# Grayson Perry embraces cultural appropriation and downplays AI fears in art



Grayson Perry, the renowned Turner Prize-winning artist, is making waves with his candid reflections on artificial intelligence and cultural appropriation. Speaking at the Charleston Literature Festival, Perry expressed nonchalance towards the use of his work in training AI models. He provocatively described his long-standing artistic practice as being akin to “ripping off” others, claiming the title of "the world champion of cultural appropriation." This self-effacing irony is emblematic of his approach to art—a mix of homage, reinterpretation, and playful engagement with cultural narratives.

Throughout his career, Perry has embraced a wide array of influences, borrowing elements from diverse cultures, including Afghan war rugs and Japanese kimonos. This proclivity has drawn both acclaim and scrutiny, with many viewing cultural appropriation as a modern sin. However, Perry remains unapologetic, stating in a recent retrospective that he openly acknowledges his artistic debts while navigating the complexities of cultural borrowing in today’s world.

In his comments about AI, Perry highlighted a crucial point: the intrinsic value of art lies not merely in replication but in its physicality and uniqueness. "I’ve never worried about if anyone wants to use my work in a lecture or whatever," he said, reinforcing the notion that the essence of his pieces cannot be captured solely through digital means. According to Perry, the fear surrounding AI is somewhat overstated; he suggests that while AI may produce numerous mediocre works, it leaves a creative void for genuine human artistry.

Perry noted his experiences experimenting with AI, wherein he prompted an AI tool to create “an artwork”—the end result, as he described, resembled a haphazard mix of colours rather than a coherent piece of art. This visual anecdote serves as a metaphor for the internet itself, which often amalgamates cultures and ideas into a "bland paste." While he acknowledges that AI art briefly glimpsed a "brilliant phase" of creativity, he believes it risks becoming overly precise and lifeless, comparable to "a very, very pedantic 14-year-old" fixated on technical accuracy.

The implications of AI in the art world are increasingly significant. Recently, over 6,000 artists petitioned for the cancellation of Christie's auction featuring AI-generated works, arguing that the technology is rooted in “mass theft” of human creativity. This controversy underscores the tensions surrounding the legitimacy of AI as a legitimate artistic form and the ethical responsibility associated with its development. As Perry manoeuvres through these dialogues, his remarks serve as an important reminder of the complexities involved in artistic creation, ranging from historical appropriations to contemporary technological innovations.

Adding to his perspective, Perry mused on the potency of narrative in art. He fosters rich character creation, employing figures like Claire and his alter ego, Shirley Smith, to inject deeper meaning into his work. This narrative-driven approach can be contrasted with AI-generated art, which, despite its technical prowess, often lacks the profound storytelling that characterises human-created pieces. "Narrative is the most potent form of human art," he elaborated, indicating that it is this depth that distinguishes valid artistic expressions from mere reproductions of style.

