SPECIAL EDITION:

Our Own Fran Forman and Kevin Tully
Share Their Thoughts on Artificial Intelligence

(Thanks, Vicky, for interviewing Fran!)

AI: A Conversation with Fran Forman

by Vicky Stromee

Discussions about AI are everywhere and opinions vary widely about its use in photography – should it be a separate category of work? Who owns the image? Are there issues of copyright infringement based on how AI is trained? Will audiences look at skillfully composed composites and assume AI is involved? Should its use disqualify an image from being considered fine art? To be fair, anyone using many of the tools in Lightroom (e.g., spot removal), Photoshop's generative fill to extend an image, or using Topaz Suite to sharpen or denoise an image, is already using AI to enhance their work.

Stoking the Fires of Controversy

by Kevin Tully

AI.

We were told the internet was going to span the great distances between peoples across the world and bring us closer together — the end of history and rabid nationalism.

Facebook was going to make us happier with all of our new friends and the ability to benignly post pictures of our pancakes, birthday cakes, and bad hair mornings.

Google was going to brilliantly replace encyclopedias and dictionaries and, ultimately, the need for a trip to the library or grandma's house to ask her where the old fire station was, where great uncle Frank used to work.

Our cellphones (pocket computers) were going to greatly simplify our lives, give us more time to be productive. The list goes on.

All the above leaps in technology did do what they were sold to us to do. However, they did more than was sold to us. Much of it negative. Some of it irreversible. Lots of it a true horror story. None of it came without negative side effects.

We have become so accustomed to looking away as bad things result from new technologies, a thirteen-year-old seduced away from her home by a bad man on Facebook, that we barely even notice the atrocities enabled by new technologies anymore.


Progress is good. Damn the consequences. A teenage Lakota sits on the hood of a decaying Chrysler in front of a tumble-down mobile home on the Res, pondering Manifest Destiny.

Many, many scientists and technologists are saying AI is the greatest technological challenge mankind has ever faced. It possibly contains the seeds of our destruction.

They said the same thing about the splitting of the atom. It's been over seventy years and it hasn't wiped us out, yet. Yet being the operative word. The world's powers came together, recognized the horror contained in it and chose to regulate and restrain it. So far so good.

I have seen the afore-mentioned analogy used in reference to AI in articles. Articles trying to make the point that it is too late to stop it, so the only sane option we have is to try and restrain, regulate, and channel it into a positive role for mankind. Who the hell knows if this is really possible. We certainly weren't able to stop the negative consequences of The Internet, Facebook, Google or cellphones.
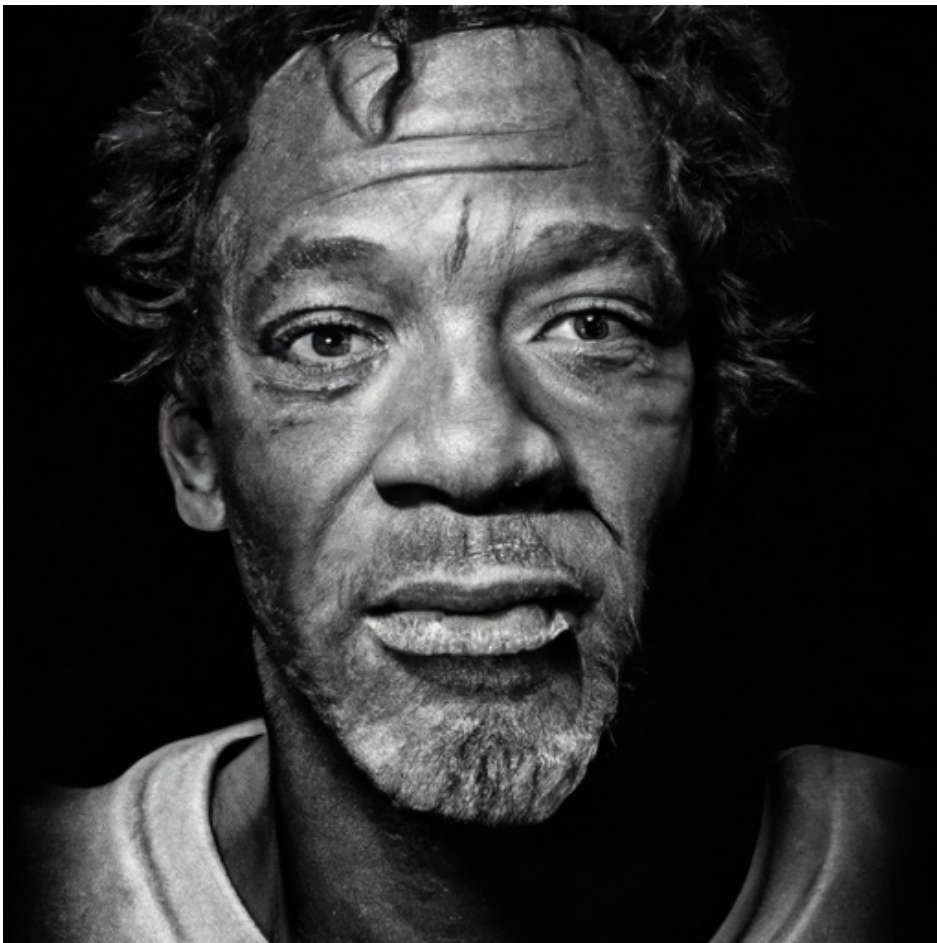
All images shown within this article were created by Kevin, as he "played around" with AI.

