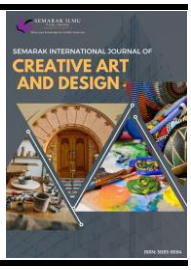
Semarak International Journal of Creative Art and Design

Journal homepage:
https://semarakilmu.my/index.php/sijcad/index
ISSN: 3083-8584



Between Control and Collaboration: Artistic Autonomy in AI-Generated Visual Artworks

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 2 April 2025
Received in revised form 20 April 2025
Accepted 4 May 2025
Available online 30 June 2025

Keywords:
AI-generated art; art and technology; prompt-based creation; human-machine collaboration; co-creation in art

ABSTRACT

With an emphasis on the developing concept of artistic autonomy, this essay examines how artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the creative dynamics of visual art production. The position of the artist changes from that of a lone creator to that of a co-director in a hybrid process influenced by both human intention and machine execution as generative AI systems become more and more involved in image-making. This study summarizes current discussions around authorship, originality, and collaboration in AI-driven artistic practices through a thorough literature assessment of 34 journal papers published between 2022 and 2025. Three main issues are shown by thematic analysis: the expansion of human-machine co-creation, the redistribution of creative authority, and the reinterpretation of originality. The results imply that although AI pushes back against established authorship constraints, it also creates new avenues for creative control, negotiation, and exploration. AI raises important issues regarding authorship, ethics, and creative ownership in the era of algorithms by relocating the artist's role inside a shared creative agency rather than decreasing it. In order to embrace AI as a creative collaborator, this paper contends that autonomy must be reinterpreted as the capacity to critically navigate and influence new technical forces in artistic practice, rather than as independence from tools.

1. Introduction

Visual art is one of the many creative industries that have seen substantial change in recent years due to the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI). Once thought to be solely a human domain based on instinct, feeling, and handiwork, artistic creation is now shared by more complex AI systems that can produce visual content with little assistance from humans. The ability to generate high-quality digital images from straightforward verbal prompts is made possible by tools like DALL·E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion, which challenges conventional wisdom regarding creativity, authorship, and artistic agency [1].

A crucial query at the center of this change is: What does it mean to be an artist in the AI era? The traditional role of the artist as the only creator of a unique vision is facing serious problems as

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https://doi.org/10.37934/sijcad.4.1.111

technology become more and more involved in creative processes [2]. The distinctions between creator, collaborator, and tool start to get hazy. Some contend that AI has brought forth a new form of creation that contradicts the idea of human-centered authorship, while others see it as nothing more than an extension of the artist's hand an additional brush in the digital studio. Therefore, a closer look at the artist's role and agency within this changing environment is required in light of the rise of AI-generated visual artworks.

The ability of artists to make deliberate, independent choices regarding their work is referred to as agency in the context of artistic practice. It includes decisions on shape, topic matter, expression, and method. There are concerns regarding who or what is influencing the creative output when AI is introduced into this process, particularly through generative systems that have been trained on enormous datasets [3]. Has the locus of authorship moved toward the algorithm, or is the human artist still the primary creative agent? Furthermore, how can we compare the artistic contribution of the individual entering the prompts to that of the AI system that creates the image if the result is produced just on a few lines of instructions?

A range of human-machine interaction is indicated by the literature now in publication, from the instrumental use of AI as a design assistance to complete co-creation, in which the computer assists with conception and visual execution. AI can be used, for example, by artists to create hundreds of variations of a concept, choose or curate outputs, and incorporate them into a finished work. In certain situations, AI functions less as a passive instrument and more as a creative collaborator. These dynamic raises more general questions about the idea of artistic control and points to a change in the locus of creativity from individual expression to dispersed authorship [4].

Additionally, the phenomena challenges philosophical presumptions about what defines art as well as conventional aesthetic values. When examining works created by non-sentient creatures, Arthur C. Danto's theory of art which emphasizes the importance of intention and interpretation in defining art becomes extremely pertinent [5]. Can AI have or carry out artistic aim if it is not conscious? And if not, is the human prompter's aim enough to qualify the piece as art? Although there are no simple solutions to these concerns, they are essential to comprehending the emerging field of AI-influenced creative production.

