

AI Art vs Slop

Cullen Houser

My goals with this blogpost are not intended to sway anyone into embracing AI, utilizing it, or accepting it as an artform. I would like this blog to offer a more nuanced conversation regarding AI, expanding the possibilities of art can be, and how AI can help achieve that. As part of my Faculty Fellowship on AI at the Cleveland Institute of Art, I was curious how to navigate such a controversial topic. Having utilized AI within my own art practice I see the value in exploring the possibilities that can be produced, albeit aware of the broad concerns that surround AI. While my views on AI are in constant flux (and more negatively as of late), I find it useful to discuss AI within the context of visual and studio art through a critical lens, one that can discern differences between AI "art" and "slop."



AI-generated image of "Shrimp Jesus" proliferated on Facebook in 2024

What exactly is AI slop? Slop takes many permeable forms from crying cats videos, sasquatch with a GoPro, or Shrimp Jesus. At best these are memes, understood as comical, ridiculous, or bizarre. At worst, AI slop obfuscates reality and spreads misinformation. This type of content is easy to make, lacks artistic vision, and is usually made for virality, where certain trends capture the public's attention like the AI caricature trend earlier this year. A major aspect to my research has been developing an "AI literacy", not for code or prompts, but discerning good and bad instances of AI use within art. Here are some qualifications that can determine slop;

AI Slop Qualifications		
Term	Definition	Example
<i>Disparage Human Labor</i>	Replacing human workers with the use of AI instead.	Coca-Cola created an AI-generated ad, avoiding hiring cinematographers, animators, actors, film crew, etc.
<i>Mimicry</i>	Using AI in an attempt to copy an art style or medium, or deceiving viewers into thinking something "real."	Creating yourself in the Studio Ghibli art style, or trying to pass something AI-generated as real (i.e. photo of an AI dog being presented as a real dog)
<i>Laziness / Lacking Artistic Vision</i>	Circumventing a skill or task through the use of AI.	Typing a prompt into ChatGPT, taking that image/video and claiming it as art.

Before diving further into these qualifications, I think something that should be addressed is the difference between an individual artist using AI compared to when a film studio or tech company does it. There should be different standards for when an artist uses AI to elevate their artistic practice or explore new methods of making that's distinguishable from when a company opts for an AI-advertisement because it's cheaper and easier. This doesn't mean an individual artist or person is exempt from contributing to the evergrowing pile of slop which now most of the internet consists of.¹ I think we intuitively feel this when we see memes on social media where the context of how AI is used allows them to exist with less scrutiny. However, there's an intention behind AI in tech companies that feels particularly vile by comparison. Whether it's their push on the public to embrace AI, building data centers in marginalized communities, or blatantly stealing from artists to train their AI models, there's an AI agenda from these companies that's been the driving force towards the anti-AI movement.² I don't think it's fair to cast individual artists into the same camp as these companies, hence why we need these standards of evaluation.

The first qualification of slop is the disparaging of human labor, replacing artists and other creators with AI. When film studios, companies, and other entities use AI in their ads it is usually at the expense of human workers. The 2025 Christmas Coca-Cola commercial is a prime example. Rather than hire cinematographers, animators, actors, set designers, and

¹ NAME. "More Articles Are Now Created by AI than Humans." Graphite.io, Graphite Growth Inc., 7 May 2024, graphite.io/five-percent/more-articles-are-now-created-by-ai-than-humans.

² Brittain, Blake. "Publishers Seek to Join Lawsuit against Google over AI Training." Reuters, 15 Jan. 2026, www.reuters.com/legal/government/publishers-seek-join-lawsuit-against-google-over-ai-training-2026-01-15/.

essentially an entire film crew, Coke used five “AI specialists” to create their ad.³ There’s no clear answer on exactly how many people worked on this ad. On one hand, Coke wants to boast about how it only took five people to make it, yet they also want to stress there were over 100 staff working on this commercial. Either way, Coca-Cola flaunted their devaluation of human creative labor, demonstrating that their ad was AI slop. Another example comes from the movie *Late Night with the Devil* (2023) where AI images were used to some controversy. It created concerns that using AI to generate graphics on film productions will eventually eliminate the need for studios to hire graphic artists.⁴ Cases like this furthers the narrative of AI replacing human jobs, where folks whose professional creative careers are at risk.



