‘Sir, will you accept it?’: Negotiating AI legitimacy in a university drawing course

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the negotiation of artistic and evaluative legitimacy following the introduction of generative artificial intelligence (gAI) tools in a university-level drawing course. By examining the lived experiences of ten art education students and three lecturers at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), the article explores shifts in teaching and learning dynamics that emerge when traditional drawing practices are challenged. Data triangulation, incorporating student artist statements, gAI-generated drawings, and reflective interviews, informed a thematic analysis. This process revealed three distinct student user categories: the “AI purist”, motivated by technical limitations; the “hybrid artist”, seeking creative control; and the “tech-traditionalist”, utilising AI for ideation while maintaining manual execution. The findings indicate that students, often driven by perceived inadequacies in traditional techniques, employed gAI as a creative scaffold, promoting new cognitive processes. The article clarifies the lecturers’ crucial role in validating artistic agency and framing human-AI collaboration, thereby directly addressing student apprehension regarding the ‘acceptability’ of their work. Ultimately, we reposition drawing as an evolving cognitive practice defined by a dynamic negotiation between digital innovation and traditional craft.

Keywords: Art education, art pedagogy, creative legitimacy, human-AI collaboration, expanded drawing, technology integration.

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Introduction

At the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), drawing[1] is a critical component of art education. Çay and Demirel (2022:2507) emphasise the importance of drawing in art education, arguing that it significantly contributes to the development of an individual's visual literacy and communication skills. Drawing spans three years of the four-year undergraduate Art Education programme at UEW,[2] including the course Independent Studies in Drawing (ISD).[3] While all other drawing courses follow strict, often restrictive outlines, ISD fosters independent drawing exploration: students are encouraged to challenge traditional drawing norms, including reliance on mainstream analogue tools such as graphite, charcoal, and paper, reliance on conventional subject matter, and the completion of self-directed drawing tasks. This openness allows students to explore diverse tools, including AI, and drawing pedagogy introduced experimentation with AI in May 2024. This study was prompted by accounts of students' first encounters with AI drawing tools. To prepare students for this exploration, the course featured preliminary sessions examining the historical expansion of drawing boundaries, drawing on examples from conceptual art, digital practices, and scholarship. The use of AI tools in ISD aligned with the course's overall objective: to inspire students to explore a range of tools, materials, and concepts; challenge established drawing conventions; and potentially shape future discourse and the recording of drawing history.

Generative AI drawing tools offer artists and designers new possibilities for creative production and experimentation (Fan & Jiang 2024:1). Despite this potential, their integration into drawing pedagogy at UEW remains ambivalent. There is a notable lack of empirical and qualitative research exploring students' lived experiences as they integrate AI tools into a formal drawing curriculum, particularly in Ghana. In this article, we address this gap by documenting how students utilised gAI tools for the first time in their ISD assignments. By synthesising first-hand accounts and student drawings collected from May to September 2024, we used thematic analysis to highlight key values, concerns, and creative outcomes. Furthermore, we explored the challenges and educational implications of adopting a digitally integrated approach to training art students.

Literature review

Drawing is increasingly understood as a mode of thinking (Nurminen, 2024:85). Marlene Louise Wasserman (2013:101) describes drawing as a cognitive scaffolding that externalises and manipulates thoughts, while Gabriela Goldschmidt (1991:130) argues that sketching is thinking itself. In ISD, this perspective shifts the focus of drawing from technical

proficiency to students' cognitive engagement, independent inquiry, and knowledge construction. Michelle Fava (2020:9) further strengthens this argument by asserting that drawing, as a means of augmenting thought processes, is increasingly recognised as an essential skill for fostering innovation. The cognitive benefits Fava describes show that drawing, as a tool for augmenting thought, does not strictly require the high-level technical rendering skills that often cause anxiety among students. This argument echoes Jean Piaget's (1951:1) cognitive constructivist theory. Students' prior knowledge, worldviews, and experiences, especially in traditional drawing approaches, serve as foundational tools that cultivate independent thinking and knowledge creation. Ultimately, drawing transcends technical execution while still valuing mark-making and craft; it acts as a cognitive scaffold that supports critical thinking, innovation, and the construction of understanding, thereby solidifying its role as a mode of thinking rather than merely an artistic skill.