Practically speaking, this change in technology has already had an effect on artistic practice and the larger art ecology. AI-generated artworks have made their way into high-end galleries and auction houses, sparking discussions about intellectual property and creativity. Many artists, meanwhile, claim that AI improves or speeds up certain aspects of their creative process, such as initial brainstorming, compositional experiments, or even final visual depiction. These tools raise issues about standardization, aesthetic flatness, and the possible marginalization of traditional skills and embodied craftsmanship, even as they can democratize access to artistic creativity [6].

The purpose of this review is to investigate how artists' agency as creative agents is impacted by the use of AI in visual art production. It specifically answers the following research question: How does the position and agency of the artist as the creator change when artificial intelligence is used in the visual art creation process? This study aims to explore the changing interaction between human artists and AI technologies through a thematic review of academic literature, philosophical discussions, and modern creative activities [7]. The objective is to comprehend the subtle changes taking place at the heart of artistic authorship, not just to assess the advantages or risks of AI in art [3].

This paper adds to current conversations over the future of artistic identity in the digital era by examining the conflicts between control and collaboration. It aims to give technologists, artists, and theorists a conceptual framework for better navigating the opportunities and difficulties presented by artificial intelligence in creative processes. By doing this, it urges a rethinking of agency as a

rearranged link between algorithmic possibilities and human will, rather than as a force that is diminished in the face of automation.

2. Related Work

With pressing concerns regarding creativity, control, and artistic ownership, the nexus between artificial intelligence (AI) and visual art production has emerged as a thriving field of scholarly discussion. A significant portion of the literature currently in publication captures a period of transition in art history where conventional roles of the artist are being challenged, reinterpreted, or even replaced. This collection of work examines the wider philosophical, legal, and cultural ramifications of this novel type of co-creation in addition to the technological uses of AI in creating images or mimicking aesthetic preferences [2,4]

The fundamental premise of traditional creative techniques is that the artist [3] is the main agent, using talent, vision, and emotional commitment to both initiate and carry out the creative process. By assigning a considerable percentage of the image-making process to algorithmic models that have been trained on extensive datasets, AI art challenges this presumption. With ever-increasing sophistication and artistic coherence, these models can imitate, remix, and create new visual content [7]. By doing this, they raise important questions about what originality is and if creativity and human intentionality are intertwined.

The uncertainty around authorship in AI-generated artworks is a major theme in the literature. The process of coming up with a prompt, a straightforward textual directive has emerged as a central topic in conversations about artistic input. Some contend that creating a prompt can be creative in and of itself, similar to how discovered things are used in collage or conceptual art [6]. Some people are still dubious, arguing that this degree of abstraction lessens the customary depth of the artist's involvement. The fact that the underlying dataset, algorithmic architecture, and training biases, all of which are mainly unknown to the end-user influence the AI's output in addition to the prompt is also becoming more widely acknowledged [8]. Figure 1 shows AI as a creative partner.

