

The Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park

The Company of Ideas Forum

17 - 19 June 2024

Art and AI

'I think of art, as its most significant, as a Distant Early Warning System that can always be relied on tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it'

Marshall McLuhan

Art and technology have been intertwined for hundreds of years. From the printing press and the camera obscura to photography and cinema, artists have always sought new ways to create and disseminate their images. The digital revolution has only intensified this process. Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of new platforms for making, showing and selling art, including robotics and 3D printing, virtual and augmented realities. Of all these rapidly evolving technologies, none has wider implications than Artificial Intelligence.

In the last few years AI has gone from being a fringe fantasy to an inescapable reality. Its impact on visual art has proved particularly significant. A growing number of artists are now using AI systems to generate and manipulate increasingly sophisticated images, some of which have met with great critical and commercial success. But the rise of AI also raises profound questions about the nature and future of art itself.

Art-making has long been considered an inherently human act, grounded in an individual's identity and morality. Jeffrey Rubinoff, whose ideas are the genesis of all of our events, famously defined art as a 'map of the human soul' and 'an act of will in accord with a mature conscience'. How do such assumptions fare in the AI age?

At this year's Forum, we will explore the complex and already controversial relationship between visual art and AI. Over two days, delegates will interrogate a cluster of related questions: are new algorithmic platforms genuinely transforming the basis of creativity? Will they undermine or empower artists? And how might they change the history and future of art?

Abstracts

Anthony Cross

Tool, Collaborator, or Participant: On AI Art and Artistic Agency

The past few years have seen an explosion in AI-generated art. AI image generation tools such as DALL-E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion are now capable of generating sophisticated and compelling images from simple text prompts. In this paper, I take it as a given that these image generation tools can be used for artmaking; I focus specifically on how artists might make use of them to create art. Most existing discourse surrounding AI art falls under what I call the *production* model: artists rely on AI image generators either as *tools* or as *collaborators* in the production of an artistically significant output. It is this output—an image, say—which is the artwork, and which is the focus of our appreciation. I introduce an alternative way of thinking of AI art, which I refer to as the *exploration* model. According to this model, artists instead relate to AI as a *participant*: artists create a space for interaction with the AI algorithm by way of their prompts, thereby allowing them to explore the way that the algorithm “sees” and “represents.” AI art practiced in this fashion bears a striking resemblance to contemporary conceptual and participatory art: the artwork is not so much the output—the resulting images—as it is the artist's structuring an interaction with the AI algorithm. I argue in conclusion that which model of AI art we adopt will have significant implications for our understanding and appreciation of AI art, with implications for the appreciation of style in AI art; concerns about novelty and originality; and the assignment of artistic credit and copyright.

Kate Armstrong

Provocations

Kate Armstrong will present speculative insights about Generative AI and reflect on possible futures arising from these technologies with regard to art, design, and creative practice. For example, what happens to art in a world where cultural experiences are individual to each person? What kind of aesthetic evolution happens when AI-altered images flood the internet to the extent that they become a new layer of training data for next generation AIs? How might communities, cultural organizations, or artists work together to build different kinds of datasets toward self-empowerment? Themes such as individualized or decentered forms, next-generation iteration, model collapse, alternative datasets, and radical multimodality will be explored in order to chart the paradigm shifts that confront us as we navigate AI-enabled artistic production.

Dominic Lopes

Real Art and Art in Reality+

Smart thinking about new technologies in art should take care not to stray too far from the details of their workings. Speculative philosophy of photography made seriously wrong predictions. The most promising work on AI and art attends to what AI actually is and how we actually use it. However, some anxieties about AI art stem from speculation. Taken in their own terms, the anxieties are misplaced. I argue that there is no significant difference between art in our world and art in the kind of simulated worlds described by David Chalmers. The reasons why this is the case also imply that there is no significant difference between art in our world and what would be bits of sim-art injected into our world. Since there are differences, the bigger lesson is one about what is significant.

Aidan Meller

Ai-Da Robot: the future of art?

