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Study Abroad

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Creating with Machines: Artificial Intelligence, Imagination, and the Question of Authorship

Fall Term 2026
Academic Course Period: 31 August – 11 December 2026
(break: 19-23 October 2026)

CATEGORY
Art, Architecture, Sociology

COURSE STRUCTURE
3 contact hours à 45 min per week (14 weeks)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE
Time
Day: t.b.a. (Monday to Friday, 09:00-11:30, 12:30-15:00, or 16:00-18:30)
Place
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Schönhauser Allee 10, Room 1.23

COURSE LANGUAGE
English

Language requirements (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)
English B2

TARGET GROUP

International students from all disciplines with a keen interest in computer-generated art. The course is suitable for students in art and design, computer science, media and cultural studies, art history and theory, curatorial studies, and creative industries. Participants will learn about the historical background of digital creativity and AI experimentation, gain skills in critical analysis, curatorial thinking, legal frameworks in the arts field, and learn about recent innovations in the creative sector.

CREDITS = 6 ECTS
All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the artistic use of artificial intelligence (AI) and its ability to create new opportunities for art, addressing questions concerning the legal and conceptual challenges of this development. Students will reflect on how AI may reshape the way we understand imagination, the concept of beauty, and storytelling. We will also think about how AI is enabling new forms of visual expression and collaboration. Additionally, the course will engage unresolved questions around legal topics such as authorship, copyright, and ownership, highlighting how current legal frameworks react —or fail to react— to machine-generated contents. Through working through case studies, theoretical and legal frameworks, participants will gain a nuanced appreciation of both the positive aspects and the limits of working with intelligent systems.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Course Goals

This course aims to explore the intersections of art, creativity, and artificial intelligence, encouraging students to critically engage with both theoretical and practical dimensions of AI-driven artistic practices. Through a combination of readings, case studies, workshops, and museum visits, participants will examine how intelligent systems challenge traditional concepts of imagination, beauty, and authorship, while also opening new avenues for collaborative and experimental forms of visual expression. The course integrates perspectives from art history, philosophy, media studies, and law, and equips students with the skills to reflect on AI-based artworks in contemporary cultural contexts.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyse the historical, conceptual, and aesthetic dimensions of AI-generated art.
- Critically evaluate the role of machines in shaping creativity, artistic storytelling, and visual culture.
- Apply theoretical frameworks from philosophy, media studies, and posthumanism to the study of AI art.
- Demonstrate understanding of legal and ethical issues surrounding AI-generated works, including authorship, copyright, and ownership.
- Assess the social and cultural impact of AI technologies, including biases in datasets and implications for representation.
- Gain information on how to curate and contextualise AI-based artworks in both virtual and physical exhibition formats.
- Communicate research and creative projects effectively in oral, written, and visual formats.

- Apply interdisciplinary perspectives from art, technology, and law to analyse the evolving impact of AI on artistic practice.

READINGS

Primary References

Anadol Studio, Refik. 2021. *Machine Hallucinations: Nature Dreams.* Exhibition catalogue. Los Angeles: RAS.

Benjamin, Walter. 1969 [1936]. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 217–251. New York: Schocken.

Bishop, Claire. 2013. *Radical Museology, or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?* London: Koenig Books.

Bishop, Claire. 2012. "Digital Divide." *Artforum* 51 (1): 434–441.

Boden, Margaret A. 1998. "Creativity and Artificial Intelligence." *Artificial Intelligence* 103 (1–2): 347–356.

Boden, Margaret A. 2004. *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms.* 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Boden, Margaret A. 2016. *AI: Its Nature and Future.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The Posthuman.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cascone, Sarah. 2018. "This $432,500 Portrait Made by an Algorithm Wasn't Even Made by the Artist Who Signed It." *Artnet News*, October 25, 2018.

Cohen, Harold. 1995. "The Further Exploits of AARON, Painter." *Stanford Humanities Review* 4 (2).

