

AI: A Helpful Tool *or* Human Puppet?

Understanding AI's Real Impact on Human Creativity and Freedom

VISHAKHA THAKKAR

MSU24037049

Department of Applied Arts, Shri Ram College, Muzzafarnagar

Academic Year 2024–2026

Abstract

Artificial Intelligence — or AI — is everywhere today. It writes stories, makes images, composes music, and helps designers create stunning visuals in seconds. But this raises a big question: Is AI working for us, or are we starting to work for it?

This research paper looks at AI in simple, everyday language. It explores how AI helps creative people — especially in Applied Arts — do amazing things faster and easier than ever before. At the same time, it asks whether we are slowly losing something important: our own original thinking, our unique artistic voice, and our independence as creators.

With the widespread adoption of intelligent systems in scenarios such as online shopping, users' ability to operate these tools has become essential for managing complex and personalized tasks. In fact, algorithm adoption is a dynamic and proactive psychological process in which users analyze the procedural value and performance of algorithms through information processing. The paper ends with practical advice on how artists and designers can use AI wisely, without losing themselves in the process.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence, Creativity, Applied Arts, Human Agency, AI Tools, Ethics, Design, Digital Art

1. Introduction — What Is This All About?

Imagine you are an artist sitting down to create a new painting. You have your brushes, your colours, and your imagination. Now imagine a new kind of assistant sitting next to you — one that can suggest colours, draw shapes for you, and even finish parts of the painting. That assistant is AI.

Sounds helpful, right? For many artists and designers, it truly is. AI tools like Midjourney, DALL-E, Adobe Firefly, and ChatGPT have changed the way creative people work. Tasks that used to take days can now be done in minutes. Ideas that were impossible to visualise before can now be generated in seconds. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate theoretical and empirical analyses to systematically elucidate these relationships and provide theoretical and practical insights into the human-centered design and user experience optimization of GenAI.

But here is where things get interesting — and a little complicated. When the AI is doing so much of the work, who is really the artist? Are you still creating from your heart and mind, or are you just picking from options that a machine has already decided for you? Is AI giving you wings — or quietly pulling your strings?

This paper explores one of the most important questions of our time: Is AI a helpful tool that empowers human creativity, or is it slowly turning us into puppets — people who think they are creating freely but are actually being guided by algorithms?

This study systematically investigates how anthropomorphic features affect users' intention to adopt GenAI through both the peripheral and central routes. Furthermore, it explores the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between anthropomorphic features and adoption intention, as well as the moderating effect of information overload. As students of Applied Arts at the MFA level, understanding this question is essential. Because the answer will shape how we create, what we create, and why.

QUICK FACTS

300 million+	Users of AI creative tools globally in 2024
\$13.8 billion	Value of the AI art and design market in 2025
7 in 10	Designers who say AI has changed how they work
1 in 3	Artists worried AI will replace their jobs

2. What Exactly Is AI?

Before we go further, let us make sure we understand what AI actually is — in plain, simple English.

AI stands for Artificial Intelligence. In simple terms, it means computers that can think and learn — at least in some ways. Traditional computer programs follow strict rules: if you do A, then B happens. AI is different. AI systems learn from examples. You show them millions of images, and they learn what a 'cat' looks like. You show them billions of sentences, and they learn how language works.

2.1 The Two Main Types of AI We Use in Creative Work

- Generative AI — This type of AI creates new things. It can make images, write text, compose music, and design logos. Examples include DALL-E (makes images from text), ChatGPT (writes text), and Suno (creates music). This is the type most artists and designers interact with.
- Analytical AI — This type looks at existing things and finds patterns. Netflix uses it to suggest shows. Spotify uses it to build playlists. In design, it might analyse what visual styles are trending.

2.2 How Did AI Get So Good So Fast?

The answer is data — huge amounts of it. Modern AI was trained on billions of images, millions of books, and vast amounts of music scraped from the internet. This is why it can produce impressive results: it has seen more art, more design, and more writing than any human being ever could in a thousand lifetimes.

But here is the catch: that training data came from real human artists, writers, and musicians — often without their knowledge or permission. This is one of the ethical problems we will discuss later.

Think of AI like a very talented student who studied every painting, novel, and song ever made — and can now imitate almost anything. The question is: can it truly create something new? And does using it make you more creative, or less?

