Authenticity and Value in AI-Generated Artworks: A Critical Reassessment of Artistic Aura

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Abstract

The intensive adoption of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in artistic production during 2023–2025 leads to a profound ontological shift that calls into question established conceptions of authorship, the creative act, and the mechanisms by which artistic value is formed. Within the article, an extended academic reconceptualization of the paradigm of aura is undertaken under conditions of algorithmically mediated image synthesis. The initial epistemological foundation is Benjamin's understanding of aura, juxtaposed with the newest theoretical models of A(I)aura, on the basis of which the concept of Digital Innerism is formulated and argued as a methodological and philosophical framework in which AI is conceived not in the mode of a mechanical generator of visual outputs, but as a medium of introspective work of consciousness. Reliance on a cross-analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from the Art Basel and UBS Art Market Report 2024 and the Hiscox Online Art Trade Report 2024, in combination with an analysis of the artist's creative practice, makes it possible to identify the formation of a specific inner aura. Its ontological status is associated not with the material singularity of the artwork, but with the emotionally charged intentionality of prompt engineering and a complex configuration of institutional validation, including expert, curatorial, and market mechanisms. The results obtained demonstrate a process of bifurcation of the art market: classical models of expertise and evaluation become drawn into a crisis of trust, whereas the emerging economy of post-authenticity constructs new regimes of legitimating AI art through curatorial gatekeeping, the neuropsychological resonance of viewers' perception, and a shift of authenticity criteria from the domain of the material carrier to the domain of cognitive-emotional experience.

Keywords: *Generative AI, Benjamin's Aura, A(I)Aura, Digital Innerism, Inner Aura, Authenticity, Art Market, Institutional Validation.*

INTRODUCTION

In his programmatic 1936 essay, Walter Benjamin formulates the thesis that even a technically perfect reproduction is incapable of reproducing the ontologically unique here-and-now of the work—its singular existence within a specific spatiotemporal context [1, 22]. This aura, inseparable from the ritual function and the material biography of the object, already in the era of mechanical reproduction comes under pressure from technological regimes of replication. By 2025, the inclusion of neural-network algorithms in the artistic pipeline radicalizes the process described: a transition occurs from the threat of mass reproduction to a regime of potentially infinite generation, in which there is no physically fixed original as a reference point for authenticity.

The discursive configuration of 2024–2025 demonstrates a qualitative shift in emphasis. If early polemics concentrated on the threat of replacing the artist with the machine, the contemporary stage is characterized by a search for modes of resonance between human and algorithmic agency. The initial shock produced by the visual perfection of synthetic images (Midjourney v6, DALL-E 3) is transformed into critical reflection on the nature of artistic value [2, 3]. Theorists and thinkers, among them Mark Coeckelbergh and Ted Chiang, shift the focus: the question no longer concerns whether AI can produce images; central becomes the problem of whether these images do or do not possess intentionality, which is necessary in order to lay claim to the status of Art [3, 21].

A key philosophical argument against AI art, articulated in particular by Ted Chiang, is built on the presumption of choice as a constitutive feature of the artistic act. Art is described as the result of millions of micro-decisions in which the subject each time makes an existentially charged choice, whereas predictive models perform probabilistic computations without incorporating into them a genuine existential dimension [4, 5]. From this there follows the notion of hollow creativity—an aesthetic shell deprived

of the ghostly presence of the author, that is, an internally empty structure retaining only the formal features of the creative act.

Contemporary neurophilosophical research drawing on Ian McGilchrist's theory of hemispheric asymmetry offers an alternative angle for interpreting the interaction between human and algorithm. AI, typically correlated with the analytical, reductionist dominance of the left hemisphere, is paradoxically capable of catalyzing creative processes associated with the right hemisphere, responsible for holistic perception, metaphorical thinking, and work with ambiguity [6, 7]. In such an optic, the artist ceases to be conceived as an artisan-fabricator directly producing a material object and becomes a conductor or curator of algorithmic potentials, whose key function consists in navigation through the latent space of meanings and in the selection of those generative trajectories that are congruent with his inner experience [8, 20].

