# Tate Modern’s Electric Dreams reveals how 1960s art-tech pioneers anticipated today’s AI creativity debates



In the rapidly evolving landscape of contemporary art, a retrospective look at past innovations can illuminate current debates surrounding technology, creativity, and authorship. The ongoing exhibition at Tate Modern, titled *Electric Dreams: Art and Technology Before the Internet*, encapsulates this exploration by showcasing seminal works from the 1950s to the early 1990s, where artists ingeniously wed technology and creativity.

At the heart of this movement is the pioneering initiative called *Experiments in Art and Technology* (E.A.T.), established in the 1960s. This collaboration between artists and engineers at Bell Telephone Laboratories brought together innovative minds like Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Lucinda Childs, working alongside engineers to create transformative art. According to Julia Martin, who spoke at a 2013 conference, the essence of this collaboration lay not in blurring the lines between art and engineering but in valuing the synergy between the two disciplines. “The fundamental thing is what the artist wants to do, and then, finding the technology to make it possible,” she elaborated, underscoring the seamless partnership necessary for artistic innovation.

Among the iconic results of this collaboration were performances held during *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* in 1966, where artists employed groundbreaking technology such as closed-circuit television and Doppler sonar, marking significant advancements in the use of tech within performance art. This historical context is crucial today, especially as discussions about the impact of artificial intelligence on creativity intensify. The lessons gleaned from past collaborations reveal both the promise and challenges of integrating new technologies into artistic practice.

Valentina Ravaglia, the curator of *Electric Dreams*, emphasises the necessity of reflecting on how automation has influenced creativity over time. She articulates that artists have been engaging with automation since the dawn of human expression, from prehistoric stencils to contemporary digital artwork. This historical perspective is vital for understanding today’s debates regarding authorship and copyright in an age dominated by algorithmic creativity.

The exhibition also sheds light on various movements, such as New Tendencies and Arte Programmata, which sought to democratise art using scientific methodologies. Artists like Japan’s Hiroshi Kawano and Croatia's Vladimir Bonačić were instrumental in paving the way for computer-assisted art. In highlighting these figures, Ravaglia aims to address a gap in contemporary discourse, noting that many innovators remain underappreciated, despite their significant contributions to what we now consider the digital age.

As the art world grapples with the implications of AI and algorithmic frameworks, Ravaglia points out parallels with historical concerns: “If we look back, we cannot help but notice that the concerns we have today about the impact of automatization on creativity and work in general echo those of the past.” This reflective approach is crucial, particularly in light of the growing fear that automation will displace creative professionals.

While acknowledging the challenges posed by AI, Ravaglia asserts that the issue often lies not within technology itself but in how it is wielded by individuals and corporations. She urges a re-examination of the current narrative that blames technology for the disruption it causes. Instead, understanding the potential for collaboration between creatives and technologists is essential for navigating this paradigm shift.

