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# EXPLORING AI THROUGH ART



Emily Gusba, Dr. Lauren Levesque, & Marta Samokishyn  
AI in Libraries: Conversations and Connections in the Capital,  
May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Photo by [Dan Farrell](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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## WHO ARE WE?



**EMILY  
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**MARTA  
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# AGENDA

**01**

## WHY IMAGES OF AI MATTER

How art shapes understanding

**02**

## HOW WE IMAGINE AI

Dominant visual narratives of AI

**03**

## CRITICAL ISSUES IN AI IMAGES

What is absent from the conversations

**04**

## REIMAGINING AI TOGETHER

Creative activity

# IMAGINE AI

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What image comes to mind when you think of AI?

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# OI

## WHY IMAGES OF AI MATTER

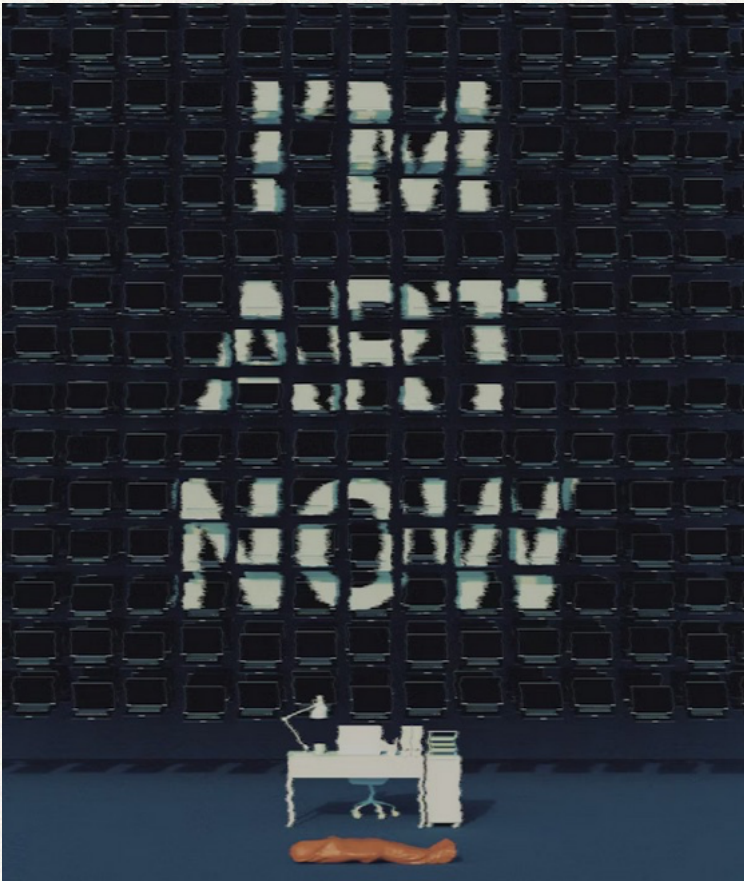


Photo by [Sijmen van Hooff](#) on [Unsplash](#)

How art shapes understanding

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# WHY ART MATTERS



Images are not neutral.  
They shape meaning

- Images guide interpretation & create mental models
- Help us interpret complex ideas
- Influence human judgment, reinforce myths, assumptions and power structures

Ex. AI depicted as robot suggest AI is human-like

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# CONCEPTUALIZING ARTS



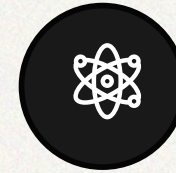
## IMPACT OF ARTS

The arts challenge us to think differently



## IDENTIFIES ISSUES

Point to potential lack of imagination (Lederach, 2005; 2010) and to alternative solutions



## IS DISRUPTIVE

Ask us to engage directly with the question: how can we think and act differently?



## OPENS PERSPECTIVE

The arts create space to consider other options



## COMMUNITY

These options are particularly powerful when collectively created and enacted



## ENCOUNTER

Enable human connection and encounter

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# A FEW CONSIDERATIONS



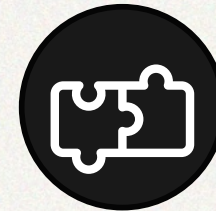
## AMBIGUITY

Need to acknowledge the ambiguity of the arts (e.g., they can be used to promote social justice/social change/nonviolence or their opposite)



## CONTEXT

Always need to consider context (e.g., we need to ask: what are the contexts in which we hope to use the arts and for what purpose?)

