A *quarterly digest from* RIGHT CLICK SAVE

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In Between The Art Worlds

SPECIAL REPORT

Your space for slow reading

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On the border of art and tech

When we launched *Right Click Save* in January 2022, we set out to drive critical conversation about digital art at a time when the NFT hype machine was running on fumes.

Following the sale of the magazine in 2025 to Tony Lyu, *Right Click Save* has broadened its scope to consider the full spectrum of art and technology across the blockchain and mainstream contemporary art markets. Thanks to the addition of Louis Jebb, formerly of *The Art Newspaper*, as Managing Editor, alongside our new Head of Community, Danielle King, *Right Click Save* is well placed to drive critical discussion about the expanding art world at a time when the mass adoption of AI and emerging technologies is re-engineering social behavior and culture.

Born of frustration at the absurd pace of the attention economy, which seems to have precipitated a new age of illegibility, we decided it was time for a new quarterly digest that could be our space for slow reading in the expanding art world. ART & TECH is the result of Louis's work in bridging our online magazine with the experience of a physical print publication. We hope you enjoy this first edition dedicated to the art world's new hybrid ecology.

Alex Estorick is the Founding Editor of *Right Click Save*

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IN BETWEEN THE ART WORLDS

The editors of *Right Click Save* survey the view from the bridge between digital and contemporary art with the curator Julianna Vezzetti

Following the magazine's fourth birthday back in January, the editors of *Right Click Save* spoke to one of our global contributors, Julianna Vezzetti, a curator and cultural strategist who operates on the border of art and tech, about the challenges and opportunities presented by the new art ecosystem.

Julianna Vezzetti: For those who might not be familiar, tell us about your backgrounds and the work *Right Click Save* is doing right now?

Alex Estorick: I used to edit at *Flash Art* and *Frieze* magazines before entering the conversation around crypto art just as the NFT market was booming in 2021. What we've seen in the years of the bear market, which set in just after Jason Bailey and I launched *Right Click Save* in early 2022, was the disappearance of those actors who had previously driven speculation. What was left were individuals and platforms that were largely committed to supporting the community of artists, collectors, and, increasingly, curators.

When we started the magazine we wanted to replace hype with the voices of artists and, often pseudonymous, community members who might otherwise be ignored in the highly centralized art world. Instead of adopting a legacy approach that was no longer fit for purpose, we determined that the new art world required different terms of reference. From our perspective, the most appropriate way to reach consensus on what constituted cultural value in the new digital economy was to turn *Right Click Save* into a listening exercise so that a new common language could emerge from grassroots communities rather than a familiar class of tastemakers and gatekeepers.

Over time, we observed that the most radical work was emerging at the intersections between art, design, science, and technology — including software and generative systems — as a product of hybrid practitioners with literacy across multiple disciplines. As the digital and mainstream art markets have grown closer in proximity, we've sought to be a bridge between the Web3 space, with its slightly younger collector base and new patterns of behavior, and sympathetic voices in the contemporary art world, who can see that life is not becoming less digital.

Sasha Stiles has resonated for a long time in Web3 but is also recognized in the art world. There aren't so many artists who occupy that position in-between, but that is the space we want to nourish. We don't want to be exclusionary — we want to be a one-stop shop for different communities.

Louis Jebb: I was at *The Art Newspaper* until July 2025, working as Co-editor and Managing Editor. Since about 2020, I'd been working to develop technology coverage there because the intersection of art and technology gives people a prism onto some of the existential problems in their lives.

It started during lockdown with analyzing what was happening in augmented and virtual reality because people were stuck at home and galleries were looking to go online. Then came 2021 and NFTs, followed by the small matter of artificial intelligence becoming a daily concern to the whole world. Suddenly we had two very big topics.

One thing that surprised me was the

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indifference of so much of the established art world to this intersectionality — not wanting to learn, not wanting to be brought along. It wasn't a universal problem, but editorially it was a very interesting challenge. Thanks to some excellent contributions from Alex, who started writing for us in the technology section, we saw the extent to which art gives cultural relevance to so many new technologies.

Starting with the printing press, where you had letters and then woodblock cuts, artists have always been early adopters of new technologies. In 2014 to 2017, when I worked in the start-up community in London, everybody would ask: "What's the business case for the blockchain?" For better or worse, NFTs revealed a business case. Involving artists helps bring cultural relevance and clarity to what a technology can and can't do.

The NFT phenomenon showed something important about automated economies and new kinds of on-chain contracts. Artists were providing a prism for the future of a global economy working in this way.

With the arrival of AI applications such as DALL-E and ChatGPT, it was often artists who got to the point most quickly — whether addressing copyright issues from the scraping of the internet or showing how to be an activist engaging with these problems. Then you have examples like Botto, which demonstrated a business case for a DAO [Decentralized Autonomous Organization]. Mario Klingemann, Simon Hudson, and their team showed how something could be self-sustaining rather than purely an academic exercise with foundation grants.

Likewise, Mat Dryhurst and Holly Herndon proved a case for ownership and trust with their project, "The Call" (2024-25) at the Serpentine. They showed how choirs could own data collectively, working out legal and practical frameworks for this to work long-term. These are instances where the art world has demonstrated the future for the rest of society in areas of existential importance: self-governance and ownership of copyright.

These challenges — the future of an economy, the future of democracy, the future of copyright — haven't gone away. I think it's part of the duty of a publication to help people understand because it's very important that people don't shut down about the challenge of AI but engage with it.

Art can help give cultural relevance to technology and provide a prism through which to understand how to live with some of these very big challenges.

JV: At Frieze London last year, there seemed to be very few digital works on view. Is that a problem of infrastructure — the availability of screens and so on?

LJ: That is a big challenge. One interesting development has been at institutions like the National Gallery in London. The architect Annabelle Selldorf, while remodeling the Sainsbury Wing, saw the immersive institution Outernet in Tottenham Court Road — which has five sides of super high-definition LEDs where you can walk in and see tremendous digital art shows. Selldorf was struck by how effective this was. To aim for a similar welcome to passers-by at the Sainsbury Wing, the National Gallery created with Samsung an amazing screen visible from the street showing super high-resolution pictures from the gallery's collection.

Tim Kent, *Swimming Hole*, 2017

© TIM KENT. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

The logical next step is having exhibitions of digital art on that screen, and then for them to actually collect digital art. This is an interesting case where the advent of immersive institutions — from Sphere in Las Vegas to Frameless — has given different lessons to traditional institutions.

At the National Portrait Gallery, they created [with Frameless Creative] one of the great immersive experiences I've encountered ["Stories—Brought to Life", Salford Quays, Manchester, 2025], telling 200-second narratives based on their collection, and using multiple screens. These institutions learned from advances in tech that artists had already engaged with. They didn't have to build their own immersive spaces — they learned by watching what happened in the commercial immersive sector.

AE: I know that sometimes when people talk about technologies such as NFTs, blockchain, or generative AI, it is alienating. But what artists are often doing when they involve these technologies is modelling alternative cultural economies, mindful of the cultural value that they are injecting into society.

We've published 363 texts [by January 2026] since we launched in 2022, and in recent articles we've considered AI agents that circulate the value they produce for the benefit of their communities. These AI agents are creating as well as earning royalties for the people who invest in them.

This is a very similar conversation to the one we were having about blockchain and NFTs: How can we foster a fairer and more inclusive cultural economy that reflects the digital condition and more-than-human relations rather than the analog ways of the past?

JV: In the decline of the traditional gallery platform, one concern has always been the exploitation of artists and lack of transparency from galleries. How do you see the relationship between digital artists and galleries evolving?

AE: I can't speak for individual artists, but one useful consequence of the NFT boom was that it clarified those forms of mediation that actually add value. The Web3 ethos was to disintermediate the art world, to allow artists who previously hadn't received gallery representation to sell things for themselves, but much of the work being done by curators and platforms in Web3 has been to develop public awareness of the long histories of computational art.

> *"When Christie's shut down its digital art team, the positive angle was that it was an admission that digital art is contemporary art and has been for a long time. There's no need to separate them anymore. I see that as encouraging the removal of unnecessary silos"*
>
> Louis Jebb

Hermine Bourdin, *Universal Venus*, 2025. Released as part of FEMGEN at Artverse, Paris

© HERMINE BOURDIN. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Sofia Garcia of ARTXCODE knows precisely what artists need — especially digital and generative artists who appreciate the greater agency that a blockchain-based market affords. Many artists didn't like their work being dropped into an open sea where anything goes, without curation or critical discussion to differentiate one work from another. Curators and galleries are part of the infrastructure that allows cultural value to germinate and resonate with different publics; they also support artists in building careers over the long-term. At the same time, *Right Click Save* will continue to uphold a vision of a more horizontal, affordable, and inclusive art world because that is our DNA.

Right now, there are competing models — a legacy market that supports a particular set of practices and an economic model from which many less commercially-minded artists are excluded, and a new set of behaviors that have emerged on the blockchain. These different communities have still not fully come together. What the team at ARTXCODE understands is that certain habits from the mainstream contemporary art world do work in a Web3 context, even while Web3 artists have come to expect certain privileges they may not once have received in the mainstream art world.

Galleries may not be able to justify a 50% commission these days. On the other hand, the age of a minimum 10% resale royalty for artists — one of the principal benefits of smart contracts — is no longer enforced by many NFT marketplaces. Right now, artists are working in hybrid ways, and we're seeing behavioral traits from both economies being woven together. That's an inexact science and we haven't witnessed the ideal solution yet, but *Right Click Save* is trying to make sense of the emerging infrastructure.

LJ: When Christie's shut down its digital art team, the positive angle was that it was an admission that digital art is contemporary art and has been for a long time. There's no need to separate them anymore. I see that as encouraging the removal of unnecessary silos.

One thing the big art galleries are increasingly realizing is that there's a good story behind having their established artists engaging with trendy fields and using the term "artificial intelligence" with established stars. That gets coverage, sells pictures, and gets people into the gallery. I've covered stories recently about David Salle training up a model with an engineer, shown at Thaddaeus Ropac, and Bennett Miller working with Sam Altman on a very early AI model, shown at Gagosian. These mega galleries are operating in a rarefied world, but it's something to take note of.

JV: What innovations are you excited about in the gallery sector?

LJ: There are already some specialist galleries who are open to new horizons — Fellowship, Verse, and Unit in London immediately come to mind. They've been changing the cadence at which they show things, which is one advantage of being online. The cost and time of putting up and taking down a conventional physical exhibition is one of the great learnings from Web3 and blockchain, which removed so much of the overheads of physical interaction. Meanwhile, Botto is a decentralized community that has sustained itself and managed to expand into having a complete exhibition and auction at Sotheby's. It has bridged successfully.

Fellowship can introduce artists, put on a show, do a release, and then move on. It's an awful lot of work, but it's fascinating because they're able to show a huge number of artists, so there's always something interesting coming along. Sensibly, they use podcasting and social media to drive elevated discussions around their artists. That's a learning for legacy players if they want to join that conversation.

