



Duncan of Jordanstone  
College of Art & Design  
University of Dundee

# LAUREN EVANS

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AI-generated Art, Augmented Reality Filters, and  
the Impact on the Female Nude

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Fine Art

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## **Abstract**

This paper will attempt to answer the question; how will AI-generated imagery affect the female nude? This question is of interest to me as I have had experiences with image-based sexual abuse and online grooming over ten years ago, and I wonder how the technological advances of AI affect women's online safety even further. I also find it interesting to learn about the increased amount of cosmetic surgery that young women are going under the knife for, to look more like an augmented reality filter that they have seen via social media. I am curious to find out whether the impacts of AI-generated 'models' will incur a new type of cosmetic surgery trend in the near future. As the AI technology is still very new, many of the theories I have researched are somewhat hypothetical, however, patterns regarding the male gaze seem to argue that the female nude will continuously be 'designed' to appease Western beauty standards and therefore, reinforce harmful stereotypes about how a woman should look in reality.

Within this paper, analysis and mention of what is referred to as 'the female nude' typically refers to that of the Western beauty standards; a white, cis-gendered woman. This reflects the popularity of such paintings and images, from the early Renaissance to modern day.

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## Introduction

Within this paper, I will be attempting to answer the question; how will AI-generated imagery affect the way in which we see the female nude, both within the fine art world and within everyday life. In Chapter One, I will be discussing research that highlights representation of the female nude throughout history, specifically during the Renaissance period, and will deliberate about the famous Venus figure from said era, and how that figure still holds influence over beauty standards today. The historical context of this is vital to understand in order to begin answering the question outlined above, as “famous nudes in art history were thought to be near-perfect configurations of the ideal female form,” (McDonald, 2001), meaning that the ideal body type has been portrayed within fine art for centuries, and therefore must have an affect on how women in particular feel about their bodies, as these famous works are continually admired and on display today. I will also be discussing examples of contemporary references to said famous nudes in art history, primarily examples that represent the body of Venus, showcasing their relevance to this research topic regarding fine art and its influence over beauty standards, primarily for women.

Chapter Two will discuss the impact of social media and augmented reality filters on the female nude and Western beauty standards. The introduction of this technology, which is still a new technological advancement as it is less than thirty years old, has already affected the way in which young people in particular want to represent themselves, and the consequent increase of cosmetic surgeries. I will also discuss the importance of social media in regard to the career of a contemporary artist, as “social media platforms [have] become a core tool to enable contemporary artists [...] to gain visibility and reach their audience,” (Riccio, Hofmann, & Oliver, 2024). Social media has become a powerful marketing tool, even within the world of fine art, with some artists making their living through commissions and sales that have stemmed from connections made via social media platforms. As this technology is seeming to have such an impact on art, it is worth questioning what kind of impact the next technological development will have; will AI

become an integral part of being a contemporary artist or will its prompted outputs create a new movement in fine art, making more traditional artists obsolete?

Within Chapter Three, I aim to debate the authenticity of AI-generated imagery, discussing who the creator of the outputs are, and ask whether AI-generated imagery can indeed be considered as a type of art movement as it inherently “lacks the emotions and sensations that an artist experiences,” (Mazzola, Carapezza, Chella, & Mantoan, 2024), therefore, can it truly be described as art? I will also be discussing the ethics behind AI-generators, as this software is trained on art created by humans that is posted online, often without the consent of the artist themselves. There is also a question of ethics regarding the way in which the technology is being used; AI-generators can create ‘deepfake’ pornography using the likeness of real people, primarily without their consent. If the technology is creating an avenue and output for online sexual abuse, will this be influencing how the female nude is being represented?

I believe these discussions to be critical to fine art studies, specifically those that focus on societal relationships like technological advances and the patriarchy. If contemporary artists are to embrace the potential benefits of AI-generators, then we should first dissect the ethics behind using the technology and integrating it into a potential artistic movement. However, as it is a new technology, there will inevitably be many bumps in the road whilst society figures out its flaws as it is implemented into our daily lives. I question if the fine art world can or should allow for such unregulated technology.

## Chapter One: Past Representations of the Female Nude

The mention of the female nude within fine art likely evokes an image of ‘Venus’, whether that be in the form of the *Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli (c. 1485), the *Sleeping Venus* by Giorgione (c. 1510), or possibly *Venus of Urbino* by Titian (c. 1538). Perhaps even the Venus de Milo comes to mind, a sculpture “for the citizens of Ancient Greece, according to the Classical ideal of bodily perfection,” (McDonald, 2001), created almost 2,000 years before artworks of the Renaissance. These iconic depictions of the female nude depict a white, cis-gendered woman representing the being of the Greek goddess Venus, a “framework dictated over centuries by the men with the tools to craft out expectations of how women’s bodies should look” (Atlanta, 2024).



