

**Generative AI in Art Museum Interpretation:
Examining Museum Institutional Perspectives and Implementations**

Karino Wada

Master of Arts, Museology

University of Washington

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Committee:

Dr. Jessica Luke

Dr. Geoffrey Turnovsky

Dr. Belen Saldias

Ramzy Lakos

Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is increasingly implemented within art museum exhibitions as a tool for interpretation. This qualitative multiple-case study investigated how art museums integrate GenAI into interpretive practice and how exhibition staff understand institutional, operational, and ethical implications surrounding the use of GenAI. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with museum professionals at the MIT Museum, the Dalí Museum, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Participating museums were primarily implementing GenAI through participatory installations, conversational systems, and AI-assisted interpretive workflows. In conversations, interviewees described GenAI use as an interpretive extension of existing exhibition strategies, while institutional motivations included audience engagement, emotional connection, accessibility, and experimentation. However, interviewees also described challenges with GenAI reliability and the necessity of professional review. Across all three cases, GenAI was implemented as a tool to extend existing interpretive strategies through visitor participation and conversational interpretation rather than replace human interpretation. This study suggests that art museums are most likely to adopt GenAI when it extends their existing interpretive strategies while remaining subject to human review and curatorial oversight.

Introduction

Problem

Artificial intelligence (AI), specifically generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), has rapidly expanded across many sectors of society and increasingly shaped how information is created and interpreted (Møller et al., 2026; Bringsjord et al., 2026; Bunz, 2023). GenAI systems, including large language models and image generation tools, have the capability to produce text, images, and other media through patterns learned from large datasets with increasing ease and accessibility. While these technologies offer new possibilities for communication and creative workflows, they also raise significant ethical concerns, including accuracy, bias, transparency, environmental cost, centralization of power, and copyright. Scholars have noted that GenAI systems can generate false information (“hallucinations”), reproduce biases embedded in training data into system models, and introduce legal and ethical uncertainties surrounding authorship and intellectual property (Bernhardt et al., 2023; Derda, 2025; Kist, 2024; Thiel, 2023). As a result, many fields are experimenting with ways to implement GenAI responsibly.

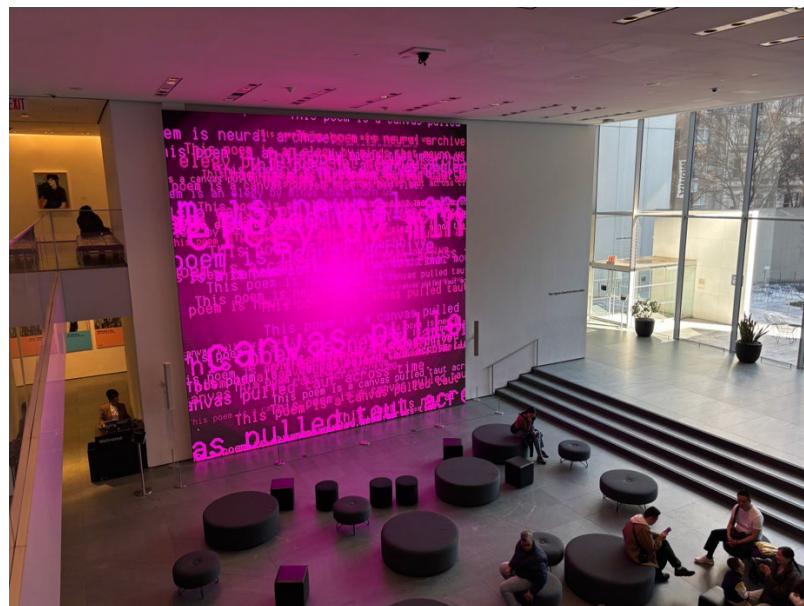
Museums are experimenting with AI technologies; within art museums specifically, GenAI is increasingly used as an interpretive tool in exhibitions and visitor experiences, including conversational GenAI, AI-generated media, and AI-assisted interpretive text development. Despite this rapid adoption, there is limited research examining how art museums make decisions regarding the implementation of GenAI as an interpretive tool. While studies have begun to explore visitor responses to AI-supported storytelling and interactive experiences, less is known about the institutional, curatorial, and ethical considerations guiding these implementations. As GenAI becomes increasingly accessible through widely available digital

tools, art museums face growing pressure to determine how these technologies should be used responsibly within interpretive practice. This article describes a qualitative multiple-case study that investigated how GenAI is implemented as an interpretive tool in art museum exhibitions and how these implementations relate to institutional values, curatorial priorities, and ethical considerations within museum practice.

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a broad and contested field, encompassing computational systems designed to perform tasks involving reasoning, learning, and decision-making (Russell & Norvig, 2021). Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), the focus of this study, is a subset of AI that generates new outputs such as text, images, audio, and video through patterns sampled from a learned data distribution (Kulkarni et al., 2023). Within museums, GenAI has been applied through chatbots, interpretive media, image generation, and other visitor-facing experiences (Caramiaux, 2023).

“Unsupervised” (Refik Anadol) exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art



Distinguishing GenAI from other forms of AI, such as recommendation systems, expert systems, and predictive algorithms, remains important because different technologies carry different implications for interpretation, decision-making, and narrative construction (Agre, 1998; Bunz, 2023). As museums increasingly experiment with AI technologies, museum professionals have emphasized the importance of aligning these tools with institutional missions, public trust, and community-centered values (AAM, 2025).

GenAI Usage in Art Museum Exhibits

Literature examining GenAI as an interpretive tool in art museums remains limited and recent. Existing scholarship focuses on experimental implementations demonstrating how AI can support participation and visitor engagement. Studies of AI-enabled museum experiences suggest that GenAI can encourage participatory learning and co-creation by allowing visitors to interact directly with collections and contribute interpretive content (Boncheva, 2024; Fu et al., 2024). Research examining museum implementations has also explored AI-supported reconstruction, recommendation systems, and immersive interpretation, highlighting the increasing role of curators in establishing ethical and interpretive frameworks for AI-assisted experiences (Li, 2025).