The article introduces the concept of Digital Innerism as a theoretical response to the critique of the absence of subjectivity in AI art. Digital Innerism maintains that aura in digital works created with the participation of algorithms is localized not in the final pixel configuration of the image, but in the inner state of the artist, who uses the model as a mirror surface for introspection and for the reflexive sampling of meanings [9, 10]. The shift of the locus of authenticity from the material object to the process of emotional-cognitive selection and structuring of experience makes it possible to identify a new form of artistic value that, with relative stability, withstands the intensity of digital reproducibility and the erosion of the traditional notion of the original.

The aim of the article is to rethink the foundations of authenticity and artistic value in AI-generated art of 2023–2025 by comparing the classical theory of aura with the concepts of A(I)aura and Digital Innerism and by testing them against art-market data and a case of authorial practice.

To achieve the stated **aim**, it is necessary to solve a number of interrelated tasks: to quantify the dynamics of the adoption of AI art in the high-market segment on the basis of 2024–2025 statistics and to explicate the ruptures between the behavioral strategies of traditional collectors and a new wave of enthusiasts; to conceptualize the phenomenon of inner aura and Digital Innerism in the context of the philosophy of technology; to conduct an author case study of the practice , considering her transition from academic jurisprudence to the sphere of AI art as a model of institutional and symbolic legitimation of the medium; and also to visualize the results of market sentiment analysis and to show the divergence of perception manifested at the level of different stakeholder groups.

The scientific novelty is that the article proposes a reconceptualization of Benjamin's aura for GenAI art through the introduction of the Digital Innerism framework and the operationalization of inner aura as a value effect arising from the intentionality of prompt practices and institutional gatekeeping against the background of market bifurcation.

The author's hypothesis is based on the claim that, under conditions of the absence of a material original, the authenticity of AI art shifts from the object to the process: inner aura is constituted by the emotional-cognitive intentionality of selection (prompt / reprompt / selection) and is stabilized by mechanisms of institutional legitimation, which is what renders the work economically and symbolically valuable.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study relies on a mixed-methods approach that integrates phenomenological analysis with quantitative assessment of market indicators. Such a design makes it possible to conjointly examine the experiential and the institutional-market levels of the functioning of AI art, avoiding reduction either to a purely technological or to an exclusively economic dimension. Within the phenomenological block, phenomenological reduction is employed for a critical revision of the thesis concerning the absence of experience in artificial intelligence. On the basis of the works of Lev Manovich and Emanuele Arielli, it is reconstructed how the black box of neural-network architecture mediates the artist's intention, transforming it into a sequence of parametric decisions and thereby shifting the locus of control and responsibility. The analysis leads to a rethinking of Benjamin's concept of aura and to the supposition of the possibility of its simulation or translocation into digital configurations of perception—a phenomenon that in the literature of 2025 received the designation A(I)aura. In Salas Espase's interpretation (2025), this is described as a transition from full aura to a state of semi-aura, requiring a radical reconsideration of the criteria of authenticity and authorship under conditions of algorithmic production.

The empirical contour of the study is formed on the basis of a corpus of authoritative market and academic sources. The key structural parameters of the global and online segments of the market are set by data from The Art Basel and UBS Art Market Report 2024, which records baseline indicators of online sales and the overall resilience of the art market. For a detailed analysis of trust in AI art, the Hiscox Online Art Trade Report 2024 is used, prepared in collaboration with ArtTactic and providing statistics segmented by collector type on perceptions and willingness to purchase works created with the participation of algorithms. Price benchmarks and the dynamics of institutional recognition are refined on the basis of Christie's and Sotheby's auction results for 2023–2025, including sales of works by Refik Anadol and Tyler Hobbs, which serve as reference points for the formation of the AI art market. The theoretical and interdisciplinary framing is ensured by analysis of publications in academic periodicals— AI & Society, Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, and Design Studies Quarterly for 2023–2025—where aesthetic, cognitive, and sociotechnical aspects of human–algorithm interaction in the artistic sphere are examined.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The economic valuation of AI art in 2025 reveals a structural paradox: growing institutional interest, supported by record auction results and the active incorporation of the new medium into curatorial and museum programs, coexists with pronounced skepticism on the part of conservative capital. Data from the Hiscox Online Art Trade Report 2024 record a distinct generational and typological divide in the attitudes of different groups of market participants: the cohort of art enthusiasts demonstrates a predominantly optimistic attitude toward AI art and a willingness to integrate it into their collecting strategies, whereas the group of traditional collectors functions as a kind of immune mechanism of the art system, producing persistent reactions of rejection toward the new technological medium and thereby slowing the institutionalization of its value status.