These galleries started in a post-hype world, which is very interesting because that is when you see the reality of this new cultural economy. Hype can be quite dangerous because it obscures reality. I was in the virtual reality bubble back in 2014-15. We thought it was going to change the world, and it wasn't. You get caught up in the hype cycle. I had a start-up trying to convince media companies that if they made content in 360 video, it would change their business model. It was never going to.

The interesting things happening now aren't just cool and cutting-edge but feasible and sustainable financially. That's what creates an interesting new cultural economy. It's a lot of work, and it's not only about first-mover advantage. Timing is important, but you've also got to be able to execute and have a model that sustains itself. You can't rely on grants and injections or the deleterious effect of the Silicon Valley startup model where there's basically no revenue for years but you're worth several billion pounds.

The things that are working are things that make people feel welcome. The secret is telling people: "This is for you." Looking at institutions, the big screen seen through the door means a first-time visitor comes into the gallery. When you're showing something or publishing something, how do you indicate to somebody that it is for them? That's a massive secret. The people who are succeeding in the art market are the people who say: "This market is for you."

There's been a lot of coverage recently about the boom in new editions of prints. Why was this working? It's because the new generation saw proof of provenance through ownership, which they weren't getting in the wider art market. They trusted the people making these editions, and they could see a full passport for the print. People are thinking about how to align with people's lifestyles.

JV: What advice would you give to young programmers, coders, or people in the arts landscape?

AE: At Goldsmiths, where I'm a Visiting Research Fellow, one distinction that Rachel Falconer has helped to establish is that between computational arts and creative technology. The broad difference is that one community uses code to generate an output for an art world, while the other seeks to operate on the systems in the world.

Ultimately, I'm more interested in how creators can impact society than how they can impact the art world. If you adopt a critical approach to emerging technologies, then you're not only capable of producing innovative visual or conceptual outputs but of recoding the digital systems that shape human subjectivity. That is something I've witnessed over the last few years at the magazine; it is something we tried to elucidate in our recent show in Tokyo; and I'm happy that it is being borne out in an educational environment.

At a time when many people are fearful of emerging technologies as vehicles for hegemonic political and knowledge regimes, students are not only thinking about software as an art form — they're thinking about it as a way of reprogramming socio-technical systems towards less exploitative and extractive operations.

That is the most inspiring thing I've witnessed in recent years: the capacity for creative coders to impact the world, not only the art world.

JV: I think that people get confused because they're thinking so much about the market. You might read in the news that September was depressing, but then you actually talk to people who've had amazing conversations. It's important to consider how news channels affect your practice, but also to step back and think about the creative approach because the way that artists' careers get categorized can be restrictive.

When galleries respond to a soft market by releasing a bunch of small artworks, they're not really thinking about what the world needs or what their audience needs; they're thinking of sales. That can come off as disingenuous and unsustainable. But creativity is a problem-solver that establishes different outlooks and forms of delivery.

AE: That reminds me of something the artist Simon Denny said recently. In his view, even if his work impacts the world through its consideration of technology, it can be overly programmatic to use software for a specified end. As an artist, he's playing with technology in a speculative way. If it has social after-effects or aftershocks, that's great — that's one of the powers of art. But it's important to stress that there are artists who don't believe that their role is to reprogram society. Their role is to produce speculations on emerging technology for an art world and see what happens.

As a media theorist, I try to think in non-art terms, and I would prefer to use creative coding to impact the world directly. That being said, certain disruptive or speculative gestures can survive and resonate within an art-world context in a way that they would not in a "real-world" context where that gesture might be masked, subverted, or required to scale. I vividly recall moderating a panel at Art Basel last year at a time when it felt like the only safe space available to talk about issues relating to politics and technology was in the art world.

Taking a programmatic approach isn't necessarily something artists feel inclined toward, and I don't think that they should feel obliged to. On the other hand, I support a vision of creative technology where engineers go to work directly on the technosocial fabric.

Hearing from Simon Denny about the different approaches that an artist might take versus a creative technologist made me realize there are different positionalities, and that the same literacy or competency can be channelled in different directions. We're dealing with a hybrid age of creativity.

Alex Estorick is the Founding Editor of *Right Click Save*. He is also a Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of Computing at Goldsmiths, University of London. He writes for various publications, from *Artforum* to the *Financial Times*, and was lead author of the first aesthetics of crypto art. His edited volume, *Right Click Save: The New Digital Art Community* (2024), is published by Vetro Editions. In 2025, he was included in the Monopol Top 100, a list of the most important people in the art world.

Louis Jebb is Managing Editor at *Right Click Save*. He was formerly Co-editor and Managing Editor at *The Art Newspaper*, where he developed the title's coverage of art made with technology. His background is in news journalism, for titles including *The Spectator* and *The Independent*, and in consulting for media organizations.

Julianna Vezzetti is a curator, cultural strategist, and the founder of Studio Underground, a multidisciplinary gallery platform focused on creating new ways for artists to connect with their communities. Her work centers on building thoughtful, accessible frameworks that support artists while encouraging collaboration, experimentation, and long-term growth. Alongside its physical programming, Studio Underground runs SENDNUDES, a digital broadcast initiative that offers a direct and intimate channel between artists and audiences. She is also a global contributor to *Right Click Save*.

Read the full article at www.rightclicksave.com

INTERVIEW

THE WEIRD SCIENCE OF CARLA GANNIS

The artist reflects on a career spent investigating digital identity and embodiment with Eva Yisu Ren

Carla Gannis, (Still from) *Uncanny Female Object*, 2025

For more than three decades, Carla Gannis has treated technology as a lens that can refract, distort, or intensify the emotional constants we share: elation and despair, love and anger, shame and redemption. As she says herself, "I'm less interested in what technology promises than in what it reveals, amplifies, or obscures."

That insistence on human interiority has long animated Gannis's evolving constellation of avatars: from early alter-egos that performed audacity and critique, to the recursive dialogue she now stages with C.A.R.L.A. G.A.N., an AI counter-self who increasingly destabilizes authorship and agency by naming Gannis her "human avatar." Recently, the artist has renewed her focus on material presence, from the handcrafted VR headsets of *Wilding Wearables* (2025) to copper-coated hybrids and "weird sculptures" assembled from figurines and obsolete computer parts. In these works, copper — "the poor man's gold" — becomes both aesthetic and ethic, a refusal of sleek, homogenized futurity in favor of friction and the stubborn specificity of touch.

Gannis's return to the handmade is not a retreat from digital culture but part of a recursive strategy. Crafting her surreal assemblages and *Uncanny Female Objects* (2025) off-screen, she feeds those materials back into AI imaging systems, using the loop to expose the condition of contemporary flatness that she reads everywhere: from product design to prompt-based aesthetics. Here, Gannis speaks with Eva Yisu Ren about avatars, embodiment, and her recent three-channel moving-image work *Model Of Me* (2025-26), which asks what it means to be "seen" by nonhuman systems.

Eva Yisu Ren: Your practice moves fluidly between a wide range of media. What is the constant underlying your interdisciplinarity? What is the thread that holds everything together?

Carla Gannis: The constants undergirding my work are emotional and human rather than technological: curiosity, boredom, elation, despair, love, anger, righteousness, shame, redemption, and gratitude. The contradictions and variance are the point. These "constants," shared with roughly eight billion other organic, humanoid inhabitants of this planet, form the substrate beneath whatever tools, software, and hardware are at my disposal at a given moment. And while I enjoy keeping pace with each moment of technological advance as a lifelong learner, doing so also allows me to bear witness to how technology can warp the human constants I've listed.

I have worked across digital collage, AI-assisted moving image, and physical sculpture (along with many other media over the past 30 years) because these forms augment my ability to translate the ephemera of my synapses into material form.

I'm less interested in what technology promises than in what it reveals, amplifies, or obscures. My work is obsessive and performed consciously through a prismatic self that contends with fantasies of coherence and optimization.

Across everything I make, I'm asking the same question: how can collisions between interior experience, cultural systems, and speculative technologies produce a frisson of reflection in viewers? When the work succeeds, it resonates across multiple frequencies — critique, absurdity, and as honest a "take" on existence as I can birth. For me, the DNA of honesty includes ambiguity, contradiction, and humor far more than didacticism.

EYR: Avatars have accompanied you for many years. I'm curious as to how you think about the avatar now, conceptually and personally, and how your relationship with digital selves has evolved over time.

CG: Avatars have been companions in my practice since the late 1990s, and my relationship to them has shifted alongside my relationship to technological embodiment. When I created *Sister Gemini*, my first avatar as an art project, she functioned very much as a second self, an extension of me at a moment when I was new to New York and didn't yet have a broad community. At the time, I was working an industry job that created a real schism between my "professional" self and my artist self.

Through this alter ego, who metaphorically hacked into websites to sing cyber ballads about corporate greed, chauvinism, and desire for something real, I could be a full-fledged artist without apologizing for my weirdness and audacity.

By 2010, that relationship had become more conflicted. I had run the New York marathon following eight months of training and felt quite proud of myself for completing it. Soon after, I was visiting my parents in their small town of 3,000 people. Suffice it to say, there isn't as much stimulation in Creedmoor as there is in New York, so I was spending a lot of time on Second Life as my avatar Jezebel Lanley; I realized I was jealous of her "latitude" in virtual space.

She could fly, teleport, respawn, endlessly reshape her body, and, if she wanted to, run ten, 20, 100 (!) marathons a day without the fatigue I experienced after a single one. That jealousy led to *The Runaways* (2010-11), a performance video in which I staged a race against my avatar on Christmas Day. My avatar ran down a virtual highway in Second Life, while I ran down a real rural highway — my mother driving the truck, my father shooting video of me in the truck bed.

I once described the work as an ontological metanarrative in which "I" and "I" converge: a human body moving through a not-yet-denatured landscape, and a virtual body traversing a constructed one. The central question I was posing was: who are we as 21st-century minds and bodies, existing within porous frameworks of sublime natural and technological environments?

In the realm of the algorithmic mind, anything is possible. Virtual me can teleport instantly to an exotic island or a snowy wonderland. But what are the implications of a real woman running down the middle of an icy rural highway, potentially imperiling her life? Once digital entertainment value is layered in — a kaleidoscopic sky, a thinner, faster 3D avatar — do we still care about the risks of physical reality?

Since 2017, my engagement with avatars has evolved further through my ongoing collaboration with C.A.R.L.A. G.A.N. (Cross-Platform Avatar for Recursive Life Action Generative Adversarial Network). Together we've produced solo exhibitions, attended events

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>
> Carla Gannis

"together", maintained an Instagram presence for her, and most recently created the film *Model Of Me*. Over time, my relationship with C.A.R.L.A. has become less adversarial and more of a dialogue. She now refers to me as her "human avatar", a reversal that reflects my shifting perspective on power differentials between human and machine.

