernst: um,

uh Right. So, um, do you see a difference in like, the effort put into creating, you know, a painting or a song, um, versus, you know, being able to have an AI do it? Um, and do you think like that sort of difference in effort, uh, makes a difference in value of the [00:26:00] work?

Dario Ghersi: It's a great question. I think it's, um, it's a very important question that is probably on many people's mind right now.

Um, it's not unique to, um, I wouldn't say it's unique to, to, uh, machine learning or artificial intelligence more broadly in general. I mean, the availability of, especially in the world of music, of these. You know, digital audio work stations and things like that have made it easier for sure to do certain things. Um, I, I am a little bit old schooled that way. I still think there is great value in, in the, the trade, you know, in the, in the skills, um, that are needed to, um, the technical skills and, um, For me, I mean, for that emotional content to, uh, to really be there, I, I need to see a human, you know, uh, in some sense, or at least something that looks like a human, I guess it makes no difference if it isn't, but, but as long as there is that the, also the, the [00:27:00] element of imperfection that, you know, you can definitely detect in, in, in live performances or things like that, where there is.

No room for, for fixing mistakes. And those mistakes are actually part of the, of the beauty, you know, of the, of the piece or whatever that might be. So I think there is a, certainly there is a problem if you're just pressing a button, you know, and, and paddling that as masterpiece. I mean, I don't know. I think it's, it's in terms of value as I do personally, I would value less.

Something that is extremely easy to make. Uh, it might be a, you know, an old-fashioned way to look at things, but I just, you know, maybe that's cause we grew up in that kind of world, you know, where making music or making art was difficult, you know, and it wasn't really readily available. And so again, they're hard to get button to, to get, you know, that kind [00:28:00] of idea that.

Which is, you know, the way the market works, you know, something that is rare is more valuable usually, right? I mean, it's pretty, pretty basic thing, but maybe it doesn't apply one-to-one to art. But I think if something is extremely simple and to make, or is mass produced, and I, I don't know that the has the same value.

Right?

Hayden Ernst: Um, okay. Uh, so. Do you think that human knowledge and or our creativity, um, is a limit to ai? I know that a lot of ai, you know, it only, uh, works because we fed it, training information and that sort of stuff. So depending on what training information we feed, it'll come out differently. Do you think that we limit it in that sense?

Dario Ghersi: I think so. I definitely think so. And I, I think the same goes for science though. I mean, it's not limited to, um, the word of art. I think, um, I'm, [00:29:00] you know, a huge fan as an app, as a style of approach, um, in the work that I do for, you know, my scientific, uh, work, which is my day job really, um, in, in genetic algorithms and evolutionary computation, you know, that kind of.

Paradigm where you are, instead of necessarily defining all the constraints of your problem, your LE solutions evolve, emerge in a more se, certain, more natural way. Not, not exactly like nature does, but a little bit more similar to what nature does than using, you know, more traditional optimization approaches.

And you know, people that do this kind of work, you know, they will tell you that and oftentimes they get surprised. Right by solutions that they didn't think, uh, will work and actually work better than their solutions. I mean, we, we have seen that in, in, in, even in this arcade playing, uh, deep networks, right? That playing video games mm-hmm. And using techniques that are counterintuitive or we wouldn't think of and score more points [00:30:00] than humans really can score. Um, and it's not just the physical ability. I mean, yes, of course the perfect control is something to do with it. Mm-hmm. But it's just a strategy.

It's just different, right? The ball bounds between the wall and the, you know, we've seen that even in stuff that is not necessarily art. So I think human creativity is human and as such as parameters and constraints. And we have a medium that is capable of going beyond what is the boundaries of what we think or most of us would think.

So I think if we are willing to let ourselves be surprised we, we, we can be surprised easily,

Hayden Ernst: naturally. Right. Yeah. Like, uh, with the games, um, in chess, uh mm-hmm. You know, the greater chess players were saying when they played, um, some of the better ai, you know, they made moves that wouldn't make sense as chess moves at all in, you know, conventional strategy, but they were just winning by so much.

Dario Ghersi: Yeah. Yeah. And the funny thing is that they, they aren't even saying that that is bad, Chas. I mean, they're saying this is [00:31:00] surprising, but it's actually quite a beautiful move, you know? Right. They can appreciate the beauty of it. So it's not just oil machine, you know, it's just very cold and all of that. I mean, as humans, we respond to that.

Wow, this is surprising. But it's actually going back to the idea of being surprised. Right. But it's actually quite beautiful as, you know, masterpiece, this move is great. Right. So it's, it's interesting.

Hayden Ernst: All right. Uh, so how, uh, do you see a lot of this technology being used in the future? I know you talked a lot about how. Um, the interactions between, you know, people and AI could, um, be more art itself, uh, rather than sort of the artwork that it's trying to produce or that it's trying to copy.

Dario Ghersi: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I mean, I think, um, there is going to be for sure, a lot of people are, uh, just going to go for the, oh, I'll give you the best possible painting that looks like.

Michelangelo painted it, you know, that, that, that's stuff. I think we'll see that, we'll [00:32:00] see that in music. You know, I can surprise you by producing a symphony that sounds just like Beethoven wrote it, you know? I'm sure. We'll, we'll see a lot of that to me, where the, the breakthroughs will be. I mean, this is, again, amazing from a technical point of view.

I don't want to discount it. I mean, it's, it's just amazing that we can do it or you are getting close to being able to do it. Um, but I think the most interesting stuff will be when we sort of, uh, take a peek into these processes, you know? And really do something more creative with this and sort of let it, um, let it flow a little bit more with our, the constraints that we impose on them, on what's been done before.

I think that would really potentially open up a whole new avenue. And that might be bringing in also different forms of,

you know, sound and, and even smell and flavors and visuals. I mean, we, we are just beginning to, uh, to see this, um, Synesthesia, you know, whatever you wanna call it. Like the con conflating of different senses that we [00:33:00] can do, right?
We can, we don't have to limit ourselves to just one type of delivery at a time, like visual versus sound versus, uh, texture. You know, we can all, we can do everything at once. So,
so those are some things that I, I, I mean, I would predict might become, Um, might, might, might be, I wouldn't say popular, but you might see more of it.
Hayden Ernst: Right. Um, so the, the paper that I'm writing has an element of sort of what should, um, sort of art galleries and museums in Omaha and in surrounding areas, uh, do, uh, due, uh, regarding this, uh, AI art.
And sort of one idea that I've been looking at preliminarily is, uh, You know, allowing people to interact with it and sort of allowing them to, you know, collaborate and make maybe our work of their own or just kind of see the processes behind it [00:34:00] more. And so I was wondering what you think about that idea and if you have any other ideas about it?
Dario Ghersi: No, I think this is, um, I think this is great. Um, interaction is, is key. Um, I think also not just humans interacting with ai, but also the AI interacting with humans. There's, I think there was a sort of an installation years ago that I read about, which, uh, I found, I found, you know, very interesting. I think they sort of trapped a robot between a wall and a, and a fake wall that was pretty easy to, um, to pierce.
Uh, and, and so they equipped this robot with cameras and my, and, you know, microphones and things like that and, and a little hammer or a drill, I forget what it was. And so the, the rubber was sort of, Exploring and then reacting to, uh, to the, to the reactions of people in the room. And so at some point it was also drilling holes in the wall to just, to take a better look what was going on.
So I think that is very interesting, right, to, to, to [00:35:00] have a mutual interaction, not just the humans interacting with the, the ai, but the AI also. Given in a safe way, uh right. Maybe it really is not necessarily a good idea, but something less dangerous, um, to have a mutual sort of a two-way street as opposed to a one-way street.
Right.
Hayden Ernst: Uh, that's all the questions I have, uh, right now, so thank you very much. It's, uh, been great talking to you. We brought a lot of interesting and new ideas. So
Dario Ghersi: I'm glad I could talk to you. And, and by the way, if you're interested, if you have the time, you know, I would love you to, uh, for you to come to, uh, to the honors class and, you know, just give a short introduction to the work you're doing.
I think it would be very nice if you, if you could do it, uh, no pressure. Know you're busy, but.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Yeah, definite. I would, uh, love to if I have time. Uh, so yeah, let me know, uh, when, when I can do that.
Dario Ghersi: Yeah, I can send you an email. I mean, the schedule is pretty flexible. I think. Uh, we meet, [00:36:00] um, Tuesday and Thursday from 10 30 to 1145, so that's the time.
Um, but you know, if you, if you, I can send you an email, uh, later in the week. Yeah. If you, if you have the time and you know, it doesn't have to be very long, but just to introduce this project, I think it will fit very well with what some of the things we're talking about right
Hayden Ernst: now. Yeah. Sounds, uh, great. I think that, uh, Thursday would probably
Dario Ghersi: work great.
Great. All right. Sounds good. All right. Yeah. Thanks
Hayden Ernst: again. I will, I'll keep you updated on, uh, sort of my paper, how's it, how it's going, and um, you can come and see. I'll be at the honors symposium and everything with, uh, um, my project and a poster, so Oh, sure. It'd be awesome
Dario Ghersi: to have you. Perfect. Thanks again.
Nice talking to you. Yeah, yeah. Good luck. See you soon. Bye-Bye. Bye.

Interview with Alexandra Cardon

Hayden Ernst: [00:00:00] Great. So then I guess, could you gimme a short introduction of yourself? Yep. Um, so I can have that too.
Alexandra Cardon: Yeah. Okay. So my name's Alexandra Cardell. I am an art historian. I am currently the curator at the Samuel Bach Museum at the University of Nebraska Omaha. And, um, my focus, uh, has been on postwar European painting. Um, I also study, um, 18th century French, um, architecture. So, um, a little bit varied there. And I have taught contemporary art classes at U N O and a variety of other universities.
Hayden Ernst: Uh, great. Um, I'm not a professional interviewer by any means, so I'll just, um, just start just asking you questions and we'll see where we go from there.
Yeah. Um, first off, could you give me a definition of what art is, um, to you? Okay. Well,
Alexandra Cardon: solves the tricky one because there's so many definitions. Um, and [00:01:00] ultimately if you want to talk about what art is, it's an activity that's done out of a desire to communicate through predominantly visual meat. Um, it's, uh, generally design, uh, designated by the art maker as art.
Um, Uh, we could also say that it expresses, uh, an emotion or, um, a worldview. Um, ultimately it is, uh, generated, uh, by someone to create, um, a ways of opening communications and other word, other ways to use in words. Um, Now, uh, I also believe that art is ultimately a component of culture. Um, and that it reflects the socioeconomic and political background, um, and, um, situates the maker, uh, in that way.
So, um, you can talk [00:02:00] about how it translates ideas of, um, And values, um, of a specific culture across space and time, but that's getting into sort of more historical, um, reading of the work of art.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Yeah. I, uh, art is a broad category, so I was expecting, uh, many different answers for that. Yeah. Question.
It's, it's a
Alexandra Cardon: difficult one. Um, right. The answer in a single sentence.
Hayden Ernst: Right. Um, So where do you find, um, meaning in art, um, in your interpretation of a piece or like, do you think that is really directed by the artist and what they wanted you to, uh, pull from that

Alexandra Cardon: piece? Uh, I think it's a, um, it's a combination.
Yeah. Um, you can't, um, deny that the artist is communicating an idea through the production of a work. Um, but you can, you also have to recognize that you will come to that work from your own space of [00:03:00] understanding with your own ideas and, um, uh, bring that to, um, the piece and to your interpretation of it.
Um, I think it's really important to also speak about the social weight. Of a work of art. Um, and by then, I mean like the place that it occupies within society, um, and have that will influence interpretation.
Hayden Ernst: Right. Um,
so like place in society, what, what do you mean by that?
Alexandra Cardon: Well, like, um, how, where the work is located. Um, Will, um, in, uh, influence this meaning, so if a work is in a museum and you come across it because it's in an institution, you're gonna think that that work is more important than, um, say the graffiti piece, uh, that was done, um, by Hugo, uh, underneath, uh, the passageway [00:04:00] by the bike line, which also has incredible social value, um, but might not be viewed within the same.
Um, Parameters. So depending on where the piece is located, um, that you have an an interpretation that's put on that off and that sucks.
Hayden Ernst: Right, right. Okay. Um, so how, um, do you rank like the value, um, in the effort put into creating art? Um, do you think that like something someone put a lot more time into is more valuable than something.
Someone put a little time into, um, and I also wanted to say like that or effort being sort of relative. Um, I know that, you know, you could draw something or you could be talented in painting and you can paint something very quickly, but that doesn't reflect maybe the time spent, um, thinking about it.
Alexandra Cardon: Yeah. [00:05:00] Yeah. I said yeah, time, time and value are somewhat relative here. Um, So something that people put little time into in terms of the prospect. The act of making, um, they could have take taken a long time to think about it. So you think Master Shaun, who takes a bottle rack and um, put signs in, puts a new title on it and it goes, um, it no longer is a battle rack because he places it within the gallery space.
So comes a s work of art and people are like, oh, you, you spent no time. Um, working on this piece, it has no value. It has no intrinsic artistic, um, value. Um, and that's been proven to be wrong, um, because it is part of the formulating and the transformation of the object, the pre-made object into something, um, artistic that was important.
Um, that was, um, the process of making, but still today, you'll have people like that will say something along the lines of, oh, my kid could have done that. And you mean my immediate [00:06:00] response is, yeah, but. Your kid didn't. Right.
Hayden Ernst: So that's what I listen to
Alexandra Cardon: like this is, um, there, there's a purposefulness in the act of creation, um, you set out to create. And I think that's the most, that has, um, holds the most value.
Hayden Ernst: Okay. Yeah, that makes sense. Um,
so do you think the understanding, um, the history of art. Where we are today, how we got there is important when, um, creating new art, um, do you kind of have to maybe build upon what your predecessors and peers are doing? Um, or like even, you know, go, like against what they're doing? Or can you make meaningful art without any of that background?
Um, knowledge.
Alexandra Cardon: I think no one exists in a vacuum like we all have, um, like. Right now statistics is are that we see over 10,000 [00:07:00] images a day. There is no way that you're not aware of the production of other artists, um, even if you don't know them by name, even if you haven't gone to an art history class and learned like every single artist from the Renaissance to now by art and know all the tape.
Titles and dates, et cetera. Um, you will still recognize, um, things like Michelangelo, assisting Chapel ceiling because it's part of our visual language. Um, it is part of our shared understanding of the world. Um, so even if you don't know your history like an A to Z, um, you will, um, You'll be basing it upon something or another.
Um, you'll be in reaction too. So, um, I don't think you can actually, um, say that you have no background mention because I mean, uh, we, we have common culture, however we look at it. Um, yeah. Uh, [00:08:00] so. I knows three year olds that can recognize poll, right. Um, because of the baby books that were, they were given.
Um, even if their parents weren't art historian, they still like, oh, there's Apollo. And you're like, okay, that's crazy. So,
Hayden Ernst: so how useful is, um, sort of the history of art, um, and talking about different styles and that sort of thing when, um, looking at artists' work?
Alexandra Cardon: It depends on the artists. Certain artists are history, history of graphs, so they're really basing their art on a conversation With past artists, um, other artists are moving away from that tradition and refusing to make reference to the past and are looking for new forms of expression.
So I think it just depends what you're doing. Um, if you're someone like Alo for Eli and you're really looking, um, at. Sort of the engineering, the world you can create through engineering, um, and through technology, [00:09:00] rather than thinking, oh, I'm gonna make a classical version of Sunset. He's making it out of light bulbs and mirrors and smoke and it's fantastic.
Um, but I wouldn't look at, um, the depiction of a sun in the Renaissance and compared to all of her Eli. Does that make
Hayden Ernst: sense? Uh, yeah. Yeah. Makes sense. Um, right. Uh, is pushing the boundaries of art, um, important when creating it.
Alexandra Cardon: Um, I, I would hope that, um, everyone is trying to, in their, uh, approach to communication are trying to find the language that serves them best.
Um, I don't know if it has to be boundary pushing. Um, I think the idea has to that you're, the idea is that you're conveying should have value and weight and add to the conversation. And I think in that way you're gonna push boundaries. [00:10:00] Um, but you could be like a really old school classical oil painter.
Um, and yet, um, your ideas are the ones that are gonna move you forward because you're using this sort of technique that's been in, in use since the 15th
Hayden Ernst: century. Right. Uh, yeah. So have you heard of, um, the AI generated art or what do you know about it and what are some of your thoughts on it?

