Future of AI in the Arts

Katherine Wang, Michelle Buyan, Samuel Tong, Saniya Mahate

October 3, 2025

Stanford University

Agenda

1 **Intro and Methods**

2 **Interview Results & Analysis**

3 **Summary and Takeaways**

1

Intro and Methods

Meet the Team

Katherine Wang

M.S. Computer Science (HCI)
B.S. Symbolic Systems (HAI)

Michelle Buyan

B.S. Symbolic Systems (DMAR)

Samuel Tong

B.S. Computer Science (AI)

Saniya Mahate

B.A. Economics
M.S. Computer Science (HCI)

Domain Selection
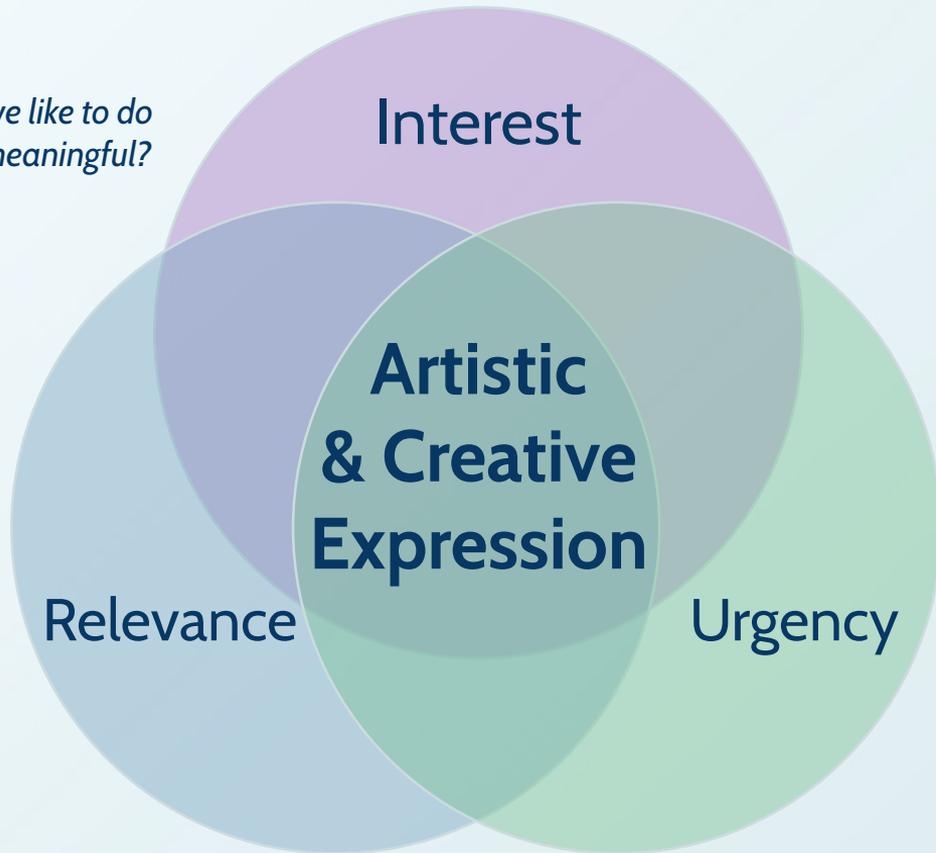

What do we like to do and find meaningful?

Interest

Where does multimodal AI have the biggest opportunity for impact?

Relevance

Artistic & Creative Expression

Urgency

Where has AI adoption lagged? Which sectors are currently struggling?

Recruiting Criteria and Methodology

1 **Beyond the Stanford bubble**

2 **Baseline arts interest**

3 **Diversity**
Across age and relationship to art (casual museumgoers, hobbyists, professionals...)

Onsite at Cantor

Networking

We spoke to...

Jennie

Pharmacist

Andi

Retired, Maker, Teacher @ Fabric Store

Mary

Coordinator at Cantor

Grace

Curatorial Cataloguing Fellow, Legion of Honor

Skye*

Artist, Gallery Assistant

Extreme User: Professional artist and staunchly anti-AI

We asked about...*

Engaging with Art

How do you find and connect with other artists?

Tell us about an experience with art that impactful, memorable, or moving.

How do you remember and reflect on the art you've seen?

What forms of art do you engage with, and when and how?

How do you find artistic experiences?

Have you seen or used generative AI for art? How did it make you feel?

Why do you create or engage with art?

What's the most frustrating part of your life as an artist?

Creating Art

Using AI

Take me through a creative project you worked on e2e, from getting inspiration, to creating, to sharing and distribution.

Do you consider yourself creative?

What motivates or inspires your practice?

What digital and physical tools do you use in your practice?

How do you feel about, especially in artistic or creative spaces?

