



# HCAA Newsletter

A publication of the Hyattsville Community Arts Alliance

## Artificial Intelligence and the Art World

by Aimee Doyle

There has been a lot of buzz in the media lately about artificial intelligence (AI)—intelligence created through computer programming—and its impact on the human world and human work. Computers have replaced humans in many jobs and have beaten Grandmasters in games of Chess and Go. Many artists now have questions or concerns, because they have read about or noticed that computers are beginning to produce “art,” whether that be visual images or musical compositions or written texts. Art has always been seen as a uniquely human activity. What does this mean for working artists, particularly visual artists who produce paintings, photography, and sculpture? This enquiry begins as a legal question but broadens into philosophical and ethical concerns.

### Definitions

First, here are a few definitions. AI is a field of computer science that focuses on building machines that mimic human intelligence or simulate the human brain through a set of algorithms. Algorithms are processes or sets of rules that a computer uses to complete a task. AI art is any artwork created using AI programs, such as text-to-image models. A text-to-image model is a visual image created by a computer command. However, AI generators cannot just pull art out of thin air. For example, say the computer is asked to produce an illustration of the “end of civilization.” The computer follows its instructions, and it utilizes an image database of other drawings or paintings of desolation, or photos of war-torn landscapes that it has access to, and uses its instructions to generate a unique visual. The “end of civilization” images I’ve seen look like typical post-apocalyptic scenes from movies or books or posters. In short, AI generators use artists’ art to learn how to make art. A programmer could use AI to produce images of pretty much anything one can imagine.



*Théâtre D'opéra Spatial*, created by Jason M. Allen via MidJourney using prompts, won first prize at the Colorado State Fair for digital art.

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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

AI and Art	1-3
HCAA Calendar	3
From the President's Desk	4
Fleisher's of Maryland	5
Art Techniques	6
HCAA Current Exhibits	7
Sponsor Addresses & Contact Information	8

(continued on page 2)

(AI and Art from page 1)

AI programming can also be used to “enhance” a photo or painting; for example, a programmed computer could take a photo or painting and render it as if Picasso or Van Gogh had painted it. To do this, of course, the computer needs access to images of Van Gogh or Picasso paintings. Here’s where the legal issues begin to arise.

### **Legal Issues**

One major issue that arises with computer-generated images is the issue of copyright. So who owns the copyright? The US Copyright Office is clear that there is no copyright protection for works created by a machine. Copyrightable works require human authorship—AI programs cannot hold copyright. But that doesn’t fully answer the question.

Does the person or the entity (possibly a corporation) who created the AI generator hold the copyright to created images? Is it the person, possibly a graphic designer, who fed the computer the images and carefully selected the compositions from it? Or is it the artist whose images have been fed to the algorithm behind the AI generator, whose work has been used to teach the AI how to create art in the first place?

Unfortunately, individuals and companies who create AI art generators typically do not obtain permission from artists to use their art to improve machine learning. AI generators can pull art—that is freely available to view—from everywhere on the internet. But freely available to view is not the same as freely available to use. Copyrighted art, say on a website, can be freely available to view. But it cannot legally be used without permission of the artist, or acquisition through licensing, or sale. The key issue is that the artists who create the images by which the programs are trained are not consulted and are not remunerated for their work. And there is a further financial impact as well. AI image generators could threaten artists’ ability to earn money, particularly artists working in illustration and design.

There is fierce debate on these issues, and not much agreement on how to resolve these problems. This is very much a gray area in the law right now. Since computer-generated art is unlikely to disappear, artists need to be part of the conversation about solutions. A solution would recognize both human artists’ contributions and the validity of digital art. It would ensure that human artists are compensated for their work. These and other checks and balances need to be put in place to ensure a successful transition as digital art takes its place in the art world.

### **Philosophical Issues**

In 2022, at the Colorado State Fair, an art competition awarded first place, in the category of “digital art” to an AI-generated art piece. The artwork, called *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial*, was created by Jason M. Allen using MidJourney, an AI program that turns text prompts into extremely realistic graphics. Many people who viewed the work were outraged, making online comments saying that Allen had “cheated” and that digital art was not “real art.”

AI-generated art has also faced backlash from various communities for being unethical. Artists who have taken years to perfect their brush strokes and art styles can be emulated in just seconds using AI. The question arises whether AI invalidates human effort. Is AI the future of creativity—a replacement for human talent?

What happens when computers can replicate not just the results of creativity but the creative process itself? This is an unnerving question. The camera created similar anxieties when it was first used to produce photographs. Portraitists and landscape artists were concerned it would make them irrelevant, since a camera could capture in a moment what took enormous work to represent by an artist’s hand. Yet portraiture is still important (look at the excitement created by the Obama portraits).

(continued on page 3)

(AI and Art from page 2)

There are galleries devoted to portraiture, and some might argue that the art has been elevated. Landscape artists and still-life artists still paint landscapes and still lifes. Today photographers are seen—and admired—as artists in their own right. Perhaps the same will happen with digital art.