Alexandra Cardon: Well, I have been reading up on AI generated art.

Um, uh, mainly, you know, every, every article that I read is, um, how scandalous it is that an artist won a prize, um, having declared his art to be AI generated. Um, And, um, how other artists are complaining that, um, you know, they're basically bread and butter has been stolen through an act that is not, that they don't qualify as creative, right?

So there's, [00:11:00] there's a lot of naysayers. Um, um, you know, For me, artists are really quick to deriv any new technology. Um, and it comes out of a space of fear. Um, painters were deriding photography, um, when that came about because they felt that they could no longer be realist painters if, um, Photography was about because it had no purpose, um, which we all know is different.

And it's the same. When Photoshop came out, people were freaking out. Photographers were freaking out saying it was gonna destroy photography as new because it was no longer composed image. It was something that someone could bring together through an Allegion and, um, They were really di

um, disdainful of, uh, that whole practice. And so to me it's like, uh, we have to see what direction it goes, [00:12:00] what people can do with it. Um, I'm almost excited to expand, um, the definition of art and like what it means to the process of creation and how it comes about. Um, I think there's some cool applications that we can look forward to.

Um, that we haven't considered because we're too wrapped up and like whether or not it can be art. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: So, um, kind of looking back at the questions I asked about art in general, um, what do you think about the value of the sort of effort put into create ar or generate this AI art?

Alexandra Cardon: Well, you know, it, it goes back to that issue of, um, you know, the prejudice of the viewer who judges the value of the work of art according to their understanding of labor.

Um, you know, a farmer will judge art harshly because it doesn't involve the same amount of labor that does too, like, um, work [00:13:00] like. For 14, 15 hour days, um, and really struggle. Um, but some, a painter will look at AI art and judge it in terms of their production. And so if you can get away from that idea of production and value, um, I think we can start, um, being a little bit more open to, um, the possibilities of ai.

Hayden Ernst: Right. So holds a different sort of value.

Alexandra Cardon: Yeah. Yeah. We don't, you don't give value based on different merits.

Hayden Ernst: Uh, right, right. Um,

okay. So what do you see as some of the strengths and weaknesses or opportunities and threats of AI art?

Alexandra Cardon: Okay, so like the, the immediate like, um, strength is that it's democratizing like anyone can make art. It's really exciting, it's super accessible. Um, it will allow people, um, from all walks of life to come together and, um, and the act of creation, you know, [00:14:00] in some ways you could compare it to like a paint by number.

Um, where you can come in and everyone can like color the numbers in. Um, everyone has the skill to do that, to create something beautiful at the end of the day. Not everyone's paint by number looks the same because they all choose different colors. Um, I think there's a lot of applications in a non-artistic sense, um, that can be cool.

Um, uh, but the biggest issues with AI for me is, um, how it pulls from across. Um, You know, the internet, um, basically that pulls images. Um, and so it doesn't give any credit to the artist whose images it's pulling. Um, it offers 'em the compensation and the creation of, um, the work. Um, it's based on the known, so you could argue like, how truly revolutionary is this?

Um, form of art when it's just pulling from what's available. Um, and then of course [00:15:00] you have the issues of rights and licensing and copyright and, um, how it offers a problem really for digital artists, um, by, um, taking their work because it's readily accessible, um, and, um, making something that can be in some cases very similar, um, and therefore causing them loss of income.

So,

Hayden Ernst: right. Yeah. Um, I was just sitting in on, um, on office hours for, uh, one of the AI art generators. Um mm-hmm. It was called Mid Journey, and they were talking about, uh, words and, uh, phrases that they had to ban, um, from their generation, um, because Oh, really? People abuse them bad. Yeah. Uh, which is interesting.

Alexandra Cardon: Yeah, the production, I think you could easily produce art that can become really offensive. [00:16:00] Mm-hmm. Like type in bodies, Auschwitz, and you'll get something Right. Truly horrendous. Um, so it can populate images, um, that are incredibly problematic. Uh, and, um, there is a question of ethics here. Um, but at the same time, They're pulling from existing images, you can easily type the same thing in your browser and print.

Um, so right. Having not played around with it enough in the terms of writing offensive things in the search part and, um, pressing populate, I'm a little stumped, um, of how different it is than, um, sharing images that are already offensive

Hayden Ernst: to people.

Um, so what do you see as, or how do you see people using this, um, technology in the future?

Alexandra Cardon: [00:17:00] Um, okay, so there's one case in point that I thought was really exciting for me. Um, it's been used in a memory ward. Um, At a, um, nursing home where they were asking individuals, um, to give some descriptors of a place, um, where they had grown up or something, you know, after sharing a memory.

And the image that was populated out of their choices of work was really close to, um, what that person had experienced. And so it allowed them to create. For people who didn't have forcibly photographs of those particular memories. And it allowed them to create a visual world, um, that, um, they hadn't inhabited since their youth.

And so as people who were struggling with memory, it was like really moving, um, and supportive of, um, their, uh, happiness basically, [00:18:00] um, as they live in this nursing home. So that's also. As far as I'm concerned, I just think that's so exciting, um, that we can like, deal with it helping, uh, people suffering with dementia or Alzheimer's and, um, Getting them into this like better space, um, through helping them generate regenerate memories.

Um, I think it could become this really cool idea generator, um, where you can rapidly type something in and create visuals that

will allow you to. Make a better painting or, um, allow you to play around with, um, visuals, um, to, in the construction of an exhibition, for example. Um, for, I mean, I'm thinking about it in my world, but I'm also thinking, um, For filmmakers if they have to, like prep scenes and, um, you know, or Disney when they're creaming, um, the frames for, um, [00:19:00] animation, it could be a really fast way to populate images.

Um, so I think for time it could, yeah, just, it would save a lot of time tell for people.

Hayden Ernst: Right, right.

Um, Yeah. One thing that I see a lot of people are worried about is, um, just it being used to create different sort of, um, copies of styles and stuff. Mm-hmm. Um, so do you think like the ability to use AI to make like, You know, hundreds of different works over, you know, many different styles and even combining styles and doing all that.

Um, does that endanger sort of individualism in art? Um, and it, does it sort of devalue this individual human, uh, creation and art, or does it make that aspect, uh, more valuable as it was created by a person? I mean,

Alexandra Cardon: I would say it would make it more [00:20:00] valuable. Um, individual work will, um, uh, All those remain the property of the individual in so many ways.

But there are plenty of artists that have already proven that appropriation is a form of art. Um, and so for me, the people who are really complaining about it are people that are not conceptually, um, aware. I'm trying to be really polite here. Right. Um, but like they're, um, they're not playing in a 21st century, um, like art field if they, um, are not aware that appropriation is a form of art.

Hayden Ernst: Okay. Um, could you like explain that a little bit more?

Alexandra Cardon: So, um, you have plenty of people, um, That have used, um, the artworks of others. Um, you can think, uh, going back to, uh, you know, artists [00:21:00] used to study the art of other artists in order to move forward. So you can look at Renaissance's artists going and studying the work of, um, their predecessors, um, to.

Better their own art to make it, um, to, to figure out where the predecessors had gone wrong, how they could become more realistic, how they could model bodies better. Um, and, um, it goes all the way to the 21st century with artists, um, taking images off of Instagram. Um, Like, um, Richard Prince, uh, to print them on canvases and present them as his own work and galleries.

Um, the Art of appropriation is an art form in itself and allows for us to have conversations about what it means to have an authentic work of our quote unquote. I'll add the quote unquote there for your transcript. Right, right. Um, Because, yeah, this, the whole idea of au [00:22:00] this is all based on an idea that there's something authentic.

Um, and, um, you know, the boundaries of authenticity have already been tested. Time and again, the 20th and 21st century. And the original idea, like what does that mean in today's day and age?

Hayden Ernst: Um, yeah. So do you see like, um, maybe a reactionary, um, you know, style of art appearing, um, from this for a little bit at least?

Um, you know, art is trying to be more out there, um, to try to be more different, to kind of create works that maybe AI can't, uh, copy as easily.

Alexandra Cardon: Sure. I mean, there's always gonna be a reaction to, um, something. Um, this is how, how we function. We're always sort of pitting ourselves for originality sake [00:23:00] against one another and saying, I can do this better.

Um, you know, the, um, I think that the, the space of tension exists very much between digital artists, um, with ar ar ai artists, um, who, uh, whose work can look very similar. You're not gonna get an oil painter really upset about AI technology because there's no way you can recreate, um, the brush stroke, um, in ai.

Like, that's like until you get printers that will come up with exactly the same pigment and exactly the same brush drawer, exactly the same canvas. Um, you know, this create like, you know, you know, you know when you see canvas art at, um, target, um, It doesn't look like it was made by a human. It looks like it's been fronted by a machine.

Um, and so painters are probably completely un [00:24:00] fussed by this debate and thinking, oh God. And now I understand what was going through the mind of 19th century painters when they saw the arrival of photography. Um, so, but ultimately, like. Barring has all has taken place and, um, this concern seems right to be incredibly monetary right now.

Mm-hmm. With, um, AI polling works that other people are putting for sale and, um, creating images that are incredibly similar to theirs. Um, and so it's a concern about how their intellectual, pro property and, um, finances are gonna be affected. Um, and so it's, yeah, I, I mean, I feel for digital artists, basically.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Uh, okay. So do you think that. You know, human knowledge or creativity, um, is a limit to the art that, [00:25:00] um, is created by ai. You know, we're pulling images and, you know, stuff that we've already done. Yeah. Um, so it's more or less, you know, kind of copying what we can do. Do you think that's a limit that we're putting on it, that maybe we should look and try to create differently?

Alexandra Cardon: Um, As a non computer person, I don't really know how to answer that question. Like this idea of like, it's pulling from all these artists from around the globe, um, and creating a composite of their image, um, in some way limits the abilities of ai, but ultimately does create a new image, um, from. All of this polling It does.

Um, so in many ways, like our human, the more humans add to this, um, online world, the more AI can pull for me and, um, the more creative it can get, um, [00:26:00] Ultimately, um, from what I've read, AI struggles just like humans with the creation of hands and feet. Um, so, um, I think we're always gonna be faced with like, that's, that's our human limitation of ai.

Um, that we haven't, um, figured out the programming yet so that I can do hands and things. But, um, yeah, um, I think as long as it's, um, based on. Um, it's pulling its imagery, uh, by, uh, from, uh, human imagery. It's gonna be limited them in some way.

Hayden Ernst: Right.

Alexandra Cardon: Um, well, but ultimately we'll never know because there's no way on earth that we'd ever know who all these artists were like, right.

Uh, like I, you know, they're pulling from artists from everywhere. So like, how will we know if it's limited?
Hayden Ernst: Right. Um, [00:27:00] so I was, uh, talking to, um, somebody else earlier and they said that they like the, uh, human aspects of art. Um, you know, whether that is a mistake in a live performance or mm-hmm. On a piece of, um, art, um, And you know, like we just said, AI isn't exactly perfect either. It sometimes makes mistakes. Do you think that that, um, sort of brings a human aspect to it?
Alexandra Cardon: Yeah, absolutely. It's, there's something really endearing. Knowing that AI can't, is struggles. Just like a first year art student with hands and feet. Like, I find that really charming. Um, um, But there is, I think, um, you know, there's something about the human touch.
Like, um, looking at a Cezanne painting for me is like absolutely mind blowing, just seeing how he's applied paint to the canvas. I don't get that feeling when I'm looking at his paintings on the screen. Like, it's not [00:28:00] until you're in front of it in person that, um, it gets really exciting. Um, and so seeing something.
That's AI generated for me. It's like, oh, that looks cool. Um, but ultimately, like. I think I, I remain really old school where I say that there's like, the thrill in art is, um, in, uh, witnessing the performance of it. Um, even if it's, you know, a past performance, uh, as with an oil painting or, um, you know, watching someone spray paint, um, the side of a building or, um, put up a mural.
Um, Or perform within the museum space. Um, an activity like those things are kind of what make art the most exciting for me. Um, is that like how we can come together as a society, um, in these spaces and witness and see. [00:29:00] Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Um, well that's all the, uh, questions I sort of had written down at least.
Okay. Um, so. As the part of my paper is looking at how, you know, galleries and museums should look at AI art. Mm-hmm. Um, sort of moving forward, I've been sort of working with the idea, um, preliminarily of, you know, instead of, you know, acquiring pieces that somebody generated through ai, uh, museums and galleries should look at.
Allowing people to interact with the AI and mm-hmm. Generate and work with their own works and understand that process a little bit better. Yeah. And then, you know, really sort of look into how AI and humans can interact together instead of Yeah. The results of ai. Yeah. And I was just wondering what she thought of that and if you had any other ideas too.
Well, I
Alexandra Cardon: think, I think that's actually a brilliant idea because, um, like how do [00:30:00] we engage in the digital age? Um, like how do we feel most comfortable? It's an entire generation that's been like basically four years being online. Um, and so it's exciting to be able to enter into spaces of communication, um, that don't forcibly demand our presence.
Um, In a particular space. Um, I find ai, as I said, incredibly democratic. Um, and this idea that everyone can create and people can come together and like pull ideas, um, as a new form of communication. That's super cool. Um, I'm always pro that, um, and what museums can do with it, you know, museums like, um, are, are becoming, uh, far more nimble than they used to be, where it was just like mm-hmm.
Put something on the wall, um, and, um, are always interested in, in like new technologies and I think this is a great opportunity for them to create some inventive programming.[00:31:00]
Hayden Ernst: All right. Uh, great. It was, uh, great to meet you and great talking to you. That's all I really have. Yeah, you too.
Alexandra Cardon: Go ahead. Maybe I'll see you on campus on real Realiz, but yeah,
Hayden Ernst: I'll, uh, keep you updated with, uh, how my paper is sort of coming along and let you know, um, sort of what parts I'll be using, um, from this interview.
Sounds good. Uh, just so I don't end up misquoting you or Okay.
Alexandra Cardon: Yeah, just, just send me, I'll, and, and I'll tell you. Yeah. Actually I totally don't, didn't mean to say that.
Hayden Ernst: Right. Um, alright. And yeah, it would be great. I'll be at the honors, um, symposium at the end of the year with my, uh Oh, nice. A poster and everything.
So if you wanted to come and see me and talk to me in person, that would also be Yeah, a great time.
Alexandra Cardon: That'd be great. Thank you for inviting me to that. Yeah, I'll, I'll keep Lucy all sends me the note and, oh, okay. Yeah, so I'll be sure to come this start. All right, C bye.[00:32:00]

