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AI ART: Transformation without Transfiguration

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Abstract

One of the most controversial phenomena of recent years is AI Art. We are witnessing the rapid development of AI Art generating algorithms and the feverish attempts by professionals and laypeople to embed the images generated into the institutional framework. Our already visually overloaded world is flooded with AI Art's instantly generated images. Meanwhile, the phenomenon raises very important questions about our understanding of art. AI algorithms create new images based on existing images – is this transformation enough to talk about AI creativity? If AI Art creates images indistinguishable from works of art, which can induce a similar aesthetic experience in the viewer as a conventional work of art – is this sufficient to consider AI-generated images as art? Is AI Art art at all, and if so, is it the art of AI? The paper is based on a case study of the 'Portrait of Edmond Belamy', auctioned by Christie's in 2018 as an AI work. The skepticism about AI Art is based on the idea that art requires more than transformation: it also demands transfiguration, and AI Art is incapable of that – unless as a tool in the hands of an artist.

Keywords: AI Art, transformation, transfiguration, 'Portrait of Edmond Belamy', authorship