

# Reframing Art Education: Addressing AI Ethics with Everyday Creativity

Ying Tianfeng Cui<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD Researcher in Art Education, Department of CUIN, University of Houston, United States

Correspondence: Ying Tianfeng Cui, PhD Researcher in Art Education, Department of CUIN, University of Houston, United States.

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## Abstract

This article translates the principles of AI ethics into actionable implementations for K-12 art education, framed by the practices of artist Helmut Smits. Smits discusses his transformative use of everyday objects in works like *Rainbow Windshield* and *Screen Time* to question traditional notions of originality and authorship. This article describes workshop activities that use generative AI tools to promote critical thought and ethical awareness for students as prescribed in the U.S. National Visual Arts Standards (NVAS). Through themes of data usage, bias, and creative ownership, the workshops guide students to think responsibly through the evolving digital landscape. The following article is intended to offer art educators tangible strategies for navigating ethical discussions in the classroom while potentially allowing them the tools to prepare students to become thoughtful and engaged digital citizens.

**Keywords:** AI ethics, art education, K-12 workshops, generative AI, digital media

## 1. Exploring Everyday Objects as Ethical Art

As a multidisciplinary visual artist based in Rotterdam, Helmut Smits engages in furniture design, conceptual sculptures and public installations — like *Screen Time*, which connects participants through digital snapshots of their everyday existence in a playful yet potent way. His art questions perceptions, creating new meanings from the mundane to force viewers to see common experiences in unfamiliar ways.

Smits' approach to her creative work mirrors the AI Ethics workshop's interest in how technological tools can reinterpret quotidian experiences and invite us to reconsider what creativity means, as she patiently observes life and creates art out of common objects. He prefers the simple and the straight, employing of jokes and visual puns to make his ideas approachable. With his *Wax Sculptures* series, said playful mode of working is best displayed through groups of candles moulded together to create unique colour combinations, offering effective, thoughtful commentary on the versatility of everyday materials; whilst *Rainbow Windshield* takes a mundane item and transforms it into a sculptural piece that complicates the ordinary — How easily can we reshape our perceptions through a few simple changes? All of these projects connect to broader ethical ideas in digital art by showing how established materials and thoughts can be used in new ways, sparking conversations around originality, authorship, and the ethics surrounding pre-existing content in AI-generated work. As Li et al. (2024) suggest, the use of AI tools in educational projects opens the door to discuss these ethical questions in terms of how digital systems interpret pre-existing works. And Garcia (2024) further explores how the idea of artificial creativity disrupts classic conceptions of authorship, resonating with Smits' vision of turning the ordinary into art statements. His iterative *Screen Time* project invites participants to send in screenshots of their mobile lock screens, allowing for a clock that generates online time according to who and what these strangers look at — a whole new approach to building relationships off the hook, as it is not only about glimpsing possible shared hours and experiences, but also about exploring an identity in a context where all you see nowadays, lots of AI

creations.