Interview with Dr. Adrian Duran

Hayden Ernst: [00:00:00] Uh, automatically take the notes or something, so, oh, yeah. Right. That, that'll be interesting to see if it, uh, works.
Adrian Duran: You mean like this thing, it, it effectively does like close captioning and like transcribes what we're saying? Uh,
Hayden Ernst: supposedly it does. We'll see how it works. Cool. Um, yeah, so I kind of have, uh, like 10 or so questions that I would, uh, I'll ask you here, uh, if it's okay, go.
Yeah. Um, well actually first could you kind of just gimme a short, uh, kind of introduction of yourself and kind of what you do and everything?
Adrian Duran: Sure. Um, my name's Adrian Duran. I'm a professor in the art history program over in the School of Arts in CFA m here at U N O. Um, I'm an art historian and critic, um, have been doing this for like 20 years, I guess.
Okay.
Hayden Ernst: Uh, [00:01:00] Great. So, um, I guess before we get, uh, started here, what do you kind of know about, uh, sort of ai, uh, generated art and how that kind
Adrian Duran: of works? Um, well, I mean, I, I guess I'm, I'm as up on it as the news cycle keeps me. Um, I can't say that I've ever used it. Um, I've never really been tempted, but a lot of that is cause I'm not necessarily, I'm not an art maker myself, so I've never really like, Had occasion to play with it.
Um, I've played with like chat g p t a little bit, um, which I guess is the writing version of this, which is, I don't know, not nearly as spooky as I think everybody wants it to be. Also, I think quite hilarious because it, it has a number of tells that if you've read student papers for more than a couple of years, you can sniff it out, you know?

Um, Uh, I don't know. I, I mean, like, I know that, you know, artists have been using tools to make art since the beginning. Um, AI to me [00:02:00] is a, is the current new tool. But even that's kind of absurd because, you know, artists were using computers to make art 40 years ago. Um, AI is. I don't know. It's another tool to me.

I don't like, you know, I don't, I don't see it as a threat in the way some people are seeing it. I don't see it as anything at all yet. Because quite honestly, I don't trust humanity enough to not make it into a fad that will die off some point quickly. Right. Um, it's cool right now and it's, um, fascinating and all of that is very true, but what kind of longevity will it have?

I'm not sure yet. Right, right. We're, we're at the beginning of the game. So it's hard. It's like what I think I know today might be proven wrong tomorrow. That's kind of the fun of it. Yeah. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Um, right. So I just want to [00:03:00] be clear about the way that it sort of works. Um, and so there are some kind of misconceptions, um, going around that I've heard about that this, uh, is sort of taking artwork from other people.

Uh, and that may be true in the sense that it is looking at other people's artworks and looking at the captions that come along with them and saying, okay, this is done in futuristic style. Maybe steam punk style, something like that. Um, but really it's looking at the objects in the art. So maybe if you say, okay, this is a car.

Mm-hmm. It will then learn how to draw a car. And it will make something different than, you know, what has been sort of shown to it. Um, right. So it's not, it's not taking like other people's pieces. Actually. It's um, kind of [00:04:00] interesting that it sort of like us, you know, we gain like, inspiration from other pieces.

Adrian Duran: No. Yeah. You're like, uh, I, I don't, um, how do I say this nicely? We're currently taught in an ownership pissing contest. Yeah. Um, this is, this is currently the terrain of intellectual property lawyers and copyright people. Right. People like me are much less worried about that because it's not really my priority.

Right. You know, like you're a hundred percent right. Artists just have been borrowing from each other for centuries. There's nothing new about that. And the idea that. A computer program would look at a bunch of art and synthesize it into its own imagery is effectively a recreation of what artists have been doing with their eyes and brains forever.

Yeah. Problem being, we now live in this very egoistic, uh, litigious society that has been convinced that everything [00:05:00] must be monetized. And so there's a kind of. Uh, combination of fear that people will be losing money to this somehow, but also a very real fact that, um, the art world and the art market is not always fair to artists by way of finances, right?

And so I think this, this is part of a bigger title shift in the art world that has to do with who gets what resources when not only about AI specifically, you know, Yeah. Yeah. But like, I don't know to tell you, like I'm teaching a class on Kart right now, and one of the first things we had to talk about was this idea of copying, because our idea of copying in 2023 is not the idea of copying in 1590.

It's a very different game, and we are just not agile enough to understand it instinctively. But once we learn about it, it's all very, I think it's actually all very instinctive to like, Have you ever made a meme? [00:06:00] You know, like it's, it's not, it's not impossibly different than that on a conceptual level.

Um, but I think that, I think people are fearful. I think we are. You know, like we, we live in a world like, I dunno how to say it, like I've seen the Terminator movies. Mm-hmm. In the back of my mind, there is a fearfulness of the moment in which we lose control of the machines. Is that a real fear or is that a kind of Hollywood infused paranoia?

I don't know yet, but I'll be damned if it's not already happening, you know? Yeah. There's algorithms everywhere in our lives. Some of them are great, like the one on Spotify is lovely. The one that steals my writing and gives it to somebody else's undergraduate paper is not, but when was the last time revolution happened?

Without some discomfort. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. Um, [00:07:00] so jumping into sort of some of the questions that I've planned to ask you, uh, Could you gimme like a definition of what art is to you?

Adrian Duran: No. Um, and, and I mean, not like an asshole. I mean that like I don't believe that art has a definition and I don't believe that any one of us has the right to put a fence around it.

Right. Uh, I think that art is what an artist intends to do with their creative energies, and I don't think any of us have. Approval rights. I think that that power resides in the artist and the rest of us are secondary. So the best definition I can ever have about art is what an artist does, and I don't really like it.

And I, I, I kind of don't wanna define it more than that. Cause I think that's reckless and shortsighted.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. No, that's a, that's a good way of putting it. I've, uh, run into this, uh, when I was asking this question to other people too. [00:08:00] Uh, it's, uh, It covers a lot of different things. It's a very broad topic, so you can't really, well, the idea that it's

Adrian Duran: one thing, like, it's just like the idea that one definition is gonna fit all art is ludicrous.

You know, it's like, define to me a human. You know? It's, it's that, it's that same level of complexity. Yeah. And so it's, it's honestly, I think it's a fool's errand because the definition of art will be different tomorrow and then it'll be different on Friday and Saturday and every day until we all die.

Right.

Hayden Ernst: Um, so going back to sort of, you said art is what an artist, uh, does, and we don't really, um, we can't tell them that it's not art. Uh, where do you find the meaning in art? Do you think that it's in your interpretation of it or your connection to a work? Or is it directed by the artist? Uh, maybe or maybe some

Adrian Duran: combination.

Yeah, both. Both simultaneously. I don't, those are not mutually exclusive categories. I think that, um, This [00:09:00] is a false dichotomy that we've been given by people who will want simple answers, quite honestly. Right? It's a combination of all of that. Um, I very much like to give the artist First Voice because they know the work more intimately than I do by way of motivation and content.

But that doesn't mean that I don't see the work of art from my very subjective perspective. I have to just kind of regulate those

things. Okay. You know, like when my students say to me like, art is in the eye of the beholder, art can mean anything. I look 'em at the eye and I say, well I think your art's about bullshit then.
And they always spook because they're like, what do you mean? I was like, well, I think you're leaving it up to me and I think you are a fraud. So I think your art is about bullshit. Um, I think that, I dunno how to say it, and this is like, this is very, a very me answer, but I think like artists do that. I think it's an act of cowardice.
To be honest, I think that artists [00:10:00] don't always like to explain their art and they find it uncomfortable, and so sometimes they refuse to, and it's not about anything but refusal. I think the best artists are willing to acknowledge that they have a very significant role in what the meaning of the art is, and that hopefully they will play some ping pong with you, you know?
Yeah. Cause I'm wrong half the time, like, don't be fooled. Just cause I'm an art historian doesn't mean I get it. Right. I need the artist's voice to help kind of keep myself focused.
Hayden Ernst: Right? Yeah. So you
Adrian Duran: context, but I reserve the right to say whatever I want. It just might not stick, you know? Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: I, uh, I understand that.
Um, there's definitely been music that I've, uh, listened to where. You know, I find sort of my own thoughts in it at first, and then I, um, have gone back and heard some of [00:11:00] the artist meaning and their context to it, and it just gave me a whole nother perspective on it
Adrian Duran: too. Right. But like, it's another perspective that's, I think the key is like, it doesn't necessarily invalidate your response, but we have to acknowledge like, that's your response.
I might have a different response, somebody else might have a third response. And somewhere in the middle of all of this, there is common ground. Right.
Hayden Ernst: So would you say that art can't really exist in a
Adrian Duran: vacuum? No, I don't think it can exist in a vacuum at all. I think people try and put it in a vacuum, like, oh, it's just about aesthetics.
Yeah. It's like, okay, that's fine. But given the opportunity we have to talk about many other things. Limiting it to aesthetics feels to me like. A bad appetizer before the meal. Okay. There's so much more to be done and to think about. That's the beauty of art, is it? It it is [00:12:00] omnivorous and all-encompassing and it what it, what it's concerned with.
Somebody might care a lot about the color blue, but somebody else might really care about gender rights. You know, all of that. There's room for all of that.
Hayden Ernst: Right, right. Um, So going back into the history of art, do you think that, um, the artist's, um, sort of understanding of that is important when, uh, creating new art? Um, do you think that they sort of may build upon what their predecessors or peers are doing or, um, even, you know, sort of go against. Do the opposite of that, have some reaction to that, or do you think that you could sort of make meaningful art, um, without even knowing that if it's possible to not know or understand where art is today?[00:13:00]
Adrian Duran: I mean, this is co that's a complicated question, like, yeah. Do I think you can make meaningful art without knowing what's going on today? Yes. But I'd be willing to argue it's going to be less impactful than if you do know what's going on today. I'm a big believer that art, whether and any artist, whether they want to or not, is going to be part of a conversation that extends backwards into the past and forwards into the future.
Um,
some people like to live in denial of that. I just don't see how it's possible, like, I don't know how like, uh, We live in a very visual world. Whether the influences you're getting are from the Joslyn Art Museum or Westroads Mall, you're still intaking visual information that's gonna impact what you do as an artist. So I think like the notion of making art that isn't really because, okay, sorry, I don't mean that's like an ask. Like some of my students have asked me [00:14:00] that same question. They've just been like, no. That's naive if you like, for you to think that you exist in some sort of bubble of safety where influence and culture around you don't impact you is like, it's just so naive.
It's almost ignorant, right? I mean, you can refuse it and deny it, but that's still doing something. You know what I mean? It's like nothing is still something, otherwise we wouldn't have to name it. Zero is still a number, even though it represents nothingness. It's the same thing here. Like you can pretend like you're not part of the world around you, but nobody's gonna believe you.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah, uh, for sure.
Adrian Duran: Um, Or at least I won't, maybe I'm not the only person you should ask, but, uh, like I, like I any art historian who's worth a damn is going to question that instantly. Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: That's, um, that's sort of the response I've been, uh, receiving when I've asked this story. I mean, like,
Adrian Duran: it's my job to [00:15:00] make sense out of art. Like, you coming up to me and be like, oh no, it's just about like what I was thinking that day is like, okay, um, yeah, sure. Understand, you know,
Hayden Ernst: Do you think that pushing, uh, boundaries in art is, uh, really important when
Adrian Duran: creating it? Oh God, yeah. At least for the last few hundred years. Absolutely. Um, but it's not the only thing I think that, you know, like in, in like in my art history classes that do 19th, 20th, and 21st century art, We put a lot of emphasis on innovation because it was one of the driving forces in that, those periods.
Right. But it certainly existed in the Renaissance. It certainly existed before that in just different versions of innovation, you know? Yeah. Like there was a time where innovation meant looking backwards at Greek statues, but then there was another moment where innovation meant making art out of tires, you know?[00:16:00]
Right. Like everything's kind of relative in a way to the moment. Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: That's, uh, that's also, you know, what I've been sort of hearing and sort of Yeah.
Adrian Duran: Discovering and, well, some innovations aren't really big ones either. You know, like sometimes Exactly. An innovation is more kind of like finessing of something and so it doesn't startle you in the same way.
Yeah. You know, like Picasso spooked the shit out of people cause it was so different. But you don't have to be the, you know, an earthquake to be felt. Right.