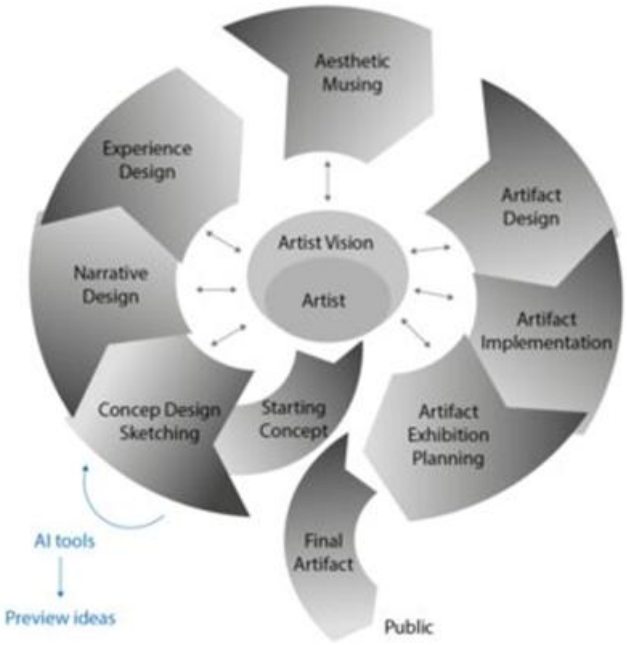

Fig. 1. AI as a creative partner: enhancing artistic creation and acceptance [14]

The idea of agency is another topic that academics struggle with. Agency seems to be dispersed among several nodes in the context of AI-driven creativity, including the artist, the machine, the prompt engineers, and even the data contributors whose work can be included in the training set [3]. The assessment of artistic excellence and accountability is made more difficult by this decentralization of authorship. According to literature, artists are increasingly acting as curators, conductors, or even editors in addition to being makers [7]. The new area of authorship is the power of selection, which involves selecting from hundreds of AI-generated variations. This results in a hybrid kind of creativity that is both human and machine-generated, rather than eliminating agency but redistributing it [9].

The ramifications for artistic identity are as important in the literature. AI offers new sources of compositional variation and visual inspiration, which some practitioners see as a way to expand creative potential. The erosion of personal expression and redundancy cause existential discomfort for others. When AI is used in creative processes, artists are forced to reconsider which elements of their work are vital and cannot be replaced. According to some academics, AI can serve as a mirror for artists to improve their own goals, boundaries, and styles rather than endangering artistic identity. However, there is still conflict surrounding the loss of direct ownership in visual execution.

Technically speaking, research shows how generative AI tools work in creative processes. AI can contribute to early ideation by providing visual stimuli or conceptual sketches with little involvement. Later, AI can help with composition refinement or even simulate lighting and material textures. Although these affordances boost productivity, they also create new dependencies. The standardization of style that results from numerous creators using the same generative models that have been trained on comparable datasets is the subject of several criticisms. The variety of visual language is threatened by this standardization, particularly when aesthetic judgments are subtly influenced by computer preferences rather than human intuition.

The ethical aspects of AI art are being highlighted by a new viewpoint in the literature. The use of copyrighted photographs in training datasets without the original artists' consent is at the heart of this controversy. Even though the outputs might seem fresh, their origins are frequently found in content that has been appropriated. This brings up ethical concerns regarding exploitation as well as legal issues with intellectual property. New legal classifications that acknowledge AI-generated works without discounting the efforts of human authors or the AI engineers are demanded by some voices in the debate. A "shared authorship" approach is put out by others, although it is still mainly theoretical and unsettled in legal systems around the world.

The debate also has a strong philosophical undertone. Using media theory, posthumanism, and aesthetics, academics question anthropocentric conceptions of creation. They contend that AI should not be evaluated according to human emotional or expressive norms. Rather, it ought to be viewed as a system that may generate meaning by means of correlations, patterns, and probability. This makes it possible to redefine creativity itself as an emergent quality of systems, including human-machine hybrids, rather than as a characteristic that is exclusive to humans. The ramifications are substantial, implying that the creative process may now take place in a space shared with intelligent robots, without the artist's conscious control.

The sociocultural dynamics of AI art are also gaining attention at the same time. The creation, dissemination, and interpretation of AI-generated works are significantly influenced by digital platforms and online communities. The exclusive character of the professional art world is challenged by the participatory nature of AI tools, which enable non-artists to create engaging visual output. Although this democratization is frequently praised, it also creates new access hierarchies, with people who are more experienced with quick engineering or AI technologies potentially controlling

creative outputs. Furthermore, preconceptions can be reinforced by cultural biases contained in training data, which would marginalize voices who are already underrepresented in the art world.