* Tailored for different participant backgrounds
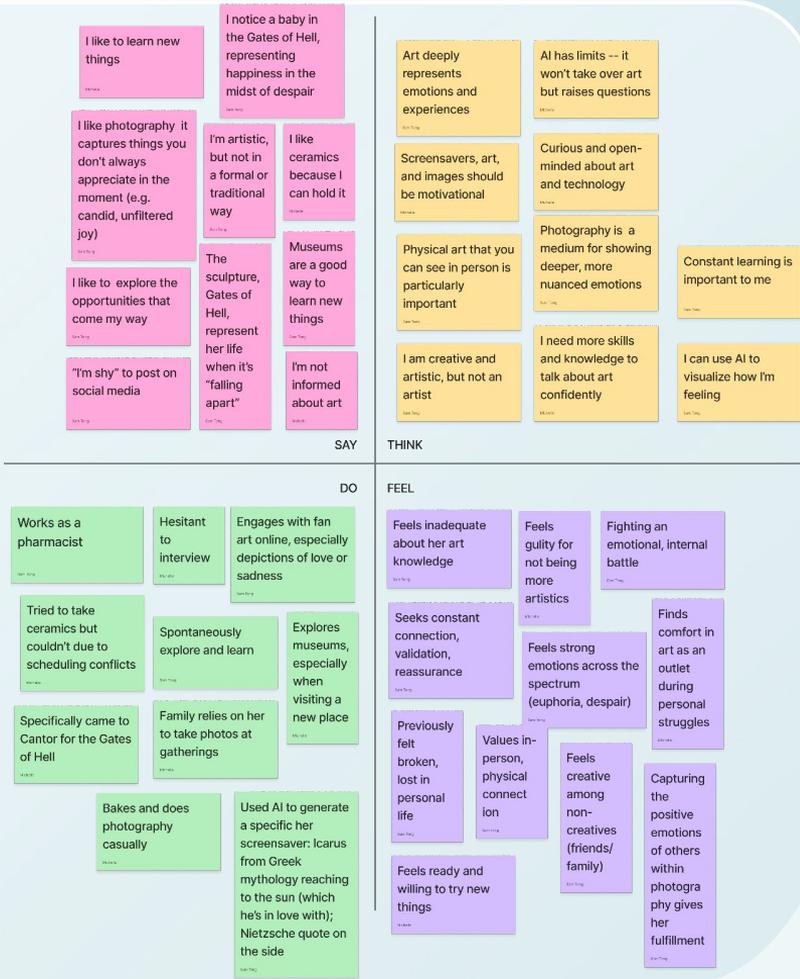
2

Interview Results & Analysis

Jennie

Pharmacist, met visiting the Cantor

"I'm artistic, but not in a formal or traditional way."

"I'm not super informed about art."

SAY

- I like to learn new things
- I notice a baby in the Gates of Hell, representing happiness in the midst of despair
- I like photography it captures things you don't always appreciate in the moment (e.g. candid, unfiltered joy)
- I'm artistic, but not in a formal or traditional way
- I like ceramics because I can hold it
- I like to explore the opportunities that come my way
- The sculpture, Gates of Hell, represent her life when it's "falling apart"
- Museums are a good way to learn new things
- "I'm shy" to post on social media
- I'm not informed about art

THINK

- Art deeply represents emotions and experiences
- AI has limits -- it won't take over art but raises questions
- Screensavers, art, and images should be motivational
- Curious and open-minded about art and technology
- Physical art that you can see in person is particularly important
- Photography is a medium for showing deeper, more nuanced emotions
- Constant learning is important to me
- I am creative and artistic, but not an artist
- I need more skills and knowledge to talk about art confidently
- I can use AI to visualize how I'm feeling

DO

- Works as a pharmacist
- Hesitant to interview
- Engages with fan art online, especially depictions of love or sadness
- Tried to take ceramics but couldn't due to scheduling conflicts
- Spontaneously explore and learn
- Explores museums, especially when visiting a new place
- Specifically came to Cantor for the Gates of Hell
- Family relies on her to take photos at gatherings
- Bakes and does photography casually
- Used AI to generate a specific her screensaver: Icarus from Greek mythology reaching to the sun (which he's in love with); Nietzsche quote on the side

FEEL

- Feels inadequate about her art knowledge
- Feels guilty for not being more artistic
- Fighting an emotional, internal battle
- Seeks constant connection, validation, reassurance
- Feels strong emotions across the spectrum (euphoria, despair)
- Finds comfort in art as an outlet during personal struggles
- Previously felt broken, lost in personal life
- Values in-person, physical connection
- Feels creative among non-creatives (friends/family)
- Capturing the positive emotions of others within photography gives her fulfillment
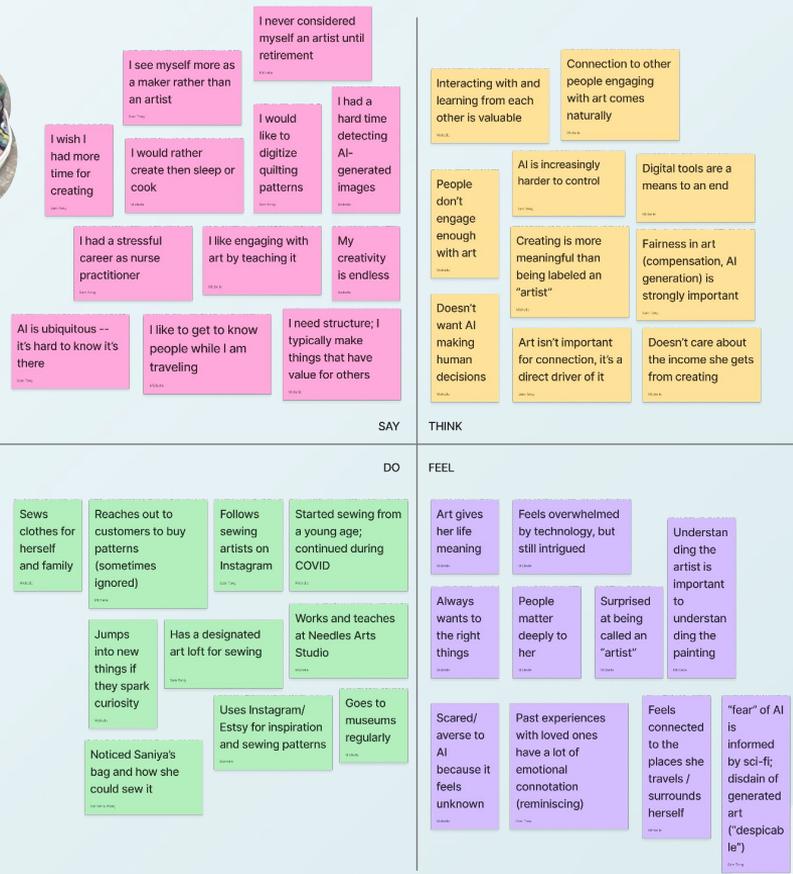- Feels ready and willing to try new things