Figure 1 - *The Birth of Venus* by Botticelli 1485 ca., tempura on canvas, 172.5 x 278.5 cm



Figure 2 - *Sleeping Venus* by Giorgione c. 1510, oil on canvas, 108 x 175 cm



Figure 3 - *Venus of Urbino* by Titian, 1538, oil on canvas, 119 x 165 cm

Paintings of nude women in the Renaissance period were largely created by male artists, as women were not permitted to engage in studying life drawing even when they were eventually allowed to attend art school almost 300 years later. Therefore, as coined by film theorist Laura Mulvey in 1975, the 'male gaze' was formed and centuries later it is still a widely discussed concept within fine art and much of popular media. The 'male gaze' is a term used to describe the way a woman's body is presented within media to reflect the male audience's ideal interpretation of beauty and to serve their heterosexuality. The 'male gaze' has been "carved out for certain kinds of erotic imagery in Western culture [for] well over 500 years" (Lindquist, 2020), and so one would assume that the depictions of idealistic female beauty within fine art would be deeply rooted in many life drawing models - however, within the early art schools of the Renaissance era the potential scandal of using a life model meant that some male students "preferred to do it without her" (Borzello, 2022). Without a female nude being in the room with these upcoming artists, they were free to imagine and create what they perceived as the definition of women's beauty, free to create an idealized version of the female body anatomy. Again, the 'male gaze' defines how men desire the female body to look like, even if 'only' within the world of fine art.

A famous example of the female nude that was created for and by the 'male gaze' was the *Birth of Venus* by Botticelli, which was likely commissioned by "a member of the rich and powerful family of Medici," (Gombrich, 1950). Botticelli's patron was Lorenzo, grandson to the head of the Medici family. A famous patron of the arts, Lorenzo was nevertheless a male patron and close friend of Botticelli (Gihring, 2022), and had commissioned the Venus painting to be inspired by classical statues of Venus from Ancient Greece (several of these were part of the Medici's family collection in Florence) (Cooch, 2025). As a classical depiction of ideal beauty, Botticelli's Venus is a flawed woman proportionately, in regards to "the unnatural length of her neck, the steep fall of her shoulders, and the queer way her left arm is hinged to the body," (Gombrich, 1950). Regardless, 'Venus' was still a white, soft, hairless vision of desire, femininity and sexuality. Botticelli's interpretation of the female nude, though initially hidden from public view in the private collection of the Medici household, is still an influential depiction of the female form. It continues to inspire within

modern mainstream context, such as advertisements for Reebok and Italy's Tourism Ministry, magazine covers such as The New Yorker, as well as an album cover for Lady Gaga (Cain, 2018).



Figure 4 - Reebok's advertisement campaign, 2008



Figure 5 - Italy's Tourism Ministry Advertisement Campaign, 2023



Figure 6 - The New Yorker cover pages, 1992 and 2014



Figure 7 - Lady Gaga's album cover, 2013

Art historian Sir Kenneth Clark (1903 – 1983), the writer of both “Feminine Beauty” (1980) and “The Nude” (1972), stated that “the concept of feminine beauty achieved its most

complete triumphs in the Italian Renaissance,” however, throughout the subsequent artistic movements, the female nude is continuously presented within fine art by some of the most revered artists of all time. During the Mannerist period, Angelo Bronzino’s (1503 – 1572) *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* (c. 1545), presents a female nude figure, supposedly ‘Venus’ as “centrally placed, exemplifying idealized beauty,” (Meyer, 2024). Similarly to Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, Bronzino’s *Venus* has an elongated neck and “artificial qualities as opposed to balanced harmony and realism” (Meyer, 2024), suggesting that again, this was another unrealistic interpretation of the female form. This is somewhat excusable as the painting of a female nude was easier for art galleries, critics, and the public to accept if it was indeed a portrait of a mythological goddess, so with that in mind, some fictional qualities given to her appearance make sense. As Clark (1972, pg. 4) once stated; “we do not wish to imitate; we wish to perfect,” however, as the abundance of female nudes within fine art continued, it is important to reflect upon how these overwhelmingly popular ideals of beauty impacted how women may have been expected to look.



Figure 8 - *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* by Bronzino, c. 1545, oil on wood, 146.1 x 116.2 cm

The Romantic era of fine art saw artists such as Francisco Goya (1746 – 1828) and Gustave Courbet (1819 – 1877) craft the female nude in a more realistic style, however still very much focusing on the ideal beauty standards that were popular (but not limited to) the Renaissance period; white skin, soft curves, youth, femininity. Goya however shocked the art world by presenting a nude whose gaze matched that of the audience in his painting *La Maja Desnuda* (c. 1795-1800). Not only was his nude directly looking back at the viewer, but also it showed “the pubic hair of a real woman and not of a goddess or nymph,” (Witek, 2023). Though the shock value of this painting would have been its most influential attribute, at least it was known that this female nude was based off a real woman, and included realistic body features such as pubic hair. This dose of reality continued into Impressionism, with Edouard Manet’s (1832 – 1883) *Olympia*, presenting the nude model with a direct gaze back at the viewer. Manet “represent[ed] the reality of his time: Olympia is a prostitute, and not a mythological goddess,” (Witek, 2023). Again, Olympia is a slender, white, young, cis woman, however, at least this female nude is stemming from a life model, a working woman in fact, so there is some realistic representation of the female body for wider audiences to relate to. Paul Cezanne (1839 – 1906) painted *Bathers* (c. 1894-1905), a landscape painting featuring a group of naked women, one of 200 paintings he created that “depict male and female nude bathers” (The National Gallery, 2025). Within the next one hundred or so years, the artistic movements continue to change and evolve dramatically, however, the female nude remains. The context of the female nude does indeed vary, arguably as soon as female artists are finally accepted within the fine art world, as it finally rids the female nude of the male gaze, or at least challenges it simply because the art has been created by a woman. The most notable change of context was during the second wave of feminism in the late 1960’s and throughout the 1970’s, in which feminist artists began to defy “the patriarchal ideal in art as well as commercial norms of feminine beauty, [...] attempting to replace the classical ideal of the female body with a positive, feminist ideal,” (McDonald, 2001).

