

# Interview with @Troup, May 2024

1. *How did you discover your style/artistic ability? Did it take time, was it sudden, or a combination?*

I've drawn and painted my whole life. My father was, among other things, an accomplished amateur artist. He taught me the rudiments of drawing beginning in my pre-school years. We also did a good deal of traveling to various art museums. Later in boyhood I had private lessons in watercolors for some years. In college I took up acrylics and oil pastels as a hobby, mostly doing Expressionist portraits. I had many art history courses which, along with film studies, were essential in learning more deeply and thinking critically about composition, symbolism, lighting, staging, and the uses of color.

Because the trad art world has always been remote, it never seemed like a possibility to pursue art as a career. Then in the summer of 2022 I took up oil painting, which was something I'd always wanted to learn. At the beginning of the next year, I discovered text-to-image AI. Although my early efforts on Dalle and then Midjourney were somewhat pedestrian, it put me in the habit of creating works daily. In Midjourney I could iterate dozens of preliminary "sketches" for my paintings in the time it would normally take me to do a single one physically. It was both a labor-saving device and a boon to creativity.

I began to pursue these AI outputs as works in and of themselves, but was dissatisfied by the lack of control I had over them. They did not seem like finished works to me, and left me cold. Consequently, I began using Photoshop to add finishing touches. This quickly led to a new approach whereby most works were created by collaging pieces from multiple AI outputs, with additional painting added in.

2. *What tools do you use and are you experimenting with any new ones?*

In almost all of my work I use a stack of multiple apps across both PC and Mac. For AI imagery, I use Midjourney as a workhorse for its versatility. If I want more painterly outputs, I will use a web-based Stable Diffusion -- either EmProps or Wand. Wand is something I was fortunate enough to be able to beta test after reading about in "The New York Times". I trained various models on it using my own glitchpaintings, so it can be a nice shortcut. It's also convenient because I have it on my iPad, whereas the other two are on my PC. I regard AI outputs as invariably a starting point, never the end result.

For painting I have a Wacom tablet I use in concert with Photoshop on my PC. However, I do the preponderance of my digital painting on an iPad, using a variety of painting apps including Art Rage and Art Set. With Procreate, I'll use custom brushes I've made, and shuttle back and forth between it and the other painting and glitching apps. To me

glitching is a stage of painting through which I can achieve brushstroke textures that would otherwise be impossible.

I am not currently experimenting with any drastically new tools or approaches, beyond trying out new painting and glitching apps when I find them. However, there are many tools I am trying to work toward integrating. I am keenly interested in acquiring a plotter so as to produce physical copies of my glitchpaintings, as well as a VR painting rig. I also intend to explore animation and generative art, though to what extent I cannot say ahead of time.

3. *Is there other media you practice or experiment with that isn't shared with the public? Are there other media you are looking to try out at some point?*

I still do oil painting, though these are not intended to be put on chain, but simply done for my own gratification. They're also useful exercises, because I use the same approach to building up (realistic) physical and digital paintings: blocking areas in roughly, and building them up from the dark colors, upon which successively lighter areas are added, with most highlights coming last.

4. *How would describe your style? It might sound limiting to ask an artist to categorize their work, but sometimes artists' have a goal to create a more nuanced category they would attribute their work towards that normal consumers might not recognize.*

I work in a variety of modes, which I expect the casual observer may find puzzling, or might make it harder for them to pin me down. I mean I do physical and digital, and figurative and abstract. Stylistically, the non-abstract work exists on a continuum between realism and Expressionism. As I go on, and I've gotten more into glitch, my work has gotten less "clean".

I don't like my work to be too neat. I have the constant urge to rub dirt into it so to speak, to scuff it up, tear the surface, and leave it disordered. This is one of the things that attracts me to glitch. So I think of my work now as primarily glitch.