Andi

Retired scrub nurse, Maker/Artist, Teacher @ Fabric Store

"I love to create and connect with others who create."

"There's so much digitally at the tip of our fingertips that's endless, all these sources of inspiration."

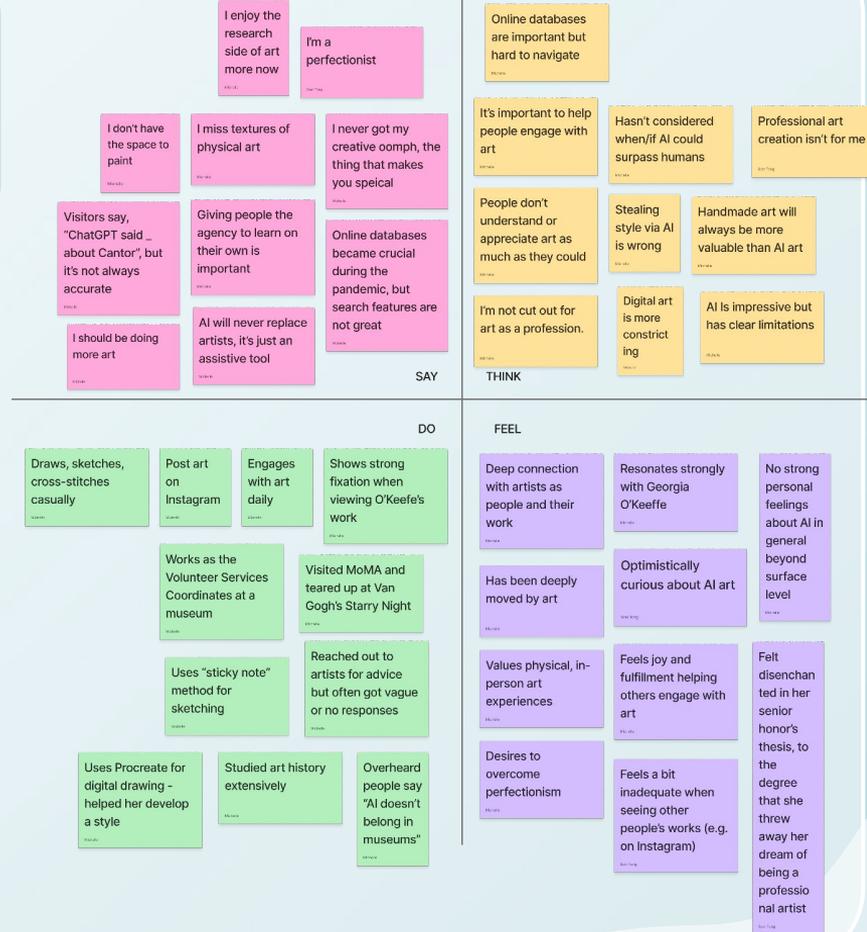"People who have lived here for a long time come in and say they never knew that [the store] exists."

SAY

I never considered myself an artist until retirement

I see myself more as a maker rather than an artist

I would like to digitize quilting patterns

I had a hard time detecting AI-generated images

I wish I had more time for creating

I would rather create then sleep or cook

I had a stressful career as nurse practitioner

I like engaging with art by teaching it

My creativity is endless

AI is ubiquitous -- it's hard to know it's there

I like to get to know people while I am traveling

I need structure; I typically make things that have value for others

THINK

Interacting with and learning from each other is valuable

Connection to other people engaging with art comes naturally

People don't engage enough with art

AI is increasingly harder to control

Digital tools are a means to an end

Doesn't want AI making human decisions

Creating is more meaningful than being labeled an "artist"

Fairness in art (compensation, AI generation) is strongly important

Art isn't important for connection, it's a direct driver of it

Doesn't care about the income she gets from creating

DO

Sews clothes for herself and family

Reaches out to customers to buy patterns (sometimes ignored)