Crucially, literature shows an increasing interest in human-machine cooperation rather than rivalry. Co-creative ventures where AI is a partner rather than a substitute are described in a number of case studies. Artists may respond to AI's outputs with their own interpretations and adjustments, treating it as an improvisational counterpart. These exchanges create a feedback loop in which the artwork is shaped by both humans and machines. These methods open the prospect of pluralistic authorship, in which creative outputs are the consequence of discussion rather than guidance, and they challenge binary ideas about agency [3,10].

When these viewpoints are combined, it becomes evident that integrating AI into the visual arts involves a complex negotiation between control and submission rather than either one. The artist's role is altered rather than completely maintained or eliminated [3]. Legal frameworks, philosophical perspectives, cultural views, and technological affordances all influence this change. Although the literature's results are far from unanimous, they all acknowledge the significant change that is taking place. AI forces a reexamination of the pillars that have historically supported artistic practice, rather than just automating the creation of images [11].

3. Literature Review Survey Method

In accomplishing a comprehensive literature review survey, a total of 450 documents were initially retrieved from the Scopus database, focusing on publications published between 2022 and 2025 under the journal category. Using the search string (TITLE-ABS-KEY("artificial intelligence" OR "AI" OR "machine learning" OR "deep learning" OR "generative art" OR "algorithmic art") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("visual art" OR "digital art" OR "contemporary art" OR "new media art" OR "creative practice" OR "artistic creation") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("artist agency" OR "creative autonomy" OR "artist role" OR "authorship" OR "co-creation" OR "human-machine collaboration")) the initial pool was reduced to 120 relevant articles.

The selection was then further refined by a comprehensive screening procedure. Articles with irrelevant titles, as well as abstracts and content that was inconsistent with the study's topic, were eliminated. Finally, 34 publications were found appropriate for in-depth analysis.

The articles chosen through this rigorous screening process represent an extensive body of literature within the defined timeframe and conditions. The methodological approach, built on the search string and subsequent screening criteria, guaranteed that only relevant studies were included in the final analysis.

This survey approach, based on Scopus, a renowned database, provides a solid framework for researching the incorporation of animation into educational technologies. The refined selection of 34 publications provides a complete picture of the present research landscape, allowing for a nuanced investigation of the junction of animation and education technology within the era chosen as shown in Figure 2 below.

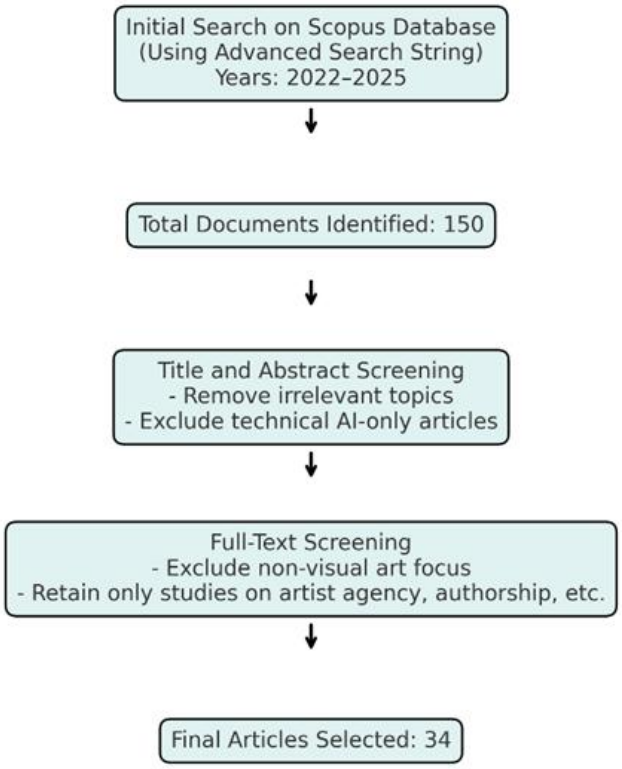

Fig. 2. Flow diagram for literature survey method

4. Results

A thematic synthesis of the studied material was carried out in order to comprehend the complex effects of artificial intelligence on the production of visual art. This synthesis seeks to reveal the conceptual, legal, and philosophical facets that reinterpret the position of the artist in the digital age in addition to the technical intersections between AI and artistic activity. The integration of AI reshapes creative agency, reconfigures concepts of originality, and introduces new collaborative paradigms between humans and machines, as revealed by the critical comparison and analytical interpretation of 34 scholarly sources.

