# The rise of AI-generated art in Malta sparks debate over creativity, ethics and copyright



In recent weeks, social media platforms have been flooded with artificial intelligence (AI)-generated images inspired by the distinctive animation style of Studio Ghibli, sparking widespread interest and debate in Malta and beyond. These AI-created artworks, which replicate the well-known hand-crafted aesthetic associated with the iconic Japanese studio, have raised significant questions about the ethical, legal, and creative implications of using AI in art.

The surge of AI-generated Studio Ghibli-style images has ignited a lively conversation about the role of technology in artistic creation. Critics, including Studio Ghibli co-founder Hayao Miyazaki, have argued that AI art lacks the essential human touch. While some perceive these images as a form of homage, others view them as an exploitation of artistic integrity, especially since AI models often train on copyrighted material without the explicit consent of original creators. This controversy has brought to the forefront broader discussions about authorship, copyright protections, and the future landscape of creative industries amid rapid technological advancements.

In Malta, key figures within the creative sector have voiced their perspectives on how AI is influencing art and culture. Maria Galea, President of the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA), acknowledged that AI presents both challenges and opportunities. She noted that AI is already being employed within Malta’s advertising and marketing spheres, sometimes replacing traditional roles such as photographers, actors, and illustrators. Galea stated, "We must find a way to co-exist and co-create." She highlighted that many creative professionals are actively incorporating AI into their processes to enhance productivity or explore new artistic forms, emphasising that ultimately, it is still the human artist who guides the creative vision.

Legal experts have also weighed in on the ongoing discourse surrounding AI art. Ioanis Revolidis, a lecturer at the University of Malta’s Department of Media, Communications, and Technology Law, pointed out the complexities of copyright law in this context. He explained that while copyright traditionally does not protect artistic style — to avoid hindering creativity — the question becomes more complicated when AI is tasked with generating images in a specific style. Revolidis observed that neither the AI models nor the users who prompt them seek permission from original artists or offer royalties, raising concerns about consent and fair compensation. “Because someone posted something online, it does not mean one is given the licence to make that art their own, and even more so gain profits from it,” he said.

AI expert Alexiei Dingli echoed the need for nuanced understanding. He described the situation as a conundrum where traditional legal frameworks, including the concept of ‘fair use,’ struggle to accommodate the scale and nature of generative AI. Dingli remarked, “When models ingest millions, sometimes billions, of creative works from the internet, including highly expressive content such as visual art, and use them to produce outputs that directly mimic or even replace the original, the ethical lines begin to blur.” He called for thoughtful and adaptable new regulations to address these challenges without stifling technological innovation.

On the artistic front, Maria Galea expressed that AI-generated work cannot replicate the emotional depth, context, or intention inherent in human art. She emphasised a clear distinction between inspiration and automation, stating, “Art integrates into the shared cultural landscape by assuming its own identity through inspiration and emotion, deeply rooted in human experience and emotion.”

Regarding protections for artists, current European Union legislation, including Directive (EU) 2021/790, provides a framework allowing AI systems to analyse creative works for training purposes while safeguarding creators’ rights. According to Revolidis, this legislation enables artists to withhold permission for their work to be used, signalling an attempt to balance technological advancement with intellectual property protection. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that legal solutions are still evolving in response to AI’s rapid development.

In the interim, professionals suggest practical measures such as watermarking and embedding metadata to help safeguard artwork. However, Dingli cautioned that these are imperfect solutions since watermarks can be removed using AI and metadata often does not survive common digital processes like social media uploads. He argued that what is truly needed is a comprehensive reevaluation of how consent, provenance, and remuneration are managed in an era where algorithms can swiftly assimilate vast amounts of human creativity.

As the use of AI in art continues to expand, the debate in Malta mirrors a global conversation about how society navigates the intersection of technology and human creativity. Whether AI will usher in a new artistic renaissance or challenge the traditional creative spirit remains uncertain. What is clear is that artists, lawmakers, and technologists alike are grappling with the complexities brought forth by this transformative technology.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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