

Disposable Art Is Still Art

By Austen Tucker · 2026

I make disposable art on purpose.

Not because I don't care about it. Because I know exactly what it is. I generate images that exist for a moment, serve a feeling, and dissolve into the feed. I write scenes that live for one conversation. I make the creative equivalent of a five dollar con sketch. The kind that hits you in the chest at 2 AM in a hotel hallway and then lives forever in a folder you forget to back up.

This is not a tragedy. This is the point.

I don't say that lightly.

I've been in and around the furry fandom for twenty years. My chosen family consists almost entirely of people from this community. The people who showed up when things got bad, who built the infrastructure I leaned on when the world outside didn't have a place for me. They're furrries. I've commissioned art. I've uploaded art. I've sat in artist alleys and hotel lobbies and Discord servers and watched every one of these fights play out in real time.

I'm a gremlin with a word processor, a command line, and something to say. I've been making things with AI longer than most people have had a word for it. My novels have AI editors. My images, AI generated as they are, still bring delight to the chats I share them with. My weird little code experiments often live and die in a group chat. And I still think the best art I've ever been part of was a badge sketch at MFF that took eight minutes and cost me ten bucks.

That sketch wasn't precious. It was alive.

Punk never asked you to frame the flyer. Zine culture ran on photocopiers and staples and the understanding that the thing you held in your hands had a half-life. Con badges got laminated if you were lucky. Most of them ended up in a drawer. The art didn't matter less because it was temporary. It mattered more because it was. It mattered now, in this room, between these people, for this weekend. Preciousness was never the goal. Connection was.

The furry community was shaped by this principle and then learned to disown it whenever a new medium showed up.

Here's the part nobody wants to talk about.

e621 is the largest furry art archive on the planet. Artists upload their own work there. Commissioners upload pieces they paid for. Fans upload stuff they saved years ago. Sometimes the original artist asked for it back and didn't get it. Tags drift. Sources go stale. Duplicates multiply. Most of it is sanctioned. Some of it isn't. The site treats art as shareable, remixable, infinite overflow — a clearinghouse more than a gallery.

Nobody calls that disposable art. But that's the economy it runs on.

Which means it's worth saying clearly: circulation is not permission. An archive that holds your work doesn't authorize what happens to it next — not reposting, not theft, not training. The community knows this when a repost goes wrong, and forgets it the second a new medium shows up. The relationship to ownership and permanence is messier than the rhetoric admits, and it has been for a long time.

Go back further. \Yerf\ was an early attempt at a curated furry art institution: selective, slow, and proud of it. The opposite approach. Quality gates. Juried submissions. Slow review. Some people called it elitist. It raised thousands in donations for data recovery after a catastrophic hard drive failure in 2004. It collapsed anyway. The community chose volume over curation, every time it had to. That was a choice. We don't talk about it that way.

Now go back one more step. The transition from print commissions to digital commissions. Real money changed hands over this fight. People argued that digital work wasn't a "real" commission. That if an artist didn't mail you a physical piece of paper, you hadn't bought art. You'd bought a file. A copy. Something disposable.

Sound familiar?

Digital won. Nobody remembers that fight. The panic evaporated so completely that the same community now treats digital art as the sacred default. The very thing they once said wasn't real.

The line moved. The community forgot. And now we're doing it again.

Fur Affinity banned AI-generated art in September 2022. The stated reason: AI content "samples other artists' work" and allowing it is not "in our community's best interests." Protect the artists. Protect the community. The same framing Yerf used to justify its gates. The same instinct, recycled, aimed at whatever medium is newest and least understood.

In 2020, "This Fursona Does Not Exist" trained on e621 data and generated legal threats and community rage. Training is not reposting. A repost is a copy. A model is something stranger — it reads ten million images and produces something nobody uploaded. The objection is real. The harm to working artists is real. The community's reaction was also a moment of self-recognition, even if no one framed it that way.

An archive built on circulation drew a hard line at a new kind of downstream use. That's a legitimate line. It is also a line the community didn't draw at any of the previous steps.

I'm not here to relitigate scraping ethics. I'm here to name the pattern.

The furry community does not resist disposable art. It produces more of it than almost any other creative subculture on earth. What it resists is seeing itself in the act of production. Every medium shift forces a moment of self-recognition, and every time, the community flinches.

Print to digital: flinch. Digital to AI: flinch. The art was always disposable. The mirror just got bigger.

I make jingles now. I make zines. I make the digital equivalent of that badge sketch. Fast, hot, born to be shared and remixed and forgotten and rediscovered. I use AI tools the way I use a Sharpie: because they're there, because they work, because the point was never the tool.

If you've ever uploaded to e621, you live in the disposable art economy. If you've ever commissioned a YCH, you live there. If you've ever grabbed a free adopt or reposted a meme or saved someone's art to your phone without checking the source? You live there.

Fan art has never obeyed museum logic. It obeys campfire logic. Pass it around. Add to it. React to it. Carry it for a night. Let it change shape in other hands.

AI didn't build that economy. It just made it impossible to pretend it doesn't exist.

There's a version of this essay that tries to be fair. That weighs both sides. That acknowledges the legitimate concerns of working artists and the real economic pressures of generative AI and the complicated ethics of training data.

Those concerns are real. So is everything I just said.

This is a manifesto. And the manifesto says: disposability is not a failure of art. It is a strategy. Disposability is not what makes art cheap. Gatekeeping is. Fan communities have always worked this way: fast, cheap, meaningful in the moment, uncontrolled by gatekeepers. The zine didn't ask permission. The con sketch didn't apply for a grant. The badge in your lanyard holder right now is disposable art and it means more to you than half the prints on your wall.

I'm not ashamed of making things that don't last. I'm proud of making things that matter right now — to me, to my friends, to the community members who show up for the experiments.

The panic will pass. The line will move. Most of what I make will dissolve back into the feed. Some of it won't. Some of it will catch fire — turn into a story, a novel, an installation, a memory somebody pulls up at 2 AM in a hotel hallway. That's what disposable art does. It dies a hundred times and then once, unpredictably, it doesn't.

The badge sketch was alive. So is the next thing. So is whatever you and I are about to make and share and forget and remake and forget again.

Keep making it.