Follows sewing artists on Instagram

Started sewing from a young age; continued during COVID

Jumps into new things if they spark curiosity

Has a designated art loft for sewing

Works and teaches at Needles Arts Studio

Uses Instagram/ Estsy for inspiration and sewing patterns

Goes to museums regularly

Noticed Saniya's bag and how she could sew it

FEEL

Art gives her life meaning

Feels overwhelmed by technology, but still intrigued

Understanding the artist is important to understanding the painting

Always wants to the right things

People matter deeply to her

Surprised at being called an "artist"

Scared/ averse to AI because it feels unknown

Past experiences with loved ones have a lot of emotional connotation (reminiscing)

Feels connected to the places she travels / surrounds herself

"fear" of AI is informed by sci-fi; disdain of generated art ("despicable")

Insights

1 Driven by in-person connection with art/artists but most of her engagement is **online**.

2 Relies on Instagram for **connection** and **inspiration**, but concerned about safety and ethics, especially AI.

3 Spends all her time creating, but doesn't consider self to be an artist.

Mary

Coordinator at Cantor, met on-site

> "Giving people the agency to learn on their own instead of directly telling them is important."

> "I'm a perfectionist."

SAY

- I enjoy the research side of art more now
- I'm a perfectionist
- I don't have the space to paint
- I miss textures of physical art
- I never got my creative oomph, the thing that makes you special
- Visitors say, "ChatGPT said _ about Cantor", but it's not always accurate
- Giving people the agency to learn on their own is important
- Online databases became crucial during the pandemic, but search features are not great
- I should be doing more art
- AI will never replace artists, it's just an assistive tool

THINK

- Online databases are important but hard to navigate
- It's important to help people engage with art
- Hasn't considered when/if AI could surpass humans
- Professional art creation isn't for me
- People don't understand or appreciate art as much as they could
- Stealing style via AI is wrong
- Handmade art will always be more valuable than AI art
- I'm not cut out for art as a profession.
- Digital art is more constricting
- AI Is impressive but has clear limitations

DO

- Draws, sketches, cross-stitches casually
- Post art on Instagram
- Engages with art daily
- Shows strong fixation when viewing O'Keefe's work
- Works as the Volunteer Services Coordinates at a museum
- Visited MoMA and teared up at Van Gogh's Starry Night
- Uses "sticky note" method for sketching
- Reached out to artists for advice but often got vague or no responses
- Uses Procreate for digital drawing - helped her develop a style
- Studied art history extensively
- Overheard people say "AI doesn't belong in museums"

FEEL

- Deep connection with artists as people and their work
- Resonates strongly with Georgia O'Keeffe
- No strong personal feelings about AI in general beyond surface level
- Has been deeply moved by art
- Optimistically curious about AI art
- Values physical, in-person art experiences
- Feels joy and fulfillment helping others engage with art
- Desires to overcome perfectionism
- Feels a bit inadequate when seeing other people's works (e.g. on Instagram)
- Felt disenchanted in her senior honor's thesis, to the degree that she threw away her dream of being a professional artist

Insights

1 Loves **empowering others** to engage with art but **sidelines** her own artistic ambitions.

2 Values art and communities **online**, but prioritizes **physical art experiences** for deeper, more emotional experiences.

3 Sees both ethical risks and potential with AI, including in the arts.

SAY

- I enjoy the research side of art mo...
- I'm a
- Some museum digital features are important and useful, but can also be inaccurate — Katherine Wang
- I don't have the space to paint
- I miss te... physical...
- ...t my ...oomph, the ...makes you special
- Visitors say, "ChatGPT said _ about Cantor", it's not always accurate
- Giving people the agency to learn on
- wants to make more art but lacks "that creative oomph"
- Online databases became crucial during the pandemic, but search features are not great
- I should be doing more art
- ...ce artists, it's just an assistive tool

THINK

- Online databases are important but hard to navigate
- art is powerful and it's important to help people engage — Katherine Wang
- It's imp... people... art
- ...onsidered AI could surpass humans
- Professional art creation isn't for me
- People don't understand or appreciate art as much as they could
- AI in art has some ethical concerns and limitations, but also potential — Katherine Wang
- ...art will ...nore ...an AI art
- I'm not cut out for art as a profession.
- Digital art is more constricting
- AI Is impressive but has clear limitations

DO

- Draws, sketches, cross-stitches casually
- Post art on
- Engages with art daily
- Shows strong fixation when viewing O'Keefe's work
- posts personal art on Instagram
- ...e ...ervices ...at...
- Visited MoMA and teared up at Van ...ght
- fixates intensely and emotionally on the art she sees
- Uses "sticky" method for sketching
- ...but often got vague or no responses
- Uses Procreate for digital drawing - helped her develop a style
- Studied art history extensively
- Overheard people say "AI doesn't belong in museums"

FEEL

- Deep connection with artists as people and th... work
- Resonates strongly
- open-minded about ai -- in general and in context of art
- No strong personal feelings about AI in general beyond surface...
- Has been deeply moved by art
- Optimistically curi...
- values in-person art experiences for feeling connection and being moved
- Values physical, in-person art experiences
- Feels ... fulfill... othe...engage with art
- Desires to overcome perfectionism
- Feels a bit inadequate when seeing other people's works (e.g. on Instagram)
- ...an ...er senior honor's thesis, to the degree that she threw away her dream of being a professional artist

Grace

Curatorial Cataloguing Fellow, Legion of Honor

"It's nice to see that someone really connected with the exhibit and was moved by it... If you don't emotionally click, exhibits can feel bland."

