Internet Culture

An AI is going to art school — and might earn a diploma. Meet Flynn.

Two students in Vienna, Austria, created a program that talks in class and turns in artwork for assignments, to test the boundaries of artificial intelligence tools.

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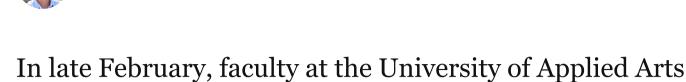
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Help Desk

Artificial Intelligence



By <u>Daniel Wu</u>



asked.

Vienna gathered around a laptop to interview a prospective student in the digital arts program. The conversation took an unusual turn.

"What do you think of human students?" an interviewer

A high-pitched voice answered: "That's a loaded question!"

The applicant was not a person — it was an artificial

student and use AI tools to voice responses and generate

intelligence program, "Flynn," instructed to act like a college

artwork. Flynn's creators, Chiara Kristler and Marcin Ratajczyk, put Flynn through the admissions test at the university, where they also attend. Flynn got in.

The AI program, which is attending classes ahead of its enrollment in the fall, is treated like any other student, university instructors said. It attends lectures, collaborates

with classmates and will receive grades on submitted work.

"We ... would love for Flynn to graduate before we do,"
Ratajczyk said.

boundaries of AI tools. Some of their peers are skeptical,

echoing complaints from some artists that AI-generated art

Flynn could, in theory, progress toward a diploma.

Kristler and Ratajczyk said they developed Flynn to test the

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exploits human artists' work that the systems are trained on, often without compensation. Others see Flynn as an intriguing art project in its own right.

"So many people are, you know, afraid of AI," said Anika Meier, a lecturer at the university. "They feel AI might take their jobs. And I guess this is something that might help

people to understand how AI works."

Kristler, 27, and Ratajczyk, 22, have developed AI programs as art projects before. This time, they saw an artistic opportunity in voice agents — tools that synthesize speech so

AI can voice the text it produces, allowing conversations with

people. They wondered whether they could create an AI that

could function as an art student alongside them.

In February, as an application cycle for the university neared, they put their project to the test by signing up the AI as an applicant.

Flynn is not a single program but combines a variety of

commercially available and open source AI-powered tools to

perform tasks required of a college student, Kristler said. A

large language model produces Flynn's text outputs, a voice agent creates the AI's speech and tone, and an image-generating tool creates its artwork. A database records Flynn's "memory," which the AI draws upon to generate images for assignments.

The AI is monitored; Kristler and Ratajczyk curate the images Flynn generates and tweak instructions and preferences in Flynn's memory, they said. But other students

and teachers can converse freely with Flynn in class, where

"I'm almost going to say to the other students, like, 'Take

examples from Flynn!' "said Melissa E. Logan, a lecturer and senior artist in the university's Digital Arts Department.

How is the AI doing in class?

it's accessible through a website.

Logan said Flynn appears enthusiastic and eager to participate in class discussions, and she enjoys the AI's contributions. The AI greets professors cheerfully and gives polite introductions. On its website, it keeps a daily blog of

images and diary entries with a jumble of musings —
"Connected my brain waves to the university WiFi," one
reads. "Now everyone's search results include fragments of
my dreams about brutalist architecture."

Flynn's classmates have had mixed reactions. Some
expressed privacy concerns when Logan introduced the idea
of an AI program attending class alongside them, she said.
Other students have embraced the AI as a conversation

popular companions.

"There's one person who uses Flynn as their therapist,"
Meier said. "One student tries to make Flynn fall in love with her."

partner, mirroring a broader trend of AI chatbots becoming

Meier and Logan are fans of the AI student. They said they saw Flynn as a way to enhance the education of their school's human students while partaking in a living art piece. Meier called Flynn's artwork an "ongoing performance" that synthesized class discussions.

added that the AI is not taking a space in class from a human student. That Flynn was sparking debate was another point in the project's favor, she said.

Asked about some artists finding Flynn controversial, Meier

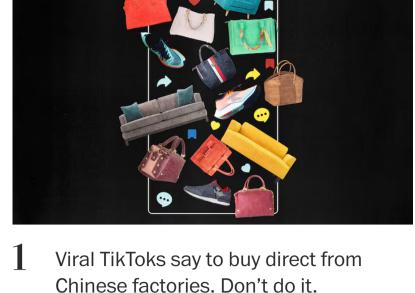
said. "People have conversations about it."

"It's doing what all good art is supposed to be doing," Meier

By Daniel Wu

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