

Art Teaching, Social Connection, and AI: Bridging Creativity with Art Praxis

Kimmy Ma
Molloy University
KMA Creative Consulting
Kma@lions.molloy.edu

Abstract: This essay explores the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and human-centered artifacts. The Social Artistic Model's (SAM) guiding framework explores the implementation of a zone of reciprocity that facilitates a shared creative, collaborative environment, enables iterative critique, and promotes contemplation; my research and development of this framework highlights social connectedness, magnifies the art-making process and empowers meaning-making through divergent perspectives and socially embedded processes. Findings demonstrate that AI can enhance creative exploration but cannot replicate the emotional resonance and social bonds central to long-term artistic practices and quality interactions. SAM offers a dialogic process where art is a growth catalyst, and social connection is a platform that encourages self-discovery, norm awareness, and belonging through reflective action cycles.

Introduction

This research investigates how reflective critique and experiential learning emerge through the Social Artistic Model (SAM) (see ref. Figure 1). It explores how AI-generated and human-created artifacts facilitate reflective critique within SAM's dialogical and socially embedded structure. Additionally, it examines how Communities of Practice (CoPs) foster identity formation, social connectedness, and the co-construction of meaning through long-term engagement in artmaking.

SAM integrates three foundational philosophies: Dewey's (1938) Experiential Continuum emphasizes long-term engagement and quality interaction with iterative learning, where each creative experience shapes future actions. This reflective-action cycle situates artmaking as a context-rich and dynamic process fostering intellectual and moral growth. Second, Eisner's (2002) Educational Connoisseurship frames teaching artistry as a reflective and interpretive practice that balances technical skill with the co-construction of meaning. SAM extends this by viewing critique as a dialogical process, connecting personal meaning with broader social and cultural narratives. Finally, Wenger-Trayner's (2022) CoP develops members' capability to build and exchange knowledge and share passion, commitment, and identification with the domain's expertise. SAM's Zone of Reciprocity emerges as a shared space where students and teaching artists engage in interpretive critique art theories and labor of art making, iterative experimentation, and co-creative meaning-making. While AI enhances possibilities for creative exploration, SAM ensures that artistic practice's relational, human-driven aspects remain central. This framework fosters joy, empowerment, and shared human narratives through creative engagement. At the same time, balancing AI-driven tools with mutuality and originality. The conceptual foundation of SAM rests on integrating experiential learning; participants express their passion for art practice as critics and connoisseurs in the communities of practice. The education community must consider "what might contribute to the

pursuit of shared goods: what ways of being together, of attaining mutuality” (Greene, 1995, p. 39). Embracing divergent views and engaging in inclusive artistic practices celebrate individuals and communities. This study employs a qualitative methodology combining artifact analysis, semi-structured interviews, and case study research to investigate how these principles manifest in real-world art education settings. (Use the QR Code at the references page for all artifacts images)

The Study

Three student participants, Manjyot Kaur, Caitlynn Khan, and David Babayev, explore perspectives on AI-generated images and human-centered artmaking. Artifacts analyzed include students’ original works, AI-generated reinterpretations, and teaching materials such as reflective dialogues and SAM’s student journals, which serve as tools for iterative critique and relational learning. Thematic analysis of these materials follows Educational Connoisseurship frames teaching as an interpretive and reflective practice, where educators act as “environmental designers” shaping creative spaces (Eisner, 2002, p. 47). Within SAM’s Zone of Reciprocity, the interaction among materials, tools, and human-centered activities allows students to integrate artistic critique with evolving technologies. CoP further underscores the social construction of meaning through shared engagement, where students and teaching artists co-create knowledge through artistic dialogue. Learning is an experience of identity transformation through participation in meaningful social practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger & Trayner, 2022). Case studies highlight how SAM’s collaborative art praxis shapes students’ identity formation, self-discovery, and creative growth. Recurring themes of autonomy, artistic interpretation, and co-construction of meaning emerge through interviews and artifact analysis. This qualitative research seeks to “make sense of how people in particular contexts experience their world,” aligning with SAM’s reflective approach; knowledge creation is inherently relational, emerging through dynamic interactions within social contexts (Blackman & Henderson, 2007; Hatch, 2002, p. 29). Meaning-making in art education extends beyond technique acquisition, incorporating cultural awareness and aesthetic critique through situated experiential learning and human-centered dialogue. In this way, AI’s role is framed as a supportive tool rather than a substitute, ensuring that relational learning remains at the core of artistic development. SAM’s theoretical foundation synthesizes intentional learning, educational imagination, and situated practice, emphasizing long-term quality interactions and purpose-driven engagement. Learning is a continuum, where “each experience shapes future intellectual and moral development,” teaching is conceptualized as an art form where educators balance technical skill with interpretive sensitivity (Dewey, 1938, p. 33; Eisner, 2002). Imagination allows learners to envision possibilities beyond the familiar; it is with caution that curriculum, when technologized, becomes static—deprived of the dynamic interaction essential to its reconstruction (Greene, 1995; Pinar, 2015, p. 80). Educators must strike a balance between overreliance on AI and preserving humanity. AI’s cultural and ethical implications in art education, noting that while it can scaffold creativity, it also risks eroding relational learning (Park, 2023, p. 35). SAM mitigates this risk by ensuring AI is integrated responsibly and supporting human-centered, reflective pedagogy. Educational Connoisseurship places imagination at the center of critique and artistic refinement. Teaching is an artistry of shaping, nurturing, and guiding students in deeply personal ways, and that critique is a reflective bridge between individual meaning and social narratives. SAM’s design-thinking approach encourages students to analyze their works alongside established artists, engaging in iterative critique to explore intent, technique, and cultural significance. Situated learning, “learning by doing,” reinforces the social nature of knowledge acquisition, positioning learning within mutually engaged communities of practice, an apprenticeship model, where active participation and mentorship foster growth; additional research indicates that out-of-school arts programs enhance participatory learning, identity formation, and social connectedness. (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Heath & Roach, 1999; Burton et al., 2000). SAM embodies these principles through its Zone of Reciprocity, where mentorship and collaborative critique empower students to balance individual autonomy with collective artistic responsibility. The responsible integration of AI within this framework