Ideally my works would be displayed publicly in a large format. I'm dissatisfied with the Twitter scroll being the primary venue for exhibition of work. This can eliminate subtleties and result in a bastardization of the works. Those that become popular favorites are often graspable in an instant. Art should be something that people take their time with, live with, and contemplate. I think my works benefit from magnification and detailed scrutiny. At any rate, that is my objective.

Finally, for reasons that should become clearer shortly, I think of myself as a something of a digital mystic.

5. *Walk me through your creative process... AI artists, especially, interest me with their process since the technology is still so new. How do you determine the subject? How long does it typically take you to create? What goes into the editing process?*

I like to be able to do multiple digital pieces in a day, though I don't always. I'd estimate I spend between one and six hours on most. Some pieces I'll keep working on for several days, thinking about them, then returning to make little changes until I'm satisfied that I can't improve them. This is not ideal. In large part it is a function of being caught up in the hamster wheel of the social media attention economy.

It's my hope that eventually I will have the financial means to take more time with each work, and produce less of them. Disposable works that are scrolled past and forgotten leave a lot to be desired.

I may have a subject in mind when I start a piece, or I may discover it as I'm working. If I've got a series of related pieces in progress, it's probable the subject of each is pre-planned.

As far as editing goes, one of the most important things to me in my current approach is that when I have the basis for a work (be it a raw AI output or a digital painting "stub"), I introduce visual noise as a layer atop the base. This I proceed to corrupt as I see fit. I will do this in several steps, moving among various apps. I build up a piece this way by adding marks and effects, but also by using shaped erasures.

One thing that's vexing is that I do much of my initial and intermediate work on an iPad, but the resulting piece will display vastly differently on my PC in terms of color, and not to the piece's credit. I often have to do additional color correction in Photoshop on my PC, which will destroy some of the grain and diminish the range of colors. I intend to fix this but am not certain how.

I would also in the near future like to incorporate dramatically larger screens in the process of creation. Each mark I make on an iPad takes up space an order of magnitude greater than it would with a properly-sized screen. The resulting image is less complex than I would prefer.

I believe that in time the specific functions of each individual app I use will be incorporated as functionalities of some super-app like Photoshop. I look forward to the prospect that opens of applying these over many different layers in a lossless way.

6. *Are there common themes that tend to motivate your art or the messaging? And if so, why these specific themes or messages?*

I am hesitant to be explicit about such things, as I think any meaning should be readily apparent from the work itself. I will now set out to completely contradict that by explaining something of my worldview because perhaps these things are, unfortunately, not obvious.

I believe that there is a metaphysical aspect to any digital art that is resolved into pixels, and that thus there is a theoretical aspect to my work. I know I am not unique in this, but it is my intuition that the simulation hypothesis is likely correct. I believe that digital works resolved into pixels are directly analogous to the digital underpinnings of a simulated virtual cosmos. The works are therefore (to me at least) transcendentalist objects of spiritual significance, which makes me a sort of digital mystic.

7. *Is there an artist you would want to collaborate with?*

No. I did a few collaborations early on and while I enjoyed them, it's not something I especially want to repeat. I found that one person usually did more of the work, and the vaunted free exchange of ideas as a springboard to something greater than the sum of its parts was often missing.

8. *Do you have a favorite piece? Why is it your favorite?*

Because I try to do the best work I am capable of doing with every piece, my most recently-completed piece is always a sentimental favorite. Other pieces I feel a closer affinity to, as with an autobiographical series I began, tweeted pieces from, and will never mint. Still other pieces I hold in higher esteem because judging critically, I believe they are objectively better works. Included in this last group I would mention the "Head of a Prophet" paintings and an oil portrait of Wittgenstein. I find these pleasing because they come close to realizing the visions I had of each prior to the start of work. Of my digitally-painted glitchpaintings, I am especially fond of "Eidetic Memory" because I believe it is the best-realized example to date of how I envision the merger of paint and glitch through visible brushstrokes. Color is sacrificed in favor of a more sculptural quality.