Museums have also experimented with AI-driven conversational interfaces. Examples such as *Ask Dali* and *Hello Vincent* use large language models to simulate interactions with historical figures, positioning AI systems as educational mediators between visitors and museum content (Avlonitou et al., 2025; Todino, 2025). These studies suggest that GenAI may expand opportunities for participation, personalization, and interaction while simultaneously raising questions surrounding narrative authority, authenticity, and institutional responsibility.

Expanding Interpretive Possibilities Within Limited Institutional Capacity

Although GenAI has expanded interpretive possibilities, scholarship suggests that museums often lack the resources and frameworks necessary to support implementation. Maksimova (2025) observed that curators frequently struggle to communicate AI's complexities while avoiding sensationalized or oversimplified narratives. Similarly, previous studies note that cultural institutions face challenges integrating AI into existing social and interpretive practices (Agre, 1998; Napper, 1994).

Research also suggests that many museums lack sufficient expertise and infrastructure to evaluate AI technologies. Studies of cultural heritage institutions report limited AI adoption, substantial reliance on third-party consultants, and widespread resource constraints (Mazzanti, 2025). Derda (2024) further identified a disconnect between AI use and self-assessed knowledge among museum professionals. Collectively, these findings indicate that museums often lack the institutional capacity and interpretive frameworks necessary to support responsible AI implementation.

Curatorial and Exhibition Ethics vs. GenAI Ethics

Museum practice has traditionally emphasized stewardship, scholarly rigor, cultural sensitivity, and accountability (Lord et al., 2002). Recent scholarship examining AI in museums argues that GenAI introduces additional ethical concerns because AI systems reflect assumptions embedded within their training data (Bernhardt et al., 2023; Derda, 2025; Kist, 2024; Thiel, 2023). Recurring concerns include:

- ***Hallucinations***: AI systems may generate inaccurate or fabricated information (Natale et al., 2025).
- ***Bias***: Outputs may reproduce stereotypes or discriminatory patterns embedded within training data (Li, 2025).

- ***Unstructured Prompt Management:*** Open-ended interactions may produce harmful or inappropriate content (Haq & Saldías, 2026)
- ***Copyright Infringement:*** AI-generated outputs may draw upon copyrighted works without sufficient transformation (Appel et al., 2023; Kulkarni et al., 2023).

These concerns intersect directly with curatorial and exhibition-development work, and museum professionals increasingly function as reviewers and editors of algorithmic content (Li, 2025). Research further suggests that visitors may struggle to distinguish between human-authored and AI-generated narratives, creating challenges for transparency, interpretive clarity, and public trust (Avlonitou et al., 2025; Ta et al., 2025).

In conclusion, literature identifies several recurring concerns surrounding GenAI implementation in museums: limited institutional frameworks, ethical accountability, transparency, and changing curatorial responsibilities. These concerns form the basis of current scholarly discussions surrounding GenAI's role in exhibition development and interpretation.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate how art museum exhibit professionals use GenAI as an interpretive tool in exhibits and how the use of GenAI is informed by institutional and curatorial values. By examining the missions, interpretive goals, and ethical frameworks guiding implementation, this research explores how GenAI is used within contemporary museum practice. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How are museums currently integrating generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into interpretation in art exhibits?
2. What curatorial or institutional goals guide these decisions?

3. Do art museum professionals see GenAI as an interpretive tool, an educational tool, or an operational tool within the exhibition context?
4. What ethical and logistical considerations shape how GenAI is implemented and sustained within interpretive practice?

By engaging these questions through a qualitative multiple-case study design, this research study aimed to offer a deeper understanding of the role of AI in the interpretive process of exhibition development. This study contributes to an emerging body of museological scholarship concerned with the responsible integration of digital tools that should reflect, not replace, curatorial and interpretive intention.

Methods

A multiple-case approach was selected to account for variation across institutions, including differences in scale, mission, and approaches to GenAI integration. Because the use of GenAI in museum interpretation is still emerging and context-dependent, this design allowed for both in-depth examination within individual institutions and comparison across relevant sites and cases.

Site Sampling

Case study sites were selected based on documented use of GenAI and their relevance to ongoing developments in AI-supported interpretation within art museums. The museums included in this study were the MIT Museum, Cambridge, MA; the Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL; and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (FAMSF), San Francisco, CA. Each institution had implemented GenAI within the previous five years through exhibition interpretation, visitor engagement, or AI-assisted content development. Museums were excluded if AI use was limited

to non-interpretive functions or if institutional constraints prevented staff participation in interviews.

The MIT Museum's exhibition *AI: Mind the Gap* incorporated multiple GenAI interactives designed to encourage public engagement with artificial intelligence, including experiences focused on creative collaboration, misinformation, and digital literacy. These installations aligned with the museum's broader mission of engaging audiences in conversations about science, technology, and innovation.

The Dalí Museum implemented several GenAI experiences that connected visitors with Salvador Dalí's artistic practice, public persona, and interest in science and technology. These projects included conversational AI, image generation, and visitor-participation experiences designed to support interpretation and engagement.

FAMSF provided a contrasting case in which GenAI was used less extensively in public-facing exhibition experiences and more frequently explored as a tool for accessibility, interpretation, and workflow support. This case offered insight into how museums may integrate GenAI operationally while maintaining a focus on visitor access and institutional capacity.

Participant Sampling

Participants were purposively sampled within each case based on their involvement in curatorial, interpretive, or exhibition development processes related to GenAI implementation. This approach was used to ensure that participants could speak directly to institutional decision-making, design processes, and ethical considerations. Between two and four participants were recruited from each institution, resulting in a total of 8 participants. Recruitment was conducted through email communication. Participants included curators, exhibition developers, exhibition

project managers, interpretive media specialists, and digital experience designers. These roles reflect the interdisciplinary nature of exhibition development involving emerging technologies.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with museum professionals. Interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom or in person, depending on participant availability and exhibit access. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Recordings were transcribed using AI-assisted transcription tools and reviewed by the researcher for accuracy.