Using constructivist pedagogy, students who participated in the study approached drawing as a visual language for ideas, exploring concepts, and communicating complex thoughts. The goal was to challenge drawing conventions, develop visual and conceptual literacy, foster independent knowledge creation, and critically question traditional practices. This was made possible by adopting a student-centred approach in drawing pedagogy, shifting the focus from the lecturer to the student. In this approach, Tomljenović and Vorkapić (2020:15) insist that students are not merely passive recipients of pre-existing knowledge constructs mediated by the teacher. Instead, they are motivated to engage actively in exploratory, problem-based learning to deepen their understanding of their artistic potential. They choose their subjects, materials, and even the techniques they wish to explore. Rachel Mark (2017:1) claims this approach empowers students to take ownership of their artistic development. While the integration of general technology into this pedagogical paradigm is well established, the initial introduction of AI was complex and met with ambivalent reception from both students and faculty. The negotiation between AI and manual techniques reflects a broader trend among contemporary Ghanaian artists who navigate the boundaries of tradition and innovation (Mensah *et al* 2024:372).

AI art encompasses diverse practices that use machine learning systems to analyse or generate visual outputs (Cetinic & She 2022:1). Rather than a fixed category, Joanna Zylinska (2020:18) describes it as an evolving field at the intersection of technology and creativity. Considering AI art as the umbrella term for all visual expressions that utilise gAI, we treated gAI drawing as a subset, focusing on techniques and outputs specific to drawing. Our attention was primarily on creating drawings, sketches, line art, and other visual representations in which algorithms mimic human drawing techniques, such as stroke patterns, shading, and perspective. We envisaged this domain as an essential dimension of the semester's drawing activities. Although drawing is often guided by

specific rules and limitations, genuine creativity, which we seek in ISD, stems from the students' ability to think beyond these boundaries and find new ways to express concepts and visual ideas. It takes considerable mental effort to be productive and expressive within these limits, but breaking free of them defines natural creativity. Dejan Grba's (2020:77) study on the cognitive aspects of artefactual creativity provides critical insights into the thinking processes behind gAI-generated artworks. He explains that successful AI-generated artworks emerge when artists go beyond the limitations of algorithms and procedures, blending them with their unique personal traits, interests, and passions. This combination results in art that is both technically sophisticated and deeply personal. This is why Tian *et al* (2025:1) concur that gAI tools could enhance users' creativity, particularly when they are motivated by their interests and social support.[4]

With the advent of AI and its recent integration into art education curricula, it has become a subject of interest to many researchers (Leonard 2021; Pente *et al* 2022:1; Hutson *et al* 2024:1). Specifically, Nicholas Leonard (2021:30) proposes a new material theoretical framework for digital art education pedagogy. His framework aims to reorient discussions around increasingly creative machines. We recognise the ongoing philosophical debate about whether machines have 'true' creativity. In this context, we view these machines as systems that can mimic or automate processes that produce new results traditionally associated with human creativity (Boden 2004:12). Leonard's framework, aligned with New Materialism,[5] regards the machine not merely as a passive tool but as an active, creative partner that students need to learn to work with, regardless of how it functions. This framework supports digital art education by encouraging the integration of AI and digital tools, making it relevant to an increasingly digital society. This helps students master modern tools and techniques. Another benefit of this framework is its capacity to foster critical thinking by challenging traditional ontological and epistemological assumptions. Leonard's framework encourages students to question and explore new ideas about art and creativity. Integrating AI into art education offers students new ways to express their creativity and explore artistic concepts. Despite AI's potential to enhance creativity and broaden creative expression, Joshua Chrosniak (2023:1) warns that these systems are only as good as the data that supports them and the users who interact with or control them. This highlights that human agency, data literacy, and interaction quality are central to AI drawing outcomes, a key finding of this study.

Hutson *et al* (2024:1) provide practical strategies and recommendations for implementing this framework and integrating AI-driven tools into the classroom. The focus needs to shift from purely technical skills to the interplay between form and content. This can be achieved by emphasising understanding to help students grasp the implications of AI-generated drawings. Educators should create an environment that promotes experimentation and innovation in this context. Educators and students must be aware of the ethical

implications of using AI in art. Pente *et al* (2022:1) discuss the ethical issues associated with integrating AI into art education pedagogy. They highlight ethical concerns about AI, including transparency, fairness, and cultural representation. Understanding these issues is critical to integrating AI into art education. gAI tools often use large datasets of existing artworks to generate new images. Some gAI tools merely mimic artists' work. This can lead to copyright infringement issues if the AI mimics the style of protected works without proper attribution or permission (Gill 2022:1). There is also a need for transparency in how AI systems are trained and used, as biases in training data can lead to unfair or discriminatory outcomes (Pente *et al* 2022:1). Another crucial ethical consideration is that AI-generated art must be sensitive to cultural contexts and avoid perpetuating stereotypes or misrepresentations. This includes ensuring that diverse artistic traditions and perspectives are respected and accurately represented (Pente *et al* 2022:1).

