



The Art World's Tech Awakening

AI, video games, museums, Himalayan art and more.



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Jul 1, 2021

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The art scene's tech awakening. (All gifs via giphy.com)

The art world is in the midst of a seismic technological shift incited by the fourth industrial revolution and accelerated by the pandemic. However, if our approach

towards NFTs is anything to go by, we're in for a wild (and rude) awakening.

- Researcher Kate Crawford's deep dive into the myth-making underlying Artificial Intelligence (AI) in her new book *Atlas of AI* is the stuff of dystopian nightmares:

We are commonly presented with this vision of AI that is abstract and immaterial. I wanted to show...its natural resource costs, its labour processes, and its classificatory logics...I went to locations including mines to see the extraction necessary from the Earth's crust and an Amazon fulfilment centre to see the physical and psychological toll on workers of being under an algorithmic management system.

- Crawford openly discussed how more data is not going to help machine learning algorithms make less errors that discriminate and AI essentially gives more power to the already powerful such as authorities and corporations, with little transparency.
- Facial recognition tools are already being used for law enforcement without public oversight. And there's the problem of deep fakes.



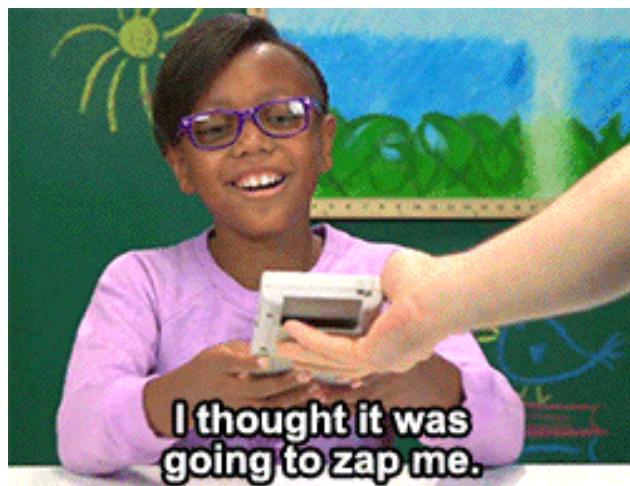
How deep fakes work. I could be wrong.

- To be fair, these issues are not entirely new to the art world.
- The nature of AI, including its flaws, have been explored by artists like Trevor Paglen, Hito Steyerl and more. (Crawford even worked with Paglen on a related project in 2017.)
- Yet, set against the backdrop of rapidly rising tech oligarchy - Amazon using machines to take over its HR functions, algorithm-loving social media giant Facebook becoming a trillion dollar company while facing little to no consequences - the potency of AI takes on a whole new urgency.



Amazon HR. Probs.

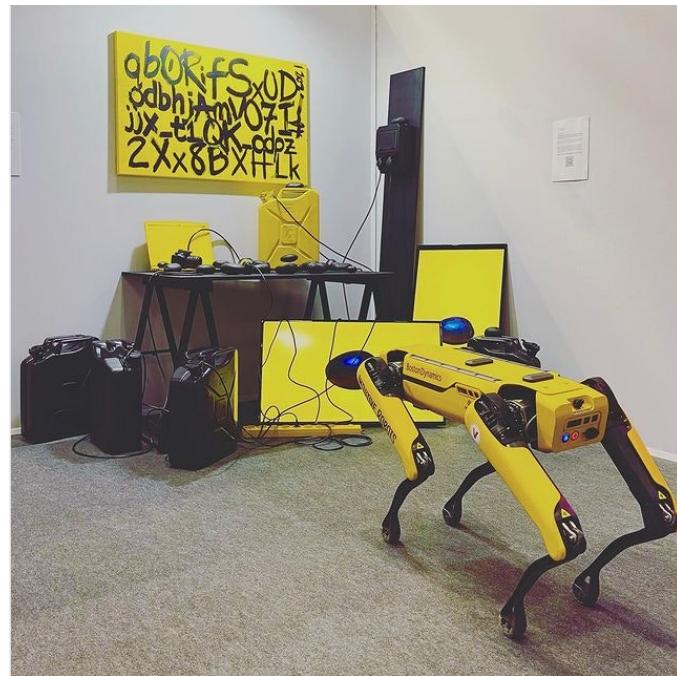
- The art world being wilfully blind towards the ramifications of developing tech in a bid to make bank is problematic.
- But its inherently don't-know-don't-care approach regarding anything new and different could cost us in myriad ways.
- It might even cost us the chance to explore existing and evolving technology in-depth, such as video games, which could provide the embodied digital experience we seek.