Interview questions focused on participants' experiences with GenAI implementation in exhibition contexts. Topics included institutional motivations for adopting GenAI, curatorial and interpretive decision-making processes, ethical and technical challenges, and perceived impacts on visitor engagement. Additional questions addressed whether and how institutional frameworks or policies informed the use of AI. (See Appendix A for the interview guide.) Supplementary materials, including exhibition documentation, interpretive texts, institutional reports, and images of GenAI exhibits, were collected where available to support triangulation.

Results

Interview responses revealed several recurring themes regarding the implementation of GenAI in museum exhibitions. Findings are organized according to the study's four research questions.

1. How are art museums currently integrating generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into interpretation in their exhibits?

Cross-case data suggested that GenAI was primarily implemented through a) participatory installations, b) AI-driven conversational systems, c) personalized visitor experiences, and d) AI-assisted workflow support.

a) Participatory Installations

Participatory GenAI installations were implemented as interactives, inviting visitors to contribute to exhibition content by co-creating image generation and storytelling. By positioning visitors as active participants, these implementations allowed visitors to shape their interpretive experiences.

At the Dali Museum, interviewees described *Dream Tapestry*; visitors scanned a QR code and entered written descriptions of their dreams into a text prompt system connected to OpenAI's DALL-E image generator. The system then transformed these prompts into AI-generated "dream imagery", which was projected onto a large-scale digital wall display alongside contributions from other visitors. Visitors who participated could view a collage of "dreams" contributed by other visitors, creating a co-created tapestry of images rendered in artistic styles presented within the exhibit. The interviewee described the project's goal as allowing visitors to "visualize their dreams" in shared interpretation, while informing audiences of Dali's interest in psychology: "He was interested in psychology and Freud as many surrealists were, alongside dreamscapes... and you know, it fosters community collaboration. This is what our community is dreaming about at any given time." Another installation, *Your Portrait*, used neural style transfer systems to transform visitor selfies into stylized artistic portraits, which could be downloaded or printed at the site.

Left: "Dream Tapestry" (Dali Museum), AI-generated images by visitor text prompts.

Right: "Your Portrait" (Dali Museum), visitors upload "selfies" to an AI model.



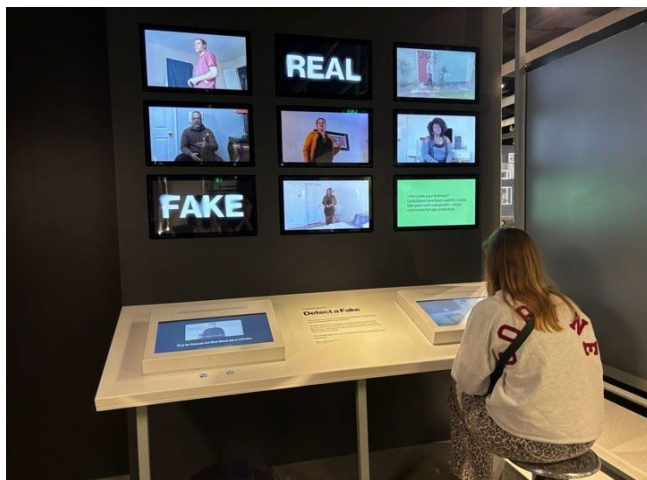
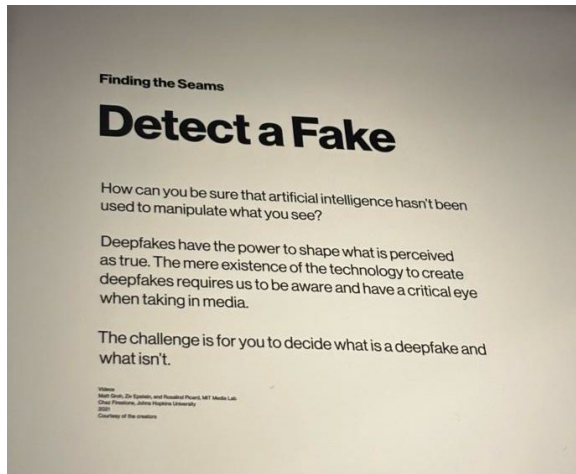
MIT Museum staff described participatory AI systems intended to encourage participatory engagement with emerging technologies. These interactives encouraged visitors to examine digital literacy around AI, as well as its collaborative uses. *Collaborative Poetry* used ChatGPT-3 through a museum-designed interface, inviting visitors to co-author poems with the AI system by alternating lines, selecting themes, and offering tone and vocabulary choices. According to interviewees, the installation was designed to frame AI as a collaborative creative system, rather than a singularly reliant creator:

“The *Collaborative Poetry* experience inspires these conversations of ethics, of shared acknowledgement...I think of how we interact with AI and how it's a part of these bigger conversations.

Another installation example was *Detect a Fake*, a generated video installation which invited visitors to discern deepfake videos, or AI-generated synthetic media, from real videos.

Left: Label for “Detect a Fake” (MIT Museum), a deep-fake installation.

Right: Visitor interacts with “Detect a Fake” (MIT Museum)



b) AI-Driven Conversational Systems

Case study museums implemented GenAI through conversational systems designed to simulate dialogue between visitors and AI-generated characters and interfaces. These systems used large language models and conversational prompting to create responsive interactions with visitors.

At the Dali Museum, *Ask Dali* invited visitors to engage in simulated conversations with an AI-generated version of Salvador Dali trained on archival recordings, interviews, writings, and biographical material. The interviewee explained that the project relied heavily on Dali's extensive media presence and public persona, noting that "there's a lot of assets to train on" because Dali lived during the rise of film and television culture. The conversational system used

voice models trained on Dali's recordings alongside prompts developed to emulate his speaking style and eccentricity. The interviewee emphasized that the project was not intended to replace historical interpretation, but to “reimagine” Dali in ways consistent with his fascination of technology, celebrity, psychology, and immortality.