Although integrating technology in art education is familiar at UEW, the use of gAI in drawing pedagogy is novel. Given recent technological advances in art education, this semester's ISD activities provided the ideal opportunity to implement gAI tools in drawing pedagogy. In ISD, drawing is viewed as a means of thinking, emphasising cognitive display over mere proficiency. This aligns with Piaget's (1951:1) cognitive constructivist theory, which holds that knowledge is constructed through experience and reflection. While traditional artistic practices have long been rooted in human creativity and intuition, integrating gAI tools presents exciting new possibilities for creative expression. Drawing is an essential form of expression, yet not everyone can draw equally well. It is possible to argue that gAI can bridge this gap by serving as a supportive tool for such students. Avlonitou and Papadaki (2025:21) conclude that AI might serve as a creative catalyst, empowering, expanding, and accelerating human creativity, thereby democratising art and encouraging artists to make discoveries and explore alternative compositional strategies, visual solutions, and modes of creative problem-solving. Building on the definitions of Manovich (2019:8) and Zylinska (2020:18), AI art emerges as a new mode of expression that surpasses human physical and cognitive boundaries. While Cetinic and She (2022) emphasise AI's dual roles in analysis and creation, this study defines 'drawing' as the externalisation of thought, intention, and conceptual design (Wasserman 2013:23). Therefore, gAI-generated images, when conceived, prompted, and curated by our students, are categorised as "gAI drawings" that serve as expressions of original ideas.

Methodology

The study employs a phenomenological research design[6] to elucidate participants' lived experiences of integrating AI into drawing pedagogy at UEW. Phenomenology focuses

on understanding how individuals experience and interpret a phenomenon from their own perspective (Neubauer *et al* 2019:91). This design enabled us to explore the experiences of individuals who utilised generative AI (gAI) in their drawing courses. The study focused on students' first encounters with gAI for drawing, examining their perspectives, uncertainties, and perceptions of the technology. Through data triangulation, integrating drawings, artist statements, and reflective interviews, we achieved a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of students who used gAI in their drawings for the first time, and of lecturers who incorporated gAI into their drawing pedagogy for the first time. Like Brown and Collins (2021:1275), we used artist statements and drawings as methodological tools to elicit and document students' conceptualisation and thinking processes, stimulating self-reflective dialogue during the interviews.

The target population comprised 346 level 300 Art Education students who registered for ISD in the 2024 academic year, as well as seven lecturers who taught the course. The class was divided into seven groups, labelled A to G, each consisting of at least 49 students. The eligible study population for recruitment consisted of groups A, B, and F, where the integration of gAI into drawing pedagogy was piloted. To ensure high-quality data collection, clear inclusion criteria were set: participants had to have used gAI tools as their primary means for ideation, creation, or refinement in their final ISD project, not merely for initial brainstorming. They also had to be willing to participate in in-depth reflective interviews. Applying these criteria, purposive sampling yielded thirteen participants (ten students[7] and three lecturers). Although this sample is small compared to the total enrolment of 346, it explicitly represents the 'early adopters' who are fully engaged in AI-integrated workflows. In phenomenological research, such a focused group is favoured over a larger, superficial sample because it enables the detailed 'thick description' of lived experiences necessary to understand how gAI impacts the drawing process.

Category	**Number of participants**
Group A	1
Group B	8
Group F	1
Lecturers	3
Total	13

Table 1: Distribution of student and lecturer participants by study group.

As shown in Table 1, the distribution of participants was uneven, with a notable cluster (n = 8) from Group B, owing to peer influence and voluntary participation. The initial recruitment of participants who met the inclusion criteria yielded more volunteers from Group B. Within this group, a core of 'early adopters' had emerged, with students actively sharing gAI techniques and influencing one another. Although we obtained informed consent from our students, we maintained their confidentiality and anonymity, even after they expressed enthusiasm to be identified through their drawings. We used pseudonyms to prevent any power dynamics[8] and to mitigate the risks associated with the high visibility and distinctiveness of the 'early adopter' group (Group B), thus ensuring all participants felt comfortable in their responses.

