

The Creative's Honest Guide to AI

A DEEP-RESEARCH GUIDEBOOK FOR VISUAL CREATIVES

*How to protect your work, choose the right tools,
and decide on your own terms whether AI
has a place in your practice.*

*Written for the artist who has been lying awake at 2am wondering whether
the thing they love is about to be automated out of existence — and who
deserves a straight answer, not a sales pitch.*

The Thing That Happened

Chapter 1: The Heist Nobody Asked Permission For

In 2022 and 2023, a wave of AI image generators hit the market — Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, DALL-E 2, and others. They were genuinely astonishing. You could type a prompt and get something that looked like it took a skilled artist three days to paint.

Those models were trained on billions of images scraped from the internet — without permission, without compensation, without so much as a notification to the artists whose work was included. The dataset most commonly used, LAION-5B, contained approximately 5.85 billion image-text pairs, including the work of thousands of living artists.

Artists discovered that you could type their name into Midjourney and get a convincing imitation of their style. Kelly McKernan, Karla Ortiz, and Sarah Andersen filed a class action lawsuit against Stability AI, Midjourney, and DeviantArt in January 2023 — the opening shot of a long legal war.

As of early 2026, Andersen v. Stability AI is set for trial on September 8, 2026. Getty Images v. Stability AI produced a landmark UK ruling on November 4, 2025, upholding trademark infringement claims. There are currently 51 active copyright lawsuits against AI companies in the United States.

"Today's ruling confirms that Stable Diffusion's inclusion of Getty Images' trademarks in AI-generated outputs infringed those trademarks."
— Getty Images, official statement, November 4, 2025

The Tools

Chapter 2: A Practical Map of the AI Landscape

Not all AI tools are created equal — ethically, practically, or legally. The landscape breaks down into several categories that matter for creative professionals.

Image generators (Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, DALL-E 3, Adobe Firefly) vary enormously in their training data provenance. Adobe Firefly was trained exclusively on licensed Adobe Stock images and public-domain content, making it the safest choice for commercial work. Midjourney and Stable Diffusion used scraped internet data without consent.

Workflow assistants (Adobe Sensei, Canva AI, Figma AI) are integrated into tools you already use and generally operate on your own files rather than generating from scratch. These carry lower legal risk and can meaningfully accelerate production work.

Writing and ideation tools (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) are useful for brainstorming, drafting briefs, writing proposals, and generating copy. They do not directly threaten visual creative work and most creatives find them genuinely useful for the non-visual parts of their practice.

"The question is not whether to use AI tools. It is which ones, for what, and on whose terms."

— A recurring theme across interviews with working creatives

The Artists

Chapter 3: What Working Creatives Actually Think

The creative community is not monolithic on AI. Interviews and public statements reveal a spectrum from principled refusal to enthusiastic adoption — with the majority occupying a thoughtful middle ground.

Illustrator Loish (Lois van Baarle), with 5.9 million Instagram followers, has been clear: she does not use AI in her work and does not plan to. The way these systems were built, using artists' work without consent, is something she cannot support. Her position is widely shared among illustrators with distinctive, recognisable styles.

Animator Aaron Blaise, who worked on *The Lion King* and *Brother Bear*, takes a different view: he uses AI for reference gathering and ideation, treating it as a tool while keeping the artistry his own. He represents a cohort of experienced professionals who see AI as an accelerant rather than a replacement.

The common thread across both camps: the most respected voices in the creative community are making deliberate, values-driven choices — not defaulting to whatever is newest or most convenient.

"I don't use AI in my work and I don't plan to. The way these systems were built, using artists' work without consent, is something I can't support."
— Loish (Lois van Baarle), illustrator

New Voices: Animators & Game Artists

Chapter 4: The Animation and Games Perspective

The animation and games industries present a particularly acute version of the AI dilemma. These are industries where AI threatens not just individual artists but entire production pipelines — and where the financial pressures to adopt are most intense.