Image: “Ask Dali” (Dali Museum), a conversational interactive where visitors can converse with an AI-generated version of Salvador Dali.



At the MIT Museum, conversational GenAI interactives were framed as tools for dialogue and public experimentation. *DebunkBot* invited visitors to converse with an AI system designed to challenge conspiracy theories and misinformation:

“We have taken it and developed the text-to-voice so that you can come into the museum and into a physical, secure, required space to talk directly to this program about your thoughts. And the research is showing, 29% of people or 30% shift their beliefs.”

Interviewees described these conversational systems as opportunities to encourage public reflection surrounding social implications of GenAI.

c) Personalized Visitor Experiences

Across institutions, GenAI personalized interpretive content for visitors. At The Dalí Museum, *Your Portrait* used neural style transfer systems to transform visitor selfies into different art styles, such as Impressionism and Cubism. Interviewees explained that visitors could download or print their transformed portraits, creating individualized souvenirs tied directly to their museum experience—using personalization to create “a more lasting impression” and strengthen emotional connection to exhibition content.

FAMSF participants similarly discussed GenAI as a tool for expanding personalized accessibility within interpretation. An interviewee described the museum’s experimentation with AI-generated multilingual audio translation for their English materials, explaining that GenAI offered possibilities for interpretive material in multiple languages despite institutional budget limitations:

“Most of our audio tours we produce are only in English, and we're just not going to have the budget to produce it in multiple languages. But using AI might enable us to offer our content to more visitors; that's the primary reason to use the AI translation and the text-to-speech feature on the website. I think it's costing us something like \$10 a month.”

The interviewee expressed that implementations could improve accessibility for non-English speaking visitors.

d) AI-Assisted Interpretive Workflow Support

The FAMSF implemented GenAI internally within interpretive workflows and media production processes to support exhibition development, accessibility, and institutional efficiency. These applications were typically framed as supplementary tools requiring substantial human oversight rather than autonomous systems replacing museum labor.

At FAMSF, an interviewee described using GenAI during interpretive planning meetings through AI-assisted notetaking and transcription software. The interviewee additionally

described using GenAI during “equity edits” of exhibition didactics, including prompting AI systems to synthesize over-length label text into shorter versions that met institutional word-count requirements while maintaining interpretive clarity:

“I was hired into supporting the inclusive framing of our special exhibitions and permanent collection rotations. I’ll get a first draft of the didactics from the curators, and I’ll edit it through an equity lens, looking for things like words at an 8th-grade reading level, or historical and social context.”

The interviewee described GenAI-assisted workflow tools as supports that augmented existing exhibition development practices while remaining dependent on institutional standards.

2) What institutional goals guide the use of GenAI in art museum interpretation?

Across cases, three major institutional motivations for implementing GenAI emerged: a) audience engagement and learning, b) personalization and emotional connection, and c) institutional experimentation and innovation.

a) Audience Engagement and Learning

Participants at all three case studies described GenAI as a tool to create more interactive and participatory exhibition environments to inform visitors. At the Dali Museum, *Dream Tapestry* was described as an opportunity for visitors to visualize and share their dreams collectively within the exhibition space. The installation therefore transformed visitor participation into part of the exhibition itself as audience-generated outputs continuously reshaped the gallery environment in real time. The museum’s installations, *Ask Dali* and *Your Portrait*, also worked similarly, inviting visitors to contribute photos, ask questions, and learn through engagement. Such installations aimed to inform visitors about Salvador Dali’s art styles and character by engaging audiences through evolving exhibition experiences—contributing collaboratively making generated images into community works or live conversations with AI-generated personalities.

Similarly, the MIT Museum's *Collaborative Poetry* installation intended to frame participation as an exchange between visitor and machine, allowing visitors a first-hand experience of human-GenAI engagement. As a curator described of the installation's development:

“Talking to researchers, I found it fascinating that you could only talk about AI for a minute or two before you immediately start to naturally, very naturally, revert to talking about humans: What if you want to talk about what it means for a machine to make a judgment call? Well, what's happening in our brain when we make a judgment call and how do we mimic that into a machine? What does it mean for us to interact with something else? And what does it mean for a machine to do that and be social?”

By engaging with the tool itself, the interactive informed visitors about GenAI's collaborative capabilities while prompting reflection on the human processes and social interactions that underlie AI development and use.

b) Personalization and Emotional Connection

Across cases, participants also described personalization as an effective motivation behind GenAI implementation: interviewees frequently emphasized that personalized outputs created stronger emotional relationships between visitors and exhibitions.

At The Dalí Museum, *Dream Tapestry* and *Your Portrait* were described as helping visitors “see themselves reflected in the experience.” A participant suggested that this personalization tied emotional impact with meaning-making, or the described importance of the artist and artworks: “If you can make an emotional connection, especially to the artist, your visit will have more meaning.” Staff at the Dali Museum also described GenAI as capable of making interpretation feel more personable and participatory; AI-driven conversational systems, such as *Ask Dalí*, were described as elements that reduce barriers between visitors and artists by allowing audiences to engage in simulated dialogue instead of relying exclusively on traditional

interpretive text: “We utilize digital technologies in general because we have to evolve with our audience.”

Participants at the MIT Museum similarly described personalization as part of broader efforts to humanize emerging technologies and create interpretation that felt responsive to individual visitors. A curator described the museum’s *Collaborative Poetry* installation as an interaction in which visitors selected themes, feelings, and vocabulary while alternating lines of poetry with ChatGPT before “co-publishing together.” Rather than generating identical outputs for every participant, the installation produced unique poems shaped through each visitor’s individual choices and responses. Another curator emphasized that *Collaborative Poetry* sought to use GenAI interactives that feel “viscerally relatable, participatory, inclusive, and experimental...” framing AI interpretation to connect complex technological subjects to visitors’ personal emotions, experiences, and social concerns.