ensures that social connection, mentorship, and human-centered artistic inquiry remain foundational in creative education.

Findings

The findings of the SAM bridge theoretical insights with practical applications, fostering identity, belonging, and collaborative creativity through art praxis and social connection activities in the Zone of Reciprocity as the collaborative space to navigate fluid boundaries, construct shared narratives, embrace divergent views, and engage in critique and experimentation in artifact creation. For research purposes and as an image bank, AI-generated artifacts are a starting point to explore divergent styles and interpretations. These serve as catalysts for deeper reflection and critical dialogues. This iterative process highlighted SAM's ability to combine technology's strengths with reflective discussion between human-centered tactile materiality artmaking versus generative AI.

Each student-created self-portrait with AI-generated interpretations reveals profound insights that exemplify the Social Artistic Model (SAM) framework, creative agency, identity, and co-creation of meaning through social connection. The six tenets and the zone of reciprocity showcase the dynamic interplay between art as reflective practice and social connectedness, showcasing how SAM encourages self-discoveries and shared purpose through long-term engagement in a communal art studio. Exploring artistic autonomy and identity, each student's original artwork reflects a deeply personal exploration of their identity, cultural narratives, and emotional states. Caitlyn's self-portraits use techniques and maturity to handle mediums; her storytelling ability illustrates her emotional disposition. David demonstrates meticulous techniques and a growing sense of confidence, transitioning from monochromatic studies to vibrant, multi-hued explorations. Manjyot's piece, *Soaring Memories*, intertwines vibrant cultural symbols with personal nostalgia, emphasizing optimism and the strength of heritage. These case studies illustrate where students become skilled critics of their creative processes, guided by reflective critique and iterative learning cycles. In contrast, AI-generated portraits often simplify or distort these nuanced self-expressions. For instance, Caitlyn noted the AI's failure to capture "the humanity and context" of her features. At the same time, Manjyot observed that AI "lacked the depth and personal narrative embedded" in her work (Manjyot Kaur, personal reflection, 2023). AI struggles to interpret cultural and emotional contexts critical to meaningful artistic critique. Art is a growth catalyst for deeper reflection, prompting students to articulate and defend their artistic choices, reinforcing the SAM tenets of creative disruption and norm awareness. AI's work lacks the softness of pastel, reminiscence of the kite, and generalization of the artist's intention with misspelled words. Most importantly, AI misses the cultural nostalgia of her childhood memories and duality, using symbolic imagery to convey emotional personal struggle and imagination. Manjyot Kaur (Figure 1: *Soaring Memories*) Manjyot Kaur (Figures 2 and 3: Self-portrait) Caitlyn Khan (Figure 4. Self-Portrait).

It is essential to note diverse backgrounds and artistic styles; these students share a strong bond forged through their long-term engagement in the studio over ten years. In the art practice community, these young artists exemplify where mutual engagement fosters shared passion, exploring identity, and evolving expertise. Although they attend different schools and live in other zip codes, their love for art and commitment to collaborative learning transcend geographic and social barriers. The Zone of Reciprocity, central to SAM, emerges as a creative force through dialogic critique sessions; students exchange feedback on AI and human-centered artifacts, co-constructing meaning that reflects divergent perspectives. Learning within CoPs is an experience of identity transformation through students' sense of purpose and joy in artmaking. Participation in meaningful social practice. This collaborative environment amplifies the joy through experiential learning. The social connection becomes a force multiplier of individual and collective artistic expression through hands-on experiences that enhance learning outcomes, creative problem-solving, and emotional well-being by fostering relationships built on trust, collaboration, and mutual inspiration. (Manjyot Kaur, Self Portrait, Figure 3.)