To explore and understand participants' lived experiences, we employed interpretative phenomenological analysis. We examined personal narratives, emotions, and perceptions to uncover unique insights into AI's impact on drawing. Each participant had a distinct narrative. We listened, disentangled, and identified constellations of meaning. This approach aligns with Brown and Collins's (2021:1276) Systematic Visuo-Textual Analysis framework, which integrates visual and textual materials within an interconnected analytical process. Methodological triangulation was employed to ensure rigour, integrating visual analysis of the drawings with thematic analysis of interview transcripts and artist statements. We chose this multi-layered approach to develop a comprehensive understanding of each student's initial user experience. The analysis was conducted across three levels: 1. Formal analysis described visual elements like line, texture, and composition. 2. Technical/process analysis examined creation methods, focusing on gAI tools and text prompts. 3. Interpretative triangulation combined visual and technical evidence with students' expressed artistic intentions and insights from their interviews and statements.

Findings and discussion: Integration of gAI in the drawing pedagogy

One of the central questions guiding this study was how the first integration of gAI into drawing pedagogy was introduced, experienced and negotiated by students and lecturers. The initial classroom engagements focused on orienting students towards self-reflective practice. This involved empowering them to identify opportunities for innovation by critically evaluating their past works to refine their unique artistic styles. Students learned mainstream drawing techniques and approaches through curated, slide-illustrated lectures covering the history of drawing from classical realism to modern digital practices. These sessions were complemented by instructional videos featuring time-lapse demonstrations of master studies and technical tutorials on media manipulation. They were also encouraged to question the established norms of drawing (e.g., constraints imposed by specific

materials, traditional representation, and linear processes). Students were freed from restrictions from previous drawing to explore and redefine conventional and unconventional materials, methods, and techniques, including gAI tools.[9] Lecturer 1 stated in class:

> This is self-directed drawing; you express yourself and explore different materials, and you can do whatever you want in drawing that you could not do in previous classes. This is the time to explore new materials, subjects, themes, and techniques. You can do digital drawings; you can even use AI!

During the initial orientation, the general student population (N=346) appeared shocked when gAI was presented as a legitimate tool for drawing. This reaction was not due to a lack of awareness of gAI; they had previously used gAI tools, such as ChatGPT, for written assignments and had often faced criticism for improper use.[10] Their surprise stemmed from a drawing lecturer encouraging them to use gAI in their drawing course. This sparked numerous questions and curiosity in the class. Some questions included: 'Sir, will you accept it?' 'How would that be considered drawing?'[11] 'Wouldn't that be unfair to those who choose the conventional method?' These questions prompted a discussion of using gAI to create or assist in making drawings, including its ethical implications. Lecturer 2 explained:

> I absolutely support using AI-generated drawings. They are brilliant because they instantly give students new perspectives. The AI can rapidly show you hundreds of stylistic directions that you might never have thought of, which really challenge your conventional aesthetic boundaries. More importantly, it helps students develop their unique styles because, to get a good result from the AI, you must be incredibly clear about what you want. That process of writing and refining your prompt forces you to articulate your conceptual vision, which is essentially refining your artistic language.

Integrating gAI into drawing pedagogy raises issues such as defining acceptable uses, addressing ethical concerns, and adapting traditional principles. These challenge the evolving role of art education, as Lecturer 3 described:

> The world is evolving, and drawing is evolving. These issues are emerging, and we must keep our students in mind.

This implies a need to expose students at UEW to AI literacy, which echoes Emily Driehaus's (2023:1) observation that gAI tools can help students develop essential digital skills that are increasingly important in the modern art world. Exposing students to gAI tools will help them become familiar with the tools they are likely to use in their future careers. The sample identified three first-time AI user categories: the "AI purist", who uses gAI without changes; the "hybrid artist", who generates drawings with AI and edits them in software such as Photoshop; and the "tech-traditionalist", who creates drawings with AI and then renders them manually.

AI purist

The “AI purists” depended entirely on gAI to produce their drawings without human intervention. The recurring theme was their desire to surpass the technical limits of traditional drawing and deliver results that are more efficient and technically proficient, judged by standards of realism, detail, and value. One student in this group was Benjamin, who created all his drawings for ISD using Meta AI from WhatsApp on his Android phone. He stated:

> I chose AI because I struggle with the pencil-and-paper approach. When I realised you would accept AI in your class, I used it to see if I could improve my drawings and get a better grade this time (Benjamin 2024).

While Benjamin’s initial goal was to get a better grade, prompting the gAI to describe his image forced him to translate visual concepts, such as shape, line, and realism, into language. This helped refine his ideas and self-assessment, offering a cognitive benefit beyond technical skill. His motivation is reflected throughout his project, including the *Portrait of a black man* (Figure 1), a 2024 AI-generated drawing created with Meta AI.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Benjamin, *Portrait of a black man*, 2024. AI-generated digital drawing created using Meta AI. Courtesy of the artist.

