

Framing AI images: Authentic Art or Fraud?



If you have not heard about AI, then you must be living under a rock. Artificial Intelligence, better known as AI, is now everywhere and used by everyone. AI is an all-rounder technology that can do *anything*. Not only it can help you write an argumentative essay about artificial intelligence, but it can also *make* art. AI can generate any type of art such as paintings, photos, and even songs, depending on what you ask for. In order to understand AI-generated artwork better, a free AI website called “OpenArt” was used for this essay. If you want AI to create a piece of artwork, you first need to tell it how; write a prompt first and then explain what type of image you would like it to create. After writing different prompts and searching through the various generated images, a prompt was finally selected: “Show a kid playing with a puppy in a forest”. As a result, this photo-like image displayed a little kid holding one of the puppy’s paws with his hands, both standing in what appears to be an immense green forest. Although

very accessible and easy to use, this new technology has raised concerns about whether AI-generated artworks are truly considered *authentic* art. But before exploring authenticity and its role in AI, something that must be understood first is the concept of 'aura'. As introduced by Walter Benjamin in his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", an aura is referred to as the "mystical" presence that an original work of art possesses, such as its historical context, story, time period, place, etc. The concept of aura is linked to the concept of authenticity since both imply that an original work of art is one-of-a-kind, meaning it carries the story of its creation, the intentions of the artist, and the experiences of those who have witnessed it. Although AI-generated artwork is art and has provided a new way for people to experience and enjoy it more easily, it cannot be considered *authentic* art due to its lack of aura, human essence, obvious emotional disconnect, and mass accessibility.

First, AI-generated artwork is not authentic due to its lack of human essence. At first glance, the "Kid & Puppy" may look like an adorable picture, however, after further observation, there are a lot of things that make this AI art very different from 'original' art. As Benjamin stated in his essay on the concept of aura, "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (Benjamin 4). This AI image cannot be called authentic as it does not possess the "human" aura in it. Its quality gives the photo a distorted and unrealistic appearance that does not make it very attractive for the public to contemplate, but most importantly, it does not carry with it the artist's intention. AI is programmed to generate any kind of image based on a prompt written by a human, but even so, AI generates endless variations of an image. This is why AI would never be able to create the exact artwork that the user has in mind, due to not being able to understand a human's purpose or intentions. AI artwork cannot

carry the artist's intention that led them to create this piece of art because AI is the one creating the piece and not the artist, and even with very detailed instructions, the artwork itself would just never be what expected because AI and the artist are not the same person. Taking the example of the "Kid & Puppy" image, this picture does not depict correctly the intention of the artist as it did not display a kid playing with a puppy and instead displayed the kid holding the puppy's paw, demonstrating how AI does not take in consideration the artist's passion and vision. Thus, this is why AI-generated artwork is not authentic art as it does not possess and transmit any kind of 'human' essence.

Additionally, another reason why AI artwork cannot be cataloged as authentic is because of its lack of emotional connection. After further analyzing and observing the "Kid & Puppy" AI image, there is an obvious absence of an 'emotional' aura in it. Benjamin touches on the topic of original art and its connections to emotions, remarking that "This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence" (Benjamin 3). This demonstrates that art's essence lies not solely in its final appearance but in the complex creative process undertaken by the artist, from beginning to end. However, as stated in the previous paragraph, AI-generated artwork lacks the involvement of the user in its creation, causing it unable to convey the artist's intentions authentically. Consequently, AI-generated images often lack the emotional essence for not having that 'human' touch, impeding viewers from establishing meaningful emotional bonds with the artwork, causing a sense of emptiness within the work. While AI artwork may contain visual elements like colors, figures, or animals like any normal piece of art, it often lacks the 'mystical' aura that resonates with viewers and drives them to return to contemplate it. Thus, AI-generated art is considered inauthentic as it lacks the emotional aura that connects people with the artwork.

Finally, AI artwork cannot be considered authentic due to AI's widespread mass accessibility and reproduction. As stated before, AI has recently become a trending topic in society, and there is no doubt that its popularity will continue to grow in the next few years. However, this might become a problem as mass accessibility and use will further diminish AI-generated art's aura, making them completely inauthentic. In his essay, Benjamin talks about the massive accessibility and reproduction that has affected art throughout the years, taking the example of photography and film, he discusses how mechanical reproduction diminishes the aura of the original artwork by creating multiple copies, stating that "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (Benjamin 4) and further declaring, "by making many reproductions, it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (Benjamin 4). This shows that using AI global websites that can create and spread AI-generated images to a transnational audience diminishes the exclusivity and traditional value of the work's 'unique' aura. As AI technology continues to gain popularity in society, its widespread use threatens to deteriorate the 'mystical' aura associated with AI-generated art. Anybody would now be able to make the same art as you with the AI's same qualities and appearance. It will no longer possess that 'exclusive' essence that makes an artwork unique due to AI's massive usage throughout the whole world. Thus, this is why AI artworks cannot be depicted as authentic due to their massive usage and reproduction that diminishes their 'unique' aura.

Based on Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", a piece of art is called 'authentic' if it possesses an aura or "mystical" presence, meaning that artworks are considered authentic and original if they carry important elements such as transmitting the author's intention, feelings, historical context, story, time period, etc. Even though AI-generated artworks might be art, they are not considered 'authentic' art because

of their lack of aura, meaning they lack human essence, obvious emotional disconnect with their audience, and due to AI's mass accessibility and reproduction that diminishes the artwork's 'exclusive' essence. Although the topic of AI-generated art has sparked debates about whether this new technology should be acceptable and whether it will forever change the way art is created, it is certainly an interesting topic that raises questions about what path the human population is going to take and what future it will bring us. But who knows, maybe AI is just the beginning and the concept of authenticity will slowly end up disappearing.

Bibliography

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