

# Negotiating Tensions: Queer Artists' Responses to the Impact of Generative AI on Artistic Agency and Labor

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As GenAI models are typically trained on data scraped without artists consent, there is a need to understand the perspectives of these — potentially involuntary — stakeholders in AI development. While the developments of GenAI models has been sharply critiqued by artists and members of marginalized communities, the perspectives of artists *from* marginalized communities is underexamined. In this work, we conduct semi-structured interviews with 15 queer artists, examining how they are making sense of and responding to the emergence and proliferation of generative AI. We identify five key points of tension: issues of ownership, authenticity, meaning, process, and labor. We detail how our participants and the artistic communities to which they belong are negotiating these tensions, such as limiting the visibility of their work online and folk theorizing to detect AI use. In response, we discuss how members of the FAccT community can better support artistic agency and artistic labor.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Art, Critical HCI, AI, Generative AI

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Generative AI (GenAI) is highly controversial among artists. Part of this concern stems from major tech companies training GenAI models using massive amounts of text, images, or videos scraped from the internet without creators' consent [18, 64–66] — a practice that has led to numerous copyright infringement lawsuits brought by artists [62, 67]. Artists have also raised concerns about the labor implications of GenAI, worrying that managers will use these models to replace artists' jobs [13, 54, 61]. Those developing GenAI models have done little to assuage artists' concerns. In a 2024 interview, OpenAI CTO Mira Murati said, "Some creative jobs maybe will go away [due to GenAI], but maybe they shouldn't have been there in the first place" [51]. For this reason, GenAI has featured prominently in numerous creative industry strikes in the past two years [13, 61]. High-profile artists [11, 71] have also even questioned whether GenAI models *can* be used to make art.

Prior research on art and GenAI has typically focused on how artists currently or might wish to use AI. Computing researchers have studied the practices within GenAI art communities [10, 70] and how to design GenAI models that better align with artists' values [5, 23, 42]. However, research on artists already using or seeking to improve the design of GenAI models may not account for those hold negative views toward GenAI. More critical scholarship has designed tools to help artists protect their work [73], examined whether AI-art "is" theft [25], and drawn on news reports and social media data to study the impacts of GenAI on artists [38, 41]. Researchers have also raised concerns that the biases

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embedded in GenAI models can harm artists from marginalized groups [38], such as queer people [56, 87]. However, researchers have not explored queer artists critical of GenAI in detail.

In this paper, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 queer artists, almost all of whom expressed critical or skeptical views toward GenAI. We found our participants' attitudes towards GenAI more nuanced than a simple good/bad binary; rather, their views depended on whether models were being used or developed in ways that align with their individual and community values. We identify five shared points of tension our participants saw between art and GenAI: issues of ownership, authenticity, meaning, process, and labor. Notably, our participants' identity as artists were much more salient than their queer identity in our interviews. Across the tensions we identified, we highlight points of agreement, disagreement, and negotiation between our participants, their artistic communities, and those they envision building and using GenAI models.

We discuss two major implications of our findings. First, we describe the aesthetic, social, and economic value misalignment our participants saw between themselves and GenAI developers. Our participants viewed art as a deeply human process while imagining GenAI developers see art as an alienated commodity to be extracted, refined, and sold. We provide implications for how computing researchers can examine and challenge the values embedded in the design and discourses surrounding GenAI and art. Our findings also point to a general lack of agency our participants felt at all stages of GenAI development and use. In response, we discuss how FAccT researchers can better support (Queer) artists' agency concerning GenAI, such as by building tools to resist online art scraping [73] and informing the design of policy.

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Value Tensions in Art

One cannot understand contemporary perceptions of GenAI among artists without also understanding these historical aesthetic, social, and economic tensions between art and technology. The question of what constitutes "art" as well as "good art" has long been a topic of study within the humanities and social sciences [7]. Sociologist Howard Becker emphasizes that the process of art making is a sociotechnical activity involving a dense network of people (e.g., photographers, curators, & audiences) and technologies (e.g., cameras & film) [3] — networks he calls "art worlds" [3]. In this work, we examine the perceptions of GenAI among our participants in relation to their various art worlds.

Different art worlds disagree over the importance of effort, form, feeling, concept, and meaning when interpreting art [3]. Non-figurative art like Pollock's drip technique is often maligned for being easier to make than figurative art like the Mona Lisa, hence the cliché: "My kid could have made that" [1, 94]. Another point of tension is the importance of form — be it figurative or abstract — versus the intended meaning of a piece. Artist Sol LeWitt distinguishes between "perceptual" art "meant for the sensation of the eye" and "conceptual" art for which "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work" [48]. A canonical example of conceptual art is Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* — a signed urinal submitted to an art exhibition in 1917 to challenge the meaning of art [8]. The aesthetic value of art is also deeply entangled with dominant power structures [7]. Queer peoples' aesthetic values often differ from those in dominant cultures. For instance, queer camp sensibilities subvert dominant values by appreciating the beauty in earnestly "bad" art [81]. Art is also an important way through which queer people explore and express their identities [20, 28].

While the category of who gets to be called an "artist" is slippery, not all artists make a living through their art, and even fewer become wealthy [2, 17]. This can be due to a variety of factors. Some art is easier to commodify than others: consider the difference between a unique painting versus an infinitely reproducible mp3 file [84]. Some

artistic communities have norms against maximizing profits, such as the stigma against "selling out" [57]. Lewis Hyde examines tensions around the commodification of art in "The Gift" [36]. Hyde associates commodities with individualism, alienation, and profit maximization versus gifts with relations of care and community. While art is produced within the gift sphere, this art making still takes place within a market context.