This AI-generated drawing demonstrates how values can be applied to develop a realistic form. The student's final prompt, simplified here for clarity, involved multiple iterations and technical details beyond the initial request: 'Generate an image of an African figure using shapes and lines with photorealistic detail and strong chiaroscuro.' The resulting image shows a refined drawing characterised by distinct lines, shapes, and colour. Notably, the image appears to depict a woman, not a man, and includes features such as a distinctive head covering and background elements (such as the wig-like shape) that were not explicitly requested. When asked about the gender mismatch and potential stereotyping, Benjamin explained that his focus on technical realism led him to prioritise achieving a specific visual effect over correctness or biases in the AI's interpretation.

Additionally, he chose to title the piece *Portrait of a black man* as a form of conceptual re-appropriation, asserting his human agency over the gAI's default representation. Furthermore, he mentioned the non-removable Meta AI watermark in the bottom right corner as an external limit on his ownership. With this intervention, Benjamin's drawing project attained a level of complexity and finish that exceeded his expectations for what he could achieve through manual processes alone. This recalls an assertion by Kayla Yup (2023), who reports that even the artistically challenged can produce decent, sometimes deceptive, images using gAI.

Similarly, Philip (2024) used AI for efficiency, noting: 'With gAI, I could visualise ideas and quickly execute them. My goal was not line-work, but the dramatic mood and contrast I couldn't capture manually.'

He created *Waterfalls* (Figure 2) on his smartphone using Grok, a gAI chatbot. As noted in his interview, this piece, which resembles a grayscale photograph rather than a traditional drawing, was intentionally styled to be photorealistic and was achieved by explicitly including stylistic modifiers in his text prompts. This demonstrates the efficient and rapid creation of refined drawings, a key feature of AI image systems, as highlighted by Joshua Chrosniak (2023:1). The final image resulted from eight iterative prompts, reflecting Philip's sustained conceptual effort to refine the mood and visual values.

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Philip, *Waterfalls*, 2024. AI-generated digital drawing created using Grok. Courtesy of the artist.

In both cases, they demonstrated a solid understanding of drawing fundamentals. Their works showed deliberate use of line, tonal values, contrast and spatial organisation even though they were generated through gAI systems. Ultimately, the AI purists used gAI as a 'creative catalyst' (Avlonitou & Papadaki 2025:21) to democratise their creative process, accelerate their workflow, and produce outcomes that they felt compensated for their perceived shortcomings in manual technique. Although they explored new techniques that incorporated photographic realism and digitally generated visual characteristics, these works were accepted as deliberate pedagogical outcomes within the ISD course framework, which prioritised cognitive skills[12] and critical reflections over manual skills. Assessment was based on the conceptual clarity of the final output, evidence of critical reflection in the artist statement, and the intentionality demonstrated through the iterative prompting process, rather than the technical quality of manual execution.

Hybrid artists

The second AI user group was “hybrid artists” who dialogued[13] with AI, beginning with AI-generated drawings. They modified the gAI outputs with other software to align them more closely with their intended compositions, colour relationships, narrative content, and stylistic preferences. They recognised AI’s boundaries, which motivated deeper creative intervention and strengthened their sense of artistic ownership. Kwaku’s experience exemplifies the desire for a personal touch. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the AI’s output:

> I wasn’t very comfortable with what AI gave me. In a way, I had not made personal inputs into the drawing. Apart from the prompt I provided, if I had not added anything else, I felt I needed to do more (Kwaku 2024).

Although Kwaku initially added colour manually, he reviewed his work further as he experimented with prompts such as ‘hand-drawn line quality’ and ‘varied line thickness’ before opting for manual modification. Ultimately, he adopted a hybrid approach because the AI-generated image did not adequately reflect his sense of authorship. The AI system produced a structurally coherent line drawing with consistent contours and tonal organisation, but Kwaku manually introduced colour relationships, selective emphasis, and compositional adjustment using Photoshop. These interventions enabled him to make aesthetic decisions that the original gAI images lacked. However, his modification was not intended to correct technical deficiencies; he wanted to assert his creative agency over the final image. For Kwaku, ownership emerged through selecting, altering, and refining the AI-generated image rather than simply accepting what was generated as his final work.