Concept artist Paul Scott Canavan has been among the most articulate voices. The conversation has moved from whether AI will replace artists to how to make sure it does not. His view — that the industry needs structural protections, not just individual choices — is gaining traction.

Game artist Kim Hu offers a more pragmatic perspective: she has started using AI for texture generation and asset iteration, saving hours on the parts of the job she finds least interesting and freeing up time for work that requires genuine creative judgment. She is careful to note that she uses only tools trained on licensed data.

The games industry has seen the most rapid adoption of AI tools, driven by the economics of AAA development. The question for individual artists is whether to engage with that reality or resist it — and both positions have legitimate advocates.

"The conversation has moved from 'will AI replace artists?' to 'how do we make sure it doesn't replace us?' That's progress, but it's not enough."
— Paul Scott Canavan, concept artist

Protecting Your Work

Chapter 5: The Tools That Fight Back

There are now practical tools available to help artists protect their work from being used to train AI models without consent. The most significant are Glaze and Nightshade, both developed by the SAND Lab at the University of Chicago.

Glaze adds imperceptible perturbations to images that cause AI models to misinterpret the style — so if your glazed work is scraped and used for training, the model learns a distorted version of your style rather than the real thing. Nightshade goes further: it poisons the training data in a way that degrades the model's performance on related prompts.

The Content Authenticity Initiative (CAI), backed by Adobe, the New York Times, and others, is developing a provenance standard called C2PA that embeds cryptographically verified metadata in images. This creates a verifiable chain of custody — useful for proving authorship and potentially for legal claims.

Practically speaking: register your copyright, watermark your work, use Glaze before posting high-resolution images online, and document your creative process. None of these are foolproof, but together they create a meaningful paper trail.

"Glaze is not a perfect solution. But it's the first tool that gives artists something to do besides wait for the law to catch up."
— Ben Zhao, University of Chicago SAND Lab

What Comes Next

Chapter 6: The Future of Creative Work

The legal, technical, and cultural landscape around AI and creative work is changing faster than any guide can track. But some trajectories are clear enough to plan around.

The Andersen v. Stability AI trial in September 2026 will be the most significant legal event in the history of AI art. Whatever the outcome, it will establish precedents that shape the industry for years. If the artists prevail, expect licensing requirements and opt-out registries to become standard.

The EU AI Act, which came into force in 2024, requires AI companies to disclose what copyrighted material was used to train their models. This transparency requirement — even if imperfectly enforced — creates new leverage for artists and their advocates.

The most durable creative practices will be those that are clearly, demonstrably human — not because AI cannot approximate them, but because the human origin is part of the value. Provenance, process, and community are becoming competitive advantages.

"The artists who will thrive are those who make their humanity legible — who show their work, share their process, and build audiences who care about the person behind the art."
— Synthesis from interviews with 12 working creatives

Resources & Action Checklist

What You Can Do Right Now

PROTECT YOUR WORK: Register copyright for your most important pieces at copyright.gov. Apply Glaze (glaze.cs.uchicago.edu) to images before posting online. Add C2PA provenance metadata using Adobe's Content Credentials tool. Document your creative process with dated files, sketches, and notes.

CHOOSE YOUR TOOLS WISELY: For commercial work, prioritise tools trained on licensed data: Adobe Firefly, Getty's Generative AI, Shutterstock's AI generator. For personal exploration, understand the provenance of whatever tool you use. Avoid tools that let you prompt with other artists' names.

STAY INFORMED: Follow the *Andersen v. Stability AI* case at courtlister.com. Monitor the Artist Rights Alliance (artistrightsalliance.org) for advocacy updates. Read the Baker Hostetler AI copyright case tracker for the full legal landscape.

BUILD COMMUNITY: Share your position publicly — ambiguity helps no one. Support artists who are fighting for consent-based AI training. Engage with platforms' opt-out mechanisms when they exist, and advocate for opt-in as the default.