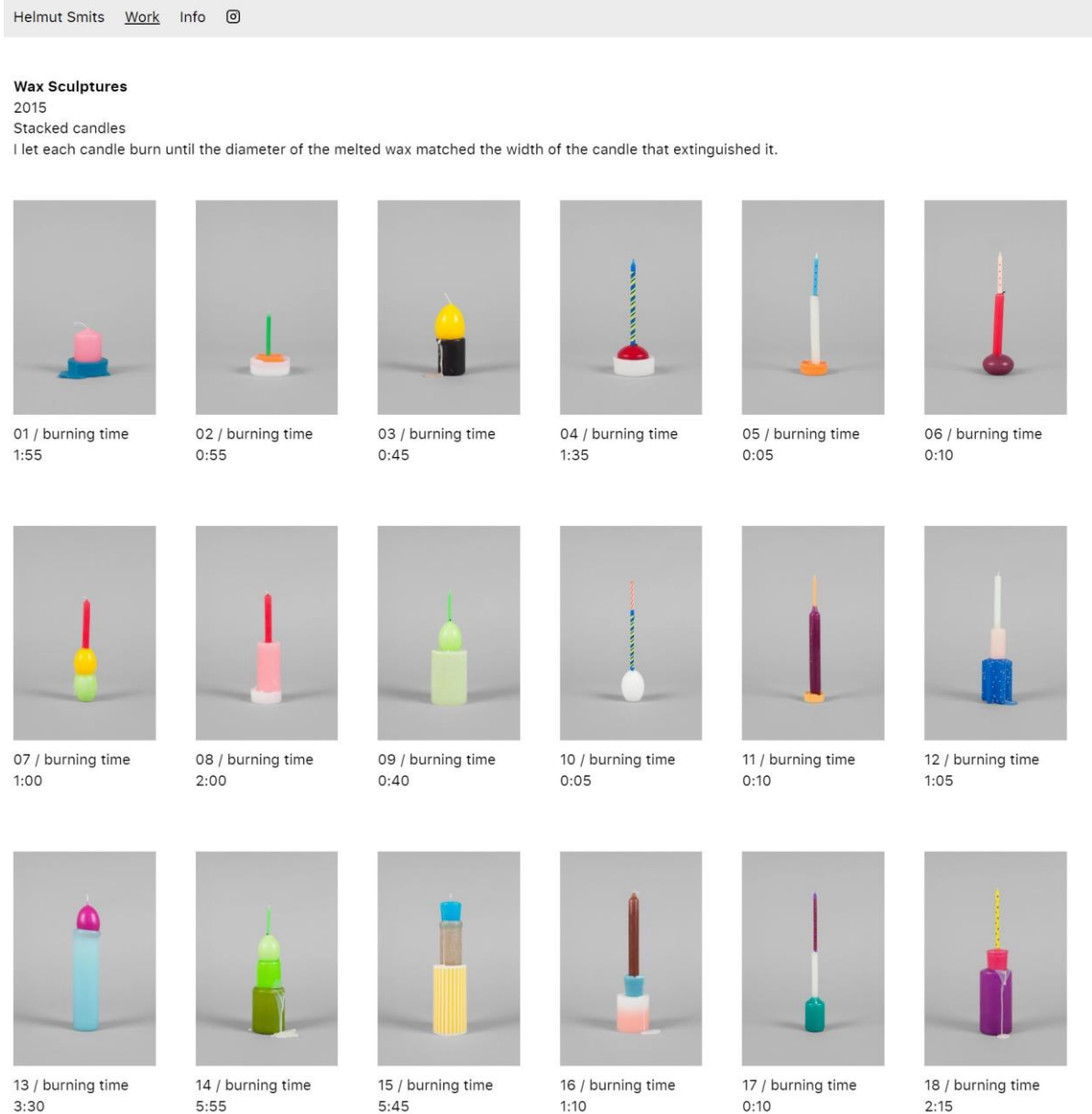


Figure 1. (Smits, H., 2015). Wax Sculptures: Stacked Candles [Screenshot]. Retrieved from the artist's website.