At the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, personalization and emotional connection were also connected to accessibility. An interviewee described the museum’s use of AI-generated text-to-speech and multilingual translation tools as attempts to create more individualized interpretive experiences for visitors with different accessibility needs and language backgrounds: “We care a lot about accessibility because our audiences often have disabilities of some kind. Having content on the site that you can listen to instead of reading improves our ability to reach audiences that need accessible accommodations.” (FAMSF) As an internal tool, GenAI implementations at the FAMSF were used to make interpretive content approachable and accessible to broader audiences.

c) Museums as Places for Gen AI Experimentation and Innovation

Across cases, interviewees described GenAI implementation as part of institutional experimentation surrounding emerging technologies. Participants frequently framed museums as spaces where visitors could encounter, test, and critically reflect on technological systems that are increasingly shaping public life. However, institutions consistently emphasized that experimentation alone was not sufficient justification for implementation; GenAI systems were typically adopted only when they supported broader interpretive or institutional goals.

At the MIT Museum, experimentation with emerging technologies was described as central to the museum's institutional identity. An interviewee explained that the museum used the redevelopment process leading up to its 2022 reopening as an opportunity to conduct “test bed kind of experiments” with immersive and AI-driven interpretation: “For us, it's to present work and project them to be open to this diverse conversation... we have a very robust set of programs where we talk about technology in incredibly serious or playful ways.” These projects included collaborative AI poetry installations and experimental conversational systems such as *DebunkBot*, which explored whether AI could help challenge visitors' conspiracy beliefs and misinformation through dialogue. The Director of Exhibitions emphasized that the museum attempted to provide transparency into the “back end of the story” by revealing algorithmic processes and technological decision-making. A curator also described the MIT Museum function as a “public lab space” where visitors could interact directly with technologies and research that were still actively developing. MIT Museum respondents aimed to create experiences that “provoke conversation” and encourage public dialogue surrounding ethics, bias, collaboration, and social implications.

At the Dalí Museum, experimentation with GenAI was framed less through scientific research and more through alignment with Salvador Dalí's recorded fascination with science,

legacy, and emerging technologies: An interviewee explained that “all roads lead to Salvador Dalí” when developing digital experiences at the museum, emphasizing that the institution viewed GenAI experimentation as consistent with Dalí’s own scientific interests: “He did not believe in his death; he knew that his body physically died, but his art would live forever. With that in mind, he created his persona.” GenAI systems such as *Dream Tapestry*, *Dalí Lives*, and *Ask Dalí* were therefore implemented not for novelty, but because participants believed these technologies extended Dalí’s long-standing interest in technological experimentation and desire for legacy.

At the FAMSF, experimentation surrounding GenAI was approached operationally and cautiously. The Director of Interpretation described a committee created at FAMSF designed to promote discussion and development of ethical guidelines:

“We’re tasked with setting policies, drafting standard practices and providing ongoing tooling evaluations for AI use, providing ethical reviews and guidance on AI tool procurement and integration, supporting ongoing AI training for all staff, identifying use cases where AI tools may be leveraged, working with department leaders to experiment with and implement tools, and then identifying opportunities to enhance visitor experience through the use of AI.”

The interviewee emphasized the museum’s AI initiatives as relatively limited and instead focused on workflow improvement and multilingual interpretation rather than visitor-facing experiences. Interviewees emphasized experimentation with AI-generated text-to-speech and translation systems largely because these tools could expand accessibility while remaining financially feasible within institutional constraints.

3) Do art museum professionals see GenAI as an interpretive tool, an educational tool, or an operational tool within the exhibition context?

Across cases, art museum professionals described GenAI as functioning simultaneously as an interpretive, educational, and operational tool within exhibition contexts, although the emphasis placed on each role varied significantly between institutions.

a) GenAI as an Interpretive Tool

Most case study museums described GenAI as an interpretive extension of existing exhibition strategies instead of a replacement for curatorial authority. Participants consistently emphasized that AI systems supported narratives already developed by curators, educators, and exhibition staff.

At the Dalí Museum, a staff member explained that GenAI “doesn’t drive our narratives, it supports them,” framing AI systems as interpretive layers that expanded visitor interaction while remaining grounded in institutional storytelling. Installations such as *Dream Tapestry*, *Dalí Lives*, and *Ask Dalí* introduced new interpretive entry points through AI-generated conversations, collaborative imagery, and personalized outputs. Staff also emphasized that Ask Dalí was trained using archival recordings, writings, and historically grounded source material to maintain consistency with Dalí’s public persona and artistic worldview.

Participants at the MIT Museum described GenAI as a tool for encouraging interpretation through dialogue and participation rather than passive information delivery. A staff member explained that the museum intentionally focused its AI exhibition on in-gallery GenAI experimentation and ethical questions surrounding AI instead of purely technical explanations: “It’s meant to start conversations around AI. Each one of our GenAI topics have interactive experiences, artifacts, art, science, installations to try to tell those stories... the visitor can be the

one to interpret.” An interviewee also described the museum’s collaborative AI poetry installation as a system in which visitors alternated lines of poetry with ChatGPT before “co-publishing together,” positioning visitors as contributors within the interpretive process.

At the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, GenAI was discussed more through accessibility and interpretive delivery. An interviewee from FAMSF emphasized experimentation with AI-generated text-to-speech and translation systems largely because these tools could expand accessibility while remaining financially feasible within institutional constraints.