Before the ‘radical’ second wave of feminism in the 1970’s, women artists had begun to immerge and disrupt the artworld. For example, Tamara de Lempicka (1894 – 1980) made “liberated female sexuality the linchpin of her art,” (Mobbs, 2025), and used her

recognizable style that many associate with art deco, to create many portraits of women that either focused on the female gaze or presented an image of a modern, confident woman (Cox, 2013). Florine Stettheimer (1871 – 1944) was another female artist who used her painting *A Model (Nude Self Portrait)* (1915) to directly respond to Manet's *Olympia*, and to “taunt the viewer to recognize her facial features above her naked body,” (Bloemink, 2001). Both de Lempicka and Stettheimer successfully challenge the male gaze within their artworks, however, the ideal female beauty standards are still prominent, as both artists depict their female nudes as slender, white, youthful cis women.



Figure 9 - *The Naked Maja* by Goya, 1795-1800, oil on canvas, 97.3 x 190.6 cm



Figure 10 - *Olympia* by Manet, 1863, oil on canvas, 130.5 x 191 cm



Figure 11 - Bathers by Cezanne, 1894 - 1905, oil on canvas, 127.2 x 196.1 cm



Figure 12 -A Model (Nude Self-Portrait) by Florine Stettheimer, ca. 1915, oil on canvas, 122.6 x 173.4 cm

Within the last 100 years or so, the ideal, or at least, the fashionable beauty standards for women have indeed changed. From the flapper girls of the 1920s (slim, streamlined bodies), the hourglass figure 'pin-up girls' of the 1950s, to the 'heroin chic' of the 1990's and early 2000's, and the current 'influencer' style of appearance (small waists, Brazilian butt lifts, Botoxed faces), women's bodies have been treated as a commodity that can be designed and manipulated, according to the trends of the time. One of the most famous artist

advocates for representing what is an opposing beauty standard for women is Frida Kahlo (1907 – 1954), who instead of shying away from her strong facial features, such as her “crooked teeth, monobrow and moustache,” (Halconrui, 2022), somewhat embellished these lineaments, particularly in her work *Self Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (c. 1940). Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972), is a Kenyan visual artist who is known for exploring the sexualisation of women’s bodies, particularly black women’s bodies, her collages using mixtures of floral imagery, pornographic imagery, beauty adverts, and creating an expression of black beauty and womanhood. Mutu challenges the traditional beauty standards with her artwork, as well as creating a conversation about the sexualisation of black women, therefore creating space for a new type of female nude that speaks for people rather than about them. Jenny Saville (b.1970) is a Scottish artist that created “unflattering” female nude paintings of herself for her degree show from Glasgow School of Art. Saville’s earlier works are notorious for challenging what the female nude should or can look like. The painting *Plan* (1993) highlights her stomach using “contour lines on the belly [to] suggest both hill regions and surgeons’ plastic surgery marks,” (Borzello, 2022). The artwork would have been revolutionary at the time, as the early 1990’s beauty trends were thinness, supermodels like Kate Moss and Tyra Banks regularly photographed and admired within popular culture. To see a larger woman with a protruding, unapologetic stomach taking space on a large canvas, Saville was “making images of women who do not possess the kind of beauty that is associated with the current cultural fantasy of what the female body should be,” (Rowley, 1996).

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries so far, the male gaze has been challenged, and a long list of predominantly female artists have created iconic works to do exactly that. However, the male gaze has been the most powerful influence regarding how women’s bodies should look, whether that has been through fine art paintings of the Renaissance, or the creation of the “luscious pin-ups, an early reclamation of the ideal nude” (Borzello, 2022) by Francis Picabia in the 1940’s. Though the female nude did alter in context and representation during societal and artistic movements, many still presented an ideal female figure, a portrayal of beauty, and continue to hold influence over the fine art world of today. However, throughout

these cultural and societal shifts, many technological movements have affected the ways in which the female nude has been presented and represented to the masses.

