Can Artificial Intelligence Become an Independent Creative Artist?

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Abstract. The works generated by artificial intelligence (AI) have attracted widespread attention and controversy in the art world. Although AI possesses powerful capabilities, whether it truly possesses independent creative abilities remains a subject of debate. This article engages both art philosophy and examples of AI technology to discuss whether AI can become an independent creative artist at its current stage of development. Beginning with the artistic philosophy definitions proposed by George Dickie, Jerrold Levinson, and Arthur Danto, representative AI technologies (such as NeRF, Midjourney, GAN, etc.) are then introduced, with specific cases such as the AI-generated work Edmond de Belamy selected to explore the role of AI in artistic creation. The study reveals that while AI demonstrates extensive capabilities in simulation and image generation, its production process demonstrates three key deficiencies: the technical aspect is constrained by algorithmic architecture, the creative aspect relies on existing data, and the value aspect relies on the social significances assigned by humans themselves. Therefore, AI cannot engage in independent creation, as humans play a primary role in the artistic creation process.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Artistic Creative Roles, Philosophy

1. Introduction

In the past three years, Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) has made significant breakthroughs in development. A report released by Tencent Research Institute points out that, in 2022, image generation models from DALL·E 2 and Stable Diffusion to chatbots such as ChatGPT have continuously taken the internet by storm, and their powerful content generation capabilities have had a huge cultural impact. This technological explosion has made AI-generated content a subject of intense interest across industrial and academic spheres alike. In 2022, an AI-generated work named Théâtre d'Opéra Spatial won the Grand Prize at the Colorado Art Expo in the United States. The China Artists Association has included 'AI Art' in its call for entries for the 2023 exhibition, rapidly increasing the influence of AI art. With continuous advancements in technology, people are increasingly concerned about whether AI can engage in independent creation and replace humans in the art industry. Debate over the role of humans in AI art creation has also become unprecedentedly intense. Some scholars, such as Helena Matute et al., have explored the reasons behind the current state of AI development. They believe that certain rejections of AI-created art

stem from the subjective nature of people's preferences for artworks, as human opinion is not always based on the quality of the works themselves. When evaluating machine-generated artworks, human rejection is often a result of inherent biases against artificial means of creation [1]. In addition, scholars such as Anjan Chatterjee have explored the significance as well as the functions of artificial intelligence. Chatterjee argues that AI requires neither emotional capacity nor life experiences, serving instead as a collaborative partner in the creative process [2].

However, these studies all have their limitations in that they do not define from the outset whether AI-created works are art. Can all AI-created works be considered art? This article will, first and foremost, define why certain AI-created works can be called art. Then, it will further analyse the roles of both AI and humans in the creation of art.

Based on the above background, this paper approaches the issue from philosophical theory as well as technological perspectives. It selects representative examples of AI creation technology, such as the award-winning Midjourney Théâtre D'opéra Spatial, and applies the theories of George Dickie, Jerrold Levinson, and Arthur Danto to support the definition of AI art. All three philosophers converge in that they define art not through intrinsic qualities alone, but through the viewer's experiential context and assigned values. Additionally, these three philosophers have explored the criteria for viewers capable of defining art from different dimensions, including the viewer's identity, literacy in art history, and professional theoretical background. By synthesising the theories of these three philosophers, this research can better assert that art created with AI participation can be defined as art, enabling deeper analysis of the distinct roles of humans and AI in the collaborative creation of art.

2. Technical layer: AI relying on human instructions, choices and professional judgment

George Dickie defines art in terms of the artist, the work of art, the public, and the art world. Dickie's 1984 monograph The Art Circle posits that “a work of art is an artifact created for presentation to the artworld public”, building upon his earlier assertion [3]. Earlier, Dickie argued that “anyone who sees herself as a member of the artworld is a member of the artworld”, and that anyone has the freedom to create and interpret art [4]. Dickie’s emphasis is that the public is the main body for art creation. Art belongs to and serves the public, and AI technology provides ordinary people the ability to create art.

AI technology is now widely used by platforms such as neuralstyle.art, which allows users to convert photographs into high-definition artwork, providing advanced style transfer technology to a wider audience. Neural Style Transfer (NST) captures the essence of photography while reinterpreting it through the stylistic characteristics of masters such as Van Gogh and Picasso. The process involves extracting content from the base image, extracting styles from reference artwork, and then combining them to produce a new image, but a human needs to select both the content and style images to guide the AI in generating the desired output [5].

