

Why We Buy the Story, Not the Art: Human Creativity in the Age of AI

June 17, 2025



A brutally honest take on why your creative soul is still safe (and probably more valuable than ever)

Let me start with a confession that might make you cringe: I spent three hours last week arguing with ChatGPT about whether a sunset could be “melancholy.” The AI kept insisting sunsets are “objectively beautiful natural phenomena,” whilst I was convinced this particular sunset looked like it needed therapy.

This ridiculous conversation crystallised something I’ve been wrestling with as both a creator and someone who’s watched AI evolve from party trick to genuine creative tool. Yes, AI is absolutely mind-blowing. Yes, it’s going to eliminate soul-crushing busy work that’s been sucking the life out of creative professionals for decades. But here’s what all the doomsday predictions about AI replacing human artists are missing: **we don’t buy art - we buy stories.**

The Messy Truth About What We Actually Value

Recent research is backing up what every artist has intuitively known forever. A [2025 study by Hall & Schofield](#) found that people prefer human-created art overall and even assign higher monetary value to it. When participants were shown identical artworks – some labelled as human-made, others as AI-generated – they consistently valued the “human” pieces higher. Not because they looked different (they were literally the same images), but because of the story they imagined behind them.

Think about it. When you’re drawn to a piece of music, are you really just responding to the mathematical arrangement of frequencies? Or are you connecting with the 3 AM heartbreak, the childhood memory, the

moment of triumph that the artist poured into those notes?

Ted Chiang nailed it when he pointed out that AI users supply a brief prompt whilst human creators make thousands of conscious and unconscious decisions. It's like the difference between ordering takeaway and spending hours crafting a meal for someone you love. Both feed you, but only one tells a story.

Why AI Actually Makes Human Creativity More Precious

Here's where it gets interesting (and slightly ironic): AI isn't killing human creativity – it's making it more valuable by contrast.

When technical skill becomes commoditised, authenticity becomes premium. When anyone can generate a "perfect" portrait in seconds, the wonky self-portrait your mate painted becomes infinitely more meaningful. When AI can compose symphonies, the off-key song your kid wrote about their pet hamster will still make you cry.

Musicians like Nick Cave and Sting aren't worried about AI because they understand something fundamental: their audiences aren't just buying sounds – they're buying souls.

Cave writes about "the profound human struggle" that animates great art. That struggle, that beautiful human messiness, can't be automated.

What This Means for Your Creative Journey

If you're a creator reading this, here's your reality check: your competition isn't ChatGPT or Midjourney. Your competition is other humans who understand that creativity is about connection, not just output.

This isn't some fluffy motivational nonsense – it's backed by hard data. [Research from Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications](#) found that people ascribe more story, emotional meaning, effort, and intention to works when they presume they're human-made. The researchers concluded that "knowledge of human engagement in the artistic process" positively impacts how we appraise art.

Let me break down what this means for your creative practice:

- **Lean Into Your Humanity** – Your weird perspective, your personal struggles, your unique way of seeing the world aren't bugs to be fixed. They're features that no algorithm can replicate.
- **Embrace the Messy Process** – Whilst AI can imitate any style flawlessly, it can't replicate the specific constellation of experiences, failures, and insights that make you... you.
- **Focus on Connection, Not Perfection** – The artists who thrive in the AI age will be those who lean into their humanity harder, not those who try to out-technical the machines.

The Boring Stuff vs. The Beautiful Stuff

Don't get me wrong – AI is going to be incredible for eliminating the tedious parts of creative work. [Architects are already using it](#) to handle repetitive drafting so they can focus on innovative, human-centred design. Writers can automate research and formatting to spend more time on storytelling. Musicians can generate backing tracks to focus on melody and meaning.

This isn't a threat – it's liberation. All those hours spent on busy work can now be redirected towards what humans do best: feeling, connecting, and creating meaning from chaos.

As Oxford researchers noted, parts of an artist's process can be automated, but the core creative decision-making cannot be replicated by current AI. Artistic creativity is fundamentally about human choices – choosing materials, subject, message – in response to one's culture and lived experience.

The Uncomfortable Truth About Authentic Creation

Creating authentic work means embracing the messy, inefficient, deeply human process of making meaning. It means accepting that your art might not be “perfect” by technical standards, but it's yours in a way that matters.

Too many talented individuals hold back, paralysed by self-doubt and fear of judgement. But here's what I've discovered through this seemingly random exploration of AI versus human creativity: the very imperfections you're worried about are exactly what make your work irreplaceable.

I'm sharing these reflections not as a victory lap, but as an invitation to demolish those internal barriers.

Moving Forward: Collaboration, Not Competition

The future isn't humans versus AI – it's humans with AI as a powerful tool. The key is knowing when to use it and when to trust your irreplaceable human instincts.

Use AI to handle the grunt work. Use it to explore ideas quickly. Use it to push past creative blocks. But when it comes to the heart of your work – the meaning, the emotion, the story – that's all you.

[Even tech CEOs in architecture](#) acknowledge that AI can augment design work but “cannot replace the nuanced human touch and creativity essential in architecture.”

Your Creative Soul is Safe (and More Valuable Than Ever)

Here's what I learned from my sunset argument with ChatGPT: the AI could describe every technical aspect of that sunset perfectly, but it couldn't feel the weight of the day settling into dusk. It couldn't connect that moment to a memory of loss or hope or change.

That's your domain. That's where you're irreplaceable.

The data is clear: whilst AI will play an increasing role in creation, it cannot extinguish our human creative domains. If anything, it challenges us to double down on what makes human creativity unique.

Total Engagement – People consistently choose human-made art when given the choice **Unexpected Connections** – Audiences crave the authentic narrative behind creative work

Personal Growth – Your creative journey becomes more valuable, not less, in an AI world

So keep creating, keep struggling, keep pouring your beautifully imperfect humanity into your work. In a world increasingly filled with algorithmic output, your authentic voice isn't just valuable – it's essential.

The story behind your art? That's something no machine can ever truly generate. And fortunately for all of us, that's exactly what people are buying.

What's your take on AI in creativity? Are you finding it liberating or threatening? Join the conversation and let's turn your wildest creative ideas into reality – because that's what this is all about.