In a landscape where the definitions of artistry and originality are continually evolving, Perry’s thoughts on AI and cultural appropriation resonate deeply. He finds himself in an enviable position, enjoying recognition and influence within the art world, while also contemplating the myriad of stories and traditions that shape his creative identity. As he articulates the connections between spirituality, creativity, and art, it is clear that his journey reflects a broader dialogue about the intersections of culture, technology, and artistic integrity.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/18/world-champion-of-appropriation-grayson-perry-says-he-isnt-bothered-by-ai-using-his-work), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/18/world-champion-of-appropriation-grayson-perry-says-he-isnt-bothered-by-ai-using-his-work)
2. Paragraph 2: [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/07/20/grayson-perry-guilty-cultural-appropriation/), [[6]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/07/20/grayson-perry-guilty-cultural-appropriation/)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/18/world-champion-of-appropriation-grayson-perry-says-he-isnt-bothered-by-ai-using-his-work), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/18/world-champion-of-appropriation-grayson-perry-says-he-isnt-bothered-by-ai-using-his-work)
4. Paragraph 4: [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/feb/10/mass-theft-thousands-of-artists-call-for-ai-art-auction-to-be-cancelled), [[5]](https://phys.org/news/2025-02-creative-mass-theft-major-ai.html)
5. Paragraph 5: [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/nov/09/grayson-perry-on-art-cats-and-meaning-of-life-if-you-dont-have-self-doubt-youre-not-trying-hard-enough)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/18/world-champion-of-appropriation-grayson-perry-says-he-isnt-bothered-by-ai-using-his-work> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/18/world-champion-of-appropriation-grayson-perry-says-he-isnt-bothered-by-ai-using-his-work> - Grayson Perry, the Turner Prize-winning artist, expressed indifference towards AI using his work to train models, stating he has been 'ripping off' others throughout his career. Speaking at the Charleston literature festival, he humorously referred to himself as 'the world champion of cultural appropriation.' Perry emphasized that he doesn't expect financial compensation for such uses, as the value of his work lies in its 'physical' and 'often unique' nature. He also mentioned experimenting with AI, noting that while AI-generated art isn't 'that good yet,' it might handle 'all the mediocre stuff' in the future.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/07/20/grayson-perry-guilty-cultural-appropriation/> - In July 2023, Grayson Perry admitted to being guilty of 'cultural appropriation' in his art. Reflecting on his 40-year career ahead of his UK retrospective, Perry acknowledged adopting ideas from various cultures, including Korean celadons, Afghan war rugs, and Japanese kimonos. He recognized the challenges of drawing broad influences in the modern world, describing cultural appropriation as a 'modern sin' he confesses to. The retrospective, titled 'Smash Hits,' was set to open at the National Galleries of Scotland on July 22, showcasing works from the 1980s to pieces created during the lockdown.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/feb/10/mass-theft-thousands-of-artists-call-for-ai-art-auction-to-be-cancelled> - In February 2025, thousands of artists urged Christie's auction house to cancel a sale of AI-generated art, claiming the technology behind the works constitutes 'mass theft.' The Augmented Intelligence auction featured 20 lots priced between $10,000 and $250,000, including works by Refik Anadol and the late AI art pioneer Harold Cohen. A letter with 3,000 signatures, including artists Karla Ortiz and Kelly McKernan, argued that many artworks were created using AI models trained on copyrighted work without a license, exploiting human artists without permission or payment.
5. <https://phys.org/news/2025-02-creative-mass-theft-major-ai.html> - A February 2025 article discussed the controversy surrounding Christie's first AI-dedicated art auction, titled 'Augmented Intelligence.' The collection aimed to explore 'human agency in the age of AI within fine art,' featuring works from early AI art pioneers like Harold Cohen to contemporary artists such as Refik Anadol and Sougwen Chung. However, over 6,000 artists signed an open letter calling for the auction's cancellation, arguing that many works used AI models trained on copyrighted material without licenses, leading to exploitation of human artists.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/07/20/grayson-perry-guilty-cultural-appropriation/> - In July 2023, Grayson Perry admitted to being guilty of 'cultural appropriation' in his art. Reflecting on his 40-year career ahead of his UK retrospective, Perry acknowledged adopting ideas from various cultures, including Korean celadons, Afghan war rugs, and Japanese kimonos. He recognized the challenges of drawing broad influences in the modern world, describing cultural appropriation as a 'modern sin' he confesses to. The retrospective, titled 'Smash Hits,' was set to open at the National Galleries of Scotland on July 22, showcasing works from the 1980s to pieces created during the lockdown.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/nov/09/grayson-perry-on-art-cats-and-meaning-of-life-if-you-dont-have-self-doubt-youre-not-trying-hard-enough> - In a November 2021 interview, Grayson Perry discussed various topics, including art, cats, and the meaning of life. He emphasized the importance of self-doubt in the creative process, stating, 'If you don't have self-doubt, you're not trying hard enough.' Perry also addressed the Eurocentric nature of the art world, noting that institutions like the Tate have been actively seeking to represent non-European art traditions. He expressed his interest in art from diverse cultural backgrounds and the evolving inclusivity within the art world.