4.1 Agency and Creative Power in the Age of AI

The use of AI in the production of visual art has resulted in a fundamental change in how artistic agency is conceptualized, according to the literature. According to conventional paradigms, vision, emotion, and technique are all created by the artist. This position, however, becomes hazy and, in certain situations, diffused in AI-assisted procedures. By analyzing how artists and non-artists interact with Midjourney, investigate this change and show how the creative agency is negotiated between the AI engine and the prompt-giver [2]. The AI's contribution to composition and style generation challenges the idea of authorship alone, even though artists still play a guiding role.

Further depth is provided by Mazzi and Francesca and Mazzi *et al.,* (2024), who contend that a text prompt's uniqueness is an act of creation in and of itself [7,12]. As Goenaga and Mikel Arbiza echoes in his examination of Edmond de Belamy's auctioned AI-generated artwork, they reposition the artist as a conceptual initiator rather than a manual executor by associating hints with artistic participation [13]. However, this viewpoint is controversial. The idea of a single author vanishes if

several agents such as developers, dataset curators, prompt writers, contribute to an artwork according to Zibner's and Jan's critique of the dispersion of authorship [14].

According to Grba and Dejan, this decentralization broadens creative possibilities while also challenging conventional measures of value and originality, as seen through the lens of generative cinema [8]. To further emphasize that agency must now be viewed as relative and relational rather than absolute, Lu and Bingbin suggests that authorship can be constructively ascribed to the person with the greatest control over the AI process [15].

4.2 Redefining Originality and the Concept of the Artwork

The second theme explores how AI challenges established notions of creative legitimacy and uniqueness. In order to investigate how purpose and interpretation become problematic when the creator is a non-sentient machine, Cascales and Raquel uses Arthur C. Danto's idea [5]. Where does AI fit into the definition of art if intention is crucial? Acil and Tufan shares this worry, raising doubts about the validity of AI-generated art and its compatibility with accepted art historical trends [6].

In her investigation of this ontological ambiguity in relation to co-creative AI activities, Fernández-Castrillo and Carolina makes the case that algorithmic design and communal online dynamics give rise to novel auratic experience types [11]. On the other hand, concentrate on the application of generative AI by designers in the fashion sector, noting that iterative teamwork rather than lone genius shapes creativity. In this context, creativity is seen as a networked interaction between human curation and AI-generated inputs [1].

Important legal and philosophical issues about the idea-expression dichotomy in copyright law are brought up by Goenaga and Mikel Arbiza [13]. The concept of originality is complicated because, although AI may generate new combinations, the underlying datasets are frequently taken from previously published, human-made works. This worry is echoed by JavieraCáceres *et al.,* (2020), who suggest that because of the hybrid character of AI-generated content, a new legal category called Artificial Intelligence Generated Works (AIGWs) is necessary [16].

Studies like Chen *et al.,* (2017) which look at prompt optimization techniques in AI drawing, further refine this changing idea of uniqueness [17]. Their findings imply that human iterative refinement, which mimics rather than replacing traditional drawing or ideation, can also contribute to uniqueness in computer outputs.

4.3 Human-Machine Collaboration in Visual Art Practices

The collaborative interplay between humans and machines during the creative process is the focus of the third theme. According to Du *et al.,* (2024) human-AI co-creation enhances accessibility and expressivity in digital art therapy settings by treating AI as a collaborator rather than a tool [4]. According to McCormack *et al.,* (2020) "collaborative creative AI systems" are platforms that allow for shared decision-making between artists and machines as well as real-time improvisation [18].