Colton, Simon, and Geraint A. Wiggins. 2012. "Computational Creativity: The Final Frontier?" In *Proceedings of the 20th European Conference on Artificial Intelligence*, 21–26. Amsterdam: IOS Press.

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European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO). 2020. *Trends in Copyright and Artificial Intelligence.* Alicante: EUIPO.

Floridi, Luciano. 2019. *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gervais, Daniel J. 2019. "The Machine as Author." *Houston Law Review* 105 (2): 1–36.

Grau, Oliver. 2003. *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* New York: Routledge.

Hayles, N. Katherine. 2017. *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hertzmann, Aaron. 2018. "Can Computers Create Art?" arXiv preprint arXiv:1801.04486.

Kant, Immanuel. 2000 [1790]. *Critique of the Power of Judgment.* Edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Manovich, Lev. 2018. *AI Aesthetics.* Moscow: Strelka Press.

McCormack, Jon, and Mark d'Inverno, eds. 2012. *Computers and Creativity.* Berlin: Springer.

McHugh, Genevieve. 2016. *Post-Internet Art and the Digital Narrative.* London: Arcadia Missa.

McShine, Kynaston L., ed. 1970. *Information.* New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Miller, Arthur I. 2019. *The Artist in the Machine: The World of AI-Powered Creativity.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism.* New York: NYU Press.

O'Neill, Paul. 2012. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s).* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Paglen, Trevor. 2016. "Invisible Images (Your Pictures Are Looking at You)." *The New Inquiry*, December 8, 2016.

Paul, Christiane. 2015. *Digital Art.* 3rd ed. London: Thames & Hudson.

Reichardt, Jasia, ed. 1968. *Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts.* London: Studio International.

Rosen, Margit, ed., with Peter Weibel, Darko Fritz, and Marija Gattin. 2011. *A Little-Known Story About a Movement, a Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961–1973.* Karlsruhe: ZKM Center for Art and Media; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ratti, Carlo, and Matthew Claudel. 2016. *The City of Tomorrow: Sensors, Networks, Hackers, and the Future of Urban Life.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shane, Janelle. 2019. *You Look Like a Thing and I Love You: How AI Works and Why It's Making the World a Weirder Place.* New York: Little, Brown Spark.

Shanken, Edward A. 2002. “Art in the Information Age: Technology and Conceptual Art.” *Leonardo* 35 (4): 433–438.

Steyerl, Hito. 2009. “In Defense of the Poor Image.” *e-flux journal* 10.

Steyerl, Hito. 2013. “Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?” *e-flux journal* 49.

Turner, Fred. 2006. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Urtiaga, Gabriela, ed. 2024. *ARTEÔNICA: Art, Science, and Technology in Latin America Today.* Long Beach, CA: Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA).

U.S. Copyright Office. 2021. *Compendium of U.S. Copyright Office Practices.* 3rd ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Copyright Office.

Secondary/Optional References

Bridle, James. 2022. *Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ratti, Carlo, and Matthew Claudel. 2016. *The City of Tomorrow: Sensors, Networks, Hackers, and the Future of Urban Life.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

ASSIGNMENT INFO

Workload and assignments

In order to be granted 6 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- Actively attend all sessions, with a minimum of 80% attendance required for both classroom or online sessions.
- Prepare for each class by reading the weekly assigned publications.
- Participate in class discussions and bring questions to engage with the group.
- Identify one or two topics of interest to develop further for the final assignment.

Assessment Components

Final Assignment:

Objective:

Groups critically examine the role of AI in contemporary art, considering legal, ethical, social, and artistic dimensions, including topics related to bias, taste, and the sense of beauty, and envisage possible future scenarios.

Description:
Each group (minimum 3 people) selects one or more focus areas and develops a 15 to 20 minute oral presentation.

