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Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Artistic Creativity

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Abstract: Generative artificial intelligence has moved from the laboratory into the studio, the gallery, and the streaming service, reshaping what it means to make, own, and evaluate art. This paper examines the transformation of artistic creativity under AI across four dimensions: the technological shift from GANs to diffusion-based systems, the philosophical question of whether machines can be creative, the empirical record of human–AI collaboration, and the legal, economic, and aesthetic consequences for artists. Drawing on recent empirical research, legal analysis, and computational creativity scholarship, it argues that AI is not simply a new tool but a cultural force that is redefining authorship, creative labour, and aesthetic standards — while also offering unprecedented opportunities for democratization and hybrid creative practice.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence; artistic creativity; human–AI collaboration; computational creativity; text-to-image generation

1. Introduction

Creativity has long been regarded as one of the defining characteristics of human uniqueness. In the arts, creative production has traditionally been understood as an intrinsically human activity rooted in emotion, lived experience, imagination, intention, and the capacity to assign meaning to aesthetic forms. Although technological tools have continuously expanded artists' expressive capabilities, the underlying assumption has generally been that technology functions as an instrument directed by human creators rather than as an autonomous source of creative production. Recent advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI), however, have increasingly challenged this distinction. With the emergence of systems such as DALL-E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion, machines are now capable of producing sophisticated visual works from relatively simple textual prompts, blurring the conventional boundary between human creativity and machine-generated content. AI-generated images have consequently moved beyond experimental technological demonstrations and entered art competitions, auction houses, advertising, design, and everyday commercial workflows, generating both enthusiasm and concern within artistic communities (Garcia, 2024).

The significance of this development extends beyond the technical capabilities of AI. The integration of generative AI into artistic production represents a broader cultural transformation that challenges established assumptions about what constitutes art, who can be regarded as an artist, and how creative authorship should be understood. As Garcia (2024) argues, the growing presence of generative AI in art constitutes a significant cultural shift that requires a reconsideration of conventional understandings of both art and the artist. In this context, the central issue is no longer simply whether machines can produce aesthetically appealing images. Rather, it concerns whether the processes through

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which AI systems generate artistic outputs can meaningfully be understood as creative, and how the increasing involvement of AI may transform the role of human artists. The question therefore shifts from whether AI can make art to what creativity means when artistic production is increasingly mediated or performed by intelligent machines.

These questions have become particularly visible through a series of high-profile controversies. A landmark example is the case of Théâtre D'opéra Spatial, an AI-generated image created by Jason Allen that received a prize at a state fair. The award generated widespread public debate concerning whether an AI-generated work should qualify as art and, more fundamentally, whose creative agency or "mind" should be considered responsible for the world represented in the image (McNamara, 2023). The controversy illustrates a fundamental tension in contemporary artistic practice: while generative AI can produce outputs that resemble conventional forms of artistic expression, questions remain regarding the source of creativity, intentionality, authorship, and artistic value behind those outputs. Such debates are further complicated by empirical evidence concerning human perception. A systematic review by Oksanen et al. (2023) finds that audiences are frequently unable to reliably distinguish AI-generated artworks from human-made artworks, even though AI-generated works may receive less favorable evaluations. This apparent contradiction—difficulty in identifying machine-generated art alongside persistent reservations about its artistic value—suggests that judgments of creativity are influenced not only by the visual characteristics of an artwork but also by beliefs about its creator and the process through which it was produced.

The emergence of generative AI therefore raises a broader question about the transformation of artistic creativity. Historically, creativity in the arts has been closely associated with human agency, intentionality, originality, and personal experience. Generative AI complicates each of these dimensions. Technologically, increasingly sophisticated models can generate novel visual combinations and stylistic variations at unprecedented speed and scale. Philosophically, their outputs challenge established definitions of creativity and raise questions about whether creativity requires consciousness, intention, or lived experience. At the level of artistic practice, AI is also creating new forms of human–machine collaboration in which artists increasingly act as prompt designers, curators, editors, selectors, and conceptual directors rather than solely as direct producers of visual forms. At the institutional level, meanwhile, legal systems, art markets, competitions, museums, and cultural communities are being forced to reconsider existing concepts of authorship, ownership, originality, artistic merit, and professional identity.

Against this background, this paper examines the transformation of artistic creativity in the age of generative AI through four interconnected dimensions. First, it considers the technology itself, examining how advances in generative AI have altered the possibilities and processes of artistic production. Second, it investigates the philosophy of machine creativity, focusing on whether AI-generated outputs can legitimately be characterized as creative and what criteria should be used to distinguish human from machine creativity. Third, it explores the empirical dynamics of human–AI collaboration, considering how artists interact with generative systems and how such interactions redistribute creative agency between humans and machines. Fourth, it examines institutional responses, including the evolving treatment of AI-generated art by law, markets, competitions, and broader aesthetic culture. By bringing these dimensions together, the paper seeks to move beyond the binary question of whether AI can replace human artists and instead examine how generative AI is reshaping the meaning, practice, evaluation, and institutional organization of artistic creativity itself.

