

The Moral and Ethical Concerns of AI Image Models

Introduction

Over the past few years, artificial intelligence, or AI, has advanced rapidly. While some argue that the advancement of AI has been nothing but beneficial, artists have realized how detrimental it is to both their careers and the future of art. The nature of AI when it comes to art is harmful to artists because it relies mostly on stolen works, can take places in competitions instead of actual artists and often puts out harmful and/or offensive images.

To understand why AI art is so harmful, we first need to understand how it works. AI art generators rely on millions of images fed into its algorithm where it is then tweaked to help the program recognize certain objects. With enough data in the form of images put into a generative program, it will be able to generate almost anything in any style.

Unfairness to Artists

Most of the data that the programs use are the works of different artists, many of whom didn't consent to their work being used to train these programs. The artists whose work has been used are also not compensated despite their work being crucial to the success of the algorithms. One of the artists whose work is most commonly used to train AI art generators is Polish artist Greg Rutkowski, who is not happy about his work being used without his permission. Rutkowski uses an old painting style to create fantasy illustrations for many different game franchises. When addressing his concerns about AI art, Rutkowski states, "It's been just a month. What about in a year? I probably won't be able to find my work out there because [the internet] will be flooded with AI art." Most of the fantasy style AI art that you see uses his work in order to be generated, all people have to do to create art that would take him months, is type in a simple phrase. According to Lexica, a website that tracks millions of images and prompts used for AI, Rutkowski's name has been used in Stable Fusions AI prompts over 93,000 times, far exceeding classical artists such as Picasso and da Vinci who have only been used around 2,000 times. Rutkowski has taken measures in an attempt to keep his work from being used in AI, such as removing his works from ArtStation.

Rutkowski isn't the only artist who has spoken up against the use of AI in art, another illustration, Karla Ortiz, an illustrator who found her work in Stability AI, has been vocal about the concerns of AI art. When addressing her raising awareness of AI art, Ortiz said, "There is a coalition growing within artist industries to figure out how to tackle or mitigate this. The group is in its early days of mobilization, which could involve

pushing for new policies or regulation.” Artists aren’t the only ones upset by AI’s advancement with visual media, photographers, models, directors and cinematographers are also concerned. Even though artists have been successful all this time, with AI art continuing to improve and adapt, artists like Rutkowski and Ortiz run the risk of being out of a job, thus threatening their livelihood.

AI art has also been harmful to art competitions and the artists who participate in them. In 2022, Jason M. Allen, a videogame designer from Colorado, won first place in the annual Colorado State Fair art competition. At first, his victory in this competition seemed well deserved, that was until he posted his work online and people figured out that he had used the AI art generator Midjourney. Many consumers and artists alike were outraged by this, although the results were never overturned. While some argue that this is a fair win because his piece was unique, others argue that it is unfair to the other participants in the contest because they had spent many hours and had to use their skills to create their submissions while all Allen had to do was type a prompt into a generator. Allen himself states that he didn’t break any of the competition’s rules and even informed the judges of how his piece was made. He also claims that he used AI art for this competition to make a statement and sees the large amount of backlash and discourse surrounding this as success. The judges of this competition also claimed that they had no idea Allen’s piece was AI art, but even with knowing this, they stand by their choice in giving him first place, stating that knowing it was AI wouldn’t have changed their minds. Thankfully, art competitions such as the Beautiful Bizarre Art Prize have stated that they will not be accepting AI art as entries.

To the developers of this technology and developers in general, AI art generators seem fascinating and even helpful to many people, but to artists, it’s a terrifying situation which leaves many out of a job. Jason M. Allen stated that he believes the negative view of AI art stems from artists’ fear of technology one day replacing them, which cartoonist Matt Bors believes is correct as he says, “to illustrators, it’s very upsetting because it feels like you’ve eliminated the need to hire the illustrator.” Bors also fears that AI art will “devalue art in the long run”, because of just how quick and easy it is to generate these images. With tools that can generate art that would take an artist hours to make in just a few seconds, many illustrators and artists could be left without work in favor of an algorithm that can get work done in mere minutes. AI art could also have the potential to erase originality from art as all of the art that can be produced is just copies of other works, leaving no room for real creativity. Artists who worked hard to develop or copy another style can be overlooked in favor of an AI model which can produce an image in the exact same style for free.

Immoral Usage/Results

Aside from how unfair AI art is to artists whose work is stolen and to those who may be denied jobs because of it, some of these generators can be used to produce harmful and/or dishonest imagery. Image generators that make AI art can also produce “real” pictures, which can potentially be used to spread misinformation by depicting things that never happened. While these consequences aren’t intentional on behalf of the companies that make these programs, they are still being used by the wrong people for the wrong reasons.