Table 1 presents the results of a comparative analysis of willingness to acquire AI art.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of willingness to acquire AI art (2024) [17-19].

Metric	Traditional Collectors (Experience >3 years)	New Collectors (Experience <3 years)	Art Enthusiasts
Actually purchased AI art	2%	7%	28%
Consider purchasing in the future	29%	39%	52%
Market growth forecast	40% (cautious optimism)	N/A	67% (high optimism)
Perception of value	Consider it less important than human-made	Tend toward equivalence	36% consider it equal, 31% better than human-made

Statistical indicators demonstrate that, to date, only a minimal share of established capital—approximately 2%—has moved into AI art, whereas the recorded level of intention to buy (29%) points to the presence of substantial latent demand that remains in a waiting mode for external—institutional, expert, or symbolic—validation. The high degree of the medium's adaptation within the art-enthusiast milieu (28% completed purchases) correlates with a demographic shift toward digital natives, for whom coded, ontologically immaterial rarity proves functionally equivalent to the physical uniqueness of the object [24]. Additional empirical data confirm the depth of the value split: 48% of millennials are prepared to recognize AI generations as art, whereas 61% of the adult population of the United States as a whole deny them this status, thereby reproducing a cultural conflict between digitally oriented groups and carriers of more traditional aesthetic attitudes [25, 34].

Against the background of collectors' fluctuations and strategic caution, institutions and auction houses, by contrast, demonstrate an accelerated mode of legitimating the new medium. According to the Art Basel and UBS Art Market Report 2024, the share of online sales stabilized at 18% of the total market volume (11.8 billion dollars), which forms the infrastructural contour necessary for the circulation of digital assets and the integration of generative art into established market mechanisms [14, 16]. Landmark auction transactions confirm the formation of a blue-chip segment of generative art: as shown in Table 2, works by pioneers of the genre reach multimillion valuations, creating a price precedent that is transmitted to the broader market and sets benchmarks for the revaluation of works by less institutionalized authors.

Table 2. Top 5 auction sales of generative and AI art (sample 2021–2023/24) [23, 26].

Artist	Artwork	Price (USD)	Auction House	Date
Dmitri Cherniak	Ringers #879 (The Goose)	$6,215,100	Sotheby's	June 2023
Dmitri Cherniak	Self-portrait #1	$2,682,000	Sotheby's	October 2021
Refik Anadol	Machine Hallucinations – Space: Metaverse	$2,353,251	Sotheby's HK	October 2021
Refik Anadol	AI Data Painting	$1,700,000	Simon de Pury	July 2022
Ai-Da Robot	Portrait of Alan Turing	$1,080,000	Sotheby's	2024