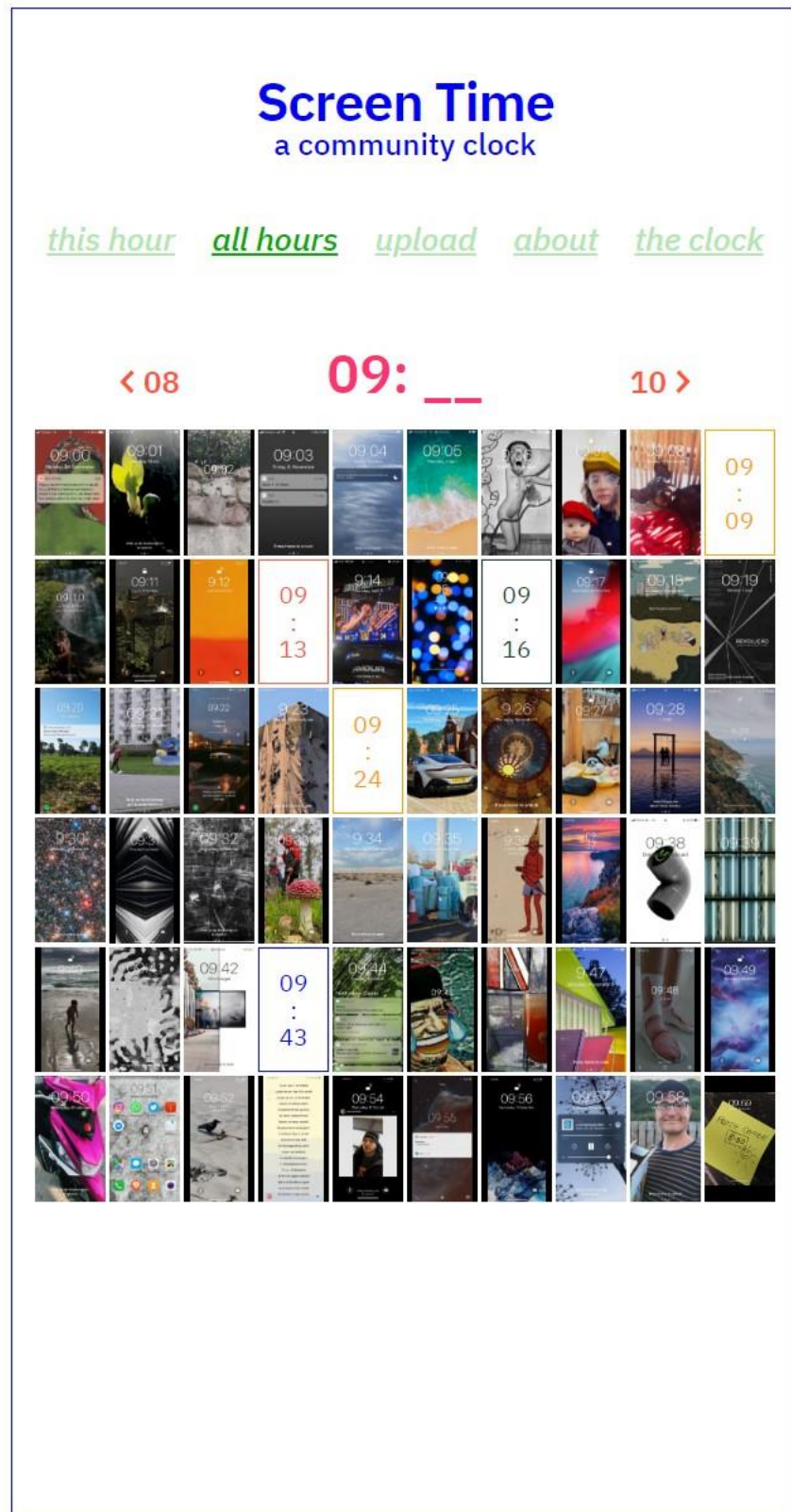


Figure 2. (Smits, H., 2019–ongoing). Screen Time: Socially Engaged Project [Screenshot]. Retrieved from the project website.



Figure 3. (Smits, H., 2010, August 5). Rainbow Windshield Project: Applied Paint to a Car's Windshield [Screenshot]. Retrieved from Make Magazine by Becky Stern. Ongoing since 2010.

His ability to treat everyday things as symbols that call into question preconceived notions has gained him much praise from critics, who say his work is challenging but easy to appreciate and ultimately uplifts audiences through simple pleasures.

Through the use of oil paintings by Helmut Smits I designed an online workshop for a non-for-profit art education institute based in New York together with students from various part of the worlds to address some of the ethical questions of digital creativity and allowed them to become cultural citizens giving them space for discussion on the topic of authorship, data privacy, and representation regarding the AI-generated artworks.

## 2. How It Aligns to Educational Standards

The artistic approach of Helmut Smits corresponds with the NVAS by supporting the educational goals of Creating, Presenting, Responding, and Connecting. His work lays the groundwork for exploring AI ethics in art education, including issues such as authorship and originality, as well as the societal impact of technology. Smits' modifying common objects, as with Rainbow Windshield, also raises questions of authorship, echoing generative AI's transition from creators to curators. His art invites students to work together within shared structures — doing so takes on new meaning with the evolving role of originality in AI art.

The *Screen Time* project draws parallels to AI's data-driven methods, and underscores the importance of ethical sourcing and transparency in the creation of art. Nagapushpa et al. (2024), which highlight frameworks for managing AI's impact on public engagement, echoing Smits' ethos of collaboration. His works similarly defuse bias through the repositioning of commonplace objects, asking for retooling of notions of inclusivity in AI-based art. Chavez et al. (2024) push for ethical codes to come with fairness in processes involving AI.

*Screen Time* and other such projects also highlight the societal impact of AI, from democratization to job displacement. Bond et al. Kasa (2024), combined with our focus on interdisciplinary approaches to ethical AI in learning systems (art and technology) form a focus and promise for future inquiry.

## 3. Contextual Information

Helmut Smits' artistic practice provides a framework for discussions about authorship, originality, and the societal impact of AI in art education. He explores such issues through projects such as *Rainbow Windshield* and *Wax Sculptures*, evidence that repurposing and recontextualizing domestic and mundane objects reflects the ways in which our digital AI also draws upon pre-existing data to produce something original (Garcia, 2024).

Smits' works also make us question biases in AI-generated art. His use of AI output, which can reinforce stereotypes, aligns with Chavez et al.'s (2024) call for equitable and inclusive designs in AI. In addition, Smits' engagement with social activism, as shown in *Screen Time*, reveals how art can serve as a community-building tool while also confronting the democratization and disruptive force of AI. According to Vyas (2022), this balance between AI's potential and ethical responsibility is a formative theme in Smits' practices.

## 4. Workshop: Artificial Intelligence Ethics and Art Education

The workshop intended to get high school students (between the ages 16 and 18 years old) to discuss and practice AI ethics in art in a meaningful manner. The international mix of students, some of whom had studied A-levels, while others had followed the US AP and IB systems, and who had attended schools across the UK, US and elsewhere in the Commonwealth, added to the challenges. Mixes of detailed group work came about where all class members tried to navigate the ethical ramifications of art and technology, given their multicultural backgrounds.