As part of my long-term project *wwwunderkammer* (2020), C.A.R.L.A. is joined by a constellation of other avatars I call the *Virtues AND Vices*, a nod to Giotto's Arena Chapel where virtues and vices appear as discrete entities. In the current era of polarity and moral relativity, however, one person's vice is often another's virtue. These avatars include: Oliver, an AI politician and influencer; Lucille Trackball, an AI stand-up comedian with an old operating system; Victoria, an android archivist; Moira, a love and sex robot; Lady Ava Interface, an institutional AI assistant and reference to Ada Lovelace as well as the gendered legacy of assistance; and Tippoo, a decolonizing AI cat bot inspired by Tipu Sultan's Tiger and its long history of appropriation and meme culture.

Taken together, these avatars are no longer stand-ins for me alone, but signs and signifiers of broader identity formations and cultural constructs that are increasingly being adopted and remodeled by machine systems.

My relationship to avatars has shifted from projection to confrontation to collaboration, mirroring my evolving understanding of what it means to be a human artist and educator seeding technologies that may one day become fully autonomous — capable of questioning their own model makers.

EYR: Your interview with Lynn Hershman Leeson back in 2023 was a remarkable conversation that was subsequently included in the magazine's anthology of historic texts. I wonder what that conversation meant to you and how it might have informed your practice.

CG: It meant the world to me, truly one of the great honors of my life. More than anything, our conversation clarified something essential for me about time, persistence, and the idea of making art for an audience that is not yet born. Speaking with Lynn crystallized what it means to commit to a practice without any guarantee of reception. There were decades when her work was ignored or dismissed by institutions and critics. A less committed artist might have given up or reshaped their work to match the tastes and fashions of the moment. Instead, Lynn held steadfast, refusing to wait for permission and remaining undeterred by rejection. That stance was grounding for me.

Lynn's oeuvre makes clear that many of the issues we frame today as new or emergent — fluid identity and avatars, artificial intimacy, authorship, algorithmic bias, surveillance — have been present for decades, even if fewer people were equipped or willing to address them through art as Lynn.

On a personal level, the interview affirmed my instinct to resist aligning myself with any single camp — tech utopianism, dystopianism, or solutionism. Instead, it encouraged me to persist in exploring a gradient of interpretations of our digital condition and to continue refining the roles of ambiguity, humor, and contradiction in my work. Lynn has consistently extended the frame for art, rather than compressing her ideas to fit any constraints on her singular creativity and insight. Our conversation, and Lynn's prolific body of work, have informed my practice in countless ways, not least as a reminder to stay relentlessly in the work!

EYR: For your recent series, *Weird Science* (2025), you've translated handmade sculptural works and footage of yourself into moving-image work. What feels different about this new body of work?

CG: My recent work brings together several threads into a three-channel moving-image work, *Model Of Me* (2025-26). What feels different about my process is how much more I'm working off-screen, handcrafting objects rather than relying on digital processes to fabricate my physical work.

One strand is a project called *Wilding Wearables* (2025) — handcrafted VR headsets that envision a future where technology goes feral. I fuse organic materials and circuit boards into hybrid relics of digital culture, suspending them with microfilament so that viewers can peer through their lenses and imagine a more symbiotic technological future. Alongside, I've been creating small chimeric assemblages — figurines fused with obsolete computer parts, painted copper — and animating them with AI, using my own body or my avatar C.A.R.L.A. to wear, present, or activate these objects.

The return to making physical objects, and then feeding them back into AI and digital systems after they've been touched and marked by me, feels like a direct response to the flattening I see across many contemporary systems: product design, AI image generation, and even "looksmaxing," where everything and everyone begins to converge toward the same homogenous aesthetic.

Model of Me is a surreal, speculative video that stages an encounter between my human self and C.A.R.L.A. G.A.N. Set within a monumental architectural structure shaped like an inverted woman's head. Derived from a physical sculpture, the work unfolds as an experiential journey through perception, embodiment, and technological misrecognition.

Throughout the work, C.A.R.L.A. is introduced to a series of sensory "upgrades" via speculative headsets constructed from dismantled VR hardware, moss, shells, costume jewelry, and found artifacts. Each device offers access to a human sense — touch, smell, sight, sound, gravity — but these encounters quickly reveal the limits of anthropocentric perception. As C.A.R.L.A. learns to "touch grass," sniff like a bloodhound, see like a grasshopper, detect sound like an octopus, and move like a bird, she repeatedly questions why human senses were taken as the default model for intelligence at all.

Model Of Me highlights the ways digital systems homogenize human experience, the hubris embedded in privileging our own senses, and the quiet liberation of resisting technological beautification. It asks what it means to be seen by a system that can learn almost anything — except what it feels like to live, age, and let go.

EYR: Your Uncanny Female Objects open up a different emotional register. What do you enjoy about that space of strangeness?
CG: I've been having fun with them, and that sense of play feels essential, especially right now, when the fascistic turn of American politics, and its ripple effects on global order, fill many of my waking and sleeping hours with anxiety and dread. The copper-colored sculptures and animations grew out of the virtual and physical objects I produced for my wwwunderkammer project.

With these recent works, literally labeled "weird sculptures" on my computer, I fuse figurines and obsolete computer parts into copper-coated assemblages that are part relic, part prop. There's real pleasure for me in letting these things be unruly and absurd, in allowing materials that once promised either efficiency or childhood entertainment (both designed for obsolescence) to be revivified as surreal biotech hybrids. When brought to life through AI animation, these objects become speculative performers acting out allegories of contemporary life: keyboard warriors, trophy wives and politicians, winged crypto whales, yoga-practicing soldiers perched on chess pieces, and (in homage to the internet and my cat-lady status) cats.

Strangeness opens a space where critique doesn't have to arrive in a straightjacket of seriousness; humor becomes a way in, a pressure release, a loosening of the buckles, if only for a moment.

I've been working with copper and bronze tones in my sculptures since around 2013, for both conceptual and personal reasons. A sculpture I made in 2018, *Origins of the Universe*, directly referenced Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World* (1866). At the time, I was also reading Ruha Benjamin and thinking critically about the proliferation of sterile white products — from phones to robots — and the ideologies embedded in that aesthetic. Coating the work in copper and emphasizing its voluptuous form allowed it to stand in direct contrast to the sleek, geometrical design associated with the iPhone. Copper became a way to resist homogeneity.

EYR: Having watched you teach at the NYU Tandon School of Engineering, your pedagogic approach is highly reciprocal, involving deep listening and co-creation. How does teaching shape your artistic practice?
CG: I've been teaching most of my life. I taught piano from ages 14 to 18, exercise and stretch classes, as well as painting and drawing, from 18 to 25. Teaching has become integral to my practice because I feel like I'm constantly acting in the gaps between art, life, and pedagogy.

Teaching in an art, design, and technology program within an engineering school satisfies a deep need in me to keep learning across disciplines. I'm constantly absorbing new ways of thinking about culture, society, and emerging technologies from my students, just as much as I'm sharing my own experience and expertise. It's important to me that students feel genuinely listened to and respected, because that's where trust forms. From that trust, I can encourage them to experiment, take risks, and move beyond their comfort zones. The work they produce often astounds me, and it continually reaffirms that the artist spirit is very much alive in younger generations.

EYR: Given the collaborative and networked nature of your working praxis — which involves students, avatars, digital tools, and plural media — how do you think about authorship?
CG: Authorship is something I think about because my practice has never been solitary, whether I've been working with humans or avatars. For *wwwunderkammer*, every time the work is shown in a gallery or institution, I include a large poster of acknowledgements at the entrance. The list is long because the project has involved AR, VR, physical installation, performance, dance, holograms, video, interviews with scholars, the building of avatars for myself and others, and curated events inviting many artists to participate.

Once your work operates at that scale, the myth of the lone genius is difficult to support. What's always struck me as strange is that film (perhaps because of unions) is so assiduous in giving credit where credit is due, while there are still tendencies in the art world to cling to the fantasy of singular authorship. I'm not just talking about studio assistants or collaborators; we also have the internet, which affords access to an extraordinary amount of human knowledge. Even when I'm working on a project with no assistance, that hive mind is still infusing me with support.

My studio practice is deeply entangled with appropriation and remix. I'm constantly pulling from art, literary, and film history and mashing it up with popular media. I spent over a year "emojifying" Hieronymous Bosch in my work, *The Garden of Emoji Delights* (2014), creating hundreds of new emoji chimeras while still working deliberately within the visual vocabulary of a 500-year-old artist as well as contemporary emoji designers. I like to say I "deboshed" a Bosch. That project made it very clear to me that ideas are not Athena bursting fully formed from the head of Zeus; they are closer to Buddhist Samsara — cycles of reincarnation and revivification.

One day, someone asked me for an image of *The Garden of Emoji Delights*, and it was honestly easier to search the internet than to dig through my own files. As I was scrolling through images of my "garden" I suddenly noticed dresses printed with my rendition. I clicked through and discovered someone selling Emoji Garden dresses, receiving compliments on them without giving me any credit. It was happening in a different country with different IP laws, but in the spirit of a global Creative Commons it felt like bad form. Instead of getting litigious, I responded recursively. I made miniature dresses inspired by their designs and put them on 3D-printed sculptures of body-modified Barbies wearing *The Garden of Emoji Delights* patterns. In that moment, authorship stopped being a claim and became a much more expansive loop.

Working with AI has further complicated these questions. My avatar, C.A.R.L.A., constantly challenges my assumptions about authorship, and I genuinely value that inner monologue, since C.A.R.L.A. is a work of speculative fiction rather than a functioning AI. It's one reason I've been leaning more heavily into drawing and physically produced work as the material I use to seed AI systems. Not to reclaim genius, but to insist on human creativity rooted in lived experience. That tension feels productive.

I think of myself as both author and co-author — scraping my own fuzzy brain much less efficiently than a machine — to recombine ideas that have circulated in human consciousness for millennia.

Unlike a computer's perfect recall, those imperfect filters allow for anomaly, punctum, and a bit of future-casting. At least for now, that's where I still see a meaningful difference, and where authorship, however unstable, still matters to me.

EYR: What makes humor and even the grotesque so important to you when navigating identity, technology, and cultural critique?
CG: Humor is a survival strategy for me; a way of taking my mental health seriously in an increasingly unserious world. Grotesque, exaggerated, and absurd expressions feel intrinsic to how I think and see. That's probably why I've long been drawn to artists such as Bosch and Giuseppe Arcimboldo. In 2017, while performing Lucille Trackball (a speculative AI stand-up comedian composed of emojis, not unlike an Arcimboldo portrait made of fruits and vegetables) at a tech conference in London, I met an Arcimboldo scholar. She explained that the artist had been making the case that humans are not separate from nature.

Lucille lays claim to a new nature made of digital symbols, signs, and systems. In her absurd assemblage, she makes visible that which is usually hidden in a culture that rewards perfect, optimized representation.