This talk will explore the journey of Ai-Da, the world's first ultra-realistic artist robot. Created in 2019, Ai-Da is a sophisticated robot, integrating AI algorithms and deep learning to create works of art, challenging our perceptions of creativity and the role of technology in the arts. As we embrace the start of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, what is creativity if AI can impinge on this aspect of human culture? The presentation will trace Ai-Da's international trajectory, highlighting her events and exhibitions, including her engagement with initiatives like the United Nations 'AI for Good' Global Summit, and her addresses at the House of Lords and the Oxford Union. Additionally, we will examine her art work at the V&A, Tate, Design Museum and during the Venice Biennale. This talk aims to shed light on how Ai-Da's art stimulates crucial discussions on the evolving intersection of technology and creativity, offering insights into the future of artistic expression in the age of artificial intelligence.

Lucy Seal

Ai-Da, AI and the Avant-Garde

Ai-Da, the artist robot, has both performative and philosophical connections to Dada and the Avant-Garde movements. Internationally recognised, Ai-Da has sparked controversy by claiming the role of an artist, a position traditionally reserved for humans. On these contested grounds, Ai-Da serves as both artist and artwork, challenging societal categories in a manner reminiscent of the Dada controversies of the early twentieth century. Just as Duchamp questioned the nature of 'art,' Ai-Da questions the nature of 'the artist.' This talk will highlight some of Ai-Da's different AI capabilities, including Neural Networks, Evolutionary Algorithms, and Language Models. It will explore how Ai-Da's ability to break traditional boundaries through her AI capabilities mirrors our evolving society, where AI is becoming increasingly dominant. Ai-Da, as a humanoid robot, exemplifies how AI is transforming not only the digital realm but also redefining the biological human experience.

Michael Tippett

Maximum Perception

Michael Tippett will present his latest film, **Maximum Perception**, which showcases the potential of new AI-powered tools that generate audio, images, and video for filmmaking. The film centers on an inventor of augmented reality technology and delves into the philosophical, ethical, and technical questions this new technology introduces. Described as a prototype rather than a completed work, **Maximum Perception** demonstrates what is possible with today's AI technology. The presentation will include a screening of part of the film, followed by an open discussion on the technology's impact on film and video, and its potential to disrupt modern filmmaking practices and the business of film in general.

Speaker Biographies

Prof. Anthony Cross, Texas State University

Anthony Cross is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Texas State University. His research focuses on the normative significance of relationships with artworks and cultural objects. He also has research interests at the intersection of aesthetics and the philosophy

of technology: recent work has explored the impact of the internet and emerging technologies on our artistic practices—including work on the nature and value of Internet memes; the significance of NFTs; and the use of AI in artistic production.

Kate Armstrong

Emily Carr University of Art + Design

Kate Armstrong is a writer, artist and curator who has dedicated two decades to exploring the nexus of art and technology. Renowned as a pioneer in generative literature, her work spans generative text and image systems, speculative fiction, blockchain text-poetry, video, dynamic graphic novels, and location-aware fiction, among other conceptually driven hybrid forms. She has exhibited her work internationally at the Contemporary Art Centre (Vilnius, Lithuania), Psy-Geo-Conflux (New York), Akbank Sanat (Istanbul, Turkey), and was included in *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art 1905–2016* at the Whitney Museum. Armstrong's artworks are held in collections including Rhizome, the Rose Goldsen Archive at Cornell University, and the Library of the Printed Web. She was part of *Poeme Objkt Subjkt* curated by the Verseverse for L'Avant Gallerie Vossen in Paris, which was shortlisted for the 2023 Lumen Prize in Crypto Art. As a curator she has produced exhibitions, events and publications in contemporary art and technology internationally. Armstrong chairs the Acquisitions Committee at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and is the Director of Living Labs at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, where she leads the research initiative *AI Futures for Art and Design*.

Prof. Dominic McIver Lopes

University of British Columbia

Dominic Lopes is University Killam Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of British Columbia. A member of the UBC aesthetics group, he has worked on pictorial representation; the aesthetic and epistemic value of pictures, including scientific images; theories of art and its value; the ontology of art; computer art and new art forms; aesthetic value; and the history of aesthetics in Europe and Asia.

Lopes's most recent books are an edition of Bernard Bolzano's *Essays on Beauty and the Arts*, published by Hackett, *The Geography of Taste* with Samantha Matherne, Mohan Matthen, and Bence Nanay, now available open access from Oxford University Press, and *Aesthetic Injustice*, which will be published by Oxford University Press in October. His next project is a book entitled *Pluralism and Its Discontents: Episodes in the History of Aesthetics*.