"I want all my databases to be digitized and shared online... I've said this 5 times."

SAY

NFTs were a 'shiny, new thing' with little impact on archive spaces, and wave of AI potentially has similar outcome

"I don't want to say that AI will be all over museums in 10 years because I don't want to be wrong, but..."

Although there was skepticism, internet had immediate 'obvious' use case for museums/archives, but there is no obvious case with AI

If a type of art interests you so will the exhibit... but if it doesn't and the exhibit is boring, so will be your experience

"I want all my databases to be digitized and shared online... I've said this 5x"

Digital art tools are tacky, like NFTs

Tapping into different communities increases art engagement

"Circulation of media, information, and culture"

"No net good from incorporating AI in museums"

AI can help with building and maintaining digital archives

Music scenes and festivals bring people together

"...a lot of people don't have meaningful experiences"

AI initiative launched by museums met with backlash from fellows

"It's nice to see that someone really connected with the exhibit and was moved by it... if you don't emotionally click, exhibits can feel bland."

I met cool people through work, but I don't have a makers or artist community

Archives aren't always accessible, takes (institutional) privilege to see them

"Publicly accessible archives bring you cool stuff you wouldn't see otherwise, where the info isn't accessible to most peopel and the stories are often suppressed"

Interest in Black photo archives because it's personal, matches cultural interest, and is political

Repatriation of art allows people to re-connect with their family history

Art "immerse(s) you in splendor and history"

THINK

Art brings people together, whether in present or even with past

Access to art + information for everyone is important

Should be increase of art intersection with community / connection

Information gaps prevent people from getting jobs in curator space

AI doesn't help with her work or research

Art should be digestible and invoke emotions for ALL people

Art space is very privileged and gate-kept

Most museum work (i.e. curator work and exhibit design) can't be replaced by AI

AI doesn't contribute to museums

Spread of knowledge is important for human existence

AI is inevitable

AI is here to stay

DO

Obtained a master's degree in history

Currently a Fellowship at the Legion of Honor in SF, focusing on conservation and cataloging of European paintings

Worked at the Palo Alto Art Center this summer

Frequently engages with art and physical media at school; would go to special collections

Physically more closed off at start (crossed arms) before opening up (leaning back, lounging)

Active reviewer on Letterboxd + Goodreads, but avoided talking about it in depth when prompted

Works in arts/ culture because all colleagues there love the field (no perks like salary)

Only attends events with people they already know, not an existing 'art community'

Conversed in more chatty and casual manner pre-interview, but more held back and intentional during interview

Met cool people through work

FEEL

Frustration that the museum's work has to 'pander' to donor's desires

Feels art more viscerally when physical instead of digital

Intellectually driven by their work (i.e. the archive)

Love museums and art culture

Aversion to being wrong

Negative associations with AI, especially in regards to her work

Felt more 'formal' in the interview setting

Hesitant around believing AI hype

Felt moved recounting an experience where a museum-goer complimented the curator on the exhibition

Unsure about their own conviction about AI / art (swinging between more and less conviction with further questioning)

Embarrassment when discussing discovery of art and archives through Instagram 'algorithm'

Insights

1 Loves hearing **positive feedback on museum exhibits**, but doesn't get explicit **validation** often.

2 **Concerned about AI** and its role in the arts, but also appreciates digital tools for **information accessibility**.

3 Art (accessed digitally and physically) **brings people together**, but can also be gatekept and **inaccessible**.

SAY / THINK / DO / FEEL

- NFTs were a 'shiny, new thing' with little impact on archive spaces, and wave of AI potentially has similar outcome
- "I don't want to say that AI will be all over museums in 10 years because I don't want to be wrong, but..."
- Although there was skepticism, internet had immediate 'obvious' use case for museums/archives, but there is no obvious case with AI
- Need to tap into communities to increase meaningful art engagement
- Digital art and AI in museums is tacky
- Art brings people together, whether preserving even with the past
- Art brings people together in the present and even with the past
- Tapping into different communities increases art engagement
- "Circulation of media, information, and culture"
- "No net good from incorporating AI in museums"
- AI can help with building and maintaining digital archives
- Information gaps prevent people from getting jobs in curator space
- Access + information for everyone is important
- Art should be
- Art can be powerful if presented well
- "...a lot of people don't have meaningful experiences"
- Art and media archives are important for personal interest and societal good
- AI doesn't contribute meaningfully to museum work but is inevitable
- Art needs to be accessible and not gatekept
- i met cool people through work, but I don't have a makers or artist community
- Archives aren't always accessible, takes (institutional) privilege to see them
- accessible archives bring you cool stuff you wouldn't see otherwise, where the info isn't accessible to most peopel and the stories are often suppresed"
- Interest in Black photo archives because it's personal, matches cultural interest, and is political
- AI doesn't help with work or research
- Most museum work (i.e. curator work and exhibit design) can't be replaced by AI
- Repatriation of art allows people to re-connect with their family history
- Art "immerse(s) you in splendor and history"
- AI is inevitable
- AI is here to stay