Focus areas and questions:

1. **Historical aspects:** In what ways does AI art build on earlier histories of cybernetics, conceptual art, and technological experimentation? Which aspects might you wish to focus on or challenge? What has changed, and what remains to be developed or improved?
2. **Legal aspects:** How do questions of copyright, intellectual property, and authorship apply to AI-generated art? Who can or should be recognised as the author of such works —the programmer, the artist, or the machine?
3. **Ethical aspects and bias:** How do datasets and algorithms reproduce or reinforce bias and inequality? In what ways can AI art perpetuate stereotypes, and how might these be addressed or avoided?
4. **Social impact:** How is AI reshaping artistic labour, collaboration, and the role of the artist? Does it expand opportunities or is there a risk of undermining certain artistic practices and artist's means of survival?
5. **Aesthetic reception:** How does AI-generated art affect issues related to taste, the sense of beauty, creativity, and cultural value? How do audiences perceive these artworks?
6. **Curatorial perspectives:** How have curators and institutions presented AI art? In what ways do exhibitions frame, legitimise, or question AI art, and how might curating practices evolve in the future?
7. **Future scenarios of AI art:** How might AI art develop over the next decade? What risks, opportunities, and societal changes can you foresee, in terms of imagination and creativity, ethics, and legal frameworks?

Format of the presentation:

- Oral group presentation (15 to 20 minutes).
- Visual or multimedia components (slides, images, or short videos) can be used to illustrate key points and scenarios.
- Summary with key arguments that will be explained during the presentation.

Following the group presentations, we will have a class discussion with questions and answers from the lecturer and the students.

Failure to fulfil one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

The final grade will be evaluated based on the above-mentioned assignment and the participation in class throughout the whole semester.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr Katerina Valdivia Bruch

Independent curator and researcher. She holds a PhD from the University of Reading, School of Art; an MA in Critical Theory and Museum Studies from the MACBA Museum/Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; and a Postgraduate Diploma in Cultural Policies and Management from the Universitat de Barcelona. Her research areas cover conceptual art, artists' collectives, video and media art, performativity in the visual arts, cultural policies, inclusivity and diversity in the arts, and radical pedagogy. She is the artistic director of the research platform on Latin American art *Rethinking Conceptualism: Avant-Garde, Activism and Politics in Latin American Art (1960s-1980s)*.

COURSE SCHEDULE

3 hours à 45 min per week (Fall Term: 14 course weeks + 1 gap week)

Week 1 – Introduction: Framing AI and Creativity

This week introduces key questions: what do we mean by artificial intelligence, and how does it relate to creativity and imagination? Students will explore foundational, contemporary, and historical perspectives through readings such as Margaret A. Boden's *The Creative Mind* (2004), N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), Arthur I. Miller's *The Artist in the Machine* (2019), Jon McCormack and Mark d'Inverno's *Computers and Creativity* (2012), and Fred Turner's *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (2006), which traces the cultural roots of digital technologies and their influence on creative practices.

Week 2 – AI: A Posthuman Artist?

This session brings together philosophical and speculative perspectives on posthuman creativity. We will read Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* alongside Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman*, asking how AI challenges human-centered models of imagination. Students will debate whether AI can be understood as a "cyborg collaborator" and consider possible futures of creativity. In small groups, students will analyse an AI artwork in terms of form, meaning, and production method.

Week 3 – Case Studies: Pioneers of Computer Made-Art

This week surveys case studies in computer art, including Harold Cohen (known as the world-first AI artist), Vera Mólnar, Rebecca Allen, Lynn Hershman Leeson, and Ernest Edmonds. We will examine selected documentation of early works and discuss how these artists implemented the use of machines in their creative processes.

Week 4 – Contemporary Artists Using AI

This week examines how contemporary artists are using artificial intelligence as a creative tool and collaborator. We will analyse the work of artists such as Refik Anadol (*Machine Hallucinations*), Mario Klingemann (*Neural Glitch*), Sougwen Chung (*Drawing Operations*), Anna Ridler (*Mosaic Virus*), Eli Cortiñas (*The Machine Monologues*), and Ayoung Kim (*Many Worlds Over*), considering how AI influences concepts of authorship, aesthetics, and artistic process. Students will work in groups and reflect on selected artworks in terms of data, algorithms, visual output, and conceptual framing, and focus on the ethical and social implications of AI in art.