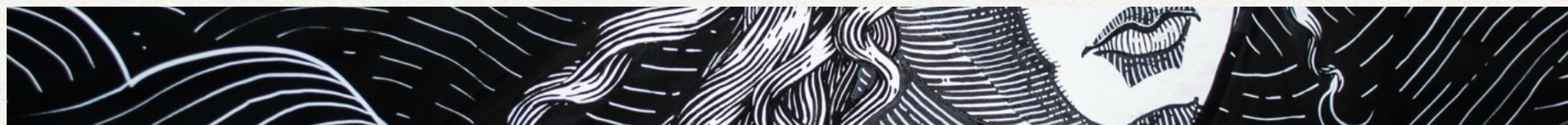


## DYNAMIC

Recognize that different forms of art have different dynamics or features related to their design and practice (e.g., dynamics stress that each art form needs be understood on its own terms).



# HOW CAN THE ARTS HELP US TO REIMAGINE OUR APPROACHES TO AI?



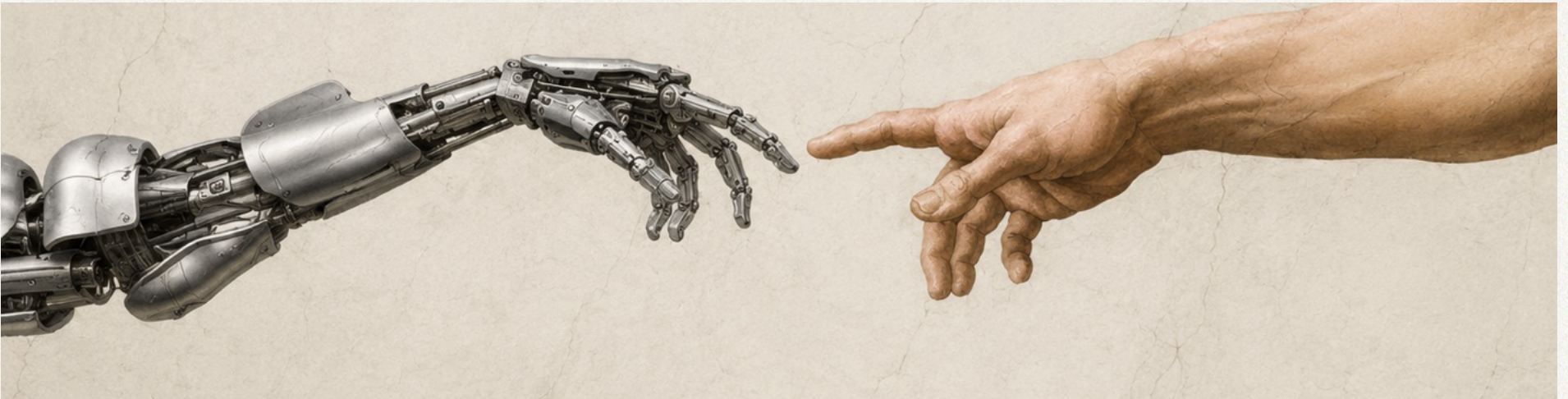
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Photo by [Diogo Nunes](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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# 02

## HOW WE IMAGINE AI



Dominant visual narratives of AI

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# WHAT DO IMAGES COMMUNICATE



## IMAGES AS METAPHORS

We encounter same symbols and metaphors in common visual narratives of AI



## THE MESSAGE

They communicate specific ideas about intelligence, technology and power

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# COMMON VISUAL NARRATIVES OF AI

