

From Canvas to Quartex

The Evolution of Art in the Age of AI and Digital Archives

In the fall 2023 semester, Goldey-Beacom College launched its inaugural Common Reading Program to explore the nuanced themes of loneliness, using Kristen Radtke's graphic novel *Seek You* as creative inspiration. The program was seamlessly integrated into the curriculum of all ENG 175 Critical Writing I sections and featured a distinctive assignment: students were tasked to create visual expressions through posters that encapsulated the novel's themes as well as a brief written narrative detailing their creative process. In collaboration with the English faculty, the library displayed the posters in both physical and digital form at the semester's conclusion.

The Assignment

Seek You explores the pervasive theme of loneliness, articulating its multifaceted presence in the human experience. Through its compelling narrative and visual storytelling, *Seek You* invites readers to reflect on solitude, connection, and the spaces in between. The novel examines loneliness as a subject of academic curiosity and a resonant theme that mirrors contemporary societal concerns. In this context, using posters as a medium for students to engage with and respond to, the graphic novel represents a unique and engaging approach to literary analysis. Posters blending visual elements with textual analysis allow students to synthesize their interpretations and insights into *Seek You* in a form that is both accessible and creatively expressive. This method not only enriches their understanding of the themes presented in the graphic novel but also underscores the significance of visual literacy in comprehending and conveying complex subjects found in the book they read. By facilitating a visual dialogue between the novel and its audience, the posters serve as a testament to the enduring power of art and the written word to evoke empathy, challenge perceptions, and connect us more deeply to our own experiences of loneliness.

Offering a broad spectrum of creative freedom, students could create their posters by hand, digitally, or with assistance from artificial intelligence (AI). Students who used AI were asked to disclose in their project description the AI system leveraged and the exact prompt they used. Allowing the use of AI in the assignment encouraged a deep exploration of loneliness through various mediums and aimed to critically examine the integration of human and AI artistry.

An exhibition in the library showcased the posters, culminating in a judging process. A panel of faculty and staff was assembled to evaluate the student-created visual expressions. Faculty who taught the first-year writing classes were excluded to maintain impartiality.

Russell Michalak is director of the library and archives at Goldey-Beacom College, email: michalr@gbc.edu.

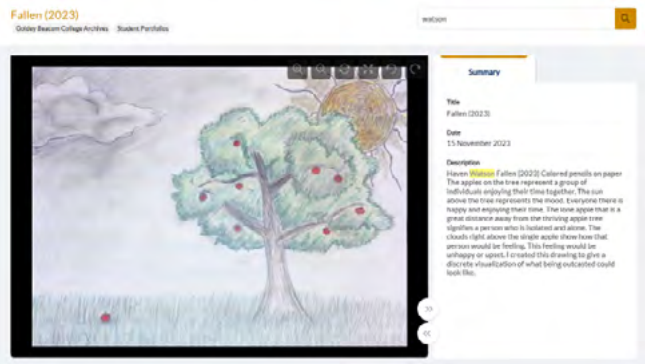
Notably, in this contest, the winning artworks were all crafted without the aid of AI tools, underscoring the value placed on human creativity. The winning posters are below, starting with third place and ending with best in show.

Creating the Common Reading Program, 2023 Subcollection in Quartex

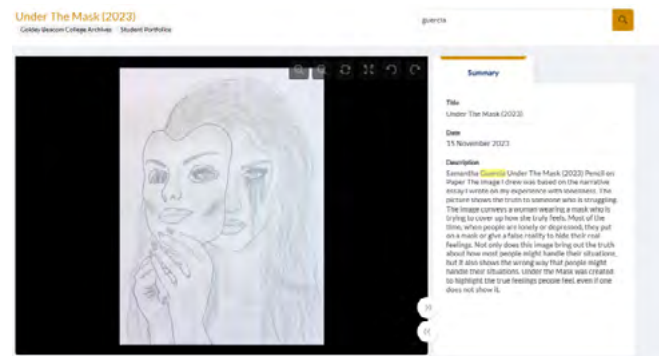
Before returning the posters to the students, the library preserved them in its Quartex digital asset management system in a new Student Portfolios Collection. This initiative highlights the library's efforts to categorize and archive digitally diverse student creations and voices and strategically aid students' careers. By showcasing these works, students gain a valuable platform to demonstrate their creativity, critical thinking, and project management skills to potential employers and academic programs. By adding these works to Quartex, the library underscores its commitment to preserving digital and physical expressions of student creativity. This strategy reflects a broader recognition of the changing dynamics in creativity and information management, ensuring that student learning and artistry expressions are maintained for future reference and inspiration for the next cohort of students in the Common Reading Program while enhancing their professional portfolio.

The library digitized all 92 posters created as part of the assignment and preserved their brief student-written descriptions in SharePoint before being uploaded to Quartex. This process involved cataloging each piece with specific metadata, including the artist's name, the creation method (hand-drawn, digital, or AI-generated), and a brief narrative on the work's thematic connection to loneliness by the student in the description field. For AI-generated posters, details about the AI platform and the input prompt were recorded in the description field. This initiative not only archived the students' creative interpretations but also began a digitally accessible collection that showcases the intersection of literature, student creativity, and technology.