Week 5 – Hito Steyerl: Images, Circulation, and Algorithms

This week is dedicated to the influential artist and theorist Hito Steyerl. We will read her seminal texts *In Defense of the Poor Image* and *Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?* and screen her video works (*How Not to Be Seen*, *Factory of the Sun*). The discussion will focus on circulation, resolution, and the politics of images in the digital and algorithmic age. Students will connect Steyerl's arguments about "poor images" and networks to their own experiments with AI image generators.

Week 6 and 7 – Exhibition Histories: Cybernetics and Information Art

In these two weeks we will examine landmark exhibitions that focused on early dialogues between art, technology, and systems thinking. We will study *Cybernetic Serendipity* (1968, ICA London), *Information* (1970, MoMA New York), and the *New Tendencies* exhibitions in Zagreb (1961–1973), and analyse their curatorial strategies, artistic practices, and historical impact. Students will reflect on how these shows framed experimental art, computational approaches, and cybernetic ideas, and discuss their continuing influence on contemporary art and AI.

BREAK: 19 – 23 October 2026

Week 8 – Cybernetics and Transnational Networks

This week focuses on transnational networks of exchange and experimentation in cybernetics in the example of the *Centro de Arte y Comunicación* (Centre for Art and Communication, CAyC for its Spanish acronym) from Buenos Aires. We will examine how artists and theorists engaged with systems thinking, communication theory, and collaborative practices across borders.

Week 9 – Social Cybernetics in Latin America

This week will be dedicated to experiments in social cybernetics in 1970s Latin America, including Chile's Project Cybersyn, Peru's Centro de Estudios de Participación Popular (Centre for Studies on People's Participation, CENTRO for its Spanish acronym), and Waldemar Cordeiro's computer-based work in Brazil, examining their roles in governance, participation, and artistic practice.

Week 10 – Visit I: AI in the Museum/Exhibition

The class visits a museum or media art centre to see AI-related works in an exhibition context (e.g., digital art festival, media art collection). The session focuses on curatorial framing: how do institutions present AI-based artworks? Students will keep a "museum journal" and take notes on the design, selection, and interpretive strategies of the exhibition.

Week 11 – Workshop: Curating AI

This practical session addresses the curatorial challenges of exhibiting AI-based art. Students will work in groups to design a concept for a mini-exhibition, either physical or online, including selection, layout, and interpretive materials. We will discuss how institutions frame AI in relation to contemporary art, technology, and society.

Week 12 – Legal Frameworks: Authorship and Copyright

This week examines how legal frameworks respond to AI-generated artworks. We will take a look at current copyright laws in the US and Europe, highlighting recent cases where authorship and ownership have been questioned. Students will participate in a mock trial to debate whether a specific AI-generated artwork should be protected by copyright and who the rightful "author" might be.

Week 13 – Data, Bias, and Representation

This week engages with critical perspectives on AI datasets and cultural representation which may include discriminatory concerns. Drawing on Safiya Umoja's book *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (2018) and her conversation with Kate Crawford "AI Ethics Conversation*"* at the 2019 Digital Democracies Conference, students will analyse how biases embedded in training data influence aesthetic outcomes. In-class, students will test AI image generators with prompts related to gender, race, and culture, then discuss the results for bias or stereotyping.

Week 14 – Conclusion: Reflections and Future Directions

The final week summarises what has been learned across the course: artistic, conceptual, and legal perspectives on AI art. Students present their final projects (oral paper presentations, curatorial proposals, or creative works) to the class. The course ends with a roundtable discussion about what could be the future role of AI in the arts and cultural institutions.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Registration on Moodle (HU’s e-learning platform)

In case of online sessions

- Fully functional device (laptop, tablet, PC)
- Stable internet connection
- Software: Zoom (video/audio)
- *Recommended* hardware: external headset for better sound quality

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions: be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment: pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions in this international classroom.

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies, especially the academic honor code and the student code of conduct. Plagiarism in even a small assignment will result in failing the entire course.

Attendance policy: Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the lecturer.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 25 September 2025