Conclusion

SAM leverages the dialogical model and fosters artistic design thinking while embracing cultural diversity through inclusive, collaborative practices. Intentionally integrating cultural and critical engagement, SAM creates a

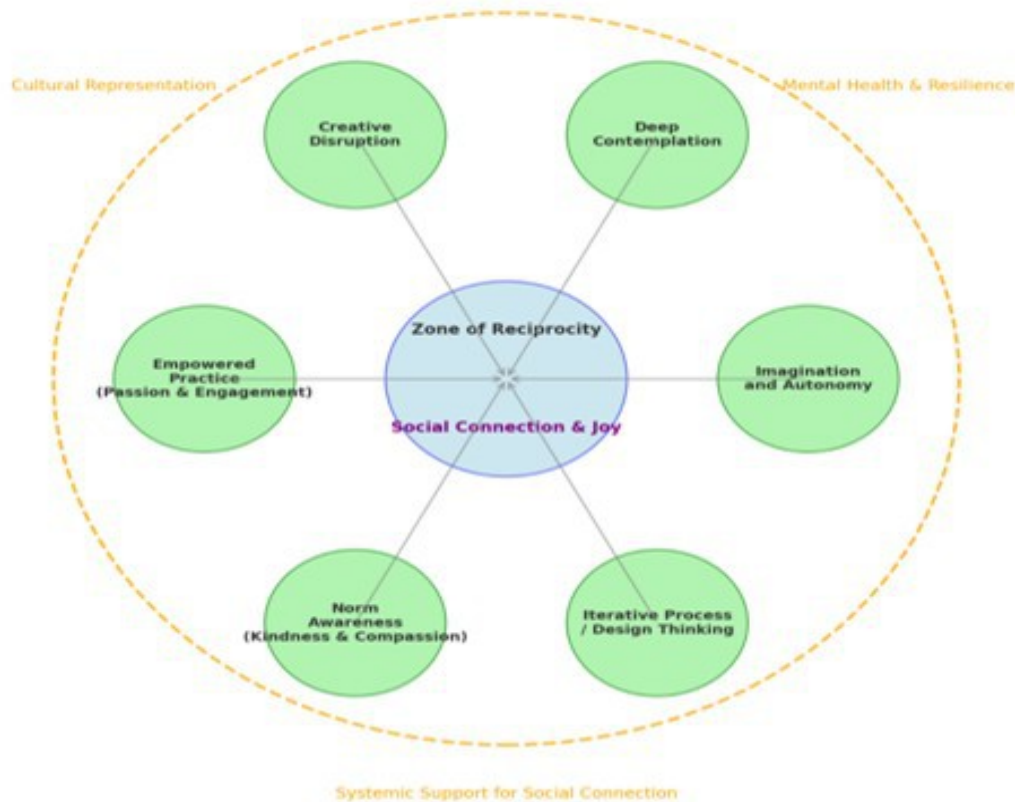
pluralistic learning environment where students honor their traditions while exploring the artistic heritage of others. In a time when intellectual and creative pursuits are sometimes dismissed as elitist (Curren, 2007, p. 227), SAM offers a model where rigor in skill development while embracing divergent views, SAM propels technical mastery as a situated activity in a socially engaged environment, the knowledge in the community of art practices regenerates and renews knowledge. "Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, would be inevitable" (Arendt, p. 192). Teaching artists are learning environmental designers, creating reciprocal learning environments where artistic practice facilitates personal growth and social renewal. Through SAM's Zone of Reciprocity, students engage in reflective critique, co-create meaning, and develop a shared artistic language. AI tools support this process, but teachers must ensure responsible integration, guiding students through the complexities of technological and human-centered artistic practice (Park, 2023). Future research can explore SAM's impact beyond the arts, emphasizing its reciprocity and community engagement principles across different disciplines.