New technologies for art making are often met with controversy and perceived to diminish the quality or aura of an artwork. Walter Benjamin famously suggested that photography diminishes the value of the art being reproduced, be it a painting or a recording of a play [4]. While one may now take for granted that photography and filmmaking "count" as art, this was hotly contested in the early 20th century [4, 80]. Likewise, making art using a computer — in any sense — was once highly stigmatized [6]. This is not to say that all technologies will eventually be accepted by artists. Rather, the social construction of *art* is an ongoing process inextricable from technological development.

## 2.2 Queer People in AI Research

Prior computing research suggests that queer people are often harmed by the design of algorithmic systems. Automated gender recognition systems misgender trans people and uphold harmful notions of gender essentialism[72]. Hate speech detection algorithms have been shown to be biased against the ways some queer people speak [86]. The design of social media algorithms have also been shown to discriminate against queer people, such as biases in feed recommendations [77], targeted advertising [69], and content moderation [52]. A group of LGBTQ+ content creators famously conducted a grassroots audit to prove that YouTube's demonetization algorithm discriminated against queer content, endangering the livelihoods of queer creators [75]. Similar issues of algorithmic harm have been raised in the context of GenAI. For instance, the Colossal Clean Crawled Corpus, which is often used to train GenAI models, used a simplistic blocklist that filtered out documents written in African American English or discussing LGBTQ+ identities [18]. GenAI models also frequently stereotype [68] or exclude queer people altogether [24], leading to concerns over how these will impact queer artists [87]. However, queer artists' perceptions of GenAI models have not yet been examined in detail.

## 2.3 Generative AI & Art

The labor impacts of GenAI on art have recently garnered substantial scholarly and journalistic attention. In the summer of 2024, video game voice and movement actors went on strike over AI [61] and recent layoffs in the video game industry have been attributed to managers using GenAI to cut jobs [54]. Computing researchers have also raised concerns over the economic impacts of GenAI on artists, such as forced GenAI use and job reductions [38]. Similar observations were made by Kawakami & Venkatagiri in their analysis of social media and news discourse related to GenAI and art [41]. Another concern is that GenAI will lead to de-skilling [38]. As an example, the video game studio Electronic Arts (EA) recently admitted to hiring artists merely to retouch GenAI-created digital models of American football player heads for an upcoming video game [53]. Similar to gig-work, converting art making to piecemeal work may increase time pressures [91] and alienate artists from the products of their labor [26].

Another major concern among artists is how GenAI models are trained: using massive amounts of text, images, or videos scraped from the internet without creators' consent [18, 66]. Investigative journalists found that major tech companies — such as Anthropic, Nvidia, and Apple — scraped YouTube subtitles without consent to train GenAI models [66]. Others discovered that a common dataset used to train large language models included pirated books from living authors [64]. These training data practices have led to numerous legal actions by artists against GenAI companies [37, 67]. Others have fought back against unauthorized scraping through data poisoning [89], such as the online fan

fiction community organizing a sexually explicit write-a-thon [76]. Computing researchers have also developed tools to help artists protect their work from being used to train GenAI models [73, 74].

Questions of artistic ownership also feature prominently in computing scholarship on GenAI [25, 38, 73]. In their recent FAccT research, Goetze draws on theories of property [50], distributive justice [63], contextual integrity [58], and data colonialism [96] to argue that GenAI relies on “art theft” [25]. HCI researchers have also found that GenAI troubles notions of creative authorship and ownership [9, 19]. Draxler et al. liken generative text models to ghostwriters because users may identify themselves as *authors* while simultaneously not perceiving themselves to be *owners* of AI-generated text [19]. On the other hand, artists using AI in their artistic process run the risk of audiences perceiving their art as being made “by” rather than “with” AI [9, 15].

HCI researchers are exploring how artists are using or might use AI — generative or otherwise. Much of this work has looked at individuals who are already using GenAI in their practice [10, 70]. For instance, Chang et al. found that “prolific users” of text-to-image models view both their text prompts as well as resulting images as forms of art [10]. Other artists use AI to critique these technologies themselves via art [9, 33, 90]. The ability to use GenAI in art is also impacted by biases embedded in the design of these systems [38, 55]. Mim et al. describe points of friction between image-makers in Bangladesh and text-to-image models, such as reproducing stereotypes and requiring English proficiency [55]. Meanwhile, other artists are interested in working with AI due, in part, to their limitations, leading to glitches [10], uncertainty [78], and surprise [9]. HCI scholars have also developed and improved tools that help individuals refine AI art prompts or creators make video podcast teasers [92, 93]. In addition to research on those *already using* GenAI, some have sought to understand how artists *might wish to use* AI in their practice [5, 23, 42], often emphasizing the need for AI tools to align with individual artistic values.

Computing research on AI and art often focuses on the practices of those already using AI or understanding how to improve the design of future AI tools; as such, study participants likely already believe that GenAI should or could have a role in art. However, this overlooks artists who hold more negative attitudes toward GenAI. Existing computing scholarship that critiques the relationship between GenAI and art (e.g., [25, 38, 41]) has tended to focus on extant news reports and social media discourse rather than speaking directly with artists. More work is needed to understand the experiences and beliefs of artists who do not use and/or hold negative attitudes toward GenAI.

