

**Speaker 1**

Yeah. Okay. So we should be recording right now. ... So just tell me how your day is today.

**Speaker 2**

Everything's pretty mellow. I have some students who are obsessed with their cell phones and tiktok. What else? Uh Sunny day outside. I try not to take personal property away, but I'm about to.

**Speaker 1**

Could you please state your name occupation inside and outside of school?

**Speaker 2**

Sure. So I'm Jessica Cohen- Bender. I am a ceramics teacher here at Mountain View High School outside of the school. I would not say that I have an occupation but more of like a side hustle as a science illustrator. And I have sold photography and drawings in various capacities, but that's probably most germane to this conversation. (00:50)

**Speaker 1**

You said science illustrator could you go a little bit more in-depth about that?

**Speaker 2**

I have two degrees. One is environmental studies and that's heavy on natural history and biology background. And then one is an art um And then a master's in teaching obviously, but whatever. Um And so the intersection of those two for me has been really observation focus, like really looking at keen details.(1:15)

And so for things like marine sciences, there's a limited capacity to actually take a photo underwater. So there's certain things that actually still require illustration and so that can be analog using traditional tools or it can be digital or some combination of the two. (1:33)

**Speaker 1**

You said that you have a master's in teaching. Did you go to the same school to pursue all of your degrees?

**Speaker 2**

I actually did not on purpose. It's just out of convenience. I love Santa Cruz. And so I went to U C S C for all of that. Um I did a little bit of like extension work at Cabrillo and then a little bit at various community colleges for ceramics just for fun.

I went to Santa Cruz for um my Bachelor's and my master's ...

**Speaker 1**

For the documentary. Yeah, I'm not really supposed to ask questions or to hear myself asking the questions.

**Speaker 2**

Oh, gotcha. Gotcha. Complete sentences. You got it for sure.

**Speaker 1**

Um So how long have you been a teacher outside of Mountain View and at Mountain View (2:27)

**Speaker 2**

So I've been a teacher for a really long time. Um I started out teaching sixth grade camp back in the day and that was 2003. And I've been a teacher ever since in terms of public school teaching, I've been in um I had a private school stand and then I've been in public school since 2008. ... This is my first year here. Yeah.

**Speaker 1**

Um So you mentioned that you did teach AP art. So that would have been in one of the, one of the public schools before.

**Speaker 2**

Yes

**Speaker 1**

3:07 Could you walk me through your experiences? Teaching AP art?

**Speaker 2**

Yeah, I love teaching AP art um AP art so you have to have like a basic understanding of what the exam is with AP art.

(3:15) So it's a portfolio exam where students are documenting their process, not just their product. So they have to demonstrate originality, experimentation and they also have to have some commitment or um some, they call it the sustained inquiry.

So they have to have some inquiry question that they personally have developed and then they form their art around that whatever that topic is, whatever their passion is. (3:39)

So my experience has been awesome. I love teaching that course because it has allowed me to get to know my students on a much deeper level because they create a lot of their own prompts as opposed to me creating prompts for them. And then I'm kind of like a coach and I help them reach their goals, but their goals in a classroom are very disparate. And so the originality and the creativity that come out of that class are fantastic.

And I will also say that they enter, typically they enter as very qualified artists and so their, their technique is already quite strong. So we just work on the student voice after that. Um Did I get everything you wanted to hear in that? Okay,

**Speaker 1**

I love how you're talking about the independence with choosing and the creative process.

Could you talk, specifically about the submitting process? Because I really want to talk about how they have to share their process.

**Speaker 2**

(4:36) So they have there's two different sections.

In the ap exam um for submitting their actual process, there's two different sections. So one section focuses a lot on technique. It does have some correlation to the originality and the design, but it's mostly about technique.

The other is really about your process. You have 15 slides to convey how you arrived at your ideas, how you experimented with materials. Um And they can be non traditional materials. You can do your work out of like chocolate syrup and string like you can go crazy with your materials, but whatever it is you're using, you have to document that you experimented um that you refined over time and that you reached some logical conclusion from that experimentation and refining that represents you're able to convey your ideas visually as well as possible.

**Speaker 1**

Um Could you try and transition into how AI is actually going to affect how this entire process might change in the future?

**Speaker 2**

Um The AP process. Yeah.

**Speaker 1**

At the start, you're talking about independence in choosing the prompts that they will have a personal connection with their prompt ... for the grading process, the process of showing their, how they got and how they made their art. How would AI Affect the AP art test.

**Speaker 2**

(6:19). So there's a couple, there's a couple different things going on here. So one is if you're using traditional materials versus if you're a 2D exam taker, um, you have the ability to, in the 2D exam you can use any medium. So there are some students that I've had and some, you know, increasingly students are using digital media exclusively for their portfolio with no actual hands-on stuff.

So obviously, if you're doing something hands on, it's quite easy to just photograph yourself doing the thing. So there's no question that, I mean, as much as anything, there's no question that you did it. Um And you can show that process changing in whatever that traditional um or tangible 2D media is.

