

AI on Art – Talking About Your Art

At dinner last night, one the guests took a number of brief glances at the painting on the living room wall while the conversation covered a range of subjects.

“You did that, right?” I nodded affirmatively. He didn’t say anything but turned his attention to the next course being served. Towards the end of the meal he asked, “Those colors, what’s that all about?”

One of the other guests came to my rescue, “AI likes to use color in unusual ways.” I tried to deflect his question by describing the subject matter. “This is a painting of a Buddha figure.” But he persisted, “What were you thinking?”

I tried, “I wanted to capture the sense of spirituality that surrounded this ancient figure.” But he wanted more, “Why did you use these particular colors?”

I have never really figured out how to respond to these types of questions. Had they come from another artist, I might have answered by describing my design decisions, the techniques I used and the intent behind their use. I would have explained that the painting “told me” it needed the bright, warm passages to balance and contrast with the cool, muted ones. That their shape was also predicated by what I felt was needed to create a harmonious whole. I might also have spoken about my desire to create a sense of mystery by creating “lost and found” passages and by making the pictorial space shallow and ambiguous.

But my guest is not a painter. So I tried to explain that artwork is not entirely complete when the artist has finished, signed and framed it for viewing. Rather the full cycle occurs when another person sees and responds to it. Only then does visual communication occur. So I reversed the question, “What do you think it means? How do you read this painting?”

He paused, “I have my own interpretation but I really wanted to know what was in your mind when you created it.” I began to understand.

He was unsure whether his assessment of the ambiguity was “correct”. I explained that there is no wrong or right way to view the piece. When I started it, I did have something in mind. But as I painted along, somewhere along the way I abandoned that initial image and instead interacted with the painting as it evolved. As I paint in a loose, impulsive way and I am using water media, the process intentionally allows for “accidents” which must be incorporated into the piece. I explained that my approach involves exploration. In the context of the particular painting I am seeking to extract the image using the materials at hand and the skills I have developed. He gave me a blank stare.

I gave up, “I was trying to capture the light, an energy force.” He smiled broadly, “That’s exactly what I thought.”

Bingo, visual communication complete.

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