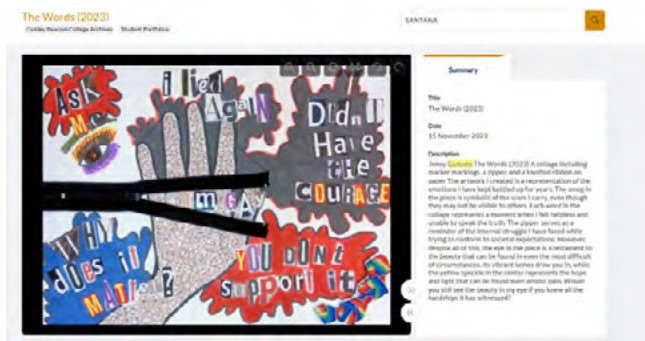
While describing the posters in the Quartex, we adhered to the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (DCMI) Metadata Terms to ensure a standardized description and categorization of digital assets. DCMI Metadata Terms include essential elements such as title, type, creator, subject, and description. These terms enhance the discoverability and interoperability of digital collections across various platforms and disciplines. However, the DCMI's predefined "Type" field, designed to classify the format of the assets (e.g., image, text, video), did not inherently accommodate the specificity required to distinguish between traditionally created and AI-generated artwork. Furthermore, we decided not to put the artificial AI tools



The third-place poster, "Fallen (2023)."



"Under the Mask (2023)," the second-place poster.



Best in show, “The Words (2023).”

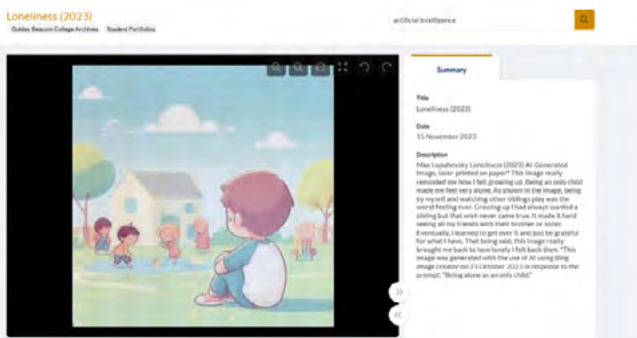
the artist’s involvement in using AI tools akin to their use of traditional artistic tools like cameras or Adobe Photoshop. The necessity for enhanced discoverability and advanced search capabilities underscores the importance of adopting a more nuanced approach to categorization in Quartex.

To address this limitation, the library introduced a new subject heading, “Artificial Intelligence,” within the metadata schema. This decision was motivated by the recognition that the intersection of art and technology, particularly the use of AI in creating visual expressions by students, represents a significant shift in how artworks are conceived and produced. By creating this subject heading, we aimed to specifically highlight and make searchable AI-generated content, acknowledging its growing relevance in academic and creative contexts. This move enriches the metadata’s descriptive capacity and anticipates future academic inquiries and explorations into AI’s role in art creation. Furthermore, it underscores our commitment to adapting digital archiving practices to reflect contemporary technological advancements, thus ensuring that our collections remain accessible, informative, and reflective of current trends in digital scholarship. By creating this subject heading, end-users can search for images generated by AI. The search for images generated by AI will become particularly important for students participating in the Common Reading Program in the coming years.

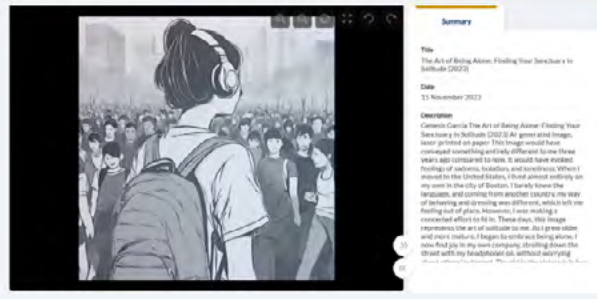
AI and Human Creativity in Student Work

The display of the AI and human-created visual expressions in Quartex exceeded stakeholder expectations. Thirty-two out of the 92 total posters represented AI-generated visual expressions. Among these is a compelling piece titled “Loneliness (2023),” where a student used the Binge Image Creator to produce an image based on the prompt “Being alone as an only child.” This AI-generated work offers a visual interpretation of solitude, reflecting the deep and personal experience of being an only child. The chosen prompt directed the AI to craft an image that captures the essence of loneliness, showcasing the student’s innovative use of technology to explore and express complex emotions. This piece, along with the rest of the AI-generated posters, demonstrates the students’ adeptness at leveraging AI tools to convey nuanced themes, illustrating the broad possibilities artificial intelligence holds for artistic creation.