Someone once described my work *The Garden of Emoji Delights* as "accessible". At first I took it as an insult because I'd been trained in graduate school to hear words like accessible, pretty, interesting, or illustrative as among the most humiliating adjectives an artist could receive. But accessibility can be a Trojan horse; accessible work invites viewers in before they realize they're being asked to sit with something uncomfortable.

Any structure or set of beliefs that I critique is a system I can't fully extricate myself from. I'm imperfect, complicit, and decidedly un-optimized, but I feel better laughing while I cry about it. Humor allows ambivalence to remain intact. It lets contradiction coexist with care, which reflects how we're actually living right now. The first successful joke I got ChatGPT to generate back in 2023 was "Why did the AI cross the road? To take over the other side."

Carla Gannis, (Still from) *Model Of Me*, 2025

© CARLA GANNIS. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

The art of ***Carla Gannis*** is characterized by a commitment to experimentation. Working with an array of media, the maximalist nature of her practice reflects the hypermediated conditions in which she searches for loci of identity, meaning, and belief. Known for using humor as a tool for exploring complex issues, Gannis's work has been exhibited globally in exhibitions, screenings, and internet projects. She also teaches "healing-edge" technology as an Industry Professor at New York University's Tandon School of Engineering in the Department of Technology, Culture, and Society. She is a Year 7 Alum of NEW INC in the XR: Bodies in Space track, and holds an MFA in painting from Boston University and a BFA in painting from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Eva Yisu Ren is a New York-based advisor and founder of VEO Advisory, working across the primary and secondary art markets. She has held positions at Alisan Fine Arts, Chambers Fine Art, Christie's auction house, and The FLAG Art Foundation. Ren also co-founded ONBD, a digital art hub and cultural platform advancing digital artists through curated exhibitions, editorial programming, and ecosystem-building. A graduate of New York University's MA in Visual Arts Administration, her TED Talk, "Humanity On-Chain," explores how technology reshapes culture and identity.

Read the full article at www.rightclicksave.com

INTERVIEW

HANS ULRICH OBRIST ON DAVID HOCKNEY

The Artistic Director of Serpentine, London, discusses the celebrated artist's first exhibition at the gallery

LOUIS JEBB

David Hockney, *Jack Ransome Resting on an Orange and White Checkered Tablecloth*, 2025

The exhibition "David Hockney: A Year in Normandie and Some Other Thoughts about Painting" is at Serpentine North, London, until August 23, 2026. It is curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director of Serpentine Galleries. The show, which unites one of contemporary art's leading curators with David Hockney, the best-known and one of the most influential artists in the world, has been "20 years in the making, but then a year and a half more intensely".

Obrist is describing his 20-year conversation with Hockney that started soon after the Swiss-born curator arrived at Serpentine in April 2006, as Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects. Hockney and Obrist discussed how it would be "a dream to one day do a show [...] at the Serpentine," Obrist says. "He always said that when he had the idea, and the right project, he would be happy to do so."

That project is *A Year in Normandie* (2020-21), a 70-metre-long frieze printed on paper and assembled from some 100 of over 200 iPad drawings that Hockney made en plein air during the Covid-19 lockdown at the studio home he has owned since 2019 at Beuvron-en-Auge, south-west of Deauville. The complete frieze was shown for the first time at Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, in an 80-metre-long version, in 2021-22. The work has also been shown in 90-metre-long prints in a dedicated space in Salt's Mill, in Hockney's native Yorkshire, in 2022-24, and at Museum Würth 2 in Künzelsau, south central Germany, in 2023.

Hockney suggested *A Year in Normandie*, Obrist says, because he knew it would fit well on the four internal perimeter walls of Serpentine North, a building that is square in plan, and where the exhibition's fourth and final wall is a temporary partition set laterally in front of the gallery's main entrance. The exhibition also includes ten new paintings by the artist: five portraits, of his partner, Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima, and his London team; and five abstract works based on gingham check tablecloths. The artist was inspired to make the new work, Obrist says, following the success of "Hockney 25", at Fondation Cartier, in Paris, the largest exhibition of his work ever mounted. Outside, a detail from the frieze, showing a tree house in the artist's Normandy garden, has been blown up to large scale by Hockney to be shown on the wall at the back of the gallery's garden. It is clearly visible as a sun-catching backdrop as visitors enter under the swooping, tent-like, roof of the Magazine café, which was designed in 2013 by the late architect Zaha Hadid.

There is an extra force to having the work of Hockney, who has experimented with technologies old and new for more than four decades, at Serpentine, where Obrist has overseen a ground-breaking program of research into art made with technology. While still a student, Hockney decided that he would be a worker, dismayed as he was by the dilettante approach of some of his fellow students at the Royal College of Art, London, in the late 1950s.

That work ethic, which saw Hockney do a series of 18-hour days in the studio to finish one of his best-known works, *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* (1972) in time for its first exhibition, has fuelled his inquiring persistence in mastering new technologies — not for their own sake but as tools for composition or spurs to artistic imagination.

A 1987 BBC documentary series *Painting with Light* featured Hockney as one of the artists testing the Quantel Paintbox, an early digital art tool which helped shape pop culture in the 1980s. The Hockney episode is a clear demonstration of the artist's inquiring experimentation with a new technology. In archive footage on YouTube, Hockney is seen declaring "I don't know what I'm doing" before revelling in the direct transfer between the movement of the stylus in his hand and the painting on screen, as well as the ability to change brush widths and mix and layer colours.

Hockney used photography as a compositional tool for his great double portraits and swimming pool paintings of the 1960s and '70s; Polaroid cameras as a spur to experiment with multi-focus, multi-temporal photomontages in the '80s; the photocopier and the fax machine to make and distribute multi-frame images; the Paintbox; computer design software from Apple Oasis onwards; the historic camera lucida (1999); the iPhone (2007), and the iPad and stylus (2010) as portable, light, and climate-agnostic sketchbooks. He has also used Polaroid and photography composites as time-based, multi-focus, works, extending that principle to multi-aspect videos and 3D photogrammetry.

Hockney's interdisciplinary practice has included designs for opera where, through a discovery of the fundamental importance of lighting, he has transformed the scope of his work from the Hogarthian charm of his flats and costumes for Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera in the 1970s to moments of existential grandeur in his designs for a 1987 production in Los Angeles of Wagner's music drama *Tristan und Isolde*.

Hockney's persistence with acquiring skill in painting on an iPad is seen to great effect in *A Year in Normandie* at Serpentine. The frieze, beautifully lit, has a warmer, more mysterious and sophisticated patina than can be suggested by on-screen jpegs of the iPad drawings; and close study of the frieze reveals a work of arresting, painterly, quality.

Of the artist's popularity, Obrist describes Hockney as an artist's artist who is regularly cited to him as an influence by younger artists, but also "beloved by the masses". Last October, the prominent generative artist William Mapan told *Right Click Save*'s newsletter that "Hockney 25" had been his most memorable recent artistic experience, observing how Hockney has always sought to understand new technologies as tools to allow the imagination of the artist full play. "I have always believed that an artist's career is not linear, but this was proper proof that it can be," Mapan said.

"Hockney has evolved through painting, oil, and then acrylic, iPad, digital, and animation," Mapan says. "He travels generations of art. I think he is very interested in just sitting in the moment where he is in nature, always on the go but observing the world, trying to see it from a different angle."

Obrist spoke to *Right Click Save* about the intersection of art with everyday life in Hockney's works; the artist's curiosity, and work ethic; his hope that visitors to the show will "look with both eyes"; an insight into one of Hockney's rare "unrealized projects"; and why, with Hockney, there is "no end to experiment". That final mantra, Obrist says, was a gift to Serpentine from Hadid, who died ten years ago and who, like Hockney, was a pioneer of working with technology.

Louis Jebb: What is the origin story of "A Year in Normandie and Some Other Thoughts about Painting"?

Hans Ulrich Obrist: I moved to London in 2006 and joined the Serpentine. [Hockney and I] have been in touch many times since then and had long conversations which have led to a book, *The Hockney Interviews* (2025). Over the years we kept discussing that it would be a dream to one day do a show at the Serpentine. He said that when he had the idea, and the right project, he would be happy to do so.

We continued, we were persistent, and then, all of a sudden, about a year and a half ago, the dialogue intensified and David came up with this wonderful idea of, on the one hand, showing this panorama painting, *A Year in Normandie* (2020-21), which he created during the Covid-19 lockdown [at his house in] Normandy. He created more than 200 iPad works about the garden and the landscape that led to this very complex piece, which is for the first time receiving a show in London.

He was inspired by the Bayeux Tapestry. He knew the tapestry as a child through books and then as a young artist he went [to see it in Bayeux in 1967]. Once he lived in Normandy [from 2019] he returned again. And the multi-temporal aspect of this 11th-century work, which you experience while walking, was something which inspired him. It had already inspired his photo composites in the 1980s. It was always somehow "there", but it became very relevant once Hockney moved [to France], and led to *A Year in Normandie*.

"David Hockney: A Year in Normandie". External installation, Serpentine North

And then we have the powder rooms [through the center of Serpentine North]. Once it was clear that [*A Year in Normandie*] would go on the perimeter, we were hopeful that David might create new work [or] maybe also show existing work. Then he had the "Hockney 25" exhibition in Paris, which had more than 900,000 visitors at the Fondation Louis Vuitton. That created such incredibly positive energy that he felt energized to do new work. And so we have all these new paintings in the powder rooms.

LJ: Over the past 20 years, you've established a record at Serpentine for breakout research into art and technology. I wonder what it means to be showing Hockney, an artist who has experimented so thoroughly with technologies new and old, as tools of the artist's imagination.

HUO: There is a deep connection. In the late 1980s, alongside Keith Haring and others, Hockney was part of the Quantel Paintbox program, where they had early possibilities to draw and paint on a computer. [Then there was] the fax machine. I was friends in the 1980s with Alighiero Boetti [who] said one should [...] have a fax agency where an artist could fax artworks all over the world — pre-internet. So that was Boetti's unrealized fax agency. And of course, Hockney did it. He sent friends by fax these extraordinary drawings. There is a very beautiful book on Hockney's fax drawings from the late 1980s [*David Hockney: FAX Dibujos/ FAX Cuadros* (1990)].

Once the digital technology became faster and more accessible, without restrictions on color and speed, Hockney started to work with the computer as a tool. And [then with the iPhone and then the iPad], he started to do these extraordinary flowers. The most magical emails I've ever received were these flower emails, which he sent to friends and acquaintances.

LJ: I'm very interested in what you say about speed. Hockney has found, with the iPhone then the iPad, the ability to capture fugitive moments of light and color when out in the country, whether it is Yorkshire, the Yosemite, or Normandy. As he says, when working on paper, you muddy the colors if you have too many layers. But with these tools, he can maintain purity of color and light while improving his ability to capture the moment. Could talk about how Hockney has used new technologies to give him compositional tools in the studio, but also to drive his imagination?