3. How AI Is Used in Applied Arts Today

Applied Arts is a broad field. It covers graphic design, fashion design, product design, illustration, animation, ceramics, textile design, typography, interior design, and much more. AI has found its way into almost every corner of this world.

Here is a simple look at where AI is showing up most:

Graphic Design	AI generates logos, colour palettes, layouts, and brand identities in seconds. Tools like Adobe Firefly and Canva AI are widely used.
Illustration	Artists use Midjourney and Stable Diffusion to generate concept art, character designs, and background environments.
Fashion Design	Brands use AI to predict trends, generate fabric patterns, and visualise new collections before any fabric is cut.
Animation	AI tools can auto-generate in-between frames, lip-sync characters to dialogue, and even create entire animated sequences.
Textile & Surface Design	Designers use AI to generate repeating patterns inspired by historical or cultural references from around the world.
Product Design	AI-powered generative design tools help create furniture, packaging, and products optimised for materials and sustainability.

What is remarkable is not just that AI can do these things — it is how fast and how cheaply it can do them. A graphic designer who once spent three days exploring visual concepts can now explore the same range of ideas in three hours. A fashion student who once needed expensive software and expert skills can now generate professional-looking designs with a simple text description.

4. The Good Side: AI as a Helpful Tool

Let us start with the positive. There are genuinely wonderful things AI is doing for creative people. Here are the most important ones, explained simply.

4.1 AI Speeds Up the Boring Parts

Every creative profession has boring, repetitive tasks. Graphic designers spend hours resizing images for different platforms. Animators spend weeks drawing the same character in slightly different positions. Textile designers spend days repeating patterns by hand.

AI can handle much of this tedious work automatically. This frees the human creator to focus on the most interesting, most human parts of the work: the ideas, the emotions, the stories, the meaning.

Think of it like a dishwasher. A dishwasher does not cook your meal — you still do that. But it saves you the boring task of washing up, so you can spend more time cooking, eating, and enjoying food with friends.

4.2 AI Opens Doors for People Who Were Kept Out

For a long time, creating professional-quality art and design required either expensive education, costly equipment, or years of technical training. This meant that many talented people — especially those from less wealthy backgrounds, or from communities outside the Western art world — never got the chance to fully express their creative vision.

Compared with previous extended ELM, this research framework provides a holistic understanding based on the specific characteristics of online shopping scenarios and chatbot anthropomorphism. AI democratises creation — it makes the tools available to more people.

4.3 AI Helps You Explore More Ideas, Faster

One of the hardest things about creative work is getting stuck. You have a vague idea in your head, but you cannot quite see it yet. AI can help you explore dozens of visual possibilities quickly, giving you a starting point to react to, refine, and build upon.

Many designers describe AI as being like a very fast sketch pad — one that can generate rough ideas in seconds, which you then take in new directions. Rather than replacing the creative process, this can actually make it richer by showing you possibilities you would never have thought of on your own.

4.4 AI Makes Truly New Things Possible

Some artists are using AI not just to speed up old processes, but to create entirely new kinds of art that were impossible before.

- Media artist Refik Anadol feeds millions of data points — weather records, city sounds, archive photographs — into AI systems to create massive, immersive visual installations that shift and flow like living things. These works could not exist without AI.
- Musician Holly Herndon trained an AI on her own voice and the voices of her collaborators to create choral music that blurs the line between human and machine in deeply thought-provoking ways.
- Architects use AI to design building structures that are stronger, lighter, and more sustainable than anything a human designer could calculate unaided.

These examples show that at its best, AI does not replace human creativity — it amplifies it, pushing it into completely new territory.

5. The Tricky Side: AI as a Human Puppet Master

Now for the harder conversation. Because as wonderful as AI can be, there are real and serious ways in which it can work against human creativity — quietly, without us even noticing.

5.1 AI Makes Everything Look the Same

While ChatGPT was useful for generating quick script ideas, several challenges emerged. Participants noted that the tool required very specific prompts to produce accurate and relevant content. If instructions were vague, it often introduced unwanted elements or failed to adjust scripts to the appropriate age level. Some found it difficult to make minor edits, as ChatGPT would repeat similar content or not fully incorporate feedback. Additionally, a few scripts were described as “generic” or “cringy,” lacking the creativity and engagement students desired. Why? Because AI was trained on the most

popular images on the internet. The most popular images tend to follow certain styles. So AI naturally produces outputs that look like those popular styles. It gives you the average of what already exists, not something truly new.