Through the use of design fiction, Kantosalo *et al.,* (2021) provide a historical perspective, arguing that the concept of co-creation with intelligent systems has origins in ancient imaginations [19]. Their study serves as a reminder that co-creation is both technological and conceptual, influenced by the way society views robots as creative beings. While AI may democratize access and expand expression, warns that it also runs the risk of undermining the human-centered intentionality that has historically served as the foundation for art [3].

According to Vartiainen *et al.,* (2023) educators play a crucial role in mediating these partnerships by demonstrating how dialogic teaching techniques encourage students to critically consider the

moral and imaginative ramifications of AI tools [20]. Similar dynamics are seen in classroom settings, where children view AI-generated sketches as launching pads for creative exploration rather than finished pieces [21]. This is in line with the viewpoint of Salta *et al.,* (2024), who suggest that AI-driven architectural visualization is more of an exercise in extended imagination than it is in authorship [10].

Notably, Zhu *et al.,* (2024) and Fernández-Castrillo stress that cooperation goes beyond individual artists to online communities, where standard notions of ownership are challenged by group urging, voting, and remixing processes [22,11]. Co-creation thus turns into a distributed act that is a part of a socio-technological ecosystem.

All things considered, this research show that incorporating AI into visual art reframes rather than diminishes the role of the artist. Regardless of whether they are seen as an interlocutor, conductor, or editor, the artist still has agency, however it is now shared with the algorithmic systems they interact with. Therefore, the future of visual art is a negotiation of boundaries, intents, and shared creativity rather than a contest between humans and machines.

5. Discussion

A significant shift in our concept of artistic agency and creativity may be seen in the relationship between visual art and artificial intelligence. It is becoming increasingly apparent from the reviewed literature that the role of the artist is changing fundamentally. The incorporation of AI systems that can produce intricate visual outputs with little human input is challenging traditional ideas of the artist as the exclusive creator of meaning and aesthetic expression. This change does not necessarily mean that human agency will disappear; rather, it means that human agency will be rearranged within a new creative ecosystem that is shared with clever algorithms.

The dispersion of control within the creative process is among the most important advances. Artists are now co-directors or curators of the results created in partnership with AI systems rather than the only creators. A layered authorship is introduced by the human-AI interaction, in which both writers contribute to the finished product, albeit in distinct ways. The system performs visual alterations based on massive data inputs, while the artist gives conceptual guidance through judgments, editing, and suggestions. However, this shared authorship brings up difficult issues of responsibility, ownership, and the very meaning of creativity. Additionally, it implies that artistic agency is now relational shaped by the interplay between computer response and human intention instead than being a fixed attribute.

Simultaneously, the concept of originality, which has long been considered essential to the worth of art, is being reexamined. The fact that AI-generated images are frequently taken from large datasets made up of pre-existing artworks raises concerns regarding the boundaries between appropriation and inspiration. Consequently, it becomes difficult to distinguish between algorithmic recombination and original expression. Both legal and aesthetic frameworks that rely on distinct authorship and provenance are put to the test by this ambiguity. Some contend that the intentionality and emotion typically associated with artistic endeavor are absent from AI-generated art, while others assert that creativity can be reinterpreted as the capacity to produce original combinations, independent of the source. Deeper philosophical conflicts regarding the definition of creative worth in the era of automation are reflected in these opposing viewpoints.

AI simultaneously opens up new avenues for creative cooperation. Many AI systems now serve as creative collaborators rather than just tools, encouraging human creativity and opening up new avenues for investigation. When AI is used to help with inspiration, composition, or visual experimentation, this collaborative model is particularly clear. This interplay, which provides a sort of conversation with the computer that produces surprising results, enhances the creative process

for many artists. Furthermore, this kind of cooperation could democratize access to artistic production by enabling people with little technical expertise to create intricate works of art. But this democratization is not uniform. Not all artists have equal access to sophisticated tools, digital literacy, and the capacity to properly direct AI systems.