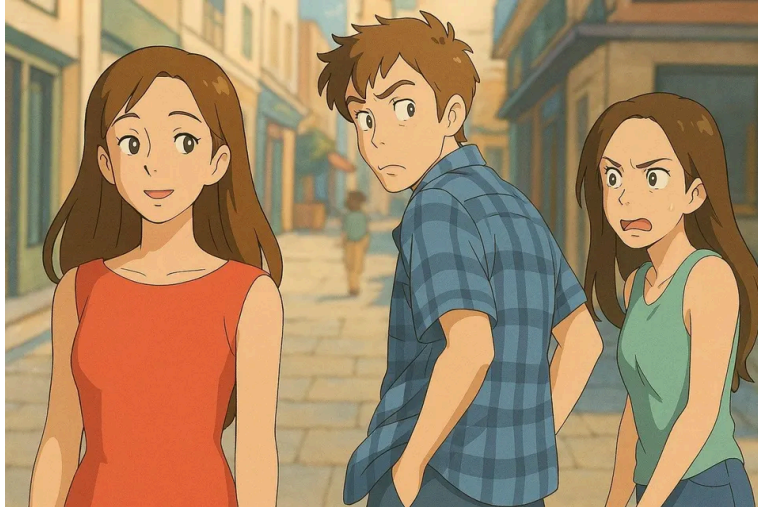
Screenshot from 2025 Coke Commercial

Another qualification of AI slop is mimicry, where users of AI attempt to copy existing styles or hide the fact that AI was even used. There was a huge surge in AI recreating the Studio Ghibli AI art style in early 2025. This highlighted ethical concerns about artificial intelligence tools trained on copyrighted creative works and what that means for the future livelihoods of human artists.⁵ In many cases mimicry is theft, stealing from artists without any permission or notice. Along with AI artworks being sold at places like Hobby Lobby and other craft stores with no indication that stated the works were AI-generated, this usage of AI feels deceptive and nefarious.

³ Landymore, Frank. “Coke’s New AI-Generated Ad Required 100 Staff and 70,000 AI-Generated Clips, and It Still Looks like Garbage.” *Futurism*, 5 Nov. 2025, futurism.com/artificial-intelligence/coke-ai-holiday-ad.

⁴ Lammers, Tim. “AI in ‘Late Night with the Devil’ Sparks Controversy.” *Forbes*, 22 Mar. 2024, www.forbes.com/sites/timlammers/2024/03/22/use-of-ai-in-late-night-with-the-devil-draws-ire-of-horror-film-critics/.

⁵ O’Brien, Matt, and Sarah Parvini. “ChatGPT’s Viral Studio Ghibli-Style Images Highlight AI Copyright Concerns.” *AP News*, 27 Mar. 2025, apnews.com/article/studio-ghibli-chatgpt-images-hayao-miyazaki-openai-0f4cb487ec3042dd5b43ad47879b91f4.



Example of AI Studio Ghibli Art

Lastly, we have laziness: circumventing a skill or task through the use of AI. Laziness would be if someone types a prompt into Midjourney or ChatGPT, takes that image or video straight from those platforms and claims it as “art”. This would be an example of slop. This process is not just lazy, but can compound into further laziness and impact creative thinking. According to a 2025 MIT Study, research showed that ChatGPT users “consistently underperformed at neural, linguistic, and behavioral levels” and only got worse over time⁶.