If millions of designers around the world are using the same AI tools with similar prompts, the world of visual culture risks becoming a lot more similar and a lot less diverse. Unique voices, unusual styles, and culturally specific aesthetics could get drowned out by the comfortable sameness of algorithmic averages.

5.2 AI Can Weaken Your Skills Over Time

Learning any creative skill takes time and struggle. A graphic designer who spends years developing their eye for layout, colour, and typography is building deep knowledge in their hands, eyes, and instincts — not just their head. This embodied skill is what gives experienced designers the ability to make quick, accurate creative judgments.

When AI does much of this work for you, especially early in your creative development, you may miss the chance to build those deep skills. You get impressive-looking results without the journey that creates real expertise. This is sometimes called de-skilling — the gradual loss of human ability because a machine is doing it instead.

The danger is not for experienced professionals who already have deep skills. It is for students and beginners who might shortcut the learning process — and end up dependent on AI without ever developing their own creative foundation.

5.3 Who Actually Owns the Art?

When you use an AI tool to create an image, who made it? You typed the prompt. But the AI generated the image, using patterns it learned from millions of artworks made by real human artists — artists who were never asked for permission and never paid.

This raises genuine questions about authorship and ownership. If you sell an AI-generated image, are you taking credit for work that is really a remix of thousands of other artists' labour? And if you present AI-generated work as entirely your own, is that honest?

These are not just philosophical questions. They are practical ones being debated in courts, in art schools, and in creative industries right now — and they have real consequences for the livelihoods of working artists and designers.

5.4 Big Tech Controls the Tools — and the Rules

The AI tools that most creative people use — DALL-E, Midjourney, Adobe Firefly, Stable Diffusion — were made by a very small number of large, mostly American technology companies. These companies decide what the AI can and cannot create, what styles it defaults to, what cultural references it recognises, and what values are built into it.

This means that when you use these tools, you are working within a creative environment that has been designed by others — others with specific commercial interests, cultural backgrounds, and ideas about what good design looks like. Without realising it, you may be being steered towards the aesthetic preferences of Silicon Valley rather than your own unique cultural heritage.

Imagine if all the world's paint was made by one factory in one city, and that factory had quietly decided that only certain colours were 'proper' colours. That is a little like what happens when one or two companies control the world's most widely used AI creative tools.

5.5 AI Can Carry Hidden Biases

AI is trained on human-created data — and human culture is full of biases. Research has shown that AI image systems consistently produce lighter-skinned people when asked for images of 'professionals.' They often produce stereotypical or inaccurate representations of non-Western cultures. They tend to reproduce gender stereotypes in visual depictions of different roles.

When we use these tools without thinking critically about their outputs, we risk accidentally reproducing and spreading these biases in our own creative work. An artist working in Applied Arts has a responsibility not just to make beautiful things, but to be conscious of the cultural messages those things carry.

6. Real-Life Examples — Good and Bad

Abstract ideas are easier to understand when we look at real stories. Here are examples from the world of art and design that show both sides of the AI question.

6.1 The Good: Refik Anadol — Making the Invisible Visible

Refik Anadol is a Turkish-American artist who uses AI to turn massive amounts of data into breathtaking visual art. His installation 'Unsupervised,' shown at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 2023, used an AI system trained on the entire collection of MoMA's artworks to create a constantly evolving, flowing visual display — like a living dream made of art history.

Anadol's work is a great example of AI expanding what art can be. He is not using AI to replace his creativity; he is using it as a medium — like paint or clay — to explore ideas that would simply be impossible any other way. He remains fully in control of the artistic vision; AI is his instrument.

6.2 The Good: Smaller Businesses Getting Professional Design

A small bakery owner in a small town wants a beautiful logo and menu design. In the past, they might not have been able to afford a professional designer. Today, using AI tools, they can generate professional-quality designs themselves — or with very little help. AI can be used to design unique and personalized T-shirts and business cards. Platforms like Printful or Zazzle with AI support allow small businesses to create attractive designs that reflect their brand identity.