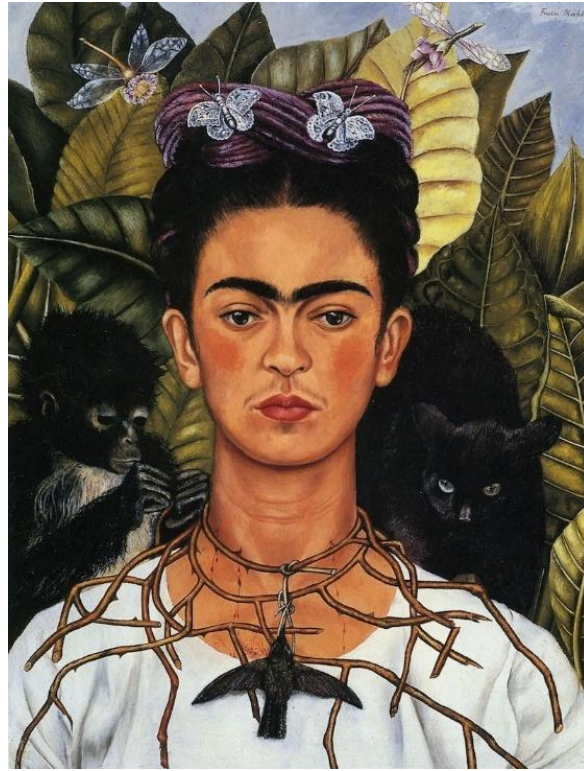


Figure 13 - Self Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird by Frida Kahlo, 1940, oil on canvas, 47 x 61 cm



Figure 14 - Plan by Jenny Saville, 1993, oil on canvas, 274 x 213 cm

## Chapter Two: Social Media, Augmented Reality and Cosmetic Surgery

In 1825, the French inventor Nicéphore Niépce created the first photo camera (Lesso, 2025), a tool that nowadays fits within a small device that almost everyone carries in their pockets. Just fifteen years after the invention of the photo camera, “pornographic images were available” (Borzello, 2022), which speaks volumes regarding human nature and our obsession with sex, desire, and nudity. With two hundred years of photographic nude images in circulation, alongside thousands of years’ worth of more ‘traditional’ artistic interpretations of the nude (such as the *Venus of Hohle Fels*, estimated to be from 38,000 BC (Gorvett, 2024)), the female nude specifically is a readily available ‘object’ for the human eye to gaze at. This accumulation of nude content also includes the ‘nude selfie’, a practice of self-expression and sexuality made easily available thanks to camera phones and social media.



*Figure 15 - Venus of Hogle Fels, discovered 2008, estimated creation 35000 - 40000 BC, carved from mammoth ivory, approximately 6cm length*

Social media has become an almost inescapable part of modern culture. It has become a way of life, as the estimated usage of social media and messaging apps per user is 151 minutes per day (Statista, 2025). Social media relies heavily on image-based content, and in

most recent times, video-based content, as videos increase the time spent on social media apps, increasing revenue from sponsored posts and advertising. As we continue to live in “an increasingly image-saturated society” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001), it is crucial for us to continually reexamine the content we are consuming on a day-to-day basis, as well as reflect upon the content we are individually creating for our followers consumption. The selfie, and nude selfie, have become a large part of that content creation. Though it may be regarded as low-culture art, Borzello (2022) has asked “is the selfie the art form of our times?”, as it certainly represents much of our modern culture – photography, technology, and of course, the female nude. Not only is the selfie a modern form of the female nude, and therefore inevitably an object for the male gaze, but it is also under a new scrutiny of the algorithmic gaze. It could however be argued that the male gaze and algorithmic gaze are simply mirror images of each other, as “the tech industry is 75 per cent men and they’re building platforms with their inherent biases built in,” (Atlanta, 2024). As many men and women have used the selfie, or more specifically the semi-nude and nude selfie, as a commodity, becoming ‘Only Fans’ creators in recent years, the algorithmic gaze regulates the content produced as well as decides which content creators will rise through the algorithm, therefore ultimately deciding which creators become the most successful in terms of revenue. There is much feminist debate about whether nude selfies are an act of taking back a woman’s power; the right to self-express their sexuality, whilst also making an income from it; or is it simply an act that aligns with the male gaze, “underscoring entrenched patriarchal values and the protracted commodification of female bodies,” (Atlanta, 2024). Art historian John Berger argued that “a woman must continually watch herself [...] From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually,” (Eaton, 2012), perhaps there is no right answer regarding the commodification of her image, perhaps it is simply a way of navigating the overwhelming and continuous discomfort of always being perceived, and having that perception drive your future successes, whatever those may be.

Social media is however not just a platform for creation but also showcasing a portfolio of work. Contemporary art is somewhat reliant on social media, as “social media now even

influences who galleries represent” (Akpang, 2021). Therefore, many artists use social media to share their artwork, to network with artists and galleries, and to gain a public following to benefit their careers. It enables anyone to showcase their work and build a following, regardless of education, privilege, or even identity, which is especially beneficial to those who may not have had the opportunity to do so previously through more traditional means. It enabled artists and designers to use a platform “as impetus for creative inspiration, digital means for display and populous validation of their artistic integrity,” (Akpang, 2021). Social media is also a platform for trends, which even fine artists cannot escape from, as recreating a trend is integral for the potential to “go viral”, or at least, gain followers who are enjoying said trend and therefore are more likely to see it as part of their personalized algorithm. Though it may not be an original idea, recreating a trend can lead to enhanced visibility for an artist on social media, which benefits the artist and the platform itself as “our images are a form of capital from which major internet firms are most likely to profit,” (Hoffmann, et al., 2021). As social media has become so integral to an artist’s career, the platform, algorithms and overall content is undeniably going to impact and potentially influence the work that the artist is making. This influence includes all that social media provides, including augmented reality filters.