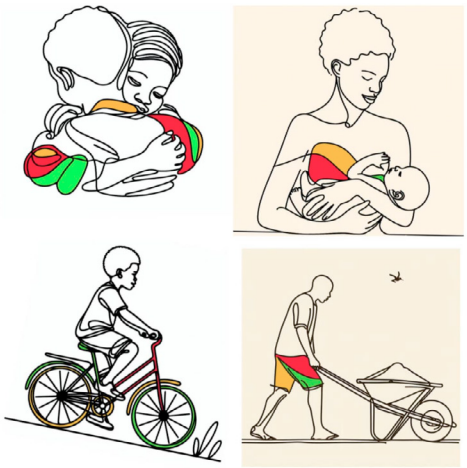

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Kwaku, *Dynamic balance in simplicity*, 2024, AI-generated digital drawing created using Microsoft Copilot. Courtesy of the artist.

Bernard, whose hybrid drawings were categorised as such, aimed to create digital illustrations and animations. He maintained that drawings should be dynamic, tell a story, or be moving. As a result, his project required a recurring cast of digitally illustrated characters with specific actions to perform across interconnected scenes. Although the AI generated visually compelling figures, it did not produce characters with the consistent facial features, costume details and narrative continuity required for animation. This is why he manually drew his characters in Adobe Illustrator and later used Runway to animate them.

> Seriously, AI work is very challenging. It takes work to get exactly what you want from AI. I decided to modify them with other software (Bernard 2024).

His ISD project, *Drawing in motion* (Figure 4), showcases a sophisticated approach to addressing AI's limitations.

FIGURE **Nº 4**

Bernard, *Drawing in motion*, 2024. Digital drawing created using Adobe Illustrator and Runway AI. Courtesy of the artist.

Because AI could not consistently reproduce the same characters across multiple scenes while preserving their defining visual attributes, he resorted to manual drawing in Adobe Illustrator before incorporating them into the Runway AI animation workflow.

Other students, such as Christopher (2024), were dissatisfied with the AI-generated drawings and described such outputs as having 'visual uniformity'. This is because the generated images contained smooth gradients, standardised lighting effects, and highly polished surfaces that were akin to many other gAI images he had encountered online. To him, these characteristics culminate in limitations of AI-generated drawings because they obscure the expressive irregularities and graphical qualities that normally distinguish his work. To address this, he imported the images into Photoshop and PowerDirector, where he added high-contrast outlines, exaggerated edge definitions, and graphic contour effects that were not present in the original gAI images he had earlier generated. He sought to reintroduce stylistic characteristics that regularly appear in his manual drawings, including pronounced outlines, simplified tonal spaces, and stronger visual contrast, into an image he perceived as visually standardised due to its reliance on common gAI-generated textures and lighting conventions. Through these interventions, his authorship became evident not in what he generated but in the selective transformation of that image according to his established artistic preferences.

FIGURE **Nº 5**

Christopher, *Shadows of compromise*, 2024. AI-generated drawing created using Microsoft Copilot, Photoshop, and PowerDirectory. Courtesy of the artist.

Lessons drawn from the collective experiences of our "hybrid artists" demonstrate that the perceived limitations of AI are not a barrier to creativity but a catalyst that unlocks

potential for creative collaboration with the software. AI's inability to generate the drawings they wanted led them to engage more deeply, pushing them to blend their skills with the algorithm's suggestions. This process supports Grba's (2020:77) explanation that the most successful new media (AI) art is created when artists go beyond the tool's procedures to assert their specific aesthetic objectives and conceptual intentions. Ultimately, this dialogue between human intention and algorithmic output led the 'hybrid artists' to produce works that demonstrated the highest degree of modification, intervention, and creative decision-making within the sample.

Tech-traditionalist

The final category of AI users was the "tech-traditionalist". This group of users embodies a synthesis of digital ideation and manual drawing. The students limited their use of AI to inspiration and concept visualisation, while insisting on fashioning their final drawings by hand.[14] This approach demonstrates appreciation for the qualities of creation and traditional media. For example, at the inception of the ISD course, Selasi struggled to identify a suitable theme and visual composition for his semester project. His experience is akin to what artists commonly describe as a "blank page" problem, where uncertainty about their subject matter and visual composition limits their ability to begin their project. Selasi, however, used AI to solve his "blank page" problem. He said, 'I needed more ideas and inspiration' (Selasi 2024), and AI helped him at the right moment. He generated the drawings using Meta AI and then copied them by hand onto wood with a felt-tip pen (Figure 6).

FIGURE **Nº 6**

Selasi, *Different abilities but success is for all*. 2024. AI-generated drawing created with Meta AI and Felt Pen on Wood. Courtesy of the artist.