"Head of a Prophet" (2023)



“Wittgenstein” (2023)

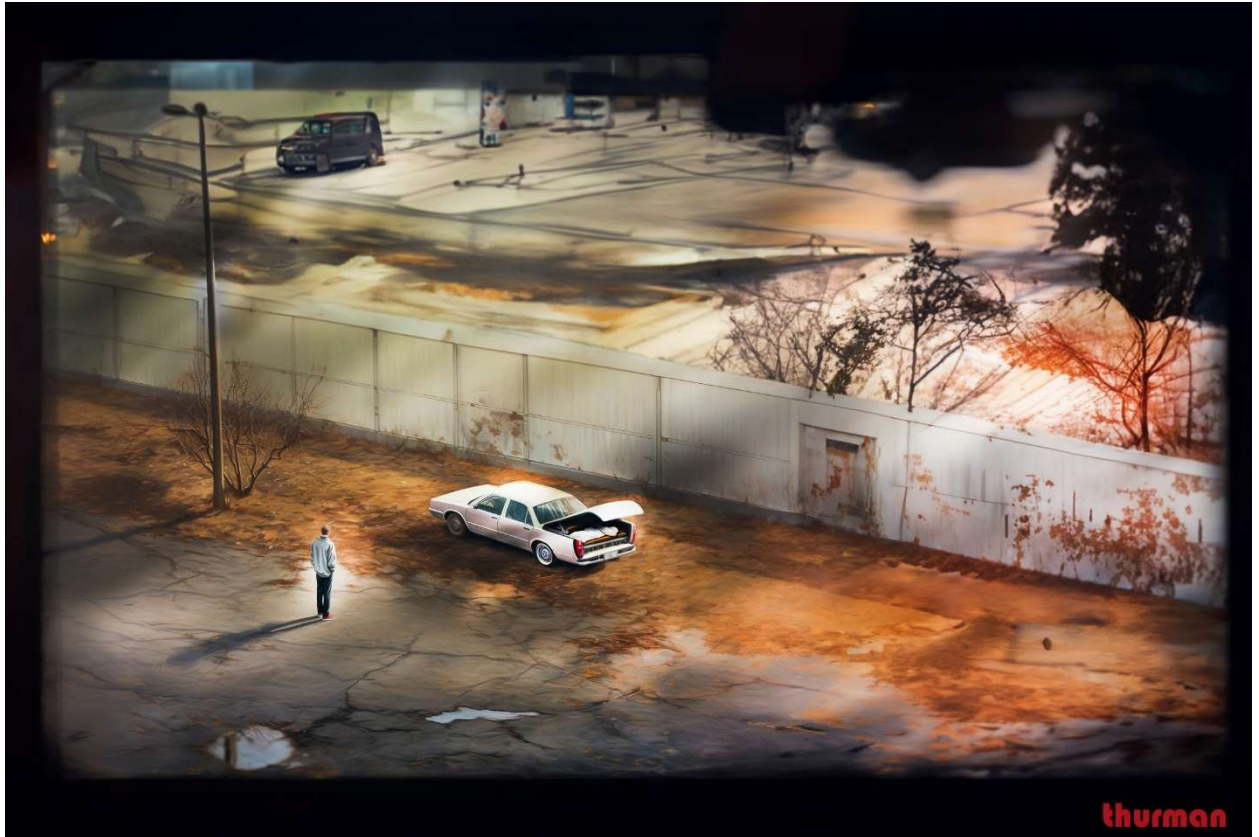




“Eidetic Memory” (2024)

9. *Do you have a piece that posed more of a challenge? If so, what about it was challenging?*

In making my earlier AI collage works especially, such as “Blood Promise” and “Laundry Day,” I would often try to use music narrowly as a triggering device in the same way a method actor might do so in order to channel sense memory into the recreation of an emotional state. Listening to the same song repeatedly for many hours put me into a sort of trance. Although I believe it resulted in good work, I found it unbearable, and can no longer work this way.