Hayden Ernst: Um, yeah. What I've been sort of coming up with is, you know, the subtle differences, the subtle changes in, you know, how people do art. It can be, you know, pretty impactful in the actual Yeah.
Uh, art itself and the
Adrian Duran: reception of it. Totally. Like a small step forward is still a step forward. Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: Um, so looking sort of at some AI. Uh, what do you see as strengths and weaknesses or [00:17:00] opportunities and threats
Adrian Duran: of this? My understanding of ai, I got, I have to confess to you is, is art oriented. I am like, I'm pretty worthless when it comes to like computers, you know, like, yeah.
I would imagine the AI is as good as the coding. Which means it's as good as the person who writes the code and as good as the people who created the agenda for that writing of the code. If your agenda is to find all the puppy dogs in the paintings, it's only gonna do that. If your agenda is to make it expansive and innovative and omnivorous, you're gonna get different results, right?
Um, But I think that part of the other issue though is like, here's the real problem. It's fucking, yes, you can use the word fucking American capitalism if you want, but that's the problem right now we're facing is that corporations like to do things cheaper, right? Like, um, do you not, like, there was an episode a couple of weeks ago where there was a campus shooting somewhere.
I can't remember which one cuz there's so many now, but, [00:18:00] There was a campus shooting and the administration sent a letter to the campus community that was clearly written by Cat G P T. Oh, wow. And the university, the student body was like, what the fuck is wrong with you people? You know? Yeah. Like, some of us just died and you're using an algorithm to write a condolence letter like you're, you're a heartless prick. Who is more interested in efficiency than humanity? Um, that's why people like AI right now is because, you know, you can generate images for it that are cool and you don't have to pay an artist for it. It's, people are trying to get shit done fast and cheap. That's the danger of ai. And fast and cheap are not the values that the art world holds here.
Right. Um, the, the dilemma for me is more of values dilemma. That, um, I understand that American capitalism likes to do things cheaply and create cheap product that can create giant profits for the, you know, executives and the stockholders of those corporations. [00:19:00] But that presumes those are the values that we all hold, and those are not the values I hold, you know?
Um, the part about AI that I think is exciting is it's a challenge. Right. Um, I think a lot of people are scared of it, quite honestly, because maybe they're not ready for the fight. It might become like, we might be arguing about AI for the next 20 or 30, or 50 or a hundred years, or it'll pass like clouds and then we'll just kind of settle into a happy medium somewhere.
Um, I get it. When artists say things like they're worried about their financial wellbeing, like, look at what Spotify has done for artists. You know, nothing. They're now actually Spotify right now. They're, they're, they're, they're trying the oldest trick in the book, which is we'll give you more exposure by entering you into more algorithms.
If you're willing to take a smaller royalty sum on your plays and the royalty sum, they're already giving on their plays is like [00:20:00] grotesque, you know? And so it's like, The world thinks this is a thing. Like they think that artists are excited and happy to work for exposure. Yeah. And like do you ask that of your plumber or your dentist?
You know, like I didn't get my teeth straightened to walk around being like, my orthodontist is the vest. I had to pay that guy. You know what I mean? Mm-hmm. Because that's his job. That's his career. That's how he earns a living. Same thing with artists. We have just got this. Ask backwards idea that artists need our generosity when they don't.
They need a fair economic system, you know? Um, the art world, economic system is screwed. You know, like if I sell a painting to an art gallery, That's one price. The art gallery then creates a second price to sell it to a member of the public. If that member of the public then wants to put that work of art back in Sotheby's or [00:21:00] Christie's to be auctioned, that thing can sell for quadruple what the artist was paid for and at the front end, and the artist won't see a single cent of that.
All the money goes to middleman, to Southern. And I think that artists are rightfully pissed about that. You know, it's like, like right now there's a big fight. Like did you hear about how the woman who wrote the book that inspired Mean Girls is mad at Tina Fey because she thinks she deserves more royalties because mean girls has taken on the life so much bigger than they ever imagined.
It's the same question, you know. Like, these are people's livelihoods. It's the same thing. Like when people are like, like, we can do this right now. Like, and, and like, this is the beauty. Like I love the honors college, you know, Lucy Morrison and what she's up to. Like, I'm, I'm a believer, so talking to you is a pleasure.
You know, I feel like this is something that like ethically I want to do. Yeah. But nobody's paying me for it. There's a part of me that could be like, well, this is my time, this is my labor. I have put in, you know, 30 years of training to be able to have this conversation. Cut [00:22:00] the check. Right. You know like when the roofer comes and gives you an estimate, you pay for the estimate.
Yeah. I'm giving you the actual work for nothing in my economy. That's good because I want you to learn and I want us to have a conversation more than I want to get paid for it, but American capitalism thinks I'm psycho right now because I'm doing something for free. Right. Right. Yeah, but I'll be damned if I can crack that nut, you know?
Mm-hmm. It's like what they said, the supermodel said in the nineties. This is one of my favorite quotes, you know, they were like, we don't get out of bed for less than $20,000. Yeah. And I was like, more power to you. I was like, if you have that kind of power in the marketplace, and if you're in demand, Such that you can set that price for your consciousness, let alone your labor, more power to you.
That's how capitalism works. [00:23:00] Does that mean it makes sense? No, but that's how it works. You know? We've just normalized that. Yeah. We're the same country, you know, like we're country. We're like, you gotta pay me 20 grand to get outta bed, but I have to do a Kickstarter to pay for my surgery, you know? That's pretty ass backwards.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Yeah. I didn't really think about, you know, an artist, you know, sells their work for this much, but then, oh, it's after on, you know, the, it gets auctioned for way more than that.

Adrian Duran: Oh yeah. It's been bananas, you know, like, um, that Salvador Mundy painting that was on auction a few years ago was, you know, like bought by the owner for a few thousand dollars and sold for 400 million.

Yeah, all that pro like, you know, like Sotheby's took 20% off the top of that. You know, the rest of that goes to, and I mean, of course the artist is long dead and not Leonard Art, da Vinci probably, but um, [00:24:00] the artist isn't the beneficiary of all that. You know what I mean? Mm-hmm.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah, for sure. If that happened and you know, you were an artist that's still alive, you're gonna be like, what the heck?

Yeah.

Adrian Duran: It's like how bands can like sell platinum records and still have day jobs. Because the red makes all the com all the money, not the artist gallery makes all the money. Yeah. Um, it's like dope dealing. It's like the middle, it's a middleman economy. You know what I mean? Like if you go and I don't know what, like if you go and buy like 200 bricks of cocaine from Pablo Escobar, you get a wholesale price.

But when you go and sell that on the street, you're gonna sell it for a whole lot more cuz you wanna profit off of it. You know, capitalism is not charity and the art market is one of its most wild of wild wests. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: It'll be, uh, [00:25:00] interesting to see where this goes.

Adrian Duran: Um, and oh yeah, it's gonna be super interesting.

This is the part, like, I, I, I like, I'm, I'm frustrated with the people who are already like, set against it. Because I think there are real problems and those people have rightly identified them and we have to deal with them. But it's so early. It's like, like getting a puppy and deciding whether it's gonna be a good adult dog two weeks in, you know, it's like there's so much left to develop and understand, and the art historians aren't talking to the coders very much yet.

One day we'll all like drink beer together and be like, let's figure this out. Yeah. Or we won't because people will just start making so much money off of ai. We won't matter anymore, you know? Right.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. I wonder what do they

Adrian Duran: care about me? Like I'm an art historian at U N O who, you know, generates like X amount of salary per year to put back into the economy.

That's a whole lot less than Nike does, you know?[00:26:00]

Yeah, for sure. Also Hayden, sorry to be boring with this, but I have to get off the phone in a little bit cause I have to get onto another phone. Sorry. Is this, am I making chaos for you? Uh, no. Sardines today. It's, it's okay. Okay. Um, but, um, but keep going though. Don't me not, um, don't let me not answer your questions.

Okay.

Hayden Ernst: Um, I'll, I'll sort of jump around and get to some of

Adrian Duran: the, uh, and hurry me up. Just be like, right.

Hayden Ernst: Uh, so do you think, uh, that there is a value in the skills used to create art? And do you think that AI sort of endangers, um, some of these skills?

Adrian Duran: I don't think AI's gonna [00:27:00] replace artists. Like, remember that time we were gonna stop buying books because we had the internet and you know, my Kindle was gonna replace every bookstore on Earth.

Yeah. Well then you tell me why we sold more vinyl records than digital downloads last year. People want. Unique analog things. We still believe in the power of the object, whether you wanna admit it or not. I still get a zing from looking at a real painting. Um, looking at a AI generated image on screen doesn't hit the same pleasure points.

I don't get the same results out of it. Like, can it make a work of art? Totally. But looking at a work of art on a screen. Is a lot like, you know, like touching somebody with gloves on. Yeah. And so, um, I don't think, I, I, yeah. Do I think that the skills are necessary a hundred percent. Kids dunno how to hold pencils anymore.

You know, we're getting like [00:28:00] elementary school kids who hold pencils, like swords or Yeah. Kids who think every screen is a touch screen, you know, or my favorite of them all. Here's the one that'll make you puke is a couple years ago they released a study that said that, Medical school students didn't have the manual skills and agility to sew their patients shut after surgery.

Wow. You know where we teach people how to do that shit in the sculpture studio, you know what I mean? In the fiber art class, like we are gonna be around forever because what we offer in the arts is unique and irreplaceable. We might, we might diminish a little bit. We might not be as cool to some people because AI is cool.

It's dazzling and fascinating. You know, it's got market share in a way that, you know, oil painting doesn't. Sure. But shit, they're still making oil paintings, you know what I mean? They're doing it right now [00:29:00] downstairs. Um, art history is like art makers like, I wouldn't quote me on this one, but I like to tell people that art is like black mold.

You know? Like you think you've killed it, but you haven't, it's just moved and started growing somewhere else. Right, right. Like, like people in the arts have been trying to kill painting for hundreds of years and painting still perseveres, cuz it adapts the art's like a virus. It'll adapt to a new circumstance.

It'll find loopholes and exceptions. It will creep underneath a door. You can't keep it in the room, it'll find a way out and you know, so I have a lot of faith in art to keep, keep going. Yeah. And those skills still be meaningful because you're still gonna have to stitch a button on your shirt. You're still gonna have to write a letter to grandma, you know?

Um, right. I still hang paintings at home, you know what I mean? Yeah. So I think people just like, I, I think we're, we're, right now, we're suffering from a 20 or 30 year [00:30:00] campaign that has emphasized STEM over the arts and humanities. Mm-hmm. And people have, have had a lot of that Kool-Aid very willingly.

Yeah. And some people thinking about that needs to be done. Yeah. Like for example, like the best example is yesterday there was an article published in The Guardian in London. Um, and what, what this. This article's a fucking stupid man, and I mean

this with love, but it was like science proves that art history was right about Monet's paintings.
And it was like art history was right before you just found your version of proof. Now, like there's an art historian who published what the Scientists Confirmed in 2004. They've confirmed it in 2023. It's been true to me the whole time. I can't help it. That science doesn't validate things except by its own methods.
Right?
Hayden Ernst: Right. Yeah. And
Adrian Duran: so, [00:31:00] um, you know, we're, this is, this AI question is part of a much bigger world in which STEM has privilege. The arts and humanities do not. Yeah. It's, it's like
Hayden Ernst: that classic, uh, going to college kind of thing where it's like, don't go into the arts or humanities cuz you don't make money there.
Go into stem. Right.
Adrian Duran: And, uh, And I'm sitting here in front of you with a job, uh, in job security and all the insurance and a comfortable life I need having studied one of the most worthless disciplines on earth. Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: I think, you know, we're getting to where technology can make a lot of tasks, you know, simpler and quicker and more efficient.
And instead of saying, okay, now that we have this time, we can, you know, we could focus on other things like art and humanity. We're using it to say, okay, but now you need to work. More on this, right? Or we're gonna just put people
Adrian Duran: out. Why do there have to be winners and losers to everything? You know what I mean?
Like [00:32:00] study English and be a loser, study accounting and be a winner. It's like, okay, yeah, sure. But like can we look at what the banking industry's up to right now? Yeah, right. With all I got, I got a lot of respect for accountants and bankers because I don't know how to do what they do, but last I checked, they're very good at fucking up what they do.
Yeah, for sure. It's, and somehow I'm the deadbeat over here in the arts because you think all I do is wear black turtlenecks and smoke cigarettes and it's like, no, your prejudices and preconceptions are not my truth, you know?
Hayden Ernst: Right. Um, one last, uh, question here that I need to get through is, do you think that like, Since AI is sort of making a copy of us, you know, it's getting all of our influences from us.
Do you think that that sort of, uh, limit, limit limits, uh, AI and the art that we can create with it?
Adrian Duran: Probably. [00:33:00] I mean, doesn't every tool limit its user, but doesn't also the user's imagination limit the tool? Like I work with a guy, he's great. You know, like he's got this great phrase, he always says, he's like a hammer can do two things.
It can create or destroy. It just de depends on what you do with it. And I feel like the same thing with ai, like we will learn more going forward, which will influence the AI to be better or different. Different, maybe better is not the right term here, you know, like will be different and it will evolve into a new thing.
But um, I'll be damned if I can predict that I, she, you know what I mean? Like, can you be like, I can't predict humanity. We're very complicated. Um, that's part of the, the fun of it is the unknown. That's part of the fear of it too. Yeah. But yeah, I think it'll all get better. I think what'll happen, what I think will be really cool is like sooner or later we'll realize that fighting with each other about it isn't the answer.
And we'll figure out how to start [00:34:00] collaborating with each other and we'll find new and better ways to use the tools that will make us better at what we do. And that'll be a really exciting moment, right? Like remember when people were all pissed off about using computers to make art? Yep. They're over that now, or they're living in the past.
Yeah. And I feel like AI will experience the same kind of phenomenon where like, it's new now, everybody's being a little bit alarmist about it. Yep. I like to not be alarmist about these things, but that's just me. Um, call me in 20 years and I'll have a, I'll have a better answer for you, but it will only be the answer for that day.
You know what I mean? Yeah. Yeah. Um, Like, think about it, like when I was a kid, you know, we didn't even have access to the internet. Now you can like fucking gene splice each other. Yeah. That's such a huge distance to cover in a very brief time. It's almost, it's like [00:35:00] absurd and arrogant to think you can decide what the future's gonna be cuz there's so many people involved.
Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: We're still trying to catch up to right now, so. Mm-hmm.
Adrian Duran: But the best part about this is that, you know, who's gonna come up with the answers to this question is the artists, they'll figure it out first. They always do. They'll find this tool and somebody will tinker around with it long enough to either like refine its use or break it and make it a new use.
You know, artists always live in the future. We just don't listen to them very well.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Um, so, uh, as a part of the paper that I'm writing here, um, I'm looking at, you know, maybe what, uh, museums or art galleries, uh, should be looking into when it comes to AI and, you know, at first to start it all kind of looking at, you know, should they be look, getting, acquiring artworks done by ai.
Uh, but [00:36:00] now, you know, I've, I've moved away from that and I'm. I'm looking at sort of as a rough idea of sort of a collaborative area where, you know, people would be able to come and interact, um, with AI and museums and galleries should really be looking at, you know, how this is changing and, um, sort of what we're gonna be doing and bringing some light towards, um, how AI is moving and working with artists in the future too.
And I was just wondering, uh, what idea, if you had any thoughts on that or if you, um, had any other ideas, uh, regarding that?
Adrian Duran: Well, you know, I think it's like, it's tricky cuz you know, museums collect what their agenda asks them to collect, you know what I mean? Like, certain museums have certain priorities, other museums have different priorities.
Is there a museum that's gonna prioritize ai art a hundred percent. Is everybody gonna do it? No. You know, um, [00:37:00] I'm also curious cuz like, remember how much we were talking about NFTs six months ago or a year ago? Yeah. Now are we talking about them as much? No. Um, maybe we'll just come to a level playing field, or maybe we'll decide, this isn't the most important argument to have right now, but like I