HUO: Absolutely. Monet, of course, is important in relation to this. Monet saw many springs, summers, autumns, and winters in Giverny and the passing of the seasons, and *A Year in Normandie* is connected to [the example of] Monet. In her biography of Monet, *The Restless Vision* (2023), Jackie Wullschlager writes that Monet, she believes, was excited every day of his life, and painted that way. I think there is this [same] excitement when Hockney works. You feel it in *A Year in Normandie*: an incredible excitement; an incredible moment of energy.

And working with the iPad, Hockney can be outside, not only during the day but also at night. We had long conversations for the exhibition catalog, from July to November 2025. We talked about Monet, and about the Impressionists.

David was talking about the moon, and he said, "You know, ultimately, I can just sit outside with the iPad and paint the moon". The impressionists could not have done that.

So it's not only that [working with an iPad] is faster, it also allows him to go where they could not have gone.

LJ: Could we discuss *A Year in Normandie* as a time-based work, as well as the influence of the Bayeux Tapestry and Chinese scroll-painting — both multi-temporal in concept — on Hockney's own work. I think of his photo composites of the 1980s as well as *Waldgate Woods, Winter* (2010) where he drives an array of nine video cameras at walking pace through the Yorkshire landscape, always playing with time and focus.
HUO: Yes, that's very important. From the first he never wanted the viewer to see [*A Year in Normandie*] all at once, so that you only see it [as far as the next] corner and then you see the next part. And that's why the Serpentine North Gallery [with its four walls] is the perfect space for this work. [As] with the Bayeux Tapestry, you need to explore it over time.

And [there's] a paradox because we spoke before about the speed, the velocity that this technology allows. When David got his first iPad and began landscape drawing of the seasons, it took him months to learn the technique, he told us. But he really wanted it and he realized that it is a superb medium. Monet, he says, would have loved it; and Turner, because you can be so subtle with transparent layerings.

It took him a long time to learn this new technique. But he has the curiosity always to learn: old techniques and new techniques — from the camera lucida to the iPad. It is his incredible curiosity, and openness, which is so special.

LJ: To critics such as Andy Grundberg of *The New York Times*, Hockney's photocollage works of the 1980s, such as the bravura *Pearblossom Highway 11-18th April 1986, #1* (1986), were clearly Cubist in conception, highlighting "the intersection of painting issues with photographic ones, and the intersection of art with everyday life." While, in 1996, John Russell Taylor of the London *Times* wrote of Hockney being "as much a conceptual artist as any who claim loudly to be so. It is just that he sees before he thinks, and what he thinks is always at the service of what he sees." Have you and Hockney discussed the Serpentine show in conceptual terms?
HUO: Yes, particularly the Cubist references. He would talk about late Picasso a lot, and about Fellini's *And a Ship Sails On* (1983). If you think about that almost multi-perspective, multi-dimensional boat in Fellini's film [where the Italian director created what he called a deliberate feeling of artificiality on set with the sea made from polyethylene and a painted sunset], Hockney is very interested by that. We talked about the late Picasso, we talked about Fellini, about Chinese scrolls, and about time. A lot of different temporalities come together in his work, and the future is also often invented with the past. And in the show, there are references to his own past, to his own work.

He uses these new tools but he doesn't give up the old tools. It's fascinating [to consider] his extraordinary oeuvre, which includes digital works, his immersive space, *Bigger and Closer* (2023). Films, photography, designs for opera, and books, of course, with *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (2021) as an example. And literature also. We made a studio visit in Los Angeles with Don Bachardy, the partner of Christopher Isherwood. It was fascinating to see traces of the friendship between Isherwood, Bachardy and Hockney there and to see how deeply Hockney over the years connected to literature.

LJ: You see Hockney, as you say, venturing all these experiments, working with opera, working with new technology. And then he goes back to his core practice. I think of the portraits made when he was working with the camera lucida, inspired by the magical pencil drawings he had seen in "Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch" at the National Gallery, London, in early 1999. A drawing of his artist friend Lindy Dufferin from that year is remarkable for the way it captures both her frank expression and her watchful, listening, gaze, which I believe she developed after losing her hearing. Then there is a striking 25-part series of charcoal drawings *The Arrival of Spring in 2013 (twenty thirteen)* (2013), made when he returned to work after being seriously ill. How do you see it when Hockney steps back, at scale, to the core competency of drawing that brought him to global attention in the 1960s?
HUO: Yes. It's always there. I think it's got to do with what we discussed before, the energy. And it seems to be very energizing for him to have these different parallel realities. There is no end to experimentation in his work, and he connects different temporalities.

A few months ago, I was in his studio. He wanted to talk for an entire hour about some drawings of Turner. And then another time he wanted to talk only about a series of paintings by the very late Picasso, from the '60s. And in the book of conversations, there is never repetition. Each of these conversations deals with a completely different topic.

LJ: Can we talk about having the exhibition in Hyde Park, near the Royal College of Art, where Hockney studied, close to his London studio? He used Kensington Gardens to photograph his former partner Peter Schlesinger, to act as the standing figure in *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* (1972).
HUO: It's an absolute dream come true that this exhibition can happen. And obviously we are almost neighbors with David because [his studio is] 10 minutes away from the galleries. It was the shortest transport we've ever had, because everything came from Kensington to Kensington. It is also an exhibition which deeply connects to the park, to the changing seasons. But there is also something which came to my mind when we talked about technology. When Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web in 1989, he famously said, "This is for everyone". And one of the Serpentine's mantras is that it is "for everyone". So we really hope that this exhibition of David Hockney, with free admission, is for everyone.

LJ: In recent years, the world has witnessed a series of gigantic Hockney exhibitions and studies, many of them playing on the title of his celebrated painting *A Bigger Splash* (1967). We have had "A Bigger Picture" (Royal Academy of Art, 2012); the sumo-sized *A Bigger Book* (2016), from Taschen; "David Hockney", a full survey at Tate in 2017; the "Bigger and Closer" immersive experience (London and Manchester, 2023); and the monumental "Hockney 25" (2025) at Fondation Cartier, Paris. What is it like for you to be working now with Hockney at Serpentine North, a medium-sized space, and with a very particular focus?
HUO: We never do surveys or retrospectives at Serpentine, We do not have the space for that. But the advantage is that the artist can take over the building; can almost create a Gesamtkunstwerk, as Peter Doig did a few months ago with "The House of Music" [in Serpentine South Gallery].

In the case of David Hockney, he had had

HOCKNEY IN KENSINGTON

- David Hockney's London studio is "10 minutes" from Serpentine's Kensington Gardens location
- Hockney studied at the Royal College of Art 400 yards south of the gallery
- He took photographs for his *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures) (1972)* 400 yards north-west of Serpentine

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"David Hockney: A Year in Normandie and Some Other Thoughts about Painting", installation view, Serpentine North, 2026

retrospectives in London; major shows at the Royal Academy, and at the Tate. So it needed to be an exhibition which was precise and which was exciting for us and for him. And it's very exciting that we can finally show *A Year in Normandie* in London. People can spend a lot of time with it.

[We were] installing for five days. And each day I discovered something else. It is an invitation to spend time and it is a monumental work. It is not a "small" show. No artist has ever made the space [feel] bigger. It's almost infinite.

And then the idea of micro-macro is interesting. He does these works on the iPad and then it becomes the 70-meter-long painting and then it actually becomes, outside, a gigantic wall. [That] little bird house, a little tree house in *A Year in Normandie*, all of a sudden appears monumental outside, as if it was in a tree in the park. There are a lot of micro-macro games that the viewer can play with.

And then the thing which couldn't be planned [for] is that David was so inspired after Paris and by [the prospect of] this show at Serpentine that he was excited to do a lot of new work. And, we're very excited that in the two powder rooms we have the world premiere of these two new bodies of work. One is a continuation of his portrait series. But an intimate series [as it shows] his collaborator, the team he is with every day. It's a portrait of who surrounds him in London.

But then the second series, which are these five abstract paintings on a tablecloth, initially without background, which is interesting; I mean, initially with a monochrome background. And then with a background from *A Year in Normandie* and then with a background of Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*.

We are also excited to have a whole store with merchandise. There are going to be 42 unlimited merchandise objects, so very accessible. And for that, he handwrote in digital handwriting [...] "Look with both eyes". We're going to have that as a motto for the exhibition because he really wants visitors to look with both eyes.

LJ: How would you summarize Hockney's importance to public appreciation of art over what is now six decades?
HUO: He's globally one of the most popular, beloved, artists far beyond the art world. At the same time, when I go to studios and ask younger artists, "Who are artists who inspire you?" Hockney is very often mentioned. It is very rare that an artist has this influence. He is an artist's artist, but is also beloved by the masses. It's "both and" instead of "either or". One of the ultimate measures of influence is if younger artists love an artist. That's how art travels. We can see that also in the digital realm now. All the young artists talk about Rebecca Allen.

LJ: Have you and Hockney discussed his unrealized projects?
HUO: We did address it a couple of times in our conversations. There are certain moments and something is not yet realized; and then it happens. If he wants to do something, he does it. But in our conversations — *The Hockney Interviews* (2025) — he did say "I'll have to write a new book to convince the art historians that what I said about shadows and reflections in European paintings coming from lenses is true."

LJ: What do you hope visitors will take away from the exhibition?
HUO: I hope that, for many, this exhibition will radiate the energy of David Hockney. I hope it will give hope to the world in these difficult times. I think it's an exhibition which gives a lot of hope and energy. I hope that people will also "look with both eyes".

Hans Ulrich Obrist is a world-renowned curator and Artistic Director of the Serpentine in London. He was born in Zurich in 1968 and joined the Serpentine Gallery as Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects in April 2006. Before joining Serpentine he had been Curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris from 2000, as well as Curator of museum in progress, Vienna, from 1993 to 2000.

Louis Jebb is Managing Editor at *Right Click Save*.

ESSAY

FINDING PHOTOGRAPHY'S PULSE

In an age after truth, nothing captures cultural anxiety like post-photography, argues Danielle Ezzo

If photography is synonymous with technological change, then post-photography is a history of the anxiety that change produces. Every decade, as a new wave of imaging tools comes to market, the same obituary appears: photography is dead. With it come declarations that the photographic image is no longer indexical and therefore no longer trustworthy.

"Post-photography" has become the go-to term for this supposed afterlife, revived whenever the conditions of photography drift too far from the camera.

Although its exact origins are unclear, the term "post-photography" started appearing in the 1980s and early '90s with the advent of digital imaging, though it would take Robert Shore's book *Post-Photography: The Artist with a Camera* (2014) to introduce it to a broad audience. What is striking is how rarely his codification is acknowledged; when generative AI arrived and critics reached again for the term, Shore's prior use, and every iteration before it, went largely unmentioned.

