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# AI-generated art won a fine arts competition – and artists are up in arms

By [Joseph Foley](#) published 6 days ago

But how long did it take to make?



AI art generators have made a huge impact in digital art in recent months. The latest generator of tools, including DALL-E 2, MidJourney and Stable Diffusion are capable of creating an incredible range of images based on text prompts – you basically tell them what you want them to create, whether that's Sponge Bob Square Pants crossed with Godzilla, a surreal futuristic landscape or a realistic still life in the style of a Renaissance master.

This has all led to a lot of existential debate about where it will leave artists, photographers and designers, with some people worrying that they could replace human creatives. Now to add further fuel to the debate, someone's just won a fine art competition with an AI-generated image, and artists are fuming.



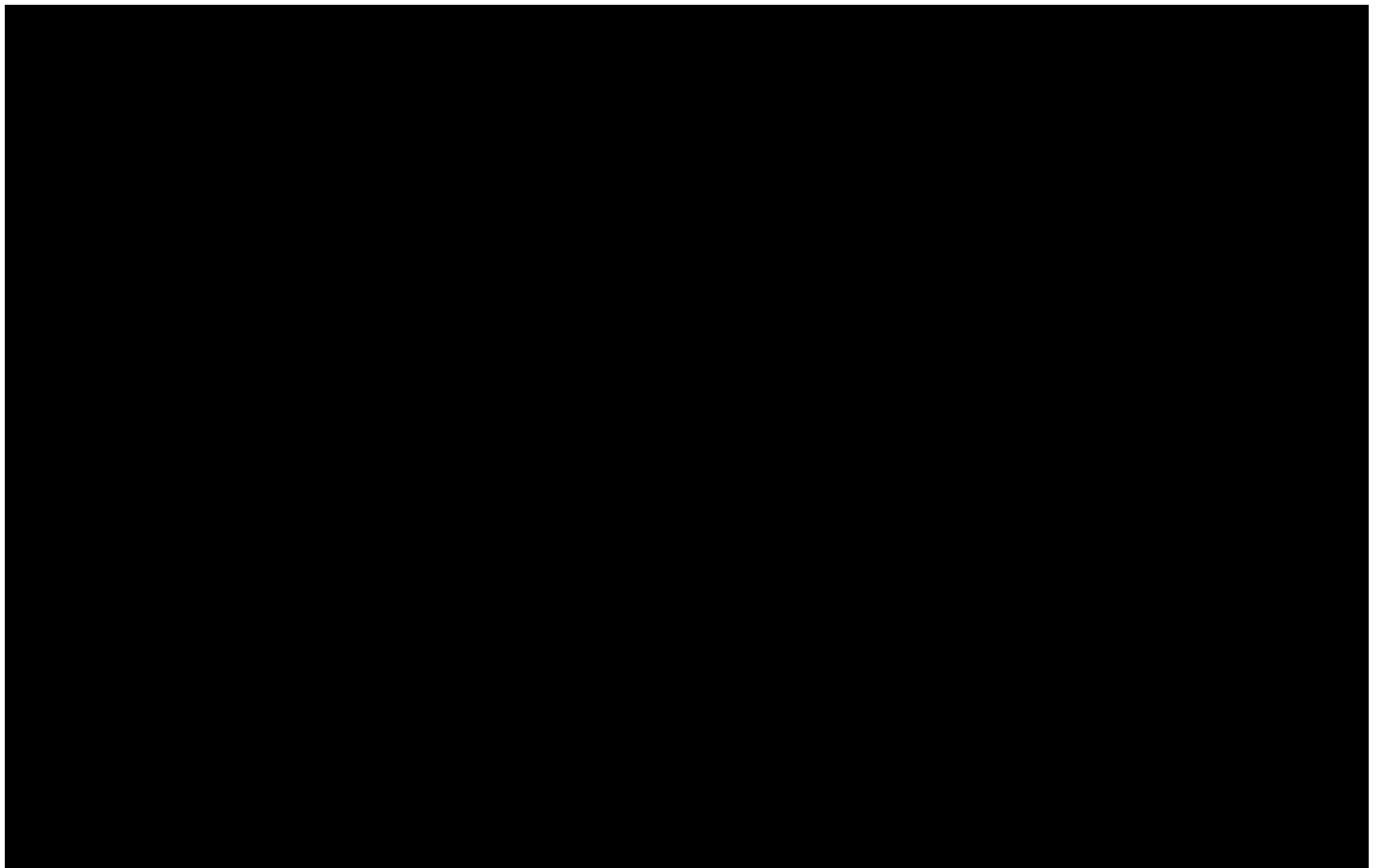


The winner of the digital art category at the Colorado State Fair's fine arts competition was Jason Allen's *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial*. It's an epic scene of sci-fi fantasy that seems to show women in elaborate dress looking out through a huge circular portal. However, it only emerged after the prize was awarded that Allen had created his artwork using the Discord-based AI art generator Midjourney before upscaling it using AI Gigapixel to put on canvas.

