

ENEMY OR COLLABORATOR? THE IMAGE OF AI AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ART JOURNALS

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Annotation. This paper investigates the reshaping of contemporary art through artificial intelligence, rejecting simplistic claims of technological displacement. By analyzing discussions in major art journals and applying theoretical models it reveals the adaptation of artists and cultural institutions to AI integration. The analysis traces the shift from artist to system architect, highlights institutional pressures from digital platforms, and confronts fundamental questions about aesthetic value. Drawing on current debates about socio-technical imaginaries, the argument centers on the necessity of critically engaging with power dynamics in AI deployment – ensuring that human agency endures within cultural creation.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; contemporary art; post-AI; art of protocol; museums; aesthetic value; human agency; algorithmic culture; socio-technical imaginaries; digital institutions.

Introduction. The intersection of art and emerging technology, particularly artificial intelligence, remains fraught with ambiguity. While early enthusiasm in major English-language art publications centered on AI's capacity to produce visual works, that fascination has evolved into a deeper inquiry: can algorithmic systems supplant human artistic expression?

Publications like *ArtReview* reflect this complexity by assembling diverse voices – artists, theorists, and critics – engaged in sustained dialogue about the implications of a post-AI artistic condition. These exchanges move beyond the reductive narrative of machine versus maker. Instead, they confront how technological transformation redefines authorship, intention, and value.

Artists today are no longer passive consumers of AI tools. Many have taken active roles in shaping these systems – designing custom models or adapting algorithms to achieve specific aesthetic outcomes. Their work pushes boundaries that were previously unattainable. Yet underlying this technical engagement is a profound question: when anyone can generate an image from a brief textual prompt, what does it mean to be an artist?

This shift extends beyond creators to those who mediate and present art. Institutions once defined artistic legitimacy through curated exhibitions and institutional authority. That authority now faces competition from digital platforms where visibility is determined by algorithmic logic rather than curatorial selection. The result is not just changing access but divergent evaluations within professional circles – some embracing the new terrain while others reject it as a dilution of artistic integrity.

Main part. The term itself now serves as a threshold, not a conclusion. At the pivotal *ArtReview* roundtable, figures like Avery Singer, Simon Denny, Holly Herndon, Mat Dryhurst, and Jon Rafman questioned whether the era of simply responding to AI's emergence had truly passed [1]. For Matt Dryhurst, the core issue lies in AI's elusiveness: it operates as a concept “even more slippery than the internet.

The implications redefine artistic practice. Dryhurst and Herndon advance “the art of protocol” as a framework: genuine creativity in this century doesn't begin with a single image but with constructing systems capable of endless variation. As Dryhurst puts it, “Art happens when an agent establishes rules or boundaries.” Here, the artist functions not just as creator but as architect – designing the underlying logic that shapes what emerges from platforms and algorithms.

Yet this view demands deeper scrutiny. Recent arguments in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* challenge the idea that mass-produced AI art – generated by non-specialists using basic prompts through tools like DALL-E – can bear full aesthetic weight beyond formal qualities. Unlike earlier procedural systems such as AARON by Harold Cohen, where intention was woven into code, these outputs deliver results that feel more mechanical than meaningful. They resemble artifacts shaped by process rather than vision – proximate to objects but distant from traditional notions of art.

If Dryhurst defines the artist's role as crafting protocols, philosophical critique insists that the protocol and its outcome are not interchangeable. The artist emerging in the post-AI era does more than configure algorithms – she restores agency to the creative sequence of permeation, generation, and selection, transforming mass-produced AI output into work that carries genuine intention.

If artists redefine their practices around protocols, the institutions that exhibit their work face a fundamental challenge from the new technological landscape. In another article, ArtReview Alistair Hudson argues that new «technology-driven institutions», such as the Outernet in London or teamLab Planets in Tokyo, attracting huge crowds, directly challenge the authority of traditional museums [2]. This creates a visible division between the «popular» appeal of immersive digital spectacles and the integrity of the traditional museum. However, Hudson argues that this opposition is more untenable. He calls for a new model, a more flexible, responsive, and technologically integrated form of institution.

This situation creates a deep divide in the museum community. On one hand, traditional institutions often respond to the challenge of rhetoric of «critical exceptionalism», contrasting their intellectual depth with that of new players' «superficial spectacle». However, Hudson convincingly argues that this opposition is more untenable. The world is no longer divided into «elitist» and «mass», «critical» and «entertainment» – these categories have collapsed under the pressure of a post-digital reality, where every viewer is both a consumer and a content producer.

Moreover, pressure on the museum model comes not only from outside but also from within. Academic research captures the fundamental transformation of institutional roles. In 2025, a group of researchers at ScienceDirect proposed a typology of «socio-technical imaginaries» for AI in museums, highlighting four development scenarios: «Infinite Canvas», «Smart Keeper», «Abolished Curator», and «Open Archive» [3].

This study highlights that AI integration is not a neutral technological upgrade, but the field of intense struggle between different visions of future cultural heritage. The choice of a scenario is a decision that determines whether a museum remains a place of expertise or becomes a platform for user experience.

Conclusion. The portrayal of AI in English-language art journals has evolved beyond binary oppositions. No longer depicted as a mechanized threat poised to annihilate creative expression, nor celebrated as a mystical tool that effortlessly elevates artistic output, the discourse now centers on nuance. AI appears as an influential partner – capable, but not self-determining – demanding renegotiation of the conditions under which it operates.

Artists must now engage with technical infrastructure not only as creators but as designers of systems and protocols, confronting ethical sourcing of training data and redefining authorship in shared workflows. Museums, in turn, are being pushed to abandon their traditional identity as static repositories. Their function shifts toward adaptive, interactive spaces capable of mediating the fragmented realities of contemporary art production.

The central challenge is no longer whether AI belongs in the artistic process – hostile or helpful – but how control over its deployment is structured. Jon Rafman observes that governance around AI remains ambiguous, with existing legal and corporate models – copyright regimes, proprietary access – often reinforcing dominant structures.

These frameworks can silence emerging or non-conformist voices. Artistic critique must therefore persist in questioning power imbalances, resisting passive acceptance of algorithmically shaped narratives. The image of AI in culture should not be passively rendered by code; it must be actively contested and redefined through human judgment and critical practice.

References

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