

ARTSTUDI/FILMEDIA 192/392: AI Art & Aesthetics (Spring 2025)

Lecture:

Mon 1:30-2:50pm

Room: McMurtry 102 (Oshman Hall)

Practicum:

Wed 1:30-3:20pm

Location TBA

Instructors:

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Teaching Assistants:

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Course Description:

Taught by a team of artists and scholars, this course introduces students to key theories and debates around AI's use and influence in contemporary art. Students will learn about artists using machine learning and related algorithmic processes to make their work. The latter will be placed in a longer history of technical and aesthetic developments, including cybernetics, generative art, and aleatoric processes. These historical precedents intersect also with speculative futures, which some artists take as the creative and critical focus of their work with AI, but it will be just as crucial to look at the ethical and political dimensions of this work in the context of present-day cultural realities. Overall, the course situates AI art as a multifaceted object of study that demands equal attention to technological, artistic, social, and philosophical concerns.

In the practicum, which accompanies and complements the 2-unit lecture course, students will engage critically and creatively with AI tools and algorithmic methods to develop works of art that respond thoughtfully to the aesthetic, ethical, and cultural questions raised by these new technologies. Class meetings will be divided between hands-on lab sessions, workshops with practicing artists, and critique sessions. Please note: Instructor permission is required for enrollment in the practicum.

Please make sure you are registered for the class on Canvas. Handouts and additional course material will be posted there.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Lecture (2 units):

1. Regular attendance and preparation for class. Active participation will help improve your final grade. Readings are to be completed by the date listed on the syllabus.
2. Weekly written responses (250 words). Questions or prompts will be announced in class or by email. Collectively, these weekly assignments will count for 60% of your final grade.
3. Final paper: 6-7 page paper (double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman, 1" margins) that makes an argument and engages with the texts and topics of the class. The paper must be text-based, but you can include supplemental materials (images, video, etc.) if this helps support your argument. This assignment will count for 40% of your final grade.

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Practicum (3 units):

1. Regular attendance, preparation for class, and participation in hands-on activities during class. Active participation in discussions and critique sessions will help improve your final grade. Readings and assignments are to be completed by the date listed on the syllabus.
2. 3 project assignments (see schedule for details).

Writing Help:

Tutoring and other resources are available from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking: <https://undergrad.stanford.edu/tutoring-support/hume-center>.

Access and Accommodations

Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of the Stanford community. We welcome you to our class.

If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit oae.stanford.edu.

If you already have an Academic Accommodation Letter, we invite you to share your letter with us. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so we may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course.

AI Policy:

We expect any assigned writing to be completed without using AI unless specified by the assignment.

Critique:

In the practicum, a short critique will follow each project. A critique is a handy tool for feedback, analysis of the experience, and a way to practice visual thinking skills. Students must present their work and participate in these group discussions. Missing any of the critiques will affect the final grade unless it is previously discussed with the instructor in advance.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

03.31. Introduction: AI and Art: Agency, Embodiment, Aesthetics

04.02. Practicum #1

Introductions, tutorial, and critique

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Week 2

04.07. AI and Nature/Ecology

READINGS: Sven Lütticken, "On Pierre Huyghe's Umweltanschauung: Art, Ecosystems, Aesthetics, and General Ecology." *Grey Room* 77 (2019): <https://greyroom.org/issues/77/175/on-pierre-huyghe-umweltanschauung-art-ecosystems-aesthetics-and-general-ecology/>

Graham Wakefield & Haru Hyunkyung Ji, *Creative Artificial Intelligence within the Artificial Life Installation "Infranet"*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QB8EbWLqmGA>

04.09. Practicum #2: Workshop with Ecologias Híbridas

Workshop in Oshman Hall with Chilean artist collective

Outside of class: meet with partner to discuss and prepare to introduce each other's work in critique session next week

Week 3

04.14. A History of AI and Cybernetic Art

READINGS: Ronald Kline, "Introduction," in: *The Cybernetics Moment: or Why We Call Our Age the Information Age* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015)