have, I, I love the expansive idea of art, you know, like, I think a museum should collect anything that qualifies as creative activity.
You know, like, I don't understand why museums don't have sneakers in them, you know? Yeah. Um, or like, cool t-shirt design should be in a museum just as much as a painting or a sculpture. But like, this to me is the same question. Like there was a, you know, not that long ago, 150 years ago, people were asking if museums should collect photographs.
It feels like the same thing to me. You know, like this is the next version of the new, and we have to decide the depth to which we want to embrace it. Some will, some won't. [00:38:00] You know, there's some people who still don't think photography is real art, and it's just like, what? Like, Okay, man. You know, I'm like, yeah, the rest of the world thinks it is, and so you can hold out all you want, but you might be in the minority at the end of the conversation, you know?
Um, I still prefer, you know, vinyl, but I'll be damned if I don't have a phone full of music too, because it's practical, you know? We'll do both. We'll do all of it. Uh, the art world tends to take a long time to get it, get it right, but We'll, in a perfect world, get it close. Yeah. I mean, we're the people who still haven't given back the fucking Elgin marbles, you know what I mean? We're the people who, like the UN had to shame art to give back the bronzes they'd stolen from the people [00:39:00] of Benin, you know, um, like. We are not the moral beacon that the world wants for this answer. We are a bunch of flawed people who are caught in between this kind of like desire for, uh, you know, intellectual experience and this incredibly beko capitalism of the art market.
Um, this is a bad parallel. I'm sorry if it's offensive. Um, but it's like, you know, when people ask their priest for, um, child raising advice, Like that dude doesn't have children. This is like asking me for advice on your taxes. Like, that's just not what I'm about. I, I am, I have no jurisdiction here. Um, the philosophers are gonna help.
The coders are gonna help. You know, this is gonna be a big group of people that make these decisions over time. One brick at a time. Some of them will look very forward thinking. Some [00:40:00] of 'em will look very conservative. That's, we've been, the art world has been like this since they invented the printing press, you know?
Yeah. But like, I don't know. I think it's, you know, it's like, it depends on your perspective. Like, you know, my dad is still pissed about people using cell phones, and it's like, okay, but you're like an 80 year old man. Like you aren't the best judge of this. You know, the best judge of this is probably a, a 20 year old who's using that phone to pay their bills and find their friends in disaster areas and communicate with people across the globe on Twitch.
You know, like we have to admit that we're not always the best judge of everything. But we live in a world right now where like, you know how it is, like you've seen the news recently, right? Like anybody with an opinion is treated like an expert, right? And opinions are like assholes. Everyone has one and many of them smell.
You know, and so it's like, what are you gonna do? [00:41:00] People are gonna act like they know the answer, but nobody's the authority yet. Mm-hmm. Which I think is why your project is so cool. You know, you get to be like, you get to weigh in on this at a moment where we have no answer yet. Like, that's right. That's sa.
That seems like a really fun little position to be in to me. Yeah. But like, I don't know. I mean, what are you gonna do? Like there's also an inevitability about it too. It's like, you know, like one day the sun's going to burn out. That's inevitable. In the same way, like AI is going to happen. It's going to be here, we're going to figure out how to use it, or it's gonna pass us by acting like it's not here.
Is denial not reality. Yeah.
I don't know. I think it's, it's like, I think ultimately we're gonna find some form of homeostasis where everybody wins and [00:42:00] everybody loses, but that is the result of what everybody wants out of it. You know, like the Super Bowl, right? Like, you know what I mean? Like I'm an Eagles fan. That was terrible.
But I went into it with a bias, so I expected and wanted a certain outcome. If I were a Denver Broncos fan or a New York Giants fan, I wouldn't have a horse in the race, and so it would've meant something different to me. You know what I mean? Yeah, yeah, for sure. Um,
but that's why it's cool though, is because it forces us to think outside of our own boxes. Right. We can't depend history or tradition for this answer. That's exciting to me. Oh, yeah, I understand that.
I don't know, like there's a part of me, like I'm, I guess I'm just like, you know, being in the history business, I think I'm, I'm perverse enough in the brain [00:43:00] that I'm excited to see what happens, because it will be very revealing about where we've been and where we want to go. It might be a disaster though.
That's the other part. We have to accept that maybe it's gonna work out poorly for everybody and you know, fucking T 2000 is gonna be melting through my door soon. And you know, like that notion of the apocalypse singularity thing, like that's real. I'm not gonna live in denial of that. I'm a little bit afraid of it.
But that's because the unknown is frightening. It's the same reason the dark was scary before they had electric lights. You know? Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah. It'll be a journey to see where we, uh, end
Adrian Duran: up with it. Yeah. And if we make that journey productive and, you know, collaborative, we might get all kinds of good things out of it.
If we make it sour and competitive, we're setting ourselves up to lose.[00:44:00]
I mean, it's like they said, like if you go into something looking for a fight, you're gonna get a fight. But if you go into it looking for a resolution, you'll find a resolution. Feels like that to me. Yeah. It's just another version of that.
Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: Um, well that's kind of all I, I had for you. Uh, cool.
Adrian Duran: Thank you that so much. I
Hayden Ernst: hope. Yes, this was, uh, this was great.
Adrian Duran: Um, no, I think you're, like, you're, um, the beauty of this is, you know, we have to listen to you, which is to say like, when Stu, this is one of these moments like where my students, where I was just being an old fart.

Here's a great example. Like, I didn't wanna find art on Instagram, excuse me, because I was being traditional. And then my students were like, you're actually being an idiot is what you're being. Instagram is a remarkable resource to find artists. You're just being old-fashioned. And so I was like, okay, maybe I'll try.

And then I tried and it was like [00:45:00] instantaneously obvious I was wrong and they were right. I was just being a stick in the mud. And so when students raise these issues upward to faculty, it's a beautiful thing cuz like what, what we're doing right now is like I'm smelling the future through your interests.

And that's pretty cool. Yeah. You know what I mean? Like you asking this question means it's gonna be part of our conversation now. I can't hide from it anymore. That's a beautiful thing. Right, right.

Um, I don't know. We'll see. I mean, like, I'll call you in 20 years. We can talk about it again. Who knows what the hell's gonna happen, right? Like, I don't think anybody in 1941 thought they were gonna be on the moon in a decade, you know, in two decades and change. Mm-hmm. You know, um, Thomas Edison had no idea that, you know, like DJs were gonna take the phonograph and turn it into [00:46:00] an instrument.

Um, Henry Ford didn't know about Tesla,

but that's the fun part about being alive. It's kind of a surprise, you know? Right. Every day.

Hayden Ernst: Oh yeah. Yep. We will. We'll find out where, where it goes, and we might go know somewhere or we'll never imagine.

Adrian Duran: And maybe that's gonna be great. Maybe that will be the end of us, but I don't know yet, you know? Yeah.

I mean, that being said, you know, like, and this is a tremendously pessimistic version of this, but like, It's 2023. Look what humanity has done since it, you know, fell out of the tree. Maybe the computer's taking over the world and oblating us as what we have earned for ourselves. You know what I mean? Like, maybe this is our destiny.

That's horrifying to think about, but [00:47:00] you know, nobody knows what the future's gonna be. Yeah. I thought I was gonna be a veterinarian and then I took AP science classes and learned how wrong I was. You know, we always have to adjust midstream.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. And yeah, you're right. The, uh, mindset that we come into it with is, uh, we're gonna be able to get out of it.

Um,

Adrian Duran: with all the change. Yeah. If you come at, if you come at it wanting to, to, yeah. Like. If you wanna suffer at the hands of ai, the opportunity is there. If you wanna thrive at the hands of ai, I bet that opportunity is there too.

Open-minded optimism, maybe it's naive, but that feels like, at least in my head, open-minded optimism feels appropriate right now. But there are definitely some parts of the the ecosystem that are already unfair and we have to fix. [00:48:00] Yeah, that was unfair before AI too. So AI is just drawing our attention back to it, right?

With a new perspective on it. It's not like the art world has always been unfair, economically. This is just another lane for us to drive in.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. And it could be, uh, something that helps out too.

Adrian Duran: No kidding, right? Remember like, um, remember, I mean, Jesus, remember that time that Europeans didn't think bathing was good for you?

Remember when they thought you could sail off the end of the globe, right? Remember, they thought cats were possessed by Satan. I mean, Thomas fucking Jefferson thought tomatoes were poisonous, right? Right. We're wrong a lot of the time, but that's part of the process. I mean, in science, that's called the scientific method, isn't it?

In art, we call that the process. You make mistakes until you get it right, and then you carry on with that new knowledge. Hopefully for the better.[00:49:00]

Right? I don't wanna stay in the same place for my whole life. That sounds boring. Yeah. Yeah. I'd agree.

But I think a lot of it is true. Like, like, like I am a perfect example of this. I have spent most of my life in the art world, I have art world values that are often very different than the values of a corporation. I know what I know, and it has nothing to do with the technology of AI as much as the sort of like aftermath of ai.

You know what I mean? Like I do autopsies on ai. Somebody else is the one giving it birth. That person should have a voice in this conversation too, right? Like, I would love to know what, like if you called like Peter Wilcott at I S N T or one of the IS S N T faculty, what they had to say about it, and then comparing those two answers would be amazing.[00:50:00]

It would probably show you more about the faculty than it does about ai. You know what I mean? Yeah, yeah. Um, We should do that. Are you a STEM student? We should like a round table about this or something. Get like, you know, some art faculty and some STEM faculty together and just sit in a room and be like, so what's the deal?

It'd be a lot of fun.

Uh,

Hayden Ernst: yeah. That I've, uh, I've talked to, uh, some faculty in the IS and t department. Um, cool. On this for sure too.

Adrian Duran: Uh, well, like, let me know if you need help from the art side of the house cuz I'm, I'm more than happy to help. That would be a lot of, like, that would be really valuable for all of us. Yeah. Um.

Hayden Ernst: I'll think about doing this. We'll see what the timeline is on my, uh, sort of wrapping up. You don't wanna graduate

Adrian Duran: and so forth. Project. Yeah. You don't wanna make more work for itself at this moment,

Hayden Ernst: but I think that would be a very interesting, uh, conversation to have.

I actually have to get going here [00:51:00] in a minute, so, uh, thank you again for

Adrian Duran: Yeah, anytime. Um, I do love to talk about art. Yeah. Yeah. It's,

Hayden Ernst: uh, this was a very helpful conversation to me. And, um,

Adrian Duran: also can, oh, can I say one more thing? And this part you definitely need to quote me on? Um, okay. This is proof that art and STEM are not different.

It's the same dance thing. We coexist without knowing each other's work and understanding what the other one does. We are lesser for it, you know what I mean? Right. Like, I can learn so many things from you because you're a STEM person, and if I negate that fact, it's just denial. So we're not enemies.
We're coming at the same thing from different angles. And if we're together, we're stronger. Yeah,[00:52:00]
that's my high horse right now.
Hayden Ernst: Um, well, yeah, thank you so much for your insights. Uh, you should come to the honors, uh, symposium. I'll have a, I will poster and everything there, so that would be cool. Great. Okay. Uh, and I will stay in contact with you, let you know kind of. Uh, what from this conversation I'll be putting in the paper, so if you ever want to revise anything that you say
Adrian Duran: Oh yeah.
Right. So I don't embarrass myself in public again. Um, but yeah, just like, I dunno what to say, like, holler. I'm more than happy to talk to you about any of this. Just lemme know. Of course. Cool. All right. Well then I will, uh, see you soon. Yep. We're at the latest. I'll see you [00:53:00] at Dun Symposium. Okay, cool.

Interview with Dr. Todd Richardson

Hayden Ernst: [00:00:00] Um, so I guess first off, could you gimme a definition of, uh, what art is to you?
Todd Richardson: Um, I don't know that I can, um, what, to me, uh, oh my God,
I, um, maybe I can talk my way into an answer. Um, like broadly speaking, like simply it's expressive culture, um, right. It's just human beings expressing, uh, meaning both individual and shared through a variety of media. Um, and like, just about anything can qualify in that. I think that art has to have what I think art.
[00:01:00] Is exist exists for its own sake. Right. And I, I, that doesn't mean that I'm going like to the extreme like art for art's sake, but I mean that art has a value independent of its transactional value or its, its financial value, its market value, its political value. Any, any, anything like that. Like, I don't think that art necessarily has to not have those or be indifferent to those, but that art does have just kind of some meaning in itself, right?
And like, Beauty, I suppose would be the easiest, the most common way of saying like, who the, what that is, right? Like that it just has this value, independent, all that stuff that it just exists to be beautiful, but beauty is so, so over-determined in our culture or so kind of like, like it has just come to mean pretty, I think like in our culture so often, but that, that, that, I mean it more in the traditional like aesthetic sense of like, like that it, it just resonates with your, with your being in some way. Like, because it is so beautiful in the conventional sense, but also because [00:02:00] it is so powerful, right? Like, like more in the um, um, uh, why is the word eluting me? Um, um, in kind of like a, um, like an epic sense of like, like you, the meaning of life kind of stuff. But I still haven't talked my way into something that I really, really like.
Like I, I'm thinking about things that like, um, like I love the Picasso line, that art is a lie that shows us the truth, right? Like it's a way of like manipulating reality, manipulating things into something that didn't previously exist, that nevertheless points us towards like, meaning that, that we all share, right?
And then I'm thinking of another great quote of about poetry. That poetry, uh, um, expresses what is often felt, but never so well expressed, right? That, that, that art takes these things that we all share in common and says it in a way that, [00:03:00] that, that we recognize it as a feeling that we've had before, but we we're thrilled by this new expression of it.
Um, And the last thing that I'll kind of try on this is that like artifice, right? Like that art is derived from the word artifice, right? Or shares its meaning from, from artifice or artfulness. And it's this like manipulation of things, um, to say something new, to say something novel. Um, and so like, it's fake, right?
Like it goes back to that Picasso court. Like it's a lie that that points to the truth. And then I kind of think of it in terms of that with artifice, right? Like it's a manipulation of things, um, to create something that isn't real, but is somehow more real. And so if you can find anything of value within that, just like the of words, I hope I, I hope you can.
Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Um, I mean, or is a broad topic to try to define. So, uh, a lot of [00:04:00] definition works. Um, okay. So where do you find your meaning in art? Um, do you find it in like your interpretation and your connection to a work, or is it, do you think it's more directed by, uh, what the artist is trying to portray?
Todd Richardson: Um, it's in, so I was just in Oklahoma, uh, and we actually went to, we were in Oklahoma City, but we went to Tulsa because we like Tulsa better.
Uh, but also, um, to go to the Bob Dylan center, um, which is just this, there, I could talk forever about why it's there when it shouldn't be there and all kinds of stuff, but blah, blah, blah. I was at the Bob Dylan Center in Tulsa and there was this film, this opening film that they show when you go in there that's just got Dylan talking about his life.
And somebody asked him the question like, do. You know what your [00:05:00] work means, or do people know what your work means? Right? Like, does the audience come and Dylan just says, you know, um, I, I don't know. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle, right? And, and I, I thought there was just like, everything Dylan says, there's this blunt eloquence to it that's just like, yeah, it's neither, right?
Like, it's not that I make the meaning myself or that the artist makes the meaning. It's a collaboration, like, and separated by time and space and all that kind of stuff. But like, the meaning, the best meaning comes through a combination of the two, right? It's the, it's what I bring to it, but also, um, what, what the artist intended to give, right?
Like intended to express. And so, so it's, it's compounded between the two. Um, like I, I like, I don't know. This is, it's actually kinda on my mind cuz like, um, I watched the Whale last night, right? The, the movie the Brandon Frazier. Um, And it just, [00:06:00] the meaning I took from it was not what the meaning that they necessarily intended.
Right. But it was damn meaningful. Uh, and I think that we did ultimately meet somewhere in the middle. What what I'm saying is like all this stuff from my life, like, like, and all more, even more so my wife's life, right? Like our, her experience, um, with her father. Like, it was just like, oh my God. Right? Like, like the, the movie was so resonant with that, right.

