

How art works with AI

Annika von Taube | [ModernMeta](#) (german) | 23 March 2023)

Artificial intelligence cannot do art. You can use it as an artistic medium, but only if you know what art is. The works of Menno Aden show how art can work with AI.



So much is currently happening in the field of artificial intelligence that artistic positions dealing with it have a rather short-lived expiration date. Yet art actually strives to be of lasting value. All the more reason to be grateful to all artists who, irrespective of this aspect, make art into fleeting phenomena or phenomena that are in the process of being created, whereby, of course, what emerges beyond the moment is something quite permanent, namely the confirmation of irrevocable conditions of art-making. Currently, this confirmation is provided by an exhibition of the Berlin photo artist Menno Aden, who, just like many others, has begun to experiment with AI tools and, thanks to a conceptual approach, proves: AI is a great artistic medium when used competently, but neither can AI replace art, nor can AI replace human art-making - provided that what makes art art is also followed when dealing with AI, and these are essentially these three factors:

1st Concept: What does the Art want and why?

It's understandable to get lost in enthusiasm when playing around with Midjourney or Stable Diffusion, but letting a tool like a slot machine spit out any number of image variations is not art. It only becomes art when motifs based on a concept convey intended content that goes beyond the motif itself. In Aden's case, the concept consists of letting the AI tool "design" a series of "devices", i.e. apparatuses or aids, which at first glance appear familiar or useful, but are totally functionless, and thus give new fodder to the eternal question of the mutual influence of technology and humans - by means of a technology, of all things, which is currently more credited than others with deciding this mutual influence struggle for itself, but spits out the biggest nonsense when a human wants it to.



Installation view Menno Aden, "Devices", In The Rack Room, Berlin 2023. Courtesy of the artist.

2nd Audience: Who sees the Art, how and why?

An audience is needed in art simply because others always decide whether something is art, not the artist himself or herself. Simply posting on Instagram is fine, of course, but likes alone don't generate reflections that take the subject further. Aden has printed out his AI motifs, framed them, and presented them in a physical project space, in other words, he has determined the form and space of the presentation and marked out a frame of reference. This is actually a matter of course, but it is often neglected in relation to new art forms, and yet it is a great acceptance driver, since such a form of presentation builds a bridge to the "traditional" art world, whose audience is increasingly open to new forms of art creation, but does not necessarily want to leave the traditional structures. Furthermore, by showing a

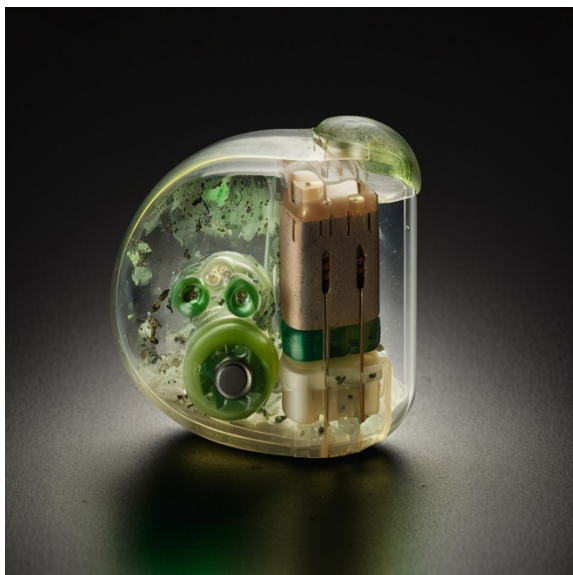
curated and limited selection of motifs and thus curbing the arbitrariness of potentially endless variations and the fleeting nature of the subject matter, the exhibition creates the possibility for the audience to engage in a rested way in a hype-free space.



Untitled (Body Awareness Device 01), 2023



Untitled (Life Enhancers 03), 2023



Untitled (Water Energizer 02), 2023



Untitled (Entertainment for Elderly 01), 2023

All images courtesy of the artist

3rd Medium: Without Prompts, AI is useless.

Even if art has long since ceased to be solely handmade and its evaluation is often independent of the quality of its technical execution, artists must still be able to master their medium. And even if "skill" is not always easy to define: If you can't paint, you can't paint. And if you can't feed an AI tool with prompts, you can't do art with AI. Here, by the way, lies the most important argument against the concern that AI could replace human creativity: Canvas, paint, and brushes only become an artistic medium through artistic use of them, and it's the

same with the AI tool and the prompt. Whereby even a concept-driven choice of subject, such as "Devices" here, is too thin in itself at first. In Aden's case, the clear backgrounds and lighting mood stand out, in addition to the meticulous arrangement of elements: The result looks very much like product or advertising photography from a photo studio. So not only the motifs themselves, but also the way they are presented pay off in terms of the concept. However, there is also a danger lurking here: Apart from weeding out small details, Aden does not manipulate the output images, but the more meticulous the visual output, the more pressing the question of why one does not simply create something like this in Photoshop. This is a question that even painters dedicated to photorealism had to put up with, but it's pointless to answer it - because it's only asked by people who only look at what they see and aren't interested in what's happening behind the image.