“Blood Promise” (2023)





“Laundry Day” (2023)

*10. Could you discuss your currently available pieces a little bit? .... How did you come up with the idea for the Couch Series and could you talk a little bit about it? And could you explain the prophets?*

I have 1/1's minted on ETH main net for sale on Foundation, and Solana 1/1's and one edition on Exchange. I started the Foundation works in July 2023 and Exchange in December of that year, though I continue to update both (usually as a function of gas prices). The works on both platforms are split into similarly grouped collections. On Foundation the vast majority are in a group called “Pictures from Life's Other Side”. The title is borrowed from a song by Woody Guthrie – I'm often inspired by popular music. A smaller group is called “Paintings and Suchlike”.

The Exchange pieces incorporate more glitching than most of the works on ETH. On Exchange, the larger of the two groups collections is simply titled “Glitchpaintings”. I'll use Patrick Amadon's term, “mixed digital,” as they are digital mixed media work, which combine AI with glitching and often include painting and collaging as well. The other collection is of paintings called “Art for Fuck's Sake” which may have some small admixture of other digital media, but are primarily paintings. (I conceive of them wholly as paintings.) I will often add glitching to these latter works, as that process complements the textures of my brushstrokes, or can be synonymous with them.

The two series you asked about are both on Foundation and were done in 2023. I would like to tell you the obvious answer about the “Couches” series, that they were inspired by the double portraits of David Hockney, whose works I admire. Shamefully, I was unaware of these when I began my own.





Couches #2: “Alone, Together” (2023)

I was instead inspired by the conventions of filmic storytelling in an attempt to convey several narratives relating the emotional and psychological complexities of the relationships of romantic couples through strictly visual means. Film was at least the ultimate cause, as I’ve made a private study of film for many years. The proximate cause was my dissatisfaction with the lack of complexity I felt I was seeing in many AI works. I’m putting it mildly. Even those AI works which were ostensibly narrative works either failed to move me emotionally, or upset me in their lack of attention to detail.