*Electric Dreams* not only celebrates past innovations but also serves as a clarion call for contemporary artists and technologists to engage in meaningful dialogues. As the exhibition unfolds at Tate Modern, it reminds us of the enduring relationship between art and technology and the importance of historical awareness in addressing the complexities of today’s creative landscape. Through this lens, visitors are invited to reconsider how the integration of technology can be harnessed to both challenge and enrich artistic expression in the 21st century.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-05-25/the-artistic-movement-that-anticipated-the-algorithm.html), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/4fdf2681-8955-4276-a731-0acbf04f37cf)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-05-25/the-artistic-movement-that-anticipated-the-algorithm.html), [[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiments_in_Art_and_Technology), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9_Evenings:_Theatre_and_Engineering)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/11/29/electric-dreams-tate-modern-explores-how-artists-pioneered-the-digital-age-before-the-inte), [[6]](https://www.wallpaper.com/art/exhibitions-shows/luma-arles-2025)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-05-25/the-artistic-movement-that-anticipated-the-algorithm.html), [[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiments_in_Art_and_Technology)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/4fdf2681-8955-4276-a731-0acbf04f37cf), [[5]](https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/11/29/electric-dreams-tate-modern-explores-how-artists-pioneered-the-digital-age-before-the-inte)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-05-25/the-artistic-movement-that-anticipated-the-algorithm.html), [[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiments_in_Art_and_Technology), [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9_Evenings:_Theatre_and_Engineering)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/11/29/electric-dreams-tate-modern-explores-how-artists-pioneered-the-digital-age-before-the-inte), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/4fdf2681-8955-4276-a731-0acbf04f37cf)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-05-25/the-artistic-movement-that-anticipated-the-algorithm.html), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/4fdf2681-8955-4276-a731-0acbf04f37cf)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-05-25/the-artistic-movement-that-anticipated-the-algorithm.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiments_in_Art_and_Technology> - Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) was a non-profit organization established in 1967 to foster collaborations between artists and engineers. Founded by Billy Klüver, Robert Rauschenberg, and Robert Whitman, E.A.T. aimed to explore the integration of art and technology. One of its notable projects was the Pepsi Pavilion at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan, which featured a fog sculpture by Fujiko Nakaya. E.A.T. played a significant role in bridging the gap between art and science during the 1960s and 1970s.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9_Evenings:_Theatre_and_Engineering> - 9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering was a series of performances held from October 13–23, 1966, where artists and engineers from Bell Laboratories collaborated to create innovative art using new technologies. The event featured ten artists and thirty engineers working together to develop technical equipment and systems integral to the performances. This collaboration produced many 'firsts' in the use of new technology for theater, including closed-circuit television and Doppler sonar devices.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/4fdf2681-8955-4276-a731-0acbf04f37cf> - Tate Modern's exhibition 'Electric Dreams: Art and Technology Before the Internet' explores how artists from the post-WWII era to the early 1990s integrated technology into their art. The exhibition delves into works of over 70 artists who utilized technology, mathematical principles, and even early AI in their creations. This period saw rapid technological advancements, transforming computers from room-sized behemoths to desktop devices. The exhibition aims to acknowledge this often overlooked artistic chapter and illustrates how historical interactions with technology prefigure today's art world debates, such as the role of generative AI in creativity.
5. <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/11/29/electric-dreams-tate-modern-explores-how-artists-pioneered-the-digital-age-before-the-inte> - The 'Electric Dreams' exhibition at Tate Modern showcases how artists from the 1950s to the early 1990s integrated technology into their art. The exhibition features works by over 70 artists who utilized technology, mathematical principles, and early AI in their creations. Notable pieces include Alberto Biasi's 'Light Prisms: Spectral Kinetic Mesh' (1966) and Carlos Cruz-Diez's 'Chromointerferent Environment.' The exhibition highlights the evolution of art in response to technological advancements and the pre-internet digital age.
6. <https://www.wallpaper.com/art/exhibitions-shows/luma-arles-2025> - LUMA Arles launched its 2025/26 season with three innovative exhibitions integrating art, technology, and immersive experiences. 'Sensing the Future: Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.)' celebrates the 1960s collaborations between artists and Bell Labs engineers, including works like Andy Warhol’s floating Silver Clouds and Jean Dupuy’s Cone Pyramid, a heartbeat-responsive sculpture. The exhibition also highlights the Moon Museum, a covert art project sent to space, and a fog sculpture by Fujiko Nakaya, originally created for the 1970 Osaka World’s Fair.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/ef0f6d42-4759-4ce8-8e40-acd83f0c64f1> - London currently hosts a diverse range of compelling art exhibitions. Highlights include Ed Atkins' introspective digital show at Tate Britain and Amoako Boafo's debut London solo exhibition at Gagosian, celebrating Ghanaian artistic heritage. At Somerset House, the Sony World Photography Awards presents powerful global visual narratives. Giuseppe Penone explores the bond between nature and humanity at the Serpentine South Gallery, while Huma Bhabha and Giacometti are showcased side by side at the Barbican. Contemporary textile artist Anne von Freyburg’s solo show at Saatchi Gallery reimagines romantic tropes, and Tunga’s innovative sculptures are on view at Lisson Gallery. Edel Assanti presents Si On’s emotive works on human fragility and resilience. The Secret 7” charity project returns to NOW Gallery with one-of-a-kind vinyl sleeve art. Christine Sun Kim and Thomas Mader examine language and deaf culture at the Wellcome Collection. The National Portrait Gallery revisits iconic photos from The Face magazine, and Piano Nobile honors Barbara Hepworth’s sculptural string works. Other must-see exhibits include retrospectives of Noah Davis and Linder, a tribute to Leigh Bowery at Tate Modern, a photographic journey through 1980s Britain at Tate Britain, and ‘Electric Dreams’, showcasing early digital art innovations.