The Silent Expression: The ethical issues with meaningless AI-generated images entering the art scene
*Maria M. Hedblom*

Artistic creativity is no longer exclusive to biological agents. Trained on millions of text-to-image pairs, AI image-generators (e.g. Midjourney[[1]](#footnote-1)) can with high degrees of variability and accuracy produce award-winning images from prompts [1]. These systems can artistically recreate objects, portraits and well-defined attributes to above human-levels. However, as generative AI lacks both semantic grounding in their motifs and intent in the creation process, they are unable to ascribe any meaning to the art [4].

Despite counter-perspectives, [2] argues that art is a communication form through symbolism and visual metaphors by tapping into the shared emotional and conceptual spaces of the artist and the observer [3, 5]. Consider the satirical work by Banksy and Charlie Hebdo and the emotional work by Kahlo and Munch. Naturally, individual experiences and perspectives influence exactly how the art is read, but perceiving entails interpreting. As generative-AI tends to be trained on heavily biased data, the width of accidental expression and consequential interpretation shrinks, risking influencing both today’s perspectives as well as diluting the human voice in the developing art-history.

While there are many heavily discussed ethical issues with AI-generated art from artists’ perspectives on ownership, accountability and the future of jobs, the often-neglected issue of generating voice-less art without any intent deserves its place in the debate. This contribution aims to address the ethical issues from the art-observers’ perspective by investigating the triangular relationship between the semantics of art, the technology behind generative-AI and the facet of human interpretation.

**References**

[1] Jason Allen. (2022) How Jason Allen used AI to win Art Prize. Interview on: Disruption Theory, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAQz7NO2E\_U, accessed: 2023-06-10.

[2] Michael Balter. (2008) On the origins of art and symbolism. Science, 323(5915):709–711.

[3] Peter Gardenfors. (2004) Conceptual spaces: The geometry of thought. MIT press.
[4] Jon Garon. (2023) A practical introduction to generative ai, synthetic media, and the messages found in the latest medium. Synthetic Media, and the Messages Found in the Latest Medium.

[5] Zoltan Kovecses. (2010) Metaphor: A practical introduction. Oxford university press.

1. https://www.midjourney.com/, accessed: 2023-09-26 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)