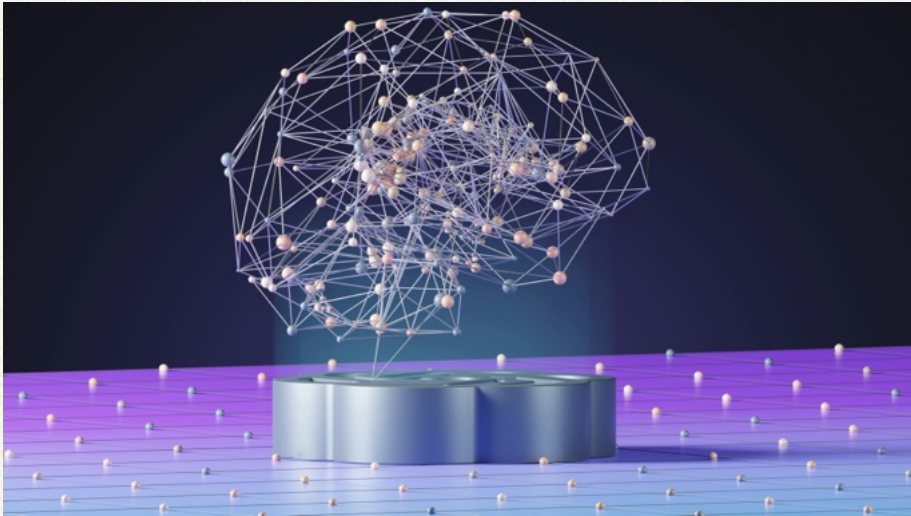


Photo by [Growtika](#) on [Unsplash](#)

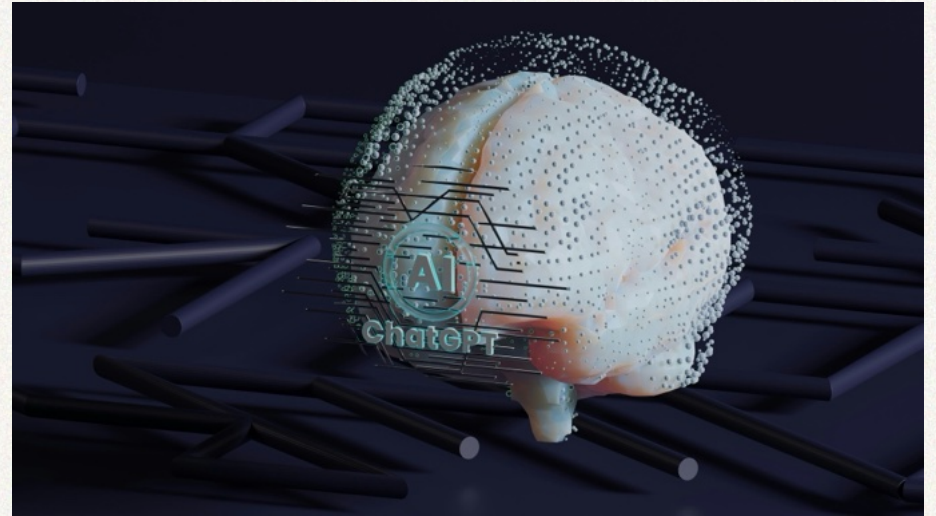


Photo by [Growtika](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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# COMMON VISUAL NARRATIVES OF AI



Photo by [ThisisEngineering](#) on [Unsplash](#)