Augmented reality filters entered the world via Snapchat in 2015, with a playful notion in mind, which was presented clearly by artist Rinus van Hall. Van Hall created a series of paintings titled *The Fake Surface* (2019), in which he recreated Snapchat filtered portraits of himself, transforming “his visage by adding bunny ears, turning his face into a creepy skull with blackened eye sockets, or making his skin look like shiny plastic,” (Cascone, 2020). Many filters engage in making users look flawless or ‘plastic’; with smoother complexions, less or no wrinkles, enhanced eye shapes (doe eyed or cat eyed, whatever the preference), with larger lips and smaller noses. The ease of having a perfectly “Instagram-able” selfie created an unprecedented amount of airbrushed content for every app user to alter their appearance for their followers. As a result of these filters however, many influencers created a movement of showing their audiences how these filters were enabling non-realistic beauty standards, highlighting the differences between reality and augmented reality pictures by

posting both side-by-side. This movement came to fruition because of the damage that augmented reality filters was doing, and is continuing to do so, to younger generations of social media users. There is currently an “epidemic of perfectionism in young women, with almost half of secondary-school girls considering some form of surgical intervention to change the way they look,” (Atlanta, 2024), with many young women taking their filtered selfies to plastic surgeons to specifically show them how they want to look post-surgery. It’s also been studied that these filters, and even your mobile phone camera as a standalone app, have been “optimised for white skin and often distorts darker skin tones,” (Atlanta, 2024), which further enables European, white beauty standards to dominate and continue to relay a harmful and racist belief that paler skin is a more beautiful commodity than darker skin. Similarly to the nude paintings of the Renaissance, “algorithms are built with the inherent bias towards slim, white women who adhere to the ideal,” (Atlanta, 2024), and though the ideal body shape of women changes marginally from decade to decade, “overweight” women have never been the main focus point of the male gaze when distinguishing what beauty trends are for women. Whilst many social media users are doomscrolling on a regular basis, watching hours of content daily, the repetition of unrealistic beauty standards are influencing how people want to look and what they individually recognise as beautiful, as “research has shown that the way we relate to our body and how we represent it is heavily influenced by the visual arts,” (Riccio, Hofmann, & Oliver, 2024). The impact of this is not only within our digital world, but also the physical, as more young people are being influenced to alter their appearance to look more like an augmented reality filter rather than rely on their natural genetic predisposition. This will have a domino effect on how people, especially women, are depicted in media and therefore culture – through photography, film, and even fine art.



Figure 16 - Artist Rinus van Hall with his series "The Fake Surface", 2019, each painting oil on panel, 30 x 24 cm

Body modification is a part of fine art already, with many famous performance pieces focusing upon actions that aesthetically change the artist's appearance. Marina Abramović (b. 1946), a performance art pioneer, performed many artworks that used her body as a canvas; "in her early work *Rhythm 0*, Abramović invited audiences to freely interact with her however they chose – famously resulting in a loaded gun being held to her head" (Royal Academy of Arts, 2023). Though *Rhythm 0* was not a piece made to surgically change her body, Abramović's performance showed how the female body could be used as an object in the arts, witnessing the willingness of her audience regarding violent acts against a stranger. Photography artist Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) "probed the construction of identity" (Gaylord, 2016) by creating different characters via make-up and costume within self portrait photography over the last forty years, using her appearance as a changeable canvas. Similarly, but more permanently, the French artist ORLAN (b. 1947) has famously had many cosmetic surgery procedures as part of her artistic practice, using her "face and body as malleable tools for shifting identities" (Artnet, 2025). ORLAN's first nine surgical operations

were to change her features to appear more like famous works of fine art, including “one operation [that] altered her mouth to imitate that of François Boucher's *Europa*, another changed her forehead to mimic the protruding brow of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, while yet another altered her chin to look like that of Botticelli's *Venus*,” (Jeffries, 2009). As body modification can be part of performance art, it could be argued that cosmetic surgery also fits in that category. Body modification could be a statement regarding the beauty standards of society, the pressures to conform to a certain hyper-feminine (or hyper-masculine) appearance. However, as “editing apps, filters, AI and AR are creating a hyper-augmented digital beauty standard that is impossible to live up to in real life,” (Atlanta, 2024) perhaps cosmetic surgery is an act of defiance against genetic disposition or possibly an act of compliance for the male gaze, or even the algorithmic gaze. It is certainly a heavily debated topic within the feminist community, similar to the conversations had regarding female nude selfies as mentioned previously; could cosmetic surgery be an act of defiance and empowerment, or simply another societal pressure.



