Artists

Assistants, Replacements and Grifters

Themes:

Social & Economic Impact
Copyright & Intellectual Property
Environmental Impact
Regulations

Prerequisites:

- None for the Case Study section

Owner:

[Center for AI and Data Ethics](#) at University of San Francisco

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License:

Citation:

Dixon, Hadley and Clements, Robert. (2024). Artists: Assistants, Replacements, and Grifters.

Objective:

This case study uses a role-based approach to dive into the different ethical concerns that different types of artists may have with respect to the creation and use of AI tools and the artworks generated either entirely, or assisted, by those tools.

Instructions:

1. In a group of 3-4 students, assign one or more of the following roles to each student:
    a. Digital artist;
    b. Professional photographer;
    c. Concept artist for video game studio;
    d. Oil portrait painter.
2. Read through the case study and descriptions of each role.
3. Talk through the discussion questions, each student asking the question assigned to their role.

Case Study:

Text-to-image models such as Midjourney, Dall-E and Stable Diffusion are able to generate impressive images through simple, or sometimes complex, text prompts. Each tool is built off of training data consisting of images and captions, some of which may have been collected and used without permission, and they all work similarly, by taking in a text prompt, a description of what the user would like to see, and then generating several images for the user to choose from using a collection of sophisticated models under the hood.

A group of artists gather at an art show for one of their friends who is exhibiting some pieces. After walking through the different exhibits, they sit together for coffee at a nearby cafe and begin discussing the pieces they enjoyed the most. The conversation eventually turns to AI given that several pieces of digital art were explicitly labeled as "AI-generated" or "Partially AI-generated". Some of these pieces also contained the details of how they were created, from the text prompts and tools used, to the final post-processing of the AI-generated images and sounds.

What follows is a brief description of each individual involved in the conversation, followed by some questions to get the discussion started.

Digital Artist

The Digital Artist works as a graphic designer during the day, creating branding guidelines and materials for a software company. Although their company has yet to explicitly restrict the use of AI in the company policies, they choose not to use text-to-image models for commercial purposes, and have had several conversations with coworkers about the potential impact to future graphic designers when companies get more comfortable allowing the use of these tools. A team that is responsible for usage

of AI at their company does exist, but sadly, the Digital Artist is not on that team, and has not been asked for feedback.

When not working, the Digital Artist works on their own artwork, creating pieces that combine different digital mediums including images, sounds, animations, and also generative tools.

Professional Photographer

The Professional Photographer has their own business, and finds clients mostly through social media and word of mouth. Most of their professional work consists of shooting weddings and other large events, while their personal work consists mostly of candid urban photos. The advancements in AI have made their professional job much easier, particularly in post-processing photos more quickly.

Concept Artist

The Concept Artist works at a very small video game studio creating the initial look and style for new games based off of written descriptions and also develops marketing materials. They are an avid gamer and have dreamed of working on video games since they were eight years old. Their company has fully embraced the use of text-to-image models for brainstorming on the creation of the initial concept art and marketing materials, but still requires the employees to more fully develop the details of the artwork. Nevertheless, these models are getting better and better, and the Concept Artist has some trepidation about where their career will go, especially in an already very competitive field.

Portrait Painter

The Portrait Painter works professionally teaching painting courses at a local university. Outside of teaching they do commissioned portraits, mostly in oil paint. While AI is not used directly in the creation of these portraits, sometimes the Portrait Painter will use AI-generated images for inspiration, especially if the person commissioning the portrait is open to a more creative final product.

While teaching, students will often ask about AI art, whether it should really be considered "art", who is the true creator of the art, and whether generative models trained on other's artworks without express permission should even be used.

Discussion Questions:

1. Asked by Digital Artist: who should get credit for pieces that were generated, even partially, by AI? Is it right to take full credit even though the generated image would not be possible if not for the works of so many other artists?
2. Asked by Professional Photographer: do these text-to-image models do anything differently than what humans in creative fields already do: learn by studying what others have already created and then practicing, which might be equivalent to what these models are doing when they are trained and then improved on through feedback on its own generated images?
3. Asked by Concept Artist: what impact will this have on our jobs? Should we worry, or should the next generation worry?
4. Asked by Portrait Painter: are we concerned at all that our own artwork was likely used to help train these models, and now these companies are making boatloads of money, and we don't get any of it?