

A Very Questionable Essay about Art and AI

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In this short essay, I will try to briefly answer the question of whether we can accept images produced by artificial intelligence as works of art, using the aestheticism approach.

As Roger Fry declares that the primary function of the artwork, actually what is meant here is painting, is to evoke aesthetic emotions, independent of any narrative concerns in other words, meaning of it. That aesthetic emotion he mentions is actually something quite subjective that differs from person to person and he even says that in order to understand an artwork, the audience have to have a high level of sensitivity and education in arts. This approach is actually based on the idea of Clive Bell which claims that the true beauty of an artwork can only be perceived by superior eyes.

I will use that information as a reference to discuss the relevance of artificial intelligence in the world of art. While doing this, I will continue by accepting the aesthetic approach as correct. The working principle of artificial intelligence is based on describing the image that is wanted to be created in the best way and entering the correct prompts. In other words, it is a work of defining an image(artwork). This then leads us to ask the question, are only people with superior vision capable of creating a true work of art? Because if only they can grasp the true beauty of art, only they can describe it. However what they can describe, if they can, will be emotions. AI can create an image which is composed of components that can evoke aesthetic emotions in terms of general aesthetic taste of an era or overall history of art. But that creates a deadlock itself, with this approach it is not possible to create a new aesthetic language since the working principle of artificial intelligence is actually based on taking orders to create something that is already liked or desired. In this sense, for us to call an image produced by AI an artwork, it is dependent on the description of something that a person should feel within himself/herself which evokes deep emotions and cannot define.

While writing this part of the essay, I realized that I can not really answer my first question but create more questions about it. Therefore, I will bring another angle to the subject. I would also like to include a few thoughts and definitions of artists I like and think are relevant to the subject, about art and especially painting. Because their view may differ from the approach of many important art historians. Since artificial intelligence is essentially a work of making and creating, we can look at people who have done it and how they define their own work, even though they could not even imagine such technology at their time. "Remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a female nude or some sort of anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order." (Art et Critique August 1890) says Maurice Denis to describe the painting. This definition while highlighting the flatness of a painting which can later be connected with Greenberg's approach also gives a more concrete and technical viewpoint to the practice of making art. This, on paper, suits the idea of using AI in terms of production.

However it also lacks information about how art should be seen and evaluated. On the other hand, Nicolas Poussin says "The purpose of art is delectation." The word "delectation" here represents something completely abstract, in stark contrast to Denis's definition. It is much closer to the idea of aestheticism and at the same time, open to interpretation. There does not have to be any message, meaning, moral aspect in an artwork. It has to be just about form which should be visually appealing to the viewer within the purpose of giving pleasure.

To conclude, it can be said that unless one can define pleasure(delectation) verbally and make that definition of such subjective and abstract thing agreed by everyone, the AI can not really create original artworks that can give delectation to the viewer without copying the styles of appreciated artworks of the past.