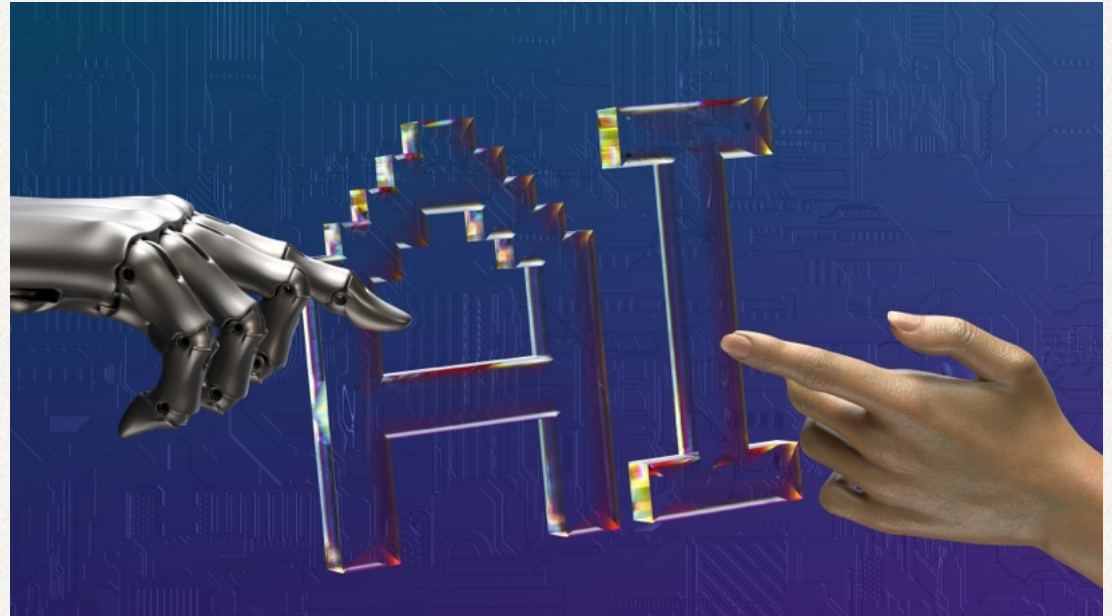


Photo by [Igor Omilaev](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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# COMMON VISUAL NARRATIVES OF AI

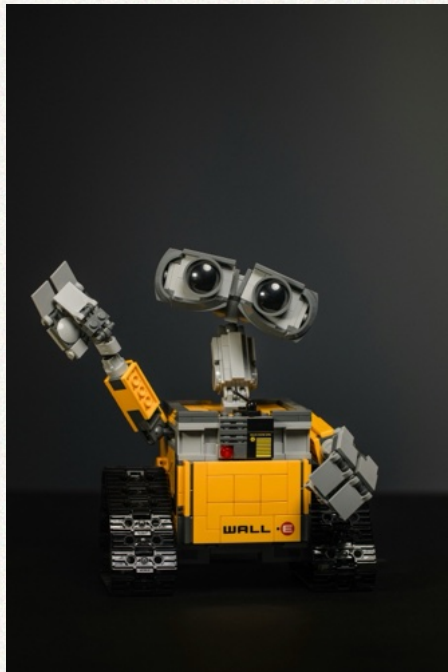


Photo by [Jason Leung](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Photo by [Gabriele Malaspina](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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# COMMON VISUAL NARRATIVES OF AI

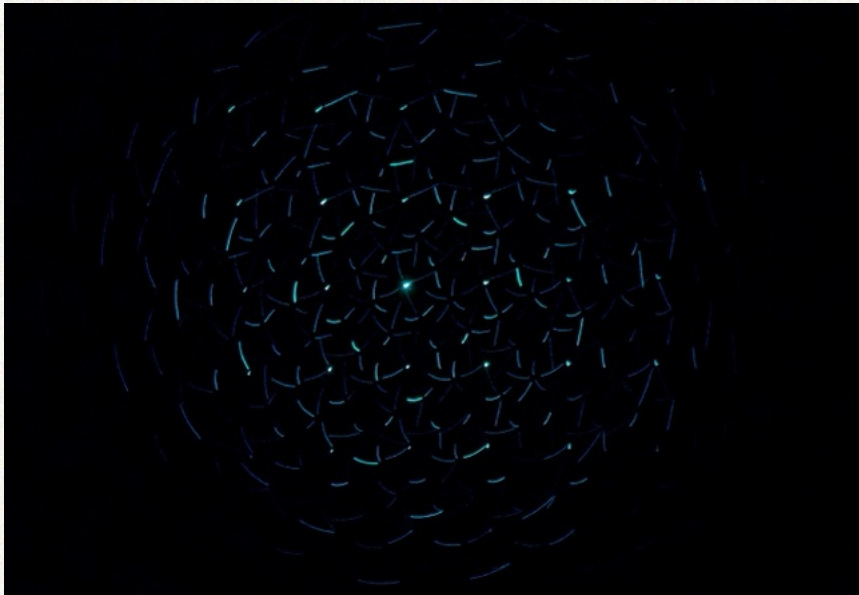


Photo by [Aron Visuals](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Photo by [Conny Schneider](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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# 03

## CRITICAL ISSUES IN AI IMAGES



Photo by [Birmingham Museums Trust](#) on [Unsplash](#)

What is absent from the conversations

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# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF AI



“This image shows multiple data servers located in a beautiful landscape but emitting a dark cloud of smoke. It demonstrates the impacts of data centres on the natural world through pollution emitted from the operation of the centres”



How does the narrative about AI as immaterial or “cloud-based” that obscures its on land, energy, water, and environment shape how we use it?



