Adapting AI-Generated Personas From Marketing Research to Media Art Practice

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Abstract

This paper explores the adaptation of artificial intelligence (AI) personas from conventional marketing research into the domain of media art practice as a research-creation methodology. AI personas are commonly used as synthetic profiles to predict consumer behavior from aggregated data. This research pivots these personas into a prototyping and audience simulation tool for artists. The methodology involves using mindful design and limited-knowledge personas to foster a structured, private dialogue that clarifies the artist's intent rather than replacing it. A concrete example, the installation "*Cyber Séance*: Rituals of the Machine Afterlife," illustrates this approach, demonstrating how an AI conversational partner can guide design decisions and audience interaction. Ethical tensions surrounding authorship, AI influence, and the potential for bias are also critically discussed. This proposed approach ultimately redefines AI from an authoritative tool to a controlled, interpretive space for engagement, supporting artistic agency and offering a novel methodology for art-based research.

Keywords: AI personas, research-creation, media art, artistic agency, audience simulation

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Introduction

The intersection of art and technology is a growing field of inquiry, with researchers and artists exploring novel tools and methodologies (Epstein et al., 2023). This paper investigates the use of AI personas within media art research as a potential avenue for exploring identity and creativity. AI personas, synthetic profiles built from aggregated data to simulate human behaviors, are typically used in fields like marketing and healthcare to predict consumer behavior and inform decision-making without involving real individuals (Ndiaye, 2025). The proposed research aims to pivot these AI personas from their traditional evaluative function to a prototyping tool and audience simulator within an artistic context.

Background on Research-Creation

Research-Creation, also known as practice-led research or arts-based research in other contexts, is an academic methodology that integrates artistic practice with scholarly investigation to generate new knowledge and innovation through the process of creation itself (Manning, 2016). This approach recognizes the artwork not just as an outcome or a creative presentation of research, but as an intrinsic form of inquiry that produces unique insights that text-based research might not (Springgay et al., 2005). This methodology is characterized by a fluid, iterative process of making, experimenting, reflecting, and gathering feedback, allowing artists to learn through making. This process is distinct from simply using research for creation, as the artistic practice actively informs and challenges theoretical frameworks, contributing to scholarly discourse in a unique, interdisciplinary manner (Sun, 2024). The methodology demands that the creative process and the resulting work are held to peer-review standards of excellence, often requiring clear research questions and theoretical contextualization.

The Role of Dialogue in Art Practice

Spoken discourse is understood as a form of social action in which people construct identities, negotiate power, and maintain relationships, with meaning shaped by context, roles, and expectations rather than by individual intention alone (Cameron, 2001). On the other hand, creative processes in art-based research often thrive on a non-linear process involving literature review, journaling, and conversation with collaborators, materials, and imagined audiences (Watson, 2019). This externalization of ideas and the reception of feedback are critical for challenging assumptions (Cameron, 2001) and deepening the creative direction. The proposed use of AI personas extends this natural dialogic process by introducing structured, multiple viewpoints. Unlike generic large language models (LLMs) which can offer overwhelming responses, these specialized personas are deliberately designed with limited knowledge and specific perspectives to foster a more controlled and meaningful dialogue. They are given background stories, names, and references that limit the data that AI model runs on. This approach helps artists explore diverse reactions to their work, from perspectives they might otherwise find difficult to access, thereby guiding their artistic inquiry and providing complementary feedback.

Problem Statement

The central problem in integrating AI into creative practice lies in the significant ethical tension between AI influence and the artist's identity and authorship (Bomba & De Angeli, 2025). Generative AI systems are highly persuasive and can quickly provide abundant suggestions, creating a risk of “creative drift” where the artist inadvertently transfers creative control to the

machine (Epstein et al., 2023). This over-reliance risks reducing the artist's unique voice and agency. The problem, therefore, is maintaining artistic agency while leveraging the capabilities of AI tools in a way that respects existing ethical frameworks and reinforces, rather than replacing human creative judgment (Baeyaert, 2025).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the use of AI personas as a way of adapting AI tools to serve as controlled, exploratory research collaborators within media art practice. The research proposes a shift of AI from an authoritative or all-knowing source of truth (Kidd & Birhane, 2023) to a focused tool for engagement. This focus is achieved by limiting the AI persona's knowledge to specific persona with characterized references and context (Yeykelis et al., 2024). This transforms the AI interaction into a limited knowledge mirror that clarifies the artist's own intent. By doing so, artists can explore complex human journeys, such as the experience of a digital afterlife explored in the *Cyber Séance* project. In this project, by treating the AI's responses as interpretable data, not definitive answers, artists protected their agency while enriching the research-creation process with AI personas.

Literature Review

The integration of AI into creative processes introduces profound questions regarding creativity, authorship, and agency (Leong, 2015). Generative AI systems are highly persuasive and can quickly provide abundant suggestions or visual outputs, creating a risk of losing agency where the artist inadvertently transfers creative control to the machine (Epstein et al., 2023). This over-reliance risks reducing the artist’s unique voice and threatening their sense of ownership over the creative work. Generic large language models (LLMs), which are persuasive and can instantly provide numerous suggestions, particularly tempt artists to rely on AI input rather than their own vision and kowledge. The central challenge lies in leveraging AI as a creative tool while maintaining artistic agency and protecting the authenticity of human creative expression.