The ethical ramifications of AI in art go beyond productivity and aesthetics. Significant discussion has been generated by worries about copyright violations, data transparency, and the exploitation of artistic creations for AI model training. Because artists tend to use similar tools and produce comparable results, there is also a chance that reliance on AI could result in style uniformity. This brings up important issues regarding the loss of cultural context in art-making and the degradation of variety. Therefore, even if AI opens up new creative possibilities, it also necessitates careful consideration and thoughtful incorporation into artistic endeavors.

In conclusion, the use of AI into visual art represents a philosophical and cultural shift in addition to a technological advancement. It forces a reconsideration of authorship, creativity, and the essence of the artist. AI calls for a reconsideration of the artist's role, one that necessitates being open to innovation while also being mindful of the ethical, legal, and cultural ramifications. Embracing a new paradigm where art is co-created through shared intention and emergent interaction is the way forward, rather than having to choose between humans and machines.

6. Conclusion

The use of artificial intelligence into the visual arts signifies a paradigm shift in the 21st-century understanding of creativity, authorship, and artistic agency, in addition to a technological breakthrough. It is clear from the synthesis of recent literature that artificial intelligence (AI) is both providing new tools and chances for creative expression and challenging conventional ideas of what it means to be an artist. AI is increasingly acting as a collaborator rather than just a tool or media. It can mimic, produce, and reinterpret visual language in ways that complement and occasionally impede the creative process of humans.

The reinterpretation of artistic agency is at the heart of this change. In methods that use generative models like Midjourney, DALL·E, or Stable Diffusion, the artist's position has changed from being the only creator to that of a co-director or conceptual guide. Today, artists navigate a creative world that is shared with the algorithmic logic of machines as they engage in prompting, curating, editing, and refining processes. This change in agency is more of a redistribution, where the focus of creativity broadens to encompass the dynamic interplay between human input and machine-generated output, rather than a loss of control. This new paradigm creates opportunities for increased authorship and communal production by making agency relational and context-dependent.

At the same time, a fundamental component of traditional art appraisal, the idea of uniqueness, is being critically reexamined. The issues of plagiarism, imitation, and intellectual property have gained attention as a result of AI systems being trained on enormous collections of previously created artwork. The uniqueness and unpredictable results of intricate algorithms now serve as the primary criteria for the originality of AI-generated works rather than just human intentionality. This has sparked discussions on the legal and institutional legitimacy of AI art, with some academics arguing for the development of new categories like "AI-generated works" to account for the hybrid character of these works. Thus, a wider cultural movement away from the concept of individual brilliance and toward collaborative and iterative creation is reflected in the changing definition of originality.

AI's capacity for collaboration has also become a recurring theme in theory and practice. Artists and designers are using AI more and more in professional studios, therapy settings, and classrooms

not just as a facilitator, but as a responsive agent that makes a significant contribution to the creative process. This co-creative connection fosters a vision of shared authorship and creative discourse, challenging the dichotomy of human against machine. However, because it relies on comparable algorithms, this development raises ethical questions about accessibility, cultural bias in training datasets, and the homogeneity of artistic expression.

In summary, the intersection of artificial intelligence and visual art demands a reconsideration of the fundamental ideas that have traditionally characterized the creation of art. In addition to being academic, the issues raised such as who produces, what constitutes originality, and the form of collaboration are also profoundly philosophical and moral. AI encourages a critical expansion of creative practice that prioritizes flexibility, reflection, and receptivity to new ways of meaning-making, rather than replacing the human artist. The future of visual art depends on embracing AI as a challenge and a stimulus for rethinking the role of the artist in a digitally intertwined society, rather than fighting against these developments as the lines between human and machine continue to blur.

Acknowledgement
This research was not funded by any grant.

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