

The echo of the image

FROM DIGITAL ART TO AI-GENERATED PRACTICES

YOel Almaguer / April 2026

The condition of the image is redefined in a context where its existence no longer depends on an object. In this space, it can simulate behaviors inherent to matter without possessing them, shifting the experience of the material into the realm of perception. Far from constituting a rupture, artificial intelligence, in its generative dimension, extends the transformations initiated by digital art, expanding a field in which languages become permeable and hierarchies are diluted. In this scenario, the value of the work does not reside in its support, but in its capacity to trigger an experience that reconfigures the relationship between image, matter, and reality.

I. Anatomy of the Visible

Images shift with every technology that crosses the history of art. Long before contemporary artificial intelligence, there were autonomous processes capable of producing visual configurations without direct intervention in every stroke: from the drawing machines of Jean Tinguely ¹ to the algorithmic experiments of the 1960s and 1970s ².

In this line, the work *“One and Three Chairs”* by Joseph Kosuth ³ does not belong to the generative field, yet it points to a problem that today acquires a new dimension: the different forms in which an image can exist. It does not replace any previous model; it simply expands the space where the image is articulated without the need for a physical referent.

The contemporary visual ecosystem is defined by screens, displacements, and digital circulations. Most images do not live in the stability of the object, but in a constant flow. Art participates in that context and reinterprets it.

II. The Digital Thread

The incorporation of AI into my practice was not a rupture, but a continuity. From my previous digital work, the image already functioned as a negotiation space between the material and the virtual. In those works, the pictorial surface blended with the digital surface, not to imitate a particular medium, but to explore how the image can behave as if it had a body without depending on a physical support. (See article by critic and curator Suset Sánchez) ⁴

The debate surrounding generative art today repeats the debate that existed when digital art began to spread. At that time, its legitimacy, its status, and its relationship with material tradition were questioned. That discussion has not changed so much: it has simply shifted from one medium to another.

What remains constant is the construction of meaning in an environment where the image is no longer tied to the physical limits of an object. AI intensifies that issue. It is not an answer, but an expansion of the field where the image thinks itself and where languages blend without hierarchies. In this context, the need for a physical support ceases to be a condition for the experience of the work.

III. Immaterial Matter

My recent work takes place in a space where the image adopts behaviors typical of the material without any physical body to sustain them. They are not real sculptures or ceramics, but they function as such within the visual order. Their intensity comes from the way they simulate weight, air, density, or fragility without resorting to any physical support.

These images operate as material hypotheses: forms that seem to be one step away from becoming an object, but remain in a previous state. AI allows that threshold to be explored not as a technical shortcut, but as a space where the sculptural is defined by perception and not by matter. In this context, matter ceases to be a guarantee of reality.

The sense of presence does not arise from introducing digital materials, but from the internal structure of the image: the way it occupies space, the way light builds it, the way its visual behavior refers to something that could exist, even if it never does.

In this sense, AI does not replace languages; it makes them permeable to each other. Working this way implies accepting that the tangible can be simulated without losing potency, and that the immaterial can generate a solid experience. Matter is a possibility, not a condition, and its presence ceases to be the criterion that defines the existence of the work.

IV. Echoes of the Image

Tools change, but the need to construct meaning remains. AI expands the territory of possible forms, but it does not decide which images deserve to become a work of art. That responsibility depends on the gaze that organizes, selects, and gives coherence to what emerges.

The support does not determine the value of a piece, nor does it guarantee its reality. A digital image can generate intensity without a physical body, just as a material work can lack resonance despite its tangible presence. What is decisive is not the technique, but the capacity of an image to create a perceptual space that allows one to think or feel in a different way.

Generative processes do not annul authorship, but force it to redefine itself. The image is no longer just a product of human gesture, but a collaboration between different systems of interpretation. The artist does not cease to be present, but their role shifts toward conceptual configuration, toward the organization of a visual field that exceeds the manual.

The responsibility for constructing meaning still falls on the artist, for now.

Notes

¹ In 1959, Jean Tinguely developed his *“Metamatics”* automatic machines capable of producing drawings through motorized mechanisms not directly controlled by the artist.

² During the 1960s, Frieder Nake, Vera Molnar, and Georg Nees explored algorithmic art based on mathematical rules.

³ Joseph Kosuth presented *“One and Three Chairs”* in 1965, a work that explores the relationship between object, representation, and language.

⁴ In the article *“YOel Almaguer: Dialectics of the Image, the Pixel and the Pigment”* Suset Sánchez analyzes how the artist works from the simulacrum: trompe-l’œil, everyday objects reinterpreted as expanded painting, and transitions between photography, object, and pictorial surface. She describes his work as situated “in that interstitial space between the pixel and the pigment,” where objectual illusion functions to “entice the viewer” and reveal the perceptual mediations that structure our reading of images.