### 3 METHODS

In this work, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 artists we recruited through a web form shared on Reddit and Twitter. We required our participants to (1) be at least 18 years old, (2) live in the United States of America, and (3) identify as “queer artists.” In our recruitment form, we asked participants to describe their artistic practice. Our participants engaged in a variety of art forms, such as writing, visual art, textile art, sculpture, music, and video game design. About half our participants mentioned engaging in fan communities (P3, P6, P7, P9, P11, P14) through either fan fiction or fan art. Through our interviews, we found that only one of our participants primarily made a living with their art (P1). Other participants sold their art in more one-off ways (P3, P6, P7, P14, P15), such as selling fan art at conventions (P7). We required participants to rate the following on a five-point scale: how often they use GenAI (1 = Never, 5 = All the Time) and how they feel toward GenAI (1 = Strongly Dislike, 5 = Strongly Like). Our participants identified as infrequent GenAI users (mean = 1.53, median = 1) and tended to hold negative attitudes toward GenAI (mean = 2.13, median = 2, std = 1.13). There was greater variation in how our participants felt toward GenAI (std = 1.13) than in how often they use GenAI (std = 0.64). More information can be found in Table 1. Our participants were also given the option of sharing additional demographic information. Of those who provided their age, they ranged from 20

PID	Artistic Practices	GenAI Use (1 = Never, 5 = All the Time)	GenAI Attitudes (1 = Strongly Dislike, 5 = Strongly Like)
1	Video Games, Game Design	Never	Strongly Dislike
2	Crafts, Physical 3D Things	Never	Neutral
3	Fan Fiction, Embroidery, Cosplay, Painting	Rarely	Strongly Dislike
4	Musical Theatre	Sometimes	Like
5	Drawing, Sequential Art	Rarely	Like
6	Visual Art, Fan Fiction, Music.	Rarely	Neutral
7	Fan Art, Fan Fiction, Original Character Design	Never	Strongly Dislike
8	Drone/Noise/Glitch Music, 3D Modeling.	Rarely	Neutral
9	Digital Fan Art, Amateur Sculpting	Never	Strongly Dislike
10	Illustration	Never	Dislike
11	Science-Fiction Writing, Digital Illustration	Rarely	Dislike
12	Crochet, Origami, Lego Building	Never	Strongly Dislike
13	Textiles/Garments, Ceramics, Printmaking	Never	Strongly Dislike
14	Cartoons, Non-Representational Drawing	Never	Dislike
15	Social Practice, Sculpture, VR	Rarely	Neutral

Table 1. Participant demographics detailing their individual artistic practices, how often they use GenAI (1 = Never, 5 = All the Time) and how they feel toward GenAI (1 = Strongly Dislike, 5 = Strongly Like).

to 33 years old, with a median age of 26. A majority of our participants identified as white, five as Asian, and two as Hispanic/Latina. Due to our inclusion criteria, all participants identified as queer artists. Most of our participants (10) identified as trans, non-binary, gender queer, or gender non-conforming. Four participants identified as disabled.

Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately one hour, and each participant was compensated with a \$25 Amazon Gift Card. The first author led each interview, which took place between March and May of 2024. Our questions focused on understanding the relationship between our participants' identities and their art, their past experiences with and feelings toward GenAI, and how GenAI has been impacting their artistic communities. However, our questions narrowed slightly over time. Based on nascent themes from our earlier interviews, we modified our questions over time to theoretically sample for a greater understanding of values associated with art and GenAI [12].

After transcribing each interview, the first and second authors engaged in open coding [12]. This open coding process lasted approximately one month. While coding, the first and second authors wrote memos and discussed initial patterns in weekly meetings. Then, we imported each of our open codes onto a digital whiteboarding tool to perform axial coding. At this stage, we identified numerous dialectical tensions between our participants' perceptions of Art and GenAI, such as "art making as a process" versus "generative AI as a shortcut." This led us to locate the source of our participants' antagonism toward GenAI as resulting from value tensions in the production of art.

#### 4 FINDINGS

To our surprise, we found that queer identity was not central to our participants attitudes toward GenAI. While queerness was an important aspect in some of our participants' art practices, such as P3 exploring her identity through fan fic, queerness was also not central to most of our participants' art. P2 mentioned: "my religious identity is my strongest, most salient identity" in relation to art. P1, a queer game developer of color, integrates characters with various skin tones and queer identities into her games but "never has it be a central thing of their character." In P1's games,

her identities "show up the way [she] would want them to show up in more general media: just like happenstance." P15 explained that queer identity was not central to their practice: "I'm just a person making art and I have a certain identity." P12 said that his art is less focused on queer identity (e.g., crocheting "in a rainbow pattern") than "queer" in the sense of challenging gender norms because a man "being into crochet is kind of fruity." Despite our decision to emphasize queerness at the outset, we found our participants' "queer" identities were far less salient in this work than their identities as "artists." Due to this, we will predominantly discuss the tensions between GenAI and art more broadly from the perspectives of our participants in the remainder of our findings.

In terms of GenAI perceptions, we found the use of GenAI to make art highly stigmatized, with individuals characterizing GenAI models as "vomiting" (P9) or "spitting out" (P2, P3, P13) text and images. AI-generated text and images were referred to as "stupid" (P12), "meaningless" (P15), and "soulless" (P1, P3). Participants often framed artists as in opposition to those developing and using GenAI. This was apparent in the GenAI controversies alluded to by our participants, such as the owners of Dungeons & Dragons changing their game license to permit AI use (P1) and someone filling in the negative space of a Keith Haring painting that the artist left unfinished to represent his impending death from AIDs (P10). We found these negative attitudes to be rooted in five, at times overlapping, points of tension related to art and GenAI: issues of ownership, authenticity, meaning, process, and labor. Our participants' attitudes hinged on the particular ways in which models are developed and used as well as their existing attitudes toward art. Therefore, we take care to highlight points of disagreement and factors impacting ethical negotiations. We also detail how our participants and members of their artistic communities are subverting and appropriating GenAI.