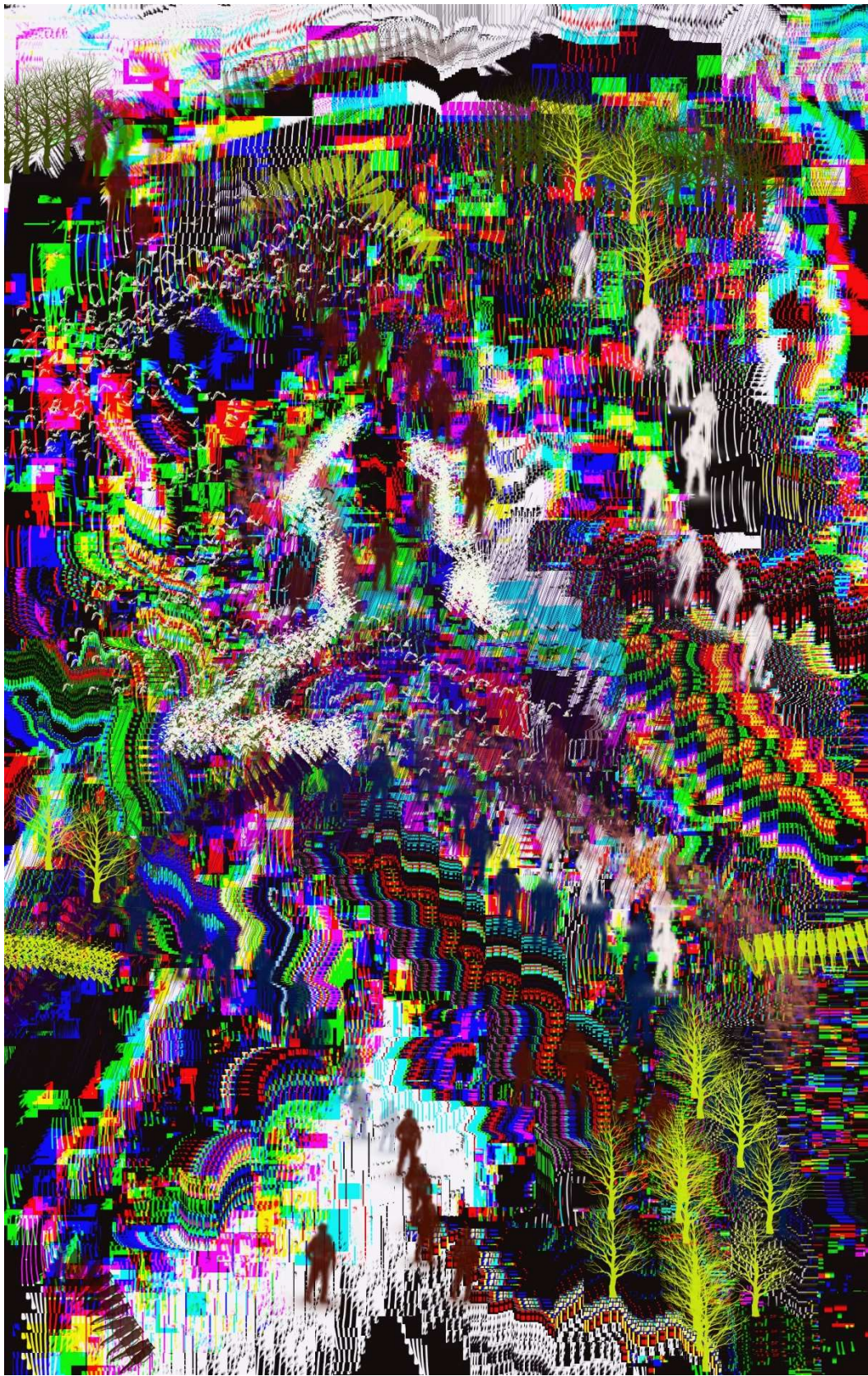
For “Couches” I used a widescreen aspect ratio, and relied on variations in facial expression (including eyelines), body postures, the staging of one figure relative to the other, lighting, color, and characters’ “business” (what they are doing with their hands as a means of telegraphing mental state). Additionally, I varied the focus of images, blurring portions of them to further guide the viewer’s eye. The result is a series of eight works minted as a subset of the PLOS collection. One more piece was completed but never minted, and a tenth remains unfinished.

As for the duo of “Head of a Prophet” pieces, I was directly inspired by Emil Nolde’s 1912 Expressionist woodcut “The Prophet”. Since I saw it as a boy, I have been haunted by this image. I wanted in my own way to try to move people as I had been moved by Nolde’s piece, and also to convey an expression of the emotional intensity of a man who believes he is chosen by God as the instrument to accomplish a new divine order and world-historical paradigm.

In addition, I was influenced by a Fauvist non-realistic conception of color, by which I hoped to enhance the emotionalism of the pieces. Originally, I had planned to do ten pieces with different color schemes, all painted in Photoshop. I completed one, and then added dithering to it to make the second version. I felt subsequent attempts with other color combinations lacking in impact. Hence, I quit the project when I felt I was ahead.

