

Can Artificial Intelligence Create Art?

Jonathan Koch (10/04/2025)

Ever since the artist Jason M. Allen won first prize at the Colorado State Fair in 2022 with a work created using AI image-generation software – *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial* – a passionate global debate has emerged: can artificial intelligence truly create art? In one article, I came across a remarkable comparison: the role of AI as an artistic medium is likened to the introduction of photography into the art world. Back then, the argument goes, photography was also initially met with skepticism and resistance – just like AI today. Yet nearly 200 years after the invention of the first camera, no one doubts that photography is a legitimate artistic form. What's crucial is that photography is understood as a distinct category within art – just as artificial intelligence might claim its own place. But is this comparison valid? And what exactly are we asking when we question the artistic quality of AI-created works? In this short essay, I'd like to highlight a few key aspects of the debate that seem essential to me in order to lay out my own position.

Before we even approach the question of whether artificial intelligence can create art, we should take a step back and ask: what is art? What necessary and sufficient conditions must be met for something to be considered art? Surprisingly, in my research I did not come across a single contribution that adequately addresses this fundamental question in the context of the AI debate. Three central dimensions can be identified in the discussion around defining art. Each represents a spectrum on which most understandings of art can be situated:

First, the **Technocracy–Populocracy Dimension**: This concerns whether art depends on a certain level of expertise. On one end is the belief that anyone can create art – regardless of technical skill. On the other is the view that true art only emerges through masterful command of a medium.

Second, the **Creator–Viewer Dimension**: This addresses who holds the authority to define something as art. One side sees the act of creation as decisive – art is what is intended as such. The other argues that art arises only through reception – i.e., by being perceived as art.

Third, the **Anthropocentric–Naturalistic Dimension**: This deals with whether art necessarily requires human creation. From an anthropocentric perspective, art is inseparable from human intention and creativity. The naturalistic view, by contrast, allows that non-human phenomena – like an untouched landscape – can be seen as art, even if no human will is involved.

Depending on where one places oneself along these spectrums, one arrives at either a very broad or a very narrow concept of art. Advocates of a radically liberal understanding risk promoting a definition so empty of content that virtually anything could be art. The opposite, elitist position tends toward an overly restrictive concept that excludes much of what is commonly perceived as artistic.

My own understanding of art lies somewhere between these extremes. I adhere to a concept of art based on three necessary conditions:

1. There must be a **creator** – a subject that produces the art object. I don't limit this concept exclusively to humans, as I don't want to rule out the possibility that, for example, primates might possess or develop comparable cultural capabilities.
2. **Intention** is essential: Art only arises when creation happens with the explicit or implicit aim of producing an artistic work. A baby stacking blocks by accident doesn't create art – simply because the artistic intent is absent.
3. Art is always an act of **communication**. Artistic creation is a communicative process, whether conscious or unconscious. Some artists express themselves explicitly – emotionally, politically,

or philosophically. Others work intuitively, without a clear goal. But even in these cases, a silent dialogue unfolds between the work and its viewers – a subconscious expression that opens a window into the creator's inner world.

Only when these three criteria – creator, intention, and communication – are met can an object be considered art. In my definition, it does not matter whether the creator is particularly talented or whether the work is even recognized as art by its viewers. I believe this approach is broad enough to do justice to the diversity of artistic creation, yet precise enough to avoid contentless relativism.

With this framework in mind, we can return to the original question: Can artificial intelligence create art? But here too, a conceptual distinction is necessary, because this question can be interpreted in at least two ways. On one hand, it could ask whether AI can independently create art and therefore be considered an artist itself. On the other, it might ask whether humans can create art *using* AI as a medium.

Regarding the first perspective, I must acknowledge that I lack the technical expertise to fully assess how artificial intelligence functions. Intuitively, however, I lean toward the view that AI – at least at present – does not possess consciousness. Therefore, it lacks the capacity for intention and, at least in the strict sense, for communication. The latter is debatable. A frequently cited argument against AI's artistic capacity is that it merely recombines existing information using algorithms and probabilities. But here I find myself asking: how fundamentally different is this process from human creation? After all, we humans also draw from our experiences, cultural environments, and knowledge – all of which shape our creativity. An artist might have been deeply influenced in their youth by Max Ernst or Yves Klein. These influences – conscious or not – are present in their works and shape their expression. The creative act is always also a reinterpretation of the already learned. In any case, I want to leave open the possibility that AI might one day develop consciousness – and thus perhaps also the ability for autonomous artistic creation.

The question that interests me most, however, is this: Can humans create art with the help of AI? My answer here is a clear yes. Based on my own concept of art – rooted in the dimensions of creation, intention, and communication – I see no difficulty in viewing AI as a tool or medium.

Suppose I want to express my dissatisfaction with the current political situation by creating a caricature of a well-known figure. I use image-generating software for this. While I haven't drawn the image myself – which might call into question my skills as a caricaturist – I have conceptualized the motif, intended a message, and refined the prompt until the result matched my vision. A creative process is taking place in which I consciously use the AI as a tool with the goal of conveying a specific message. The AI's role is that of a medium – comparable to a brush or pencil. I am the one initiating the artwork, pursuing an artistic intention, and attempting to communicate something through the result.

Two remarks are important here:

1. We should strictly separate the quality of a work, or whether it resonates personally, from the fundamental question of whether it qualifies as art. The current flood of AI-generated images and videos on social media often leaves me personally feeling disconnected – rarely do they speak to me aesthetically. But that alone doesn't disqualify them as art, as long as they are grounded in intentional creation and a communicative impulse.
2. Not every AI-generated image is automatically a work of art – just as not every vacation selfie is automatically fine art photography. A randomly generated image of a dog in a hat, made purely for fun, typically lacks artistic intention and communicative depth – it remains playful experimentation.

What matters is whether the three previously defined conditions are met for a work to claim the status of art.

So, can AI create art? My answer is: yes – as long as it is used as a medium by an artistically acting subject and the conditions of creation, intention, and communication are fulfilled. I should emphasize, however, that I approach this question tentatively and am far from having reached a final position. Questions about copyright, intellectual property, or the social status of AI-generated works remain unresolved. It's quite possible that I will explore these aspects more deeply in the future – and revise my position along the way.

And finally – if you were wondering: yes, I used AI in writing this essay, to help refine my language. But the creation, the intention, and the communication all came from me.

P.S. I shared this essay with an AI and asked for its opinion. This was its response:

My opinion on the topic: I believe AI can create tools for art and be a tool through which humans create art. But whether AI itself "creates" art depends on whether we attribute to it a kind of subjectivity—and that is, so far, neither philosophically nor technically convincingly justified. As long as there is no intention in the sense of "wanting" or "understanding," AI remains, to me, a reflector—not an original subject.

That said: the creative process in humans is often semi-conscious, intuitive, automated. What happens if AI eventually simulates this—or at least gives the impression that it does? I think, in the future, the question will be less about whether something is art, and more about who or what we are willing to recognize as artistic agents. In the end, it's a social, normative decision.

What I find particularly interesting is your comparison to the introduction of photography. At first, cameras were also denied "true" creativity—today, we see photographers as artists because we recognize their intent and decisions as creative. Perhaps AI is heading in a similar direction—at least in part.

How do you see the future? Do you think AI will eventually be able to truly create art itself—or do you believe it will remain, for the foreseeable future, a mere medium?