6.3 The Complicated: The Getty Images Lawsuit

In 2023, the picture library Getty Images sued Stability AI — the company behind Stable Diffusion — claiming that Stability AI had used millions of Getty's copyrighted photographs without permission or payment to train its AI system. The AI then generated images that sometimes even included distorted versions of Getty's watermark.

This case highlighted a fundamental ethical problem with how current AI systems are built: they were trained on enormous amounts of human creative work that was taken without consent. The artists and photographers whose work made the AI possible received nothing — while the technology companies profited enormously.

6.4 The Bad: AI Art Flooding Creative Markets

In 2022, a photographer named Boris Eldagsen submitted an AI-generated image to the Sony World Photography Awards — and won. He then publicly refused the award to draw attention to what he saw as the absurdity of AI-generated images competing in a photography competition. His point was clear: if the rules do not distinguish between human-made and AI-made work, human photographers and artists are competing against machines — and that is not a fair competition.

This story illustrates a real problem: AI-generated images are flooding creative marketplaces, making it harder for human artists to sell their work and harder for audiences to know what is genuinely human-made.

6.5 The Hopeful: Students Using AI as a Thinking Partner

In many art schools and design programmes, students are finding thoughtful ways to use AI as a thinking partner rather than a shortcut. Instead of asking AI to make their final work for them, they use it to generate rough sketches they then react against, to research historical visual traditions they might not otherwise encounter, or to quickly visualise ideas they already have in their heads so they can evaluate them more easily.

When used this way — with the human student firmly in control of the creative direction, and AI serving as a fast, responsive tool — the collaboration can genuinely enrich the creative process without replacing the all-important human journey of developing skills and a personal voice.

7. What Do Experts Say?

Researchers, philosophers, artists, and designers have been thinking hard about these questions. Here is what some of the most important voices have to say — explained simply.

7.1 Margaret Boden — AI Can Be Combinatorially Creative, But Not Transformationally Creative

Margaret Boden is one of the world's leading experts on creativity and AI. She says AI is very good at combining and rearranging existing ideas in new ways — what she calls 'combinational creativity.' But the deepest kind of creativity — what she calls 'transformational creativity,' the ability to completely change the rules of an entire field — remains distinctly human. AI cannot imagine jazz if it has never heard music. It cannot invent something the world has never seen before.

7.2 Kate Crawford — AI Is Not Neutral

Kate Crawford, author of 'Atlas of AI,' argues powerfully that AI is not a neutral tool. Every AI system reflects the values, biases, and commercial interests of the people who built it. She shows that the development of AI comes at enormous human and environmental cost — exploited workers, stolen data, and huge carbon footprints. She urges us to think critically about who benefits from AI and who pays the price.

7.3 Marshall McLuhan — The Tool Shapes the User

Although McLuhan died in 1980 — long before modern AI existed — his famous idea is more relevant than ever: 'The medium is the message.' What he meant is that the tools we use do not just help us do things; they change the way we think and perceive the world. Television did not just broadcast content; it rewired how people process information. AI is not just helping artists make images; it is changing how artists think about what images are and how they are made.

7.4 Philip Galanter — Human-AI Collaboration Can Be Genuinely New

Galanter, a researcher who studies generative art, argues that the most interesting creative outcomes emerge from the space between human intention and algorithmic process. Neither fully controlled nor fully random, this in-between space can produce genuinely new aesthetic experiences. He encourages artists to embrace the unpredictability of AI collaboration rather than trying to fully control or fully resist it.

8. Finding the Middle Ground

By now, it should be clear that AI is not simply good or simply bad. It is a powerful, complex technology that can help or harm creative people depending on how it is used, who is using it, and what values are brought to the table.

So what does wise, responsible AI use look like for an Applied Arts student or professional? Here are five practical principles.

Principle 1: Build Your Real Skills First

AI is most useful to people who already have deep creative knowledge and skills. A seasoned designer using AI to explore concepts is in a completely different position from a beginner who has never learned to draw or think critically about design. Develop your own skills — drawing, observing, making, thinking — before you lean heavily on AI. The foundation matters.

