

# Beyond the Canvas: Exploring the Ethical and Cultural Implications of AI-Generated Art

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of AI-generated art has fundamentally altered creative labor, which in turn raised concerns about artistic exploitation, authorship, and digital colonialism. While these AI models claim to democratize artistic expression, they are built on the systematic extraction of artistic labor, often without the consent or compensation towards the original creator. By leveraging datasets of pre-existing works, these technologies not only commodify human creativity but also reshape the cultural and economic dimensions of digital labor. This paper investigates AI-generated art's impact on ownership, cultural representation, and economic inequities. By exploring alternative ownership models, this study seeks pathways to reclaim artistic autonomy in an increasingly automated creative landscape.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has begun to revolutionize the world of art, introducing new possibilities and reshaping traditional notions of authorship and labor. AI-generated art created by machine learning algorithms such as generative adversarial networks (GAN's), has gained significant attention for its ability to produce artworks that resemble those made by human artists. Along with that comes with the ease and accessibility it offers to the community, regardless of one's creativity or artistic skill. In the modern world, many individuals take advantage of these AI-generated art algorithms, for example Instagram having the option to create stickers from text to art to include stories and posts, or TikTok art accounts gaining a following through using such AI-generated artworks, or even sticker businesses that arise from the usage of these models, saving time in regard to the creation processes.

These developments raise important questions about the nature of creativity, the value of artistic labor, and its cultural and economic implications for creators in an automated society. While AI-generated art offers wider access to artistic creation, it also results in the exploitation of human creativity, as these algorithms are trained on large datasets of existing works without compensation or consent from the original artist. The rise of AI in the art world also raises concerns about cultural representation as these systems often reproduce biases inherent in the datasets in which they are trained on, marginalizing voices, perspectives, and art styles from original authors. This paper seeks to critically examine the implications of AI-generated art for labor, culture, and economics, addressing the hidden costs associated with the commodification of human creativity, and how we can use this knowledge to raise awareness of these existing inequalities and examine potential alternatives for ensuring a more equitable distribution of value and representation in the art world. "This work is in partial fulfillment of the ENGR184 course using the blueprint curriculum in Ref. [1,2] and captured in a collection [3]."

## ETHICS OF AI-GENERATED ART

The emergence of AI-generated art has sparked multifaceted ethical discourse, which ranges from issues related to intellectual property exploitation of marginalized groups, and the perpetuation of societal biases. One of the most significant ethical concerns surrounding AI-generated art is the issue of intellectual property. AI art often emerged from training data that includes images, paintings, photos, and other artworks by human artists, raising questions about

ownership and consent in the digital age. As AI becomes more capable of creating art that mirrors the work of established artists, the line between human and machine-created art becomes increasingly blurry, where it can be debated whether AI-generated art should be treated as a product of the AI system itself, or if it is inherently tied to the work of the artists whose creations were used. Traditional artistic practices have long recognized these rights, which protect the integrity and attribution of a work. The concept of “moral right” is rooted in the belief that an artist’s personality and identity are inseparable from their creations, such that “the concept and justification for moral rights is the notion that the personality of the author is bound up and expressed by his work” [1]. The recognition of moral rights affirms that an artist’s connection to their work is not merely economic but profoundly personal, reflecting their unique identity, vision, and integrity, which is undermined from AI-art algorithms and models. When we introduce AI into the creative process, the question arises of who holds a personal connection to such art pieces. Can an AI, devoid of human experiences and consciousness, be said to possess any moral connection to its creations?

The challenge of AI-generated art lies in its ability to replicate, synthesize and produce works that may closely mimic the styles of renowned artists, and while the AI algorithms themselves may not possess a personality, does this mean that its output lacks moral significance? A case that exemplifies this challenge is the controversial use of AI-generated art in digital marketplaces. In 2018, the AI-generated portrait Edmond de Belamy created by the Paris-based art collective Obvious, was sold for over \$432,000 at a Christie’s auction. This work was generated through a process where the algorithm was fed with 15,000 portraits from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century, where The Generator produced new images based on this data set, while the Discriminator sought to distinguish machine-created portraits from human made ones. While Casellas-Dupre acknowledges that “for sure- the machine did not want to put emotions into the pictures,” he contends that the human creator of the algorithm – who provided the input and vision – should be considered the artists behind the work [2].