Across all cases, participants described GenAI as creating more dynamic, conversational, and participatory forms of interpretation while remaining grounded in institutional expertise and curatorial research.

b) GenAI as an Educational Tool

Participants in most cases described GenAI as an educational tool that could support media literacy, critical thinking, youth digital literacy, and public understanding of emerging technologies. At the MIT Museum, educational programming surrounding the AI exhibition focused heavily on AI literacy and public dialogue. An educator described programs in which students engaged with *Detect a Fake*, a GenAI-generated video installation. This GenAI interactive required students to distinguish between AI-generated and non-AI-generated images, videos, audio, and text. By engaging with this interactive, students were introduced to issues surrounding misinformation, plagiarism, copyright, and algorithmic bias. The interviewee also explained that the museum aimed to educate student groups about “potential opportunities for bias” and the broader social implications of AI technologies: “We have rich conversations about the potential for harm with generative AI and how that may or may not outweigh the potential

benefits.” Instead of focusing solely on technical explanations, *Detect a Fake* and *DebunkBot* encouraged visitors to consider how AI systems influence judgment, media literacy, and trust. Staff at the MIT Museum emphasized that museums could encourage media literacy and human assumptions embedded within AI algorithms:

“Ideally, AI becomes a tool that is purposed in a positive and productive way to expand our vision and understanding of the world. I think there are obviously hugely problematic parts, such as what the models being trained on right now and how that is disenfranchising artists and their work and trampling their IP rights. It’s a challenge, but it’s another tool.”

At the Dalí Museum, educational goals were often connected to visitor engagement with Salvador Dalí’s personality and artworks. An interviewee described the museum’s GenAI interactives as educational tools to emphasize Salvador Dalí’s recorded interest in technology, as well as engagement with his artworks. “He was very forward thinking when it comes to using science and technology. We lean into that, it helps us.” By approaching GenAI experiences as tools of interpretation, the interactives were used not only to entertain visitors but also to contextualize Dalí’s artistic practice within broader conversations surrounding Dalí’s experimentation with technology.

At the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, educational uses of GenAI were less prevalent. One participant described AI-generated translation and text-to-speech systems as tools that could expand access to exhibition interpretation for audiences with different language backgrounds and accessibility needs. However, this was only present in internal experimentation.

c) GenAI as an Operational Tool

At the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, a participant explained that the museum primarily used AI for “workflow improvement,” used operationally for AI notetaking, audience research synthesis, and shortening exhibition labels to meet word-count requirements:

“It’s used for workflow improvement. Meetings are very human-to-human discussion, and I see AI as a supporting tool to get at the goals of a meeting. We’ll have a better, we’ll have access to data, we’ll have a greater framework, we’ll have references. But humans still need to make the connection during that meeting to do what we need to do.”

However, the participant also noted that human review was still heavily needed for both use cases:

“We have a rubric that we uploaded to GenAI, as well as a batch of didactics, then asked GenAI to review it using our rubric. We tried that a couple of times and it was too literal—there’s a lot of nuances that it doesn’t capture. I imagine that technology will evolve to be a good place to start, but there’s human intervention needed.”

At the MIT Museum, participants discussed operational uses of GenAI through institutional planning, policy discussions, and experimentation surrounding AI integration. A curator described ongoing conversations about how museums might operationally use AI technologies within museum practice in the form of symposiums, written articles, informal conversations, and conferences: “We have had conversations with our colleagues at the institute. For example, the MIT center for Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence has sponsored several symposiums featuring short talks, debates, and conversations around AI.” However, internal operational uses were limited according to the participant:

“Personally, I have never used AI a single time to write something. I did an experiment with it once recently, and I asked it to write something and I thought, what if I ask it to write something and then I’ll tweak it? But as I started to tweak it, I realized, ‘No, this doesn’t feel like my voice.’ It doesn’t feel like the curatorial voice I try to have around the museum.”

At the Dalí Museum, a participant also discussed the operational role of GenAI through the development and moderation of visitor-facing installations. For *Dream Tapestry*, museum staff tested OpenAI’s filtering systems beforehand to ensure inappropriate prompts or imagery would not appear publicly within the exhibition space. The participant explained that staff

evaluated how the system functioned operationally before implementation: “We tested out the filtering ahead of time, just to make sure it works...and we never had any problems.”

4) What ethical and logistical considerations shape how GenAI is implemented and sustained within interpretive practice?

Across all three case studies, interviewees emphasized that GenAI implementation remained dependent on human oversight. Participants consistently identified concerns related to hallucinations, misinformation, and interpretive accuracy, while a) transparency, b) curatorial oversight, and c) resource constraints and third-party reliance shaped how these systems were implemented and maintained.

a) Transparency

Participants emphasized transparency as a major consideration for public trust, shaping how GenAI was implemented in public-facing interpretation. At the MIT Museum, transparency was repeatedly connected to helping visitors understand “back end” AI systems instead of presenting technology as seamless or neutral. This information was accessible by QR codes near each GenAI interactive, sharing algorithms and back-end information about its development; an interviewee explained that the museum attempted to reveal “what the algorithmic decisions were” and “what the procedures” behind the systems involved, particularly within AI-based installations. Another participant emphasized that AI systems are ultimately shaped by human assumptions and choices, arguing that museums should help visitors critically understand decisions embedded within technological systems: “These interrelated technologies (AI) will be based on assumptions that humans will design the algorithms, humans will set the parameters for these choices, and they have to... our goal in the museum context is to help people understand those relationships, realities, and complexities.”

At the Dali Museum, transparency existed through general disclosure strategies: Exhibition labels, interpretive text, branded naming, and marketing. Some examples of their marketing include, “Dali Lives: Museum Brings Artist Back to Life with AI “and “Ask Dali (Via Artificial Intelligence)”. The chief marketing officer explained this approach:

“GenAI can support educational goals when used thoughtfully. It allows for more tailored, engaging experiences, but it also requires transparency. With *Ask Dalí*, we clearly communicate that responses are AI-generated and encourage visitors to seek deeper context from docents when needed.”