2. The Technological Landscape: From GANs to Diffusion Models

The technical foundations of AI art have evolved rapidly. Early breakthroughs relied on Generative Adversarial Networks, exemplified by the Portrait of Edmond de Belamy produced by the collective Obvious, which sold at auction and became the object of intense scrutiny over authorship and authenticity (Cetinić & She, 2022). Contemporary systems, however, are dominated by transformer-based large language models and, above all, diffusion models, which generate images by progressively denoising random signals conditioned on text prompts (Kumar et al., 2026). Comparative analyses of these model families highlight trade-offs in controllability, interpretability, scalability, and creative diversity, and have motivated a taxonomy of AI-creative systems organized by generative mechanism, degree of human involvement, and domain specificity (Kumar et al., 2026).

Applications now span the full range of artistic domains — painting, drawing, music, and literature — with empirical studies indicating that over half concern visual arts and roughly a quarter concern music (Oksanen et al., 2023). AI tools are also used to analyze large-scale art-historical datasets, to enhance consumer experiences in online art shops, and to

provide virtual-reality access to cultural heritage sites (Oksanen et al., 2023). Yet the creative sector differs fundamentally from domains where AI excels: while AI accomplishments rely heavily on the conformity of data, creativity often exploits human imagination to generate original ideas that do not follow general rules — the "What if" questions a constrained learning system cannot readily address (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2021).

3. Philosophical Questions: Can Machines Be Creative?

Whether a program can be genuinely creative is a question with roots in the nineteenth century, when Ada Lovelace argued that machines could not originate anything (Ritchie, 2007). Contemporary computational creativity has largely converted this philosophical debate into an empirical one: rather than asking whether creativity is possible in principle, researchers ask what aspects of a program's behavior might be noted or measured to arrive at an empirically supported judgment that creativity has occurred (Ritchie, 2007). Ritchie's influential framework enumerates criteria concerning the relationship between a program's inputs and outputs, the novelty and value of generated artefacts, and the program's generalizability (Ritchie, 2007).

Evaluation methodologies have since matured considerably. Lamb, Brown, and Clarke synthesize perspectives from psychology, philosophy, cognitive science, and computer science on how creativity can be measured in humans and in computers (Lamb et al., 2018). Jordanous argues that creativity is best treated not as a single monolithic quality but as a collection of interrelated factors — such as originality, value, and productivity — that are more tightly defined and therefore more amenable to measurement (Jordanous, 2009). Standard assessment techniques descend from the Turing test tradition: if human judges cannot distinguish computer creativity from human creativity, the system is deemed to have achieved a satisfying level of creativity, as operationalized in the Consensual Assessment Technique, in which a pool of experts independently evaluate artefacts and an artefact is judged creative when evaluations are strong and inter-rater reliability is high (Carnovalini & Rodà, 2020).

Philosophically, the question remains open. Coeckelbergh observes that if creativity presupposes the capacity to evaluate art, then we must ask whether machines can be art consumers and evaluators at all — whether evaluation requires something like Colton's notion of "appreciation" (a system's capability to evaluate the artefacts it produces) or, more demandingly, consciousness and meaning-giving (Coeckelbergh, 2016). These debates matter practically: definitions of creativity shape the empirical criteria used to evaluate systems, the legal tests applied to machine outputs, and the cultural reception of AI art.

4. Human–AI Collaboration: The Empirical Record

The most consequential transformation may be not the replacement of artists by machines but the reconfiguration of the artistic process itself as a human–AI collaboration. Large-scale evidence supports this view. Analyzing over 4 million artworks from more than 50,000 unique users of text-to-image systems, Zhou and Lee found that AI significantly enhanced human creative productivity by 25% and increased the value of outputs — measured as the likelihood of receiving a "favorite" per view — by 50% (Zhou & Lee, 2024). Peak content novelty increased over time while average novelty declined, suggesting an expanding but inefficient idea space, and both peak and average visual novelty were reduced, indicating that stylistic conformity is a real cost of the new workflow (Zhou & Lee, 2024). The authors conclude that ideation and filtering become necessary skills in text-to-image practice, giving rise to "generative synesthesia" — the harmonious blending of human exploration and AI exploitation in new creative workflows (Zhou & Lee, 2024).

