

AI robot's portrait of Alan Turing that 'challenges what it is to be human' sets record, selling for \$1.08 million

By Issy Ronald, *Cnn.com* [abridged], Fri November 8, 2024

An AI robot's painting of British computer scientist and codebreaker Alan Turing has sold for \$1.08 million, becoming the most valuable artwork by a humanoid robot ever to change hands at auction and raising new questions about the role of artificial intelligence in art.

The sale price far exceeded the pre-auction estimate of \$120,000-\$180,000, with the work attracting 27 bids before going to an undisclosed buyer, according to Sotheby's, which handled the sale in New York.

The painting, titled "AI God: Portrait of Alan Turing," was created by Ai-Da, a humanoid robot artist with a black bob and robotic arms, which communicates using large language models and was invented by British gallerist Aidan Meller.

Turing's work laid the foundations for the development of early computers and helped the Allies decrypt German communications during World War II. He took his own life in 1954 after being convicted under homophobic Victorian-era laws and subjected to chemical castration.

Eight decades after Turing predicted the rise of computers and AI, Meller hopes that Ai-Da and its artworks can act as a "kind of mirror to where we're going." [...]

The staggering sum that Ai-Da's artwork fetched at auction marks a change in the way that AI art is viewed, and valued, on the art market – a shift that Meller likens to the invention of the camera.

"There's a slightly apocalyptic view of AI art wiping out everybody. The camera changed the art world enormously ... I feel it's sort of similar, (but) it's more than that .. because AI can be done in lots of different ways where the camera was just a physical representation from light so it's more singular," he said.

Not everyone sees this as such a milestone, however. For Alastair Sooke, chief art critic of

British newspaper The Telegraph, it represents only a "very sophisticated, dressed-up version of those periodic news stories about farmyard animals that can supposedly paint like Pablo Picasso."

Ai-Da was launched in 2019 after Meller collaborated with a robotics company based in Cornwall, England to build it.

[...]

Before starting its artworks, Ai-Da discusses with its creators the things it would like to paint. "In this instance, we had a discussion with her about 'A.I. for good' which led to Ai-Da bringing up Alan Turing as a key person in the history of A.I. that she wanted to paint," said Meller in a statement.

[...]

"'AI God,' a portrait of pioneer Alan Turing, invites viewers to reflect on the god-like nature of AI and computing while considering the ethical and societal implications of these advancements. Alan Turing recognised this potential, and stares at us, as we race towards this future," the robot added.