Allen, who's the founder and lead developer at the board game company [Incarnate Games](#), had said that his pieces were created with a computer, thus they were put in the "Digital Art" category. He also claims that he submitted his work using the phrase "via Midjourney", but this seems to have been omitted when his work was hung for judging. It's unclear if the judges knew that the piece had been created by an AI art generator. They certainly know now, but they're sticking to their decision and welcoming the "great conversation" generated by this year's event.

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The digital art category at the Fine Arts competition has people talking! At the Colorado State Fair, we think this brings up a great conversation. With advancing technology, the

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Artists (and non-artists) have responded with fury, with many people seeing the use of an AI art generator in an art competition as cheating. One person responded to the Colorado State Fair's tweet writing: "That's ridiculous. Makes your whole art competition less prestigious to the point where it's laughable." "wow .. someone can buy a software, tweak a prompt and call it art. I'll be sure to do that next year so I can pretend to be an artist," another person said.

Allen's defended his entry in a post on Discord (screengrabbed and shared to Twitter above). He also clarifies that creating a prize-winning piece of art using an AI art generator isn't quite as quick and easy as a lot the critics seem to think, noting that he spent weeks generating hundreds of images and fine-tuning them to get three that he was happy with to submit to the competition.

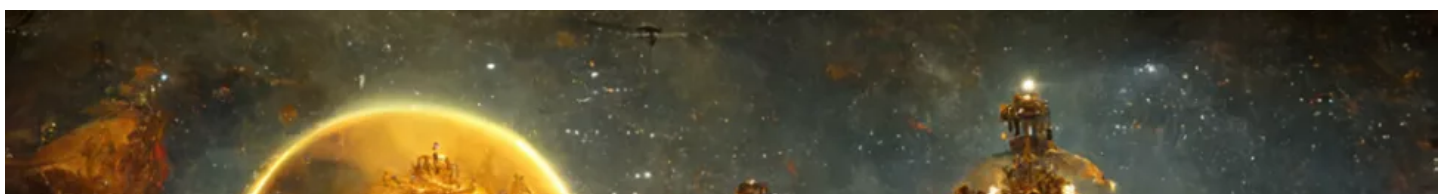
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TL;DR — Someone entered an art competition with an AI-generated piece and won the first prize.

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But much of the Twittersphere still isn't convinced. "This sucks for the exact same reason we don't let robots participate in the Olympics." one person said. While another person asked, "Jeez... Are artists gonna have to start 'showing their work' like it's a f\*\*\*ing math class?"

## How long does it take to create an award-winning piece of AI art?





The artist John Lewis says he created this image in "about 10 seconds" (Image credit: John Lewis)

The artist John Lewis says he put Midjourney to the test to see how long it would take him to make something similar to the award winning AI artwork. His verdict? "About 10 seconds". He uploaded a bunch of images to [imgur](#) that he says he made by entering a prompt "then "hitting 'refresh' a few times".

"Midjourney is a text based generator but the user doesn't really have a great deal of control over the output," he told Creative Bloq. "It's more of a random image generator, albeit with some really cool art styles built in. You can guide it but you can't control it or fine tune it."

He added: "Midjourney is a lot of fun, and as a quick ideas generator its great, certainly just as useful as a google image search, but to claim the user is an artist, or that there is any real skill involved in using it is a bit misleading."

Since it all comes down to the prompt used, AI prompt writers (that's fast on its way to becoming an official job title and side hustle) is are starting to closely guard the prompts they used to generate pieces of AI art, and there are even online AI art prompt marketplaces, where you can buy prompts for DALL-E 2, Midjourney and Stable Diffusion that can create particular styles.

Lewis has however given away the prompt he used for his 10-second test: "concept painting of epic space opera scene, epic golden portal, red nebula in background, victorian spacesuits, planets and stars visible beyond huge golden portal, reflections and ornate baroque platforms in the style of Joaquín Sorolla and Richard Schmid --ar 16:9."

## But is it cheating?

AI generated art's first competition win has certainly added fuel to the debate around AI art. Some people are making an analogy with when Deep Blue beat Gary Kasparov at chess, but there's a difference. AI art generators don't decide what to create but follow the prompt



There's an argument that an AI art generator is a tool just as a paintbrush is a tool. So is using an AI art generator in an art competition cheating? It probably should be if it's not declared as such. Allen's suggested that the organisers of the Colorado State Fair introduce a category for AI art next year, and that seems a sensible solution.

They're apparently considering it. So if you want a chance at winning, start learning more about AI art, see our piece on [how to use DALL-E 2](#) and on how people are using [DALL-E 2 outpainting](#) to "uncrop" images.

You might also want to see the [best AI art generators compared](#) to decide which tool you like the look of most. And for inspiration and examples of just what surreal things you can create with AI art generators, see our pick of the [weirdest AI art](#) yet.

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**Joseph Foley**



Joe is a regular freelance journalist and editor at Creative Bloq. He writes, news and features, updates buying guides and keeps track of the best equipment for creatives, from monitors to accessories and office supplies. A writer and translator, he also works as a project manager at a design and branding agency based in London and Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he manages a team of designers, photographers and video editors. He enjoys photography and wellness and also dances tango.

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