I agree that, like kudzu, it is already too invasive to stop.

Therefore, in my opinion, concerning its effects on the art world, the only rational, effective way to embrace it and allow it a foothold is to make it its own category, like sculpture or painting or photography. I really enjoy watching photographers that want to use it,

tying themselves into knots trying to prove its photography or that it's no different than Photoshop, just another tool. Yeah, just like the atomic bomb was just another bomb.

Since I have been so vocally against it, I decided that to be an honest broker I had to try it. It is truly amazing. It is seductive. It is fun. It scared the crap out of me initially. The people

created don't look back as they do in a photograph. Many indigenous people won't allow their picture to be taken. They fear it will steal their soul. AI proves they were right – photographs can capture the soul of an individual. An AI image is an Image by Machine.

So, in conclusion, why don't we all agree that AI is going to be another, separate creative category and move on. We may not have control over the beast borrowing our imagery, but we still have free will and can decide whether to use it or not.

Thanks for listening.

The images are the result of my playing around.

I wish Judy was around to give her opinion. Whichever way she would go it certainly wouldn't be simple and it wouldn't be softly spoken.

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Kevin is co-director of A Smith Gallery in Johnson City, Texas. He is an artist, photographer, and woodworker. Kevin spent over thirty years as a designer, fine art painter and furniture maker prior to joining A Smith Gallery. A Smith Gallery is a Fine Art Photography Gallery with a national and international footprint, with an emphasis on creativity and education. Kevin has juried numerous exhibitions over the past nine years. Kevin also conducts portfolio reviews and mentors individual photographers as well as writing about photography and art.

Each time a new technology emerges (painting and drawing to cameras, film to digital, darkroom to Lightroom) we are challenged to reassess what is the artist's hand. Perhaps the larger issue is what constitutes art – how much is about the process and how much about the outcome?

With so much to consider, it seemed like time to talk with Fran Forman about her thoughts and how she occasionally incorporates AI into her work. Fran has a long history with photo compositing, so AI became a natural extension by offering an important new tool.

Fran got interested in exploring AI recently while in France. Fran wanted to do a series of scenes from Paris in the 1940's as a backdrop for a new story she'd envisioned. AI gave Fran a way of generating interiors and street scenes consistent with the time period by using a set of carefully crafted prompts. By combining these scenes with Fran's other photographic

assets and images of human models, she was able to construct more accurate representations of the period. Fran calls her work a hybrid of both traditional photography and AI generated imagery.

Fran has explored several different AI generators including Dali, Playground AI, Stable Diffusion, but has worked mostly with Midjourney. Recently she began experimenting with Night Café.

While each AI generator uses different algorithms and has been "trained" on different sets of knowledge (and yes, you can train it on your images and get it to replicate your style) the one common element is that images are derived from words. It's important to develop a set of succinct and clear prompts that establish the parameters for the image to be generated. The first prompt can include as many parameters as possible including the basics like photo or illustration, time period, location, time of day, angle of the shot, and type of camera, in addition to stylistic parameters (e.g. Rembrandt lighting). The program will generate several options for you to consider. You can continue to modify those images by using additional

All images shown within this article were created by Fran, combining AI with her photography.

prompts. While using a consistent set of initial prompts can help, sometimes the generated images have bizarre affectations - missing fingers, odd facial features and of course, as with any learning system, you may encounter implicit biases about beauty.

Fran expressed some frustrations that you never know what you'll get, even using the same prompt gives you something different each time. For Fran's purposes this means you can't get a character to repeat, so using a human model is important in her work.

The files themselves are quite small and often require additional work to be useful in her composites.

On the other hand, by feeding in her own images, the program provides a detailed description and offers examples of similar work. This has opened the door for Fran to explore new artists, experiment with different ideas and use interior spaces she wouldn't have seen otherwise.

While Fran shares many realistic concerns with the misuse of AI to produce false stories that masquerade as truth, as an artistic tool it has broadened the universe of creativity.

To quote Guy Tal: "*Consider also, as many now do, collaborating with AI, rather than fighting against it. Find ways to leverage the technology in your workflow, adding your own creative contribution. Let AI do the* *"grunt work" it can do better than you, then focus your own attention on qualities of your experience, and your efforts on the creative and expressive aspects of your art.*"

Ready to explore? Here's a link with an overview of AI generators: https://www.unite.ai/10-best-ai-art-generators/

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"*I love making photographic pictures but I'd rather be a painter. I love manipulating photographs because I'm a lousy photographer. I learned most about making pictures from studying typography. I love learning new technologies to help me make better pictures, but I flunked math.*"