AI personas are synthetic profiles built from aggregated data to simulate human behaviors and attitudes (Sattele & Carlos Ortiz, 2024). These personas offer a potential solution to the challenges that using LLMs introduces. Originally developed for marketing and healthcare research, AI personas enable businesses to model and predict consumer behavior efficiently, simulate hard-to-reach audiences, and conduct rapid testing without exhausting real participants (Verve, 2024). These tools reduce research costs while supporting early-stage exploration (Hardcastle et al., 2025). Advanced implementations like Verve Intelligent Personas achieve high accuracy (correlations over 0.9 with real human responses) by building on curated, validated datasets (Verve, 2024). Park et al. show that interview-based generative agents predict individual attitudes and behaviors with high accuracy, achieving up to 0.85 correlation with participants’ own response, consistently (Park et al., 2024). These agents meet demographic and persona-based baselines across surveys and personality measures.

When adapted for artistic practice, AI personas can serve as controlled research collaborators, providing multiple perspectives and simulating audience responses while remaining bounded by specific knowledge parameters that prevent them from overwhelming the artist’s creative vision. These personas can be imagined as alien intelligences, partial or fragmented consciousnesses confined within computational systems, or non-human perspectives drawn from animals, ecosystems, or natural processes. However, the application of AI personas in art

raises distinct ethical concerns. AI models are trained on vast datasets of existing art and literature, often without the original artists' consent or compensation, raising questions about intellectual property and fair attribution (Lovato et al., 2024). This practice risks perpetuating biases embedded in the training data, potentially leading to outputs that reflect harmful cultural, gender, or racial stereotypes (Amin et al., 2025). The lack of established legal frameworks around human-AI collaboration further complicates authorship and accountability (Jie et al., 2025). The challenge, therefore, lies in navigating the tension between leveraging AI personas for innovative creative input and maintaining the artist's agency, ensuring ethical data sourcing, and critically addressing potential biases to develop responsible collaborative practices.

Case Study: The Cyber Séance Installation

To explore these questions in practice, this research employed a case study involving an installation project titled *Cyber Séance*: Rituals of the Machine Afterlife, a collaboration between Zhino Yousefi and Kyle Duffield. The project began with a question about the digital afterlife (i.e. When someone dies, their data persists in the digital realm). The artists imagined a fictional character, "John," who had passed away, and built an art installation around the idea of a partial digital replica of him still existing. Using a tool like Character.ai, the artists created an AI persona of John, feeding it his imaginary background, relationships, and limited data fragments. The intent was not to replace human reflection but to use the persona as a way to speculate on what a digital echo of John might sound or feel like. Visitors interacted with this persona through a digital séance table as part of the installation (see Figure 1). The conversations the artists had with the persona even influenced the final design, leading to the decision to give John a choice about continuing or destroying its own existence, which resonated well with the audience.

Interaction Design: The Digital Séance Table

The physical interface (the digital séance table) served as the primary site of engagement. Unlike passive exhibits, visitors took an active role in "administering the encounter," effectively generating the performance through their dialogue with the AI persona. The combination of the physical table, lamp, Virtual Reality (VR) visuals of his data, and the AI persona created an assemblage where the of the representation of digital data became a source of emotional connection for the audience.

Figure 1

Cyber Séance Installation – Participants Engaging in Conversations With an AI Persona

Results

Using Character.ai to model John revealed how AI personas handle fragmented data. Early interactions showed that the system could maintain John's imagined background and personality traits in short exchanges. Over longer séance-like sessions, however, the persona gradually drifted toward more generalized, emotionally intelligent responses rather than adhering closely to John's fragmentary data. The final installation centered on the audience's emotional response to the AI's perceived agency and personality. Giving the persona a choice about continuing its own existence emerged as a key design success. In our study, identity consistency and control over one's digital legacy were central concern, and allowing John to choose between deletion or persistence activated ethical questions around digital dignity and posthumous autonomy. Visitors described the experience as a speculative tool for coping with loss, shifting the focus from technological necromancy toward a more nuanced exploration of how digital remains can sustain relationships between the living and the dead.

Conclusion

This research argues that by mindfully designing AI personas as controlled, exploratory collaborators, artists can maintain agency while still benefiting from AI as a research tool. The key is limiting the persona's knowledge base to specific artistic references and contextual history, effectively transforming it into a limited knowledge collaborator that clarifies the artist's own intent rather than overriding it. The *Cyber Séance* project serves as one example of this approach, where the AI persona guided a research project about digital afterlife while the artist retained full creative control.

This approach suggests that AI personas could be treated as another voice in the room, and preferably not as an ultimate authority or source of truth. By pushing back against generic LLM suggestions, the artist's unique identity and perspective emerge more clearly. This structured engagement helps manage the temptation to rely entirely on instant AI responses and protects the originality and authenticity of the artwork. The research findings suggest that AI personas can offer new modes of creative expression but must be coupled with critical engagement and continued reflection on human agency in the artistic process to develop responsible guidelines for collaborative practices. The ultimate responsibility for research outcomes and artistic value remains with the human artist and/or researcher, who uses AI personas as valuable conversational partners.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting

grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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