Comic book artist says AI is 'threat to livelihood'

A comic book illustrator says artificial intelligence (AI) is "a threat to [his] livelihood", over fears the quickly evolving technology could render artists obsolete.

Gloucestershire-based author Nich Angell spent years perfecting his signature style but worries there is enough of his work in existence that AI could reproduce it perfectly, without him.

It comes as the Lords, who are looking for more protections for artists from AI, [rejected the latest amendment](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clyrgv2n190o) to the Data (Use and Access) Bill.

"What AI generation is doing is focusing purely on the product and removing people from that creative process," Mr Angell said.

AI generators are programmed to analyse patterns and relationships in vast sets of data points to generate similar looking outputs based on user text prompts.

At his studio workshop in Gloucester, Mr Angell surrounds himself with pictures and posters that spark his imagination and influence his unique style.

But he fears technological advances could soon catch up, and even replace him altogether.

"It used to be very easy to spot mistakes, but the whole essence of how AI works is that it's constantly iterating and learning from more and more data," he said.

"Why would the value and time I've put into developing my visual signature be worth anything at all, if anyone could do it with a click of a button?

"There's a real sense of replacement here rather than addition. It exists purely to replace the artist entirely."

Mr Angell described the technology as "insidious" and "terrifying", capable of collating information on such a vast scale that no man can possibly compete.

But alongside his fears of dwindling commissions and copyright infringements, Mr Angell said the biggest shame would be losing the essence of art itself.

"The people behind the art, are the point of the art," he said.

"When you see an incredible piece of art, what you are astonished by is not the final result, but the fact that a person made it.

"That is incredible and beautiful and it touches you in a way that a lot of people don't understand."

'Greater transparency'

Mr Angell's Liberal Democrat MP in Cheltenham, Max Wilkinson, told BBC Politics West: "The creative industry is creating about £124bn of investment into our economy every year and it's our second-biggest industry.

"Creatives like Nich - writing, drawing, composing music - need protection for their work and it isn't right that tech companies can use bots to cruelly rip-off people's work."

He added: "If we remove their IP rights or copyright rights, what we're going to end up doing is having no financial incentive for humans to create anything."

Earlier this month, the House of Lords dealt a [fourth defeat to the government](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clyrgv2n190o) over its plans to allow tech companies to use copyrighted material to train their models.

Peers backed calls for greater transparency after musicians such as [Sir Elton John also warned of the threat](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c071elp1rv1o) to creative industries.

The Data (Use and Access) Bill has now been returned to the Commons.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology said it is carrying out a wider consultation on these issues and will not consider changes to the Bill unless they are completely satisfied that they work for creators.