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# PRIVACY



“This digital collage modifies a 1900 piece to expose the deal proposed by Big Tech. The title refers to the gap between what is presented as an ideal future and what is actually being exchanged. The image points to how corporate narratives hide the real costs of this deal. What is presented as innovation and efficiency comes at the cost of constant data capture, surveillance and environmental damage”



Who benefits from the AI deal? Are the trade-offs in data, privacy, and surveillance worth the promise of progress?



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# AI AS REFLECTION



“The image breaks down the interactions between humans and technology that support the inner-workings of AI chatbots. AI reflects the human thoughts and opinions that are fed into systems through training and interaction. These three layers of the image (user, mirror, and code) break down the process of interactions and focus on the blurred lines between human work and AI generation”.



Yutong Liu & Kingston School of Art / <https://betterimagesofai.org> / <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



If AI is built from human input, why do we so often regard it as more neutral than humans?  
What assumptions underpin human trust in these systems?

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# HUMAN LABOUR & AI



“By blending traditional Persian Negargari with modern AI symbols—such as circuit boards, cloud storage, and digital glitches—the artwork underscores that AI is rooted in human effort, shaped over time through the fusion of data, labor, and algorithms, whilst also highlighting the interplay of heritage and technology”.



If AI is made from collective human labour, culture, data, and imagination, what happens when it is governed by profit, and who should have the power to shape its future?



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# 04

## REIMAGINING AI TOGETHER

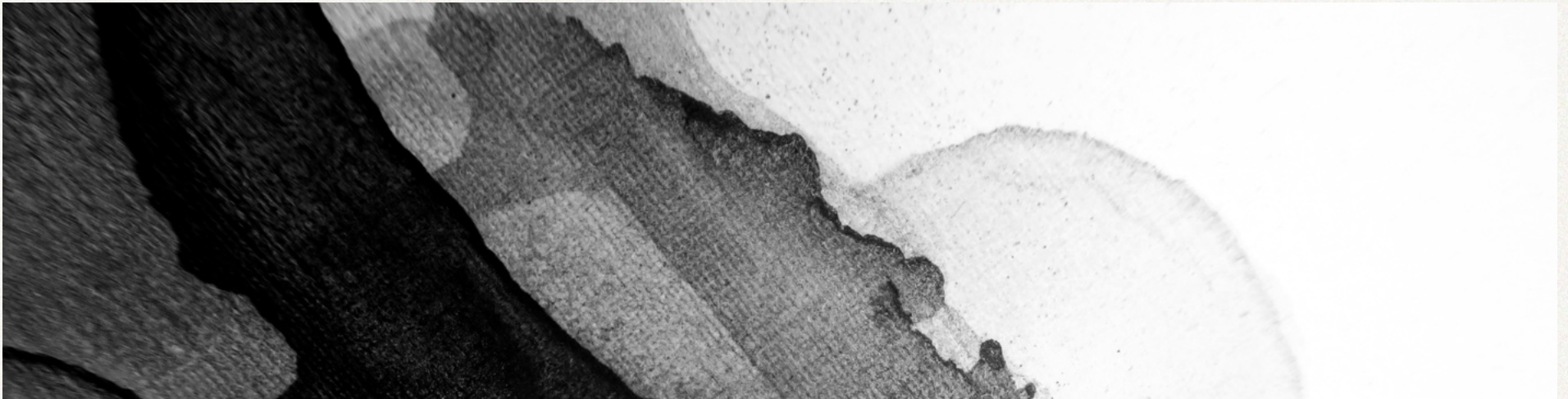


Photo by [FIA YANG](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Creative activity

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# WHAT STORY ABOUT AI WOULD YOU TELL THROUGH AN IMAGE?

Create a postcard that represents your vision, concerns, hopes, or questions about how AI may shape libraries, society, or learning

No artistic skills needed!

# THANKS

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Do you have any questions?

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# Resources

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Archival Images of AI: <https://aixdesign.co/projects/archival-images-of-ai>

Better Images of AI: <https://betterimagesofai.org/>

Dihal, K., and Duarte, T. (2023). *Better Images of AI: A Guide for Users and Creators*.

Cambridge and London: The Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence and We and AI.

<https://blog.betterimagesofai.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Better-Images-of-AI-Guide-Feb-23.pdf>

Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford University Press.