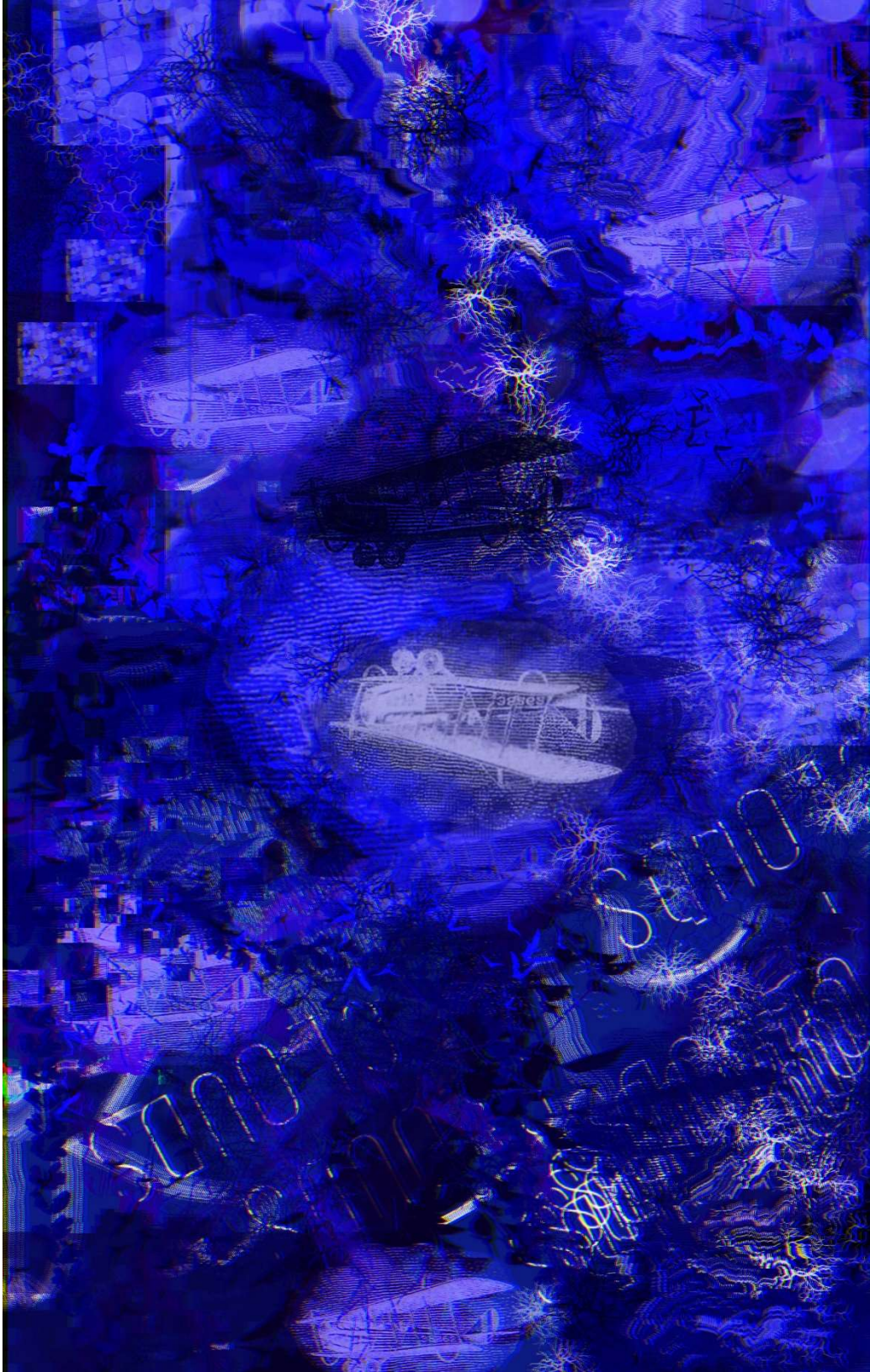
I also have many more digital paintings on SOL than ETH. “Pickets” and “Jenny” were both mostly painted in Procreate with custom brushes. With the former I also used a repeating brush. In the latter I included a custom brush that was made by sampling an image of the famous “Inverted Jenny” U. S. postage stamp. So, although it’s made with brush strokes, it’s also essentially the result of a manual digital image synthesizer.