A participant also explained that visitors were also made aware that their prompts or interactions were being processed through AI-generated systems rather than human artistic production, and other means of interpretative methods were encouraged to inform visitors: “We preface it. We don't take (GenAI) at its word. We encourage people to take a docent tour or read about him or listen to our audio tours.”

At the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, transparency concerns were internally focused on communications. An interviewee described a need to define transparency conditions within the workplace through experimentation and internal policy development, often discussed by the institution's AI committee:

“In the charter, the scope of the things that we're tasked with doing is setting policies, drafting standard practices and providing ongoing tooling evaluations for AI use, providing ethical reviews and guidance on AI tool procurement and integration, supporting ongoing AI training for all staff, identifying use cases where AI tools may be leveraged, working with department leaders to experiment with and implement tools, and then identifying opportunities to enhance visitor experience through the use of AI.”

Another example the participant provided was communication with stakeholders on internal uses of GenAI: “I must translate that if I'm trying to share it with a stakeholder, having to do the job of explaining what's in front of you. It's mainly the ways in which I intervene as a human with GenAI as well as always disclosing.”

b) Curatorial Oversight

At the Dalí Museum, a participant explained that GenAI “doesn’t drive our narratives, it supports them,” emphasizing that AI systems were designed around institutional storytelling already established by museum staff. Another participant explained that installations such as *Ask Dalí* and *Dalí Lives* were trained using archival recordings, writings, and historically grounded materials to maintain consistency with Dalí’s public persona and artistic worldview: “We trained algorithms on Dalí’s text, moving images, voice recordings, and mannerisms to reconstruct his public Persona.” However, staff also described subsequent staff involvement in testing filtering systems and shaping the prompts and conversational structure used within the museum’s AI experiences: “Anytime you’re developing experiences for a museum, you just must be cognizant on what technology tools you’re using that your experience might rely on. That’s just what happens when you’re creating these things that you need to consider from an operations perspective.”

MIT Museum participants depended on contextual curation around GenAI interactives:

“Our exhibition topics were ‘Programmed or Decisive’, ‘Competitive or Collaborative’, ‘Passive or Expressive’, ‘Neutral or Partial’ and ‘True or False’. Each one of these topics have stories that are meant to say that it’s not a black or white issue; it’s not that a machine is either going to be ‘competitive with us or collaborative with us’, but it’s meant to start conversations around that. Each one of these topics have interactive experiences, artifacts, art, science, installations to try to tell those stories.”

Instead of relying on GenAI interactives to independently generate meaning, museum staff selected artifacts, interactive systems, and tools that supported curatorial narratives about human relationships with AI technologies: “We ask ourselves, where does it have a meaningful inclusion and ability to make something even more understandable or more useful?”

At the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, an interpretation lead described how AI-generated outputs required continued institutional review before use within interpretive workflows. A participant explained that he had used and held licenses for ChatGPT-3, writing inputs to assist with audience research, note-taking, and reducing exhibition labels to required word counts. He emphasized that staff still revised outputs for clarity, accessibility, and institutional accuracy: “I think it's an exercise in the art of prompting and editing for hallucinations. Prompting to make sure you're getting what we want.”

c) Resource Limitations and Third-Party Reliance

Staff at the Dali Museum explained that *Dali Lives*, *Ask Dali*, and *Your Portrait*, installations were developed through third party collaborators:

“We have an IT team, people who help make sure it's working. Whenever we develop these experiences out of house, we don't develop them. We don't have a team that develops these things. We work with Goodby, Silverstein and Partners, outside sources, and outside vendors when they deliver the experience. We have a lot of documentation on how to trouble shoot if something isn't working.”

However, installations would face technical difficulties when outside GenAI tools, such as OpenAI software failures or subsequent updates:

“It's down. Because OpenAI is down, they changed their API, they changed their technology. That impacted the experience. And you know, from my perspective, I must be careful of creating an experience that's going to be live every day. We must make sure that the platforms that we rely on are going to be up every day.”

At the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, a digital lead explained that AI-generated translation was being explored largely because the museum did not have the budget to produce multilingual audio tours through traditional methods. However, the participant also noted that AI outputs still required staff or contractors to conduct quality control, review translations, and correct pronunciation or phrasing issues:

“It's a capacity issue for us. People need time to run the (translation) audio through an AI program and quality control because we still need a human to listen to it and make corrections; that's something that we haven't fully figured out yet. How much do we need to pay for that quality control, how quickly can they do it, and who is going to do it?”

The MIT Museum's Director of Exhibitions also explained the financial costs and limitations of GenAI implementation: “The challenge for museums will be that visualizing any of this generative AI stuff at any larger scale, is incredibly expensive; that's going to be a huge barrier for institutions.” The participant noted that the museum tried to avoid implementing technology unless it meaningfully contributed to interpretation, because experimental technologies could be unsustainable: “Our museum is quite small, and the staff is intensely tasked with most of what they do. It takes both a lot of resources to build up enough of a robust infrastructure and then enough resources to maintain a technology that's rapidly transitioning to stay timely.”

Discussion

GenAI as a Participatory and Personalized Interpretive Tool

Findings supported literature suggesting that GenAI can facilitate participatory learning, co-creation, and personalized visitor engagement within museum settings (Boncheva, 2024; Fu et al., 2024; Avlonitou et al., 2025). Similarly, the case-studies examined GenAI implementations through conversational systems, participatory installations, and personalized experiences that encouraged visitors to actively engage with exhibition content. A central finding of this study is that museums did not position GenAI as an independent interpretive authority; across all cases, GenAI was implemented as an extension of existing interpretive practice designed to strengthen engagement, emotional connection, and accessibility.

Museums as Spaces for AI Literacy and Critical Engagement

Findings supported scholarship suggesting that museums can serve as spaces for public education around emerging technologies and their social implications (Caramiaux, 2023; Maksimova, 2025). The MIT Museum described exhibitions as opportunities to encourage comprehensible and accessible discussions surrounding AI, while the Dali Museum utilized it as a tool for public engagement and learning. These findings described GenAI implementations as experiences to promote critical reflection and public dialogue, suggesting that museums play an increasingly important role in promoting AI literacy and helping visitors understand the human-GenAI interaction and uses.