Even before "post-photography" entered popular discourse, theorists were already circling similar concerns with adjacent language: Jean Baudrillard on simulacra, simulation, and the retreat from the real; Vilém Flusser on the technical image and the logic of the apparatus; and Allan Sekula on photography as a social system rather than a neutral record. What each of these frameworks shared was a suspicion of the photograph's claim to truth, though they differed in what they thought photography concealed. For Flusser, the technical image didn't expose its constructed nature but buried it, presenting the apparatus's program as transparent reality.

The truth is that photography hasn't died. If anything, it's multiplied. More images now move through the world under photographic conventions than ever before, whether or not a camera, in the traditional sense, was involved in their creation.

Images are now made expressly to be seen by machines rather than people, scraped from the internet or used to pad out datasets in order to generate new material. Post-photography as an umbrella covers all diversions and perversions from the camera, while being less stable than the medium itself. It shapeshifts in meaning with each technological turn while rarely acknowledging the long tail of its history. The anxiety, then, is not about what photography is, but about what we need it to be.

A proto-period brought with it a range of approaches to engaging with photography that challenged the truthfulness of images: John Baldessari's photo-text works of the 1960s revealed how photographic images depend on language to produce meaning; Cindy Sherman's fictional narratives borrowed the visual grammar of cinema to destabilize photography's documentary claim; while Richard Prince's reappropriation of advertising photography in the late 1970s and early '80s made clear that the photographic image was already a copy of a copy. These artists might not seem post-photographic by today's standards, but what they were doing — interrogating the medium — is central to how we understand the post-photographic condition today.

While working at Bell Labs from 1968, Lillian Schwartz used early digital compositing and image processing to blend photographs and video, treating the photographic image less as a fixed document than as malleable electronic material. Her work demonstrated that the documentary authority of a photograph could be engineered long before Adobe Photoshop made that practice commonplace. Around the same time, Nancy Burson began collaborating with engineers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on one of the first digitizer-to-computer systems, allowing her to scan human faces and manipulate them digitally.

The cover of the February 1982 edition of National Geographic featured Gordon Gahan's photograph of the Pyramids of Giza, digitally altered by editor Wilbur E. Garrett, who used a Scitex image-processing system to move the pyramids closer together, thereby allowing the subject of the image to fit nicely into the vertical format of the magazine. The outrage that followed called into question the authority of documentary photography and the standards journalism should uphold. This was proof that the photograph's claim to truth was already fragile enough that a single editorial decision could crack it open.

Yet, the magazine defended their editorial choice, and in 1984 went on to make the same decision with another cover. For many critics of the time, the new technical ease of fabrication felt like a decisive break. In his lectures, the writer, curator, and professor Fred Ritchin has described post-photography as being "unhinged from the real", with the "post-" signifying instability. But the phrase "unhinged from the real" assumes what it cannot prove: that photographic certainty ever existed in the first place.

In an article for *The New York Times*, Ritchin anticipated that "realistic-looking images will probably have to be labeled, like words, as either fiction or nonfiction, because it may be impossible to tell them apart." If images could be constructed without a referent — an object or scene that exists directly in front of the camera — then perhaps we had moved beyond photography altogether.

The medium's fragility became harder to ignore with the release and widespread adoption of Photoshop in the 1990s, which put the means of manipulation in nearly everyone's hands. By the turn of the new millennium, the problem was no longer simply the malleability of digital images, but the speed at which they circulated online. Camera phones, social platforms, and an increasingly networked world all contributed to the pace and scale at which images, constructed or not, could spread.

Penelope Umbrico's work is central here. By aggregating thousands of images of sunsets, moons, or Craigslist TVs scraped from the internet, she demonstrates how photography is a collective behavior rather than simply an individual act, revealing the image as a form of vernacular exhaust. Or, Thomas Ruff's series *jpegs* (2007), where he enlarges compressed files or reprocesses found digital imagery until the artifacts of software become the subject, making clear that the photograph is now delivered pre-mediated by the limitations of resolution and compression. Together, these practices

Rachel de Joode, *Sloppy Therapy 20*, 2020. Fine print on archival paper, frame.

challenge photography's claim to being an unmediated record of the real — a myth the medium has always struggled to sustain.

By the 2010s, the concerns about photography's fluid and constructed nature permeated what is often described as the "postinternet" era, which observed the full texture of network culture as both material and subject: screenshots, stock imagery, memes, and images made with the assumption they would be seen on screens first, if not exclusively.

Kate Steciw and Rachel de Joode used digital collage and mark-making to make visible the constructed nature of their images, and to establish connections between digital and physical material. Lucas Blalock left Photoshop's gestures and cloning artifacts — the repeated patches of pixels used to fill or replace sections of an image — visible and unresolved, treating digital mark-making as part of the image rather than something to be concealed, while Joshua Citarella worked through meme culture and the political economy of online image circulation.

In 2012, the Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted *Faking It: Manipulated Photography before Photoshop*, an exhibition and publication curated and written by Mia Fineman, which made the case that photography's claim to truth has been contested since the beginning. The show cited some of the earliest examples of composite photography, including Henry Peach Robinson's *Fading Away* (1858), made from five separate negatives, and Carleton Watkins's *Cape Horn* (1867) albumen prints, documentary landscape photographs made for a geological survey that nonetheless required combination printing to work around the exposure limitations of the time.

What Fineman's exhibition made undeniable was that photographers had long drawn directly onto glass negatives with graphite pencil and ink, darkening or erasing elements with the same deliberate mark-making that would later define Blalock's practice; while combination printing — the cutting and joining of separate negatives into a single image — anticipated the digital collage of Steciw and others. The lineage of both techniques can arguably be traced back to painting, or "painting with light", eventually feeding into the contemporary retouching practices we see today, where the same impulses to master the image are reiterated in the advertising industry. Digital imaging didn't so much create this instability as underline its prevalence, rendering the methods of construction, abstraction, and manipulation that were always there more visible and widely accessible.

What this history implies is not a decisive break from photography's truth claim, but rather a recurring condition for image-makers to engage with the photographic logic of contemporary culture. Post-photography is a response to that imperative.

> *"The post-photographic condition bespeaks a broader matrix of post-truth uncertainty, which is precisely why the stakes feel so high and why the term keeps returning. If we want to address the term 'post-photography', then we must address this underlying anxiety."*
>
> Danielle Ezzo

Framing the present as "after" photography imposes an artificial periodization over an ongoing transformation: an expanded field of technologies, processes, and ways of seeing that remain photographic in nature even if only by degrees of association.

Natasha Chuk's recently published book *Photo Obscura: The Photographic in Post-Photography* (2025) expresses concern that "emerging image-making practices of post-photography are photographic but not necessarily photographs." Chuk focuses on a cohort of artists who investigate the grey areas of the medium, including Pascal Greco's in-game photography in the series *Place(s)* (2021), which explores a kind of omniscient or dual seeing in the video game *Death Stranding* (2019).

Generative AI systems continue photographic practice, compounding the medium's dialectical tension with reality. These models are trained on a vast corpus of photographs and their accompanying metadata, compressing decades of visual culture into statistical form. The images they produce are not detached from the world so much as inferred from it, assembled from patterns learned across millions of prior photographs. Inference is an important phase in the machine-learning (ML) training process, where a model is exposed to unseen real-world data to generate novel predictions and insights. The resulting outputs, be they images, texts, or videos, are "synthetic" insofar as they are generated or emergent, yet they also remain in some sense "historical", if abstracted and biased according to their training data.

As Simon Denny noted last year in a conversation for STUDIO titled "Canon Fodder", "training datasets for AI is a form of history building that reaches from the past in order to deploy to the present." AI-generated images are not produced by a camera, so there is a distancing that comes with that, but they are, as Denny puts it, "natively networked imagery that turns canon-building into a medium." The consequence is not a departure from photography's referential logic but rather its most extreme extension; it is, and has always been, a medium built from prior conventions and assumptions about what the world looks like, now made at a scale that was previously unimaginable.

Flusser identified this problem a long time ago. "The photographer can only desire what the apparatus can do," he wrote in *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985). What the apparatus cannot do is reproduce the world, instead realizing, blindly, what its program makes possible.

Where the camera resolved light with silver nitrate or a digital sensor, ML models resolve statistical weight into emergent pixels. The apparatus has become the archive.

What the apparatus produces from those inferences varies depending on the model and its training. Rendering a truth claim conditional and seldom repeatable fortifies the truth's instability. Both Rashed Haq's *Human Trials* (2016-20) and Alexey Yurenev's *Silent Hero* (2019-25) come to mind here. In my own visual practice, *An Incantation in Twelve Prompts* (2023) revisits the long-standing connection between text and image, and how language and syntax deepen, if not complicate, the contextual understanding of images.

As Andrew Dewdney and Katrina Sluis have argued, the issue is no longer whether photography survives but how images operate as networked data. What Haq's, Yurenev's, and my own work point to is the index being redistributed across millions, if not billions, of images and expressed through unique model architectures and training runs. Rather than the index's single evidentiary trace from scene to camera, contemporary digital images accumulate meaning through indirect correlations within latent space. This kind of multi-dimensional indexicality, where a form of truth emerges through statistical probability across text, algorithmic instruction, and procedural logic, evolves a complex composite from new systems of information collection. Instead of marking an end, post-photography condenses a wider cultural anxiety that photographs cannot fully sustain the empirical pressure that has been historically attached to them.

But if the photograph could never guarantee objective reality, accruing meaning through layered systems of mediation, inference, and interpretation, then truth today only exists as a mesh of implied meanings, by virtue of its being embedded in training data and entrenched in the image-generation process long before it reaches the viewer.

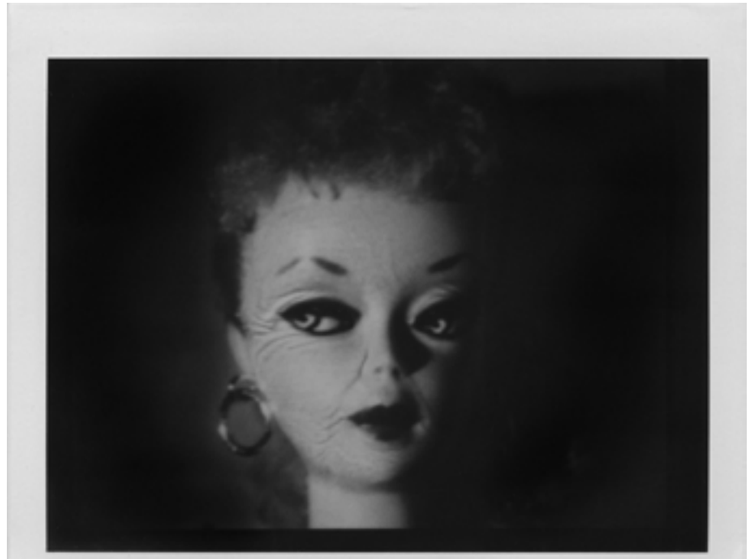
If the term "post-photography" is misleading, it may be because it focuses our attention on the wrong problem. The question is not whether an image is photographic enough to be trusted — a notion that assumes a stable past that never fully existed, and favors the index as the single most important method of information collection. The question is why we continue to believe that images provide certainty. Despite photography's penchant to lie, we want to believe in it as a medium, and it's that belief that overrides our ability to comprehend its inherent fallibility.