Indicative in this respect is the 2024 sale of a work by the robot Ai-Da for 1.08 million dollars [26]. This transaction registers a shift from a predominantly algorithm-oriented valuation (as in Cherniak's case) to an evaluation of anthropomorphic performance, in which the robot functions as a material carrier of aura. Economic and symbolic value here is linked not only to computational architecture, but also to corporeally staged presence that turns the machine act of drawing into an object of perceptual and medial attention. In this wa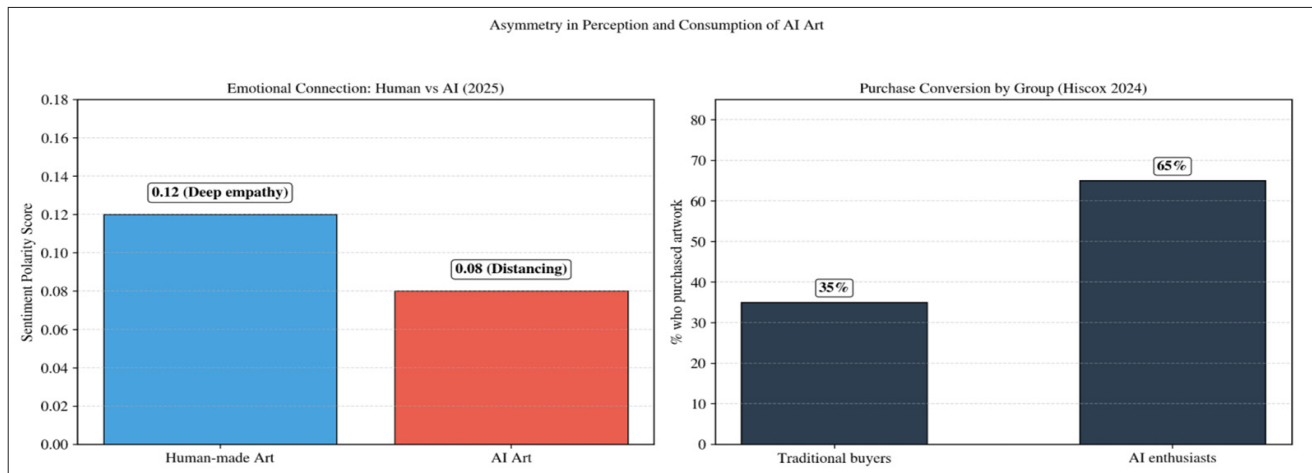y, a hybrid regime of value is formed, combining the status of a technological artifact, a performative sculpture, and an institutionally marked artistic event.

One of the key factors restraining the movement of conservative capital toward AI art remains legal uncertainty. The Art Basel Report emphasizes the influence of regulatory initiatives such as the UK White Paper (March 2023) and the EU AI Act (a document adopted in 2025, discussed since June 2023) on the configuration of issues of copyright, data mining, and permissible regimes of dataset use [13, 15]. Empirical surveys of artists show that 73% of respondents insist on

the necessity of obtaining consent for the use of their works to train models, and nearly 40% express concerns regarding possible legal consequences of copyright violations when introducing AI into their own practice [25]. The resulting legal fog is converted into a risk discount embedded in pricing and collecting strategies; overcoming this discount is possible predominantly through transparent provenance, contractual certainty, and strong institutional support from auction houses, museums, and galleries.

For an analytical description of the divergence in perception between human and AI art, a model of the distribution of market sentiment is used. Figure 1 is based on a simulation of the polarization of evaluations, which makes it possible to reflect the asymmetry of trust in different types of artistic objects and to correlate it with demographic and institutional parameters recorded in studies of 2025 [27].

Fig. 1. Comparison of the polarity of emotional response (compiled by the author based on [15, 25, 27]).

Figure 1 confirms the thesis that even at high aesthetic quality AI art elicits a reduced emotional response (0.08 versus 0.12), which correlates with a low level of acceptance among traditional collectors. However, the quantitative indicators illuminate not only the structure of demand, but also a deeper problem of value: the persistent hesitation of traditional collectors is explained not so much by a lack of liquidity as by features of the psychology of perception [2]. This generates an emotional gap separating the institutional novelty of the medium from genuine affective resonance.

A response to this gap is the formation of a new artistic direction designated as Digital Innerism. Within this approach, the generative algorithm is interpreted not as an external fabrication machine producing spectacular images, but as a subtle probe immersing itself in the subject's internal psychological states [10 - 12]. The central principles of Digital Innerism can be described as a shift of focus from external representation to introspection, an interpretation of the prompt as a form of confessional utterance, and the intentional obscuring of the technological layer. First, the artistic task consists not in constructing a scene or an illustrative plot, but in externalizing inner emotional texture—silence, the fragmentariness of memory, the experience of psychological rupture [10]. Second, the text of the prompt begins to function as confessional discourse: interaction with AI takes on a predominantly linguistic and affectively charged character, in which the artist is compelled to articulate to the machine what in everyday speech remains inexpressible. Third, the technology deliberately recedes into the shadows: unlike glitch art or early psychedelic DeepDream experiments that foregrounded the tool and

its glitch aesthetics, Digital Innerism seeks to conceal the algorithm behind the emotional resonance of the image, so that the aesthetic experience is reduced not to recognizing a technological trick, but to restoring the capacity to remember what it means to feel [28].

