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Gabe Cohn,
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October 2018 - Painting generated by A.I sells for $432,500 USD at auction

What's you reaction to the Christies auction and to the artwork in question? And why?

It's really interesting one, I feel it's sparked a lot of discussion about important topics for AI art community to address, and for art world are aware of. Questions relating to ownership, for instance as artists working in this field we must not forget what we owe to and credit the many engineers working on this field who are generously open sourcing their research for us to play with.

As artists working with artificial intelligence we need to be careful not to tread on each others toes, if using pre-trained models or training on public datasets as well as open source algorithms theres a danger of producing work aesthetically quite similar. Of course we should take inspiration from each other and try and collaborate and I believe sometimes we unknowingly produce similar work. But this is motivation to find other interesting areas and techniques to explore, discovering different ways of producing work that can say something new.

One issue I have with the auction is in the miscommunication, there's a danger in mystification and assigning too much agency to machine learning models. As artists we can stand outside and reflect upon things around us, I feel it is a responsibility to be honest in communicating the ideas, materials and processes we are working with.

AI is an incredibly exciting and fast moving field, and it can be fun to speculate and debate wild theories around simulations, singularity and artificial consciousness.

However these things are distant speculations, and for people who do have not delved deeply into these areas they can be greatly misunderstood. With the area of artificial intelligence this can be an issue as many of the more serious and prescient issues are too abstract and complex to visualise as they exist as millions of numbers on servers which are informed by our data and biases and are informing how we live our lives the decisions we make. So fear mongering around questions of agency at this point in time is unproductive.

I'm definitely inclined to agree with Robbie Barrat about the fact that 'a human chose the dataset, designed the network, trained the network and curated the resulting outputs'.

In my work I'm certainly interested in removing my artistic hand from the output, as with 'Closed Loop' 2017 where I chose not to curate the machine's output. The piece consisted of two AI's having a conversation, with one trained to interpret images in words and the other trained to

interpret words and generate images. For a conceptual standpoint I was interested in seeing where they ended up and chose to let them keep running without editing or curating the output, but I would by no means claim that the two models are actually autonomous beings creating the art.

What do you think of the idea that a legacy auction house like Christie's is trying to dip its toes into A.I. art? Do you think they're doing it in the right way?

It's great Christies are taking an interest as it raises the profile of the field. I say this as an artist who has been working with this technology for the last couple of years, and have been exhibited in multiple group shows themed around A.I. art.

It's a shame however that it's not a more original work that's being showcased, such as work being produced by artists such as Mario Klingermann, Anna Ridler and Memo Akten. However, the debate that's been stimulated raises important questions relating to AI agency, crediting human collaborators and demystifying the technology used.

The whole debate feels like nothing new to me; in London we've built quite a lively community (mainly though Luba Elliot's Creative AI Meetup) where we've been discussing these techniques and concepts for the last couple of years.

More recently 64/1 (an art curation and research collective focused on building public understanding of how artists and artificial intelligence can come together to create art for the post-human age) curated an exhibiton with seven international artists (including myself) at Nature Morte, Delhi. I felt their way of talking about the work, and the technology involved, in interesting and poetic terms whilst still staying true to the technology was something that the art world can learn from.

And in more general terms, what do you think makes for a compelling work of A.I. art?

This is really hard to answer - if I knew I'd be making it

I do feel however that the most interesting work comes when artists use AI techniques to create work which has interesting aesthetics as well as a conceptual depth.

I'm interested in how we can use these techniques in ways that are not just seen as demonstrating what can be done with the technology today. For work to stand the test of time it needs something more, in the same way artists like John Cage or Nam June Paik who were fascinated by the technology of their time were able to make incredibly powerful, conceptual and poetic pieces which did not lean too heavily on the technology being used.

As much as I love the aesthetic potential of GAN's (generative adversarial networks/image generators), I'd be excited to see more work being made from other areas of artificial intelligence such as audio generation, natural language processing and deep reinforcement learning algorithms.