Now, more than ever, individual artists need their work protected. Creation makes us human, and it has separated us from other creatures on the planet since we came to be. Our legacy on this planet are the creations we leave behind. The art, the structures, the very changes hewn into the landscape itself. While technologies are developing now that may very well lead us to an "evolution" in the creative landscape, I strongly feel that it is currently being grossly mismanaged.

First, I believe AI-development should be closely monitored and governed. I don't believe it is, and these discussions about datasets and machine learning and copyrights are mostly being handled by people on social media and by individual entities without the best interests of humanity as a whole at heart. I have seen some mentions of an "opt-in" structure, and this is how it should be. Artists deserve control over their property. Why should a machine be allowed to use that data indiscriminately, when it is already protected? A machine cannot create without a dataset; it will simply have nothing to iterate on. But the same cannot be said about a human being, who will strive to create, and offer their interpretations of the world around them, with or without inspiration from others. I believe that this notion single-handedly shows that AI-generated imagery, as it currently exists, is theft, and should never be protected by copyright.

You might see some people claim that art is not "democratized". This is meaningless. Certain types of content may be restricted, but the act of creating art itself is not. Anyone is free to pick up a pencil, or a paintbrush, or a stick, and begin drawing. Art is the most democratized thing a human can do: it can be performed irrespective of wealth, station, or residence. Where humans are, humans create. I believe this statement is meant to mislead others who are less familiar with how AI datasets work, by putting trained artists' work on an unreachable pedestal. This belief that everyone is entitled to create professional-level work, without putting in the work required to do so naturally, is pure entitled fiction, and you will never see this type of behavior anywhere else, without a human providing educated input, or compensation being reached somehow. Production line equipment is still monitored by engineers, for example, and when chefs make food, they are paid to do so. This AI trend is just that: a trend to obtain material that would otherwise cost money, or require troublesome adherence to law. Laws that do not yet exist, but should, and I believe, will soon.

So what steps can be taken? I believe transparency is important. AI datasets should be required to list, in an output or dump file, all the sources of work that it has drawn data from. Artists should have to opt-in to these data sets, so that they must consciously choose to include their work or not. Then, once participation has been verified, compensation can be provided. I believe a great strike against proponents of AI is that they are generally unwilling to provide compensation to artists. Why is that? Because in order to compensate every artist whose data was taken without consent, any one entity would owe millions, if not billions, of dollars. And so, if one does not have to pay, why would they? This is blatant exploitation. It's the equivalent of walking into someone's crop field, stealing as much as you can, and then selling it again. It is theft.

An important thing to realize is that most artists are not against AI technology as a whole. We know that it will only continue to get developed, and will explode in functionality and accuracy as time goes on. We, as artists, are against our material being misused, mishandled, and stolen for the profit of others. I firmly believe that, through art, most humans simply want to express themselves, and in doing so, to improve their connection to the world, and to other human beings; in other words, to create a legacy, and inspire others as well. The current state–and I feel like that should be stressed–of AI-generated image technology is predatory, exploitative, entitled, and misled. Artists are not against AI as a technology–we are against other human beings perverting our journey to make the world better, bit by bit. In many ways, AI has the ability to forge even stronger connections with one another, as it creates new images from our collective work as a species. This should be celebrated, absolutely. But look into the statements present by modern AI proponents, and you will not find an environment celebrating artists, or even humanity, but a collection of individuals with nothing but contempt for them, and who only wish to discover ways to make them irrelevant.

As such, I do not believe any current AI-generate image deserves copyright, but I do believe the work from whomever it scrapes from, which are published and, as such, copyrighted works under law, should be duly compensated.