#### 4.1 Ownership Tensions: Consent, Data Theft, & Resistance

Our participants expressed frustration that GenAI models were built from art without creators' consent, describing GenAI development as "stealing" (P1), "theft" (P6), "scummy" (P7), "nasty" (P9), and an "invasion of privacy" (P13). As P11 explains, "Artists are not super happy about generative AI because they were not being properly taken care of or consulted and no one asked their permission." P13 worried about the lack of transparency and agency for artists:

"I wanna be able to be certain that Microsoft isn't pulling from a Tumblr blog I've forgotten about from 2013 with pictures of my art on it or something. I just don't want my work being fed into the AI blender ... You cannot be certain that if you opt out that your choice is actually being respected." (P13)

Our participants did not necessarily reject all GenAI. Rather, their ethical attitudes and responses were shaped by the particular ways GenAI models do or do not align with community values. For example, participants mentioned they would have fewer ethical concerns if GenAI models were built from more ethically sourced data (i.e., built with artist consent). P13 explained, "My dislike of AI is not my dislike of digital tools. I think digital tools are great. I just think that with AI the consent issue of it is what gets me." P11 felt that "a nice, formal, transparent consent process" would help "reconcile" her ethical concerns. P9 compared the morality of GenAI to fan art norms toward using other artists' work:

"Having a generative AI that is trained on a consensual data set is more ethical to me than one trained on stolen data, just like 'tracing' versus taking a publicly available base and using it. Because the base creator wanted people to use their stuff while the tracer or the person you traced probably did not." (P9)

P7 distinguished between the use of existing media by fan artists and GenAI developers: "Fan art is usually well, I hope, usually created through the own means of the artist ... They aren't just like tracing a photo or whatever, and slapping it on the Internet and saying, 'Hey, I drew this.' They're usually like creating something." In other words, P7 argued that building on existing art is more ethical when one mixes their individual creative labor with another piece.



We explore this conversation around effort in greater detail in Section 4.4. Thinking through potential remedies for these issues of consent, P6 worried about artists invoking the language of copyright protection: "Copyright is horsesh\*t anyway. It shouldn't exist. It's just a tool to give The Mouse [Disney] more billions." However, P6 — an artist who works in IT — believed that GenAI relies on "data theft," with GenAI being one example of widespread unethical data practices.

Improved data consent was not necessarily perceived as a panacea for the ethical concerns regarding GenAI. P7 felt that seeking data consent would make GenAI feel "a lot more ethical." However, she still worried resulting models might be used in ways that artists might not desire, such as "not safe for work art" or art that is "derogatory to other people." Similarly, P3 explained she would feel "a little better" if everyone had consented to their work being used to train a GenAI model but still worried "there's so much potential for the models to be used in negative ways."

In light of these concerns, participants described numerous ways they and members of their artistic communities are resisting those building AI models without artists' consent. P13 chose to limit the visibility of their art: "I don't put my art online anymore. I don't want [fast fashion brand] stealing it. I don't want AI combing through it to take chunks of it and cut it apart and use it for other things I don't want. I don't want any of that. So I purely share my art person to person." In an attempt to regain agency, P3 saw fan fiction writers place 'do not scrape' requests at the top of stories: "They'll put something up top that says like 'Please don't use this for AI training' ... not that I think that [the requests] would actually stop anybody." P6 was excited about the use of data poisoning tool, noting that "most people" are using data poisoning tools to "mess with the data sets so [developers] can't use [these models] anymore." However, P6 thought "it's cool that the data sets are getting messed with because now we are going to get something different out of those generative AI. We're going to get something that we wouldn't expect, which is so exciting to me."

#### 4.2 Authenticity Tensions: Deception, Disclosure, & Detection

The undisclosed use of GenAI to make art was seen as a form of deception by our participants. P1 explained: "My feelings towards [GenAI] are pretty negative right now. They mainly seem to be used to — I mean to be blunt — scam people. To create soulless art or to haphazardly take away any kind of the critical thought that goes into art." Similarly, P7 worried: "Just the fact that I would be able to find out that something's AI. It gets upsetting because it's becoming more and more like deception." P10 also recalled: "I have had a moment of being like 'oh, this is a really cool visual,' and then I find out it was AI-generated and then it kind of it feels a bit like a letdown." This same phrase, a "letdown," was used by P9 to describe the feeling of finding out a piece of work was made using GenAI. The mere possibility that one could find out art was made using AI has led our participants to approach art they encounter with greater suspicion.

Participants wanted to know if or how GenAI was used to make art. P4 said one should "give credit where it's due," meaning "if you didn't do all the work, you should probably mention that you used AI to assist you." Our participants emphasized that technological mediation in-and-of-itself does not diminish art but rather the lack of disclosure of this process. P3 considered both hand embroidery and machine embroidery to be "just two different ways of approaching a piece of art." Unlike with GenAI, P3 felt "people who do machine embroidery aren't trying to pass it off" as hand embroidery. P2 compared the recent "outrage" toward GenAI to "the stir in the art world [in the early 20th century] where people were starting to use photographs of people in place of live models" which people believed "takes something out of [the art]." As a remedy, P2 encouraged artists to "just be open about what you're doing with [GenAI]." Attitudes toward GenAI in art depend not only on the use of AI but also how a piece of art is presented.

Owing to the desire for greater transparency into the use of AI to make art, participants wished various technologies were designed to better support the disclosure and detection of AI usage. Some participants (P9, P10, P11) wished AI-generated art was labeled when shared on social media. P11 was glad to see that visual and written art contest

submission forms increasingly "ask you to click the box if this is AI-generated." P11 went on to say that without these "labels" you "cannot track it down" if "original artists claim that they have had their copyright violated." P11 also thought that better detection tools might help address the negative consequences of AI-generated spam, noting that numerous sci-fi magazines have "paused their open calls because they were spammed by AI-generated stories."

