



Do Androids Dream of Synthetic Images?

by Alan Healey-Greene



"HISTORY DOES NOT REPEAT – BUT IT DOES RHYME"

When I got Instagram in 2012, I became enamored with Street Photography.

Photographers like 13thWitness, Jason Goldwatch, and TrashHand showed me that by injecting perspective and personality, seemingly mundane moments could be captured as story-telling scenes that live forever as sequences of 0s and 1s.

Recently, a friend of mine was browsing my archive and suggested that I create a book featuring a selection of my photos.

The timing of this suggestion happened to coincide with unprecedented technological breakthroughs in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

AI is defined as computer systems designed to simulate human cognition.

Within the field of AI, an emerging sub-genre called Generative AI concerns itself with the creation of new content such as text and images.

These systems are fed vast datasets of existing content in order to identify patterns that they can later use to generate new content.

Now that we have established proper context, I can explain my thought process in response to my friend's suggestion that I create a photobook.

My first impulse was that I had missed the boat. I had seen many photographer friends of mine create fantastic photobooks and I wondered if the genre had been rendered obsolete by the hype surrounding "Generative AI Art".

This initial gut feeling of fear and resentment towards a changing paradigm reminded me of the cyclical, adversarial dynamic between artists and their tools that I learned about in a "History of Modern Art" course.

I recalled learning that the French Academy des Beaux Arts reacted against burgeoning Impressionists and, later on, that film photographers resisted the digital photography revolution brought about by DSLRs and Photoshop...

"A CIRCLE HAS NO END"

"The minute you understand that you can poke life, and that if you push something in, something can pop out the other side... You'll never be the same again" – Steve Jobs

In this spirit, I decided to leverage the new AI-powered tools at my disposal to participate in the never-ending dialectical dance of human creation.

One such tool called Midjourney is a text-to-image Generative AI system that offers two key functions:

1. **Describe:** Users upload an image and Midjourney attempts to generate a natural language description of it.
2. **Imagine:** Users provide a description and Midjourney attempts to generate a corresponding image.

My intention is that the following pages serve as a vehicle for examining the intersection of art, technology, and human cognition in the year 2023.

METHODOLOGY:

The process for each image in this book involves a two-step journey:

1. Upload an Original Image taken with my digital camera into Midjourney's "Describe" function, which returns a Generated Description.
2. Feed the Generated Description of the Original Image into Midjourney's "Imagine" function, which returns a Generated Image.



"STARING BACK"

Original Image #1



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #1:

A large cavern with large groups of pools, in the style of dark reflections, natural phenomena, light red and emerald, wildlife photography, uhd image, leica 50mm f/.95, light amber and silver

Midjourney's Generated Image #1



"JPEGGY"

Original Image #2



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #2:

Some people are in silhouette on a wall, in the style of detailed crowd scenes, minimalist black and white drawings, blurred forms, deconstructed objects, animated gifs, aerial view

Midjourney's Generated Image #2



"OUTPOST"

Original Image #3



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #3:

Starry night at a log cabin in the forest, in the style of minimalist landscapes, rural landscapes, rural America, vernacular photography, light red and dark emerald, ISO 200

Midjourney's Generated Image #3



"ON THE UPSIDE"

Original Image #4



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #4:

A pond with people standing in it, in the style of gravity - defying architecture, majestic ports, rui palha, 8k resolution, haifa zangana, thomas heatherwick, hall of mirrors

Midjourney's Generated Image #4



"DEAD END"

Original Image #5



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #5:

An older woman walking with a skateboard in the middle of the road with a city view in the background, in the style of the new york school, industrial photography, new American documentary photography, black and white art, cody ellingham

Midjourney's Generated Image #5



"ON SCHEDULE"

Original Image #6



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #6:

A man walking on gravel at the train station, in the style of
cildo meireles, contemporary landscape, maroon and green,
kengo kuma, rectangular fields, jusepe de ribera, confessional

Midjourney's Generated Image #6



"MC EYESHER"

Original Image #7



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #7:

The eye of oslo black and white staircase photography,
in the style of colorful eye-catching compositions,
dusan djukaric, layered organic forms, uhd image,
studyplace, symmetry and balance, marcin sobas

Midjourney's Generated Image #7



"HIGH PRIEST"

Original Image #8



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #8:

An aerial view of the st peter's square in rome, in the style of
impressive panoramas, light sky - blue and dark white,
expansive landscapes, futurist gothic, romanesque,
dignified poses, bold lines, vivid colors

Midjourney's Generated Image #8



"KRUMLOV"

Original Image #9



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #9:

Sky is clear, in the style of slovenian paintings,
canon ts - e 17mm f/4, tilt - shift, light gray and dark amber,
uhd image, zigzags, villagecore, emerald and black

Midjourney's Generated Image #9



"WATCHING CLOSELY"

Original Image #10



Midjourney's Description of Original Image #10:

An empty beach, in the style of minimalist canine sculptures,
leica m10, dark beige and amber, chicago imagists, candid
photojournalism, odd juxtapositions, caninecore

Midjourney's Generated Image #10



"CLOSING TIME"

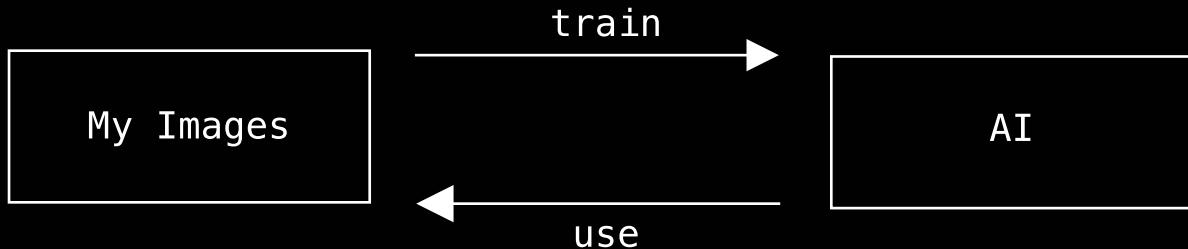
Subjects of Future Inquiry:

1. What does it mean to create an "Original Image" in 2023?
2. Is the old saying true that a picture is worth 1000 words?
3. Does Midjourney have an imagination?

This exploration aims not to reach definitive answers, but to stimulate discussion in this emerging creative field.

Acknowledgments:

1. Shout out to Stable Diffusion, the underlying Generative AI system powering Midjourney.
2. Special recognition to every artist whose work was "scraped" from the Internet and used as training data for Stable Diffusion. This includes my Original Images, which are featured in this book.



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"DON'T PANIC"