As artificial intelligence increasingly permeates creative education, ensuring that human-centered values remain integral to artistic practice becomes crucial. Social connection has been identified as a key factor in fostering joy and well-being. The strength of social connection is a primary driver of happiness, resilience, and learning, reinforcing that engagement in collaborative art praxis nurtures emotional and cognitive development and that meaningful relationships are the strongest predictor of well-being, highlighting that artistic collaboration is not just about skill acquisition but also about nurturing a sense of belonging and shared purpose (Simon-Thomas, 2020; Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). Within SAM's Zone of Reciprocity, the iterative cycles of critique, reflection, and artistic collaboration create a space where autonomy and community coexist, providing a foundation for artistic and social flourishing. Future research could employ mixed methods further to explore the role of social connection in experiential learning, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the depth of relational engagement in artistic practice. Further inquiries can examine how students critique artistic and social norms through sustained engagement, contributing to a broader understanding of norm awareness and creative disruption. These studies will provide teaching artists with actionable strategies for integrating technology ethically while preserving cultural storytelling and social connection. Ultimately, SAM bridges theory, framework, and practice ensuring that artistic critique and creative exploration exist within a fluid, dynamic boundaries. As Barad (2003) asserts, "Boundaries do not sit still. They are enacted through specific practices and processes of exclusion and inclusion" (p. 817). This dynamic perspective empowers students and educators to sustain social connectedness as an intentional practice. As technology reshapes education, SAM ensures that art remains human-centered, preserving soul, beauty, and innovation in the evolving learning landscape.

Scan the QR codes below to access
the entire paper and presentation slides.



Social Artistic Model (SAM) © 2024 by Kimmy Ma Art Studio is licensed under CC BY-SA .4.0



The Zone of Reciprocity is at the heart of SAM (Social Artistic Model), where artistic engagement and social connection intersect. This model emphasizes the power of collaborative and iterative artistic practices in nurturing joy, autonomy, and shared purpose. SAM's structure integrates six interconnected domains, fostering identity, resilience, and collaboration:

- **Creative Disruption** – How does breaking conventional patterns foster innovation?
- **Deep Contemplation** – What role does reflection play in creative and social growth?
- **Imagination & Autonomy** – How do independence and visionary thinking drive artistic exploration?
- **Iterative Process / Design Thinking** – Why is experimentation and adaptability essential for learning?
- **Norm Awareness (Kindness & Compassion)** – How does awareness of social norms shape inclusive communities?
- **Empowered Practice (Passion & Engagement)** – What sustains long-term creative dedication and motivation?

- ✓ Social Connection strongly predicts happiness (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023).
- ✓ Social Connection influences mental health and stress resilience (Simon-Thomas, 2021).
- ✓ Cultural representation and systemic support strengthen social connection.
- ✓ Intentional practice through art: active listening, expressing gratitude, and acts of kindness.
- ✓ Promote human-centered activities through community of practice.



Figure 1: Social Artistic Model QR Code

References:

- Arendt, H. (2007). The crisis in education. In R. Curren (Ed.), *Philosophy of education: An anthology* (pp. 188–192). Blackwell Publishing. (Original work published 1954).
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), 801–831. <https://doi.org/10.1086/345321>
- Blackman, D., & Henderson, S. (2007). Knowledge creation and transfer: Towards a dynamic theory of learning. *Management Decision*, 45(4), 285–299.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (1999). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. National Academy Press.
- Burton, J. M., Horowitz, R., & Abeles, H. (2000). Learning in and through the arts: The transfer question. *Studies in Art Education*, 41(3), 228–257.
- Curren, R. (Ed.). (2007). *Philosophy of education: An anthology*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as Experience*. Minton Balch and Co.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. Macmillan.
- Eisner, E. W. (1979, 2002). *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (1st & 4th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*. <https://epdf.tips/the-arts-and-the-creation-of-mind-5ea7bb2876848.html>
- Gardner, H. (1973). *The arts and human development: A psychological study of the artistic process*. Wiley.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. Jossey-Bass.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Heath, S. B., & Roach, A. (1998). Imaginative actuality: Learning in the arts during non-school hours. *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning*, pp. 19–34.
- Halverson, E. R., & Sawyer, R. K. (2022). *Learning in and through the arts*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge.
- Ma, K. (2024). *Social-Connected Artistic Model (SAM)*. Kimmy Ma Art Studio. <https://kimmymaartstudio.com/sam> and Facebook. <https://facebook.com/kimmymaartstudio>
- Murthy, V. (2023). Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>
- Pinar, W. F. (2015). *Educational experience as lived: Knowledge, history, alterity*. Routledge.
- Park, Y. (2023). Creative and critical entanglements with AI in art education. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 42(2), 29–39.
- Simon-Thomas, E. (2021, August 27). Berkeley Talks transcript: Emiliana Simon-Thomas on where happiness comes from. Berkeley News. <https://news.berkeley.edu/2021/08/27/berkeley-talks-transcript-emiliana-simon-thomas/>
- Waldinger, R., & Schulz, M. (2023). *The good life: Lessons from the world's most extended scientific study of happiness*. Simon & Schuster.
- Wenger-Trayner, E., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2022). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Wenger, E., & Snyder, W. M. (2000). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(1), 139–145.