

Making Time 2023: Imagining the future: where will creativity take us? - Transcript #4

CAN's CEO Danielle Antaki

Danielle Antaki: Thank you so much, Jack for that beautiful, beautiful speech. I'm taking a slightly different slant. And I don't know if people have heard, but apparently the artists of the future will be AIs?

Well, you know, there is very seriously some understandably concerned conversations, globally, about how AI will potentially replace jobs in the arts. The writer's strike in the US – case in point. And I don't want to dismiss these concerns but I'm wondering if these conversations may be missing the point.

This debate, I think, is now a massive opportunity for us to start questioning, what is art? What is it for? Why do we do it?

So, using a fairly imperfect analogy – when photography was invented, visual artists initially feared for their livelihoods. But soon they realised the opportunities that it presented. Suddenly, these new conventions of framing were made visible, and no longer were they bound by the necessity to capture and represent reality. They could represent, evoke, symbolise so much more than the mere appearance of things. They started to focus on the colour or the light or the energy. And then photography itself became an art form, in itself.

So artists had so much more to play with. So in a same/same but different way. What questions are being raised right now by the idea of computer generated art?

Well, for me, is art merely generating content to be consumed? Right, and we all know the answer to that question here, right? We know that the creative process and all the things that contribute to it, is in and of itself, the power and the value of the art. You take away the process, and what's left? What value? What meaning does the object ultimately have?

CAN's Place Names projects – we bring Elders together to rediscover the original Noongar meanings of the names of familiar places around Noongar Boodjar. And intrinsic to these projects is a creative process that uses stories, memories, shared experiences of the community, to collaboratively create powerful works of art. But the meaning and the power of these works lies in the fact that the outcomes, the objects created, are inseparable from the process, the experiences, the shared wisdom that led to their creation. AIs couldn't create anything of such inherent social, cultural, spiritual value.

And what is it that draws us to any art? For me, it's – okay – it's the fact that the artist manages to ride the zeitgeist of our times and synthesises our dreams, fears, joys or despair into something that speaks to our shared humanness. It's about communicating, right, the human experience to each other. It's not just the product that's interesting. It's the process. It's the reason for its making that draws us.

So as photography spurred this revolution of ideas in the visual arts, in a slightly different way, AI has the potential to do that for us now, by offering us a shift in perspective around the purpose of art in our societies, the role of artists, reminding us that art is more than just a product to be consumed. It's a process inherent to our humanness, to our cultures. It's a way of bonding, learning, of exploring our inner and outer worlds, of processing. It's participatory.

And that's where we come in, all of us here. I honestly believe that the future of the arts will be participatory, and human. It will be about reclaiming the communal purpose of art. It may see a democratisation of the arts, perhaps eroding the myths of the genius artist auteur, perhaps rediscovering the humble value of the craft. The importance of collaborating, as we've heard, of how shared imaginative investment creates shared meaning and social value. A re-awakening and celebration of the artist in all of us.

So, what could this future filled with participatory artistic experiences look like? Well, we're doing it right now. And stick around for the workshops after lunch and see, but really, it is already kind of gradually happening, I think. There's the increasing awareness of the enormous benefits that participation in arts and creativity have to mental health, social engagement, emotional well being, community connectedness, intercultural engagement, the applications to education, youth, justice, health, the list goes on.

And the purpose of this conference, isn't it to advocate for the participatory potential of the arts and grow our collective language around the real human benefits it offers? So I think every new advance in technology affords us the freedom to contradictingly, kind of more explore our humanness. So far from making us machines or replacing us as humans, it allows us to do the things that we would rather do while the machines do the boring repetitive bits, right? Like humble washing machine, revolutionises housework [audience laughs].

But so maybe then, AI will end up generating all the consumable content. But the real artists will get to do the interesting stuff, creating powerful community-led creative processes, and collaborative artworks with authentic shared social value.

AI could generate hours, endless hours of content, but none would ever have the same power and impact as a story shared, generation to generation, over 60,000 years. And all the participatory arts projects and creative processes being delivered by you artists and organisations here today. I believe the future of the arts is ours.