



The Association of Photographers Position On:

AI Generative Content + Image-based Competitions

The appearance of an AI-generated image winning submission to the Sony World Photography Awards (and the Australian DigiDirect competition, which saw Absolutely AI win under the pseudonym Jan Van Eyck) raises some crucial questions about our ability to discern whether as human beings we can trust what we see online.

There is merit in the German media artist, Boris Eldagsen, admitting that he submitted an AI-generated image and then refusing to take the prize, but the issue this raises is about recognising the importance we should be placing on authentic and original artistic works made by human beings.

It's really about how we value human expression and endeavour; certain AI developers have effectively raided the internet, scrapping as much content as they can from websites to feed these massive datasets, rather than taking a consensual approach and crucially without remunerating the hundreds of thousands of creators whose works form the basis of these generative programs.

Additionally, the issue of whether these programs are merely assisting tools or not. We have to separate them into two parts - firstly there are the massive datasets that are using other creators' works to enable the microsecond mimicking of their style or rapid machine-learning using creators original works as the basis, then there's using AI as an assisting tool to work on your own photographs or images. The differences are clearly ethical, particularly from the point of view of valuing a professional career photographer who will be spending a lifetime of emotion, talent and financial investment to become established and successful, or an AI machine that takes a microsecond to mimic the style of a photographer when prompted.

What will be increasingly difficult for both industry experts selected as judges for image-based competitions, and for the public at large, will be whether they can discern what's real and what's AI-generated.

I would recommend that labelling creative works as AI-generated would be the first crucial step. This should be followed by the UK Government, and other governments, taking serious measures to set out a fair and ethical policy framework that balances AI innovation with responsibility and accountability for creative human endeavour, so that we don't end up in a world where professional photographers and image-makers are competing with free AI-generated images.

We mustn't hasten the age of misinformation, in which the public can no longer tell whether what they see is real or not - we're not there yet but this rampant technology is advancing this likelihood quicker than anyone expected.

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