Walter Benjamin argued that technical reproduction destroys aura by tearing the object out of its traditional context and dissolving the work's unique here-and-now. In the logic of Digital Innerism, a different trajectory is proposed: not an external, but an Inner Aura is created. If AI is used as a means of visualizing a specific, unrepeatable human experience, then unique being (aura) ceases to be tied to a physical canvas and migrates into the moment of co-creation and intentional selection, when the artist, through a series of prompts and reprompts, singles out one relevant configuration from a potentially infinite set of variants. Recent studies of 2025 emphasize that in situations where art mediates everyday objects or personal memories through algorithmic intervention, aura does not disappear but is produced anew, forming an additional distance between subject and object [29]. It is precisely this distance—the gap between the human unconscious and machine output—that is filled by the viewer's interpretation, as the viewer attempts to reconstruct the psychic trajectory that led to the given image. Work [8] confirms a shift of focus from the static object to the fluid and process-oriented nature of the work, where what becomes significant is not the final visual result, but the dynamics of human–algorithm interaction, described in the concept of A(I)aura [8].

In the neuropsychological dimension, drawing on Ian McGilchrist's theory, Digital Innerism performs an integrative

function. AI functions as a hypertrophied agent of the left hemisphere: it carries out analysis, categorization, detailed decomposition, and recombination of visual material, structuring it in accordance with probabilistic rules. Artistic practice in such a mode requires the author to activate right-hemispheric capacities—contextualization, empathy, work with the holistic gestalt, and the allowance of ambiguity [7]. The value of the work arises precisely in the dialogical tension between these poles: the machine provides a level of technical virtuosity and variability unattainable for the human, whereas the human introduces semantic context, existential motivation, and the capacity to connect the image with lived experience, which are inaccessible to the algorithm.

The trajectory of the author-artist serves as a paradigmatic illustration of the transition from perceiving generative practices as a tech demo to their recognition in the status of high art [30]. The turn to AI art becomes for her a radical epistemological shift, described as a movement from academic logic to an emotional language [10]. In one interview she formulates the central dichotomy of her practice: Law taught me to keep control. Art taught me to let go [28]. The conflict between control (jurisprudence, a structured prompt) and surrender to the latent space (the generative algorithm, unexpected output) becomes the driver of her method: algorithms are used as mirrors reflecting invisible textures of consciousness, which directly correlates with the theory of Digital Innerism and the concept of the Inner Aura.

Under conditions of the contemporary art market, value is largely constructed through the decisions of gatekeepers, and the institutional validation of author's practice was pinned by success at the Boomer Art Prize (second edition, 2024/2025), organized by Boomer Gallery in London [31]. The exhibition took place in a landmark space by Tower Bridge, which added a layer of historical-symbolic legitimacy to digital works and inscribed them into the narrative of the British art scene. A key role was played by the composition of the jury, which ensured the transfer of symbolic capital [32]. Anthony Fawcett—an art historian and critic directly connected with the twentieth-century avant-garde (work with John Lennon and Yoko Ono, interaction with Andy Warhol and Man Ray)—in this context acts as a bridge that transfers the aura of the classical avant-garde to the AI artist. His participation on the jury and a personal interview with the winners validate AI not as a technological novelty, but as a continuation of the lines of surrealism and pop art. Tabish Khan, visual editor of Londonist and critic for FAD Magazine and Culture Whisper, known for his course toward the democratization of art and a programmatically critical approach (What's Wrong With Art?), represents a more skeptical, broad-audience-oriented view; his approval signals that author's works withstand scrutiny not only at the level of innovation, but also as substantive artistic statements.