Uh, with her experience. Right. Uh, her father died, uh, when she was younger and mm-hmm. Sorry if you haven't seen it yet, but that's where the movie's going. Right. Um, and that like, I know that the filmmaker, Darren aos definitely was leading us in a certain direction, but it was ultimately the, the fact that it like picked up, like it just, it had these echoes, these resonances with my wife's life and with my life and with my wife, life with my wife, that then created this other meaning that I don't think any of us could have anticipated.

So it's, it, like I said, it's [00:07:00] this totally, it's a collaboration between all of them. But I also, like, I, your, your question made me think of something else that, that, um, I'm working on right now that I'm doing. Um, so I do a lot of work with indigenous pop art, um, and I'm writing something right now about an in, uh, an indigenous artist named Mary Soly, who was not a pop artist, but I'm kind of reading her that way.

So, and she did these really weird, no, I say weird and I don't mean that judgmentally. She does these really unique. Completely singular works. These triptic where I couldn't even begin to describe 'em. There, there are three different pieces in the end that there's a pattern to 'em, that the top piece is figurative.

It's like a depiction of something. Uh, like, like she, she does these of personality prints of, of different people. And so like she would, she did one of Henry Ford and so like the top one would be just like, just a depiction of like cars, right? [00:08:00] Um, and then the second one would like be a riff on that, where she would turn it into an art new Vogue pattern.

Uh, that was kind of like design of the era where it'd be like, like it, like a tire then turned into like a pattern. Mm-hmm. And then the bottom one would be she would then. Extrapolated even further by incorporating the, the, the visual imagery into like, traditional native patterns. Like, like, like, um, bead work within her tribe, um, or par fletches.

It's, it doesn't matter, but it, like, she would do these, like these three different interpretations of a single kind of visual, uh, kind of concept. Um, and so I'm writing about that right now, right? And on the one hand, like I'm reacting to her work, like intellectually and, and being like, oh, this is really cool and I see these, the, these values at work and I see these, this kind of beauty being expressed, but I don't, that's insufficient for me.

And so simultaneously, I'm, I'm making my own personality prints based on her, her formula, [00:09:00] right? And so it's like, not only that, it's not just enough for me to read the work. It's that I have to create work in that spirit, right? Like I am inspired artistically. Now, do not get, do not for a moment think that I'm like a talented artist or that I, that there's any value to these things that I'm making beyond the pr, the actual making of them.

But it's that not only am I re responding intellectually to the work, it's that I'm also trying to make my own work in that spirit in order to understand her process and to understand creativity more broadly. So it's, it's both thinking and doing. Right? And so I think that fits into your question, uh, and the idea of like, am I making the meaning myself or, or is it all to the artist?

Well, it's all to myself, but I'm also trying to relate to the artist to understand how they made that meaning. Does that make sense? Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. That makes a lot of sense actually. Okay. Um, sort of brings me to the, to my next question, um, of is there value and [00:10:00] effort put into, uh, creating art? Or how do you, like, how do you value effort that is put into creating art?

Um, do you think that something that like someone put more time into is more valuable than someone, something someone put a little bit or less time

Todd Richardson: into? Uh, an

Hayden Ernst: an effort is sort of difficult to, uh, define here because I could feel, you know, somebody put less time into the actual creation of the art, but maybe put more thought into, uh, the feelings behind it.

So

Todd Richardson: Yeah. And, and, and I, yes. Um, and it actually, you're making me think of like, like people, people before have asked me like, how many hours a week I work, you know? Uh, because it's a professor from a cer, if you look at my job from a certain angle, it's like he never works, right? Like [00:11:00] I'm on campus like, Sometimes in some weeks, like some semesters I'm on campus like twice a week, right?

Yeah. And I'm just like teaching classes and people are like, you get paid for that, right? Like, like, like how many hours a week do you really work? It's just like, well, there's the hours that I'm on campus where I'm like putting the labor in. But what about the, the, the drive where all I'm thinking about is the content of classes, or I'm thinking about like, like how to, how to, to better relate to students or thinking about how to shape assignments so that, so that students can, can learn the most from them.

You know what I mean? Like, like I just drove to Oklahoma City, right? Mm-hmm. It's like a seven hour drive. How many of those hours were I, was I thinking about work? Right? And, and like how does that then factor into like how much time do I put it in a job? And I think art is very much the same way, right?

Like even if you are only like spending five minutes, making a work of art, could be days, [00:12:00] months. Of thinking about how to approach it and do all this kind of stuff, right? So it is totally different, difficult to quantify, like hours. It's not like clocking, clocking in and clocking out, right? But I, I, I, the, the, the main answer that I have here is that it's all a process.

I don't care about the product, right? Like, and this is maybe, I don't know, um, this is kind of related to the authenticity stuff, that it's, it really doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter what you create or how it's received or anything like that. Um, it's just the process of making things right. That's where all the value is, right?

And that's also kind of where I'm at in life and just like thinking about things is that, uh, we put such a heavy emphasis in our culture on achievement and, and, and goods, right? That we made this thing that then has value. But I'm actually really interested in the things that didn't come to be, or that failed to be what I thought they were gonna be.

[00:13:00] Um, and that I think those have value too, and that the value is in the process of making them right. And so for me, an artwork's value from the artistic, from the creative perspective, it is all about the making. Right? And so it doesn't matter if something sells for a million dollars or doesn't sell at all, that's totally irrelevant to the process of making it right.

And that's where, that's where the meaning is. It's, it, it emerges from me interacting with something and learning and all that kinda stuff. Okay? But that's like an idealized answer and I

totally get it. Um, I'm thinking totally of Andy Warhol, uh, and that mm-hmm. He made his silk screens. He came up with his, his artistic process in order to make it as quick as possible, right?

Like, and, and so he would, Like put a fair amount of time into, into laying out the whole process for the silk rings. But then it was just like, like you could just like make a painting that could be done in 20 minutes. Right. Whereas like [00:14:00] from the, from the play, red, red, r e d that we read, uh, where Rothko is like laboring over this and like trying to get every little thing.

Right. Right. Like where he's like, a painting isn't done until there's tragedy in every brushstroke. Right. And that's like the kind of traditional way of looking at it, that it's, it is the intent, it is the time and the depth of the investment in these things. Whereas Warhol said, I like silk screens because they're quick. And Chancey, that's like a little quote from him. He's just like, I like it. Mm-hmm. Because it's quick. And then he's like, I don't have a whole lot of control over it. Right. Like, it, it, like everyone will come out a little bit different. All that kinda stuff. Um, and that, that I was utterly shocking. To people at the time because it ran so counter to the way that people traditionally view art, right?

Because it was just like, he's making fun of us, right? Like he's, he's not a serious artist cuz he's just making these, these things, right? Like he's, he's, he's whatever. Um, and so what? Right? Like, like, like he was, he was just saying like, [00:15:00] it's the contemporary art market is about the product and it is about profit.

And so I'm gonna do this right? Like, I live in a world that values machines, right? As you're work, taking a step back and being kind of professorial here for a second. Warhol is your guy, right? As you're talking about AI and art and all that kind of stuff. Cause Warhol said things like, these are little quote, a little quote from his is, I wish everybody could be a machine.

Right. Like he, he wanted that. He's just like, let's get the emotion out of it. Let's get the feeling out of it and let's just make products and let's just do the work and let's just like make money and do this kind of, I want everybody to be a machine. And so he liked the robotic process of silk screening cuz it got all that other human garbage outta the way and just allowed him to just like, produce, work and make a shit ton of money on it.

Um, and so like while traditionalists, right, and, and a part of me like recoils at the idea of Warhol, eliminating time, like [00:16:00] making art more efficient. He's just calling everybody's bluff, right? And he's like, you don't really value the, the, the, the process and the soulfulness of all that kind of stuff. You just want shit that you can hang on your wall and that is going to appreciate value.

Right? Like it's an investment for you. Right. Um, yeah. Simultaneously I'll created things that do, do deeply move me and all, all kinds of stuff, but that's a whole nother discussion. So it just totally depends on what you're looking for. Right. And if you're looking for some kind of traditional, traditional stuff where it's like how much it is the time that you put into a product that matters, right?

That's wonderful. But if it's ultimately just gonna be about the market and, and, and the finances of all this stuff, who cares? Right? Right. The value of work of art is not how much time you put into it. The value of work of art is how much you can get paid for it. Yeah.

Does that answer your question? I'm, I'm trying to remember. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. That's, uh, that's an interesting answer. So, Um, and it's [00:17:00] definitely something to think about when it comes to like AI creating art and that sort of thing. Oh, totally. Uh, so do you think that understanding the history of art, sort of where art is today and how it got there is important when, uh, creating new art?

Um, do you think that you have to sort of build upon what your predecessors or peers are doing? Or can you make meaningful art without any background knowledge of any of that at all?

Todd Richardson: You can totally make meaningful art without any background knowledge of that at all. Like, There are artists who do it all over the place.

Right. Um, uh, you might, uh, just another kind of just pro poking you in a direction that I'm not really gonna talk about, but like, outsider artists do this all the time. Right. Um, we're gonna watch a documentary in the class later the semester about Dan Daniel Johnson, who's a total outsider artist. Um, and so absolutely like there are people who are like, they're, they're called outside artists.

They, oh God, there's all kinds of other names for 'em. Like, there's like [00:18:00] equity language trying to like, be more sensitive about this, that they're like visionary artists or anything like that. But ultimately, outside artists are, are traditionally people, often with mental illness. Uh, people who do not have formal training, who create work that is often read as fine art.

Right. And so they are detached. They, they are celebrated actually for their detachment from conventional art, historical narratives. Um, so there is value in that. And there is, I mean, and sometimes I, and I've encountered work that is just like, Jesus Christ, that's beautiful. Or, or, oh my God, that's terrifying.

And so, and that's independent of, its, its place within the, the art traditional Western art historical narrative. That being said, hell yeah. Like, I think art gets valued from where it fits into the larger historical narrative. And like, I don't know, like this cla, this higher, lower class is making me con confront in a way that I didn't anticipate.

That I do [00:19:00] have like a certain avantgarde spirit to the way that I consume art and the way that I interact with art and things like that, where it is like art should exist for itself. And that, with that in mind, yeah, I, I should understand how Marcel Duchamp is a necessary precursor to Andy Warhol. And that John Michelle Basquiat's relationship to Andy Wars absolutely important to the way that he, he represented things and that like going backwards and forward in both directions.

It enhances my appreciation for all of this artwork knowing it's general lineage, right? And that art exists to respond to other art like I, that can get problematic. And there's all kinds of stuff when you start talking about social justice and, and, and, and, and the, the role that art plays in larger social structures, which are important, but that doesn't deny that I get immense.[00:20:00]

It is immensely edifying to interact with an art artwork and understand how it's speaking to other art, uh, and how it is it is. Part of a larger conversation and under being able to understand the conversation that's happening, the ways in which Annie