I think that the trouble comes in or the growth area, let's say comes in when we start thinking about students who are using just digital media because it's very hard to prove who created that sequence of pixels, right?

(7:13) Like that's, that's a bit more challenging. I also, I'm not a member of the AP commission or the college board at all. I have graded exams. So I've been trained to read exams and score them, but I don't know internally what they're planning for the future of AI and how they're planning to parse what student generated versus what's machine generated versus what some combination of the two, meaning a student using AI to generate really interesting original art? Are they using it as a tool? Are they using it to create derivative art? That's very low effort and very low yield. So I'm not sure how they're going to parse that, but I think that's the critical question coming up.

### **Speaker 1**

But they do have a ban on the use of AI when it comes to submitting Ai art?

### **Speaker 2**

(8:03)So for the moment you can actually, I mean, this public, you can look it up. Um There's a full ban on using any AI in your AP art portfolio regardless of what medium you're using.

### **Speaker 1**

Can we talk about your experience with what you define as AI art? Because I know when we were talking yesterday, you were talking about photoshop, you're talking about computer generated art and stuff like that. And um for sure, what was your first experience with AI affecting art?

### **Speaker 2**

(8:47)So just to preface this, I would say that I view AI as a spectrum. So a lot of the things we're calling AI right now have predecessors, right? This comes from somewhere.

So one of my first experiences on that spectrum would be when I was in a (9:07)science illustration class um at a university level. And I had a professor who I very, very highly respect and at the time Respected. Um and I was instructed, very clearly instructed by this professor to follow their lead. And what they do in their professional practice is they would **lift** various textures, various brushstrokes um from **other artists** or from other sources online.

And then they would very definitely **photoshop** that. And so their final product looked like it was created with two D media. Um But it was not, it was fully digital, it was impeccable in its quality, but it was essentially a **collage of other people's labor**. And so from that, it reframed my thinking on what **belongs to us as artists** (9:57)and what we present as our **own** work and what we're **required to disclose** about the creation process.

**S 1**

That was awesome.

Um Could you talk about how that kind of shape or you did talk about how that kind of shaped your view on art and how people are, what might consist as an artist's own art, right? And how somebody might be influenced by other artists, art.

Would you say that what the ai machines are doing now? Like DALL-E are basically doing the same thing or do you think you're taking it a step further?

**Speaker 2**

Definitely. The current machines are definitely taking it a step further than a Photoshop example. (10:59) I think, you know, Photoshop is what, 20 years old or more, I don't know when Adobe invented that product, but it's, it's, you know, there's a lot of iterations of that software, the new stuff, I think. Yeah, I think we have to admit that it's taking, it's taking language and transforming it to images.

That's not something that we were seeing before. So there's certainly that element and then there's a lot that I would say, I'm probably not qualified from a technological point of view. Like I just don't, I'm not a programmer, you know, I understand what natural language programming is. But like that's not my expertise. So you'd do better to get that from somebody else.

**Speaker 1**

Um So, but companies have come out and said that they train their engines using data sets of other artists

So the question really is, and the big question is, is at one point at what point does it become inspiration? And at what point does it become genuine plagiarism? Because these, these machines aren't making up, art, they aren't creating new art from inspiration.

They're literally taking examples that they've seen and they're just duplicating it maybe with a different color, but what they are essentially doing what they really are just duplicating and they're not taken into their own interpretation.

## Speaker 2

(12:20) So I think, I mean, there's a lot to tease apart here and I think ethicists will be teasing this apart for a long time, especially as the software and the use of the software develops over time. So with that caveat knowing that there's, you know, and all, and I am not going to summarize it all in one cute little nutshell. Um I will say that the **(12:36) role of the artist feels like it is diminishing and the role of the tool feels like it is increasing.**

So, you know, in the past, it was the artist had to fully conceive of the art. Let's go Renaissance art. Um The artist had to fully conceive of it, create the sketches, use live models and they had to synthesize a bunch of different skills to arrive at a stone statue or sculpture that we still, you know, worship in Florence, today. Nowadays, you can spend 30 seconds typing up, you know, cute and clever prompt and IAI will give you that instant gratification of **feeling like you have**

**created a thing**. But the **(13:18) level of investment by the human versus the software or the data set that they relied on is obviously disproportional** compared to, you know, the OG traditional art.

## Speaker 1

The OG art, ... what um influences in your life kind of attracted you to becoming an artist or even just teaching art.

## Speaker 2

(13:59) What attracted me to art is kind of, it's so early in my development that it's like actually hard to pinpoint. But I was an only child for the first eight years of my life and my mom was a single working mom. So there were a lot of times when I needed to be quiet and she would give me pads of paper and whatever pens and pencils she could get from her office.

And so I just had a good time by myself just sketching random little comics and things. And I think from there, you know, being in elementary school, you get reinforcement for what you're

already good at. And I had so much practice that I got reinforcement. And so little by little, like I developed my own practice and I always found that like my introvert, my introverted side was nurtured by being an artist.