This method demonstrates that Selasi valued AI for idea generation but preferred to physically produce the final work. Similarly, Michael's adoption of AI for his drawing project was motivated by a philosophical need for tangible presence. He said:

> I wanted AI's creativity, but I also needed the physical presence traditional drawing provides. Traditional drawing is unparalleled in tangibility (Michael 2024).

This perspective reflects his emphasis on 'physical presence' and 'tangibility' in his work, *The pains within* (2024) (Figure 7), which qualities are inherently absent in digital or AI-generated imagery.

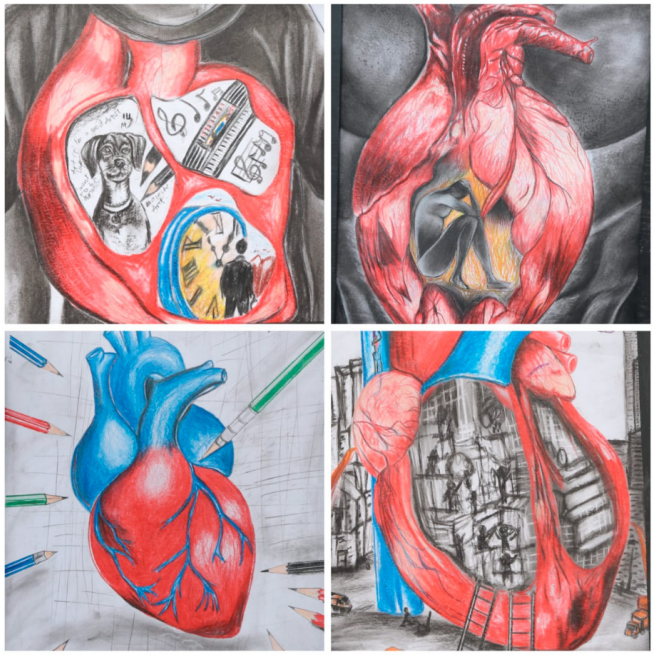

FIGURE **Nº 7**

Michael, *The pains within.* 2024. AI-generated drawings with coloured pencils. Courtesy of the artist.

Although gAI generated the foundational concept and composition, his sense of 'physical presence' persists through the meticulous, coloured pencil rendering of the gAI output. His ISD project showcases pencil textures and hand-drawn lines, giving a tactile quality that a digital print cannot match. Vincent's drawings offer a direct, side-by-side comparison of handmade and AI-generated drawings, aimed at improving skill. He explains,

> This exercise was designed to enhance my technical skills. I can only improve a little if AI takes over my work. At least reproducing what I generated added a personal touch and improved my drawing skills (Vincent 2024).

His drawings, *Pictorial composition-AI vs manual drawing* (2024) (Figure 8), directly materialise this stance through their structural dichotomy.

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Vincent, *Pictorial composition: AI vs manual drawing,* 2024. AI-generated drawings created with Meta AI and ball pen on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

He achieved this by presenting the same compositional arrangement in two formats. The AI-generated image was placed in direct opposition to the manual rendition, drawn with a blue ballpoint pen. This juxtaposition allowed him to compare differences in line quality, tonal handling, surface texture, and expressive mark-making, while practising his observational drawing skills. This arrangement visually reflects his preference for retaining human involvement in his drawing process while using AI-generated imagery as reference material or muse.

Vincent conducted a comparative formal analysis between synthetic and analogue media. The gAI sections exhibit the software's characteristic blended shading and ethereal quality, with the illusion of charcoal and a futuristic appeal. Conversely, the counterpart of his drawing was handcrafted and displayed visible variations in line pressure, overlapping pen strokes, and minor proportional inconsistencies. These micro-variations in line weight, ink density and proportions clearly show the physical presence of Vincent's hand and ground the work in human authorship. This dual approach served a pedagogical purpose: refining his representational drawing skills. Conceptually, his work frames human creativity and AI output as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Findings on the tech-traditionalist approach indicate that AI-generated content is a valuable tool for improving skills and boosting creativity. This aligns with research (Tian *et al* 2025), which demonstrates that AI can enhance artistic creativity, particularly when supported by social connections and interests. Students who combined digital ideas with handmade work embraced innovation while valuing traditional drawing.

Conclusion

The study examined the lived experiences of first-time gAI users in a university-level drawing course. As students navigated new creative boundaries, lecturers shifted from sceptical gatekeepers to pedagogical co-explorers. Despite initial scepticism, encouraging both groups to challenge traditional boundaries fostered unhindered creativity, repositioning AI from a monolithic threat to an adaptable ally. The three user categories – AI purist, hybrid artist, and tech-traditionalist – indicate multiple ways to integrate AI into drawing instruction, not just one 'correct' method.

