

AI 'Art'

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma Art, in all its forms is a creative act. So are many areas of creativity such as science, technology, artifacts and so on. But Art is what TS Eliot called 'objective correlative'. When the artist wants to share an experience, they find a common metaphor or way to relate to the viewer or listener. It is about communicating experience or understanding in a way that the other not only understands but feels. I was teaching at Gaia House in May. It was bursting with spring. I stood beneath the oak in the front lawn with friends and we marvelled at its size, its strength and vitality. Its huge presence dwarfs us. Suppose the oak tree were made of plastic by an artist expressing his feelings about how people don't connect with nature? Or the same manufactured by a 3D printing machine at the command of an AI 'artist'. Machines don't do meaning. A few days later, I came across a painting by Vincent Van Gogh, called 'The Olive Trees'. If you google it, you will see it has little to do with olive trees as such. There is a swirling, undulating movement throughout the painting and the sombre blue mountains and churning clouds gives me the feeling of apprehension. It brought up the feelings of foreboding I have about the Polycrisis. Van Gogh has shared with me the mental state he was in when he painted the picture. And I am grateful he has evoked these feelings in me. They motivate me to do the little I can to limit the Crisis. Suppose someone asked AI to produce a picture in the style of van Gogh of a football crowd. I have no doubt that it would be interesting, but it will lack experiential meaning. The 'artist' has done nothing and intends nothing but inane play. It may indeed evoke similar feelings, but I will be communicating with a machine. I will have lost that essential reason for art – communication – communis – as if one, in common. I won't be able to make a heart connection with another human being. It will just be lonely, little me, hugging my feelings. Of course, I might share the experience of a poem, a song, a picture with a friend, but there would still be that feeling that it is a machine, without care or ethics, that has induced these sentiments in me. All art forms with their various concerns such as erotic, social, political, personal and healing and religious, are communications between human beings. Imagine if all you had around you were robots who behaved exactly as human beings, but you knew they were devoid of inner purpose of life. How would you feel if in distress you were hugged by a cyborg? You may feel comforted, by what? It must be by way of a projection of a human onto a 'humanoid'. Surely, at some point, there must arise a feeling of separation from humans, an alienation, a deep loneliness. But why is this possible in the first place? Because we identify with the body and mind – the root cause of our dukkha, the frustrating inability to find lasting happiness in the sensual world. So we seek distraction. This has, of course, always been so, but now made more acute by relying on technology that further separates us from each other and from our true inner being. The real danger is that we become like robots – drowning out any feelings of meaninglessness, of sickness, ageing, sorrow and death with entertaining 'art' empty of human experience. Having said all this, no doubt

artists will arise who can use AI to produce real art. Please send me your thoughts. This article inspired the Tip and is worth reading for the social and political consequence: The Trouble with AI art isn't just lack of originality. It's something far bigger. Eric Reinhardt 'Deep Bach' is an algorithmic program that uses machine-learning to analyse Johann Sebastian Bach's compositions and then produces its own variations. The results are convincing enough that many people can't distinguish between DeepBach and the real thing. Futures Centre The Threat of Computed Creativity Creativity here refers to Art. Letter by Nick Cage read by Stephen Fry

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.