## **IMPLICATIONS OF AI-GENERATED ART ON MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES**

The integration of AI into artistic creation not only challenges traditional notions of authorship and originality but also poses cultural concerns as AI-generated art often reflects and amplifies existing societal biases, leading to the marginalization and misrepresentation of underrepresented groups. Research indicates that generative AI models tend to reproduce intersectional stereotypes, adversely affecting marginalized groups. The advancement of AI technologies, particularly in generative models such as DALL-E, has raised concerns in how biases in models such as these can reinforce harmful stereotypes related to race, gender, and other marginalized groups. Within the article *White Default: Examining Racialized Biases Behind AI-Generated Images*, Park explains how models like DALL-E, which is trained on large data sets “repeat intersectional stereotypes of marginalized people and communities, which contribute to reifying social categories and justifying discrimination, hostility, and violence against the,” [3]. Although AI can be perceived as a tool, the data sets used to train these models carry the biases of their creators and the historical inequities embedded in the data. Despite its sophisticated algorithm, DALL-E reflects Western-centric and often racially exclusionary patterns, leading to output images reflecting American associations, biases, value, and culture. Moreover, the commodification of AI-generated art results in the appropriation of marginalized identities. AI systems can not only be trained on data that presents a narrow cultural perspective, but can ably remix, reproduce and generate works on cultural artifacts that are known to be historically oppressed or stolen. This undermines both the authenticity of these marginalized traditions and strips these communities of the ability to control the narrative around their own cultures and histories. As Jade Underwood argues in *The Explosion of AI Artwork & Its Harmful Impact on Black Creatives*, AI-generated art is “displacing human creatives: in favor of cheaper and

quicker alternatives, often depriving marginalized artists, particularly Black creatives, of recognition and compensation [4].

This exploitation is compounded by the economics of AI art, which leaves marginalized communities further disenfranchises. The ability for marginalized communities to change their own narrative is limited due to the lack of access to cutting edge AI tools for creating art as it requires significant resources, such as technology, education, and access to digital platforms. Additionally, the value of art in a capitalist society is often determined by who owns the platform and by whoever has the resources to promote their work, thus the commercialization of AI art often centralized from the values of a small, privileged, elite group, making it harder for marginalized artists to compete. Sovereignty within AI art resides within large corporations such as OpenAI or Google, who wield significant influence over how AI art platforms operate and what images they train their models on. This centralization of control and ownership of AI models means that marginalized groups, who lack resources to engage or influence these technologies, are often excluded from the benefits and being able to produce meaningful representations of their cultures and identities. Personhood in AI-generated art is tied together with the risk of misrepresentation or erasure of marginalized cultural values and practices, where AI systems replicate existing societal biases, which reinforces stereotypes. These dynamics reveal how the current application of AI-generated art implicated vulnerable communities, depriving them of the agency to control their own narratives and voices in a capitalist society.

## CONCLUSIONS

To build an equitable digital future in the realm of AI-generated art, it' is crucial to recognize the complexities that result from the cycle of possession, authority, and personhood that is posed between a centralized corporation in charge of such models and the marginalized community affected by such power structures. While AI-generated art has the potential to democratize creativity, it places control in the hands of larger corporations, who profit from creators, works with a lack of compensation or recognition towards the original artists, which consolidate all the wealth and influence while independent artist struggles to maintain their livelihoods. However, as with any technology evolving, there are avenues for resistance and change, where communities can continue to innovate and create alternative platforms that support fair compensation and rights for creators, such as cooperative ventures and open-source projects. It is not enough to simply rely on corporations to regulate themselves, where only legislation, policy reforms, and critical inquiry by such artists can help amplify the voices of artists and marginalized communities. Technology should serve the community, and so should AI-generated art by reflecting diverse artistic practices, rather than a centralized, oppressive, stereotypical perspective. By supporting platforms that prioritize transparency, ethical practices, fair compensation, and higher representation, only then can we reshape the industry where art can reflect the diversity of human experience.

## REFERENCES

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