

Pioneering AI artist says the technology is ultimately 'limiting'

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

An artist who shook up the cultural world with a haunting female portrait created by artificial intelligence has decided she's had enough of the new technology for now.

Working with AI to create art is ultimately "very frustrating and very limiting," Swedish-based artist and writer Supercomposite told AFP.

For the moment, she has stopped working with AI and is writing a screenplay instead, saying her experience with AI art left her "burned out".

"It creates this dopamine path in your brain. It's very addictive to keep pushing that button and getting these results," she said.

Supercomposite created the red-cheeked, hollow-eyed woman called "Loab" in 2022 when she was testing out the new artistic possibilities offered by AI.

Her posts on social media of Loab and about the process to create her went viral, with commentators describing the images as "disturbing" and saying they had "sparked some lengthy ethical conversations around visual aesthetics, art and technology".

Tools like Midjourney, Stable Diffusion and DALL-E have made it possible to generate images from written prompts.

Supercomposite—whose real name is Steph Maj Swanson and is originally from the United States—had been looking at so-called "negative prompts", designed to exclude certain elements from an image.

'That was the spookiest'

She typed in the negative prompt "Brando::-1", asking one tool to come up with something as far as possible from the late American actor Marlon Brando.

What appeared at first was a black logo with green lettering that spelt out

"DIGITA PNTICS", the 32-year-old told AFP in an interview at the Chaos Communication Congress, which brings the hacker scene together every year in late December in Hamburg.

But when the artist requested the opposite of this again with the query "DIGITA PNTICS" skyline logo::-1", the image of "this really sad, haunting looking woman with long hair and red cheeks" appeared for the first time, she said.

The text "Loab" appeared in truncated letters on one of the images—giving a name to the creature that looked like it sprang from a horror movie.

Swanson then sought to get AI to modify Loab with another request. And to that new generated image, she made another different request, and another. But a strange trend surfaced.

"Sometimes she would reappear, after vanishing for a few generations of the lineage. That was the spookiest," she said.

More disturbingly, Loab appeared regularly alongside children, "sometimes dismembered", and always in a "macabre" and "bloody" world, she said.

Of the hundreds of images including Loab that were generated, Swanson decided not to show those she deemed the most shocking.

'My life changed'

Loab's existence was first revealed in September 2022 in a series of posts on Twitter, since renamed X.

"It became viral, my life changed," she said, explaining how she became

"so obsessed" with Loab.

"I wanted to explore who she was, the different scenarios in which she would appear and her limits, to see how far I could push the model."

The reasons for the character's recurring appearance are unclear. Experts have noted it is impossible to know how generative AI interprets abstract requests.

Swanson has not revealed which tool she used to create Loab, wanting to avoid "shifting the focus away from art and onto the makers of the model" and being accused of "marketing," she said.

But her refusal to name Loab's creator has led to doubts over how she was created, with some [internet users](#) suspecting Swanson of re-touching the images to create a so-called "creepypasta"—a kind of digital horror theme cooked up to haunt social networks.

Swanson denied she'd dreamt up or manually altered Loab, saying she took the claims as a compliment: "It meant people were interacting with it."

But it has been over a year since Swanson has touched Loab, saying the whole affair left her exhausted and burned out. She has stopped creating AI [images](#) as she devoted herself to a screenplay.

She summed up her current sentiment about such tools with a quote from South Korean-born video art pioneer Nam June Paik: "I use technology in order to hate it properly".

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