However, not every instance of AI use comes from being lazy. Experimenting with the tools allows for opportunities to explore and integrate new processes into creating artwork. For example, in *Scenic Route Firmware* (2024), Chuck Anderson of No Pattern studio uses AI in an experimental and playful way, weaving AI imagery into multi-layered work. A review of his work describes his methods as clearly not about ease or laziness, instead “Anderson avoids this fate because he layers AI into a practice defined by a stack of image-making tools that is not optimized for efficiency but instead prioritizes experimentation, play and, finally, a lot of smart editing.”⁷ Rather than a meticulous construction of prompts to yield better results, Anderson takes curatorial control using Photoshop to edit and construct his work. AI is part of the equation but not the end all be all. Artists like Chuck Anderson direct the AI models to function more like tool, or a medium to be applied like a collage.

⁶ Chow, Andrew. “ChatGPT May Be Eroding Critical Thinking Skills, according to a New MIT Study.” *TIME*, Time, 17 June 2025, time.com/7295195/ai-chatgpt-google-learning-school/.

⁷ “Meandering with AI.” *Lerandom.art*, 2025, www.lerandom.art/editorial/meandering-with-ai. Accessed 19 Mar. 2026.



Scenic Route Firmware, Chuck Anderson (2024)

I've gathered a collection of artists similar to Chuck Anderson that act as counters to these slop qualifications. Their work uses AI not as a shortcuts, not as mimicry, but as an extension of their creative endeavors. These artists don't shy away from their works being AI-generated but rather embrace it in all its uncanny absurdity, either as a medium or source of inspiration. Much like art, slop can be subjective, and it's totally understandable to walk away from these artists thinking their work is slop, but hopefully a kind of slop that can be looked on more favorably.

Noper, known as bagdelete on Instagram, uses AI tools like AnimateDiff and Stable Diffusion to create bizarre, constantly changing landscapes. Coming from a traditional art background, Noper's work develops a distinct visual language rooted in glitch, VHS-inspired distortion, and surreal re-imaginings of elemental forces.⁸ The work that goes into Noper's videos goes beyond simply typing prompts and letting AI do the rest, there's video editing, sequencing, and other digital manipulation that help curate these vignettes into moments of reflection and memory. An aspect that I appreciate with Noper is that the work isn't trying to be someone else's art, nor is it trying not to be AI. These videos revel in their AI-ness, producing more interesting results through something only AI can produce while still capturing Noper's vision and style.

⁸ noper, ABOUT . "Noper Works." Noper Works, 2019, noper.xyz/about.



Soft tension, Noper, 2024

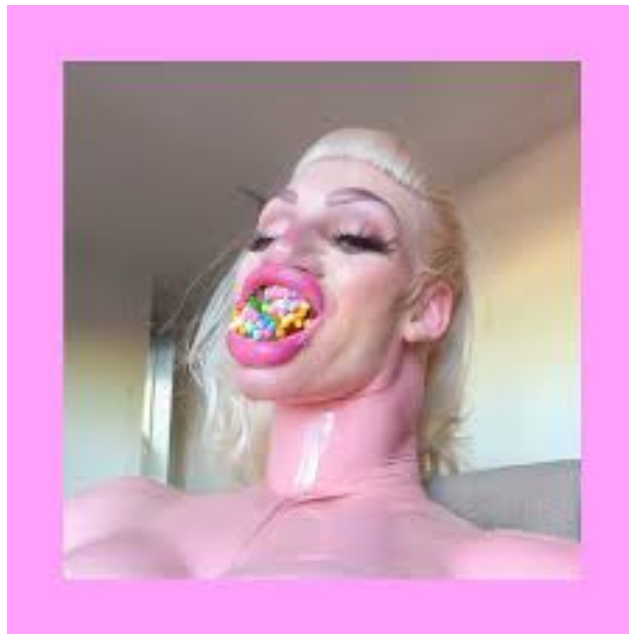
Another artist known as xeocho on Instagram explores a similar route, taking advantage of the unnatural look of AI to establish a particular aesthetic of glamor and nostalgia. The world building involves more than just a curation of AI, there's video editing, photography, digital collage, and other manipulative softwares to create this work. It's within these skillsets outside of prompt generation along with an understanding of design and other art concepts that help drive such work to this level of finish. These are not works made with a lack of effort.