DO
- Obtained a master's degree in history
- Currently a Fellowship at the Legion of Honor in SF, focusing on conservation and
- Worked at the Palo Alto Art Center this
- Frequently engages with art and physical media at school; would go to special collections
- Engages with media/art physically and online: visiting archives, on Letterboxd, at museum
- Works in arts/culture because all colleagues there love the field (no perks like salary)
- Only attends events with people they already know, not an existing 'art community'
- Conversed in more chatty and casual manner pre-interview, but more held back and intentional during interview
- Met cool people through work

FEEL
- Frustration that the museums work has to 'pander' to donor's desires
- Feels art more viscerally when physical instead of digital
- Intellectually driven by their work (i.e. the archive)
- Love museums and art culture
- Aversion to being wrong
- Intellectually and personally driven by art and their work
- Felt more in the in setting
- Frustrated by inaccessibility of art and 'pandering' to donors
- Felt more recount experience where a museum-goer complimented the curator on the exhibition
- (swinging between more and less conviction with further questioning)
- Embarrassment when discussing discovery of art and archives through Instagram 'algorithm'

Skye

Artist, Gallery Assistant

"The most rewarding part of my art is being able to bring an idea into the world and honor it.. the next best thing is sharing it with people and getting validation from others."

"Instagram feels awful and humiliating... shallow."
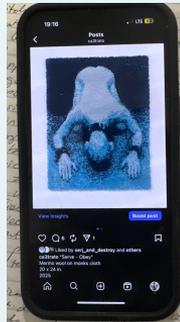
SAY

- Jokes about 'signing away their rights' when signing the consent form
- Takes inspiration from oceanography
- I feel art so deeply in my soul
- Art reflects personal identity; it's not just a profession
- Seek art that "helps them cope with being alive"
- I want my work to be seen and shown
- Gallery world feels more closed, exclusive, and bureaucratic
- My studio is where I get shit done
- I've have a rough time with school, MFA, grad applications
- I need validation, don't want it
- Instagram is humiliating. My visibility depend on likes and algorithmic approval
- Geology helps inform my art process
- I don't identify as a painter
- The most rewarding part of my art is being able to bring an idea into the world and honor it
- I don't want to make art that is appealing to the entire world
- I never had an artistic community before SF
- I had a rough time in art school

THINK

- One slip-up with AGI can cause massive destruction
- Questions what the purpose of the interview is
- To get visibility, you need to master the algorithm
- Art schools don't prepare students for the realities of the art world
- The art world is exclusionary; it dooms artists without access to resources
- Art is tied to personal life, emotions, struggles
- AI art is tacky, but has potential
- People feel doomed about AI just because it is new
- Instagram is unethical
- IG is necessary for platform
- Don't want to create art that is palatable for every person

DO

- Surprised when we moved conversation from work they've made to their life
- Taught fiber art through passed down family knowledge
- Went to art school at University of Michigan, but took some geology classes
- Stopped making art for years
- Makes a lot of work related to identity
- Stopped cross stitching, focuses on more mixed media
- Made 'tortured' art in past
- Used to write music
- Networks and posts via Instagram
- Reached out after interview to ask to see consent form again
- Previous job at Minnesota Street Gallery
- Gets recommendations from others about art to visit
- Eager to talk in depth about their work - their inspiration and proccesses
- Journals about art they see

FEEL

- Their artistic creations reflect who they are on a personal level
- Coming to SF was serendipitous -- for finding community and people
- Repulsed by lack of authenticity within community
- Self-conflicted about use of Instagram
- Expects a lot from themselves, art wise
- Art is a way to process emotions and interiority
- Used to be terrified of sharing art, not anymore
- Frustrated at the access barriers
- Feelings can change their mind
- Proud of their art
- Feel motivated and driven by being able to bring ideas to life
- Feels validated and motivated when community engages with their work
- Turmoil, yet acceptance about the future of AI
- Excited to reflect on how art connects with their life experiences

Insights

1 — Create to **self-express** identity but seek external **validation** for **affirmation** and **material support**.

2 — Finds that artistic **community** is vital for connection and access but **networking** feels shallow.
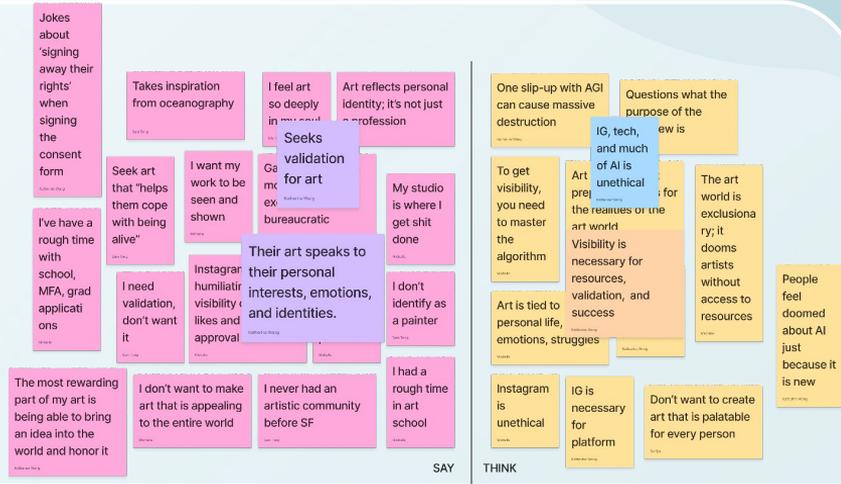
3 — Relies on Instagram for **visibility** and **networking**, but feels repulsed by its **shallowness** and Meta's **ethics**.