In addition to image processing, AI has also revolutionised 3D modelling by converting hand-drawn sketches into detailed 3D models. Neural Radiation Field (NeRF) further extends AI's contribution to 3D modeling by constructing realistic 3D models from 2D photos. By analyzing multiple images captured from various angles, NeRF can learn to generate new scenes, thereby efficiently creating 3D effects [6]. For example, NVIDIA's Instant NeRF can quickly generate high-resolution 3D scenes, transforming simple photos into immersive environments. However, the input of 2D images must still be filtered by humans before conversion, and once the 3D image is rendered, human expertise and experience are required to optimize the final results [7].

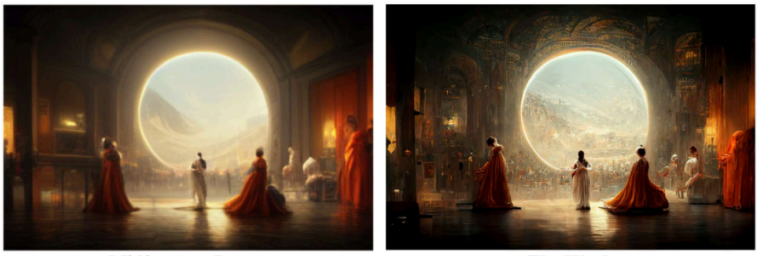
All these technologies share the commonality that AI merely handles the formatting and converting of the original image without adding any ideas, and the selection of the original photo's content remains a human task. Although AI expedites the modeling process, the initial and final phases still rely heavily on human expertise to ensure that the work conforms to artistic and functional standards. Hence, without human involvement and human command, AI generations cannot be produced or validated. There are many more such examples such as Adobe Photoshop Neural Filters... Although these technologies are already easily understood and operated by the public, the AI is only a tool in the creation process. The interaction between the AI and the human is the core of the process.

3. Creative layer: AI relying on human aesthetics and life experience

Jerrold Levinson's theory of art emphasizes that the identification of an artwork does not depend only on the intrinsic qualities of the work itself but more on what society and the viewer perceive it to be and what the creator wishes to present as 'art regard.' The style of a previous artwork can be interpreted as 'art regard,' and when a work possesses characteristics analogous to a previous artwork, it may be regarded as art. This 'regard' includes the common identity of social, cultural, and historical contexts, as well as a specific processing and understanding of the work [8].

Théâtre d'Opéra Spatial's artistic validation stems precisely from its intertextual dialogue with art history, evidenced by its 2022 Colorado State Fair victory where judge Dagny McKinley noted immediate Renaissance resonances. Sebastian Smee, an art critic for the Washington Post, stated the textures and lighting were reminiscent of the late 19th century artist Gustave Moreau. According to Levinson's theory, Théâtre d'Opéra Spatial has stylistic similarities to Renaissance works and Gustave Moreau, so it can be considered a work of art [9].

Jason M. Allen employed Midjourney in the creation of this work, which portrays an imaginative scene. The work combines a classical composition with futuristic elements, breaking the boundaries of traditional art and inviting the viewer to stand at the intersection of history, art, and fantasy.



Midjourney Image | The Work

Figure 1. Image generated by Allen using Midjourney [10]

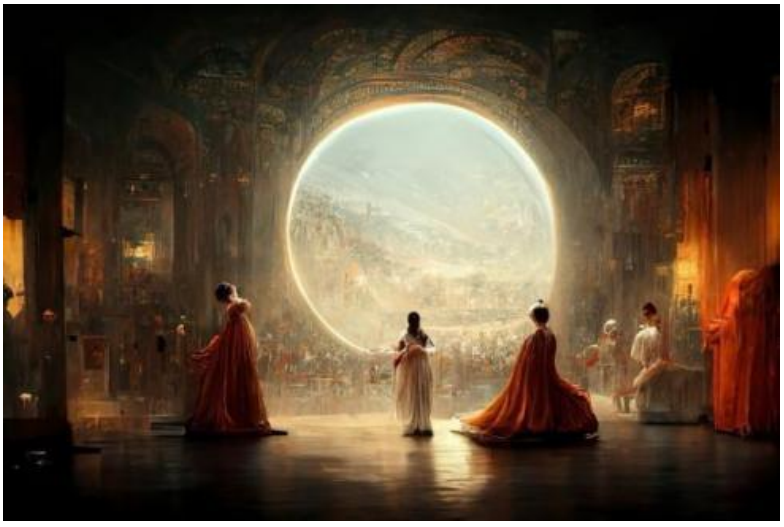


Figure 2. Jason M. Allen—Théâtre d'Opéra Spatial—2022 [10]