It was held online, on Zoom, and the course was designed to include students from around the world with consideration for different time zones. The four sessions of the workshop centered around Authorship & Originality, Copyright & Fair Use, Bias & Representation, and Social Impact & Responsibility. Each of the sessions had a common structure consisting of an introduction with case studies from the tutor, a group activity run by students and presentations sharing the project.

The workshops used Helmut Smits's artistic practices as a basis for discussing some important AI ethics issues. Through dynamic hands-on exploration, collaborative dialogue, and reflection, students investigated generative AI in the context of artistic practice and ethics. By bridging traditional and AI driven art making processes, the workshop hoped to provide students with the analytical tools needed to digest the changing landscape of digital creation.

#### *4.1 Workshop 1: Authorship & Originality*

In this session, students considered how Smits' playful manipulation of commonplace items, like the Rainbow Windshield and Wax Sculptures, upended traditional notions of creativity and authorship. Instead, the only discussion was around comparing Smits' physical reinterpretation to the digital reimaginings of AI. When art can be made using A.I. tools trained on large-scale data sets, students considered what original means and whether this is an ethical act.

Students were divided into two groups — one group researched images of Smits' artworks on Instagram and Google, and a second group researched AI-generated pieces of visual art from newer platforms like Prompt Base and Prompt Hero to expand their understanding. After the collection tasks, the students presented their findings and debated whether the transformations carried out by Smits were ethical different from interpretations by AIs. This session promoted students to critically consider the shifting ideas surrounding authorship in a digital world.

#### *4.2 Workshop 2: Copyright and Fair Use*

The session is based around Smits' *Screen Time* project which turns user-screen submitted screenshots and macros into shared pieces of art. The ethical comparison was to A.I. models that also rely on data pulled from the internet to generate new art, frequently without the express consent of the original authors. This opened up a conversation about whether such use is considered fair use or the exploitation of Smits' work.

Then students were divided into two groups and given a hands-on activity. The "training group" collected the image files from the previous workshop to train a generative AI model in KREA, an online AI platform. The "prompt group" then came up with prompts to generate images using the trained AI model. Theoretically, we are still in a time of learning but with technical difficulties to train a model. One of the main points of the workshop was to understand the relevance of data sourcing and consent in AI-generated art. The session ended with a discussion reflecting on the ethics in drawing similarities between participatory practices in the traditional art and AI generated context.



