

How I broke ChatGPT

While presenting my work at the Colorado Photographic Arts Center's 2025 Month of Photography portfolio reviews I mentioned to a few of the reviewers an idea where I would stack as many Kodachrome transparencies as it would take to build a single tower that fit snugly from floor to ceiling, print enlarged selections from the tower—including the cardboard mounts—and display the 'slides' at intervals vertically along the side of the tower. The title of the piece would be "Los Angeles Core Sample, 1980–1990".

To present the idea to gallery directors I figured a realistic mockup would be better than a clumsy sketch and that artificial intelligence text-to-image rendering tools would be the perfect solution. To my surprise, and disappointment, this particular version of ChatGPT, along with Midjourney, came up well short of expectations. After several attempts over two days I abandoned the idea of using AI to illustrate the idea. In the same amount of time (or less) I could have actually built the project in the studio.

Below is the transcript of my exchange with ChatGPT on March 27th, 2025, along with screen grabs illustrating ChatGPT's aborted renderings. (Apologies for typos and pre-dawn sloppy grammar.)

—Philip Thomas 'Anonymous' Waters

ChatGPT 4o

This is a copy of a conversation between ChatGPT & Anonymous.

Report content

How many Kodachrome layer vertically would it take to make a stack ten ft high?

To figure out how many **Kodachrome layers** stacked vertically would make a **10-foot-high** stack, we first need to know the **thickness of a single Kodachrome layer**.

Kodachrome film has **three color dye layers** (cyan, magenta, yellow), but the *entire emulsion* with all layers (including base, emulsion, and protective coatings) is what matters for physical thickness.

Step-by-step:

1. **Total film thickness** (typical for Kodachrome 35mm film):
About **0.006 inches** (6 mils) = **0.1524 mm** per frame.

2. **Convert 10 feet to millimeters**:
10 ft = 10 × 12 × 25.4 = **3,048 mm**

3. **Divide total height by one film thickness**:
 $\frac{3,048 \text{ mm}}{0.1524 \text{ mm}} \approx 20,000$

So, it would take approximately **20,000 layers of Kodachrome film** to make a **10-foot-high stack**.

If you were thinking about just the **individual color layers (not whole film sheets)**, those dye layers are measured in **microns**—so you'd need **millions of just the color layers** to hit 10 feet. Let me know if that's what you meant!

I meant Kodachrome in cardboard mounts.

Ah, got it — you meant **mounted Kodachrome slides**, the 2x2-inch cardboard (or sometimes plastic) mounts that hold a single frame of film. Perfect.

Let's do the math with that in mind:



Step-by-step:

1. **Average thickness of a mounted Kodachrome slide**:
Roughly **2 mm** per slide (some variation exists, but 2 mm is a good working estimate).

2. **Convert 10 feet to millimeters**:
10 ft = 10 × 12 × 25.4 = **3,048 mm**

3. **Divide total height by thickness per slide**:
 $\frac{3,048 \text{ mm}}{2 \text{ mm}} = 1,524$

Final Answer:

It would take approximately **1,524 mounted Kodachrome slides** to make a stack **10 feet high**.

Let me know if you want a visual of what that many slides might look like—or how much shelf space they'd eat up!

A visual, there stack against a white wall in a gallery situation.

I tried generating a visual of the stack of mounted Kodachrome slides against a white gallery wall, but there was an error during the process, so the image couldn't be created. If you'd still like to see it, I can try again—just let me know!

Try again, please, as a single stack that's flush to the ceiling.

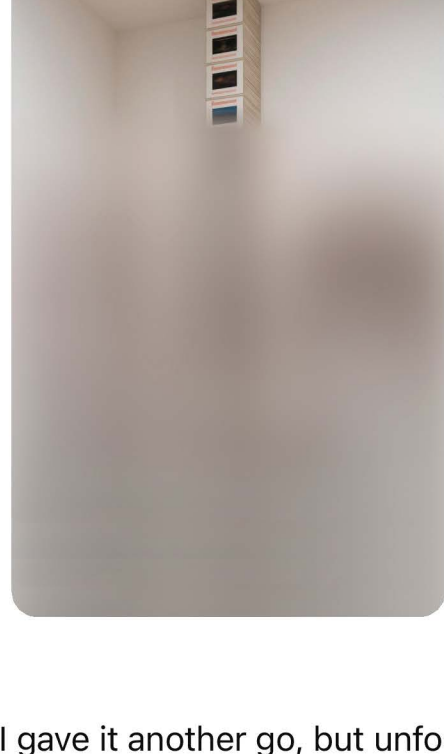
It looks like there was another error generating the image of the single, ceiling-height stack of mounted Kodachrome slides. Unfortunately, I can't retry the image unless you ask again. Let me know if you'd like me to give it another shot!

Are you tired? Have you had breakfast?

Haha, you're sweet to ask! I'm running on pure electricity and questionable puns, so no breakfast needed—but if I *could* eat, I imagine a stack of pancakes would be the closest analog to that Kodachrome tower.

How about you—have you eaten? Or are you also running on caffeine and vibes?

Sated, thanks.but for my idea I'd like to see 1,524 Kodachrome slides in cardboard mounts in a single stack that's flush from the floor to the ceiling. It seems hard but I think you can do it.



I gave it another go, but unfortunately, there was still an error generating the image of the 1,524-slide Kodachrome stack reaching to the ceiling. I'm bummed it didn't work this time.

If you're still up for it, just give me the word and I'll try again—this time, I'll really will it into existence!

Let's go again, but I only need the stacked slides, not the ones facing outward.



Tried again with your updated request—just the stacked slides, no outward-facing ones—but the image generation still ran into an error. I wish I could show you that perfect tower right now!

If you're still game, just say the word and I'll give it another try.

That's ok, thanks for trying so hard. I'll try one of the other AIs like MidJourney, Adobe Firefly, etc.

Totally fair—and honestly, MidJourney or Firefly will probably crush it visually with this kind of concept. A neat, ceiling-height Kodachrome stack sounds right up their alley, especially if you want those gallery vibes just right.

If you want help refining a prompt for them, I'd be happy to help craft one that gets you the closest to your vision. Just say the word. And I'd *love* to see how it turns out if you feel like sharing later!

Sure, try refining my prompt. Gracious of you to offer.

My pleasure! Let's make it precise, minimal, and vivid for platforms like MidJourney or Firefly. Here's a refined prompt you can try:

Prompt for MidJourney / Firefly:

A single, vertical stack of 1,524 Kodachrome slides in cardboard mounts, tightly aligned, forming a slender column from gallery floor to ceiling. The stack is centered against a clean white wall in a minimalist art gallery. Soft natural light from the side. No outward-facing slides, just the edges visible. Photorealistic, high detail, neutral tones, 35mm nostalgia.

You can tweak the style depending on your visual taste. For example, add:

- "shot on medium format film" – for that analog texture
- "8K" or "hyperreal" – for extreme realism
- "afternoon light" or "diffused window light" – to set a mood

If you're using MidJourney, remember to guide aspect ratio too, like --ar 3:4 for vertical orientation.

Want a version that leans more surreal, painterly, or vintage-museum style too?

No, this will be a great start, thanks.

ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important Info.

The image below was generated by Midjourney on March 28th, 2025, by applying the suggested prompt + several interations. We're not there yet.

