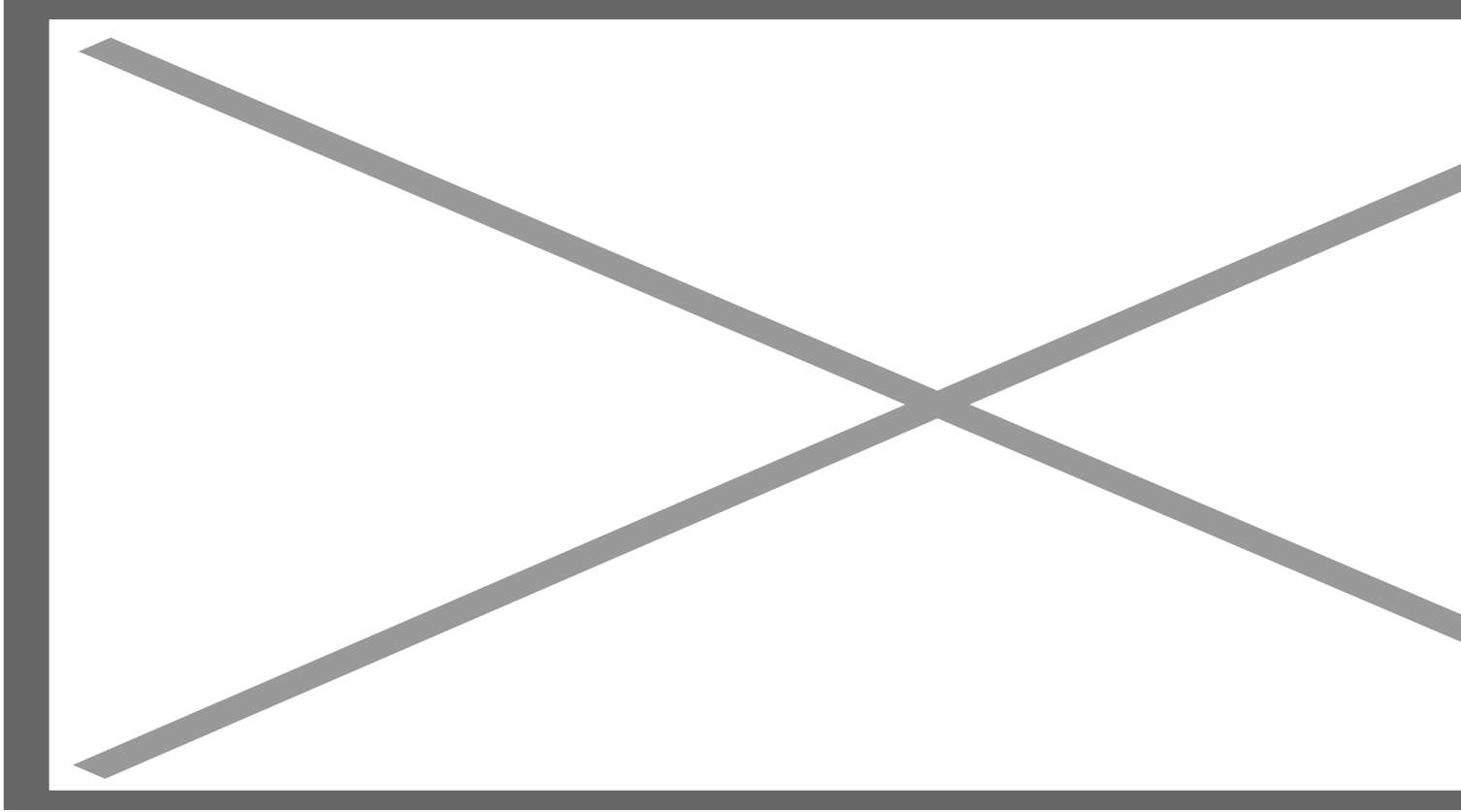


Michael Takeo Magruder's, *The Horse as Technology* and *Casper Zebrafish [expanded]; A New Jerusalem; Reconstructed Landscape{s}— Green Oaks .burn (iteration 1)*

by [Aaron Rosen](#) in the [November 2025](#) issue

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Clockwise from left: *The Horse as Technology*; *Casper Zebrafish [expanded]; A New Jerusalem; Reconstructed Landscape{s}— Green Oaks .burn (iteration 1)* (All images © and courtesy of the artist)

New discoveries and technologies often outpace our ability to describe them accurately, let alone contextualize their implications and theorize about their future. Yet even by these standards, artificial intelligence is developing in directions that all but defy our capacity to fashion aesthetic and ethical frameworks to comprehend it.

In contemporary art, it is unclear whether AI is merely the latest extension of conceptual art or something fundamentally new. If someone instructs an AI system to produce a work of art by following a prompt or tinkering with parameters, does that make that person an artist? Or, more theologically, how do we apply notions of inspiration and presence to the use of generative AI? Is there a (holy) ghost in the machine? Artists are wrestling with these questions in real time, testing the limits of an emergent technology that even its own creators do not fully understand.

One of the most insightful people working with AI is Michael Takeo Magruder. The Japanese-American artist has worked across a range of media, including real-time data, digital archives, virtual reality, and, recently, AI processes. Whereas many artists have jumped into the deep waters of AI with reckless abandon, Magruder has

waded in judiciously, preferring a human-in-the-loop approach that emphasizes the *sui generis* insights of human judgment. It is no coincidence that a decade before the ubiquity of generative AI, Magruder had already collaborated extensively with theologians and undertaken major projects such as *De/coding the Apocalypse* (which includes both *The Horse as Technology* and *A New Jerusalem*), in which he speculated about the potential impact of unbridled or un-principled uses of digital technology.

In his recent works, Magruder utilizes AI to peer into the horizon, beyond the limits of our human senses. Like Moses on Mt. Nebo, Magruder is intrigued by intangible vistas and the promise of potential realities. Sometimes, his dialogues with AI conjure elements of landscapes that elude the human eye and the lens of the camera, challenging viewers to question what is and is not a “real presence” in the natural world. At other times, Magruder trains his gaze on microscopic details, using tiny tissue samples from simple creatures like the zebra fish to generate lush cinematic environments. In either case, AI becomes a tool to revel in the possibilities of creation, to stretch its boundaries—but never to lose sight of reality.