AI also generates harmful images in other ways, such as the biases of the images that are generated. An AI model called Lensa, which had been popular on TikTok, would hypersexualize what it generated, even when given a selfie where the user was fully clothed. This same model would also make users thinner and lighten the skin of black users. AI models like this have become notorious for hyper sexualizing the pictures it is given, adding “cartoonishly sexualized features” as said by Olivia Snow. These models also primarily produce images of people with white features even when prompted to create people of different races, which then reduces the proper inclusion of people of color. AI that uses pictures in this way aren’t the only models that produce harmful results. The AI generator known as Stable Diffusion has no limits on what can be made, creating the risk of people using this model for violent and sexual images such as revenge porn and deep fakes. Another AI model called DALL-E has thankfully been filtered to create fewer violent and sexual images, however this caused the program to produce less images of women in general which becomes concerning. Even though there are people out there who don’t intend to use these AI models to create harmful images such as these, there are still plenty who do and will.

Thankfully, the rising threat of AI art to artists has resulted in some push back. While there are many artists and consumers alike who speak out about the ethical concerns of AI art, some have taken it a step farther and created measures that actively defend against and/or combat against AI. Some artists use digital signatures or water marks on their work which helps identify who made the piece, stopping anyone who may try to copy their work and also show that it isn’t AI. There are also some AI art models that will allow artists to opt out of their work being used, although this is a bit late as thousands of artists have already had their work used to help train AI.

Detecting AI In Images

There have also been programs developed to help detect AI, which can help judges in art contests keep track of any entries that may be created with AI. Ai or Not is

a tool which reviews an image and identifies whether or not it's AI. The way it is able to identify AI art is by the program using advanced image analysis and learning. AI or Not is able to compare photos of actual human made art and AI art to look for any characteristics which may show if it's AI. Unfortunately, AI or Not can only review JPEGs and PNGs, as a result other file formats need to be converted before being shown to the program. Another program which works similarly is Illuminarty. Like AI or Not, Illuminarty uses advanced techniques to identify any changes to the image, copied work and AI generation. Unlike AI or Not, Illuminarty is able to identify pictures in formats other than just JPEGs and PNGs, making it more effective and usable for all people. It has been used by professionals and casual people alike, being trustworthy when used for journalism, legal issues and scholarly reasons. Other programs like AI or Not and Illuminarty include SightEngine and Hive, which use similar methods as the previously mentioned programs and have been proven to be successful.

AI art can also be detected without the use of programs like AI or Not and Illuminarty. AI models can struggle to generate certain things properly, most notably hands. Oftentimes these models will generate hands poorly, adding extra fingers, not enough fingers or blending fingers together. These images will also have inconsistent textures, unnatural smoothness and random blurs are a common mistake in AI images. Videos made with AI can be spotted by the same things listed before, as well as people and things "clipping" into themselves or each other, making them much easier to identify as AI than pictures.

Pushback Against AI

A more upfront and more effective way to protect art from AI, is by using cloaking models. The Glaze system was developed at the University of Chicago by The Glaze Team, led by Shaun Shan and Ben Zhao. Glaze works by disrupting the style mimicry that AI uses to generate art. It does this by slightly altering the art it is presented with, which thankfully isn't noticeable on pictures without flat colors and smooth backgrounds. When art that has been "glazed" is put through an AI model, it will tell the AI that the picture is in a much different style than it actually is, for example, seeing modern abstract art as an oil painting. There is another program, created by the same team, which is also used to combat AI art. Nightshade, much like its predecessor Glaze tricks AI into seeing something entirely different from what is actually shown, but Nightshade is more offensive than Glaze is. Nightshade is the more aggressive version of Glaze as it not only confuses AI, but also increases the cost it takes model trainers to teach AI models. The "poison" which Nightshade produces can't be removed by screenshotting or cropping images either, making it very difficult to fully get rid of. Sadly though, Nightshade can still have noticeable effects on flat colors and smooth backgrounds. The creators of these programs hope that they will deter model trainers from scraping the

internet and ignoring opt out lists out of fear their models will be corrupted or taught how to generate images incorrectly.

Conclusion

While AI in general has been used for good things, the impact that it has had on artists has been overwhelmingly negative. From artists having their work used without their permission, to potentially being replaced by these generators, there is little good that it does for the art community. Luckily, programs like Illuminarty and AI or Not have been created to help identify AI, as well as there being things to look for to spot AI art without the help of a program. Programs such as Glaze and Nightshade working to actively poison AI models is also a lesser known, but hopeful step towards combating AI. Hopefully over time, with the help of people speaking out and the help of these programs being developed to detect and combat ai, it can be kept under better control and fair to all artists.

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