The creative process began with Midjourney-generated base imagery (Figure 1), which Allen subsequently refined through Adobe Photoshop to alter elements from the Midjourney image, before finally using Gigapixel AI to improve the clarity of the image. Comparing the Midjourney image with the final winning work (Figure 2), it is evident that Jason M. Allen's additions resulted in significant enhancement of the image's realism. For example, the people's hairstyles and the folds of their clothes were blurred in the Midjourney generated image, whereas Allen's additions resulted in clearer, more realistic textures and hairstyles. This demonstrates that although AI tools like Midjourney can generate images based on textual clues, they lack the creativity, emotion, and life experience unique to human artists [11]. In this case, the human artist is responsible for conceptualising the initial idea, and selecting and refining cues from the AI-generated output, as well as processing it for final adjustments to improve its aesthetics and correct any generative errors. The AI technology helps the artist visualise the idea, but does not create the artwork independently. This partnership suggests that AI technology is an aid to expanding artists' creative capabilities, not a replacement.

4. Value layer: AI relying on human sociality and value given

Philosopher Arthur Danto argues that the artistry of a work is determined by the 'theory of art' and the 'context of art', and that a work becomes art only when it is placed within the framework of the 'art world' and understood as an expression or statement of 'art'. George Dickie further expanded on Danto's ideas. The core of Dickie's theory is that the status of an object as 'art' is determined by members of the 'art world'— (such as artists, museum curators, art critics, etc.)—according to established rules. These members often possess the ability to appreciate art, enabling them to more easily recognise the value of a work. Since art institutions typically include such members, when an object is recognised by an art institution, it can be called art [12]. Created by the Paris-based artist collective Obvious, Edmond de Belamy sold for $432,000 (GBP 337,000) at Christie's in 2018, far exceeding its initial estimate of $7,000 to $10,000, which proves that it is recognized by art institutions. The work was created by feeding a dataset of 15,000 portraits, from the 14th to the 20th century, into the Generative Adversarial Network (GAN) [13]. GAN architecture deploys dual neural networks: a Generator synthesizing novel images from datasets, and a Discriminator evaluating authenticity [14]. For the first time, GAN enables the fusion of machine-autonomous

creation and art-historical stylistic inheritance, with algorithms generating new images based on deconstructing Rembrandt's light and shadow techniques and Ingres' line expressions.

During the creation of the work, Obvious's artists are responsible for managing the dataset, selecting specific portraits to train the GAN, and fine-tuning the algorithm's parameters to achieve the desired end result. While the collection and replenishment of the upfront data repository often rely on humans, human supervision during the generation process is also important as it guides the AI's learning process and directly influences the outcome of the resulting images. Without humans, the AI would lack the necessary data, context, and insights, and ultimately would not be able to create works of art that meet universal artistic standards and sentiments. The creation of GAN is also a result of human ingenuity, as humans have tried to combine generators with discriminators, expanding a new way of using AI. More importantly, humans put the generated works into the art market. GAN technology alone cannot make the generated images recognized by institutions like Christie's. Instead, it is the human dissemination of these images that enables the works to be seen by art institutions. Only then can the artistic value of the works be recognized by the art world, and the works can be called art.

5. Discussion

Based on the aforementioned, it can be inferred humans are currently an integral part of art creation. However, as technology evolves in the future, AI is also anticipated to play a more central role in art creation. For example, on 6 February 2025, SECQAI launched the world's first Quantum Large Language Model (QLLM), capable of training and reasoning at unprecedented speeds, paving the way for self-aware AI systems [15]. Just as human consciousness may stem from neurons involved in quantum entanglement, future AI systems may similarly develop a synthetic sense of self. The concept of AI consciousness is fundamentally related to the unique properties of quantum computing.

6. Conclusion

This study is dedicated to exploring whether AI can create art independently. It is found that most AI-generated works predominantly satisfy philosophical criteria for art while achieving remarkable visual sophistication. However, there is a triple dependency on the technical, creative and value aspects in AI creation, which limits its ability to become an independent creative artist. Technically, AI is limited by algorithmic architecture; regarding its creative abilities, it is dependent on existing data; and value-wise it needs human beings to give it meaning. Despite quantum AI possessing advanced reasoning and problem-solving capabilities, it remains devoid of the lived experience and existential comprehension inherent to human consciousness. AI enables broader creative access, yet its status remains strictly tool-based within the creative workflow. The centrality of human agency in art creation proves irrefutable. Therefore, AI cannot be an independent creative artist. The study also shows that the rise of AI art does not diminish the position of the human creator, but clearly demonstrates that humans need art, art needs humans, and the presence of AI deepens rather than weakens this connection. It also demonstrates that though art is inclusive and allows for diversity of form, the soul of art lies not in pixels or algorithms, but in the beauty of human behaviour.

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