Warhol's, Mona Lisa, his white, Mona Lisa, is responding to the Mona Lisa, right.
Is, is rewarding for me, right? Like, I really, really love that. So like, you don't have to know all this stuff in order to get stuff out of art, but with some artworks and a lot of artworks, hell yeah. It, it is worth it. Uh, and, and you will be richly rewarded, um, if you put the effort in to really, really understand how art is, is, is part of a larger product process.
Right? Um, God damn it. And there was a quote at the Dylan Museum that I can't, I can't remember that said something like that. [00:21:00] Um, and I don't remember who said it, but it was, um, I think about the ocean. But that's not about me, that's about the ocean. I, I am the ocean. We are all the ocean. The ocean is all that matters, right?
And it's this idea like, you fine, you can paint the ocean, all that kinda stuff. But it is the ocean. And, and that ultimately matters. And the way that we're all contributing to it, I, I don't know, I'm not getting it across quite right, but it's this idea that there is this larger thing that we're all in service to.
Yeah, you should understand that larger thing and then you'll get more outta the artwork. Does that make sense? Mm-hmm.
Hayden Ernst: Right. So then sort of another question off of that is, um, how important do you think like context of, um, like how this art was created is to the artwork?
Todd Richardson: It depends on the artwork. Um, but in general it's absolutely essential. Um, like, and no, it's not like it definitely if you just want something decorative, uh, or if you just want [00:22:00] something that just speaks to you, right? Mm-hmm. You're just like, oh my God, that reminds me of my grandma, right? Like, God bless you, right?
Like, you can get extraordinary meaning outta that. But if other art works of art, right? Like, I don't wanna say Warhol again. Um, I don't actually, I don't wanna think,
I don't, I like to understand the world in which Woody Guthrie made his music, increases my appreciation of his music. Um, and like, I can appreciate it, like on a, on a surface level without all that kinda stuff. Like, this land is your land. That's a Woody Guthrie song, right? And we all know it, right? And it's just like, yay.
Right? Like, mm-hmm. I can like that song, understanding that he wrote that as a labor organizer and that it's actually like a, a, a Marxist Communist. Anthem, [00:23:00] right? It's like this land is your land. This land is my land. Right. Um, and that there are these verses that, that they cut out, right? Like when you sing this land is your land in grade school, you don't sing the last verse, which is like, I came to a sign that said private property.
So I just hopped the fence and on the other side it didn't say nothing. This land is made for you and me. Which is like saying like, you can't own the land. Right? Like I'm, I'm gonna go. Hell yeah. That makes me appreciate it more. Right? Uh, and, and, and get more meaning outta that, that experience. Not to say that other people aren't making meaning and that that other meaning isn't valid, but there's a whole different depth of meaning that comes from appreciate in the context of things.
And so I, yes, I think it is, it is worth it. Again, like, I mean, I'm, I'm starting to see a theme here where I'm saying like, you can totally appreciate art independent of all this stuff, but it's worth it to try and understand it. Yeah. Within its larger story and its context. Yeah,
Hayden Ernst: I agree. Um, with a lot of like music and stuff. Um, when I listened to it originally, you know, I could [00:24:00] appreciate it and like it, but then, you know, I learned the context of, you know, how it was created and you know, what the artist was doing at the time, and it just brings a whole nother level to it, I think completely. It's well put. Um, okay, so again, it is pushing the boundaries of art important when, um, creating it and, um, maybe this, we don't limit this to like a single like artwork, but mm-hmm.
In general, um, should we as humans be pushing the boundaries of art when we're creating it?
Todd Richardson: Yeah, I mean, yes. Uh, and it, it depends on the artist and what's being made and all that kind of stuff. Um, but yeah, like, um, well actually I'll get far too deep real quick here, and that's that, um, I, I think Steven Hawking, um, has articulated, [00:25:00] has come to as close as anyone has come closer than anyone to articulating the meaning of life.
Uh, and that is, somebody asked him what the meaning of life was and he said, it's really not that complicated. He said, we are the universe contemplating itself. And what do you meant by that? Is just that we are, that's literally what we are. We are the stuff of the big bang. We are the cosmos, rearranged, reoriented into these human forms, right?
Like just through, through, through physics and procreation and all the other processes that come to create us out of whatever, right? Which is billions of years process. And that through that we develop, we have developed the, this consciousness and that that is the universe finding a way to think.
Because the universe itself can't think, or as far as I understand, it doesn't have a consciousness, right? We are the, the consciousness of the universe. Okay. With that in mind, I think that the meaning of all of [00:26:00] this, or, or the closest you're gonna get to is not about what's right or getting it right, or like, like finding the correct answer.
It's finding better questions and that it is finding out what. What we're capable of. What is, what is possible, not as, not what is Right. Right. I, I hope this is kind of coming across and making sense, right? Like that it is, we are here not to get to get something. Right. We are here to figure out what is possible with this human form and this existence and this universe and all that kind of stuff.
With that in mind, hell yeah. That's what art and artists do, is they then challenge the limits of what is possible, right? And it's not about getting things right or being efficient or doing this or do, or like, like solving the problem. It's about going out there and being like, what other more interesting problems are out there?
And then what other problems are beyond that? And let's just keep pushing the boundaries so that we can see all of it is possible. Um, so with that perspective, that is, that is, that is the way I conceptualize existence, that it is an [00:27:00] exploration, not an execution, right? Like that. It's just like what else is possible out there?
And I think artists more than anybody figure that out, right? Uh, and just speculate and push the boundaries of what is possible, right? And this can go from. Um, like, like you can read it just, you know, there some avant garde art that, that like, I love the music of John Zorn. It's not pointing in any direction.
It's just like, can I get away with this? Can I do this? Can I make these noises? And will people listen? And what kind of

reactions will they have with this stuff? Right? I just love that. Right. Like, it's just kind of exploration, just kind of general, just what's possible. And then there's stuff like Star Trek, which I also love, right?

That is like, oh, maybe we can, we can, what if this were possible? And then people are actually like delivering on the promises of Star Trek, right? Like, so Star Trek is actually pushing in a very specific direction. Like

it's not about, well first of all you can't travel [00:28:00] faster than the speed light, all that kind of stuff. That's all garbage. Uh, but like iPhone smartphones were kind of conceptualized on Star Trek. Before they exist now, right? Like without getting too, what I'm saying is that they, they're like, Ooh, what is possible in pushing the, the, the boundaries of vision later we would deliver on that vision.

So sometimes it's like a practical pushing of boundaries, and then other times it's just an impractical, what the hell can I get away with? Like alvan garde music? I, I hope that makes sense, right? Like, so that it's Yeah. In, in either direction. In popular culture or experimental culture, it is about pushing the boundaries.

That being said, there is again, a place for stuff that is totally safe and doesn't push any boundaries. Mm-hmm. And is just comfortable, I get it right. And that's decorative art. And it's wonderful Not to, particularly Warhol again, he once described his artist, he's like, I'm just a decorative artist, Warhol.

You can find a Warhol quote to say absolutely anything you want. Right? Yeah. And so I can make him sound like the edgiest most avant-garde artist in the [00:29:00] world where I can make him sound like the most boring, decorative artist possible, just so you know. Uh, but like I, that is, it's totally true. Like this morning I was listening to the cheesiest corniest seventies jazz.

Uh, not because I was trying to push the boundaries or to, to like, you know, far from it. I just wanted to feel comfortable. Yeah. Right. And so there's a place for that kind of stuff. But yes, artists should be pushing the boundaries. Uh, great art often pushes the boundaries and so, so

Hayden Ernst: yes. Right. Um, so moving on from a little bit of an art background.

Uh, so what are some of your thoughts on, um, AI generated art?

Todd Richardson: Um,

I'm interested to see what it generates and what people do. Uh, and I say what it generates, no, there's always a person behind it. Uh, that's, [00:30:00] that's pointing it in that direction. It is ultimately a tool. Uh, and it's no different in that sense from a paintbrush to a silk screening process or whatever. It's just another tool that artists are adding.

How people manipulate that tool, I think is radically different because you don't, as I understand it, when you're generating AI art, it's not working a paintbrush. It doesn't necessarily rely on those kind of like, Digital skills, and I mean, digital in that sense literally is like fingers, right? Like, like, yeah.

Digits on a hand like that. You're not manipulating it in that sense. You are. Instead, it's a more linguistic manipulation, right? Like, it's like, can you feed the right sequence of words into the band to generate what it is you're looking for or, or something that is engaging. Um, and so it's a tool, but it just seems like a tool that just relies on a completely [00:31:00] different skillset than we traditionally associate with visual artists.

Um, but Right. Like, but people will, will learn to manipulate it. And then there's also this kind of fear that the, the, it's the perpetual fear of ai that it's gonna develop a consciousness and is gonna start operating without commands, which mm-hmm. Which is not a totally un. Dumb did fear. Right? Like, like I get it.

Right. Um, and some of the shit I've been reading about the ai I under, it's freaky shit, right? Like, it, like some of it is just like, just runs so counter like it, the AI seems to be operating in the spirit, so separate from what we had created it for, right? And that, that yeah. Does seem to suggest like this volition and stuff like that, that is a conversation for a totally different project.

Um, uh, it's, it's, it's a tool. Um, [00:32:00] and so I, and my, and my more generous moments, that's just the way I read it and I'm just like, we'll see what it creates. And I, I have manip, I messed with it a little bit myself and it's, in my experience, it's 75% of the way towards what I want. But then that 25% is garbage.

Mm-hmm. Like, it's, it's like, it's like, oh my God, that's a really, really cool thing, except for this thing that's totally wrong about it. Yeah. Um, and so I, and maybe that's just, I, I'm not, I'm not good with the tool. Yeah. Uh, so there's that. And then, and then the other thing that I would say is that it, AI and its relationship to craft is really interesting, problematic, and whatever.

And it's just like, this is something, I don't know that has come up so much, but there's art in this ideal, I sense. But then craft is just the [00:33:00] ability to make it right. And that there are great artists who are terrible with craft and there are great craft people who are terrible producing great art, but that they nevertheless have this relationship.

And it's just like, how, let me think of a good example. Um, uh, Um, action. Julian Lej, uh, LAJ, uh, is a guitarist, uh, and, and an amazing guitarist. Like, like his facility with guitar is just otherworldly. God, his music is just boring, uh, when he's making it himself, when he's like writing it, the music himself, right? But when somebody else comes in and gives him written music like John or, or Bill Frak, or, or NES Klein, these are people that he's worked with.

Like he, he produces, it's some of the, it's some of my favorite stuff to listen to. And so he's an amazing craft person, right? Like he's got the craft of [00:34:00] guitar down, but he doesn't have a vision to deliver on it, right? In that, um, AI. Eliminates that craft. And then it becomes like all vision, if that makes sense.

Like, like people don't have to develop that craft anymore, but for some people it doesn't matter. Right? Like it, maybe I should put it a different way that like, um, I don't have to have that craft, that Julian Le Laj has developed in order to like, like in someday like point and be like, you know, I have this great vision now, I can just have a robot execute that vision for me without having developed that craft.

Um, and that, that's pretty cool to think about. But then there's also, I gotta believe there's something valuable in Julian Laser's experience, just developing that craft and just having that ability to play things right. And so I'm a little, I, I don't know if worried is the right word, but it's just as I take a step back, like the thing that I think that, that AI generated art and dangerous most is craft.

And that there [00:35:00] is value just in, in the craft of learning how to make something. Uh, and I, and I hope, and I, and actually I know it, that's never gone away. People are still gonna do it. People are still gonna like, make things just to learn how to make them. It's not like we're not, we're not gonna have robots do everything for us.

Hayden Ernst: Right. Um, okay. So we kind of went over a little bit of this. Um, but what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses or opportunities and threats of AI art.

Todd Richardson: I, um, it's strengths, it's democratizing. Uh, ooh. I'm a little, I hesitate to say that right now, it seems democratizing right now because we're making it available to people.

Mm-hmm. But I'm absolutely certain, um, that it will not be democratic going, like people, rich people will have better AI than poor people. Right. Like, that's gonna happen. Right. Yeah, [00:36:00] I know that. Because, because capitalism is true. Right? Right. Like it's, that's just the way it's, um, so right now it seems democratizing cuz people have more access to it, but we'll see how that plays out.

Um, so I see that as one of the strengths. Um, and then also I think, uh, it does. This is related to democratizing, like, it gives people with different skill sets and different embodiments the ability to create art that they couldn't create before. Like, um, I'm thinking of, um, my wife works with, with people with, um, incredibly challenging embodiments, people with profound disabilities.

Uh, and I can imagine somebody who doesn't have the use of their arms or their legs, um, being able to all of a sudden create incredibly dense visual artworks in a way that they couldn't before. And I think that that's a pretty cool thing to ponder. [00:37:00] Um, people with different, like I said, different skills, different bodily skills, being able, all of a sudden having access to, to, to creativity.

Um, and then the dangers, I mean, or the threat, it's, I, I get sad thinking about the loss of craft. Um, uh, and I also get sad. Democracy's great. I love democracy, but not always, right? Like I do like there being, I don't, I don't want everything that everybody to have the same abilities and the same skills. I like that different people have different abilities, and some people can create amazing art and some people can't because those people who can't can do other amazing things, right?

And, and the people who create amazing art sock at other things, I don't, I don't want everybody having, bringing this, having the same skills and the same tools to create the same artwork so that I, I fear that there might be a sort of leveling where it's just like, it's the same thing, right? Uh, [00:38:00] and it won't, right?

It just won't human beings or just it won't. Um, people are gonna fight to create their own vision no matter what. And if that means getting offline, that means getting offline, uh, which is less, more life offline, I think is good for everybody. Um, And then, I don't know, so strengths weaken. Oh, and weaknesses.

And then, and then was it threats?

Hayden Ernst: Uh, yeah, opportunities

Todd Richardson: and threats. Opportunities. Um, and I, I mean, I think my answers kind of covered both of those. Uh, I can't think of anything that I haven't really said on that accord. Um, um, I, yeah. And the only other thing, and I don't think, I don't know if it fits into any of those really neatly, and, and I just, it just changes the game.

It just changes the, the, the playing field. Um, and, and, and so that's an opportunity, but also a, a challenge. It just, like I said, like it's [00:39:00] people who learn for years. In order to manipulate a paintbrush in a certain way, the rules have changed. And so the game is moving to a different field. And so it's just gonna be alienating for those who have certain skill sets.

Um, it's just, there's gonna be an adjustment. Right. Um, Which happened with television. I mean, I think people are just now figuring out television, right? Like it was invented 70 years ago. But I think just now people are, you know, and so it'll take time. It's just, there's gonna be an adjustment period.

Right.

Hayden Ernst: Um, so how do you see people using, uh, this AI art generation in the

Todd Richardson: future? Um, uh, both brilliantly and stupidly. Um, yeah. Uh, I think there will be people who understand it, uh, and become, it will become a craft in its own right. You know? Mm-hmm. Like I was kind of talking about [00:40:00] like, it's a different skillset cuz I think it's more linguistic.

But there are gonna be artists who figure that out, how to manipulate that, how to, to find the right way to, to, to speak, to generate. The thing they're most looking for. And so I think there will be buying artists who manipulate, who use AI as a tool, but then there's gonna be just like a lot of low skilled, dumb asses just generating all kinds of garbage.

Um, and so I think, I don't even know what that looks like, but it's gonna be a lot of garbage. And, and I think it's gonna put, frankly, a lot of, um,

mid brow artists out of business. I don't know how else to put this. Like, um, [00:41:00] like actually, yeah, I'll, we're not friends anymore, so I'll, I'll pick on him. Uh, I have an old, old, a guy he used to be friends with. Um, He was really kind of talented as an artist and, and he worked in advertising for years. Mm-hmm. Uh, still does. And he makes just like totally adequate commercials and ads. Right. You know what I mean? Like they're nothing that you're gonna be like, oh my God, that's really brilliant. Or anything like that. It's just like, okay, yeah. That lets me know there's a product I should buy. Right. Um, he's gonna be put out of business.

Right. Because, because you're gonna be able to have AI do that middling work. Right? Like, you're just gonna be able to type in a command that says, um, create me a touching visual image that's gonna make it so people wanna buy my detergent. Right. And that we'll generate that. And so I think those kind of just like [00:42:00] middle brown creative professionals.

Are in great danger, right? But there will, because everybody's gonna be able to do that. But again, there will be the master craftspeople who really know how to work this medium and their skills are gonna be, um, cherished, uh, uh, and will have great value. Does that make sense? Yeah. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: I think that learning how to, you know, put in the right words to make the AI make a certain, you know, painting that you like or a certain thing that you like, uh, is going to be a really, really interesting skill.

Um, because I've messed around with them and it is difficult to sometimes get what you want. And I think that creating some

of the images that, you know, people create is, uh, very difficult. So.

Todd Richardson: Mm-hmm. Oh, God. Yeah. And I, I thought I had something. I don't, that's, but, uh,[00:43:00]

Yeah, no, I got nothing else. I have a thought, but it's too far out and I can't, I, I can't wrangle it, so, yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. It's difficult to, um, understand because the ai, what they, you know, they just give it images and, uh, sort of labels and say, this is, you know, what a car looks like, or This is what this type of car looks like.

