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Bachelor of Fine Arts, Thompson Rivers University, 2025

BANE OF THE PRODIGIOUS

This special issue of Future Earth Journal: Explorations in Art and Generative AI showcases the work of visual art students from the Fall 2024 Selected Topics visual art course *Explorations in Art and AI*. Each featured artist engaged with generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) to create original artworks that respond to and reflect on current conversations in art and technology. Through their

unique practices, these students explored Gen AI as a tool, a collaborator, and/or a conceptual influence.

The artworks featured here—and in the exhibition held at the TRU Art Gallery from March 17–29, 2025—highlight the cultural, ethical, environmental, and creative dimensions of using Gen AI in artistic production.

Avery Stainton is one of the participating artists whose work exemplifies this exploration.

AI Source: Midjourney



ARTIST STATEMENT

"Bane of the Prodigious" encapsulates the intricate tension between beauty and confinement, purity and loss, presenting the entrapment of a mythical creature in a world that seeks to dominate the extraordinary. This painting, created in oils on a wood panel, is a visual exploration of rich textures and deep shadows that evoke a profound sense of both sorrow and resilience. Through this work, I aim to draw the viewer into a contemplative space where the dualities of existence can be fully examined.

Figure 1. Bane of the Prodigious (2024) by Avery Stainton.
Oil on board, 14" x 8" (Image credit: Nicole Favron)

In my creative journey, I have embraced AI as a



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futuristic collaborator—akin to a modern-day alchemist striving to harness the power of a fantastical being. Just as the unicorn symbolizes extraordinary beauty and magic, AI embodies immense potential that, when guided thoughtfully, can elevate artistic expression to new heights. By consulting AI for critiques and guidance throughout the artistic process, I can explore fresh perspectives while reflecting the wisdom of the old masters. This relationship fosters an environment ripe for innovation, pushing the boundaries of my creative practice.

However, this partnership is not without its complexities. It raises critical questions about agency and control—parallels that resonate with the themes reflected in the unicorn's captivity. While I endeavor to channel the transformative power of AI, I remain acutely aware of the implications of

beauty and innovation when constrained by limitations. It challenges us to consider the delicate balance between guidance and restriction in our pursuit of creative expression. Are we, as artists and creators, truly capable of harnessing the extraordinary without compromising its inherent value?

In navigating this landscape, I am driven by a desire to unveil the complexities of our relationship with art and the fantastical realms that inspire us. The unicorn in my painting becomes a metaphor for the extraordinary potential that exists within both the natural world and the technological advancements we embrace. By reflecting on the nature of creativity itself, I encourage viewers to engage in a dialogue about the consequences of our choices and the ethical implications of how we wield our artistic tools.



Figure 2. The artist's original digital sketch and Midjourney generations of that image in the style of Gerald Brom, Annie Stegg and Dariusz Zawadski

wielding such influence. In an age where technology is often seen as a tool to serve our desires, it is essential to recognize the risk of prioritizing utility over the sanctity of creativity. The act of collaborating with AI can mirror the act of trapping a unicorn for its power—an endeavor fraught with ethical dilemmas and the potential for exploitation.

"Bane of the Prodigious" invites viewers to reflect on the implications of chaining the extraordinary, whether in the form of a mythical creature or cutting-edge technology. This artwork serves as a conduit for contemplation regarding the cost of

Ultimately, "Bane of the Prodigious" serves as an exploration of not only the beauty found in the mythical but also the complexities inherent in the creative process. It beckons us to question whether we can truly harness the extraordinary without losing sight of its inherent value. Through this interplay of the mythical and the technological, I aim to foster a deeper understanding of the delicate relationship between art, beauty, and the forces that shape our creative endeavor.

Process

Avery created a sketch which she fed to Midjourney as a "character reference" to create a unicorn portrait in the style of various artists whom she admires: Gerald Brom, Annie Stegg, and Dariusz Zawadski (these artist's styles were already known by Midjourney). She used those generated images as references, taking inspiration from the parts she found most intriguing to create an original painting.



Figure 3. Bane of the Prodigious in situ Gallery installation of "Hutch the Heinous" (2024) by Avery Stainton. (Image credit: Twyla Exner)



Figure 4. Bane of the Prodigious in situ Gallery installation of "Hutch the Heinous" (2024) by Avery Stainton. (Image credit: Twyla Exner)



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