

Emily McDermott, "How AI Will Change Art, According to Arthur Jafa, Marilyn Minter, and Other Artists,"
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Art

How AI Will Change Art, According to Arthur Jafa, Marilyn Minter, and Other Artists

Emily McDermott

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AI has quickly become an omnipresent tool—for research, writing, image generation, and more. In the art world, this shift has had a polarizing effect: embraced by some, rejected by others.

At times, the use of AI has led to controversy, as with the much-opposed, though hugely successful, auction “Augmented Intelligence,” Christie’s first-ever sale dedicated to art made with AI.

The auction, held in February and March 2025, featured works by early pioneers of the technology, such as a piece from the 1980s by Harold Cohen, as well as contemporary artists making names for themselves within the space, like Refik Anadol, Holly Herndon & Mat Dryhurst, and Sasha Stiles. Prior to the auction, nearly 4,000 individuals, including many artists, signed an open letter urging the auction house to cancel the sale. The letter claimed that AI models were trained on copyrighted material, and therefore exploit human creativity without consent. The auction house, however, proceeded with the sale, claiming that AI is a tool that has enhanced the featured artists’ existing practices, not unlike, say, a new paintbrush. And when push came to shove, the auction generated nearly \$730,000 in sales, well over its \$600,000 projection.

We asked the following artists—ranging from those embedded in the space, like Anadol, to those further afield, such as Arthur Jafa—how they think AI will change art as we know it. Throughout their answers, there was an undercurrent similar to the argument Christie’s made: For now, it’s a tool, but one that wields exponential power.

Arthur Jafa

Known for: powerful moving image works exploring Black identity, culture, and experience



Portrait of Arthur Jafa. © Arthur Jafa. Courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery, and Sprüth Magers.

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“I remember when my brother showed me the first ChatGPT a few years ago. It’s incredible how quickly it went from something from science fiction to being everywhere. But I was never intimidated, nor even that interested in most of what people are talking about. I’m not saying [AI is] not real and the fears aren’t warranted, but the whole idea that scriptwriters in Hollywood are terrified they’re gonna start using AI to write scripts—it’s like, well, you write the kind of scripts that AI can write. 99.9% of what’s being done is so generic, AI might as well do it. But I’m not worried about no AI writing my shit.

“It’s a tool like any other kind of tool. As far as I can tell, nobody’s done anything with it that couldn’t be done before. It’s just that some things can be done more quickly, more efficiently, than they’ve been done before. It’s kind of like this is the first kid on the block with an electric guitar: What they’re playing is not amazing. It’s just louder. And everybody’s going to have it.

“I’m not saying the fears aren’t founded, but the level at which most people are working, it is completely irrelevant for artists—maybe it’s less irrelevant if your future is working in a factory. Look at how quickly ChatGPT images started to look the same. It’s generic. It’s the definition of least common denominator elevated to so-called ‘aesthetics.’ And it’s not aesthetics. A lot of this AI stuff is just bullshit, honestly.”