Um being a teacher, I mean, I could say that it comes from, I was like the oldest kid in my family and I did a lot of babysitting and whatnot, but I was whatever it is, whether it's circum stance or whether it's just innate in me. Um (14:52)I really enjoy the process of relating to other people, talking about creative ideas and helping them realize what methods or skills they need in order to express themselves.

And so I find it super gratifying. So I'm not sure if that comes from like being a babysitter and just liking, you know, working with younger people or if that's just who I am, but it's, it's fun and gratifying beautiful story, perhaps more complex than you're going for.

### Speaker 1

It's amazing. Um You said that there was a connection that you felt with the art and with other people through creating art. Do you think people could still find that connection with just typing words inside of a prompt or machine?

### Speaker 2

I absolutely think that people can still use AI as a tool of art. I think that it's inevitable. We will have knockoffs, we will have derivative, we will have a lot of boring trash that pulls from a flawed data set and relies on flawed prompts. But with that being said, we will also have absolute brilliance and we already do have some examples of that emerging.

One of the places I look to is just, you know, within the last month or two is looking at the(16:07) **Black futurists**. There are some artists who I would certainly call them artists who are producing very body positive, very inclusive, very age positive art that is absolutely gorgeous to look at. Um It is new and unlike anything I've seen from a painterly perspective, which could be what I'm exposed to. It could just be that I haven't seen that stuff out there.

A couple of different artists have like a very science fiction sort of look, but it's also very, very warm and very affirming. So with things like that, um I guess for me it's just like a little inkling of what's to come. So I think, you know,(16:49) **it's the internet, you have to weed through the trash to find the gems**. But there is really, really incredible stuff emerging with the emergence of new tools.

### Speaker 1



Um I remember yesterday we had a big talk about how not everybody is actually gonna have access to this art. Um Would you like to talk about that?

## Speaker 2

For sure. So I think one of the huge issues with **AI is one of the huge issues with the internet at large**, (17:18) which is access. Um Those of us who are geographically located next to tech, those of us who **have funds to purchase** subscriptions or software or hardware or whatever the things are um **have increased access to voice** and we **increase our presence** in the data set.

The problem with that is that **wealth distribution often in this country anyways is lying on racial lines or age lines or other things.**(17:48) And so getting equal representation and equal voice from everybody so that we can have a rich data set. That's representative, fair, beautiful and creates the world we want to see is a major challenge for AI I really hope, I don't know that it will, but I really hope that people who are at these very early stages of developing um different programs

will make very hard efforts to include in their basic data sets and their basic assumptions that there are a lot of voices that are important and interesting and beautiful that need to be incorporated.

## Speaker 1

Thank you so much for that. Um ... That was, that was such, that was such a beautiful, like branch of insight into, you know, what, you know, a I might how scary it is but how beautiful it can be, you know.

## Speaker 2

you're very gracious interviewer.

## Speaker 1

Thank you. Do you think that that there um that these companies truly do have the best intentions for people?

## Speaker 2

I don't think that a corporation can have an intention. I think that the individual humans that are in the room are the critical elements and I think that we all see financial motivation is huge. So if people are financially motivated to do something, they often choose that. Um and **ethics is sometimes a side project**, I find that really tough.

I mean, I'm a teacher for a reason. I, you know, that's, that's not where my heart is. Um So I have a have a tough time relating to that, but I think we all have to face that. (19:53) Like financial motivation is real and there's a lot, lot, lot of money to be made in this space. So what the individual people, whether the good people or bad people are mixed, like come on, we're all mixed.

Like what decisions they make might be responsive to early laws we pass. Um we have the ability to, you know, consult with professors or ethics, you know, ethicists or whoever it is that is, you know, kind of our gold mine of information and insight into projects like this. We can consult them and we can craft guardrails in our society that incentivize things we actually want or we can just let it go wild and like see what happens.

I hope that we create some guardrails, especially in these early stages when there's so much potential for good and so much potential for just wacky stuff to happen. I think we might do well to be conservative upfront and then expand those guardrails as it proves necessary, productive and beautiful for our society. That was perfect. So

### **Speaker 1**

we do have to end. But is there anything any last points that you really want to add or something that you might want to email me

### **Speaker 2**

that you have? Um If I can find the one particular artist that I'm speaking of a lot, um I will send you a link to their Instagram. Um Yeah, there's several people who fall under that umbrella. There was one in particular that kind of kicked my butt in a really good way. Like I was just stunned by the beauty. (21:31) I think overall, like it's important for us to consider what the value of art creation is and whether or not **we're letting robots steal our joy in that way.**

I teach ceramics. So I'm heavily biased. Um **I love the process of creating.** I actually **don't care that much about the stuff I make as a finished product.** I think AI is those interactions aren't necessarily, they can, but they don't necessarily follow that formula. So for me, **I'm very protective over the creation process um as opposed to a product that is commercially**

**viable.** So I think we just need to do some deep thinking about the mental health benefits and just the dopamine like just the social sharing that comes from the creation process

**Speaker 1**

so much for your time. Thank you so much. Quick and quickly planned interview. It's a super fun topic. I obviously care. So I appreciate you coming around with it. I'm really stoked that students are passionate about this topic.