Figure 17 - still image of Marina Abramović's performance of *Rhythm 0*, 1974

Though cosmetic surgery has a long history; most of that history focused on skin grafts for soldiers after war; cosmetic surgery has become a permanent augmented reality filter to the body. Certainly within photography, a portrait of a woman that has gone under the scalpel or syringe is far more likely than it ever has been, with “increasing numbers of people in the UK – often young women – are opting for dermal fillers to achieve a fuller look without surgery,” (Frame, 2025). It is worth considering how the next technological advances, particularly AI, will influence the way in which people want to look, and therefore how they are represented within artistic practices and fine art.

### **Chapter Three: The Ethics, Authenticity and Influence of AI-Generated Art**

Since the years of Hollywood glamour, celebrities have been a huge influence through various mediums; advertisements, music, film, fashion, etc. When AI-generated “celebrities” become part of modern-day culture, will they have the same influence as the last hundred years of celebrity? Timbaland, a famous musician and producer over the last three decades, has recently launched an AI entertainment company called “Stage Zero”, which has introduced “the world’s first AI-native pop artist” (Aswad, 2025) called ‘Tata’. With such a famous and successful music producer creating an AI pop artist, the influence that this ‘musician’ may have on ‘her’ potentially large fanbase is a cause for concern. If fans, especially younger fans, idolize Tata just like they would for human pop artists and celebrities, will they want to look like a celebrity whose glossy skin is just pixelated content? Could seeing AI-generated celebrities have the same effect that augmented reality filters have had on the cosmetic surgery industry?

AI-generated celebrities are not just becoming part of the music industry, but they have also become models for advertisements, with “some of the world’s biggest companies Nestlé to Unilever are already using AI in their advertising and digital commerce” (Bates, 2025) and so expanding their reach, portraying a certain type of model to a widespread audience. Even fashion brand Levi has been “partnering with digital agencies to supplement human models with AI generated ones,” (Atlanta, 2024), meaning that clothes that are designed for human wear are being advertised to us via the body-type of an accumulation of pixels and data. As mentioned in Chapter Two, there was a body-diversity movement several years ago via social media, in which some influencers would engage in body-positivity content to show the reality of, primarily, female body types and how different clothing can look on a variety of body shapes. However, as we divulge into a world in which AI-generated models are being used to represent clothing for human bodies, this body-positivity movement seems to be taking several steps backwards. The technology to create these ‘models’ is still somewhat in its infancy and “the rate of AI progress is rapidly increasing” (Rocktaschel, 2024), so perhaps there is the chance that as the technology develops, so does the diversity of the

types of bodies represented. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore the fact that “the ideal body of our times, the perfect body, [...] is a slim body,” (Borzello, 2022), and that, as previously mentioned, the majority of the leaders in the tech industry are male, and therefore, the male gaze continues to influence and hold power over how women’s bodies are being represented via this new visual medium. It seems inevitable for AI-generated models to become part of advertising, as “AI exponentially amplifies the knowledge shared by marketing experts with regard to our desires and fantasies, while being much quicker and much more efficient at actualising them,” (Zylinska, 2020). AI technology ‘learns’ through our input, so it seems logical that it would be the perfect tool to create our ideal outputs, visuals that we are attracted to aesthetically. AI also has a great deal of hype around it, similarly to the Snapchat filters of 2015; a playful and easy new piece of technology for anybody to engage with and create imagery that may have seemed impossible or complicated to do previously. With that in mind, it is easy to see why artists have begun to use AI image-generators to create new pieces of work, especially since “many arts organizations [are] jumping on the AI bandwagon because this is where the promise of funding, excitement and innovation lies,” (Zylinska, 2020). There is much debate however regarding the ethics of AI art, and whether this new medium can truly be part of the world of fine art.

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was a German-Jewish philosopher who famously wrote the essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in 1935, in which he discusses the impact of photography within the world of fine art. Benjamin was concerned with what he labelled “the aura” of reproductive art forms; photography and print primarily; and how “even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be,” (Benjamin, 1935). Benjamin was writing about non-digitized forms of artwork and commenting on how the ‘easy’ methods of creating a piece of work and reproducing it perfectly through print were resulting in a lack of aura, a lack of uniqueness to the piece - reprints of photographs, for example, meant that one was not experiencing art in the same way. Benjamin believed that the over-production of artwork would take away from the

experience of said artwork; “the painting invites the spectator to contemplation [...] before the movie, he cannot do so” (Benjamin, 1935). The notion of going to a gallery to view art takes time, allows for the viewer to stand and take in the scene in front of them, however, if using a smart phone, the work can still be viewed but with much less commitment - it is easy to simply move on to the next piece of content if desired. However, because “almost all art and all cultural production can be digitized,” (Zylinska, 2020), the enhancement of technology has enabled more people to be able to look at art, to find art that they respond to, or to perhaps create their own audiences for their artwork, as mentioned previously. The AI-generator tools can be useful for those who perhaps face a physical barrier but still wish to create art. They can finally be able to quickly and easily produce what is in their imagination by simply typing out a few commands or using a speak-to-text application to further assist them. These tools create “unprecedented possibilities for artists to explore new aesthetic landscapes, pushing the boundaries of their own imagination,” (Mazzola, Carapezza, Chella, & Mantoan, 2024), which could be considered a benefit to using AI-image generators as an artistic tool in general, however, the way in which this content is produced by AI needs to be considered. How does this technology learn and create? If the ethics behind these AI-generators are lacking, as well as the lack of “emotional depth, intentionality, and authenticity” (Mazzola, Carapezza, Chella, & Mantoan, 2024), is the novelty of speed and ease worth it?