Traditional art world dealing with video games.

- Curator Marie Foulston talked about gaming on last weekend's Masterpiece Online panel, citing artist Everest Pipkin using online game platform Roblox for their creations as an example.
- (Pipkin is known for their widely quoted essay on the environmental implications of crypto art and their public Google spreadsheet of artist opportunities.)

kevinabosch



A post shared by [@kevinabosch](#)

- Foulston also discussed other digital creatives and experimental efforts during the panel such as Rhizome's [Michael Connor](#), artists [Angela Washko](#), [Robert Yang](#) and Kevin Abosch.
- Clearly, there is growing awareness and meaningful action being taken regarding tech, power, identity and more. But this needs to go beyond a specific subset of artists, writers, gallerists, curators or collectors and become a whole-of-art-world approach for maximum breakthrough.

Curious: Are Museums Broken?

Museums. Probably.

- A study by the **American Alliance of Museums** (AAM) earlier last month revealed that 15 percent of US museums face risk of closure, as compared to their July 2020 findings that approximately 33 percent may close due to the pandemic.
- On the other hand, an annual survey by **The Art Newspaper** at the end of March 2021 reported plummeting attendance figures (and revenue) for major art museums around the world in 2020.
- Recent post-lockdown numbers for UK museums don't look great either.



Museum staff these days. I'm guessing.

- Meanwhile, founder and director of New York art non-profit **Participant Inc.**, Lia Gangitano called out museums' hold on the art world as "the highest arbiter of acclaim."
- Lest we forget, the **Met** is doing a **Disney** exhibition.
- There's also an increasing push for museums to return cultural property to their country or community of origin.
- The former head of UK treasury, who oversaw arts funding cuts, is joining the **British Museum** as its new chair.
- Not to be outdone, **Centre Pompidou** made a ridiculous leadership decision before backtracking.



Curiouser: Himalayan Art

- Last month, the **Rubin Museum of Art** in New York opened the exhibition **Gateway to Himalayan Art**, running till 2023. The show presents sculptures, paintings, artefacts such as a 16th century Tibetan Cosmological Scroll.
- While we were discussing the exhibition via IG DMs, Taiwanese artist Charwei Tsai, who viewed the show online, said rather aptly:

I feel like the ancient wisdom traditions and the art that come out of them is what is helpful during these difficult times! Their knowledge of the balance of mind and body, human and nature, the nature of reality and the process of dying.



Articles worth reading for their prescience in describing contemporary issues and developments beyond the insularity of the art world:

- Amy Castor is *the* investigative reporter for crypto shadiness, so much so she writes for Artnet now. Her recent post goes behind the scenes on El Salvador and crypto.
- Julia Ioffe's latest newsletter really shines a light on how there are essentially no consequences for the powerful, wealthy and/or well-connected.
- If you're as morbidly fascinated with Peter Thiel as I am, the latest ProPublica investigation and Teddy Schleifer's take on it will not disappoint.
- As someone who spent her mid-twenties (deludedly?) cultivating herself as a Blair Waldorf type, this well-written 2008 Vulture piece The Genius of Gossip Girl gets it and more.
- I never quite understood why I couldn't relate to Aziz Ansari's performances even before his #MeToo controversy but The National's article dared to go there.
- I leave you with this bittersweet speech US President Richard Nixon would have given if the astronauts failed to make it back from the moon in 1969.
- Also the last stanza of a Rilke poem I came across this week:

would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

Note: I'm currently trying to focus on writing more about financial toxicity in the art world so if you have any tips, advice, leads, please feel free to reach out here or via Twitter and Instagram.

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