Experimental research complicates the picture. In three experiments with 560 participants, Messer found that co-created art is liked and recognized less than purely human art, especially when AI is used in the implementation stage; although co-created works are perceived as more novel, they are judged to lack creative authenticity, and artists who co-create are less admired (Messer, 2024). Importantly, two boundary conditions mitigate this effect: disclosing the level of artist involvement (e.g., training the algorithm on a curated set of images rather than prompting an off-the-shelf generator) and commercial context, where the effect diminishes (Messer, 2024). In the domain of poetry, McGuire and colleagues found that people were most creative writing on their own, compared with editing AI-generated text, but that this "creativity deficit" dissipated when participants co-created with AI rather than editing it — with creative self-efficacy identified as the underlying mechanism (McGuire et al., 2024). Co-creation, in other words, must be structured so that the human occupies the role of creator rather than editor.

Controlled comparisons of creative conditions reinforce the value of collaboration: studies of abstract art production find that human–AI collaborative works outperform both human-only and AI-only works on novelty–coherence balance, conceptual diversity, and variety (P et al., 2026). Generative AI systems thus function less as replacements for

human ingenuity than as collaborators that augment the creative process and challenge conventional notions of authorship (Bhambri & Khang, 2024).

5. The Transformation of Creative Labour and the Economy

While collaboration defines the positive face of the transformation, the economic reorganization of creative labour is its most contested dimension. Business leaders have already begun replacing human artistic labour with AI-generated images, and artists have responded with an organized protest movement (Goetze, 2024). Goetze argues — analyzing, substantiating, and critiquing the artists' claims — that AI image generators involve an unethical kind of labour theft: they extract value from the accumulated creative labour encoded in training data while displacing the workers whose labour is extracted (Goetze, 2024).

Community responses reveal the material stakes. Commentary surrounding AI art generation rejected the comparison of AI generation to collage, with artists' conceptions of injustice centering on the labour requirements of artistic production: it feels more like copying, and more unjust, when the work that previously demanded manual skill becomes trivially easy (Sarkar, 2023). Artist Kelly McKernan's testimony captures the anguish: working 30 hours on a painting that may not sell for months, while AI-generated images bearing her visual signature circulate without her consent (Sarkar, 2023). Sarkar observes that technological advances have repeatedly thrown the ideals of creativity and labour into crisis in artistic communities, forcing a re-evaluation of creativity in response to AI — a shift from material production toward critical integration (Sarkar, 2023).

Survey evidence from artists documents concrete harms: companies report cost reductions achieved through layoffs and the substitution of human roles with AI-driven solutions, with entry-level positions in film, television, and gaming particularly at risk, and the conceptual phase of projects a popular point of replacement — exemplified by Netflix Japan's layoffs of animators (Lovato et al., 2024). Economic analyses of music and digital art industries find both volatility and opportunity: AI has democratized content production and global exposure, yet longstanding questions remain about market revenue, artist compensation, and the ownership of AI-generated content, leading some to conclude that sustainable profitability depends on hybridizing human creative contribution with industrial AI efficiency and policy that protects intellectual property (Garg, 2025). Expert interviews in creative industries similarly emphasize that while AI expands creative possibilities, it raises concerns about originality, quality, market dynamics, job displacement, and declining artistic uniqueness — alongside still-evolving regulatory frameworks, particularly in the EU (Schinello, 2025).

Artist adaptation, however, is not uniform passivity. Research among digital artists in Manila identifies a three-tiered landscape — traditional artists, artists who blend AI with traditional methods, and artists using AI tools exclusively — with many artists willing to adopt AI to increase revenue, improve satisfaction, and reduce workload in line with client needs, even as the human element remains central to the creative process (Cajulis et al., 2025).

6. Authorship, Originality, and the Law

The transformation of creativity has outpaced the legal architecture built to protect it. Legal analysis points to significant gaps in copyright law regarding AI-generated art, particularly around the Human Authorship Requirement, with unresolved litigation against Midjourney and Google underscoring the ambiguities (Cunningham, 2025). In the United States, the case of Thaler v. US Copyright Office — in which the Copyright Office refused to register a work generated by an AI system — has become a touchstone for the question of whether machines can be authors (Cunningham, 2025). Scholars argue that legal frameworks must evolve to balance the protection of human creators with the realities of AI's capabilities, and note practical remedies such as data poisoning as a means for artists to protect their works from unauthorized training (Cunningham, 2025).

The provenance of training data is the crux of the matter. Because part of the training data for AI art generation may include copyrighted images, final outputs can embed other people's artistic contributions (Cetinić & She, 2022). Yet while debates rage over attribution, most recent sales of AI artworks have attributed authorship to the artist who produced the work using AI techniques, regardless of the narrative of machine authorship; the analogy to photography is instructive — it would be as absurd to credit the inventor of the camera for photographic authorship as to credit the developer of a model (Cetinić & She, 2022).