Due to the lack of transparency over GenAI use, participants developed and deployed their own strategies to try to detect AI-generated images, such as examining "hands" in visual art (P3, P7, P9). In turn, these folk theories can be leveraged to accuse others of using GenAI. P3 recalled: "I see AI-generated fan art come across my timeline way more often but usually it's coming across because somebody is quote retweeting the fan art and saying like 'this is AI-generated and you can tell because of like this, this and this.'" At the same time, P9 doubted the efficacy of these strategies: "I really wish it could always be true that we can tell when there's a human behind stuff but I think the reality of the situation is that we can't." As these folk theories are imperfect, artists now run the risk of being falsely accused of using AI:

"I have seen artists who have genuinely created this work get replies saying, 'this is AI,' even when it's not so, it adds, I think, a level of frustration. That not only has have people had their work ripped off but now their work is being accused of not being theirs in the first place." (P10)

P3 recalled: "I have heard of my friends who are fan artists, saying that now they try and draw in a very much more distinctive art style or when they draw they'll do time lapses of like them drawing the actual picture so they don't get accused of it being AI." Due to the risk of AI accusations, artists must sometimes *prove* the authenticity of their work.

### 4.3 Meaning Tensions: Intentions, Concepts, & (In)Humanity

Participants' attitudes toward GenAI depended, in part, on the importance they place on the meaning or concept behind art. Some of our participants did not think one can imbue meaning in a piece of work through prompting GenAI. Defending conceptual art, P7 said: "As long as there's like some degree of sincerity or personal belief put into it, regardless of what it is, I think that makes it art." However, P7 does not consider GenAI to be art because "it's the thought behind it, like it is the intention you put behind something and GenAI models don't have intention." Similarly, P13 believed art made using GenAI "feels emptier" because "there's no intention there" and "there's no person behind it."

Like other participants, P11 said that "what makes art art is that there's something inherent in art that's communicative and expressive." However, P11 thought GenAI *can* be used to make art because they think prompting can encode meaning: "it's still a human having the urge for expression but might not have the skill set or time or energy to manifest it in an artistic way." Similar to the use of "meaning" and "intent" to evaluate art, participants often used the metaphor of having, lacking, or being filled with a "soul" (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P10) to explain their feelings toward GenAI. However, participants disagreed over the extent to which art made using GenAI can have meaning or a soul.

While acknowledging that GenAI is often used to make meaningless art, some participants believe this is not a property of GenAI itself but rather the way it is used. P15 has not used GenAI themselves because "the process of an artist is to generate good ideas." However, P15 caveated: "if you have a great idea and you are able to use GenAI to make it faster or more efficient or maybe it's research of some form where you have to aggregate all this data and then generate an image from that, I think, 'Okay, sure that's a good way of using generative AI.'" P6 and P8 prioritized the idea behind art versus the effort that went into making a piece of work, both drawing on the history of conceptual art. P6 critiqued those making "strict judgments about what can and can't count as art," going on to say: "I fail to see the difference between [Duchamp's *Fountain*] and using generative AI. I don't think it's worthwhile as a discussion to



consider whether or not art has a soul or whether enough effort went into making it because at the end of the day what matters is the end product. What matters is the idea that's being expressed by the art." P8 described similar feelings toward GenAI, explaining that someone using a generative image model in their art making exerts control over the concept behind the work even if they did not "have much direct influence on the work in terms of the image file."

Participants often found GenAI most artistically interesting when artists lean into the inhumanity or meaninglessness of the technology, rather than trying to replace human creativity. P8 was most interested in how GenAI can create a "picture of something that doesn't exist and can't possibly exist in the real world," which "harkens back to [surrealist] art." Similarly, P6 was excited about the potential applications of GenAI in "data bending" glitch art, which he described as "some of the most surreal — inhuman in a good way — feeling art." P9 enjoyed the "early days of AI-generated images" because they were "pretty freaky." P9 elaborated:

"[Early AI art was] way more art than what the AI image generators are spitting out now because you could see a machine struggling to comprehend stuff. And I think that was pretty cool because it wasn't really comparable to what I think that artists could make. So it was like its own niche. But instead of becoming its own niche it's now intruding in artist territory, and I think that's bad." (P9)

What P14 found most interesting about GenAI in the context of art "is that [GenAI] is so non-human." He went on to explain: "I could probably find hypothetical ways that I would use AI in a project and make it not corny, but I think it's very hard to do that right now because our imagination around AI is collectively limited because of the way it's hyped. It's hyped as this product that can substitute for human creativity, which is obviously disrespectful to human creativity and also to the particular creativity that AI offers."

#### 4.4 Process Tensions: Tools, Shortcuts, & Effort

Our participants were more comfortable with those using GenAI as a small part of a broader artistic process than those treating the direct output of a GenAI model as art. To make sense of this distinction, three participants (P3, P9, P10) alluded to a controversy in which the animators of a recent film were accused of using AI. P3 found it acceptable for animators to use AI to help with "grunt work." Similarly, P10 explained, "I think if [GenAI is] something that can make a job just a bit easier, then I think that's that's a good application [of GenAI]." Likewise, P11 has never used GenAI to write her stories. However, she has used GenAI to help with "preparation" (e.g., information seeking) and "post-production" (e.g., editing pitch letters or synopses for writing competitions). This sentiment toward GenAI as a tool versus the end product was summed up by P1: "I think there can be some benefits. Ultimately, the problem I have with [GenAI] is that it's a really interesting tool that people are treating as the producer of an end product."