Human Oversight, Ethics, and Institutional Capacity

While copyright and privacy remain prominent concerns within broader discussions of GenAI, participants more consistently emphasized issues of hallucinations, misinformation, and interpretive accuracy (Bernhardt & Thiel, 2023; Derda, 2025; Kist, 2024; Mazzanti et al., 2025).

Regarding these concerns, participants emphasized that large-scale, public-facing GenAI implementation remained dependent on human review and institutional oversight. Findings also supported previous research suggesting that museums faced technological issues, staffing skills, and financial constraints when adopting large-scale GenAI technologies, which often relied on third-party collaboration. However, this study suggested that museums are most likely to implement GenAI when it addresses specific institutional goals, particularly accessibility, interpretation, and workflow support while remaining subordinate to human curatorial decision-making.

Implications

This study implied that art museum interpreters should approach GenAI as a tool that supports, rather than replaces, interpretive strategies. Existing implementations positioned GenAI within established interpretive and institutional frameworks; museum professionals may therefore benefit from using GenAI to advance specific interpretive objectives, such as audience engagement, accessibility, or participation.

Transparency emerged as a central component of GenAI implementation as a regular museum practice. These findings inform museum interpreters to strongly consider incorporating disclosure materials that help visitors understand the relationship between human expertise and AI-generated outputs. The study also indicated that GenAI may offer practical opportunities to expand accessibility and visitor participation—for museums with limited resources, these tools may provide cost-effective methods for broadening interpretive access and creating more individualized visitor experiences.

This study was limited to three art museums actively implementing GenAI and may not represent practices across all museum contexts. However, this study suggests that art museums

are most likely to adopt GenAI when it extends existing interpretive strategies while remaining subject to human review and curatorial oversight. Future research should examine visitor responses to GenAI-assisted interpretation, particularly regarding transparency, trust, and interpretive value. Comparative studies across different museum types may further identify how institutional contexts shape GenAI implementation. Longitudinal research may also help document how museum practices evolve as GenAI technologies mature.

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Appendices

Interview Questions

Examining the role of GenAI in Exhibition Development and Interpretation

Thank you for agreeing to participate. This study examines how museums are incorporating generative artificial intelligence, or GenAI, into curatorial interpretation. I am interested in your experiences, decision-making processes, and institutional context.

(Ask how they would like to be referred to: Name, pronouns, Prof./Dr./Mr./Ms.)

Your participation is voluntary, and please feel free to skip any questions or stop at any time.

With your permission, this interview will be kept and recorded for data collection purposes.

Do you consent to participate and to be recorded?

YES / NO

Section A: Participant Background

(Purpose: establish participant role, responsibilities, and organizational context)

1. Can you describe your current role at the museum and your primary responsibilities related to exhibitions or digital initiatives?
 - How long have you been in this role?
 - What aspects involve interpretive or curatorial decision-making?
2. Have you worked on any projects that involved GenAI?
 - How was this tool intended to be used?
2. Have you been involved in any conversations surrounding GenAI within your field?
 - Conferences, workshops, staff training, workplace conversation, or self-experimentation

Section B: Research Question #1

(Research Aim: How are museums currently integrating GenAI into the art exhibit, and what curatorial or institutional goals guide these decisions?)

1. How has your institution begun integrating GenAI into the exhibit?
 - Examples of projects or pilots

- How AI is being used in content creation within the exhibit
2. What goals or motivations guided the museum's decision to incorporate GenAI?
 - Audience engagement
 - Personalization
 - Operational efficiency
 - Innovation, experimentation, or funding priorities
 2. Who within the institution drives these decisions?
 - Executive leadership vs. curatorial staff
 - Cross-department collaboration
 - External vendors, consultants, or tech partners

Section C: Research Question #2

(Research Aim: In what ways do curators conceptualize GenAI as interpretive, educational, or operational tools within exhibitions?)

0. When GenAI is used in an exhibition, how do you understand its interpretive role?
 - Does GenAI expand, improve, replace, or complicate traditional interpretive strategies?
 - Does it create new forms of visitor control?
 - Does it alter narrative structure?
0. How does GenAI influence the conceptualization or development of exhibition narratives?
 - Does GenAI generate content, refine scripts, or shape storytelling?
 - Does the museum constantly work with or monitor GenAI outputs?

0. How has GenAI affected your curatorial authorship or decision-making?
 - Maintaining your exhibit's curatorial intent?
 - Negotiation of control with algorithmic systems
 - Collaboration with technical staff or data scientists
0. Do you see GenAI as supporting or complicating educational goals for visitors?
 - Accuracy and contextualization
 - Ability to tailor content for diverse audiences
 - Risks of misinformation or oversimplification

Section D: Research Question #3

(Research Aim: What ethical, pedagogical, and logistical considerations shape how GenAI is implemented and sustained within institutional practice?)

0. What is your institution's approach when using GenAI?
 - Accuracy, transparency, authenticity
 - Visitor trust
 - Cultural stewardship and authority
0. How does the museum inform visitors about the role of GenAI in an exhibit?
 - Labels, disclaimers, interpretive framing
 - Media, marketing
 - Transparency
0. What logistical or operational challenges have emerged when implementing GenAI?
 - Staff training, learning on the job
 - Budgeting, maintenance, and sustainability

- Data privacy and security
 - Vendor dependency
0. What institutional support or resources would improve your ability to implement GenAI responsibly?
- Policies
 - Ethical frameworks
 - Interdepartmental expertise
 - Time or funding

Section E: Closing Questions

0. If you could give one piece of advice to art museums considering using GenAI in exhibitions, what would it be?
0. Is there anything we did not discuss that you feel is important to understanding GenAI's role in the exhibit?