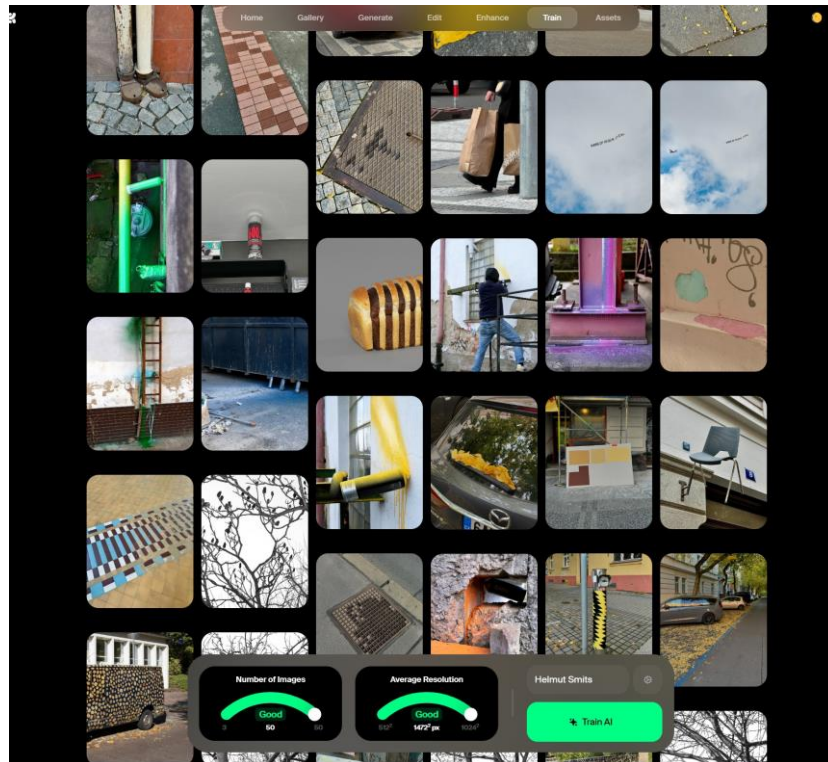


Figure 4. Screenshot of the training process using Helmut Smits' works

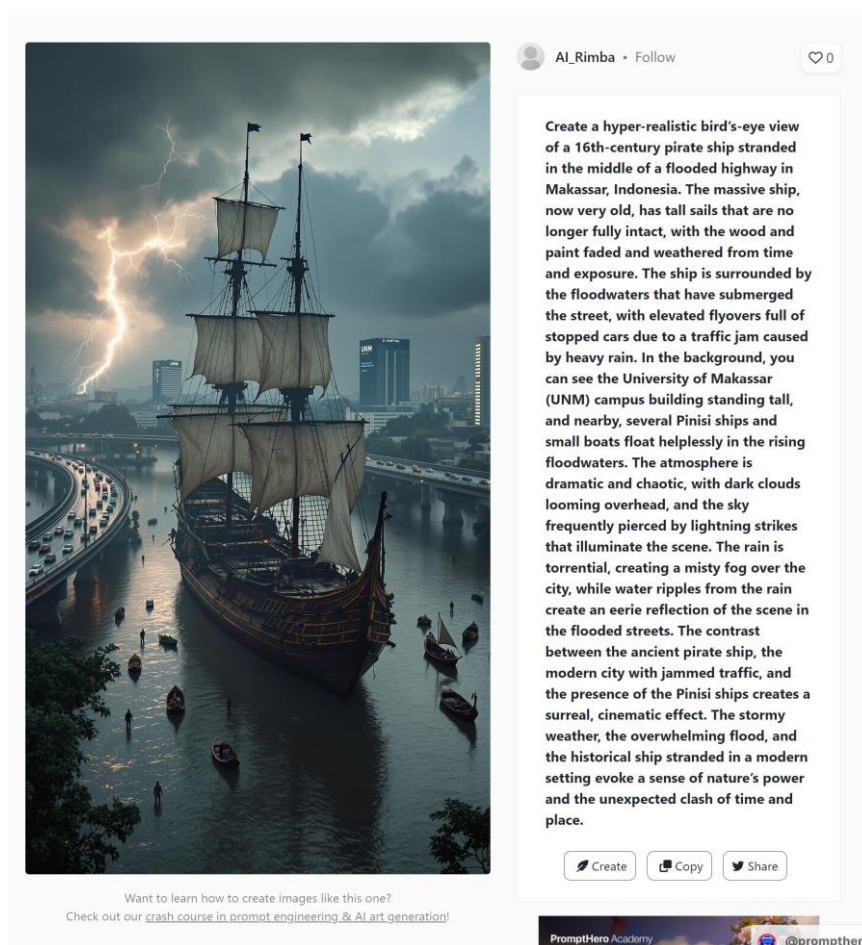


Figure 5. Screenshot of the students' visual and prompt reference from PromptHero