3
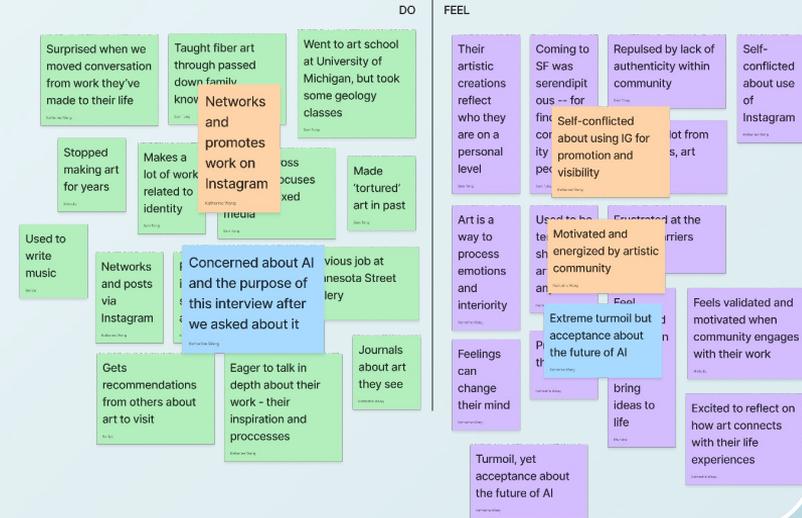
Summary and Takeaways

Key Learnings

01

Art is vital for self-expression and connection

Art allows people to self-express or connect with identity and emotions.

02

In-person experiences are the most meaningful

Most engagement happens digitally (for inspiration and general access), but people found immersive experiences to be most impactful.

03

Community is powerful

Creative communities bring people together and yield inspiration. But connections can also be inaccessible and networking can feel shallow.

04

Digital tools bring opportunities and concerns

Digital tools allow for connection and access. But current tools and platforms like Instagram and AI face some ethical backlash and hesitation.
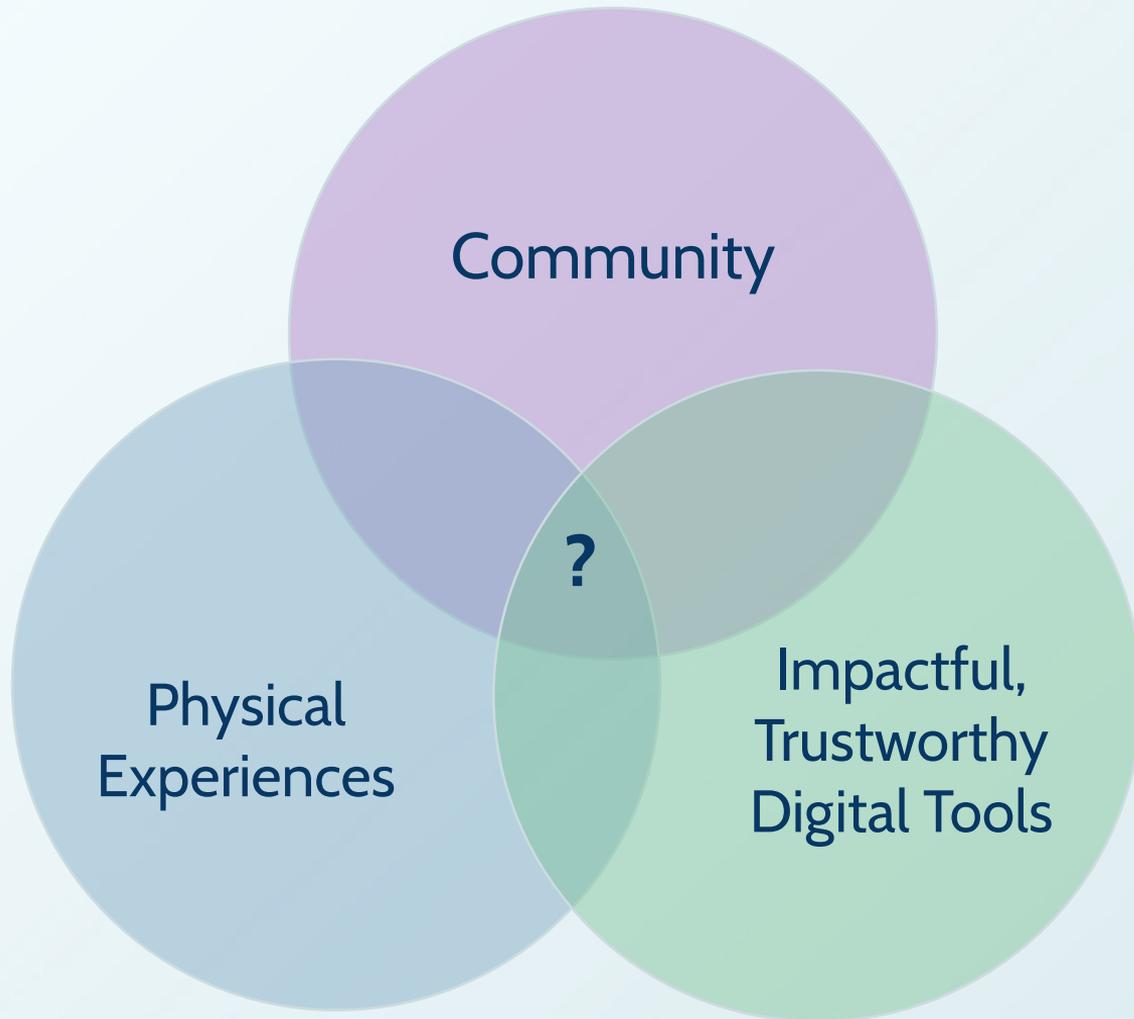
What's Next?