Purists used gAI to address perceived technical shortcomings in their traditional drawing proficiency. This action is understood within the curriculum's historical emphasis on technical virtuosity, which created pressure for students who felt deficient in manual skills. This shift demonstrates AI's potential to democratise creativity by moving the focus from manual skills to conceptual thinking. Participant accounts suggest that the iterative prompting process helped translate abstract visual intentions into explicit linguistic commands, thereby strengthening their conceptual clarity and planning. Hybrid artists dialogued with gAI, exploring its boundaries to foster creative drawings that reflected their inputs and ownership, switching between the algorithms' output and other digital software. The 'deeper creativity' in their final projects (for example, multimedia and animation) demonstrates greater sophistication and ownership than their earlier manual outputs. Finally, the 'tech-traditionalists' viewed AI as a partner in their drawings, not their replacement. They suggest that AI is not an autonomous author; its production needs manual refinement. Their approach to using AI predominantly for idea generation and to spur curiosity suggests that being innovative does not mean ignoring tradition; instead, technology is a tool to enhance what we already know and do and to explore what we do not know.

Ultimately, integrating AI into drawing pedagogy transcends tool adoption; it nurtures a new cognitive paradigm. We fostered this by encouraging critical engagement, enabling students to define their relationship with technology. Students' experiences with AI shape their view of it as a drawing medium, partner, or muse, challenging the human-versus-machine binary in creativity. It promotes a future in which the artist's vision is realised

through a fluid, personalised harmony between digital and traditional methods. In this way, students are prepared to embrace the digital literacy needed for their future careers. Further longitudinal research is required to track the long-term impact of AI integration on manual skill development and the evolution of artistic identities. Ultimately, this fosters a critical and adaptive skill set that will enable them to succeed in the constantly evolving world of drawing.

Notes

1. Defined here as a complex process of mark-making used for observation, ideation, and visual communication.
2. The structured drawing curriculum at UEW requires students to complete Basic Drawing and Object Drawing in the first year, followed by Figure and Landscape Drawing in the second year, culminating in Pictorial Composition and Independent Studies in Drawing (ISD) in the third year.
3. The official course code ARD361 and course title Independent Studies in Drawing is a three-credit-hour course designed to foster self-directed drawing for third-year students in their second semester.
4. In the context of ISD, "social support" refers to the pedagogical encouragement and peer validation provided within the course.
5. "New Materialism" in this context refers to the theoretical shift that attributes agency to non-human objects. It moves drawing pedagogy away from human-centric skill toward a 'distributed creativity' shared between the student and the digital algorithm.
6. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach concerned with understanding how individuals experience and interpret a particular phenomenon. It aims to describe the meanings participants attach to their experiences (Neubauer *et al* 2019:90).
7. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Despite student enthusiasm for identification, pseudonyms are used to protect anonymity and address the inherent power dynamics of the lecturer-student relationship.
8. Power dynamics involve hierarchical relations between lecturers and students, where authority may hinder honest responses or voluntary participation. All names of participants are not their true names.
9. Most students used free gAI tools like Meta, Grok and Copilot, which were readily available on their phones. The availability of AI tools did not deter their exploration of technology.
10. The acceptable limits for AI use in drawing were set early in the course. Inappropriate use was defined as submitting AI-generated work without human input, iterative refinement, or critical reflection, treating it as unexamined output rather than a genuine display of cognitive effort.
11. This question was poignant as university-wide discussions discouraged AI use for assignments due to ethical issues about authorship and honesty. Endorsing AI in a drawing course diverged from students' understanding of AI's role in academics.
12. The 'thinking' shifts from hand-eye coordination to prompt engineering and conceptual curation.
13. Within this context, 'dialogue' refers to a dynamic, iterative negotiation of agency between the human artist and the algorithmic system. Each prompt, selection, and manual modification recalibrates creative control, distributing intentionality across human and non-human actors, challenging traditional notions of sole authorship.

14. Selasi's final work, *Different abilities but success is for all* (Figure 6), shows significant cognitive effort. The gAI image guided the figures and layout. Manually copying it onto wood with a felt-tip pen simplified digital shading, translated digital lines into wood grain, and faced the permanence of the pen. This process turned the gAI's suggestion into a personal, tactile experience, emphasising the material's expressive qualities.

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