As mentioned previously, AI generators learn via our input. The most common AI generators used for art are Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), that “enable the creation of new artwork by learning from the features of a reference artistic dataset,” (Mazzola, Carapezza, Chella, & Mantoan, 2024). It is a collection of human work that creates the ‘work’ of an AI-image generator. Although there is much discussion about ‘stealing’ ideas within creative industries, as argued by Austin Kleon in his book “Steal Like An Artist” (2012); “what a good artist understands is that nothing comes from nowhere. All creative work builds on what came before. Nothing is completely original;” it is worth questioning whether AI has the rights to collect data (human artists’ works) to repurpose into its own output. Consent from the artists is another issue to consider, and even though art protection tools like Glaze and

Nightshade have been put in place to safeguard artists' work, "artists are still at risk of their work being used for training AI models without their consent," (Foerster, 2025). As AI-generators use potentially unconsented artworks within their database to create new outputs, the author for these new outputs is also put into question. Is it the programmer who created the code which enables the AI software, is it the artist whose stolen work it is based on or is it the person who wrote the prompts to create using this tool – perhaps it is all the above. This would mean a joint authorship, "depending on what exactly the various agents and stakeholders have contributed to the outcome," (Hermerén, 2024), which is still a heavily debated topic as many laws surrounding these AI-generators are being created post-implementation of the technology.

As AI image-generators are learning through artists' content, as well as what its users are inputting into its system, it is unfortunately inevitable that the female nude, when included in a prompt by the user, is more than likely going to reinforce gender stereotypes and reflect the male gaze. The body types that AI-generators output often "overemphasize the curves of the female body in the representation of female sexuality," (Li, 2024), which is similar to those hyper-feminine features that are created via the Snapchat filters of 2015. As mentioned previously, AI-generator tools create what is inputted to them, consequently producing imagery that the audience and prompt-writer would like to see in a style that may have been specifically asked for, or at least, is popular enough for the system to recognize as an optimal choice. Therefore, its portrayal of women, especially the female nude, "reflects a complex interplay of historical biases, societal norms and market dynamics," (King D. , 2024). Consequently, the algorithmic gaze is producing images that surrender to the Western beauty standards that have developed and marginally deviated over time. The Venus figure, as mentioned in Chapter One, may not be the exact type of beauty that the algorithm is looking to recreate, however many of her features would still be represented within an AI-generated female nude, for example, white, poreless and hairless skin, circular and symmetrical breasts, slim body shape. Again, it should be noted that this technology is still new, and so there may be a learning curve in which "diversifying the datasets used to train AI models [...] can reimagine the possibilities for representing women," (King D. , 2024).

This change of the data embedded within AI-generators has potential to create an inclusive range of body types when producing human portraiture and therefore, representation, however examples of how this technology is being used now reflects the historical biases and engrained stereotypes within societies and cultures globally. The images that most likely please the male gaze are the images that will be more successful, as that will coincide with the algorithmic gaze, and unfortunately, can affect women's online safety as well as their relationship with their body. This statement reflects the online world of deepfakes, a type of pornography that can be created easily via AI-generators using a person's likeness, most commonly without consent. There are dedicated websites for not only creating this unconsented content, but also for sharing it. With the "most popular website [...] receiving around 17 million hits a month," (McGlynn, 2025), it is hard to imagine how many of these AI-generated images are in circulation. It is important to consider whether the GANs creating them are also being trained using them, therefore creating a cycle of content that is not only an offensive act to the unconsented person it is based upon, but also a continuously unrealistic version of what a woman's body should look like.

The ethics surrounding AI-generated imagery not only focus upon the authorship of the output produced, but also the consent around how it was made. There is still also much debate regarding the authenticity of AI-generated imagery, and whether it can be classed as part of fine art. It is possible that AI-generated imagery is the next art movement, a debate similar to that of Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) who submitted his artwork *Fountain* (1917), leading the medium of readymades. Readymades taught the art world that "creativity in art is not necessarily tied to the production of an object, but can be found in the way it is experienced," (Mazzola, Carapezza, Chella, & Mantoan, 2024), and it is possible that AI-generated imagery can become part of fine art once it is more developed in a holistically ethical way.