I'm not sure that AI generators can wholly reproduce the "creative process." I suspect the creative process varies from artist to artist. Computer AI can use a creative process which is dependent on the instructions provided and the images available to draw from. This is knowledge of a sort, and it is limited by what is already there. AI art is only as good as the algorithms and prompts that create it. Humans, on the other hand, have access to a deeper pool of inspiration than a computer. I like to remember this quote from Albert Einstein: "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand."

## HCAA Calendar

### April

Apr 16: 2:00 PM	PGPCC Installation: "Nature's Rejuvenation"
Apr 16: 2:30 PM	PGPCC Reception
Apr 30: 2:30 PM	Workshop at PGPCC scheduled for this date has been postponed

### May

May 6: 9:00 AM	Franklins installation: "The Sound of Colors and Motion"
May 6: 9:45 AM	Fleisher's installation: "The Sound of Colors and Motion"
May 20: 12-5 PM	Bladensburg Waterfront Festival
May 21: 3-5 PM	Franklins Reception

### June

No events scheduled

**Every artist was first an amateur.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

## From the President's Desk: Planning to Continue Your Artistic Legacy

by Eileen Cave



This past year, I have experienced a lot of transitions of family members and friends, some of whom were also artists. Death is certainly a difficult subject to address, but thinking about the fate of our artwork is clearly a responsibility for those of us who have created a body of work, especially if we are AARP eligible. I must admit that I have only done estate planning relative to my banked financial assets; I have avoided thinking about what will become of all of my artwork. I would like to share some thoughts as I begin to research this matter.

We should create our life story about our art career now, so that it is captured the way we want it told. Let's select the works of art and include actual images of the works that we are most proud of. Don't we know best what should appear in a tribute show? We should also catalog all of our completed works. Some artists prefer that unfinished works be destroyed. How extensive should that catalog be? Mine only covers the current works in my home or that are in a temporary exhibit. But a comprehensive listing should also include works in a studio and online images, and the descriptions should show the appraised or approximate value and a history of sales. If you have made any videos or published interviews about your work, your catalog should also include details on accessing these materials.

In a will, artwork is considered a "tangible personal property." A bequest or gifted piece should be recorded, especially if you have children or relatives and more than one may have expressed to you a love of a particular/the same piece of art. Any bequests to institutions should be arranged in advance. Do not assume that any business or institution has the desire or capacity to receive your gift of art and can afford the associated costs of maintaining archival storage (unless your will is also allocating funds committed for this purpose).

If you have traveled extensively, as I have over the years, be sure that those works of art that you did not create, but purchased from other artists, are also identified with a value.

We must also protect the intellectual property of our art. Research copyright laws, to make sure that any licensing, royalty fees, or one-time use of your work is controlled by your heirs as you intended. Ending on a positive note, one of my favorite places is the Faith Ringgold Study Room at the Driskell Center at University of Maryland, College Park. I had the opportunity to conduct a workshop with teachers and artists, and we were able to view the well-organized works of this renowned artist and author. Books and works in museum collections that I taught about were viewable in many stages of production, with the artist's comments and revisions, providing a thrilling insight into her creative process.

Artists attending the celebration of life for artist Zenobia Rickford in January include: Margaret Boles, Eileen Cave, Lavern Whitley, and Alita Irby. Zenobia was president of the Prince George's Artists' Association.



## Fleisher's of Maryland Fills Niche for HCAA Artists

by Pete Pichaske

An institution in Maryland since 1949—and on Route 1 in Hyattsville since 2015—the jewelry shop Fleisher's of Maryland is the only Hyattsville Community Arts Alliance venue that displays not just paintings and photography but sculpture and jewelry as well.

As such, it is especially valued by the artists who work in those media.

"Fleisher's of Maryland is a hidden gem," said Richard Brown, who has displayed his handmade jewelry there for years, and who, along with wife and fellow artist Denise Brown, helped recruit the jewelry store as one of the association's venues. Richard elaborated. "It features jewelry, paintings, and sculpture, along with unusual gift items. ... It features local artisans and artists."

"I have always found them to be helpful and accommodating," said Delia Mychajluk, who displays her three-dimensional pieces there. "They are our only current venue that allows for showing some nude figurative work, and they have also allowed some of my angel pieces, which can't show at Franklins." In the past, she added, Fleisher's also has held receptions for the artists and been a destination for the annual Gateways Open Studios Tour.

A family business, Fleisher's of Maryland is now managed by Fred Fleisher, whose parents started it in 1949, and partner Luis Pena. The jewelry store shut down at its original location, in the Queenstown Shopping Center in Chillum, in 2012, but reopened a few years later at its current location on Route 1, directly across from Franklins Restaurant.

"It was slow opening up, people didn't know us," Fleisher recalled of his move to Hyattsville. Business eventually picked up, he said, but it has fallen off dramatically in the past couple of years. Fleisher attributes the slowdown to the pandemic and the influx of younger residents to the area who have very little interest in buying jewelry.

"The last two years, it's been totally dead," Fleisher said of his shop. "If it wasn't for the repairs, we probably wouldn't still be here." (In addition to jewelry and watch repairs, the store replaces watch batteries.)