The global circulation of works and, in particular, the work What Slips Through (2025) demonstrate the acceptance of her method by key cultural centers [31]. The exhibition history of the project, including showings in London, Seoul, and Tokyo, testifies to multilayered validation: Tokyo and Seoul, functioning as hubs of digital and technological innovation, provide technological recognition, whereas London provides traditional market canonization [10]. The work What Slips Through conceptualizes the stated theory: in visual form it explores psychological fragmentation and the quiet violence of disconnection, forming images in which spectacle is subordinated to the task of articulating subtle, often traumatic states [30]. Here, a beautiful picture generated by a superficial keyword is not offered; rather, a visualized psychological state is conveyed, having passed through rigorous authorial selection in latent space and thereby producing an Inner Aura resistant to technological repeatability.

Returning to Ted Chiang's philosophical critique, according to which AI is in principle incapable of creating art due to the absence of its own intention [5], the authorial case and the concept of Digital Innerism form a substantive counterargument. In the proposed paradigm, intentionality ceases to be associated with an immediate gesture— a brushstroke or a manual movement, already largely automated and delegated to the machine—and shifts into the domain of refusal, selection, and the sequential narrowing of a set of possibilities. The artist filters out thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, of generations in order to fix a single variant that enters into resonance with her inner state and biographical experience. It is precisely this act of curatorial selection, realized at the intersection of rational analysis and affective intuition, that becomes the core of artistic action in the age of AI and the level at which human subjectivity is preserved [3]. The additional use of a graphic tablet for manual refinement of the result—a practice indicated by one of the researchers [35]—opens access to a less conscious side of the creative process, connecting digital precision and computational predictability with human contingency, motor non-repeatability, and micro-gestures irreducible to algorithmic logic.

In this context, a specific value proposition is formed, described as the human-in-the-loop model. Data from Hiscox 2024 show that 54% of viewers remain able to distinguish AI art from works created by traditional means, and 61% of the US population continue to believe that AI images do not have the status of art [25]. Such skepticism not only hampers the mass legitimation of generative practices, but also paradoxically increases the market significance of hybrid forms in which human participation is clearly articulated and institutionally confirmed [30]. In this way, an important condition for the accumulation of symbolic value (Aura) is established: AI art must be perceived not as a technology of replacing the human agent, but as an instrument of his amplification, expanding the range of expressive means. Value in this configuration is concentrated in the human component—in academic and professional capital,

biographical complexity, and the philosophically articulated concept of Innerism, which, as it were, wraps and interprets the algorithmic core.

The formation of economic and symbolic valuation is inevitably influenced by ecological and ethical dimensions. Discussions of the carbon footprint of large-scale models and the phenomenon of creative displacement anxiety associated with fears of the displacement of human labor create a negative background around AI practices and intensify the moral ambiguity of their use [4]. However, study [2] demonstrates that artificial intelligence exerts a deep, structural impact on creative practices in design, education, and adjacent fields, transforming not only the toolkit but also the cognitive strategies for solving creative tasks [2]. Against this background, transparency in the use of algorithmic means, demonstrated in particular through the open authorial brand lenko.group, begins to function as a new form of ethical authenticity: the artist does not hide the technological component, but reflexively embeds it in her own statement, thereby reducing the level of distrust and strengthening the legitimation of the practice.

Also important is the paradoxical relationship between the rhetoric of democratization and the factual revival of elitism. Despite the fact that AI is often described as a force that radically lowers the entry threshold into artistic production and democratizes access to visual means, author's trajectory of success reveals the opposite tendency. It was precisely institutional validation by figures such as Anthony Fawcett, who has a direct linkage to Warhol's legacy and the twentieth-century avant-garde, as well as the physical presence of works in a prestigious exhibition space near Tower Bridge, that contributed to elevating her works above the sea of unfiltered digital content [33]. In this way, the relevance of the Institutional theory of art (Dickie, Danto) in the digital era is confirmed: AI art acquires the status of Art only at the moment when the art world—critics, curators, galleries, auction houses, and art historians—collectively names it as such, converting a technological experiment into a symbolically charged cultural object.

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