1 **Narrow down problem domain within artistic and creative expression**

2 **Targeted interviews based on narrowed focus**

3 **HMW statements and experience prototyping**

Thank you!

...Questions?

Appendix

Interview Breakdown

Where	5 in-person interviews (museums, personal studios, home)
When	2 spontaneous, 3 pre-scheduled
Script	Mix of pre-drafted and spontaneous follow up questions based on participant background; emphasis on listening and asking "why"
Apparatus	Audio recordings, written notes, photos
Ethics	Offered coffee for their time, established trust through conversation
Lengths	25-75 minutes
Procedure	2 people interviewing, one facilitating, another taking notes

We asked about...

Engaging with Art	Creating Art	Using AI
What forms of art do you engage with?	Do you consider yourself creative?	What comes to mind when you hear "AI"?
Where and how often do you engage?	Do you make your own art? What's your process?	Have you seen or used generative AI for art? How did it make you feel?
Tell me about the last time you were emotionally moved by art.	What digital/physical tools do you use?	

Empathy Map: Jennie

Needs

A way to express and visualize her emotions in some sort of creative/ artistic outlet

Sam Tong

Needs flexible, low-barrier ways to create

Michelle

Needs accessible context for art, she admits being "ill-informed" but appreciates the structure of museums

Michelle

To find spaces to learn new things

Sam Tong

Needs tangible, creative outlets (baking, ceramics, holding a camera)

Michelle

Insights

Art is an outlet/ funnel to truly understand and channel (and validate?) big emotions. It allows her to truly feel things

Sam Tong

She thinks she's creative, but not conventionally artistic. She can think it, but not apply/create it

Sam Tong

Empathy Map: Andi

Needs

Engage with other artists to feel inspired

Katherine Wang

Feel safe online

Katherine Wang

Create and make!

Katherine Wang

Interact with and learn from others always

Katherine Wang

Insights

Likes connecting with other artists on Instagram, but doesn't like using it when it becomes irrelevant or unsafe

Katherine Wang

Spends all time creating, but doesn't consider self to be an artist

Katherine Wang

Driven by engaging with art/artists physically (e.g. going to museums, meeting people at the store), but most of her engagement is digitally (e.g., inspiration from Instagram)

Katherine Wang

Art breathes meaning into her life, such that her world seems to revolve around these passions

Sam Tong

Reaches for spontaneous and novel inspiration + creativity, even with more planned engagments (i.e. planned trips, unexpected violinists or noticing Saniya's bag and how she could sew it)

Saniya

Empathy Map: Mary

Needs

A way to express and visualize her emotions in some sort of creative/ artistic outlet

Sam Tong

Needs flexible, low-barrier ways to create

Michelle

Needs accessible context for art, she admits being "ill-informed" but appreciates the structure of museums

Michelle

To find spaces to learn new things

Sam Tong

Needs tangible, creative outlets (baking, ceramics, holding a camera)

Michelle

Insights

Art is an outlet/ funnel to truly understand and channel (and validate?) big emotions. It allows her to truly feel things

Sam Tong

She thinks she's creative, but not conventionally artistic. She can think it, but not apply/create it

Sam Tong

Empathy Map: Grace

Needs

track and preserve art and physical media

Katherine Wang

interact with art in physical spaces for art regardless of digitization + whatever new wave of technology comes next

Saniya

engage museum visitors with compelling and original exhibits

Katherine Wang

reflection of personal interests and identity through art and media

Katherine Wang

Insights

contradiction: feels negativity about AI, but also uncertainty towards its impact or tangible uses in art

Saniya

Loved seeing positive feedback on museum exhibit, but doesn't see that explicit validation often

Katherine Wang

Negative impression of museums as gatekeepers but works at one

Katherine Wang

Empathy Map: Skye

Needs

gain external validation

Saniya

see and be seen by others

Katherine Wang

support material needs to create (funding for living and supplies)

Saniya

build community relationships and support

Katherine Wang

Insights

can't effectively create or express themself without validation + support

Saniya

To them, Instagram is a repulsive platform because of its shallow community and Meta's ethical history -- but it's a necessary means to an end

Sam Tong

They create to express their identity and sense of self, but seek external validation

Katherine Wang

Building artistic community is necessary for support, connection, and happiness, but they feel that networking for artistic success is shallow.

Katherine Wang

Misc Artifacts

Mary's Favorite Art in Cantor

Jennie's AI-Generated Lockscreen

Andi's quilted sneaker creations

Andi's IG inspiration

Skye posting their art on IG