"Pickets" (2024)



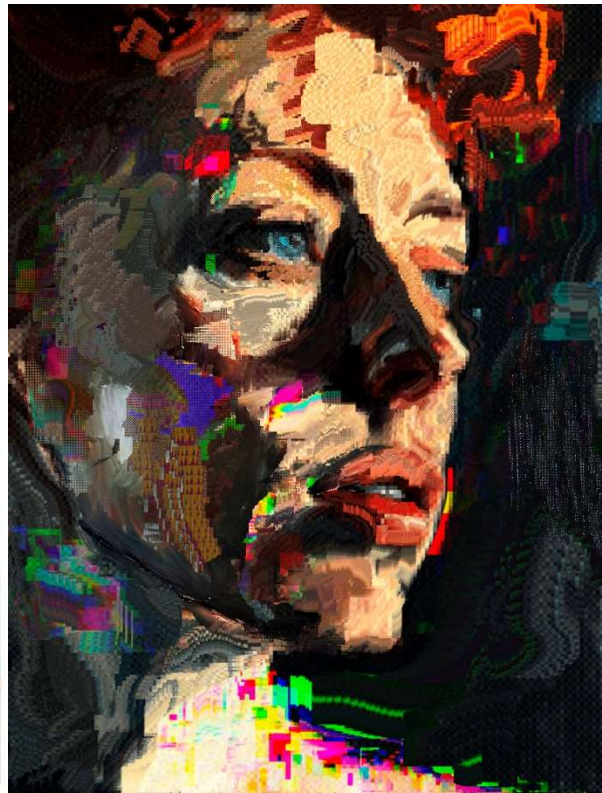


"Jenny" (2024)





“Caballers” (2024)



“Cold World” (2024)



“Babel” (2024)

*11..What about AI art/ digital painting attracted you to the style(s)?*

AI attracted me because the barrier for entry was virtually non-existent. I’m not a tech person. I found it incredibly easy to use and get something that, while not perfect, looked pretty good. It was also easy to experiment with different styles using it. Because it was so easy to use, I did so maniacally for months, and eventually got better at controlling it.

My use of digital painting began incrementally, initially as a means of editing AI works and later as an end in and of itself. I also think I was inspired just by breathing in the works that were floating around from the great painters here such as Ratcloaksy and Hasdrubal Waffle/Cedar Plank. My work is not similar stylistically, but they showed how personal, distinctive, and expressive digital painting media can be.

*12. When do you create? and what gets you into a creative mood? And what do you do when you get [writer’s] block?*

I’m very lucky in that I never have a true block. If I get stuck on a piece, I’ll set it aside and ruminate on it subconsciously while I work on other pieces. Usually when I go back, I’ll realize a solution to the difficulty I was encountering. Also related to this is an awareness of time slipping away. I really try not to waste time.

There’s very little consistency in the hours I keep from one week to the next, though my natural preference is to stay up all night working. If I’m taking a while to get started for



the day, I'll usually just get into it by going through the physical motions of work. I'll either start a painting or run some AI prompts with no specific goal in mind. But the act of doing will itself then spur ideas, and I'll get going from there. My routine is iterative, and I rely a great deal on my subconscious to guide me.

Other times there are specific pieces I have in mind, and I'll make it a goal to do x, y, or z for that on a particular day. I keep a notebook with a page for the goals I want to accomplish each day. Writing them down seems to free up my working memory, and I have also tricked myself into believing that it helps in some way to bring these actions into being.

*13. Is there somewhere specific you would like to see your art displayed? A venue you would love to have a solo exhibit? Or maybe [another] collective you would like to be a part of? Where do you want to take your art, or yourself as an artist, in the future?*

I'd like to have work displayed in Times Square. It seems to be a rite of passage here. A solo exhibit anywhere would be nice. Just now it seems like some distant dream. Ultimately, I'd like my work to be displayed anywhere and everywhere it can be. And I'd like to be able to cross over into major traditional cultural institutions.