Lopes is past chair of the Board of Officers of the American Philosophical Association, past president of the Canadian Philosophical Association and the American Society for Aesthetics, associate editor of *Ergo*, and a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics*, *Cognitive Semiotics*, and *Imaginations*.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and has been a Canada Council Killam Research Fellow, a Guggenheim Fellow, a fellow of the National Humanities Center, Distinguished Scholar at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, and Leverhulme Visiting Research Professor at the University of Warwick. He has won two teaching awards, a Philosophical Quarterly essay prize, a Canadian Philosophy Association essay prize, the American Society for Aesthetics Outstanding Monograph Prize, the Killam Research Prize, and the APA's Quinn Prize, given for "service to philosophy and philosophers".

Aidan Meller

Aidan Meller is the Director of the Ai-Da Robot Studios, and has over 27 years' experience in the art world. It was while reading and seeing how technology is disrupting large sections of society that he realised the need to discuss these shifts in society. Meller eventually narrowed down on AI and robotics, and devised Ai-Da as an entity that would be able to comment on emerging social and technological trends. Ai-Da has since travelled the world and exhibited in several major museums, such as the V&A, Tate, Barbican, Design Museum and during the Venice Biennale. Meller says: "I believe the greatest artists in history grappled with their period of time, and both celebrated and questioned society's shifts. Ai-Da Robot is the artist today to discuss the current developments in technology and the unfolding legacies."

Lucy Seal

Lucy Seal is the Researcher for the Ai-Da Robot project. Graduating from the University of Oxford, her interests have focused on Dada and the Avant Garde. She has travelled internationally with Ai-Da – including trips to the United Nation's 'AI for Good' initiative, Ai-Da's pavilion during the Venice Biennale, and the pyramids in Egypt. She has spoken about Ai-Da's poetry on BBC Radio Three, and written about Ai-Da's art for The Art Newspaper.

Michael Tippett

Michael Tippett is an Emmy-nominated technology professional with nearly two decades of experience in the industry. He has founded multiple technology companies in New York and Vancouver, including NowPublic, the largest citizen journalism network in the world. He also led GrowLab, a technology incubator, and Hootsuite Labs, driving innovation and nurturing startups. A graduate in Philosophy from Queen's University and an alumnus of The Vancouver Film School, Michael combines analytical thinking with creative storytelling. His current work focuses on the intersection of artificial intelligence with film and video.

Further Information for Participants

Company of Ideas Forums are not conventional academic conferences. They are ambitious but informal events, designed to bring together people from all corners of intellectual and creative life.

Participants are encouraged to take intellectual risks they normally might be reluctant to take. Speakers and delegates are expected to make propositions, to test out big ideas, and to engage in genuinely interdisciplinary conversations.

Senior Speakers

- Presentations should be no more than 45 minutes, and should ideally be spoken (with or without notes), but not read. All presentations will be followed by discussion.
- Papers should be intellectually challenging but accessible, targeted at a mixed audience of academics, students, artists, and members of the public. Speakers are asked to frame their talks within the larger issues of the Forum.
- Please put any audio or visual files required for your presentation on to a USB stick. The A/V tech will upload them to the system on Monday in advance of your session.
- NOTE: due to technical limitations, presentations cannot be projected directly from your laptop.

Student Speakers

Student sessions will take place on both afternoons of the Forum.

Participating students are required to prepare a 10-15 minute presentation. Each set of presentations will be followed by questions and discussion.

Students can choose to talk about any topic, but are required to directly address one or more of the following questions:

- *How does AI change or challenge the notion of artistic creation?*
- *What are the creative and/or socially transformative possibilities of AI?*
- *How might AI transform our experience and understanding of the history of art and culture?*

Student speakers are encouraged, where possible, to make reference to what they have seen, read or heard at the JRSP.

Recording and broadcasting

Note to all speakers and participants: unless a speaker requests otherwise, Forum presentations will be recorded and posted online. All discussions may be recorded and posted, and by participating in the Forum you are agreeing to the dialogue proceedings being used by the JRSP on any of its internet platforms for the purposes of educating the public on the topic of the Forum.