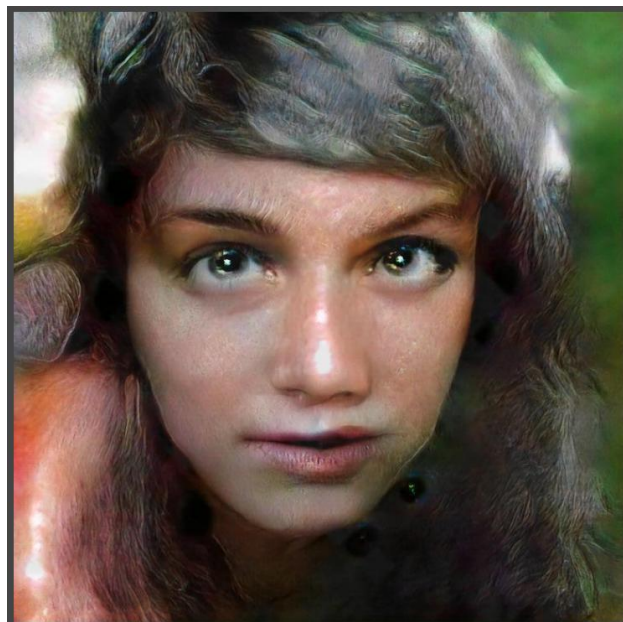


Figure 18 - Fountain by Marcel Duchamp, 1917, replica 1964, porcelain found object, unconfirmed: 36 x 48 x 61 cm

## Conclusion

This dissertation has explored multiple subjects, from the Venus of the Renaissance and the creation of the term 'male gaze', augmented reality filters becoming part of reality through cosmetic procedures, and the arguments regarding how AI is being trained to produce content. All these subjects relate to contemporary art, particularly the female nude, as they all impact how women's bodies have been and continue to be represented within society's multiple media channels, from portrait paintings to music videos. The examination of historical female nudes was a crucial starting point to the discussion, as the Western beauty standards created so early on in humanity's history continues to influence us greatly. Through research on this topic it is evident that "all visions of ideal beauty – from Ancient Greece to cyberspace – are young, fair-skinned, hairless and poreless, with smooth skin, a symmetrical face, sensual yet pure," (Atlanta, 2024), and though there have been some movements towards a more inclusive outlook to beauty and appearance, the algorithmic gaze seems to favour the more traditional, exclusive beauty standards created hundreds of years ago. What does this mean for art? As "contemporary art tends to reflect the cultural mood of its time," (Charlesworth & Harbison, 2016), any shift in the everyday of society impacts the art that is made, arguably more so when there is a new technology that trains on art made by human artists without their consent. It is also relevant as AI-generated imagery of female nudes may be produced with obsolete aesthetics in mind, a very narrow definition of what a woman is supposed to look like, and if AI continues to learn through the mass of content supplied on the internet, "there is a good chance that a lot of low-quality and harmful data will be contained in the resulting training set," (Rocktaschel, 2024). One way that this can be combated is more regulation regarding what training data the AI technology is learning from, but also, a type of rebellion from contemporary artists "by [turning] their backs on perfection in order to face up to the concerns around the 21<sup>st</sup> century body," (Borzello, 2022). Contemporary artists can take a stand against the harmful 'ideal' nude that AI-generators are outputting by further celebrating inclusive body types through more traditional methods of making.

AI-generated artwork may be the next art movement, with examples such as Mike Tyka's (b. 1982) series of AI-generated portraits called *Portraits of Imaginary People* (2017). These portraits used "thousands of photographs of faces from Flickr," (Miller, 2019) to create surreal, distorted portraits of people that don't exist. This series of work has been discussed on several websites regarding the potential of using GANs to create artwork, as well as shown as several museums and exhibitions across the globe, so there is clearly an audience and interest for this kind of work within cultural institutions. It is also worth noting that "globally \$21.3 billion was invested in generative AI in 2023 alone," (Bates, 2025), suggesting that there is a huge market for this technology, and therefore it will most likely continue to develop in intelligence at a rapid pace, perhaps moving out of its infancy stages much quicker than social media has over the last thirty years. Though there is clearly a high level of interest in AI-generators, even within the artworld, there is still a lack of regulation regarding how we are using AI-generators and what content we are training it on. If we are to successfully embrace this technology, there needs to be safety measures put in place to protect the artists whose work these systems have stolen from, the likeness of those people that have not consented to being part of the dataset, and call out the male gaze that seems to be the main influence when outputting portraits of women.



*Figure 19 - "I See You" by Mike Tyka, part of the series "Portraits of Imaginary People", 2017, AI-Generated print, 50.8 x 50.8 cm*

From the research within this paper, it has become increasingly evident that AI-generated imagery is only set to become more refined and commonplace. On one hand, there are increasing numbers of people using it in their daily lives, as it is being marketed as something that will make people's lives easier, even when creating artwork. On the other hand, there are billions of dollars being pumped into the development of new AI technologies and data centres. It is a "disruptive novel phenomenon," (Chiodo, 2024), but if it is left ungoverned there is a real concern that this next "artistic movement" is just a highly reductive form of replication, unable to conceive anything truly original. Not only that, but AI-generators continue to rely on an algorithm strongly influenced by a regressive male gaze, defining and portraying women in an increasingly dehumanized way. The technology might be advancing, but the culture it reflects and draws from should be left in the past.

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