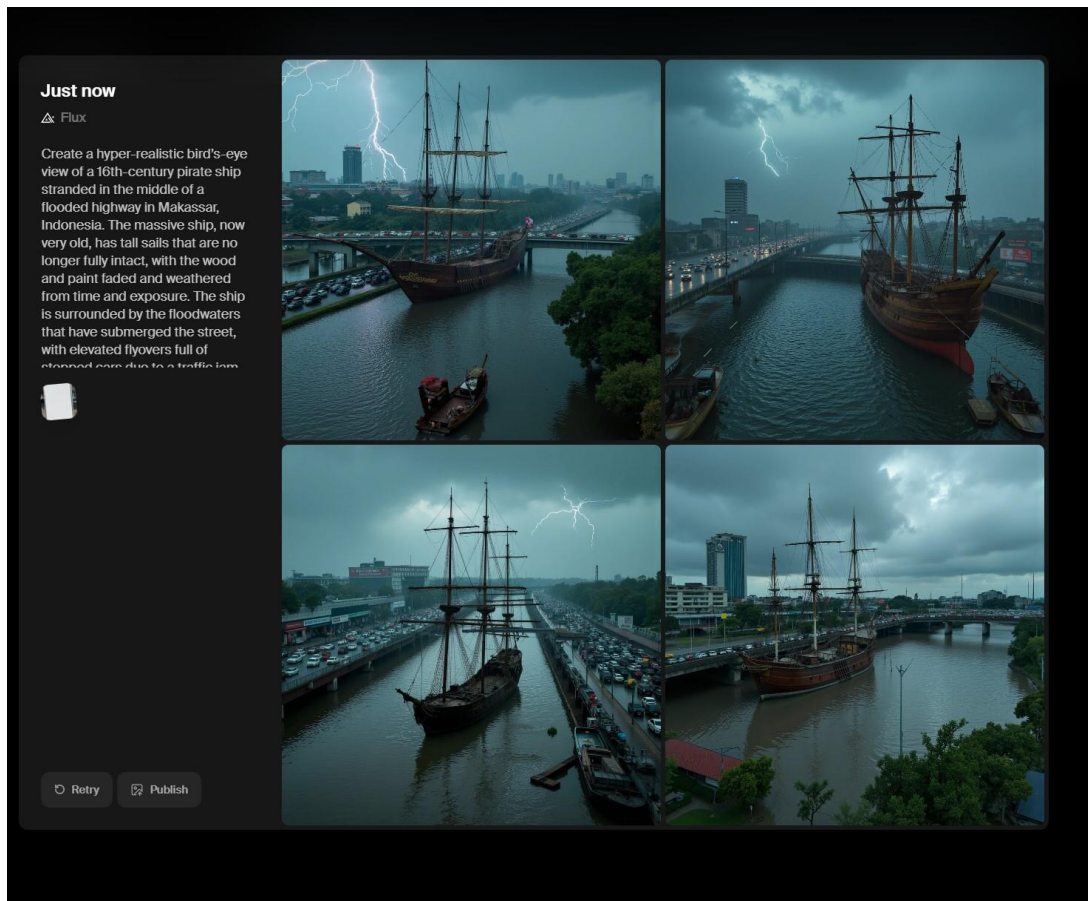


Figure 6. Screenshot of student's work generated using prompt from Prompthero that applied to pre-trained gen-AI by KREA

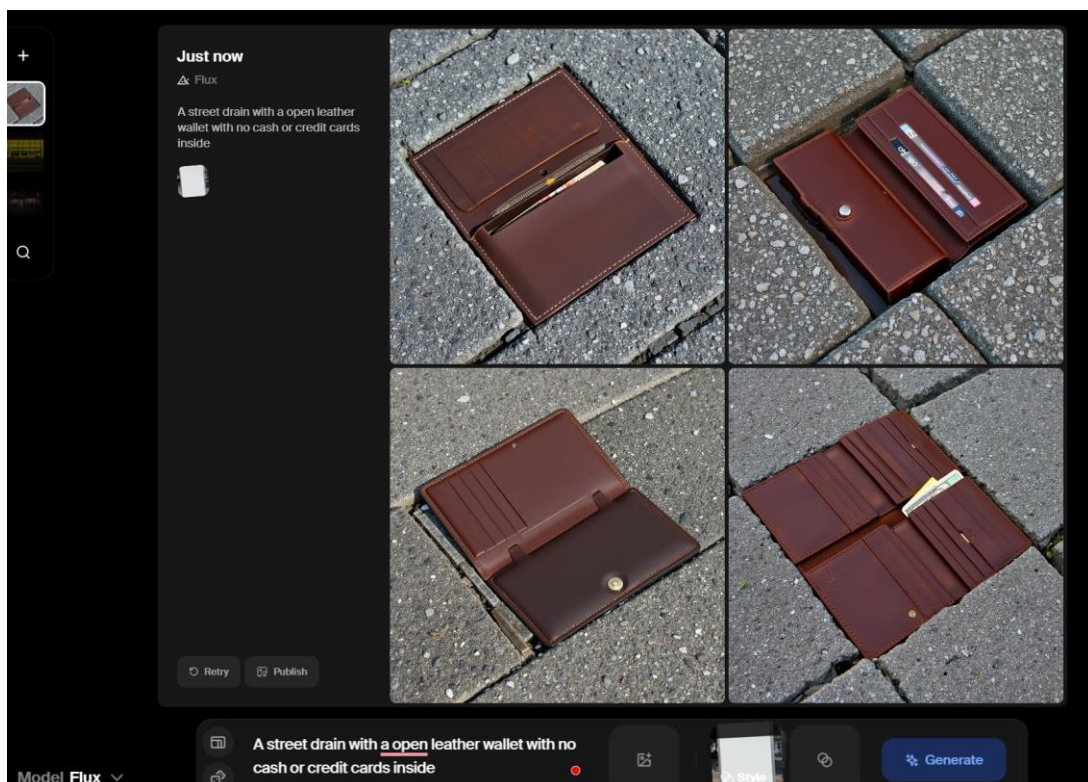


Figure 7. Screenshot of student's work generated using original prompt applied to pre-trained gen-AI by KREA