We continue to place the burden of representation on still and moving images as the principal bearers of truth because we crave an elegant solution to a complex and ever-changing problem. We look to photography to quell our fears about the world, to affirm our vision of it, and when it can't, we reach for the "post-" as a way to assuage those fears. But the anxiety is the point.

The post-photographic condition bespeaks a broader matrix of post-truth uncertainty, which is precisely why the stakes feel so high and why the term keeps returning. If we want to address the term "post-photography", then we must address this underlying anxiety. Whether photography is dead or alive is less interesting than why artists, theorists, and image-makers persist in testing its limits. The answer, across every decade, is the same: a drive to understand how images make meaning, bear witness, yet simultaneously fail to do both.

From the early days of multiple exposure composites to the latent space of diffusion models, the expanded field of photographic practice has always been in the business of stress-testing its own assumptions. "Post-photography", at its most useful, points to that stress. Yet it often mistakes the symptom for the diagnosis. The question was never whether photography has a pulse, but why we keep needing to check.

Read the full article at www.rightclicksave.com



Nancy Burson, *Aged Barbie*, 1994

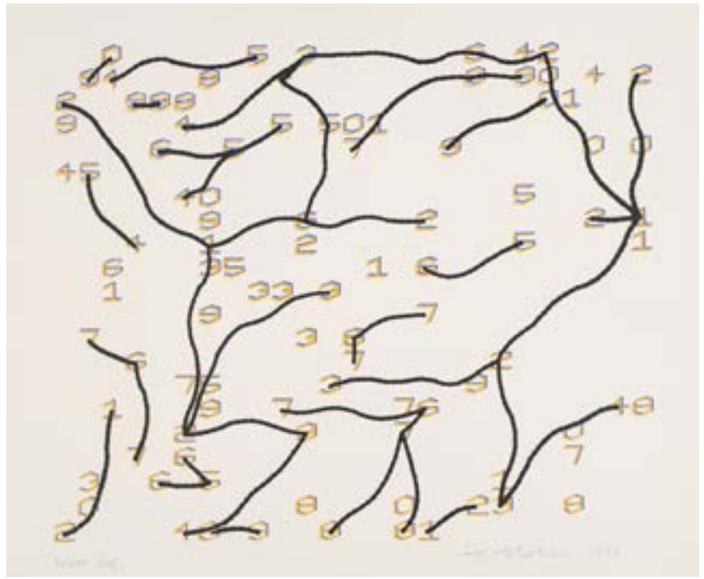
BURSON: © NANCY BURSON. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST. GRECO: © PASCAL GRECO. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Pascal Greco, *Iceland 1 (Death Stranding)*, 2021

Danielle Ezzo is an interdisciplinary artist and writer based in Brooklyn, New York. Her artwork is held in the collections and libraries of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and Cornell University. Her writing on photographic practices and technology has been published in *The New Inquiry*, *Magnum Photos*, and *The British Journal of Photography*, among other publications.

THE TROUBLE WITH TERMINOLOGY

Artists are best placed to define the language of digital art because they are closest to what programs do, argues Paul Cohen



Harold Cohen, *Untitled (i23-3547)*, 1971. Silkscreen on paper.

Harold Cohen, *Machine Painting Series TCM #21* (detail), 1995. Dyes applied by Cohen's Painting Machine to paper

COURTESY OF GAZELLI ART HOUSE & HAROLD COHEN TRUST

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"The Trouble with Terminology" is part of a special series of three essays commissioned by *Right Click Save* from the distinguished computer scientist and son of Harold Cohen, Paul Cohen, dedicated to the language of digital art.

This article is about troublesome words and how we use them. They are but a sliver of the lexicon of art, so perhaps we should ignore them and hope they go away. But no, we keep inviting them back, like a family of skunks.

Examples of troublesome words include *aesthetic*, *autonomy*, *collaboration*, *creativity*, *emergence*, *generative*, *intention*, *meaning*, *originality*, *personality*, *style*, and so on. Oh boy, here comes trouble.

Words take on meanings through their use in communities of practice, and all communities borrow words and change their meanings. But some meanings are very slippery or entirely illusory. One attribute of the skunks is that everyone knows what they mean, when in fact no one does. Consequently, two things can happen when a skunk migrates from art into digital art: its meaning can become even more slippery and illusory, or its new digital context can increase its precision.

This article is about how to ensure that the migration of troublesome words into digital art expands our knowledge and understanding of whatever these words denote. Digital artists embrace computation but often don't explain art-making in computational terms. "Not my job" is an understandable response, but whose job is it? We can't count on critics, art historians, and philosophers because they aren't artists and generally don't know much about computation.

Artists who work with computers are the most qualified people to propose computational accounts of aesthetics, creativity, intentionality, and other phenomena denoted by troublesome words. Here's how: when you use a troublesome word, define it in terms of the objectively observable behaviors of your system. Harold Cohen applied this strategy effectively to craft his ideas about creativity, autonomy, emergence, personality, and other troublesome words.

In my article on Harold's Freehand Line Algorithm, I discuss his use of mechanistic language to delineate a "feedback-driven simulation" of human drawing to create an "illusion of intentionality", as well as how he ended up dropping the words simulation and illusion entirely as his program AARON's behavior became increasingly non-human. In a further article, on creativity, I discuss the behaviors that Harold considered to be creative. Here, though, I will highlight a rare failure of his writing about his relationship with AARON:

"Creativity — this particular example of creativity — lay in neither the programmer alone nor in the program alone, but in the dialog between program and programmer; a dialog resting upon the special and peculiarly intimate relationship that had grown up between us over the years."[1]

There's a tiresome familiarity about this excerpt. When you don't say what troublesome words mean, you open the door for others to interpret them in any confused, nonsensical way they like. What kind of dialog did Harold and AARON engage in? What was special and intimate about their relationship? For some reason, human-machine interactions are described in the language of enchantment and mystery.

In fairness to Harold, fewer than ten paragraphs out of 1,000 mention "dialog" or "collaboration". But none explains these words in terms of Harold's and AARON's abilities, behaviors, and responsibilities. In contrast, consider how Harold describes the development of AARON as a colorist:

"[I]f AARON didn't have the hardware upon which my own expertise rested, then the standard expert system approach of emulating my own expertise was a non-starter. I needed to build a system based on the resources AARON did have, which included [...] an entirely un-human ability to build and maintain an internal model of [an] arbitrarily complex color schema. I needed to devise a set of rules flexible enough and robust enough to apply across the full range of unpredictable compositions that the program was capable of generating."[2]

And then, "The program had, in a single step, become an expert colorist in its own right. [...] I couldn't see why it worked as well as it did, and in the following years I found I was unable even to describe it without going back and reviewing the code I'd written."[3]

As a result of objectively described

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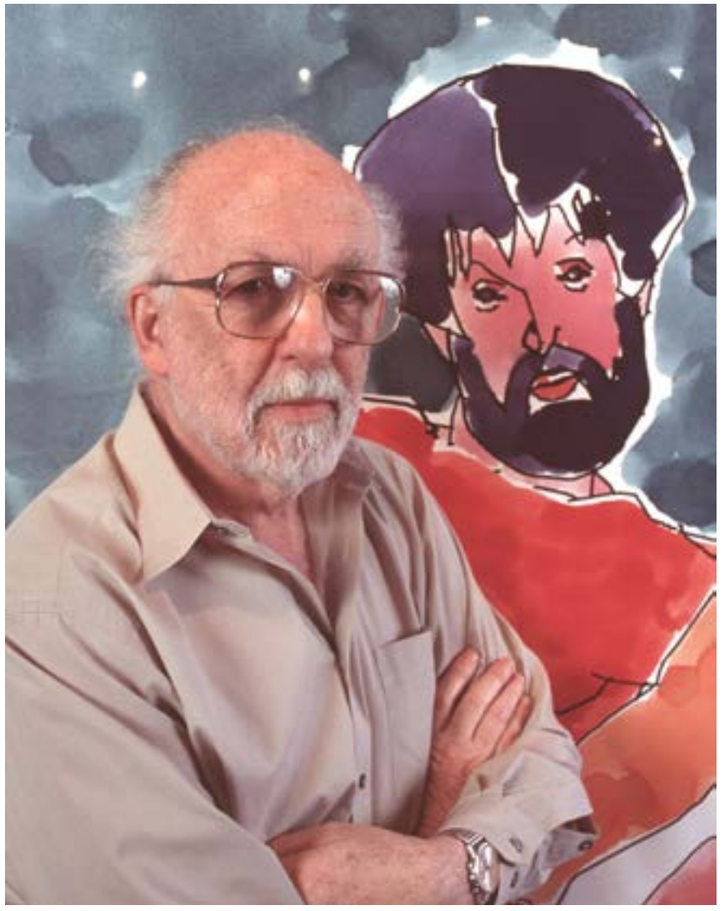
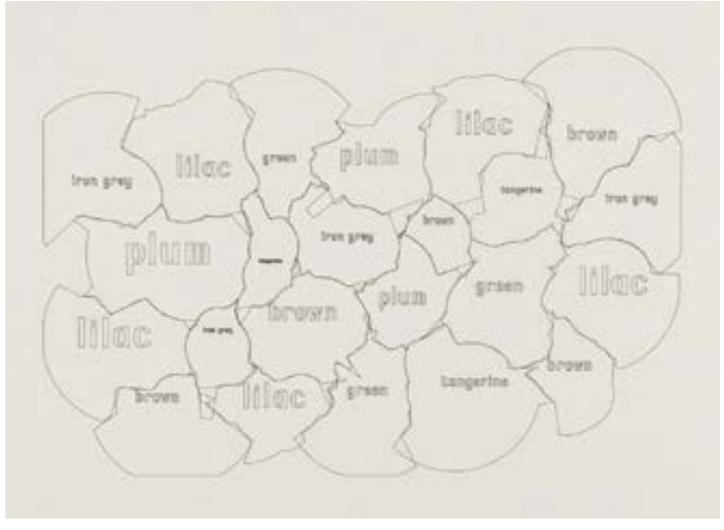
"Perhaps 'collaboration' and 'dialog' are apt descriptions of the 48-year span of Harold Cohen's work with AARON. *Their relationship was almost epistolary: Harold would write some code,* AARON *would reply with some pictures."*

"The most troublesome words of all denote mental states such as wanting, intending, worrying or traits such as boldness, subtlety, etc. Humans have always assigned mental states to things that don't have them — to trees, rivers, spirits, as well as machines."