Some were more comfortable with those using GenAI to learn rather than replace skills. P9 believed one "shouldn't shovel over [tasks] to AI," such as using GenAI to finish one's colors. However, P9 caveated that: "If you just want to practice coloring and there was like a generative AI that could spit out forms for you to color. I might be less disapproving of that, especially if it was never a sold product." P15 — an art school student — raised similar pedagogical concerns. Recalling their experience TAing a design course, P15 was dismayed that: "nobody sketches anymore like nobody actually makes anything by themselves, and I think that it's frustrating or it could be like a little sad." P15 went on to explain: "it's like a different way of experiencing the world to sketch it and I think that is lost [by using GenAI]."

Our participants critiqued those who use GenAI to sacrifice artistic quality for efficiency. P1 explained: "There's always going to be people who take stuff that's meant to be tools or minor shortcuts, but then they use *all* the shortcuts." P1 likened GenAI to "asset flipping," when "game developers buy a bunch of pre-made assets, put them into a really

quick game and then sell it for profit." P14 raised similar concerns: "I can tell like, 'oh, they didn't budget for hiring an illustrator to make a bespoke image for this because they had a Midjourney subscription.' In those sorts of cases, that's just laziness. That's not necessarily an AI problem. That's a laziness problem. That is a lack of imagination problem."

The joy our participants found in art was often tied to the social relationships that art-making can foster. P13 explained: "I like being able to give my friend, a cool mug or a cool plate that I made, and then, whenever they use it, they're like, 'Oh, yeah, [P13] loves me.' I like that about art." However, the use of GenAI can diminish the social value of art. P3 said: "I really don't get the point of AI-generated [fan art or fan fiction] because the point of making creations like that is to share joy with others, to share my vision with others, and to connect with others. It feels like a very human activity ... I just don't understand where the joy is in [using GenAI]." Likewise, P5 felt: "It just wouldn't be the same if I told Microsoft Image Creator to make this personal art and I shared it with my friends."

Overall, we found that the value of art is typically inseparable from the history of its making. P12 told the story of a textile artist on Instagram who made a blanket for their baby, saying he enjoys "the humanity part" of art: "I know people say you can separate the art from the artist, but I disagree ... [with GenAI] there's no artists attached to it so there's no humanity." P9 also critiqued those seeking to divorce art from the context of its production: "There is an argument for why [using GenAI] shouldn't be disappointing being that 'Oh, look at the product and stuff.' But that sort of approach to making stuff leads to a less empathetic more miserable world, one more susceptible to consumerism and working for our Lord and saviors Amazon and being exploited until the end of time. We need to value people around us more than we value products." Here, we can see that the value of art is brought into tension because GenAI can reduce the effort to make art and, in turn, distance art from artists.

#### 4.5 Labor Tensions: Cost Cutting, Profits, & Personal Use

Although most of our participants did not make money from their art, they often worried about the labor impacts of GenAI on other artists. For example, P10's "main concern" regarding GenAI was that "people are using [GenAI] at the expense of working artists, writers, actors, etc." This concern over GenAI models replacing artists' jobs has contributed to a stigma toward using GenAI. For P3, using ChatGPT once felt "like almost a betrayal, in a sense, to my values and how much I value the work of writers and also artists because I know AI-generated art has taken away a lot of jobs."

Our participants' did not necessarily believe that GenAI could *truly* replace artists' jobs. Rather, they feared that employers seeking to "cut costs" (P9) believe AI can replace artists' jobs. P14 characterized employers' present use of GenAI as "a violence against those artists who now are finding themselves out of work because the people who would hire them falsely believe that AI is capable of replacing that type of work." P6 worried managers will use GenAI to pressure artists: "The expectation is no longer going to be 'You have a week to do this' Now it's 'Okay you have 2 days to do this because we've given you this new tool, which means that you should be able to do it faster.'" P1 echoed:

"There's this inherent joy in art of facing a problem and coming up with a solution on your own. That's why I think for a lot of game developers AI doesn't seem that enticing as opposed to CEOs and more business oriented people who want to cut as many game developers out of the development process. Which probably contributes to the stigma. It's literally the machines taking dream jobs away." (P1)

The perceived labor impacts of GenAI on specific artistic communities depends on their existing economic practices. P3 mentioned "it's part of the culture of fan fiction where people generally want it to be free and have it be a free exchange of ideas and fiction. I feel like that's a big cultural value." As a result, P3 felt "the fact that [fan fiction is] not profitable will discourage AI use." However, P3 worries "there's more reason for people to want to make AI-generated fan

art" because "people do often make a profit off of fan art, either through selling prints or commissions." This is perhaps why P7, a fan artist, recalled recently selling her art at a fan convention that "explicitly [banned AI art] on the page to register for the artist ally." P12 discussed a controversy where a prominent yarn company shared an AI-generated image of crochet art that is impossible to make on social media. He worried that these images may harm artists who publish instructional books by "distorting people's perception about crochet."

Participants distinguished between those using GenAI to make money versus those using it for personal use, perceiving the latter to be more ethical. As P3 explained: "I feel like using it for your own purposes is fine, perhaps, but if it's taking away people's jobs, or if you're making a profit off of it that I feel way less comfortable with." P11's attitudes toward GenAI use depended on whether the art was "personal versus public" as well as whether a piece of art is made "for profit." P11 had few qualms with private usage or public usage for non-profit purposes. However, she thought that when GenAI is used for profit there is a need for "more regulation and transparency."

Finally, some participants located their concerns with GenAI not entirely within the technology itself but rather the capitalist system. Rather than debating if GenAI should be used at all, P6 wished artists would focus more directly on "workers rights in creative industries," such as "seeking to regulate the ways that we use [GenAI] or regulate the treatment of workers using it." Similarly, P8 focused on critiques of capitalism rather than GenAI itself:

"I just feel like if people didn't have to rely on their art to make money and support themselves that would be a better world. I feel like we wouldn't be having these conversations about the fear of being replaced. It's only because there's this need to extract profit from art." (P8)

As P15 summarized, "being a creative person under capitalism is hard" because "good art" is not necessarily the most "financially successful art."