used by the students in the “Creator” field because the US Copyright Office’s guidance on the copyrightability of works produced by generative AI tools considers such works as lacking human authorship due to their automated generation, disregarding the critical role of human artists in the creative process.¹ Generative AI, while advanced, functions as a tool that requires human inspiration, direction, and design to create art, making



“Loneliness (2023)”



“The Art of Being Alone: Finding Your Sanctuary in Solitude (2023)”

In “The Art of Being Alone: Finding Your Sanctuary in Solitude (2023),” a student explored the theme of solitude through Canva’s AI capabilities, creating an AI-generated image from the prompt, “girl wearing headphones giving us the back, with people walking in front of her.” This visual piece looks at the concept of finding peace in solitude amid a bustling world, symbolized by the contrast between the solitary figure and the

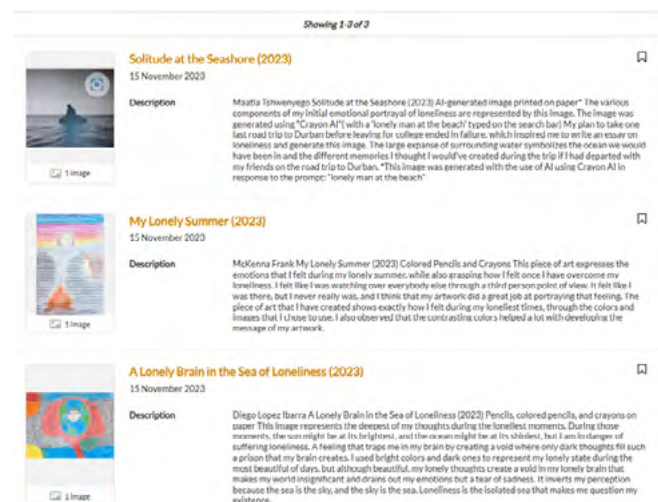
anonymous crowd. The use of headphones suggests a deliberate choice to disconnect from the surrounding noise and find comfort in one’s own company, illustrating a personal journey to solitude as a space for introspection and self-discovery. This artwork invites viewers to reflect on their moments of solitude and the serene detachment it can offer from the chaotic pace of life.

Three posters juxtaposed artistic techniques and perspectives on loneliness. These included two hand-drawn posters, “My Lonely Summer (2023)” and “A Lonely Brain in the Sea of Loneliness (2023),” both crafted with crayons, alongside an AI-generated piece, “Solitude at the Seashore (2023),” produced using Craiyon.ai, a free AI art tool. The hand-drawn posters bring a tactile and personal touch to the exploration of loneliness, with each stroke reflecting the artist’s hand and the intimate relationship with their subject. In contrast, “Solitude at the Seashore” showcases the capabilities of AI in capturing and interpreting the theme of solitude through digital means, offering a different, yet equally profound, lens on loneliness. This combination highlights the diverse ways artists, whether human or AI, navigate and represent the complex landscapes of solitude and introspection.

Metadata at a Crossroads

Implementing the Common Reading Program, 2023 subcollection in Quartex not only preserves the cohort’s creative endeavors but also sets a standard for future digital archiving practices, particularly in the context of contributions from AI. This initiative signals a pivot toward more dynamic and inclusive digital archives that accommodate various forms of creative expression, including those generated by AI. By creating a dedicated subject heading for AI within the metadata, the college recognizes the evolving role of AI as a legitimate and influential tool in academic and artistic creation. This acknowledgment is critical as AI advances and becomes more integrated into educational and creative processes.

In broader educational contexts, this approach to digital archiving could encourage other institutions to consider how AI-generated content is preserved and accessed. It raises questions



“My Lonely Summer (2023),” “A Lonely Brain in the Sea of Loneliness (2023),” and “Solitude at the Seashore (2023).”

about authenticity, authorship, and the criteria for archiving such works. As AI-generated art and content become more prevalent, there will be a growing need for frameworks that can categorize and evaluate these contributions fairly and accurately.

Furthermore, the detailed metadata, including the prompts used to generate AI artwork, is a resource for understanding how students interact with AI tools. This transparency in the creative process provides a valuable dataset for research into AI's impact on learning and creativity, potentially influencing curriculum development and pedagogical strategies. As AI-generated materials proliferate, archiving practices will face challenges, such as ensuring equitable representation, maintaining the integrity of the archives, and addressing the legal and ethical considerations of AI contributions. Institutions must navigate copyright issues, the attribution of AI-generated works, and the balance between human and machine contributions.

Goldey-Beacom College's integration of AI and handmade visual expressions and its digital collections may inspire more comprehensive discussions on these topics within the academic community. It could also lead to the development of best practices for archiving AI-generated content, fostering a more nuanced understanding of AI's place in the future of education, art, and digital preservation. ¶¶

Notes

1. Michael D. Murray, "Tools Do Not Create: Human Authorship in the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence," *Journal of Law, Technology and the Internet* 15, no. 1 (2024): 76.