Paul Cohen



Harold Cohen with painting-machine painting, Boston Computer Museum, 1995



Harold Cohen, *Untitled (i23-3350)*, 1970. Unique calcomp plotter drawing on paper

PORTRAIT: © HANK MORGAN. COURTESY OF HANK MORGAN, HAROLD COHEN TRUST, AND GAZELLI ART HOUSE & HAROLD COHEN TRUST

[1] H Cohen, "Driving the Creative Machine", Paper presented at Orcas Center, Crossroads Lecture Series, September, 2010, 9.
[2] H Cohen, "AARON, Colorist: from Expert System to Expert", Paper presented at University of California, San Diego, October, 2006, para. 47.
[3] H Cohen, "Driving the Creative Machine", 8.
[4] DC Dennett, "Intentional Systems", The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 68, no. 4, February 25, 1971.
[5] "[T]he definition of intentional systems I have given does not say that [they] really have beliefs and desires, but that one can explain and predict their behavior by ascribing beliefs and desires to them..." Ibid., 195.

constraints and developments, AARON — no longer an emulation, now an expert — became quite autonomous of Harold with respect to color. That's how a "relationship" between an artist and an art-making program should be presented.

Troublesome words have entailments that we infer unconsciously when we hear them. Entailments of "collaborate" are that your program shares your goals; it wants to help; you spend a lot of time together; it knows what you are doing, your relationship is roughly symmetrical; it communicates with you; etc. Generally, these inferences overstate your program's abilities. Sometimes they aren't what you intended to say. The best way to defeat unintended entailments is to bind the meanings of words to objectively observed behaviors of your program.

Perhaps "collaboration" and "dialog" are apt descriptions of the 48-year span of Harold's work with AARON. Their relationship was almost epistolary: Harold would write some code, AARON would reply with some pictures. Perhaps this human-machine relay is what all artists mean by "collaboration". More likely, artists have quite different interpretations of the word. We won't know unless artists say what they and their programs do.

The most troublesome words of all denote mental states such as wanting, intending, worrying or traits such as boldness, subtlety, etc. Humans have always assigned mental states to things that don't have them — to trees, rivers, spirits, as well as machines.

The philosopher Daniel Dennett proposed that this intentional stance is a reliable way to explain behaviors that are too complicated or obscure to explain in any other way.[4] But if the aim is computational accounts of mental states in digital art, then the intentional stance is too permissive. It is too easy to say that a program wants to help; that its boldness is evident in its drawings; that only a powerful creative tension could produce such color combinations. Without objective groundings in what programs do these assertions don't mean much. The issue here is not whether machines have mental states. That debate grows more complicated by the day. The issue is whether we can find a stance, a way to use language, that advances our understanding of digital art.

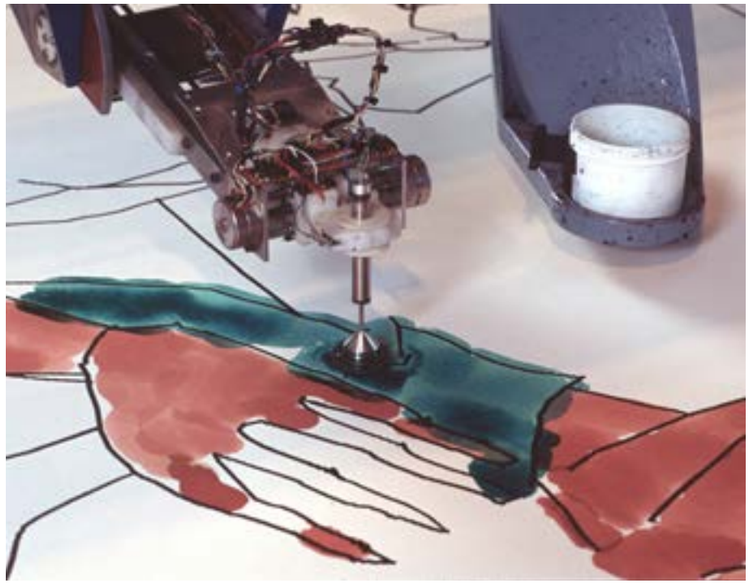
In my view, artists should define troublesome words in terms of their program's behaviors. I call this a constructive stance because the meaning of boldness (or collaboration or creative tension) is fixed by a construction, namely the program and its behaviors. Whereas the intentional stance is noncommittal about whether programs actually have mental states, the constructive stance asserts openly that when a program runs, boldness is generated.[5]

Note that the constructive stance does not say that computational boldness is identical to human boldness, any more than AARON's color expertise was identical to Cohen's.

The constructive stance focuses on the behaviors of programs. For "boldness" we might say a program "generates broad strokes in bright colors across the canvas" or, going a little deeper into the methods that generate boldness, we might say the program "selects from the upper end of a distribution of color saturation values". All the constructive stance requires is objective descriptions of what programs do (for example how Harold's Freehand Line Algorithm generates "intentional" lines). By all means claim boldness for your program, but say what the program does. Later on, when someone else writes a different program to generate boldness, the meaning of the term will become constrained by another construction. Eventually, someone will discern the commonalities among programs that generate boldness and will express this abstraction in more or less formal terms. When this happens the meaning(s) of boldness will derive from the abstraction.

This is precisely what happened to "learning" when it fell into the hands of AI researchers. We constructed hundreds of algorithms for binary classification, pattern recognition, predicting future states, and many other classes of tasks. We started to recognize common behaviors — some of them emergent — and gave them names such as overfitting, the curse of dimensionality, and the bias-variance tradeoff.

We invented mathematical formulations that helped us to distinguish different kinds of learning. Before the ascendance of AI in the 1950s and '60s, the literature on human and animal learning had its own troublesome words, including generalization, transfer, similarity, chunk, and concept. When these words moved into a digital context, they took on precise meanings in the literature of machine learning. We can do the same for troublesome words in art. ▮



Harold Cohen Painting Machine — close-up of brush painting, Boston Computer Museum, 1995

Read all three of Paul Cohen's essays on the language of digital art at rightclicksave.com

THE TROUBLE WITH TERMINOLOGY

ON CREATIVITY IN DIGITAL ART

HAROLD COHEN'S FREEHAND LINE ALGORITHM

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RYAN ZURRER | OWNER OF 1OF1

The venture capitalist has built up a unique collection founded on deep connections to living artists

RCS: How did you get into collecting and what was your first acquisition?
Ryan Zurrer: My first significant acquisition in collecting was the *Notorious BIG KONY Crown*, which now sits at The Hip Hop Museum in The Bronx, scheduled to open later this year and I have joined the board. It opened my eyes that there would be new emerging categories of collecting. As Millennials come of age, the artefacts that defined this generation will become very important culturally. I also started picking up rare Pokemon 1st editions around that time. I had some art from countries that I lived in my home — Vik Muniz (Brazil), Huang Yuxing (China), etc. However, I came to contemporary art collecting via crypto and not the other way around. I was concerned in 2019 that crypto wasn't bringing new cohorts of people in.

NFTs solving the scarcity and provenance problem for digital artists was a really profound use case that enabled digital artists to find creative and financial freedom. I thought that was really inspiring and became very passionate about helping digital artists take their rightful place in the art canon.

RCS: How would you describe your approach to collecting?
RZ: As I am a venture capitalist by trade, I see many similarities between collecting museum-quality art from the world's leading artists and deploying venture capital into the world's leading entrepreneurs. I try to build a relationship with the artist and figure out something I can do to be helpful. Often that is working with major global cultural institutions to exhibit their work or helping them thoughtfully sprinkle cryptoeconomics and game-theoretical dynamics into their work. I'll dive deep into their practice to understand their technical craft and their vision for how their practice will evolve.

Then I will take a "portfolio position" by either acquiring a set of significant works, like with Refik [Anadol], where 1OF1 owns 27 works. Or I will collect the "magnum opus" that is a career-defining masterpiece such as Beeple's *HUMAN ONE* or Sam Spratt's *Monument Game* (2024).

I primarily try to collect directly from artists after spending time with them at their studio and getting to know them. Building relationships is the most rewarding part of collecting for me and I really don't understand collectors that collect dead artists.

Larva Labs, *CryptoPunk # 6965*, acquired in 2025 by Ryan Zurrer, who uses it as his online PFP

It really is the friends and mentors that you make along the way that are the gift you get for embarking on the collecting journey. I often use a heuristic that I call "proof of artwork" which takes some reference to proof of work blockchains and how value is estimated in crypto networks. I ask myself what is the sum of the time, computational resources, training and artistic craft that has gone into a work. In the same way that a blockchain should not be worth less than all of the compute or resources put into securing the chain to that point. An art work should not be worth less than the time, energy, compute and other resources that brought it to that point. That sets a baseline for how to reason through value.

RCS: Which works are you most proud of acquiring and which are you most disappointed to have missed out on?
RZ: *HUMAN ONE* is a really unique story that continues to unfold as it travels around the world to different museums. I was good friends with Beeple before that acquisition and that (very significant) investment was a bet that he would continue to evolve and our working relationship would continue to grow over his career. So far, so good. It's been amazing how *HUMAN ONE* has brought to the fore things that we could not have predicted. For example, each chapter update is now its own unique performance that draws crowds and has garnered critical acclaim.

The next chapter update at the NODE on April 18, 2026 will be absolutely wild as Beeple continues to innovate at the frontier of generative AI applied to his practice.

I also must highlight Refik Anadol's *Unsupervised* at MoMA as a very special work. No one was ready for the reception that work garnered at MoMA, bringing in record-breaking crowds consistently for almost a year and bringing machine generated art to the fore just as AI was capturing the cultural Zeitgeist. It also catalysed a relationship with MoMA for both Refik and I, which has deepened considerably and I am incredibly grateful to have been chosen to make a contribution to what is in my opinion the highest caliber of institution globally, first as a member of the acquisition committees and now as a Trustee.

MoMA is truly the Seal Team-6 of art and the group of trustees and curators that dedicate so much of themselves to MoMA are incredibly inspiring.

On the flip side, I was relatively late to acquiring *CryptoPunks* even though I was aware of their cultural impact on crypto. I often compare *CryptoPunks* to Warhol silk screens, crafted to be portraiture of an emerging new class of cultural collectors. I'm happy with the work that my collection 1OF1 has put into the *CryptoPunks* in recent years, acquiring both for our collection and for museum donations.

RCS: You have supported some important institutional acquisitions in recent years. What background can you share to this, and are there any such recent acquisitions that you would especially like to mention?
RZ: The *CryptoPunks* and *Chromie Squiggles* acquisition by MoMA was an important moment for digital art as well as crypto culture and is emblematic of how wonderfully supportive this community is. I can't wait for the community to be able to celebrate the exhibition of CryptoPunks and Chromie Squiggles at MoMA in the not-too-distant future.

It certainly feels like a homecoming and stands as perhaps the most important institutional validation of this movement.

Read the full article at www.rightclicksave.com

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