Rebekah Rutkoff, "Painting by Numbers: The Art of Lillian Schwartz," in: *Artforum* 55, no. 2 (October 2016): <https://www.artforum.com/features/painting-by-numbers-the-art-of-lillian-schwartz-230796/>

04.16. Practicum #3: Project 1 Due/Critique

Critique of project 1

Week 4

04.21. Interrogating the Data – Creative Misuse & Small Data

READINGS: Eryk Salvaggio, Caroline Sanders & Steph Maj Swanson *Cultural Red Teaming: ARRG! & Creative Use of AI Systems* in *Critical AI Journal*, Issue 3.1 (forthcoming)

<https://criticalai.org/2025/01/17/sneak-preview-eryk-salvaggio-caroline-sanders-steph-maj-swansons-cultural-red-teaming-arrg-creative-misuse-of-ai-systems>

videos discussed in the article (optional): <https://www.cyberneticforests.com/defcon31>

Stephanie Dinkins, *Artist's talk at Stanford HAI's 2019 Fall Conference: AI Ethics, Policy, and Governance*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPx9P1Mybu8>

The video is the whole conference, just watch Stephanie's talk timecode 2:21:30 - 2:46:00 (25 min total) (optional) Q&A through 2:59:00 (13 minutes)

04.23. Practicum #4

Procedural art and AI – in-class tutorial and discussion

Outside of class: meet with partner to discuss and prepare to introduce each other's work in critique session next week

Week 5

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04.28. **Artificial Imagination**

READINGS: Ian Bogost, "A Tool to Supercharge Your Imagination." *The Atlantic*, October 31, 2023: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2023/10/ai-image-generation-human-creativity-imagination/675840/>

Eryk Salvaggio, "Infinite Barnacle: The AI Image and Imagination in GANs from Personal Snapshots." *Leonardo* 56, no. 6. (2023): 575-578.
<https://direct.mit.edu/leon/article/56/6/575/115406/Infinite-Barnacle-The-AI-Image-and-Imagination-in>

04.30. **Practicum #5**

In-progress presentations of work

Week 6

05.05. **Art, Generative AI, and Authorship**

READINGS: Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," in: *Image, Music, Text* (1977)

Noam M. Elcott, Amy Adler, "Art Beyond Copyright," *Grey Room* 94 (Winter 2024)

05.07. **Practicum #6: Project 2 Due/Critique**

Critique of project 2

Week 7

05.12. **Ghost Work: Automatic Art**

READINGS: Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, chapter 2: "Labor"

Cade Diehm and Caroline Sindors, "TECHNICALLY RESPONSIBLE: THE ESSENTIAL, PRECARIOUS WORKFORCE THAT POWERS A.I." New Design Congress, 14 May, 2020:

<https://newdesigncongress.org/en/pub/trk/>

"The Umbra of an Imago: Writing under Control of Machine Learning." Serpentine Galleries: <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/art-and-ideas/the-umbra-of-an-imago-writing-under-control-of-machine-learning/>. 14 Aug 2020.

05.14. **Practicum #7**

In-class tutorial and discussion

Week 8

05.19. **Interface/Design Choices and their Implications**

Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite, [*Making Kin with Machines*](#) (2018)

you may need to login with your stanford credentials to access this article. It is also [here](#) in the week 7 files.

Nadia Piet, Research Lead [*Prototyping towards a Feminist UX of AI*](#), on [Aixdesign.co](#)

click on "see outcomes" and read through all the "cards" in the Library of Prototypes

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05.21. Practicum #8

Visiting Artist – [Yvonne Fang](#) / critique of in-progress projects

Week 9

05.26. Memorial Day - No Lecture

05.28. Practicum #9

Visiting Artist – [Morehshin Allahyari](#) / critique of in-progress projects

Week 10

06.02. Conclusion

READINGS: TBD

06.04. Practicum #10: Final Project Due/Critique

Critique session for final projects

Finals Week

06.09. Final Papers Due by 6:30pm!