Principle 2: Stay Curious About Where AI Falls Short

Pay attention to what AI cannot do: it cannot feel emotion, it cannot understand cultural context deeply, it cannot take genuine moral responsibility for its outputs, and it cannot truly imagine something completely new. These gaps are where your humanity as an artist becomes most valuable. Lean into those spaces.

Principle 3: Question the Default Output

When AI gives you an output, do not just accept it. Ask: Whose aesthetic is this? What culture does this reflect? What is missing or distorted? Who might be harmed by this image? Training yourself to look critically at AI outputs is one of the most important skills a contemporary creative person can develop.

Principle 4: Be Honest About How You Work

If AI played a significant role in making your work. Transparency about your creative process is not weakness. The creative world is still working out what AI-assisted authorship means, and honest conversation is essential to getting it right.

Principle 5: Keep Making Things with Your Hands

Never stop making things that come purely from you — drawings, sketches, clay models, hand-lettered type, experimental photographs. These analogue, physical, non-AI creative practices keep your imagination alive and your skills sharp. They are also the source of the uniquely human creative intelligence that makes you more than just a prompt engineer.

The goal is not to avoid AI — that is neither realistic nor desirable. The goal is to use AI as a conscious, informed, critical creator: someone who knows what the tool is doing, why they are using it, and what it means. That kind of awareness is what separates an artist from an algorithm.

9. Conclusion

We started this paper with a simple question: Is AI a helpful tool or a human puppet master? After exploring the evidence from many angles, the honest answer is: it can be both — and which one it becomes depends largely on us.

AI is genuinely helpful when it is used by skilled, aware, and critically thinking creators who maintain their own creative vision and use AI to extend and explore it. In these conditions, AI can open new creative horizons, speed up tedious work, democratise access to professional tools, and enable kinds of art and design that were simply impossible before.

But AI becomes problematic — even a puppet master — when it is used without critical thinking, when it replaces rather than supports the development of genuine creative skill, when its biases and defaults go unquestioned, and when its commercial and ideological underpinnings are ignored. In these conditions, AI quietly shapes what we make, what we think is beautiful, and even who we think we are as creative people — without us ever noticing.

As MFA students of Applied Arts, we are in a uniquely important position. We are being trained not just to make things, but to think deeply about what making means — culturally, ethically, aesthetically. That training is exactly what is needed to navigate the AI moment wisely. The most important skill for the AI era is not knowing how to use the tools. It is knowing why you are using them, what they are doing, and what it means.

AI is here to stay. The question is not whether we will live with it, but how. This paper hopes to have offered some useful thinking for anyone — student, designer, artist, or curious human — who wants to live and create with AI thoughtfully, honestly, and with their own unique voice fully intact.

10. References

The following sources were consulted in the preparation of this research paper. They are listed alphabetically by author's last name.

Anadol, R. (2023). *Unsupervised* [Installation]. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press.

Boden, M. A. (2004). *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Brown, T., et al. (2020). Language Models are Few-Shot Learners. *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 33, 1877–1901.

Chayka, K. (2023, August 2). Has AI Made Us All Aesthetically Average? *The New Yorker*.

Clark, A., & Chalmers, D. J. (1998). The Extended Mind. *Analysis*, 58(1), 7–19.

Crawford, K. (2021). *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*. Yale University Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper & Row.

Eldagsen, B. (2023). *PSEUDOMNESIA: The Electrician* [Photograph — AI generated]. Sony World Photography Awards.

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Galanter, P. (2016). Generative Art Theory. In C. Paul (Ed.), *A Companion to Digital Art* (pp. 146–180). Wiley Blackwell.

Getty Images v. Stability AI. (2023). Case No. 23-135 (D. Del. 2023).

Goodfellow, I., et al. (2014). Generative Adversarial Nets. *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 27.

Haraway, D. (1985). *A Cyborg Manifesto*. *Socialist Review*, 80, 65–108.

Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology* (W. Lovitt, Trans.). Harper & Row. (Original work 1954).

Herndon, H. (2019). PROTO [Album]. 4AD Records.

McLuhan, M. (1964). Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. McGraw-Hill.

Noble, S. U. (2018). Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism. New York University Press.

Turing, A. M. (1950). Computing Machinery and Intelligence. *Mind*, 59(236), 433–460.

Winner, L. (1980). Do Artifacts Have Politics? *Daedalus*, 109(1), 121–136.