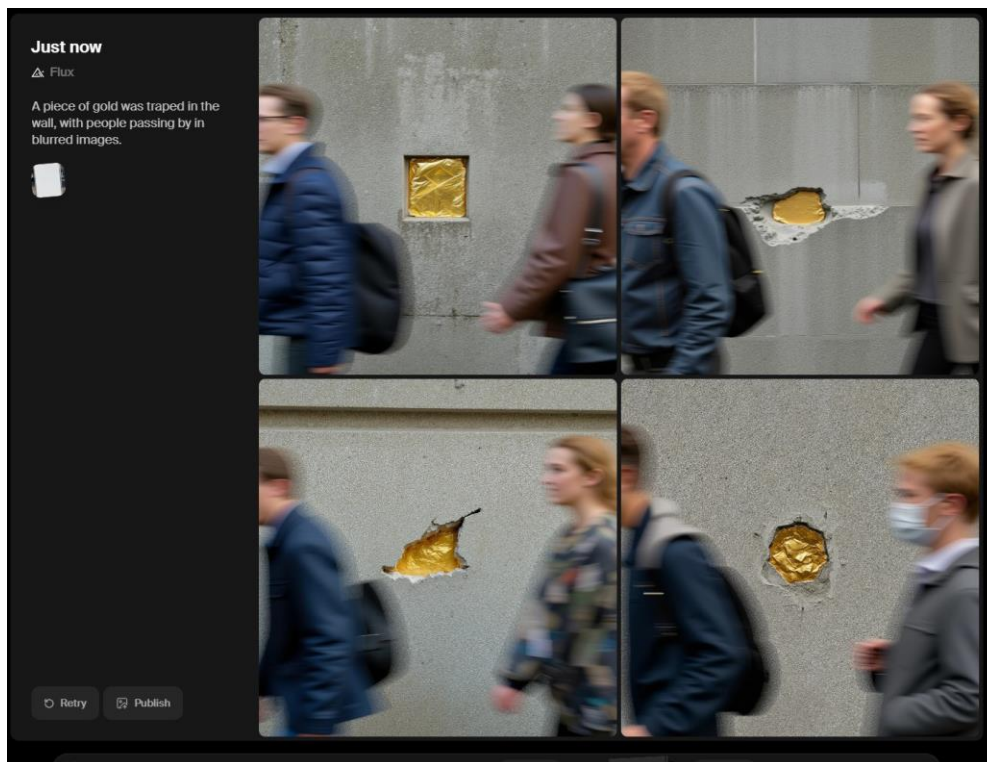


Figure 8. Screenshot of student's work generated using original prompt applied to pre-trained gen-AI by KREA

#### 4.3 Workshop 3: Bias and Representation

Smits' works, which recontextualize ordinary objects to encourage viewers to view the world in a new way, formed a topical springboard for exploring bias in AI-generated imagery. This session focused on how AI outputs are often manifestations of social biases found within the data with which the system was trained, against Smits' use of art as an inclusive, democratizing force.

Students were regrouped based on whether they preferred to use the class-trained AI model or other generative AI tools. The two groups identified keywords from everyday life that they thought were biased and created prompts to produce pieces of art that would highlight these biases. Instead, students reflected critically on the potential of AI systems to perpetuate stereotypes and how artists could work towards creating more inclusive AI tools. Reflecting on how Smits' ethos of reinterpretation of the mundane could inform ethical AI design — through a promotional, rather than reductive claim to inclusivity/diversity — students drew their own digital practices in making art.

#### 4.4 Workshop 4: Social Impact & Responsibility

Modelled off Smits' *Screen Time* project, this session led us through the implications of the increasingly artificial intelligence world we find ourselves in the art community. The workshop addressed anxieties over AI's ability to democratize creativity while also increasing concerns about job loss and over-reliance on technology.

As the workshop was online and the students were from different time zones, in this case, the students worked on a collaborative project to create still or motion pictures of popular food from their living countries using generative AI platforms. The students were first asked to take pictures of one of their meals and then use these photos as prompts to generate AI-created images reflecting their regional cuisine. Both the AI-gen and real-life images were submitted anonymously via a shared cloud storage drive ahead of the workshop. In the session, students commented on images that were not uploaded by themselves, and made comments on whether these images represent their region's culture or not. He also described whether generative AI was a challenge to contemporary image-making for multiple audiences.





Figure 9. Picture by a student that documented one the person's meal, since the student was taking a road trip on a motorbike through southwestern China



Figure 10. Picture of the food generated by the student using Flux AI (Instant Ramen Noodle)



Figure 11. Picture of the food generated by the student using Flux AI (New York Style Pizza)



Figure 12. Picture of the food generated by the student using Flux AI (Fish and Chips)

The debate ignited passionate discussions, and students were divided on whether generative AI belongs in the lexicon of traditional art practices. Visual art students viewed AI as a tool for increasing productivity and inspiration, while some voiced concern that it could threaten traditional media. Across differences, the workshop facilitated genuine discussion on the intersections of art and society with AI.

These workshops furnished pragmatic and conceptual tools for grappling with AI art's ethical quagmires. Using Helmut Smits's art, students examined issues about originality, copyright and bias, using digital art and its

relationship to its social context to prepare the next generation of creatives to address ethical questions in an ever more autonomous digital art world.