Jurisdictional differences further complicate the picture. In US law, "where the only similarity between two works relates to uncopyrightable elements, there can be no infringement" — bad news for artists whose styles are absorbed into models, since style itself is not protectable; UK law, by contrast, understands originality to presuppose the exercise of

substantial independent skill, labour, and judgement, offering more room for the original artist (McLoughlin, 2024). Distinctions between AI-generated and AI-assisted work are central to these debates, as are questions of accountability when AI-generated works infringe the intellectual property rights of others (Shrivastava, 2024). Underlying the doctrinal disputes is a philosophical challenge: AI-generated art tests whether traditional notions of creativity and authorship can survive the automation of artistic execution (Cunningham, 2025).

7. Aesthetic Consequences: Homogenization and Innovation

Beyond law and economics, AI is reshaping the aesthetic field itself — with contradictory effects. The democratizing promise is real: AI has opened visual creation to millions who lack formal training, and case studies document AI painters, DJs, performance artists, and music-accompaniment systems (Oksanen et al., 2023). But critics warn of a countervailing pressure toward stylistic sameness. Because generative models depend on pre-existing training data, their output is constrained by what the data contains: AI's reliance on training data may limit innovation and encourage stylistic repetition, producing a risk of aesthetic homogenization that could standardize artistic production and erode diversity (Virginia & Maribel, 2025). The empirical finding that average visual novelty declines even as productivity rises is consistent with this worry (Zhou & Lee, 2024).

Bias compounds the problem. The primary learning algorithms for AI are data-driven, and if training data are unevenly distributed or unrepresentative due to human selection criteria or labeling, the results after learning can be equally biased and ultimately judgemental, requiring periodic retraining even for systems initially trained on balanced data (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2021). Responding to homogenization, researchers suggest strategies such as prompt engineering and the combination of digital and manual techniques to preserve aesthetic diversity, alongside regulatory frameworks to protect originality (Virginia & Maribel, 2025).

Yet the aesthetic transformation also includes genuine novelty. AI-generated works are perceived as more novel than their human counterparts, even as they are judged less authentic (Messer, 2024). The tension between novelty and authenticity — and the finding that audiences value human-made art more in some studies even when they cannot tell it apart from AI art (Oksanen et al., 2023) — suggests that authenticity functions as an aesthetic category in its own right, one that the market for AI art has not yet resolved.

8. Democratization and New Modes of Practice

A further transformation concerns access. Text-to-image systems collapse the distance between idea and image, enabling people with no training in drawing, painting, or compositing to produce sophisticated visual artefacts. This democratization of art creation is among the most frequently cited opportunities of generative AI — along with the expansion of creative boundaries and the development of new collaborative and economic models (Garcia, 2024). The empirical record on market access is cautiously positive: AI adoption decreased the concentration of value capture among adopters, suggesting that the technology redistributes attention across a broader base of creators (Zhou & Lee, 2024).

New modes of practice are emerging in response. Human-in-the-loop systems combine human intuition, emotion, and intent with computational pattern-finding and generative ability, and interactive interfaces now enable iterative human guidance, constraint-setting, and feedback-based refinement (P et al., 2026). These developments point toward "computational co-creativity" as a distinct artistic genre rather than a mere automation of production (Kumar et al., 2026). At the same time, the concept of the artist is being reconfigured: if ideation and filtering become the core skills of AI-assisted practice (Zhou & Lee, 2024), then artistic skill migrates from material craft to conceptual direction, curation, and critical judgment — the "critical integration" identified by Sarkar (Sarkar, 2023). For education, this implies that future artists must learn not only traditional technique but also how to direct, evaluate, and ethically deploy generative tools (Constant, 2025).

9. Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is transforming artistic creativity in ways that are neither simply liberating nor simply destructive. Technologically, the shift from GANs to diffusion models has put generative capacity in the hands of millions, while philosophical and empirical research has complicated the question of machine creativity: machines can produce outputs judged creative by established criteria, yet the most valuable creative work emerges from co-creation in which humans direct, filter, and integrate (Carnovalini & Rodà, 2020; Coeckelbergh, 2016; Zhou & Lee, 2024). Economically and legally, the technology has unsettled creative labour markets and authorship doctrines faster than institutions can adapt —

from the Human Authorship Requirement and Thaler to disputes over training data and style appropriation (Cunningham, 2025; Goetze, 2024). Aesthetically, it threatens homogenization even as it expands the space of the novel (Virginia & Maribel, 2025).

The research converges on a practical conclusion: the productive path forward is collaborative. Artists, technologists, and policymakers are urged to integrate AI into creative fields while preserving the cultural significance of human-driven expression (Cunningham, 2025), and to pursue the hybridization of human creative contribution with AI efficiency under transparent, balanced regulation (Garg, 2025; Schinello, 2025). The transformation of artistic creativity by AI is thus best understood not as the obsolescence of the artist but as the reinvention of what an artist is — a shift from the mastery of materials to the mastery of meaning, judgment, and collaboration in an era of generative machines (Garcia, 2024; Sarkar, 2023).

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