Fleisher started welcoming artists to his store eight years ago. "We wanted to give artists another area where they can display their work," he said. "People come in to see the art, maybe they'll look at our cases as well." Also, Fleisher noted, "this is an art district. We want to stay active in the community in some way, shape or form. ... It gives our store a local flair."

Eco-artist Jan Garland, who curates the art hangings at Fleisher's, described the store as "a pleasure and a treasure to us artists at HCAA. "Fred and employees at Fleisher's not only put up with the disruption on the day of the hang, but they accommodate us with our requests—like a hammer, ladder, and such—all with a smile."

Garland said she believes the store's employees and customers like having the art on their walls "as much as we like putting it there. It adds an additional interest and perhaps sparks a conversation or two. Beauty of jewelry, beauty of art perhaps go hand in hand. She added, "They are a gem." "We at HCAA have been most appreciative of the opportunity to display our work here and have for many years. We hope our relationship goes on and on."

The man who will make that decision gave HCAA artists reason for optimism on that score. "As long as we're here, they're welcome to put their work up," Fleisher said. "Without all the artwork, our walls would be a little bare."



Fred Fleisher, second-generation owner of Fleisher's of Maryland, next to a case displaying objects for sale, including HCAA artists' work.



## Art Techniques: Scratchboard Etching

by Delia Mychajluk

I became interested in scratchboard etching (also called scraperboard etching) after seeing the work of an artist in the local Artist Gathering Group. I had never tried it but became interested, especially after viewing videos online that demonstrated a variety of approaches and final products. It is an adjustment to work in black and white and with another medium after working primarily in oils on canvas, where color was one essential element in my work.

Scratchboard was invented in Britain and France in the 1800s. It became popular in the U.S. in the mid-20th century. It was originally invented as a more practical and economical alternative to methods such as engraving or printing with metal etching plates or woodcuts. It has been used for prints in books and newspapers and advertising. Although scratchboard paper is available, the surface that seems to be most frequently used by artists consists of a hardboard that has a layer of clay (kaolin) topped by a layer of black ink. Since I am interested in both showing and selling my work, I prefer to work with a professional archival board (there are several brands). There is also information available online explaining how to make your own scratchboard.

As the name suggests, the process of working on scratchboard is to scratch or etch, removing the black layer of ink and revealing the white clay below (there are also some boards with silver, gold, or multi-colored underlayers). There are scratchboard tools that can be found online or in stores, but other things can also be used as tools. In addition to some of the commercially available tools, I have used fine sandpaper (400 and 800 grit), steel wool, clay pottery tools, and an X-Acto blade to get a variety of effects. Alcohol on a Q-tip can also be used to get bright whites, but I have not tried that method. There are artists who also use colored inks over their black-and-white etchings.

Scratchboard art can be preserved by framing with glass or acrylic or by using multiple layers of a spray varnish. I have used UV archival spray varnish and framing without glass. There are a lot of suggestions online about framing, varnishing, etc.

There is a scratchboard artist organization, [International Society of Scratchboard Artists](#), that offers more information about this art form.

Some artists put an image on the board before working; I have found that working freehand is what I prefer, and I have taken some of my photos and printed them in black and white to use for reference.

As an artist who is new to the medium, I am interested in continuing to pursue it—I find it challenging and meditative, and it is “sharpening” my looking and drawing skills.

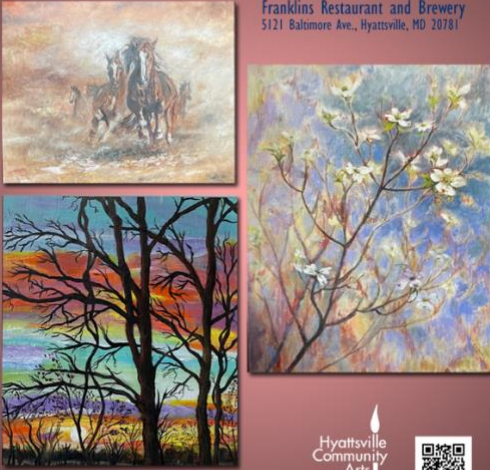


Three scratchboard etchings by Delia Mychajluk.

## HCAA Current Exhibitions


**"Natural Wonders Awaken"**  
March 4, 2023–May 5, 2023

Franklin's Restaurant and Brewery  
5121 Baltimore Ave., Hyattsville, MD 20781



RECEPTION  
Sunday, March 19, 2023, 3-5PM


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**"New Beginnings"**  
**Black History: Resistance**  
January 22, 2023–April 15, 2023

PRINCE GEORGE'S PLAZA COMMUNITY CENTER  
6600 Adelphi Road, Hyattsville, MD



RECEPTION  
February 5, 2023, 2-4PM

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT  
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HCAA is seeking someone to create and print out flyers for our exhibitions, using HCAA's Epson 400. Expenses plus an honorarium are paid. Contact Eileen Cave if you are interested:

[ecaveart@gmail.com](mailto:ecaveart@gmail.com)

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