## **5. Feedback from the Workshop and Other Discussions: Indigenisation of AI Ethics in a Multi-Cultural Context**

The participants from different countries made the online workshop a cultural and educational melting pot. With students joining from the UK, US and other Commonwealth countries, the international nature of the class was one that led to a real confluence of global perspectives within the workshop. Representing various academic backgrounds — A-level, AP, IB — they brought their own experiences to the debate about the ethics of AI in art.

The multicultural environment enabled students to investigate how cultural contexts influence perceptions of AI-generated artwork. The responses varied amongst participating individuals, each reflecting issues shaped by their social and cultural context related to authorship, originality and ethics in digital creativity.

### *5.1 Contrasting Response to Artwork Between Visual Art and Non-Visual Art Groups*

The network of students supported through the workshops were drawn from diverse and active academic study backgrounds: Approximately two-thirds studied, or were planning to study, visual art or design, and the remainder wrote of their studies being devoted to the liberal arts and/or science-related studies. Because we had different apparent career paths for the future, we had disparate views on the ethical considerations for generative AI.

Interestingly, students from visual art fields mostly thought that generative AI benefited their work processes. They stated AI tools allowed them to be more productive, creative, and confident in working through mediums in which they felt uncomfortable. In contrast, students without backgrounds in visual arts were more measured, frequently voicing concerns about the perceived threat that AI poses to traditional art practices.

The tensions between these perspectives spurred exciting and challenging conversations in the workshops. While some students noted that generative AI could easily undercut artistic originality, other students viewed generative AI as a new way to stretch what was possible artistically. Not only did these workshops allow students to critically reflect on their own biases and assumptions concerning the use of AI in art, but they also created a space within which students could work through the ethical issues raised by new technologies.

### *5.2 Expanding Upon Those Insights Is a Workshop on AI Ethics: Art + AI — An Art Utilization Workshop*

Demonstrating a crucial avenue for making the discourse around AI ethics increasingly inclusive, the future Workshop that planned for the various demographic cohorts and community institutions will set the stage for growing numbers of informed global citizens. Project-based learning (PBL) and culturally responsive teaching drive one's inspiration to instil AI literacy in middle school and adult learners through workshops. These methodologies will align with the larger goals identified in the educational technology and ethics literature.

### *5.3 Middle School Workshops (10-13 Years)*

Middle school workshops aim to introduce AI concepts in a subtle yet playful, and hands-on way. Literature identifying ways of engaging younger students with AI states that both technical content and accessible, interactive tools, represent a trade-off through which we need to fit AI into younger students understanding. For instance, using such tools as text to image AI or specific GPTs based on LLM, students can widen their creative horizons with AI, and at the same time, students' curiosity about ethical issues would be stimulated (Dehkhoda et al., 2024). An example of an approach is the "AI Literacy Toolkit" detailed in one study, which focuses on embedding AI tools as part of multi-disciplinary lessons to encourage critical thinking, it points to the need for supportive learning spaces for learners at this pre-adolescent age (Li et al., 2024).

### *5.4 Libraries and Community Centres — Community-Based Workshops*

Instilling AI ethics education beyond formal education institutions, such as within libraries and community centres, also acts to promote digital literacy in wider audiences. The literature indicates that the access to AI tools should be democratised, and collaborative learning environments (Li et al., 2024) should be stimulated. Such workshops can include hands-on projects illustrating AI's societal impact, such as creating personalised artwork with generative AI platforms. This corresponds with studies on the incorporation of PBL methods in nontraditional educational spaces to promote the public understanding of AI (Dehkhoda et al., 2024).

## **6. Conclusion**

The art of Helmut Smits and his projects provide a solid base from which to plan AI ethics workshops in K-12 art classrooms. His works, like *Rainbow Windshield* and *Screen Time*, defy conventional notions of authorship, originality, and social impact by converting everyday objects into provocative art pieces. All of these themes are closely linked to important ethical issues in AI, such as method of data use, AI bias and authorship and ownership of creative products.

This would incorporate principle-based classes and practical workshops where learners can use generative AI tools to create pieces of digital art based on what a professional artist does — take photographs of everyday items and turn them into art. This physical activity may provoke conversations concerning the ethical considerations of having pre-existing content in AI models. Moreover, initiatives such as *Screen Time* can prompt collaborative efforts in which students document their environments and create AI representations, encouraging critical awareness of how AI shapes cultural depictions.

Such workshops should invite students to think critically about how AI transforms the creative process and the narratives we tell ourselves about culture. Chavez et al. (2024) pushing for ethical frameworks regarding AI art instruction in education to make it equitable and inclusive, much like the community-centric and inclusive approach Smits strives for. Bringing AI ethics into art education gives students practical skills and ethical considerations to build a foundation that prepares them to navigate digital creativity in a responsible manner.

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