## 5 DISCUSSION

Although queerness was not central to our participants attitudes toward GenAI, we identified numerous tensions they saw between art and GenAI. Some of these tensions were rooted in the lack of consent and transparency in GenAI model development and use, leading to a denial of agency. Our participants expressed frustration that GenAI models are developed in ways that conflict with our participants values toward artistic ownership, values that do not necessarily comport with the legal framework of copyright law (Section 4.1). They also worried about individuals not disclosing the use of GenAI, violating norms around authenticity in the presentation of art by deceiving audiences (Section 4.2). Meanwhile, other tensions stem from the nature of GenAI models, namely the ability to quickly make text or images. On the one hand, our participants cared deeply about the craft of art making, such as the intended meaning behind a piece (Section 4.3) and the process that went into its making (Section 4.4). On the other hand, our participants worried about individuals and corporations that primarily value the profits that can be extracted from art (Section 4.5). Below, we first discuss how computing researchers, designers, and policy makers can better support artists' agency by improving consent and transparency. We then discuss how members of the FAccT community can better support artistic labor.

### 5.1 Supporting Artistic Agency

The ownership tensions we identified in Section 4.1 largely stem from a lack of consent and transparency in GenAI development. These findings demonstrate the importance of helping individuals learn if, how, and by whom their art has already been used to train GenAI models. For instance, researchers should audit and make visible the content in prominent open-source datasets, such as prior investigations of the Book3 [64] dataset. Designers can also help

communicate the results of these investigations by building tools to help artists check if their work is in popular datasets, such as a tool created by journalists to search for authors in Book3 [65]. However, this work may be insufficient to address transparency concerns because companies rarely disclose their GenAI training data. Therefore, computing researchers should also advocate for policy changes to increase training data transparency [29]. Merely knowing if one's work was used to train GenAI models is still insufficient to address our participants' concerns, such as the inability to opt their work out of being used to train GenAI models (Section 4.1) and fear of these models being used to replace one's work (Section 4.5). Lacking other ways to opt out, some of our participants have resorted to limiting the visibility of their art online (Section 4.1).

Researchers and designers should help artists opt in or out of having their online work used to train GenAI models across all levels of the technology stack. At an infrastructural level, technologists could update internet standards — such as robots.txt — to differentiate between scraping permissions for search engine indexing versus GenAI training [39]. However, such changes may prove ineffective because internet standards are usually enforced by norms rather than laws [46]. Applications developers could imperceptibly perturb images and videos that users upload [73] to protect these works from being used to build GenAI models, similar to social media sites removing location metadata when users upload images [22, 34]. At the user-interface level, designers of online platforms should provide artists with clear consent settings, with opting out being the default option. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that for-profit companies will make decisions that are best for users at the expense of their bottom-lines, as indicated by Reddit and Tumblr deciding to sell user data to GenAI developers [60]. Therefore, we encourage computing researchers to advocate for user data protection policies, such as extending right to be forgotten laws to training datasets [59].

As indicated by the numerous lawsuits facing tech companies at the time of our writing over the development of GenAI models [37, 67], tech companies have a long history of skirting regulation by "asking for forgiveness rather than permission" [88]. Regardless of any policies, standards, or interface-level changes intended to give artists greater agency, there will certainly be tech companies and individuals that continue to ignore artists' wishes. Technologists have spent decades developing DRM software to prevent everyday users from scraping artwork owned by major corporations [17], with much less attention paid to designing technology to protect everyday artists from major corporations [47]. To reverse this course, we encourage oppositional privacy research and design to help artists protect their work from being used to train GenAI models without their consent, such as tools like Glaze [73] and Nightshade [74].

Our participants also expressed a desire for greater transparency into how or if GenAI is used in the art-making process (Section 4.2), such as art made using GenAI being labeled when shared on social media. However, implementing such labeling poses numerous design challenges. Our participants' perceptions of art depended greatly on exactly where in the artistic process one uses GenAI (Section 4.4). It follows that a single "AI-generated" label may fail to account for the myriad ways GenAI may be used in the process of art making. Future work should explore how to design art labeling schemes beyond the binary of GenAI use/non-use [21] as well as how the design of different interfaces for displaying these labels impact audience perceptions, similar to usable privacy research on the design of opt-out buttons [27]. Researchers should also continue exploring how to watermark or detect AI-generated media [43, 95], while also balancing the relative harms of false-negatives versus false-positives in different application domains [14].

Our participants and members of their artistic communities have resorted to using folk theories to try to detect AI-generated images (Section 4.2). However, we found this heightened suspicion harms artists and artistic audiences by adding additional labor to prove use/non-use when sharing or enjoying a work of art. Future research should investigate the strategies, harms, and benefits associated with these grassroots "everyday audits" of art [75], paying particular attention to false-positives, false-negatives, and the space between GenAI use/non-use. Like recent work

designing platforms to support crowd audits of biases in algorithmic systems [16, 45], designers could create tools to support AI-generated art crowd labeling. However, such systems would need to provide avenues for accused artists to contest or refute claims as the consequences of a false-positive could be detrimental to artists' reputations (Section 4.2). Researchers should also study the experiences of those who have — rightly or wrongly — been accused of using GenAI to make art. In turn, researchers and designers may wish to consider how to help artists prove the "authenticity" of their art-making process.