Work by Xeocho

Another artist and director, among many of his titles is Chris Cunningham who recently exhibited AI artwork in the exhibition *Post Human* at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery. Cunningham has had a history directing music videos for artists like Aphex Twin, Björk, and Madonna and has worked in film sets for movies like *Alien 3* (1993), *Judge Dred* (1995), and (coincidentally)

Artificial Intelligence (2001). The work in *Post Human* titled *Transforma* featured “Blew—a polymorphic cam-girl who performs an ASMR shapeshifting routine for her audience of futuristic fetishists who get off on the close-up sounds of her bodily transformations. Every sound in Blew’s act is synced and tuned to the 60Hz drones of the video light box that houses her.”⁹ Many comments on the Instagram post of this work share a distaste for Cunningham’s piece calling it slop, but there’s a larger discussion in regards to his use of AI that ties into the theme of the show. The work aims to showcase the testaments to technical progress while highlighting the loss of humanity.¹⁰ Cunningham’s work uses AI to drive a discussion about the use of AI in art, underlining the constant changes to what defines art and the self.



Transforma, Chris Cunningham (2024)

Using AI to act as a commentary on what AI generates also provides a unique outlook on its role in fine art. Artist Emily Davis Adams’s work explores this junction of historical idealizations of the human body with emerging, uncertain technology through meticulously painted recreations of Dall•E imagery. In her solo show *I’m Your Venus* (2024), Adams delves into how classical representations of beauty change over time and AI’s role within our collective impressions. In an era where technology increasingly shapes our perceptions, *I’m Your Venus* examines the intersections between human touch and machine interpretation, raising questions about how—and by whom—ideals are defined and perpetuated.¹¹

⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/DAUVPSWsVwA/>

¹⁰ ““Post Human” at Jeffrey Deitch | Spike Art Magazine.” Spike, 2024, spikeartmagazine.com/articles/review-post-human-jeffrey-deitch. Accessed 20 Mar. 2026.

¹¹ Davis, Emily. “Emily Davis Adams: I’m Your Venus | Exhibitions | MutualArt.” Mutualart.com, Emily Davis Adams: I’m Your Venus | Exhibitions | MutualArt, 2026, www.mutualart.com/Exhibition/Emily-Davis-Adams--I-m-Your-Venus/C1D2919DC19D7FF7. Accessed 24 Mar. 2026.



Apeshit/Dall•E Venus, Emily Davis Adams (2024)

I hope that these artists showcase the possibilities of what AI can do within a studio practice. These artists are not lazy nor does their work come at the expense of others. One could argue that mimicry plays a conceptual role within their works, especially Adams's *mimicking* the AI *mimicry* of historical artworks, but overall the art is not trying to hide that AI was involved and the artists are very open about its utilization. These are my qualifications of what determines AI slop and what elevates it into an artform and I don't expect everyone to carry these same views. There's been a rising anti-AI movement that has played an important role in pressuring AI companies away from unwanted and problematic usage. My goal is that through this post we can still be critical of AI when it is slop while recognizing when it can be beneficial to an artist and their art.

A year from now my views may drastically change even further. New tools may emerge that could promote new ways of creating art and policies might be enacted to protect intellectual property within AI models. Alternatively, more issues regarding AI could arise that bring forth a plethora of new problems that affect not just artists, but whole communities and society as a whole. I don't think AI will quietly vanish like the NFT crash, turning thousands of Bored Apes into pennies on the dollar, but we are seeing upheavals in AI's future proof status. Examples like the MIT's study showing cognitive impairment associated with AI use and the projected multi-billion losses to Open AI in 2026, we are starting to see the flaws and limitations of AI. It might not be a bubble about to burst, but rather a tire with a nail slowly leaking air. Perhaps in this decline, when the ethical and political baggage of AI starts to wane, artists are more free to explore the possibilities of AI within their art practice. Or not. My argument is not to defend AI, but the artistic freedom to use it appropriately.