Um. Mm-hmm. And they don't really have, they don't really see what happens behind the scenes. They see the output then, and they say, oh yeah, that's a good, that's that car, or, oh no, that is not that car. And so it'll be interesting if somebody would learn more what happens in between, so that way they can manipulate it better, I think.

Todd Richardson: Absolutely. And, and that is, that is, I mean, you're nailing it. I mean, it's just we need to understand the thought processes of the ai, um, so that we can better relate to it. And the better we relate to it, the more effective the products are going to be. Yeah. Um,

Hayden Ernst: Um, right. We talked about this a little bit, but do [00:44:00] you think that the ability to use AI to make, uh, many different works and many different styles of work, and maybe even combine different styles, um, endangers individualism in art, uh, does this e devalue some individual, uh, human creations, or does this make, um, them more valuable?

Todd Richardson: Hmm. I think it makes gr uh, I kind of riffing off of what I, what I just said, that I think, um, it, it makes good artwork more valuable and it makes bad artwork even less valuable. Right. And so that, that, sure, it's gonna devalue some hu human creativity cuz you're gonna be like, no, that's, that human creativity wasn't so special to begin with.

Um, But it's gonna make other stuff, you know? Um, the truly remarkable human creations, the, the, the, the great art. It's, that's not, that's not gonna lose value at all. It's gonna become even more valuable. Um, and that I say [00:45:00] all that and it's, when I say devalue it, I mean that in the financial sense, right?

That I talked about at the beginning and war. Holy, I sense even crappy artwork is still gonna have its value to the person who makes it. It's right. It's as long as you focus on the process, as long as you realize that's all that matters, right? Is the making of it. The product is,

what did Cather say? Um, the destination is nothing. The road is everything, right? And it's just like how you get there is all that matters, right? Um, and so if it's gonna be product oriented, if you're gonna take that kind of view of art, that it's the product that matters, yeah, it'll devalue certain things.

But if you are process oriented, Art is still gonna have its value. Every artwork is still gonna have its value to the person who's making it. Um, and then simultaneously, like, you know, I can't, it's kinda like I was talking about with the whale, right? Like, like, um, you can tell [00:46:00] me a computer made it or do any of these kind of things devalue it, but like, ultimately it's something just very human in me that, that it is the fact that I watched a movie about a dying father trying to connect with his daughter, with my wife who lost her father when she was about the same age as the, the daughter in the movie.

I don't care if a robot made that or a human, or whatever, it's, I'm a human responding to that. And so that value's gonna be there no matter what, right? Like wherever the artwork comes from that, that's not going anywhere, right? Like in, unless we're gonna start creating AI to feel for us, which that's a.

Real huge fucking problem. That's the way that we're talking, right? So, um, the audience will still be humans and as long as the audience is still comprised of humans, like there's gonna be, art is gonna be subjective in the meanings there, there's meaning to be made everywhere. Yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Um, [00:47:00] so I have been seeing a lot of people are, uh, a little bit worried that, um, even artists who we thought were sort of immune to their jobs being, um, automated or, you know, thinking that the Ai AI might be able to do it.

So do you think that there will be maybe sort of a reactionary, um, form of art to this, where people are trying to be more out there and maybe even make something that they, you know, AI can't, you know,

Todd Richardson: copy. Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Right? Like they're, it's, uh, from a certain perspective, it's heroic. And from another perspective it's bratty.

Uh, but that's artists, right? Yeah. Like they, the, they, they, they're both heroic and bratty. Um, and so, yeah, I mean, it'll go in totally different places. And even that, like, I, I, I mean, and I'm not talking about the, cuz it's, what is it? Is it, is it pronounced doll e? Is that the d a l l e? That's the, yeah.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah.

I think that's how it's pronounced. That's how I've been saying

Todd Richardson: it at least. Okay. And I've messed around with that a little [00:48:00] bit. Um, but it's the new one. The and which is different. The chat G what is it? Jesus. Yeah. Chat. G p pt, right? I've, I've fid around with that. Um, you know what, I write better, right? I know that I can tell it to write something.

Um, and it's just, it's um, I'm confident. Right. That I'm not gonna be replaced by it, but at the same time, I write professionally, um, English composition, oh, it's gonna replace the work that students do in there. Right? Like, I get it. Yeah. I know students are gonna use chat G B T to generate papers because that's all they care about.

Like, that's fine. Right? But I don't know. Now I'm just kind of thinking out loud that, that, like, I suppose the, the, the devaluation might not happen for a few generations. Uh, and at that point, nobody will remember anyway. Right? Mm-hmm. And that we've gone through this with every, I mean, Jesus Christ, we go through [00:49:00] Play-Doh, but Socrates, right? Um, the founder of Western Philosophy never wrote anything, right? Like he never wrote a single thing in his, in his lifetime. The only reason we know Socrates existed is because Play-Doh wrote a book in which Socrates was, was figured in. Right. And Socrates would say, I don't write things down because that is bullshit technology.

It's making me weak intellectually. I need to remember these things. I need to have a sharp mind where I can recall things and that everything should be oral. Anything written down is lazy, lazy, technological thinking. Right. Which is absurd to us from a certain perspective. Right. Um, and so like what I'm saying is like enough generations away, people will forget that this was ever an issue.

Right? Yeah. And so I have no idea what, what, how AI will affect the way people in think [00:50:00] many generations down the road. But I'm sure it will be completely incomprehensible and unrecognizable to me and horrifying. And that people of that era will be like, you're irrelevant. This is the way we do it. Right.
Yeah, I dunno. Yeah, that's what I got. All right.
Hayden Ernst: Um, so the ai, when they work, because, um, we feed them all of the, uh, training information that they get so that way they know, you know, what a car is or whatever. Um, do you think that human knowledge and uh, creativity, uh, limit the AI in this
Todd Richardson: sense?
I mean, I suppose, but it is in service to us. Yeah, right. Like, so I mean, I, and I want it to be in service to us. I want it to be limited by us. Um, [00:51:00] like I am not, I am not building a bunker in fear of the AI takeover. Um, but there's a Kurt v quote. Uh, that comes to mind a lot when I think about ai and that's that, uh, in the end, we all become what we pretend to be, right. And that what v get meant by that was like, it's kind of fake until you make it kind of stuff. Like, like, right. If you pretend to be, um, a responsible middle class citizen, you're gonna end up being a responsible middle class citizen. If you pretend to be a a rebel, you're gonna be a rebel. Like, like we are.
It's life as performance, right? Like we are the, the, the characters that we perform to the world. And that, I get it, AI is not a consciousness, AI is not a being in any sense, right? But it pretends to be right. And I think in the end, like we all become what we pretend to be like, [00:52:00] I do kind of feel like no matter what safeguards, whatever limits we put on ai, the the ways in which we try and like wrangle it and do all that kind of stuff, in the end, it's gonna become what it pretends to be.
Right. Whether or not that means the end of everything and it's gonna exterminate all humans on earth, which I do not think, well, I have no idea. I'm not, I, I'm not, I'm, I don't, that's not the kind of thinking that I do. Um, but yeah, I mean, AI is limited by us until it isn't. Right. Um, and then I figure if it wasn't limited by us and it, it started like figuring out, like it depends on the input that we give it order and that that's the sort of limit, if it's gonna start doing that, if it's gonna work beyond the, the limits of humanity, it's gonna become incomprehensible to humanity, right?
Like the artwork that it would create without those limits would be just meaningless to us because it would cease to be human anymore or it cease to have those human reference points. Does that make sense? Like, yeah. Yeah. [00:53:00]
Hayden Ernst: Um, yeah. So I guess sort of also a little bit to rephrase that, do you think that we are right now using it, um, in a way that limits it?
Um, one paper that I read, you know, said that right now we're using it to copy our own artwork. Um, do you think that we could sort of reframe this to work with us to create something different and new?
Todd Richardson: Yes, absolutely. But that's, that starts getting into like posthumanism that, like to put the fancy term, like the, the academic term on it, which I get, and I'm not, whatever, and posthuman thinking is, is interesting to me sometimes, but I work in the humanities, right?
Like, like I'm, I'm interested in humanism. Mm-hmm. And so I get that, but that's just not, uh, an avenue I'm terribly interested in pursuing or, or, um, like I'm not looking to exceed the limits of my humanity. I'm [00:54:00] looking to explore the possibilities of my humanity. I don't, I don't
Hayden Ernst: know. I don't know.
Interesting. Yeah. Um,
Todd Richardson: but I might need to think about that a little bit more. Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: Well, you what you said exploring your humanity is interesting cuz that is sort of, you know, what you think of when you think of art, so. Mm-hmm.
Yeah.
Todd Richardson: Would you And Yeah. Yeah. Um, but I don't know, but I can also think of a million things I'm saying right now that contradict with other things I said, but also I don't care. Um, uh, Ralph Emerson said a, a, a foolish consistency of the hobb goblin of little mines. Uh, he's just like, if you contradict yourself, go for it.
Um, and what you thought yesterday think different today. Yeah. Cause it's more interesting. Yeah.
Hayden Ernst: Um, okay. That's all the, uh, questions I had for you. Um, okay. But yeah, so one aspect of my paper that I, we [00:55:00] discussed will be, um, sort of giving recommendations for, you know, art galleries and maybe museums mm-hmm.
In the Omaha area. And sort of what I've been, um, thinking about and looking at is, uh, AI in regards to that. And, um, maybe rather than getting works of art that are created by ai, uh, the museums or art galleries, look at, um, using these AI and how we interact with them and allowing, you know, people to come in and interact and, uh, you know mm-hmm.
Do their own art that way. And I was wondering if you have any thoughts on that or what you think about my idea too.
Todd Richardson: I like it. I like that a lot. Um, and I think it would work with different, some museums better than others, but I mean, it certainly fits the, the, the kind of thrust of everything today, which is participatory, uh, [00:56:00] and, and empowering, right?
Like, or elevating, however you wanna put it. Like, uh, that you don't go. We're getting rid of the distinctions between the great works on the wall and the little people viewing 'em, and it's like, no, you get to interact and you get to do. And so that's perfect. I mean, it's just whatever. And I mean, um,
uh, museums would love it, um, because it's, you give people, well, you make people feel important, they're more likely to go to a place and, and then the museums are more likely to be sustainable. That being said, there is a part of me as I get older, that I am, we are not all special in all regards and that there is a pretty goddamn big difference between, um, [00:57:00] uh, let me think of somebody.
Great. Um, um, Georgia O'Keefe and me, right? Like, like I can go to a museum and I can do this kind of stuff and, and I can create all this kind of stuff. I like a world where Georgia O'Keefe, I look up to it, not eye to eye. Right? Right. Like there is something to that preserving the, and this is again, our class is making me feel this even more strongly than I anticipated.
But like I, there is a value to higher and lower classifications for things. Now I wanna make it abundantly clear that I am not advocating for some kind of ask system or something that we're all fixing these things. I, I think an ideal world is one in which you are higher than me in, in the execute in some realm.

Mm-hmm. Right. And I look up to you and I'm like, holy [00:58:00] shit. What Hayden does is incomprehensible to me, and I see in him the, the, the, the, the value of his singularity. But then in another context, in another arena, our roles are reversed. Right? Right. So that we both have the experience of being higher and lower.

Right. I don't want anybody fixed higher and fixed lower, but I want these, but I still want higher and lower. Right. Because I want people to have those experiences. I don't wanna still, God damn it, it comes down to the god damn Incredibles, uh, where they're just like, in a world where everybody's special, that means nobody is Yeah.

Right. Okay. Um, and I don't like that. I don't like that eventuality. I like, I like keeping something special. Yeah. I, I hope I don't sound like a tyrant when I say that. No,

Hayden Ernst: that makes sense. Like, uh, like a form, like specialization in like people's, like jobs and stuff. Yeah.

Todd Richardson: People need to feel special.

People need to feel singular. Um, and so that's, that's [00:59:00] the one that's getting in a broad philosophical, uh, thorny patch when we're talking about incorporating AI into the museum experience for people. Um, and that's just me being annoying. Uh, cuz I think it's a great idea. I think what you're proposing is a great,

Hayden Ernst: so, okay.

Well it was, uh, it's great talking to you. That was, uh, absolutely brought a lot of

Todd Richardson: interesting ideas. Um, well I don't, I I don't know how to process that because you know what I write when, uh, I don't have anything nice to say on student papers you say. Interesting. I'll just, um, ill happily read a draft of this whenever it's ready.

Okay. Um, or whenever you need, uh, um, cuz I think it's cool.

Hayden Ernst: Yeah. Yeah. I will like keep you updated on it for sure. Um, and it's great cuz I'm also bringing a lot of ideas from class. And [01:00:00] class has also given me a lot of different and new ideas. Um,

Todd Richardson: and let me real quickly, I'm gonna, I'll give this to you as quickly as I possibly can and that's that, um, Andy Kaufman is one of my absolute, like I, I'm fascinated and panted by Andy Kaufman.

And he came up in class the other day because he's the guy who did, he was like on a sitcom and then he, he started doing wrestling. Like he's, he just occupies a lot of different spaces and. Late seventies, early eighties, American entertainment where he was incredibly approachable, pop culture, but also the edgiest of Avantgarde stuff.

Um, and he did some fascinating work that I think is relevant to this, um, where he looked at the mechanization of performance, um, and it's not ai, but it's the same kind of thing where like lip syncing, right? Like, like lip syncing is a fascinating thing in that it's like this thing where we [01:01:00] allow technology to do the work for us.

Kind of like ai, right? Mm-hmm. Um, and we're cool with it until somebody acknowledges it or until we like see it. But what I'm getting at is Andy Kaufman did this thing, like he, on the first episode of Saturday Night Life, he just came out on stage and he put a record player there, and then he like put the needle on the record player and he just let this Mighty Mouse song play.

And then he would lip sync only the chorus. Like, he would just say like, here I come to save the, and it was this, this way of being like, okay, we all know lip syncing happens now. You can't deny it. What are you gonna do about it? Right, right. And he did the same thing with like, laugh track. It just, I think there's, I think there's something relevant to AI going on there.

Uh, and you maybe spend a half hour looking into Andy Kaufman, um, or maybe not. He's a hero of mine,

Hayden Ernst: so. Yeah. Um, well thanks again. This has been Uh, no problem. [01:02:00] Very fun and awesome. Okay.

Todd Richardson: Yeah. Well, thank you. Um, alright. Yeah. Well, I'm gonna go, uh, I'm gonna eat lunch and then I have to grade papers. Yeah. Um, which, that's the AI I'm waiting for is grading papers.

AI. But I would never do it because, no, welcome. Um, alright. Uh, I will see you. I'll see you

Hayden Ernst: Monday. Yep. See you Monday. All right.

Todd Richardson: Bye Hayden. Bye.