Our findings also problematize the relationship between technological erasure and harmful [49]. In order for erasure to be harmful, one must want to be included. While prior work has critiqued the inadvertent erasure of queer people from GenAI pre-training datasets [18], many of our participants would not want to be included in GenAI datasets compiled without consent. Likewise, critical scholars have advocated *against* greater inclusion in harmful algorithmic systems [35], such as facial recognition often used for state surveillance [32]. Our findings demonstrates the need to challenge rhetoric defending non-consensual data practices under the guise of greater inclusivity. Instead, centering agency requires giving individuals the choice of whether they want to be included.

## 5.2 Supporting Artistic Labor

Not all tensions between our participants and GenAI can be reduced to issues of agency, consent or transparency. As mentioned previously, our participants cared about the craft of art-making as well as their artistic communities (Sections 4.3 and 4.4), while worrying that corporations primarily value the profit that can be extracted from art (Section 4.5). The former treats art as inextricable from its deeply-human history, while the latter view treats art as an alienated commodity. Our participants negative attitudes toward GenAI were largely rooted in the conflicts between these two competing visions of what art is and should be, between the social and economic value of art [36].

To support the humanity of artistic labor, we encourage researchers to augment rather than replace the art making process. Our participants typically had fewer ethical concerns with those using GenAI to learn rather than replace skills, indicating potential opportunities for design. Similarly, recent research has explored using GenAI to train online peer mental health counselors, supporting rather than removing the humanity of care work [83]. Computing scholars can also support artistic labor by embracing the uniquely surreal nature of GenAI. Our participants praised early GenAI models for their strangeness, but found newer models to be "corny" simulacra of human creativity (Section 4.3). That which GenAI developers malign as bugs may actually be creative features for artists [9, 10, 78]. Augmenting the artistic process may require taking a broader view of what counts as art making. While P11 was not interested in using GenAI to directly write her fiction, she was ok with using GenAI support more peripheral activities (e.g., editing pitch-letters). Rather than focusing on using GenAI to "make" art, computing scholars should explore how GenAI might support peripheral activities in the art making process. Finally, we encourage researchers to weary of AI replacement hiding under the guise of augmentation, as is often the case in the introduction of workplace AI technologies [40, 44].

Although most of our participants did not primarily make a living through their art, they felt such strong solidarity with working artists (Section 4.5). In light of the numerous strikes involving GenAI in the past two years [13, 61], FAccT researchers can support artistic labor by working with with creative unions to craft labor contract language. Researchers could help design policies on how or if GenAI models can be trained on past or future creative work, remedying the uncertainty our participants experienced (Section 4.1). One could also co-develop contract language with union members around how or if workers can use particular GenAI models, such as preventing forced use from management (Section 4.5). At the same time, individual artists may still want the option to use GenAI models on their own terms, such as P11 who only used GenAI to help with pre- and post-production work like writing formulaic pitch

letters (Section 4.4). Researchers should consider how to design technologies to help workers enact hard-fought AI policies [82]. Future work could also study how artists are discussing GenAI during labor disputes as well as how current GenAI labor policies are designed, such as a close reading of the Hollywood writers' strike negotiations and the resulting contract [13]. At the same time, not all artists have privilege of belonging to a strong union. There is also a need for research supporting more vulnerable, freelance artists.

In addition to focusing on the impacts of GenAI on paid work, our findings demonstrate the need to consider the impacts of GenAI on unpaid artistic labor (Section 4.5). Not only are GenAI models built using freely shared art (Section 4.1), some of this art is produced within art worlds with strong communal, anti-capitalist values (Section 4.5). It is unjust for GenAI developers to commodify art held in common and freely exchanged within an art world against these artists' wishes. Much like Goetze argues [25], GenAI models are developed in ways that echo the colonial dispossession of communal property [30, 31]. Open-source software communities have similarly responded to companies seeking to commodify technology built on free labor [47]. So-called "copyleft" licenses use copyright law to force those building on free and open software to release derivative works for free [79]. Future computing research could collaborate with legal scholars to design similar licenses to resist the enclosure and commodification of free online art [85].

### 5.3 Limitations

Our work should not be interpreted as speaking for all "queer artists." In this study, most of our participants were queer people who happened to make art rather than those who center queer identity in their practice. This is likely why our participants' queer identities did not seem central to their attitudes towards generative AI. At the same time, the relationship between GenAI and art may also be an instance where class conciseness trumps identity politics. Our findings are also not meant to represent the experiences of all "artists." Although all of our participants self-identified as "artists," they often belonged to different art worlds — ranging from textile art to game design to fan fiction. In recruiting broadly, we were able to study a breadth of attitudes toward GenAI and get partial views into various artistic communities. At the same time, each art world has its own particular histories, norms, and mediums. One salient aspect of different art worlds is how or if people make money from their art, such as the norm against profiting from fan fiction (Section 4.5). In this study, most participants did not make a living primarily through their art. The attitudes of, for instance, full-time screenwriters toward GenAI would likely differ from those of our participants. Another limitation of our work is that all our participants lived in the United States of America, and our interviews were conducted in English. However, perceptions and experiences of art and GenAI may differ outside our particular context of study, as evident from prior work on image-making in Bangladesh that found substantial cultural biases in GenAI models [55]. Computing researchers should examine GenAI within various cultural, linguistic, and artistic contexts in greater depth.

## 6 CONCLUSION

We examined how artists from a variety of art worlds are making sense of and negotiating the recent proliferation of GenAI. We identified five points of tension between art and GenAI related to artistic ownership, authenticity, meaning, process, and labor. Our participants, at times, held subtly different beliefs about GenAI and art. Therefore, we call for more research on GenAI within particular art worlds, with an eye toward similarities and differences between artistic communities. At the same time, our participants were largely unified in their condemnation of the major corporations developing and seeking to use GenAI models to profit from art. We call on computing researchers to contest corporate power over GenAI through programs of design, research, and policy to support artistic agency and artistic labor.



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